EARNING AN AGE

Migration and Maturity in Colonial Kenya, 1895–1952

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the migration of boys and young men from their parents’ homes out onto the coffee, sisal, and tea estates of the settler colony of Kenya. Age and gender figured prominently in their decisions to leave home and work for wages. Young men viewed their physical mobility, financial independence, and distance from elder surveillance as essential to enjoying their youth and rethinking their manliness and coming of age. As they made demands on their elders to acknowledge and ritually authenticate their newfound maturity, they sparked heated debate about and complicated their generational and kinship relations. Age also mattered a great deal to the British colonial state. One of the primary tasks of the state was to ensure the profitability of the settler and multinational firms that produced Kenya’s most important cash crops. With one hand, the state levied its authority, often violently, to draw the young into the wage labor market. With the other, pulled along by social reformers, British officials tried to shield communities from what they believed to be the breakdown of generational, patriarchal authority by legislating underage labor, regulating recruitment, inspecting farms, and fining unscrupulous employers.

Age matters a great deal in Kenya. Long before British conquest at the turn of the twentieth century, age framed social, political, and...
economic relationships within East African communities. How men and women lived their lives, explained their place in society, and sought mobility through it were all influenced by their sense of belonging to a given generation and the relationships they forged with their age-mates. Early anthropological literature emphasizes the importance of age in the organization of labor and access to wealth created by family members’ efforts. Elder men competed with one another to control the labors of wives and mothers as well as young male warriors and clients. To regulate competition over these resources, communities organized themselves around age. As men and women aged, they passed through powerful ritual moments like initiation and marriage, ascribing them with expanded rights and obligations. Elder men controlled the making of generations and norms generations were expected to follow. They created an awareness of time, sense of order, and perceptions of masculinity within the community.

But the power of elders was never absolute. Male age-relations in Kenya depended on reciprocal obligations. An age, and the rights that came with it, had to be earned. Young men expected fathers to work hard for them, to accumulate wealth to arrange for their initiations into manhood as well as pay bridewealth to the family of their future wives. Meanwhile juniors had to work just as hard, tending livestock, defending the community, showing respect for their elders, and exhibiting acceptable codes of mature, manly conduct.

Recently, historians of age have begun to challenge this earlier scholarship’s linear, patriarchal process of aging. Not everyone agreed on how to be a hardworking father or son, and seniority was not granted to anyone simply for growing old or playing by the rules. Age-relations, and the pursuit and performance of masculinity and maturity, simmered with productive tension. Generations constantly argued with one another about their biological, social, and economic standing within the community. Ideas and practices surrounding age could deftly shift depending on the ideas and eloquence with which a generation argued, with whom a generation argued, and the wider socioeconomic and political contexts in which the argument occurred. Moreover, maturity and authority were reevaluated and reworked through a range of criteria, including wealth in material goods, kinship, or knowledge.

The colonial encounter gave African men, young and old, a great deal to argue about. Colonialism opened up a host of new spaces the young could access beyond their family’s rural households or elders’ surveillance. And they used the new wealth and knowledge they earned to reimagine their masculinity and age. In recent years, historians have shown how age and gender were reconfigured as young people inhabited new colonial spaces.
like mission stations, military barracks, urban spaces, and workplaces. They also sought social and economic worlds distasteful to their families and deemed disorderly by colonial officials, such as sex work, hawking, gang life, criminality, and street culture.

Of all the spaces opened up by the colonial encounter, the migration and labor of young Africans has enjoyed long and thorough historical study. Historians have considered the decisions they made to work, networks they forged to get to and from their work, arguments they had over wages for their work, and the ways those wages altered their social and economic mobility within their communities. And a growing number of scholars, especially those working in southern Africa, have focused attention on the interrelated ways that work, and the physical and economic mobilities that came with it, shaped ideas and practices of age and age-relations. Migration and wage labor brought young Africans new sources of wealth and knowledge, which in turn gave them the “analytical distance” to question the authority of their elders. As they pushed back more forcefully against the interests of their fathers, arguments among generations intensified and conflict ensued, sometimes violently. As Benjamin Carton has shown, young Zulu men in turn of the century Natal embraced wage labor at a time of crippling war and epidemic disease. And in time, their households became dependent on their wealth. Burdened by demanding fathers and colonial taxation, young men rose up against chiefs and household heads in the 1906 War of the Heads. Around the same time in Ovamboland, Meredith McKittrick argues, ecological and economic uncertainties compelled the young to invest in new communities—Christian missions and migrant wage labor.

In East Africa, particularly Kenya, historians have been slow to pick up the insights made by their colleagues working in the south. Histories of migration, labor, and class dominated the study of Kenya’s settler economy in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet since then, little work has been done to further uncover the meanings hundreds of thousands of young men made with their work and mobility or the cultural implications their experiences had on both their perceptions of age and gender and their relationships with other generations. In this article, I explore the migration of boys and young men from their parents’ homes out onto the coffee, sisal, and tea estates of Kenya. I argue that age and gender figured prominently in their decisions to leave home, work for wages, and spend their capital. Young men viewed their physical mobility, financial independence, knowledge, networks, and distance from elder surveillance as essential components of enjoying their youth as well as rethinking what it meant to be manly and come of age.
Whether flashy clothing, exotic music, European dance moves, gifts for sweethearts, or livestock for fathers—these new commodities allowed young men, some mere boys, to perform masculinity and maturity, often in new forms that made elders uncomfortable. They then made demands on their elders to acknowledge and ritually authenticate their newfound masculinity and maturity by advancing them in age. Young men’s demands and activities sometimes irked their fathers and elders, who nervously complicated a future in which younger generations had abandoned their villages and forgotten their responsibilities to kin. Yet some sons did return home, often with earnings in hand, willing to contribute to the household or rely on fathers to purchase livestock on their behalf. Some boys used their time as migrant laborers to indicate their readiness for initiation or marriage. Migrant labor complicated and often intensified arguments within households about age and gender, but it did not always erode kinship.

I also argue that the age of young migrant laborers mattered a great deal to the British colonial state in Kenya. As a settler colony, one of the primary tasks of the state was to ensure the profitability of the settler and multinational firms that produced Kenya’s most important cash crops like coffee, tea, and sisal. As they marched westward from the coast, conquering or coopting the communities they encountered, the British sought out able-bodied men to work in an ever-expanding market. Soldiers, porters, and police; interpreters, clerks, and postmen; field hands, herdsboys, and domestic servants—all were needed to meet the demands of the fledgling colonial economy and administration. The state levied its authority, often violently, to draw the young out of their parents’ households and into the wage labor market.

Yet the security of settlers and fiscal stability of the colony were not the only issues with which the state had to contend. British officials also had to meet their obligations to the civilizing mission. Kenya teemed with Christian missionaries, nongovernmental organizations, and African political associations constantly pressuring the colonial state to consider the well-being of African laborers. Furthermore, the Colonial Office and non-state actors like the International Labor Organization kept close eyes on the ways the officials in Kenya pushed young Africans into the labor market. As such, British officials in Kenya were doubly cognizant of age, pressured locally and internationally, to protect the young from the satanic mills of settler industry. How young Africans fared under their employers became a barometer for the success or failure of the civilizing mission and the superiority of metropolitan ideas and its institutions.

