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### THE EFFECTS OF THE ZAMBIA—ZAIRE BOUNDARY ON THE LUNDA AND RELATED PEOPLES OF THE MWERU—LUAPULA REGION:

by

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The area designated as Mweru—Luapula stretches from the Calwe to the Mambiliam rapids (formerly called Jonston Falls), covering the banks of the lower Luapula River and the shores of Lake Mweru. On the west is a wide swampy plain with a number of habitable high lands. The plain is bounded by the Kundelungu Mountain Range stretching from the south to the north. On the northern half of the lakeshore is the Bukongolo plateau rising almost from the bed of the lake. On the east is a narrow plain bounded by a mixed savanna and dry forest vegetation of the Chipya type. This in turn is bounded by the Muchinga plateau running from the south to the north. This plateau turns east just south of the lake. The lake area is bounded by a thicket (umushitu) with a series of hills and inselbergs.

From time immemorial, this area has been inhabited by fishing communities, speaking dialects of the Chibemba language spoken in southern Shaba Province of Zaire, northeastern Zambia and the Copperbelt. Today, there are six ethnic groups living in the area. Three of these, the Lunda in the south, the Shila in the centre and the Bwile to the north were living on both sides of the Luapula and shores of Lake Mweru. The Yeke, Bakunda and Bena Ng'oma are found in small clusters on the western side of the fishery. 1

Each of these ethnic groups — as the name indicates — differed from the other on the basis of origin, history and area of settlement. The Bwilile, who were an acephalous group from Buluba settled in the area about 1400 A.D. They lived in scattered clan communities all over the fishery. They did not develop any centralised political institutions. About 1650, a Bemba group under the leadership of Nkuba Mukuka Mubemba arrived in the area and gradually established the first centralised political state in the area. They intermarried with the Bwilile and the products of the union called themselves Aba Shila (fishermen), which gradually became their identification name.<sup>2</sup>

The principal occupation of the people was fishing. They alternated this activity with cultivating sorghum and cucurbits. Sorghum meal and fish formed the main staple diet. They varied it with game meat and vegeatables.

During the dry season, a section of the Shila living on the northern shores of Lake

Mweru, produced salt from the salt pans.<sup>3</sup> This item was given as tribute to chiefs and also exchanged for iron tools and weapons from the Chishinga area to the east and forest products from the surrounding areas.<sup>4</sup> The people also hunted elephants for meat and ivory. Ivory was given as tribute to chiefs<sup>5</sup> and was used mainly as a prestige item and in religious rituals.

Between 1700 and 1730, the Bwilile infilterated the area on the northern shores of the lake. Through treachery, they managed to wrestle the salt producing area from the Shila, reducing the size of the state by half.<sup>6</sup>

In 1740, the Lunda of Mwata Kazembe arrived in the area. They quickly defeated the Shila and Bwilile and incorporated them in their state, which at its height, stretched from the Lualaba River in the west, to the Chambeshi River in the east. But by 1850, the state was beginning to decline. Most of the peripheral areas were lost to other ethnic groups. By 1890, the size of the state had shrunk to the area around the lower Luapula River and the southern half of Lake Mweru. They, however, retained some nominal control, extracting tribute from the chiefs from time to time.

In about 1796, the Lunda began to develop long distance trade, first with the Portuguese in Mozambique and second, with the East African traders from the Tangan-yikan mainland and the coast.<sup>8</sup> The items of trade were ivory, slaves and, to a small extent, copper from Katanga. Because of the distances involved, trade with the Portuguese did not last long. That with the East African traders flourished and was only stopped after the introduction of colonial rule.

The East African traders were very adaptive to the areas they traded in. A number settled in the area and often married local women to facilitate their trade relations with the local people. By 1880, these settlements became political factors in resolving local conflicts. Some traders passed through the area to Katanga to trade in copper. One of the traders, Msiri, gradually built a power base which he transformed into the Kingdom of Garanganze. By 1870, he had wrestled the area west of the Luapula River from Kazembe. The Luapula became a natural boundary between the two states.

