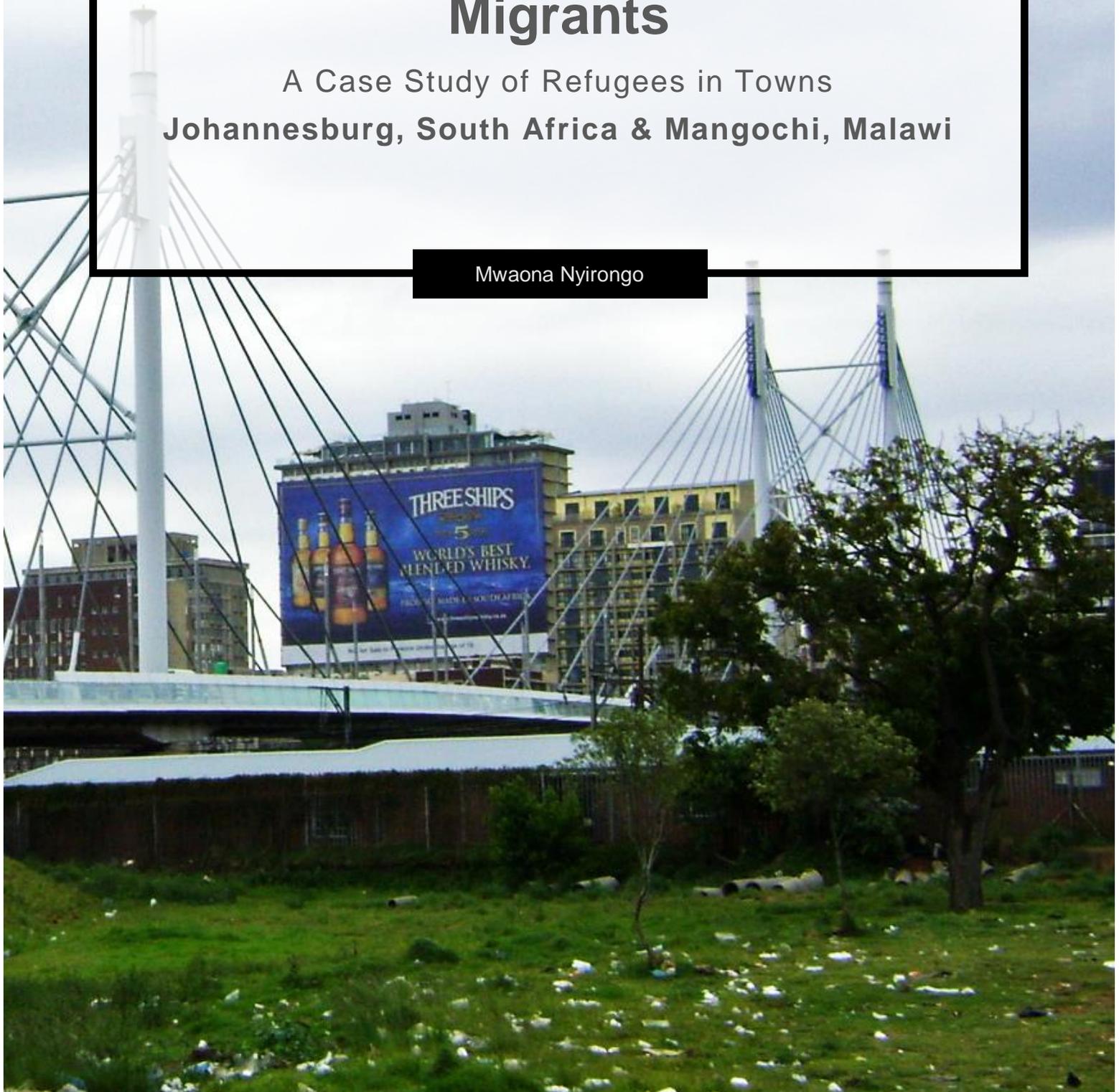


Staying Rooted: Value Transfer and Integration of Malawian Migrants

A Case Study of Refugees in Towns
Johannesburg, South Africa & Mangochi, Malawi

Mwaona Nyirongo



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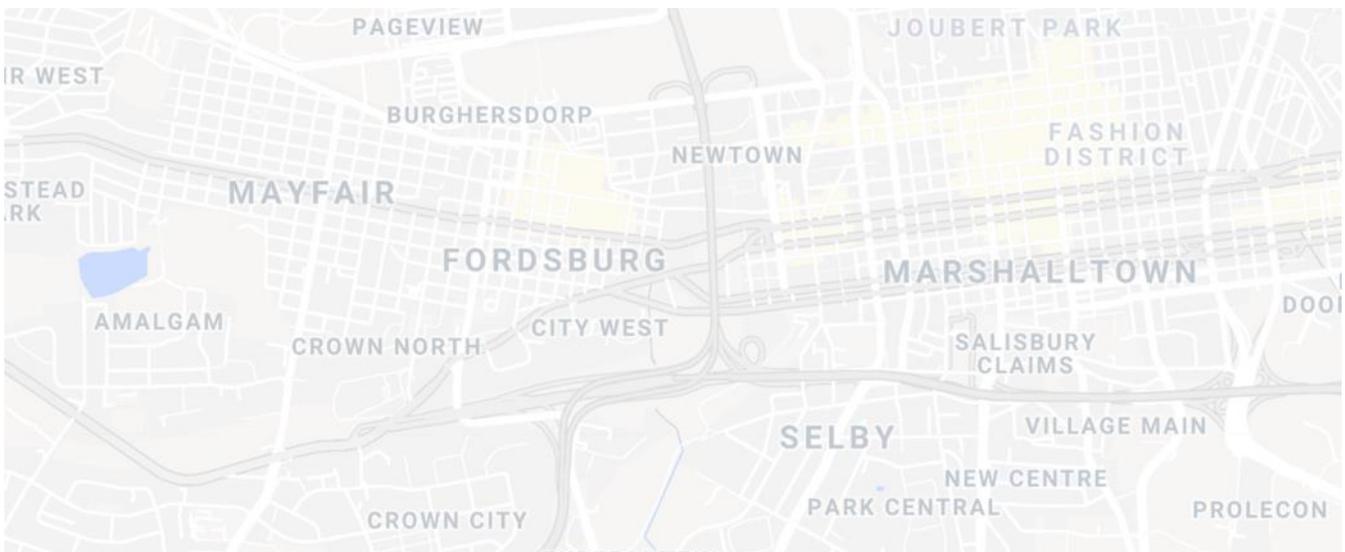
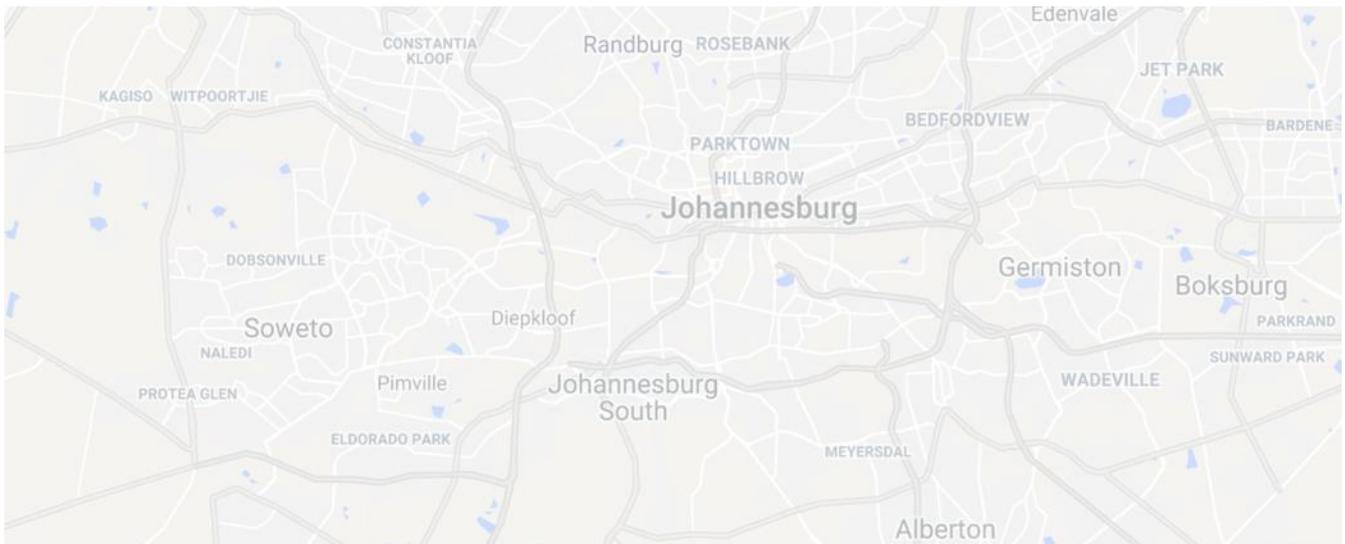
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Cover photo: The Nelson Mandela Bridge connects the neighborhood of Braamfontein to the city center of Johannesburg. Despite Mandela’s legacy and the symbolism of the bridge, there are many obstacles to the integration of migrants to South Africa’s cities. Most live far away from the city center without the time or financial resources to cross into the city center. Cover photo by Barnabas Ticha Muvhuti. All other report photos by the author.

Location



Malawi’s economic situation—as well as hostility toward minority groups such as albinos or those accused of witchcraft—have led to large scale emigration, many of whom end up in South Africa’s cities (left). Johannesburg is a receiving city for migrants from across southern and eastern Africa. Most of these migrants settle in the low-income, low-cost of living neighborhoods on the periphery of the city (middle), rather than the higher-income, neatly organized city center (bottom). *Base map imagery © Google 2019.*



For more information on migration in South African and Malawi, continue to the appendices.

Introduction

This report explores the lives of Malawian migrants living in Johannesburg who come from Mangochi—a district in Southern Malawi along Lake Malawi—to South Africa to work and send remittances back to their families. I look at how their remittances impact the lives of those left behind and how sending remittances affects migrants’ integration in Johannesburg while maintaining their old identity and connections in Mangochi. This report also explores migrants’ sources of income in their new host city, the money transfer methods between Johannesburg to Mangochi, and the ways these two towns have become economically, socially, and culturally linked, with migrants partially integrated to both places.

