

Negotiating Displacement during the Colonial and Early Independence Period along the Zambia-Mozambique Border

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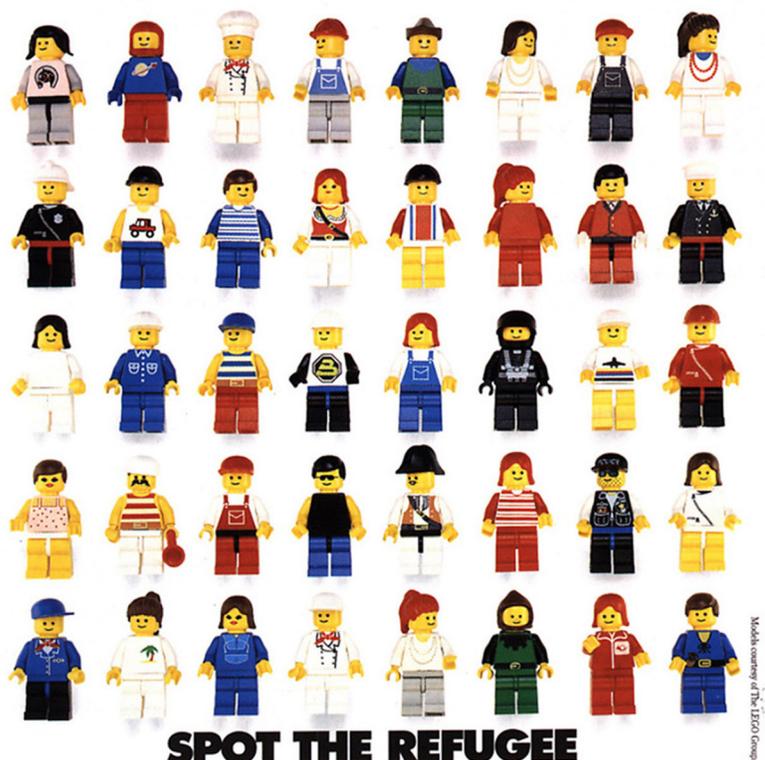
Contemporary refugee situations are frequently discussed in the absence of the historical geographies in which such situations unfold; however, understanding contemporary forced displacements benefits from deeper geo-historical analyses than the majority of refugee research employs.¹ Taking a longer, wider geo-historical perspective captures several critical components of contemporary displacements that short-term, geographically-narrow accounts miss. For instance, the longer historical lens contextualizes previous experiences of migration, displacement and resettlement; while the wider geographical lens incorporates the experiences of host communities within affected regions. Mapping the historical geographies of forced displacement clearly illustrates that contemporary refugee situations do not exist in a vacuum – that refugees do not descend upon a place without a history and the place refugees arrive is not without a history of its own. At first this may seem like an unproblematic, common-sense assertion. However, a thorough examination of the refugee relief regime’s discourse demonstrates and reinforces time and time again the notion that refugees have nothing. Consider the imagery and text of a UNHCR poster (Figure 1) to commemorate World Refugee Day, which characterizes refugees in the following manner:

Each one has something: a tool or implement here, a bicycle or a briefcase there. All completely normal and unremarkable. But wait. Something’s amiss. That nice fellow near the bottom – third row down, second from the right. He doesn’t seem to have anything. Indeed. You see, he’s refugee. And as you can see, refugees are just like you and me except for one thing: everything they once had has been destroyed or taken away, probably at gunpoint. Home, family, possessions, all gone. They have nothing. And nothing is all they’ll ever have unless we help.²

Although these humanitarian calls for assistance lead many to believe refugees come to the table empty-handed, refugees most certainly bring their own histories with them. So although they carry little physical luggage, they do carry enormously rich histories which remain very much a part of their oral tradition, identity, and social negotiations, contrary to popular depictions. Additionally, the places into which refugees arrive are not empty spaces, but rather have particular geo-histories of their own which must be a part of the discussion.

This paper traces out these rich histories through an examination of the historical geography of forced displacement in eastern Zambia, along the border with Mozambique. Since Zambia’s independence in 1964, eastern Zambia experienced two significant periods of in-migration

of Mozambican refugees, resulting in the creation, construction, and management of two organized refugee settlements in the region. The first, Nyimba Refugee Camp (Nyimba RC), hosted Mozambican refugees fleeing violence from the liberation struggle against the Portuguese. The second, Ukwimi Refugee Settlement (Ukwimi RS), opened in 1987 for Mozambicans refugees fleeing the violence of civil war. In addition to these two formal settlements, eastern Zambia also hosted large refugee populations in informal arrangements along the Zambia-Mozambique border. Each of these disparate experiences of refugee-hosting (and especially the earlier experiences at the border and at Nyimba RC) actively shaped and re-shaped what it meant to be “Zambian” or “Mozambican” and “host” or “refugee.”



There he is. Fourth row, second from the left. The one with the moustache. Obvious really. Maybe not. The unsavoury-looking character you're looking at is more likely to be your average neighbourhood slob with a grubby vest and a weekend's stubble on his chin. And the real refugee could just as easily be the clean-cut fellow on his left. You see, refugees are just like you and me. Except for one thing. Everything they once had has been left behind. Home, family,

possessions, all gone. They have nothing. And nothing is all they'll ever have unless we all extend a helping hand. We know you can't give them back the things that others have taken away. We're not even asking for

money (though every penny certainly helps). But we are asking that you keep an open mind. And a smile of welcome. It may not seem much. But to a refugee it can mean everything. UNHCR is a strictly humanitarian organization funded only by voluntary contributions. Currently it is responsible for more than 26 million people around the world.



