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SLAVES, PORTERS, AND PLANTATION WORKERS

Shifting Patterns of Migration in 19th- and Early 20th-Century East Africa

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1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the major shifting patterns of migration in East Africa over the 19th century and in the early 20th century. The analysis is structured around four historical processes that produced major shifts in migration patterns in East Africa. The development of the plantations on the coast and in Zanzibar led to the major quantitative and qualitative shift in the history of migration in 19th-century East Africa, which was the migration of enslaved people from the interior regions to the coast and Zanzibar. This gave rise to a migration system that supplied enslaved laborers to coastal and Zanzibar plantations, largely from the Congo area and from Southeast Africa. Another important historical process that involved East Africa in the 19th century was the expansion of ivory exports to global markets. As no other means of transport were available, waged porters were employed to carry ivory from the interior regions to the coast. Even if not quantitatively as relevant as the migration of enslaved people, the circular migration of porters gave rise to a migration system that survived well into the colonial period. The development of the long-distance trade in ivory and slaves stimulated the expansion of urban centers on the coast and in the interior to which people either moved voluntarily as free laborers or settlers or were forcibly moved after being enslaved. Finally, the establishment of European colonial rule in East Africa represented a major shifting pattern of migration, also in relation to the enforcement of the abolition of slavery. The chapter will discuss how European colonialism impacted and transformed the migration systems that had developed in connection to the ivory and slave trades.

The chapter combines qualitative sources and the limited available quantitative evidence in order to investigate the major drivers in shifting patterns of migration and provide a degree of magnitude of the main migration flows in East Africa in the 19th century and early 20th century. In order to unravel directions of change, the chapter adopts a geographical perspective that goes beyond present-day nation-state borders and look at East Africa as a region formed by present-day Kenya, Tanzania, southern Somalia, northern Mozambique, as well as parts of the Great Lakes region (Uganda, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

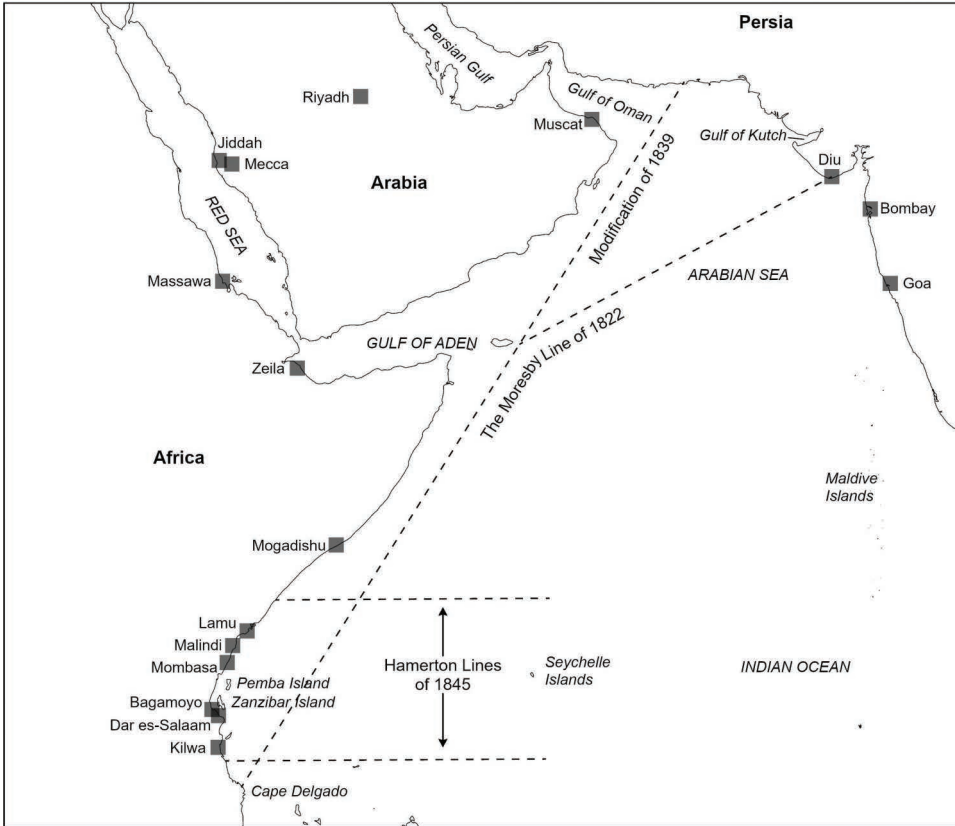
(DRC), Rwanda, Burundi). This broad geographical approach will allow us to show major trends and patterns in the ways in which people migrated or were forcibly moved across the region.

The first section of the chapter discusses how slavery changed in 19th-century East Africa and how these changes impacted migration within the region. Slavery was already a well-established institution and East Africa was a region of significant forced migrations from the 16th century onward. Even if people could be enslaved within their own societies as a result of indebtedness or in neighboring communities with the same language and cultural traits, almost all enslaved individuals were “outsiders,” being obtained outside the receiving society (Campbell 2004, XV). This meant that these people were almost all cross-community migrants. With the establishment of a flourishing plantation economy along the Swahili coast and in Zanzibar in the 1810s, slave trading developed on an unparalleled scale in East Africa and gave rise to migration systems that supplied enslaved laborers to coastal and Zanzibar plantations from the Congo area and from Southeast Africa. Over the 19th century more than 750,000 people were forcibly moved to the coast. At the same time, the employment of enslaved workers also expanded in the interior regions, especially in the region of Unyamwezi in Western Tanzania (Deutsch 2006).

The second section of the chapter discusses the expansion of the ivory trade as a major driver of circular migration in 19th-century East Africa. With the expansion of the global demand for East African ivory at the beginning of the 19th century, new long-distance trade routes that connected the interior regions with the ports on the coast were established and pioneered by African traders who took their ivory to the coast with caravans formed by hundreds or even thousands of porters. Coastal traders followed, and settled in the main interior markets. The vast majority of porters were free waged workers, who voluntarily enlisted in commercial caravans. The majority of them were sojourners, as they returned home after spending months or even years away from home, whereas some of them settled permanently on the coast (Rockel 2006, 19–23). The expansion of long-distance trade created a migration system in which porters, especially from Unyamwezi, migrated to the coast. This system, as this chapter will discuss, persisted after the establishment of European rule and the construction of colonial railways, as workers from Unyamwezi continued to migrate to the coast, this time to be employed in European settlers’ plantations. Connected to this migration system was the migration of people to the quickly expanding urban settlements that developed in connection to the ivory and slave trades.

