Recruiting Labour in the Horn of Africa for the Southern Rhodesian Market, 1899 — 1901: The Futile Exercise[1]

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Until the African risings of 1896/7, the colonist employers of Southern Rhodesia had resorted to overt physically repressive methods of African labour recruitment. In the years following the risings, ideological forms of coercing African labour were adopted though these were often coloured by nuances of repression in order to maximize the supply. [2]

On the whole, the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers greatly resented the post - 1877 mores of African labour mobilization especially as these exercises were frequently circumscribed by the strictures of the imperial watchdogs in Britain and South Africa. Perhaps another cause of this colonist resentment could have been the growing awareness of these employers of the various advantages offered by foreign African labour supply in terms of its greater vulnerability to political control as well as economic and social explotation.[3]

For a singularly unpopular and marginally profitable economic sector like the Southern Rhodesian Mining Industry which had been founded on the basis of misplaced optimism during the nineteenth century, there could be no better solution to the mineowner's problems than the resort to foreign labour supply. Thus whilst a battle was raging over the merits and drawbacks of specific caveats of the pass legislation designed to strengthen the colonist employer's political and economic domination over his African labour force by the beginning of the twentieth century, [4] there also arose another argument in favour of the importation of African labour from the Horn of Africa involving the so-called "North East Coast Natives" of Abyssinia, Somaliland and adjacent territories. [5]

KUSEL'S BACKGROUND PREPARATIONS FOR THE NORTH-EAST AFRICAN LABOUR SCHEME

The implementation of the North-East African labour scheme in 1900 had been preceded by the enlistment of its most vigorous architect, John Kusel, the previous year. In its entirety, the North-East African labour scheme demonstrated the complex character of Southern Rhodesian labour problem as well as the varied ethnic content of its potential labour recruits since the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers repeatedly but erroneously emphasized the ethnic factor as having some bearing on production trends in the territory's labour market.

John Kusel was a German subject and apparently a former resident of German East African (Tanganyika) but was by 1899 an employee of the Consolidated Goldfields of South Africa Limited, one of the giant mining combines founded by Cecil Rhodes to operate particularly on the Rand. Kusel's work as a purveyor of possible African labour supply from the Horn of Africa to the Rand, for which he had been greatly valued, had been prematurely terminated by the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899. For this reason, the Southern Rhodesian mining industry, which was bent on taking advantage of the misfortunes of the Rand mines, had, seemingly with the tacit support of Consolidated Goldfields, arbitrarily inherited both the ventures itself and its architect. But as the events were to prove, the entangled ethnic and political web in the Horn of Africa which had been chosen as a zone of labour recruitment did not help matters at all due to the manner in which it stultified the judgements of the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers with regard to the alleged merits and labour value of this class of African labour supply and also because of the complex diplomatic issues which the recruitment of such labour entailed. In the end, it was complications such as these which were to partly frustrate the successful implementation of the North-East African labour scheme.

In this connection, it is important to observe that the common practice of the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers to arbitrarily pigeonhole the various classes of African labour supply under their charge

on the basis of ethnic origin and in accordance with the whims of individual mine managers and officials was undoubtedly thwarted by the complex distribution of African national groups in the Horn of Africa which symbolizes those characteristics peculiar to the African boundary problem of the colonial area. The continual intercourse amongst the people of Abyssinia (Ethiopia), the three Somali territories namely British Somaliland at Berbera, Italian Somaliland at Mogadishu and French Somaliland (Djibouti), and the adjacent Arabian peninsula as well as the attendant exchange of cultural and religious influences between Christians and Moslems [7] made it quite difficult for Kusel and other emissaries of the Southern Rhodesian mining industry to determine what groups of people were actually suitable enough to satisfy the requirements of their patrons. In fact, the Horn of Africa represented a classical conflict between super-imposed political boundaries and natural anthropo-geographical demarcations which consequently spawned various problems by cutting peoples across cultural, linguistic and historical patterns of human settlement.[8] John Kusel and Alexander Tulloch, the emissaries of the Southern Rhodesian mining industry to the Horn of Africa did not, in accordance with their patrons' thinking, pay sufficient heed to these complex factors in their labour recruitment attempts and naturally their initial blunders were bound to foil the whole programme to import labour supply from that part of the continent to the South on a regular and permanent basis.

Kusel's appointment as an envoy for the Southern Rhodesian mining industry was obviously justified by the extensive surveys and connections he had made in 1899 in his endeavours to lay down a solid foundation for permanent labour recruitment in North-East Africa for the Southern African colonist employers. In these surveys, Kusel had been able to establish a network of agents and acquaintances ready to assist his recruiting campaign for the South and in this way, this labour connoisseur was thus able to surmount some of the political and diplomatic problems which were likely to choke his programme even at the time of its inception. These acquaintances included among them Manoli, a Greek representative of a New York firm, the Livierato Brothers, whose interests Manoli was in charge of in Harrar, then the capital of Southern Abyssinia.[9] Although

Manoli had no knowledge of the English language at all and could only read and write Greek and Arabic, Kusel had apparently chosen him for his wide experience in the region especially during this Greek agent's previous employ on the Arabian peninsula where he had been chief of the coast guards detailed to counter all forms of smuggling by Arab dhows from the Turkish-ruled territory of Yemen.