Fearful of being drawn into the scandal of settler exploitation and racism, of raising the alarm of welfare-minded activists and reformers in
Britain and Kenya, or of attracting the ire of the Colonial Office, the colonial state adopted “the role of even-handed arbiter, of defender of the weaker, African, interest.” With one hand, the state worked alongside recruiters and settlers to coerce young African men into the workplace. With the other, it tried to shield communities from what they believed to be detribalization—the breakdown of familial, generational, and patriarchal authorities precipitated by young men’s emergent mobility, monetary power, and claims on maturity. As a result of this contradiction, British officials busied themselves with legislating underage labor, regulating recruitment practices, inspecting settler farms, and fining unscrupulous employers. Yet, preoccupied as they were, district and labor officials did only enough to silence criticism from the metropole and muffle the concerns of parents. The state never really questioned young men’s decisions or desires to work far from home, and in fact, encouraged their physical mobility across the colony.

**Drawing Out the Young, 1895–1933**

In 1895, the British government seized control of the floundering Imperial British East Africa Company. The new colonial administration carried on much of the company’s work. It continued construction of the railway that had nearly bankrupted the company, connecting the main coastal port city of Mombasa to ivory traders near the shores of Lake Victoria. To do so, it used the labor of thousands of men imported from British India and young Africans from the surrounding communities. Out ahead of the railway, the British drove columns of recruited and conscripted young soldiers and porters on expeditions of conquest, establishing forts, securing alliances with agreeable local leaders, and subjugating resistant ones. Conquest and the railway were costly misadventures, and the British looked for ways to make the colony profitable. Beginning in 1902, to salvage the economic prospects of a colony teetering on financial ruin, the British encouraged Europeans and South Africans to settle in Kenya and grow profitable cash crops.

Prior to the turn of the century, communities like the Gikuyu, Kipsigis, and Maasai had used the soil to their advantage. Their livestock and farms prospered. Their households thrived and grew, families expanded out into the frontier founding new households, farms, and herds. The British parcelled out the most fertile of these areas for European settlement, evicting the African occupants, especially the Maasai, Gikuyu, and later the Kipsigis. Those evicted had the choice of either moving into newly demarcated African reserves or remaining on the farms to work as squatters.
communities living inside the reserves, who had not been evicted from their homes, had little motivation to permanently enter the wage labor market. In the early years of colonial rule, for most Africans, their agricultural and pastoral pursuits remained profitable and temporary. Seasonal wage labor paid taxes and supplemented incomes.

In the years prior to World War I, most young men ignored government efforts to encourage their labor, much to the dismay of British officials. In 1907, director of agriculture A.C. MacDonald complained that, “[T]he native . . . will only engage himself for a month or at most two. If the work is not to his liking he may take himself off quietly at the end of a week.”22 And even if he fulfilled his contract, a young laborer returned “to the Native Reserve to spend a ten or eleven months holiday and the farmer has to take on a fresh batch of the rawest and most ignorant of youths, when ground has to be cultivated, seeds sown and crops harvested.” These “raw, ignorant youths” came with no training, earned what they pleased and left, only to return when they ran out of money and wanted more.23 To make labor more regular and permanent, officials like MacDonald believed the state had to pry open the reserves, and draw out labor with a firmer hand.

The number of Africans working away from home grew from 5,000 in 1903 to 120,000 in 1923.24 The steady growth of young men in the workplace reflected several of the strategies the British used to draw them out. First, they relied on local chiefs to compel young men into the labor market.25 Pressured by chiefs, fathers often turned to their children to fulfill compulsory labor demands, which when discovered by missionaries ignited scandal back in Britain.26 Officials also turned to taxation. The hut tax, calculated by the number of homes in a man’s compound, targeted the wealth of older men, who, officials hoped, would send their young male dependents out to earn wages to pay the tax. The poll tax targeted young unmarried men over the age of sixteen.27

The state used the eviction of African families off their land to make way for European settlers and the intensifying land disputes in overcrowded reserves to push African families to move onto settler estates as squatters.28 In the Gikuyu reserves of Central Province and the Kipsigis reserves of Rift Valley Province, some of the first to set off for European estates were landless young men. And many young men saw the estates as a means to escape burdensome taxation, compulsory labor, and tense familial relationships. They also sought out a little adventure—new spaces beyond the surveillance of fathers and kin to makes themselves manly and mature. As squatters, they spent part of their days tending a settler’s livestock, cash crops, or household. In exchange, they had access to plots of unused land where they grew foodstuffs and grazed herds. Before and during the interwar
years, squatting was an attractive, profitable arrangement, so much so that many young men sought out work as squatters.29

Other young men entered the wage labor market as temporary, seasonal migrants.30 After their family’s crops had been planted and harvested, they traveled to settler estates and hired themselves out on short-term contacts. Rather than bring their families with them as squatters had done, they left home alone or with a few male kin. When their contracts expired, they either signed up for another or returned home. Migrant, contract labor gradually became one of the most preferred forms of labor in the colony. Settlers growing coffee in Central Province and the large-scale agricultural firms harvesting tea in the Rift Valley were situated nearby the Gikuyu and Kipsigis reserves, allowing for short-distance commuter labor. The sisal industries located closer to the coast required workers brought from further afield.

As settlers and multinational firms ramped up production of coffee, sisal, and tea, the demand for larger numbers of African migrant laborers intensified.31 Prior to the 1920s, the number of Africans entering the labor market did not meet this rising demand from the cash crop economy. In response, the British encouraged yet another means of drawing young African men into the labor market: recruitment. The networks of recruitment that developed in Central, Rift Valley, and Nyanza Provinces depended on the creative strategies of ignominious recruiters and employers as well as the emerging desire of young men to work for wages. For their part, British provincial administrators, working on the ground in the districts as well as officials in the department of labor, facilitated the exodus of thousands of boys and young men out of their reserves, all while trying to exert some control over recruitment, often in vain.

Recruitment had a long history in the region. From their earliest years along the coast, the British recruited laborers to work on clove plantations in Mombasa and Zanzibar.32 As the railway wound its way through the central highlands, European and Asian recruiting agencies scoured Kamba and Gikuyu villages for young men willing to work. In 1908, the colonial state ordered that recruitment should be left largely to market forces—a combination of settler demand, recruiter persuasion, and African curiosity.33 From 1913 to 1914, an estimated seventy-four per cent of Africans out at work had been recruited.34 By the end of World War I, the vast majority of young men in Machakos, Kitui, and Kiambu had engaged with a labor recruiter.35

Despite efforts by the government to regulate the number and quality of recruiters operating throughout the colony, officials in the districts found themselves inundated by privateers. Nowhere were officials more irked by abusive recruitment practices than in 1920s Western Kenya. By
1923, seventy-five per cent of registered recruiters operated out of Nyanza Province, where communities had become more receptive to seasonal migrant and wage labor. Although the creation of reserves in Western Kenya ended their ability to expand their holdings, less land had been taken from them than their neighbors in Central Kenya. Kipsigis, Luo, or Gusii young men had little reason to leave their reserves and become squatters on European estates. Instead, households sent out their boys and young men to work in the hopes that their income would supplement household wealth and pay taxes.

