

The production of tea in the Usambara Mountains (Tanzania)¹

The historical dimension of the modern forms of peasant labour organizations

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Mshambaa...what does it mean then?

It means good worker.

(Interview with Shekulavu)

Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to explain how the actual forms of labour organization among the tea-peasants in the Usambara Mountains have their roots in the colonial past and post-independence Tanzania. Currently, the tea cultivation is conducted through the formula of 'smallholders'. In summary, the land is divided into small plots of tea plants held by individual families who sell the leaves to a main central factory belonging to a private entrepreneur. Many influences and political devices affected today's labour force organization throughout the history: In summary the present system has its distant roots in the (I) pre-colonial period, passes through the (II) establishment of plantations under German rule, evolves into the (III) system of 'smallholders' under the British mandate, reflecting also the (IV) post independent Nyerere's socialist policies and the influences of the (V) market economy promoted by the World Bank during the nineteen eighties and nineties.

I outline the major turning points of this history shifting from the national and international perspectives to the local point of view, following the historical changes which have happened in Mazumbai, a hamlet belonging to a small village named Sagara, located in the Usambara Mountains, a range set in northeastern Tanzania (Tanga region).

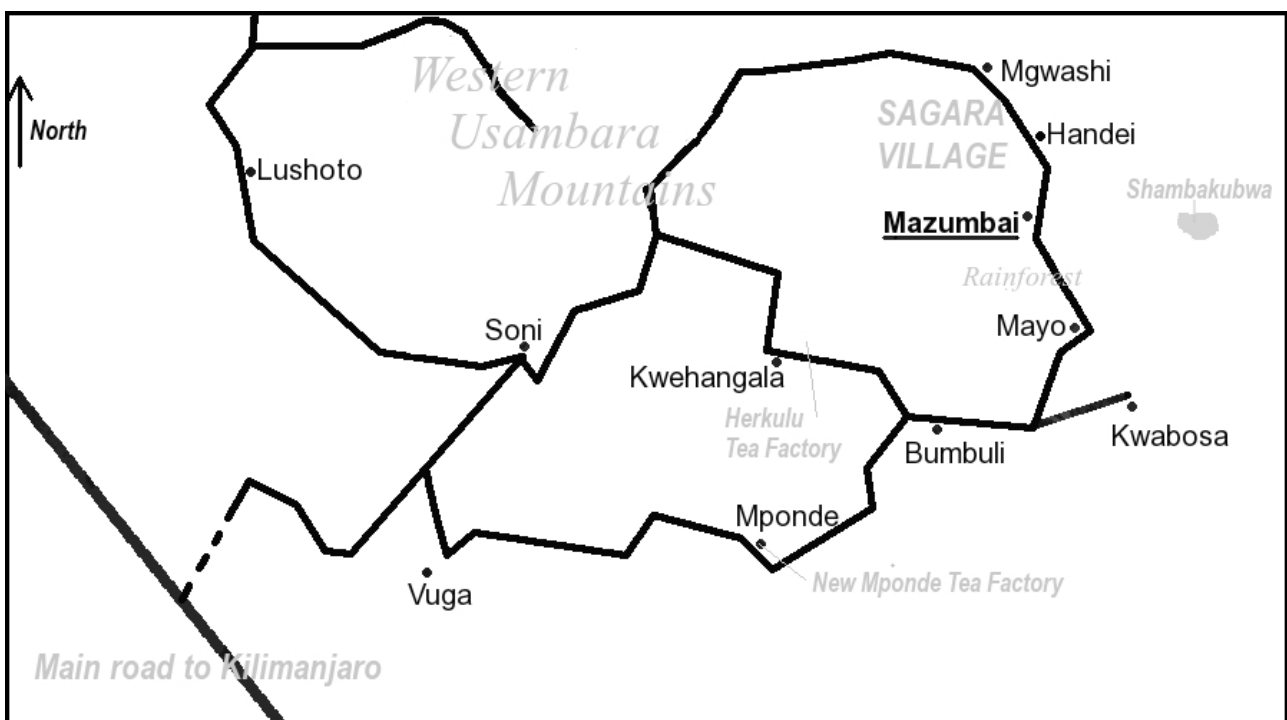
Introduction

At regular intervals, every Tuesday at four o'clock, the engine of a tractor breaks the silence of a village called Sagara. This place has still conserved some traces of a rainforest that once covered

1 This article is based on my Master's Degree thesis in Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology discussed the 1 5th July 2009 at the University of Bologna (Italy). The fieldwork was conducted in the context of a formative journey to Tanzania that was held from January to June 2008 and partly founded by the University of Bologna. I presented this paper at the CAAS (Canadian Association of African Studies) Conference 2011 at York University, Toronto.

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the larger part of the mountain range of Usambara. Mazumbai is a small hamlet of about forty houses surrounded by the mountains at 1500 meters above the sea level. The time the tea-tractor takes to reach Mazumbai depends on the weather conditions: the only rough road, built in the period of German colonization, gets flooded during the rainy season and it can take hours to the track for moving from one place to another. But when the farmers – mostly women and children – recognize the distant noise of the engine, they run fast bringing fresh, just-picked tea leaves wrapped in *kanga*.³ They move rapidly towards the present stations which have been the same for forty years. These places are called *vipimo*⁴ in Kiswahili: they are simple wooden structures, placed along the route, which serve to support a balance for weighing the crop. The tractor arrives from a factory, located further south, the New Mponde Tea Factory; it arrives to load and transport tea leaves grown in this area. This zone is exactly located in the mountain range of West Usambara, in the East Coast Region of Tanga.



Hand-sketch map of Sagara village based on personal notes and a poster located at the headquarters of the Lion Wattle Company in Lushoto. Author: Elisabetta Campagnola.

3 On the distinction between peasants and farmers Iliffe wrote: ‘Involvement in local community and wider state distinguishes peasants both from tribes-men, whose societies are more exclusively local, and from farmers, who employ non-family labour and are chiefly concerned with the wider market’ (Iliffe 1979: 273). Cooper distinguishes: ‘Peasants are very different from plantation workers. They work on their own, on small farms, with simple tools and the labour of their families’ (Cooper 1980: 12). For Steven Feierman: ‘Peasants are farmers who produce a large part of what they consume’ (Feierman 1990: 24). In this article I use both terms – *peasants* and *farmers* – to translate the term *wakulima*, which is used by the people of Mazumbai to describe themselves in connection to the work on tea’s fields. In other circumstances they call themselves as members of the village. *Kanga* is a fabric square that usually serves as a cloth.

4 *Kipimo* is the singular form, *Vipimo* is plural.

Pre-colonial period: the reciprocity discourse

The West Usambara Mountains are inhabited mostly by Shambaa, people speaking a Bantu dialect. In the nineteen sixties they were defined by scholars as a patrilineal tribe, having virilocal residence (Winans 1962).⁵ The Shambaa are by definition people of Shambai, the area of the Usambara Mountains: until today they are generally farmers who grow bananas, maize, potatoes, sugar cane, medicinal plants, beans and tomatoes.⁶ The wealthier of them are able to breed a few animals (chickens, goats, cattle) and to do *business* in Lushoto, the district capital. In the sixties' Edgar Winans⁷ argued that they were living mostly in villages where men belonged to a single lineage like domestic corporate groups. The lineage had the rights over the land. The first migrant who had occupied the land is the ancestor to whom the all patrilineal group of descendants is connected to. In this way land was inherited along the patrilineal lines from the very first settler and could not be alienated (Winans 1962: 21, 49). People that did not belong to the lineage needed permission to settle on the land. In Mazumbai the situation nowadays can be read partly in the same way. There are few major different patrilineages. Women are still the ones that move from outside into the house of the man, except for Kilindi women.⁸ The transfer of the land happens through lineage lines (both males and females).⁹ A stranger, to acquire the land, needs to ask permission to village authorities because he doesn't belong to the community. Village authorities are also the major representatives of a group of peasants, connected with the management of tea cultivation and

5 On the criticism on the concept of tribe and its relation with the *Indirect Rule* see Iliffe 1979: 318. See also Bayart 1989: 78 and Mamdani 1996.

6 Shambaa or *Sambaa* – as it is spelled nowadays by the government in <<http://www.tanzania.go.tz/regionsf.html>> – is differently recorded by European historical sources: *Washambaa* in Baumann 1891; *Waschambala* in Wohlrab 1918 (quoted in Feerman 1990: 329); *Washambara* in Krapf 1860 (also Farler 1878: 84). In Bantu dialects, the prefix *wa-* determines the plural personal nouns. Nowadays in *kishambaa* it is not uncommon to notice a similar pronunciation for the sounds 'r' and 'l' like they are just one consonant. In terms of the name of the area Oscar Baumann is very clear: Usambara is the common name in Swahili, *Ushambala* is heard mostly in Bondei, and *Ushambā* is the one used by themselves (Baumann 1890: 153).

7 Winans writes in the sixties. His ethnography uses the *ethnographic present* melting data from the past (especially from European pre-colonial explorers) to his personal observations on the field. He analyses the political system of the Shambaa according to the model proposed by Evans Pritchard and Meyer Fortes in 1950, arguing that the Shambaa political system is lignatic and occasionally segmentary, based on patrilineal groups. Through their descended group Shambaa occupy territory, inherit rights of property, get their authority and make their religious observations (Winans 1962: 150). On land transfer he argues: 'When a man of the lineage group get married he has to give large parts of his property to his first wife. If he wants to have more than one, he has to provide land for all of them, convincing for example the first wife to reduce her property' (Winans 1962: 33). He also explains the existence of other available lands other than the lignatic land: unopened bush for example, or land previously cultivated that doesn't have any more any legitimate holder (Winans 1962: 143). On the rights over land see also the careful explanation made in the forties by E. B. Dobson (Dobson 1940). The actual Tanzanian law concerning land, reformed in 1999, states that 'All land in Tanzania is public land vested in the President as trustee on behalf of all citizens [...] existing rights in and recognised long standing occupation or use of land are clarified and secure by the law'. The land Act, part II 3(1) 1999, declares then the President as the owner of the whole land and theoretically protects customary right of occupancy in accordance with customary law.