From about 1878, Msiri felt strong enough to attack the ethnic groups on the western shore forcing one Shila chief, Nkuba Bukongolo, to seek the support from one East African trader named Simba. This trader succeeded in repulsing Msiri's forces from the area. As a compensation, he was given Kilwa Island. <sup>11</sup> But this defeat did not stop Msiri from mounting a concerted attack on Kazembe in 1888. Kazembe fled and sought the assistance from the Chishinga and the Bemba. <sup>12</sup> With these forces, Kazembe was able to repulse Msiri's forces, though a small group still remained at Chibambo (Kashobwe today). So at the time colonial rule arrived, the situation was in a state of flux with several parties contending for power.

#### Colonial Rule

Colonial rule came to this area by default. The initial interest of the European powers was in the Katangan copper. <sup>13</sup> Between 1890 and 1891, a race for Katanga developed between King Leopold II of Belgium and Cecil Rhodes, the well known British South African financier. <sup>14</sup> Rhodes lost to the Belgians. The Belgian success came with the killing of Msiri in September 1891. <sup>15</sup> Msiri's Kingdom of Garanganze together with the rest of Katanga became part of the Congo Free State (CFS). The area to the east of the Luapula was taken over by the British to form part of the North East Rhodesia (NER), administered from 1895 by the British South Africa Company (BSAC). The

Luapula and the lake came to be recognized as the boundary between the two colonial states. 16

While the British were mourning the loss of Katanga to the Belgians, two Belgian officers, Commander Bia and Charles Lemaire, took steps to consolidate the Belgian gains. Lemaire visited the Lake Mweru area and supposedly signed treaties with the local chiefs. Bia visited the lower Luapula River and followed it up-stream, reaching the Bangweulu swamps and signing treaties with the chiefs. The two visits which, to the Belgians, established their presence and control of the area, became the basis on which the delimitation of the "official" boundary between the CFS and NER were based. <sup>17</sup> This was formalized in the treaty of 12 May 1894.

According to this treaty, the boundary between the CFS and NER was to run from where the Luvua leaves Lake Mweru. From here, "the line then runs directly to the entrance of the river [Luapula] into the lake, being deflected .... towards the south of the lake to give Kilwa to Great Britain. It next follows the thalweg of the Luapula up to its issue from Lake Bangweulu..." 18

The delimitation of the boundary divided the Bwile, Shila and Lunda into two groups, one part in each case in the CFS and the other in NER. In spite of this division, the boundary did not interfere with the traditional political organization in the area. The tributary system remained unchanged. The Lunda in the CFS sent their tribute to Mwata Kazembe living in NER. Similarly the Shila in the CFS sent it to Nkuba in NER, while the Bwilile in NER sent it to Mpweto living in the CFS.

Similarly, the people continued to fish and hunt on either side of the boundary. They also visited their relatives, attended funerals, family or clan gatherings on either side of the boundary. In the case of the death of a clan leader, village headman or chief, a successor was sought on both sides of the boundary. When found and approved by the clan or ethnic group, he or she assumed the position which in some cases meant taking up residence as well, whether this was in NER or CFS. This position still continues to hold till today.

After the delimitation of the boundary, the administrations in the CFS and NER had some difficulties in establishing their administration on parts of the territories they ruled. The Belgians had to crush Arab opposition forcing Malijawa Chiwala, then trading south of our study area, to flee across the border into Ndola in what was then North West Rhodesia. The BSAC on their part had to crush the Ngoni in 1897 and then raised a well armed army to fight Mwata Kazembe Kanyembo Ntemena who had been resisting the introduction of the Company rule in his area. In October 1899, this army marched against Kazembe and forced him to flee across the border into the CFS for safety. He surrendered a few months later bringing an end to his resistance to colonial rule. 20

The flight of Mwata Kazembe (locally remembered as ulubutuko), became an important event in the Lunda history. The Lunda noted that although the BSAC forces burnt down the village and killed a number of people, they did not pursue Kazembe across the Luapula River. This was not because they did not have canoes, but because the western side was under the jurisdiction of the CFS (Mbulumatali — a corruption of Mbula matari — rock breaker to the local people). This more than anything else made them realize the importance of the boundary. But it also made them realize one thing, that if one was in trouble with the administration, the best way to escape arrest was simply to cross the Luapula into the CFS, and in the years which followed, this fact was made use

of by hundreds of people running away for a number of reasons, some of which are discussed below.