Thus because of Manoli's knowledge of the whole region between the Horn of Africa and the South-Western coast of the Arabian peninsula, Kusel had concluded that this Greek agent was a very valuable asset indeed, more so since this man had also consented to act as Kusel's labour agent at Mokka (or Mokha), a base on the Yemen coast. As part of his duties, Manoli was to recruit and forward Hamil labourers from Mokka to Assab in the Italian territory of Eritrea, one of the two ports chosen by Kusel as points of embarkation to Southern Africa. Kusel also seems to have had a very high opinion of Hamil Arabs as mine labourers, a view which his Greek agent did not share. In spite of this, Manoli however promised to raise from his Mokka base, at least a monthly average of some 300 recruits in return for a commission of 5/- per head; a charge considered sufficiently high to cover all the problems associated with the inadequate communications system between the said base and Assab. A positive sign on this score however was Manoli's promise for increased Hamil labour supply should transport facilities improve in due course. [10]

Other contacts who had volunteered their services in promoting Kusel's labour schemes from North-East Africa were not less significant. There was for instance the British consul in Harrar, John Gerolimanto, who, like Manoli, was connected with the Livierato Brothers in his private capacity. Gerolimanto's consent to act as one of Kusel's agents in the heartland of the Moslem population of Abyssinia was important not only for the paltry figure of some 2,000 Somali and Galla recruits that this official promised to raise in return for a remuneration of "41/- per head" for the recruits so delivered, but primarily for the political advantages that Kusel's labour programme derived from such co-operation. Kusel' admiration for Geralimanto's "personal energy [and] good relations with the Abyssinian government ..." [11] is another factor which must have weighed a great deal in

the efforts of this German agent to enlist the services of the British diplomat. Besides, this admiration must also be viewed in relation to his earlier pessimistic assertions on the problems raised by the restrictive policies of the Abyssinian government on labour recruitment for service in foreign countries. Whilst Kusel had at first avoided to risk breaking these restrictions in order to meet his obligations under the Southern African labour scheme,[12] he was naturally pleased to exploit the political influence of his friends in order to achieve the same objective. In fact it is quite evident that by enlisting the services of Geralimanto, Kusel expected the British official to exert the necessary political leverage on Abyssinian officials especially the governor of Harrar, Ras Makonnen, the hero of the battle of Adwa against the Italians in 1896 and a cousin and right-hand man of King Menelik as well as the father to the late Emperor Haile Sellaise.[13] The same contention should also be applied to the relationship between Geralimanto and the Abyssinian leader, Artu Mercia the governor of Dgialdessa, an administrative sub-division of Harrar. In Artu Mercia's case however, it could also be conceded that the permission to recruit labour for Southern Africa might have been precipitated by the copious supplies of cognac provided to this official by Kusel himself.[14]

Other minor leaders in the Horn of Africa also co-operated with Kusel in his labour scheme with varied degrees of success. There was for instance Sultan Lueta of whom Kusel spoke in glowing terms as being quite influential in Djibouti and "much patronized by the French government" there. This leader was apparently prepared to raise a sizeable proportion of Somali, Abyssinian and Galla labour recruits at 2 francs per head in remuneration as well as some 5/- to 6/- per head in transport expenses. In addition, Sultan Lueta undertook to forward his recruits in person to Assab for shipment to the African sub-continent. Similar offers were also made to Kusel by some chiefs residing in the neighbourhood of Assab who were prepared to procure labour recruits for Kusel from the surrounding Danakil communities. Unfortunately Kusel would not accept these offers arguing that, in spite of their superficial appearance as "well built [men] with good muscles and [an] easily contented [nature]....",[15] the physical fitness of the Danakils was dubious. These people, who were also

known as Afars, may have unwittingly fallen victims to their historically unpopular image in the eyes of outsiders who generally regarded them as "cruel and merciless", characteristics associated with their reputation for massacring expeditions and caravans in the region. [16]

Whatever criteria Kusel may have used in sorting out potential labour supplies for the colonist employers of Southern Africa and in the process building up bridges to facilitate the extraction of this labour, his approach and judgement on the matter appear to have been largely influenced by those social and psychological stereotypes which characterized general European ideological disposition towards indigenous communities during the course of black-white interaction at the end of the nineteenth century. The arbitrary manner in which positive and negative ascriptions were attributed to various non-white groups is indeed demonstrated by the way in which Kusel either summarily condemned or recommended those groups he came into contact with in the Horn of Africa. Thus whilst the Danakils could only be recruited to constitute "a small trial batch", [17] other ethnic groups in the region were treated as special priority cases and were therefore especially eligible for Kusel's labour programme. The Hamals (or Hamils), a nomadic people with their roots in Yemen but frequently plying between the Arabian peninsula and the Horn of Africa and generally regarded as the "low and principal working class" in the region were for example very favourably considered by Kusel as far as his labour recruiting plans were concerned.

Notwithstanding the opposition of the Turkish authorities in Yemen to large-scale emigration of contract labourers which Kusel was quite aware of, this envoy for Southern African mining interests was still prepared to run the risk of stationing Manoli, his Greek agent and principal functionary, at Mokka with orders to "tip" the area's governor with presents worth "£30 to £50" at a time in order to forestall any obstruction of dhows conveying Hamal recruits to Assab in Eritrea. Kusel obviously priced Hamal labour supply so much that he was even prepared to pay the necessary sacrifice in order to get it. The Abyssinians, Gallas and Somalis were ranked second best in Kusel's estimation of ethnic labour value in the Horn of Africa.

