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## CHIKUNDA TRANSFRONTIERSMEN AND TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATIONS IN PRE-COLONIAL SOUTH CENTRAL AFRICA, ca1850-1900<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*This article analyses the lived experience of the Chikunda people of the Zambezi hinterland in the pre-colonial period. It investigates, in particular the Chikunda diaspora in the nineteenth century, when the disintegration of the prazos of the lower Zambezi in the middle of the nineteenth century, resulted in these former military slaves of the Portuguese escaping in large numbers into the communities of the interior or to establish autonomous communities "beyond the gaze and control of the Portuguese colonial state". It argues that the Chikunda diaspora is "part of a larger pre-capitalist migratory pattern" of "transfrontiersmen", namely, those who were usually victims of class or race oppression, such as slaves, deserters, criminals and conscripts, who fled from their natal societies across ecological and political frontiers. Their migration differed from that of other groups in a number of ways such as the illegal or extra legal character of their migration, the intent of the fugitives to sever permanently their ties with their natal societies and the absence of women in their midst. The Chikunda diaspora, it is contended, bears many similarities with other transfrontiersmen experiences in Latin America, the Caribbean and China and offers a useful way of reconceptualising both the dynamics of cultural interchange between the transfrontiersmen and their host societies as well as providing "an important gender dimension to the study of interactions beyond the periphery".*

Political instability, poverty, exploitation and breakdown of civil society have precipitated massive trans-national migrations throughout colonial and post-colonial Africa. Nowhere did such migrations occur with greater regularity than in Mozambique. While the best-documented example of this phenomenon is the hundreds of thousands of migrant labourers who went to South Africa,<sup>2</sup> a substantial number of Mozambicans also fled to other neighbouring colonies. In 1948 alone, 46 305 Mozambicans

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article was first presented at V Congresso Luso-Afro-Brasillero de Ciências Sociais Maputo, Mocambique, 1-5 September 1998.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of Mozambican migrant labourers in South Africa, see Ruth First, *Black Gold: The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasants* (Sussex, 1983); Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, 1860-1910* (Portsmouth, 1994).

entered Southern Rhodesia.<sup>3</sup> Most migrated clandestinely, seeking refuge from the harsh contract labour system, known as *chibalo* and the brutal forced cotton regime.<sup>4</sup> Similar considerations motivated thousands of northern Mozambican peasants to flee to Nyasaland and Tanganyika.<sup>5</sup> These migratory patterns which continue today had their historical antecedents in the period before the formal imposition of colonial rule. Then, as now, flight was often an insurgent act as well as an opportunity to seek a better life.

This article examines the lived experience of one such group of pre-colonial migrants — the Chikunda. During the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, the Chikunda had been military slaves on the Zambezi *prazos*, or crown estates. In this capacity, they played a critical role in the establishment of a Portuguese political and commercial presence in the Zambezi hinterland. With the disintegration of the *prazo* system in the middle of the nineteenth century, thousands of ex-slaves fled to “backwater regions” beyond the gaze and control of the Portuguese colonial state. Many ultimately became absorbed into the local Chewa, Nsenga, Mang’anja and Gwembe Tonga communities who lived on the margins of the Zambezi river in contemporary Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Other freedmen, in alliance with Afro-Portuguese outcasts, constructed autonomous communities in the remote Zumbo hinterland. Many of their descendants have retained their Chikunda identity until today.

The Chikunda diaspora is part of a larger pre-capitalist migratory pattern whose participants I have termed transfrontiersmen. Transfrontiersmen were typically victims of class or race oppression who fled from their natal societies across ecological and political frontiers where they were either absorbed into the local communities of “the great beyond” or constructed autonomous refugee communities. Their ranks typically included runaway slaves, deserters, criminals and conscripts. They were often referred to with disdain by their more privileged contemporaries as having “gone native”. For the socially oppressed, however, flight was both an act of defiance and an opportunity to negotiate their future.

<sup>3</sup> National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), S3269/36/5, Prime Minister’s Department, “Explanatory Memorandum”, enclosed in a letter from Prime Minister to Sir Roy Welensky, 26 June 1959.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the cotton regime, see Allen Isaacman, *Cotton is the Mother of Poverty. Peasants, Work and Rural Struggle in Colonial Mozambique, 1938-1961* (Portsmouth, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Elias Mandala, *Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Tethi Valley 1859-1960* (Madison, 1990); Edward Alpers, “To seek a better life” “The implications of migration from Mozambique to Tanganyika for class formation and political behavior”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 18 (1984), 367-88.

Conceptualising transfrontiersmen in such terms highlights the fact that frontiers are socially rather than geographically constructed. This formulation also distinguishes transfrontiersmen from other immigrant groups in three important and interrelated ways: (1) the illegal or extra legal character of their immigration; (2) the intent of the fugitives to sever permanently their ties with their natal societies; and (3) the absence of women in their midst.

Before turning to the role of Chikunda on the *prazos* and their subsequent quest for freedom, a word about the sources used in this article is in order. Any study of transfrontiersmen is necessarily constrained by the nature of the extant documentation. By definition, much of what transpired took place beyond the view of traditional chroniclers — state officials, urban writers, clergy and travellers. Moreover, to the extent that these writers did report on the runaways, their accounts were shaped by their own privileged race, class and gender positions. Such written documentation, therefore, must be used with care and used with appropriate scepticism. To overcome the limits of these written sources and because this study is concerned, above all else, with the lived experiences of the fugitive slaves, it relies heavily on oral testimonies. While these oral documents are also social texts with hidden, multiple and often contradictory meanings, read critically, they do provide a rich and detailed interior view of the complex and often ambiguous relationship between the former slaves and their host communities.

#### THE CHIKUNDA ON THE PRAZOS, CA 1700 TO 1850: AN OVERVIEW

For more than 150 years, the Chikunda were slaves on the *prazos*<sup>6</sup> of the lower Zambezi Valley. They constituted the military arm of the estate-holders (*prazeiros*) and enabled the Portuguese to maintain a political and commercial presence in the Zambezi interior. Well armed and feared, their principal task was to collect tribute and the annual taxes, which the peasants on the *prazos* were required to pay, to enforce the dictates of the *prazeiros*, to repress peasant insurrections, to prevent peasant flight, and to defend the estates against external enemies.

In addition to their military role, the Chikunda performed a wide range of economic activities, which enhanced the profitability of the *prazos*. Caravans and Chikunda traders, porters, canoe men and soldiers, ranging in size from ten men to several hundred, traversed the interior

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the *prazos*, see Allen Isaacman, *Mozambique: The Africanization of a European Institution, The Zambezi Prazos 1750-1902* (Madison, 1972); M. D. D. Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi* (New York, 1973).

exchanging imported cloth and beads for ivory, slaves and gold. A slave official, known by the title *musambadzi*, led each caravan and conducted negotiations for these commodities. The expeditions, which lasted as long as 18 months, regularly traded in the Shona, Chewa and Nsenga chieftaincies and went as far north as the Lunda kingdom of Kazembe.<sup>7</sup>

Chikunda hunters, armed with spears, axes, half moon scimitars and locally made rifles (*gogodelas* or *gogudas*), took advantage of the large elephant herds in the forests and woodlands adjacent to the Zambezi and of the increasing international demand for ivory in the second half of the eighteenth century to become the most celebrated hunters in south-central Africa. Special medicines, thought to enhance their powers and make them invisible, and strict sexual prohibitions prior to the hunt reinforced their sense of invulnerability.<sup>8</sup> Oral traditions throughout the region regale their expertise at stalking their prey, the fearless way in which they incapacitated elephants by cutting their hamstrings with axes, and their skill as marksmen.<sup>9</sup> Chikunda mythology and dances (*gorolombe* and *mafue*) praised the daring exploits of the elephant hunters, and their prowess was also celebrated in song.

Their enthusiasm for hunting was matched by disdain for agriculture, at least among Chikunda men. As a result, they had to rely on the peasants living on the estates for much of the grain they ate and the beer they consumed. The slaves acquired these foodstuffs as tribute and through plunder, as well as in exchange for meat. To supplement household diet, Chikunda women cultivated small fields, sometimes with the aid of captives.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the prominence of the Chikunda, it is difficult to determine the exact number of slaves on the *prazos*. Not only did the size of the slave contingents vary from year to year, but Portuguese accounts tended to inflate the figures. Nevertheless, contemporary reports suggest that the Chikunda constituted a substantial force. A long-time resident of the region, who conducted a survey in 1759, estimated the figure at more than 33,000.<sup>11</sup> At the turn of the nineteenth century the Portuguese

<sup>7</sup> Francisco de Mello de Castro, *Descrição dos Rios de Senna, Anno de 1751* (Lisbon, 1861), 21; Manuel Galvão da Silva, "Diário ou Relação das Viagens Filésoficas, nas Terras da Jurisdição de Tete e Algumas dos Maraves", in *Anais de Junta de Investigações do Ultramar* 9, tomo 1 (Lisbon, 1954), 317-319; Arquivo Nacional da Torre de Tombo (A.N.N.T.), Maço 604, Luis António de Fuguerido, "Noticias do Continente de Moçambique Abreviada Relação do seu Commérça", 1 December 1788.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Diamond Mpande and Willie Payson, Bawa, 24 September 1997; Interview with Custódio Luis Gonzaga Chimlizen, Tete, 24 October 1997; Interview with Castro Amoda Jack *et al.*, Tete, 21 October 1997.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Castro Amada Jack, *et al.*

