Origin and Development of Telegraphs in Mwanza District from the 1880s to 1960

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ABSTRACT

This paper concerns with the colonialism and the growth of telegraphs in Mwanza District as the main objective the study aimed at covering up. The theory of globalization was the one assisted this study right from the very first step to the last. The main argument of the study was to trace the origin and development of telegraphs in Mwanza district in both German and British colonial periods. The kind of research approach applied is qualitative approach. The study applied this approach because of its ability in describing the historical events which took place in the remote past. The study was able to utilize both primary and secondary data, in order to achieve that, the study used both documentary and oral history as the methods of data collection where by both primary and secondary data were effectively utilized. On documentary review the study reviewed data from TNA, UDSM, SAUT Library. On oral sources the study conducted interviews at Mwanza General Post Office, and SAUT.

Keywords: Communication, telegraphs, operators, trunk calls, subscribers, wireless, telegram, radio station.

INTRODUCTION

Mwanza District was founded by the Germans in 1913.[1] This came after the stiff competition or race for the Lake between British and German agents in 1880s over the occupation of what by then was known as Usukuma land. The intention of both was to take total control of human and natural resources, most interestingly was its strategic location on the headwaters of the Nile.

By virtue of Anglo German Treaty of 1890 Usukuma fell under German rule, and by 1913 German's colonial government established Mwanza District so that it could take full charge of the Lake zone.[2] During that particular period, German East Africa included Tanganyika, Rwanda and Urundi. Immediately after the occupation of Mwanza and made it a district, German established telegraphs, as part of colonial transport and communication investment. Therefore, the study was conducted to know why German established telegraphs in Mwanza district in the 1800s and not elsewhere.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The word telegraph for the first time was used by French engineer Claud Chappe. The term comes from the Greek words "tele" meaning "at a distance" and "graphie" meaning "to write," hence it can be translated as the message from a far. [3] Hugill also is in support of this argument that, telegraphs come from two Greek words which are translated in English as far-writer, this means that, telegraphs can encompass any type of device that conveys a long-distance information.[4]

Based on this fact, technically even smoke signals, drumming could be considered forms of telegraphs.[5] However when thinking of telegraphs today most people would consider isolated modern offices connected by line and wires with clerks bent over at their desks.[6] Richardson supports this fact by defining

telegraphs as the means of written communication by coded signals. [7] The literature above traces the origin and meaning of telegraph.

This knowledge enabled the researcher to understand the meaning of telegraphs. At this point, the reviewed literature above granted a room for studying about the origin and development of telegraphs in Mwanza District.

Samuel Morse, (the inventor of Morse code), believed that, the word telegraph should only be used in the situation where the message can be both sent and recorded over a distance.[8] The discussion above supported by Claude Chappe, the French engineer, who introduced the pre-electric telegraph system as the first genuine organized communication system in history.[9] The efforts of Chappe enabled the Morse Code system inverted by Samuel Morse, to operate. The above literature enriched this study to trace on the origin of telegraph. This motivated a researcher to study more on how telegraphs operated in Mwanza during Germans and the British colonial period.

Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels stated that telegraphs created the Bourgeoisie class. They also insisted that the global expansion of the Bourgeoisie was much facilitated by the communication system[10]. This Marx and Engels idea opened the door to this new study to examine more on the impact of telegraphs in Mwanza during the colonial period.

At the end of 1916, telegraphs services had been operating in Dar es salaam, Bagamoyo, Dodoma, Ruthumie, Sadan, Kilosa, Korogwe, Mombo, Morogoro, Moshi, Kigoma, Pangani, Tanga, Mahenge, and Mwanza.[11] In addition to that, Ton Dietz discussed on the development of telegraphs during British period. Those areas which did not have telegraphs services during German period, British supplied them with the services. Such areas include Ngudu, Mantare, Sengerema within Mwanza district. Others were Musoma, Arusha, Bagamoyo Pwani, Bismarck burg (kasanga) Rukwa. Moreover, Bukoba, Iringa, Kilimatinde Singida, Kilwa Lindi, Njombe, Mikindani Mtwara, Kisaki, Songea Ruvuma, Marangi Kilimanjaro were supplied with the telegraph's services.[12]

