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BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY  
OF ZAMBIA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF  
ARTS IN HISTORY.

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CHIWOMBA TEMBO MTENGA M'KUNGA

1992



This dissertation of CHIWOMBA TEMBO MTENTA M'KUNGA is approved as fulfilling part of the requirements for the Award of the Master of Arts Degree in History at the University of Zambia.

DECLARATION

SIGNATURE OF EXAMINERS

DATE

I, CHIWOMBA TEMBO MTENTA M'KUNGA

hereby, declare that this dissertation is original and has not been previously submitted for any degree at this or any other University.

245507

Signed:.....*Mkunga*.....

Date:.....13/01/92.....

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SIGNATURE OF EXAMINERS

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## DEDICATION

To My mother, Bwanga.

my father Chiwombakumania Dikhi Muzungu.

my aunt, Munyonkelo.

my uncle, Mtenta.

my sister Ba Mary.

and

To all students of University of Zambia, past and present.

## ABSTRACT

In Chipata, Asians have been engaged in trading since colonial times. Trading has been their principal occupation even though agriculture is the predominant economic activity in the area.

This study examines the evolution of the Asian trading class in Chipata between 1900 and 1964. It provides a historical explanation of why Asians came to occupy a predominant position in the retail and wholesale trade of Chipata during the colonial period. It also examines the role played by Asians in the politics of decolonisation and assesses the impact of the Asian trading class in the area.

F. A. Samboya of Kapulanga Boys Secondary School.

Theoretically, this study examines the complex interplay between the factors of race and class in a colonial context. It demonstrates that in a racially stratified society racism influences the class struggle because the substructure and the superstructure determine and influence each other, that is, they are fused and mutually reinforcing.

I am grateful to Mrs. Nilda Banda for writing the first draft and Mr. Ross Mwenze for successfully putting this work on computer at the last minute when others had already failed. I must also register my gratitude to Mr. J. Chikuni, Mathematics Department and

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I record my appreciation for the considerable help I have received from my friend, Geoffrey Simwanza. In particular he accommodated me in Lusaka and also in Chipata where I undertook my field research. His family accorded me the hospitality which eased up my research burdens.

I am deeply indebted for deep insights into this study to Professor Kaniki, Dr. Chipungu, Dr. Nyeko and Dr. Zilombo of History Department, UNZA, as well as Mr. F.M. Songiso of Kabulonga Boys Secondary School.

I would like to thank Ismail Suleiman, Chairman of the Chipata Muslim Association, for making it possible for me to have access to Asian oral sources.

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I am grateful to Mrs. Hilda Banda for typing the first draft and Ms. Rose Mweendo for successfully putting this work on computer at the last minute when others had dismally failed. I must also register my gratitude to Mr. J. Chikunji, Mathematics Department and

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. DC - District Commissioner
2. DO - District Officer
3. PC - Provincial Commissioner
4. Legco- Legislative Council
5. APC - African Provincial Council
6. BSAC - British South Africa Company
7. ALC - African Lakes Company Ltd.

## A NOTE ON CURRENCY

I have used the British Imperial Pound, Shillings and Pence for the currency as shown in the colonial records because throughout the colonial period Zambia was using the Imperial British Pound. In 1968 Zambia changed to the present Kwacha and Ngwee currency.

