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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38140/sjch.v49i1.8020>

ISSN 2415-0509 (Online)
Southern Journal for
Contemporary History
2024 49(1):3-22

PUBLISHED:

28 June 2024

PROMINENT MALAWIAN MACHONA PROGENIES IN ZIMBABWE

ABSTRACT

As immigrants settle and gradually entrench themselves in foreign spaces, some permeate the socio-economic and political fabric of their host nation and in the process assume unprecedented hegemonic prominence over time. Such has been the case of Malawian Machona (lost ones) descendants in Southern Africa, who as products of the colonial labour migration system, have over the years carved a niche for themselves in their adopted lands. Despite many of them living invisibly on the margins of the state, they have exhibited and showcased their unique ancestral traits and gained prominence across various fields. In Zimbabwe and South Africa, which are territories that immensely benefited from the sweat of colonial regional migrant labour, these immigrants have imprinted their genetic socio-cultural cosmology and left an everlasting influence and legacy across numerous spheres. Therefore, using biographical narratives of people of Malawian ancestry in Southern Africa, this article details how descendants of Malawian labour migrants in the region have become visible and left an indelible mark on the southern African geo-political landscape. The article anchors itself within the concept of visibility and invisibility, to showcase how migrants become prominent or visible in situations where formal bureaucracies and even historiographies tend to conceal, invisibilise or underrepresent such minorities. In the context of Malawian progenies, I argue that this prominence or visibility emerges out of an inherent assertiveness that has been historically informed by numerous socio-cultural circumstances in the diaspora.

Keywords: *migrant labour, prominence, visibility, marginalisation, economic, political and cultural agency, Malawians, Zimbabwe, Southern Africa*

1. INTRODUCTION

Descendants of the nation of Malawi, the former “slum of the British empire”¹, who are a by-product of the legacies of the infamous colonial labour migration system (*Chibharo/Mthandizi/Wenela*) and are scattered across Southern Africa, continue to make a name for themselves in their adopted homelands. These remnants of the colonial labour export economy have settled in the region with Malawi, their ancestral home, largely becoming an imaginary homeland. Currently numbering in thousands across four generations, Malawi regards this forsaken population as the *Machona* or “the lost ones” who never returned and were swallowed by the southern labour markets. Despite the numerous challenges encountered in the diaspora, where they live in a perpetual state of unbelonging as so-called “Aliens”, many Malawian progenies have, over the years, carved a niche for themselves outside Malawi. They have exhibited and showcased their unique ancestral traits and gained prominence and/or visibility across various fields. In Zimbabwe, a land that immensely benefited from the sweat of regional migrant labour, these immigrants live, albeit on the margins, and have permeated the country’s socio-economic and political fabric. Malawian descendants have been imprinting their genetic cosmology and continue to have an everlasting influence and legacy across the country’s geo-political landscape.

Using biographical narratives as a methodological tool, I showcase how descendants of Malawian labour migrants have left an indelible mark on Zimbabwe’s geo-political landscape but remain largely peripheral in the annals of Zimbabwean history. Being one of the major destinations for Malawian labourers, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe saw an influx of Malawians (Nyasas) trickling under the infamous “*Chibharo/Mthandizi*” labour migration system, starting from as early as 1895 into the 1970s.² They gradually turned into an integral part of Southern Rhodesia’s social, economic and political history. Many became proletarianised on farms, mines and urban locales across the colony, with many living under rigid white settler “domestic” regimes.³ Though bunched together as “native aliens” or “aliens” by the Rhodesian and Zimbabwean states, respectively, Malawian labour migrants

1 L Vail, “The making of an imperial slum: Nyasaland and its railways, 1895-1935”, *The Journal of African History* 16 (1), 1975, pp. 89-112.

2 C Van Onselen, *Chibharo: African mine labour in Southern Rhodesia: 1900-1933* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1976); Z Groves, “Urban migrants and religious networks: Malawians in colonial Salisbury, 1920 to 1970”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38 (3), 2012, pp. 491-511; M Gelfand, “Migration of African labourers in Rhodesia and Nyasaland: 1890-1914”, *Central African Journal of Medicine* 7 (8), 1961, p. 293.

3 B Rutherford, *Working on the margins: Black workers, white farmers in postcolonial Zimbabwe* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2001), p. 33.

had diverse sub-ethno-linguistic identities, with the Chewa, Yao, Ngoni, Tonga, Tumbuka, and Manganja, being the most common.⁴ They came to Rhodesia on foot, by road or by rail, either as groups/kin or individuals and as men, women or juveniles, at different times, initially as formal *Mthandizi* contract workers or informal independent or *selufu* migrants, before gradually settling permanently.⁵

Current regional historiography has not gone beyond profiling some of the most renowned Malawian immigrants in Southern Africa, most notably Elliot Kamwana and Clement Kadalie, whose millenarian and labour movements shook the foundations of colonialism in the region from the 1920s to the 1950s. To date, Kadalie's Industrial Commercial Workers Union (ICU), whose centenary was celebrated in 2019, continues to be topical amongst historians of African labour unionism, where Henry Dee, Lucien van de Walt, Noor Niftagoodien, John McCracken and others have been active.⁶ Henry Dee has intricately reconstructed Kadalie's bio-narrative that unpacks some hitherto undocumented aspects and themes on his illustrious and iconic career as well as his regional and global impact on unionism.⁷ A recent volume has further entrenched Kadalie and his ICU narrative, with however some notable emphasis on hitherto undocumented regional histories.⁸

Whilst Kadalie and Kamwana stand out in prominence regionally, the narrative remains inexhaustive and underrepresented. In fact, historiographies on labour, migration and refuge studies in southern Africa and beyond, have historically tended to overlook certain ordinary migrant protagonists, especially those that have been assertive and vocal. For instance, in Zimbabwe, the majority of works on migrant minorities have stampeded upon their marginalisation and victimisation, particularly during post-colonial elections

4 Rhodes University Cory Library (hereafter RUCL), Smith papers (unprocessed), Cabinet memorandum: solution to the Rhodesian alien question: Report by the working party on foreign labour and unemployment, 25 July 1968.

5 *Selufu* is a Malawian Tumbuka word derived from the English word "self" and implies informal independent labour migration.

6 L Van der Walt, "The first globalisation and transnational labour activism in Southern Africa: White labourism, the IWW, and the ICU, 1904-34", *African Studies* 66 (2-3), 2007, pp. 223-251; N Niftagoodien, "Clements Kadalie". In E Akyeampong and H Gates (eds.), *Oxford dictionary of African biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); J McCracken, *A history of Malawi: 1859-1966* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012).