#### Cross-Border Migrations

#### 1. From the CFS to NER, 1900 - 1906

Both the BSAC and the Compagnie du Katanga (Katanga Company), later replaced by the Comite Special du Katanga (Special Committee of Katanga, hereafter CSK), were commercial companies seeking to make profit. But while the BSAC sought to earn profit from the sale of agriculturally fertile land, promotion of settler agriculture and the establisment of "legitimate trade", their counter-parts sought to make it from the sale of ivory and rubber.<sup>22</sup> They set out to achieve this by brutal coercion and a variety of atrocities which are detailed by Morel.<sup>23</sup>

But while ivory required the presence of a large herd of elephants and skilled hunters, rubber did not. It was extracted from rubber bearing liana vines (Landolphia florida) which grew widely in the CFS and NER. What was required was local labour to extract the rubber. This extraction was done by making an incision in the vine and extracting the white latex which was then made into round rubber balls. These were packed into baskets (utumponda) which were then delivered to CFS administrative officials.<sup>24</sup>

Between 1900 and 1906, the CFS devoted "all its energies to the collection of revenue." This meant that the local peoples were required to collect a given quota of rubber per year. African soldiers (coming mainly from the Batetela) were sent to the villages to collect this rubber. The administrative officials were not concerned with the methods used but in results, i.e. more rubber. Given these powers, the soldiers beat villagers and even burnt villages when the rubber collected fell below what was considered to be the minimum quota, which varied from one military collector to another. In Mweru-Luapula, these atrocities forced many people to abandon their villages and cross into the British side for safety. In 1903, for example, one European visitor passing through the area noted that:

With the exception of half-a-dozen villages, the whole Belgian Luapula, from Mweru to the Johnston Falls, has been abandoned by the Africans. They have all crossed to the British side, simply on account of the Belgians and their soldiers.<sup>27</sup>

This impression was confirmed by other contemporary European Visitors.<sup>28</sup>

This flight to the British side created some concern for a number of British administrators who reported on the atrocities and, in so doing, contributed to the publicity of the "Red Rubber Scandal" documented by Morel. By 1906, the intensity of the atrocities had declined, allowing the refugees to return to their original villages. But within two years, the tide was changed. The refugees were now coming from NER.

#### 2. Flight from NER to CFS

The flight from NER to CFS was brought about by the outbreak of Sleeping sickness (Human Trypanosomiasis) epidemic in Mweru-Luapula in 1906. The disease was spread by the Glossina palpalis tsetse fly. This tsetse fly inhabited thick groves along the river banks and the lake shores.

When a person contracted the disease, the incubation period was short. The patient had rash and swellings, and if untreated, the patient grew puffy and became sulky and

drowsy. The patient was often seized by periodic tremors and died sooner or later. The appearance of this disease alarmed the BSAC and the CSK. They immediately sent doctors to the area to investigate the extent of the disease and to recommend steps to combat its spread. After a year's work, the NER medical personnel recommended the quarantining of the area to control the movement of people within, into and out of the area. The NER administration responded immediately. It proscribed all fishing activites. To ensure that this was adhered to, the administration confiscated all the dugout canoes and destroyed them without compensation. Furthermore, all the villages along the banks of the Luapula and lake shore were moved further inland. In 1910, they were all moved to "safe" areas in Mofwe area and the middle Kalungwishi River. On the other hand, the Belgians did absolutely nothing. In their view, there was no cause for alarm.

This disparity in the enforcement of the Sleeping sickness regulations was quickly noticed by the local poeples. The restriction on fishing was particularly hard to take by a fishing people. Between 1908 and 1910, a number of villages on the eastern side of the Luapula crossed into the Congo with their canoes where they continued to fish undisturbed.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, this was hampering the British effort to contain the disease. In April 1909, for example, Dr. Storrs, the medical officer stationed at Fort Rosebery noted that:

the opposite bank of the Luapula is thick with villages and more are being built (unfortunately it must be admitted that some of these at least are peopled by refugees from this side) and as long as these villages are allowed to remain on the river bank affording every facility for fishing and the like, they will be a continual temptation and a continual menace to our own people. 31

