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FROM TEMPORARY URBANITES TO PERMANENT CITY DWELLERS?

Rural-Urban Labor Migration in Colonial Southern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo

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1 Introduction

In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the foundations of early urban development were laid prior to colonial rule and the introduction of industrial capitalism (Freund 2007). However, colonialism would constitute a “virtually continent-wide rupture” that altered the course of African urbanization. Whether European colonists established new cities or expanded existing urban areas, African cities served as business hubs for European economic and political interests and attracted large numbers of African workers from rural areas (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2005, 4, 27–8). Varying by colonial context, the experiences of African migrants traveling to burgeoning cities differed considerably. Some settled permanently in town, while others labored temporarily in cities before returning home. This chapter evaluates the intriguing differences between the relatively early shift from temporary to more permanent settlement of African migrants in Belgian Congolese towns as opposed to the more persistently transient character of rural-urban migration in Southern Rhodesia.

These two colonies offer excellent cases for comparison, sharing some distinct similarities, along with significant differences that together affected the nature of their respective migration systems during the early 20th century. In terms of similarities, first, both colonies had relatively sparse urban settlements during the 19th century. In what would eventually become colonial Southern Rhodesia, the Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe had displayed impressive urbanization from the 11th to 15th century; however, by the late pre-colonial period, the only major extant indigenous city was Bulawayo. In the Congo, nearly all substantial cities were founded by the Belgian colonizers, except for the pre-colonial town of Boma (Heymans 1952, 9–10). Second, migrants began flowing to urban centers in both colonies relatively early and quickly, exceeding average sub-Saharan African urbanization rates (14.7%), reaching 23% (Belgian Congo) and 17% (Southern Rhodesia) in 1961 (see Table 12.1) (Kamer der Volksvertegenwoordigers 1958, 69; Gargett 1977, 38, Table 12.2).¹

Third, both colonies developed relatively diversified economies, with significant mining, commercial farming, and manufacturing sectors. They would ultimately rank among the most industrialized colonies in sub-Saharan Africa. By the 1960s, manufacturing comprised

TABLE 12.1 Urbanization rates in Southern Rhodesia and Congo, 1936–61

| Year | Southern Rhodesia (%) | Belgian Congo (%) |
|------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1936 | 3.6 | 8.9 |
| 1946 | 5.9 | 14.7 |
| 1949 | 10.0 | 18.3 |
| 1951 | 12.7 | 20.2 |
| 1956 | 14.3 | 22.9 |
| 1961 | 17.0 | 23.0 |

Sources: Southern Rhodesia: *Report* 1958, 162; Gargett 1977, 38; Zinyama and Whitlow 1986, 378; Congo: *Annual Reports Congo*, 1938–58.

Notes: Urbanization rates for Southern Rhodesia imputed from the available indexes. Congo: 1936 = 1938.

16% of GDP in Southern Rhodesia and 14% in the Belgian Congo, trailing only behind South Africa's 20% (Austin, Frankema and Jerven 2017, 346, 353, Table 14.1). In both colonies, urban growth and industrialization progressed in tandem, as African laborers poured into emerging cities to work in the growing industrial sector, while others found urban employment in services. In East and West African cities, in contrast, opportunities in manufacturing were less decisive in stimulating rural-urban migration, with trade and (informal) services playing a more pronounced role.²

Amid rapid industrial and urban growth, colonial officials in both Southern Rhodesia and the Congo expressed concern over mounting urban pressures. Consequently, attempts were (eventually) made to stabilize the urban labor force by encouraging African male laborers to permanently settle in town with their families. Here, however, outcomes differed markedly. In the Belgian Congo, the percentage of working-age men in the total urban population declined substantially from the 1940s onward, from 46.8 in 1938 to 31.1 in 1958, suggesting a steady increase in the settlement of families in urban zones (Kamer der Volksvertegenwoordigers 1939–58). In the mining region of Katanga (e.g., contemporary Lubumbashi, then Elizabethville), “labor stabilization” dates back further to the 1920s.³ By contrast, in the two main cities of Southern Rhodesia, working-age men comprised 48% (Salisbury) and 46% (Bulawayo) of the population by 1962, reflecting a still predominately migratory labor force of mostly single men with tenuous urban ties (Central Statistical Office 1964).

This chapter aims to uncover *how and why rural-urban migration patterns shifted* more rapidly toward permanent urban settlement in the Belgian Congo compared with Southern Rhodesia. We argue that the specific geopolitical circumstances of the two colonies affected the timing and character of their industrial take-offs and the degree of integration of each colony with surrounding territories, both of which influenced the nature of their urban labor markets and migratory flows. Meanwhile, the different colonial contexts of the semi-autonomous settler colony of Southern Rhodesia relative to the more metropolitan-controlled Belgian Congo influenced colonial institutions and social policies. This affected rural and urban opportunity structures, thus impacting the decision-making of potential African migrants in profoundly different ways.

Thematically, we predominantly study *rural-urban migration to manufacturing centers*, although rural-rural migration and migration to mining areas feature as part of the broader colonial migration systems in our case studies (Section 2). Geographically, we focus on the main industrial urban centers in each colony: Salisbury⁴ and Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia and Leopoldville,⁵ Elizabethville,⁶ and Stanleyville⁷ in the Belgian Congo. Our analysis begins in the 1920s, when the Congo received its initial industrial impulse, and continues to mid-century, when both colonies were undergoing substantial industrial and urban growth. While analysis of the Belgian Congo concludes with its independence in 1960, our discussion of Southern Rhodesia, which declared independence in 1965, moves beyond that point to analyze the persistence of temporary urban migration well past the early industrial boom years.

The next section provides an overview of the most important migration systems in Congo and Southern Rhodesia. Section 3 then sketches differing opportunity structures in rural and urban labor markets in the two colonies, which would result in divergent labor stabilization patterns. The remaining sections unpack the underlying drivers of those differing opportunity structures.

2 Migration systems in colonial Southern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo

Rural-urban migration can best be understood as a dynamic “system” consisting of sending and receiving zones – rural and urban “sub-systems,” respectively – that exist within a broader “environmental” context, encompassing institutions, policy, market conditions, and technological characteristics, which affect the migratory system (Mabogunje 1970, 4). African migration in colonial Southern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo was broadly typified by three often overlapping systems that provided alternative opportunities to would-be migrants: rural-rural migration, rural-mining area migration,⁸ and rural-urban migration. To understand the development of the rural-urban migration systems in our two cases, we must also consider competition and interactions *between* systems in each colonial context.

The rural-rural migration system in colonial Southern Rhodesia predated significant rural-urban migration flows in the colony. After the foundation of Southern Rhodesia in 1889, African migration remained predominantly rural-rural in nature, involving movements either to European settler farms or to the Native Reserves established in 1903 (Section 5). As labor shortages began to emerge, indigenous peasants whose land had been heavily alienated by the colonial government regularly labored on commercial farms. The majority of black Southern Rhodesians remained active in subsistence agriculture, but many necessarily supplemented household incomes with rural wage labor or – increasingly after the Second World War – employment in urban settings (Pilosof 2014, 252–3). Meanwhile, labor for all sectors was increasingly drawn from other nearby British territories, particularly Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Between 1904 and 1922, the proportion of “foreigners” in the colony’s total black wage labor force rose to 68% (Arrighi 1970, 208–10). From the 1930s, the Southern Rhodesian government even operated a *Free Migrant Labor Transport Service*, which included rest stops and food depots, to efficiently funnel labor into the colony (Scott 1954, 36; Clarke 1974, 25). The share of extra-territorial workers in agriculture would remain high until the late 1950s. Likewise, the Wankie coal mines and gold fields

attracted migrants from beyond Southern Rhodesia, especially Northern Rhodesia and, secondarily, Nyasaland and Mozambique (Scott 1954, 42–5).

Rural-urban migration forms the main focus of this chapter. Most Southern Rhodesian cities were established as forts or early mining towns soon after the *British South Africa Company* (BSAC) obtained mineral rights in the area from the British government in 1889. Salisbury, in the northeast, was founded by settlers in 1890 and would become the eventual seat of government and a major industrial center. Bulawayo, which would become the colony's second largest city and manufacturing center, forms an exception. It was established in the 1840s in Matabeleland as the seat of the Ndebele king and came under settler control only after it was captured in 1893. From around 1900, settlers increasingly clustered in these growing towns, where 58% of the colony's non-African population (mostly of European origin) lived (Smout 1975 80, 82). Almost immediately, relatively small numbers of Africans took up urban employment – primarily in workshops and services. Most early urban laborers were male migrants, working for roughly two-month stints before returning home (Urban African Affairs Commission 1958, 6). Consequently, most African urban inhabitants were men, comprising 94–95% of the African population of Salisbury in the early 1900s. Like much of the colony's agricultural and mining labor force, many urban labor migrants came from abroad, with more than half of Salisbury's African inhabitants hailing from neighboring colonies until the 1950s (see Table 12.2) (Yoshikuni 1991, 134–6).