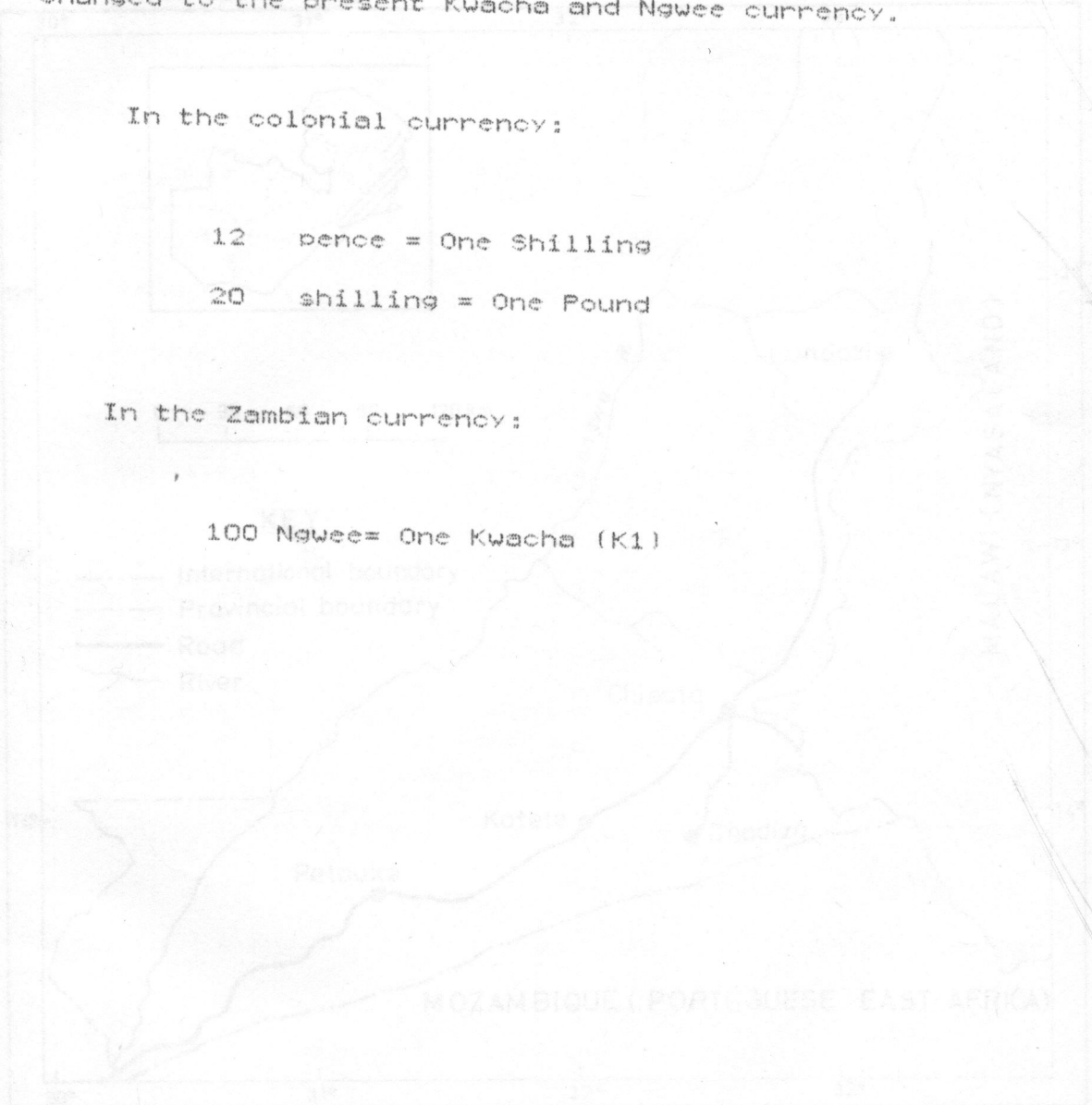
In the colonial currency:

12 pence = One Shilling

20 shilling = One Pound

In the Zambian currency:

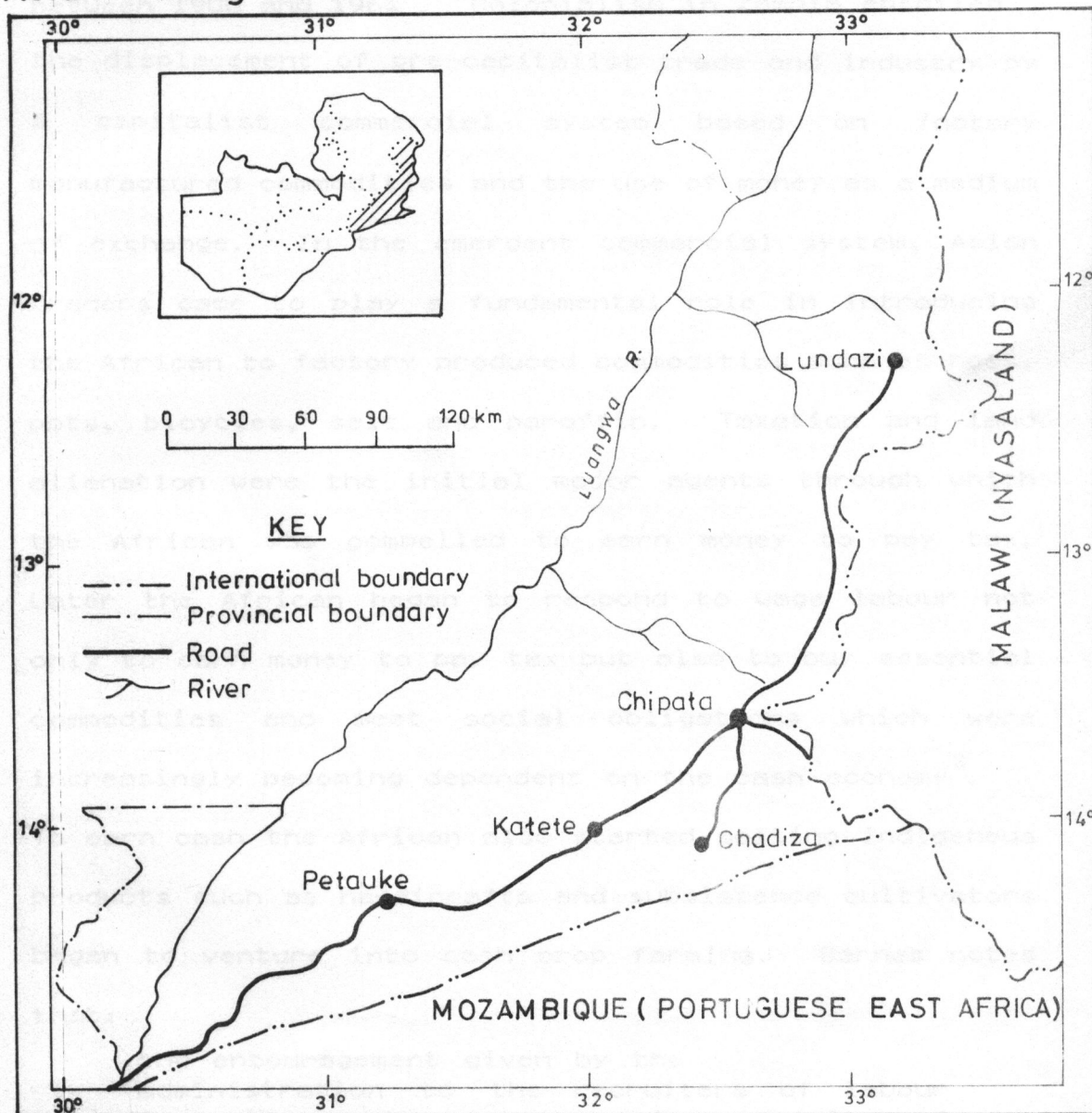
100 Ngwee = One Kwacha (K1)



Source : National Archives of Zambia



# Asian Trading Towns in Eastern Province of Zambia



Source : National Archives of Zambia

## INTRODUCTION

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims at investigating the development of the Asian trading class in Chipata District, Zambia, between 1900 and 1964<sup>1</sup>. Colonialism in Zambia entailed the displacement of pre-capitalist trade and industry by a capitalist commercial system based on factory manufactured commodities and the use of money as a medium of exchange. In the emergent commercial system, Asian traders came to play a fundamental role in introducing the African to factory produced commodities such as hoes, pots, bicycles, salt and paraffin. Taxation and land alienation were the initial major agents through which the African was compelled to earn money to pay tax. Later the African began to respond to wage labour not only to earn money to pay tax but also to buy essential commodities and meet social obligations which were increasingly becoming dependent on the cash economy<sup>2</sup>. To earn cash the African also started selling indigenous products such as handicrafts and subsistence cultivators began to venture into cash crop farming. Barnes notes that:

the encouragement given by the administration to the recruiters of labour from the south and economic necessity of earning money to pay tax, together with such subsidiary measures as the prohibition of native smelting, and pressure on men to clothe themselves in imported clothing, ensured that the old order changed beyond the mere loss of sovereignty<sup>3</sup>.

Consequently, the capitalist commercial system gave rise to a class of traders who set up stores to cater for the African as well as the settler. Traders began to provide retail services in line with new forms of consumption which the Africans were speedily adopting.

The African Lakes Company, well known as Mandala in Chipata was the pioneer trading concern in the District as it established a store there around 1900<sup>4</sup>. Other trading firms as well as sole traders followed suit. By 1904 Asian traders also began to establish trading outlets in the district catering primarily for Africans<sup>5</sup>. Asian business gradually developed and it achieved a position of predominance in African trade by 1935<sup>6</sup>. This predominance remains in spite of Zambia's economic reforms<sup>7</sup>. Therefore this study aims at investigating why Asians managed to predominate in African trade during the colonial period. It makes a contribution to the studies of minorities in particular and business history in general in the historiography of Zambia.

There is a paucity of literature about Asians in Zambia's historiography even though reference to Asians exists in geographical, political and historical studies on Zambia<sup>8</sup>. West and East Africa have a comparatively richer historiography on immigrants from the continent of Asia. These are written from either the liberal or the marxist theoretical perspectives. The liberal

perspective is represented by studies such as Twaddle's Expulsion of a Minority: Essays on Ugandan Asians, Ghai's Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa, Grewal's Indians in Tanganyika, Merani and Van der Laan's: 'The Indian Traders in Sierra Leone' and Mangat's A History of Asians in East Africa. The Marxist perspective is represented by Mamdani's Politics and Class Formation in Uganda, Atieno-Odhiambo's 'The Political Economy of the Asian Problem in Kenya, 1898-1938', Kambwegyere's 'The Asian Question in Uganda, 1894-1972' and Kaniki's 'The Psychology of Early Lebanese Immigrants in West Africa' and 'Attitudes and Reactions Towards the Lebanese in Sierra Leone during the Colonial Period'<sup>9</sup>.

Gann's The Birth of a Plural Society and A Short History of Northern Rhodesia examined the genesis of Asian business in Zambia<sup>10</sup>. In the latter study he traced the development of Asian business in Zambia<sup>11</sup> and in the former study he demonstrated that the settlement of Asian traders in Chipata occurred at the behest of the BSAC Administration<sup>12</sup>. The methodological limitation in both studies lies in the fact that Gann did not employ data from the insiders themselves to counter-balance his archival sources. The Dotsons went further than Gann by examining Asian capital formation in their sociological study, The Indian Minority of Zambia, Rhodesia and Malawi<sup>13</sup>. They also examined Asian politics during Federation. They made a methodological contribution by employing data from insiders obtained from oral



testimonies. permanent to go to 'carry on their trade and

business in security'.<sup>13</sup> he further argued that Asian

under Kapferer's Strategy and Transition in an African

Town and Turner's 'A Social Economic History of Kabwe,

1902-1966' gave some deep insight into the complex

interplay between production relations and racial

relations within the colonial context in Kabwe<sup>14</sup>.