The third section of the chapter will then analyze how new urban settlements emerged and expanded, both along the coast and in the interior, as a response to the demands of the ivory and slave trades. These towns became important drivers of migration in the second half of the 19th century as they became instrumental to the working of long-distance trade. Traders could use them to buy and store their goods, obtain fresh water, and attend rich markets offering a wide variety of food products needed to supply their caravans. These towns – such as Bagamoyo and Mombasa on the coast or Ujiji, Tabora, and the capital of Buganda Kingdom in the interior regions – had thousands of inhabitants and became attractive to people who migrated in search of new opportunities, and worked amongst others as small traders, smiths, tailors, or prostitutes (see Map 4.1).

The fourth section of the chapter analyses the early colonial period and the impact that the establishment of colonial rule had on pre-existing migration patterns. Toward the end of the 19th century, the abolition of slavery in Zanzibar and along the coast and



MAP 4.1 Legal slave trading zones in East Africa in the 19th century.

Source: Adapted from Harms, Freamon and Blight (2013), digitized by Stefan de Jong.

the establishment of European colonial rule created a new demand for migrant agricultural laborers. The wage labor colonial economy was built on established patterns of work that included portering. Groups that had been involved in long-distance trade as porters, such as the Nyamwezi, appeared more willing to migrate to colonial plantations. The migration of laborers in the colonial period thus presented significant continuities from the point of view of motivations and origin of the migrants, with pre-colonial migration patterns, at least in the early colonial period.

2 Shifts in the migration of enslaved people in 19th-century East Africa

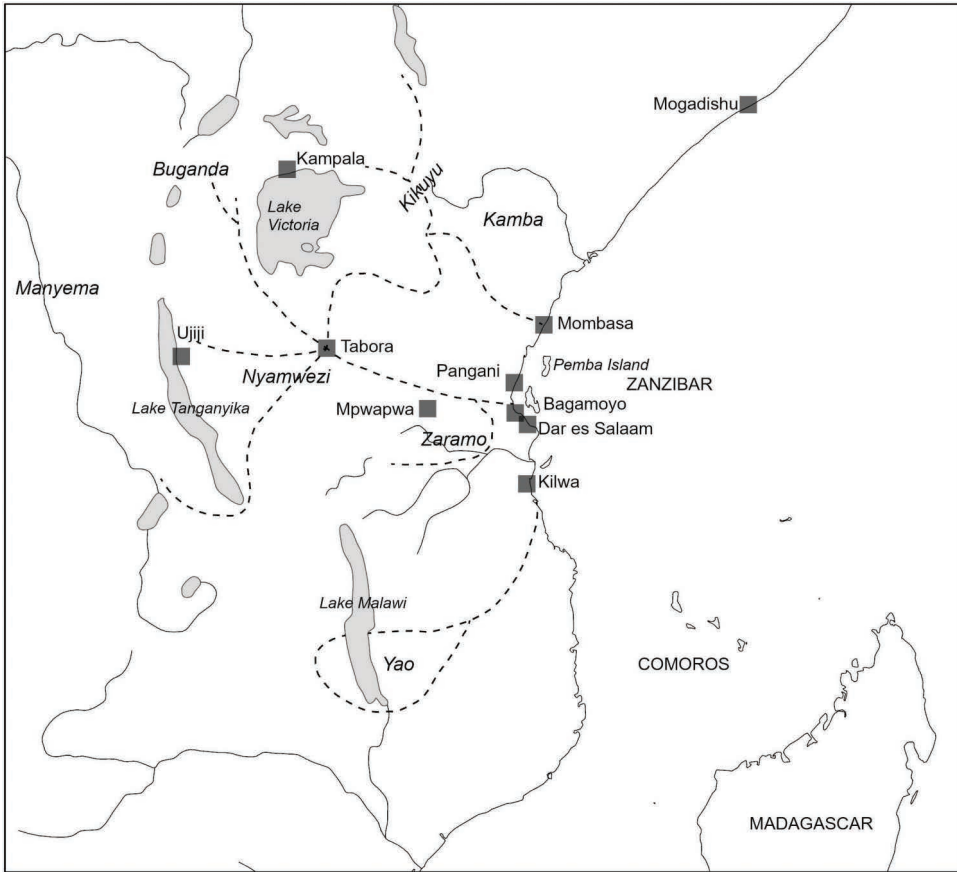
What Edward Alpers calls the “tyranny of the Atlantic” in slave studies has for a long time obscured how the structure of slavery and practices of enslavement in East Africa and the Indian Ocean World contrasted with that of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and plantation slavery in the Americas (Alpers 1997). These differences, as this section will discuss, had important consequences for the ways in which enslaved people were forcibly moved and/or freely migrated in 19th-century East Africa.

In East Africa and other Indian Ocean societies enslaved people could be – and actually often were – assimilated into the hosting society and their children could often obtain the status of non-slaves (i.e., were born free). As Gwyn Campbell points out, the distinction between freedom and slavery, even if analytically helpful in the Americas, does not fully apply to East Africa, where categories of hierarchy and dependency are more effective in analyzing slavery (Campbell 2004, VII–XXI). Another important difference with Atlantic slavery is that the majority of people enslaved in East Africa were women, who were valued for their reproductive power and attractiveness. Both within East Africa and in the regions where they were exported – the Arabic peninsula, the Persian Gulf, and Western India – enslaved people were largely employed as domestic servants, family helpers, concubines, and soldiers, whereas a limited number were employed as agricultural laborers. Owing to the variability that characterized their activities, their living and working conditions varied significantly from society to society. They were socially mobile, in that those enslaved by rich and wealthy people could acquire important positions as traders, guards, or overseers. This gave them freedom to move and even to migrate voluntarily. Before the establishment of plantations on the coast, East Africa had thus been a region of significant forced migrations, whose characteristics and conditions were highly diverse across the region and for which it is hard to isolate a common pattern (Médard 2007; Vernet 2009).