Integration is not only about connecting to a new host city but is also about staying connected to home. For example, migrants often live in low-quality shacks in dangerous neighborhoods in Johannesburg while building nice houses in Mangochi through remittances. Migrants sometimes keep their children out of schools in Johannesburg while paying school fees for the children in their village back home in Mangochi. Migrants typically maintain strong personal connections and the respect of village elders in Mangochi but are often distrustful of South African authorities or South African people in general because of their experiences with crime in Johannesburg, and violence and corruption at the South African border crossing. Thus, migrants remain partially integrated to their hometown, limiting their ability to integrate to their new city.

A Note on Terminology

I use the term “migrant” to describe people who have come to Johannesburg regardless of their legal status or reasons for leaving. Many are called “economic migrants,” but they did not leave only for economic reasons; they came to South Africa for a complex mixture of reasons.

Makwerekwere is a derogatory term used by South Africans to refer to Black people from other African countries, with the connotation that these are backward countries. Politicians speak against the use of the word, but it has been used for a long time, and sometimes people use it without deliberately intending to offend foreigners.

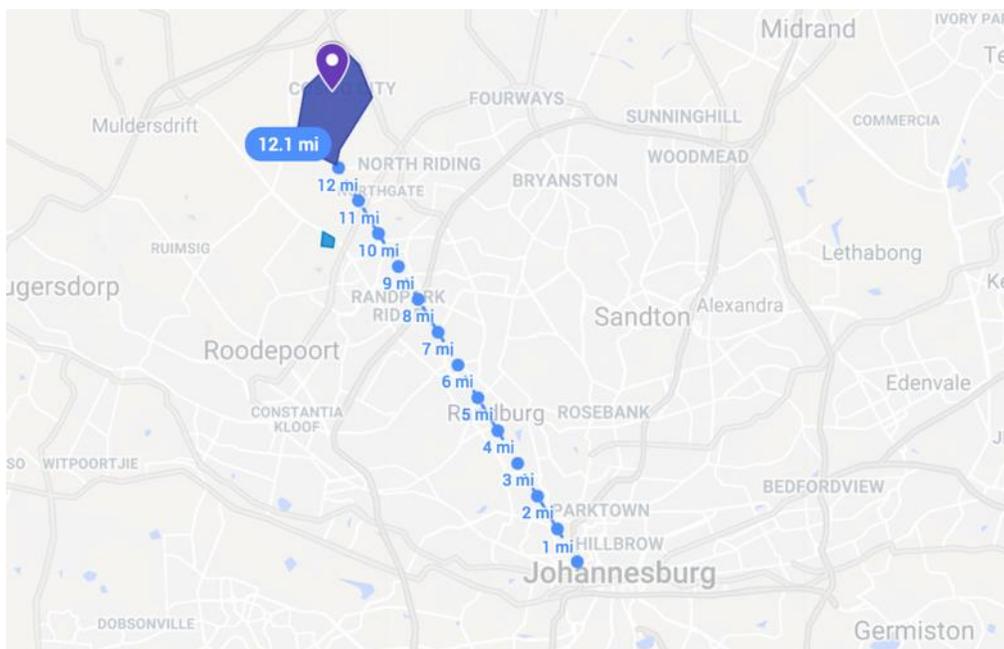
By contrast, the term *Ubuntu* is roughly translated as “I am because we are” and connotes the idea that each member of society is responsible for other people’s lives. It is the foundation of Malawians’ rootedness in their hometowns and their integration to new communities in South Africa. It is an African concept that transcends borders. It promotes tolerance and acceptance among people, but this study has found that it does not translate into acceptance by South Africans of Mangochi migrants.

The Author's Position in Johannesburg and Experience Researching this Case

I am a student at Rhodes University (South Africa) doing a M.A. in Media Studies, specializing in digital media from the perspective of “southern theory.” During some of our courses such as critical social theory and study of space, place, and belonging, we learned about how people send money as they move. This helped me appreciate the conditions of Mangochi migrants as they send remittances, and to look at my own experience and the conversations I was having with migrants from a critical perspective.

At school, I have kept in touch with friends and relatives from Mangochi and Johannesburg. Most of the migrants are young millennials like me. Being an educated young African, I have friends from all walks of life, and I draw on this diverse social network for the report. South Africa is full of migrants, which means that education or ethnic group tends not to be as important in social bonding as the fact that you are co-nationals. If you are from Malawi, then all Malawians in South Africa treat you as a brother and try to connect with you. All Malawians are able to speak Chichewa. This made it easy for me to communicate with other migrants, especially with people who have problems expressing themselves in English.

Spatial Segregation of Johannesburg



The neighborhoods of Honeydew and Cosmo City on the outskirts of Johannesburg attract many Malawian migrants because of their low cost of rent. However, these neighborhoods' distance from the city center limits migrants' ability to become socially, economically, or politically integrated, forming international enclaves.

Map by the author and Anna Cumming. Base map imagery © Google 2019.