<sup>11</sup> A.N.N.T., Maço 604, António Pinto de Miranda, "Memória Sobre a Costa de África." ca.1760.

governor of the Zambezi calculated their numbers at about two-thirds this figure.<sup>12</sup> The size of the Chikunda force also varied considerably from one *prazo* to another. Slave armies on several of the larger estates often numbered more than a thousand, while less powerful *prazeiros* could only marshal a fraction of that figure.<sup>13</sup>

The estate holders acquired their Chikunda retinues through commerce, conquest, raiding and, on occasion, the forced enslavement of the peasants who lived on their lands. Strangers, social outcasts and others struggling to survive often exchanged their freedom for short-term security. According to one eighteenth century *prazeiro*, "the largest part [of the Chikunda slaves] came to be captives during the times of famines, pestilence and locusts, and because of their urgent needs they had no alternative but to offer themselves as slaves".<sup>14</sup> Their incorporation into the ranks of the military included an elaborate ritual, known as breaking the *mitete*, in which they swore their loyalty to the estate owner who, in turn, guaranteed that, as long as he was alive, they would not be sold.<sup>15</sup> In return for enlisting, the recruits often received wives, land that their spouses farmed, the right to extract produce from the peasants living on the estates, as well as highly valued imported goods, including cloth, beads and guns. To an unattached individual, these benefits held an obvious attraction.

For the purpose of this article, what is most interesting about the Chikunda on the *prazos* is the diverse ethnic background of the slaves who swelled their ranks. Zambezi elders noted that most captives were of Chewa, Mang'anja, Chipeta, Nsenga, Sena, Tonga, Tawara and Tibuka extraction.<sup>16</sup> A detailed registry of 659 male slaves freed in the Tete area in 1856 confirms the oral sources. In all, 13 different ethnic groups were represented in the ranks of these freedmen.<sup>17</sup> Assuming that *prazeiros* did not emancipate slaves according to their ethnic background, this

<sup>12</sup> António Norberto de Barbosa de Villas Boas Truão, *Estatísticas da Capitania dos Rios de Sena no Anno de 1806* (Lisbon, 1889), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement*.

<sup>14</sup> A.N.T.T., Maco 604, António Pinto de Miranda, "Memória Sobre a Costa de África," ca.1760.

<sup>15</sup> Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (A.H.U.), Moçambique (Moç.), Códice 1452, Custódio José da Sliva to José Maria Pereira Almeida, 15 July 1860; A. C. P. Gamitto, "Escravidão na África Oriental," *Arquivo Pittoresco* 2 (1859), 369-72; Interview with Dauce Gogodo, Caya, 3 September 1968; Interview with Alfaced Pangacha, Cheringoma, 4 September 1968.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Gaspar Cardoso, Boroma, 17 July 1968; Interview with Marco Coutinho, Degue, 23 July 1968; Interview with Pedro Chamualira, Boroma, 25 July, 1968; Interview with João Pomba, Cheringoma, 31 August 1968; Interview with António Gavião, Massangano, 27 September 1968; Interview with Conrado Msussa Boroma, Boroma, 29 September 1968.

<sup>17</sup> Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique [A.H.M.], Códice 2-1167, "Registo dos Libertos do Distrito da Villa de Tette", Livro no. 1, fols. 1-58, unsigned.

census provides an important sample of the composition of the slave population at the end of the period under examination. These statistics would also appear to be representative of the slave population during the second half of the eighteenth century as well. There is substantial evidence that during this period the principal Zambezi markets for slaves were located among the Chewa, Mang'anja and Nsenga homelands.<sup>18</sup> *Prazeiros* also captured a number of slaves during their military campaigns against relatively defenseless Chewa politics, such as Biwi and Sazora, and a number of chieftaincies on the Mang'anja frontier.<sup>19</sup>

While the ethnic background and the actual number of resident Chikunda varied from one estate to another, the slaves shared a similar mode of organization throughout the Zambezi. They were divided into a number of localized regiments, or *butaka*, directed by a slave chief, known as the *mukazambo*, who was assisted by a *badzo* and a council of elders. The *prazeiro* selected the slave chief based on his demonstrated loyalty, military prowess, and ability to command the respect and obedience of his Chikunda subordinates. In return, the *mukazambo* received wives, cloth, imported trade goods and guns, some of which he redistributed to his followers. Next in this military hierarchy were lieutenants, or *chuanga*, who provided intelligence for the slave chiefs and who were primarily responsible for tax collection. They were, in turn, followed by the *sachikunda*, who directed the *nsaka*, which consisted of groups of 10-12 male slaves and their families.<sup>20</sup>

Because the slaves were strategically stationed throughout the vast expanse of the *prazos*, they remained physically isolated from the indigenous population. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, if not earlier, they had discarded their former life styles and had constructed a network of patrilineal kinship relationships, new cultural practices, and a distinct social identity.<sup>21</sup> Finally, competition between songs, dances and religious ceremonies celebrated the cult of the warrior-hunter and set them off from the agriculturalists living on the estates. They adopted a number of military greetings, known as *kukwenga*, which mixed Portuguese and Chi-Tawara, and had a unique set of facial tattoos (*makaju*) to affirm their superiority and to differentiate them from the local population.<sup>22</sup> As one Tete elder put it,

<sup>18</sup> See Isaacman, *Mozambique*, 85-89 and 105-113.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>20</sup> A.N.T.T. Maço 605, António Pinto de Miranda, "Memória Sobre a Costa de África", (ca.1760); Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement*, 187-199.

<sup>21</sup> Allen Isaacman, "The origin, formation and early history of the Chikunda of South Central Africa", *Journal of African History*, XIII (1972), 443-461. Isaacman is currently writing a book on the social and cultural transformation of the Chikunda in which these issues are more fully developed.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Castro Amonda Jack, Tete, 22 October 1997.

Originally, when the Chikunda came to the *prazos*, they did not have *makaju*. The *makaju* developed out of warfare. It became a symbol of their position as warriors and distinguished them from the other people.<sup>23</sup>

Their reputation, power and ability to acquire wealth notwithstanding, one social fact remained unchanged — the Chikunda were slaves. They, or their ancestors, had been forcibly torn from their natal societies and, in the words of Orlando Paterson, had experienced a type of "social death".<sup>24</sup> The Chikunda were unable to choose their own place of residence or occupation, they could not dispose of their property, and they lacked legal recourse against abusive masters. Their position was permanent and hereditary, since their owners could ill afford to manumit them without undermining their own authority. Thus, the Chikunda were both objects of domination and the means by which estate holders dominated the peasantry and accumulated wealth.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth century the slaves and their owners jockeyed for power. The Chikunda sought to minimize *prazeiro* abuses and expand their limited autonomy, and the estate holders tried to preserve their dominance. The annuals of Zambesian history are replete with examples of well-armed Chikunda who rebelled against estate holders who either exploited their position or abdicated their authority.<sup>26</sup> As one eighteenth century estate-holder candidly admitted, "A *prazeiro* cannot give a single negro of the slave regiment away without the others all mutinying."<sup>27</sup> Many slaves ran away, some with the intention of returning to their natal societies, and others finding sanctuary in nearby Tonga, Tawara, Mang'anja and Chewa villages. According to Newitt, "the favorite escape route was across the Zambesi to the wooded slopes of Mount Morumbala where rival chiefs, Inhanbendico and the Massache, welcomed them".<sup>28</sup> Finally, competition between *prazeiros* enabled those Chikunda who were more tied to the *prazo* system "to jump fences" and attach themselves to less abusive owners.<sup>29</sup>

This potentially volatile relationship erupted in the first half of the nineteenth century, resulting in the demise of the *prazo* system. Three factors combined to rip asunder the world of the *prazos*. First, because of

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Custódio Luís Gonzaga Chimalizent.

<sup>24</sup> Orlando Paterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Their situation was not unique. For a discussion of military slaves, see Daniel Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System* (New Haven, 1981).

<sup>26</sup> Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement*, 203-204.

<sup>27</sup> A.H.U., Moç., Cx.3, Padre Fernando Jesús, M.A., 1 April 1752.

<sup>28</sup> Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement*, 201.

