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Settling in motion

Nyasa clandestine migration through Southern Rhodesia into
the Union of South Africa, 1920s – 1950s

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Abstract: Illegal African migration into South Africa is not uniquely a post-apartheid phenomenon. It has its antecedents in the colonial/apartheid period. The South Africa colonial economy relied heavily on cheap African labour from both within and outside the Union. Most foreign migrant labourers came from the then Nyasaland (Malawi) and Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique) through official channels of the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA). WNLA was active throughout Southern Africa and competed for the same labour resources with other regional supranational ‘native’ labour recruitment agencies, providing various incentives to lure and transport potential employees to its bustling South African gold and diamond mining industry. However, not all migrant labourers found their way through formal WNLA channels. Using archival material from repositories in Harare (Zimbabwe), Zomba (Malawi), Grahamstown (South Africa), London, and Oxford (UK), the paper casts light on illicit migration mainly by Malawian labourers (Nyasas) through Southern Rhodesia into South Africa between the 1920s and 1950s. It argues that many transient Nyasas subverted the inhibitive WNLA contractual obligations by clandestinely migrating independently into the Union. They also exploited the labour recruitment infrastructure used by the state and labour bureaus to swiftly move across Southern Rhodesia. In essence, Nyasas settled in motion, using Southern Rhodesia as a stepping-stone or springboard en-route to the more lucrative Union of South Africa. An appreciation of such informal migration opens up space for creating a more comprehensive historiography of labour migration in Southern Africa. Likewise, illicit migration is not confined to the contemporary African diaspora, but early diasporas as well. Consequently, this narrative acts as a background for understanding the precursors of the rampant illegal African migration into post-apartheid South Africa.

Keywords: informal, migration, colonial, archival, Rhodesia, South Africa

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1 Introduction

In the last twenty years, South Africa has experienced an increased influx of illegal African migrants from the region and beyond. Many of these immigrants are political and economic refugees fleeing socio-economic and political inadequacies in their homelands in pursuit of the lucrative promises that post-apartheid South Africa offers. In the process South Africa turned into a melting pot of different races and ethnicities, a number of whom are illegal or undocumented migrants. However, illicit movement of people, particularly Southern Africans, into South Africa has never been a post-apartheid phenomenon. It is predated to the colonial period, more precisely, during the colonial labour migration from the 1890s onwards. This is when a burgeoning Rand economy in South Africa and the quest for a second Rand in Southern Rhodesia, triggered an insatiable appetite for cheap African labour from the northern territories of Nyasaland (Malawi), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique) (Phimister 1974; Van Onselen 1976; Daimon 2017). The South African labour empire enlisted an array of migrants and vastly extended as far north as Tanzania and as far beyond as India and China. The ensuing process of resource exploitation, labour recruitment competition, colonial statecraft, and border reconfigurations led to the criminalization of African trans-communal/national mobility and the emergence of clandestine or illegal migration (Musoni 2012).

Existing studies on colonial labour migration in the region have illuminated on a plethora of nuances but without being explicit on the nuances of illicit labour movement into the Union. For example, South African literature has shown that the majority of black miners were Mozambicans who according to Harries (1990, 1994, 2014) were transformed from slavery and indenture in the Cape to migrant labour in the 1800s. Internal labour recruitment was hindered by numerous socio-political circumstances. Rankin-Smith et al. (2014) reveal how post Anglo-Boer War labour shortages compelled the industry to rely on alternative Chinese labour from north China but were pushed out/repatriated in the aftermath of changing race politics in South Africa. Harris (1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2008) further looked at the experiences of these indentured Chinese migrants or ‘overseas Chinese’ in South Africa showing their struggles to belong in a racially hierarchical society where they are seen as not black or white enough. Thereafter, migrants from Mozambique, Malawi, or—as highlighted by Coplan (2014)—from Lesotho, flooded the mining industry. These transnational migrant labour histories were further enriched by works that have discussed the economic and socio-cultural synergies that emerged between migrants’ places of origin (homelands) and their diasporic places of employment. In his discussion of Mozambican migrant labourers in South Africa, Harries (1990, 1994) documented the hybrid identities and cultural traits that the migrants created in South African mining compounds and frequently took back to Mozambique over the course of their contractual labour obligations. Moodie (1992) similarly showed how culture and broader identities of Mozambican migrants on South African gold mines were central for surviving ethnic and work-related challenges far from home. Despite the general local apathy towards mine labour, South African mines engaged autochthonous Africans from across all ethnic groups, in particular, the Pedi, Zulu, Xhosa, Suthu and Mpondo. Nonetheless, Musoni (2012) broadly attempted to discuss the rise and resilience of illegal migration across the Zimbabwe-South Africa border from the late nineteenth century, but without being explicit and specific on Nyasa labour migrants. Dubbing it ‘border jumping’, he merges migration and statecraft or state-making processes arguing that border jumping emerged and expanded as an unintended by-product of state building processes, which began with European colonization of the Southern African region (Musoni 2012).

The role that illegal African migrant labourers played as an equally important source of cheap labour, and how the Union’s government even encouraged such informal migration

notwithstanding the experiences and processes involved in such an arduous and dangerous activity, has not been fully acknowledged in existing literature. Such concerns form the basis for this paper as it contends that illicit migration is not only limited to the contemporary African diaspora in South Africa, but early diasporas as well. It therefore historicizes experiences and processes of clandestine migration into the Union of South Africa that were prevalent among northern African migrants, particularly those from Nyasaland, hereafter Nyasas. It assumes a transnational approach to trace how independent labour migrants migrated from their districts/regions in Nyasaland across the Zambezi River through Southern Rhodesia and across the Limpopo River into South Africa using such modes of transport as foot, road or rail. Such transient illegals supplemented the efforts of the WNLA, commonly known as *Wenela* among African labour migrants, and immensely sustained the South African mining and agricultural colonial enterprises. To some extent the South African government also encouraged such unsanctioned mobility to enhance its labour needs.

This paper is a product of an extensive two-year archival research process between 2013 and 2014 that broadly sought to document the life histories of labour migrants and their descendants in foreign frontiers. The pursuit for relevant research data witnessed an extensive engagement with regional and international archival institutions in Harare, Zomba, Grahamstown, London, and Oxford. The archival residues from the broader project conspicuously revealed the intriguing aspect of clandestine migration prevalent among northern migrants, Nyasas in particular. While oral interviews could have greatly enhanced the narrative herein, bearers of such oral histories—especially those covering the 1920s to 1950s—have either died away or could not be reached, especially in South Africa. Therefore, the study relies more on the available archives which revealed various nuances and agency on the part of the migrants who were operating in an inhibitive colonial environment.

2 Nyasa stimuli for migration to the southern labour magnets

Colonial encroachment and the capitalist wage economy brought drastic changes to African livelihoods in Southern Africa. It triggered wholesale mobility of Africans towards labour magnets south of the Zambezi river. Colonial capital turned Africans from the Southern African region, especially those from Nyasaland, into transnational migrants whose labour was in great demand across the region. McCracken (2012: 182) notes that a labour market existed in the Katanga copper mines during the 1920s boom with many Nyasas employed in jobs where skills of language and literacy were at a premium, particularly low-level supervision, and clerical, store-keeping and minor hospital posts. More opportunities for semi-skilled Nyasas emerged with the development of the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt from 1928 while on the Tanganyika Lupa goldfields, a sudden surge in demand for labour in 1935 resulted in employment, on short-term contracts, of as many as 15,000 Nyasas.¹ Thousands more moved to Southern Rhodesia and found employment on commercial farms, plantations/estates, mines and in the urban areas in construction, domestic service and industry. Others followed a ‘stop-and-go’ process working their way down to comparatively better paid jobs in the Union of South Africa which was a major magnet for labour migrants from as far north as Tanzania.

¹ A large number of Nyasas from northern Malawi, particularly those from the north Nyasa district of Karonga, went into the Lupa goldfields of Tanganyika and the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt. For details see M[alawi] N[ational] A[rchives] NNK1/8/1-9, Nyasaland District Administration Files, District Commissioner Karonga District Labour Reports 1925-1951; MNA NNK2/1/3-9, Nyasaland District Administration Files, District Commissioner Karonga District Annual Reports, 1925-1951.