8 Kilindi is an aristocratic lineage which took control over the entire Usambara Mountains during the nineteenth century.

9 I can personally attest two cases of transfer of rights over the land involving women: one from grandmother to her grandchild and a friend of him; a second one from a dead father to the children, among them a girl.

rainforest conservation, which takes the name Sagara.¹⁰

When the first European explorers¹¹ arrived in the region in the nineteenth century, the Shambaa were organized into a kingdom ruled by the King Kimweri, the fourth member of a dynasty belonging to a single aristocratic group: the Kilindi (Feierman 1974: 31).¹² The founding myth of Kilindi kingship is transmitted in several versions; they differ in some details but are alike in general terms. Mbega, a foreign hunter, came from far away and took refuge in the Usambara rainforest, surviving by killing wild pigs. The Shambaa, impressed by this fact, received him as a new leader of Vuga, the capital of the kingdom (Feierman 1974: 45). Therefore, the royal power, established by the myth of Mbega, had the specific task of taking care of his subjects, ensuring their welfare, and receiving tributes as compensation.

Steven Feierman described how in the nineteenth century the king was the only real ‘owner of the land’ as land administrator. The Kilindi dynasty was able to take control over the political discourse of sovereignty that existed before and after them.¹³ ‘Healing the land’ and the ability of rain making –which means to make the land prosperous and wealthy– became a prerogative of the king. The king was responsible for the welfare of the Shambaa: he used to bring rain and food, receiving tributes in exchange. The tributes due to the ruling elite could consist of livestock, food or physical labour. In particular, referring to this last point, the work, mainly conducted by youth, was to take care of and cultivate the banana gardens of the king and the leaders (Feierman 1990: 46-51). Winans, few years before Feierman, was expressing the duties of service for the chief in terms of ‘mutual dependency’ between the chief and the subjects. What keeps the king and subjects together in a reciprocal relationship is the communal ancestors and the myth of Mbega which implies that the subjects accepted the installation of the authority and reminds to the chief that he has to defend and feed his people (Winans 1962: 86).¹⁴

A peasant I met in his home in Mazumbai, born in 1938 and belonging to the Kilindi aristocratic lineage, referring to the time of the mythical hero, confirmed this exchange and spoke of it in terms of mutual assistance by saying that during the Mbega period everyone owned land but the leaders

10 Sagara Group is definitely pre-existing the Sagara Village, as a local territory established by the government just in the last decade.

11 The first European to cross Usambara Mountain and reach Vuga is Johann Ludwig Krapf, a German missionary stationed in Kenya and Ethiopia, who visited Usambara Mountains two times in 1848 and 1853 (Krapf 1860).

12 Kilindi is still a group considered separately but nowadays it doesn't have any position of privilege.

13 Rainmakers were not appearing for the first time with Kilindi chieftainship and the ruling elite didn't have the exclusivity over the power of bringing rain and wealth to the land, but Kilindi became the most notable rainmakers. After, with the arrival of German imperialism, the colonial officers and the *akidas* – mostly muslim tax collectors for the colonial government – partly replaced the African chiefs as rainmakers (Feierman 1990: 129). Local rainmakers kept a sort of counter-hegemonic political discourse that persisted even when English colonialism took over, and through the practices of ‘indirect rule’ intended to re-establish a new ruling elite ‘who could convince people that their well-being depended on controlling soil erosion’ (Feierman 1990: 166). The attempt to impose a foreign way of farming indeed was rejected (Feierman 1990: 188).

14 Service for the chief was involving payment of taxes, service as warriors, communal labour for projects of public interest and the work in the field of the chief (Winans 1962: 143).

had more extensive fields; therefore the Shambaa used to help leaders cultivate their major crops.¹⁵ These fields were planted with mostly with banana trees and some beans.¹⁶ Oscar Baumann, the Viennese explorer and geographer who worked for German colonial offices and travelled the area in 1888 describes the economy of the Shambaa as based on banana's crops, tobacco, *pombe* and sugar-cane (Baumann 1891: 74).¹⁷

It is important to distinguish between the fields of the chiefs and the fields belonging of a single household. The latter was allocated by the owner of the land of a single lineage –or *Mgosh wa mwango* (Winans 1962: 58)– to women, youth, children and dependants belonging to his lineage. But in a broader sense all the land belonged to the king and his chiefs who had to ensure its welfare (Huijzendveld 2008: 387). As I pointed out, the agricultural work on banana fields, at every level, was built on the idea of reciprocity. It could be expressed in terms of mutual help; something is given for having something back and not for an equivalent in currency.¹⁸ In doing so, there is of course also a reciprocal recognition of status. Peasants were subjects embedded in dependency relations with the the king who should, in exchange, provide rain and fertility for the land. Peasants were subjects of the king but not necessary slaves. Slavery had existed for centuries along the Swahili coast.¹⁹ As many scholars have pointed out, slavery has been interpreted in Africa as a part of a *continuum* that has kin at one end and slavery at the other (Miers and Kopytoff 1977: 67). Dependency relations exist simply because of belonging to the social network *naturally* built on the lineage and the community. The condition of slavery is the opposite of affiliation status (Viti 2007: 12). A subject could be enslaved once he left from the kin protection. This could happen mostly

15 Interview recorded in Mazumbai, May 2008. The interview is made with one of the older person in Mazumbai, at his home. He belongs to Kilindi descendent group. Since now on I will call him *Shekulavu*, a ritual names which was used in Kilindi clan as a form of greeting (Winans 1962: 85).

16 Also in Krapf: 'Here and there I saw tobacco, banana and sugar plantations' (Krapf 1860: 317). The historian Frans Huijzendveld pointed out how the 'local agrarian subsistence economy' was based mostly on irrigated banana plantations called *ghunda* (Huijzendveld 2008: 390). It deserves to be noticed that still today banana is one of the major components of the local diet.

17 Oscar Baumann was kept with his friend and co-worker Hans Meyer for a while at the court of a Shambaa chief, Semboja, who was involved in the uprising of 1888 of Bushiri bin Salim against Germany. After that experience, the German East Africa Association (DOAG) sent him back on the same area formally asking for a complete geographical exploration. *Pombe* is a traditional alcoholic beverage based on sugar cane distillation.

18 Feerman writes: 'Mbega gave meat and received starch. In every instance the Shambaa get starch and received meat. In addition reciprocity was more important than equivalency. That is Mbega did not sell meat for a price but gave it away' (Feerman 1974: 54). Concept or reciprocity has been analysed from the beginning of anthropology: Malinowsky *kula* system for example or Marcel Mauss analysis on gift as a mean to built social solidarity. In African studies the concept on reciprocity is often connected with many others: clientelism, nepotism, dependency, paternalism, redistribution. For example Bayart, on the postcolonial state in Africa, states: 'Toutefois, la réciprocité, symbolique ou matérielle, qu'institue la personnalisation des rapports sociaux et politiques, dans le cadre des réseaux, ne saurait être sublimée. Malinowski soutenait encore que "l'État primitif n'est pas tyrannique pour ses propres sujets" puisque "chacun est lié, réellement ou fictivement, à n'importe quelle autre personne", par le biais de la parenté, de l'appartenance clanique ou des classes d'âge. On ne peut se contenter d'une conclusion aussi idyllique au sujet des sociétés africaines' (Bayart 1989: 285). From another point of view Goran Hyden associates the social morals of reciprocity he calls 'economy of affection' to a fundamental social logic different from market economy and capitalistic values that is responsible for the political and economic dynamics of the continent. For a critical approach see Mamdani 1996: 13.

19 See note 21.

through debt, accusation of witchcraft and war. Chiefs acquired slaves providing them refuge but at the same time relegated them to a form of extreme personal dependency and ownership. Feierman is very clear about this: 'chief's subjects were *washi*, people of the land, while chiefs dependants were *watung'wa*, slaves, a loan word in swahili' (Feierman 1990:57). Contracting a debt and not paying it back could easily lead to enslavement by the chief. What prevented one from being easily enslaved was the unit of reproduction, the kin group – *kifu*, among Shambaa– the group of the descents and its wealth.

Right before the German occupation of East Africa, in the mid nineteenth century, the Kilindi decided to enter directly into a world market economy that was asking more and more for slaves and ivory, importing firearms and cotton.²⁰ The political economy of the area was changing. What Huijzendveld would call the 'agrarian subsistence economy' and Feierman had analysed as *kifu* group, started to interact with the capitalist economy, producing as sort of articulation of modes of production.²¹

The shift lead towards an economy based mostly on trade and organized by warlords (Huijzendveld 2008: 393) and the authority shifted its structural basis from the control of livestock and labor taxes to the monopoly of slaves and ivory trade through Zanzibar (Feierman 1990).

What was changed in the dependency relations with slaves is for Feierman the fact that chiefs started to sell slaves, thereby breaking the traditional rule (Feierman 1990: 113). An external factor 'permutes' (Miers and Kopytoff 1977) slavery, redefining dependency relations and transforming it into an institutionalized system (Meillassoux 1992).