We now turn to the migration systems in the Belgian Congo. Here, rural-rural mobility traditionally involved movement into “internal frontiers,” stimulated by shifting agriculture.⁹ Following the establishment of the Congo Free State by Belgian King Leopold in 1885, colonial land occupation for cash-crop production and the imposition of forced cultivation disturbed existing shifting cultivation practices, which Europeans deemed backward (Jewsiewicki 1983, 112–3). Consequently, the colonial government introduced policies to prevent shifting agriculture. A distinctive colonial-era rural-rural migration system emerged with the introduction of European plantations, often run by concession companies. The *Huileries du Congo Belge*, for instance, employed thousands of people in the Eastern Province. Many were migrant workers recruited by force, as low wages and poor working conditions formed a disincentive to move to European plantations voluntarily (Northrup 1988 132, 148, 164–6). Due to similar abysmal working conditions in the mines,

TABLE 12.2 Africans in employment in Southern Rhodesian towns, 1956

| Town | Country of birth | | | | | Total | % Foreign migrants |
|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|
| | Southern Rhodesia | Northern Rhodesia | Nyasaland | Portuguese territories | Other | | |
| Salisbury | 41,203 | 2,181 | 28,987 | 28,972 | 701 | 102,044 | 59.6% |
| Bulawayo | 42,841 | 7,928 | 10,262 | 5,224 | 1,150 | 67,407 | 36.4% |
| Umtali | 7,496 | 93 | 618 | 5,568 | 77 | 13,852 | 45.9% |
| Gwelo | 8,737 | 425 | 1,030 | 517 | 77 | 10,768 | 19.0% |
| Que Que | 2,890 | 474 | 960 | 457 | 15 | 4,796 | 39.7% |
| Gatooma | 2,049 | 460 | 1,137 | 584 | 35 | 4,265 | 52.0% |
| Fort Victoria | 3,031 | 41 | 116 | 167 | 17 | 3,372 | 10.1% |
| Total | 108,247 | 11,602 | 43,110 | 41,489 | 2,072 | 206,520 | 47.6% |

Source: Report 1958, 16, Table VII.

recruitment problems also arose in the sparsely populated copper fields of Katanga. Until 1925, the mining areas relied on laborers from surrounding British and Portuguese African territories, predominantly Northern Rhodesia. Most were circular contract migrants, who returned to their colony of origin after a specified number of shifts. However, after the discovery of new copper and sulfide deposits in Northern Rhodesia, the flows of “foreign” migrant workers to Katanga dried up. In 1929, the monopolist concession company *Union Minière du Haut Katanga* decided to exclusively recruit workers from the Congo and Belgian-mandated Ruanda and Urundi. In the same period, mining real wages started to rise, and there were serious attempts to stabilize the workforce in Katanga from the mid-1920s (Juif and Frankema 2018, 321–2, 327).¹⁰ Measures were taken to secure a steadier, healthier workforce maintained in newly built houses with running water, sewerage, and cooking facilities (Elkan and van Zwanenberg 1975, 657).

Finally, rural-urban migration formed an integral part of the Congo’s broader migration system. In 1881, commissioned explorer Henry Morton Stanley established Leopoldville, the eventual colonial capital of the Congo, on the west coast (Taylor 1959, 352). Several other towns were soon established, including Elisabethville (1910) and Jadotville¹¹ (1917) in the mining region of Katanga in the south and the smaller towns of Stanleyville (1883) and Albertville (1892) in the east. Around 1920, about 5% of the Congolese population lived in an urban environment (Marzorati 1954, 106), and the migration of black Congolese to urban areas steadily increased over the next decades (see Table 12.1).

Rural-urban migration in the Belgian Congo included comparatively few “foreigners.” Around 1950, the majority of urban dwellers in the Congo’s three largest cities came from rural areas within the colony (Figure 12.1). In geographically isolated Stanleyville, a notable percentage was born in town and a large share arrived from nearby areas, suggesting short-distance migrations. In contrast, the larger cities of Leopoldville and Elisabethville attracted migrants from across the Congo, but also from other colonies, probably partly due to their relative proximity to the colonial border, which offered economic opportunities

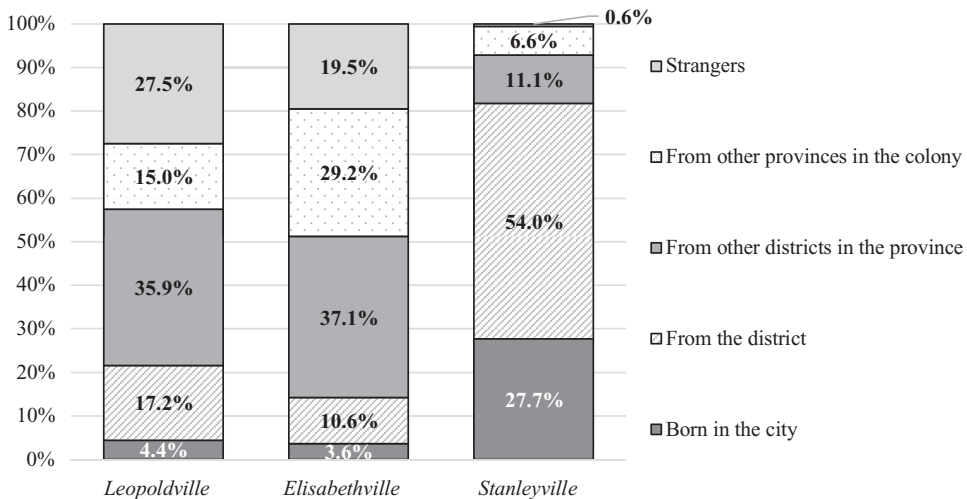


FIGURE 12.1 Background of laborers in Leopoldville, Elisabethville, and Stanleyville, 1951.

Source: AA, 3ème DG, dossier 379, Rapport de la sous-commission des problèmes sociaux, 1952.

to cross-border migrants (Jewsiewicki 1983, 109). In Leopoldville, most of these *étrangers* (“strangers”) originated from nearby Portuguese Angola (about 23%) (Capelle 1947, 29–30). Compared with Southern Rhodesian cities, however, both Leopoldville and Elisabethville attracted relatively *few* foreign migrant workers.

The character of rural-urban migration in the Belgian colony differed markedly from Southern Rhodesia in one other crucial respect: in the Congo, a shift toward permanent urban settlement of laborers emerged considerably earlier. Just as in Southern Rhodesia, early rural-urban migration in the Congo consisted primarily of circular migration of rural men, who returned to their home villages after laboring in town for a few months or years. In the early 20th century, colonial authorities and private European enterprises in the Congo favored this temporary character of migration and discouraged the permanent settlement of Africans in “European towns” (Northrup 1988, 210). However, because of the vast distances between their rural homelands and places of urban employment, some migrants began settling in cities in the 1920s (Pons 1969, 35). By the 1940s, colonial policy shifted decisively in favor of boosting urban labor stabilization, which would proceed more rapidly than in Southern Rhodesia, where stabilization of the urban African population began only after 1960.

The differing pace of stabilization in the two colonies is reflected in their urban sex ratios (see Table 12.3). Congolese cities experienced a decline in sex ratios during the 1940s, suggesting a reduction in the circular nature of the colony’s rural-urban migration system and an increase in urban settlement. Whereas the share of adult men in all “extra-customary centers” (which included urban zones) had been almost 47% in 1938, this had declined to just over 30% by 1958. The proportion of adult women declined slightly, from 28% to 24%, whereas the share of children rose from 25% to 45%. Thus, urban areas increasingly consisted of settled families (Kamer der Volksvertegenwoordigers 1939–58). There was, however, some variation between Congo’s cities. Leopoldville and Elisabethville, which attracted more cross-border migrants, exhibited more skewed sex ratios than Stanleyville as migrants from abroad were less likely to settle permanently in Congolese towns. In both of Southern Rhodesia’s main cities, sex ratios in the early 1960s were considerably more skewed than

TABLE 12.3 Sex ratios in a number of cities, Congo, 1952, and Southern Rhodesia, 1962

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Locality</i> | <i>Number of men per 100 women (total population)</i> | <i>Number of men per 100 women (age >16)</i> |
|-------------|------------------------------|---|---|
| 1952 | Leopoldville | 150 | 184 |
| 1952 | Elisabethville | 127 | 140 |
| 1952 | Stanleyville | 116 | 119 |
| 1952 | All Congo | 99 | 93 |
| 1962 | Salisbury | 186 | 276 |
| 1962 | Bulawayo | 163 | 211 |
| 1962 | All Southern Rhodesia | 108 | 111 |

Sources: Southern Rhodesia: *Final report* 1964, 45; Congo: AA, 3ème DG, dossier 701, Fonds; dossier 800, Documentation; *Annual report Congo* 1952, 69; Pons 1969, 43–6, 60 (note 15).