The Economic Impact

Migrants have greatly impacted the economy of Johannesburg. Mangochi migrants use their strong connections with their home villages to import goods to sell, such as *Chitenje* and *Matemba*. *Chitenje* is a cloth that women tie around themselves as a traditional African way of dressing. Malawian *Chitenje* is of high quality and is in high demand in South Africa, so migrants ask their relatives back in Malawi to send them cloth to sell. Through this trade, South Africans are able to appreciate how other Africans dress.

Matemba is small dried fish that is common in Malawi. When migrants first arrive in South Africa, they are excited by all the novel food options available, but as time passes, they miss the foods from home and begin to import *Matemba* (see image). South Africans sample Malawian food and learn about another African culture. In turn, this trade helps Malawian fishermen and businesspeople. As Chisomo, a Malawian woman in her late 20s, said, “It’s very difficult for someone from Mangochi to start a reasonable business here in Johannesburg because it requires a huge capital. Most of the people who have businesses here are doing it at a very small scale.”

Mangochi migrants also export clothing and electronic goods from South Africa back to Mangochi, where they sell them, sometimes at a 100% markup. These traders are taking advantage of people's desire for foreign products, but the trade benefits both migrants—who make money trading the goods—and the South Africans who supply the Malawian traders.

Matemba



A matemba seller in a market of Johannesburg.

Finding work

Malawian migrants also work as laborers in homes. These are not desirable jobs for locals but are accepted by Malawians, perhaps because Malawians did not experience White domination for as long as Black South Africans did and are therefore not bothered by working as gardeners or taking service jobs offered by White South Africans. Black South Africans avoid this work as it reminds them of Apartheid South Africa, when “garden boys” were forced to work for long hours for little compensation and were generally treated poorly. By performing work that South Africans won’t, migrants are providing services that would likely not be fulfilled without their presence.

Migrants obtain information about jobs in Johannesburg through friends and relatives. Relatives provide this information for free, but non-related Malawians demand money (700–1,000 rand, or 51–72 United States dollars (USD)) to provide information on job opportunities. Jobs are not easy to find as, a 32-year-old Malawian male named Happy said:

“When I came here, I had high expectations to find a job, but things are getting tougher each day. Since I don’t have a work permit, there are very few options for me. Sometimes I do help with manual work but it’s not enough to sustain me. Sometimes I feel like going back home but there is no longer anything for me now back home.”

Sending money to Mangochi

Eighty-three percent of reported remittances in Malawi are from South Africa (Sabola, 2018). However, this percentage must be higher in actuality because much money sent from South Africa goes through informal channels and is not officially counted. Mangochi migrants in South Africa often use these informal methods to send money because it is less expensive and does not require a valid permit/visa, passport, or proof of residence. Most foreigners do not have proof of residence because they stay in homes that are not registered under their names. Some migrants have fake residence permits, but these would be identified by the money transfer agency.

Many Malawians send money using Hello Paisa or Mukuru, which are online money transfer providers with fees of about 10% (see image below). Mukuru is UK-based and Hello Paisa was launched by HomeSend, a joint venture between MasterCard, eServGlobal, and Belgacom International Carrier Services (BICS).

Most Mangochi migrants are on tourist visas and do not have papers that allow them to live or work in South Africa. Securing a legitimate job in South Africa is difficult, as most companies require foreigners to demonstrate that they have a work permit. However, the South African High Commission in Malawi does not offer Malawians a work permit unless they demonstrate that they have found a job in South Africa, creating a catch-22 situation. While the South African government is generally welcoming of migrants, it does not consider Malawians forced migrants or eligible for asylum. Migrants without work permits find jobs in the informal, cash-based sector and try to avoid the Home Affairs Office. Some migrants who are afraid of staying illegally in South Africa cross the border each time their visa is about to expire so that they can register again as a tourist. Some employers take advantage of migrants’ precarious legal status and pay them poorly.

Value Transfer



A Mukuru payment booth in Mangochi where migrants receive funds sent from South Africa.

The economic impact of remittances on Mangochi

Migrants send money home to support not only immediate family like their wives and children but also extended family like uncles and cousins, or even friends; this is because of the spirit of *Ubuntu*. Most of the time, this money is used to meet basic needs such as food and clothing. There are four main impacts on Mangochi from the money sent from migrants: supporting basic necessities, housing development, medical costs, and education fees.

Basic necessities

Although Mangochi sits along Lake Malawi, irrigation has not been fully developed, so people survive mostly on rain-fed agriculture. There are frequent shortages of food, and malnutrition is common. Remittances from Johannesburg to Mangochi help relatives improve their diet, and in desperate times to buy basic maize meal used to make *Nsima*, the country's staple food. In exchange for the money sent to them, relatives back home help migrants living in Johannesburg with errands such as collecting equipment that they have sent to Mangochi.

Housing development

People in Mangochi also use money from South Africa to build homes. In Malawian culture, home is always where your ancestors lived or are buried. So, even if one lives in South Africa for many years, South Africa is still not home. Most migrants do not know when they will return to Mangochi for good, so they need to have a house built in their village to have a sense of home. Remittances go to constructing this home, which is then occupied by relatives who live there free of charge in the migrant's absence. This helps those in Mangochi to have decent housing and supports migrants' wellbeing in Johannesburg, because they know that loved ones are taken care of at home while keeping alive their hope of eventual return.