For the Gallas in particular, the high estimation that Kusel had of them was apparently influenced by the fact that they were also regarded as "the working class in Abyssinia". Accordingly, arrangements were made by Kusel with Geralimanto, Artu Mercia and Sultan Lueta which especially focussed on the recruitment of these favoured classes of recruits from either Harrar or Djibouti. [19]

The justification for the criteria applied by Kusel in his arbitrary classification of potential labour recruits from the Horn of Africa may have been simplistic and whimsical to say the least, but the whole exercise provided substance to Kusel's preparatory activities and it was on the basis of his unrealistic conclusions that he was able to assure the colonist employers of Southern Africa on the viability of his North-East African labour scheme then said to be capable of supplying about 700 recruits per month or over 7,000 labourers every year, with, of course, a possible increase in the supply once communication between the hinterland and the North-East African littoral should improve. The Southern African colonist employer's anxieties on recruiting costs were also skilfully allayed by Kusel's assurance that the cost of delivering these recruits from either Aden or Assab to Delagoa Bay in Southern Mozambique, according to arrangements already entered into with the "Konig" and the "Hertzog", the steamers of the Deutshe Ost Africa (German East Africa) Line, ranged between 80/- and 85/- per head, all expenses included. Besides, the said recruits were expected to work specifically under-ground on the mines for at least two years at a wage rate of £1 per mensem but with the prospects for wage increases "as soon as they [recruits] [were] found to be ordinary workers...". The return passage for the recruits at the end of their contracts was free as long as they constituted batches which amounted to no less than 300 labourers at a time, a stipulation included obviously for the purpose of discouraging any desertion. [20]

From all appearances, the basic features of the Kusel labour scheme were quite attractive to the colonist employers because of the manner in which the agent promised to provide labour on the basis of long-service contracts that had the guarantee to stabilize African labour supply at the mining properties whilst at the same time raising the

level of the efficiency of the African labourer force. Thus when the Southern Rhodesian mining industry took over the North-East African labour scheme from the Rand mines in October 1900, they retained its main features. Consequently the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers had also engaged the services of its German author who was to be accompanied by Alexander Tulloch, a pioneer settler in Eastern Mashonaland and a respected prospector and farmer in white colonist circles.[21] The main objective of these two envoys was to pick up the bits and pieces of the North-East African labour project from the point where Consolidated Gold Fields had left off in January 1900 when the Anglo-Boer war had compelled these Rand employers to postpone the scheme "indefinitely", but at the same time advised Kusel and his contacts "to keep in touch with the sources of [labour] supply in order that they may be in readiness".[22] Thus it could be said that the Kusel scheme and its seeming promises of abundant cheap labour resources in the Horn of Africa may have so conditioned the attitudes of the envoys and their paymasters in Southern Rhodesia that they could not even be persuaded to seriously look for alternative sources of African labour supply, en route notably in East Africa.

The Kusel/Tulloch Partnership in Operation in North-East Africa

In his report to the British South Africa Company (B.S.A.Co.) Administration in Salisbury, Tulloch, the chef-de-mission, had for example hinted on the potential for obtaining labour supply from such areas of East Africa as Northern Mozambique, particularly those parts of this Portuguese territory which bordered on German East Africa (Tanganyika) like the Nyassa province and the northern Mozambique coast. Here in a country inhabited chiefly by the Makua, Yao, Makonde and the so-called "half-caste Arabs" (Swahili) who together boasted an estimated adult male population of about 50,000 souls allegedly accustomed to work on the adjacent islands of Ibo, Querimba and others constituting the Portuguese off-shore archipelago, Tulloch was confident that, with the co-operation of the Swahili chiefs and Portuguese authorities, the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers could successfully exploit this reservoir of abundant cheap labour supply. From Tulloch's point of view, similar prospects were evident with regard to the recruitment of labour from the Buganda and Bunyoro

provinces of the Uganda Protectorate as well as from the hehe country in Tanganyika. [23]

All these prospects of cheap African labour supply from East Africa which appeared obvious and apparently advantageous to the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers were however not pursued, at least immediately. Many factors could have been responsible for this lack of interest on the part of the Southern Rhodesians. For instance there was Tulloch's own discouraging confession that the French procured their labour supplies for service in Madagascar from those areas of Mozambique that this envoy had indicated, whilst the German colonists in Tanganyika preferred to rely on imported Indian labour for railway construction purposes rather than resort to these nearby African sources. [24] In any case, the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers were too engrossed with Abyssinian, Arab and Somali labour to bother about Tulloch's proposals on alternative sources of labour supply in East Africa. Because of this pre-occupation, the Southern Rhodesian colonists were understandly averse to such types of labour as the Swahili recruits from Mombasa whom they were to reject later on as being accustomed mainly to railway rather than underground minework. [25]

On the whole, the achievements of the Kusel/Tulloch mission to the Horn of Africa between October 1900 and January 1901 were minimal in spite of the high degree of optimism shown by its sponsors, the Southern Rhodesian mining industry and the B.S.A.Co., when programme was first initiated. From the beginning, the whole scheme to recruit labour in North-East Africa for the benefit of Southern African colonist employers was somewhat shaky. As we have already observed, Kusel, the main brain behind the scheme, had indicated in his solo surveys some of the variables which were likely to affect the outcome of the programme in an adverse manner. Such factors as Kusel hinted included the diplomatic problems posed by the rival claims of different sovereign states over the control of the movement of peoples in the Horn of Africa especially so since a large proportion of the region's population was nomadic by occupation, with political allegiance which tended to fluctuate in accordance with their perennial movements. Besides, there was the complex nature of the intercourse and distribu-

tion of the various cultural, religious, political and linguistic groups in the region which was virtually a melting pot of Hamitic (Cushitic), Semitic and negroid habitation.