A first important shift in the structure of slavery and slave migration was caused in the second half of the 18th century by the establishment of sugarcane plantations in the French-occupied Mascarene Islands (Isle de France and Isle de Bourbon, present-day Mauritius and Réunion). This was a shift both in the quantity of slaves exported and in the way in which they were employed. The methods used to produce sugarcane in the Mascarene Islands were in fact very similar to those of Caribbean plantations, and it was here where enslaved East Africans were for the first time employed as plantation laborers. In 1787–88 there were 71,000 enslaved laborers in the Mascarene Islands, a number that increased to 133,000 in 1807–08 and 136,000 in 1815. The majority of these workers originated from East Africa and Madagascar, and small numbers from the Horn of Africa, West Africa, and India (Deutsch 2006, 34; Allen 2010; Lovejoy 2011, 151).

The Mascarene slave trade began to decline after the establishment of British colonial rule in Mauritius in 1810 and especially after 1822, when the Moresby Treaty was concluded between the Sultan of Muscat and Oman and the British. This treaty banned the export of slaves to the east and south of an imaginary line drawn from Cape Delgado in Mozambique to Diu in India, in this way prohibiting the purchase of captives by British and French citizens and subjects (see Map 4.2). As Abdul Sheriff points out, after the Moresby Treaty was signed, members of the Omani merchant class “realised that if slaves could not be exported, the product of their labor could” (Sheriff 1987, 48). The treaty produced a major shift in slave migrations in East Africa that has to be considered in relation to a changing regional economic system based on the production and export of cloves, coconut, sugar, and grains in Zanzibar, Pemba, and along the East African coast (Sheriff 1987, 60).

From the 1810s onward, following the introduction of the lucrative cultivation of cloves, large areas of Zanzibar previously devoted to the cultivation of food crops were converted into commercial clove plantations. The production of cloves was extended to Pemba in the 1840s. The production of this spice increased ten-fold between 1839/40 and 1846/47 when it amounted to about 1,500 tons. Production fluctuated, but reached 2,200 tons by 1850s and 3,900 tons by the 1870s. As the cultivation of cloves expanded, so did the demand for



MAP 4.2 Main caravan roads and urban centers in 19th-century East Africa.

Source: Author's own, digitized by Stefan de Jong.

slave labor.¹ Various estimates exist on the number of enslaved laborers that were annually imported to Zanzibar and Pemba. By the 1810s, Zanzibar imported about 8,000 slaves per year. This number increased to 13,000 in the 1830s and 1840s, and peaked in the 1860s and 1870s with 15,000–20,000 imported per year (Sheriff 1987, 226). According to Paul Lovejoy (2011), out of a total of 1,650,000 slaves traded in East Africa during the 19th century, almost 50% were retained in the area for plantation work (see Figure 4.2). People imported to Zanzibar as agricultural laborers were largely men, who originated from the hinterland of Kilwa and the Lake Malawi region. This was a significant shifting pattern of migration, as men rather than women became the main migrants. At the peak of the slave trade, 95% of imported laborers came from this area, whereas only a small part originated from the northern interior, in present-day Kenya.² Slaves were also obtained in the regions around Lake Tanganyika and Lake Victoria, especially from the Manyema region in present-day Eastern DRC.

Given that more and more land in Zanzibar and Pemba was devoted to the cultivation of cloves, a new demand developed for imported grains and foodstuffs needed to feed the laborers of the plantations. Coastal planters employed slave labor to produce northern interior fruit, maize, sesame, millet, rice, and coconut that they then exported to Zanzibar and

Pemba. The so-called *shamba* (field) slaves worked for four or five days for their owners and then cultivated their own piece of land for subsistence for the rest of the week. The crops that they cultivated independently were divided between the enslaved and the enslaver (Clayton and Savage 1974, 2). There was an important difference between *waja* (newcomers) and *wazalia*, the latter being people born in captivity on the coast and who were generally employed as domestic servants in the house of their enslavers. Male *wazalia* often had a great deal of independence and could work outside the house as carpenters, builders, sailors, and dhow captains. They had to give one-half or one-third of their earnings to their enslavers and could retain the rest (Sunseri 2002, 30–1).

The peak of production on the coast was reached between 1875 and 1884, when about 45,000 enslaved laborers were reported to live in the coastal areas (see Figure 4.1) (Deutsch 2006, 39). The increase in the production and consequent slave imports was the result of two main factors. On the one hand, Zanzibari merchants and financiers invested their capital in the plantations on the coast after the decline of the clove price on the international markets and the economic stagnation in Zanzibar in the 1870s. On the other hand, the import of slave labor was favored by the decline in the price of slaves following the anti-slave treaties that the Sultan of Zanzibar signed with the British. After the 1822 Moresby Treaty mentioned above, in 1845 the area in which the slave trade was tolerated was further reduced by the Hamerton Treaty, which allowed trading within only the Sultan of Zanzibar's possessions (see Map 4.2). In 1873 slave markets in Zanzibar were closed. Even if an illegal trade continued to supply the plantations, the import of enslaved workers was significantly reduced and ended in the 1890s when the Germans obtained control of the ports on the coast. In 1897 slavery in Zanzibar – which since 1890 had become a British protectorate – was delegalized.³ The abolition of slavery in Zanzibar, as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, represented an important driver of shifting patterns of migration, as laborers migrated to Zanzibar to replace those freed from slavery.