The Arabs of Zanzibar had, at that time, full control of caravan routes for the slave and ivory trades.²² In the early nineteenth century, the island of Zanzibar became the centre of Omani business (Alpers, 1969). The sultan moved his capital from the Arab Peninsula to the island, managing the strategic traffic from the mainland to the Middle East and India. The road from Pangani, a coastal port south of Tanga, towards Usambara and Kilimanjaro, was one of the main trade routes that was crossing Tanganyika. The Kilindi, the dominant descent group, progressively became intermediaries of this trade for the Arabs of Zanzibar along this road. Kimweri ye Nyumbai is the king that ruled during this time of change.²³ From the 1830s, the increasing demand for slaves and ivory –

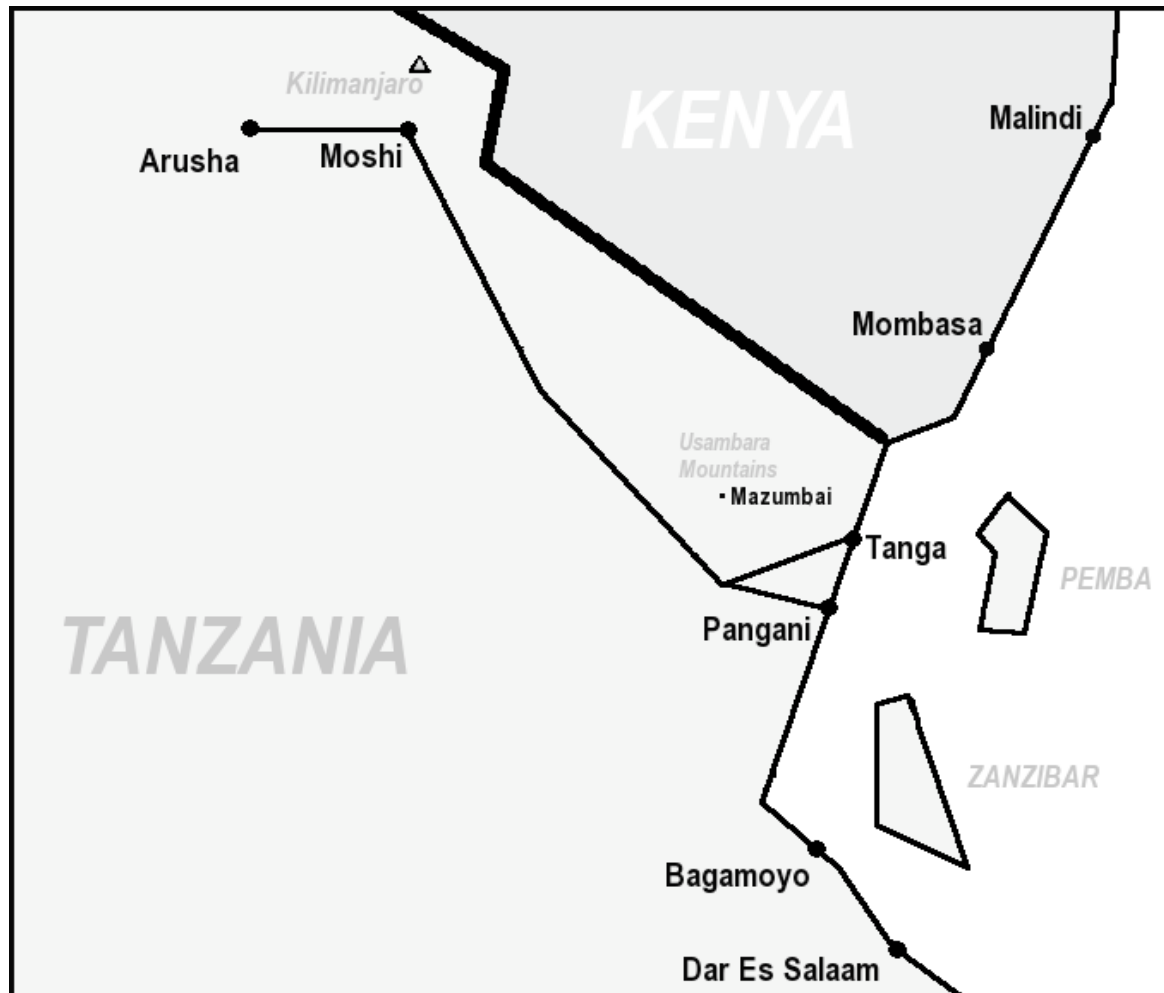
20 Slaves and ivory's trade was existing long time before in a sort of Indian Ocean and Arab peninsula's market but had increased in nineteenth century for the added demand of westerns markets. See also note 21.

21 I'm referring to the 'articulation of modes of production', a model proposed by Peter Geschiere on the basis of Rey and Terray's studies (Geschiere 1985).

22 Slave trade was probably existing in East Africa before the emergence of any external market, whether European or Arabian (Deutsch 2006: 17). In any case evidences showed that Kilwa Kisiwani, a small island on the coast south of Dar es Salaam, was a centre of slave exports since fourteen century (Deutsch 2006: 33). Archeological ruins in Kilwa attest the existence of a mosque since 1340. The ruler class of the island called itself Shirazi as descendent of a settler who came from Shiraz in Persia. Slaves' trade, then, was not introduced in East Africa by Zanzibar merchants and Arab plantations' owner on the coast.

23 Kimweri is recorded to be the third successor of Mbega, the mythical founder of the reign (in order: Mbega, Bughe, Kinyashi, Kimweri). Kimweri died in 1862 (Feierman 1974: 147).

stimulated by the effect of Swahili cloves plantations economy on the islands and along the coast (Cooper 1977: 38) and by the requests of European, Indian and Persian markets– finally brought the Kilindi to take complete control of the caravan routes. Oral sources claim that even now is possible to visit in Zanzibar the tombs of the Kilindis' intermediaries responsible for the trade.²⁴



Hand-sketches map of Tanzania, based on the map available in: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/cia-maps-publications/map-downloads/Tanzania_Physiography.pdf>, highlighting West Usambara Mountains and the road from Pangani to Kilimanjaro. Author: Elisabetta Campagnola.

German colonization: the establishment of the plantation economy

At the beginning of twentieth century, the Germans built the first stretch of railroad from the coast to the interior. Their key interests in Tanganyika were the commercial positions along the sea and the plantations. In particular, after the failure of rubber production, they were attracted by the idea of processing *cinchona*, coffee and sisal.²⁵ The decision to occupy the area and establish a German colony in east Africa was taken a few years earlier by Otto von Bismarck, in 1885.²⁶

²⁴ Interview with Shekulavu, note 14. From the same interview: ‘ There was a good relationship between Kilindi and Arabs. the Kilindi were the ones who tend to sell the slaves to the sultan of Zanzibar.’

²⁵ The plant from which quinine is obtained.

²⁶ German merchants trafficked in East Africa since 1847 (Ilfiffe 1979: 89). The decision to colonize East Africa is

Between 1884 and 1886, the German Society for Eastern Africa (DOAG or *Ostafrikanische Deutsche-Gesellschaft*), a private company created specifically by the Chancellor, completed eighteen expeditions with the intent to sign treaties to extend its territory (Ilfte 1979: 89-91). In 1887 Bismarck encouraged a groups of bankers to invest in the company, which thus became a real commercial enterprise. During this period the British and the Germans were sharing the East African territories: with the Berlin Conference of 1884 Zanzibar and Kenya became a British Protectorate, while Tanganyika, Rwanda and Burundi came under the control of the German *Reich* by the name of *Deutsch Ostafrika*. The historian John Ilfite describes for this period the establishment in Tanganika of a real colonial economy based on plantations (Ilfite 1979: 135). The Germans overlapped in some ways the Arab caravan trade and, by substituting slavery with wage labour on plantations, they introduced definitively the capitalist mode of production.²⁷

(i) Exploitation of labour force

The German Reich, as the British and French colonial powers, justified the conquest of Africa through antislavery rhetoric. But, once the county was occupied, the colonial government was never able to formally outlaw slavery, even if the pressure and the debates of the metropole were very strong.²⁸ In any case, an agreement on international level –such as the Brussels Conference Act of 1890– and the absence of positive legal recognition of slavery, maintained the administration in an ambiguous direction which has been interpreted by scholars as a policy of ‘emancipation without abolition’ (Deutsch 2006), or as ‘gradualist’ emancipation policy (Sunseri 2002: 27).²⁹

The control of the labour force was central to the success of the entire colonial enterprise. Slavery, as I pointed out, for centuries had been at the core of the mode of production of the area: on the one hand there was long-standing international slave and ivory trade controlled by Kilwa and Zanzibar; on the other, more recently, slave labour was used in Arab clove and coconut plantations on the islands and along the coast, fuelling an internal market (Cooper 1977).

An entire elite, which was based its existence on the wealth produced by slavery, had to be controlled by colonial officers at the time of the conquest. Indeed, the demand for a labour force by

probably related to the suspicion that British and French conspired to exclude German traders in West Africa. As happened in the British Empire, the German occupation was influenced by an ideological motive, i.e. the anti-slavery sentiment which became the moral justification of colonialism (Cooper 1980: 32).

27 Jan-Georg Deutsch dedicated an entire book to the slavery question and the German rule in East Africa. The process of abolition never really occurred in *Deutsch-Ostafrika*. The colonial government preferred to limit the intervention to avoid the collapse of the economy and letting slaves to find their own way towards emancipation (Deutsch 2006). Issa Shivji argues that the wage labour in Tanganyika was introduced by the Arabs with the long-distance trade between the coast and Zanzibar Island: traders used to employ a large number of temporary carriers paying them in goods rather than currency. This fact constitutes the first step towards wage labour (Shivji 1986). Ilfite argues: ‘Plantation development in the north-east introduced a capitalist sector into Tanganyika’ (Ilfite 1979: 151).