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNHCR Public Information
P.O. Box 2500
1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

Figure 1. UNHCR Lego Poster - Spot the Refugee, 1997

Stepping back and examining Ukwimi RS within the longer historical and wider geographic perspectives of both Mozambican refugees and their Zambian hosts reveals a history defined by forced relocations, land alienation, and internal migrations for both refugees and their Zambian hosts. Stepping back requires a widening of the geographic and temporal scale of analysis to include an examination of 1) the colonial construction and management of the Zambia-Mozambique border region, 2) the self-settlement of Mozambicans into Zambian border areas and communities, and 3) the forced resettlement (and re-displacement) of refugees into Nyimba Refugee Camp. Uncovering these deeper historical geographies also reveals central aspects of the “on-the-ground” workings of colonialism and the early independence era’s concern with fiercely managing colonial boundaries and constructing inherently spatialized identities.³

This paper also joins in the conversation of numerous other cultural geographers addressing issues surrounding the construction of place, paying particular attention to who belongs and who doesn’t.⁴ All of these studies recognize the need to understand the complex, dynamic processes involved in place-making, yet they nearly all do so in North American and European settings. As noted by Myers, “humanistic cultural geographers have paid relatively little attention to sub-Saharan Africa.”⁵ By examining similar questions in the African context, this paper contributes to geographers’ concerns for understanding of place and answers Myers’ call for more “African humanist approaches to place meaning,” which combine “detail of the political, material, symbolic, or historic struggles of people in places.”⁶ In doing so, it is clear that questions of displacement, land alienation, and resettlement surrounding contemporary refugee flows in eastern Zambia are not new struggles for these border communities.

Colonial Border Migrations and Management

Zambia’s pre-colonial history is a story of migrations – but not just any kind of migrations. In fact, using the current international institutional framework, Zambia’s pre-colonial history is more accurately described as a story of refugee movements. From the Bantu expansion to the flight of the Ngoni and Kololo, the vast majority of Zambian settlers came as forced migrants from areas outside the present-day territory of Zambia. As argued by Nyerere:

If one looks at what are called African tribal migrations over recent centuries, many of the movements would today be defined as a ‘refugee problem’. Minority groups, or dissident families, were fleeing from the dominant authorities and moved to what is now a different country. Very many African nations are made up of a lot of waves of refugees.⁷

The majority of these pre-colonial migrants were quite similar to refugees of today in terms of the causal (or “push”) factors of their forced migrations. As such, the history of Zambia is a “continuous history of the movement of peoples” and the eastern region is no exception.⁸ However, unlike their present-day counterparts, pre-colonial migrants’ refuge was provided primarily by geographic distance rather than by a sovereign power or international conventions.

The earliest oral traditions recorded in eastern Zambia relate to the establishment and development of Undi’s Chewa kingdom in the late 16th century.⁹ Undi’s kingdom ruled throughout present-day Malawi, Zambia’s Eastern Province and Mozambique’s Tete Province. According to historian Harry Langworthy, other communities in the area, such as Kalindawalo’s Nsenga people in present-day Petauke District “maintained their separate distinction within Undi’s kingdom, although aspects of their culture were greatly modified by Chewa influence.”¹⁰ The degree

of cultural modification described by Langworthy is most evident in the linguistic similarities between Chichewa and Chinsenga, as well as shared cultural traditions throughout eastern Zambia. The Chewa and Nsenga were not the only people to make an imprint on the physical, cultural, social, and political geographies of eastern Zambia. The Ngoni, led by Zwengendaba, first entered Undi's kingdom from the south in November 1835.¹¹ The Ngoni settled just at the edge of Kalindawalo's Nsenga kingdom in the Petauke area, often raiding and capturing the Nsenga and their cattle.¹² As tensions mounted between the Ngoni and Nsenga, Zwengendaba led his people northward into Bemba territory. During this migration, Zwengendaba died and the Ngoni split into two separate groups under different leadership. The first group followed the leadership of Mbelwa and continued northward into Bemba land. The second group fell under the leadership of Mpezeni and returned south to Petauke. It was there, near Petauke, that the Ngoni began to challenge the supremacy of Undi's kingdom in the area. After a series of confrontations, Mpezeni succeeded in effectively destroying Undi's Chewa kingdom.

Ngoni rule was cut short by the arrival of Europeans into the area after Mpezeni granted a large mining concession to German hunter and trader Carl Wiese, who worked closely with the Portuguese. "In April 1891, he [Carl Wiese] obtained from Mpezeni a general territorial concession covering 25,000 square kilometers and persuaded the chief to accept the Portuguese flag."¹³ During the next several years, the Ngoni continued to dominate the region, with the help of their occasional (less than 10) white visitors, and "developed a feeling of self-confidence in understanding European intentions."¹⁴

A few years after the original deal between Wiese and Mpezeni, Wiese sold his concession to the Mozambique Gold Land and Concession Company (MGLCC) for approximately £1,500.¹⁵ To the frustration of MGLCC, the colonial administrator of Nyasaland (now Malawi), Harry Johnston, refused to issue MGLCC a certification of their claim and instead recognized the claims of the North Charterland Exploration Company, firmly controlled by British South Africa Company (BSAC), thereby placing Mpezeni's territory "firmly in the British sphere."¹⁶

Although this seems like a somewhat obscure piece of the overall story, it is a moment that significantly altered how the issue of forced migration and refugee-hosting ultimately played out in the area. Consider for a moment if MGLCC's claims had been fully recognized – the majority of Wiese's concession, including the Nyimba/Ukwimi area, would have come under Portuguese rule and ultimately become a part of Mozambique at decolonization. This is important in the context of forced migration and refugee-hosting because it is the very existence and exact placement of the Zambia-Mozambique border that served to define those fleeing violence as refugees (instead of internally displaced persons). The nearly straight-line Zambia-Mozambique border is one of countless examples of artificial, ambiguous, and/or arbitrary borders in sub-Saharan Africa. As articulated by Oliver Bakewell:

The geography and history of Africa means that one common feature of refugee movements on the continent is that the refugees often arrive in the host countries in remote rural areas far from the state capital. The borders imposed by colonial powers cut across many ethnic groups and in many cases the people of the frontier areas have a loose relationship with the distant state whose authority is frayed at its edges. The people of different nationalities on either side of the border may have more in common with each other than either group has with their corresponding co-nationals from the capital.¹⁷

Bakewell's observation is particularly true in the case of the Zambian-Mozambican border communities and the historical geographies of forced displacement which play out in the region.