Although slow to enter the wage labor market, thousands of young Western Kenyan recruits passed through the Kisumu labor camp before and during the interwar years. Linked by rail and road to Mombasa and Nairobi, the camp served as a base of operations for labor agents and recruiters. From the camp, they then forwarded young laborers by train or lorry to employers in Kericho, the White Highlands, Nairobi, and as far as the sisal estates near the coast. Between January and March 1914, district officials recorded over 4,000 African men passing through the camp—this during the recruiting offseason when laborers usually stayed home to harvest their own crops.

Africans despised the labor camp. After an exhausting, dangerous journey, many arrived at Kisumu with sleeping sickness, malaria, and other diseases. Fearful that recruiters would load the sick or dying onto cattle cars and send them out east, British officials required that all laborers undergo medical examination. Africans resented the intrusive exams, unexplained vaccinations, and detention in overcrowded conditions. Worse still, if any of them were declared unfit, they were expected to return home on their own. Of the 4,000 men who passed through the camp in the first three months of 1914, medical officers denied work to nearly six hundred. The British saw all this as a success. By 1919, the chief native commissioner noted that because of the system, government registered most labor coming out of the region and outfitted them with work passes. Nyanza recruitment was a vast improvement, he argued, over that found in Coast and Central Provinces.

But by the mid-1920s, district and labor officials found themselves overwhelmed and worried about the rising number of underage Africans passing through the labor camp. In March 1925, the assistant district commissioner inspected the 10:30 A.M. train out of Kisumu. On board he found “a number of uncontracted totos [children]” forwarded to employers by the Kavirondo Labour Bureau and John Riddoch, both successful labor agents in Nyanza. At the labor camp he found an additional thirty-four boys, all of whom he had to send home. In July of that same year, labor inspector
P. de V. Allen informed the chief native commissioner of a growing number of Nyanza boys working at the railway fuel and ballast camps and on the sisal estates in Thika and Murang’a. Allen worried that they lived in squalor, earned too little to feed themselves, and would eventually drift to towns and slip into criminality. A month later, at a labor camp along the new Thika-Nyeri rail line, the district commissioner of Murang’a found fifteen Gusii boys, all between the ages of twelve and fifteen, working construction. To his astonishment, all of them carried proper registration and passes.38

Despite these complaints, it was only when young laborers died, when parents complained, or when girls went out to work that officials scrambled to investigate and propose reforms.39 In 1926, labor officials traveled to Thika to investigate the deaths of eight young employees of British East Africa Fiber and Industrial. They interviewed two twelve-year-old Gusii boys, Mugire Kyamukia and Obuya Nyaranga, the only survivors. According to the boys, a fellow Gusii named Petro had recruited them back home. The labor inspectors knew Petro well. He worked for the Kavirondo Labour Bureau in Kisumu. The Bureau’s labor agents, Messrs. Yates and Mackey, were notorious in Nyanza for flagrant disregard of regulations. Mugire and Obuya admitted that they had undergone neither medical inspection nor registration before boarding the train. A month after their arrival, eight of their coworkers fell ill and died. Fortunately, they had been taken to the hospital in time. When questioned later, Mr. Mackey took responsibly for his recruiter Petro, but argued that once the boys arrived at the sisal estates, whether they lived or died was none of his affair.40

The strategies of recruiters like Mackey and Petro revealed to the British just how little control they had over the flow of labor out of Nyanza. Professional recruiters hired African sub-contractors who knew the country well, sometimes the very villages and families from which they recruited. When African sub-contractors ran afoul of district authorities, recruiters like Mr. Yates argued that their sub-contractors had simply recruited relatives. Recruiters used other tactics to circumvent the authority of district officials. If medical officers rejected a batch of boys, then recruiters put them on the train anyway or took them to another labor camp. In September 1928, officials discovered that recruiters eluded the Kisumu labor camp by taking boys up to North Kavirondo district, where medical officials were less stringent. Recruiters also mixed boys into larger groups with older men in the hope that government officials would not check every recruit.41

Officials loathed recruiters like Yates and Mackey and their sub-contractors. The commissioner of South Kavirondo described them as “ex-convicts, defaulting debtors, dipsomaniacs, or men of straw” who should
not be allowed to “roam about or to live in the heart of a Native Reserve for the purposes of recruiting.” Recruiters exposed European weakness, corrupting the image of authority district officials had worked tirelessly to perform. Yet when government had the opportunity to stop the recruitment of the very young, it did very little. In 1927, the provincial commissioner of Nyanza Province visited a medical officer in Kisumu to observe the procedure for examining would-be laborers. While there, he watched three batches of boys arrive and undergo examination. The recruiters informed the commissioner that two batches would go to the coffee estates in Kiambu and Fort Hall, the third to Donyo Sabuk sisal estate in Thika. After looking over the recruits, the medical officer determined that the average age of one group was about seven. All of them were approved for work and loaded onto a waiting train. The most powerful colonial official in Western Kenya had just observed the recruitment of children as young as seven and stood silently by as they were put on trains bound for farms hundreds of miles away.

Agents of the state often actively participated in recruitment. Chiefs assisted recruiters in their search. Raphael Ndai, who grew up in North Kavirondo, recalls that chiefs would call the young to his homestead with promises of sugar and caramel. Once assembled, Raphael and his age mates were told to line up. The chief inspected them and took the tallest boys aside. During one particular recruitment drive, Raphael’s elder brother was taken away to Kisumu, where he was vaccinated, loaded onto a train, and sent to work on a sisal estate. Whether chiefs coaxing boys with candy or British officials standing by as medical officers approved boys for work, the colonial state was implicated in the very recruitment process it claimed to regulate.

The depression-era economy of the 1930s pushed employers, especially larger tea and sisal firms, to look for cheaper labor and more efficient methods of recruitment. They turned away from professional, state-regulated recruiters to privateers and their own employees who could sidestep labor agencies, camps, and inspectors. Private recruitment made finding work easier for young men. Recruiting offices began to appear in trading centers across Western Kenya. Boys from nearby villages could easily walk to these offices, present themselves to a recruiter, and then board transportation directly to tea or sisal estates. Lazaro Weke recalls meeting a private recruiter in the trading center of Awendo in South Kavirondo district. Rather than walk the hundred miles to the Kisumu labor camp, Lazaro boarded a bus with several other boys, which then travelled from town to town picking up more young people, until it finally reached Kericho. Abiathar Opudo also remembers recruiters driving from village to village, asking young
men if they wanted to make money. They began running routes through Western Kenya, paid for by employers, to transport laborers to and from the Rift Valley estates. No longer did boys and young men have to make the arduous trek by foot to major towns like Kisumu only to be stripped, prodded, and vaccinated by medical officers or turned away by district officials. The buses encouraged African employees to go home after their contracts ended and return with young kin in tow.