Moreover, Ahvenainen argues that, in 1950 motorcycle delivery of telegraphs was introduced in Mombasa, Dar es salaam, Kampala, and Tanga. Parallel to that, several additional circuits were added including a high-speed radio stations were opened at Lake Katwe and Mwanza.[13] This argument is supported by the League of the Nations which states that, wireless station had been suggested before first World War between 1912 to 1913.[14]

The Italian operated wireless station on the Benadir coast, while the Germans possessing similar installations at Mwanza and Bukoba.[15] This literature has influenced the researcher of this work to search more on why German introduced telegraphs in Mwanza District in the early years of colonization.

The literature above has discussed about telegraphs in general, but the origin and development of telegraphs in Mwanza has been overlooked. Therefore, the goal of this study was to fulfil the missing knowledge in Mwanza district from 1880s to 1960.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study to the great extent applied documentary review as the method of data collection

Documentary Review

The study reviewed both primary and secondary sources that seemed to contain information on the origin

and development of telegraphs in Mwanza District from the 1880s to 1960.

With the guide of the theory of the globalization used in this study, research objectives and questions, the study reviewed sources found at SAUT library, such as books, and dissertations. From the University of Dar es Salaam the department of history library, and East Africana library in which the study reviewed the following sources, annual reports, books, newspapers, dissertations, proceedings. From TNA the study reviewed the followings, files, annual reports, minutes, letters, District books, secretariat files. From Bujora the study reviewed files, and unpublished sources.

ORIGIN OF TELEGRAPHS IN MWANZA DISTRICT 1880s-1918

Mwanza District was founded by the Germans in 1913.[16] This came after the stiff competition or race for the Lake between British and German agents in 1880s over the occupation of the region. The intention of both was to take total control of human and natural resources, most interestingly was its strategic location on the headwaters of the Nile. By virtue of Anglo German Treaty of 1890 Usukuma fell under German rule, and by 1913 German's colonial government established Mwanza District which was part of German East Africa which by then included Tanganyika, Rwanda and Urundi.[17]

The origin of telegraphs in Mwanza District can be traced back to the time of the establishment of colonialism by the Germans. By 1880s Germans already established telegraphs in Mwanza.

German introduced it with a purpose of facilitating information exchange between Europe and the colonies in German East Africa. [18] At this juncture it was seen that telegraphs were the easiest method of passing a message from one point to another. Once something happened within colonies or in the metropolitan, telegraphs could immediately be used to share information among the colonial officials. This helped them to strengthen security and keep the colonies safe from dangers of being invaded by their enemies.

During German colonial period, telegraphic network in German East Africa including Mwanza, functioned as tools of empire, means that, telegraphs assisted the Germans in securing political control across Africa, and through the power of the global news they were able to control certain part of the World precisely Mwanza.[19] This was possible because telegraphs provided constant stream of information which enabled the Germans to establish and consolidate regional, imperial and international spaces of political-economic orders including Mwanza.

Moreover, telegraphs could immediately offer to German colonial officials the following services, security, defense, intelligence, spy, exploitative, military and war information. [20] In case of security purposes telegraphs were considered as an instrument that protected colonialists against their enemies especially during invasion. As the tool of communication, it could alert the colonial official about any danger ahead of them. Moreover, it has been commented that, the importance of telegraph for commercial, military and political activity cannot be underestimated.[21]

Apart from facilitating information among colonial officials, telegraphs by its nature has also been a part of monopolistic institution since 1880s. It is a monopolistic stage of capitalism which always aims at maximization of the super profit.[22] Monopolistic companies such as trusts, concerns, German East Africa Company, syndicate and cartels have been controlling and monopolizing the world through the power of telegraphs.[23] These imperialist companies exported financial capital in the form of investment in peripheral world including Mwanza District. In this juncture, telegraph was seen as the foundation of the capitalist exchange, and its networks were constructed to support extant capitalist system especially in less competitive areas like Mwanza.

At the beginning, telegraphs were within the Governor's office, who was fully in charge of it.[24] From the

head office in Dar es salaam, Governor was also responsible for the appointment of telegraphic officers, who could supervise telegraphic offices in different parts of the territories.

