Journal of African History, **41** (2000), pp. 173–195. Printed in the United Kingdom

'A NATION OF PORTERS': THE NYAMWEZI AND THE LABOUR MARKET IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY TANZANIA

BY STEPHEN J. ROCKEL
University of Toronto

FROM the beginning of the nineteenth century, Nyamwezi long-distance trading caravans dominated the central routes through Tanzania, stretching from Mrima coast ports such as Bagamoyo and Saadani to Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika.[1] Despite the inroads of Omani Arab and Swahili trading enterprises from the middle of the century, the Nyamwezi maintained a position of strength. In the second half of the nineteenth century, market relations emerged as the dominant form of economic organization along the central routes, although the market for many commodities was clearly fractured by transport difficulties, and non-market relations frequently substituted for weakly developed commercial institutions and tools. Most caravan porters in nineteenth-century Tanzania were free wage workers, and nearly all were clearly migrant or itinerant labourers.[2] The development of a labour market for caravan porters was an early and significant stage in the

[1] Research for this article was aided by a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship and a grant from the Associates of the University of Toronto. Thanks to the Tanzanian Commission for Science and Technology and members of the Department of History at the University of Dar es Salaam for assistance during my research trip in 1992–3. Thanks also to Bill Freund and Hamshaveni Chetty for commenting on versions of the paper, and also to the anonymous readers of this journal for their helpful suggestions.

[2] There is a small but significant recent literature on pre-colonial porterage in Africa. Of general importance is Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Paul E. Lovejoy (eds.), *The Workers of African Trade* (Beverly Hills, 1985). For caravans in Tanzania, see Edward A. Alpers, 'The coast and the development of the caravan trade', in I. N. Kimambo and A. J. Temu (eds.), *A History of Tanzania* (Nairobi, 1969), 35–56; Richard Gray and David Birmingham (eds.), *Pre-Colonial African Trade* (London, 1970); John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge, 1979); T. O. Beidelman, 'The organization and maintenance of caravans by the Church Missionary Society in Tanzania in the nineteenth century', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 15 (1982), 601–23; Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770–1873* (London, 1987); Juhani Koponen, *People and Production in Late Pre-colonial Tanzania: History and Structures* (Jyväskylä, 1988); Jonathan Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Portsmouth NH, London, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, 1995). The specialist literature on porters includes S. C. Lamden, 'Some aspects of porterage in East Africa', *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 61 (1963), 155–64; Robert Cummings, 'A note on the history of caravan porters in East Africa', *Kenya Historical Review*, 2 (1973); Donald Herbert Simpson, *Dark Companions: The African Contribution to the European Exploration of East Africa* (London, 1975); Stephen J. Rockel, 'Wage labor and the culture of porterage in nineteenth-century Tanzania: the central caravan routes', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 15 (1995), 14–24; Stephen J. Rockel, 'Caravan porters of the *nyika*: labour, culture and society in nineteenth-century Tanzania' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1997).

transition to capitalism,[3] which began in a period of violence and political upheaval. Clearly, this has implications for how scholars should view broader processes of economic transformation prior to the imposition of colonial rule, which cut short a series of significant indigenous innovations.[4]

The argument that porters were mostly wage labourers rests on evidence that their labour was bought and sold according to fluctuating labour market conditions.[5] Market conditions in the second half of the nineteenth century shows a broadly rising demand for porters, a demand that could only be met if caravan operators offered adequate wages and observed the customs established within porter work culture. Thus, market conditions along the central routes contributed to the development of a free wage labour, characterized by a unique labour culture.[6]

The fortunes of Nyamwezi traders and porters were linked not just to trends on the coast and changes in the international economy, but also to adaptability in the face of these changes, and a favourable labour market. Developments within the Nyamwezi domestic economy facilitated long distance trade and migrant labour. Like colonial migrant labourers, porters combined wage earning with continued access to household production on the land. In Unyamwezi, increased cultivation of *mbuga* marshlands and the adoption of white rice increased agricultural production, facilitating the absence of a large proportion of the adult population.[7] Many Nyamwezi porters used their earnings and profits to invest in cattle and their farms, the more successful paying for additional labour in the form of wives, slaves, and client Tutsi cattle herders. In turn, access to these sources of labour made porterage possible. Thus the nature of gender and other social roles were crucial.[8] The ability of the Nyamwezi to compensate for lost labour gave a particular coherence to the only partly monetized economy of nineteenth-century Unyamwezi.

[3] Iliffe, *Modern History*, 45, 77.

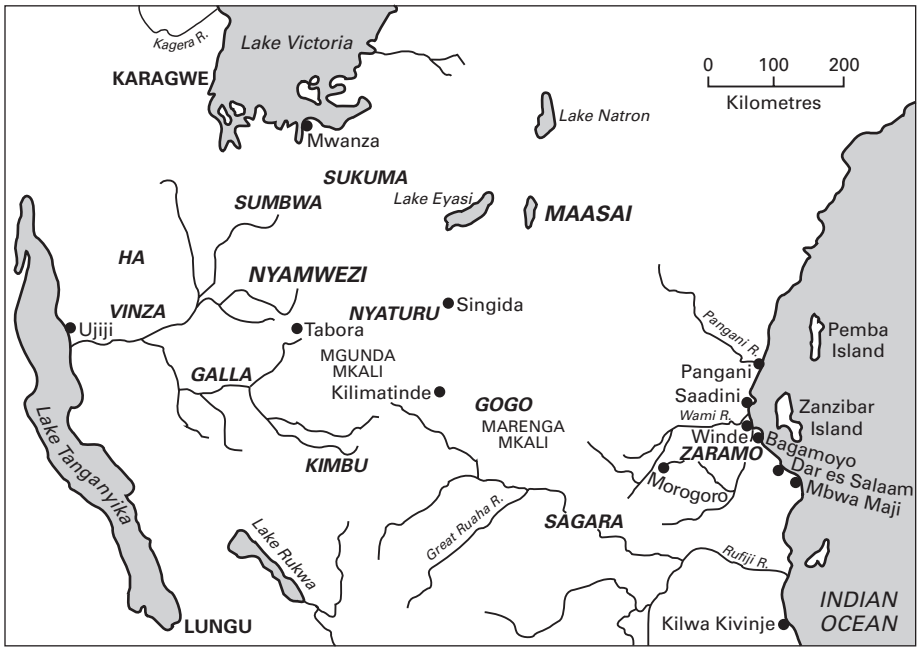
[4] These innovations were clearly limited in many respects, and were hindered by the very fact of the transportation problem. Nevertheless, there is evidence for the spread of market relations in foodstuffs and the partial and uneven commercialization of agriculture along parts of the central and northern routes. For introductory comments, see O. F. Raum, 'German East Africa: Changes in African tribal life under German administration, 1882–1914', in Vincent Harlow and E. M. Chilver (eds.), *A History of East Africa* (2 vols.) (Oxford, 1965), II, 196–7. For north-east Tanzania and the northern route along the Pangani Valley, see Helge Kjekshus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History* (London, Ibadan, Nairobi, Lusaka, 1977), 111–16; Koponen, *People and Production*, 103–4, 118–9; Isaria N. Kimambo, 'Environmental control and hunger in the mountains and plains of nineteenth-century north-eastern Tanzania', in Gregory Maddox, James Giblin and Isaria N. Kimambo (eds.), *Custodians of the Land: Ecology and Culture in the History of Tanzania* (London, 1996), 71–95. Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, ch. 1, explores some of the implications of the commoditization of material things. For the central routes, see John Hanning Speke, *What Led to the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (Edinburgh and London, 1864), 357; Alfred C. Unomah and J. B. Webster, 'East Africa: the expansion of commerce', in John E. Flint (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa* (8 vols.) (London, 1976), V, 296; Rockel, 'Caravan porters of the *nyika*', 280–2.

[5] It also depends on an analysis of bargaining and wage payments. See Rockel, 'Caravan porters', ch. 6, for discussions of bargaining, customary control over the labour process, and wages.

[6] Rockel, 'Caravan porters', *passim*.

[7] For rice in pre-colonial Unyamwezi, see Rockel, 'Caravan porters', 87, 90–1.

[8] Rockel, 'Caravan porters', 94–122; Sharon B. Stichter, *Migrant Laborers* (Cambridge, 1985), 10–12, 35–9, 58, and *passim*.



Map 1. Tanzania: ethnic groups and places mentioned in text.

A study in precolonial labour history, this article reassesses aspects of Nyamwezi caravaning and the increasingly commodified labour market for porters during the last decades of the nineteenth century. The next section outlines some preconditions for Nyamwezi commercial expansion, followed by a discussion of caravan organization at the peak of Nyamwezi success during the 1870s and 1880s. The final section analyzes the development of the labour market, and shows that the expansion of the market was connected to the persistence of Nyamwezi commercial operations.