While private recruitment was more expensive for the estates, it enabled larger firms to address several interrelated pressures bearing down on their bottom lines. It stabilized the ebb and flow of labor. When business was good in the late 1920s, private recruiters increased the number of Africans brought to the estates. The tea estates in Kericho boasted that their private recruiting infrastructure allowed them to call up 10,000 boys and young men from South Kavirondo district alone. During the depression, when demand for labor fell, the estates could tighten the spigot on labor and return laborers home. Private recruiting also unfettered the estates from government regulation. The provincial commissioner of Nyanza freely admitted that private recruiters “scouring the Districts in search of Labour” required no permit, brought no one in for registration or medical inspection, and followed no rule of law.

While the private recruiting efforts of the late 1920s and 1930s aimed to offer young Africans a choice, it still relied on coercion and exploitation. Men recall that recruiters approached them as they tended their father’s livestock promising candy and money if they went with them. Christopher Achar, who lived near the Awendo recruiting office, remembers being told by recruiters, who were always local people, that they were going bird hunting. Boys eagerly, unwittingly boarded buses bound for Kericho only to be picking tea rather than hunting birds that very same day. However not all young men who went out to work were coerced, and for many of those who were, migrant wage labor became a profoundly important part of becoming men.

Buying Shukas, Earning an Age, Becoming Men

Boys and young men rarely chose to work on their own. In constant conversation with their age-mates, siblings, parents, recruiters, and even government officials, young men weighed decisions about the type of work they would like to do, where in the colony they would like to do it, and how much money it would take for them to leave home. And by the interwar years, migrant wage labor had piqued the interest of many more young men than it had in the past. Leaving a father’s household was not always
easy, though. It was a decision that sparked intense debates within families and between generations about respectable, appropriate ways for being young and masculine.

Thomas Tamutwa, a Kipsigis man born in 1932 just outside the massive tea estates of Kericho, desperately wanted to go to school. His father flatly refused. As Thomas’ father knew well, sons’ labors reproduced their fathers’ wealth, and eventually provided them the skills to start their own families. Many men who came of age during colonial rule described the work they did at home as children, and the work their forefathers had done in their youth, as important cultural work, a kind of education and socialization in a set of reciprocal obligations with their elders. Prior to and in the earliest years of colonial rule, nearly every community put their sons to work looking after livestock. Young sons started off with a goat, and as they proved capable, they graduated to cattle. As a new day dawned, boys woke up, threw on their goatskin blankets, and drove their father’s herds into the grazing fields. For the rest of the day, they hunted and played games with their age-mates who had also brought their fathers’ livestock to the fields. At sunset, they sorted out the herds that had mixed throughout the day and went home only to find themselves back out herding the next morning.

Thomas’ father wondered why his son did not want to enjoy the same kind of childhood work that he had done years before. He was also reluctant to allow an uninitiated son leave the homestead. Yet Thomas pressed his father and snuck away to visit his age-mates at school. When his father found out, “he would beat me at the mention of a school, asking me who I would leave the goats to, the cattle to. He would flog me whenever I mentioned school.” Eventually, Thomas’ frustrated desire to go to school and fear of his father’s violence compelled him to make a decisive move: “He beat me until I decided to run away.” “To escape the constant caning,” Thomas fled to the Kericho tea estates, which offered him refuge from his father’s obstinacy and his own failure to convince the man to send him to school.

In the end, the uninitiated son found a way to leave home and do something other than herd his father’s livestock. Thomas’ network of age-mates had already made the decision to work or attend school, with or without their parents’ consent. When I asked Thomas why he went to the tea estates rather than the classroom, Thomas said:

I went to Kericho because that is where everybody went. The whites had employment opportunities at the estates. There are my age-mates who were already there and would brag that Kericho was where the action was. My age-mates would teach me the ways of Kericho whenever they visited home.
Thomas’ decision to travel to the tea estates was deeply influenced by the recommendation or peer pressure of his age-mates. This was an outcome many colonial officials and European settlers desired: young employees going home after contracts had ended and recruiting and returning with their peers. Thomas’s decision to leave home and work for a wage was ultimately dictated by his childhood relationships, his conversations he had out on the grazing fields with his friends, who gossiped about life on the tea estates or who had experienced it firsthand.

After he completed his first contract in Kericho, Thomas went home and entered his father’s homestead wearing a shuka, a piece of red cloth commonly worn by young Maasai warriors, and carrying six shillings in savings. His parents were overjoyed. According to Thomas, the six shillings particularly impressed them. “He loved me a lot for that. Even my mother! I had my shuka on and gave them six shillings.”58 With Thomas’ savings, his father bought him a goat and sheep. Many Kipsigis and Luo men recall that their fathers bought livestock with the wages that they had saved—down payments on future bridewealth and households of their own.59 Seeing the monetary benefits of wage-earning sons, parents sometimes came round to the idea of their sons being employed far from home.60 As Thomas prepared to leave home to begin another contract in Kericho, his father took him aside and “asked me to work and not squander money, but to save and bring more.”61 Well into the early 1950s, a father’s household could remain a place for young men to invest in their wages and their futures. They saw their savings as a familial responsibility, too.

Fathers still worked for their sons, accumulating livestock and currency that could be poured into making their sons more masculine and mature through initiation ceremonies, bridewealth payments, and weddings. Sons also worked for themselves, asserting a more active role in their financial destinies. Savings could signal discipline and maturity to elders and age-mates.62 For his hard work, for returning home and investing in his family’s fortune, Thomas earned the greatest of gifts—his initiation into manhood. In 1947, at the age of fifteen, Thomas’s father arranged for him to be initiated into the Chuma age group, the last group of boys to do so. He faced the knife far earlier than many of his age-mates, and his initiation was perhaps one of the most powerful ways his father could acknowledge that his son, through wage labor, had become a man. Age-relations made room for the new possibilities of colonial rule, even if it required a little youthful rebellion to jumpstart the conversation.

Yet conflict between fathers and sons was not always the norm. Kimeli Too, born the same year as Thomas twenty miles away, but initiated a year or two later, tells a different story of how he came to leave home. Kimeli’s
decision to work was easy, one he made with a receptive father. After his initiation into the Sawe age group in 1948, Kimeli worked at Bureti Tea Estate as a farmhand, earning about six shillings a month—an average sum for a man his age in the tea industry at the time. The job made practical sense for the Too family. Not only was the estate a short distance from home, but his father worked there. Kimeli’s decision was driven in part by his father’s own choice to join the migrant labor force years before. Kimeli’s father was one of the first or second generations of Kipsigis to leave for the tea estates. Kimeli recalls that his father lived and worked on the estate for twenty-five years. “He would come home over the weekends for family visits. At times he would make impromptu visits during weekdays and then rush back the following day early in the morning.” While Kimeli does not know whether his father struggled with his grandfather over his work at Bureti Tea Estate, his father’s decision as a young man had paved the way for Kimeli to do the same years later. What had been an act of rebellion to Thomas’ resistant father was simply a natural part of Kimeli’s coming of age.