7 H Dee, "'I am a bad native': Masculinity and marriage in the biographies of Clements Kadalie", *African Studies* 78 (2), 2019, pp. 183-204.

8 D Johnson, N Niftagoodien and L van der Walt (eds.), *Labour struggles in Southern Africa, 1919-1949: New perspectives on the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU)* (Johannesburg: HSRC Press, 2023).

and the agrarian reform, without nuancing their hegemonic prominence.⁹ Therefore, as shown above, many influential and ordinary migrant luminaries and individuals remain understudied and invisible.

Tara Polzer and Laura Hammond regard this as the concept of “invisible displacement”, where certain groups are concealed or remain invisible in the eyes of the state.¹⁰ Migrant (in)visibility as a concept emerges from anthropology, where Jasper Bjanersen and Simon Turner describe the intricate ways in which African migrants are marginalised and excluded from public discourse across the globe.¹¹ Defining (in)visibility as recognition or the ability to be heard or not heard, to be seen or not seen, Bjanersen and Turner explore how African migrants negotiate structural and strategic discrimination by deploying deliberate strategies of avoidance or assimilation to survive.¹² Migrants may seek to be invisible or remain below the radar of restrictive governance regimes, avoiding the gaze of states and other authorities in their search for safety and their quest for better lives. On the contrary, as showcased and argued herein, some Malawian migrant descendants, whom James Muzondidya regards as “invisible subject minorities”¹³ opted to be visible and become prominent to gain access to the destinations or opportunities they seek and assertively claim a niche for themselves in foreign frontiers, even though such visibility may render vulnerable groups to more persecution and victimisation.

Despite these socio-economic adversities, numerous Malawian progenies have historically entrenched themselves in their host frontiers, turning their ancestral home into an imaginary homeland. Other than permanently settling across the region, many managed to adapt to the traverses of the diaspora and, in the process, carved a niche for themselves over the years. They exerted diverse individual and collective agency to cope with the several challenges, anxieties and uncertainties they encountered in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. Many made their own history and found ways to assert and

9 Rutherford, *Working on the margins*; M Chiweshe and T Chabata, “The complexity of farmworkers’ livelihoods in Zimbabwe after the Fast Track Land Reform: Experiences from a farm in Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe”, *Review of African Political Economy* 46 (159), 2019, pp. 55-70.

10 T Polzer and L Hammond, “Invisible displacement”, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21 (4), 2008, pp. 417-431.

11 J Bjanersen, “The paradoxes of migrant in/visibility: Understanding displacement intersectionalities in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso”. In: J Bjanersen and S Turner (eds.), *Invisibility in African displacements: From marginalisation to strategies of avoidance* (London: Zed Books, 2020).

12 Bjanersen, “The paradoxes of migrant in/visibility”.

13 J Muzondidya, “Zimbabwe for Zimbabweans: Invisible subject minorities and the quest for justice and reconciliation in postcolonial Zimbabwe”. In: B Raftopoulos and T Savage (eds.), *Zimbabwe: Injustice and political reconciliation* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2005), pp. 213-35.

express themselves through inventing intricate everyday modes of survival anchored in gender and class dichotomies, historical configurations, ethnic orientation, language, age, education, occupation, settlement and other socio-political interests. Malawians in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe were men, women, and juveniles toiling as first, second, third and fourth-generation descendants, some of whom had been farm workers, miners, factory workers, maids, gardeners, the educated and uneducated, students and house owners from diverse ethnic backgrounds. It is in this diversity that they reproduced a sense of their own identities moored in ethnocultural motifs with, for instance, the Chewa propping themselves through their *Nyau/Gule Wamkulu* dances, the Yao being visible through their Islamic initiation customs and *Beni* dances, whilst the Tonga became renowned for the Watchtower movement. This agency was also multi-faceted and was exercised in different spheres, domains and levels. Ultimately, as they navigated the treacherous othering obstacles in a foreign space, many Malawians adapted and successfully carved out a niche for themselves in a terrain that was now their adopted home. Many visibly permeated the Zimbabwean socio-political fabric, improving and consolidating themselves and sometimes attaining cult hero status.

2. NYASA PROMINENCE IN RHODESIA: A REVIEW

Studies on Zimbabwe's colonial labour history have detailed how, through African worker consciousness, Nyasas spearheaded activism against colonial discrimination through millenarianism and unionism. Charles Van Onselen, Ian Phimister, Tsuneo Yoshikuni, Timothy Stapleton, Zoe Groves, and John McCracken, amongst others, have, at various junctures, chronicled the influence of educated and semi-educated Nyasa workers and evangelists in confronting Rhodesian injustices and bigotry on farms, mines and urban workplaces. From the onset, Nyasas led Rhodesian social movements from the 1910s until the late 1950s. Driven by their early exposure to missionary education in Nyasaland, migrant labourers were quite conscious of their socio-political rights and, therefore, mobilised against white dominance and colonial rule.¹⁴ As a result, they fronted early anti-colonial struggles in Rhodesia, which

14 The first missionaries in Malawi were the Scottish Presbyterians, established their initial mission stations on the lakeshore around the mid-1870s and early 1880s. Groves explains that by 1915 missionary education in Nyasaland had grown in quality and quantity with intense competition being experienced amongst the many missionaries who included the DRC and the Monforts and the French White Fathers in the Ngoni and Chewa heartland of the central region; the Livingstonia in the north; the Blantyre, UMCA, Catholics and Adventists.

laid the basis for their largely treacherous relationship with the colonial state as exemplified by Kamwana's millenarian movement, Kadalie's proxy ICU activities, and the numerous historical labour unrests from the 1910s onwards. The notoriety of Nyasa migrants in the development of regional labour and political consciousness until 1960 saw the colonial regime labelling them as ringleaders and troublemakers who spread discontent among the supposedly passive and happy Rhodesian African "natives".¹⁵

For instance, evangelist Kamwana's Watchtower movement raised unprecedented concern across the Southern African colonial regime, as it preached the coming of Armageddon and the banishment of all Europeans from Africa.¹⁶ The resultant anti-colonial gospel alarmed the Rhodesian state, whose distrust of Nyasa migrants also emanated from the infamous 1915 John Chilembwe Rising in Nyasaland.¹⁷ In response, the Rhodesian state curbed the movement's spread through deportations, mail interception, censorship and selective use of the pass laws. For instance, in 1926, about 15 Nyasa Watchtower leaders were rounded up and deported to Nyasaland.¹⁸ Another Nyasa who gained prominence through notoriety in Southern Rhodesia in the 1920s was Robert Sambo, who was a proxy for Kadalie, the leader of the rabble-rousing South African Industrial Commercial Workers Union (ICU).¹⁹ Sent by Kadalie in February 1927 to establish a sister branch in Southern Rhodesia and operating from his base in Bulawayo, Sambo, with the assistance of another Nyasa, John Mphamba, managed to irritate the establishment for five months, and by mid-1927, the movement had been visibly effective enough to get him deported from Rhodesia.²⁰ His *blitzkrieg* success earned him a characterisation as an "undesirable element", which would come to shape and define the largely acrimonious relationship between the Malawian diaspora and the Rhodesian state and Rhodesian African indigenes.