Kapferer examined the nature of conflict between African

employees and Asian employers within a factory

environment and Turner demonstrated why Europeans opposed

settlement of Asians as well as how racial stratification

evolved in Kabwe. Justice against the Asian by Africans is

represented in Zulu's pamphleteer articles entitled 'Who

Ours Kay's A Social Geography of Zambia<sup>15</sup> examined

racial segregation in land use in Zambia and demonstrated

that spatial segregation coincided with racial

stratification as regards land use. Phiri's 'Parameters

of Social Stratification in Chipata, Zambia,'<sup>16</sup>

investigated why racial stratification in Chipata has

survived in independent Zambia. He argued that Asian

business is one of the major constraints to the growth of

African traders in the District<sup>17</sup>. The Dotsons' study, The

Indian Minority, Frankenburg criticized the liberal

Non-academic literature such as Wood's Northern

Rhodesia: The Human Background and Keith's The Fading

Colour Bar discussed the socio-economic position as well

as politics of Asians in Northern Rhodesia<sup>18</sup>. Wood

argued that the Lusaka Asian community supported the

colonial government so as to 'carry on their trade and business in security'<sup>19</sup>. He further argued that Asian traders contributed to the economic growth of Northern Rhodesia because they were reinvesting their wealth instead of exporting it to India<sup>20</sup>. To the contrary, Keith argued that Asians do not contribute towards 'the cultural and economic progress of their adopted countries'<sup>21</sup>. She also argued that Asians were used as scapegoats in times of economic and political crisis by both Europeans and Africans<sup>22</sup>.

Racial prejudice against the Asian by Africans is represented in Zulu's pamphleteer articles entitled 'Who Owns the Shop Next Door?'<sup>23</sup> Zulu alleged that Asian business plays an inherently exploitative role in Zambia<sup>24</sup>. Thus far the literature review demonstrates that there is a gap in the historiography since no detailed study exists on Asians in Zambia.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is not a marxist study on Asians in Zambia's historiography. In his review of the Dotsons' study, The Indian Minority, Frankenburg criticised the liberal perspective. He argued that the racial factor is epiphenomenal since the Asian question purely hinges on class struggle<sup>25</sup>. Thus he put forward a simple economic determinist perspective. Mamdani adopted a similar approach in his study on Uganda. He observed that 'to

understand history we need to look at human beings not as racial beings but as productive beings who find themselves in a particular environment.'<sup>26</sup> Even though this perspective succeeds in pin pointing the economic position of Asian minorities, it proves a handicap in investigating the complex interplay between class struggle and the racial factor because it disregards the role of race as an economic factor in the colonial environment. Mittelman and Marwah observed that:

Many societies contain racial-ethnic class divisions. The relationship of the former and the latter is complex and variegated. At times racial and ethnic distinctions are existentially and analytically separable from class differences. In other cases, racial, ethnic and class differences are parallel, and still in other instances, racial or ethnic and class differences are fused and reinforcing.<sup>27</sup>

Extensive debate has emerged on the relationship between production relations and the racial factor. Davenport provides a summary of this debate as it relates to apartheid South Africa<sup>28</sup>. On one hand the liberal historiography holds that racism is purely the cause of racial economic inequalities in South Africa. On the other hand marxists hold that it is purely economic interests that cause racism. According to the marxists, race is essentially an epiphenomenal factor in economic relations.

There also exists an eclectic approach which recognises the complex interlinkage between race and under changing conditions of capital accumulation.<sup>29</sup>

class in colonial societies. Representative of this approach is Fanon who observed that:

When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the factor of belonging to a given species [race]. In the colonies the economic substructure is also the superstructure. The cause is the consequence: you are rich because you are white; you are white because you are rich. This is why the marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every<sup>29</sup> time we have to deal with the colonial problem.

Similarly Grove observed that the Marxian analysis which subordinates ethnicity and race to class has proved a handicap in the study of racial and ethnic struggles especially when 'national liberation movements in colonial societies have stressed the ethnic and racial ties and have called the class factor epiphenomenal ...'<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Grove has demonstrated that race and class are inextricably interlinked in plural societies<sup>31</sup>. Makambe's study, 'The Asian Labour Solution in Zimbabwe, 1898-1904,' demonstrated that racism was used as a means of institutionalising economic inequalities in a colonial political economy<sup>32</sup>. Turner's study also demonstrated that race assumed an economic dimension in regard to racial stratification in Kabwe<sup>33</sup>.