Notes: Figure for Leopoldville age >16: 1950. Figure for Elisabethville age >16: 1948.

even the most gender-imbalanced Congolese towns. Here, urban living remained a temporary stage in the life cycle for most rural-urban labor migrants, with persistently low levels of urban family settlement decades after urban populations began to swell.

3 Uneven rural and urban opportunity structures

The proximate cause of different labor stabilization developments in the Belgian Congo relative to Southern Rhodesia lies in the different opportunity structures for both rural and urban laborers that arose in the two colonies despite some similarities in urban wage developments. In both cases, urban wages rose beyond agricultural wages, drawing men to urban employment. In the Belgian Congo, empirical wage data are scattered, and some studies provide only rough indications of wage indexes over time and between regions (Dupriez et al. 1970, 270–3),¹² but we can reconstruct relative rural and urban wages for Leopoldville and Elisabethville between the 1920s and late 1950s (Figure 12.2).

During the 1920s, which saw an initial industrial impetus in the colony, urban nominal monthly wages rose dramatically – far above those offered by (usually European-owned) agricultural firms – inducing the first wave of (still mostly temporary) rural-urban migrants. Soon, however, the Great Depression caused urban unemployment and prompted the return of laborers to their home villages, indicating strong remaining rural-urban ties (Dupriez et al. 1970, 369). But thereafter, the economic boom of the 1940s led to higher nominal wages in *all* regions, and even faster wage growth on plantations and European farms than in cities. Based on supply-and-demand principles, the substantial flow of migrants from rural to urban areas in this period likely led to a relatively strong demand for remaining labor in

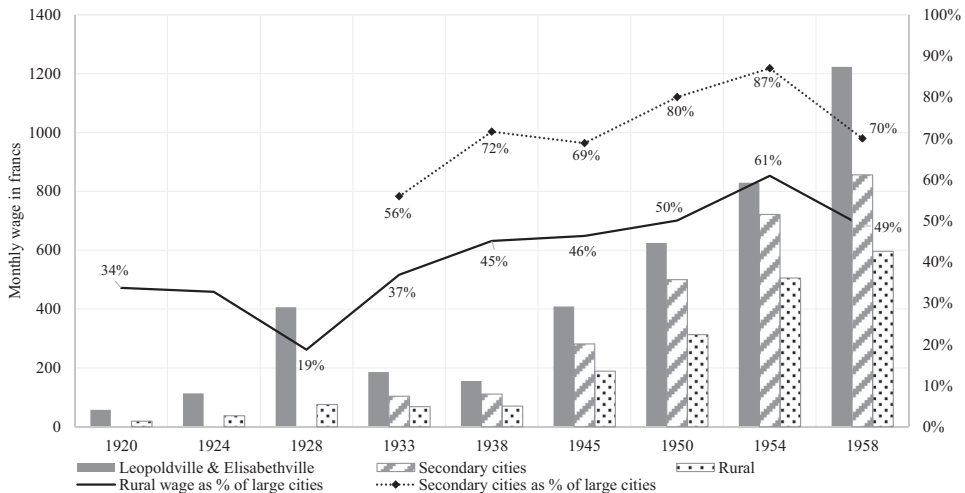


FIGURE 12.2 Nominal monthly wage of unskilled male day labor in the Belgian Congo, 1920–58. Sources: Kamer der Volksvertegenwoordigers (1933, 155–6); AA, 3ème DG, dossier 379, Commission; Dupriez et al. (1970, 271, 273).

rural areas, which may partly explain why agricultural wages rose so quickly and even surpassed the rate of growth for urban nominal wages, which also continued to rise.

Importantly, the purchasing power of wages in both Congolese cities *and* the countryside had risen considerably by the late 1950s. The improvement in urban purchasing power, particularly in the 1930s and early 1940s, played a crucial role in the decline of circular migration and increase in permanent settlement in cities. Prior to this period, an unskilled wage worker could barely support a wife and children without any additional income, creating a barrier for urban family settlement. Instead, men migrated alone, leaving family members in rural areas to tend their land, which generated much-needed additional household income. Women remaining in rural areas were under increased pressure to provide subsistence food for the family (as they had traditionally done) and produce for local markets to supplement household incomes (Dupriez et al. 1970, 308–9).¹³ Indeed, home farms formed an important safety valve for urban migrant workers during economic slumps and unemployment, such as the Great Depression (Kamer der Volksvertegenwoordigers 1931, 7; 1933, 131; 1934, 10). However, by the late 1930s urban nominal wages in Congolese cities had risen much faster than prices, providing both the means and the incentive for rural migrants to permanently settle in town with their wives and children (Figure 12.3). This process began earliest in Elisabethville in the Katanga mining region, where real wages grew with impressive momentum, allowing families to settle in cities in the 1920s (Elkan and van Zwanenberg

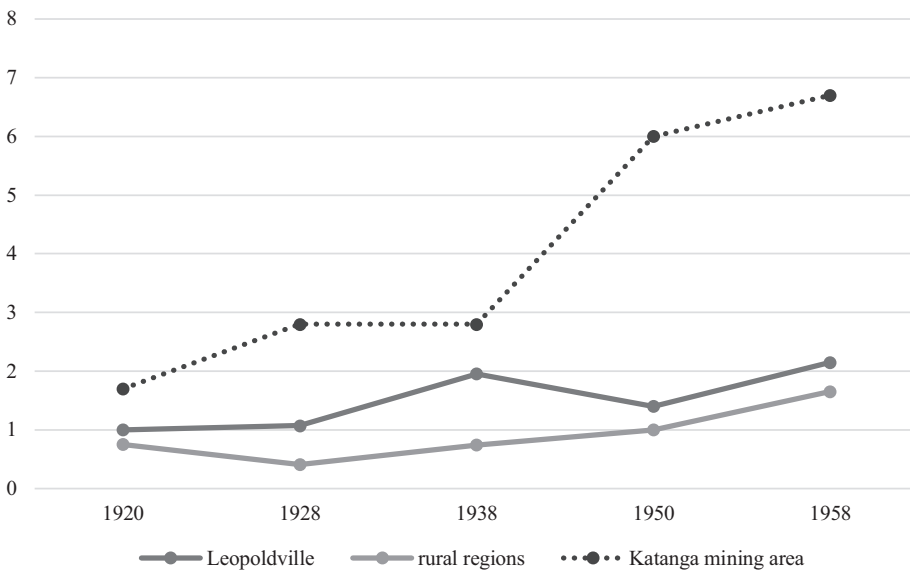


FIGURE 12.3 Welfare ratios of unskilled wages (Leopoldville & rural regions) and mining wages (Katanga) in the Belgian Congo, 1920–58 (1 = subsistence level for a family of 4).

Sources: Leopoldville and rural regions: Dupriez et al. (1970, 370); AA, 3ème DG, dossier 379, Rapport de la sous-commission des problèmes sociaux, 1952; Kamer der Volksvertegenwoordigers (1951). Katanga: Juif and Frankema (2018, 325).

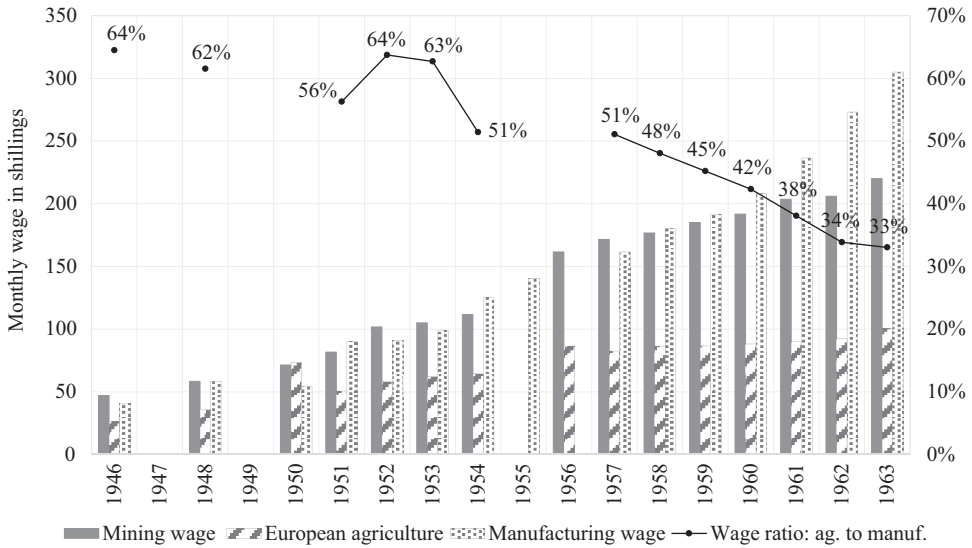


FIGURE 12.4 Average nominal wages for African labor, Southern Rhodesia, 1946–63.