Kimeli’s decision to leave home and work for a wage also coincided with his initiation. Kimeli decided to work “because I wanted to make something of myself. Just staying idle at home when you are grown up would make you look like a fool.” His initiation made him a “grown up,” and wage labor was a way he could earn and express his newfound masculinity and maturity. Thomas had seen his migration and wage labor as the reason his father must initiate him, transitioning him from boyhood to manhood. Kimeli, however, saw his work as the natural fulfillment of the maturity he had already earned through initiation. In the Too household, migrant labor had become the norm, rather than a mark of boyish rebellion. Kimeli never needed to argue with his father over the value of earning an age in colonial industries. And his father understood that Kimeli, having been recently initiated into manhood, would possess the maturity to bring home his wages—which he routinely did.

Although born in the same year and initiated separately, Thomas and Kimeli did not stray too far beyond the acceptable behavior their elders expected of them—after all, they both returned home and invested in their fathers’ households. Not all young men came back. Many stayed away, moving from job to job out on the estates, forging new lives outside of kinship. The lure of town life often kept boys and young men from routinely returning home. As they did, young men could lose track not only of time but also a sense of where they had come from. Luo men still tell stories of boys who left their jobs on the estates and then got lost on their way back home, eaten by wild animals, or captured and assimilated by neighboring ethnic groups. Those who had travelled the farthest afield to look for work still
carry intense memories that they and their age-mates might have traveled so far that they had lost themselves and connections to kin. Parents also worried. Thomas recalls that his parents were adamant that they expected future installments of capital: “They would ask me for money, but I also felt it was my obligation to provide for them. How could I earn and visit home empty-handed? My father wouldn’t have liked it.”64 And if he squandered his wage or did not return home on time, he was beaten. Parents exerted their authority, often violently, to ensure their sons understood their importance, and the importance of their earnings, to the household.

For many of the Gikuyu, Kipsigis, and Luo men with whom I spoke, migrant labor was a thrilling way to spend their youth. Young men took on many different jobs in the colonial economy. They pruned coffee bushes in Kiambu, picked tealeaves for Brooke Bond, and swept the manufacturing floor of Ziwani Sugar. Their work was typically unskilled or something in which they were already skilled. Settlers often hired young Kipsigis or Nandi boys to herd livestock or milk diary cattle because they had already learned these skills at home. Employers also recruited the young to pick tea and pyrethrum, arguing that children’s height and “nimble fingers” made them ideal harvesters.65 Yet employers deskilled complicated production processes so younger workers could perform simpler tasks for smaller wages than adults. Uncoupling skill from labor allowed employers to reduce their production costs—just as they had done in Britain.66 The sisal industry routinely deskilled the manufacturing process of sisal fiber so they could employ young laborers. The youngest employees harvested sisal leaves and brought them into the factory. Adults ran the sisal through a de-corticator machine separating the fiber and the flesh known as tow. Young laborers then transported the fibers outside to dry or swept the machine shop floor.67

Many men also recall the monotonous grind of getting up each morning, reporting to work, breaking for lunch, heading back out again, and retiring for dinner—only to do it all over again.68 “At the beginning,” Thomas Tamutwa told me, “it was hard work, but once you were used to it, it was quite easy.”69 As their minds and bodies adapted to the rhythm of the work, they could focus on leisure and socializing. Young employees on the tea estates in Kericho spent their evenings playing games with one another or telling stories around the fire. Herdsboys stepped away from grazing cattle to high jump and wrestle.70 Migrant labor became as much a social affair as it had been back home on the grazing fields, as well as an important part in forming relationships among age mates and debating what it meant to be manly.

During World War II, high wartime demand for labor pushed companies like Kericho Tea and Brooke Bond to create new recreational facilities for
young workers. They opened schools, organized open-air cinema nights, and built football pitches. In 1943, Kericho Tea had 6,500 young men between the ages of twelve and sixteen out to work on its estates, and the association had to find ways to encourage its youngest employees to continue their contracts. Estate managers had also begun to find too many boys smoking, drinking, and using drugs, resulting in a breakdown in labor discipline.71 Football was extremely popular. Young employees formed teams on each estate and then competed with teams from nearby companies. Boys also attended rudimentary estate schools. Daniel Langat managed to work his way up to Standard III before he returned home. Classes were voluntary, though, and many young men received only rudimentary education. Kimeli Too recalls that he went on and off to school and did not learn as much as he would have had he gone to a proper school. Work and football came above arithmetic.72

Not all young men enjoyed work in the migrant labor market. The experiences of young Luos, whose villages were much farther away than Kipsigis or Gikuyu youths, differed considerably. Lazaro Weke and Christopher Achar remember their loneliness, homesickness, exhaustion, and the unceasing demands made by employers.73 For some young Luo men, they simply deserted their contracts. Their work was hard. Boys lost fingers, limbs, and lives in the grinding gears of the colonial economy. They endured unequal, exploitative labor relations. In July 1942, labor officer J.H.B. Murphy inspected a small farm in North Nyeri, consisting of twenty acres of pyrethrum, five acres of oats, and a herd of three hundred cattle. Young men made up a third of the owner’s forty-one-person workforce. When Murphy interviewed the herdsboys, they complained that their wages were too low and asked him to advocate on their behalf. By the time Murphy had left the farm, he and the boys had renegotiated their wages up to eight shillings per contract, including food rations.74 The following year, the workers at the Government Flax Mill in Uasin-Gishu district went on strike. Labor commissioner P. de V. Allen traveled out to the factory to investigate. There he discovered that nearly half the workforce was made up of Luo boys under the age of sixteen, earning seven shillings per month with food rations. To Allen’s surprise, the boys had led the strike. They informed Allen that they were being cheated out of their rations. Their contracts required they receive two pounds of mix meal rations along with salt, sugar, and meat or groundnuts. When he weighed the meal ration, Allen discovered the boys were being shortchanged three ounces. Allen informed the strikers that sadly no more rations were available, to which the boys replied that there was always plenty of food back home in the reserve and that Allen had given them no choice but to walk off the job.75
Tens of thousands of young men took these sorts of risks to earn a wage in Kenya. When asked why, the men whom I met always mentioned money. As mere boys they understood clearly that money offered them food, clothing, alcohol, and sex—commodities that they then translated into new expressions of masculinity. The young earned dramatically lower wages than adults, about half as much. In 1938, chief registrar of natives A.E.T. Imbert estimated that Africans under the age of sixteen earned about four shillings a month across the colony, including food and housing. The young could find ways to earn more. Jobs in towns offered higher wages. As early as 1919, the chief native commissioner admitted that boys could earn twice as much by finding work in Nairobi. Moreover, if a boy had a smattering of education, he could use the skills he learned in the classroom to find higher paying jobs. Abiathar Opudo, who grew up in Homa Bay in the 1930s, abandoned his schooling to look for work. His basic literacy and arithmetic skills got him work as a bookkeeper for a Lake Victoria transportation firm. At the age of twelve, he became an accountant and earned twenty cents a day. Wachira Mwaniki left his school in Kiambu in 1940, and took a job as a domestic servant for a pyrethrum farmer in Kinangop. He earned 120 shillings per month, an astronomical sum compared the wages his age mates earned picking pyrethrum blossoms just beyond the kitchen window.