Medical costs

Malawi has free medical care in all public hospitals; however, hospitals frequently run out of medicine for treating common infections such as malaria. Hospitals are so overcrowded that clinicians do not take proper time to examine patients. This means remittances are often used to pay for private hospitals with better care. When migrants know their remittances have enabled their people at home a higher quality of life, they believe this keeps them in good standing with their ancestors.

School fees

School fees are a big problem in Mangochi and are the cause of many children dropping out of school. The Malawian government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have scholarships ("bursaries") to support students, but many are still not able to pay, so they ask for help from migrants in Johannesburg. The children might be migrants' own children if they were left behind, or those of relatives and friends. However, this is relatively uncommon because most people in Mangochi do not have confidence that education will improve their lives, and therefore they do not keep their children in

the school system long, even if they have the money to do so. Mangochi residents have seen educated people go for years without jobs.

Most young men see the lake as a solution to poverty through fishing, and others dream of migrating to South Africa. Early this year, friends and I tried to sponsor a young secondary school graduate from Mangochi to pursue higher education, but he refused the sponsorship because he wanted to migrate to South Africa. I hear he now lives a few minutes outside of Johannesburg. Even though migrants don't believe that much in education, they still send school fees because they believe in the power of literacy and in giving children a wider scope from which to choose how to live their lives.

Mangochi benefits from the money migrants send home, but the area would benefit more if young people had better jobs in Mangochi instead of going abroad. The Malawi government agrees and encourages young people to stay in school to become educated citizens who earn a decent wage.

Refugees' Experiences

Language: an obstacle to integration in Johannesburg

Migrants sometimes leave Mangochi when they have not attained adequate education. As such, they are able to speak Malawi's local languages of Chichewa and Yao, but they struggle to speak English, which is essential for communication in South Africa. This hinders the communication process. Hence, they are not able to easily ask for jobs, housing, and other needs they have. There are some migrants who have been in South Africa for so many years that they have improved their English. Some have even learned South African local languages such as Zulu, but these are few.

Remittances: an obstacle to integration in Johannesburg

Migrants feel compelled to send money back to Mangochi, even if they are working very low-wage jobs. If they do not, people at home will not understand why, and they lose their good standing with tribesmen, which means they will not be welcomed should they decide to go home. But the financial drain of sending remittances negatively affects the integration of migrants in Johannesburg in terms of access to decent housing, education, and the South African healthcare system.

In an effort to save money, migrants live in "shacks" or abandoned buildings and poorly maintained flats, usually made of iron sheets and poles. These buildings in Johannesburg are usually considered uninhabitable by the municipality, but local South Africans rent them to migrants under the table. The shacks are often overcrowded, with as many as 15 people living in one room. Married couples often share a room with other family members, and babies are even born in such rooms. The shacks are hot in summer and cold in winter—a difficult season for Malawians in South Africa because Mangochi does not get nearly as cold. The shacks are fire hazards because they are too close to each other and fire easily spreads. They also have bad sanitation: residents sometimes use the same room where they sleep as a bathroom by bringing in a big water basin. Only some shacks have electricity. As James, a

Malawian man in late 30s, said, “We live in the kind of places that we would not live in at home, but we do not mind because what matters the most is that we are able to send money back home.”

Migrants often live in insecure parts of the city. Thieves regularly target migrants for mugging and take their money and cellphones. The thieves usually move in groups and are armed, making it difficult for migrants to protect themselves. If migrants don’t have cash or expensive phones, the robbers often harm them out of frustration. There are reports that Malawians sometimes resort to theft of other Malawians. These places also see human trafficking and drug abuse.

Without the financial drain of sending remittances, migrants would be able to avoid this difficult living situation. Remittances from South Africa are improving housing in Mangochi but preventing migrants from having decent housing in Johannesburg.

Sending money to Mangochi also makes it difficult for migrants in Johannesburg to send their children to good schools in South Africa. Private schools in South Africa are better quality than public schools, and private schools do not require study permits or residency papers for a student to register. Public schools take documents seriously, so Malawi migrant children rarely attend public schools. Migrants can buy fake documents to enroll in public schools, but these are very expensive, about 3,000 rand (281 USD). As with housing, migrants’ remittances are paying school fees to support educational services in Mangochi at the expense of enrolling their own children in the Johannesburg school system.

Basic healthcare in South Africa is officially free, and hospitals do not ask people to produce permits to access care. However, public hospitals are overcrowded and of low quality. If one wants to get decent medical care in a timely way, there are private hospitals and clinics, but like good schools they are very expensive. For advanced medical conditions in public hospitals, recipients are billed high amounts, and migrants struggle to meet these costs. Tensions between foreigners and South Africans arise, as South Africans claim foreigners are burdening their already stressed medical resources.¹