The telegraphic officers appointed by the governor were only military officers who held higher positions in the army, for instance Generals, Lutein Generals, Major Generals, Brigadier Generals and a host of others. [25]. The intention of appointing such military officers was to strengthen security in the colonies, on top of that, those military officers were trustiest hence could never dare to link government top secrets to their enemies.

During the German period, Tanganyika was connected to the international cable system by the line of the Eastern and South African telegraph company from Dar es Salaam to Zanzibar via Bagamoyo.[26] In order to make it successful, in 1914 at Tabora, German colonial government constructed a big power station. With the help of this power station, it brought a territory into wireless communication with Togo, and what was German South West Africa.[27] On the other side through Togo once again, Tanganyika was connected with Nauen in German.

Germans took all these efforts just to make sure that Tanganyika, precisely Mwanza was accessible from every corner of the world. In such manner it would be easy to control Mwanza and exploit its resources both human and natural ones such as gold from Geita, Shinyanga, and Musoma. Exposing Mwanza to modern kind of communication such as telegraphs would also help Germans to tap whatever information concerning the safety of their territories.

It has been observed that the use of wireless communications in Mwanza and Bukoba by the Germans had been suggested before the World War 1, right from 1912-1913 they provided estimates for the building of a coastal station at Mombasa. [28] Besides Germans, the Italians as well, operated wireless stations on the Benadir Coast.[29] This made Germans to plan to building a high-power station for communication that would connect Mwanza and Europe.

By 1914 wireless stations operated at Dar es Salaam, Biharamuro, Mwanza and Bukoba on Victoria Nyanza. [30] The Mwanza and Bukoba wireless stations intended for local administrative use, the Dar es Salaam and Biharamuro wireless stations principally were for marine work.[31] German introduced wireless stations in Mwanza and Bukoba because the native population would oppose the erection of landline. [32]   Therefore, the use of wireless telegraphs seemed safer than erection of the landline services.

During the German colonial period, Mwanza was not the only place which had an access to telegraphs as noted in previous chapters. German extended the telegraphs from the Dar es Salaam head office to different parts of German East Africa. For instance, Mahenge, Iringa, Dodoma, Songea, Kilwa, Lindi, Bukoba were also connected to telegraph services. [33] Up to 1914 there were thirty-four telegraphic offices, operating 2, 537 kilometers of land lines. [34] Apart from that, before world War I, there were three main telegraphic systems. [35] The one near line of Tanganyika railway ran from Dar es Salaam to Ujiji and Kigoma. Besides that, there was another from Kilosa this one ran along the shore of Tanganyika to Bismarckurg, to British territory at Kitata.

The most difficulty thing German telegraphic authorities experienced was the slowness in railway construction. For instance, work in the central line between Dar es Salaam and Kigoma began in 1905 was completed only in 1914.[36] It took nine good years just to accomplish the central railway, this automatically delayed the supply of telegraphic service in most strategic areas. Because of that, the government of German East Africa compensated by transporting mails on the Uganda railway.[37] This implies that, telegraphs never worked alone, but always assisted with other means of transport and communications such as railways, roads, airdromes, steamships, boats, and runners.

BRITISH COLONIAL PERIOD AND TELEGRAPHS IN MWANZA DISTRICT

After the end of the first World War I in 1918, German East Africa which included Tanganyika Rwanda and Urundi districts were divided by the League of the Nations. The districts of Rwanda and Urundi assigned to Belgium, the other district officially came to be known as Tanganyika from 1st February 1920, this was mandated to British.[38] Two years later, that is July 15th 1922, the League of the Nations appointed the Minister who could administer the mandated territory of Tanganyika. That appointment officially marked the beginning of British domination of Tanganyika. From 1922 on, the telegraphs of Tanganyika territory became a branch of British colonial administration.[39]

Since the days of German domination, Mwanza has been the capital of the Lake province region, hence the communication center of the Lake zone. [40] British continued with telegraphs investment initiated by Germans. New policies were composed which guided the telegraphic department. British extended telegraphic to those places which did not have an access to it during German rule. For instance, Mantare, Magu, Maswa, Misungwi, Nasa Bukoba and Musoma were connected to telegraphic services.[41]

British were aware of the importance of other means of transport and communication like roads, railways, airways, steamships and boats, runners host of others. These means of transport and communication were so important because they worked parallel with telegraphic services. In running a mail or telegram received in the colony from metropolitan, the colonial administrator needed to have smooth environment to do so, otherwise running a mail or telegram from the Governor to the District Commissioner or from District Commissioner to local rulers for implementation would never be possible without the help of the roads, railways, steamship, airways, and boats.