The transition of Wiese's concession into British hands, in addition to the increasingly aggressive nature of European involvement in the area led to a "crisis of choice" in 1897.¹⁸ The "crisis of choice" for the Ngoni revolved around how they planned to handle their relations with Europeans. Although often depicted as monolithic, ethnic groups in Africa encounter the same kinds of internal conflicts and complexities of any other society and the Ngoni were not an exception. According to Rau:

Mpezeni and his older indunas...felt that peaceful relations [with the Europeans] were possible and desirable. Nsingo, Mlonyeni, Kamzembe and other younger men feared that the European presence within Ungoni [Ngoni land] and to the east was a direct threat to their country and security. They urged Mpezeni to kill the locally-based agents of the North Charterland Exploration Company, and thereby remove the most immediate threat to Ungoni. Mpezeni, under strong pressure, resisted these demands until January 1898 when an invasion by Protectorate troops resolved the issue. Defeat for the Ngoni was quick and definite as a new phase of colonial rule was introduced into eastern Zambia.¹⁹

From this point forward, the eastern border region fell under the BSAC-controlled and administered Northeastern Rhodesia. With its incorporation into Northeastern Rhodesia, border communities experienced significant social, cultural, and geographic restructuring, including considerable internal and external migrations, relocations, and resettlements. As early as 1898, colonial administrators instituted a five shilling hut tax which most local families were unable to pay.²⁰ In response to the hut tax demands of the colonial administrators, a significant majority of the healthy young males in the area headed to Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) for employment, leaving their families behind typically for periods of two years, but frequently longer. Archival research reveals that the social impact of this out-migration significantly altered the local social landscape. Ironically, colonial administrators also used the out-migration to justify the lack of the development in the region. As explained by the District Officer:

It is inevitable that the absence of 60 per cent of the able-bodied males...should slow up development. Often the actual...population of a village is found to be a horde of women supported by a handful of elderly men and weaklings. Indeed, it is a matter of some surprise that so much can be done in the way of subsistence production and improved agricultural methods when the material is so weak and scanty.²¹

In the eyes of colonial administrators, the lack of development throughout the province was the product of the "absence" of able-bodied males. Yet there is no recognition that such absences were the direct consequence of colonial tax policies which incentivized out-migration of able-bodied males, leaving "weak and scanty" females ("material") in the rural areas. In many ways (and in a different era), this out-migration constituted a forced migration of a specific portion of the population out of the area and ultimately had "grave results" for the local economy.²²

In addition to this significantly gendered out-migration, communities in eastern Zambia also faced internal relocation and reconfiguration of social networks due to the imposition of colonial laws concerning resettlement to native reserves and other aspects of life and subsistence, such as hunting. In fact, colonial restrictions on hunting and colonial preferences for closely settled village communities "led to the development of large areas of bush in which an ever-growing animal population dwelled and set the stage for one of the major ecological reverses in eastern Zambia's history - the spread of tsetse fly and, with it, human and animal sleeping

sickness.”²³ Although some negative consequences of colonial policies could be described as unintended (such as the spread of the tsetse fly), other disruptive outcomes were quite consciously pursued and intended. For example, Livingstone Bruce, the General Manager of the North Charterland Company, argued that the colonial authorities restrict Africans access to land precisely to force them to enter into the local (and regional) labor market for survival. According to Bruce,

It would be politic to procure Reserves on the basis of the bare subsistence of the Native, giving an allowance for that only, assuming that the policy of the country is to encourage European development. I shall not go so far as to say that the Natives in the whole of the Territory should be cut down to a bare subsistence allowance, but I do say so as regards the Concession.²⁴

It is upon such logic that the colonial administration demarcated native reserves in 1913 and 1914. In Eastern Province, approximately 3,500mi² of the lowest quality land was set aside for the entire African population, while 6,500mi² of the best land was allocated to the 80 European settlers.²⁵ Although colonial administrators in Eastern Province anticipated the arrival of large numbers of Europeans into the area, European settler populations never reached anticipated numbers due to the crumbling tobacco markets of the 1920s.²⁶ According to one resident of Petauke District at the time,

We were moved away from our homes (so) that Europeans might come and live there. No Europeans have come and soon there will be none of us left here. If we stay here, we shall know that the government has destroyed us.²⁷

Over the course of several decades, the areas delineated for European settlement returned to bush, while the native reserves became “devastated from overuse, severe soil erosion, deforestation, and a falling water table.”²⁸

It is important to note here that this devastation did not occur without considerable opposition from the local communities. For instance, the Ambo community residing just outside the Nyimba/Petauke area lost an estimated 54% of their population from 1928 to 1938.²⁹ In response to such overwhelming loss and social disruption, Chieftainess Mwape pleaded with the Governor for the restoration of her people to their land. The Chieftainess conveyed her people’s desperation to escape the tsetse fly infested reserves.³⁰ The Governor concluded that he was well “aware of the wish of her people” to return to their lands, but “the government could not ask the North Charterland Company to part with their most fertile land.”³¹

With continued pressure from Chieftainess Mwape and her colleagues, colonial administrators at the provincial level began corresponding to colonial administrators in Lusaka. In a 1937 letter to the colonial secretary, the provincial Governor wrote that the “reserves are in a woeful plight and the...paramount need of the natives is for more land immediately. The natives cannot understand the delay and have become embittered.”³² The District Commissioner wrote to Lusaka about the desire of the local people to acquire the “empty, silent” lands that had been set aside for European settlers, but that had now “filled with bush and game and tsetse fly.”³³ Ultimately, the colonial government awarded £154,000 to the North Charterland Exploration Company in exchange for transferring land to the government ownership in 1941.³⁴

This transaction did not immediately or quickly translate into the return of people to their lands. Several major obstacles fell in the way of the people’s return to their lands. First, most of the 6,500mi² set aside for European settlement had reverted to bush land, filled with wild game and tsetse fly. The colonial government began an extensive program in 1943 to clear the

land and thin out the wild game populations.³⁵ Secondly, the colonial government determined that, due to the severe erosion, any agricultural production in the region must employ “modern” agricultural techniques – techniques which the local communities had neither the capital nor the labor supply to engage. So although the colonial government was interested in converting the land to agricultural use, the out-migration to more lucrative employment in Southern Rhodesia, South Africa, and the Copperbelt was “far too high to allow for the sort of agricultural revolution that the Government was seeking.”³⁶ Besides, the BSAC had already turned its attention to “what would become the *raison d’être* of this territory for the entire twentieth century, its metals.”³⁷ A 1946 Land Commission Report concluded that the end result of the land policies created a “profoundly unsatisfactory situation in many of the reserves” and caused much “unnecessary suffering and ill-will.”³⁸ For the people of Eastern Province, the “unnecessary suffering” and government-managed land displacement technically concluded in 1941, but the spatial legacies of these forced migrations remain today.

