



Ouma, 2017

Plantation

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Plantation

The plantation and its organizational structure, facilitating colonial exploitation, have cast a long shadow in colonized areas such as Tanzania. The meaning of the word 'plantation' has changed multiple times throughout history. In the beginning, it simply meant a "plot of ground with trees". In times of British colonialism, the term became known to describe a "group of settlers or their political units" (Watts 2009: 542). With time, 'plantation' was a term for estates typically located in tropical or subtropical areas, producing plantation crops like 'sugar, coffee, tobacco, tea, cocoa, bananas, spices, cotton, sisal, rubber and palm oil' (ibid.).

An exhaustive **definition** of the word 'plantation' is difficult to give, due to numerous factors regarding topics like degrees of industrialization, labor regime, and property rights (Watts 2009: 542). In general, plantations can be differentiated from other agricultural operations based on "size, authority structure, crop or labour force characteristics" (ibid.: 543). An attempt for more specificity can be made based on the global-market-oriented character of plantations (Hall et al. 2017: 519). Because of a lack of connection to their surroundings, caused by the export orientation, Ferguson established the concept of plantations as '**enclave**

economies' (Ferguson 2006). Plantations' effects on their surroundings can also be negative, as is the case with the frequent **displacement** of local people due to the need for an enormous area of land (Hall et al. 2017: 519). Plantations, while creating a large number of them, are understood to provide comparatively low-wage casual jobs (Hall et al. 2017: 515).

The study of plantations and the power structures that were simultaneously established must entail a reflection on the position of plantations in their wider social context as well as in their relation to the history of exploitation and capitalist accumulation.

As is evident in the word's etymology, there exists an undeniable link between plantations and colonialism since the 16th century (Chatterjee et al. 2010: 1). Apart from the meaning of the word, there is a myriad of (ongoing) other factors that link plantations to colonialism. An important connection here is the **commodification of land and people**, which started with the colonization of different areas and is evident in current structures of plantations (ibid.: 2). With that, an elaborate network of

categorizations based on western European norms were exported to the colonized areas, including but not limited to hierarchization based on gender, sexuality, and class.

The colonial matrix of power:

“This matrix [...] centres knowledge, racism, patriarchy and capital as the basis of modern global power developed through colonialism. This modern global system [...] imposed spheres of power (subjectivity, gender and sexuality, authority, and the exploitation of land and labour) as instruments of domination.

These instruments are interdependent, operating in relation to one another, and serve to uphold and reproduce the modern construction of global power” (Paton et al. 2000: 1113).

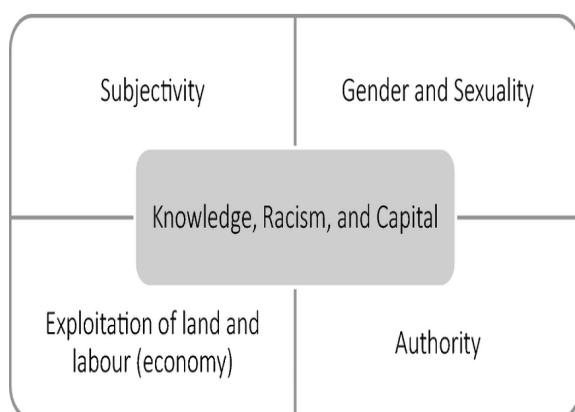


Figure 8: The Colonial Matrix of power by Quijano. Source: Paton et. al. 2020: 1113

As seen in **Figure 8**, power dynamics in favor of capital are complicated and reciprocal. Hierarchization based on gender and sexuality cannot be separated from constructions of race and racialization of gender roles and topics of sexuality (Chatterjee et al. 2010: 4). “Racialized notions of gender and sexuality make plantations what they are and constitute the embodied bedrock of colonial settlement and rule” (ibid.). A better understanding of the oppression established on plantations, based on the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality, can be achieved with regard to the concept of “**sexual economy**” coined by Adrienne Davis (Davis 1999: 246). Even though the concept was primarily based on the period of slavery in the United States of America, it is applicable everywhere where there are plantation labor regimes present. The core attributes of the “sexual economy” are first, the blending of the market/public sphere and the private sphere, second, the lack of protection of racialized women by the law, and third, the emphasis on the role of gender and sexuality in a topic often reduced to race (ibid.: 246 f.). The concept works to make the suffering of racialized enslaved women visible, where it is often overlooked.