28 Final abolition did not come until 1922, with the British administration.

29 Jan-George Deutsch states that Germans didn’t outlawed slavery but instead embark in a ‘policy of obscuration and legal subterfuge that left core issues deliberately undecided’ (Deutsch 2006: 244).

expatriates' plantation companies in some ways overlapped the necessity of the colonial government to control the area. At the very root of the labour relations in the colonial plantation economy and at the very basis of the colonial authority, was the slave system and its eventual ambiguous dismantlement.

Oscar Baumann, in 1890, is perfectly conscious that the success of plantations could be achieved 'just with the help of forced labourers, whether you may call them slaves, *contratados*, convicts, mission boys or coolies' (Baumann 1890: 215-216).³⁰ The purpose of DOAG itself was the creation of plantations in East Africa. Thaddeus Sunseri states that in 1905 there were around 120 German estates in the hinterlands of *Ostafrika*. Many of them, controlled by a few major trading corporations and run on the model of Arab and Swahili slave plantations of the coast, were located in the Pangani River valley up to the Usambara Mountains (Sunseri 2002: 53).

The colonial policy concerning slaves, as I explained, was ambiguous: it had never formally outlawed enslavement, nor formally encouraged the slavery system. The result was a multiplication of freedom certificate (emancipation) made out by plantation owners or other recruiters (Sunseri 2002: 35). Indeed the first device to fulfill the desire of colonial expansion was the creation of a semi-freed labour force, based on master and servant dependency relations, that had existed in the area for a long time.

A Labour force was also created through the use of local villagers, living in the areas chosen for the establishment of plantations. In fact 'planters located their estates among African villages so that they could draw on local "day" labourers for much of their workforce' (Sunseri 2002: 54).

On the same issue Iliffe writes: 'Each settler entering Usambara in the late 1890s was allocated several villages whose headmen had to provide a fixed number of workers each day' (Iliffe 1979: 152).

Sunseri reports how some sort of everyday form of resistance obliged the settlers, in accordance with the state-authorities, to acquire the workforce in other way.³¹ One of these devices was the use of Asian indentured labour, a transitory practice of hiring Chinese and Javanese workers. The method was too expensive and was abandoned soon. Penal labor was another artifice used to obtain labour force for plantation and public work: The punishment for a crime was transformed into a period of compulsory labour (Sunseri 2002: 55-56).

In 1907 another famous solution was invented: the 'Wilhelmstal work card system'.³² The first

30 'Es ist nun eine bemerkenswerthe, fast für die ganze tropische Welt giltige Regel, dass wirklich bedeutende Erfolge im Plantagenbau nur mit Hilfe farbiger, unbesoldeter oder nahezu unbesoldeter Zwangsarbeiter erzielt werden, möge man sie nun Sklaven, Contratados, Sträflinge, Missionsjungen oder Kuli nennen'.

31 Baumann as well complains about the unreliability and the inclination to run away of the workers (Baumann 1890: 216)

32 *Wilhelmsthal arbeitskarte*. Wilhelmsthal is the colonial name of the actual Lushoto, the capital of the district. In Conrad S., 2010. *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany State*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press it is said that the system was invented by missionaries. Deutsch writes: 'The infamous Wilhelmstal labour card system, pioneered in Usambara mountains in Wilhelmstal district and introduced later on a less rigorous basis on

experiments were put into practise in the Usambara Mountains: each Shambaa was equipped with a card that forced him to work for Europeans thirty days within a four month period at a fixed salary, with the penalty for disobedience being conscription to public works (Iliffe 1979: 153).

According to Chris Maina Peter, the Germans took three main measures to create labour force (Peter 1990: 203). The first was the personal card, which I have just explained. The second was to grab peasants' land and move them from the interior to the coastal areas working on plantations for at least three months. The third method was to create a relationship between work and taxation (Peter 1990: 20).³³ The 'hut tax' was introduced for the first time in 1897. People hired as contract labourers on plantations for more than six months were exempt from paying it (Deutsch 2006: 219).

The whole system developed by the authorities was indeed responsible for the creation of a semi-freed labour force, with blurred boundaries, where it was difficult, if not impossible to distinguish between slaves and free individuals. This entire 'proletarian class of subalterns' carried on struggles over labour through everyday forms of resistance that seriously threatened and undermined the dream of a triumphant and productive colonial economy in the same ways as the riots of those years (Sunseri 2002: 52).³⁴

(ii) Sagara Village under German rule

During this period, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Shambaa were fighting a civil war for the succession of the kingdom of Kimweri, died in 1862. On one side there was the grandson of the great king, Shekulwavu, who reigned for just six years and then was replaced by his young brother Kibanga and his son Kyniashi. On the other side there was one of youngest sons of Kimweri, Semboja, the ruler of a place very close to the caravan route. Semboja was able to put his weak son, Kimweri Maguvu, at the head of the fallen city of Vuga (Iliffe 1979: 99 and Feireman 1974: 153). It's a period recorded as *pato*, greed: all the chieftainships were almost independent from each other and the division of power was bringing the kingdom into crisis and poverty (Feierman 1974: 153-165). Feeding the political fragmentation, German settlers signed contracts with both sides for the sale of the land (Iliffe 1979: 126). The conflicts among Kilindi over power resulted in the abandonment of large areas of the mountains, which easily became personal property of German expatriates. In fact, the Usambara Mountains, presented by Krapf and Baumann to their contemporaries as the Switzerland of East Africa for the lush beauty of the landscapes, the pleasant weather and the strategic position along the road to the coast, became one of the most important

Morogoro, Dar es Salam, Rufiyi and Lindi districts as well as Mafia island (Deutsch 2006: 220). The labour card in kiswahili is called *Kipande* (Sunseri 2002: 146).

33 Sunseri is sceptic on the real success and application of this method: he argues that the small amount of the hut tax could be paid easily through the selling of some chickens.

34 For example the uprising of Bushiri bin Salim in 1888 or the Maji Maji rebellion of 1905.

areas for the placement of plantations, especially those of coffee.³⁵

Frans Huijzendveld states that between 1896 and 1899 colonial settlers in West Usambara created four major coffee plantations : Sakarre, Ambangulu, Balangai and Mazumbai.³⁶

Mazumbai plantation probably belonged to the trade group called *Westdeutsche Handels und Plantagen Gesellschaft* (DHPG) which was also holding plantations of sisal near Pangani.³⁷

During my fieldwork I had the chance to have three long interviews with the oldest man in Mazumbai, a living memory of the place - a man that I will call hereafter Mzee.³⁸

Mzee is reported to be more than one hundred years old. He welcomed me at his home during the twilight evenings, after he slowly came back from the daily work he was still conducting in the banana garden. He talked a long time about the local history of the place. He confirmed the existence of Mazumbai during the German ruling period but just 'like a name' he said 'not like a village' (hamlet). Mazumbai was the place where the machine to process coffee beans was placed. He told me that at the beginning of the 20th century a European, a German settler, whose name is handed down in his narrative as Kiboshoi, bought for 15 rupees the whole area of the village from a Kilindi chief. He built the only road, which still exists, and began to cultivate coffee. Kiboshoi appointed to the coffee plantation a coordinator who tried, unsuccessfully, to extend the cultivation. It seems that only one company, under different names and with different supervisors, has operated in Mazumbai since that time. The company name was transmitted as Amboni.³⁹

About the labour conditions on the coffee plantation during German colonization, Mzee gave me this account:

MZEE [...] (During German colonial period) there was a man who was going around in every village: Mayo, Mgwashi, Kwabosa...and he was calling the people when the harvesting day was ready. Even the women, they forced them to leave their babies and go to harvest.

The man had something to make a sound, like a whistle. When people were hearing the sound, they knew they have to come and harvest.

ME And what is the name of this man?

MZEE They call him colonial supervisor; he was a Shambaa [...]

ME What is his name in kishambaa? To say this name...the supervisor of the *gunda*?

MZEE *Msimamizi* is the name. These guys were calling people, they were going normally on a

35 Krapf 1860: 307. Baumann 1890: 74.

36 Private communication.

37 Huijzendveld 1997: 226. Also in: Warburg O. and Wohltmann F. (eds), 1911. *Tropenpflanzer; zeitschrift für tropische landwirtschaft*, XV. Berlin, p.680.

38 Here after I will try to reconstruct the local history of the place using the oral fonts. An archive research is needed to compare historical notions, oral history data with archives findings.

39 Amboni is still the name of a huge sisal plantation I visited, located along the coast near Pangani, now belonging to a Kenyan society. In support of the reliability of oral fonts it is important to notice that following Fitzner R., 1903. *Deutsch Kolonial Handbuch*. Berlin, p.120, an Amboni plantation was existing at the beginning of the twenty century and was part of the *Westdeutsche Handels and Plantagen Gesellschaft*, the same trade's group, that in those years, was controlling the plantation in Mazumbai (see note 36).

hill for calling the harvesting the day after. So people knew that the day after they had to go to harvest coffee and if the job was not finished they had to go again, three or four times a week. And they normally bring the coffee to the machine. The machine is over there (indicating a place not far from his house). There are some remains of the machine (in Mazumbai) [...]

ME So people were not so satisfy to work for Ambi then, what was the problem? they were not free? or not well paid? or something else?⁴⁰

MZEE The problem was that they were forced. Sometimes you don't want to do it, you are sick, but you have to do it.

Who was working then on the Mazumbai plantation? Huijzenveld claims that in West Usambara the existence of plantations created those need for labour which led to the assignment of an entire villages' workforce to coffee plantations. Local chiefs, probably using dependency relationship networks, were involved in these allocations and what resulted was that the Europeans were paying taxes and giving away money and gifts to the community instead of paying the labourers. (Huijzenveld 2008: 396).

This general observation is confirmed in Mzee's history which recounts how local villagers, men and women, coming from the nearby hamlets, were working on the Mazumbai plantation.