Writing on South Africa Wolpe rejected the fundamentalist marxist approach which attempts to impose 'a uniform, unchanging, law-like stamp on all history' in favour of one 'flexible enough to analyse class struggle under changing conditions of capital accumulation'<sup>34</sup>.



Engels observed that race influences class struggle because the substructure and the superstructure determine and influence each other, that is, they are fused and mutually reinforcing<sup>35</sup>. He argued that:

We regard economic conditions as the factor which ultimately determines historical development. But race itself is an economic fact ..... it is not that the economic position alone is the CAUSE AND ALONE ACTIVE, while everything else has a passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of the economic necessity, which ULTIMATELY always asserts itself.<sup>36</sup>

Thus Engels dismissed simple economic determinism as the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure is complex and not simple.

My own standpoint is that in a racially stratified society race assumed an economic dimension since, in the last instance, it influenced class struggle among Africans, Europeans and Asians. To side-step the constraints of simple economic determinism and race determinism, my approach is informed by Wolpe who has put forward an approach 'capable of yielding an analysis of COMPLEX DETERMINATION of social processes'<sup>37</sup>. This approach is appropriate to my study seeing that the racial factor fundamentally impinged upon the development of the Asian trading class in Chipata.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study has four major objectives. Firstly, I will outline and analyse the factors that influenced

Asian settlement in Chipata. This entails examining the way the variables of class and race became interwoven in the emergent racially stratified society. I argue that race assumed an economic dimension in the multi-racial political economy. Both Europeans and Africans were antagonistic to Asian traders due to the class-race complex.

Secondly, I will examine the development of the Asian trading class and business in the district. I will also examine the extent of diversification in Asian business. This entails reconstructing the pattern of Asian capital formation from the genesis of their trading enterprises up to 1964 when Zambia became independent. I will demonstrate that Asian business has progressed from retail to wholesale with some diversification occurring into tobacco farming and small scale manufacturing firms. I will argue that their cardinal sources of accumulation were profits in African trade and exploitation of kin labour under a voluntary contract system.

Thirdly, the study examines the impact of Asian business in the area. I will explore the relationship between Asian traders and African traders, African customers as well as the colonial government. I argue that Asian traders were able to achieve a position of predominance inspite of administrative measures meant to check the expansion of Asian business in favour of

expansion of African business. I also argue that macro-economic crisis during the Second World War and Asian acquisition of land after this war played a major role in promoting inter-racial antagonisms between Asians and Africans. Furthermore, I argue that even though Asian business has contributed to the economic growth of the district, it has also played a significant role in retarding the growth of African business in the area.

Fourthly, this study examines the nature of Asian politics. I will explore the kind of support Asian traders provided towards the politics of decolonisation. I argue that Asian politics, which has sometimes been seen as purely opportunistic, is shaped by their objective vulnerable class-race position at any given place and time.

#### METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This study is based on colonial records from the National Archives of Zambia (NAZ), and oral interviews conducted in Chipata. Oral testimonies were obtained through informal oral interviews of Asians, Coloureds and Africans particularly those who have lived in Chipata since colonial times. Ismail Suleiman, Chairman of the Chipata Moslem Association and M. Kolya, history teacher of Asian origin<sup>38</sup>, were most helpful in making it possible for me to interview most of my Asian respondents.

Racial mistrust on the part of Asians, especially

the aged, was a limitation in the oral testimonies. I encountered strong resistance to questions on politics, structure of business and relations with Africans<sup>39</sup>. It must be borne in mind that this research was being conducted at a time when Asian business was victimised for abetting 'black-marketeering' by politicians<sup>40</sup>. Consequently, I was compelled to tread very cautiously on probing questions. However, some young men divulged useful information on structure and diversification of Asian business.

