

## Foreword

This book is about the history of a village on the eastern shores of Lake Malawi. Maybe, it is also the history of two villages. For there is no doubt that the settlement of Malango, a 30-minute walk north of the original center of Nkhlongue, can today be considered a distinct village. In 2015, Nkhlongue and Malango had 548 and 400 inhabitants respectively. Compared to other lakeside villages, they are small settlements. Nkhlongue and Malango stretch along the main trail that follows the shore of Lake Malawi. From Malango it is about a two-hour walk to Metangula, the capital of Lago District. If the winds and waves on the lake permit, the trip is made faster by boat, taking about 30 minutes. From Metangula, minibuses reach Lichinga, the capital of Niassa, in about three hours. From here it is another road trip of 2,300 kilometers to Mozambique's capital Maputo. Few of Nkhlongue's inhabitants have ever made this journey.

"The end of the world" is what Niassa is often called in Mozambique. I certainly shared this sentiment when I first arrived in Nkhlongue in the rainy season of 2008/9 as a 19-year old student from Europe with only a very scant knowledge of African history, encountering the mud huts with thatched roofs, the women with their hoes in their fields, the fishermen in their dugout canoes and a more than 90-year-old village chief, who did not speak any Portuguese, Mozambique's only official language. For me, it seemed that little had ever happened in this out-of-the-way place. This image was further reinforced by the impressive scenery of this seemingly endless lake, given the contours of opposite Malawi were usually only visible when the sun disappeared behind them.

But doubtlessly, there was also considerable change going on. In the hills behind the lake, on Niassa's *planalto*, a Swedish company was busy drawing up large plantations of pine trees along the road to Lichinga. The road itself had been asphalted only a few years prior to my arrival. In 2006, Metangula had been connected to the national power network or *Cahora Bassa*, as people use to call it in Mozambique after the large dam on the Zambezi river. Connection to Cahora Bassa was quickly followed by the installation of the first mobile phone antenna. The first petrol station and bank were to follow in the years to come. And in Nkhlongue, a small "upmarket lodge" was about to receive its first tourists from Europe.

In many ways, I arrived in Niassa as part of this change, even if I had never intended to do so. I had originally come to Mozambique to do a short internship at the Swiss Embassy in Maputo. The internship was a prize I had won in a science competition for Swiss high school students. I had initially rejected the idea of my chemistry teacher Fritz Wenzinger to participate in it, because I doubted the scientific value of my high school thesis (it was a conceptual work for a network of

mountain bike trails). He finally persuaded me to participate. How I finally won the prize I can only guess. The prize message read something like “an internship at a Swiss embassy of my choice.” As generous as this may sound, the range of possible embassies turned out to be much more limited than initially thought. I had wanted to go to Russia because I was learning Russian. However, for certain reasons this was not possible. The same was true for the other former republics of the Soviet Union. So I had to resort to my third option: somewhere in Africa. The Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed either Kenya or Mozambique. I chose Mozambique for the sole reason that I had never heard of the country before.

Having arrived in Maputo, I made the acquaintance of Thomas and Maya Litscher, the Swiss ambassador at the time and his wife. It was Maya who had set up the lodge mentioned above. When I arrived in Maputo, the lodge called Mbuna Bay was still lacking a proper website. Since I had been working as a web designer in Switzerland, I offered to build one. When it was ready, she urged me to visit the place, which until then I had known only virtually. It was an extremely fascinating trip and I undoubtedly came back with the feeling that I had learned more about life in a few days than in an entire year at home. I later returned to Niassa to work as a volunteer for Mbuna Bay for three months in 2010 and almost a year in 2011. It was during my free time that I started to delve into the history of Nkhlongue, the nearby village.

I consider it important to highlight this rather unprofessional beginning of my research, first, to show how the object of my study was initially chosen, or rather “not chosen,” and, second to critically point out my initial involvement in Nkhlongue.



**Map 1:** Nkholongue and the larger region including the borders of the modern day district of Lago (Please note that this map only shows a selection of roads, places, and rivers). Map by the author. Small map based on a template by GeoCurrents Customizable Base Map.



Map 2: The lakeshore area around Nkhlongue. Map by Dominic Schuppli and the author.