Motives for Nyasa migration varied from district to district. Generally, with Nyasaland unable to offer employment opportunities due to its lack of mineral resources and its inherent poverty, Southern Rhodesia and the Union of South Africa became the prime destinations for Nyasas. According to Else (2012: 42), Nyasaland's greatest export was manual labour because there was insufficient employment to cater for the population. Responding to A.G.B. Chisumbi's letter in a 1956 *African Weekly* titled '*kodi bwanji Mthandizi ulipobe muNyasaland*' (why is labour migration still continuing?), T.N.W. Malinga, a Nyasa residing in Salisbury, aptly noted that '*kuNyasaland kulibe ndalama zambiri, ndiponso zincito zakuti anthu agwile kulibe*' (there are no jobs and wages are very low in Nyasaland).² The protectorate was not blessed with viable natural resources except in a few southern and central Nyasaland districts.³ The so-called 'dead north', that is, the undeveloped, uneconomic and sparsely populated northern Nyasaland districts, were mostly affected by labour exodus.⁴ Burden (1938) noted that the vast majority of migrants came from more than eleven out of twenty districts while the other southern districts had economically viable cotton, tobacco, tea, rice and fish industries.⁵ Yet, due to Nyasaland's chronic poverty, some migrants came from the densely populated south. In a 1937 population survey of Nyasas in Southern Rhodesia, Eric Smith reported that:

of the Protectorate emigrants (about 67,747), a much higher percentage (69 per cent) from the north go to South Africa than is the case with emigrants (18 per cent) from the Southern Province; whereas about 77 per cent (of 22,350) from the Southern Province are in Southern Rhodesia and only 8 per cent in South Africa.⁶

More specifically, the Tumbuka and Ngoni of northern Malawi were apparently pushed by the undermining of their economy, the end of raiding and the severe blow struck by the rinderpest in 1893 which decimated Ngoni cattle for some years (McCracken 2012: 84). By 1901 the Ngoni were departing en-masse across the Zambezi river. Colonial tax obligations added more impetus to the exodus. This saw the introduction of the hut tax in 1895 and the differential labour tax introduced in 1902 which propelled men into the labour market (McCracken 2012: 84). These colonial tax demands together with the emergence of bride price, school fees and obstacles to African cash crop cultivation increased financial burdens and economic demands on Nyasas. Migrant labour became the major means of satisfying economic demand. By 1930, about 80 per cent of hut tax revenue in the Mzimba District directly or indirectly came from migrants and the District Commissioner noted that it was 'now unusual to find any young men in the villages' (McCracken 2012: 179). Furthermore, perennial droughts and famine exacerbated Nyasaland's poverty and migration. Such was the case with the outbreak of famine early in 1903 in the notoriously drought-stricken Lower Shire Valley. Likewise, in 1926, the Kasungu District Resident identified the famine of 1924-25 as the cause for 'excessive emigration last year' from northern Nyasaland (McCracken

² 'Mthandizi Suzatha muNyasaland', *The African Weekly*, 21 November 1956.

³ See variously, N[ational] Archives UK CO525/158/8, Nyasaland: Recruitment of Native Labour, 'Extract from 'East Africa', 30 May 1935, and NAUK CO525/214/6, Central Africa, Nyasaland: General Economic Background, Memorandum on the Economy of Nyasaland, Economic General Department, 31 October 1949.

⁴ See also NAUK CO525/173/11, Native Labour, Report by Captain Burden on Nyasaland Native Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1938, and MNA S1/221A/37, Reports from the Nyasaland Labour Office, Salisbury, 1939.

⁵ *Ibid*; and McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, p. 178. See also NAZ S1561/3/1, CNC Migrant Labour: Nyasaland Matters from 23 February 1935 to 5 September 1940: Correspondence from Secretary for Native Affairs to the Prime Minister on Migrant labour agreement (Machona), 5 January 1938.

⁶ NAUK CO525/173/4, Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia: Native Affairs, Survey of Population of Nyasaland Protectorate with a View to Discover Taxable Capacity of Each District and Number of Able-Bodied Men who can Seek Work Abroad Without Detriment to Village Life, 1938.

2012). Murray noted that labour agencies recruited an appreciable number of Africans from Nyasaland following the 1948-49 famine, a trend that was subsequently re-enacted in the 1950s with close to 10,000 labourers being recruited due to drought and famine (Murray 1970: 337).

Nyasa migration was also driven by the desire to accrue material possessions. Topping their wish list was buying a bicycle (*njinga*). Square Kazembe recalled that 'I came to work and buy a bicycle and a gramophone.'⁷ Henry Banda Matekenya, a Chewa from Kasungu, Malawi, migrated as a 19 year old, aiming to work and replace his old bicycle that had been stolen. He later learnt that it had been hidden at his local cemetery by which time he was already on his way to Southern Rhodesia to find a job and replace it.⁸ Oddly, Matekenya never returned home. He only managed to get his first bicycle as a service award after working for 25 years in Southern Rhodesia. Even as late as the 1970s, Malawians continued migrating to Rhodesia for property accumulation. Williard Banda, a Tonga from Nkata Bay, reached Rhodesia on 27 September 1970 because 'poverty and the desire for properties, especially a *njinga*, sent me here'.⁹ Another informant from New Grade farm in Trelawney, Denisani Iliyasa noted that 'having a bicycle was prestigious; it was as a symbol of great advancement and wealth.'¹⁰ Rafael Wilson pointed out that 'those returning home used to show off their material accumulations (trunks full of new clothes, shoes, hats and bicycles), which were an envy for those of us who had never been to Southern Rhodesia or South Africa.'¹¹ Ironically, the pursuit of material possessions indirectly assisted colonial labour recruitment. As noted by McDonald (1962), bicycles were a cherished possession that stimulated many Nyasas to join the trek south with little or no manipulation from labour recruiters. Not all Nyasas were lured by bicycles. Austin Nyirenda went south in 1958 to work and raise funds for carpentry tools.¹² Some simply followed their relatives in the diaspora or were pushed by poverty. For example, James Asidi left his Kalembo village, Nyasaland in 1954, after receiving a telegram from his elder brother who was working as a maize miller in Southern Rhodesia.¹³ Selemani Chipwanya substantiates that 'we ran away from poverty in Nyasaland; we did not have money to even pay for *lobola* (bride price); could not afford clothes and there was too much farming in our *dimbas* (local farming fields).'¹⁴ For some like Saidi Selemani, going to Southern Rhodesia or South Africa was a rite of passage; what Read (1942) and Scott (1954) termed 'an essential introduction to manhood.' Selemani said that 'going to Southern Rhodesia was equated to the Chewa and Yao initiation ritual; a transformation into adulthood because we were venturing into the unknown and becoming independent through migration and working in foreign lands.'¹⁵

Both the Southern Rhodesian and South African governments aggressively competed for Nyasa labour. Both ultimately sanctioned the inception of national labour organizations or agencies to coerce and harness migrant labour from the north. WNLA was the oldest; established in 1897 to regulate the recruitment and entry of 'foreign natives' in South Africa. Acute labour shortages emerged at the end of the South African War in 1902. According to McCracken (2012: 86), the labour crisis confronting the Transvaal gold mines from 1903 onwards forced a dramatic shift in

⁷ Interview with Square Kazembe, Maryland Farm, Trelawney, 15 October 2013.

⁸ Interview with Henry Banda Matekenya, Dalny Mine, Chakari, 7 May 2014.

⁹ Interview with Williard Banda, Dalny Mine, Chakari, 8 May 2014.

¹⁰ Interview with Denisani Iliyasa, New Grade Farm, Trelawney, 17 October 2013.

¹¹ Interview with Rafael Wilson, Maryland Farm, Trelawney, 16 October 2013.

¹² Census Interview with Austin Nyirenda, Hatcliffe Extension, Harare, 20 August 2012.

¹³ Interview with James Asidi, Stratford Farm, Trelawney, 15 October 2013.

