

# Migrancy and the Birth of Nativism, Uganda 1920s-1960s

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**ABSTRACT:** Uganda has experienced explosive inter-ethnic conflicts and yet internal migration has persisted, and intermingling of different ethnicities has led to a complex relationship among them. This article bases on the oral history and life histories of the former Banyankole migrant laborers and their former Baganda employers, to discuss the incentives that propelled migration of people and what impact it had on the relationship among them. The article argues that the Banyanyankole migrant labor experience informed their socio-economic and political behavior back home, influenced the penetration of capital in southwestern Uganda, informed the Banyankole perception of the Baganda, and subsequent relations that defined their interactions, which ignited flames of nativism. It is pitched in the historical theories of Ravenstein and Lee. The findings show that the labor migration in Uganda was in response to the colonial economic policies, which aimed at developing the colonial overlord. The factors that propelled migration included the need to pay taxes, mobilizing resources for marriage, access to manufactured goods, and cash nexus. Migrancy had an impact on both the sending and host communities in defining their identities in relation to cash crop growing and expansion in Ankole, change in the labor dynamics, monetarization and commoditization of the economy in Ankole, change in gender roles, Baganda versus Banyankole perception, and modern life in Ankole.

**KEYWORDS:** migrancy, ethnicity, nativism, migrant labor, citizenship

## Introduction

This article focuses on the two critical questions namely; what factors forced the migrant laborers to migrate from Ankole to Buganda? And, what impact did migrant labor experience have on those who were involved in it and, on sending and host communities? The study on which this article is based, established that there were two generations of migrant laborers from South-Western Uganda to Buganda during the period studied. The first generation migrated in the 1920s and 1930s. The members of this generation have long passed on and this study could not capture their firsthand narratives. The second-generation migrated in the 1940s and 1950s. Many of the members of this generation have also passed on, but there are a few who are still surviving. This study captured the testimonies of those few still live. This is because, for the most part, the second-generation migrants were sons of the members of the first generation. Therefore, the researcher was able to gain insight into the experiences of the first-generation migrants through the testimonies of the second-generation migrants. From the testimonies, the factors that compelled the Banyankole migrants to travel to work in Buganda were both push and pull, and, among the various consequences, the Banyankole migrant labor experience determined the perception of the Baganda and subsequent relations between the groups (Banyankole and Baganda).

### ***The factors that led to labor migration from Ankole to Buganda***

The main factors for migrant labor from Ankole to Buganda during the period under study included: the need to pay taxes, mobilise resources for dowry and marriage, access to manufactured goods, bandwagon effect among others.

### **The need to pay taxes**

All the participants in the study stated they and their fathers were driven from their villages to migrate to Buganda to earn money to pay government tax (poll tax), imposed in the early years of

colonialism. According to the various testimonies, since the cash crops needed by Europeans had not yet been introduced in their area, there was no other source of money to pay government poll tax. If one migrated to Buganda, he would either take up employment with Baganda landlords and earn a wage or would hire land and cultivate cotton and sell it to raise the required monies for the service of the colonial state whose official labor policy was directed towards profit maximisation on capital (Rutabajuuka 1989). The participants indicated that the poll tax was paid annually and if one was found not to have paid, he would be arrested by the local chief and imprisoned. It was, therefore, a crime, not a civil wrong to fail to pay the poll tax. The fear of imprisonment on account of failure to pay poll tax forced all the migrants to move to Buganda. Migrant labor from Ankole to Buganda was undertaken by men because the poll tax was exclusively charged on adult men. Participants in the study also pointed out that all migrant laborers were Bairu cultivators. The Bahima were seldom involved in migrant labor because they would sell animals like cattle and get the money to pay the poll tax. This finding is consistent with the previous researches in West and South Africa during the colonial period.

Tax administration was a serious consideration by the migrant communities. For travel, the “Nimbanza”, first-time taxpayers were required to travel with their tax assessment slips. Those who had started paying were required to travel with their poll tax tickets. In some circumstances, some of the migrants travelled using the tickets of their kinsmen. As the tax was an annual obligation, those migrants who stayed in Buganda had to send money to their home *gombololas* (sub-counties) to have their taxes paid and the tickets brought to them. Those who failed to do that risked facing double taxation i.e. paying tax in Buganda and their home districts, or harassment from tax collectors and enforcement agents positioned at strategic points along Buganda -Ankole Road. Kabwegyere (1995) stresses this element of double taxation thus, “when labor recruitment went beyond a given district boundary, as when the Banyankore or Bakiga would go to Buganda, this established a new dimension. If a person paid tax outside his own district, on returning to his home district, he was required to pay another one. The argument was that the money paid to the foreign district was not going to benefit his own district – and this was true because the policy was that each district should be self-sufficient” (Kabwegyere 1995, 148). This finding is consistent with the previous researches such as in South Africa, West Africa and central Africa, particularly in Belgian Congo (Marks and Trapido 1987). It becomes clearer here that migrant labor did not come from Ugandan labor reserves alone after 1940s.