Still, it is important to stress the oppression faced by racialized men under plantation slavery conditions. Plantations are said to work as “differentiation machines” deciding the ascribed degree of “humanness” based on race

(Ouma & Premchander 2022: 418; Davis et al. 2019). Like the aforementioned topics, race as a category was a means of organizing plantations in favor of “clarity” and “efficiency” (Chatterjee et al. 2010: 7). In Tanzanian colonial history, workers were said to be categorized and broken down into digits, based on the concept of **manamba** –meaning ‘numbers’ in Swahili (Sabea 2010: 144). It is however important to mention, that there are contradictions regarding the origin and meaning of manamba (ibid.: 149).

“Manamba is a universe of contradictory and multiple meanings that has no specific and identifiable temporal, institutional or physical boundaries, a ‘topos’ (‘it’ did and did not exist under German East Africa, much like ‘it’ did and did not exist under the British Mandate; and though the postcolonial state ‘abolished’ manamba [...], there wasn’t a category in the first place to abolish)” (Sabea 2010: 165).

Nevertheless, a ‘modern’ way of organizing work was established based on the colonial power’s expectations of “discipline, the rationalization of human labor [...], careful time management, the separation of production from consumption, and the alienation of the means of production from laborers” constructed after the industrial model (Chatterjee et al.

2010: 6). The **dehumanization** was aimed, on the one hand towards rationalization of production and, on the other hand towards simplification of racialization and with that towards easing objection against the oppression and exploitation voiced by third parties (ibid.: 7 ff.).

With the immediate impact of the power structures explained, it is important to mention the economic aspect of this exploitation and its foundational contribution to and the necessity for the wealth of former colonial powers in Europe. The “plantation complex and slave labor provided the surplus capital for Europeans to accumulate, kicking off industrial modernity [...] this means that the plantation, a racialized space from the start, was at the heart of industrial capitalism as it developed in the following countries” (Chatterjee et al. 2010: 6).

Materialisation of “Plantation” in Tanzania

The United Republic of Tanzania, as we know it today, was established in April of 1964 and is comprised of the mainland, formally known as **Tanganyika**, and the islands of Pemba and Unguja, known together as **Zanzibar** (Mbogoni 2012: 3). Zanzibar was a sovereign state, ruled by the Sultan of Oman until it became a British protectorate in

1890 (Mbogoni 2012: 3). The mainland, then called German East Africa, was colonized and under the rule of Germany until the country lost World War I and Britain gained control over Tanganyika in 1919 (ibid.). In December 1961, Tanganyika gained its independence and united with Zanzibar in 1964, after the insular region overthrew the Sultan and the Arab government in the Zanzibar Revolution (Speller 2007: 286, 293). During the period of German colonization, the area that is now Tanzania came to a position of immense significance regarding the international trade of **sisal fiber** (Sabea 2008: 411). The number “of sisal plantations rose from 1 in 1893 to 54 by 1913, and production jumped from a mere 0.6 tons in 1898 to 20,835 tons in 1913, comprising almost 30

percent of the total value of GEA [German East Africa] exports” (ibid.). The colony, now Tanganyika, became the number one exporter of sisal and provided over a quarter of the global supply when British rule took over (ibid.). As is evident in **Figure 9**, the sisal production of the area was at an all-time high around the time of independence, ‘when production reached 233,500 tons, contributing 35.6 percent of Tanzania's export earnings’ until a distinct drop towards the end of the 20th century (ibid.).

“Tanzanian postcolonial history is intimately tied to the German and English introduction of colonial management techniques to sisal plantations” (Chatterjee et al. 2010: 9 ff.).