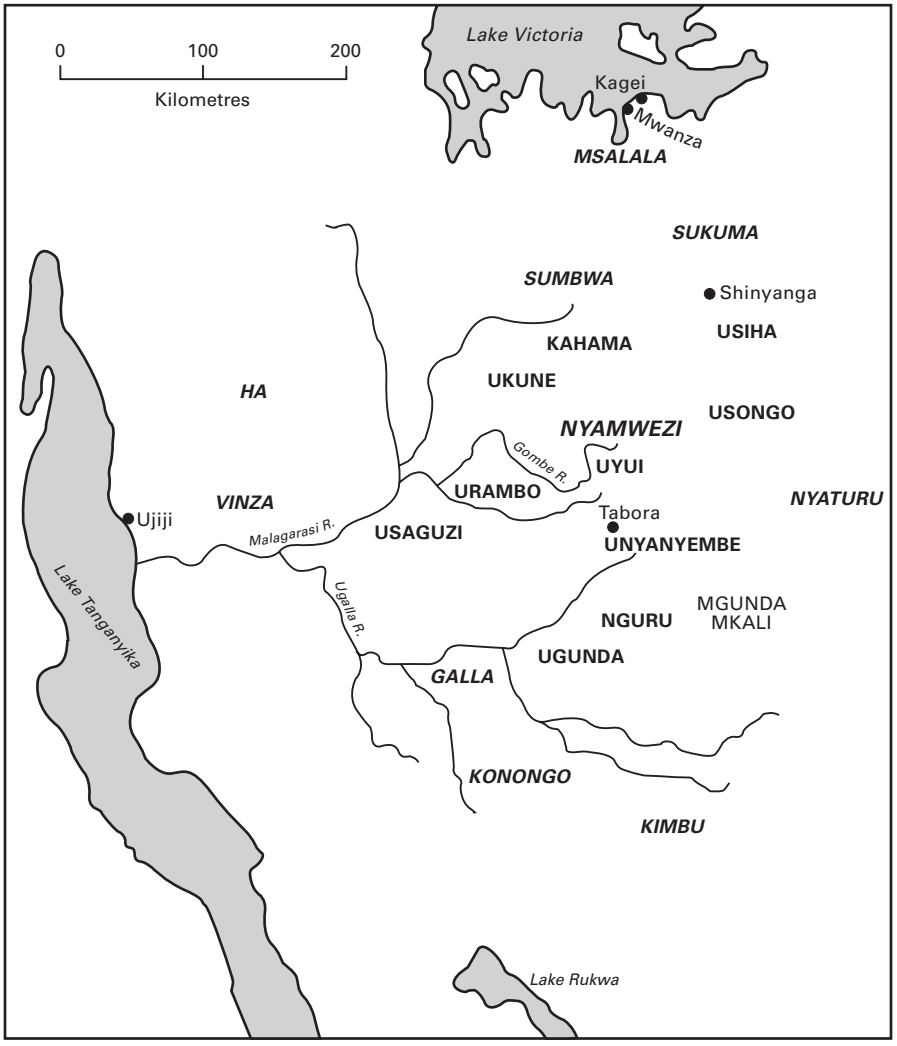
THE BEGINNINGS OF NYAMWEZI PORTERAGE

Unyamwezi occupies a vast expanse of western Tanzania, beginning in the east at Tura, where the first caravans of the chiefdom entered after crossing the Mgunda Mkali wilderness (now the Itigi Thicket), which lies between Ugogo and Unyamwezi.[9] To the west, the Nyamwezi homeland extends to Usaguzi, abutting the Malagarasi river; to the north, Unyamwezi includes Kahama and Ukune, and to the south, Ugunda and Ugalla.

The Nyamwezi and related groups were alone among the peoples of the interior to take advantage of the economic opportunities presented by the Sagara migrations from their mountain homeland in eastern Tanzania.[10] For the arrival of Sagara migrants during the eighteenth century with their knowledge of the coast region indirectly stimulated Nyamwezi traders to carry down their ivory and other goods. As Shorter puts it:

[9] For the Mgunda Mkali, see Rockel, 'Caravan porters', 35–8. For Ugogo in the nineteenth century, see Carol Jane Sissons, 'Economic prosperity in Ugogo, East Africa, 1860–1890' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1984).

[10] See Aylward Shorter, *Chiefship in Western Tanzania: A Political History of the Kimbu* (Oxford, 1972); Rockel, 'Caravan porters', ch. 2.



Map 2. The Nyamwezi and their neighbours.

The coming of the Nyitumba from Usagara was an event of the first importance, for they opened up a route linking the interior to the hinterland of the coast, and ultimately drew the peoples of the interior to the coast in search of the new objects of value they had brought.[11]

Equally, the Nyamwezi had long been operating caravans over shorter distances as part of regional trade in items such as salt and iron.[12] Significantly, it was this experience that enabled them, and not other groups, to take advantage of new opportunities.

The impact of migrations, the distribution of natural resources in western

[11] Shorter, *Chiefship in Western Tanzania*, 225.

[12] J. E. G. Sutton and Andrew D. Roberts, 'Uvinza and its salt industry', *Azania*, 3 (1968), 45–86; Andrew Roberts, 'Nyamwezi trade', in Gray and Birmingham, *Pre-Colonial African Trade*, 44–7.

Tanzania, and the central position of the Nyamwezi in the regional trading system, all became key factors leading to the rise of the caravan system.[13] The Nyamwezi were essentially cultivators, producing, among other crops, grains, pulses, potatoes, pumpkins and tobacco. But because Unyamwezi is somewhat more forested than neighbouring territories, inhabitants were able to harvest forest products such as honey, to make baskets and wooden utensils, and to hunt wildlife. Lacking iron ore and good quality salt, the Nyamwezi exchanged their products for Sumbwa and Konongo iron, and salt from the Uvinza pans. Other neighbours, especially the Gogo, Sukuma and Ha, kept large cattle herds. The Nyamwezi exchanged their grain, bark cloth, honey and other products for the cattle and hides of herders. The fortuitous position of the Nyamwezi in the centre of the regional trading system of western Tanzania made them ideal intermediaries. Moreover, the organization of the gender division of labour, the absence at first of large herds of cattle, and the utilization of immigrant Tutsi and slave labour,[14] left them free to travel during the dry season when there was little work in the fields. In contrast, the nature of the local economies of other peoples in central and western Tanzania made it impossible for large numbers to be absent at any one time.

The geographical location of Unyamwezi became even more important when the main routes to and from the coast shifted during the 1840s from the Ruaha river line to the central route network through Ugogo and Unyanyembe.[15] Location is inadequate in itself to explain the central role of the Nyamwezi, but other trading peoples including the Yao, Swahili and the Kamba, were all based in strategic positions for the caravan trade.

A secondary factor that may have encouraged long-distance travel and caravan porterage was the prevailing condition of lengthy peace and stability.[16] There is no evidence for attacks by outsiders until the mid-nineteenth century, when parts of Ukimbu, Unyamwezi and Usumbwa were invaded by the migrating Ngoni.[17] Prior to this, conflict was limited to occasional small-scale raiding of one Nyamwezi chiefdom by another. In

[13] Sutton and Roberts, 'Uvinza'; Roberts, 'Nyamwezi trade'; Unomah and Webster, 'East Africa: the expansion of commerce', 273; A. C. Unomah, *Mirambo of Tanzania* (London, Nairobi, Ibadan, Lusaka, 1977), 7–8.

[14] For detailed discussion of these topics, see Rockel, 'Caravan porters', ch. 4.

[15] See Rockel, 'Caravan porters', ch. 2.

[16] This idea is borrowed from Unomah, *Mirambo*, 7. For the political history of the Nyamwezi, see also R. G. Abrahams, *The Political Organization of Unyamwezi* (Cambridge, 1967); R. G. Abrahams, *The Peoples of Greater Unyamwezi, Tanzania* (London, 1967); Achim Gottberg, 'On the historical importance of the crisis of the Fundikira empire', in W. Markov (ed.), *Afrika-Studien* (Leipzig, 1967), 63–83; Andrew Roberts, 'The Nyamwezi', in Andrew Roberts (ed.), *Tanzania before 1900* (Nairobi, 1968), 117–50; Norman R. Bennett, *Mirambo of Tanzania, 1840?–1884* (New York, 1971); Shorter, *Chiefship in Western Tanzania*; Alfred Chukwudi Unomah, 'Economic expansion and political change in Unyanyembe (*c.* 1840–1900)' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Ibadan, 1972); J. B. Kabeya, *King Mirambo* (Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam, 1976). Little new has been published since the 1970s in any language on the history of this very important ethnic group.

[17] Known as the Watuta. See Elzear Ebner, *The History of the Wangoni* (Ndanda-Peramiho, 1987), 59–61; Shorter, *Chiefship in Western Tanzania*, 255–61; Abdul M. H. Sheriff, 'Tanzanian societies at the time of the partition', in M. H. Y. Kaniki (ed.), *Tanzania Under Colonial Rule* (London, 1980), 33.

contrast, peoples to the east, such as the Gogo and Sagara, were subject to raiding by the Nyaturu and Maasai, and in the Sagara case, the Swahili. The Nyamwezi were relatively immune because of their smaller cattle herds. To the west, the Ha accepted Tutsi overlordship, but the Nyamwezi were left alone. By the time of the Unyanyembe civil war in the 1860s and the conflict between Unyanyembe and Mirambo in the 1870s and 1880s, the caravan system was long established.