Source: Mosley (1983, 160, Table 4.9b). Note: the agriculture-manufacturing wage ratio for the outlier year 1950 has been excluded to more clearly illustrate the broader trend.

1975, 657). Similarly, living standards in the industrial city of Leopoldville would double between 1928 and 1938, underpinning urban family settlement.

In Southern Rhodesia, urban and rural wage developments followed a different pattern (see Figure 12.4). As in the Belgian Congo, urban wages showed upward momentum from the early years of industrialization in the 1940s, exceeding rural agricultural wages and eventually even outstripping mining wages by the 1960s. Rising wages consequently drew many male migrant laborers from the countryside to cities from the 1940s onward. Unlike the Belgian Congo, however, rural wage rates would *not* show a marked improvement in the ensuing decades and thus fell increasingly behind urban manufacturing wages. Consequently, rural men were drawn in ever-larger numbers to wage work in urban areas where they competed fiercely for employment. The strong, increasing differential between rural and urban wages intensified the instability of urban tenure for migrants by keeping the urban labor supply high, resulting in high levels of unemployment and uncertainty in cities, even as wages rose.¹⁴

Meanwhile, although wages for black urban laborers rose, they remained far too low to support a family in town, perpetuating the much higher share of single male laborers in urban Southern Rhodesia relative to the Belgian Congo. Similarly, as Meier zu Selhausen highlights in his comparison of rural-urban migration in East and West Africa (Chapter 13, this volume), low wages in East African cities – generally set at rates to sustain a single male worker – deterred urban family settlement for much of the colonial period, resulting in distorted urban sex ratios; West African urban wages, in contrast, were nearly double, enabling families to settle in towns, thus engendering more balanced urban sex ratios.

For Southern Rhodesia, a 1958 commissioned study on the poverty datum line in Salisbury found that most African laborers could not maintain a family in urban environs, and those who did typically struggled immensely. Wages for married men were often higher

TABLE 12.4 Percentage of households in income brackets relative to the Poverty Datum Line (PDL), Salisbury, 1957

| | <i>Extremely impoverished (%)</i> | <i>Below PDL (%)</i> | <i>Within PDL (%)</i> | <i>Above PDL (%)</i> | <i>Extremely affluent (%)</i> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Single men | 5 | 22 | 37 | 17 | 13 |
| Families in New Highfield | 47 | 18 | 20 | 2 | 13 |
| Families in “other areas” | 57 | 19 | 17 | 3 | 3 |

Source: Bettison (1958, Tables 1, 6, and 7).

than for single men, but these earnings could not offset the increased expense of urban family living, relegating a large share of black urban families to poverty (Table 12.4). While only 27% of single African laborers in the Salisbury sample fell below the poverty datum line, this number increased to 65% for families residing in the township of New Highfield – which housed “in general a wealthier class of African” – and reached 76% among families located in “other areas” of Salisbury. Moreover, 47% of the families in New Highfield fell under the category “extremely impoverished,” reaching 57% in “other areas.” Even in comparatively affluent New Highfield, the incidence of “extreme impoverishment” increased substantially with each additional child (Bettison 1958, 188, 193). Consequently, the vast majority of urban laborers continued to venture to the city alone as temporary migrants, maintaining a “dual existence,” noted already by officials in the late 1940s, characterized by “part-time employment in the European [urban] areas and part-time farming in the Native Reserves” (cited in Phimister 1993, 231).

The position of married laborers residing in town with their families remained precarious for decades, even as nominal wages increased through the 1950s and 1960s. A 1974 poverty datum line study found that 89% of black industrial laborers in Southern Rhodesia still fell below the monthly wage required to support a family of six (Harris 1975, 149). The capacity to comfortably establish a family in urban areas thus remained out of reach for most Africans in Southern Rhodesia decades after the initial industrial boom had stimulated urban migration. In the remainder of this chapter, we explore the underlying causes of the divergent opportunity structures that perpetuated the transient character of rural-urban migration in Southern Rhodesia, while labor stabilization proceeded much earlier in the Belgian Congo.

4 Two colonial economies: Southern Rhodesia and the Congo in wider geopolitical context

Key differences between Southern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo derived from their colonial origins and geopolitical circumstances, which influenced European settler behavior and differing degrees of economic integration with surrounding colonies. This, in turn, affected the relative pace and nature of industrial development, along with the rural and urban opportunity structures that subsequently developed in each colony.

Following a series of unsuccessful revolts by the Ndebele against encroaching white settlers, Southern Rhodesia was largely brought under British control by 1900, and settlers

began establishing both mines and farms. Over the succeeding decades, what had initially been founded as a mining colony, largely controlled by the BSAC, increasingly transformed into a settler farming colony, steadily attracting European immigrant farmers and their families (Phimister 1988, 4–20, 100–1). The political voice and legislative capacity of these settlers was bolstered by the British government’s acquiescence to allow semi-autonomous “Responsible Government” in the colony from 1923. The resulting political control of the relatively large settler community in Southern Rhodesia contrasted sharply with metropolitan-controlled Belgian Congo, which drew comparatively smaller numbers of European settlers, who typically remained for relatively short stints.

Since the founding of Southern Rhodesia, white settler politics had been largely framed in opposition to the economic agency of black Africans in the colony. The establishment of mining ventures and embryonic cities by the turn of the 20th century had initially brought new agricultural trading opportunities for the indigenous Shona and Ndebele, who began producing foodstuffs for the market (Phimister 1988, 25). White settlers were consequently confronted not only with competition for settler-grown produce but also labor shortages since Africans who could generate incomes from peasant production were unwilling to work for wages in mines or on European farms. A number of measures were consequently taken to minimize African agricultural marketing opportunities and funnel African labor toward European enterprises (see next section) (Arrighi 1970, 209–10). Once settler political control was strengthened in 1923, these processes intensified. A policy of segregation and land alienation was institutionally solidified with the *Land Apportionment Act* of 1930, which allotted less than 29.8% of the colony’s land to Africans, who comprised 95% of the population (Table 12.5) (Zinyama and Whitlow 1986, 368–9). Rural Africans were thus under immense economic pressure by the 1940s, when the colony rapidly began to industrialize, prompting rural–urban migration.

In the early 20th century, the colonial government championed the mining industry and commercial settler agriculture but showed comparatively limited interest in manufacturing

TABLE 12.5 Population development, Southern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo, 1901–60

| <i>Southern Rhodesia</i> | | | | | <i>Belgian Congo</i> | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| | <i>Black African population</i> | | <i>Population of European descent</i> | <i>Total population</i> | | <i>Black African population</i> | | <i>Population of European descent</i> | <i>Total population</i> | |
| 1901 | 1,107,415 | 99.0% | 11,032 | 1.0% | 1,118,447 | | | n.d. | 9,355,140 | |
| 1911 | 1,291,789 | 98.2% | 23,606 | 1.8% | 1,315,395 | | | n.d. | 8,495,725 | |
| 1921 | 1,508,870 | 97.8% | 33,620 | 2.2% | 1,542,490 | 8,152,779 | 99.9% | 9,361 | 0.1% | 8,162,140 |
| 1931 | 1,847,656 | 97.4% | 49,910 | 2.6% | 1,897,566 | 9,275,871 | 99.8% | 22,482 | 0.2% | 9,298,353 |
| 1941 | 2,315,053 | | n.d. | | 2,315,053 | 10,511,169 | 99.7% | 29,735 | 0.3% | 10,540,904 |
| 1951 | 2,697,902 | 95.2% | 136,017 | 4.8% | 2,833,919 | 12,407,692 | 99.4% | 69,204 | 0.6% | 12,476,896 |
| 1960 | 3,526,000 | 94.0% | 225,000 | 6.0% | 3,751,000 | 15,332,997 | 99.2% | 118,003 | 0.8% | 15,451,000 |

Sources: Black African population: AEHN, Frankema-Jerven African Population Database, v. 1.0, pertaining to Frankema and Jerven 2014; European population Southern Rhodesia: McEwan 1963, 429 (Table 12.1); European population Belgian Congo: *Congo Annual Reports* 1921; 1931; 1939–44; 1951; 1958.

Note: While early colonial census data for African populations represent guesstimates, they provide a rough picture of early population shares and developments.

(Clarence-Smith 1989, 173–5). Urban industries did grow gradually, particularly in the years after the Great Depression when enhanced mining profits encouraged domestic demand for manufactured goods. However, much of this demand was met with imports from Britain or early-industrializing South Africa, with whom Southern Rhodesia traded extensively, limiting incentives to expand Rhodesian manufacturing (Phimister 1988, 240). The Southern Rhodesian government's lukewarm attitude toward broader industrial development shifted during the Second World War when the need for domestic industry to fill supply bottlenecks became painfully apparent. The government threw its support behind industrial development and by 1940 provided funds for essential industrial projects, including a state-sponsored ordnance factory, spinning mill, and nationalized iron and steel works. The number of factories increased from 294 to 473 within a decade, with average annual output growth reaching 24.4% between 1944 and 1948. Thereafter, the governments of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia negotiated a Customs Union agreement that offered Southern Rhodesian consumer goods free access to the large South African market, while providing Southern Rhodesia access to South African capital goods. Investors, particularly from Britain and South Africa, flocked to develop Southern Rhodesia's consumer goods sector, situated primarily in Salisbury and Bulawayo (Phimister 1988, 239–57).