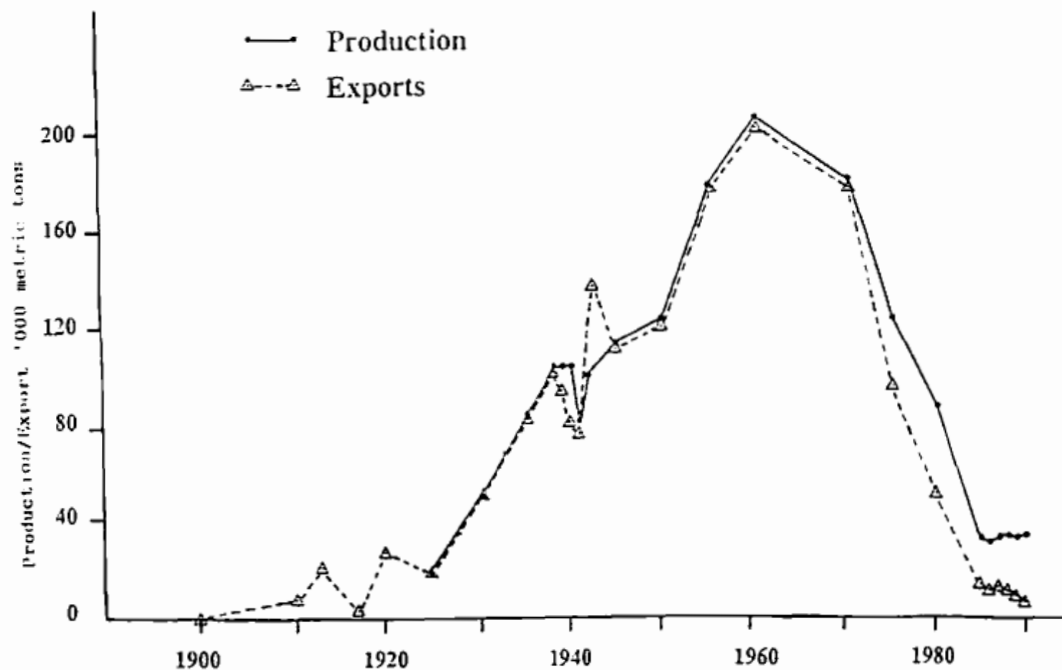


Figure 9: Tanzania Sisal Fibre Production Trends 1900-1990. Source: Kimaro et.al., 1994: 231

As was discussed before, even with the significance of sisal plantations in Tanzania coming to an end, colonial structures established on the plantations remained. The hierarchization based on categories of race, gender, class (and more) was ingrained in the labor regime of sisal plantations and would become an integral part of structuring agricultural projects and the wider society. It is now of interest, to what extent traces of the colonial organization of work elaborated in the previous segment can be proven in plantation economies today and how they can be counteracted.

One area where colonial legacies of plantation labor regimes might be evident is the sugar industry. Even though the sugar industry is not an important contributor to the export industry, it is a good research subject due to its long history in the area. **Sugar**

production in what is now Tanzania dates back to the 1920s colonial period in form of smallholder production, but the first commercial sugar factory was only established in the late 1960s (Sulle 2017: 521). There are five active sugar companies in Tanzania, four of them operating commercially: Kilombero Sugar Company, Mtibwa Sugar Estates, **Tanganyika Planting Company (TPC)**, and Kagera Sugar (ibid.). There are difficulties finding recent information about the fifth corporation mentioned, Bagamoyo Sugar Limited (BSL), as well as another sixth company established in 2017 called Mkulazi Holding Company Limited (MHCL). In 2017, the year of Sulle’s research, the fifth company was still in the process of planting sugarcane, it is unclear if the two companies have begun producing sugar in the meantime (The Citizen 2018; The Citizen 2017).