<sup>29</sup> A.H.U., Moç., Cx.21, José Pedro Diniz, 1 December 1790.



the increasing demand for slaves from Brazilian and Cuban sugar plantations, estate owners shifted their commercial activities from hunting expeditions to slave-raiding forays. Unable to acquire sufficient numbers of captives in the interior, short-sighted *prazeiros* resorted initially to selling peasants living on their estates and later to exporting Chikunda slaves. Their violation of the time-honoured practice, which expressly forbade *prazeiros* from selling the Chikunda or their family members, precipitated wide scale insurrections and flight.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, recurring droughts and locust infestations led to a further decline in agricultural production and left the Chikunda, who were dependent on peasant output, particularly vulnerable. Finally, successive invasions by the Barue and Ngoni sealed the fate of the *prazo* system. By the middle of the century virtually all the estates were abandoned.<sup>31</sup>

The rapid disintegration of the *prazos* left thousands of Chikunda unattached. Freedom proved to be both a challenge and an opportunity. To be sure, the Chikunda were no longer subject to the arbitrary and capricious rule of the *prazeiros*. On the other hand, they simultaneously lost their access to food, land, a ready supply of arms and a secure base of support. They also faced the very real possibility of being re-enslaved either by other Portuguese and Goan settlers in the region or by a new generation of harsh warlords, most notably Matakenya, Bonga and Chissaka, who were in the process of absorbing many of the abandoned estates and conquering much of the Zambezi hinterland.<sup>32</sup>

Within this volatile world the former slaves pursued a variety of different survival strategies. Some sought to organize runaway communities, not unlike the maroon societies of the Americas.<sup>33</sup> Often they were located on or near the abandoned *prazos*. In 1858 Livingstone described how "a large force comprised chiefly of fugitive slaves fighting against their masters, had constructed a military stockade near the Lupata Gorge".<sup>34</sup> Invariably, these insurgent communities were crushed by Portuguese troops. Others forged predatory bands which plundered peasants living on, or in the immediate environs of, the decaying crown estates. Still others were forced to take up farming to eke out a living on the former estates or in adjacent areas. Most sought refuge and freedom outside the Zambezi.

<sup>30</sup> A.H.U., Moc. Códice 1315, Manoel Joaquim Mendes de Vasconcellos e Cirne, 1830; David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels* (New York, 1858), 630-631.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the decline of the *prazos*, see Isaacman, *Mozambique*, 114-123.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of these warlords, see Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement*, 234-294.

<sup>33</sup> See Richard Price, *Maroon Societies* (Baltimore, 1979).

<sup>34</sup> N.A.Z., L11/1/1, David Livingstone to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 9 September 1858.

## DIFFERENT PATHS TO FREEDOM: THE CHIKUNDA AS TRANSFRONTIERSMEN

Flight, or the transfrontier option, had always existed. The Chikunda historically enjoyed a fair degree of physical mobility, which could be converted into political freedom. Because most Chikunda were either stationed on the frontiers of the estates or spent a great deal of time hunting or trading in the interior, they were in a relatively good position to escape from an abusive master. Many did, despite the threat of harsh retribution from their owners. According to Mandala, "the earliest Chikunda to come to the [Shire] valley were fugitives from the Lower Zambezi when their prazo masters started selling them as slaves at the beginning of the nineteenth century".<sup>35</sup> An official government census of the *prazos* in 1806, listed almost half of the 20 000 slaves "absent".<sup>36</sup> The disintegration of the *prazo* system meant that there were fewer barriers to flight and less incentives for the Chikunda to remain in the Portuguese territory.

A number of ex-slaves took advantage of their newly found freedom to try to return to the lands of their ancestors. This was a formidable task. Even for individuals of Chewa or Mang'anja descent who had been enslaved on *prazos* relatively near to their family villages, returning home alone was dangerous. From the 1840s onwards, Ngoni, Yao and Swahili slaves and bandits traversed the northern banks of the Zambezi in search of easy prey.<sup>37</sup> Threats of wild animals and food shortages compounded the refugees' difficulties. Even if they survived and made it home, there was no certainty that they would ever find their families, since many Chewa and Mang'anja communities had either fled to more remote areas to avoid enslavement, or had been annihilated. Despite the long odds, some ex-captives persevered and were reunited with their communities. Chewa traditions recall with pride how a number of captives returned decades later to settle among their brethren.<sup>38</sup> But these happy outcomes were clearly the exception.

Although most Chikunda did not have the option to return to their natal societies, many still elected to flee. They sought refuge among Mang'anja, Chewa, Nsenga, and Tawara chieftaincies immediately adjacent to the *prazos*, which had traditionally been zones of sanctuary and important hunting regions. Mai Pingeni stressed,

<sup>35</sup> Mandala, "Capitalism, Ecology and Society", 88.

<sup>36</sup> Truão, *Estatística*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of the predatory activities of the Ngoni and Swahili slaves, see Carlos Weise, *Expedition in East-Central Africa, 1888-1891: A Report* (Tulsa, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Yohane Banda, Tayese Chiguo and Lameck Banda, Kasungu East, 23 August 1973 (Kings Phiri Collection, Chancellor College Library, University of Malawi).

[T]he main reason the Chikunda came here was because of the wars. There were many wars in their homelands, there was no peace at all. Just the mention of the work "ku-Chikunda" and you know that it is a land of wars. So they ran away to this place [Mchinji] and never went back because this land was peaceful. Others went to settle in Zambia.<sup>39</sup>

Here neighbour Zulu Kayesa concurred. "They fled the wars in Mozambique. Some went to Zambia and others settled with us here in Malawi."<sup>40</sup> Other elders, such as Chief Kwaza of Katete, noted that recurring famines in Tete drove the refugees from their homelands.<sup>41</sup> Unattached individuals, and remnants of slave villages, crossed the Zambezi in search of freedom. Rarely did they come with their wives.

They used to come as individuals. Sometimes they would arrive in small groups but never very large ones. They were people who did not fear anything . . . It was difficult for them to come with their families because it was very dangerous so that the women would not accompany them. But after settling down, some would go back and get their families.<sup>42</sup>

Other ex-slaves used their military expertise, skills as canoe men and knowledge of the interior, to carve out a niche for themselves as independent hunters.<sup>43</sup> They regrouped north of the Zambezi river, organizing roving bands of between six and twelve freedmen under the direction of a revered hunter, known as *nkumbalume*. "The *nkumbalume* was the person who knew how to kill large animals and had killed many. Only after many successful expeditions was a hunter recognized as a *nkumbalume*."<sup>44</sup> Armed with locally manufactured guns, it was commonly recognized that the ex-slaves "were the best hunters in the region: no one was better".<sup>45</sup> Chikunda hunters were single handedly responsible for the sharp increase in ivory exports from Tete, which tripled between 1821 and 1865.<sup>46</sup>

The Chikunda hunting forays, however, quickly decimated the elephant herds in the areas immediately adjacent to the former *prazo*

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Mai Pingeni, Msewa Village, Mchinji, 23 January 1997.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Zulu Kayesa, Kayesa Village, Mchinji, 9 September 1997.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Chief Kwaza, Katete, 26 November 1964 (Harry Langworthy Collection, Chancellor College Library, University of Malawi).

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Mai Pingeni.

<sup>43</sup> Some ex-slaves opted to work as hunters for Portuguese and Goan merchants based in Tete. Since they remained firmly embedded within their natal society, they were not transfrontiersmen and fall outside the scope of this study.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Castro Armado Jack *et al.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Exports increased from approximately 50,000 pounds to more than 161,000 pounds (A. H. M., Moçambique [Moç.], Códice 1760, Relatório do Governo do Distrito de Quelimane, 25 January 1866, fols. 122-123).

zone. As a result, the ex-slaves were forced "to go very far-afield in search of the much coveted animal".<sup>47</sup> Chikunda bands fanned out throughout Chewa and Nsenga territory, whose woodlands and forests were home to large elephant herds. Elders in the Lilongwe area remember that "as the elephants moved into this area from Tete, the Chikunda or Kalongwe followed them".<sup>48</sup> Masitala Jeke described his Chikunda grandfather's odyssey in search of the large mammals.

The father of my mother originally came from Mozambique and then settled in Zambia. After staying there for a while, he left Zambia for Malawi. When he reached Chief Zulu's area in Mchinji, he decided to settle permanently. The major reason he left Mozambique was not war, but hunting. When he noticed that animals were becoming scarcer in his homeland, he began moving until he found a place that he felt was good. When my grandfather arrived he became a good friend of the Chief.<sup>49</sup>

Other Chikunda transfrontiersmen followed the Zambezi river west toward the Kariba Gorge, where they settled among the Gwembe Tonga. According to Tonga traditions,

the Chikunda established settlements on islands all the way up the Zambezi as well as Ntuni or Sitkwe on the northern bank and in the Chiabi river . . . They seem to have made some use of the Zambezi and to have travelled up and down it in canoes, between the lower river at the Kaungwa rapids and the Kariba Gorge. They sometimes used donkeys to carry loads on their journeys inland from the Zambezi . . . Their main quest was for Ivory.<sup>50</sup>

It is clear from Chewa, Nsenga and Tonga accounts that the strangers could not begin their activities until they had secured permission to do so from the local land chiefs. This required that the Chikunda acknowledge the political, economic and spiritual hegemony of the indigenous authorities and that they offer them goods or services in exchange for the right to hunt in their domain. Typically, the offerings included cloth and the promise of the larger of the two tusks, which was the one closest to the ground. An elder in Mlolo recalled that "after the Chikunda arrived, they would go to Undi and get permission, give part [of the meat and ivory] to the chief and return to the Zambezi".<sup>51</sup> Mtipa, who was 96 years

<sup>47</sup> Walter Montagu-Kerr, *The Far Interior* (London, 1886), Vol. 2, 47.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Abisai Mkusa *et al.*, Lilongwe, 24 May 1974 (Phiri Collection).

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Masitala Jeke, Mnjolo Village, Mchinji, 22 January 1998.