15 For more details, see A Daimon, "Ringleaders and troublemakers: Malawian (Nyasa) migrants and transnational labor movements in Southern Africa", *Labor History* 58 (5), 2017, pp. 656-675.

16 R Rotberg, *The rising of nationalism in Central Africa: The making of Malawi and Zambia, 1873-1964* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

17 Van Onselen, *Chibaro*, pp. 204-6.

18 I Phimister, *An economic and social history of Zimbabwe: 1890-1948: Capital accumulation and class struggle* (London: Longman, 1988), p. 158.

19 A Daimon, "The Rabble-rouser: Robert Sambo's ICU Stint in Rhodesia". In: D Johnson, N Nieftagodien and L van der Walt (eds.), *Labour struggles in Southern Africa, 1919-1949: New perspectives on the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU)* (Johannesburg: HSRC Press, 2023).

20 NAZ S1671/2265, Robert Sambo - Organising Secretary of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, Southern Rhodesia; Phimister, *An economic and social history of Zimbabwe*, p. 158.

Two months after Sambo's expulsion, a handful of Nyasas led the first formidable African workers' industrial action ever seen in Rhodesia at Shamva Mine. Close to 3 500 African mineworkers, mostly long-service migrants from Nyasaland, struck for higher wages from 12 to 17 September 1927.²¹ In the end, 28 suspected Nyasa ringleaders were arrested, tried and deported.²² The 1940s further witnessed increased worker agitation, with Nyasas being pivotal during the 1945 and 1948 Rhodesian general strikes, which were watershed events of the decade. In February 1954, another strike for better wages occurred at Wankie Colliery, with about 60 Nyasas accused of collaborating with the employer to the exasperation of their African workmates.²³ More Nyasa prominence was visible during the February 1959 Kariba Dam strike, where over 1600 workers, comprising 520 Nyasas, quit the dam's indentured labour, complaining of poor working conditions.²⁴

All these machinations added to the visibility of Nyasa immigrants, a condition which was fully epitomised by the Nyasa political elite during their anti-Central African Federation crusades in the 1950s.²⁵ For instance, Hastings Kamuzu Banda's implacable opposition to the Federation earned him the label "a nasty little man" from JC Morgan of the British Colonial Office.²⁶ The Southern Rhodesian authorities saw him as a "danger to peace" after having spoken violently against what he described as "this stupid Federation" on his visit to Salisbury in 1958.²⁷ Through the activities of the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) in urban Salisbury and Bulawayo, Nyasa leaders such as Dunduzu Chisiza, who worked as a clerk interpreter and translator at the Indian High Commission in Salisbury, were accused of radicalising the moderate Rhodesian nationalist movement in the 1950s.²⁸ Chisiza became instrumental in the formation of the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress Youth League. Together with locals such as George Nyandoro, James Chikerema, Paul Mushonga and Edson Sithole, he helped form the City Youth League (CYL), whose first major accomplishment was the 1956

21 Phimister, *An economic and social history of Zimbabwe*, p. 160; I Phimister, "The Shamva Mine Strike of 1927", *Rhodesian History* 2, 1971, pp. 65-68.

22 Phimister, *An economic and social history of Zimbabwe*, p. 161.

23 I Phimister, "Wangi Kolia": *Coal, capital and labour in colonial Zimbabwe, 1894-1954* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1994), p. 138.

24 Annual Report of the Rhodesia Native Labour Supply Commission for 1959, Salisbury, 1960; Boeder, "We won't die for fourpence", p. 314; "Kariba rioters gaoled", *African Weekly*, 02 March 1959.

25 A Cohen, *The politics and economics of decolonization in Africa: The failed experiment of the Central African Federation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

26 McCracken, *A history of Malawi*, pp. 345-49.

27 Groves, "Malawians in colonial Salisbury", p. 219.

28 J Power, "Remembering Du: An episode in the development of Malawian political culture", *African Affairs* 97, 1998, p. 373.

Salisbury Bus Boycott leading to his deportation in August 1956.²⁹ By the time Rhodesia went into the war (1964-79), Malawi had gained autonomy, but her *Machonas*, many of whom had decided to permanently settle in Southern Rhodesia, continued to toil and spread their hegemonic tentacles in various capacities across the colony.

3. PROMINENT MACHONA PROGENIES IN ZIMBABWE

At Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, Malawian descendants had fully entrenched themselves in their adopted homeland and began to fully assert themselves into the country's geopolitics, regardless of their continued categorisation as non-citizens or "aliens" by the postcolonial state. In the process and just like their colonial kinsfolk, they gradually began to excel in various fields: sports, politics, business, education, property ownership and popular culture. By ultimately looking at the biographies of prominent Malawian descendants in Zimbabwe, this section showcases how some of the so-called "aliens" exploited the numerous post-independent platforms to achieve micro and macro success. Malawian descendants visibly excelled in numerous fields and occupations, engraining themselves within Zimbabwe's socio-economic fabric and gaining prominence over time. They established dominant enclaves in sports, social entertainment (music and theatre, to be precise) and to some extent in politics, albeit as troublemakers for the state.