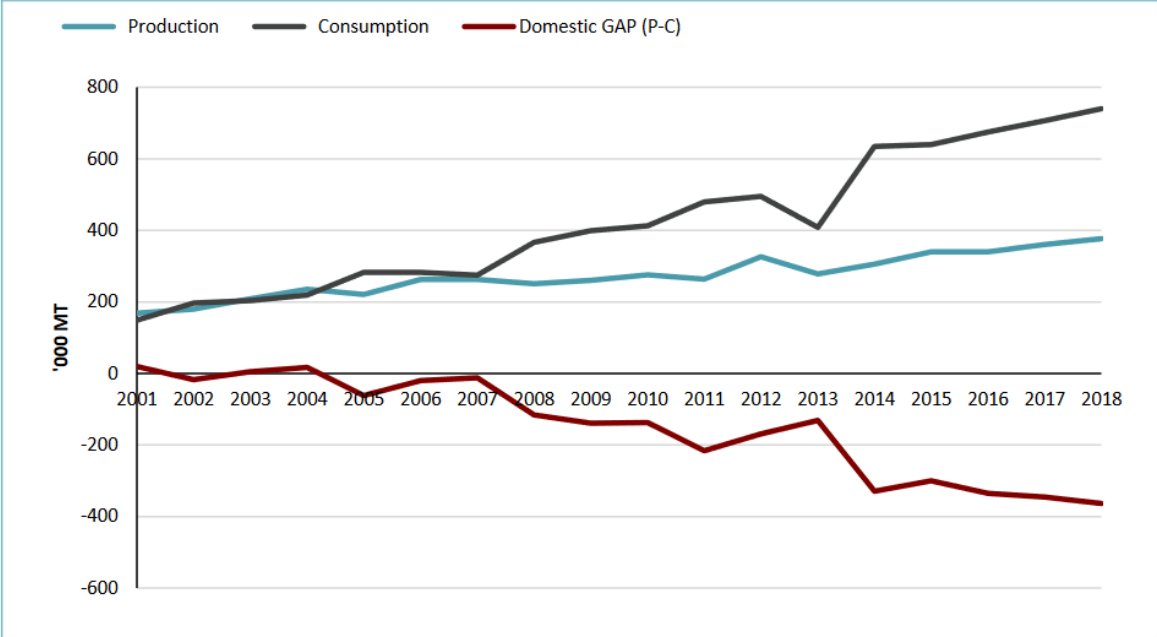


Figure 10: Sugar Production, consumption and the gap in Tanzania. Source: Andreoni et.al. 2020: 20

As is evident in **Figure 10**, Tanzania has difficulties meeting the country's demand for sugar, an issue that seems to be rising, and thus, the sugar industry is of special interest (Andreoni et al. 2020: 12). It will be interesting to observe the development in terms of **untapped potential** regarding economic importance as well as societal impact. The Tanzanian sugar industry employs "about 18,000 people in direct jobs and supports over 300,000 people employed in related businesses" (ibid.). Here, it is important to examine the impact of colonial power relations on the labor regime, meaning gendered and racialized injustice regarding employment, pay gaps, promotions as well as overall treatment of the workers. A way in which these injustices, especially ongoing gendered injustice can be combatted, is through citizen participation in form of civil society organizations. Important Tanzanian organizations in that respect are the Feminist Activist Coalition (FemAct), the Land Rights Research and Resources Institute 'Haki Ardhi' and the **Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP)**.