<sup>50</sup> Timothy Matthews, "The Historical Traditions of the People of the Middle Zambezi". (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1976), 199.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Mlolo, Mlolo New Area, 12 September 1965 (Langworthy Collection).

old when interviewed in 1965 and who had witnessed these negotiations, described how the Chewa rulers enforced this provision: "When they [the Chikunda] went to hunt, the chief would select a person to go with them, and, when they killed the elephant, the ground tusk would go to the chief."<sup>52</sup>

Once an understanding had been reached with the land chief, the transfrontiersmen were given a designated site in the bush where they set up their temporary camps. "They did not build villages but built *misasa* (grass shelters) in which they lived while engaging in hunting."<sup>53</sup> These *misasa* served as their base of operations. From there, the *nkumbalume* and their followers stalked game and, upon their return, they hid the tusks underground adjacent to their *misasa*. The Chikunda often constructed fences, made of heavy trunks and thorny trees, which provided a modicum of protection against slavers, rival merchants and wild animals. According to one European observer, "some *msasas* are so well made . . . that they are a kind of village [where] travelers can defend themselves from armed assaults and attacks".<sup>54</sup>

Over time, many of the ex-slaves were permitted to live within the local villages. Tonga elders recall that "the Chikunda used to come to stay . . . They used to live at Ntuni, in the country of Sitinkwe, (also) many Chikunda lived in the country of Ciabi in the village of Sitinkwe".<sup>55</sup> In Mchinji, "some people used to induce them to stay in their villages so that they would provide meat for them".<sup>56</sup> The Chewa chiefs Dzoole, Khoingoni and Kalolo were motivated by military considerations. They encouraged small bands of Chikunda to reside in the stockades (*malinga*) which they had built to deter Ngoni and Swahili slave raiders.<sup>57</sup>

The Chewa, Nsenga and Tonga rulers offered logistical support, not because they were particularly altruistic, but because they and, to a lesser degree, their subjects, derived substantial benefits from the Chikunda presence. One was that the strangers provided a direct link to the Indian Ocean trading system. While it is true that Undi, Mkanda and several other powerful Chewa chiefs had periodically set caravans directly to coast, Ngoni, Yao and Swahili slavers made such journeys increasingly precarious. So did the widespread brigandage along the margins of the

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Mlpa, Katete, 20 October 1965 (Langworthy Collection).

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Yohane Banda, Tiyese Chiguwo and Lameck Banda.

<sup>54</sup> Carlos Weise, *Expedition*, 128.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Laisi Siyananga Salinda, Chiabi village, 14 June 1974 (Matthews Collection, Documentary Collection, University of Zambia).

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Mal Kalomba, Village Headman Chisamba, Mchinji, 27 July 1997.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Lennose Chhikuse, Mwale and Kafanandiye Nkohma, Dowa, 29 June 1974 (Phiri Collection).

Zambezi. Armed with guns and war medicines and familiar with the terrain, the Chikunda were one of the few groups who could successfully operate in this dangerous zone.<sup>58</sup> For the smaller Nsenga and Gwembe Tonga chieftaincies, located almost a thousand miles from the coast, the transfrontiersmen provided the opportunity to exchange ivory for highly prized cloth, beads and other imported products which enhanced the power and wealth of the local land chiefs. Before the Chikunda arrived, many "chiefs did not have much use for ivory. All they did with it was use it as props to support their sleeping mats."<sup>59</sup> And among the Gwembe Tonga elephant tusks served primarily to decorate the graves of prominent ancestors.<sup>60</sup>

As expert hunters, the Chikunda provided the local chiefs with additional supplies of ivory and meat. Their reputation for being brave hunters spread rapidly throughout the region. Listen to the words of Raphael Chimseu:

The Chikunda were very skilled at hunting. They were using Ilwamba (axes) for killing animals. Some used to have dogs, spears, bows and arrows. However, their main weapon was the "gogodela" [Chikunda made guns]. After they killed the animal, they were supposed to give part of the kill to the chief. There were some chiefs who used to give their daughters to the Chikunda if they found that they were very good hunters.<sup>61</sup>

The Chikunda also exchanged the meat from other animals, such as buffalo, eland or wildebeest, for grain, since they never farmed. Typically, they brought the meat to the chief's village or that of a powerful local headman, where the local leaders would organize celebrations to acknowledge the successful hunt. "After the flesh is cut up in strips, [it is] taken back to the settlement where he [the Chikunda hunter] is received with much joy. The young women of the village throw flour on his head as a sign of congratulations."<sup>62</sup> The game, which the Chikunda offered to the rulers, was particularly important during periods of famine, when these leaders were responsible for feeding their subjects. Sometimes Chikunda bands provided meat directly to their neighbours.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Weise, *Expedition*, 56-57.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Nalitemphere Phiri and Nathando Mpondagaga Phiri, Lilongwe, 23 May 1974 (Phiri Collection).

<sup>60</sup> T. I. Matthews, "Portuguese, Chikunda and peoples of the Gwembe Valley: The Impact of the 'Lower Zambezi Complex on Southern Zambia'", *Journal of African History*, 22 (1981), 31.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Raphael Chimseu, Chisamba Village, Mchinji, 24 January 1998. Zulu Kayesa offered a similar account.

<sup>62</sup> Weise, *Expedition*, 57.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Yohane Banda, Tiyese Chiguwo and Lameck Banda.

Additionally, the transfrontiersmen served as brokers of technology. They instructed their hosts on how to manufacture both guns (*gogodelas* or *gogudas*) and ammunition. They made the latter from iron stones, *mischili-ya-makasu*, or worn iron hoes, and locally produced powder.<sup>64</sup> The Chikunda then taught the local population how to use these *gogodelas* along with the *akatemo*, or hunting axes; both were far more effective than the bows, arrows and spears on which they had heretofore relied. The Chikunda were also responsible for the introduction of new types of traps and higher quality iron hoes.<sup>65</sup>

Most importantly, the transfrontiersmen provided protection to their hosts. As the second half of the nineteenth century progressed, local communities throughout the middle Zambezi region found themselves increasingly under siege. Ndebele soldiers periodically crossed the Zambezi, raiding Gwembe Tonga communities on the northern margin of the river. In 1859 the British explorer Thorton described the precarious position of these communities. "One day's journey from the Kafua we received news that a larger party of Landeens (I think of Moselekadze) were coming down the right bank of the river, plundering all the villages on the way."<sup>66</sup> To the east, Ngoni forces engaged in frequent slave raids against the Nsenga and Chewa to increase their own ranks. "The Ngoni came and took captives back to their own areas where they cut the ears of the captives and so made them Ngoni."<sup>67</sup> The resurgent demand for slaves on the Indian Ocean plantations and on the Swahili coast also stimulated raids by Yao, Bisa, Swahili and Afro-Portuguese slavers, since they were unable to supply these markets through peaceful means.<sup>68</sup>

A number of Gwembe Tonga, Nsenga and Chewa chieftaincies turned to the better-armed and more skilled Chikunda hunters to shield them against these incursions. The results were mixed. Sometimes Chikunda assistance tipped the balance in favour of their hosts. The guns, which the Chikunda provided as well as the direct military assistance of the transfrontiersmen, enabled the Gwembe Tonga to thwart the Ndebele raids. "In the aftermath of the defeat it was twenty years before the Ndebele ventured again [across the river . . . and the value of firearms was amply demonstrated to the lower river People [Gwembe Tonga]."<sup>69</sup> To the east in the Dowa region, a band of Chikunda hunters joined with the villagers of Chimungu to build a large stockade from which they

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Pini Chinani, Mgubo Village, Mchinji, 13 September 1997.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Samudeni Kasuza, Masitala Village, Mchinji, 28 July 1997.

<sup>66</sup> E. C. Tabler (ed.), *The Zambezi Papers of Richard Thorton* (London, 1963), Vol. 1, 153.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Chivungwe, Chikuwe, 20 November 1964 (Langworthy Collection).

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion of the slave trade, see Edward Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves* (Berkeley, 1976).

<sup>69</sup> Matthews, "Portuguese", 31.

blunted the Ngoni attacks.<sup>70</sup> Among the most successful Chikunda defenders was Chilenga.

This Chilenga came from across the Dzalanyama mountains to the west, from Makanga. He brought muzzle-loading guns, which we called gogodela. With these guns, Chilenga hunted elephants in Malimba. Elephants were so plentiful in those days, but they gradually got exterminated by Chilenga . . . Chilenga himself became so powerful as a result of the wealth derived from the ivory that several Chewa chieftains, Masekwe and Nyambo, took refuge in his chemba [stockade] . . . the Yao from the Machinga tribe raided the surrounding villages for slaves, but never raided the people of Msekwe and Nyambo, as they were afraid of Chilenga.<sup>71</sup>

Chilenga's military prowess was probably unique. Many smaller bands of transfrontiersmen were not nearly as successful at either blunting slave-raiding incursions or even defending themselves. Carlos Weise, who traveled widely throughout the Zambezi interior, described their vulnerability as follows:

The Arabs or Nharaca [local term for Swahili] caravans buy only when they cannot acquire ivory by stealing. If, passing by the area of the hunt, they are attracted by the sound of shots, and they find the hunters engrossed in cutting up the meat; and if they are not frightened by the number of the hunters [Chikunda], they will start a fight which will always end up badly for the hunters who, being in the minority, will be beaten, robbed, killed or sold as slaves.<sup>72</sup>

On balance, the Chikunda relationship with the people of "the great beyond" was mutually beneficial. In return for their military assistance, the runaways and hunting bands received land on which to settle, safe passage through the chief's territory, food and other logistical support. To stress the symbiotic relationship between the ex-slaves and their hosts, however, is not to minimize the tensions and conflicts which periodically surfaced. Most disagreements seemed to have centred around hunting transactions. Chikunda bands sometimes were accused of withholding some of the ivory which rightfully belonged to the chiefs, of not supplying sufficient meat, of hunting in restricted areas, and of poaching.<sup>73</sup> While most informants indicated that the Chikunda studiously avoided becoming embroiled in local politics, this was not always the case.<sup>74</sup> Chewa and Gwembe Tonga elders also indicated that occasionally the Chikunda flagrantly abused their power.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Weise, *Expedition*, 57.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Sambane Mwale and Matutua Mduwa Phiri, n.d. (Phiri Collection).