¹⁴ Interview with Selemani Chipwanya, Dalny Mine, Chakari, 9 May 2014.

¹⁵ Interview with Saidi Selemani, Zororo Section, Triangle, 14 April 2014.

colonial attitudes towards migrant labour. In earnest the WNLA began recruiting in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. Between 1903 and 1907 WNLA was recruiting about 1500 Nyasas for the Transvaal mines, mostly drawn from the Dowa-Dedza area in southern Malawi and the north (McCracken 2012). WNLA influenced other colonies to engage their own labour agencies, with Southern Rhodesia launching the Rhodesia Native Labour Association (RNLB) in 1903 to supply cheap covenanted migrant labour to mining and agricultural industries (Van Onselen 1976; Johnson 1992; Groves 2011). This heralded the beginning of the forced/contract labour system commonly known as *Mthandizi* or *Chibaro* among Nyasas and other migrant workers from the northern territories (Gelfand 1961; Chirwa 1996). According to Van Onselen (1976: 104), the RNLB sought to secure for the Rhodesian mining industry its share of African labour with the regional economic system. It had to try to ensure that labour from the northern territories made its way to the Rhodesian mines rather than to other labour markets, and that Africans did not proceed to the Witwatersrand after a short period of work. Manganga (2014: 72) observes that RNLB and the South West Africa Native Labour Association (SWANLA) were part of the supranational 'native' labour recruitment agencies in Southern Africa, fashioned after WNLA which was active throughout the region. Both WNLA and RNLB opened recruiting agencies along Nyasaland borders incentivized their activities by offering free transport, food and shelter. WNLA went to the extent of launching an air service for its Nyasa labour recruits from Chileka Airport in Blantyre to Johannesburg in the 1950s which only stopped in 1974 when Malawi's post-independence president, Kamuzu Banda, eventually banned such flights following the death of 74 Malawian labourers returning from work in South Africa in a plane crash in Francistown, Botswana in April 1974 (Chirwa 1996: 623). *Wenela* flights briefly made labour recruitment more attractive and prestigious. Jackson Chibwana first flew to South Africa in 1966 working as a locomotive operator in mines around Johannesburg.¹⁶ Another WNLA recruit, Mbwana Batani flew to Johannesburg in 1972 and then boarded a bus to Bloemfontein to work at a gold mine in the Free State.¹⁷

WNLA was initially banned from recruiting Nyasas in 1913 due to high death rates from pneumonia and tuberculosis suffered by tropical miners from north of Beitbridge (McCracken 2012: 87). RNLB operated until the 1930s and by that time it had become totally unfavourable to migrant labourers. McCracken (2012: 183) and Van Onselen (1976) indicate that by the 1930s RNLB's indentured labour had become synonymous throughout Rhodesia and Nyasaland with forced labour or slavery resulting in many migrants rejecting the greater ease of travel that labour touts could offer in order to preserve their freedom of action. The Bureau was universally feared and hated by black workers throughout most of central Africa and to secure *chibaro*-labour was neither pleasant nor a simple task for some members of the Bureau (Van Onselen 1976: 104). The RNLB became redundant in 1933 having earned a reputation amongst Africans for *Chibaro* (slave-like) labour (Van Onselen 1976: 103). The recruitment ban for the labour agencies was only rescinded in 1936, following the 1936 Salisbury Agreement between Nyasaland and the two major labour importers, Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, under which Nyasaland sought to benefit from its export of labour. WNLA gradually increased its labour quota such that by the early 1950s, WNLA was recruiting a quota of 8,000 Nyasas for South African gold mines, increasing to 12,500 in 1955, 20,000 in 1959, and 26,000 in 1960 (McCracken 2012: 257). The RNLB was only reinstated after the post-Second World War labour crisis as a new labour recruiting organization: the

¹⁶ Interview with Jackson Chibwana, Dalny Mine, Chakari, 9 May 2014.

¹⁷ Interview with Mbwana Batani (late), Alaska Mine, Chinhoyi, 28 December 2011.

Rhodesia Native Labour Supply Commission (RNLSC) in 1946, which supplied migrant labour to Rhodesia until the 1970s, but with less success.¹⁸

The majority of labour migrants found employment independently, avoiding WNLA and RNLB indentured conscription. As shall be detailed below, these travelled illegally subverting official channels to maximize their gains under an exploitative colonial system. This uncovenanted labour was primarily responsible for the huge influx of migrant labour into Southern Rhodesia and South Africa and sustained the colonies' mining and agricultural industries for decades. The Minister of Agriculture corroborated in 1925 that of the 142,000 Africans employed in Rhodesia, 92,000 were from Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and PEA.¹⁹ 30,300 of these migrants were engaged on mines and 62,000 in other sectors.²⁰ Only 5 per cent (4,864) came through the RNLB; the rest independently made the long journey down south.²¹ Nyasas engaged in Rhodesian mines steadily increased from an average of 12,500 between 1920 and 1926 to 30,700 in 1935, about 33 per cent of the total workforce (Gray 1960: 92). Some 25,000 Nyasas worked on farms and 20,000 in towns, including at least 10,000 in Salisbury, on one estimate, nearly half of the city's African population (Yoshikuni 2006: 160). By 1937, Rhodesia was employing about 75,000 Nyasas in various sectors such as on farms and as domestic servants, clerks and policemen (Burden 1938: 16). This was at least two-thirds of all Nyasaland migrants (120,000) in Southern Africa (McCracken 2012: 181). The 1945 Nyasaland census estimated that 133,306 persons were abroad including 9,446 women (Groves 2011: 55). By 1947, Rhodesia had 202,500 African male migrant workers in total, of which 80,500 were Nyasas, many of whom had come as free (*serefu*) labourers.²² Raftopoulos (1995: 82; 1997: 58) states that of the 36,873 Africans employed in Salisbury by 1947, 41 per cent were Southern Rhodesians, while 59 per cent were non-indigenous. By 1966 about 229,000 Malawians were working abroad, to which could be added 22,000 women and 33,000 men over 50 years old who had settled permanently outside Malawi. Of these Malawians 139,000 were in Rhodesia and 68,000 in South Africa (Boeder 1974: 289).

3 Clandestine migration into the Union of South Africa

For many northern labour migrants, Southern Rhodesia was not their final destination. They were guest workers, using the colony as a springboard en-route to the more lucrative Union of South Africa. In essence they 'settled in motion', entering Rhodesia up north and gradually working their way down south. They would eventually reach the shores of the Limpopo River and clandestinely cross into the Union to seek work on farms and mines in Musina, Transvaal, Johannesburg, the Orange Free State and reach as far as Durban and Cape Town. The British South Africa Police (BSAP) Provincial Criminal Investigation Officer, Mashonaland, observed in October 1950 that 'because Rhodesia lies astride their route to the Union, they only go through the motions of registering and working here...as soon as they can (in some cases they only stay a matter of weeks)

¹⁸ Southern Rhodesia: Central African Statistical Office, Official Year Book of Southern Rhodesia, 4, 1952, p. 218.

¹⁹ NAZ S235/400, Migrant Labour: Employment of Nyasaland Labour; Correspondence from the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands to the Secretary to the Premier, Salisbury, 4 Feb 1925.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² NAUK DO35/3710, Native Affairs: Annual Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs, CNC and Director of Native Development, 1947.

they move to the Union by various devious routes.²³ McCracken (2012: 182) substantiates that ‘for many Malawians, including the two most famous, Clements Kadalie and Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Rhodesia was a staging post to South Africa’s higher wage economy.’ Banda worked for 18 months at Hartley hospital in Southern Rhodesia before moving to Maronjeri colliery in South Africa in 1917. Kadalie worked as a clerk for the Rhodesian Railways and two gold mines before heading south to Kimberley almost exactly a year later (Pachai 1969).