### **Mobilise resources for dowry and marriage**

The testimonies of all participants in the study indicated that the need to earn money to purchase the commodities and goods needed to start a family was a very important push factor for migration. In Ankole at that time (till now), a man wanting to start a family with someone's daughter had to pay bride price. The bride price was mainly in the form of cattle and goats. Many Bairu cultivators did not own or raise cattle, yet they were required to pay bride price in this form (Jan 1987). Therefore, to acquire the cattle, the Bairu young men had to either enter the service of a Omuhima for many years, after which get paid with “akanume” (a male calf), then the Omwiru would have to raise the calf into a big bull, after which convert it into a heifer to pay bride price. It was not acceptable to pay bride price using a bull or an ox. This process was not only long and humiliating, but also a very unpopular practise that made migrant labor appear to have offered the poor Bairu a solution to the long and humiliating labor service to the Bahima (Doornbos 1978, 38-51). Therefore, the migrant labor offered an opportunity for one to work hard and after a short time (one or two years) earn money, use it to purchase a cow or two which he would use to pay bride price. This factor was voiced by all the participants in this study. One of the participants, Mzee Nazario, recounted a unique experience. He first identified a wife but could not wed her before completing the payment of bride price. He then proceeded to Buganda and worked for a year before returning home to proceed with the marriage procedures. This information was validated by records of the Catholic Church at Kitabi Parish, which was started by white Fathers missionaries headed by Pere Jean Marie Le Tobic in 1908 and started

giving sacraments in 1912. From records available over 645,286 Christians have received the Sacrament of Baptism and over 10,000 couples have had their matrimonial sacraments at the parish. In the marriage registration records book at Kitabi Parish, there were several cases of people who were registered but delayed their weddings for more than six months and the remarks against these records indicated that the delay had been caused by failure to complete payment of bride price.

### **Access to manufactured goods and household equipment**

All the participants in this study indicated that they migrated and worked in Buganda more than once. While all of them were motivated by the need to raise money for bride price and marriage, they did not stop migrating after marriage. For many of them, marriage brought about more additional costs which required cash/income. Therefore, many newly married males made one or more trips to Buganda to earn the money to buy articles of clothing, beddings, and household equipment like cooking pans, plates, cups, hoes, pangas, axes among others. A few of the participants in the latter generation purchased bicycles and corrugated iron sheets which they used to roof their houses. Mzee Kaceremete and Mzee Ntunduguru have kept to-date the items they cherished much from this experience as part of their treasures. For example, Mzee Kaceremete treasures his corrugated iron sheet roofed house, which he built in 1958 with money and iron sheets got from Buganda.

### **Escape from *Luwalo***

The testimonies from the participants in the study indicated that some men got involved in migrant labor in order to escape from forced labor -*luwalo*. *Luwalo* was a form of labor used in Nkore before the establishment of colonial rule. It was used by chiefs and kings to perform works that would benefit the community such as constructing bridges across rivers and swamps. The same labor practice was used to construct houses, clear compounds for chiefs and palace quarters for kings. The colonial administration adopted the institution of *luwalo* and applied it in the construction of government/public works in order to encourage the supply of free labor (Mamdani 1999, 125). This factor started with the generation of the 1920s and 1930s when forced labor was a major government policy in different regions of Uganda but did not end there. *Luwalo* was demanded from all able-bodied men to perform roles in government public works such as road construction and maintenance, school construction, office building construction and maintenance of labor camps. *Luwalo* was thus a form of labor performed for the benefit of the community.