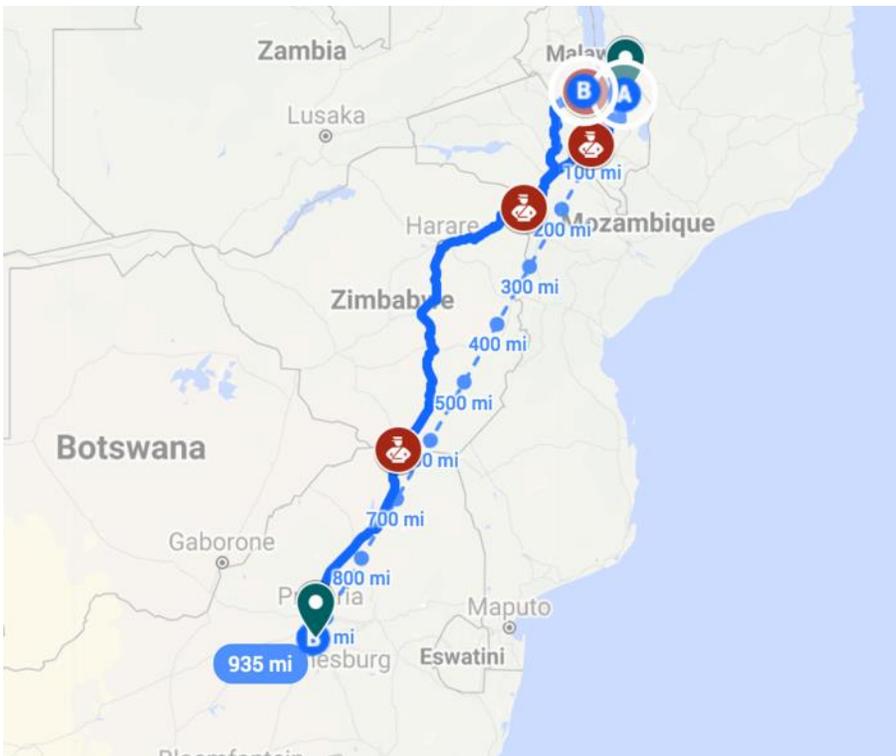
¹ If one looks at the ratio of migrants to the South African population in Johannesburg, there is no reasonable way that migrants are putting a significant strain on healthcare resources. See Erasmus, 2015.

The journey to South Africa: an obstacle to integration

A final obstacle for migrants trying to integrate to Johannesburg comes from the costs accrued just trying to get there. Malawian migrants must pay bribes or migrate illegally to reach South Africa (see box below) and spend so much money on the journey that by the time they arrive in South Africa, they do not have the financial resources to support themselves. Without money, it is exceedingly hard to get around the city to find jobs, to afford decent housing, or to pay school or doctors' fees, thereby delaying and limiting their integration to Johannesburg.

Experiences with corrupt and violent border security personnel while in transit from Malawi also mean that Malawian migrants arrive in Johannesburg suspicious of South African authorities, or even of all South African people. This harms their ability to become socially, culturally, or politically integrated.

The Route to Johannesburg



The route to Johannesburg from Mangochi involves numerous checkpoints, each requiring bribes for migrants to pass through. The financial drain of these checkpoints, and their effect on reducing migrants' confidence in South African police and its government, act as an obstacle to integration.

Map by the author and Anna Cumming. Base map imagery © Google 2019.

Migrant experiences bribing through the border

Most Mangochi migrants come to South Africa by bus because they cannot afford to fly. The Malawian government negotiated an agreement with South Africa not to allow Malawians who have less than 3,000 rand (218 USD) to enter South Africa (The Nation, 2012). Because of this, the moment one crosses into South Africa, the immigration officers demand to see proof of sufficient funds. In my experience, most people do not have proof, so they bribe the immigration officers all the way from the Mozambican border to South Africa.

Migrants pay these bribes directly to the immigration officials or bus drivers, who act as collectors and have an arrangement to split the earnings with border officials. On average, migrants without papers bribe 50 rand (3.56 USD) at each border crossing.¹ Further, if a migrant has been to Zambia or other countries where there is yellow fever, they are also expected to have a yellow fever immunization card. If they do not have this, they must pay another bribe.

Upon arrival in South Africa, at Park Station, there are police officers who check documents, even though they have no legal authority to do so. When I first arrived in Johannesburg, I was searched three times within ten minutes. I had the proper documents, so I was not too concerned. However, migrants who do not have proper documents are instantly deported and will have to go through the bribery process all over again in order to come back. To protect themselves from getting deported, they sometimes bribe these officers also.

A Malawian 33-year-old male named Takondwa recounted his experience crossing the border:

“As I boarded a taxi just outside Park Station, the officer looked into my passport and found that there was no problem. Then he asked me to stand up and strip-searched me, touching my private parts. When I complained that it was inappropriate, he asked me if I would still complain if it was a woman who was touching my private parts. I felt depressed but I was not prepared to confront an officer in a foreign land, so I just stayed quiet and told myself to be strong.”

Conclusion

The first obstacle to Malawian migrant integration in Johannesburg occurs before migrants even arrive in South Africa, during the corrupt practices on the borders en route from Malawi. These experiences leave migrants financially unprepared to settle in their new host city and personally suspicious of South African authority, thereby reducing their willingness to become socially, culturally, or politically integrated. Once they have arrived in Johannesburg, they are expected to send money back home,

keeping them connected to their hometown and helping develop Mangochi, but creating a financial burden that makes it difficult for them to afford quality housing, education for children, and healthcare in Johannesburg. Migrants in Johannesburg mostly fly under the radar, but their willingness to accept low wages for jobs and feelings of competition from their reputation for hard work has also led to xenophobic attacks. Despite these obstacles, Malawian traders have developed exchanges of electronic goods, clothing, and nostalgic foods that bring economic benefits and cultural benefits for both Malawians and South Africans.

