

**Border Crossings:**

**Life in the Mozambique/ South Africa Borderland since 1975**

by

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## **Abstract**

### **Border Crossings: Life in the Mozambique/ South Africa Borderland since 1975**

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The southern Mozambique/ South Africa borderland is a landscape epitomised by fluctuation, contradiction and constant transformation. It is a world betwixt-and-between Mozambique and South Africa. The international border, imposed on the landscape more than a century ago, gives life to a new world that stretches across and away from it. The inhabitants of this transitional zone constantly shape and reshape their own identities vis-à-vis people on the opposite and same side of the border.

This border, which was delineated in 1875, was to separate the influence spheres of Portugal and Britain in south-east Africa. On the ground it divided the once strong and unified Mabudu-Tembe (Tembe-Thonga) chiefdom. At first the border was only a line on a map. With time, however, it became infused with social and cultural meaning as the dividing line between two new worlds. This was exacerbated by Portuguese and British colonial administration on opposite sides of the border, Apartheid in South Africa and socialist modernisation and war and displacement in Mozambique.

All these events and factors created cultural fragmentation and disunion between the northern and southern sides of the borderland. By the end of the Mozambican War in 1992 the northern side of the borderland was populated by displaced refugees, demobilised soldiers and bandits, as well as returnees from

neighbouring countries. Many of these people did not have any ancestral ties to the land nor kinship ties to its earlier inhabitants. Whereas a common Thonga identity had previously united people on both sides of the border, South African policies of Apartheid increasingly promoted the Zulu language and culture on the southern side of the border.

The end of warfare in Mozambique and of Apartheid in South Africa facilitated contact across the border. Social contact between the inhabitants of the borderland is furthermore fostered by various economic opportunities offered by the border, such as cross-border trade and smuggling. The increase in social and economic contact has in turn dissolved differences between the inhabitants of the borderland and promoted homogeneity and unity across the political divide.

Fragmentation and homogeneity characterises daily life in the borderland. Inhabitants of the frontier-zone play these forces off against each other, now emphasising the differences across the border, later emphasising the similarities. The borderland is a world of multiple identities, where ethnicity, citizenship and identity, already fluid and contextual concepts in their own rights, become even more so as people constantly define and redefine themselves in this transitional environment.

*Keywords:* borders, boundaries, borderland culture, citizenship, cross-border trade, displacement, ethnicity, illegal border crossings, refugees, smuggling, spirit possession, Mabudu-Tembe, Maputaland, Mozambican War.

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## ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
EKZNW	Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife
FRELIMO	<i>Frente da Libertação de Moçambique</i> (The Mozambican National Liberation Front).
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
LSDI	Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative
MNR	Mozambique National Resistance
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
ONUMOZ	<i>Operação das Nações Unidas para Moçambique</i> (The United Nations Operation in Mozambique – instituted after the end of the Mozambican War in 1992)
RENAMO	<i>Resistência Nacional Moçambicana</i> (The Mozambican National Resistance, also known by its English abbreviation, MNR)
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAPS	South African Police Services
SARS	South African Revenue Services
UNHRC	United Nations High Commission on Refugees
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union