It is possible to add another detail to this picture. On the coffee plantation of Mazumbai, in 1902, at least fifty Wanyamwesi were also employed.⁴¹ This term is used to name people from the interior areas, especially from the current Tabora district. During the nineteenth century they were mostly caravan porters for the ivory and slave trades. Often, once established along the coast, trapped by debts, they ended up going to work as slaves on the Swahili clove plantations. At the beginning of the twenty century they were utilized in the construction of the central railway (Deutsch 2006: 18-28). German settlers tried to introduce from the very beginning the use of Wanyamwesi on plantations as paid immigrant labourers, who were partly misled by recruiters, partly victims of force labour policies and partly in voluntary acceptance of an alternative employ to the portage which was in decline (Deutsch 2006: 224).⁴² Mazumbai's plantation attests this case. The labour force of the village was not enough to carry on and expand the production: immigrants labourers were added. Also, this case gives further evidence of the fact that workers and villagers were

40 In this testimony Ambi is a German owner of a plantation in Mazumbai who plans to acquire other land in Bumbuli area. Kibanga, a chief of the area near Bumbuli, who denied any offer from him and was later killed.

41 'Plantage Mazumbai hat z. Z. 55 h: mit durchschnittlich 2200 Bäumen arabischen Koffee gepflanzt 40 weitere ha werden im Laufe dieses Jahres zugepflanzt, auf Mazumbai wird viel mit Washamba gearbeitet, da der dortige Leutebestand im Verhältnis zu der zu leistenden Arbeit ein zu kleiner ist. Es werden ca. 50 Wanyamwesi dort beschäftigt' (Kaiserlichen Gouvernement von Deutsch-Ostafrika, 1902. *Berichte über Land und Forstwirtschaft in Deutsch-Ostafrika*, Vol. I. Heidelberg, Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, p.231).

42 Sunseri sustains that the beginning of the twentieth century was a period of "wild" recruitment: 'This "wild" recruitment was fraught with abuse and chicanery. [...] Cases of mistreatment, negligence, physical abuse leading to death, and forced recruitment surfaced in the first few years after 1908' (Sunseri 2002: 139).

interacting together, side by side on plantations, in an environment where the conditions of ‘slaves and free (individuals) began to merge imperceptibly’ (Deutsch 2006: 227). A blurred boundary between villagers, peasants and semi-forced workers, made these categories almost indistinguishable. At this point one could ask if the plantation economy, imposed on peasants and villagers of Usambara, was slowly eroding the local ‘subsistence agrarian economy’, bringing the decline of banana gardens and irrigation system (Huijzendveld 2008: 399) or if the subaltern, almost indistinguishable labour class of the plantation that was being shaped in those years, was able to undermine the success of plantation imperative through everyday acts of resistance and disobedience, suggesting that maybe political discourses as ‘healing and harming the land’ could have a role in a counter-hegemonic culture.⁴³ In any case, it is a fact that on the eve of the eruption of the first World War, the dreams of a productive colonial Ostafrika were generally unattained.

The British Tanganyika

In 1919, after the defeat of Germany in World War I and the subsequent Versailles agreement, Tanganyika passed under the authority of the British Empire. *Ostafrika* was no more the main core of a colonial project made out by the German metropolis, but became one of the last dowels of a huge Empire.

During the nineteen thirties the major innovation, from a political point of view, was the introduction by Governor Donald Cameron of ‘indirect rule’, the system of control of territory aimed to re-establish –or establish from scratch– institutions, hierarchies, tribes, ethnic groups and local authorities, that existed before German rule.⁴⁴

In the Usambara Mountains the effects of this policy was that the authority of the last Kilindi chief recognized by the Germans continued up to 1926. In that year *akidas*, muslim tax collectors for the German government, were abolished and the old Vuga Kingdom was completely restored (Winans 1962: 28).

However from an economic perspective the English colonial occupation was closely related to that of the German one. There was a substantial continuity between the positions of German settlers and the new English expatriates (Iliffe, 1979: 303). Until the outbreak of World War II, in many cases Germans kept their properties. For example, regarding tea plantations: ‘The Germans continued to grow tea for export until 1945 when, following their defeat in the Second World War, their tea farms

43 It is important to state that, in any case, the peasant's subsistence economy was important to ensure the needs of reproduction of the productive force. It means that the subsistence economy was in some way useful for the purpose of plantation economy.

44 Following Iliffe, the ‘indirect rule’ in Tanganyika was a real creation of tribes (Iliffe 1979 : 318). ‘Indirect rule did not mean incorporating existing institutions into the colonial structure but reconstructing the institutions existing before the disaster of German rule.[...] The notion of tribe lay at the heart of indirect rule in Tanganyika.[...] Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes; Africans built tribes to belong to’ (Iliffe 1979: 322- 324) . Bayart argues in similar way when he explains that the idea of ethnic group was an ideological premise to the colonial bureaucracy and after became the ground where the subjects affirmed their own existence (Bayart 1989: 78).

were taken over by the British Colonial power '(Gonza, Moshi, 2002, 1).⁴⁵

This remark coincides with Mzee's oral history about Mazumbai. During the period that he remembered as 'Hitler's period', a German settler, handed down as Kruga 'was chased away'.⁴⁶

But most important for the history of Mazumbai is that, for the first time, during the British mandate, we are introduced to the figure of Hugo Tanner. This is his history, as transmitted by oral sources⁴⁷. Hugo Tanner was, during the forties, the general manager of a large coffee plantation company with a number of properties in Usambara: the name of this company was probably Mazumbai Coffee Estate.⁴⁸

At the end of the forties Hugo Tanner left the company and was rewarded with some plantations around Mazumbai. In this way he created his personal property: the Mazumbai Limited. For a while both the enterprises, Mazumbai Coffee Estate and Mazumbai Limited, worked alongside each other. In the late fifties both of them started experimenting with cultivating tea. In the meantime the owner of Mazumbai Limited became John Tanner, his son. Probably after the independence of Tanzania, in 1962 on a small hill in the middle of the rainforest, John Tanner built a large villa and the machinery to produce electricity using the flow of a stream from the forest. This beautiful building still exists. Today it is a branch of the Sokoine University of Agriculture and dominates the small group of houses made around it for his closest workers and their families: the name of this place is Mazumbai.

(i) Organization of labour force

In the opinion of the Tanzanian scholar Issa Shivji, the British were far more sophisticated than the Germans in the ways of acquiring a workforce. That is because they were essentially constrained by the Prohibition of Compulsory Labor of the League of Nations mandate on Tanganyika and by the ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labor, adopted since 1930.⁴⁹ Slavery was finally formally abolished in Tanganyika in 1922.⁵⁰

45 Huijzendveld informed me that the major change that happened in the transition from the German rule to the British in connection with plantations in the West Usambara Mountains, is that the German settlers had to leave Africa and many plantations were left. In 1925 they were allowed to return and some of them bought back the estates .

46 From my first interview with Mzee: 'At that time in Tanzania there were a lot of Germans, one example is *Kruga*. So people came to catch *Kruga* and chased him out of the country.'

47 Historical reconstruction based on oral sources: the three interviews with Mzee, the interview with the former secretary of the Sagara Group, the interview with the director of the branch of the Sokoine University of Agriculture and the interview with Shekulavu.

48 The name of Mazumbai Coffee Estate is also remembered as Amboni. This information needs to be verified with archived sources, but it is worth it to say that, at least during German rule, between these two there was a real historical connection: see note 38.

49 'Each Member of the International Labour Organisation which ratifies this Convention undertakes to suppress the use of forced or compulsory labour in all its forms within the shortest possible period. [...] For the purposes of this Convention the term forced or compulsory labour shall mean all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily ' (*Forced Labour Covention*, 1930, N.29, Articles 1, 2).

50 Slavery was previously abolished in Zanzibar by the British in 1897.

According to Shivji, the devices used by the British were basically three: (1) ‘Communal Labor’ which requires an individual to spend ten or rather twenty days a year on community service; a practice that, according to the scholar, was residing in the tribal custom of providing volunteer work for the chief. (2) The ‘institution of a tax that replaced public works, while tax defaulters were required to work to replace the payment of taxes. (3) Conscription to work before a war: this might have been the military service in the strict sense, but also as porters or employees on plantations essential to war-related activities (for example sisal and rubber). Shivji argues that 60% of conscripts were actually employed in private capital (Shivji 1986).

During this period we can also attest to the emergence of the famous figures of *manamba*, legal forced workers created to overcome international conventions. They were immigrant labourers, recruited by professional staff and recognised by numbers and not by their names.⁵¹ They had a contract, voluntarily accepted, but the breach of contract could mean imprisonment. In some ways they can be assimilated to the Wanyamwesi of the German time, but with diminished bargaining power over time.⁵² The high presence of migrant workers as *manamba* leaving their rural home in search for work opportunities and the shortage of men employees during the Second World War increased the pressure on rural women, to produce and maintain the households (Huijzendveld 2008: 406).⁵³

As I pointed out previously, the interviews that I conducted with elders in Mazumbai, allow me to say that the control of the workforce in the area was developed in continuity with the previous policy.

But considering the change in production –from coffee to tea– it is rather interesting to concentrate our attention on the general organization of tea plantations in the British Tanganyika and then focus on the local trajectories of Mazumbai.

(ii) Tea plantations: the birth of the ‘smallholders scheme’

In terms of labour organization, tea and coffee crops are very similar: they are both typical perennial colonial cultivations, like rubber, sisal, cotton or cloves. Throughout the period before independence, these products were usually cultivated within the plantation system: European expatriates as employers and local employees organized in different ways, as illustrated above. The different aspect of tea plantations in comparison with the other crops, consists of the fact that the

51 ‘In the colonial literature this was commonly known as contract or recruited labour or *manamba* (the Swahilized plural of the English number since it was by numbers and not by names that the recruits were identified’ (Shivji 1986: 21).