African traders, marketeers and retired officers offered very penetrating information on the growth of Asian business in the district<sup>41</sup>. Since it was the farming season, I could not meet some of the pioneer African traders who were attending to their limas. Group interviews with Africans of advanced ages rewarded me with information on Asian business practices in the colonial period<sup>42</sup>. There was no language communication problem as all interviews were conducted in either English or Nyanja. I have relied on scant statistics from colonial records because neither Asian nor African traders were willing to provide figures pertaining to their capital and profit outlays.

My study covers the colonial period. I have divided this period into two major phases in line with the major developments in Asian business, that is, the



pre-1935 period and the post-1935 period. In the former period the Asian trading class took form and Asian business emerged successful in competition with European business as well as African business. In the latter period Asian traders penetrated all the principal trading centres and Asian business expanded into the outlying areas to the detriment of African business.

3. J.A. Barnes, Politics in a Changing Society (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), pp. 108-109.
4. Mandala is the name by which the African Lakes Company was known in the district. On the origin of the name and the company itself see A.J. Hanns, The Beginnings of Nyasaland and North-Eastern Rhodesia, 1859-63 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 23.
5. 'The Coming of Indians', Mruwe Magazine, 1962. The author is not given. This magazine used to be published under the auspices of Mruwe Sports Club, a sporting club for Asians in Chipata.
6. African trade refers to retail and wholesale business catering specifically for Africans. European trade, therefore, refers to retail and wholesale business catering specifically for Europeans.
7. In 1968 UNIP government promulgated economic reforms aimed at curtailing the dominance of non-Zembiens in business generally and in retail trade particularly. Retail trade in the rural areas was declared an exclusive domain of Zembiens. K.D. Kaunda, 'Zambia Towards Economic Independence,' in S.F. Gray, ed., After Mulungushi: The Economic Reforms of Zambian Humanism (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), p. 54.

# NOTES:

1. In this study I use the term Asian to refer to the trading community of Chipata of Indo-Pakistan origin. Class refers to the socio-economic position in the production, distribution and service industries of a given political economy.
2. For example, L.H. Zgambo examines the development of wage labour in Eastern Province: see L.H. Zgambo, 'Farm Labour in the Eastern Province of Zambia, 1898-1964,' M.A. (University of Zambia, 1983).
3. J.A. Barnes, Politics in a Changing Society (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), pp. 108-109.
4. Mandala is the name by which the African Lakes Company was known in the district. On the origin of the name and the company itself see A.J. Hanna, The Beginning of Nyasaland and North-Eastern Rhodesia, 1859-95 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 23.
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8. For example, G.M. Muvwanga, 'Housing in Livingstone: Government Policy and Practice, 1946-1976', M.A. (University of Zambia, 1983); A.A. Turner, 'A Social Economic History of Kabwe, 1902-1966, Ph.D (University of California and Los Angeles 1979)
9. Bibliographical details appear in the Bibliography.
10. L.H. Gann, The Birth of a Plural Society (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958); A Short History of Northern Rhodesia: Early Days to 1953 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964).
11. Gann, A Short History, pp. 146-147.
12. Gann, The Birth, pp 153-155.
13. F. Dotson and L.O. Dotson, The Indian Minority of Zambia, Rhodesia and Malawi (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968).
14. B. Kapferer, Strategy and Transition in an African Town (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972); Turner, 'A Social economic History.'
15. G. Kay, A Social Geography of Zambia (London: University of London Press, 1961).
16. S.H. Phiri, 'Parameters of Social stratification in Chipata, Zambia' Unpublished paper presented at East African Universities Social Science Eighth Annual Conference (December, 1972).
17. Phiri, 'Parameters, ' p. 6.
18. J. A. Wood, Northern Rhodesia: The Human Background (London: Pall Mall, 1961); G. Keith, The Fading Colour Bar (London: Robert Hale, 1966). Wood was a former District Officer in Lusaka and Keith was a settler.
19. Wood, Northern Rhodesia, p. 123.
20. Wood, Northern Rhodesia, pp. 121-122.
21. Keith, The Fading Colour, p. 86.