Even a handful of shillings a month dramatically altered young laborers’ self-worth and their ability to project notions of manhood to each other, parents, and younger kin. When asked to name the first thing they bought for themselves with their hard earned wages, Gikuyu, Kipsigis, and Luo men with whom I spoke—in a near unanimous chorus—mentioned clothing. They abandoned their boyhood goatskin blankets and adorned themselves with new styles of clothing. During World War II, Thomas Tamutwa earned only one and half shillings a month weeding, pruning tea bushes, and mowing grass. And yet he still saved up to buy a shuka. “Being able to wear a shuka, while I had a goatskin,” Thomas recalls “is what attracted me to Kericho.” The shuka cost him one shilling, nearly an entire month’s wages. “I felt so proud,” he says. Buying and wearing a shuka marked personal milestones for many of these men. Terer arap Korir and Daniel Langet grew up in Kabianga, and after the war, they went to work at Chamji tea estate for five shillings a month. They both bought shukas for about fifty cents per piece. “I felt so proud,” Terer told me, “because it didn’t feel cold anymore.”

Clothing came to represent a young man’s growing sense of masculinity, which when displayed earned him respect back home. As young migrants returned home sporting their bright red shukas, they attracted their age-mates’ notice. Daniel Bett remembers his friends admiring and approving
of the new clothes he wore. Shukas “were the most fashionable then and people liked them a lot,” and my friends “treated me with respect and admiration. This made me feel quite great.” Boys with shukas also piqued the interest of girls. Dominic Gaga, who grew up near Kisii, spent the wages he earned picking tea in Kericho on clothes and, as he described them, shoes that made noise. After his contracts expired, he returned home, put on his clothes and shoes and strolled through the village, certain he was the object of female attention.

Wachira Mwaniki, who lived in Kiambu and Laikipia, remembers one particular shirt known as hariri (Kiswahili for silk) that caught the eyes of potential lovers. “There were some shirts in fashion which when dancing would fill with air like a balloon, and it was lovely.” Silk shirts tucked loosely, billowing in the wind, inflated the egos of young men who had the capital to wear them. Young migrants’ wages and the commodities they bought set them apart from their friends who had remained in the village or gone to school. Some, like Dominic Gaga, believed that the “boys in the villages feared them because they were independent whereas the boys on farms at home were still dependent on their parents.” Being a migrant laborer and controlling his wage granted Dominic the perception of independence. While five shillings per month picking tea or weeding coffee was not enough for a young man to go his own way without his father or family’s help, it was enough for young men to leverage their labor to make claims on new masculine norms. Wachira, who made considerably more as a domestic servant, argued that his wage meant “that I could buy nice clothes and dress just like adult youths.” Clothing made Wachira feel like an adult, but it did not necessarily make him more mature. Brightly colored shukas might have gotten these young migrants their age-mates’ admiration, but it did not pay a dowry or build a household.

Protecting the Young or the Wartime Economy?

As young men went out to work in the 1930s and 1940s, British colonial officials, especially those in the provincial administration and labor department, struggled to define the role of the state in these conversations. Beginning in the 1930s, the district and labor officials tried to intervene more frequently in the lives of young wage earners and employers. Throughout the 1930s, the Colonial Office, hectored by the League of Nations and pressured by revelations that Kenya did not meet the Empire’s international commitments, forced the colonial state to reexamine its policies toward young laborers. But the British officials never seriously questioned or prevented young men’s decisions to work. Moreover, the interwar blossoming of state labor regulations was short lived. World War II grabbed the
attention of Britain and her Empire, and colonial officials in Kenya and employers leveraged the necessities of the war effort to stifle new regulations and encourage the labor of young men at unprecedented levels.

The colonial state’s first major effort to legislate the labor of young Africans came in 1933, with the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children ordinance (EWYPCO). The ordinance put Kenya in line with conventions the International Labor Organization had passed thirteen years previously. While the ordinance had little impact on most young African laborers who worked in agriculture, it opened up, ever so slightly, two new means for the colonial state to control young laborers. It pushed the state to define who was and was not too young to work. By prohibiting the work of children under the age of twelve in industry, the British took a major step in creating an acceptable minimum age for work. The ages in the EWYPCO were not simply the application of the International Labor Organization standards but part of a broader endeavor by the colonial state to release young people around the age of twelve into the labor market.86 The EWYPCO also required industries to keep records of their young employees, a requirement they would try to extend to the entire underage labor force by the end of the 1930s. Registration became a central feature of the state’s efforts to exercise some authority over the work of young Africans.87 Forcing young men to obtain their own work passes, officials hoped they might finally find a way to control recruitment, prevent the youngest from working, and appease parents who did not approve of where their sons had gone.

As these ideas made their way through the colonial administration in Kenya, scandal consumed the Colonial Office back in London over the colony’s continued reliance on young laborers. In May 1938, Archdeacon W.E. Owen of the Church Missionary Society condemned the recent passage of the Employment of Servants ordinance in the Kenya in a column in the Manchester Guardian. Since the 1920s, Owen had been an outspoken critic of colonial labor practices, especially compulsory labor in Nyanza Province.88 The ordinance, Owen argued, was further evidence of the colonial state’s exploitation of the young. The ordinance allowed anyone ten years or older to enter into a labor contract, he wrote. Moreover, allowing the very young to work resulted in empty schools, families desperate to find missing children, and estates overrun by underage drunks and addicts. Owen appealed to Briton’s own uneasy history with child labor, writing: “[M]ust African children go through the same mills of tragic experience, as did many in England?”89

That summer, two more of Owen’s editorials appeared in the Manchester Guardian and 109 letters from angry citizens arrived by post at the
Colonial Office. On the floor of the House of Commons, secretary of state for the colonies Malcolm MacDonald faced a barrage of questions from ministers of Parliament. MacDonald promised to inquire with officials in Kenya. The Colonial Office offered only vague responses to Owen’s revelations. They worried that if they pointed out any inaccuracies in his editorials it would only lead to further scrutiny. Assistant undersecretary of state for the colonies J.J. Paskin warned that “we are not in a position to deny it without providing him with a handle for widening his agitation to cover all the colonies in which there are similar or lower minimum ages.”

The Colonial Office library had discovered that the minimum age in Kenya was actually the same as in Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and three other territories. The age was even lower in Malaysia and British Guiana. If the press were to find out, the Colonial Office’s woes would only escalate.