52 Sunseri underline how the word *manamba* was wrongly referred to the pre-British period (Sunseri 2002: 195).

53 Marjorie Mbilinyi wrote a radical article in 1977 on the gender roles in Shambaa society. She states that precapitalist patriarchal relations persisted after the arrival of the capitalist system. In her view those relations contribute to understanding the oppression and exploitation of Tanzanian women, especially poor peasant women. If the migrant labour force was mostly constituted by men, women remained at home, would be put in charge of the complete survival of the household.

collection of leaves is continuous throughout the year and not seasonal. Therefore, the labour force has to be regulated differently in time, as a continuous work force in the field. Nowadays the harvesting happens one or two times per week on average.

Focusing on how labour was organized on tea plantations of British Tanganyika, it is really interesting to look at one of the reports commissioned by the British government. The author is Harold Mann and his writing goes back to 1933.⁵⁴ Reading the report we notice immediately how the availability of a local labour force became one of the main reasons for the soil predisposition to the crop.⁵⁵

In case of a local workforce shortage, he offers three perspectives of development: (1) to create favourable conditions for the workers to move their residence in proximity of the plantation; (2) building a central factory, managed as a cooperative society owned by the workers; and (3) encouraging the creation by the peasants of small plots, making them sell the leaves to a central factory. Here are his words:

‘There is still a third possible method of developing tea cultivation, namely, by the encouragement of small peasant plantings of tea varying from half of an acre upwards in extent, the peasants then selling the tea to a central factory. I do not know how far this is a possible method of development in any part of Tanganyika [...]. It is a method of tea planting which has prevailed in China from time immemorial, and which is now being developed by the Russians in Georgia. It exists nowhere else in the world on anything but a very small scale. If, however, a central factory is provided in any district in any way, then there seems to me little objection to encouraging peasants to plant tea, giving, if necessary, small grants for the purpose and arranging for the factory to take leaf for manufacture’ (Mann 1933: 45).

According to the author, this last perspective –the creation of small plots assigned to peasants’ families– was already tested in those years by Russians in Georgia and it was used in China since ancient times. In this case farmers become ‘smallholders’, owners of small plots of land, where they have to grow tea leaves, selling them to a main central factory.

In 1933 Harold Mann essentially proposes the solution widely adopted in subsequent decades, especially after the independence of Tanzania.

Even today, fifty years after the end of colonial rule, the ‘smallholders project’ continues to play a

54 I collected three different reports on Tea Cultivation, belonging to British Tanganyika: M. F. Bell, 1928, *Tea Planting Prospects in South Western Highlands of Tanganyika*. London, Waterlow and Sons; H. Mann, 1933, *Report on Tea Cultivation in the Tanganyika Territory and Its Development*. London, Crown Agents for the Colonies; T. Eden, 1956, *Report on Possible Extension of Tea Cultivation in Tanganyika*. Dar es Salam, Govt. Printer.

55 ‘Land which is taken out of jungle for the purpose of planting tea is in every case the most desirable [...] It is in fact usually considered that ordinary tea estates cannot be worked satisfactorily without a complement of one worker (including men, women, and children) per acre, constantly available throughout practically the whole of the year’ (Mann 1933: 6-8).

key role in tea production. I will clarify this point in the paragraph that concerns the present situation, explaining the role of a special agency controlled by the government called the Tanzania Smallholder Tea Development Agency and the economic support it receives from international organizations like the World Bank.⁵⁶ This model was possibly first developed in Kenya.⁵⁷ In Kenya and Uganda, two longstanding British protectorate, the tea production was undoubtedly higher and much more developed. In fact the major market in East Africa for the selling of tea is located in Mombasa.



Individual plots of tea, close to the rainforest in Mazumbai. Author: Elisabetta Campagnola.

In Tanzania two thirds of the production of tea are concentrated in the Iringa and Mbeya regions, a central western area where, at the beginning of the twenties, the first experiments on tea were conducted. However, the production in Tanganyika developed quite slowly. Although introduced by Germans in 1902, for several years it remained confined to very limited areas. The major interests for British expatriates were in sisal cultivation. Commercial production of tea in Usambara began in 1926. The first report on tea concerning production in south-western Tanganyika is date back to

⁵⁶ See note 60.

⁵⁷ In the book *Tea in Kenya*, written in 1965 and published by the Tea Board of Kenya, it is written: 'First experiment with Kenya's smallholder-grown tea were carried out in 1950 by officers of the agricultural department and Provincial Administration, in Nyeri district.'

1928.⁵⁸ In 1933 the biggest coffee plantations of west Usambara –Ambangulu, Sakarra and Kwehangala– were slowly conducting experiments to be turned into tea (Mann 1933: 12). The date of the very first law ordinance on tea is January 1939. Stefano Ponte explains how it was just during the forties that the British government began to intervene directly in the agricultural market thorough the establishment of marketing boards, controlled by expatriates, with the task to purchase crops from farmers at the price established by the government, and selling these products to British ministries (Ponte 2002: 41). Tea production can be inscribed in these policies.

In 1950 the colonial rule released a second ordinance on tea⁵⁹. It rearranged the composition and the functions of the Council, which took the name of the Tea Board of Tanganyika, and regulated taxation and exports by allowing permits. Compared to the measures of 1939, there was certainly an increase in the authority of the colonial state. The ordinance of 1950 remained largely in force until 1997 and marks the beginning of tea cultivation in Tanzania on a large scale.⁶⁰

Returning to the local point of view, the cultivation of tea in the area of Sagara Village starts in the second half of the fifties, in accordance with the slow development of the tea industry in the whole country.

As I previous mentioned, there is no significant perception of discontinuity between German and British period with regards of Mazumbai plantation. Mzee and other oral sources transmit the idea that different supervisors were working for the same company, remembered as Amboni or Mazumbai Coffee Estate.⁶¹ This company and John Tanner started the first experiments in tea planting in the mid fifties. Mzee remembers also that in the period of British rule there were *Manamba* workers:

MZEE [...] *Manamba*...people who came from different place as workers, labour. They were living here, because they were *Manamba*, the houses were allocated just down.

ME Here, in Mazumbai?

MZEE Here in Mazumbai.

(...)

MZEE (The supervisor) called all workers and give them a promotion saying he was going to add the salary. It was fifty cents. It added something to arrive at 1 shilling. But he gave them also the option: if you want to have this pay per day, you have to come and live here. There was some regulations of being *Manamba*...of staying here...it means that you wake up early in

58 See note 56.

59 Tea Ordinance of 1950: ‘An Ordinance to provide for the Establishment of a Tea Board, the regulation of planting and export of tea, and the imposition of taxes on tea and generally for matters incidental thereto’.

60 It is worth to notice that with an amendment in 1968 the Tanzania Tea Authority (TTA) substituted the functions of the Tea Board, amplifying its power.

61 The oral sources (Shekulavu, the former secretary of the Sagara Group and one representative of the Sagara Group) have to be compare with further researches in archival sources for better more detail.

the morning around six and when you wake up you take the tools and then you go to work and you are going to finish also at six in the evening. So this people were working the whole day, compared to the people that were living in normal domicile from Mayo, Kwabosa etc. They used to come here around eight and finish their work at four pm. So those that were living here are know as *manamba*.

In conclusion, during the British mandate we have finally seen the complete and clear abolition of slavery, but also the introduction of others practice in order to obtain a labour force. In Mazumbai we can ascribe to the plantation labour force the villagers and the *manamba*. The villagers from around the plantation had lightly different treatment from the *manamba*, who were immigrant workers from outside, to whom it was given housing and the obligation to work everyday, the whole day, on the coffee plants. This policy continues the previous creation of a blurry semi-freed labour force, that has its root in the precolonial period and German *Ostafrika*. As during the German rule we saw the presence of immigrant Wanyamwesi, now oral sources confirm they witnessed the presence of *manamba*. But gradually, beginning in the thirties, it is possible to watch the development of another device: the ‘smallholders schemes’, especially invented for the cultivation of tea. In Mazumbai we have to wait until the introduction of the first tea plantation experiments in the fifties and the full development after independence, to see how this scheme had been locally applied. It will emerge in concomitance with another political and economical innovation: the African socialism of Julius Nyerere, leading to the creation of a very local hybrid.

The independence from colonial rule

In 1961 Tanzania became an independent country. Julius Nyerere, the main actor of the independence of Tanganyika and leader of the single party (TANU) which dominated postcolonial politics, became President of the Republic in 1962 and remained so until 1985.

The first effect of independence from British rule was the nationalization of the land and the centralization of all productive activities. The power of the state and the single party were consolidated: Nyerere developed a policy of nationalization of the principal means of production and exchange (Baroin and Costantin 1999: 69-72). From the tea production point of view, for example, in 1968 a Tanzania Tea Authority (TTA) was established in order to control and centralize all the production activities.⁶²

With the Arusha Declaration (1967) Nyerere adopted an explicit socialist and self-sufficiency policy. In his political project agriculture had a central role: freed from colonial rule, it was centralized and nationalized by the single party-state bureaucracy.

62 See note 59.

The Kiswahili word used to refer to this policy, *Ujamaa*, means togetherness or family. According to James Ferguson *Ujamaa* is exactly the way one can talk about African socialism: not the scientific socialism of the European context but a moralizing and traditional concept built on the idea of family (Ferguson 2006: 75).

The Arusha Declaration is simultaneously the ultimate fulfilment of this ideology and also the famous act which started the ‘villagisation process’ of the seventies. It consisted in the forced displacement of populations from their original land and grouped in *Ujamaa* villages. *Ujamaa* villages became basic productive centres, based on cooperation and collective work. They were, at the same time, units of cooperative production and able to maintain the private property intact.