As mentioned earlier, most labour migrants travelled independently and clandestinely in order to avoid the exploitative contractual obligations of the WNLA and RNLB. While this was the main impetus to such illegality, other equally important reasons sustained this activity. Crush et al. (2005) noted that there are numerous well-documented reasons for the informal movement of people across borders, which also has a long history in Southern Africa. To begin with, many colonial boundaries severed societies and cut communities in half with members of the same family or lineage living on the opposite of the border. These are what Asiwaju (1984), Mamdani (2001) and Connor (1978) dubbed ‘artificial boundaries’ that culminated in what Davidson (1992) termed ‘the curse of the nation-state’, causing incessant civil strife and conflicts across Africa (Daimon 2016). Musoni (2012) explains that:

European conquest and subsequent colonization of Africa in the late nineteenth century introduced new notions of borders and border enforcement, which destabilized patterns of mobility that existed in the continent. While mental mapping played a key role in marking out political boundaries in pre-colonial times, the colonists created geo-political units with strictly defined boundaries, and deployed legal and quasi-legal instruments to control Africans’ movements within and across colonial boundaries.

Therefore, colonial policies of migration control criminalized and produced new kinds of mobility, most notably the phenomenon of border jumping or illegal migration, which to this day, continues to be a site of socio-political tensions and negotiations in many parts of Africa (Musoni 2012). The borders delegitimized African mobility across territories. Indeed, the imposition and subsequent enforcement of the Limpopo River as the boundary between Southern Rhodesia and South Africa destabilized pre-existing networks of migration in the region (Musoni 2012). Consequently, this saw the criminalization of human movement across nation-states and the emergence of nomenclature such as illegal, clandestine, irregular, informal and undocumented migrants or border jumpers.

Despite the imposition of colonial boundaries, trans-border migration and social interaction continued unabated in Southern Africa, especially during the period from the 1920s to 1950s. Many migrants found it easy to move to other countries to find work primarily because of the absence of border controls between many Southern African states prior to the 1960s (Crush 2005).

As shall be shown further below, the borders were long, not clearly marked and not well-policed. The situation was exacerbated by the selective and monopolistic recruitment of labour by mining enterprises at the expense of other colonial industries. Crush et al. (2005) explain that the regional mining industry was the only sector to establish a formal contract labour system. Other employers,

²³ NAZ S1226, British South Africa Police Files: Correspondence and other Papers: Illegal Recruiting of Native Labour, 1925-1951, Correspondence from the Provincial Criminal Investigation Officer in the BSAP Mashonaland to the Criminal Investigation Department, Salisbury, 5 October 1950.

such as commercial agriculture and domestic service, hiring migrants did not have access to this labour and often hired migrants outside the law, fuelling clandestine migration in the process.

As early as 1920, Nyasa clandestine exodus to the Union through various routes had become a major site of discussion, tension and negotiation among authorities of different state departments, as well as between state officials in Rhodesia, South Africa and Bechuanaland. Indeed, numerous devious routes were used by alien labourers proceeding to the Union. One stretched along the eastern border of Southern Rhodesia from Mutare, Chiredzi, Nuanetsi to Beitbridge. Some of the most popular and notorious routes went through the Matabeleland area emanating from Bulawayo. The Assistant Superintendent of Police, Bulawayo South Sub-District, Lieutenant W.H.D Walker narrated in July 1939 that:

a very considerable flow of alien native labour is at present moving southwards through this District to the Union of South Africa. Two main routes southwards are utilized from Bulawayo, viz: by rail to Gwanda or West Nicholson through Colleen Bawn and Jessie sidings, Filabusi, thence to Beitbridge by Railway Lorry Service or foot; secondly, by privately owned motor services from Bulawayo via Matobo and Kezi to the Antelope and Legion Mines, the latter mine being some 18 miles from the Bechuanaland Border.²⁴

When questioned as to their destination the answer invariably is the Antelope or Legion Mines. Sergeant G. Haines of the B.S.A. Police, Kezi pointed out that 'it is significant that natives, only in the Colony of a few days, know of these mines, situated on the border, had they required mining work in the Colony they could easily have obtained employment at the numerous mines in the Colony passed on their journey to this, the most southerly, portion of the Colony.'²⁵ Other migrants bravely opted for a direct route to the Union through the Bulawayo to Mafikeng train. For those going by the Gwanda, West Nicholson and Beitbridge route, they usually crossed the border into the Transvaal in the vicinity of Bainsdrift, on the Limpopo River approximately 15 miles east of Beitbridge. Numbers also crossed the border between Beitbridge and Tuli and between the confluence of the Buby and Limpopo rivers and Bainsdrift; and many others proceeded via Pafuri.²⁶ The Kezi-Antelope/Legion Mines route saw the emigrants proceeding south on foot across the Shashi River into Bechuanaland. They then made for Macloutsie or to a village known as Bonowe's Kraal, two days journey into Bechuanaland. On arrival they get recruited, find transport and sent into the Union.²⁷ Others continued along the main road as far as

²⁴ NAZ S1226, British South Africa Police Files: Correspondence and other Papers: Illegal Recruiting of Native Labour, 1925 – 1951, Correspondence from the Assistant Superintendent of Police, Bulawayo South Sub-District to the Chief Superintendent, B.S.A. Police, Bulawayo, 31 July 1939.

²⁵ Ibid, Correspondence from Sergeant G. Haines of the B.S.A. Police Kezi to the Assistant Commissioner, CID, B.S.A. Police, Bulawayo, 1 July 1942.

²⁶ Ibid, Letter from the Chief Superintendent, B.S.A. Police, Bulawayo to the Staff Officer, B.S.A. Police on Emigration of Natives via Beitbridge, 11 October 1937.

²⁷ Ibid, Letter from the Assistant Superintendent of Police, Bulawayo to the Chief Superintendent, B.S.A. Police, Bulawayo, 7 September 1939; Letter from the Chief Superintendent, CID, B.S.A. Police, to the B.S.A. Police Headquarters, Salisbury, 24 October 1939; Letter from the Chief Superintendent, CID, B.S.A. Police, to the Staff Officer, B.S.A. Police, Salisbury, 15 June 1939.

the Jessie Mine – before West Nicholson – and then across country to the Mzingwane River, down that and past Siwule Store to the Union border.²⁸

Crush et al. (2005) are of the view that by definition, informal labour migration is extremely difficult to measure since no records were kept by employers or governments and there are thus no reliable numbers other than census data which does not distinguish legal from undocumented migrants. While this could be true, archival evidence does cast some statistical light on such illicit movement into South Africa. Approximately 95 per cent of unofficial migrants proceeding to the Union were northern aliens, especially Nyasas. Beitbridge police patrols revealed in 1937 that between 200 and 300 Africans crossed the border monthly.²⁹ Between August 1938 and January 1939, the Rhodesia Railways Road Motor Service carried 4,006 indigenous and northern migrants from West Nicholson to Beitbridge.³⁰ Pass Office records at West Nicholson from January 1st to June 2nd 1939, revealed that 3,805 ‘passes to seek work’ were issued to ‘alien natives’ of which 3,650 were to Beitbridge, indicating an exodus of alien labourers at a rate of about 7,000 a year.³¹ Reporting in June 1939, Bulawayo North Compound Inspector, J.E. Beasley relayed that ‘non-indigenous natives, principally Nyasas, are migrating south via the Kezi-Antelope/Legion Mines route with the Legion Mine storekeeper approximating about 25 natives passing through weekly... the traffic takes place principally on Sundays, the natives being mainly conveyed in lorries driven by Indians.’³² The Chief Superintendent, CID, B.S.A. Police detailed that ‘two Indians and an African transport contractor owning seven lorries, were engaged in conveying approximately 100 passengers, of whom 90 per cent were aliens, between Bulawayo and the Antelope/Legion mines each week.’³³ The southerly migration was also evident through passes issued to alien natives at various stations in Southern Rhodesia. For example, at Gatooma, no less than 917 passes ‘to seek work’ were issued to aliens in 1938, 25 per cent of the total issued was for Bulawayo, Gwanda and West Nicholson Districts. For the month of March, 1939, out of a total of 400 passes issued to alien natives, 70 were to Gwanda, 30 to Bulawayo, 5 to West Nicholson and 1 to Fort Victoria.³⁴

Most of the migrants had strong transnational social networks that enlightened them of the better working conditions across the Limpopo. J.C Kallis, who was the native commissioner of Gwanda pointed these transnational connections in a correspondence to the Superintendent of Natives in Bulawayo. He reported that ‘by each train a number of alien natives arrive at Gwanda wishing to proceed to the Union’, and his office had of late been inundated with numerous alien natives (25 at the time of writing) applying for passes to go to Messina, ‘passes which are refused but there is little doubt that a number go on.’³⁵ He continued that ‘all I can get from enquiries here is that the exodus is due to letters from ‘brothers’ at Messina telling that labour is wanted, and that the pay is

²⁸ Ibid, Letter from the Chief Superintendent, CID, B.S.A. Police, to the B.S.A. Police Headquarters, Salisbury, 24 October 1939.