Mozambique’s War of Independence and Nyimba Refugee Camp

Although 1960 was a watershed year for the independence of African countries, the Portuguese colonies across the continent were only just beginning what would become a fifteen-year struggle for liberation. In fact, in 1960 Mozambique was only just witnessing the formation of its first political party, *União Democrática Nacional de Moçambique* (UDENAMO), led by Adelino Gwambe from Harare, Zimbabwe. In 1961, two additional nationalist parties formed in Dar es Salaam, Mozambique National African Union (MANU) and *União Africana de Moçambique Independente* (UNAMI). In September 1962, all three parties merged to form *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO). FRELIMO’s first president, Eduardo Mondlane, was one of a handful of black Mozambican graduates, with a degree from the United States. On September 25, 1964, FRELIMO began its long struggle for independence, launching a number of attacks in the Mueda area, fifty miles south of the northern border with Tanzania.³⁹ Under Mondlane’s leadership, with its headquarters in Dar es Salaam, FRELIMO steadily increased its power in the two northern districts of Niassa and Cabo Delgado, effectively creating liberated areas freed of Portuguese control.⁴⁰

In 1968, FRELIMO held its first meetings inside Mozambique, re-electing Mondlane as president and setting the strategy for the liberation of the entire country. The following year dealt FRELIMO many blows, undermining many of the achievements they had made. In February, Mondlane was assassinated by a parcel bomb and a power struggle within FRELIMO intensified between those who were fighting for socialist restructuring of society and those who basically wanted to substitute Portuguese elites with black elites.⁴¹ Ultimately, the military commander Samora Machel emerged from the struggle as Frelimo’s leader and president. According to Englund, a “new sense of common purpose was embodied by Samora Machel.”⁴² At the same time, Portuguese General Kaulza da Arriaga, “Portugal’s hope in the Mozambique war,” arrived in Mozambique to combat FRELIMO and bring an end to the independence movement.⁴³

After gaining its own independence in 1964, Zambia remained firmly committed to the anti-colonial struggle of its neighbor, demonstrated most vocally in the drafting and subsequent adoption by 14 African nations of the Lusaka Manifesto in 1969. The Lusaka Manifesto is probably most noted for laying out the following statement in its opening words:

By this manifesto we wish to make clear, beyond all shadow of doubt, our acceptance of the belief that all men are equal, and have equal rights to human dignity and respect, regardless of colour, race, religion or sex.⁴⁴

But buried a bit deeper into the Manifesto is an assertion that has something quite significant to add to concerns of boundaries, identities, and place-making within the context of the struggle against colonialism. The Manifesto asserts the following about Zambia's neighbors:

In Mozambique and Angola, and in so-called Portuguese Guinea, the basic problem is not racialism but a pretence that Portugal exists in Africa. Portugal is situated in Europe; the fact that it is a dictatorship is a matter for the Portuguese to settle. But no decree of the Portuguese dictator, no legislation passed by any parliament in Portugal can make Africa a part of Europe.⁴⁵

Although indeed Africa could not be made a part of Europe, Portugal's violent resistance to the liberation of its colonies made many Mozambicans "Zambians." Throughout December 1965, several thousand Mozambicans crossed the border into Zambia, either fleeing from or attempting to avoid the violence of the liberation struggle.

The border between Mozambique and Zambia was (and is) a remnant of the colonial era and for many of these refugees the "border between the two countries is a fiction."⁴⁶ So much so that the archives are filled with correspondence concerned with distinguishing between Zambians and Mozambicans and making "fiction" into reality - actively trying to create "Zambians" and "Mozambicans" (i.e., "refugees") by attempting to draw clear distinction among border communities. For example, several letters grapple with the challenge of determining the refugee-status and citizenship of individuals in inter-border marriages. In fact, special attention was needed to discern between "Zambians" and "Mozambicans" with regard to the issue of inter-border marriages. A 1969 letter to the Chadiza District Immigration Officer details the common practice of deriving the citizenship of women through marriage, rather than birth. According to the letter:

If a Zambian was long ago married to a Mozambique in Mozambique, that woman - after running away from the Portuguese terror in Zambia with or without her husband - is a refugee because she qualified on the citizenship of the husband in Mozambique. Likewise, a Mozambican woman whether to be a refugee or not if married to a Zambian man she qualifies on the citizenship of the husband and [should] be treated as Zambian.⁴⁷

The long history of interaction, intermarriage, and movement across the border in the area meant that nearly all of these refugees crossed the border intending to stay with Zambian friends and relatives.⁴⁸

The few who did not have friends or relatives on the Zambian side of the border successfully petitioned local chiefs and headmen for protection.⁴⁹ As the number of Mozambicans seeking refuge in Zambia grew, the Zambian government decided to transfer all the self-settled refugees to one place "for the sake of proper administration" and in the service of defining who was Zambian (and, perhaps more importantly, who was not).⁵⁰ The government quickly established Nyimba Refugee Camp, just south of the Great East Road, and within one year, more than 2,000 Mozambicans were relocated to Nyimba RC (Figure 2).

Refugee research and literature often begins the story at this moment – with the establishment and subsequent growth of a particular camp – and rarely unpacks the complicated and contested nature of establishing and populating a refugee camp. Beginning the story in such a manner obscures the problematic processes which compel refugees to transition from self-settlement to organized settlements/camps. Utilizing archive material as well as interviews, I pieced together some of the complexities that underlay the “establishment” of a refugee camp. Telling such stories reveals the very real ways in which people challenged and resisted attempts to control their movements and settlement choices.