Script for the Excursion Day

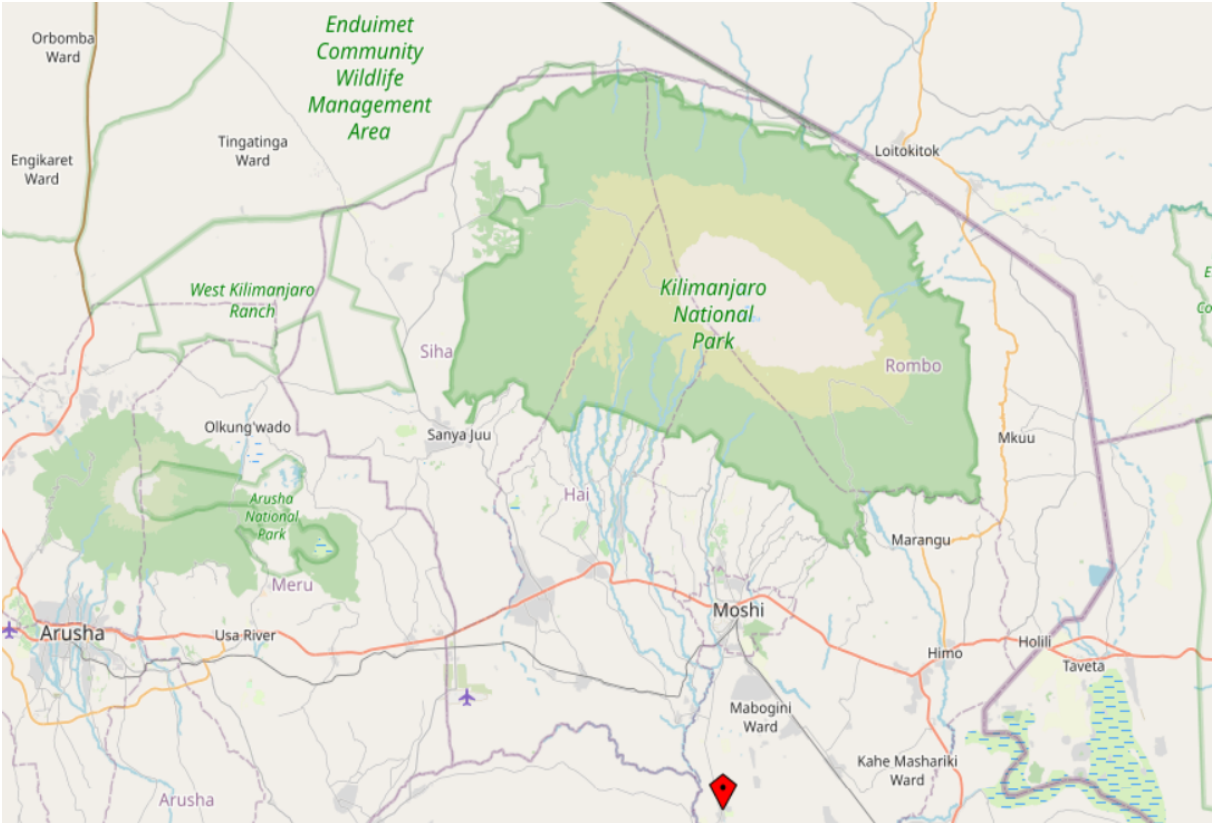


Figure 11: The location of TPC Limited Sugar Estate. Source: Open Street Map, (accessed on: 15th of March 2022)

To examine the topics presented in the previous paragraphs, mainly the colonial structure of plantation economies and other agricultural projects, we will visit two very different locations on our excursion in Tanzania.

1st Part: Hortanzia TPC Limited (9:00 - 12:00 am)

For our first stop, we will visit a plantation owned by the sugar company TPC Limited that is located around Moshi. The visit to the **TPC sugarcane plantations** will take place on Wednesday, the

6th of April. We will drive from our accommodations in Arusha towards the area of TPC plantations and are expected to visit the place at around 2 pm. On-site, we will have the possibility to get an insight into the organization of plantation economies and the possibility to talk about the historical continuum of certain power structures and their relevance to Tanzanian plantations today.

We will start the day with a visit to Hortanzia, the largest horticulture exporter in Tanzania.

We connect this visit to the previous work of Stefan Ouma and are joined by Dr. Emmanuel Sulle (University of Western Cape), who is a prominent researcher on agrarian change in Tanzania. Under the moderation of Stefan Ouma, we will discuss the following topics:

- The history of Hortanzania's operations
- The state of the Tanzanian horticulture sector, also in relation to Kenya's sub-sector
- How the company accesses markets and copes with the demands of buyers, particularly but not exclusively EU retailers (traceability, lead times, quality standards, "promotions", etc.)
- How Hortanzania deals with innovation and questions of competitiveness and intra-industry cooperation
- Social, economic and environmental impact questions

The meeting will be followed by a debriefing with Dr. Sulle.

2nd Part: Meeting with Prof. Mbilinyi (2:30 pm)

One week later, on Wednesday, the 13th of April at around half past 2, we will be meeting with **Professor Marjorie Mbilinyi (Photo 9)** in at the Woodberry Café in Oysterbay.

She is a remarkable scholar, activist, and co-founder of the TGNP in 1993. With Professor Mbilinyi, we will be able to discuss

the founding and work of the TGNP as well as topics of gender and gender inequality in agricultural projects such as plantation economies. With those two visitations, we will, on the one hand, gain knowledge about the current labor regimes and colonial legacies of plantations owned by the TPC. On the other hand, when talking to Professor Mbilinyi about the work of the TGNP, we will get to know a strong example of the agency that is executed by those marginalized by the very power structures established under German and British colonial rule.



Photo 9: Professor Marjorie Mbilinyi, co-founder of the TGNP. Source: <https://roape.net/2017/08/24/gender-politics-change-africa-interview-marjorie-mbilinyi/> (accessed on: 15.03 2022)

Postscript for the Day of the Excursion on: Plantation

Summery of the Day

The meetings regarding the keyword ‘plantation’ were spread across two days of the excursion. On the first day of the topic, Wednesday the 6th of April, we visited the ‘Hortanzia farm’ located in Arusha. There we met with Yusuf Hanari, who has been working as manager of sales and marketing of Hortanzia for 20 years, as well as with a Zimbabwean agronomist responsible for functioning working procedures and employment administration.