Regional exporting spurred the expansion of Southern Rhodesia's manufacturing sector, facilitated by the colony's economic ties with neighboring British colonies. Textile and clothing exports alone, sent primarily to South Africa and secondarily to Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, grew swiftly – from £65,000 in 1948 to £988,000 in 1949, reaching over £4 million in 1953 (Phimister 2007, 437). By the early 1950s, the Southern Rhodesian manufacturing sector matched and even surpassed net earnings in both mining and settler agriculture (Urban African Affairs Commission 1958, 9). Demand for industrial labor consequently boomed, stimulating rural-urban migration, with urbanization rates more than tripling between 1936 and 1951 (see Table 12.1). Many cross-border “voluntary” labor migrants (as opposed to contracted migrants, who were typically directed toward farms and mines) were attracted to the comparatively high wages and better conditions of Southern Rhodesia's urban centers, especially Salisbury. In the mid-1950s, 53% of black African laborers employed in secondary industries came from beyond Southern Rhodesia, particularly from the British colony of Nyasaland. While voluntary labor migrants were not under contractual obligation to return to their colony of origin, migrants from Nyasaland typically ceased working in the colony within five years (Scott 1954, 45–6). Consequently, the presence of foreign manufacturing employees undoubtedly influenced the far more temporary character of urban tenure in Southern Rhodesia compared to the Belgian Congo, at least during the 1940s and 1950s, when the number of foreign migrants in Southern Rhodesian cities reached its peak.

As in Southern Rhodesia, early colonial rule and economic development in the Belgian Congo was characterized by exploitation of African colonial subjects. To maximize resource extraction, King Leopold installed a violent regime in which concession companies displaced entire villages and created harsh work regimes, most notably for harvesting wild rubber. A brutal system of taxation and force was imposed to extract labor (Harms 1974, 11–4; Hochschild 1998). However, ensuing financial troubles, along with international indignation over these atrocities, led the Belgian state to become increasingly involved in the Congo and finally annex it – against Leopold's will – in 1908 (Vanthemische 2012, 21–6). Under international scrutiny, the Belgian state developed a less violent and comparatively

more humane approach to colonial rule. This is not to suggest in any way that Belgian colonialism became benevolent: resource extraction still remained the colonial state's primary objective. There were few freedoms or benefits for the majority of the black population, particularly before the 1940s, and although forced labor declined, it continued to exist throughout the colonial period, especially for public works (Exenberger and Hartmann 2013, 27–8). However, as noted, the white settler population of the Belgian Congo remained comparably small and unattached to the colony. Thus, unlike in Southern Rhodesia, the colonial government was not beholden to the vested interests of a large settler community competing for (and with) African labor.

Moreover, in contrast with Southern Rhodesia, the Belgian Congo was relatively isolated, situated between the African empires of Britain, France, and Portugal, and had been mandated a free trade and navigation area at the Berlin Conference. This prevented Belgium from favoring industrial imports from the metropole via preferential tariffs and ultimately incentivized domestic manufacturing within the colony (Clarence-Smith 1989, 193). Consequently, the Congo began to industrialize in the mid-1920s, relatively early for the African colonial context, bolstered by Belgian investments in export processing industries, food processing, and textile manufacturing (Brixhe 1953, 110–2). Emerging employment opportunities drew rural Africans to manufacturing towns, initially mostly as temporary or circular migrants, although increasing numbers began settling around the “European” city centers.

Rural-urban migration gained further steam following a brief downturn during the Great Depression (Vandewalle 1966, 31). The Second World War boosted industrial development in the Congo when isolation from the German-occupied metropole caused shortages of consumer product imports during the war (Taylor 1959, 353). The post-war economic boom led to a rise in indigenous living standards, further inducing internal consumer demand for Congo-made products (Dienst voor de Voorlichting 1960, 38). By 1946, industrial textile production – which began in Leopoldville in 1925 – supplied a quarter of the domestic market, a uniquely high share in colonial Africa (Clarence-Smith 1989, 194). Manufacturing soon received further stimulus as European capitalists, fearing a Third World War, funneled their money toward Congolese industries. The Congo became one of the most developed industrial regions in sub-Saharan Africa and began catching up with earlier-industrializing South Africa due to exceptional growth in Congolese industrial output.¹⁵ This fed back into increasing demand for urban industrial labor, resulting in an uptick in post-war rural-urban migration and rising urbanization (see Table 12.1).

5 Colonial policies and the development of uneven opportunity structures

Alongside (and related to) geopolitical and colonial characteristics, an array of specific institutions and policies would have profound implications for the development of migration systems in our two case studies. From the early stages of colonization, both the British in Southern Rhodesia and the Belgians in the Congo restricted the economic agency of rural Africans. This interference served at least three purposes: first, the exploitation of African land to extract natural resources, including cash crops and minerals; second, the creation of a wage labor force by narrowing alternative economic opportunities; and, third, the reduction of competition for European agricultural enterprises from African farmers seizing

new commercial opportunities arising from settler consumer demand. Typically, colonial authorities employed three main methods to create a cheap and transient African labor force directed either to European farms and mines or to cities: restricting African access to land, imposing rural and urban segregation policies, and levying taxes in money or labor services. Alternatively, authorities could seek to *stabilize* the wage labor force by improving living conditions, thus diminishing incentives to migrate. We argue that the choice of policies, and their relative “success,” played a decisive role in creating distinctive rural and urban opportunity structures in Southern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo, which led to fundamentally different labor stabilization outcomes in both rural and urban zones.

At the turn of the 20th century, Southern Rhodesia created the first Native Reserves for African settlement. This land alienation strategy started a process of African–European segregation that progressively eroded the economic position of most black Southern Rhodesians. Reserve lands often had poor soil quality and inadequate water supplies and were typically located far from emerging urban centers and railways, leaving peasant producers disconnected from growing markets.¹⁶ By 1909 Africans still living outside the reserves were obligated to pay land rents – to which grazing fees were added in 1912 – to the BSAC, pushing many toward the reserves. Others were evicted from their land to supply farms to white settler immigrants. In 1922, 63.5% of Southern Rhodesia’s black inhabitants already resided in the reserves (Phimister 1988, 65–7, 83). The 1930 *Land Appropriation Act* further segregated the colony into the existing *Native Reserves*, a *Native Purchase Area* (available only to wealthier Africans), various unassigned zones, and a *European Area*. While white European settlers made up no more than 5% of the colony’s population, the *European Area* ranged over 51% of the colony (Floyd 1962, 577). Africans were forbidden to reside in *European Areas*, including all urban centers, unless employed by a white employer. The geographic mobility of black Southern Rhodesians was consequently sharply curtailed. Meanwhile, space on the reserves steadily dwindled, from 19 hectares per person in 1931 to only 9 by the early 1950s, as populations increased (Phimister and Pilosof 2017, 217).

Alongside land alienation, taxation further diminished peasant incomes. Hut tax, levied on Africans from 1893, was doubled by 1904, and additional taxes were introduced (Phimister 1988, 83). While the fiscal burden was placed on black peasants, investments in white settler agriculture “became one of the major items on the Government budget” (Arrighi 1970, 210). Moreover, in the 1930s, the *Maize Control Acts* sharply depressed grain prices paid to most African cultivators, which diminished their capacity to pay rents and taxes and pushed poorer peasants onto the wage labor market.¹⁷ The proportion of black male inhabitants of Southern Rhodesia engaged in wage labor grew from around 20% in 1920 to about 60% in 1951 (Arrighi 1970, 204, 221–2). From the 1940s, many were heading to urban centers, as industrial employment opportunities expanded, rather than to European farms, where wages were considerably lower.