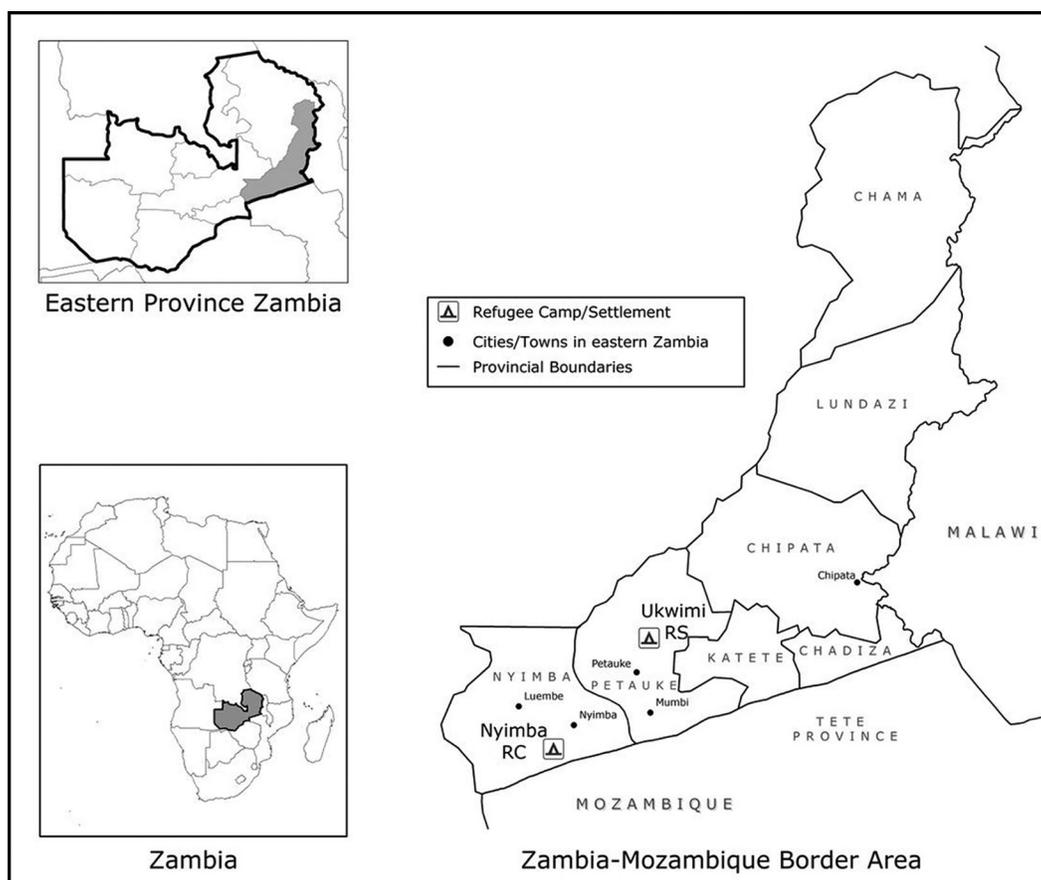


Figure 2. Refugee settlement areas in eastern Zambia

The transition from self-settlement with friends and relatives into the organized settlement of Nyimba RC was anything but smooth as many of the Mozambican refugees were unwilling to voluntarily move to Nyimba RC. Several incidents created a refugee population wary of the merits of organized settlement at Nyimba RC. Zambian police and immigration officials were sent into the border areas to convince (and in some cases coerce) refugees to relocate to the camp.⁵¹ Many refugees ran into the fields to hide when the police and immigration officials approached. Reflecting on such difficulties, Mr. Moonga, an Immigration Officer, informed the Permanent Secretary of Eastern Province that he had been unable to resettle a group of approximately 60 Mozambicans to Nyimba RC because “each time I go there to try to contact them, they run away and hid in the bushes towards Mozambique.”⁵² The archives detail extensive attempts to identify Mozambicans and relocate them to Nyimba RC, often commenting on the difficulties of such exercises.

Even after processing, documenting, and transferring some of the self-settled refugees to Nyimba RC, other factors complicated the success of Nyimba RC as a viable option for Mozambican refugees. Shortly after an early influx into Nyimba, an outbreak of measles caused the death of a significant number of children at the camp hospital.⁵³ Many of the refugees connected the deaths with the camp itself and as the “rumour about the epidemic spread, [it]... made those refugees still in villages even more reluctant to go to the camp...[and] many who were [already] at the camp left.”⁵⁴ In fact, the Portuguese are reported to have used this incident to begin an effective propaganda campaign among the refugees, convincing many that if they went to Nyimba RC their children would die and their men would be sent as forced labor to Kariba Dam.⁵⁵ These negative impressions and fears of Nyimba Refugee Camp, together with the refugees’ relatively successful and effective survival among friends and relatives in the border areas,⁵⁶ coalesced in such a way that sustained resistance to resettlement at Nyimba RC continued (and intensified) throughout the liberation struggle.

Judging from the archival material, concern about the presence of self-settling refugees in the area intensified in the early 1970s. In a July 14, 1971 letter from F.S. Kameli to the District Secretary in Chadiza District, the Immigration Officer detailed his growing concern with the presence of refugees in the border areas. According to his report, Kameli sent three Immigration Assistants to the border villages to “collect” refugees and recorded his “astonishment” when they returned with only two Mozambican refugees.⁵⁷ The rest of the refugees living in the border villages had run into hiding upon the advice of their local Zambian hosts. Throughout the letter, Kameli is clearly frustrated by the lack of cooperation by village headmen, arguing that it is “high time” that the headmen along the Zambia-Mozambique border be “shaken-up.”⁵⁸ Kameli stated that upon questioning by his Immigration Assistants the village headmen “clearly admitted that they had plenty of refugees from Mozambique and that they could not reveal their names...for fear they could be taken to Nyimba.”⁵⁹

