

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis details the lives of ordinary people who live at the frontiers of modern nation-states. It is a history and ethnography of life in the borderland. It is about the partition and fragmentation of unified ethnic and cultural polities through the creation of borders. Also, it is an analysis of the processes that transpire when territorial borders become infused with social and cultural meaning to become lines of division between discrete groups. However, it is also about the survival of ethnic, cultural and historical bonds, despite the imposition of territorial boundaries. In essence, this study deals with the creation of new social groups with distinct identities, related to experiences shared in the bi-national environment of the borderland.

With reference to the southern border between Mozambique and South Africa this thesis investigates how people react to enforced territorial (national) boundaries. The question I ask is, 'Do these imposed divisions gradually become accepted as the social lines between distinct groups, or are the ties between and within ethnic, social and cultural communities so strong as to resist the new borders and the programmes of states to entrench them as social boundaries?' I conclude in the end that, along the southern Mozambique/ South Africa border, both and neither of these scenarios developed. Instead, a community that is in a state of constant fluctuation and change developed along the borderline. In the borderland, people simultaneously emphasise both their differences and similarities. The international border is both bridge and barrier. It has become a dividing line between different ethnicities and cultures and,

at the same time, it has become a knot tying together people on opposite sides of the border with shared ethnic loyalties, customs and cultural forms.

The southern border between Mozambique and South Africa - along the provincial boundaries of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and Maputo in Mozambique - was imposed on the southern African landscape in 1875 (see Map 3). It is an artificial line, following a river for a short while, but for the most part following a straight line that cuts through the landscape not resembling any natural frontier. The border was drawn on a map in France to separate the influence spheres of Portugal and British control in south-east Africa. On the ground it divided, although only with a partial degree of success, a unified political community with a shared sense of identity and culture.

At first the border had no real impact on the lives of the Mabudu-Tembe<sup>1</sup> people whose chiefdom it divided. The old authority structures of chieftainship remained on both sides of the new border, despite efforts by the Portuguese north of the border to eliminate them and to assimilate her colonial subjects into the Portuguese culture. Ironically, the colonial border only became a real obstacle to transnational contact after the withdrawal of the Portuguese in 1975. Whereas the colonial government in Mozambique supported South Africa in stemming the tide of African liberation in Southern Africa, the new Mozambican government publicly opposed South Africa's minority government and lent active support to South African liberation movements. South Africa, in turn, supported an insurgency movement in Mozambique. A long and devastating war ensued in Mozambique that saw the displacement of millions of people, many of whom crossed the border and settled in

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<sup>1</sup> The Mabudu-Tembe is the junior branch of the Tembe-Thonga (Felgate 1982:1). They are also referred to in the literature as the Maputo, Tembe and Ronga.

South Africa. Under these circumstances the borderland became a militarised zone, where access across the border and contact along the borderline was prohibited.

The Mozambican side of the borderland became almost completely depopulated during the war. When the war ended in 1992, displaced soldiers and refugees, with no ties to the land, settled in the area. This trend continued after 1994 as Mozambique became a corridor for thousands of people wanting to enter South Africa. As a result, the northern or Mozambican side of the borderland became ethnically and culturally dissimilar to the south, despite the fact that many returnees to the area had moved there from KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa.

At the same time, the Apartheid system of ethnic ‘homelands’ changed the ethnic landscape on the South African side of the border. Local ethnic alliances and identities changed after people living south of the border – whom had previously identified themselves as Mabudu-Tembe (Tembe-Thonga) – were incorporated into the Zulu ‘homeland’ of KwaZulu. According to its plan of social engineering, the South African government imposed a Zulu identity upon the Mabudu-Tembe people. People from the area could no longer choose to identify themselves as Thonga in their identity books and Zulu became the official language in the schools and administration. This intensified in the 1980s when the South African government revealed a plan to cede the Ingwavuma District<sup>2</sup> to Swaziland, on the grounds that the inhabitants of the area were ethnically and historically Swazi. In response, the Zulu political and cultural organisation, Inkhata, launched a forced recruitment programme in the Ingwavuma District that led to an almost complete Zulu cultural and political dominance in the area. Thus, when the international border was re-opened in 1994 it

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<sup>2</sup> The Ingwavuma district was the most northern municipal district of Natal and later of KwaZulu. The Mabudu-Tembe chiefdom lay within the boundaries of the Ingwavuma district. The name of the district has recently been changed and the boundaries have been redrawn. Today the Tembe Traditional Authority lies within the Umhlabuyalingana local municipality of the Umkhanyakude district municipality.

came to separate in many peoples' eyes, the Zulus in the south from a mix-match of ethnicities in the north, commonly labelled as Shangaans or Makwerekweres by the people in the south.