22. Keith, The Fading Colour, p. 86.
23. Sam Zulu, 'Who Owns the Shop Next Door?', Times of Zambia, September through November, 1976.
24. Zulu, 'Who Owns the Shop?', Times of Zambia, September 13, 1976, p. 4. Zulu picked up the same theme in 1984: 'Are Asians Mixing?' Sunday Times, January 15, 1984; 'Asians: Was Uganda a Lesson?', Times of Zambia, January 30, 1984. Zulu's articles aroused reaction from the readers which demonstrated that there exists anti-Asian attitudes on the part of Africans in Zambia.
25. R. Frankenburg, Review Article: The Indian Minority of Zambia Malawi and Rhodesia (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 1968) in African Social research, 7(1969), 556.
26. M. Mamdani, Politics and Class formation in Uganda (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 18.
27. J.H. Mittelman and O.S. Marwah, 'Asian Pariahs: A cross-Regional Perspective', Studies in Race and and Nations, 6(1974), p 4.
28. T.R. Davenport, South Africa: A Modern History (London: MacMillan, 1977) pp. 373-375.
29. F. Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (Middlesex; Penguin Books, 1963); pp. 373-375.
30. D.J. Grove, 'The Race Versus Ethnic Debate: A Cross-National Analysis of two Theoretical Approaches', Studies in Race and Nations, 5,4 (1973-74), 13.
31. Grove 'The Race Versus Ethnic Debate.' 15-16.
32. E.P. Makambe, 'The Asian Labour solution in Zimbabwe, 1898-1904: Labour Practices and Racial Attitudes in a Colonial Society,' Transafrican Journal of History, 13(1984), 119.
33. Turner, 'A Social Economic History', pp. 1-2.4.

34. H. Wolpe, 'A Comment on the Poverty of Neo-Marxism,' Journal of Southern African Studies, 4, 2(1978), p 254.
35. The Selected Correspondence of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 1846-1895 (New York: International Publications, 1942), Engels' Letter to Starkenburg pp. 516-519.
36. The Selected Correspondence, 'Engels' letter to Starkenburg, p. 517.
37. Wolpe 'A Comment on the Poverty', p 253.
38. M. Kolya is a practising Moslem and so is a member of the Chipata Moslem Association.
39. Substantial data from oral sources has been lost with the demise of the pioneer strata of Asian traders in the past four to six years in the district.
40. For example see K. Kaunda, 'Crackdown' Times of Zambia, February 21, 1988. In fact the State illegally seized some of the Asian shops: 'Shops Seizure Illegal Council,' Times of Zambia, June 18, 1988.
41. Among Marketeers I interviewed bankrupt African businessmen. For example, B. Makungu, a once successful African Baker in the District gave me detailed information on relations between African traders and Asian Traders.
42. One group of elderly women I interviewed gave me information from their personal experience about an Asian trader, Patel, whose shop they used to frequent in their teens.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE RISE OF THE ASIAN TRADING CLASS IN CHIPATA. 1900-1935

#### 1 THE COLONISATION OF CHIPATA

Chipata district is situated in the Eastern Province of Zambia. Eastern Province was known as East Luangwa until 1934.<sup>1</sup> It comprised three districts, namely, Chipata, Petauke and Lundazi. Katete and Chadiza were sub-Bomas of Chipata. Presently Eastern Province comprises six districts: Chipata, Petauke, Lundazi, Katete, Chadiza and Chama. The first three mentioned districts were the earliest administrative centers in the province.

Most of the Chipata area is inhabited by the Ngoni ethnic group who are descendants of warrior refugees from Shaka's brutal wars of expansion in South Africa. They succeeded in establishing political hegemony over the indigenous inhabitants namely, Chewa, Senga and Kunda around 1875. In turn the Ngoni were subdued by military forces of the BSAC in January 1898 and thereafter the BSAC established a colonial administration over the entire area east of the Luangwa. This area comprising present day Northern and Eastern Province became a territory known as North-Eastern Rhodesia. A site called Fort Jameson was established in Mbezeni's area in 1898 and became the capital of North-Eastern Rhodesia in 1899.