A systematic depression of agricultural wages in Southern Rhodesia – which accentuated the rural-urban wage gap and perpetuated competition for better-paying urban jobs – was linked to a steady inflow of cheap contract labor from neighboring colonies. From the early 20th century, contracted migrant laborers flowed into Southern Rhodesia and were channeled toward commercial farms and mines by the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB), which was established in 1903 to redirect labor away from the Transvaal and toward Southern Rhodesian enterprises (Phimister 1988, 50, 85). Labor recruitment agreements between Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland lubricated the

inflow of migrant workers (Secretary for Labour, Social Welfare and Housing 1961, 11–2).¹⁸ By the 1950s, numerous recruits hailed from Nyasaland, stimulated by local job scarcity, population pressures, and taxation, while others came from Portuguese Mozambique (Scott 1954; Clark 1974, 39). Most contracted laborers were destined for rural employment, and their influx helped keep rural wages stagnant, even as urban wages continued to rise. This rural-urban wage differential was exacerbated by the restrictive *Masters and Servants Act*, which diminished agricultural worker rights, and the powerful Rhodesia National Farmers Union, which lobbied against wage regulations (Clarke 1974, 43–4). In contrast, strike action by black industrial laborers during the 1940s had resulted in the *Native Labour Boards Act* (1947), which instituted labor dispute machinery. This led to upward momentum of manufacturing wages, although wages paid to black workers still remained far below those earned by white workers (see discussion below).

Relative to Southern Rhodesia, colonial-era land alienation policies were milder in the Belgian Congo. Still, colonial interventions resulted in an urban push effect for many rural dwellers. Before the colonial period, land tenure systems were based on shifting cultivation within corporate groups (e.g., chiefdoms, villages, and lineages) and consisted of temporary individual rights on cultivated land and communal hunting and gathering rights on uncultivated land (Harms 1974, 1–2). When Leopold's Congo Free State was founded, it generally recognized rights over cultivated land but ignored communal rights on uncultivated land, which it claimed for settlement, cultivation, and natural resource extraction (Harms 1974, 11–4). Land alienation for plantations was relatively limited, but when it did occur, the most fertile arable lands were targeted (Jewsiewicki 1983, 111).

As in Southern Rhodesia, extractive colonial policies stimulated the development of a rural-urban migration system. Contemporary anthropologists noted that compulsory cultivation, combined with harsh *corvée* labor in some rural areas, incentivized rural-urban migration (Pons 1969, 48–9). Initially, the Belgian colonial authorities tightly controlled the Congolese wage labor market. Recruitment for public and private works – largely rural in nature – was primarily handled by the government as of the 1920s, while forced labor kept a check on wage levels. Although measures were introduced to break this stringent regime – for instance, by limiting forced labor in certain sectors, such as railroad construction, and for private enterprises – officials often bent the rules to aid European entrepreneurs. At the same time, low wages and poor working conditions in European mines and plantations did little to stimulate voluntary wage labor in these sectors (Northrup 1988, 158–60). In contrast, more remunerative wage-earning opportunities in growing urban centers had become increasingly attractive to many (young) men from the 1920s onward.

By the 1940s and 1950s, living standards were gradually improving in rural areas (Figures 12.2 and 12.3). Wage workers were still better off in cities than in rural zones, but this difference declined from the late 1940s. Part of this shift in rural fortunes was related to a reorientation of rural policies. Before the Great Depression, colonial agricultural policies had generally favored large concession companies, like the *Congo Cotton Company (Cotonco)*, that produced export crops, while African farmers were pushed onto marginal lands and often forced to produce food crops for the non-agricultural labor force. During the economic crisis of the 1930s, the colonial state expanded its forced peasant cultivation strategy to include cash crops, such as cotton, coffee, and palm oil (Jewsiewicki 1983, 100–1). By the 1940s, it had become clear that forced cultivation led to soil exhaustion and an exodus to the cities. Consequently, the colonial government abandoned forced cultivation and introduced

the *paysannat* scheme, allotting individual rectangular plots to be cultivated in fixed rotations (cash crops, food crops, and fallowing), thereby binding Congolese peasants to their farms (Brixhe 1953, 64–7). However, the plan did not account for substantial local differences in soil quality. In poorly endowed regions, many farmers soon left, fearing that soil depletion would lead to starvation. Instead of providing greater security through fixed land tenure, the introduction of the *paysannat* led to increasing rural insecurity and migration to cities (Harms 1974, 18). Government policies in the early 1950s therefore shifted (with greater success) to improving living conditions in rural areas to prevent excessive urban migration and promote greater stability throughout the colony. For example, efforts were made to decrease the cultivation of soil-depleting export crops and introduce less land-exhaustive agricultural techniques.¹⁹

Despite often ineffective and disruptive colonial interventions and the dismissal of communal land rights, cultivatable land was generally more accessible for peasants in the Congo than in Southern Rhodesia. Moreover, Belgian colonial authorities had recognized relatively early on that balanced urban *and* rural development was vital to the broader development of the colony. This helped prevent land alienation policies similar to those faced by Southern Rhodesian peasants. This was a crucial condition for the eventual convergence of living standards in rural and urban areas in the Congo, which in turn promoted labor stabilization in *both* rural and urban zones. Improvements in rural living conditions diminished earlier incentives for peasants to flee to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities; meanwhile, improvements in urban wages not only enabled family settlement, but likely also reduced the necessity of maintaining close rural-urban kinship ties for support in times of economic distress. The greater reluctance of the Belgian colonial state to divest rural Africans of access to land, compared with Southern Rhodesia, was undoubtedly tied to the fact that there were far fewer European settlers in the Congo. As the next section illustrates, the government of Southern Rhodesia had to reckon with the interests of a vocal white settler community in the cities. This undermined policies directed toward stabilizing the African wage labor force in the settler colony, whereas in the Congo, this process proceeded more smoothly.

6 Labor stabilization policies in urban context

In the early 20th century, colonial officials – particularly in British settler colonies – were preoccupied with concerns that industrial development would lead to “detrribalization” if African laborers began settling permanently in urban areas, which were generally reserved for Europeans. In their view, this would undermine colonial efforts to establish “institutional segregation,” along with “territorial segregation,” which was widely demanded by white settlers. Consequently, temporary urban migration of African male laborers was generally favored over family migration and permanent urban settlement (Mamdani 1996, 6–7). However, colonial attitudes and official policy regarding urban labor stabilization shifted markedly after the Second World War. Imperial powers had become increasingly concerned with the consequences of what they deemed the “abnormal” (i.e., largely transient) movement of black laborers into urban areas. In the post-war years, stabilization was widely promoted to instill so-called “modern” behavior among Africans, who, according to paternalistic colonial rhetoric, were too attached to “tribal” values and culture that perpetuated backwardness and unproductivity. Fear of a potential rise in social unrest and political

instability among the African population further fueled stabilization efforts. Colonial administrations broadly agreed that providing urban wages sufficient to support a family, along with adequate housing and social services, was key to stabilizing the urban workforce (Cooper 1996, 365–7).

Of course, colonial officials' juxtaposition of African workers as being either "tribal" or "urbanites" was far too simplistic and disregarded the capacity of migrants to flexibly adjust to multiple social realities and contexts, as late-colonial anthropologist J. Clyde Mitchell observed in his work on Tanganyika and the Rhodesias (Mitchell 1951, 1958). Moreover, while, in theory, colonial policies pursued stabilization of the urban African workforce, in practice, these aims were complicated "by diverse social linkages and conflicting interests; they remained contradictory and unrealizable projects" (Cooper 1996, 381). With respect to our two cases, the contradictory nature of colonial stabilization projects was most prominent in Southern Rhodesia, where white settler interests were often at odds with the material interests of both rural and urban black Africans. However, in both colonial contexts, segregationist ideologies defined urban space and restricted African movement.

In the Congo, increasing rural-urban migration prompted state-led designation of particular African quarters. These *Centres Extra-Coutumiers* (CECs – extra-customary centers), established in 1931, were located mainly around white urban centers and were distinguished from the customary centers – those areas where Africans lived as peasants.²⁰ The CECs were carefully separated from European city centers by a *cordon sanitaire* of airports, military bases, and other non-residential areas for purported "hygienic and safety reasons" that were grounded in racist ideology. Africans were forbidden to live in the centers but permitted to work there, with a day pass, until dusk (Van Bilzen 1993, 25–6). With the influx of migrants into towns after the Great Depression, concerns grew about the social and moral pitfalls associated with predominately male urban populations, including prostitution in the CECs.²¹ The colonial government consequently disseminated policy suggestions to urban employers to address emerging socio-economic problems in Congolese cities. First, the government appealed to urban employers to provide affordable housing for their workers, suitable for accommodating wives and children. Although compliance remained mixed, housing improved in the 1940s, sometimes subsidized by employers, particularly in Elisabethville and Stanleyville. Colonial authorities remained preoccupied with providing adequate housing and social provisions, even developing an early pension system.²² By the early 1950s, a special committee recommended that urban employers be obliged to maintain a share of 60% married employees among their total staff. In Elisabethville and Stanleyville, this prescribed ideal was (approximately) achieved by 1951, with percentages of married male workers reaching 63% and 55%, respectively.²³

Ultimately, the government intervened more directly. The development of public provisions constituted part of the ambitious Ten Year's Plan designed after the Second World War to facilitate Congolese economic development and reduce the colony's dependence on exports and vulnerability to world market fluctuations (Dienst voor de Voorlichting 1960, 69). Considerable funds were allotted to economic development from 1950 to 1959, initially budgeted at \$500 million but ultimately doubling to nearly \$1 billion over the decade. Although the majority of this budget was spent on improving infrastructure, including roads and electricity, more than 25% was intended for social provisions (Huge 1955, 66). Along with investments in agricultural innovations to aid rural peasants, funds were also earmarked for improvements in public healthcare, education, and housing for urban African

laborers and their families. To this end, *Offices des Cités Africaines* (offices for African quarters) were established in the colony's major cities. The plan was to construct 40,000 houses by 1959. Although by the mid-1950s a considerable shortage of adequate housing reportedly remained,²⁴ over 8,000 new urban houses had been built using government funds (Huge 1955, 69).