Therefore, British in Mwanza improved transport and communication. For instance, in 1928, British completed the rail project which was initiated by the Germans. Besides rail project, British also strengthened air services. The study discovered that there was Mwanza aerodrome situated near the Lake shore at mile 4 on a grade 'A' road it ran northwards from Mwanza township in the direction of the Mwanza chiefdom headquarters. [42] These means of transport were important because they assisted colonial government in running mails or telegram from one point of the colony to another. The railway for instance built from Mwanza to Tabora, assisted them in running mails, telegrams, laborers and other investments.

Moreover, the airdromes which British constructed in Mwanza, Bukoba and Dar es Salaam then were linked by air transport, once a week, so that to simplify air transport among the three mentioned areas. [43] This actually enabled the flow of mail and telegraphs easily since air transport was and still the fastest means of transport compare to other means like roads or railways. The circulation of mails and telegrams among the mentioned areas increased and this in other hand intensified colonial activities both political as well as economic.

Based on the security matters, in 1950 British connected Mwanza with Kampala by trunk telephone service, the same line that connected Bukoba with Tabora.[44] This strategical line enabled British to exchange official information over the matters of the two areas. Most telegrams exchanged between these two areas carried political and economic messages.[45] The circulation of information from Mwanza to South Africa was also possible through an African air mail services opened to Mwanza and extended to Cape town in 1932.[46] This line intended to share news over the progress of mining business in South Africa and in Geita Mwanza were British invested in both.

In addition to that argument above, the study findings revealed that, with air transport in 1931, British connected Mwanza with outside world too.[47] For instance, with what it was called African route of imperial airways, Mwanza and United Kingdom were connected.[48] This connection actually made the flow of mails and telegrams so easy and fast. Mwanza then used to receive current news of whatever

happened in the United Kingdom, and the vise verse. The air service proved a valuable stimulus to colonial administrators in Mwanza since news sharing helped them to administer the colony more effectively.

In 1950 British introduced motorcycle delivery of telegrams in Mombasa, Dar es salaam, Kampala, Tanga and Mwanza.[49] This at least reduced the movement of the mail runners to walk a long distance for mail deliverance: at least now they could use motorcycle instead of peddling. In addition to that, British added several circuits including radio link stations opened at lake Katwe and Mwanza.[50] The aim was to make sure that the government officials could exchange mails and telegrams as fast as possible.

Development of science and technology in Europe brought changes in Mwanza. British introduced wireless communications to replace landline communication. The wireless communication seemed to be way better than landline communications.[51] But one thing for sure is that, the development of wireless during the early twentieth century threatened the virtual monopoly of international telegraphs exercised by the Eastern telegraph company in the interest of British supremacy. Cable rates between Kenya the United Kingdom was expensive and subjected to constant criticism. The introduction of wireless made the cable company bankrupt because most buyers preferred wireless service to landline which relied on cables and at that point this one seemed to be old fashion.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of Telegraphs in Mwanza District had been a devastating issue simply because it affected the daily lives of Sukuma society in Mwanza.[52] Telegraphs led to the destruction of the Sukuma system of communication. The Sukuma society was introduced to new communication system, like mails, letters and telegrams. Apart from that, telegraphs exploited the Sukuma people. Sukuma were employed as security guides, operators, cheap labourers, mail runners a host of others.[53] In Mwanza telegraphs led to migrant labours, it brought people from different parts of the world to work in Mwanza. For instance, migrant labours were imported from Kenya, India, Japan. These people held different position in the telegraph department, such as telegraphs operators, road and railways constructors.

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