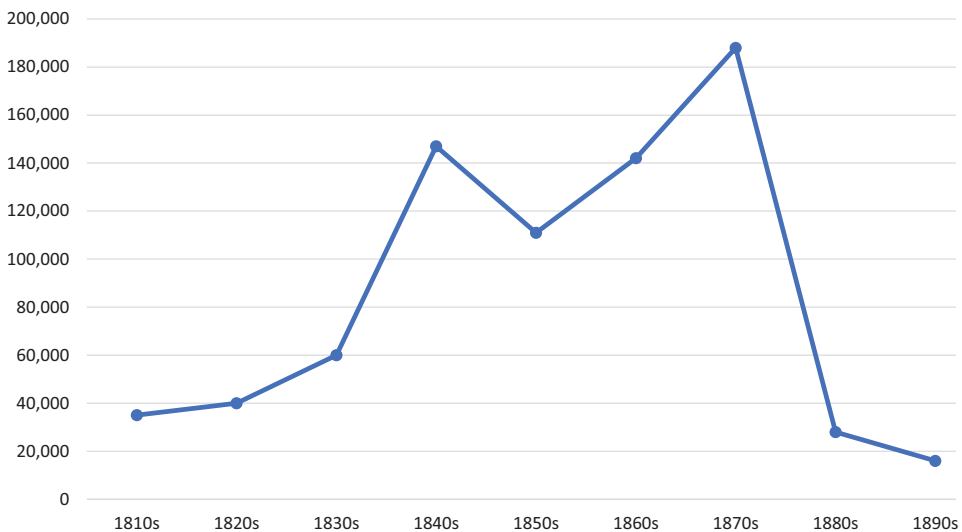


FIGURE 4.1 Slaves retained on the East African coast and Zanzibar, 1810s–90s.

Source: Lovejoy (2011, 151).

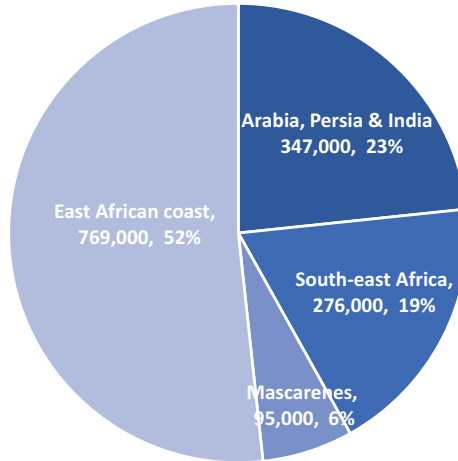


FIGURE 4.2 Destinations of the East African slave trade in the 19th century.
Source: Lovejoy (2011, 151).

The first census that reported the ethnic origin (“tribal designation”) of the Zanzibar population was carried out by the British in 1924. Many identified themselves as Nyasa (10,570), Yao (6,623), Manyema (5,013), and Zaramo (6,170), which were the main ethnic groups from which the enslaved people exported to the coast during the 19th century originated (Zanzibar Protectorate 1924). For people freed from slavery the question of social identity was clearly a crucial aspect in the post-abolition era. They commonly asserted a “Swahili” identity, as a way to associate themselves with Islam and the coastal culture. However, many of them also decided to reject Islam and identify with their homeland ethnic group. The significant number of people who identified as “Manyema” confirms this aspect, as the region of Manyema was not involved in colonial migration processes and Manyema people had migrated to Zanzibar during the 19th century as enslaved laborers (Cooper 1980, 166; Zöllner 2019) (Figure 4.2)

The East African slave trade boomed in the 19th century. While exports to Arabia, Persia, and India increased, the main driver of expanding slave migrations was the development of plantations within East Africa, in Zanzibar, and along the coast. At the same time, slave trading and slavery were also significant drivers of forced migration in the interior regions of East Africa. At the time of the establishment of German colonial rule in Tanzania, it was estimated that about 10% of the total population of the colony consisted of enslaved people, who were largely concentrated on the coast (Sunseri 2002, 27). The first German explorer who reached the region of Unyamwezi in the 1880s estimated that between 70% and 75% of the population of the region was enslaved (Reichard 1889, 277). These numbers are very likely exaggerated and motivated by the abolitionist spirit of the time, but nevertheless testify to the great presence of enslaved people in the region. Thomas Vernet guesstimates that in the 19th century about 10% to 15% of the people living in the interior – meaning the commercial hinterland of Zanzibar – were enslaved (Vernet 2013, 5). Among the most important areas were the Kingdom of Buganda and the urban centers that developed along the main caravan roads, such as Tabora, Ujiji, and Mwanza in present-day Tanzania.

In Buganda the institution of slavery was critical to social and economic life. Captives were obtained by the Baganda mainly from Bunyoro and Busoga (see Map 4.1). Women and girls became wives or concubines, performed agricultural tasks and domestic work, and also tended the grounds of the shrines providing food for the spirit mediums and priests. Men and boys were employed in the Buganda army, as well as in agricultural work and domestic service. The position of enslaved people in Ganda society depended on hierarchies determined both by the task performed and by the length of their stay in Ganda society. Compared to newcomers, long-term residents were more likely to be integrated into the household and less likely to be sold (Reid 2002, 116–24). Children of enslaved mothers were regarded as free as long as their fathers were not enslaved (Twaddle 1988, 126). Enslaved persons were also incorporated into state or private armies. Women were married into local families, and even in the royal family, testifying to the social mobility of enslaved people in many interior societies, as has been previously described for the coast. Mobility was also favored by the fact that clans were very large and it was easy for an enslaved person to move from one place to another without being detected, as the Ganda state put little energy in searching for fugitive slaves (Unomah 1972, 110–3; Médard 2007, 29).

The Baganda were also exporters of slaves, who rarely reached the coast and were mainly bought by Nyamwezi and coastal traders and farmers in the area of Tabora (see below). The export of slaves in Buganda increased in the 1860s and 1870s and reached its peak in the 1880s, when the Kingdom of Buganda exported about 1,000 slaves per year. This peak occurred at the same time when the export from the interior regions to the coast was declining, as a consequence of the prohibition of slave markets in Zanzibar in 1873. The restrictions posed on slavery had “the effect of internalizing that sector,” in the sense that the slave trade shifted from export to the coast to intensified use of slave labor in the interior regions (Sheriff 1987, 35). As a consequence, the slave trade increased from the 1880s and peaked in the 1890s, especially in the Great Lakes region. With the expansion of the slave trade, Buganda leaders sold their own people. Between 1889 and 1892, 20,000 Ganda captives were sold to Bunyoro in exchange for food, guns, and cloth (Hanson 2003, 97–8; Médard 2007, 18–9). Even if the destinations of these people are not all known, many of them were sent to the chiefdom of Unyanembe and its capital, Tabora, in present-day west-central Tanzania (Reid 2002, 161). Here, coastal settlers as well as local residents employed enslaved agricultural laborers, as we will see in Section 3. The migration of enslaved people within the interior regions was partly connected to processes of urbanization in the interior of 19th-century East Africa which, in turn, were the result of the development of ivory exports to global markets.