Two other explanations for the emergence of travel and porterage as major features of Nyamwezi economy and society must be rejected. Some scholars refer to 'recurrent severe famines in Unyamwezi', which made it necessary for the Nyamwezi to find additional means of support beyond agriculture and pastoralism.[18] On the surface this is a reasonable argument. There is circumstantial evidence that famine in the homeland of the Kamba of Kenya encouraged them to work as long-distance traders and porters from the late eighteenth century.[19] In contrast, Unyamwezi is less prone to drought and famine than many other parts of Tanzania, including regions along the central routes.[20] If famine did occur on a local scale, people travelled to less affected neighbourhoods to buy food. When the party bearing Livingstone's body to Bagamoyo passed through famine-afflicted Nguru (south-east Unyamwezi), Jacob Wainwright recorded that 'many travel to Ugunda to buy seed corn for domestic use'.[21] The numerous swamps in Unyamwezi provide reservoirs of water not present to the same degree in, for instance, Uzaramo, Usagara or Ugogo. If famine was the main reason the Nyamwezi turned to long-distance trade and porterage in such numbers, then it has to be wondered why other groups did not do so. The Zaramo, Sagara and Gogo are closer to the coast than the Nyamwezi and were affected by famine at various times in their history. In the case of the Gogo it was the nature of their economy, with its heavy emphasis on both livestock rearing and the cultivation of millet, sorghum, maize, watermelons, pumpkins and other crops, which made porterage unattractive.[22]

The second inadequate explanation relates to culture. The success of Nyamwezi trading initiatives, which brought wealth and the taste for adventure, ensured an important place for travel among Nyamwezi cultural icons, and eventually resulted in porterage becoming embedded in Nyamwezi

[18] Abrahams, *Political Organization of Unyamwezi*, 9–10; Bennett, *Mirambo*, 10. The phrase is Bennett's.

[19] D. A. Low, 'The northern interior, 1840–84', in Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew (eds.), *History of East Africa* (2 vols.) (London, 1963), I, 314; Robert J. Cummings, 'Aspects of human porterage with special reference to the Akamba of Kenya: towards an economic history, 1820–1920' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1975), 48, 103–4, 108–9; Report of Sir A. Hardinge for the Year 1897–98, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, C.9125, m.f. 105.547–548, 26.

[20] Verney Lovett Cameron, *Across Africa* (2 vols.) (London, 1877), I, 191; also Richard F. Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa* (New York, 1860), 255.

[21] (Jacob Wainwright), 'Tagebuch von Jacob Wainright über den Transport von Dr. Livingstone's Leiche, 4. Mai 1873–18. Februar 1874', *Petermann's Mittheilungen*, 20 (1874), 192. Wainwright was mission-educated and wrote the first safari journal by an East African.

[22] Carol Sissons tell us: 'There was no way of integrating a travelling occupation, such as long-distance trade during dry season months, with the demands of the agricultural cycle'. See, 'Economic prosperity in Ugogo', 177.

culture. Society's values encouraged the young to travel as traders or porters. Numerous nineteenth-century writers thus proposed a cultural explanation for the Nyamwezi predilection for porterage. One described the Nyamwezi as:

> the professional transport agents of the East Coast. Not one of them was allowed to marry before he had carried a load of ivory to the coast, and brought back one of calico or brass wire. It was the tribal stamp of true manhood, at once making him a citizen and warrior.[23]

To reflect their heightened status, Nyamwezi men who had reached the coast would often change their names to mark the significance of their visit.[24] Other Europeans who visited Unyamwezi noted that youths would copy the experienced men by walking around with mock loads.[25] Such causal explanations concentrating on culture have sometimes failed to distinguish between outward expressions of the tendency towards migrant labour such as cultural tropes or the personal search for gain, and underlying socio-economic causes.[26] This important distinction was made long ago in a classic article by J. Clyde Mitchell.[27] The origins of Nyamwezi long-distance trading activities, porterage and attraction to migrant labour have more to do with local economic and social dynamics than culture, political history or geography. The Nyamwezi were only able to utilize the advantages they possessed, described above, because of certain characteristics in the social and economic structure of their homeland.[28]

NYAMWEZI CARAVANS, 1857–90

The organization of caravan labour was closely connected with the relations of production in the porters' home societies, and differed on each of the main route clusters.[29] As economic, social and political change occurred in the

[23] Alfred J. Swann, *Fighting the Slave Hunters in Central Africa* (London, 1969; 1st ed., 1910), 58. Nyamwezi porters arriving at Zanzibar told Bishop Edward Steere that they considered any of their compatriots who never undertook a journey to the coast as a 'milksop'. See Bennett, *Mirambo*, 12; also Burton, *Lake Regions*, 235; Roberts, 'Nyamwezi trade', 66.

[24] C. T. Wilson and R. W. Felkin, *Uganda and the Egyptian Sudan* (2 vols.) (London, 1882), I, 43.

[25] Paul Reichard, 'Die Wanjamuesi', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin*, 24 (1889), 259; Bennett, *Mirambo*, 12.

[26] Jonathan Glassmam has recently written: '[Nyamwezi] caravan labour was seen not as a way to earn a living, but as a way to prove one's manhood'. Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 59. See also Bennett, *Mirambo*, 12; Unomah and Webster, 'East Africa: the expansion of commerce', 284.

[27] J. Clyde Mitchell, 'The causes of labour migration', reprinted in Abebe Zegeye and Shubi Ishemo (eds.), *Forced Labour and Migration: Patterns of Movement Within Africa* (London, Munich, New York, 1989), 28–54. It should be noted that long-distance porterage was a specific kind of migrant labour, with important differences from the more familiar migrant labour systems of the colonial period.

[28] As Helge Kjekshus points out, we must look to local factors as well as external forces when considering the expansion of the caravan trade and porterage: Kjekshus, *Ecology Control*, 111–25. See also Koponen, *People and Production*, 81.

[29] Glassman makes a similar point, although he describes the contrast in terms of struggles over culture, and identity politics in the coastal termini of the main routes:

interior and at the coast, the terms of caravan labour also changed, but within a framework that was well established by the middle of the century, and which was dominated by the cultural and other norms of the Nyamwezi and their neighbours. Caravan culture, basically Nyamwezi in origin, influenced people from the coast, just as up-country porters were exposed to the values of *ustaarabu* or *uungwana* (coastal civilization). Nyamwezi social and cultural norms prevailed because the peoples of the western interior pioneered the caravan system and the majority of porters and caravans working the central routes were Nyamwezi. Nyamwezi caravans had characteristics that influenced other groups such as coastal Muslims.[30] Nyamwezi influence on the culture of caravan travel diminished only at the end of the nineteenth century as the power of foreign employers, backed by the embryonic colonial state, increased and as structural and political change associated with early colonial rule undermined the independence and economic vitality of the peoples of the western interior.

There was no single pattern of Nyamwezi caravan organization. For porters, a range of options existed between occasional journeys and full-time specialization. Nyamwezi caravans could be small-scale ventures of a dozen or so traders and porters, or massive undertakings of a thousand or more people. Many Nyamwezi entrepreneurs were members of the ruling class, but lesser citizens, such as subordinate chiefs, hunters, medicine men and ordinary people also operated trading caravans. Often the caravans were formed by individuals carrying their own trade goods, and small employers who hired just a few porters each. These numerous petty traders banded together for protection and selected a caravan leader from among themselves.[31]

Nevertheless, some common characteristics of caravan organization and the division of labour among caravan workers can be identified. The pattern for many porters of dry season travel, with agriculture being the priority during the wet season, survived throughout the century and the reluctance of most Nyamwezi porters hired at the coast to travel beyond their home countries on the return journey remained typical. These points were much commented upon by European travellers. Cameron, when in Uganda in November 1873, found it 'impossible to obtain any pagazi … as they would not leave home during the sowing season'. In 1876, a mission caravan was on its way to Lake Victoria. In December, near Nguru, the Nyamwezi porters left the missionaries, having met the terms of their contract. It was impossible to engage new porters as 'the first rains having fallen, the whole population was employed in preparing the ground for sowing, and until all

---

Jonathan Glassman, 'Social rebellion and Swahili culture: the response to German conquest of the northern Mrima' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1988), ch. 2; *Feasts and Riot*, ch. 2.

[30] Glassman recognizes this, but in the context of his argument concerning the defence of Nyamwezi autonomy against Swahili domination of the trade routes: *Feasts and Riot*, 59–60. I would argue that Nyamwezi cultural dominance in caravans working the central routes long predated coastal economic domination.

[31] Burton, *Lake Regions*, 237; James B. Wolf (ed.), *The Central African Diaries of Walter Hutley, 1877–1881* (Boston, 1976), 36, 22 June 1878; Abrahams, *Peoples of Greater Unyamwezi*, 38; Unomah and Webster, 'East Africa: the expansion of commerce', 285; Iliffe, *Modern History*, 44.

the seed was sown no men would engage as porters'. After the task was finished a few weeks later, 'several gangs' of men signed up.[32]

The pattern of small-scale enterprise remained common throughout the century. In small chiefdoms such as Ndala, where there were no indigenous traders as rich as those in Usumbwa, Unyanyembe or Urambo, caravans remained co-operative affairs of several small traders. A few weeks before harvest, in April, a drummer would tour the villages, broadcasting the news that a caravan would soon depart. Porters would then gather at the appointed place. Some would have their own goods to trade at the coast or elsewhere.[33] Sheriff suggests it was probably such small bands which used the northern or Pangani valley route during the 1840s, and perhaps earlier. The northern Nyamwezi and Sukuma made similar journeys to Pangani in the 1850s, but during the 1870s and 1880s took their ivory instead to Saadani and Winde.[34] The survival of this tradition of small bands of traders and porters showing the security problems they faced is suggested in a missionary's record of an encounter in the Marenga Mkali, the wilderness on the eastern edge of Ugogo, in August 1891:

> About midday a number of Wanyamwezi travellers came into our camp looking extremely excited, and told us a sad tale of murder and robbery. They said that shortly before... they had been attacked by a number of predatory Wahehe... who had killed their leader, and carried off two tusks of ivory and between thirty and forty goats which they had been taking to the coast.[35]

This caravan, given the circumstances and the small quantity of stolen goods, probably consisted of a dozen or so individuals. A second option for porters was employment for wages by some of the bigger Nyamwezi traders, or as a personal service. A third was exercised by those intrepid individuals who took nothing to the coast but joined a party hoping to find paid work in a returning caravan.[36] An account from Usambiro in northern Unyamwezi in 1891 highlights the attraction for up-country porters of wage earning in caravans leaving the coast:

[32] Cameron, *Across Africa*, I, 183; Wilson and Felkin, *Uganda*, I, 76–7. Similar comments are in Richard F. Burton, *Zanzibar, City, Island, and Coast* (2 vols.) (London, 1872), II, 298; François Coulbois, *Dix années au Tanganyka* (Limoges, 1901), 48; Mackay to Wright, Uyui, 25 May 1878, Church Missionary Society (CMS) CA6/016; Broyon to McGregor, Zanzibar, 1 Oct. 1879, London Missionary Society (LMS), School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 2/3/D.