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Chief Mawere, Mchinji, 10 June 1965 (Langworthy Collection).



They used to come to the village. One would say, "this chicken had eaten my grasshopper tied to my gun". The next day they would return. As they arrived they leaned their guns (against the hut). One would say, "This one is a slave." Why? "Because your chicken went and ate my grasshoppers." Then you gave them a slave . . . Sometimes he takes goats, chickens and baskets of flour. You give them to him. Then he would say, "Oh, your case is settled now."<sup>75</sup>

Such transgressions were a sign of weakness, rather than strength, since they quickly alienated local chiefs on whom the transfrontiersmen depended.

To induce the ex-slaves to reside permanently in their village, the chiefs would offer a number of the newcomers land, hunting rights, captives and, most importantly, wives. Marriage alliances between the runaways and the local chiefs created a permanent bond between the transfrontiersmen and the royal family and eased the absorption of the strangers into local. Chikunda marriages with Gwembe Tonga, Nsenga and Chewa commoners had the same effect. Through such nuptial agreements the transfrontiersmen gained a network of kin and resolved the impending crises of social reproduction. Marriage to local women, however, had the effect of culturally swallowing up the Chikunda and absorbing them and their descendants into their host communities. "If a Chikunda wanted to marry a woman from here there was no problem . . . [but] then he was expected to follow the traditions."<sup>76</sup> Indigenous residential and descent patterns obligated the ex-slaves to reside among the wife's maternal relatives and to acknowledge that the children born of this union belonged to the local matrilineage. In the process, their social identity as Chikunda was obliterated. Matthews, who has done the most extensive research on the Gwembe Tonga, described this blurring of identities in some detail:

In the middle river [Kafue region] the Chikunda are said to have intermarried with the Tonga and many were assimilated into Tonga society, especially in the 1890's and later. Significantly, the Chikunda in the Middle river were assigned to the Kuli (elephant totem) clan. Some of their songs and dances are still known today while the introduction of a new type of drum is attributed to them. In the Lower river [Kariba region], the distinction between the Chikunda and the original inhabitants seems to have almost disappeared . . .<sup>77</sup>

A Chewa elder offered a similar account:

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Cinkumbe, Xinkumbe Village, 13 April 1974 (Matthews Collection).

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Masitola Jeke.

<sup>77</sup> Matthews, "Portuguese", 35-36.

The Chikunda people no longer call themselves Chikunda. They have integrated with the Chewa so that it is not easy to tell that so and so is a Chikunda. We have descendants of the Chikunda here, but it is difficult to identify them now.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, although the economic and political impact of the Chikunda on the local Gwembe Tonga, Nsenga and Chewa chiefdoms was appreciable, by the end of the nineteenth century the Chikunda had effectively vanished from these local societies.

### CHIKUNDA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRANSFRONTIER COMMUNITIES

Many Chikunda were not assimilated. Conflicts with indigenous authorities and threats from slavers motivated numerous ex-slaves to keep migrating. The destruction of many large elephant herds in the Chewa and Nsenga homelands hastened their exodus. Some moved northwards in search of more profitable hunting grounds, primarily in the Luangwa Valley. Others settled in Zumbo where major Chikunda transfrontier communities sprang up.

The Zumbo region offered many attractions to the refugees. Located at the confluence of the Zambezi and Luangwa Rivers, it was easily defensible and enabled the transfrontiersmen to control the flow of trade over two well travelled waterways which extended deep into the Central African interior. The large herds of elephants in the adjacent forest had an obvious appeal as well. Perhaps most important, however, the Zumbo region was relatively free space, falling outside the sphere of control of the Portuguese colonial state<sup>79</sup> and only under the nominal influence of the Mburuma Nsenga.

The Chikunda were not the only social outcasts to seek refuge in the Zumbo region. They were joined by deserters from the Portuguese military garrison at Tete, fugitives from the Tete prison and a few merchants of Goan ancestry who were despised in Portuguese society and were contemptuously referred to as the "Jews of Asia". In reality most of these outcasts were of mixed African, Portuguese and Asian parentage. Known collectively as "*muzungu*," they were viewed by colonial authorities as "racial and cultural degenerates".

The Europeans who got to reside in East Africa, principally those who establish themselves in the interior, instead of divesting the kaffirs of their grossest superstitions, adopted these superstitions in an

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Albert Banda, Msewa Village, Mchinji, 23 January 1998.

<sup>79</sup> The Portuguese had effectively abandoned Zumbo in the 1830s and only re-established a minimal administrative and political presence there in 1862.

exaggerated form; with the result that the grandchildren of the Portuguese live absolutely like savages.<sup>80</sup>

Decades of isolation from European and Asian cultural institutions and an increasing tendency to be socialized by relatives of African descent had alienated these "renegades" from colonial society.<sup>81</sup> For them, in a very real sense, the colonial frontier had no real meaning. The *sertao* was no longer a landscape of fear, but a place which they had come to know through their African relatives. Among the most famous of these *muzungu* were Chikwasha (Emmanuel José Anselmo de Santanna) and Kanyemba (José do Rosário de Andrade).

In the late 1850s a band of Chikunda, perhaps numbering as many as 200, arrived in Zumbo. It was led by an Afro-Portuguese elephant hunter and trader, Emmanuel José Anselmo de Santanna, known more commonly by his African name Chikwasha. Together with a few family members, Chikwasha had pushed westward from Tete recruiting ex-slaves as he went. According to Tiyago Matega, whose ancestors were in this first contingent,

When the Achikunda came, Chikwasha was not their *mambo* [chief] but the employer of the Achikunda. He came with his people from Nyungwe [Tete]. The Achikunda originally had belonged to various tribes: the Tawara, Barue, Sena and Chewa.<sup>82</sup>

Other elders stressed that most of the Chikunda who migrated with Chikwasha were runaway slaves.<sup>83</sup> This initial group also included several highly respected hunters (*nkumbalume*), whom Chikwasha had purchased from the Yao and manumitted, as well as three iron workers whom he had hired to make hunting implements and firearms.<sup>84</sup> Throughout the next two decades, other ex-slaves and social outcasts found refuge with Chikwasha.

In the first instance, the strangers found themselves in a somewhat precarious position. They were highly dependent on the good will of the local Chiponda land chiefs, and especially their Mburuma Nsenga overlords. Both had suffered from Ngoni raids and initially were suspicious of Chikunda intentions. Chikwasha and his lieutenants took several steps to assuage the concerns of the local rulers. From the outset they stressed their hunting and commercial interests and disclaimed any territorial

<sup>80</sup> F. M. José Lopes de Lima, *Ensaio sobre a Estatística das Possessões Portuguezas na África Occidental e Oriental e na Asia Occidental na China* (Lisbon, 1944), Vol. 4, 53.

<sup>81</sup> For a discussion of this process, see Isaacman, *Mozambique*, 55-63.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Tiyago Matega, Chausa, 18 February 1974.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Gwashelo Chibuya *et al.*, Feira, 21 July 1974; Interview with Chinyendeyende and Zyoa Mbewe, Chinyenyendeyende, 31 July 1974.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Tiyago Matega.

ambitions. They acknowledged the supremacy of the resident chiefs and sought permission to hunt, promising to provide as tribute the tusk closest to the ground and the hind quarter of any animals they killed. The ex-slaves also agreed to only construct temporary hunting villages (*msasa*) and to locate them as sites designated by the Nsenga leadership. Their willingness to pay homage to the Nsenga rain priests and to the senior Chiponda ancestor spirit, Kankule, further reduced concerns about their long-term agenda.<sup>85</sup>

Despite their ability to gain the confidence of their hosts and their success in the highly profitable ivory trade, Chikwasha's Chikunda initially remained landless strangers confined to temporary hunting bases. Their vulnerable position was only short-term, however. Within a few years of their arrival, the Chikunda helped the insurgent Nsenga chief, Chirungunduwi, overthrow the tyrannical ruler, Mburuma Nyanzokola.<sup>86</sup> After Chirungunduwi became the new Mburuma, as a sign of gratitude he offered Chikwasha and his followers a sizable tract of land at Feira, across the Luangwa river from Zumbo.<sup>87</sup>