3 The expansion of the ivory trade and the circular migration of porters

Along forced slave migrations, the 19th century witnessed the migration of free laborers in connection to the development of the ivory trade. In the 19th century, East African ivory began to be widely requested in Europe and America by a growing middle class, for which ivory-made luxury products, such as carved figures, parts of instruments, combs, billiard balls, and so on, became one of the symbols of high living standards (Beachey 1967, 274). The global demand for East African ivory had the effect of pushing up its price in Zanzibar by about 6% per year between 1823 and 1873 (Sheriff 1987, 102–3). The trade in ivory being very lucrative, new commercial caravan roads were established that connected the interior

regions with the coast. Among them, the most important in terms of the volumes traded was the so-called central caravan road that connected Lake Tanganyika to the town of Tabora, in Western Tanzania and then to the port of Bagamoyo on the Swahili coast.

In many parts of East Africa, the use of draft and pack animals was severely hindered by the presence of the tsetse fly, whose bite causes sleeping sickness, a disease fatal to many animals. Therefore, the only way to transport ivory and other goods was by human carriers. African porters successfully transported goods across deep-rooted trade networks and played a critical role in creating the conditions for the participation of East Africa in the global economy. Porters originated from different areas of the interior as well as from the coast, but the biggest part of them were Kamba from present-day Kenya; Nyamwezi from present-day Western Tanzania; and Yao, from present-day Southern Tanzania/northern Mozambique. All the groups that enrolled as porters came from regions that were crossed by the main caravan roads and were therefore strategically located for long-distance trade (Rockel 2000, 177). Reasons for working as porters varied per group, and were largely connected to social and economic conditions in the sending regions from which porters were recruited. For the Kamba, for example, enrolment as porters at the end of the 18th century was a response to recurrent famines that led them to engage in hunting and trade and put them in contact with the coast (Cummings 1973, 11, 1975, 277; Håkansson, Chapter 5, this volume). Porters generally enrolled freely for wages and for the prestige that derived from the experience of travel, as was the case for the Nyamwezi. Employment in the caravans was a way for personal socio-economic improvement. Wages obtained during commercial expeditions created the conditions for the accumulation of wealth in the form of imported commodities, especially cloth, that were then employed in the payment of bridewealth and the purchase of cattle. Wages could thus be transformed into social prestige, and well-experienced porters could exploit their knowledge of the caravan routes, their personal relationships, and their skills to finance their own caravans (Cummings 1973, 12; Rockel 2006, 77). As a class of wage laborers, porters acted individually and collectively to defend their common interests. When the wages were not considered appropriate they refused to continue their march until conditions of employment were renegotiated.

Travel and portage had great social prestige among many East African societies, and this provided an important motivation for joining the caravans. For the Nyamwezi, for example, it was a long-term tradition and involved pride and skills. The region of Unyamwezi had already been central to a network of interregional trade in iron and salt before the development of long-distance trade with the coast (Roberts 1970). Thanks to this experience and the central position of Unyamwezi in the trading system of the interior regions, Nyamwezi porters profited from the new opportunities that emerged from the expansion of the ivory trade. It has been estimated that in the 1890s one-third of the total male population of Unyamwezi was engaged in the caravans (van der Burgt 1913, 309). Women also traveled with the caravans as porters, traders, and partners of men. They enrolled voluntarily as a way to get individual access to paid labor or to accompany their husbands. They provided domestic and sexual services, and also carried small loads, such as kitchen utensils (Rockel 2006, 118–27).

In the first part of the 19th century, portage was a seasonal occupation and porters remained circular migrants. They traveled with the caravans only in the dry season from May to November, when agricultural labor was less demanding and could be carried out by women, and then went back to their fields at the beginning of the rainy season. When

the ivory trade reached its peak in the 1870s, however, portering became a more permanent occupation. The need for laborers increased owing to the growing demand for ivory, and porters could negotiate higher wages and spent longer periods away from home. They could spend years in the caravans before returning home. For some of them it became a lifetime occupation and they became permanent migrants (Deutsch 2006, 24). Nyamwezi men could move over great distances and be away for long periods for a variety of reasons. On the one hand, Nyamwezi people did not own large herds of cattle. Cattle was herded by Tutsi immigrants, who sold milk and butter to the main markets of Unyamwezi (Rockel 2019). On the other hand, women took care of the fields while men were away with the caravans. Women were helped in their agricultural tasks by enslaved laborers, the number of which increased significantly over the 19th century (Rockel 2000, 177). Money earned with caravan work or trade was in fact used to buy slaves needed to help women in the fields. This long-term development of labor specialization is confirmed for many interior societies, including not only the Nyamwezi, but also the Kamba (Cummings 1973, 116).

About half the able-bodied Nyamwezi men participated in portering during the second half of the 19th century. Estimates for the second half of the 19th century range from 15,000 to 30,000 porters reaching the coast each year (Rockel 2006, 33). According to German colonial statistics, the number of porters traveling in German East Africa (GEA) in 1892 was 100,000, and these data only considered those porters who reached and departed from the coast (Sunseri 2002, 56–7). In Bagamoyo, the main coastal terminus of the caravan road that connected Lake Tanganyika with the coast, Nyamwezi porters established semi-permanent settlements and while waiting to be enrolled by the caravans found work in the plantations or tended small gardens on their own (Deutsch 2006, 23). The development of urban centers such as Bagamoyo was a response to the demands of trade, and these towns became in turn drivers of shifting patterns of migration, as discussed in the next section.