[33] Francis Patrick Nolan, 'Christianity in Unyamwezi, 1878–1928' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1977), 36, 201–2; Koponen, *People and Production*, 114, 116. Philip Stigger, 'The late nineteenth-century caravan trade and some of its modern implications' (unpublished paper, Simon Fraser University, n.d.), 11–17, has accounts of small-scale trade in northern Unyamwezi and Usukuma leading to participation in caravans to the coast. The Nyamwezi and Sukuma share similar institutions and cultures.

[34] Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 174; Glassman, 'Social rebellion', 104; Speke, *Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, 350. Mackay reported meeting 'many small caravans' bound for the coast in mid 1876: Mackay to Wright, Zanzibar, 12 Dec. 1876, CMS CA6/016.

[35] Robert Pickering Ashe, *Chronicles of Uganda* (London, 1971; 1st ed. 1894), 22.

[36] Graf von Schweinitz, 'Das Trägerpersonal der Karawanen', *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, 2 (1894), 19; Norman R. Bennett (ed.), *From Zanzibar to Ujiji: The Journal of Arthur W. Dodgshun 1877–1879* (Boston, 1969), 64, 2–8 May 1878; Nolan, 'Christianity in Unyamwezi', 36, 201–2.

A drum was sent out into all the villages round about… The drummer, on such occasions, would usually return with a crowd of followers – some anxious to carry loads to the coast – others wishful simply to follow in the… train, as a protection… The men who did no work paid their own way down-country by selling tobacco or spades [hoes] of their own manufacture… The main object of porters and followers alike was to get to the coast and to carry back a load for which usually good wages were paid.[37]

During the period from about 1840 to 1890, the Nyamwezi also operated much larger caravans, representing the commercial status of the members of the trading elite of Unyanyembe and other large chiefdoms. Burton describes the formation of such a caravan:

In collecting a caravan the first step is to 'make', as the people say, a *khambi*, or kraal. The *mtongi*, or proprietor of the goods, announces, by pitching his tent in the open, and by planting his flag, that he is ready to travel; this is done because among the Wanyamwezi a porter who persuades others to enlist does it under pain of prosecution and fine-paying if a death or an accident ensue. Petty chiefs, however, and their kinsmen, will bring with them in hope of promotion a number of recruits, sometimes all the male adults of a village, who then recognize them as headmen.

Once the porters were assembled and all was ready, the *mtongi* oversaw the allocation of loads.[38] The more powerful chiefs, as members of the *vbandevba* (Kinyamwezi: merchant elite) could mobilize a huge work force, drawing on their status as chief, rich trader and warlord. In 1882, Mirambo sent a caravan to the coast in the charge of his uncle and chief commercial agent Mwana Seria, which numbered some 1,300 porters. They carried 314 large tusks to buy cloth, guns and powder, and another twenty 'fine' tusks as a present for Sultan Barghash. Soon after the return of this caravan, Mirambo despatched several ivory trading caravans to Buganda, Karagwe, Usukuma, Katanga, Manyema and other places, indicating his large resources of trade goods and manpower. In September, he still had sufficient porters available to send a 'large' ivory caravan under Mwana Kapisi to Unyanyembe and the coast.[39] Such large caravans of Nyamwezi porters were almost certainly organized according to the model adopted by the Irish caravan leader and trader Charles Stokes, who successfully managed columns of 2,500–3,000 porters during the 1880s and early 1890s. Stokes was unique among Europeans in East Africa in the ease with which he could attract porters, largely because he learnt and applied the methods of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma. Among the northern Nyamwezi and Sukuma he gained a good reputation, partly through his marriage to Limi, cousin of chief Mtinginyi of Usongo, and partly because of his demonstrated belief in non-violent caravan management and racial equality. He was thus able to gain access to the labour resources of Usongo, 'a land of porters', and other parts of

[37] Alfred R. Tucker, *Eighteen Years in Uganda and East Africa* (London, 1911), 57.

[38] Burton, *Lake Regions*, 111–2; Richard F. Burton, 'The lake regions of Central Equatorial Africa', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 29 (1859), 411–12; Cummings, 'A note on the history of caravan porters', 114.

[39] Southon to Thompson, Urambo, 17 Apr. 1882, LMS 4/4/B; Griffith to Thompson, Uguha, 1 July 1882, LMS 4/4/C; Copplestone to Thompson, Uyui, 2 Sept. 1882, LMS 4/5/A; Roberts, 'Nyamwezi trade', 65, n. 5. Mwana Kapisi's caravan only got as far as Uyui. For more on Mwana Seria, see Stokes to Lang, Uyui, 18 Dec. 1884, CMS G3A6/02.

northern Unyamwezi.[40] The future Bishop of Uganda encountered Stokes' caravan at Saadani in July 1890:

> Away from the sea … some 2,500 Wanyamwezi porters were encamped. These men had come down to the coast, under the leadership of Stokes, and would each carry back a load weighing some seventy pounds. They were mostly fine, stalwart-looking men. Some had brought their wives, who cooked and carried the cooking utensils and food – often no light burden … Many [of the porters] were swaggering about in … a few yards of white calico … Others had cloth … wrapped about their heads as a turban or folded round their waists as a loin-cloth. Others, again, were simply clad in skins. All apparently were armed with spears, bows and arrows, or antiquated muzzle loaders …
>
> These 2,500 porters … were divided into fifteen camps and companies. For instance, there had been assigned to us for the porterage of our loads some 300 Wasukuma. These men were in [the] charge of a *nyampara*, or head-man, named Simba … Under him were five or six subordinates who had charge of companies. Four or five, or a larger number … messed together. These smaller companies also had each its head. It was each man's duty in turn to cook for his fellows, draw water and fetch firewood.
>
> Thus the whole caravan was organized …[41]

As Tucker noted, after the merchants the most important caravan officers were the *wanyampara*, literally 'grandfathers'.[42] The origins of the name and function clearly lie in the political structure of Nyamwezi, Kimbu and Sukuma chiefdoms. Northern Unyamwezi and Usukuma, according to the missionary C. T. Wilson, were divided into numerous districts, each ruled by a chief or *monungwa*. Under the *monungwa* were several 'lesser chiefs' or *banyampara*. 'It is under these *niamparas*', he wrote, 'that the porters or *pagazi* go down to the coast to engage in caravans going up into the interior'.[43] Wilson was actually describing sub-districts of chiefdoms governed by *batemi*; *nyampara* is most correctly rendered as 'elder'.[44] We have accounts from central Unyamwezi and Ukimbu of the role of *wanyampara* as members of chiefs' councils.[45] It is unlikely, however, that it

[40] Anne Luck, *Charles Stokes in Africa* (Nairobi, 1972), 59, 63–5, 68, 85, 157–8, 163, 203; Nicholas Harman, *Bwana Stokesi and his African Conquests* (London, 1986), 23, 34–47, 54–6; Blackburn to Lang, Uyui, 2 July 1885, CMS G3A6/02 (quote). Stokes wrote soon after his first wife's death, thankful to be on safari, that he was 'quite at home' with his 'wild boys'. Stokes to Lang, Kulehi camp, 26 July 1884, CMS G3A6/01; Luck, *Charles Stokes*, 59.

[41] Tucker, *Eighteen Years*, 26–7. Tucker implies that it was Stokes who had created this system. In fact, this ordered arrangement was typical of most caravans, whether Nyamwezi, Sukuma, or coastal. The cloth noticed by Tucker was probably a portion of the porters' advance wages.

[42] I use the Swahiliised *wanyampara*. In the original political context in Usukuma, for example, the correct term is *banamhala*.

[43] C. T. Wilson, 'A journey from Kagei to Tabora and back', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, 2 (1880), 619; also quoted in Achim Gottberg, *Unyamwesi. Quellensammlung und Geschichte* (Berlin, 1971), 120.

[44] C. F. Holmes and R. A. Austen, 'The pre-colonial Sukuma', *Journal of World History*, 14 (1972), 384, state that a *banamhala* was 'an advisory council of village elders', subject to the authority of *ng'wanangwa* (pl. *banangwa*), who was subject to the *mtemi*.

[45] Copplestone to Hutchinson, Uyui, 22 Mar. 1881, CMS G3A6/01; Tabora Stationschef, 'Beantwortung des Fragebogens' (1899), in Gottberg, *Unyamwesi*, 242–4. The author wrote that the position was only open to senior males, and that a *mnyampara*

was the same individuals sitting on chiefs' councils who regularly went on safari, as they are described as 'elders' or 'elderly'. Rather it seems that the title and authority was transferred to influential caravan headmen, who may later have become council members. The title was also used in caravans of coast-based porters, and was therefore accepted in a multi-ethnic environment, where its original meaning was lost. This is the implication of Raum's statement, 'the leaders of the porters, the *wanyampara*, were self-made men of great physical strength endowed with moral stamina and a sense of justice. Famous leaders spent their best years on the caravan paths, passing from one expedition to another'.[46] Here, then, we have a clear example of how the caravan culture of the Nyamwezi and related peoples penetrated to the coast and dominated other caravans, albeit in modified form.