Kameli explicitly connected the presence of refugees “wandering about in the border villages” to larger questions of national security.⁶⁰ He requested that the District Secretary speak to the headmen about the “dangers they and the state could face by harbouring new entrants.”⁶¹ Kameli further suggested that those refugees who refuse to relocate to the “prescribed resettlement” at Nyimba RC be handed over to FRELIMO in Mozambique.⁶²

Kameli’s letter provides useful insight into the complications involved in trying to “collect” refugees into camps, revealing both the frustrations of a district level bureaucrat and the coalition between self-settled refugees and their local hosts, particularly village headmen. The energy and frustration evident in Kameli’s letters and the subsequent responses to his letters also challenge the common assumption and discourse that refugee settlements are solely (or even centrally) humanitarian endeavors. The archives clearly demonstrate that monitoring and managing the border area was motivated by Zambia’s need to define who belonged and who did not, to distinguish between Zambians and Mozambicans, and to consolidate its own sense of “One Zambia, One Nation.” Zambia’s geo-political, state-centric motives were as strong (if not stronger) than any humanitarian rationales.

The archives also revealed significant disagreements within the government bureaucracy concerning the proper procedures and methods by which to monitor and document Mozambican refugees along the border. In September 1971, the Katete District Secretary, E.C. Nbita, wrote a scathing letter to the Chief Immigration Officer in Lusaka to voice his frustration with the “collection” methods employed by Immigration Officers in his district.⁵³ According to Nbita, the Immigration Officers’ documentation activities were an “unnecessary burden...on my office.”⁶⁴ The following excerpt from his letter details his objections to the way in which Immigration Officers were conducting affairs in his district:

23 September 1971

From: E.C. Nbita – District Secretary, Katete

To: Chief Immigration Officer, Lusaka

Re: Minute KAT/28/71 of 17th September 1971

I have disagreed with the method [by Immigration Officers] of documenting refugees and leaving them in villages and then bringing copies of documentation forms with a request that I send District Messengers to collect them. This method is not effective and has led to a waste of funds without achieving desired results. Several times when District Messengers have been sent on collection of refugees upon receipt of the reports from the Immigration Officer, it has been proved when reaching the place in question, refugees are not found and reports in more or less all cases indicated that refugees return to their country of origin immediately when immigration staff left the place after effecting documentation.

In some cases, we find it too expensive to detail a Messenger to escort only one refugee to Nyimba. It is further not realized enough that unlike Colonial days, a district like Katete has very little number of District Messengers and indeed transport and other facilities which can assist to keep a refugee for a few days before removal to Nyimba can be made.

To cut this minute short, I have to state that the present role played by the immigration staff in this particular exercise is not a relief but unnecessary burden placed on my office... I just wonder why immigration staff cannot be made to do more practical work rather [than] ending at mere documentation, and expect the District Secretary to go hunting for refugees who leave convenient places after being alarmed as a result of documentation.

Last not the least, the unquestionable need to remove refugees in Zambian villages along the borders can not be overemphasized by anybody but what is required is to pay attention to the factors involved and not merely to end at documentation.⁶⁵

Upon further investigation into the archives, I discovered that Nbita's letter to the Chief Immigration Officer in Lusaka was in reaction to a complaint filed by the Katete District Immigration Officer, L.K. Zimbiri. Apparently, Zimbiri filed a complaint against Nbita due to an incident involving the escape of Mr. Olokani Banda, a Mozambican refugee under the guard of one of Nbita's District Messengers at the time of escape. In response, Nbita wrote the preceding letter to Lusaka, as well as a letter to Zimbiri himself. Nbita maintains that Zimbiri's complaint is not "genuine" because Mr. Banda was not under arrest and was "merely being moved to the refugee camp with a liberty of a free person."⁶⁶ Nbita's letter to Zimbiri is interesting in that it acknowledges a contradiction in the government's conception and treatment of refugees – on the one hand, refugees have the liberties of a "free person", yet on the other hand, they are consistently described as needing to be "rounded up" or "collected" as though their presence outside of Nyimba Refugee Camp is in fact a crime.

As the number of Mozambicans seeking refuge in Zambia accelerated throughout the early 1970s, the government of Zambia grappled with both its inability to effectively identify and "collect" refugees and the growing inadequacy of Nyimba RC to sustain such large numbers

of refugees. The approach advocated by the Ministry of Rural Development in Lusaka was to maintain the status quo and continue pushing refugees into Nyimba Refugee Camp. This decision appears to have been reached without the consultation of local bureaucrats, local Zambian headmen, and/or Mozambican refugees.

According to Chipata Land Use Officer, T.E. Bourne, the proposal from Lusaka was “completely and absolutely unacceptable to us in this province, from the economic, agricultural, ecological, political, and humanistic aspects.”⁶⁷ In his November 15, 1971 letter to J.D.B. Eerdamns (Planning Officer – Social Aspects in Ministry of Rural Development, Lusaka), Bourne outlines the shortcomings of Nyimba RC as the solution to the current refugee crisis in the province. He calculated that Nyimba RC could handle fewer than 400 refugee families, leaving over 600 refugee families with no place in the organized settlement at Nyimba RC.⁶⁸ Additionally, Bourne cautioned the government against proceeding without consultation with the local border communities. He warned that the “local people are already a little disturbed by the fact that these people [Mozambican refugees] are pouring in and receiving aid, while they themselves have no development projects. They would be even more disturbed if they see vast areas of their land being taken away.”⁶⁹ In response to Bourne’s concerns, the Ministry of Rural Development began to re-evaluate its plans for Mozambican refugees.

According to archival evidence, several changes in government policy necessitated that alternative land be allocated for Mozambican refugees who could not be accommodated at Nyimba Refugee Camp. The most significant policy change came in the area of agricultural development. Prior to 1972, the agricultural policy at Nyimba RC was one of communal farming, with heavy “mechanization and intensive use of fertilizers” as managed by the Ministry of Projects of the Ministry of Rural Development.⁷⁰ According to a letter from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs, each refugee family would now be allocated an individual family farm plot, which was to be cultivated “traditionally” without the use of fertilizers or mechanization.⁷¹

Due to this shift in policy, the Permanent Secretary concluded (in agreement with Bourne) that “the Refugee Settlement at Nyimba is now utterly inadequate.”⁷² In his letter, the Permanent Secretary addresses the fact that with less than 600 acres of arable land, Nyimba RC can only support 120 refugee families, at 5 acres/family, leaving over 800 refugee families in need of land.⁷³

In response to this “insoluble dilemma”, numerous alternatives to Nyimba RC were pursued by various government offices.⁷⁴ The first such alternative is outlined in the following letter from the Planning Officer in Lusaka.