²⁹ NAZ S1226, British South Africa Police Files: Correspondence and other Papers: Illegal Recruiting of Native Labour, 1925-1951, Letter from the Chief Superintendent, BSAP, Bulawayo to the Staff Officer, BSAP on Emigration of Natives via Beitbridge, 11 October 1937.

³⁰ Ibid, Letter from the Chief Superintendent, CID, BSAP, to the Staff Officer, BSAP, Salisbury, 15 June 1939.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, Letter from Bulawayo North Compound Inspector to the Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo, 2 May 1939.

³³ Ibid, Letter from the Chief Superintendent, CID, BSAP, to the Staff Officer, BSAP, Salisbury, 15 June 1939.

³⁴ Ibid, Letter from the Chief Superintendent, CID, B.S.A. Police, to the Staff Officer, B.S.A. Police, Salisbury, 15 June 1939

³⁵ NAZ S138/22, Native Movements: 1923-1933, Correspondence between Office of the Native Commissioner, Gwanda and the Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo on Natives proceeding to the Union, 15 February 1924.

higher.³⁶ Indeed the wage in South Africa was distinctly attractive as compared to the region. For example, workers on Rhodesian farm and mines were earning an average of 10 shillings and 19 shillings a month, respectively, out of which they had to pay one pound per annum tax.³⁷ On the contrary, mines around Messina were paying as much as five pounds per annum.³⁸ McCracken (2012: 259) further clarifies that ‘in 1949 minimum wages on the Rand ranged from 70 shillings to 100 shillings a month, plus free rations and quarters; minimum wages on Cholo tea estates remained stuck at around 15 shillings’.

The Provincial Criminal Investigation Officer, BSAP Mashonaland corroborated on these social networks stating that ‘the natives hear from their brothers in the Union and are advised by them of what routes to follow as well as alerted to the fact that they were not required to carry Registration Certificates or pay tax.’³⁹ Sergeant G. Haines added that ‘letters have been found on these natives from friends in the Union giving full particulars of the route to be taken, situation of Police Stations and such like places to be avoided in order to get through and they usually have considerable sums of money on them for the journey.’⁴⁰ A number of Nyasas were occasionally caught within Southern Rhodesia in possession of such incriminating letters. One of these was Roben whose registration certificate number was 158453 Mtoko, Alien. He was searched by his employer Mr. Bazeley and found in possession of three letters one of which contained 5 pounds in Rhodesian notes. This letter stated that work was easy to get in the Union and the money is between 4 and 5 pounds per month.⁴¹ The letter was from native Bright who was employed at Mlezi, R.A.F. Bombing School, presumably near Johannesburg. Another letter also emanating from Bright stated ‘I am sending 4 pounds – 1 pound is for Nyaronga and 3 pounds for yourself, let me know if you receive this money, there is much work here (Joburg) and you must come quick.’⁴² Roben had arrived in Southern Rhodesia on 24 November 1943, having travelled from Nyasaland with a native named Charamba and commenced work with Bazeley on 6 December 1943. He then gave notice on the 13th February 1944 together with his colleague Nyaronga arguing that ‘we do not see our tickets and have to work longer than a month to get our pay.’⁴³ Roben first denied knowledge of Nyaronga but eventually admitted that both of them intended to proceed to Johannesburg to join Bright and take up employment there. Roben stated that he intended to take out a pass to seek work at Gwanda and then walk to the Limpopo via the veld tracks and cross the river near Beitbridge.

Alien natives also employed all forms of sophisticated trickery and deviance to cross into South Africa. One of the most popular tactics was using forged passes. Nyasas and other northern natives proceeding to South Africa through Rhodesia were persons of interest because their registration

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, Correspondence between Assistant Native Commissioner, Shamva and the Chief Native Commissioner, Salisbury, on Exodus of Northern Natives, 22 July 1925.

³⁸ Ibid, letter to the Attorney General, Salisbury from Lieutenant Staff Officer, Commissioner’s Office, British South Africa Company on Natives of S. Rhodesia obtaining employment in the Transvaal, 2 June, 1925.

³⁹ NAZ S1226, British South Africa Police Files: Correspondence and other Papers: Illegal Recruiting of Native Labour, 1925 – 1951, Correspondence from the Provincial Criminal Investigation Officer in the BSAP Mashonaland to the Criminal Investigation Department, Salisbury, 5 October 1950.

⁴⁰ Ibid, Correspondence from Sergeant G. Haines of the B.S.A. Police Kezi to the Assistant Commissioner, CID, B.S.A. Police, Bulawayo, 1 July 1942.

⁴¹ Ibid, Letter from F.W. Harrison, the Assistant Native Commissioner to the Native Commissioner, Bulawayo on Clandestine Migration of Natives to the Union, 21 March 1944.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

certificates or passes confined them to seeking employment in Southern Rhodesia. Hence, railway and other transport authorities were instructed to refuse to issue tickets to natives desiring to proceed south of latitude 22 unless in possession of authority from the Union Immigration Department for such journey.⁴⁴ Thus, the entry of natives to the Union was prohibited by Union Immigration laws particularly the Immigrants Regulations Act of 1913 which prohibited natives north of latitude 22 degrees from entering the Union.⁴⁵ This was a culmination of a concerted effort by both the South African and Southern Rhodesian states to restrict unsanctioned mobility and recruitment of northerners that was predated to the late 1890s. For example, Southern Rhodesia had implemented the Natives Employment Ordinance in 1899 that hindered the recruitment of Africans for employment outside the colony. Both colonies also required passes or permits for transient foreign 'natives' to enter their territories and seek employment.

In order to by-pass such legal restrictions, some Nyasas acquired forged Union passes from colleagues and syndicates. Most of these fake passes were badly written 'from which it would appear that they were issued by natives and not by any European in authority.'⁴⁶ The Provincial Criminal Investigation Officer, BSAP Mashonaland noted that 'at one time, there was also a considerable traffic in forged or counterfeit passes sent from the Union to natives outside to facilitate their journey and there is no reason to believe that this traffic has ceased.'⁴⁷ Nyasas usually sent letters to friends in the Union to bring or send them the passes for easy transit into South Africa. F.W. Harrison, the Divisional Criminal Investigation Officer, Bulawayo reported that 'letters from natives in the Colony to natives in the Union of South Africa show an increasing number of requests to relatives there to visit the Union and supply them with passes, fictitious or otherwise, to enable the natives to proceed as returning employees to the Union of South Africa...natives have been found in possession of printed passes from mining and other concerns in the Union of SA which have been forged.'⁴⁸ The Controller of Censorship Department in Bulawayo usually intercepted 5 or 6 of such letters per day. Below are copies of the letters.

⁴⁴ NAZ S138/22, Native Movements: 1923-1933, Letter to the Attorney General, Salisbury from Lieutenant Staff Officer, Commissioner's Office, British South Africa Company on Natives of S. Rhodesia obtaining employment in the Transvaal, 2 June, 1925.

⁴⁵ *The Rand Mail*, Immigration Laws not Enforced: Thousands Cross Northern Border, 5 April 1934.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, Correspondence from the Chief Superintendent, C.I.D, B.S.A. Police to the Secretary Department of Mines and Public Works, Salisbury, 19 February 1940.