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Appendix A: Methods

This report is based on my observations and conversations with migrants and South Africans while living in Johannesburg since 2014. However, I first began observing Malawian migration patterns when I worked as a tour guide in Mangochi in 2009 and talked to people who were considering leaving or had already spent time in South Africa. I needed this information to respond to tourists' questions. I visited Johannesburg several times beginning in 2014, and my interest in the life of Malawians in the city has since grown. I have come to know many migrants, and we often talk about the experiences of Mangochi migrants. I have also been helping some Malawian children go back to school in Mangochi, and knowledge of migration has been important in counseling them on why they need to stay in school instead of following the commonly held belief that their best option is going to search for work in Johannesburg.

I interviewed 15 migrants from Mangochi living in Johannesburg and 4 South Africans about their experiences with integration. Some South Africans whom I am proud to call my brothers and sisters openly shared with me the concept of *Makwerekwere* and how it has evolved over time. During a recent visit to Malawi, I spoke to 10 people in Mangochi about their experiences with family and friends' migration to South Africa. These interviewees, both in Malawi and South Africa, were introduced by mutual friends. Others I spoke to trusted me because I often buy products from them and know them well; they were happy to share memories from home and in due course talk about their experiences. I talked to people ranging from 18–40 years old, some of whom had been in Johannesburg for as long as 10 years. My cousin also helped me by talking to Mangochi migrants whenever he met them in Johannesburg. He would then share with me what he had found. He also shared his experience with people from Mangochi in Johannesburg during his five-year stay there.

I have anonymized almost everyone in this report with pseudonyms. However, while conducting the research I came to realize that most migrants *wanted* to be heard, especially on the challenges they faced as they traveled to South Africa, so for the people who asked that their names be connected to their quotes and are not at risk, I have provided their first names.

Appendix B: Migration to Johannesburg

Malawi is located in southeast Africa and has a population of 16 million people. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2015, 50), 79% of non-returning emigrants from Malawi go to South Africa. Most migrants are females younger than 30 years old. Male migrants are mostly 30 and older. Migration to Johannesburg from Malawi dates as far back as colonial days. The British, who had colonized Malawi, called Malawi the “Cinderella of Africa,” because it was beautiful but had no minerals to provide economic value (Tindal, 1988). Therefore, they used Malawi from around 1906 to 1956 as a reservoir for supplying labor to South Africa, Zambia (Northern Rhodesia), and Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia). Most migrants came from the following districts in Malawi: Nkhata Bay, Mzimba, Dowa, Dedza, Ntcheu, Chikwawa, and Nsanje.

The growing need for cheap labor in South Africa led to labor migration. To fill this need, representatives of mining industries created a labor recruiting company in 1901, which became known as the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA), or Wenela by many Africans. WNLA was mandated to recruit labor from Mozambique, but it ended up recruiting from other places like Malawi, Liberia, Egypt, Uganda, and Mauritius.

Most people did not migrate willingly; they were forced. In Malawi, the British government developed conditions that made it necessary for people to leave their homes, for example the Hut-Poll tax. The argument for the introduction of this tax was that local people should contribute to the cost of government, but the tax was so high that most men had to seek employment abroad to pay it. Seeking employment was not usual because most people were rain-fed farmers who depended on their farm yields for their everyday survival. But with the new tax they needed more money than could be raised through rain-fed traditional agriculture, and they sought jobs elsewhere because employment in Malawi was not viable. On White estates, for example, workers were paid very low or no wages, a situation known as *Thangata*. Young men were frustrated with this arrangement and chose to migrate to South Africa.

Appendix C: Malawians in Johannesburg

Johannesburg is one of the 50 largest urban agglomerations in the world. It has a population of 4,434,827, making it the most populous city in South Africa (Joburg, 2018). The city was established in 1886 following the discovery of gold in 1884. Thousands flocked to the area in a “gold rush,” and within ten years, the city had 100,000 inhabitants.

Since colonial days, Malawians have flocked to the city for a range of reasons. There are so many Malawians there that some have come to see Johannesburg as their second home. Although xenophobic attacks on Africans produce fear when one is deciding to seek refuge in South Africa, when people think of problems at home in Mangochi, they tend to realize that they have no option but to suppress their fears and survive in South Africa. Malawian forced migrants stay in townships like Honeydew, Cosmos City, and Extension 6.

Emigration from Mangochi

Mangochi lies in the southern part of Malawi. The area has 51,429 people and is renowned for fishing, tourism, and emigration to South Africa.

People as young as 13 years old are forced to migrate for several reasons. The main reason most people migrate is unemployment. Malawi is a small economy, and there are few companies that employ people and pay good salaries. The government also does not have enough money to employ youth² in the public sector. In the past, people with nursing, medicine, and teaching degrees were absorbed into civil service, but recently the government is unable to employ youth because of insufficient funds. As a result, over 50% of Malawi’s youth is unemployed (Nyale, 2016). These financial problems have grown worse since the start of Joyce Banda’s presidency, which saw international donors such as the UK withdrawing their direct support for the Malawi government after the “cashgate” scandal.³ These international backers now offer aid through NGOs instead that are not accountable and are feared to be corrupt, leaving citizens desperate.