In societies where the state had emerged such as Buganda, Ankole, Toro and Bunyoro, *luwalo* labor at times was utilized for the benefit of chiefs and kings. A chief would call upon his subjects to perform any form of labor for himself (the chief) or for the king, and construction of footpath or manned bridges as it was the case in Ankole. However, such was always regarded as tribal obligations for the good of the whole community. What ought to be emphasised here is that this pre-capitalist form of labor organization and control was adopted by colonial capitalism as it did with other pre-colonial forms of social, political and economic organisations. *Luwalo* labor was widely used in road construction, construction of public buildings, churches, schools among others. In Ankole, and particularly in West Ankole, forced labor of *luwalo* type was widely used for public works namely roads, gombolola, saza as well as district headquarters, schools, bridges, swamp drainage to destroy breeding grounds for tsetse flies to eradicate sleeping sickness and nagana. The respondents in this study reported the use of *luwalo* on the construction of roads between Mbarara and Kasese, the construction of the bridges across river Rwizi in Mbarara and across Kazinga channel on the border between Ankole and Toro at Katunguru. They also reported the use of *luwalo* labor on the construction of Ntare School, construction of migrant labor camps (emiginda) at Mbarara and construction of Mbarara Hospital. Some young men chose to migrate to Buganda for labor on Baganda farms for payment instead of the forced non-paid labor. The *luwalo* was not incumbent upon the migrant. Once the man was not at home, that year passed without him having to perform the obligation.

### **Cash nexus**

The participants in this study through their testimonies indicated that there were situations when young men, who had not married joined in the migration experience because they needed money. Cash nexus was fast spreading and deepening and the need for money was no longer a novelty but rather a real need because these young men needed cotton cloth and other industrial goods; they were not merely following others (Tunanukye 2017). The motivations for labor migration were: taxation, resources for marriage, access to manufactured goods, escape from *luwalo* and cash nexus.

The migrant labor situation in Buganda was engineered by the colonial policymakers in Uganda who divided the country into labor reserve areas and cash crop zones or non-productive and productive zones axis (Lwanga-Lunyiigo 1989) The experience of the Banyankole brought about the breakdown of this policy because it led to the spread of coffee growing from Buganda to Ankole. Testimonies from the participants in this study revealed that the introduction and the growing of robusta coffee are associated mainly with migrants from Buganda. On their day of departure, it was common for migrants to pack coffee seedlings or coffee seeds in their clothes for fear of being seen by Baganda landlords. Seedlings or seeds were then planted in their home fields before returning to Buganda in the subsequent trips. Mzee Ntunduguru narrated how he treasures his coffee variety which has got two seasons. He indicated that after the second harvest of his coffee, he swore never to go back to Buganda. Following the successful experiment with robusta coffee by migrant laborers, the colonial government started to distribute coffee seedlings in Ankole from the early 1950s onwards. Soon the coffee trees became coffee shambas and coffee became a major export/cash crop produced in the area. The colonial government's success of the coffee seedling distribution was eased by migrant labor experience. Those who had worked in Baganda coffee shambas or had smuggled the seedlings saw the distribution as an opportunity to expand their gardens. One of the major effects of migrant labor experience in Ankole, therefore, was to accelerate the expansion of the coffee cash crop production in the region. The peasants (Bairu) became coffee producers hence obtaining an income that transformed their status and increased prosperity in terms of housing and articles of clothing.

### **Change in the labor dynamics**

The Banyankole migrant laborers experiences gave rise to the concept in Ugandan labor relations known as “*okupakasa*” to work for a wage. With the experience of migrant labor relation of wage labor otherwise called “*okupakasa*” which became popular in the region, was related to “new social grouping of men” reported by Davidson in Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia whose livelihoods depended on colonial mines and plantations (Davidson 1989, 28). Prior to the penetration of capital in the region, work that was rewarded in terms of “*enume*” or other property, but with the interaction of capital and labor on the land, work was interpreted in form of wages and so a new labor relation “*okupakasa*” was born. The terminology *okupakasa* in Ankole became the product of migrant labor experience which was associated with wage labor. The noun *Omupakasi* was used by the Baganda referring to the Banyankole and Banyoro migrant laborers.