(i) The production of tea in Mazumbai: the socialist hybrid

Referring back to the field, I’m going to consider the consequences of independence and socialist policies in Mazumbai from a local point of view. On the one hand, in 1962, the Mazumbai Limited Estate (handed down as Amboni) stopped working in the Mazumbai area.⁶³ On the other hand, on March 11th 1964 John Tanner and some of his workers founded the Sagara Limited. This is the story that was told to me.⁶⁴

‘SECRETARY [...] He (John Tanner) called a meeting for his workers saying that they could start to plant tea together. This meeting was just propaganda. They were saying: “We have to depend on ourselves”...The people were free to choose: who want to join and who do not want to. Seventy-five people agreed with him. John Tanner paid who refused to work with him. After they started to plant tea, in 1962. This is the Sagara Limited. In those days John Tanner was still paying them as workers. Later he changed his mind: “It's better if I pay you from the money we make with tea. I will pay according to what we will get”. In 1964 the group had finally his name “Sagara” and the government approved it.⁶⁵

Two hundred people were working for him at that moment. Ninety-seven of them left the company after being paid.⁶⁶ The residual one hundred and three workers joined him to establish a type of cooperative society, called Sagara Limited.⁶⁷ The new group of shareholders cultivated tea leaves,

63 This part of reconstruction has been made by putting together the interviews we: Mzee, the former secretary of the Sagara Group, the village chairman and one representative of the Sagara Group.

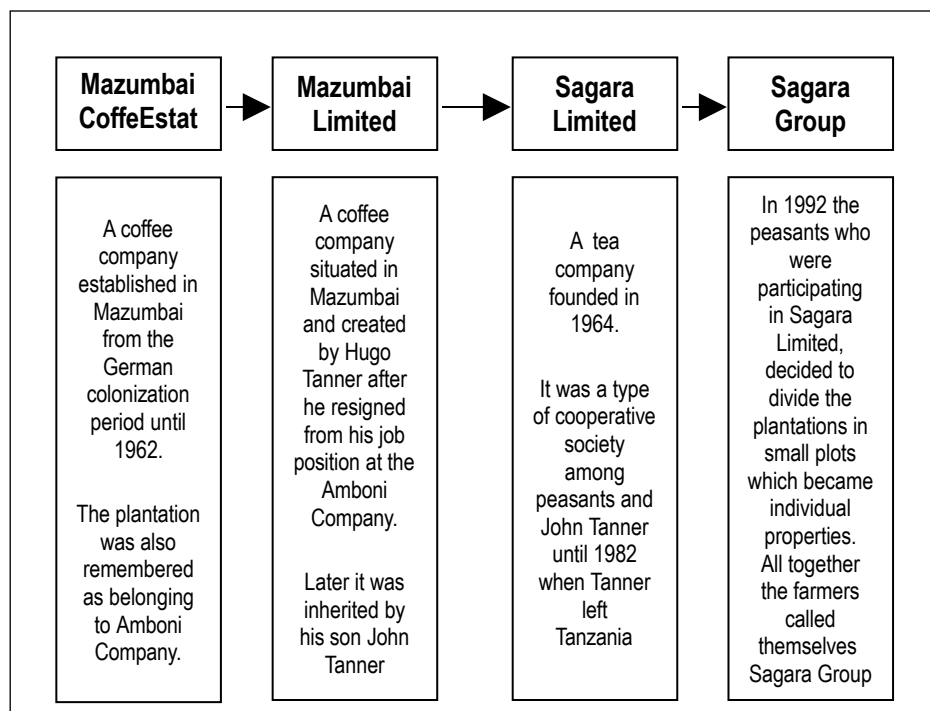
64 Interview with the former secretary of Sagara Group.

65 There is almost total agreement by sources that John Tanner was able to manage the production well. The village chairman and former assistant manager of Sagara Limited reported that the board of directors, composed by farmers, elected John Tanner to be the manager because of his great experience and because he was the one who had the idea of creating the society.

66 Mzee transmits that they had to pay an entry quote in order to be part of the new cooperative society.

67 It is very interesting to notice the precision of this number even using different calculations: Mzee transmitted that the workers were 200 and 97 decided to leave Tanner, indeed 103 people remained with him; while the former

selling them to nearby factories (Herkulu, Kwehangala and Mponde) and then dividing the incomes.



Schematic summary changes in Mazumbai with respect to tea and coffee production based on oral sources. Author: Elisabetta Campagnola

Tanner remained the manager of Sagara Limited until 1977. In 1982 he decided to leave Tanzania. The society, created by him and his previous workers, was established around the ideology of socialist cooperation, with local variations and an original hybrid .

The inhabitants of Mazumbai remember Sagara Limited as a company shared between the owner and some of his former workers, a sort of *Ujamaa* plantation.⁶⁸ As is clear from the interviews, the stakeholders were used to divide the profits of the sale. The tea was sold to a central factory. At the beginning the factory chosen belonged to an Indian plantation's company named Herkulu, located near Bumbuli.⁶⁹ In 1971, a sort of cooperative society owned by indigenous people and the government –the Tanzania Tea Authority (TTA) that I have already mentioned– began the construction of the Mponde Tea Factory. The plant was placed along the valley that goes from Mazumbai and Bumbuli towards the south. The factory started its functions in 1973, processing tea

secretary of Sagara Group said that the workers were 150 and 75 agreed to work for John Tanner, the other 21 were added by Tanner himself and the last 7 were added for secret reasons: which also totals 103.

68 It's possible to refer to a similar example in the analysis made by Rie Odgaard in *Tea - Does It Do The Peasant Women in Rungwe Any Good?* In this research the author deals with two case studies of villagisation process in Rungwe district. For a village, simply called Village B, a sort of co-operative block farm, it is written that: 'The communal tea farm was started in the early 1970s as an *ujamaa* farm – in the sense that all the members in principle were to share the work and the fruits of the work equally' (Odgaard 1986: 217).

69 Herkulu is an impressive tea estate that is still active and has been owned since the fifties by the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation.

collected from peasants living in the surrounding area.⁷⁰ Since then, Sagara Limited, sells its harvest to Mponde.

Sagara Limited is a local and specific solution which arose after independence combining, as I showed, the colonial plantation economy in the person of John Tanner and Nyerere's *Ujamaa* policy of cooperation and statalisation of productive activities.⁷¹

An important detail enlightens the relations between the government and the peasants: in fact the latter were used to paid to the government a tax of 200 shilling every hectare.⁷² This also means that, even if the situation was a little bit blurry because of the collective management of the company, every member of Sagara Limited had a specific plot, for which taxes were paid. The government, through the TTA, was also the owner of the central factory, which was paying the farmers for the harvested leaves. In fact peasants became, thorough the intermediation of Tanner, like dependants of the Tanzania state itself: the postcolonial state and its ruling class became the new 'owner of the land'.

The cooperative society was a voluntary acceptance: as we have seen not all the peasants decided to join the society. Some of them refused. A *bwanashamba*, a supervisor of the crops, had the specific task of teaching people how to plant tea and to control the accuracy of the harvest, making them productive even if the pay was small.

MZEE [...] everything was very cheap at that time. It was not enough and that time was a little bit like colonial period, you can't complain, there is nobody you can complain to. It was little, a very small amount of money, but you can't blame. You have to agree to the situation.

Considering the transformation affecting the labour force, beginning in the eighties it is also necessary to add to this picture the implementation of 'smallholders' strategy. Since independence, the Tanzanian government, with the financial aid of the major international credit organizations, pursued the development of tea 'smallholders' activities.⁷³ As I have already explained presenting Mann's report on tea from 1933, many peasants all over Tanzania, especially in the area of major production –Mbeya and Iringa– became owners of small plots of tea. As an example from Rungwe District: the tea smallholders, who were only six in 1960-1961, became 10,756 sixteen years later (Odgaard 1986). In Mazumbai this development was slower. As I will explain in the following

70 Interview with the former director of Mponde Tea Factory, now manager of Herkulu Tea plantation.

71 The history of very close areas, like Mayo or Shambakubwa, takes slightly different paths (interviews with Mayo and Kwevumo block farm representatives).

72 Interview with the former secretary of Sagara Group.

73 In World Bank Report John Baffes wrote: 'The production in Tanzania has been supported by two World Bank operations: a \$1.4 million loan in 1966 (part of an agricultural credit project) and a \$7.1 million loan in 1972' (Baffes 2004). According to the World Bank online archive, the explicit goals of the projects of 1972-1980 and 1977-1984 were the creation and consolidation of tea 'smallholders' activities.

paragraph, only after Tanner left the country, did the Mazumbai peasants finally become owners of small plots of land planted with tea.

The Structural Adjustment policies in Tanzania

During the eighties agricultural production decreased. The whole country plunged into a major economic crisis after the failure of the socialist policy of villagization. The code of conduct and morality wanted by Nyerere in the Arusha Declaration did not limit the corruption and personal management of power.⁷⁴

Since 1986 the Tanzanian Government gradually departed from the Arusha Declaration towards political and economic reforms in the context of structural adjustment policies, supported by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.⁷⁵

According to some scholars (Ponte 2002: 22-23) the immediate and most obvious consequence of this change was the elimination of state control over the agricultural system (sales and productions). During the nineties, this occurred first for subsistence crops and then for cash crops. Meanwhile the process of privatization of the state controlled enterprise started and the first multiparty election was held in 1995. Since then, the role of the single party that had ruled Tanzania for more than twenty years (CCM, former TANU) was reduced.