Despite the history that divided people along the line of the imposed border, there were also processes that unified people into a common borderland community. With the end of the Mozambican war and Apartheid people in the borderland are increasingly coming into contact with one another, spurred on by social and economic push and pull factors from both sides of the divide. They share a way of life different from other people in the states in which they live. They share a way of life that ties them closely, even if not always ethnically or culturally, to people across the fence. This thesis aims to illustrate how these processes work. It is the narration of life in the borderland, a landscape created by an imposed political boundary, with a society that stretches across and away from its territorial bounds.

### **Borders, boundaries and borderlandscapes: a literature review**

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition (Anzaldua 1999:25).

This literary review has two aims. Firstly, to clarify the concepts of borders, boundaries and borderlands as used in this thesis. I briefly discuss the growth of anthropological investigation into territorial boundaries and borderlands. This discussion leads to an introduction of the concept of borderland-*scapes* as a way of analysing and understanding territorial landscapes that stretch across and away from nation-state borders. Secondly, to show how borderland literature describes three

socio-cultural scenarios or impacts that result from the forced imposition of political borders. In some cases imposed territorial borders became social, ethnic and cultural boundaries. In other cases imposed political borders remained devoid of social and cultural meaning, while in a third scenario imposed territorial borders have created new landscapes infused with their own cultural meanings and ideas of ethnicity and social belonging.

According to Berdahl (1997:3), boundaries are ‘symbols through which states, nations, and localities define themselves.’ ‘They define at once territorial limits and socio-cultural space.’ Classical studies of boundaries in anthropological literature tend to focus more on social boundaries (Barth 1969 and Cohen 1986, 2000). Although some anthropologists have investigated geographical boundaries (Cohen 1965; Aronhoff 1974; Cole & Wolf 1974), the study of geo-political boundaries has only recently gained more serious scholarly attention (Alvarez 1995; Berdahl 1997; Borneman 1992 and 1998; Donnan & Wilson 1999; Englund 2002; Martinez 1998; Nugent & Asiwaju 1996). Indeed, Rosler and Wendl (1999:1), suggest that geographical borders and borderlands have become a ‘crucial key’ to understanding the predicaments of culture at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the past, borders were merely seen as a ‘backdrop’ to some other line of inquiry. Donnan and Wilson (1999) illustrate clearly how anthropologists like Frankenberg (1957), Cohen (1965) and Harris (1972), who worked in border communities in the 1960s and 1970s, paid scant regard to the significance of the border on the people they studied. In these studies the border was ‘often no more than an analytically distant presence with a vague influence on whatever the topic in hand’ (pp.26-27). However, in more recent studies borders have become a subject of investigation in their own right. In a similar manner, recent approaches in landscape

theory problematise the social and cultural significance of place and space (Abramson & Theodossopoulos 2000; Bender 1993; Pugh 1990; Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995; Rodgers 2002). This thesis aims to contribute to the 'anthropology of borderlands', which makes the borderland, the landscape that stretches across and away from international borders, the primary subject of investigation.

Due to the amount of work that has been done along the United States/ Mexican border (Alvarez 1995; Martinez 1998), the term borderlands is sometimes narrowly applied to refer only to this specific stretch of space, as if it were the only geographical and cultural borderland that exists. In truth, borderlands are found along all spaces bisected by geopolitical or nation-state borders.

Greverus (1999) has even theorised that islands can become borderlands and Driessen (1998) has shown how the Mediterranean Sea functions as a borderland between Morocco and Spain.

Borderlands are human-made places, imposed on the landscape through various historical processes. Their territorial limits depend, according to Martinez (1998:5) on the 'geographic reach of interaction with the other side'. Some borders seem more natural than others, being lines that separate unified political, ethnic and cultural groups. The territorial boundaries of the states of the old world, in particular, are usually argued to be the exact territorial limits of distinct ethnic and national groups. However, as P. Sahlins (1998) has shown in the case of the borders between France and Spain, territorial borders were imposed from a political centre on the territorial periphery. 'Peasants, artisans and notables on both sides of the political boundary shared a common language and ethnicity other than French or Spanish: they were Catalans' (Sahlins 1998:33). The artificial or arbitrary nature of state borders, supposed to be the limits of discrete nations, is especially evident in the world that

was colonised by European powers between the 1600s and the middle 1900s. In Africa particularly, the territorial boundaries that were agreed upon at the Berlin Conference in 1884-1885, cut straight across old lines of political, ethnic and cultural community (Asiwaju 1985:1-11). These imposed lines in effect created borderland communities.