In the afternoon, we had a meeting with Dr. Emmanuel Sulle at the ‘Rotterdam’ café in Usa River, where he gave us professional insights into the changes within the agricultural sector regarding power structures, social differentiation, and capital movement.

On this day, we also drove by the Tanganyika Planting Company (TPC) plantation in the Kilimanjaro region, where originally a meeting was scheduled, which was canceled unfortunately. Here, the students had a look at the sugarcane fields and got some information about the workings of TPC Limited.



Photo 10: Hortanzia Office Building.
source: Own Picture, 2022

The second day regarding ‘plantation’ was held in Dar es Salaam. On Wednesday, the 13th of April, we met with retired Professor Marjorie Mbilinyi (University of Dar es Salaam) at the Woodberry Café in Oysterbay. Here, we were provided with a private room that guaranteed a good environment for our meeting. Professor Mbilinyi was sent questions by Professor Ouma via E-Mail in advance, which she prepared with much care. The questions posed raised the issues of “a critical agrarian studies perspective” on the current situation in Tanzania, a feminist perspective on the topic, forms of worker organization and resistance against agricultural exploitation, and the role of colonial legacies. Professor Mbilinyi presented her answers in a timespan of about 30 minutes so

that we would have time for a question-and-answer segment afterward.

Another meeting important to mention, even though it was not actually part of the meetings regarding the keyword 'plantation', was the meeting with the manager of the 'Kilimanjaro Plantation Ltd.' coffee plantation located in the Moshi area. The meeting was scheduled as a part of the day regarding 'Cooperative Development' on the 8th of April but gave insights into the reality of a coffee plantation. Here, the topic of coloniality became more visible in the spatial and organizational structure of the plantation, which will be elaborated on in the last section about ethical and methodological challenges.

Reflecting on 'Plantation' after "the Field"

The visit to the Hortanzia farm gave a strong impression of the gendered nature of the labor regime practiced in plantation agriculture, which goes back to colonial times. Manager Hanari explained that certain jobs are "friendly for the ladies", like weeding and packing the products, while jobs like driving, spraying pesticides, and digging holes for irrigation are "for men". This might mean more exposure to different work-related hazards for men but also better payment or more secure employment. The 80% female workers, out of a total

of 350 employees, tend to be working in a casual arrangement in accordance with the global trend of feminization and casualization of the workforce (Standing 1989). In the context of bigger systemic changes planned for the Hortanzia farm labor regime, a trend towards rationalization is also evident.

Several employees of Hortanzia praised the new system of metrification that is going to be implemented since the firm has been taken over by an investment fund from Mauritius. This new system entails payment based on output, which would increase competition between and replaceability of the workers, for example through the election of a 'worker of the month' who will be rewarded with benefits. This new system will arguably also lead to more access points for control and surveillance of the workers by managers as well as investors.

In our meeting with Dr. Emmanuel Sulle, we also discussed the about 250 workers who left the farm after the new system had been announced. This fact was exclusively presented in a positive light by the management of Hortanzia, since it is cost-saving and seemingly efficiency-enhancing, which is satisfying the investors' interest in profitability. Dr. Sulle also stressed the trend of casualization of jobs, which decreases the company's expenditure on worker insurance and benefits. The overall

development of the agricultural sector, according to Dr. Sulle, seemed to be the change from labor-intensive to **technologized, capital-intensive economies**.

With the meeting of Prof. Marjorie Mbilinyi, we included the perspective of a self-proclaimed “scholar-activist”. Already involved in social justice movements in her birth country, the USA, she moved to Tanzania in 1966 during a time of great transformational efforts surrounding the University of Dar es Salaam. There she was involved in the establishment of study groups regarding struggles for justice which ultimately led to the establishment of different initiatives such as the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (GNP) in 1993. In our talk with Prof. Mbilinyi, she emphasized that topics of resource struggles and injustices must not only be addressed as academic topics but should be tackled through activist efforts, too.