In the music circles, popular musicians such as Alick Macheso, Nicholas Zacharia, Simon Chimbetu, Daiton and Josphat Somanje, and Fred Manjalima have a Malawian genealogy. The most popular Macheso revolutionised Zimbabwean secular (*sungura*) music with a trademark bass guitar that has influenced many other artists over the years. Dubbed the "King of Sungura", Macheso was born on 10 June 1968 in Bindura and rose from working as a juvenile farm labourer in Shamva to stardom. His mother, Emilia Macheso, was Mozambican, whilst his father, Hudson Chisale, a drifter who broke up with Emilia and left Alick in his infancy to be looked after by his uncles, was Malawian.³⁰ "My father would always play music in the compounds after work, entertaining in pubs and at drinking parties thus, people said he was directionless, but I inherited the gift of music from him", he recalled.³¹ Alick was able to nurture his talent with the help of his maternal uncles, Silver, Julius and Rogers Macheso. The farm environment did not provide many

29 Power, "Remembering Du", p. 373.

30 "Alick Macheso biography", <http://www.alickmacheso.blogspot.com/2009/11/alick-macheso-biography.html>, accessed 26 August 2024.

31 "Alick Macheso biography".

opportunities, and he was forced to drop out of Mashambanyama Secondary School at Form Two for lack of funds. In 1982, at the youthful age of fifteen, Macheso arrived in Harare in search of fame and fortune. He went on a music-inspired journey, joining several bands (Seaside Band, Vuka Boys), mostly *sungura*-playing outfits.³² In 1988, Macheso joined hands with a fellow Malawian descendant, Nicholas Zacharia, forming the popular Khiama Boys band. Khiama is a Chewa/Yao word for music, and their five-member band was an ensemble reflective of their Malawian ancestry, consisting of second-generation Malawians, including Nicholas and his young brother Zacharia. After a successful ten-year stint with the Khiama Boys, Macheso went solo in 1998, forming the Orchestra Mberikwazvo.³³ His turning point came with his third album, *Simbaradzo*, in 2000. With 350 000 copies sold, the product became one of Zimbabwe's best-ever-selling albums.³⁴ His discography continued with more than half a dozen successful albums, making him a household name with hundreds of thousands of albums sold and numerous international tours. In recent years, Macheso has risen to become a farmer and an advertising face for many corporations, with one of his many achievements being the Red Cross brand ambassador in Zimbabwe.

Macheso and Zacharia's articulation of Malawian traits was consolidated by other fellow musician descendants. Born in Zimbabwe in 1960, popular musician Simon Chimbetu traced his roots to Malawi and continued to stick to his Yao traditions until he died in 2004. The Somanje brothers, Josphat and the late Daiton, born and bred in Marondera, are also of Yao origin. They formed the Pengaudzoke band and produced numerous hits influenced by their Malawian ancestry. Fred Manjalima, a third-generation Malawian started as a comedian, turning to music post-2000. A trademark of these musicians was the transnational ties maintained with their ancestry through their music. Virtually all of them have a tradition of including songs and phrases in their *native* Malawian languages, Chewa and Yao in particular, to signify their foreign roots. The artists' popularity led to their appropriation as Zimbabweans regardless of their foreign ancestry. Joseph Chikowero suggests that Zimbabweans regard these music icons as "heroes", as evidenced by the cult following some of these personalities of foreign origin have achieved by making Zimbabweans proud.³⁵ Their music has undoubtedly helped to foster visibility, appreciation and integration of migrant descendants in Zimbabwe. South Africa also had the late Ray Chikapa Enock Phiri, the legendary

32 "Alick Macheso biography".

33 S Chinyani, "The truth about Alick Macheso", *New Zimbabwe*, 26 April 2012.

34 "Alick Macheso biography".

35 J Chikowero, "I too sing Zimbabwe: The conflict of ethnicity in popular Zimbabwean music", *African Journal of New Poetry* 5, 2006, p. 121.

jazz, fusion and mbaqanga musician born on 23 March 1947 in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, South Africa, to Kanyama Phiri, a Malawian immigrant worker and guitarist who inspired his son into music.

Zimbabwean journalism also benefited from expertise from the Malawian diaspora. The late Bill Saidi, a renowned southern African journalist, worked for both the public and private media in a colourful career spanning almost 60 years. Born on 8 May 1937 in Mbare, Harare, Bill's father, Agonelepi Saidi, a tailor by profession, was Malawian, whilst his mother was Shona.³⁶ Saidi became a journalist in 1957, joining the only daily newspaper in Rhodesia that covered African news, the *African Daily News*, a year after its establishment in 1956. He also edited *Parade* magazine and *Bwalo la Nyasaland*, a weekly newspaper aimed at Africans in Nyasaland.³⁷ Working as a young reporter under editor Nathan Shamyarira, he learned his trade before the *African Daily News* newspaper was shut down by the Rhodesian regime in 1963 for subversion. Saidi then moved to Zambia in 1963 to become production editor of the *Central African Mail*, renamed the *Zambian Times* after Zambia's independence. He spent 17 years in Zambia, returning to independent Zimbabwe in 1980 and joined the government-owned Zimpapers as assistant editor of the *Herald*.³⁸ After nine increasingly frustrating years at Zimpapers, Saidi joined the private media, starting with the *Standard* newspaper in 1988, followed by a brief stint at the *Daily Gazette* and then the popular and critical *Daily News* from 1999 to 2003.

Throughout his career, Saidi encountered numerous African nationalists and leaders, many of whom he annoyed because of his critical journalism. At the *African Daily News*, he was sought by Rhodesian police on treason charges for inciting Africans against the government.³⁹ Forced into exile in 1963 in Zambia, he had a face-to-face encounter with President Kenneth Kaunda in 1971, who quizzed him, "Are you a spy for Ian Smith?"⁴⁰ He was eventually fired from the *Zambian Times* on orders from President Kaunda in 1975 for his anti-establishment reports. A year before, Saidi had been barred from entering the country of his forefathers, Malawi, by Hastings Kamuzu Banda's regime for meddling in Malawian politics. He recalled that,

36 B Saidi, "The African journalist 'not endangered' anymore", 17 June 2010, <<https://billsaidi.blogspot.com/2010/06/>>, accessed 26 August 2024.

37 B Saidi, "How a column can change your life", 2 August 2010, <<https://billsaidimemoirs.blogspot.com/search?q=How+a+column+can+change+your+life>>, accessed 26 August 2024.

38 B Saidi, "Zimpapers: Ten years of turbulence", 25 July 2010, <https://billsaidimemoirs.blogspot.com/search?q=Zimpapers%3A+Ten+years+of+turbulence>, accessed 26 August 2024.