Although Kusel had in November 1899 assured Consolidated Gold Fields about his intention and capability to out-manoeuvre the diplomatic factor should the need arise, it would appear that during the occasion of his trip to North-Eat Africa with Tulloch, the two envoys were inexorably caught in the grip of the diplomatic vice. To make matters worse, these envoys were also plagued by the problem of transporting recruits from the hinterland to the littoral of North-East Africa whence the said recruits were to be forwarded to the port of Beira on the Mozambique coast and then by land to Southern Rhodesia. In this particular case, the transport problem was aggravated not only by reasons of the inadequacy of the infrastructure, but also by the diplomatic moves and dicta of different political authorities of the region as to where, how and when labour recruits from specified areas could move. For their part, the envoys of the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers only weakened their cause by resorting to unorthodox methods of recruiting and forwarding their cargo. Moreover, these envoys' scheme had never been strong enough to stand the test of time as it relied rather heavily on the co-operation between the local agents and top officials in the zones of operation, either out of bribery and exchange of illicit gifts or on token friendships at the expense of the labour recruits themselves. Such exclusion of major partners in the scheme by commercially interested parties was ill-advised and inexorably led to misrepresentations and gross misunderstanding which could only prove harmful to the prospects of further labour recruitment in North-East Africa. In short, it could be said that Kusel's labour empire in the Horn of Africa had been built on foundations of clay and any efforts to exploit it to its maximum potential were bound to produce very adverse repercussions.

As far as the activities of the individual envoys in the Horn of Africa were concerned, these provided little comfort with regard to the overall success of their mission. In this case, it should be noted that Tulloch's clash with diplomatic officials over his activities in British Somaliland and Djibouti and the dubious manner in which

he raised and transported his first batch of Abyssinian, Somali and related labour recruits who arrived in Southern Rhodesia in December 1900 left much to be desired. In fact, it was a clear indication of some of the weaknesses in the scheme which were bound to undermine its continuity. What is more, the Kusel/Tulloch mission could be said to have taken place at an inauspicious time. During the ten-months period between January and October 1900 for example, various changes, mostly of a political nature, had occurred especially in Abyssinia. The result was that, as Tulloch confessed, those arrangements which Kusel has made for purposes of labour recruitment the previous year were consequently shattered. At Aden, the authorities there refused to officially recognize the agents of the Southern Rhodesian mining industry and in this way frustrated their plans to use that port for shipping their recruits to Southern Africa. In the process, the two envoys were forced to face long delays which cost them dearly in missed recruiting opportunities, whilst even those recruits they had gathered gradually but steadily dissipated.

Similarly, the French colonial government in Djibouti refused to allow any form of labour recruitment and emigration to Southern Rhodesia apparently bacause it regarded such actions as a breach of French neutrality in the Anglo-Boer war. In any event, it is difficult to conceive the possibility of any permission being granted to the Southern Rhodesian envoys to recruit labour in Djibouti in 1900 taking into account that the French themselves used that territory to supplement their labour resources in Madagascar where the local Malagasy people were said to have proved rather unco-operative on the labour question. [26]

Given the fact that the Southern Rhodesian envoys had also been refused permission to recruit labour in any British possession in North-East Africa not to mention the general abhorrence of their sponsors to operate within the framework of a politically restrictive system, it is hardly surprising that these envoys ended up in a tug-of-war with diplomats. Their recruiting opportunities had become severally circumscribed. In the end, they devised peculiarly devious mechanisms whereby for instance they encouraged more active participation of local labour touts on whom they relied to carry out all the

recruiting in the restricted areas of the hinterland and thereafter forward their quarry to the coast. This system of recruiting labour by proxy had very interesting results. In fact, one such scheme involved a Galla agent named George, a former employee of the Beira-Mashonaland Railway line whose role in labour recruitment was later to raise considerable controversy. George apparently played a very prominent role in raising a fairly sizeable amount of Abyssianian, Galla and Somali recruits from Harrar in Abyssinia whence they were subsequently despatched on the 2 000 mile journey into the French territory of Djibouti where Tulloch collected them to Zeyla in British territory and then to Aden for embarkation to Southern Africa.[27]

The primary motive for adopting this enormously circuitous course was not by any means the false assertion by Tulloch himself that there were better shipping facilities in British Somaliland for forwarding recruits to Southern Africa.[28] Indeed in this respect the British consular officials vouched that Djibouti offered superior shipping facilities than either Zeyla or Berbera in British Somaliland not only in terms of accommodation for the recruits, but also with regard to the regularity of voyages between the North-East African mainland and the port of Aden.[29] Essentially what Tulloch had in mind was to frustrate the ban previously imposed on him in connection with labour recruitment in Djibouti and at Zeyla[30] and in this way create a state of affairs whereby once his labour gangs started moving from the hinterland through these territories, they would naturally gather moss like the proverbial rolling stones consequently rendering impotent those British authorities at Zeyla who would find themselves unable to prevent the enlistment of labour recruited from areas outside their sphere of influence. It was this kind of theory which proved unacceptable to Arthur Keyser, Her Majesty's Consul General in British Somaliland when he urged greater vigilance in cases like that of Tulloch.