Back in Kenya, governor Robert Brooke-Popham hastily assembled a committee to investigate Owen’s claims. The committee consisted of four members, most of whom were retired colonial officials, and a Presbyterian missionary. Committee members fanned out across the colony to visit agricultural estates, goldfields, factories, and other businesses. At each stop, they met with government officials, settlers, and associations representing the major industries. Just as the archdeacon had feared, their final report tried to sweep the issue under the rug. In their report, the committee acknowledged that African boys were common fixtures of working life in the colony; girls were not. They described the working conditions young men endured as “almost without exception good.” They found little wrong with their work on sisal farms or cotton ginneries, though they were alarmed by a number of boys working in mines. Their only criticism came with the work of young men in towns like Nairobi, which they believed led to “consorting with undesirables” and “becoming detribalized nonentities.”

The committee reaffirmed that wage labor among young Africans was an accepted, unquestionable principle in Kenya. Without compulsory education, they argued, work had its advantages. Having defended the state’s endeavor to encourage young Africans to work, the committee tried to silence its critics with a series of amendments to the Employment of Servants ordinance. Their recommendations included raising the minimum age from ten to twelve; restricting the recruitment of young Africans to private recruiters, rather than professional agencies; and ending penal sanctions for underage workers. The committee thus managed to respond to each of Owen’s main criticisms while still maintaining the necessity, and even desirability, of allowing young men to work.
In December, Governor Brooke-Popham announced a revised ordinance that would end the professional recruitment of young people once and for all, though the private recruitment operated by employers remained unregulated. It also required all young people to obtain an underage-version of the work pass, which so many African adults despised. Employers also had to keep a register of all underage employees, and the colonial administration could cancel those contracts if it discovered inadequate working conditions. Yet the revised ordinance offered officials no guidance with how to implement these new rules, especially the issuing of work passes to tens of thousands of young employees. Before Owen could launch any further critiques, the attention of the British public, the British government, and the colonies shifted dramatically to growing tensions in Europe. All eyes lay on the movement of German troops into Eastern Europe rather than the movement of young Africans in and out of their reserves.

World War II swept colonial labor practices from the headlines. And yet throughout the war the Colonial Office continued to fret that someone might discover nothing had been done, and when the war ended, another scandal would erupt. In Kenya, labor officials spent much of the war thinking about how to issue work passes to the young, often with farcical results. In November 1939, government approved a proposal to provide every employee under the age of sixteen a nickel wristband, which would serve as his work pass. According to the registrar of natives, A.E. Imbert, a boy interested in finding work would visit the district officer, who would give him a registration certificate and a metal container to store it, free of charge. The boy would also receive a nickel wrist bracelet stamped with his registration number and the initials JUV. The district officials would fasten the bracelet to the boy’s wrist with a sheep punch. A great deal of work went into this plan to shackle Kenya’s underage workforce. Estimates had been drawn up by companies for the price of the metals and production of the boxes and the bracelets. The labor superintendent had collected 1,000 wrist measurements of Luo boys for a precise estimate of just how much metal they would need. But all this hustle and bustle came to a screeching halt in April 1940, when the Crown Council’s office informed the registrar that the Colonial Office was likely to frown on “the permanent clamping of this kind of bracelet on the wrist of an African juvenile,” not to mention that the Employment of Servants Ordinance had called for a “disk” and not a “bracelet.” Back to the drawing board officials went, trying to find a work pass that a child would not lose. In less than two years, over a thousand pounds was poured into the search for the perfect juvenile work pass. In July 1940, the chief native commissioner abruptly announced that government’s main priority was registering the young
men being conscripted into the military, not their younger kin sent by the lorry-load to pick Kericho tea. In London, the Colonial Office waited anxiously for Kenya to amend the EWYPCO and Employment of Servants ordinance. In September 1942, members of the Colonial Office discussed the reasons why nothing had been done. Some officials noted that the colony was suffering from a shortage of metal for the disks and chains to fasten them. Others argued that in Kenya there was simply not the same objection to the labor of young people as elsewhere. Their counterparts in Kenya simply lacked a sense of urgency applying the law. In the end, despite their fretfulness, the Colonial Office decided that the approaching Kenyan coffee harvest could not be disrupted and that any intervention must wait.

Back in Kenya, talk of nickel disks suspended by nickel chains from the necks of young Africans disappeared. Labor commissioner A.H. Kneller warned that registering every underage laborer would infuriate employers. Without fail, when word broke that the government would begin registering all laborers under the age of sixteen, the Kenya Tea Association vigorously voiced its irritation. In January 1943, the association met with the labor department to outright oppose registering its more than 6,500 young laborers under the age of sixteen. The labor superintendent of the association argued “with a large number of their European staff on Active Service [in the war], and with a shortage of material, [its members] are producing tea in quantities of more than 60% over normal pre-war production figures.” If the British wanted the association’s members to maintain such incredible levels of wartime production, then they would have to abandon any attempt to register their youngest employees.

Plans to register laborers under the age of sixteen died in that very meeting. “Change,” the labor superintendent argued, “is naturally, abhorrent to all of us.” Yet it would have been possible for the tea estates to provide lorries, fuel, and drivers to transport 6,500 young laborers back home. It had been done the year before, but in the opposite direction. In 1943, over 4,000 laborers, mostly under the age of sixteen, had been brought to Kericho to work. And yet any effort by the colonial state to bring the Employment of Servants ordinance into effect would “have the most shattering effects on output.” To justify their decision, to abandon any effort to register young laborers during the war, colonial officials took the Kenya Tea Association at its word: that none of its 6,500 workers were under the age of twelve and that they offered adequate provision—schools, hospitals, sport, housing, and food.

In February, when the Colonial Office prodded the colony yet again to bring itself in line with international standards, governor S.H. Moore
replied that no action would be taken. He had “received long and reasoned protest” from the Kenya Tea Association and Sotik Settler’s Association. They had expressed sympathy for the new regulations. If only, the associations argued, they lived in “normal times.” To register underage laborers in the midst of the war “would completely disorganise their labour forces and seriously jeopardize their production programme.”

Rather than wait out yet another harvest season, the governor requested they simply wait out the war. And so thousands of boys continued to pick pyrethrum blossoms, cure coffee beans, and sweep sisal fibers throughout the war, for wages that had not changed since the 1920s.

**Conclusion**

After the war, district and labor officials continued to feel pressure from superiors, and they in turn from the Colonial Office, to avoid scandal. They continued to complain of “pirate lorries” sailing the reserves, seizing young from their homes while the young parlayed with recruiters and employers to find work without the consent of their parents. And a few enthusiastic officials continued to concoct wild schemes to bring recruitment and registration under some control. Off stage, away from the theater of shackleing young laborers with sheep punches, the state worked tirelessly to preserve the flow of young labor out of the reserves. The labor department and provincial administration did inspect workplaces to pluck out boys they deemed too young to work, identify atrocious working conditions, and fine disreputable employers. Yet their main aim was to satisfy the demands of the settler economy, and they did so by encouraging boys to stake their manhood on earning a wage, by making migrant labor an acceptable way to come of age.