⁴⁷ NAZ S1226, British South Africa Police Files: Correspondence and other Papers: Illegal Recruiting of Native Labour, 1925 – 1951, Correspondence from the Provincial Criminal Investigation Officer in the B.S.A. Police Mashonaland to the Criminal Investigation Department, Salisbury, 5 October 1950.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, letter from the Divisional Criminal Investigation Officer, Bulawayo to the Sergeant, B.S.A. Police, Beitbridge, 13 April 1944.

4 Copies of letters nabbed by the Controller of Censorship⁴⁹

<p>COLONY OF SOUTHERN RHODESIA CENSORSHIP</p> <p>CORRESPONDENCE SUSPECTED TO REQUIRE SPECIAL ATTENTION</p> <p>Sender's Name.....Wiliam Blantyre..... Sender's Address and Office of Posting c/o...Bushtick Mine, P.O. Bushtick..... Date of Letter...18.4.44.... Original Language...Chinyanja...Disposal of Letter...To C.I.D Name of Addressee.....Joseph Tembo..... Address of Adressee.....c/o..A.E. Freeman Esq., P.O. Box 1, Palapye..... Nature, or amount, of Enclosure (if any)..... Material passages copied here: '...Please I am still here waiting for you to come and pick me up there, am really anxious to come over there. When coming up here you must please get a pass leave from your master and that pass must be given to me, do not write as if it is yours.'</p>	<p>COLONY OF SOUTHERN RHODESIA CENSORSHIP</p> <p>CORRESPONDENCE SUSPECTED TO REQUIRE SPECIAL ATTENTION</p> <p>Sender's Name.....Pitirosi Kumwenda.... Sender's Address and Office of Posting c/o...Oliphant Farm, P.O. Box 76, Que Que..... Date of Letter...14.4.44.... Original Language...Chibenga...Disposal of Letter...To C.I.D Name of Addressee.....abrack Mitt, Dan Dyk Myr.... Address of Adressee.....No. 2 Compound, Room No. 13, P.O. Box 20, Boksburg..... Nature, or amount, of Enclosure (if any)..... Material passages copied here: '...I am desirous of coming down there and I beg your most kindness to buy me a pass of that country and after you have bought it, please send it to me very urgently. I am sure to pay your money back on arrival there. I am here with my two friends, their names are as follows: 1. Sandiresi Ngoma, 2. Taniyere Ngoma. I have written their names as to show that otherwise if possible you may favour them also.'</p>
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Individuals and syndicates were also caught by the police for using or producing forged passes. For example on 20 January 1940, a Nyasa worker, Hasani Mankwala, was detained by the police at West Nicholson after being found in possession of a Union of South Africa 'Sub Nigel Mine Pass'.⁵⁰ On interrogation he stated he had been recruited by another Nyasa, one Richard Manda, who had handed him the pass in question. Richard Manda was subsequently located at Beitbridge and eventually charged at Gwanda. He was convicted and sentenced to a fine of 5 pounds or 6 weeks in jail.⁵¹ The Gwanda Native Commissioner had in the past suggested that 'natives employed in the Union usually visit this Colony with books of signed passes for distribution but nothing to confirm this appears to have been revealed by C.I.D and Police enquiry.'⁵² The South African Police also apprehended Andrew Ndhlovu, a prohibited immigrant from Rhodesia, in Johannesburg on an allegation by one of his own countrymen that he was supplying passes to Rhodesian natives at 8 pounds per pass.⁵³ On investigation of the matter the evidence available against native Andrew proved to be insufficient to establish a charge against him. He was charged and convicted under

⁴⁹ Ibid, Correspondence from G. Trench, Controller of Censorship, Bulawayo to the Native Commissioner, Bulawayo, 20 April 1944.

⁵⁰ Ibid, Correspondence from the Chief Superintendent, C.I.D, B.S.A. Police to the Secretary, Department of Mines and Public Works, Salisbury, 19 February 1940.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, Correspondence from the The NC, Gwanda to the Chief Superintendent, C.I.D, B.S.A. Police, Bulawayo on Clandestine Emigration of Natives to the Union of South Africa, 19 January 1940.

⁵³ *The Rand Daily Mail*, 9 Feb 1951; Ibid, Correspondence from (Lt. Col.) Officer Commanding, C.I.D HQ to The Commissioner, B.S.A. Police HQ, Salisbury, 10 Feb 1951.

the Immigration and Native Urban Areas Acts. Altogether 52 Rhodesian natives were arrested for being in possession of these false passes in February 1951.⁵⁴

Bigger syndicates involving Nyasas were also busted within Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia. One involved a Nyasa named Webster who issued bogus passes to fellow Nyasas from Kasamba, Ntcheu District in Nyasaland. Some of his clients were usually nabbed as far as Plumtree and Beitbridge on the verge of entering the Union. Apparently, Webster used to work for the African Explosives and Industries Ltd in Modderfontein where before departing for his homeland had stolen the company's booklet of passes.⁵⁵ He then sold these passes to those wishing to travel to the Union for 6 shillings for each pass. Webster would forge the details of his clients in pencil on the blank passes which purported to show that they were on leave from various firms in the Union. On 28 March 1944 four of his clients from Ncheu District, Nyasaland namely Starford, Lestar, Sonosi and Chabudeni, were arrested at Plumtree in possession of the fictitious passes and were sentenced to one month's hard labour at Bulawayo Gaol for contravening the Native Passes Act, and were discharged on 27th April 1944.⁵⁶ All implicated Webster for the forged passes. In his affidavit Starford for instance stated that

on my arrest I was found in possession of 2 passes, one being a leave pass from the African Explosives and Industries Ltd, Modderfontein and the other being a leave pass from the S.A. Clay Industries Lawley S.A. I have never worked for any of these firms and have never been to the Union before. I bought these passes from Webster in Nyasaland. Both these passes were blank at first and Webster wrote them both out for me in my name. Webster told me I should take two passes and if one was rejected I could use the other.⁵⁷

Other Nyasas simply proceeded without the requisite passes. The Assistant Native Commissioner of Mtetengwe in the Gwanda District pointed out that 'many alien natives wanting to proceed to the Union to work, come here for passes, these are refused and they are sent north again, they leave this Station and proceed south east of here and cross the Limpopo River, they then throw away their Registration Certificates issued in Southern Rhodesia and state they have entered the Union via Portuguese Territory.'⁵⁸ The Chief Native Commissioner, Salisbury, A.H. Bowker corroborated this stating that 'it is known that Rhodesian Natives also enter the Transvaal from Portuguese Territory and represent themselves as being Portuguese natives and many of these alien natives do ultimately reach Johannesburg.'⁵⁹ Hence on reaching Johannesburg, many aliens did not have any valid passes. H.S. Cooke, the Director of Native Labour in the Department of Native Affairs Johannesburg reported in 1925 that 'a large number of prohibited immigrants have

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ NAZ S1226, British South Africa Police Files: Correspondence and other Papers: Illegal Recruiting of Native Labour, 1925 – 1951, Correspondence from Detective Sergeant Leaver, CID, Bulawayo, to Detective Inspector CID, Bulawayo, 29 March 1944.

⁵⁶ Ibid, Correspondence from the Assistant Commissioner, CID, B.S.A Police to the Superintendent, CID, Zomba, Nyasaland, 30 March 1944.

⁵⁷ Ibid, Correspondence from Detective Sergeant Leaver, CID, Bulawayo, to Detective Inspector CID, Bulawayo, 29 March 1944.

⁵⁸ NAZ S138/22, Native Movements: 1923-1933, Letter from Assistant Native Commissioner, Mtetengwe to the Native Commissioner, Gwanda on Rhodesian natives proceeding to the Union, 4 February 1924.