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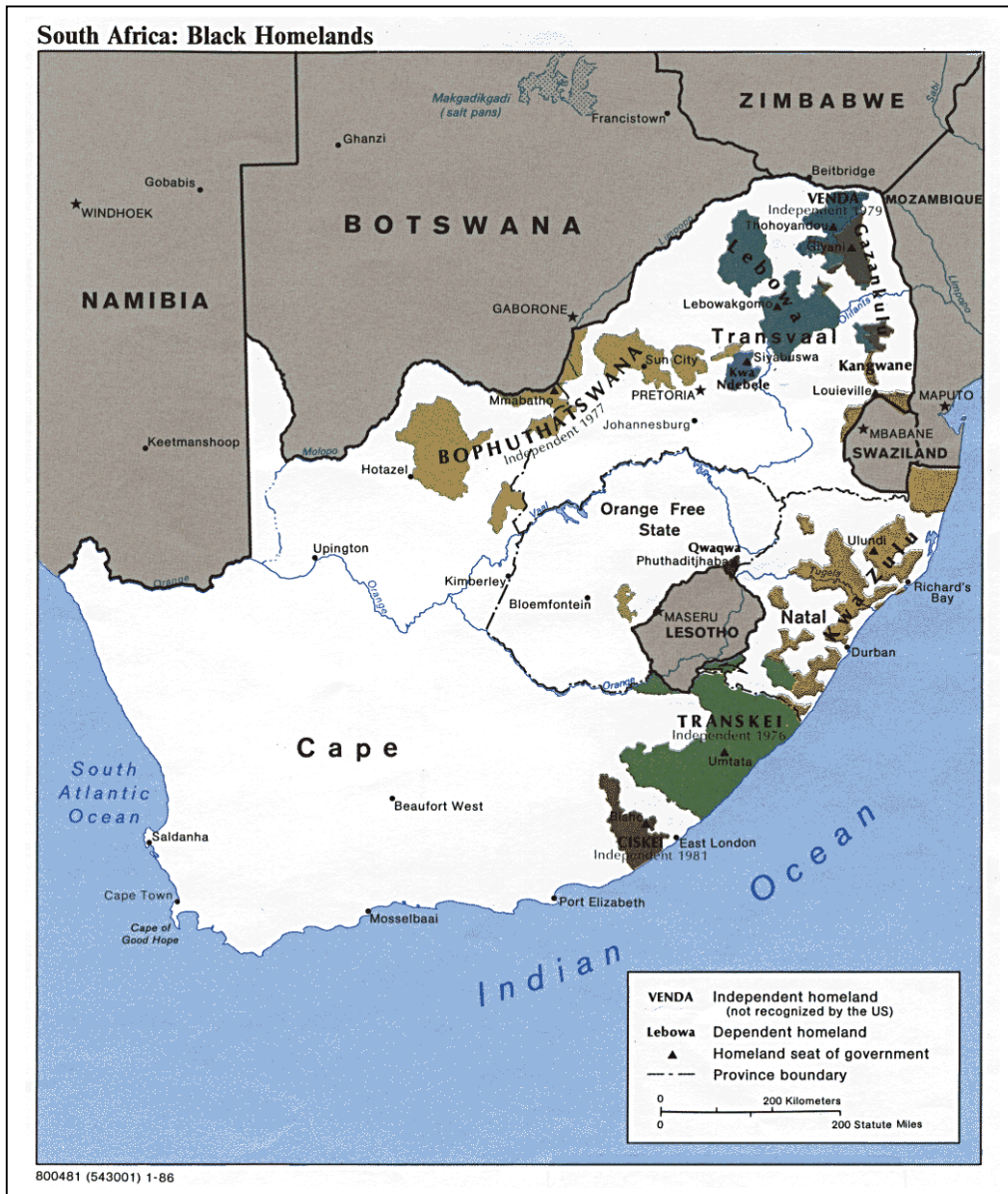
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Map 1: Mozambique's borders with South Africa.



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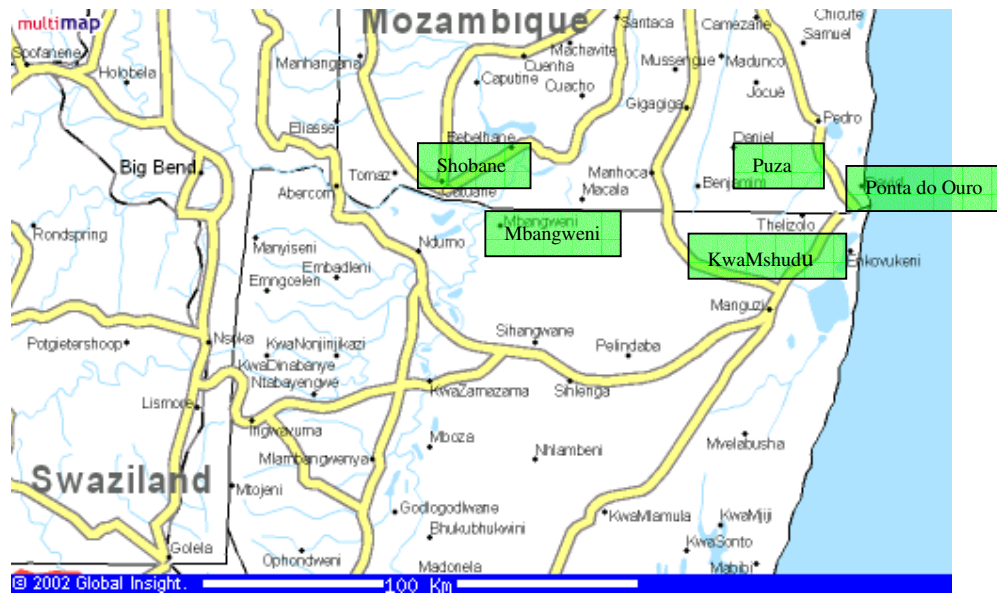
Source: [www.govmaps.gov.za](http://www.govmaps.gov.za)