4 New urban centers as drivers of migration in 19th-century East Africa

The establishment and growth of urban settlements represented an important driver of shifting patterns of migration in 19th-century East Africa. As is well known, the Swahili coast had a long tradition of urbanism since its origins in the latter part of the first millennium AD. In the 19th century, with the expansion of the ivory and slave trade, settlements on the coast, such as Bagamoyo, Pangani, and Kilwa Kivinje, expanded as terminus of the caravan roads coming from the interior (see Map 4.1) (Burton 2002, 8). During the trading season their population swelled and these settlements became in themselves drivers of migration as they attracted people for economic reasons, including porters, traders, prostitutes, and slaves.

The development of urban settlements in the interior regions was also related to issues of security. The intensification of slave raiding, the insecurity caused by the arrival of the Ngoni from Southern Africa in the 1840s (Keeton and Schirmer, Chapter 6, this volume), and the emergence of expansionist political leaders such as Mirambo or Nyungu ya Mawe in what today is Tanzania led to the proliferation of fortified and more concentrated settlements, especially starting from the mid-19th century (Burton 2002, 14).

The main driver of urbanization in the interior regions continued to be long-distance trade. Commercial towns developed along the main caravan roads and were inhabited by thousands of people who moved to these towns mainly for economic reasons. Along the

main caravan road through which ivory was exported to the coast, three main settlements developed: Bagamoyo on the coast, Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika, and Tabora in the region of Unyamwezi. In the second half of the 19th century, Bagamoyo became the most important port on the coast. Its population was around 4,000–6,000 people in the 1880s, a number that swelled when caravans arrived from the interior regions. Porters remained in town for up to three or four months waiting for a caravan for the interior to be reorganized. Besides porters, Bagamoyo attracted merchants, financiers, farmers, and craftsmen, who moved to the town thanks to the commercial opportunities it offered. Enslaved people were also present in large numbers and were employed as domestic servants and family helpers. They accounted for 15% of the population in the 1890s (Fabian 2013).

Tabora was the most important town in the interior of East Africa. Established in the 1840s following the collaboration between local political authorities and coastal merchants, in the 1870s it had a population of about 5,000 inhabitants, increasing to 20,000 in the 1890s (Pallaver 2020). Tabora was populated by a large number of enslaved people, for the biggest part coming from the Lake Victoria region and Eastern Congo, who were employed by coastal merchants and by local families to produce food. Traders from the coast, of both Swahili and Omani origin, had migrated to Tabora to deal in ivory, but later also engaged in food production for caravans and landless people in town, such as merchants and artisans. They imported slaves, the majority being women, whom they employed in the production of rice and cassava amongst others. Between 100 and 300 enslaved people lived on the estates of important merchants, where they were employed as domestic servants, concubines, and/or agricultural laborers. Local families also bought slaves to improve their productive capabilities and for domestic service. The number of enslaved people that entered Unyamwezi from Buganda, Bunyoro, and Karagwe was “substantial” and led to a “remarkable increase in population and economic prosperity” (Unomah 1972, 113–4). The attractiveness of these towns was related to the resulting opportunities to trade, for example, of foodstuff for passing caravans. In Unyamwezi, for example, grain, rice, sweet potatoes, and cassava were produced by immigrants from Buha and Burundi, by Nyamwezi women, and by agricultural enslaved laborers, and then carried to the market of Tabora (Deutsch 2006, 25).

The capital of the Kingdom of Buganda was unique in the East African interior for its size, population, and political and religious significance. It had a population of about 10,000 in the early 1850s, half of which were soldiers and members of the royal entourage (Reid and Médard 2000, 100). The transformation of its urban environment was related to the development of long-distance trade, and the expansion of foreign religions in the second half of the 1880s. With the development of long-distance trade in the 1850s, the capital of the kingdom that had been itinerant until that moment became more permanently anchored to the area around modern-day Kampala, a convenient location for the control of trade (Reid and Médard 2000, 99–103). Foreign traders from the coast as well as from neighboring regions visited the capital and this enhanced its commercial centrality. People moved to the quickly expanding settlement attracted by trade opportunities, and the capital extended into suburban areas. The first Christian missionaries – first French Catholics and then British Protestants – reached Buganda in the 1870s. Both the Roman Catholics and the British Protestants built big cathedrals in the capital, and in the 1890s – after the religious wars – the town became the most important Christian center in the interlacustrine region. At the time of the 1911 British census, the population of the town had increased to 32,000 (Burton 2002, 15).

Enslaved people formed a significant part of the population of these urban settlements. They were imported by traders and farmers from neighboring regions or from the coast. But they also migrated freely from the coast. Enslaved people from the coast were often slave artisans (*fundi*) and worked as blacksmiths, tinkers, masons, carpenters, tailors, potters, rope makers, and guards (Unomah 1972, 113). They paid their enslavers a percentage of their earnings that was set at between one-third and two-thirds (Clayton and Savage 1974, 2). Finally, concubines (*suria*) also traveled and moved with their enslavers from the coast to all parts of Eastern Africa, as far as the Eastern Congo (Wright 1993).

The presence of markets and the opportunities offered by long-distance trade also attracted free migrants to these towns. As already mentioned, coastal traders migrated to interior towns and created trading diasporas in Ujiji, Tabora, Mwanza, and in the region of Manyema. At the same time, free people moved to these towns in search for opportunities and advantages, including small traders, caravan staff, and artisans who came from both the coast and neighboring regions, such as modern-day DRC, Uganda, and Zambia. They brought with them their material culture, their language, their way of dressing, and their religion (Pallaver 2020). As a consequence, these urban settlements shared important similarities. They had similar immigrant groups; they shared similar commercial practices, including the use of glass beads and cloth as currency; and, finally, they acquired a common cultural life expressed linguistically with the use of Kiswahili as *lingua franca*, and religiously with the introduction of Islam. Together, these towns formed a network of “places where people met, mixed and traded goods and ideas” and became nodal points within a wider social and economic system (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1993, 213).