⁵⁹ Ibid, Correspondence between Chief Native Commissioner, Salisbury, and the Secretary to the Premier, Salisbury, on the Emigration of Natives to the Transvaal, 21 November 1925.

passed through with no documents whatsoever connecting them with Rhodesia.⁶⁰ Such a scenario also prevailed at Nuanetsi with the Assistant Native Commissioner of Nuanetsi, noting that of the 250 aliens who passed through his territory only '28 took out passes to leave the territory with many surreptitiously going to the Union using to a very large extent paths which do not pass near here.'⁶¹

Just like many contemporary illegal migrants in South Africa, some Nyasas followed procedure by obtaining the necessary pass from various stations granting them permission to visit Messina for a few days after which they would disappear in South Africa. Such treachery was raised by the assistant native commissioner of Gwanda when he remonstrated that 'it has been customary to give alien natives who apply here for Passes seeking permission to visit Messina for 4 days, with instructions to report to the Pass Officer at Messina. They very seldom return here, and there is no doubt they obtain work in the Transvaal, the majority I think at Messina, and I am unable to prevent these natives from crossing the Rhodesian border, whether the Limpopo River is in flood or not.'⁶² The Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo explicitly summarised this alien native deviance in his letter to the A.H. Bowker, the Chief Native Commissioner drawing extracts from October 1926 monthly report of the Native Commissioner of Gwanda:

Natives arrive by every train from the North and if only a small proportion would engage themselves locally there would be no shortage. Every opportunity is given them to do so but they refuse, their aim and object being to reach the Transvaal. As a blind they request passes to search for work at the Jessie Mine south of Gwanda and when procured slip down the old Tuli Road via Oliphants Pits and thence into the Transvaal'.⁶³

Reports of serious misdemeanour also came out of white Rhodesian employers whose enterprises lay along the clandestine routes to the Union. Desertions by aliens were rampant and swift. There were many deserters from mines in the Gwanda district including the antelope, Noel, Nickel, sun Yet Sen, Masawe and Legion.⁶⁴ For example the manager of the Legion Mine informed the Bulawayo North Compound Manager, J.E. Beasley, that a number of Nyasa natives had engaged themselves for work at the mine, during the rains, and deserted immediately on the weather clearing.⁶⁵ Other than experiencing incessant desertions of the workplace, these employers complained of rampant theft from the migrants. Complaints were frequently lodged with the native authorities over such theft. One of these was made to the office of the Gwanda Native Commissioner by Messrs Liebegs as to these natives passing over their ranch on all the foot paths and complaining of the loss of stock.⁶⁶ In another letter received by the same NC from a resident

⁶⁰ Ibid, letter from H.S. Cooke, Director of Native Labour, Department of Native Affairs, Johannesburg to the Principal Immigration Officer, Pretoria on Alleged illegal recruitment of S. Rhodesia Natives, 18th September, 1925.

⁶¹ NAZ S138/22, Native Movements: 1923-1933, Correspondence from Office of the Assistant Native Commissioner, Nuanetsi to the Native Commissioner, Chibi on Natives Proceeding to the Union, 2 September 1925.

⁶² Ibid, letter from Assistant Native Commissioner, Mtetengwe to the Native Commissioner, Gwanda on Natives from Rhodesia entering Transvaal, 7 May 1925.

⁶³ NAZ S1226, British South Africa Police Files: Correspondence and other Papers: Illegal Recruiting of Native Labour, 1925 – 1951, Letter from Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo to the Chief Native Commissioner on Gwanda Monthly Report, October 1926: Labour Passing through District to Transvaal, 20 November 1926.

⁶⁴ Ibid, Correspondence from the Assistant Superintendent of Police, Bulawayo South Sub-District to the Chief Superintendent, B.S.A. Police, Bulawayo, 7 July 1939.

⁶⁵ Ibid, Letter from Bulawayo North Compound Inspector to the Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo, 2 May 1939.

⁶⁶ Ibid, Correspondence from Office of the Native Commissioner, Gwanda to the Superintendent of Natives, Matabeleland on Alien natives proceeding to Mtetengwe and Messina, 17 June 1925.

in the Union, it was said that such natives were breaking into stores as a consequence of starvation.⁶⁷ Unlike in the north where the aliens systematically received food rations on their way from Nyasaland into Southern Rhodesia, those proceeding to the Union did not enjoy such facilities. The Union only provided food to those alien natives apprehended near the border and held up by the Department of Native Affairs at Louis Trichardt awaiting repatriation/deportation. In other cases, those arrested were frequently consigned as labourers to the low-wage farms of Bethal in Northern Transvaal (McCracken 2012: 182). On the contrary, those who were arrested as far as Johannesburg were not repatriated. Instead 'Hundreds of such prohibited immigrants appear before the Pietersburg authorities every year, and they are sentenced to a week's imprisonment or so. But there is no means of repatriating them and after they come out of gaol these natives simply remain in the Union. They manage to get passes eventually and drift on to the Rand mines and Natal sugar plantations in thousands.'⁶⁸

Apparently, illicit migration was impossible to stop for both the native authorities and the colonial police. It was remonstrated in the *Rand Mail* that in spite of the immigration laws thousands of 'natives' wandered into or were being smuggled into the Union from northern territories and that it was impossible to stop the practice since Union farmers and miners on the whole 'prefer foreign natives because they remain longer on the farms and mines and are stated to be better workers.'⁶⁹ Even the B.S.A Police saw the task of curbing the flow of clandestine migrants as insurmountable. To begin with 'our southern and south western borders are more than 400 miles in extent and for the greater part of the year can be crossed with ease at any place and it is an impossible task for BSAP to cover this distance by day and by night', said the Provincial Criminal Investigation Officer, Mashonaland as late as 1950.⁷⁰ The Chief Superintendent of Police, Bulawayo, Major H.T. Onyett further observed in 1939 that 'parties of natives travelling southward on foot have absconded at sight of Police patrols and continued their journey to the Union surreptitiously - by no means a difficult matter.'⁷¹ The lack of stringent laws also made life difficult for the police and far much easier for illicit migrants. As long as a migrant had a valid pass permitting him to seek work within Southern Rhodesia and exuded obvious intentions to leave the territory, police had no right to arrest him. The Assistant Superintendent of Police for Bulawayo, Lieutenant W.H.D Walker explained that 'in most cases migrant natives proceeding voluntarily southwards with a view to entering the Union are covered under the Pass Laws by the possession of a pass to seek work and police cannot act against them as long as the passes are valid.'⁷² Likewise, the imposition of a fine or short term of imprisonment would have little or no effect as a deterrent to emigration. Emigrants caught without passes on the southern borders were usually convicted of the offence of 'leaving the Colony'.⁷³ Hence, the Provincial Criminal Investigation Officer suggested in 1950

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *The Rand Mail*, Immigration Laws not Enforced

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰NAZ S1226, British South Africa Police Files: Correspondence and other Papers: Illegal Recruiting of Native Labour, 1925 – 1951, Correspondence from the Provincial Criminal Investigation Officer in the BSAP Mashonaland to the Criminal Investigation Department, Salisbury, 5 October 1950.

⁷¹ Ibid, Correspondence from the Chief Superintendent of Police, Bulawayo to the Staff Officer, BSA Police, 31 July 1939.

⁷² Ibid, Correspondence from the Assistant Superintendent of Police, Bulawayo South Sub-District to the Chief Superintendent, B.S.A. Police, Bulawayo, 31 July 1939.

⁷³ Ibid, Correspondence from the Chief Superintendent of Police, Bulawayo to the Staff Officer, BSA Police, 31 July 1939.

that ‘if our law was amended to read “manifesting an obvious intention of leaving the Colony unlawfully” it might help to stem the flow’ of clandestine migration.⁷⁴

Nyasas en-route to the Union also exploited the availability of the free Rhodesian government transport services to quicken their journey to South Africa. The Southern Rhodesian government had introduced the Free Migrant Labour Transport Service consisting of buses, trains, lorries, food depots, shelters and river barges/ferries on the Zambezi, Ruya and Mazoe rivers in 1936.⁷⁵ Popularly known as *Ulere* among Nyasas (*Ulere* means ‘free’ in Chewa), this service ran from Nyasaland through Salisbury to the mines of southern Matabeleland near the border with South Africa. *Ulere* began carrying passengers in May 1938 (Rubert 1998: 37). The Commissioner of Native Labour in the Colonial Office, A.J. Huxtable, pointed out that the cost of *Ulere* was incredibly low when compared to the number of extra labour days the colony gained.⁷⁶ McCracken (2012: 187) notes that some migrants had already begun to travel by lorry at rates of between 15 shillings and one pound from Blantyre to Salisbury prior to *Ulere*. With *Ulere* there was no charge for the southbound rides, but a fee of ten shillings was charged to homebound workers (Boeder 1974: 151). Thus, it saved thousands who previously travelled entirely on foot without adequate food and would as a result arrive in an emaciated condition unfit for immediate work.⁷⁷ By the 1950s, *Ulere* transported about 70 per cent of northern migrants entering or leaving the colony.⁷⁸ However, these figures were an under-estimate based on passes issued to migrants and ignored other independent migrants.