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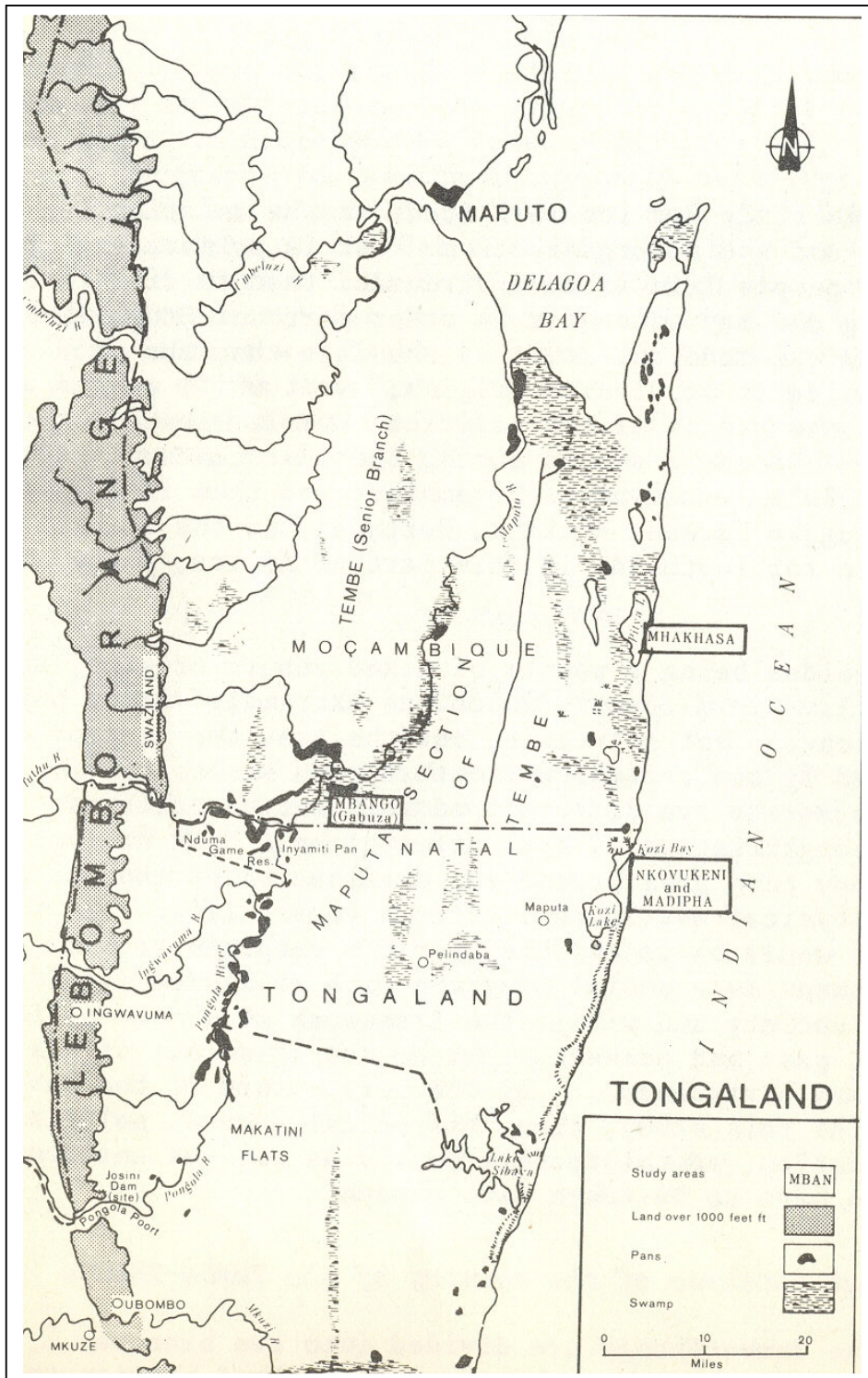
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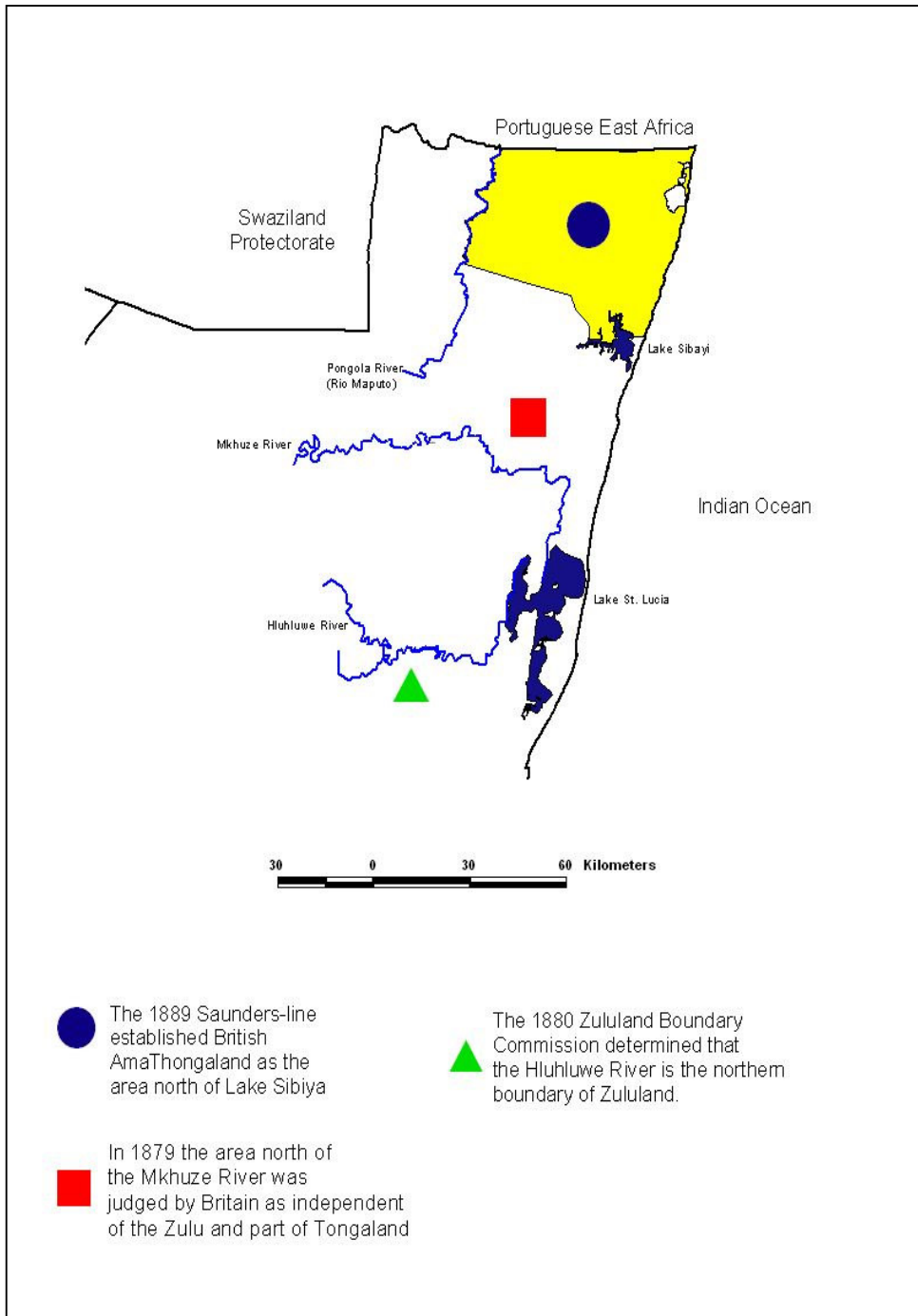
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Source: Felgate (1982:1)