Rights to land proved critical in the transformation of Chikwasha's following from a disconnected band of ex-slaves to an emerging community on the frontier with a recognizable social identity. The Chikunda were no longer guests on the Nsenga, but were now their neighbours with full rights of residency. Chikwasha was recognized as a land chief in his own right — his authority enhanced through a marriage alliance with the Nsenga royal family — which allowed him and his followers to exact tribute both in labour and food from the local population living in his domain. According to Chikunda traditions, which must be treated with some skepticism, a number of Nsenga and Chiponda villages chose to remain under Chikwasha in return for meat and protection against marauding bands of slavers.<sup>88</sup> Their decision to remain, whether inspired by choice or by fear, expanded the Chikunda enclave, since most of the Chiponda and Nsenga were ultimately absorbed into the Chikunda transfrontier community, as were other strangers and social outcasts, many of whom were victims of the slave trade.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*; Interview with Moses Mwatigola *et al.*, Feira, 23 July 1974; Interview with Yapiti *et al.*, Feira, 28 November 1974; Interview with Gwashelo Chibuya *et al.*

<sup>86</sup> Albert Williams-Myers, "The Senga of Central Africa: Political and Economic Aspects of Clan History, 1700 to the Late 19th Century", (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 1978), 246.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Tiyago Matega; Interview with Moses Mwatigola *et al.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Moses Mwatigola *et al.*; Interview with Chinyende-yende and Zyoa Mbewe; Interview with Gwashelo Chiyua, *et al.*

A secure homeland also enabled the fugitives to begin to rebuild their shattered family lives. Most of the refugees had come without wives. Through intermarriage with the local population as well as with female refugees who sought sanctuary from the slavers, they were able to construct a new network of kinship relations. "In the Achikunda society", recalled an elder, "our ancestors were encouraged to have more than one wife in order to have many children and increase the size of their families."<sup>90</sup> No longer strangers, they were now able to dictate the terms of marriage and impose their own patrilineal practices. As a result, the offspring were brought up with their fathers' identity and socialized by Chikunda elders. Such unions eased the crisis of reproduction and fueled the growth of the dynamic transfrontier community.

With a well-defined territorial base, the ex-slaves were able to expand economically as well. Hunting remained their central activity. "It was from the elephants that our ancestors earned their living by selling the ivory of the dead elephants . . . As a result they became very famous and all the villages began singing songs and praising their elephant hunters."<sup>91</sup> Unlike in the past, the Chikunda now owned all the ivory and game within their territory or in the adjacent frontier region. Within a few years of their arrival, the Chikunda hunters had amassed more than 25,000 pounds of ivory.<sup>92</sup> They were also able to construct permanent stockades (*aringas*) to protect their hunters and safeguard the ivory from the Swahili, Ngoni, Yao and Portuguese rivals. The *aringas* also served as well-stocked warehouses from which Chikunda trading and hunting caravans fanned out into the Soli, Lenje, Lala and Bisa homelands. There, they either exchanged calico cloth, iron implements and guns for the ivory which the local land chiefs had acquired or used these commodities as gifts to win hunting licences from the indigenous authorities.<sup>93</sup>

Chikwasha's Chikunda also used these forays into the Central African interior to acquire slaves. Livingstone, who met Chikwasha in 1860, noted that, although the Chikwasha's wealth was derived primarily from hunting, his followers were also "driving a trade in slaves which was something new in this part of Africa".<sup>94</sup> With the surrounding chiefs anxious to buy cloth and guns, the Chikunda rarely had to resort to force. "All the slaves Chikwasha acquired from the local chieftaincies were obtained in exchange

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Azavedo, Felra, 25 July 1974.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Tiyago Matega.

<sup>92</sup> Charles and David Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambezi* (New York, 1865), 345.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Chief Undauda and Shapola, Nyamanongo, 4 March 1974; Interview with Mwandenga and Chief Mwanvi, Kabulungu, 26 March 1974.

<sup>94</sup> Livingstone *et al*, *Narrative*, 340.

for cloth, beads, salt and jewels, guns, hoes, axes and many other products, which were brought from Nyungwe [Tete] to trade with the local population".<sup>95</sup> Most of the female slaves were incorporated into Chikunda society. Most males were sold, although some were used as porters and agricultural labourers.

Control over land and labour also guaranteed the transfrontiersmen a secure supply of food. Since their days on the *prazos* the ex-slaves had historically been disdainful of agricultural labour. While Chikunda men continued to hunt and trade, their newly acquired wives and slaves worked their fields that were farmed in the rain season as well as the river-fed gardens which they cultivated year round. As one elder recalled, "The Chikunda never worked their fields by themselves. This work was done by the slaves whom they bought from local peoples for this purpose."<sup>96</sup> Not surprisingly, Chikwasha, his trusted lieutenants and his principal hunters had the largest fields and supplemented slave labour with tributary labour from their Nsenga and Chiponda subjects. When necessary, Chikunda hunters purchased additional labour from the local population in exchange for meat and calico cloth. Thus, the runaways seeking freedom forged a society that was hardly egalitarian.

Over time, the transfrontiersmen constructed an autonomous religious system and spiritual hierarchy to gain a measure of control over their new environment and to cope with life crises. Having fled from the *prazo* region, they were disconnected from both their ancestor spirits (*mizimu*) and the regional *mhondoro* cult which they had propitiated to ensure divine protection from droughts, famine and other hardships. When they had first arrived in Zumbo, they had worshipped Chiponda and Nsenga spirits. By transferring land ownership, the Nsenga Mburuma Chirungunduwi freed them from their dependence on local religious authorities. The Chikunda leader, Chikwasha, ordered his followers to bring seedlings of the M'sika and Mutumbi trees from Tete, which had historically served as ancestral shrine centres. As these trees matured, the Chikunda were again able to invoke the spirits of the ancestors of the runaways who had originally migrated out of the Tete region with Chikwasha. Sometime before his death in 1868, Chikwasha obtained special royal medicines (*makoma*) from a senior Tande or Korekore *mhondoro*, Bena'm'baiwa. It was believed that, upon his death, this potion would transform Chikwasha into a *mhondoro*, thereby ensuring the spiritual autonomy and well being of his followers and their heirs. In fact, that is what happened.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Juli Mpuka *et al.*, Zavendo, 13 December 1973.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Mwandega, Kabulungu, 26 July 1974.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Tiyago Matega; Interview with Zavedo *et al.*, Ntopa, 30 January 1974; Interview with Malito Mpuka *et al.*; Interview with Maga, Yapite, 3 September 1974; Interview with Justan Temo, Feira, 2 October 1985.

Creating their own spiritual domain and *mhondoro* was inextricably linked to the broader process of constructing a full blown Chikunda ethnic identity unrelated to their previous slave status. This new identity centred around the cult of the warrior hunter. Chikunda mythology, and dances (*mahuwe*, *gorolombe*) praised the daring exploits of the hunters whose activities insured the well-being of Chikwasha's transfrontier community.

Their prowess was also celebrated in song:

I have shot the elephant  
 There it is on the bank of the rivers  
 I have shot it, there follows the vultures  
 I have shot the man, there he is  
 I have shot him  
 There he is on the bank of the river  
 I have broken the world  
 There follows the vultures.<sup>98</sup>

Hunters, caravan leaders and the warriors who protected expeditions were all accorded a revered place in Chikunda lore. Special medicines were prepared and elaborate ceremonies organized to insure the safety of the hunters. When they returned home from a successful expedition, they received a heroic welcome and imported gifts from Chikwasha.

The cult of the warrior hunter distinguished the Chikunda from both their slaves and their agricultural neighbours. Their distinct set of three round facial marks (*makkazu*), which, as on the *prazos*, had set them apart from the peasants living there, calico cloth (*kapunga*) which the hunters proudly wore around their waists, and a set of military greetings (*kukwenga*) underscored their privileged position and new social identity. Over time, the Chikunda also developed their own language which reflected the diverse background of their community.

By Chikwasha's death his band of ex-slaves had begun to transform the very conditions of their existence. No longer were they uprooted runaways. They had acquired a permanent homeland, expanded their following, and grafted an agricultural branch on to their hunting base. They had also forged new bonds of kinship and created a new identity which was embodied in the venerated spirit of Chikwasha. Indeed, the Chikunda of Chikwasha had transcended the frontier and had established a niche for themselves in the culture and economic mosaic of south-central Africa.

Following Chikwasha's death, the mantle of leadership passed to his son, Mpasu. Although the Chikunda under Mpasu were unable to maintain

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Tiyago Matega.

their preeminent hunting and commercial position, they continued to play an important economic role in the Zumbo region until the end of the century. With the "scramble for Africa", both the Portuguese and British were anxious to gain control of the strategically located Chikunda enclave. The British moved first. Like many of their neighbours, the ex-slaves recognized the futility of resisting the British advance and were incorporated into colonial Zambia where their descendants still reside and retain their Chikunda identity to this day.

In many respects the broad outlines of the history of the Chikunda of Kanyemba closely approximated that of Chikwasha and his followers. However, their history diverged in several important ways. Most notable were their differential dependence on the slave trade and their antagonistic relations with the peoples of the frontier.