39 A Milazi, "Zimbabwe: Bill Saidi's penchant for annoying leaders", *Financial Mail (SA)*, 14 November 2003.

40 Saidi, "How a column can change your life".

I was shocked when, on arrival at Chileka Airport in Blantyre, I was very politely asked to stand aside [...] after a few tense moments - for me - I was handed a form to sign written in large print - PROHIBITED IMMIGRANT.⁴¹

Such notoriety and clashes with the authorities characterised his career. As Editor of the *Daily Gazette*, Saidi broke the story of Mugabe's affair with his secretary and later wife, Grace Mugabe in 1994, leading to stern warnings from the then state vice-president, Joshua Nkomo.⁴² He was fired as a result and the newspaper eventually folded in December 1994.⁴³ Saidi incurred incessant government wrath during his stint at the *Daily News*, the first private daily paper in independent Zimbabwe.⁴⁴ The bitter irony was that he was crucified by his first editor and mentor, Nathan Shamuyarira, later Zimbabwe's Information Minister before his replacement by Jonathan Moyo in the new millennium. Often accused of supporting opposition politics, the *Daily News* was repeatedly harassed by the government through arrests, death threats and bomb attacks.⁴⁵ After the *Daily News* was banned in 2003, Saidi re-joined the *Standard* where he received a bullet in an envelope, with the warning "Watch Your Step" after publishing a cartoon of baboons laughing their heads off after reading the payslip of a soldier in the Zimbabwean army.⁴⁶ After nearly half a century in journalism, Saidi retired in 2008 but returned to assist the struggling *Herald*, later moving back to the *Daily News*.⁴⁷ Many other prominent journalists trace their roots out of Zimbabwe, with veteran sports journalist and editor, Robson Sharuko, being of Zambian descent.⁴⁸

Machona prominence was replicated in sports, particularly in Zimbabwean soccer. Moses Chunga and Benjani Mwaruwari, both at one time Zimbabwe national soccer team captains, Kembo Chunga, Friday Phiri and many others were celebrated footballers of Malawian descent. The legendary player and coach Moses Chunga, nicknamed "The Razorman" because of his dribbling skills, was born on 17 October 1965 to parents of Malawian origin.⁴⁹ Widely regarded as one of the greatest football players to ever emerge from Zimbabwe, Chunga played for the popular Dynamos Football Club and

41 B Saidi, "Prohibited from capacity to expose", 16 July 2010 <https://billsaidimemoirs.blogspot.com/search?q=Prohibited+from+capacity+to+expose>, accessed 26 August 2024.

42 Saidi, "A call from Joshua Nkomo", 21 June 2010.

43 D Compagnon, *A predictable tragedy: Robert Mugabe and the collapse of Zimbabwe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

44 G Nyarota, *Against the grain: Memoirs of a Zimbabwean newsman* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2006).

45 G Nyarota, *Against the grain*, p. 303.

46 Saidi, "The African journalist 'not endangered' anymore".

47 Saidi, "The African journalist 'not endangered' anymore".

48 <https://www.herald.co.zw/glamour-at-sharuko-wedding>, accessed 28 August 2024.

49 "Moses Chunga Razorman: 100 Greatest Zimbabweans", 17 July 2014, <http://www.pindula.co.zw/Moses_Chunga>, accessed 26 August 2024.

Eendracht Aalst in Belgium. Twenty years after leaving Eendracht Aalst, he received a hero's welcome and a standing ovation from the club's fans and management.⁵⁰ He is the only midfielder in Zimbabwe to score 45 goals in one season and the only Zimbabwean signatory of the Golden Book of the city of Aalst, alongside others like Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.⁵¹ Chunga had the option of playing for the Malawi national team, but just like Benjani Mwaruwari, he chose the Zimbabwean team. Mwaruwari was born on 13 August 1978 to Malawian Ngonde/Tumbuka parents. He claims that his real name is Mpenjani Mwalughali, a common Ngonde/Tumbuka name which got distorted by the registration officers when his father Amon, who was born in Karonga village in northern Malawi on 4 May 1945, went to get his registration papers.⁵² Amon came to Zimbabwe in the early 1960s, where he settled in the Headlands area before moving to Bulawayo in 1975, where he worked for Datlabs until retirement in 1986. Benjani began his football career at Young Blood, joining Bulawayo giants, Highlanders Football Club juniors before moving to Lulu Rovers Football Club, Zimba Africa Rivers, University of Zimbabwe teams in Zimbabwe's Division One and eventually Air Zimbabwe Jets. His big break came when he joined Jomo Cosmos of South Africa, soon moving to Grasshoppers Zurich in Switzerland.⁵³ From then on, Mwaruwari played for other clubs around Europe, including Auxerre, Portsmouth, Manchester City and Blackburn Rovers.⁵⁴ He was the first Zimbabwean to score in the European Champions League and won the Players' Player of the Season in South Africa.⁵⁵

Malawian visibility was also pronounced in politics, where some politicians, who conveniently identified themselves as Zimbabwean indigenes, were rumoured or speculated to be of Malawian ancestry. The country's first president, Canaan Banana, for instance, was said to have been born of a Malawian father and a Ndebele mother.⁵⁶ It was also believed that post-colonial Zimbabwe's first Finance Minister, Bernard Chidzero, was a second-generation Malawian. The same for Tendai Biti, the formidable and firebrand opposition politician who commendably guided Zimbabwe's economy out of crisis during the 2009-13 Government of National Unity period as Finance Minister. Local and national governments had and still have

50 R Sharuko, "The day Moses Chunga cried in Belgium", *Nehanda Radio*, 16 December 2014.

51 Sharuko, "The day Moses Chunga cried in Belgium".

52 "Mwaruwari's Father dies", *The Chronicle*, 30 March 2015; "Benjani Mwaruwari, family and football", *Bulawayo24News*, 6 April 2013; "Benjani: My real name", *Mafaro*, 24 July 2020.

53 "The truth about Benjani Mwaruwari", *New Zimbabwe*, 29 July 2009.