During the earliest years of colonial rule, many young men resisted pressures to leave home and work, but by the 1920s, a growing number were answering the call of recruiters and employers. And quickly, boys and young men realized they could leverage their wages, experiences, and access to new ideas and commodities into expressions of masculinity and maturity. Certainly, migrant labor created conflict within African households. Not all parents approved, and they made their outrage known to chiefs and district officials. But many young men and their elder kin argued productively about valuing work outside the household, about investing it back into family fortunes, and incorporating it into existing ideas and practices of growing up.
Notes


15. McKittrick, To Dwell Secure, 4.


22. TNA:PRO CO 544/1, A.C. MacDonald, Director of Agriculture, Department of Agriculture, British East Africa, Annual Report, 1907–8, 13.

23. Ibid., EAP, Annual Report, 1908–9, 620.


30. Stichter, Migrant Labor, 84–6.


32. Cooper, From Slaves to Squatters, 92–4.

33. TNA:PRO CO 544/3, EAP, Minutes of the Executive Council, 23 December 1908.

34. TNA:PRO CO 544/7, EAP, Annual Report, 1913–14, 221.

35. Stichter, Migrant Labor, 38.

36. TNA:PRO CO 544/16, CNC, Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1923.

37. KNA AG/25/80, John Ainsworth, PC Nyanza to Principal Medical Officer, 31 March 1914. For patterns in the seasonal migration of African workers, see Stichter, Migrant Labor, 84–6.

38. KNA PC/NZA/3/20/17/1, Assistant DC Central Kavirondo to DC Kavirondo, 25 March 1925; P. de V. Allen, Labor Inspector to CNC, Juvenile Labour on Plantations, 28 July 1925; DC Fort Hall to SC Nyanza, Immature Labourers, 11 August 1925; and R.A.W. Proctor, MO Fort Hall to PMO Nairobi, Toto Labour, 3 September 1925.

40. KNA PC/NZA/3/20/17/1, Labour Inspector to SC, Nyanza, 17 April 1926; Assistant DC, South Kavirondo to SC, Nyanza, 29 April 1926; F.E. Yates to SC, Nyanza; and F.R. Mackey to Senior Commissioner, Nyanza, 26 May 1926.

41. KNA PC/NZA/3/20/17/1, C.E. Campbell Clause, Manager of Thika Sisal Co. to CNC, 24 April 1925; Acting PC Nyanza to Ismaili Imamdin, 21 September 1928; and LO Kisumu to Principal Labour Inspector Nairobi, Juvenile Labour, 29 January 1930.

42. Ibid., DC S. Kavirondo to SC Nyanza, Re: Juvenile Labour, 26 August 1925.

43. KNA PC/NZA/3/20/17/1, SC Nyanza to DC South Kavirondo, 12 January 1927.

44. KNA PC/NZA/3/20/2/1, DC Kisii to SC Nyanza, 11 March 1926.


50. KNA PC/NZA/3/20/2/1, SC Nyanza to CNC, Labour Agents, 28 March 1926.


53. KNA PC/CEN/2/1/4, Kiambu LNC Meeting, 1 October 1925; and KNA PC/NZA/3/20/2/1, SC Nyanza to CNC, Labour Agents, 28 March 1926.


57. Tamutwa, interview.

58. Ibid.


60. Omwenyo, interview.

61. Tamutwa, interview.
62. Achar, interview.
64. Tamutwa, interview.
67. KNA ABK/14/142, H.A Nisbet, Acting PLO to LO, Kisumu, Juvenile Labour, 3 November 1936, and H.A Nisbet, PLO to AG, 30 November 1936.
68. Tamutwa, interview; Langat, interview; and Dominic Obondo Gaga, interview by author, Awendo, 27 March 2008.
69. Tamutwa, interview.
70. Tamutwa, interview; Langat, interview; and Gaga, interview.
71. KNA DC/KSM/1/17/27, F.D. Hislop, DC to PC Nyanza, Employment of Juveniles, 13 February 1943.
72. Gaga, interview and Achar, interview.
73. Weke, interview and Achar, interview.
75. Ibid., P. de V. Allen, LC, Labour Inspection Report No. 269/43, 12 August 1943.
76. KNA ABK/14/140, A.E.T. Imbert, Chief Registrar of Natives to PLO Nairobi, Employment and Registration of Natives, 21 July 1938; Kanogo, Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 82.
77. TNA:PRO CO 544/10, CNC, Report on Native Affairs, 1918–19, 285.
78. Opudo, interview.
79. Mwaniki, interview.
80. Achar, interview; Omwenyo, interview; Korir, interview; Bett, interview; Langat, interview; and Joseph Kibelyon Korir, interview with author, Chepilat, 8 June 2008.
81. Tamutwa, interview.
82. Korir, interview and Bett, interview.
83. Langat, interview.
84. Gaga, interview.
85. Mwaniki, interview.
86. KNA AG/12/208, The Official Gazette, Government Notice No. 89, 14 February 1933.
87. In 1937, British officials in Kenya became very animated when they read the Southern Rhodesia Native Juvenile Employment Act of 1926. The act required all
young laborers to be registered with the government and obtain parental consent before leaving home. The chief native commissioner and chief registrar of natives wanted Kenya to consider drafting similar legislation, one in which young people would have their own registration certificates. KNA ABK/14/140, G.V. Maxwell, CNC to Chief Secretary, Native Juvenile Employment, 6 June 1937, and Acting Chief Registrar of Natives to CNC, Identification of Juveniles, 19 October 1937. See also Grier, 111–160.

88. Okia, Communal Labor, 93–113.
92. TNA: PRO CO 847/12/14, J.J. Paskin to Mr. Creasy, 13 October 1938.
94. Ibid., 9.
95. KNA AG/37/130, R. Brooke-Popham, Governor, 18 July 1939.
97. TNA: PRO CO 847/12/14, R. Brooke-Popham, Governor to SSC Malcolm MacDonald, 16 December 1938.
98. KNA ABK/14/140, A.E.T. Imbert, Chief Registrar of Natives to E.C. McInnes, Labour Superintendent, 21 February 1940.
99. Ibid., Acting Crown Counsel for Attorney General to Chief Secretary, 8 March 1940; and C.M. Johnston, Chief Secretary to A.E.T. Imbert, Chief Registrar of Natives, Employment of Servants Ordinance—Identification of Juveniles, 22 April 1940.
100. Ibid., Secretariat, The Employment of Servants Ordinance and the Native Registration Ordinance—Identification of Juveniles, 17 July 1940.
101. TNA: PRO CO 533/497/3, A.J. Dawe to Henry Moore, 19 January 1942, and J.G. Hibbert to Mr. Seel. 2 December 1942.
102. Ibid., A.H. Kneller, Acting LC to Chief Secretary of the Secretariat, 8 May 1942, and P. Wyn Labour, Juveniles Registration, 21 November 1944.
103. KNA ABK/12/68, H. Borman, Secretary of the Kenya Tea Growers’ Association to LC P. de. V. Allen, 27 January 1943.
104. Ibid.
105. KNA DC/KSM/1/17/27, F.D. Hislop, District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner Nyanza, Employment of Juveniles, 13 February 1943.
106. TNA: PRO CO 533/527/20, Telegram from Sir H. Moore, Governor of Kenya to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24 February 1943.
107. KNA ABK/14/138, LC to Member for Labour, Confidential, 13 April 1949.