As in the Belgian Congo, Rhodesian cities were highly segregated. The *Land Apportionment Act* of 1930 had designated cities as "European areas," and later acts would stipulate "where Africans shall live in urban areas and how control shall be exercised over them there" (Mitchell 1954, 5). Among white settlers, segregationist ideology and anxiety about blacks and whites living closely together fostered a preference for temporary African urban tenure, with wives and children left on the reserves or in their colony of origin (Gray 1960, 256). However, as the urban African labor force continued to grow, Southern Rhodesian officials became concerned, like their Belgian counterparts, about the "overwhelming preponderance of men [dominated by] the fluid mass of the irresponsible 18–35 age group," supposedly undermining industrial productivity and leading to widespread prostitution (Howman Committee 1945, 11–3). By the early 1950s, the government began a series of interventions intended to increase urban labor stabilization and simultaneously cope with ever-worsening overcrowding on rural reserves.²⁵

Whereas the Belgians sought to reduce transitory rural-urban flows by simultaneously improving rural living conditions and providing the means for urban workers to settle their families in town, Southern Rhodesia pursued a radical – and far less effective – solution under the *Native Land Husbandry Act* of 1951, which ultimately produced greater insecurity in both rural and urban areas. The colony's black African subjects were to be divided into either rural peasants, situated on tenured land, or industrial laborers, settled with their families in urban zones.²⁶ The urban African industrial worker, it was envisioned, would have "his tentacles pulled out of the soil" and lose access to reserve lands (quote from Phimister 1993, 231). Meanwhile, married women were prohibited from owning land in rural areas, even if their husbands had migrated for a shorter or longer period to work, thus increasing their economic precarity (Boserup 1970, 60). By the end of the 1950s, the *Land Husbandry Act* had reportedly been applied to roughly 42% of the African reserves, creating an estimated 102,000 landless families (Phimister 1993, 236). This did little to correct rural or urban gender imbalances, with on average only 28 men per 100 women in the age category 20–35 reported in Southern Rhodesian villages in 1956 (Mitchell 1961, 80). Meanwhile, a recession in the late 1950s reduced urban employment opportunities, generating crises for urban labor migrants.²⁷ The Act, a disruptive failure, was abandoned by the early 1960s.

The Southern Rhodesian government implemented additional interventions to achieve urban labor stabilization. The *Foreign Migratory Labour Act* of 1958 sought to reorient the colony's cross-border migration system by banning the employment of "foreign Africans" in urban zones, with the exception of mining areas. This legislation was, first, intended to minimize competition between foreign-born and indigenous African workers in Southern Rhodesian cities; second, it sought to redirect cheap foreign labor from Nyasaland and, increasingly, Mozambique to European plantations and mines (Clarke 1978, 51). Within a decade, the share of black urban laborers of Southern Rhodesian origin increased rapidly: from 52% in 1958 to 67% in 1963, reaching 82% by 1969 (Urban African Affairs Commission 1958, Table VII, 16; Central Statistical Office 1964, 27; Harris 1974, 13).

However, even as native-born Southern Rhodesians formed an increasing share of the black urban labor force, white settler interests continued to hinder the permanent settlement of black families in cities for decades. Well into the 1970s, insufficient wages would remain the single greatest barrier to the development of a substantial permanent urban African labor force in Southern Rhodesia (Harris 1974; Gargett 1977). Low wages, according to Bettison, were in line with a Southern Rhodesian “subsistence wage” tradition for black labor – that is, wages primarily determined not by market mechanisms but essentially fixed at a level sufficient to provide subsistence for a *single worker*.²⁸ White workers, in contrast, earned considerably higher wages. The racial wage gap grew from the 1940s onward and persisted, with white workers of European origin earning nearly 11 times more than black workers in 1972, even *after* the relative gap had showed modest improvement from 5% in 1938 to 14% in 1966 (see Figure 12.5) (Harris 1974, 11). While white laborers comprised no more than 20% of the manufacturing labor force between 1938 and 1966, they claimed on average nearly 70% of the sectoral wage bill.

Colonial officials claimed that lower wages for black African laborers were a consequence of their lower productivity (e.g., Urban African Affairs Commission 1958, 73). In reality, the racial wage gap was effected and perpetuated by institutional factors, particularly strong bargaining power among white Southern Rhodesian workers and legislation that diminished African access to skilled and semi-skilled occupations, creating pronounced occupational segregation (Arrighi 1967, 49–50). Tellingly, a number of jobs were reportedly “reserved” at “European” wage rates – principally in state-run organizations – to “provide

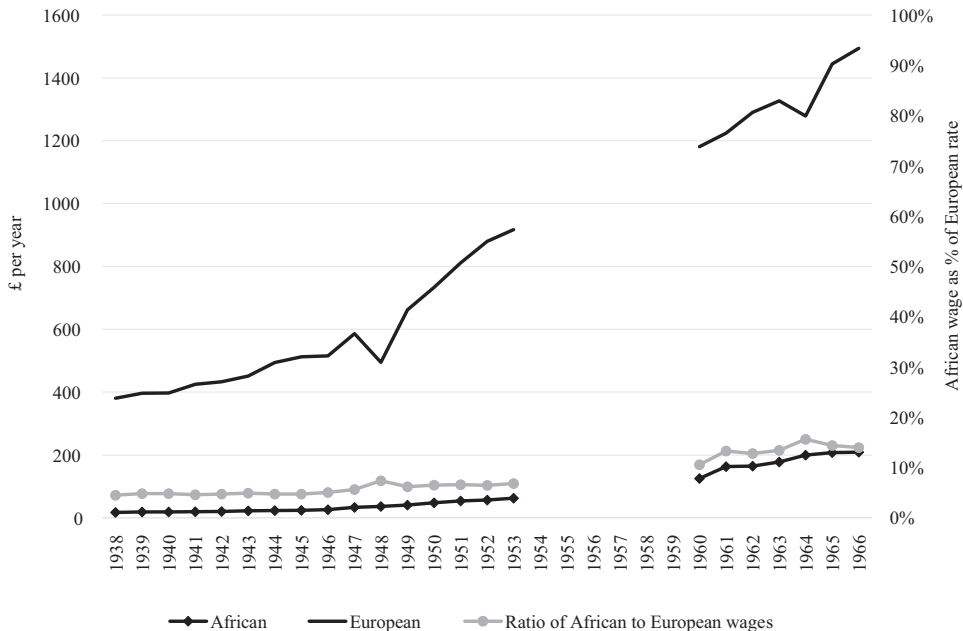


FIGURE 12.5 Average annual white European and black African nominal wages per worker, Southern Rhodesian manufacturing sector, 1938–66.

Sources: Central African Statistical Office (1955, 26, 34, Tables II and III); Central Statistical Office (n.d., 53, Table 6). Note: “European” category includes a small number of “Asian” and “Colored” laborers for the years 1960–66.

assurance that any unskilled members of [white] families will not have to compete directly with similarly unskilled blacks for employment” (Harris 1974, 15–6). Thus, the presence of a well-organized community of blue-collar settler workers in urban areas accounted for both occupational segregation and racial wage discrimination, which depressed black urban wages well into the 1970s.

Alongside inadequate wages, black laborers faced perpetual housing shortages and poor living conditions in Southern Rhodesia’s manufacturing centers, with many forced to “live in hovels and places not fit for human habitation” (Ibottson 1946, 79). The *Natives (Urban Areas) Accommodation and Registration Act* (1946, 1951) sought to tackle the housing crisis by requiring employers to provide housing for laborers in approved accommodations. However, in practice, this legislation further restricted African urban tenure by linking accommodation with official employment, thus diminishing African workers’ ability to remain in town in the event of temporary unemployment. Meanwhile, the broad powers afforded by the Act enabled city officials to identify women co-habiting with men without official marriage certificates, who were “deemed to be living ‘illegally’ in the city” and became “the main target of increasingly frequent police raids” in the 1950s (Phimister and Raftopoulos 2000, 311–2).