Thus it could be asserted that Tulloch's choice of a British possession and of Zeyla in particular as the base from which to launch his labour forays into neighbouring foreign territories and the subsequent errors of omission which these escapades entailed had all been skilfully calculated and executed. The Southern Rhodesian agent appears to have consciously taken advantage of the conditions then prevailing

at Zeyla which seemed the weakest point in the whole chain of tight diplomatic and political control in North-East Africa. At Zeyla, it should be noted that this sub-station of the main British Consul in Berbera further South was under the control of an Indian consular official, Khan Sahib Aderjee Surabjee. Although Khan Surabjee had had some eighteen years' experience as the Superintendent of Her Majesty's Customs, this non-white British functionary was naturally disadvantaged in his dealings with white customers in racially stratified world. For this reason, it was easier for Tulloch to mislead Khan Surabjee with cheap assurances that he intended to proceed to Aden via Berbera since the latter thought the Southern Rhodesian envoy ".... appeared to be an European of position".[31] Such implicit confidence in the veracity of a visiting white official was in this case enhanced by the fact that the Zeyla post was manned exclusively by non-white officials, mostly Sudanese, for whom the visit of an European such as Tulloch and his recruits was treated with more than average "interest and curiosity" and also aroused "considerable comment".[32] An additional advantage to Tulloch is the fact that once he had left Zeyla with his labour recruits for Aden, a locality well removed and quite independent of all forms of control by the authorities of the British Somaliland Protectorate, he could be contacted only with difficulty.

The slow and inadequate telegraphic and postal communications system between the North-East African mainland and the Arabian peninsula certainly safeguarded the Southern Rhodesian envoy against any move to either retrieve the recruits or impede his journey to the South.

From the preceeding evidence, it is apprarent that the diplomatic factor seems to have been one of the strongest obstacles which threatened to seriously interfere with Tulloch's bizarre labour recruiting activities in the Horn of Africa. For their part, the British officials in North-East Africa openly conceded that, in addition to the main charge against Tulloch that he had left a British port with emigrants for whom authority to do so had not been granted, there were graver political issues raised by the Southern Rhodesian envoy's unorthodox activities. In this respect, it was pointed out that most governments in the Horn of Africa were opposed to any form of labour emigration involving their peoples. As far as the Abyssinians who

formed the major proportion of Tulloch's batch of recruits were concerned, it was understood that Ras Makonnen, the governor of Harrar, was "averse to the subjects of King Menelik leaving [the country] in any numbers". In any case, it was felt that the proper procedure for enlisting Abyssinian labour for a British colony like Southern Rhodesia should have been through Colonel Harrington, the British representative in Addis Ababa, especially as mine labour was involved which required the official approval of both King Menelik and Ras Makonnen and their endorsal of the terms of service and related agreements. Under the circumstances, British officials in North-East Africa reacted critically to Tulloch's activities not only because of the "great excitement" which this agent's lack of savoir faire had occasioned in Djibouti, but also because in Addis Ababa it was reported that :

> ... persons inimical to Great Britain took immediate advantage to caution the Abyssinian King against allowing his subjects to be recruited for the Transvaal War. [33]

On the more direct local political level, British officials in North-East Africa would not accept Tulloch's declarations of innocence and assertions that most of his recruits were not British subjects and were therefore no concern of British officials. Apparently Tulloch and his sponsors were ignorant of the local conventions amongst North-East African governments regarding the forms of political control applicable to their nomadic subjects. This state of affairs was best explained by Keyser, the British political and diplomatic supremo at Berbera, when he stated that:

> As is well known the Somalis are a nomadic race and it is difficult even for officials on the coast, to be always certain under which Government individual sub-tribes may dwell, since their stopping place will vary according to the rainfall season of the year.
>
> Whenever they may be they are naturally subject to the laws of the locality whether Abyssinian, French or British ..... [34]

In the final analysis, Tulloch's labour recruiting escapades in North-East Africa seriously displeased both the Colonial and Foreign Offices in London who took the opportunity to warn the B.S.A.Co. Board in the British capital that its Administration in Southern Rhodesia ran the risk of losing the confidence of the British government in further foreign labour schemes should they resort to the kind of clandestine methods adopted by Tulloch to promote the cause of the Southern Rhodesian mining industry. [35]

Tulloch's tussle with the diplomats was however only one feature in a series of factors which ultimately undermined the success of the North-East African labour scheme. Another seemingly mundane but very serious feature of this external labour scheme was the lack of communication between the recruits and the labour agents and consequently between these foreign labourers and their colonist employers in Southern Rhodesia. The commercial dimension of foreign labour recruitment very often created a situation whereby some measure of rapprochement emerged between the labour agents and officials in the source areas which unfortunately did not embrace the recruits themselves who were treated primarily as a marketable commodity to whom it was not necessary to adequately explain even the conditions of service under which these foreign labourers were destined to work. Besides, given the avowed objectives of the Southern Rhodesian mining industry by the beginning of the twentieth century to achieve profit accumulation through such imperatives as maximisation of output and ultraminisation of labour costs especially by instituting a system of ultra-exploitation of the African labour force, [36] it would have been surprising if a more liberal approach to foreign labour recruitment could have been adopted. As far as the Tulloch/Kusel mission to the Horn of Africa was concerned, this was not the case.