54 M Madyira, "Benjani revisits England days", *Standard*, 31 August 2014.

55 E Muchinjo, "Which Zimbos have played in the UEFA Champions League?", *Daily News*, 7 May 2014.

56 Chikowero, "I too sing Zimbabwe", p. 121.

scores of Malawian descendants in top civic posts running rural and urban administration. The most notable of these was Francis Phiri, who, until his death in mid-September 2000, was Mayor of Masvingo in southern Zimbabwe. He was a very popular administrator who brought much development to the small town.⁵⁷

For a long time, Robert Mugabe, the late former president of Zimbabwe, was thought by many to be of Malawian origin himself, primarily because of the secrecy surrounding the identity of his father. The media has occasionally alleged that Mugabe's father was a Malawian immigrant, alleging that Mugabe never forgave him for abandoning his mother, Bona, for another woman in Bulawayo.⁵⁸ They claim that Mugabe's father was born Masuzyo Matibili. Masuzyo, when translated into the local Shona language, means *Nhamo* (tribulations), and Nhamo was Mugabe's late son's name, who died in Ghana in the 1960s. Matibili's father was Chatunga and Chatunga is Mugabe's youngest son. It is also a common name among the Tumbukas in Malawi. Mugabe had, on several occasions, described Zimbabweans of foreign descent as totem-less.⁵⁹ Ironically, the private media saw Mugabe as topping the list of totem-less Zimbabweans, together with some of his relatives. News about Mugabe's Malawian connection comes as no surprise since Malawi allegedly produced other presidents in Zambia, including Dr Kenneth David Kaunda, Frederick Chiluba, Rupiah Banda and Edgar Lungu, who is believed to be of Tumbuka origin.

Some Malawian progenies established themselves as landlords (house owners) across Zimbabwe's major towns and cities, particularly in the capital, Harare. Urban property hegemony by non-indigenous Africans can be explained historically. Migrant labourers exploited municipality and company housing schemes within urban areas during the colonial and early post-independent periods to acquire and own urban accommodations at the expense of indigenous Zimbabweans. Although various workers were housed in the Matapi hostels in present-day Mbare, less-crowded suburbs such as Lonchivar, Rugare, Kambuzuma and Dzivarasekwa emerged in the 1950s to 1970s. Government and city councils offered African workers houses on a rent-to-buy basis, especially during the colonial period. In 1957, for example, the Rhodesian government offered two-roomed houses in Highfield Township, Salisbury, at £90 by cash or through monthly instalments, three-roomed

57 "Stakes high in Masvingo mayoral polls", *Zimbabwe Standard*, 18 March 2001.

58 D Molokele, "Is Mugabe Zimbabwean", *New Zimbabwe*, 11 December 2009; Staff Reporter, "Mugabe's father was from Malawi", *Nyasa Times*, 11 April 2007.

59 A Daimon, "Totem-less aliens: The historical antecedents of the anti-Malawian discourse in Zimbabwe, 1920s-1979", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44 (6), 2018, pp. 1095-1114.

houses at about £150 and four-roomed houses at £250.⁶⁰ Companies such as the Rhodesia Railways had rent-to-buy housing schemes for their workers, many of whom were Malawian and Mozambican migrants.⁶¹ Migrant tenants and house owners turned African townships, such as Mbare, Kambuzuma, Dzivarasekwa, Mufakose, Rugare and Highfield in Harare, into melting pots for various nationalities from Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi as well as local Ndebele and Shona speakers. Migrant identities prevailed then and now. Kambuzuma suburb, for example, established in 1964, was christened by that name by Malawian and Mozambican migrant workers to mean truth-telling.⁶² Cultural practices like *Gule Wamkulu* and *Chinamwali* characterised these migrant-dominated urban spaces, especially Rugare, Epworth, Mbare and Dzivarasekwa in Harare.

The dominance of migrant landlords was cemented after independence. George Sedi who acquired a house in Kambuzuma in 1965 noted that “after 1980, the government/municipalities and companies initiated a program allowing urban tenants, the migrants included, to purchase houses they were living in”.⁶³ Before this, retiring workers for companies such as the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) were obliged to move out of company houses and in some instances forced to return to Malawi or Mozambique or look for alternative accommodation elsewhere. On the other hand, many locals detested investing and owning urban housing properties until the late 1980s. Instead, they preferred devoting their income to developing their rural properties, which was, for many, the ideal idea of home. Locals often relinquished such accommodation whenever they returned to the “reserves” because owning urban housing was regarded as a, “loss of their African *ubuntu*”.⁶⁴ Brian Raftopoulos clarifies that many indigenous workers straddled their rural and urban lives, using wages earned in Harare to strengthen their rural basis and to fight off permanent dependence on wage labour.⁶⁵ As a result, northern migrants, whose rural homes were far away across the Zambezi River, wittingly or unwittingly took advantage and began occupying and acquiring urban housing properties. Many migrant descendants acquired houses in high to medium-density suburbs. Examples include Kampira in Glen View 3, Saukani in Mbare, Wyson Chipiko, John Karonda and Austin

60 “Tenants to discuss rents”, *African Daily News*, 9 March 1957.

61 Interview: A Seda with B Chihambakwe, NRZ Estates Officer, NRZ Head Office, Harare, 17 May 2013.

62 Personal communication from V Chenzi, Harare, 17 May 2014.

63 Seda, “A social history of Mozambican labour migrants”, p. 26.

64 Interview: author with W Tugwete, Harare, 26 May 2014.

65 B Raftopoulos, “Nationalism and labour in Salisbury 1953-1965”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21 (1), 1995, p. 82.

Nyirenda in Hatcliffe, amongst thousands of migrant landlords in Harare.⁶⁶ Others are found in towns like Kadoma, Kwekwe, Gweru, Chiredzi, Norton and Chegutu near mining and agricultural areas.

Becoming landlords commanded visibility and respect, but also generated “xenophobic” undertones towards those of foreign origin. As a result, locals sarcastically stereotyped and caricatured Malawians, in particular, as *mabwidi*, implying people lacking rural homes who had assumed or adopted an urban identity. Beacon Mbiba and Psychology Chiwanga explain that Malawians are sometimes called *mabwidi*, meaning foreigners from Malawi who have completely adopted an urban dweller identity because of the lack of an ancestral home in Zimbabwe.⁶⁷ They were viewed as societal failures who had lost their rural inheritance in favour of a European mode of life. Nonetheless, being landlords cultivated a sense of belonging and patriotism among migrant communities as they could now point to a place they could call their own home. “Regardless of what locals said, owning a house in town ensured that I now had a home in Zimbabwe and that I belonged here”, said Abraham Kampira of Glen View in Harare.⁶⁸ Locals also envied and respected these landlords. Wisdom Tugwete pointed out that, “Malawians were clever enough to acquire houses in towns, becoming our bosses; our landlords and we cannot take that away from them, they own us tenants and belong here”.⁶⁹

After independence, numerous skilled and semi-skilled Malawian descendants excelled in specific industries such as mining, agriculture and railways. The Malawian diaspora commanded supervisory jobs on white commercial farms. In Chinhoyi and Banket farming areas, for instance, managers and foremen at most of the tobacco and maize farms were of Malawian origin. Shame Mzekezeke, a second-generation Malawian, started as a tractor driver at Stratford Farm in 1991, became a foreman in 1994 and eventually the overall farm manager in 1996 until the land reform programme.⁷⁰ At the same farm was the late Rueben N’ona Mbewe, a first-generation Ngoni from Balaka, Malawi. After working on various farms since his arrival in Zimbabwe in the 1950s, Rueben became an expert in tobacco

66 Personal observations during fieldwork and informal encounters with migrant descendants during Zimbabwe’s August 2012 census.