### **Monetarization and commoditization of economy in Ankole**

One of the objectives of colonial economic policy which stimulated migrant labor was to hasten the integration of entire Uganda into a monetary economy as it was with the Kenyan experience (Berman and Lonnsdale 1992). The Ugandans' adoption of the money economy would expand the market for British manufactured goods. Migrant labor, therefore, accelerated the spread of monetary economy to Ankole. Before this, transactions of trade were carried out using the barter method and wealth was measured in terms of herds of cattle and how much food was harvested at the end of the season. The bigger the harvest, the more food secure a family was and therefore the bigger the size of the family and influence of such a family in the society. Migrant labor experience availed money for the

purchase of cattle and other items for pride price. Migrant labor introduced a new approach to life from informal communal kind of life towards a commercial and profit-oriented kind of life. Two examples were cited by the participants in this study: the replacement of the free communal beer party “entereko” with the introduction of “ebarā”- a bar where beer was sold. The second example was the introduction of gambling “wakareba”. One of the key informants to this study, Mzee Koyikyenga told of his experience, how he was abandoned by a Muganda lorry owner in Kyabakuzā – Masaka as he awaited for transport to complete his journey, he was conned by gamblers. In this experience, he lost all his money and had to first take up wage labor for several additional months to earn money required to complete the journey home. Whereas the key witness may not have been the person who introduced the practice of gambling; the two economic ways of life – “ebarā” and “wakareba” were introduced in Ankole by migrant laborers from Buganda. Migrant labor experience of the Banyankole, therefore, accelerated the monetization and commoditization of the economy in Ankole.

### **Migrant labor experience and Gender issues**

Women in the sending communities suffered in two aspects: physical and psychological. While women and children in Sothern Rhodesia who remained at home in the country side bore some of the heaviest costs of labor migration, this study found a related situation among the Banyankole as far as migrant experience was concerned. The wives remained the breadwinners of the migrant families. They had to till the land for food and take care of the children. Normally, the tilling of land for food was the responsibility of the two: the husband and his wife and very specialized. But with migrant labor systems, the task had to lay in the hands and shoulders of one- the wife, with exception of those that had fairly early teenage children which was also very rare. Thus, the absence of the husband readjusted the wife's responsibilities and routine work. Flumera, recalls her experience, thus: “in the morning of a day, with my hoe on my shoulder, a panga in my left hand, my baby on my back, the ropes of three goats in my right hand followed by two children of the ages of 3 and 4 years would head for work in the garden. While in the garden, I would dig and by the time I finalized the last part of it the one I started with would be already bushy. Returning home was the same except that I would add a bundle of firewood on my head”.

Other widows and wives of the migrants reported of leaking huts which became so challenging and at times resulted into sexual harassment by their in-laws and other village men. Consequently, fixed under such unbearable conditions, the migrant’s wife would succumb to sexual advances of either the in-law who had been left by the migrant to take care of the family or any other available man that thatched the leaking house. This was so because it was a common practice that whoever thatched the house had to sleep in it on the pretext of “checking” whether it was fully thatched. In most cases, this would culminate into unwanted pregnancies and immorality in form of adultery that was heavily punishable as was the case in southern Rhodesia, where older men pressed Europeans to pass the Native Adultery Punishment Ordinance of 1916, that provided for a huge fine or a year of imprisonment with hard labor to the adulterous woman (Curtin, Feierman and Vansina 1995, 501). Testimonies of migrant laborers informed the researcher that their sons and daughters born in this period were named **Kaheru**, name that is popular among the Banyankole implying that the child was produced from outside the family circle because they were not always sure that the children were surely their biological children after all on the return, the migrants would at times find their wives pregnant or with a young child or information in the village about a sexual affair with another man which at times led to divorce. These findings are related to those among the Romanians whose cases of divorce exponentially grew due to economic migration (Ivanoff 2016, 197).

In addition to physical torment was the psychological effects of loneliness and lack of intimacy. In many instances, the migrant laborers were young men, with really young wives and very new in their marriages. The absence of their husbands was, therefore, a very difficult experience tantamounting to denial of marital intimacy. Although this experience did not leave a

lasting legacy that was retold by the witnesses, such physical torment was worsened by the psychological torment. She felt the loneliness which was brought about by the absence of the husband and was always worried by the morality and discipline of the children. The long-time period of absence by the father from the home meant single parenthood with its consequences especially raping of the girl children and improper behaviour of the boys.

Women could not offer the necessary labor to produce enough food for the household in the absence of the man. This was because the traditional labor relations were highly specialized. Clearing of the bush was essentially the work of the man thus in his absence it became extremely hard and indeed impossible to carry out cultivation. This led to a serious shortage of food in the period 1958-60 similar to that of Rwanda-Burundi in 1943 (Powesland 1954). This famine was known as Rukuura-ihega or Rwaranda during which period, people resorted to wild fruits and other nature's provision as food which had never happened before. With the occurrence of this famine, men who would return had to go back to Buganda for one more time to clear up and finish up their "business" never to go back again. Informing their fellows, one after the other and group after the group, migrants returned home with some food crop varieties like sweet potatoes which are currently known as "Karebe Enganda" that would mature within three months. Migrant labor experience of the Banyankole therefore altered the role and position of women in the society: taking double responsibility in the home yet not paid and suffered psycho-social and physical torments.