6 January 1972

From: J.D.B. Eerdamns – Planning Officer (Social Aspects), Lusaka

To: T.E. Bourne – Land Use Officer, Chipata

Subject: Nyimba Farm

After discussions with the Commissioner for Refugees, it appears that the position is as follows:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs prefers to concentrate refugees in large camps of at least 2,000 people for administrative reasons
- At Nyimba not enough arable lands is available to settle a large number of families
- It is not desirable to take over Trust land for settling refugees in areas like Nyimba where population density is relatively high

- It is not desirable for political reasons to “settle” refugees among people of the same linguistic and tribal grouping. The refugees may tend to forget their temporary status in the country.

For these reasons it is preferable to move all refugees from Nyimba and resettle them at Meheba, North Western Province, where about 90,000 acres are available. Each family will be given a 10 acre plot. Though no final decision has been made yet by the Ministry of Home Affairs, it is hoped that at least part of the present Nyimba refugees will move to Meheba after this growing season.⁷⁵

Eerdamns' response to Bourne is enlightening in many ways. To begin, his first assertion reinforces the preference of refugee-hosting governments to consolidate refugees into organized settlements for their own security purposes. If we pause here to unpack the idea of organized settlements, it is clear that Eerdamns is advocating for the creation of highly governed spaces – spaces in which the government can, with the assistance of its international partners, monitor and govern the activities and the movements of refugees within its borders. The second interesting aspect of the government's approach is found in Eerdamns' fourth point: that refugees should be settled away from hosts with whom they share cultural characteristics. The culmination of Eerdamns' four basic assumptions leads him to advocate that Nyimba refugees be resettled to Meheba Refugee Camp, nearly 1,000km away in Western Province.

The second alternative to Nyimba Refugee Camp sought to find a suitable site for refugee-hosting within the province, signaling a repudiation of Eerdamns' contention that refugees be sent far from those with whom they share cultural traits. Zambian authorities were particularly concerned with movement between Nyimba RC and border regions and increasingly viewed Nyimba refugees as “militant supporters” and “carriers” for FRELIMO.⁷⁶ The following July 14, 1972 letter written by Immigration Officer Matalaka in response to a government directive to forcibly resettle a group of 350 Mozambican refugees to Nyimba RC explains some of these concerns in detail:

I interviewed the leaders of the groups on 13th July 1972, including the representatives of Frelimo, who explained to me that the reasons to enter the country was not to settle permanently in Zambia, but that their village in Mozambique was destroyed by Portuguese planes and four people were captured. They were therefore advised by Freedom Fighters to seek shelter in Zambia.

- (a) Before they entered the country, the Frelimo Leaders went to see Chief Mwanjawanthu in order to allow them to camp near the border and permission was granted to them.
- (b) It is a problem to remove them to Nyimba Refugee Camp as they indicated that they are essential to Freedom Fighters in the area by supplying food and labour.
- (c) They also emphasized that should they be away from Freedom Fighters, they will not be able to support the freedom fighters as they do now.
- (d) These people are willing to go back to Mozambique, but it is a risk to them because the Portuguese soldiers are aware of their movements and their villages have on several times been bombed.

Please advise what action can be taken as soon as possible.⁷⁷

My own field interviews with former soldiers confirmed that local border communities were “essential to the Freedom Fighters in the area by supplying food and labour.”⁷⁸ The Eastern Province archival folder is filled with similar letters and correspondence concerning the security risks of Nyimba’s proximity to the border areas.⁷⁹ One final example of this concern can be found in another letter written by Matakala on July 21, 1972 which discusses a number of instructive points concerning security, community, and resettlement away from Nyimba RC.

21 July 1972

During my tour of inspection in Chief Mwanjawanthu’s area in Petauke District and Chief Mwangala’s area in Chadiza District, I discovered that our people have their villages less than a mile from the boundary with Zambia and Mozambique where Freedom Fighters are operating [and] harassing the Portuguese. It appears that a day will come when Portuguese soldiers will retaliate by bombing villages and our people will continually be subjected to air attacks, even at Nyimba.

Both chiefs mentioned above, Freedom Fighters, and their supporters mix with our people in beer parties. When I visited Chief Mwangala’s area 24 miles from Chadiza boma, I was informed that Frelimo are camping 5 miles inside Mozambique but their supporters, men and women including children, have camps in Zambia in separate groups. I failed to see their leaders. I was informed that all men went out assisting in transporting ammunition for freedom fighters. This case is similar to that of chief Mwanjawanthu’s area in Petauke District.

In Chief Mwangala’s area Chadiza District, there is a hill 5 miles away which serves as a boundary and towards Zambia there is a thick bush with big and tall trees which makes difficult for Portuguese soldiers to track freedom fighters. I and my officers walked to the border but returned after being warned of landmines. We visited another [border] camp but it was deserted leaving only two small boys of 10 years old who were capable enough to answer few questions we asked them. One of the two boys revealed that his father had left in the morning to assist freedom fighters and would return in the evening.

On my return I was contemplating that women and children of those people are certainly not part and parcel of Frelimo and I fail to understand why they should be regarded as supporters of freedom fighters. I felt women and children should be separated away from the area and be kept into a refugee camp where children will attend school rather than to leave them in the bush starving.⁸⁰

The push to close Nyimba RC was also motivated by security concerns and frustrations with local authorities. The District Secretary of Petauke, H.S. Lubinda, wrote to the Commissioner for Refugees and stated that “the present camp at Nyimba is a security risk” and poses a “danger” to administration of refugee relief operations.⁸¹ In the end, officials proposed that Nyimba refugees be transferred to Sasare Farms, a farm block that had originally been planned to house Watchtower refugees from Malawi.⁸²

Throughout May 1973, government officials spent considerable time and energy (as evident in the archives by frequent correspondence) planning for the relocation to Sasare Farms. On January 21, 1974, Stokes confirmed the government’s intentions to begin resettling Nyimba refugees to “Sasare Refugee Settlement” after the rains.⁸³ This resettlement to Sasare and the creation

of "Sasare Refugee Settlement" did not transpire as events in Mozambique began to deescalate throughout 1974, with the signing of a transfer of power agreement between Lisbon and Frelimo. On June 25, 1975, Samora Machel became the first president of a newly liberated and independent Mozambique.