67 B Mbiba and P Chiwanga, “Death and the city in the context of HIV/AIDS: The case of Harare”. In: B Mbiba (ed.), *Death and the city in East and Southern Africa* (Harare: Peri-NET, 2006), pp. 19-32.

68 Interview: author with A Kampira, Harare, 26 May 2014.

69 Interview: author with W Tugwete, Harare, 26 May 2014.

70 Interview: author with S Mzekezeke, Banket, 8 June 2014; A Daimon, “In the shadows of the third Chimurenga?: African migrant intermediaries and beneficiaries within Zimbabwe’s agrarian reform matrix”, *Critical African Studies* 13 (2), 2021, pp. 183-196.

nursing and curing. His expertise was in great demand at farms such as Bheri, Chitara, Harper and Stratford until his retirement in 1999.⁷¹ James Asidi, a first-generation Yao migrant from Kalembo, Malawi, started working as a chef in hotels before becoming a ZAPU cadre during the liberation war. After demobilisation, he sought work on white commercial farms around Banket, initially as a chef/cook, then as a tractor driver and ultimately as a renowned farm mechanic.⁷² At Riverside farm, a second-generation Malawian descendant, Mamudu Manangwa, was born on the farm in 1955 to a Malawian chef father, Ali Manangwa, and a Zimbabwean mother, Eresi Manangwa. He started working there as a juvenile in tobacco fields in the late 1960s and early 1970s, during which time he became interested in tractors. Eventually, he became a tractor driver in 1975, then a farm mechanic in 1984.⁷³ By the 1990s, he had become one of the farm's three managers.

The mining industry continued to rely on the manpower of the African diaspora after independence, with Malawian and Mozambican descendants visibly forming the majority of the labour force. Indigenous Zimbabweans had traditionally shunned “dirty and dangerous” underground mining jobs. This stereotype was illustrated by a popular local expression, “*Handishande mumugodhi sembeva*” (I do not want to work underground like a mouse).⁷⁴ This trend continued until the late 1990s when the Zimbabwean crisis, characterised by high levels of unemployment, compelled desperate individuals to take previously “dirty” jobs. Nonetheless, Malawian descendants continued to be prominent mine workers. A number of them were expert underground locomotive drivers, machine operators, bellmen, hoist drivers and gang leaders. Henry Banda Matekenya, for example, started working as a fuel attendant in Banket and moved on to Mhangura Mine in 1965 to work as an Assistant Shaft Bellman.⁷⁵ This heralded a new career in mining, spanning 42 years, during which time he evolved from a bellman to a hoist driver, working in various mines such as Mazowe in 1970, Jumbo in 1980, Dalny in 1995, Frebles and Tompson in 1997, and Ayrshire mine in 1998 until his retirement in 2007.⁷⁶ Another Malawian migrant, Jackson Chibwana, first worked as a locomotive operator in mines around Johannesburg in 1966 before coming to Zimbabwe in 1975 to work at Dalny Mine as a hoist driver until 1997.⁷⁷ Mbwana Batani also started his work life in South Africa

71 Interview: author with S Mbewe (son of Rueben Mbewe), Banket, 13 November 2019.

72 Interview: author with J Asidi, Trelawney, 15 October 2013.

73 Interview: author with M Manangwa, Banket, 8 June 2014.

74 Interview: author with G Fox, Banket, 3 June 2014.

75 Interview: author with H Banda Matekenya, Chakari, 7 May 2014.

76 Interview: author with H Banda Matekenya..

77 Interview: author with J Chibwana, Chakari, 8 May 2014

under a *Wenela* contract, working as a locomotive driver at a gold mine in the Orange Free State.⁷⁸ At the end of his two-year contract, he went back to Malawi before coming to Zimbabwe in 1975 to work at Dalny Mine, first as a locomotive operator for five years, then as a gang leader for ten years and finally as an Overseer Miner. He resigned from Dalny Mine after 22 years in 1997 and joined the Ayrshire Mine in Banket, where his expertise as a supervisor of locomotive drivers was needed. He was promoted to be the Senior Overseer Miner until his retirement at the age of 60 in 2006.⁷⁹ The Dalny and Ayrshire mines benefited from the services of News Phiri, a prominent second-generation Malawian who rose from a mere lasher in 1987 to mine captain by 1995 at Dalny. He then moved to Ayrshire in 1996, becoming an underground manager and eventually the mine manager in 2001. Phiri was not well educated, having dropped out of school at the primary level due to poverty, but his eagerness to learn and hard work saw him achieve success in the mining industry.⁸⁰

Those who grew up in farms, mine compounds and townships are also aware of numerous legends of Malawian descendants who were/are renowned traditional healers and talismanic experts. In rural Zvimba near Murombedzi stays the widow of Size Mwambe, who was a famous traditional healer who attracted clients from as far as South Africa. Mrs Mwambe narrated that her husband once worked at Riverside Farm near Banket in the 1970s and 1980s and, upon retirement in 1989, acquired a rural home where his healing profession prospered.⁸¹ Prior to the death of Mwambe in 1998, he had built a bigger rural household and managed to finish sending his children to school using proceeds from his trade. At Dalny Mine, Chakari, in the 1980s and 1990s, was the late Wali Kalonje, who used to assist the local mine soccer team, Falcon Gold FC, and other surrounding teams from Suri Suri military base and Kadoma with charms and talismans. His son Elias Kalonje recalled that, “as children of the soccer monk, we used to enjoy free entry into the local stadium whenever Falcon Gold, nicknamed *Bweraufe* (come and be massaced) played”.⁸² He added that his father was always in demand in the Kadoma area as most teams sought his popular services.⁸³

Contrary to colonial discourses of industrial ethnicity that stereotyped migrants as farm and mine workers, the period after independence saw some ingenious Malawian diaspora excelling in other occupations. A number