Kusel, the expert in the North-East African labour scheme who had been appointed by the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers mainly because of his long years of experience "... as a Labour Agent in Somaliland, Djibouti, and adjecent parts of Arabia and the [African] mainland...," [37] certainly manifested some of the characteristics of the unscrupulous commercially motivated private labour agents of the

early colonial period in Africa before semi-official labour recruiting organizationas became fashionable. Of special importance on this score were Kusel's faulty judgements and lack of sensitivity to the peculiar whims and idiosyncrasies as well as general suitability of particular recruits for minework. It was because of these shortcomings that the British Consul General at Berbera expressed misgiving over the recruitment of Somalis by the Southern Rhodesian envoys when he stated that :

> The Somalis, a pastoral people, are absolutely unfitted for work in the mines. Should they appear to go willingly for that purpose it can only be because such conditions of labour are altogether beyond their knowledge and experience, and in such case it would be necessary for the officers of the Government to whom they look for assistance and advice to explain to them the work for which they are engaged.... Had Mr Tulloch gone to Berbera [where] the terms of their contract would have been explained to the recruits.... it is doubtful if any of the Somalis would have consented to leave even had they been permitted to do so. [38]

Perhaps what may have been true for the Somali labour recruits could have been applicable with equal force to the rest of their compatriots who comprised the foreign labour consignment despatched by Kusel and Tulloch to Southern Rhodesia. The case of the Gallas with whom the Somali are said to have a very close historical relationship,[39] is quite pertinent on this matter.

It is evidently against this background that the "revolt" of the Abyssinian, Somali and Arab labour recruits at Beira in January 1901 must be viewed. The incident had significant implications for the North-East African recruits as they woke up to realities of the situation in which they had involved themselves. It was essentially a classical case of the tragic consequences of misrepresentation by labour agents whose profit motives seriously obscured their vision and by the same token marred any further prospects of labour supply from North-East Africa. The Beira "revolt" clearly demonstrates some

of the unpleasant aspects of foreign labour recruitment by private agents who showed no scruples in their dealings with what they considered "... ignorant and gullible natives, and ... inexperienced employers...." and generally took labour recruiting as "... a profitable alternative to big-game shooting or prospecting, [and were] lavish in [their] promises to employers as well as natives; so long as [they] secured a substantial first payment on account for expenses..."[40] The result of shady proceedings of the kind indicated above is that it left both the recruits and the colonist employers disillusioned and discontented.

The Beira "Revolt" and its Aftermath

As far as the Beira "revolt" was concerned, it is evident that the North-East African labour recruits did not take too lightly the descriptions on labour conditions in Southern Rhodesia as given to them by the sailors and other passengers aboard the German steamship "Hertzog" contracted to deliver them at Beira. These descriptions obviously did not tally with the promises made by Tulloch and Kusel to the North-East African recruits before they left their homes, more so as these labour agents had deliberately evaded the normal channels which governed such emigration. Moreover, there was no independent arbiter to verify and guarantee the implementation of the promises in question. With the onset of the "revolt", even outsiders became aware of the whole crux of the matter.

For this reason, Ralph Belcher, the British Consul at Beira, informed Sir Marshall Clarke, the Resident Commissioner in Salisbury that the main problem was that the North-East African recruits had been told aboard the "Hertzog" that :

> "they were to be taken in chains to work underground in the mines, and that they had been sold as slaves for their lifetime". [41]

Such language and imagery to recruits from a region which had served for many generations as the epicentre of the Arab slave trade evidently had special implications among them. In addition, the

assertions that these recruits "would be badly paid"[42] and that in volunteering to come down to Southern Rhodesia "... they were going to certain death by working in the mines",[43] also greatly strengthened the feeling amonst the North-East Africans that they had been badly done-by especially as they had already had the misfortune of travelling as deck passengers from Aden to Beira under conditions described by the Rev. Shearly Cripps as "drippy and wretched...." [44]

The consequences of the Beira "revolt" were inevitably disastrous in terms of their physical and political costs, not to mention the frustrated economic objectives for which the scheme had been originally designed. The physical costs were apparent in the carnage and naked victimization of the "rebel" recruits which the incident entailed. Of course, most officials involved in he North-East African labour scheme shared the view of the British Consul at Beira that the treatment of subject races in composite colonial societies demanded a firm hand at all times and therefore praised the Portuguese colonial police for having performed their dury "with adorable pluck" against recruits who had "... given a lot of trouble and ... naturally annoyed" the authorities.[45] But less hardline observers who also witnessed the Beira incident held different views altogether.