Kanyemba (José Rosário de Andrade) was also a "muzungu" outcast despised both by the Portuguese and African communities. The son of the Tande Chief, Chowufumo, and a Goan mother, Kanyemba was brought up by his paternal relatives. Although raised as an African, he maintained links with his mother's family, several of whom became prominent merchants in the Zumbo region. Kanyemba's ties to the Goan community upset his Tande kin. At the time of his father's death, they demanded that he renounce his Portuguese name and return to the fold. He refused and was passed over as a successor and cast out of Tande territory along with his followers.<sup>99</sup> Despite his reluctance to sever his ties with family members on the European side of the frontier, he was despised by the Portuguese, who referred to him as a "half caste" scoundrel and worse.<sup>100</sup>

Alienated from both communities, in the late 1860s Kanyemba set out from Tande to carve out his own empire. He was joined by a small number of Tande loyalists.<sup>101</sup> He also recruited several prominent Chikunda elephant hunter and gun makers who lived in the Tete hinterland.<sup>102</sup> As with Chikwasha, the largest group of initial recruits came from the ranks of unattached ex-slaves, almost all of whom were males.<sup>103</sup> A number had fled from Tete "because of the shortages of food".<sup>104</sup> Selous noted that many of Kanyemba's subjects were "freed slaves, or runaway slaves, of the Portuguese from the countries near the

<sup>99</sup> Interview with White Mbuluma, Feira, 21 March 1974; Interview with Moses Mwazigola *et al.*

<sup>100</sup> Frederic Selous, *A Hunter's Wandering in Africa* (London, 1971), 298-299.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Diamond Mpande, Willie Payson and Mafioso Juga, Bawa, 24 September 1997.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Diamond Mpande, Bawa, 2 September 1997.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Mafioso Junga, Bawa, 12 September 1997.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with António Gregório, Cambera Island, 22 September 1997.



mouth of the Zambezi".<sup>105</sup> It would appear, however, that the position of his followers was rather more ambiguous. "The soldiers and hunters were free" noted two Chikunda elders, "but they could not leave Kanyemba's territory without his permission".<sup>106</sup> There is also evidence that Kanyemba coerced other ex-slaves to accompany his band as it moved up the Zambezi. "Kanyemba collected some of his soldiers by force, taking them from their homes like slaves. But later on after they had settled in Bawa, they became free and they could do whatever they wanted."<sup>107</sup> In this unstable frontier environment the formal distinction between freedom and slave was often blurred.

Kanyemba and his followers were attracted to the Bawa region, on the southern margins of the Zambezi just across the river from Chikwasha's territory. According to Chikunda traditions,

His younger brother came to Bawa before Kanyemba. When he arrived here, he saw that the people here were living well. There were no whites here at the time. He noticed that the land was fertile and that there were a lot of animals. He stayed here for some time. Then he returned to Tete and informed Kanyemba.<sup>108</sup>

Shortly after Kanyemba arrived in the region he enlisted the support of a number of independent Chikunda hunters who had previously settled in Bawa. One of these was Mbanda, a close ally of the powerful land chief, Bwembwe.

My grandfather Mpande had a good relationship with Bwembwe. My grandfather married Nhamita who was related to Bwembwe. Bwembwe gave Mpande a place to stay. My grandfather gave gifts to Bwembwe — blankets, mats and sometimes cloth. He did so because they were in-laws.<sup>109</sup>

With Mpande's assistance, Kanyemba and his Chikunda retainers secured a place to settle, at least temporarily.

Local traditions depict a relationship between the stranger and their host that initially was harmonious.

When Kanyemba arrived here, he went to ask for a place to stay from Bwembwe. Bwembwe gave him permission to stay in Bawa because Kanyemba and his followers had come from very far away. He wanted somewhere he could rest. When Kanyemba killed an elephant, the tusk closest to the ground was given to Bwembwe, because Bwembwe was the owner of the land. Kanyemba also took chicken and maize to Bwembwe.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Selous, *A Hunter's Wandering*, 295.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Diamond Mpande and Willie Payson.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Diamond Mpande, Willie Payson and Mafoso Junga.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Diamond Mpande.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Diamond Mpande, Willie Payson and Mafoso Junga.

The Chikunda also paid homage to Zirola, the *mhondoro*, or spiritual guardian, of the region. The initial encounter thus bore a striking similarity to the amiable relationship between Chikwasha's Chikunda and their Nsenga hosts to the north.

It was at this point, however, that their histories diverged radically. Whereas Chikwasha and his followers received territory for assisting the Nsenga leader, Chirungunduwi, Kanyemba's band forcibly appropriated it. Shortly after their arrival, they refused to recognize Bwembwe's rule and, in fact, demanded that he and his subjects pay them taxes. When Bwembwe protested, they turned their guns on him. "Bwembwe had no power to resist. Thereafter anyone who killed an elephant had to bring the tusks to Kanyemba."<sup>111</sup> The local population also had to pay him annual taxes in grain and livestock.<sup>112</sup> To enforce his mandate and prevent discord, Kanyemba assigned several Chikunda lieutenants, known as *chuanga*, to live in the principal villages around Bawa. Kanyemba and his followers then constructed a self-contained fortified village from where they could oversee their subjects and control trade along the Zambezi river.

Almost immediately, Kanyemba and his Chikunda hunters shifted their focus from ivory to slaves. For the next quarter of a century the ex-slaves engaged in predatory activities designed to provide slaves for the Indian Ocean plantation and captives for the internal Central African trade and to ensure a steady supply of new recruits into their ranks. In the process, they eclipsed Chikwasha's Chikunda who, under the weak leadership of his successor Mpasu were unable to compete in this increasingly hostile environment.

The slave raiding campaigns of Kanyemba's hunters-turned warriors is well documented in the literature.<sup>113</sup> Suffice it to say that the well armed Chikunda terrorized a vast area of South Central Africa, stretching from the Zezuru homelands south of the Zambezi to the Tonga and Nsenga region north of the river, as well as to the lands of the Soli and Lala in contemporary Zambia.<sup>114</sup> Selous described the plight of their victims as follows:

<sup>111</sup> Interview with António Gregório.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Diamond Mpande.

<sup>113</sup> See A. F. de Mesquita e Solla, "Apontamentos sobre o Zumbo", *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*, 1907; Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement*, 295-312; Allen Isaacman, *The Tradition of Resistance in Mozambique* (Berkeley, 1976).

<sup>114</sup> A. H. M., Distrito de Zumbo, Capitania Mór das terras do Zumbo, 8-3m1(28), Agostinhode Oliveira Baretto and Joaquim de Mondonca to Cupitão Mór das terras do Zumbo, 15 November 1887; A.H.M., S.E. a. V.p.1 no.44 (a-c), padre Dialer S. J. Luiz Gonzaga, "Costumes e historia do Zumbo e Mirulu," Vol.3, 1909; Selous, *A Hunter's Wanderings*, 295-317; Weise, *Expedition*, 121 and 190.

I have forgotten to mention how the slaves are secured at night after being captured in considerable numbers. Large logs are cut by the slaves, from nine inches to a foot in diameter, and in these logs holes are chopped sufficiently to allow of a man's or woman's foot being put through; other holes are then bored, and wooden pegs driven in, which pass through the holes through which the feet have been pushed, and only just leave room for the ankle, rendering it impossible to withdraw the foot. In this matter five or six slaves are safely fixed up in each log. By day they march with the forked sticks round their necks.<sup>115</sup>

The explanations for this radical transformation of the Chikunda transfrontiersmen from elephant hunters to slavers lies in the changing political economy of Central Africa and the increasing militarization of the region. By the 1870s competition for ivory had depleted the herds. "Success in hunting", noted one observer, "is slight, and year by year the results are diminishing."<sup>116</sup> The decline in ivory undercut the economic and social base of the ex-slaves and their descendents and threatened their very survival. While not abandoning ivory, the Chikunda hunters redirected their activities to capitalize on the expanding Indian Ocean slave trade. If the slave trade offered new opportunities to profit, they also posed new challenges, as the Chikunda encountered stiff competition from their Yao, Swahili, Bisa and Ovimbundu rivals. In response, they resorted to conquest. As one Nsenga elder recounted:

At the beginning, Kanyemba and his followers crossed the Zambezi and traveled to the country of the Nsenga of Mbuluma, the Lala, Soli and the Tonga of the Gwembe Valley. They carried with them salt, cloth, beads, guns and precious jewelry which they traded with the local people in exchange for ivory and slaves. Later, when they found that they were not getting enough slaves . . . they began to take the villagers by force.<sup>117</sup>

Not all the captives were exported or resold in the internal slave trade. Many were integrated in the Chikunda transfrontier community. Since most of the ex-slaves had come to Bawa without wives, the reproduction of the Chikunda community could best be assured by the capture of women as the spoils of war. But it was not only women who were incorporated into Kanyemba's enclave. Angelina recounted how her father and his descendants became Chikunda:

My father was born in Chingombe. My father was not a Chikunda. He was a Soli. He was captured during the time of the war and became a Chikunda. When my father first came here, he was forced to work in the

<sup>115</sup> Selous, *A Hunter's Wanderings*, 298.

<sup>116</sup> Montagu-Kerr, *The Far Interior*, 47.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Juli Mpuka et al.

fields of Kanyemba. Later, he married a Chikunda woman. I am a Chikunda because I was born here. I am a Chikunda from Kanyemba.<sup>118</sup>

Angelina's account is instructive in two respects. On the one hand, it highlights the Chikunda use of captive labour to work their fields — a fact confirmed by other elders as well.<sup>119</sup> It also suggests how the Chikunda were able to increase their numbers by marrying captives as well as vulnerable refugees who initially sought food and sanctuary in their enclave. One observer estimated that in the 1880s Kanyemba had more than 10,000 Chikunda followers.<sup>120</sup> While this figure was probably an exaggeration, it does suggest how successful the ex-slaves were in expanding their demographic base. Over time, most of the new recruits and their descendants adopted the markers of Chikunda identity which the ex-slaves had brought with them from the Tete *prazos*. They took on the characteristic Chikunda facial scarification (*makaju*), they wore the distinctive imported white calico cloth (*kapundu*), they participated in Chikunda hunting rituals and dance, and they came to speak Chi-Nyungwe, the language of the Chikunda. Since many of the strangers became hunters and warriors, this further expanded Kanyemba's wealth and power.