5 The impact of the establishment of colonial rule on migration patterns

The establishment of European colonial rule in East Africa was another important driver of shifting mobility patterns. The creation of plantations together with the building of colonial railways produced a new demand for migrant laborers all over East Africa. Laborers recruited locally were not sufficient to satisfy the needs of colonial enterprises and they were often not available to work for Europeans. For this reason, the colonial states had to turn to migrant laborers. This was particularly true for Kenya and GEA, where the demand for labor from settler-led plantations created the conditions for the development of new migration flows, but also for Zanzibar and its clove plantations. In Uganda, on the contrary, the production of the most important export crop, cotton, was left to chiefs and local peasants and remained largely a household production rather than a plantation crop (Hanson 2003, 169–70).⁴ It was only after 1910, when cotton became the most important export product of Uganda, that Buganda attracted migrant laborers from Ruanda-Urundi, Eastern Congo, and other parts of Uganda, thanks to its better wages and labor conditions (Reid 2017, 269–70; De Haas 2019). It was, however, only after the First World War and the abolition of forced labor in the early 1920s that migration took off (Powersland 1957).

The demand for free migrant laborers on the coast was also the result of the abolition of slavery, which in the pre-colonial period had been the main way of mobilizing labor, as already discussed. The British abolished slavery in Zanzibar in 1897 and in Kenya in 1907. After abolition, it became difficult to make freed people work in the settlers’ plantations, as they preferred to cultivate their own land. This created a new demand for wage laborers that was satisfied by the promotion of labor migration from the interior regions.

Contrary to the British, the Germans in GEA did not delegalize slavery. As a way to deal with labor shortages, the Germans used enslaved people as a ready source of labor for the plantations. German planters made contracts with both the enslaved laborers and their enslavers, according to which the plantation owner paid the redemption of the worker, who in turn had to work to pay for his/her ransom for about two/three years. As a matter of fact, in GEA, enslaved laborers in the plantations outnumbered wage laborers. In 1914, there were 180,000 enslaved laborers in the colony and 172,000 wage laborers. Besides slave ransoming, the Germans used penal labor and indentured labor to increase the number of available workers (Sunseri 2002, 27). In Tanzania, slavery was only abolished in 1922, by the British administration following Germany's loss of its colonies after the First World War.

In order to manage recurrent labor shortages, at the beginning of the colonial period both the British and the Germans hired indentured laborers to build colonial infrastructures, especially railways. In 1896 the British began the construction works for the Uganda railway that connected Mombasa on the coast to Kisumu on Lake Victoria. They hired 3,948 laborers from India. At the time of the completion of the railway in 1902, their number had reached 31,983 (Clayton and Savage 1974, 11). Indian laborers received higher wages compared to African laborers. Wages for Africans were in the range of 4–5 rupees per month, whereas Indian laborers received 12 rupees per month, and skilled craftsmen could even obtain 45 rupees per month. Hiring Indian laborers had the advantage that they would stay for longer periods compared to African workers, who were both unfamiliar with waged labor and did not have enough incentives to move for long periods. They worked for short periods and their presence was temporary as it was connected to the seasonality of agricultural labor. But indentured labor was expensive and difficult to obtain, and could not be a viable solution for the demand for laborers in the plantations.

For this reason, both the Germans and the British turned to long-distance migrants. The entire colonial period was characterized by incessant labor shortages, as the colonial state failed to mobilize the required number of workers. This forced the colonial state into a perpetual search for labor that in GEA became to be known as the *Arbeiterfrage*, the “labor question.” In order to control the sources of uncertainty and instability in the labor supply, the colonial state used coercion and expanded the scope and intensity of its intervention (Berman 1990, 68). However, this could not suffice, as the availability of laborers was connected to the level of taxation, the rhythms of the subsistence agricultural production, and the attractiveness of wages. As discussed above, in the pre-colonial period waged labor, such as portage, could be combined with agricultural labor and followed the seasonality of agricultural production. Contracts in the plantations or for railway construction implied a form of more permanent labor, longer periods away from home, and, ultimately, less negotiating power for African laborers.

The establishment of African reserves in Kenya was an important factor pushing up the migration of laborers, especially after the beginning of the expansion of European settler production from 1908. Unskilled migrant laborers were recruited in the reserves by labor recruiters, local chiefs, and the settlers themselves. African laborers left the reserves out of land shortages, cash need, and the pressures of chiefs who recruited laborers for the colonial state or the settlers. As many settler areas were located near to the most populous reserves, laborers moved back and forth between the reserves and the plantation areas, giving birth to “a relative brief cycle of labor migration to the estates with regular return to the reserves” (Berman 1990, 223).

The Kikuyu, the group that was more dramatically affected by the presence of British settlers in Kenya, moved more permanently out of the reserves and became squatters on European plantations. Kikuyu laborers were allowed to settle on the farmer's land with their families, to cultivate a small plot of land, and to herd their cattle. In exchange, they had to provide a certain amount of labor for the settler, or services or rent in kind. It was calculated that in the early 1930s one-fifth (110,000) of the total Kikuyu population were living outside the reserves, the biggest number of them as squatter laborers on settlers' plantations (Berman 1990, 229). Thus, squatting became a new pattern of migration in colonial Kenya – a pattern characterized by short-distance and permanent migrations within the colony that also characterized other regions of the continent in which there was a strong presence of European settlers, such as South Africa.⁵

In Zanzibar, the establishment of colonial rule and the abolition of slavery became important drivers of long-distance labor migration. There, the British government recruited clove pickers from Kenya and GEA on three-month contracts. They were 819 in 1905 and 1,600 in 1907. The migration of these laborers was, however, temporary. Many migrants stayed for two or three picking seasons and many for less than six months. According to Frederick Cooper, in the period 1924–26, 13,546 arrived in Zanzibar and 9,233 left (Cooper 1980, 106–7). The 1924 census in Zanzibar – the first census that listed occupations and the ethnic origin of laborers – showed that the Nyamwezi were the largest group of “weeders” (2,075) in the clove plantations. Many Nyamwezi women (1,406) also migrated to Zanzibar with their husbands (Zanzibar Protectorate 1924).⁶ They worked in the plantations picking cloves from the lower branches and separating the cloves from the stems (Sheriff et al. 2016, 40). The Nyamwezi started to migrate to Zanzibar in 1905 and their number increased significantly after the First World War (Cooper 1980, 106). They migrated voluntarily, through a communication network that was not controlled by the colonial state.