78 Interview: author with M Batani, Chinhoyi, 28 December 2011.

79 Interview: author with M Batani..

80 Personal communication from N Phiri, Chinhoyi, 20 January 2015.

81 Interview: author with M Mwambe, Murombedzi, 9 June 2014.

82 Interview: author with E Kalonje, Chakari, 8 May 2014.

83 Interview: author with M Batani.

became renowned educationists at tertiary institutions. One of these was the late Government Christopher Phiri, a second-generation Malawian, born in 1959 in Mufakose, Harare, where he did his primary and secondary education.⁸⁴ At the age of 18, he went to Malawi to further his education at the University Chancellor College of Malawi. Involved as a student activist against the Kamuzu Banda regime, he was expelled in the 1980s.⁸⁵ Phiri came back to Zimbabwe and enrolled in the University of Zimbabwe's (UZ) Economic History Department for his first degree in 1985. He then graduated with a Masters' degree in 1991 and taught in Harare secondary schools before re-joining the UZ's Economic History Department as a tutor in 1995, eventually becoming a lecturer in the same department. Vocal in labour matters, he became the voice of UZ lecturers, first as Secretary-General and secondly as president of the Association of University Teachers (AUT) from 2004 onwards.⁸⁶ There are also successful business people with Malawian genealogy, one of which is Shingi Munyeza, a pastor and hotelier who was once a member of Zimbabwe's president, Emmerson Mnangagwa's Presidential Advisory Board.

In the semi-arid area of rural Zvishavane, southern Zimbabwe, lives an award-winning smallholder farmer, Zephaniah Phiri Maseko, renowned for conserving water for productive farming. He is a first-generation Malawian migrant who has practised sustainable agriculture using innovative indigenous knowledge techniques. He said, "I marry water and soil so that they won't elope and run off but raise a family on my plot".⁸⁷ His resourceful practices, which offer hope for dryland farmers, involve harvesting water as it cascades down the hill next to his homestead. He constructed structures such as sand traps and a pond at the foot of the hill that overlooks his home, where he "welcomes" water. He calls it the "immigration centre".⁸⁸ The water moves through the soil to his fields where it goes into canals for irrigation. This has transformed his plot into what he calls a "water plantation".⁸⁹ For years, Maseko's neighbours have benefited from his water harvesting as they fetch drinking water from one of his wells. Such ingenuity has made Maseko famous. He has been awarded numerous accolades, such as the Ashoka

84 Personal communication from M Nyakudya, Harare, 11 May 2015.

85 Personal communication from M Nyakudya.

86 Personal communication from M Nyakudya.

87 C Mabeza, *Marrying water and soil: Adaptation to climate by a smallholder farmer in Zvishavane, Rural Zimbabwe* (PhD, University of Cape Town, 2014); M Mawere, B Madziwa and C Mabeza, "Climate change and adaptation in Third World Africa: A quest for increased food security in semi-Arid Zimbabwe", *The International Journal Of Humanities and Social Studies* 1 (2), 2013, pp. 14-22.

88 Mabeza, *Marrying water and soil*.

89 Mabeza, *Marrying water and soil*.

Fellowship in 1997 and the National Geographic Society Award for Leadership in African Conservation in 2006. In 2010, the University of Zimbabwe's Centre for Applied Social Sciences conferred on him a Lifetime Achievement Award. He is also earmarked to be awarded an honorary degree at one of the state universities in Zimbabwe.⁹⁰ All these biographical examples are testimony to the ingenuity and agency of people of Malawian ancestry, which reveal their efforts to be visible and naturalise their identity and belong to Zimbabwe after independence.

4. CONCLUSION

Malawi's *Machona* population has left a significant imprint in Southern Africa. As their ancestral homeland nation trudges through several decades of autonomy from British rule, it is without doubt that the small nation has spread its human tentacles and talent beyond the legacies of the colonial labour migration system across the region. Using Zimbabwe as a window into understanding this dynamic, this article has engaged biographical narratives of Malawian descendants to showcase their prominence in the diaspora. It has grappled with an important but hitherto neglected topic of the contribution of people of Malawian origin, whether the original migrants themselves or their descendants, to the economic and social history of Zimbabwe from the colonial period to the post-colonial era, showing how they made key contributions to the country's economy, music, politics and other forms of national life. From prominent footballers to iconic musicians who have garnered much support from indigenous Zimbabweans, these individuals of Malawian origins have made a mark for themselves in the annals of Zimbabwe's history.

The article has underscored that their prominence has been a product of inherent and historical assertive visibility where Malawians have challenged systematic invisible displacements or marginalisation by restrictive bureaucracies and regimes. I have therefore argued herein that Malawian progenies became visible and prominent to gain access to destinations or opportunities, even though such visibility may render vulnerable groups more susceptible to persecution and victimisation. Henceforth, many took the initiative to carve a niche for themselves in various Zimbabwean spaces. Many consolidated their status within the Zimbabwean social, political and economic fabric, becoming prominent property owners (landlords), sportspersons, politicians, businesspeople, educationists, agriculturalists, journalists and musicians. Some have not discarded their Malawian roots, as they continue

90 Mabeza, *Marrying water and soil*.

to uphold their foreign identity through songs, language and culture. They have thus created new economic and social practices and added vivid strands to the tapestry of diasporic life and Zimbabwe's popular culture. In the process, some have attained a cult hero status, which has increased their social visibility and contributed to the naturalisation of their migrant ancestry and appropriation of their belonging/identity by indigenous communities. Such prominence testifies to the ingenuity and agency of the descendants of the *Machona* from the former British "imperial slum" in exploiting numerous diasporic platforms to achieve micro- and macro-success, a trait that is traceable to their hegemonic notoriety of the colonial era. This agency and dominance consolidate the fact that though many Malawian descendants have lived on the margins of the Zimbabwean state and been politically and economically victimised, some have managed to make their own history in a frontier where they have eternally lived as what Sonja Lehmann calls, "minorities, in states of unbelonging".⁹¹

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend thanks to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for granting me a research stay in Germany, which made it possible for me to get more time to work on this paper. I am also grateful to the Institute for Ethnology in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, for hosting me in Germany.

91 S Lehmann, "Transnational identities in Michael Ondaatje's fiction". In: F Reitemeier, (ed.), *Strangers, migrants and exiles: Negotiating identity in literature* (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, 2012), p. 290.