With the advent in Tanzania of liberalist policies, all the factories and land, which had been previously nationalized, gradually returned to private investors. For example in 1999 in the Lushoto district, the New Mponde Tea Factory – the former state company that I talked about- was half acquired by the private capital of a Tanzanian entrepreneur who is the owner of Tanzania Tea Blenders Ltd.⁷⁶

The shift towards market economy also implemented the ‘smallholders’ scheme. For example the Tea Act of 1997 abolished the Tanzania Tea Authority but established a specific agency responsible to promote and develop the smallholders tea sector: the Tanzania Smallholder Tea Development Agency (Baffes 2004).

What was happening in the Mazumbai area during the same period?

(i) Mazumbai in the eighties and nineties

In 1982 John Tanner made a remarkable party before his departure; the biggest cow was killed and,

74 ‘On peut donc dire que l’une des conséquences économiques à long terme de la Déclaration d’Arusha fut invalider l’économie du pays à un point tel que la crise économique ne pouvait être résolue autrement qu’en acceptant les conditions du FMI’ (Baroin and Constantin 1999: 75).

75 The first Structural Adjustment Program of 1981 was the ‘Program of economic survival’ (NESP). The following year, the second program had the support of WB and IMF, but was then abandoned. The Economic Recovery Program (ERP1) started in 1986 and in the next year (ERP2) (Baroin and Constantin 1999).

76 The factory, that during socialism was a full property of the state, now belongs half and half to this entrepreneur and to an association of peasants, called UTEGA, that involves farmers from the whole West Usambara.

as a present that he received from his father, he assigned as a gift the entire Sagara Limited to his stakeholders.⁷⁷ The next day he left Tanzania forever.

The peasants administered the company collectively but the subsequent mismanagement caused the gradual abandonment of tea cultivation until 1992, when farmers decided to divide the land into portions thus becoming the Sagara Group, and finally ‘smallholders’. This is the situation up to the present-day. The division of land was neither fair nor easy.

[...] When we failed to continue (the cultivation of tea) we decided to divide the farms, but not equally. It was divided in different ways. [...] People were taking the land on the base of their needs at that moment, and in any case was a temporary division. That is why nowadays you can see somebody with bigger farm than others. [...] The division was made only looking at the farms, not measuring.⁷⁸

To determine exactly how it occurred, I first asked about the involvement of the government in such circumstances. The former manager of Sagara Group and chairman of Sagara Village, told me that the government participated in this division but not directly:

‘[...] The whole process lasted a couple of days: the chairmen of villages were carrying members at the Group's office [...] No accurate measures were taken. Somehow people knew first their own portions of land in accordance to work they could pursue. [...] They were walking together along the cultivations, watching and choosing. [...] The division considered also the distance from the village of residence. [...] There weren't any problems. Everyone agreed with it’.

The distribution of land has a temporary purpose and nothing prevents people from returning to a collective management. However, given the historical circumstances that I outlined earlier, this transaction turned them definitively into ‘smallholders’; nevertheless they continue to call themselves peasants (*wakulima*) or, in relation to tea production, they are members of the Sagara Group. All these names reflect the historical process that created and shaped them as the subjectivity they are today.

Conclusion

⁷⁷ This is how the story has been remembered, which is partly reminiscent the way that Feierman talks about the authority in the old Shambaa kingdom: the chief is the one who gives away the meat and doesn't sell it (Feierman 1974: 54).

⁷⁸ Interview with the former secretary of Sagara Group. In contrast, Mzee reports that the portions of land were divided equally, 2 hectares each.

In this paper, through historical data, reference information and analysis, I tried to outline the changes which have affected the workforce on a Tanzanian tea plantation from the colonial to post-independence period, drawing a genealogy of the present organization.

I focused my research on the Mazumbai hamlet, located about 1000 km above sea level in the West Usambara Mountains. During the last century, the people who had lived here passed through the establishment of a plantation economy: coffee production first, during the German colonial period, and tea crops from the end of British mandate. The imposing of a plantation economy tried to transform them into a semi-freed labour force, counting, at least initially, on the dependency relationship of slavery rooted in long time trade along the Swahili coast, and thus creating an unclear working condition that is still perceptible today. I showed also how immigrant workers, wanyamwesi and *manamba*, were part of the local workforce during the entire pre-independence period. After independence, during Nyerere's socialism, these farmers were became dependants of the postcolonial state in a type of cooperative society, an original hybrid combination of colonial plantation organization and the socialist politics.

Later on, through the application of neoliberal policies developed during the eighties and the nineties and the help of structural reform encouraged by international agencies, they became 'smallholders'. I showed how the smallholder idea has its root in the control of tea plantations of the British Tanganyika, thus tracing a line of continuity which explicitly relates colonial and postcolonial policies. In the nineties the *ujamaa* hybrid group of farmers splitted and today the peasants cultivate tea in small plots of 1 or 2 hectares selling the harvest to a central factory (New Tea Factory Mponde) owned half by an association of peasants that involves the entire West Usambara Mountains and half by a Tanzanian private entrepreneur.

After more than a century, dependency relations reflecting a specific notion of land and labour interact with the neocapitalist imperative. The entrepreneur, as a postcolonial Mbega, is obliged to take care of the community that works for him, usually in terms of building schools and medical care. This is shown clearly also by the propaganda that arrives from the factory: the slogan addressed to the farmers is: 'Help the tea which will help you'.

This brings up the question of whether the notion of 'articulation of modes of production' mentioned by Peter Geschiere, based on previous studies by Rey and Terray, could still be useful to enlighten part of what is happening in this region of Tanzania.⁷⁹

It is a fact that every agricultural policy imposed from above and unable to interact socially and ecologically with the environment, has failed. Feierman for example described the collapse of the anti-erosion plan put together by British rulers (Feierman 1990). In a 1977 book Hermann

⁷⁹ It is also important to mention that mostly women and youth do the daily work in the field, replicating in this way a domestic mode of production (Meillassoux 1975) based on gender and age. The investigation of a 'domestic mode of production' in Mazumbai and the networks of dependants that are the actual workers on the tea farms deserves a specific analysis.

Schonmeier analysed carefully how the 'traditional agriculture' in West Usambara was conflicting with and preventing the imposed development of a modern agronomy. Shifting the attention from modes of production to producers, the workers, through the use of local practice and discourses, developed the ability to resist and erode any attempts at an imposed political economy from above, whether it be colonial, socialist or neoliberal. Sunseri, for example, clearly affirms that the working class was able to undermine the plantation imperative of the *Deutsches Ostafrika* (Sunseri 2002).

To conclude, there is a detail that frequently reoccurs in my interviews: the Sagara Group is not only the very last stage of labour force organization imposed from above since the precolonial time. The Sagara Group, from the point of view of the peasants, deals with the management of the rainforest and other local resources. Farms are indivisible from the forest. John Tanner gave them both to the farmers. From the scientific standpoint, the humidity of the rainforest is necessary to grow high quality tea leaves. The forest provides the scarce wood to make cooking fire. In the counter-hegemonic discourse of 'harming the land and healing the land' analyzed by Feierman, now that the rainmakers have disappeared, it is just the forest that brings the rain.

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List of Interviews⁸⁰

- General Manager of Lion Wattle Company, Lushoto.
- General Manager of Tanzania Tea Blenders, Lushoto.
- Manager of Sokoine University, Mazumbai branch, Mazumbai.
- Bwanashamba, first interview, Mazumbai.
- Mzee, first interview, Mazumbai.
- Bwanashamba and Matron, Shambakwbwa.
- Chairman of Kwevumo block farm, Shambakubwa.

⁸⁰ The interviews are semi-structured and they were conducted between March and June 2008 in Tanzania. Some of them were recorded, some instantly transcribed as notes. For the translation I have to thank the work of Mr. Kaniki . I also made a short quantitative research by personally giving a questionnaire to the peasants I met during a complete journey on the tea tractor in Mazumbai and the surrounding area. Other everyday and occasional talks that I had with peasants, even if important for general comprehension, are not listed as interviews.

- Former Chairman of Kwewumo block farm, Shambakubwa.
- Workers of Shambakwbwa, Shambakubwa.
- Secretary of Sagara Group, Handei.
- Chairman of Sagara village, first interview, Handei
- Amani Institute Researchers, Mazumbai.
- Shekulavu, Mazumbai.
- Mzee, second interview, Mazumbai.
- Bwanashamba, second interview, Mazumbai.
- Driver's inspector, Mazumbai.
- Secretary of Mayo Group, Mayo.
- Herkulu factory manager, Herkulu.
- CCM Chairmain in Kwevumo, Kwevumo.
- Tea tractor driver, Mazumbai.
- Former Herkulu employee, Bumbuli.
- Mponde Factory employee, Lushoto.
- Mzee of Mayo, Mayo
- Five interviews with people working in *bustani*, the garden, Mazumbai.
- Old woman's friend working on the tea field, Mazumbai.
- Workers for a representative of the Sagara Group on his tea field, Mazumbai.
- Interviews during the distribution of the factory's payments, Handei.
- Fertilizer seller, Mgwashi.
- Members of a public meeting of UTEGA, Handei.
- Mzee, third interview, Mazumbai.
- The former cook, Mazumbai.
- One representative of the Sagara Group, Mazumbai.
- Chairman of Sagara village, second interview, Handei
- Chairman of Himisa, Qweshashi
- The broker, Mazumbai.
- Women Tea producers, Ngonkoi.
- Amani Institute Researcher, Mponde.
- Permanent Manager Mponde Tea Factory, Mponde.
- Representative of Chai Bora, Iringa.
- Manager of Tanzania Tea Blender, Dar es Salaam.
- Representative of Tanzania Smallholders Tea Development Agency, Dar es Salaam.
- Tea Board Representative, Dar es Salaam.