The *mganga*, or traditional doctor and diviner, another important caravan official, acted as advisor and provided ritual protection against the dangers of the road. Important diviners were sometimes also ivory merchants, and organised their own caravans.[47] *Waganga* advised unsuccessful itinerant traders to carry out the 'gourd of travel' ritual to improve their fortune.[48] Apart from protecting caravan personnel, the *mganga* also ritually cared for the ivory. Ivory tusks were ensured safe arrival at the coast after they had been ritually marked with spots, lines and figures. The *mganga* carried only a light load 'in view of his calling'.[49]

The fourth important caravan functionary was the *kirangozi*[50] (plural: *virangozi*), the guide or leader on the march. The *kirangozi* was usually elected by the porters; he was not necessarily from a special rank or section of society.[51] Any individual with experience and some standing among the porters, and with good knowledge of the road, could be chosen. The *kirangozi* had no substantial power; the position was more a matter of honour and status, with a few more opportunities for personal gain than were available to regular porters. According to Burton, he had to 'pay his followers to acknowledge his supremacy' and purchase 'charms and prophylactics' from his *mganga*. While on the march the *kirangozi* preceded the porters, who would be fined if they stepped ahead of him. His work was to lead the caravan along the correct route, and mark off the paths which stragglers were not to take. This was done with leaves or sticks or by drawing

---

had 'several villages under him'. In Ukimbu the elders making up the council of the chiefdoms were known as *ivanyaampala*. In Usumbwa they were *banyampara*. See Shorter, *Chiefship*, 24, 120–2.

[46] Raum, 'German East Africa', 169.

[47] John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (New York, 1864), 125; Nolan, 'Christianity in Unyamwezi', 53; Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 181.

[48] F. J. Lake, 'The organisation of ancestor worship', 1–2, Nzega District Book, Tanzania National Archives, Dar es Salaam. See Glassman, 'Social rebellion', 138, for a brief discussion of religious ritual on caravans working the northern routes.

[49] Burton, *Lake Regions*, 509–10, 241.

[50] Also *kilangozi* or *kiongozi*. Compare with *-ongoza* (Kiswahili): to drive forward, carry on vigorously, lead.

[51] Although a missionary described his *kirangozi* as a 'Wanyamwezi chief', and Wilson believed he was usually chosen from among the *wanyampara*. Southon to Whitehouse, Lagula, Ugogo, 6 Aug. 1879, LMS 2/1/D; Wilson and Felkin, *Uganda*, I, 43.

a line across them. Sometimes porters were lost who 'walked on mechanically, never noticing these signs, and were only brought to their senses by arriving at a strange village many miles out of their way'. The *kirangozi* might also negotiate *hongo* (taxes, fees) with chiefs along the route. Despite his responsibilities, he was the butt of abuse 'for losing the way, for marching too far or not far enough, for not halting at the proper place, and for not setting out at the right time'. His perquisites included better rations, a lighter load, and sometimes the attendance of a slave.[52] At the beginning of the journey he was entitled to a goat 'to make the journey prosperous', and perhaps other presents.[53] According to Unomah, the office was similar to that of the flag bearer of the Unyanyembe army, especially in the use of ritual implements, including a small drum.[54] A *kirangozi* at the head of a caravan made a powerful statement:

> The dignitary is robed in the splendor of scarlet broadcloth ... with some streamers dangling before and behind: he also wears some wonderful head-dress, the spoils of a white and black 'tippet-monkey' [colobus monkey?], or the barred skin of a wildcat ... or the gorgeous plumes of the crested crane. His insignia of office are the *kipungo* or fly-flapper, the tail of some beast, which he affixes to his person as if it were a natural growth, the *kome*, or hooked iron spit, decorated with a central sausage of parti-coloured beads, and a variety of oily little gourds containing snuff, simples, and 'medicine' for the road, strapped around his waist.[55]

Men such as these were clearly professional porters, familiar with caravan life and possessing a deep knowledge of the roads.[56]

THE NYAMWEZI AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LABOUR MARKET

In an influential work, Abdul Sheriff argues that by late in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, African traders in the interior had little scope for advancement as their societies were increasingly undermined by the logic of capital. By the early 1870s, the Nyamwezi trading elite had been reduced by forces emanating from the international trading economy and competition from coast-based merchants. Labour was transferred from the productive sectors, especially subsistence agriculture, to trade, porterage and hunting, 'thereby developing, and in some instances overdeveloping, the more backward and secondary sectors of the economies of the African interior'.[57] The combined effect was to reduce Unyamwezi to the status of a labour reserve, 'a foretaste of the colonial situation', and the Nyamwezi to 'a nation of porters'.[58]

[52] Burton, *Lake Regions*, 112; Wilson and Felkin, *Uganda*, I, 43; Swann, *Fighting the Slave-Hunters*, 41. For the election of a *kirangozi*, see Burton, *Lake Regions*, 431–2. For a somewhat different account of the functions of *virangozi* in coastal caravans, see Glassman, 'Social rebellion', 93.

[53] Speke, *Journal*, 50. Burton is incorrect when he says that a present was optional at the end of a journey. His evidence on wages and customary payments is unreliable given his own failure to pay his porters according to their agreement with the British consul in Zanzibar.

[54] Unomah, 'Economic expansion', 262–3.

[55] Burton, *Lake Regions*, 240.

[56] For more on the characteristics of professional porters, see Rockel, 'Caravan porters', 146–60, and Rockel, 'Wage labour and the culture of porterage'.

[57] Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 247.

[58] Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 182.

Sheriff's phrase is not inappropriate; the Nyamwezi did dominate the caravan labour force, and a large proportion of young Nyamwezi males were absent from home on long caravan journeys.[59] However, a reassessment of how and why this came to be so is overdue. We need to consider the role of the Nyamwezi from an up-country perspective, rather than through the distorting prism of coastal society, and reintroduce the porter as an economic actor.[60] Sheriff's analysis ignores longer-term trends and important evidence concerning the nature of the caravan system and the role of the Nyamwezi within it. In addition, the chronology of decline needs re-examination. The Nyamwezi trading elite were vigorous performers until well after Sheriff suggests, and their decline was due more to the onset of colonial rule and associated economic changes in the 1890s than to the earlier incorporation of the Zanzibari commercial empire into the world economy. Nyamwezi merchants successfully competed with coastal and foreign traders into the 1890s, and were only weakened when the combined forces of intervention by the colonial state and structural change in the mainland economy initiated a new phase in the East African ivory trade. Nyamwezi and other African traders were eventually undermined by increased penetration up-country of foreign traders, the construction of the railway in British East Africa, the fall of ivory prices, and the gradual imposition of restrictive regulations on their caravans by the German authorities on the mainland and the British in Zanzibar. In addition, European employers of caravan labour were increasingly able to utilize the coercive authority of the new colonial state.[61] If the Nyamwezi were 'a nation of porters', this does not automatically imply a greater degree of labour exploitation, or degradation of their homeland.

The concentration by historians on the supply side of the labour market[62] has therefore resulted in an inadequate understanding of its dynamics. Commodification of caravan labour was part of the gradual spread of market relations along the central routes. The continuing vitality of Nyamwezi trade and the burgeoning demand for porters at the coast led to a rapid expansion of the labour market during the 1880s and 1890s.

Market centres, caravan termini and re-supply points were increasingly places where the labour requirements of caravan leaders were met.[63] As Nyamwezi traders expanded their operations and sent caravans on increasingly lengthy journeys across most of East and Central Africa their activities contributed to the general expansion of demand for porters, especially from within their own societies. However, the supply of porters on the market was not always dictated by demand. At certain times political or

[59] Probably more than one third during the dry season, representing several tens of thousands. For a short discussion of numbers, see Rockel, 'Caravan porters', 342.

[60] As has been done for peasants and pastoralists in Tanzanian environmental history. See Maddox *et al.*, *Custodians of the Land*.

[61] In German territory from the late 1890s Africans needed permits to take caravans to the coast. Further restrictions on elephant hunting, trading and firearms acquisition were imposed in the early years of the twentieth century. See Stigger, 'The late nineteenth century caravan trade', 18–19. Enforcement of firearm regulations was probably spotty until after Maji Maji. See Juhani Koponen, *Development For Exploitation: German Colonial Policies in Mainland Tanzania, 1884–1914* (Helsinki and Hamburg, 1994), 541. For further discussion, see Rockel, 'Caravan porters', 173–4.

[62] Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 181–2.

[63] For recruitment practices, see Rockel, 'Caravan porters', 163–72.

environmental factors dominated decision making, so that during times of warfare in the interior, for instance, fewer caravans took to the roads, despite good prices for ivory at the coast. From about the middle of the century a large body of caravan porters emerged who travelled year in and year out, often moving from one caravan to another, and who, after ending a journey, were open to other engagements in exchange for wages and rations. These specialist porters provided a large part of the labour requirements of caravans travelling the central route. For many Nyamwezi the caravan trade continued to be lucrative until after the imposition of colonial rule, and caravan porterage was a good way for a young man to accumulate wealth in order to buy a gun, build up a cattle herd or otherwise improve his fortunes.[64] The continuing high demand for Nyamwezi porters can be seen in the numerous contemporary accounts of Nyamwezi trading activities and caravans on the road, as well as reports of labour shortages at the main termini.