### **The Baganda–Banyankole Perception**

The Banyankole migrant labor experience affected the Baganda- Banyankole perception of each other. On the one hand, the experience created a superiority complex among the Baganda, because they were the ones who provided employment and wages for the Banyankole migrant laborers, the former tended to look at the latter with disdain (Mamdani 2001, 19-39) On the other hand, the Banyankole laborers felt humiliated by the treatment they got from migrant labor experience which challenged them towards avoiding and ending *okupakasa*. The end result of that attitude was the expansion of cash crop production sector and the lasting legacy was what Kabwegyere described as "the suspicious approach" (Kabwegyere 1995, 70).

At the time the Banyankole were seeking labor in Buganda, they were living a relatively lower standard of living than the Baganda as generalized by Bhavnani and Lacina migrants frequently live on the economic and social margins in their new homes (Bhavnani and Lacina 2018, 23). For example, in terms of dress, beddings, quality of housing and level of hygiene, the Baganda were better than the migrant laborers. This tended to promote the perceptions of superiority and inferiority (Geschiere 2009). In fact, several of the participants in the study recalled incidents where the Baganda landlords could not serve food to the Banyankole laborers on their plates, but rather served them on banana leaves modelled as plates, which contributed to the rise of nativism, a feeling of difference, suspicion and discrimination motivated by the political environment that divided natives' groups basing on custom and geography other than history and law (Mamdani 2012 and Lonsdale 2016).

### **Migrant labor experience and modern life**

Migrant labor experience had a long-lasting legacy of modern life in Ankole on a few who stayed longer in Buganda and the majority who had one leg at the workplace and another at home as was the case in South Africa (Mamdani 2017, 218-222). While some few migrants had been able to rent and acquire some few plots in Buganda stayed there for more years with their families. These were mainly the few men who had just married without children. Mathias, the British commissioner, in his annual report for the year 1950, noted that: "an interesting feature of this movement [read southwestern labor migration route] is that about 26 per cent of men are accompanied by their womenfolk" (Uganda Protectorate 1951, 26). The testimonies of the migrant laborers do not suggest

that many of them stayed behind and settled. They gave four explanations as to why the Banyankole migrants did not settle. First, the majority of the migrants had stable families which they had left behind which they could not abandon, secondly, the majority of the Banyankole migrants did not like the conditions and despised the conditions in which they were working and living; and could not tolerate them, thirdly, the frequent attack of malaria and the experience of death of their colleagues dissuaded them to stay, and lastly, the Banyankole had developed land ownership ethic-great attachment to their Kibanja-Land, whereby they aspired to own and not to rent, and therefore could not be satisfied with renting land in the Baganda tenure system (Hanson 2003). Because of these four reasons, the Banyankole migrant laborers of the first generation returned to Ankole with many buried in Buganda forests while those of the second generation, the majority returned and a handful settled in Buganda.

Migrants were able to adopt modern living styles similar to those of their employers. Migrant laborers facilitated individualism and breaking of extended family ties. Mzee Katunda admired the lifestyle of his employer, he remembered, thus: "After a long period of work, the landlord would come back home, clean his feet and relax in his comfortable seat. When I went to his room to ask for Orubimbi for our evening meal, I saw him relaxing and hence decided to work relentlessly to purchase the same seat as you can see it here". This modern life also extended to the administration of the family and individual experience in many communities in Uganda (Meinert 2017). Mzee Katono informed the researcher that he was not worried about the absence of his children because lonely life was one of the major experiences he got from Buganda during the 1950s. He reported that a Muganda parent would live alone while his children were away in schools or even abroad. He further noted that such a parent would only enjoy the company of his/her children after returning usually twice or even once a year. This partly explains why the employers would enjoy the presence of the company of migrant laborers in their compounds since they too, assured them security.

## Conclusion

The migrant labor experience had a great impact. Firstly, it led to the introduction of a cash crop-coffee, and secondly, it led to the alteration of the social ties of the Ankole society. The Banyankole migrant labor experience thus informed their socio-economic and political behaviour back home and influenced the penetration of capital in South Western Uganda which was consistent with the historical materialism theory.

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