To the local people, crossing the Luapula gave them the freedom to fish. By 1910, the CFS administration was openly admiting thousands of people including prominent chiefs from the NER.<sup>32</sup> To arrest these flights, the British administration arranged for a meeting with their Belgian counterparts in June 1910. But although the Belgians promised to enforce the regulations, they never did. The CFS thus continued to attract people from NER.<sup>33</sup>

The flow from NEP increased slightly during the First World War. As their contribution to the war effort, African able-bodied men were recruited as porters for a period of between three and six months. The old men, women and children were expected to contribute their share by supplying foodstuffs – especially cassava meal — to administrative posts.<sup>34</sup> These obligations were so demanding, and some villagers elected to cross the border into Belgian Congo (as the CFS was now called).<sup>35</sup>

#### Taxation and labour migration

Another form of induced migration from NER to the Congo came in the form of the imposition of the hut tax in 1901 in NER.<sup>36</sup> Initially, payment was accepted in kind. But due to the lack of a market to sell the foodstuffs and livestock paid in tax, payment in cash began to be enforced in 1906.<sup>37</sup> This meant that all able-bodied men had to find employment to earn their tax money. But as the area had few employment opportunities, many men had to look outside the borders of NER — in Katanga and Southern Rhodesia — for employment.

Prospecting for copper deposits in Katanga began in 1901. By 1904, several deposits had been pegged by the Tanganyika Concessions Limited, a British Company which was given a concession by the CSK.<sup>38</sup> The copper-producing region was sparsely populated.<sup>39</sup>

Consequently, it was not able to provide the much needed labour and foodstuffs. These had had to be procurred, at the beginning of the prospecting operations, from the areas outside the mining region.<sup>40</sup> One of the areas which became dependable sources of labour and foodstuffs was Mweru-Luapula.

From 1904, labour recruitment for the Katanga mines began.<sup>41</sup> A few other people went to Southern Rhodesia. By 1907, most of the able-bodied men had worked either in Katanga or Southern Rhodesia.<sup>42</sup>

This source of employment was removed when the NER quarantined the area and restricted the movement of the people. The administration deployed messengers to patrol the Luapula River and arrest would be labour migrants. It conducted periodic census of every village. <sup>43</sup> But in the absence of an alternative source of employment all these efforts proved unsuccessful. The flow of men to Katanga continued. A reporter for the *Livingstone Mail* discussed the ineffectiveness of the government efforts when he stated that:

The government have totally prohibited any movement of the Africans of the thickly populated districts on the eastern bank of the Luapula. Unfortunately, it is practically ineffective, the natives are accustomed to seeking work at the copper mines in the Congo territory and further south, and for a thousand other reasons persist in evading the absurdly ineffective cordon. Their boats have been confiscated but at certain seasons there are parts of the river that can be crossed on foot and there are devious waterways through the swamps in which it would be practically impossible to follow them.

This is exactly what the Acting Administrator had feared when the cordon was imposed in 1908.<sup>45</sup> The alternative was to allow the resumption of labour recruitment by the Robert Williams and Company, recruiting for Katanga and the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau, with some conditions attached. Among these were that the recruits receive medical examinations to ensure that they were free from Sleeping sickness before leaving for either Katanga or Southern Rhodesia, that they received deferred pay, with the other half paid on their return and that they should have a balanced diet.<sup>46</sup>

The resumption of labour recruitment did not stop individuals from migrating on their own. All were attracted by the high wages offered in Katanga and the opportunity to acquire clothes and other products unavailable in NER.<sup>47</sup> The migration to the Katanga mines continued up to 1960 when the chaos which followed Zaire's independence made it no longer attractive to job seekers. So what began as a government-induced crossing of the border later became an accepted pattern of life for the people of Mweru-Luapula.

#### Cross-Border Commerce

Besides the border crossing, forced or induced by administrative action or policy, there were also voluntary border crossings to sell fish or foodstuffs, or to buy merchandise in the shops which were established all along the western bank of the Luapula and shores of Lake Mweru.