Indeed, *Ulere* reduced the transnational trip from Nyasaland to the Union to less than week. At Salisbury, the head of a large labour organisation expressed the opinion that:

prior to the introduction of free Government transport, the majority of alien natives arriving at the northern borders of this colony worked their way slowly south, whereas today, such natives proceed direct to Salisbury where they continue west and south ultimately reaching the Union borders within a very few months or days of their first arrival in Southern Rhodesia.⁷⁹

Johnson (2000) stated that prior to *Ulere*, intending illegal migrants, having walked through the Zambezi valley, arrived in the colony ‘so tired and debilitated’ that they had to ‘work for two or three months in Southern Rhodesia to get in condition for proceeding to the Union, and possibly to find money to travel otherwise than on foot to the border.’ With the rise in illicit migration to the Union, this free transport system ended up defeating its own objectives. The local labour recruiter for the Shabani and Mashaba mines, Mr Price stated that:

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ NAUK CO525/173/6, Nyasaland, Native Labour: Transport of Nyasaland Labour to and from Southern Rhodesia, Proposed Road Transport Service, 1938.

⁷⁶ NAUK DO35/3710, Native Affairs: Annual Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs, CNC and Director of Native Development, 1948; NAUK CO525/173/6, Nyasaland, Native Labour: Transport of Nyasaland Labour to and from Southern Rhodesia, Proposed Road Transport Service, 1938. See also ‘For Labour: Transport to be Provided’, *The Bulawayo Chronicle*, 20 January 1938.

⁷⁷ NAUK DO35/3710, Native Affairs: Annual Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs, CNC and Director of Native Development, 1948.

⁷⁸ Southern Rhodesia: Central African Statistical Office, *Official Year Book of Southern Rhodesia*, 4, 1952, pp. 217-218.

⁷⁹ NAUK DO35/3710, Native Affairs: Letter from the Chief Superintendent, CID, BSAP, to the Staff Officer, BSAP, Salisbury, 15 June 1939.

since the advent of Government rail and motor transport, the labour situation had become worse because by travelling free as far as Southern Rhodesia, natives are enabled to save what money they may have, and to use it for the purpose of proceeding further south in the direction of the Rand mines. If on foot, they are given a good start in that direction.⁸⁰

Therefore, movement was relatively swift with the free transport with Nyasas no longer really settling in motion or gradually working southwards. It now took at most four or less days to travel from Mtoko or Umtali in the north to the southern border as was the case with four Nyasas, (Starford, Sonosi, Lestar and Chabudeni), who were arrested with forged passes. They had entered the colony on 24 March 1944 through Mtoko and were arrested exactly four days later on the 28th March 1944 at Plumtree.⁸¹ Such transnationalism was characterized by agency, authority circumvention, trickery and desertions all in pursuit of economic advancement within an exploitative colonial wage economy.

By the 1940s, the clandestine migration had become uncontrollable as transient Nyasas increasingly proceeded to the Union. Nyasas were entering the Union at a rate of approximately 14,000 a year, but were permitted to remain after purchasing five shillings Temporary Immigration Permits (TIPs) renewable half yearly.⁸² Due to serious labour shortages, 75 per cent of these northern migrants immediately got employment, mainly in the Transvaal and Free State on farms, mines, roads, railways and as domestic servants.⁸³ As quantified by the table below, South African census data indicated a steady increase of foreign Africans in South Africa both legal and undocumented, working or not working, with regional migration reaching its zenith of around 600,000 just as the Nationalist Government came to power. Malawians in South Africa grew from 4,573 in 1911 to 22,122 in 1921 and dropped to 17,657 in 1936 (Crush 2005). At any given moment in the 1940s, some 36,000 Nyasas were resident in the Union.⁸⁴ In 1946 they were 61,005 Malawians. About 64,000 Nyasas, 63,655 to be exact, were residing in South Africa by 1951 reaching a peak of 110,777 by 1970 (Crush et al. 2005).

⁸⁰ NAUK DO35/3710, Native Affairs: Correspondence from 3D/Sergeant W.B. Parr, CID Salisbury to the Assistant Superintendent CID, Salisbury, 10 May 1939.

⁸¹ Ibid, Correspondence from Detective Sergeant Leaver, CID, Bulawayo, to Detective Inspector CID, Bulawayo, 29 March 1944.

⁸² NAUK CO525/220, Nyasaland: Migration of Labour, Native Laws Commission of Enquiry Notes Relating to Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia Natives Employed in the Union of South Africa, 1949.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ NAUK DO35/3710, Native Affairs: Annual Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs, CNC and Director of Native Development, 1947; and NAUK CO525/193/5, Nyasaland Native Labour: Recruitment for the Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, 1947.

Table 1: Foreign Africans in South Africa, 1911–1970

	1911	1921	1936	1946	1951	1960	1970
Angola			28	6,716	6,322	68	3,859
Botswana	5,020	11,959	4,048	38,559	51,017	21,658	49,469
Lesotho	75,132	111,733	163,838	199,327	219,065	73,639	157,499
Malawi	4,573	22,122	17,657	61,005	63,655	23,608	110,777
Mozambique	114,976	110,245	98,031	141,417	161,240	35,857	142,512
Namibia	2,230	2,296	1,879	4,990	4,129	1,073	2,518
Swaziland	21,662	29,177	31,092	33,738	42,914	17,836	29,167
Tanzania			118	2,937	7,127	225	288
Zambia	2,158		12,189	13,515	13,544	2,996	2,194
Zimbabwe	2,526		2,167	32,034	32,697	11,805	13,392
Other	930	5,146	2,730	22,569	4,282	857	4,369
TOTAL	229,207	279,819	333,777	556,807	605,992	189,622	516,044

Source: Author's adaptation from Crush et al. (2005).

5 Conclusion

The narratives of clandestine migration detailed herein nuance and challenge numerous orthodox views within the historiography of migration in Southern Africa. More broadly, this paper revealed that illicit migration which continues to bedevil regional economic powerhouses had its antecedents in the colonial period, emerging at the inception of the colonial nation-state and was largely fuelled by the colonial labour migration system. Africans from Malawi (Nyasaland) were at the centre of this phenomenon, subverting an exploitative capitalist wage system for their own economic survival. While some went through the rigorous contractual WNLA and RNLB system, many others chose their own destiny, becoming independent labour migrants who clandestinely traversed the regional boundaries to their ultimate destinations, most preferably in the Union of South Africa. Ample evidence from archival research has shown that many Nyasas were highly mobile transnational migrants who looked beyond the confines of Southern Rhodesia towards the more profitable Union of South Africa. Such revelations go against the grain and are contrary to the popular stereotype in Zimbabwean historiography and amongst ordinary Zimbabweans that portrays Malawian migrants as desperate beings who envied Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Sedentarism was not a major characteristic of these migrants, especially in the first half of the 20th century, with many Nyasas being on the move, settling in motion and hopping from one workplace to another towards South Africa. This quest to reach the more lucrative mines and farms of the Union showcased the characteristic agency embedded in Nyasas, which was characterized by numerous narratives of authority circumvention, trickery, social networks, fraud, forgery, arduous journeys and desertions. By looking beyond Southern Rhodesia, Nyasas who ventured or attempted to venture into South Africa showed impetus and serious transnational ambitions that challenged the colonial obstacles that sought to confine them within the rigid labour system. For the Rhodesian authorities such illicit activities added substance to their views or construction of Nyasas' identity as troublesome 'natives' or ring-leaders, an aspect that could be a subject for future research.

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