Many Nyamwezi, attracted to the travelling life and a steady income, joined the caravans of coastal traders. Even before the founding of Tabora by entrepreneurs from the coast in 1852, their Nyamwezi counterparts travelled 'in large numbers' to the Arab depot of Isanga in Ukimbu to do business, and Nyamwezi youths followed them and offered to work as porters for the Arabs and carry loads to the coast or to Unyanyembe.[65] Some years later, in September 1857, Burton and Speke met a large caravan of 400 Nyamwezi porters, apparently employees of four Arabs. They encountered another in October, about 1,000 strong, under the command of slaves of Salim bin Rashid, an Arab trader based at Unyanyembe.[66] Fifteen years later, when Tippu Tip travelled to Urua in the eastern Congo, he took with him about 800 Nyamwezi porters, and Nyamwezi continued to work for him along the Lualaba river.

Other coastal traders operating west of Lake Tanganyika in the 1870s, such as Jumah Merikani, also employed Nyamwezi gangs on a permanent basis.[67] At the coast, especially in the middle decades of the century when demand for labour was increasing but recruitment facilities were not yet well established, porters were hired directly from among the thousands of Nyamwezi who arrived each year. Even this was not enough to ensure sufficient porters for coastal entrepreneurs and *madiwan* (public officials) seduced by the tempting opportunities in the far interior. The result was that procurers or 'touts' were sent up to 250 kilometres or more inland to

[64] For a brief discussion of personal motivations, see Rockel, 'Caravan porters', 135–8.

[65] Burton dated the innovation of Nyamwezi porters hiring themselves out to coastal traders travelling the central route to 'a few years ago', i.e. a few years before 1857–8. Previously, 'servile gangs' hired at the coast or Zanzibar had been used, and these were still employed on the routes leading from the northern Mrima to the Maasai country and beyond, and the southern roads to Lake Nyassa. See Burton, *Lake Regions*, 235; Unomah, 'Economic expansion', 77.

[66] Burton, *Lake Regions*, 153, 186. It is possible that many members of these caravans were independent traders who had joined the larger group for security.

[67] Hamid bin Muhammed (Tippu Tip) (ed. and trans. W. H. Whitely), *Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi yaani Tippu Tip* (Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam, 1974), 53, 68, 75, 77, 100, 103; Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (2 vols.) (Toronto, London, 1988; orig. pub. London, 1899), II, 100, and *passim*; Cameron, *Across Africa*, I, 299. In this region the opportunities for plunder and trade probably outweighed wage incentives.

persuade downward Nyamwezi caravans to divert to their particular village, both to secure porters and to profit from the visitors' ivory sales and purchases of cloth, beads and other goods. 'When they [porters] are rare', Burton wrote, 'quarrels take place among the several settlements, each attempting a monopoly of enlistment to the detriment of its neighbours, and a little blood is sometimes let'.[68]

The trend toward the hiring of porters accelerated during the 1860s. This was the period during which massive ivory exports to the United Kingdom from East Africa began, in addition to the existing large trade in Indian re-exports from East Africa, and exports to the United States and elsewhere.[69] In addition, some Nyamwezi traders may have found that the discriminatory duties on ivory levied at the coast by the Zanzibari sultanate from 1864, and the advantages accruing to the coast traders because of easier access to capital and market information, hindered their own trading activities.[70] Given the established and rising demand for cloth, guns and other goods in the interior, more Nyamwezi took up regular wage work as hired caravan porters, both for coastal traders and the Nyamwezi *vbandevba*.

However, for much of this period it is clear that Nyamwezi caravan-operators remained competitive. Burton believed that a 'far greater' number of caravans of up-country traders than Arabs plied the central routes. During a visit to Bagamoyo in 1866, a French missionary noted that Nyamwezi porters worked both for coastal traders and organized their own caravans.[71] Nyamwezi caravans were probably more numerous than those of coastal traders until at least 1880, later than has been realized. In June and July 1876, when missionary Roger Price travelled from Saadani to Mpwapwa, his party met almost daily 'a goodly number' of ivory caravans bound for Winde and Bagamoyo, and presumably Saadani. He emphasized the dominance of Nyamwezi and other caravans from the interior, noting that 'these were all purely native caravans'. In 1878, another missionary travelling up-country met numerous Nyamwezi caravans en route over a two month period. In the same period he noted just one large Arab-led caravan, and its porters were also Nyamwezi.[72]

[68] John Hanning Speke, 'On the commerce of Central Africa', *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society*, 15 (1860), 141; Speke, *Journal*, 62, 23 Oct. 1860; Burton, 'Lake regions', 57, 80; *Lake Regions*, 82, 119–20, 236. For similar activities of 'couriers' in the Kilwa Kivinje area and 'touts' in Uzigua, see David Lawrence Horne, 'Mode of production in the social and economic history of Kilwa to 1884' (Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984), 156; James L. Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control in Northeastern Tanzania, 1840–1940* (Philadelphia, 1992), 46–8.

[69] Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, Appendix C, 'Ivory imports into the United Kingdom, 1792–1875', 257–8.

[70] Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 122–6.

[71] Burton, *Lake Regions*, 237; Glassman, 'Social rebellion', 92–3.

[72] Roger Price, *Report of the Rev. R. Price of His Visit to Zanzibar and the Coast of Eastern Africa* (London, 1876), 23, 39; Wolf, *Central African Diaries*, 25–6 (5 May), 30 (30 May), 34 (16 and 17 June), 35 (18 June), 37 (24 June). The first of these was not an ivory caravan but one of work seekers. In another entry Hutley notes that at the Kidete river, on the road to Mpwapwa, 'several caravans … passed during the day, some going in and others coming out'. There is no indication here whether these were Nyamwezi or Swahili/Arab caravans. Wolf, *Central African Diaries*, 19–20, 7 Apr. 1878. Note that Price and Hutley used the same route from Saadani to Mpwapwa. The situation may have been different on the Usagara road. See also Nolan, 'Christianity in Unyamwezi', 59.

This evidence should be compared with that presented by Sheriff.[73] Sheriff argues that the ability of the Nyamwezi to compete against coastal traders was undermined by the early 1870s, and hence they were forced to work for others.[74] This led to a reduction in the number of Nyamwezi caravans and an enlargement of the available labour force: 'The Nyamwezi had become a nation of porters, and their country a labour reserve, a foretaste of the colonial situation'.[75] There are several problems with this hypothesis. In the first place it does not account for the many Nyamwezi who worked on a wage basis for other Nyamwezi. Second, the direct evidence which Sheriff cites for the reduction in Nyamwezi caravans comes from Cameron's account of his journey in 1873–4. But Cameron was travelling during the period of hostilities between Mirambo and Unyanyembe (1871–5), and caravan traffic from west of Unyanyembe had been greatly disrupted, as British Consul Kirk noted in March 1873: 'On enquiry I satisfied myself that this year it is quite impossible to obtain a large number of Unyamwezi *pagazi* or porters, few having come down owing to the interruption of the Ivory trade'.[76] Kirk was referring to the situation at the coast, but conditions were much the same at Tabora.

Early in 1874, Murphy, Cameron's companion, reported: 'In October last we were ... unable to move from want of porters, the whole surrounding country being filled, if not with Mirambo's men, with at least imaginary robbers and allies of his, which prevented the Wanyamwezi from offering themselves'. Cameron himself found that 'not a soul would follow me' when he attempted to pass through to Ujiji on the direct road from Unyanyembe.[77] The situation had been the same during 1871 and 1872. From July to September 1871, Stanley was not able to advance beyond Unyanyembe in his

[73] Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 181–2.

[74] As long ago as 1972, Alfred Unomah's work radically revised prevailing ideas about the extent of Arab power in Unyamwezi: see 'Economic expansion'. This is a slightly different issue, but still relevant.

[75] Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 182; also quoted in Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 59. Glassman goes further than Sheriff when he writes (p. 56) that the central routes 'would ... become notable for a high degree of Arab control and for the exclusion of upcountry people from all but the most menial of roles'. See also p. 58 where Glassman's argument is virtually identical to Sheriff's. Both writers ignore the continuing importance of Nyamwezi and Sumbwa commerce along the routes to Katanga.

[76] Kirk to Major E. Smith, Private Secretary to Sir Bartle Frere, Zanzibar, 10 Mar. 1873, Cameron Papers, VLC 6/1, Royal Geographical Society (RGS), London. See also Murphy to Kirk, Bagamoyo Camp, 19 Apr. 1873, Cameron Papers, VLC 3/4, RGS, and Walter Thaddeus Brown, 'A pre-colonial history of Bagamoyo: aspects of the growth of an East African coastal town' (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1971), 158. Murphy believed that there were, in fact, sufficient Nyamwezi porters in Bagamoyo, but they were demanding excessive wages and the entire amount in advance, rather than just the usual instalment. In addition, the porters he succeeded in hiring quickly deserted, and others were seized by Arabs because they were 'Mirambo's' men. These conditions probably reflected the insecurity of the time.

[77] Murphy to Sir B. Frere, Zanzibar, 7 Mar. 1874, VLC 3/4, RGS; Cameron, *Across Africa*, I, 175–6. On numerous occasions Cameron points to the disruption of trade and the difficulties and dangers of travelling in western Unyamwezi as a consequence of the war. For instance, of Ugunda in Jan. 1874 he wrote: 'In consequence of the disturbances between Mirambo and the Arabs, trade had suffered much and the whole country was very unsettled'. See *Across Africa*, 77, 151, 161–2, 163, 175–6, 201 (quote), 212.

quest for Livingstone because of the war. Few caravans were moving, Nyamwezi porters were not procurable and it was only by hiring thirty *Waungwana* (coast based Muslim slave or ex-slave porters) at triple rates that the expedition could continue. In June 1872, Livingstone also cited war as the cause of difficulty in hiring porters.[78] Thus, there may well have been fewer Nyamwezi caravans on the road at this time, but this was not typical.