Moreover, new housing projects concentrated primarily on providing hostel accommodations for *single men*, particularly in Salisbury, which did little to improve the lot of urban African families (Urban African Affairs Commission 1958, 50). While the Belgian Congo had succeeded in improving living conditions for urban African households by the 1940s (and earlier in mining areas), black Southern Rhodesians faced urban housing shortages and inadequate wages into the 1970s. Economic precarity perpetuated the persistence of a circular rural-urban labor migration system and slowed the evolution toward more permanent rural-urban movements that had developed decades earlier in the Belgian Congo. Family settlement in towns would increase by the 1970s, concurrent with rising wages, but the majority of black laborers earned wages below the minimum required to support an average-sized family. Among those urban families that managed to settle in town, most consequently remained heavily dependent upon connections with rural areas for economic assistance, maintaining the rural-urban ties that had loosened decades earlier in the Belgian Congo (Gargett 1977, 20, 25, 29).

7 Conclusion

In both Southern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo, uneven opportunity structures stimulated the development of rural-urban migrations during the first half of the colonial 20th century. However, the migration systems that arose would evolve very differently. Circular migration remained dominant in Southern Rhodesia deep into the early post-colonial era. In the Belgian Congo, rural-urban ties had instead been gradually disengaged and urban tenure increasingly secured from the 1940s onward. Our comparative analysis shows that a combination of geopolitical and institutional factors was decisive in explaining the differentiated evolution of rural-urban migration and labor stabilization patterns that developed amid early industrialization in the two colonies.

First, the relative geopolitical isolation of the Belgian Congo stands out in contrast to the much firmer integration of Southern Rhodesia in the British Southern African imperial context. The position of the Belgian Congo as a mandated free trade zone helped

incentivize Belgian investment in local industries, as did a large internal market for manufactured goods, stimulating early industrialization and rural-urban migration flows in the region. Moreover, the colony had less tangible links with broader migration systems beyond its colonial borders compared with Southern Rhodesia, which had long bound its own migration system with a broader institutionalized labor migration system encompassing nearby British colonies. This initially underpinned a greater degree of transience in Southern Rhodesian urban centers – since many laborers were temporary migrants from abroad. This intertwining of cross-border migration systems would also help perpetually depress rural wages in commercial agriculture, motivating many rural young men to migrate to cities, despite high urban unemployment.

Second, there were noticeable dissimilarities in colonial policies in both regions. In Southern Rhodesia, policies were overwhelmingly influenced by the vested interests of white settlers, including farmers, miners, industrialists, and white urban laborers. These interests, which at times were contradictory, strongly influenced institutional developments. The establishment of Responsible Government in 1923 effectively allowed the semi-autonomous government to craft policies that catered to the demands of the white settler community, often to the detriment of the colony's African inhabitants. A combination of increasing urban industrial wages and perpetually depressed rural wages drew Southern Rhodesian men to cities. However, direct interventions into land and labor markets shaped economic possibilities within rural and urban zones, keeping *both* rural and urban wages low – particularly relative to high settler wages – making it difficult for urban African laborers to sustain a family in the city. This would perpetuate the circular nature of the colony's rural-urban migration system.

Initially, European interests in plantations and mines were likewise safeguarded in the Belgian Congo via forced labor and the alienation of common land in the early colonial period. However, the relatively small number of European settlers (and often temporary nature of their settlement), combined with a largely metropolitan-controlled colonial government, eventually led to the development of colonial wage labor markets that were more sensitive to supply-and-demand changes compared with Southern Rhodesia. Wage rates in industrializing urban areas were higher than in rural areas, but this differential declined as rural wages rose, in line with a broader colonial policy that favored improvement in urban *as well as* rural living conditions. Where the Belgian Congo could respond with relative dexterity to urban African development issues, the Southern Rhodesian government was beholden first and foremost to settler interests, which were often at odds with those of African laborers.

These differing contexts affected the consumption capabilities of Congolese and Rhodesian laborers, which, in turn, influenced migration choices. In the Congo, substantial up-ticks in nominal *and* real wages allowed for more family migration to urban areas from the 1940s onward as men were increasingly able to provide for their wives and children. This fundamentally changed the existing rural-urban migration system into a system increasingly characterized by one-way migrations. Conversely, in Southern Rhodesia, the “subsistence wage” tradition for African labor, which helped subsidize high white settler wages, forced black urban migrants to retain close ties to the poor but vital reserves, where their families often remained. Moreover, in the Congo, urban settlement was further stimulated by efforts to improve housing facilities and social provisions for urban families. Meanwhile, in Southern Rhodesia, urban accommodations remained woefully insufficient, particularly

for families. Taken together, these factors informed and (re)directed migrant flows, producing a marked divergence in the character of rural-urban migration and urbanization in the Belgian Congo and Southern Rhodesia by the close of the colonial period.

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Notes

- 1 For average sub-Saharan Africa rates in 1960, see the World Bank website: <https://data.world-bank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>.
- 2 For rural-urban migration in East and West Africa, see Meier zu Selhausen, Chapter 13, this volume.
- 3 In this chapter, we use “labor stabilization” to denote the process of increasing permanence of the labor force in urban settlements. We are aware that this term was used by colonial authorities in connection with urbanization ambitions and concerns about male predominance in colonial cities. We employ the term as a synonym for permanent urban settlement but do not intend to reproduce the moral or socioeconomic anxieties of colonial authorities.
- 4 Current-day Harare. Given the periodization of our analysis, colonial city names are used here.
- 5 Current-day Kinshasa.
- 6 Current-day Lubumbashi.
- 7 Current-day Kisangani.
- 8 Rural-mining area migration often overlapped with rural-urban migration as mining towns developed into major urban centers, as in the Belgian Congo.
- 9 On “frontier” land in sub-Saharan Africa, see Kopytoff (1987), and for a critique Austin, Chapter 2, this volume.
- 10 For a comparison of labor recruitment, migration, and stabilization in Katanga relative to the mining areas of Northern Rhodesia and South Africa, see Juif, Chapter 10 in this volume.
- 11 Current-day Likasi.
- 12 The authors do not provide the nominal data on which they base their indexes. However, their growth rates correspond with archival data and colonial reports for several points in time (1933, 1938, and 1950), so we have applied these growth rates to the actual average urban and rural wages we found and extrapolated them to years for which we lack information.
- 13 On traditional subsistence production by women, see Boserup (1970, 16–22).
- 14 In the early 1960s, “general unemployment on a large scale” was reported in urban areas, while demand for labor exceeded supply in rural areas (Secretary for Internal Affairs and Chief Native Commissioner 1963, 32).
- 15 Congolese industrial production multiplied over 12.5 times between 1938 and 1957, whereas South African and Southern Rhodesian output expanded 3.8 times and 7.5 times, respectively. A growth index (1949=100) reveals that Congo’s industrial expansion exceeded all other African colonies (Lacroix 1967, 22–3).
- 16 Initially, Africans could theoretically purchase land beyond the reserves, but few had the means to do so. The segregation-oriented *Land Apportionment Act* of 1930 would later specify particular areas where black Africans were allowed to purchase land, separate from European zones (Zinyama and Whitlow 1986, 368–9).
- 17 While white farmers received on average 8 shillings per bag of maize between 1934 and 1939, African farmers received between 2 shillings and 6 pence and 6 shillings and 6 pence (Phimister 1988, 185–9).
- 18 Contracted migrant laborers typically remained in Southern Rhodesia for the duration of their contract (between 12 and 18 months) before returning to their home colony, where they received final settlement of their wages under a deferred payment system (Clarke 1974, 39–40).

- 19 Brussels, *Archives Africaines* (AA), 3ème Directeurat Général (3ème DG), dossier 379, Note de M. le Gouverneur Général sur le problème de la M.O.I. au Congo Belge, 1952.
- 20 The CECs obtained a limited degree of administrative autonomy, which according to Northrup (1988, 210), points to the acceptance of permanent urban migration by the colonial authorities early on.
- 21 AA, Affaires Indigènes (AI), dossier 1994, Protection de la femme noire.
- 22 For housing, see AA, 3ème DG, dossier 379, Rapport de la sous-commission des problèmes sociaux, 1952. Pensions were associated with labor cards introduced in the 1940s (Capelle 1947, 14).
- 23 AA, 3ème DG, dossier 1123, Commission de la main-d'oeuvre et du travail indigènes.
- 24 AA, AI, dossier 1396, Amélioration des conditions de vie matérielle des indigènes.
- 25 Already by 1943, it was reported that 62 of the 98 reserves were overpopulated, with 19 of those overpopulated by at least 100% (Phimister 1988, 237–8).
- 26 For the official philosophy underlying this plan, see Urban African Affairs Commission (1958, 21).
- 27 Some historians suggest that the recession of 1957/58 was a key determinant in the demise of the *Land Husbandry Act* as demand for labor dropped among urban employers, reducing interest in stabilizing the industrial labor force (Palmer 1977, 243–4).
- 28 The concept of the “subsistence wage” was initially identified by Bettison (1960) and subsequently expanded upon by Arrighi (1970).

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