Hunger is another common reason for emigration. Continuous drought and rising costs of fertilizer makes it difficult to contain hunger in Mangochi. Poor Malawians are especially vulnerable to drought, and the ACP-EU (2003) reports that 65% of Malawians are poor, with a per capita income of approximately 220 USD per year, the lowest in the entire southern Africa region. Even when the government says there is enough food, there is barely enough for one to have a balanced diet or eat

² In Malawi, a youth is someone who is 35 years or younger.

³ The cashgate scandal was a looting of government money in 2013. Public servants failed to account for 250 million USD during the Joyce Banda administration. See BBC, 2014.

three times a day. This explains why the Food and Agricultural Organization (2015) reports that almost half of the children in Malawi have malnutrition.

Specific to Mangochi, the people of this district were renowned for self-employment, especially fishing. Young people could catch fish from Lake Malawi and sell them in nearby towns. This brought about the famous saying of “*chikhwaya cha Mangochi*,” which is directly translated as ‘the rich of Mangochi,’ praising the people of Mangochi for how they could accumulate wealth through fishing. However, over the years, overfishing and low water levels in Lake Malawi have adversely affected the fishing industry (FAO, 2018), and young people are now looking for other ways to survive. From their perspective, South Africa seems to be the solution.

Finally, witchcraft accusations also make people emigrate. Malawi is a religious country, and people are superstitious. If there is no rain in the village, people sometimes think someone has jinxed the rain. People accused of witchcraft in Malawi are disparaged, sometimes are killed, or might have their property destroyed. For example, in October 2018, a 30-year-old man killed a senior citizen of 105 years; in 2016, a man in Mangochi was arrested; and in 2015, 28 houses were burned in Karonga, all over witchcraft accusations. These are just a few of the reported cases where people have been harmed over these accusations. While the Malawi Secular Humanism Association has been trying to fight this problem—helping those who have been unlawfully imprisoned—it still looms large, and one cannot defend oneself from rumors once they have been started. The accusations spread fast, and they stay with people their entire life.

Without a sustainable solution, these accusations are forcing people to move out of their town or country. If one leaves because of witchcraft accusations, one does not only lose one’s home, one also loses loved ones. Often witchcraft accusers are close relatives, friends, and even spouses. This makes emigrants from witchcraft accusations feel lonely and isolated. They have problems connecting and trusting people as they integrate into a new society. After leaving, it becomes difficult to maintain contact with home, and each time an accused person tries to reach out to loved ones, if something bad has recently happened to a loved one, they may say this was because the accused person has bewitched them and will try as much as possible to add distance and prevent possible suspicion.

About the RIT Project

The **Refugees in Towns (RIT)** project promotes understanding of the migrant/refugee experience in urban settings. Our goal is to understand and promote refugee integration by drawing on the knowledge and perspective of refugees and locals to develop deeper understanding of the towns in which they live. The project was conceived and is led by Karen Jacobsen. It is based at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University and funded by the Henry J. Leir Foundation.

Our goals are twofold

Our first long-term goal is to build a theory of integration from the ground up by compiling a global database of case studies and reports to help us analyze and understand the process of immigrant/refugee integration. These cases provide a range of local insights about the many different factors that enable or obstruct integration, and the ways in which migrants and hosts co-exist, adapt, and struggle in urban spaces. We draw our cases from towns in resettlement countries, transit countries, and countries of first asylum around the world.

Our second more immediate goal is to support community leaders, aid organizations, and local governments in shaping policy, practice, and interventions. We engage policymakers and community leaders through town visits, workshops, conferences, and participatory research that identifies needs in their communities, encourages dialogue on integration, and shares good practices and lessons learned.

Why now?

The United States—among many other refugee-hosting countries—is undergoing a shift in its refugee policy through travel bans and the suspension of parts of its refugee program. Towns across the U.S. are responding in different ways: some resist national policy changes by declaring themselves “sanctuary cities,” while others support travel bans and exclusionary policies. In this period of social and political change, we seek to deepen our understanding of integration and the ways in which refugees, migrants, and their hosts interact. Our RIT project draws on and gives voice to both refugees and hosts in their experiences with integration around the world.

For more on RIT

On our website, there are many more case studies and reports from other towns and urban neighborhoods around the world, and we regularly release more reports as our project develops.

www.refugeesintowns.org

About the Author

Mwaona is an M.A. student at Rhodes University in Media Studies. He holds a B.A. in Communication and Cultural Studies from the University of Malawi. He is originally from Malawi and is interested in sharing experiences of Malawian refugees from Mangochi residing in Johannesburg, especially their utilization of informal value transfer.

Email: mwaona@gmail.com

Refugees in Towns is a project of the Feinstein International Center. More information on the project, including more case study reports, is available at <https://www.refugeesintowns.org/>

The Feinstein International Center is a research and teaching center based at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. Our mission is to promote the use of evidence and learning in operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of people affected by or at risk of humanitarian crises.

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