Between 1910 and 1919, the subsistence fishing industry existing in the Lualaba — Lufira, Mweru-Luapula and Bangweullu — Luapula fisheries, was gradually developed into a commercial industry to feed the mine and other urban workers of Katanga. Fish became a cheap substitute for the imported meat in the rations of urban workers. By 1920, the fishing industry was already attracting Furopean and Asian traders. These traders opened retail shops and stocked them with cheaper and better quality merchandise including pots

and plates, which were in great demand in the area. These items acted as a lubricant in the commercial development of the fishing industry.<sup>48</sup>

The cost of the merchandise in the retail shops on the western bank was much lower than in the Rhodesian shops. To a large extent, this was due to devaluation of the Belgian Congo franc by about fifty percent after the First World War. This was later followed by further devaluations in 1927 and 1935.<sup>49</sup> The first devaluation of the franc occurred at the time when the price of merchandise in the Rhodesian retail shops appreciated by about one hundred percent.<sup>50</sup> This made the merchandise in the Congolese retail shops about 150 percent cheaper and a big attraction to the Northern Rhodesians. The devaluation made the franc popular with the people on the British side of the fishery who accepted it as a de facto unit of exchange. Its utility led to an increase in its circulation on the eastern side of the fishery.

The popularity of the Belgian Congo franc on the British side did not escape the attention of the British administrator for Kawambwa. In his annual report for 1925, he reported that:

It appears that the [people in Kawambwa District] have got used to being paid in the Belgian [Congo] money that they are extremely averse to change [to the British coin] and insist on a higher price if paid in our currency. They prefer to be paid in Belgian [Congo] currency.<sup>51</sup>

The preference for the franc, confirmed in the report cited above, was based on its utility, for it enabled the fishermen and their families to satisfy their needs.<sup>52</sup> The currency continued to be used as a unit of exchange even after Northern Rhodesia became the independent state of Zambia.

Although many of the shops were concentrated in Kasenga, a number were located at strategic places like Katabulwe to attract Northern Rhodesian consumers. The popularity of these shops increased when they began to stock second hand American clothes (locally called *Kombo*). These clothes, sold in bales, were then resold in small village shops in the fishery, giving the traders a hand some profit. Some of the traders, came from as far as Chinsali, three hundred miles east of the fishery.<sup>53</sup>

The fishing industry generated a big demand for foodstuffs right from the beginning. many, women, married or not, periodically crossed the Luapula to sell their cassava meal at Kasenga market. They used the money earned to buy salt, palm oil, paraffin, matches and other necessities. From time to time, Rhodesian men also crossed the border to sell fruits, charcoal and firewood.<sup>54</sup>

To the people of Mweru-Luapula, Kasenga's importance as a commercial, distribution and transport centre was only secondary to Elisabethville, the capital of Katanga. It was the centre of progress and a reflection of what was development (ubuyantanshi) as well as an extension of urbanisation (termed by the local people as ichisuungu).

By 1948, there was a sharp contrast between the eastern and western sides of the fishery. This was brought out in a tour report by a cadet officer stationed at Kawambwa. The cadet, after visiting Kasenga, reported that

At present we [ the Northern Rhodesia administration] are doing very little if any, by way of development as was made clear to me on the recent visit to Kasenga where the fish industry is being developed ....on a very extensive scale. There was a marked contrast between the activities on the two banks of the river. On the Belgian side there is a fleet

of large motor boats, ice factories.... and numberless lorries ready to take fish on ice — fifteen tons a day — to the Belgian Copper mines. On our side, which is richer in fish, one saw [only] a few canoes. 55

With such a contrast, the western side had an economic advantage and therefore able to attract a continous stream of Northern Rhodesians.

The Northern Rhodesian side did attract a few people from the western side. Being in a swampy plain, the Congolese usually came to the eastern side for their supplies of bamboos for making fish traps, sticks for weirs and roofs and fibres. They also came to this side to look for timber for making dugout canoes. But this was seasonal and on a very small scale.

#### Medical Services

Another form of voluntary border crossing was induced by the presence of excellent medical facilities for the Africans on the Congolese side of the area. Here there were four relatively well equipped and staffed hospitals (Kaboka and Chibambo in the Kasenga area, Chamfubu in Mpweto area, and Luanza). All were Christian missionary institutions. On the eastern side, there was only one inadequately equipped and poorly staffed hospital at Mbereshi Mission.