In addition, Sheriff presents several circumstantial arguments for the decline of the Nyamwezi merchant class, which are seen as having contributed to a larger wage labour pool. The first (and best) concerns the differential tariff structure at the coast which discriminated against ivory carried down by Nyamwezi caravans.[79] But Sheriff does not give figures for the proportion of ivory registered at customs which were subject to various levels of duty, so it is difficult to say that this policy put Nyamwezi caravans out of business. His second argument – that coastal entrepreneurs had much greater access to credit and capital than their Nyamwezi counterparts – is overstated. This advantage must have been partly offset by the lower costs of the latter.[80]

Sheriff's third argument is that there was a drop in ivory exports from Tanganyika because of the destruction of elephant herds. This is based on a comment by an American trader at Zanzibar concerning ivory from Unyamwezi, and figures for ivory exports from Zanzibar and then German East Africa. There may have been a reduction in ivory produced in Unyamwezi, but in the second half of the century Nyamwezi ivory traders no longer relied on sources from their own country. Sheriff's export figures from Zanzibar show an annual average during the 1860s of 24,000 tusks each weighing over five pounds, with a drop to an annual average of 15,000 tusks exported from German East Africa during the early 1890s.[81] The problem with this evidence is that like is not compared with like. As Sheriff himself shows so well, a large proportion of Zanzibar's exports in the 1860s came from beyond the borders of the future GEA. One would expect that the export figures from GEA would show a reduction compared with exports from Zanzibar in the 1860s, because of the smaller territory available for exploitation. Some ivory sold by Nyamwezi traders must have passed through British territory, or even down the Congo, and that should also be taken into account.

There are difficulties with Sheriff's other arguments. He suggests that Nyamwezi traders responded to their declining position in three ways: by

[78] Norman R. Bennett (ed.) *Stanley's Despatches to the New York Herald, 1871–1872, 1874–1877* (Boston, 1970), 26; Simpson, *Dark Companions*, 79; David Livingstone (ed. H. Waller), *The Last Journals of David Livingstone* (New York, 1875), 430, 10 June 1872; the war continued through the dry season: 434, 436, 21 and 28 June; 449, 17 July.

[79] Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 181, 122–3, 125.

[80] Charles Stokes gave Smith, Mackenzie and Co. of Zanzibar a quote of MT$30 per load to transport goods to Msalala in northern Unyamwezi for the Emin Pash relief expedition. The quote was based on the cost of hiring Nyamwezi porters. The usual charge using coastal porters was MT$40. See Smith, Mackenzie and Co. to Gray, Dawes and Co., Zanzibar, 7 Oct. 1887, Box 83, Mackinnon Papers, School of Oriental and African Studies, London. The difference is partly explained by the heavier loads carried by the Nyamwezi, and perhaps by Stokes' special relationship with them, which was equivalent to that of a large Nyamwezi trader.

[81] Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 181–2, 198, n. 59.

engaging in commercial agriculture, by migrating to distant regions to establish new policies or to aid existing rulers, or by turning to porterage on a professional wage-earning basis. The first option can be seen as a symptom of success rather than failure. As Sheriff himself notes, numerous wealthy coastal traders including Tippu Tip also invested in plantations, either at the coast or around Tabora.[82] There is little evidence that either subsistence or commercial agricultural production in Unyamwezi was undermined by labour migration.[83] The agricultural labour force in Unyamwezi does not appear to have been diminished by the absence of large numbers of porters. On the contrary, porterage and trade helped to mobilize and sustain a large back-up labour force in precisely the most commercialized regions of Unyamwezi from which a high proportion of Nyamwezi males migrated along the caravan routes. The second of Sheriff's options, migration, often occurred during early periods of successful trading activity.[84] To summarise, the *vbandevba* were undermined, but this occurred later, and was more closely related to colonial conditions than are the reasons suggested by Sheriff.

My argument, in contrast, is that the Nyamwezi elite and smaller traders continued to operate their own caravans well into the 1890s, and provided employment at the same time that many young Nyamwezi men were working for coastal traders and Europeans. During the late 1880s and 1890s there were still many Nyamwezi and Sukuma caravans visiting the coast. In 1888, at the start of the uprising against the Germans, Nyamwezi caravans were in Bagamoyo, and another 'large Nyamwezi caravan' was diverted to Dar es Salaam with its ivory. Even during the fighting, a large Sukuma caravan with great quantities of ivory, cattle and goats entered Bagamoyo.[85] In October 1889, the survivors of Stanley's Emin Pasha expedition met a Nyamwezi caravan 1,500 strong on the eastern edge of Unyamwezi. In June 1890, a German traveller returning to the coast encountered a large Nyamwezi caravan numbering about 1,200 in Ugogo, then another 'great Wanjamwesi caravan' under the German flag, followed by several others in the Marenga Mkali.[86] Another traveller wrote of the Nyamwezi from his experience in 1891–2:

> The energies of the people are … absorbed in travel, and they trade in ivory, copper wire, salt, honey and so forth, over the whole of central Africa, frequently

[82] Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 108.

[83] In 1884–5, during the severe famine in eastern and central regions of Tanzania, parties of Nyamwezi carried surplus grain to Ugogo, hundreds of kilometres to the east through the Mgunda Mkali, while Gogo travelled in the opposite direction to seek relief in Unyanyembe. See Annie Hore, *To Lake Tanganyika in a Bath Chair* (London, 1886), 120, 125, 127.

[84] The early examples in Rockel, 'Caravan porters', 58–9, are clear evidence.

[85] Rochus Schmidt, *Geschichte de Araberaufstandes in Ost-Afrika* (Frankfurt a. Oder, 1892), 29, 78; Brown, 'A pre-colonial history of Bagamoyo', 282; Walter Thaddeus Brown, 'Bagamoyo; an historical introduction', *Tanzania Notes and Records*, 71 (1970), 82. Brown's source is H. F. von Behr, *Kriegsbilder aus dem Araberaufstand in Deutsch Ostafrika* (Leipzig, 1891), 138. See also Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 203, 213–4.

[86] A. J. Mounteney Jephson (ed. Dorothy Middleton), *The Diary of A. J. Mounteney Jephson : Emin Pasha Relief Expedition 1887–1889* (Cambridge, 1969), 409, 17 Oct. 1889; Carl Peters (trans. H. W. Dulcken), *New Light on Dark Africa* (London, 1891) 531, 533, 535.

journeying in large caravans, and being absent from home for two years or more. These expeditions are generally commanded by Arabs … But very frequently voluntary associations are formed every spring, a drummer beating up recruits from village to village, which journey down to the coast or into the interior.[87]

And in June 1893, a missionary met in the Mgunda Mkali wilderness 'a huge native caravan – fully a thousand people … all carrying up to what seemed their utmost capacity'. The description of their loads suggests a Nyamwezi or Sukuma caravan.[88] Hundreds of smaller Nyamwezi and Sukuma caravans arrived at the coast during these years.[89]

There is further evidence that is ambiguous: it is not clear whether the caravans in question were led by Nyamwezi or Swahili or Arab traders. Travelling up-country in July 1891, William Stairs, the commander of a Belgian caravan, mentioned in his diary that huge quantities of ivory were being carried to the coast. When four days from Bagamoyo, he wrote:

Considerable quantities of very fine ivory tusks are now on their way towards the coast, coming from Unyamwezi … This morning, we saw almost fifteen hundred ivories file past which will net the Germans 14,200 dollars [Maria Theresa *Thaler*] thanks to export duty.

At Morogoro, eleven days later, he wrote: 'A huge caravan overburdened with ivory passed through our camp'.[90]

A closer look at the local level illustrates the vitality of both big and small Nyamwezi traders during the late 1880s and early 1890s. During the early 1880s in northern Unyamwezi, the insecure political conditions in the region between Uyui and Msalala chiefdoms persuaded many Nyamwezi caravan operators from the Kahama and Shinyanga areas to move east to new bases in Usiha, east of modern Shinyanga in Sukuma territory. As well as relative stability, Usiha had the advantage of its location on the routes from northern Unyamwezi to the coast, and to Mwanza and Kagei on Lake Victoria. Philip Stigger describes the initiative as an apparent 'general movement of independent Nyamwezi traders', who included well-established entrepreneurs such as Ndekeja Holo of Kahama and Mlabu of Lohumbo.[91] From 1885, numerous smaller operators, including the sons of chiefs, became

[87] J. A. Moloney, *With Captain Stairs to Katanga* (London, 1893), 57.

[88] Ashe, *Chronicles of Uganda*, 439.

[89] See examples in William G. Stairs, 'De Zanzibar au Katanga: journal du Capitaine Stairs (1890–1891)', *Le Congo Illustré*, 2 (1893), 47, 29 July 1891; Janina M. Konczacki (ed.), *Victorian Explorer: The African Diaries of Captain William G. Stairs, 1887–1892* (Halifax, N.S., 1994), 201–2, 31 July 1891; and the discussion in Brown, 'A pre-colonial history of Bagamoyo', 282–6; Brown, 'Bagamoyo: an historical introduction', 82.

[90] It is probable that the porters were Nyamwezi and Sukuma because, when at Bagamoyo previously, Stairs had commented on the 'numerous close columns of Wanyamwezi' which arrived virtually every day. The issue was complicated because by this time Nyamwezi caravans carried the German flag. See Konczacki, *Victorian Explorer*, 193, 8 July 1891; 197, 19 July; 190, 2 July; 202, 1 Aug; Moloney, *With Captain Stairs*, 36.