Compared to Kenya, the German colonial state was less coercive in terms of labor recruitment. The Germans established plantations on the coast and in the northeast of the colony, especially in the region of Usambara. The main products were cotton, coffee, sisal, copra, and coconut. The aim of the German colonial state was to base the development of the colonial economy on large-scale plantations, what Thaddeus Sunseri calls the “plantation imperative” (Sunseri 2002, 55). The employment of workers in the vicinity of plantations was complicated by the fact that it was more profitable to produce grain and vegetables to feed the laborers of the plantations, rather than being employed by German planters over long-term contracts. To satisfy the “plantation imperative,” the colonial state initially employed enslaved people and later convict laborers. However, toward the end of the 1910s, the colonial state ceased to be the main mobilizer of labor in the colony and migrant laborer moved more freely to the plantations (Sunseri 2002, XXV–XXVII). In 1902, European farms in GEA employed between 4,000 and 5,000 workers; in 1905–06, 36,000 workers; and in 1912–13, 90,000 workers (Koponen 1988, 367). Contracts were signed for 180 days and they could be renewed. Upon termination of the contract, about half of the workers went home, 25% remained on the plantations, and the remaining 25% moved to other plantations (Calvert 1916, 88). In 1913, the new labor statuses introduced the 240 days-per-year contract, or a minimum of 20 days of work per month, and this produced more stabilized communities of migrants in the coastal areas and in Usambara, where German-owned plantations were concentrated (Koponen 1988, 394).

In terms of numbers, the most significant group of migrant workers in the colony in the early colonial period were, again, the Nyamwezi. They represented the majority of migrant workers in Usambara, as well as on the coast. They were also employed as dockworkers in Dar es Salaam, Mombasa, and Kisumu, and they even migrated to the mines in South Africa (Koponen 1988, 168). According to one missionary, in 1913 the male population of Unyamwezi was reduced by one-third compared to 1892, owing to permanent migrations to the plantations (van der Burgt 1913, 706). As Deutsch points out, this was in part due to the restructuring process that took place in the caravan trade after the establishment of colonial rule and the building of colonial railways (Deutsch 2006, 225). In 1912, the Central Railway from Dar es Salaam to Tabora was completed. This reduced the number of porters traveling along the central caravan route as the new railway basically followed their route. In 1900, 35,000 porters reached Bagamoyo on the coast and 43,880 left for the interior. After the opening of the railway, the number of porters drastically declined: in 1912, 851 porters arrived at the coast and only 193 left for the interior (Iliffe 1980, 280). The pre-colonial tradition of traveling contributed to the willingness of the Nyamwezi to migrate to colonial plantations and shows an important continuity between the pre-colonial and early colonial periods from the point of view of the origin and motivation of migrants.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the four main drivers of shifting patterns of migration in East Africa during the 19th century and the early 20th century: (1) slavery and its abolition; (2) portage; (3) urbanization; and (4) European colonialism. Among them, the most important, both quantitatively and in terms of the legacy for the societies involved, was slavery. The establishment of plantations in Zanzibar and along the Swahili coast gave rise to a new migration system that developed “out of a more diffuse form of slavery” that had characterized the region (Cooper 1979, 112). The variability of the status of slavery that characterized coastal societies complicated the trajectories of enslaved migrants. As this chapter has discussed, enslaved people were not only forced to migrate, but they could move voluntarily, with their enslaver’s permission, from the coast to the urban centers that developed along the main caravan roads. When looking at slavery in 19th-century East Africa, it is possible to identify different migration flows that overlapped and did not just follow the direction interior regions-coastal plantations.

British attempts to limit slavery and the slave trade in the Indian Ocean contributed to an important shift within the slave migration system, as the slave trade shifted from export to the coast to a major use of enslaved workers in the interior regions. Following this relocation, more enslaved people migrated within the interior regions and to the urban centers that had developed along the main caravan roads in connection with the ivory trade. These settlements had thousands of inhabitants and were characterized by the presence of immigrant groups both from the coast and from the interior region. The expansion in the ivory trade gave rise to another migration system, formed by free laborers who traveled the caravan roads. As the journey from the coast to Lake Tanganyika and back generally took from four to six months, they spent long periods away from home and became circular migrants.⁷

Changes brought about by the establishment of colonial rule were important drivers of shifting patterns of migration. The restructuring of the caravan trade in GEA after the

building of the Central Railway, the pressure of white settlers and the coercive nature of the colonial state in Kenya, and the abolition of slavery created the conditions for the emergence of a new migration system that supplied waged laborers to European plantations. External factors cannot be held solely responsible for migrations. Even if forced recruitment was not absent, these migrations were the result of choices of groups and individuals who responded to changing socio-economic conditions.

Notes

- 1 On the history of the introduction of cloves to Zanzibar, see Sheriff (1987, 49–51), and for exports and prices (62–3).
- 2 Lovejoy (2011, 151–2) estimates it at 47.5%.
- 3 Slavery continued, however, to be tolerated in the coastal areas by colonial authorities, who needed slaves as manpower for the plantations; see below.
- 4 This was due to the 1900 land agreement between the Baganda and the British that limited the land available for settlers in Buganda. Cotton seed were distributed by the government to local chiefs, who in turn distributed them to peasants. See De Haas (2017) and Wrigley (1959). On migration flows connected to cash-crop production in Uganda see De Haas and Travieso (Chapter 11, this volume).
- 5 On South Africa see Keeton and Schirmer (Chapter 6, this volume) and Fourie (Chapter 7, this volume).
- 6 The total population of Zanzibar at the time was 115,016 (Zanzibar Protectorate 1924).
- 7 The average was 60–5 days from the coast to Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika and 45 from Tabora to the coast (Cummings 1973, 114).

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