The shift into more violent forms of production had important political repercussions. Slave raiding led to Chikunda military domination and territorial expansion. Over time, the Chikunda community was transformed into a conquest state and Kanyemba into a ruthless warlord. By the 1880s his followers had conquered a number of Tande and Korekore chieftaincies south and east of Zumbo, subordinated Gwembe Tonga villages further up the Zambezi, and occupied extensive territory in the Nsenga homelands.

The political basis of Kanyemba's authority within the Chikunda community shifted markedly as well. Whereas Kanyemba's legitimacy had initially rested on his ability to provide safe haven and material goods for the ex-slaves, two decades later fear had become the critical ingredient by which he maintained his power. Kanyemba's public abuses of his Chikunda clients remain legendary until this day.

Kanyemba castrated men who broke the rules of the country and warriors who never fought well in battle. He cut women's breasts off and sometimes men who offended him had their ears and eyes cut out . . . Warriors [who looked at his wives] were thrown into the Zambezi river tied to huge stones, at a place called Kabira near the present barra of Feira.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Vena Dixon, Violet Peter and Angelina Bawa, 20 September 1997.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Diamond Mpande, Willie Payson and Mafloso Juga.

<sup>120</sup> Montagu-Kerr, *The Far Interior*, 46.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Maliko Mpuka *et al.*

Such horrifying accounts, corroborated repeatedly in oral testimonies, suggest that a "culture of terror" formed the basis of Kanyemba's system of domination.<sup>122</sup> These public acts, as well as the stories of violence repeated in songs, casual conversation, rumours and gossip constantly reminded the Chikunda of their vulnerability. Thus, unlike the Chikunda of Chikwasha, the Chikunda of Kanyemba were both the victims of their warlord's terror and his agents of repression.

By the 1880s Kanyemba's slave raiding state had become the dominant force in the Zumbo region, stretching as far west as the Kafue River and northwards up the Luangwa Valley. In a confidential letter to his government, a senior British official concluded that "if these parts are to be included in the English portion of East Africa . . . strong measures will have to be taken against these Zambezi scoundrels, especially as they are now making a great movement to Luapula".<sup>123</sup> Lisbon had come to a similar conclusion after futile efforts to co-opt the Chikunda warlord through land grants, arms, military titles and even support for his slave raiding activities.

At the very moment that the British and Portuguese pressure intensified, the power of the Chikunda state began to unravel. A series of insurrections by Gwembe Tonga, Soli and Nsenga chieftaincies in the second half of the decade had weakened Kanyemba's grip over the northern banks of the Zambezi.<sup>124</sup> The defection of several of Kanyemba's lieutenants and their followers further underscored the fragile nature of the Chikunda state.<sup>125</sup> In 1896 Lisbon initiated a major campaign to dislodge the ex-slaves and their descendants after they had refused to recognise Portuguese sovereignty. Mounting colonial attacks took their toll. Faced with impending defeat, the Chikunda once again fled across the frontier. They crossed into colonial Rhodesia where they were welcomed by the British and recognized as a distinct "tribe". To this day the Chikunda of Kanyemba retain their ethnic identity, recognize Kanyemba's descendants as their chief, and propitiate the spirit of their warlord who, in death, became a venerated *mhondoro*.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Diamond Mpande, Willie Payson and Mafioso Juga.

<sup>123</sup> Public Records Office, F.O.413/144/CP6069, Alfred Sharpe to H. Johnston, March to July 1890.

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Kumbalesa; Group interview with July Mpuka; Matthews, "Portuguese", 9, 40; Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement*, 305.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Juli Mpuka *et al.*

<sup>126</sup> Like Chikwasha, Kanyemba also took medicines which his followers believe transformed him into a *mhondoro*.

## CONCLUSION

The flight of Chikunda individuals and groups and their very different patterns of interaction with the people on the periphery of the frontier is not unique. In many corners of the world victims of race, ethnic and class oppression also sought refuge in "the great beyond". Probably the single largest source of transfrontiersmen were slaves in the Americas who fled into the interior to escape the cruelties of plantation life. Some became absorbed into the societies beyond the frontier, such as the freedmen who took refuge with the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chikasaw and Seminoles in the American south.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, the black Caribs in Guatemala arose out of the union of runaway slaves and Indians.<sup>128</sup>

Because of their precarious position, liberated slaves often created transfrontier communities. Of these, the most famous were Palmeras in the Brazilian hinterland, Saramaka in Guyana, and the Leeward and Westward communities in Jamaica. Each of these enclaves was forged in rugged backwater regions not easily accessible to the planters or to the colonial state.<sup>129</sup> Although fugitive slave communities developed with greatest frequency in the Americas, slaves who fled the plantations of the Sokoto Caliphate in Nigeria and fugitives from the Zanzibar and Kenya clove estates adopted similar strategies of survival.<sup>130</sup>

Transfrontiersmen were also drawn from the ranks of those whom the State had forcibly interned. The two most common categories were criminals and military conscripts — both socially marginal types, primarily of lower class backgrounds, who were often despised and feared by their natal societies. In his study of seventeenth century China, Wakeman documented the recurring pattern of renegade soldiers who fled beyond the Great Wall to live among the "barbarians" and took on Manchu names and adopted tribal customs. He noted that "they crossed the boundaries of their own culture so that they eventually lost their identity as Chinese, seeming in manner, dialect, custom and physique to be more akin to the Manchus than to their former countrymen".<sup>131</sup> A similar phenomena occurred in the Amazon during roughly the same period.

[The runaways] were a tough and unruly caste of men, with all the requisite skills for survival in the Amazon basin, most of them were

<sup>127</sup> Kenneth Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier* (New York, 1971).

<sup>128</sup> Douglas Taylor, *The Black Caribs of British Honduras* (New York, 1951).

<sup>129</sup> Edison Carneiro, *O Quilombo dos Palmares, 1630-95* (Sao Paulo, 1947); Ernesto Ennes, *As Guerras nos Palmares* (Sao Paulo, 1938); Price, *Maroon Societies*.

<sup>130</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the Coast of East Africa* (New Haven, 1977); Paul Lovejoy, "Fugitive slaves: Resistance to slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate", in Gary Okihiro (ed.), *Resistance: Studies in African, Afro-American and Caribbean History* (Amherst, 1986).

<sup>131</sup> Frederick Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise* (Berkeley, 1985), 43-44.

illiterate, Paraenses born of Portuguese fathers and Indian mothers who had been raised speaking the *lingoa geral* . . . Among them were many deserters from the miserable military garrisons of Para and the river forts; others were civilian outlaws, refugees from a harsh system of justice.<sup>132</sup>

The recently dispossessed constituted yet another source of transfrontiersmen. Many of the ancestors of the Cossacks were originally runaway serfs who had lost access to the common lands.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, the ranks of the infamous buccaneers included landless bond servants and a mix of marginalized men who escaped from the British and French Caribbean islands to adjacent islands which the Spanish had abandoned.<sup>134</sup>

Allowing for vast differences in time and space, the fugitives faced a number of common problems. Of immediate importance was the acquisition of (1) legitimate rights to land and hence a territorial base, (2) a secure supply of food and other essentials, and (3) women for procreation, domestic labour, sexual gratification, the development of a secure economic base, and the creation of new bonds of kinship and culture.

The use of the category, transfrontiersmen, opens up new ways of thinking about frontier history and, by extension, transnational migrations. For example, it calls into question the work of many frontier historians, whose narrow geographic and cultural perspective blinded them to the dynamics of change which were occurring on *both* sides of the frontier. For them, the only relevant unit of analysis was the side of the frontier which they presumed to be advancing, dynamic and civilized. In the context of the maritime expansion and the spread of merchant capitalism, this inevitably meant the European side of the frontier. The transfrontier phenomenon, recurring as it does over time and space, underscores the fallacy of the assumption that culture change could be uni-directional. The examples from places as diverse as the Zambezi Valley, the Amazon interior, the Chinese frontier, and the American South demonstrate that these transfrontier encounters transformed the lives of all the participants.

The emphasis on transfrontiersmen also provides an important gender dimension to the study of interactions beyond the periphery. It reflects the immobility of women in most pre-capitalist societies. The absence of women among the migrants, in turn, had far reaching social consequences. On the one hand, it created a crisis of social reproduction.

<sup>132</sup> Owen Lattimore, *Studies in Frontier History* (Baltimore, 1959); David Sweet, "A Rich Realm of Nature Destroyed: The Middle Amazon Valley, 1640-1750". (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Madison, 1974).

<sup>133</sup> Philip Longworth, *The Cossacks: Five Centuries of Turbulence on the Russian Steppes* (New York, 1970).

<sup>134</sup> Robert Ritchie, "Marginal People on the Periphery of Empire." (Unpublished paper, n.d.).