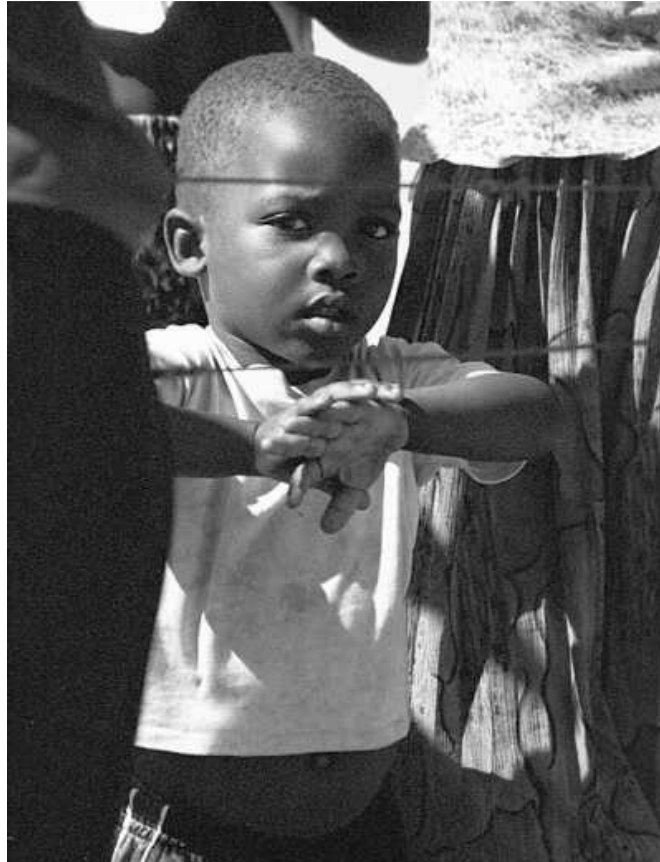


Map 6: The disputed southern boundary of the Mabudu chiefdom (1879-1890)



Source: Map compiled by J. L. Jones, Centre for Environmental Studies, University of Pretoria.

Figure 1: Boy leaning against border fence, 2002



Photograph by Hannie du Plessis