Rev. Cripps who was then paying his first visit to Africa and was also a passenger on the "Hertzog" en route to join the Anglican Mission in Southern Rhodesia was for example one observer who differed with hardline colonial officials. In his much more sympathetic description of the Beira "revolt", Rev. Cripps stated that :

> The Roman [Catholic] Father [his travelling companion] who saw it told me it was a horrible scene. The Portuguese [officials] rushed these people [the North-East African recruits] with drawn swords and tried to bundle them into a barge.[46]

Consequent to the tough reaction of the Portuguese authorities at Beira, two North-East African recruits were killed; ten were "severely" wounded and thirty sustained minor injuries. Of the several recruits who had jumped into the ship's lighter, eight were later picked up,

but the rest were swept away by the current. As a further punitive measure, about thirty-three of these recruits were arrested and gaoled as ring-leaders and only fifty five out of the original batch of 136 recruits aboard the "Hertzog" remained on board the ship before they were taken over by the Southern Rhodesian authorities. [47]

The reaction of the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers and the general white public to the Beira incident was characterized by bitter and scathing attacks against what these Southern Rhodesians regarded as rank insurbordination on the part of labour recruits whose introduction into the country had been prompted in the first place by the search for docile labour. Thus the Southern Rhodesian colonists accused the North-East African labour recruits involved in the Beira affair of being

> ... about the most useless things on the face of the earth, and [likely to] die like rotten sheep in [Southern] Rhodesia. [48]

The bitter reaction of the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers naturally reflected their frustration and disillusionment with labour material they had been waiting for with a marked degree of optimism. Higher placed officials were however quite embarrassed by the Beira affair and the political repercussions it was bound to spawn. As far as Sir Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner for South Africa was concerned, the Beira incident seriously discredited Southern Rhodesia as a credible labour market and also manifested the weaknesses of the administrative mechanisms which controlled the said labour market. What Milner particularly deplored was the choice of labour agents in the North-East African labour scheme which he denounced as smacking of the "unsuitable men and methods" that characterized Southern Rhodesia's troubled history and which also endangered all further prospects of labour supply from North-East Africa. [49] Milner's conclusions on the Beira incident were to be considerably vindicated by the intransigence of the Aden authorities over the question of further co-operation with southern Rhodesian labour agents. [50]

More fundamental than mere political criticism and platitudes was the manner in which the Beira incident pre-determined the modicum of interaction between these foreign labourers and their colonist employers in Southern Rhodesia. Their reception and subsequent treatment at the various centres of employment in Southern Rhodesia were to shape and indeed provide a distinctive character to the reactions of the North-East African labourers. The sense of utter disillusionment and resentment amongst these labourers over what they viewed as deliberate trickery and deception employed to bring them down from the Horn of Africa naturally sharpened their appetite to resist any moves to worsen their lot. But these labourers' endeavour to challenge the essence of the territory's cheap African labour policies could only excite bitter accusations and other forms of verbalized hostility from the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers.

A very clear indication of the general aftermath of the Beira affair and the overt hostility it elicited from the Southern Rhodesian colonist circles is the allocation of some 176 North-East African recruits to the Surprise mine in the Selukwe district in early 1901 on condition that "a sufficient body of police" be stationed at the mining property "to maintain law and order".[51] Besides, it is quite easy to detect the nervousness of the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers and administrative officials once it was reported that some of the North-East African recruits who had been distributed to the Beatrice mine in the Marandellas district were "dissatisfied" by the inadequate accommodation facilities and the poor feeding conditions on the property. With the Beira "revolt" obviously at the back of his mind, the Resident Commissioner sternly cautioned both the Southern Rhodesian Administration and the mining industry in March, 1901 to improve the conditions under which these North-East African labourers worked by especially ensuring regular payment, fair treatment and due attention to their ailments.[52] The failure of the Resident Commissioner to persuade the mining industry to effect these token reforms in the labour market was demonstrated a month later when the same labourers marched from Marandellas to Salisbury whereupon

> ... they assumed a threatening attitude and after the police had been called in, the labourers in question ... were lodged in the gaol compound for the night.[53]

The recurrent expressions of resistance on the part of the North-East African labourers strongly reinforced the opposition within the Southern Rhodesian colonist community to import further labour supply from the Horn of Africa. This anti-Abyssinian labour lobby based its agitation on the grounds that Kusel and Tulloch had recruited their labour from the "slums" of Aden,[54] whence, according to Milner who was also against the North-East African labour scheme, these envoys were alleged to have "... literally collected the scum of unsuitable men without any discrimination".[55]

The movement against further labour supply from the Horn of Africa also benefited a great deal from some of the unfavourable reports which were pouring in from the various employment centres in Southern Rhodesia where this type of labour was engaged. At the Surprise mine, which was one of the most unpopular mining properties in the Gwelo/Selukwe region, the management adopted the eclectic attitude which was then characteristic to the territory's mining industry and consequently bifurcated the North-East African labour force into national categories. Thus whilst the Surprise mine management was to some extent satisfied with Abyssinian labourers at the property, they were, on the other hand, ostensibly disenchanted by the Somali ones. For that reason, Edward Dicey stated that:

> ... the Somalis are unfitted for either surface or underground work. They have absolutely no energy, and little or no idea of how to exert their strength which at best is very poor, and very few wish to work underground, even with the prospect of receiving a higher wage. They apparently do not value money and are perfectly satisfied as long as they have sufficient to eat.[56]