The people on the NER side of the fishery were quick to note that the Congolese hospitals offered better medical treatment and care than Mbereshi. So from 1930 up to 1970s, many people in the upper and lower reaches of the Luapula took their patients to the hospitals in Kasenga area, while those on the northern shores of Lake Wweru took theirs to Mpweto. To a small extent, this pattern is still continuing.

#### Reversal of Roles

Following the attainment of independence by the Belgian Congo in June 1960, the country was plunged into civil war following the secession of Katanga from the rest of the country. The fighting which resulted forced thousands of people including a good number of traders to take refuge in Northern Rhodesia, some never to return. The chaos which resulted from the strife left the infrastructure in shambles. The prosperity that the western side enjoyed was on the decline. By 1975, for example, Kasenga was a mere shadow of its former self. Many of the shops were closed, limiting the attraction of consumers from the eastern side.

Following the attainment of independence by Northern Rhodesia in October 1964 and its eventual conversion to the Republic of Zambia, the government embarked on the development of the infrastructure and social services. Many primary and secondary schools were opened. Medical services were improved and expanded. All these were free. Bore holes were sunk to provide the people with clean water, and retail businesses sprung in all parts of the area. Many of these were stocked with good quality merchandise and items like salt, sugar, cooking oil and milk, unavailable on the Zairean side. Many Zaireans, traders and ordinary villagers alike, began crossing to the eastern side to settle or to smuggle some of the goods in short supply on the western side. Others flocked to the dispensaries and hospitals which were better stocked with drugs than those in Zaire. This was a reversal of what had been the trend during the colonial era.

#### Conclusion

For Mweru-Luapula, introduction of the colonial boundary produced a mixed bag of events. While it did not interfere with the socio-cultural way of life of the local people, it did create a sense of division among the divided ethnic societies living on either side of the boundary. It also made them realize that as each area was ruled by a different colonial power, crossing the boundary provided them with a refuge. This, as we have seen, was exploited to the full by people on both sides of the boundary.

The contrast in economic development in the area did contribute to frequent boundary crossings. The Congolese side, was from 1920, developed into a commercial fishery to provide fish to the mining areas. This opened a ready market for fish for Northern Rhodesians as well. The opening of retail shops as a lubricant for the fish trade, opened another avenue of attracting Rhodesian consumers to the western side. Rhodesians were also attracted to the Congolese side by the presence of superior medical facilities.

This trend is now reversed. The Zaireans are now crossing more into Zambia than before to buy merchandise and other needs. This has produced large scale smuggling which has become a major worry for the Zambian Government and a subject for frequent discussion with the Zairean authorities. The solution must be found in the organisation of Central African States into the same type of common economic union as is currently being actively pursued by their counterpart in West Africa.

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- 42. Interview, Salati Mutepa, Mununga, 20/5/1975.
- 43. Musambachime, "Social and Economic Effects", op.cit., pp. 10-16.
- 44. Livingstone Mail, 16/5/1908, 7; See also the opinion of the Administrator of NER and a few other officials, NAZ/BS2/109, Administrator, For Jameson, to Secretary, BSAC, London, 9/12/1909; Quarterly Report on Fort Rosebery Sub District in NAZ/ZA7/3/1 for 1913.
- 45. NAZ/BS2/109: Administrator to Secretary, BSAC, London, 9/12/1909.
- 46. Musambachime, "Social and Economic Effects", 16 -20.
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- 48. Musambachime, "Development", Chapter 3.
- 49. For the discussion on the Congolese franc, see Paul Fontainas, "Le regime monetaire au Congo belge", Bibliotheque coloniale internationale, Record of the XXIII Meeting, held in London, 5-8 October, 1936, (Brussels, 1937), 412-26.
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- 51. NAZ/ZA7/1/9/8, Annual Report for Kawambwa Sub District for the year ending 31/3/1920.
- 52. Musambachime, Development, Chapter 4.
- 53. Musambachime, Development, Chapter 5.
- 54. Musambachime, Development, Chapter 4.
- 55. NAZ/SEC2/875: Tour Report Kashiba, Lubunda and Lukwesa Areas by Cadet J. Mackishan.