Regarding the topic of colonial power dynamics on agricultural projects like plantations, there was a myriad of important aspects mentioned in her talk. According to her work, the focus was on gendered injustices; the most important statement to take away was the questioning of gendered labor division as ‘natural’ or ‘traditional’, as was the case on Hortanzia farm, and the realization that this very dynamic is colonial to its core. Before colonialism, according to Prof. Mbilinyi, there

was no concept of superiority or inferiority between the jobs of men and women. It was the responsibility of both to provide for the family. Under colonial rule, it then was statutory that women would get paid less, which was not tenable anymore after independence. Still, in a very similar vein, women now would get different labor opportunities than men which would ultimately mean less income.

Following on from that, Prof. Mbilinyi challenged the widespread rhetoric of the passive woman and highlighted **women’s agency** surrounding land rights and agricultural work. In the instance of men leaving to become migrant workers, women are often depicted as being left behind, as being unable to act and shape their lives independently. Prof. Mbilinyi painted the opposite picture, explaining that women often chose to resist and could manipulate the patriarchal structures to their benefit, for example when refusing to leave their land to become migrant workers based on exclaiming it was ‘men’s work’. By doing so, women prevented the loss of land for themselves and their families, which would remain an important resource.

Prof. Mbilinyi also stressed the topic of the **dehumanization** of migrant workers and the **differentiation** between field workers and office or service workers, which deeply resembles

the structure of labor regimes in times of colonialism and enslavement. Another question of importance was the extent to which the workers in question were aware of colonial remains in the labor regimes. Prof. Mbilinyi stated that workers mostly express their struggles against racism, segregation, and apartheid systems but would not articulate them in the form of concepts of coloniality. This begs the question to which extent academic concepts of colonial remains and coloniality are helpful to the everyday struggles of different marginalized and exploited groups. As a concise statement about the current situation of power structures on plantations, Prof. Mbilinyi clearly said that there are “racist, sexual and class dimensions that go on on plantations, especially in fieldwork”.

The last meeting important to mention, is the meeting with the manager of the coffee farm ‘Kilimanjaro Plantation Ltd.’ at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro in Moshi. To enter the estate, the group had to pass a gate behind which three flags were presented: one Tanzanian, one German, and one flag seemingly representing the company or a coffee cooperative. This fact caught the attention of the group, as well as the manorial house towering over the rows of coffee trees. In the office of the (white) manager, there was a colonial painting displayed in plain sight “Greetings from German East Africa” in German. These circumstances, as well as the knowledge about the German plantation owners, led to an emotional reaction in the German part of the group while the students present, who were from the Moshi Cooperative University, did not visibly react.



Photo 11: Kilimanjaro Plantation Ltd. Source: Own Picture, 2022

Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Upscaling the Topic

Considering the previously mentioned topic of confrontation, an ethical challenge of upscaling the topic of coloniality of plantations might lie in the demanded 'neutrality' as well as the **positionality** of the researcher. The researcher must understand which limits of discriminatory structures can no longer be neutrally observed as a scholar but must be faced in a more outspoken fashion. In this context, it is also important for the researcher to reflect on their positionality regarding the discriminatory structures and degree of personal affectedness. In the instance previously mentioned, I, for example, spoke over and for people, much more in a position and right to be upset, talking about the group of African students who were with us. For long-term research efforts, this confrontation would have been detrimental, the circumstances and severity of the discriminatory situation must be weighed up, as Professor Ouma expressed during the day's group reflection meeting.

Some methodological issues lie in the access to workers and their true opinions and assessments of their situation. To get to the bottom of discriminatory power structures on plantations, the workers must have a deep trust in the researchers, to openly answer questions and articulate struggles

without fear of endangering their employment. Through the method of participant observation, one could get closer to understanding the labor regime but due to the complicated privileged position of especially white but also Black researchers and researchers of Color from the so-called Global North, one could not experience everyday life as close to the people as it would be possible in other contexts. An attempt at a more reciprocal research structure can be made by working with local colleagues but global power dynamics regarding knowledge production, the sovereignty of interpretation, and access to resources cannot be completely undermined.

Many aspects of the discriminatory labor regime cannot be documented properly and academically, for example, the impact of the colonial structures on the workers' mental health and overall life quality. Ultimately, everyday power structures are invisible and can only to an extent be proven empirically. On a much more general level that applies to every topic presented in the paper, the research of (white) scholars of the Global North in countries of the Global South must be problematized and arguably abolished to dismantle the global epistemic power structures.

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