[91] Stigger, 'Late nineteenth-century caravan trade', 3–9. Compare with the account of political instability in Usiha itself in Holmes and Austen, 'Pre-colonial Sukuma', 392, 394. Holmes and Austen discuss Shinyanga and western Usiha, but the main caravanserai was in Negezi in eastern Usiha. For the Lake Victoria route, see C. F. Holmes, 'Zanzibari influence at the southern end of Lake Victoria: the lake route', *African Historical Studies* 4 (1971), 477–503.

associated with Ndekeja, and local Sukuma attached their caravans to those of the powerful trader. One of Stigger's informants travelled with Ndekeja's great caravan to the coast in about 1893:

> He left Mwadui with two castrated goats and nine companions who had cattle, sheep and goats. They met Ndekeja, a tall, thin, rather dark man who wore nothing on his head but was dressed in a rich, multi-coloured, fringed cloth, at the assembly point. By the time the caravan left, it contained a thousand or more people, escorted by *rugaruga*, thirty of whom were armed with muskets.[92]

As such records show, eastern Usiha quickly became an important centre sending many caravans to the coast.

The crucial factor driving the expansion of the labour market was the high demand for labour rather than surplus supply originating from impoverishment of interior peoples. As trade boomed, there was a parallel massive increase through the century in the demand for carriers. As the ivory frontier was pushed back into the furthest parts of the interior, the routes lengthened, caravans spent more time on the march and caravan journeys became more protracted affairs. More and more regions and peoples were drawn into the orbit of the Zanzibari commercial empire. In addition, the second half of the nineteenth century was the age of European expansion in East Africa. The demand for porters further increased from the early 1870s as expeditions and caravans of European explorers and missionaries competed both with local traders and with each other for labour.[93] During peak periods, experienced porters could pick and choose among the numerous caravans leaving the coast. In some years, coastal and interior towns were almost cleared of porters as demand outstripped supply. Recruitment 'agencies' emerged in coast towns, a tendency which matched specialization in other aspects of the caravan business. This was particularly the case at Bagamoyo. 'The whole and sole occupation here is preparation for journeys to the interior', wrote a missionary in 1878, for 'everywhere the signs of a large pagazi business are apparent'.[94] Porters were able to find work easily, either individually or through a popular headman by registering with recognized recruitment agents.

The high demand for labour at Bagamoyo in the dry season of 1882 was described by the agent for the trading house, Boustead, Ridley and Co.: 'Although an immense number of Wanyamwezi have come to the coast this season, they have all been hired at high rates, some very large caravans of traders having been dispatched'.[95] In Tabora as well, porters were reported

[92] Stigger, 'Late nineteenth-century caravan trade', 9–10. According to Holmes and Austen, Stokes' Sukuma name was Ndokeji, suspiciously similar to Ndekeja. It is possible that the two caravan leaders have been confused in tradition. See Holmes and Austen, 'The pre-colonial Sukuma', 391. I accept Stigger's account given his extensive research in Usiha. A contemporary of Ndekeja and another important caravan leader operating from Usiha was Telekeza. See Schmidt, *Geschichte de Araberaufstandes*, 101, 153; Peters, *New Light on Dark Africa*, 502–4; von Schweinitz, 'Das Trägerpersonal der Karawanen', 19; Franz Stuhlmann, *Mit Emin Pascha ins Herz von Afrika* (Berlin, 1894), 754–5.

[93] Bennett, *From Zanzibar to Ujiji*, 57 (ed. n.); Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925* (New Haven, 1980), 52.

[94] Bennett, *From Zanzibar to Ujiji*, 77, 11 Aug., 1878; Beidelman, 'The organization and maintenance of caravans', 610.

[95] Muxworthy to Thompson, Zanzibar, 14 July 1882, LMS 4/5/D/

to be 'scarce' because of the large number of caravans on the road.[96] In Zanzibar the situation was often the same. The drain of labour away from the island caused considerable consternation among Arab plantation owners, who petitioned the Sultan to prevent European travellers from 'inducing slaves to run away' and shipping them clandestinely.[97] As a European traveller described the state of the labour market in early 1883:

> The African Association on the Congo had drained off the very best porters in the town. Several large caravans, missionary and otherwise, had just left for the interior, so that there was hardly a good porter to be had... To cap the situation, two large caravans were about to be organized for the interior, one for Victoria Nyanza, and another for Karema.[98]

These comments do not even take into account the demand for labour created by Arab caravans. Again, in June 1891, Stairs heard 'of a great dearth of men' in Zanzibar resulting from the large number of caravans leaving for the interior. Around the same time another traveller was told, 'there were no porters to be had, even at Zanzibar, so many caravans had been equipped for the Germans as well as for the IBEA Co., and for some private expeditions that had combined to drain the country of available porters'.[99] Thus, for many years, demand far outstripped supply. More rarely, there was a surplus of porters at Bagamoyo, as during the dry season of 1878. Then, *pagazi* were unusually cheap and plentiful. 'Some men', wrote a missionary, 'have even despaired of getting work and are building and planting and will stay here till next season'.[100]

CONCLUSION

Modern historians have paid scant attention to evolving labour systems associated with increasing commercialization, at an intermediate stage between those of pre-capitalist times and those imposed under colonial capitalism. Nyamwezi porters and traders working the central caravan routes developed a unique form of such labour organization, which became the model for coastal and foreign-led caravans alike. Adapting cultural forms that had emerged in earlier regional trade, and utilizing indigenous social and political features, the Nyamwezi model remained the basis for caravan organization until the early colonial period. Up-country traders and porters were makers of their own destiny, and were not hapless casualties of change.

[96] Wolf, *Central African Diaries*, 86, 7 Mar. 1879.

[97] Bennett, *From Zanzibar to Ujiji*, 56–7, 26 Jan. 1878.

[98] Joseph Thomson, *Through Masai Land* (London, 1968; 1st ed. 1885), 23. See also Stokes to Lang, Zanzibar, 1 Mar. 1883, CMS G3A6/01; Kathryn Barrett-Gaines, 'Travel writing, experiences and silences. What is left out of European travelers' accounts – the case of Richard D. Mohun', *History in Africa*, 24 (1997), 58. For similar comments referring to various recruitment centres, see Henry Morton Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone* (London, 1872), 49; Bennett, *From Zanzibar to Ujiji*, 67–8, 13 May 1878; Mackay to Wright (?), Uzigua, 9 Dec. 1877, CMS CA6/016; O'Flaherty to Hutchinson, Mpwapwa, 20 Oct. 1880, CMS G3A6/01; Hore to Thompson, Zanzibar, 23 June 1882, LMS 4/4/C; Hore to Thompson, LMS Camp, Makwui, 17 July 1882, LMS 4/4/D; Wolf, *Central African Diaries*, 270, 21 June 1881.

[99] Konczacki, *Victorian Explorer*, 188, 13 June 1891; May French-Sheldon, *Sultan to Sultan* (London, 1892), 85. The shortage of porters at Zanzibar reflects the general labour market for porters at the coast, and the demand for both Waungwana and Nyamwezi.

[100] Bennett, *From Zanzibar to Ujiji*, 79, 17 Aug. 1878.

They proactively shaped the economy and culture of both pre-colonial and early colonial Tanzania, rather than merely reacting to outside forces and demands.

Nyamwezi porters found their labour and skills in high demand as the ivory and associated trades expanded, and labour became increasingly commodified. At the same time, the Nyamwezi trading elite remained strong competitors until significantly later than has been realized. Together, Nyamwezi traders and porters were able to ride the nineteenth-century economic boom. From the 1870s, porters also took advantage of the labour requirements of imperial agents and missionaries. The market for caravan labour was therefore characterized by a massive expansion in demand. Economic changes, the projection of European military power, state regulation, railway construction and deskilling ultimately undercut Nyamwezi enterprise, and suggest a diminution of the bargaining power of porters. But up until the 1890s at least, successful adaptation to wage labour and innovation at home and on the road shows that the Nyamwezi grasped market opportunities and were able to manage economic transformation.

SUMMARY

The nineteenth-century ivory trade in Tanzania and surrounding countries, and European imperialist and missionary activities on the mainland in the second half of the century, created an expanding demand for long distance caravan porters. Along the central caravan routes between the Mrima Coast and Lake Tanganyika, most traders and porters were Nyamwezi, or from related groups in western Tanzania. The prevalence of the Nyamwezi was related to unique structural features of their domestic economy and society that made it possible to take advantage of new opportunities, rather than a cultural predisposition towards travel and adventure, as some historians have claimed. Nyamwezi caravans provided a model of organization with a unique labour culture that dominated the central routes, and was followed by caravans originating at the coast. According to recent histories, Nyamwezi and other up-country traders were undermined by the 1870s through competition from coastal caravan operators, exposure to the world capitalist system, and changes in the international market for ivory. In this view, the Nyamwezi were progressively impoverished and increasingly relied on wage work for others. In contrast, there is evidence to show that the Nyamwezi remained vigorous traders into the early colonial period, while many of them also sought wage work for coastal, European and local caravan operators. The development of a labour market for caravan porters, which was partly connected to the success of Nyamwezi trading ventures, was crucial in the transition to a more market-based economy along the main central caravan routes. The expansion of Nyamwezi porterage was related to a massive expansion of the labour market, as the overall demand for labour increased at the same time that long distance trade remained viable. Explanations for the eventual decline of up-country traders and porterage must therefore be sought through analysis of change in the early colonial political economy.