With the de-escalation of violence, many of the self-settled and Nyimba-settled refugees crossed back over the border and returned home. Shortly after their repatriation, Nyimba Refugee Camp was officially closed. Upon their return, Nyimba-settled refugees maintained communication and trade with their Zambian hosts on the other side of the border. According to one Mozambican refugee, inter-border trade and communication resumed to levels that existed prior to the disruptions of colonialism:

People from Mozambique used to take meat and fish for sale to Zambia in the border area. After the sales, they could buy whatever they wanted, mostly salt, clothes, soap, ploughs, and other fancy things. Again from the Zambian border line people could take salt, some sugar, clothes, and soap to Mozambique to exchange for fish and meat. Sometimes ploughs could be taken in exchange for cattle in Mozambique. This trade became very famous so much that is made many people from Mfingoe and Maloera bomas in Mozambique friends with many people again from Petauke and Katete bomas in Zambia. Because of that, relationships were being made; marriages across the border became famous *again*.⁸⁴

Returning Nyimba-settled refugees also implemented a series of changes to their agricultural practices, changes they had encountered and learned while staying at Nyimba RC. For example, numerous informants signaled that the introduction of extensive plowing on the Mozambican side of the border only began when the Nyimba refugees returned from the camp with ploughs and other agricultural implements.⁸⁵ My field interviews with Mozambican refugees and their Zambian hosts at Ukwimi RS confirm that the impacts of forced displacement are not confined to the places where refugees arrive (such as Nyimba RC or Ukwimi RS), but can also impact their places of origin upon return.

Conclusions

In his eloquent and persuasive ethnography of conflict and displacement in Mozambique, Stephen Lubkemann contends that "in Mozambique...migration was one of the most important and common ways people coped with violence and its effects."⁸⁶ As such, intensified internal conflict in Mozambique's Tete Province precipitated an influx of 3,000 Mozambicans into Zambia in June 1985, seeking refuge from the ongoing and escalating violence on the Mozambican side of the border. Within a year, more than 22,000 Mozambicans had "poured" into Zambia, spontaneously settled themselves along the border areas.⁸⁷

Just as in the decade before, spontaneous self-settlement in the border areas made sense to the Mozambicans due to the artificial nature of the boundary in the first place, the cultural and historical affinity of the communities on either side of the border, and Mozambicans experiences in the Zambian border regions as refugees less than 10 years before during their liberation struggle. Many of these Mozambicans self-settled with their relatives on the Zambian side of a colonially constructed border.⁸⁸

Though firmly committed to the resettlement of refugees into an organized settlement, the Zambian government did not entertain the idea of reopening Nyimba Refugee Camp. With-

out the detailed history of the Nyimba operation discussed above, the decision to create an entirely new refugee settlement at Ukwimi instead of using Nyimba would not make much sense. But, given the deteriorating stability of the Nyimba camp towards the end of its existence and the recorded desire to close Nyimba RC as early as 1972, it should not come as a surprise that Zambian authorities were not keen to re-open Nyimba RC as an organized settlement, especially given its problematic history and its proximity to the border. Due to its previous experiences with Nyimba RC, the government of Zambia resettled the 1980s influx of Mozambican refugees to the newly established Ukwimi Refugee Settlement in Petauke District.

Although the creation and populating of an organized refugee space like Nyimba RC or Ukwimi RS is typically described in very objective, unproblematic language, geo-historical analysis illustrates a much more complex and problematic story. As discussed, migration – particularly forced migration – defined the pre-colonial and colonial history of the people of eastern Zambia in very concrete ways. As such, the forced displacement and resettlement of Mozambican refugees in the region did not represent a profoundly different experience from prior land alienation and forced relocations. The narratives documented in the archives also point to the contested nature of creating, constructing, and settling refugee camps/settlements. Interestingly, and contrary to the prevalent narrative of host-refugee tensions, the archives give evidence of the degree to which local Zambians, especially chiefs and headmen, and Mozambicans resisted efforts to be re-displaced to Nyimba RC. These types of unexpected partnerships and relationships are precisely the stories that go untold in our contemporary understandings of displacement – and are exactly the stories that a geo-historical perspective can most effectively tell.

NOTES

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⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷ Julius Nyerere quoted in Gaim Kibreab, "The State of the Art Review of Refugee Studies in Africa," *Uppsala Papers in Economic History* (1991) 26: 18-19.

⁸ W.V. Brelsford, *The Tribes of Northern Rhodesia* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1956), 4; D.W. Phillipson, *The Prehistory of Eastern Zambia* (Nairobi: British Institute in Eastern Africa, 1976).

⁹ Henry Wells III Langworthy, *A History of Undi's Kingdom to 1890: Aspects of Chewa History in East Central Africa* (PhD dissertation, Boston University, 1969); Henry Wells III Langworthy, *Zambia before 1890: Aspects of Pre-Colonial History* (London: Longman, 1972); Phillipson, *The Prehistory of Eastern Zambia* (1976).

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³⁸ Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ), *Report of the Land Commission* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1946), 2.

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⁴⁰ Thomas Henriksen, "People's War in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 14 (1976): 377-399; J. Nunes and Kenneth Wilson, "Repatriation to Mozambique: Current processes and future dilemmas," paper presented at *Social and Economic Aspects of Mass Voluntary Return Movements of Refugees from one African Country to Another Symposium*, UN Research Institute for Social Development, Harare Zimbabwe (Oxford: Refugee Studies Center RSC/J-56 Conf Box SYM 91, 1991).

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