Although Dicey's assertions on Somali labourers where basically an attempt to discredit a foreign labour force that had refused to conform with pre-conceived colonist notions of "docile labour" which was expected to accept exploitation without any question whatsoever, these assertions however found support in most colonist quarters where it was agreed, as F.G. Elliott the Inspector of Compounds for the Gwelo/Selukwe division indicated, that the North-East African labourers were "a failure" and "practically useless".[57]

Perhaps another way of demonstrating the extent of the increasingly negative disposition of the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers towards North-East African labourers is to look at the specific conditions under which they worked. In fact, it has been powerfully argued that the marginally profitable mining industry of Southern Rhodesia could only survive by the beginning of the twentieth century because of the strategies which it employed. Such strategies involved considerably depressed African labourers' wages and reduced costs on indirect expenditure on the mining properties on items that were generally associated with the process of African labour reproduction such as food, accommodation, hospitals and many others which adversely affected the working conditions of the African labour force.[58] In their bearing, these adverse working conditions plagued the grossly maligned local African labourers more drastically than they did some foreign African workers, hence the former's resort to desertion as a mechanism for resistance.[59] As the hostility of the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers persisted, the North-East African labourers were compelled to share the lot of their local counterparts and the low wages which these foreign labourers were paid at the local centres of employment clearly demonstrate this point. At the Surprise Mine for example, the monthly rates of 20/- for surface labourers; 25/- for underground work and 30/- for boss boys rendered the North-East Africans some of the most lowly paid workers in the mining industry at the beginning of the 1901 especially if their rates are compared with the 60/- monthly wage paid to the all-time popular Shangaan labourers from Portuguese East Africa engaged on the same property.[60]

The frustration of the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers towards the North-East African labourers was also intensified by the threatening increase on indirect expenditure involving the welfare of these foreign recruits. On this score it should be noted that the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers strongly resented the relatively expensive food items which the North-East Africans required in their fare. For instance, in spite of Kusel's earlier assurances that these labourers would be contented with "ordinary native food" normally issued to most African labourers at the cost of "7½d per diem" per person, the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers were obviously disgusted by the refusal of the North-East Africans, especially Somalis, to touch any "nyauti"

and millet meal rations in preference to only rice or rice mixed with ghee for their food which consequently led to a rise in the estimated expenditure on this item to about "11½d per diem".[61] Besides, the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers also disliked the prospect of increased expenditure on medical facilities on their mining properties in order to cope with the requirements of these foreign labourers from areas within the tropical latitudes of Africa whose capability to withstand the Southern Rhodesian winter had not yet been tested. The fact that a large proportion of the North-East Africans (40 out of 156 by April 1901) had already gone down with dysentry, malaria fever and colds on their arrival at the Surprise Mine,[62] was indeed a discouraging factor as far as cost minimisation was concerned.

But it was not only the mineowners and managers who were dissatisfied by the labourers from the Horn of Africa. Other colonist employers who had received this class of labour were equally disillusioned particularly by what they viewed as the lack of discipline amongst their new charges. Of course, accusations against these labourers over their alleged lack of discipline were apparently a backdrop of the Beira affair which had inexorably aroused feelings of bitterness and resentment within the white settler society of Southern Rhodesia. It was this kind of feelings which influenced B.A. Coope, the Inspector of Roads to report to the Southern Rhodesia Labour Board that :

> ... they (the North-East African labourers) do not perform as much as a local native. They are extremely lacking in discipline and have little or no respect for the white gangers. They are lazy and unreliable and appear to have been drawn from a bad class of people and are mostly loafers who are unaccustomed to honest work....[63]

From all appearances, it would be logical to assume that the Beira incident; the refusal of the North-East African labourers to submit to chattel labour conditions and the relatively special food which these labourers required altogether defied the cheap and docile labour policies of the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers. In the process, the anti-Abyssinian labour sentiment was greatly strengthened and

the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers were supported in their opposition to North-East African labour by highly placed imperial officials as well. One such official who voiced his opposition to the scheme was Lord Cromer, the British Administrator and Diplomat in Egypt, who based his opposition not only on the dubious value of Abyssinian labour, but also on the grounds of the restrictive conditions which had been imposed by the reluctant Abyssinian monarch, King Menelik, on the recruitment, repatriation and protection of Abyssinian subjects.[64] It was this kind of prejudice against North-East Africans which put an end to further Southern Rhodesian labour schemes and forays into the Horn of Africa. Thus when late offers were made in November 1901 by the Abyssinian Exploration Company Ltd., a private firm operating in the region, to supply Southern Rhodesia with some "2 000 - very good underground labourers for a term of three years...",[65] the offer was not accepted in spite of the recommendation of the B.S.A.Co. Board in London that the chance was "too good to be lost".[66] North-East African labour no longer excited the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers and their supports who began to look to alternative external sources of labour supply.

In conclusion, it is argued in this work that in their desperation to procure cheap and unfree labour in order to offset high labour and production costs and thus enable their marginally profitable mining industry to survive, the Southern Rhodesian colonist employers resorted to the Horn of Africa for this kind of labour supply. But the methods which were employed to raise this labour and the resistance of these labourers themselves to submit to the regimen of ultra-exploitation which characterized the Southern Rhodesian mining industry by the beginning of the twentieth century considerably frustrated the continuity and general viability of the North-East African labour scheme. In the end the scheme proved futile and was therefore terminated in favour of other alternatives.

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