It is however, imperative to bear in mind that borders are only ‘artificial’ from the view point of the powerless and poor who have no vested interests in their existence. Political elites who benefit from the existence of state borders do not see state borders as artificial. Cooper (2001:209) shows how political elites in the former French colonies tried to use their newfound French nationalities to make claims to the metropolis. Coplan (2001:111) also notes a similar trend with regards to the Lesotho/South Africa border. Although there are many advocates for the demolition of the border, the elites in that country (Lesotho) do not see the border as artificial at all. Instead, the border provides the elites with power in the form of an

autonomous defence force, the protection of senior chiefly authority, direct access to foreign development assistance, favoured status for local private and public sector enterprises, and government employment (p. 111).

According to Anderson and O’Dowd (1999:594) every borderland is unique. Their ‘meaning and significance can vary dramatically over space and time, as regimes change in one or more of the adjoining states, as borders are “closed” or “opened”, or as prices lurch from one side of the border to the other’ (Anderson & O’Dowd 1999:594). However, whilst every borderland should be analysed by looking at the particular history and circumstances thereof, there are certain experiences shared by all people living in the borderlands of nation-states. All borderlands are located along the territorial limits of modern states. Borderlands move across and stretch away from the lines along which states control the flow of

people and goods into and out of their territories. Borderlands are sites and symbols of power. Borderlands are places where different ethnic, cultural and national groups meet, they are places where political, ethnic and cultural communities are bisected and joined, and, where new cultures, ethnicities and loyalties are created<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, although every border region is unique with its own history, borderlands all share certain similarities and should be studied as particular places or landscapes.

Nordstrom (1997:37-39), in her study of the war in Mozambique, argues that anthropologists can no longer see their 'subject matter in terms of isolated, self-contained cultural communities.' Instead, she argues, anthropologists 'must write to a contemporary world, and that world is a tangled web of transnational linkages' (Nordstrom 1997:37). Nordstrom (1997:38) describes her study as ethnography of warfare in general, rather than of the war in Mozambique. Nordstrom (1995:139) calls her approach the 'ethnography of a warzone.' She further remarks that 'the theme of war, rather than a specific locality, situates the study.' 'Process and people supplant place as an ethnographic "site"' (Nordstrom 1995:139). Building on Appadurai's (1996) concept of an ethnoscape, Nordstrom (1997:37) introduces the idea of a war-*scape*. Appadurai (1996:48) writes that 'As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic "projects," the *ethno* in ethnography takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality.' Appadurai (1996:33) also introduces other new landscapes for anthropological inquiry, divorced from particular spaces, places and time, which are the building blocks of what he calls (extending Anderson 1991) imagined worlds, that is, 'the multiple worlds that are

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<sup>3</sup> According to Martinez (1998:19), tolerance of ethnic and cultural difference is a major trademark of borderlands, since they are 'constantly exposed to foreign values and attitudes. This contact fosters open-mindedness and cosmopolitanism, impelling borderlanders to understand and appreciate the perspective of their neighbours much better than people in the interior zones.'



constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe.’

Building on Appadurai (1996) and Nordstrom’s (1997:37) work on ethno- and war-*scapes*, I would like to use the concept of a borderland-*scape*. A borderlandscape is a particular landscape of anthropological inquiry. The concept illustrates the similarities in experience people have who live, and have lived, in the border regions of the world. It highlights that, although every border region in the world may be unique (Anderson & O’Dowd 1999:549), there is a web that ties people in all the border regions of the world. There is a similarity in way of life - a border culture.

Boundaries both:

make possible certain kinds of transactions and prohibit others. Theft, *chicane*, refugees and refugee ‘problems’, ‘external’ guerrilla bases and ‘internal’ political opposition movements are all made possible by boundaries, however arbitrary. Around these develop considerable economical and political interests that seek to maintain them. In time, deeply held emotional attachments and identities may also arise (Thornton 1994: 11).

Throughout this thesis I make use of ethnographic material from various borderlandscapes all over the world, comparing life and culture in those areas with life in the southern Mozambique/ South Africa borderland.

This thesis deals with social and cultural reactions towards imposed territorial borders. In particular, it deals with colonial borders that have become infused with cultural meaning. This is particularly notable in Africa where the process of border-making was the result of imperialistic power struggles between European states.

Whereas state borders in Europe reflect the boundaries between homogenous, even if ‘imagined’ national communities (Anderson 1991), state borders in Africa arbitrarily

cut across ethnic, cultural and family groups.<sup>4</sup> As Thornton (1994:9) notes ‘most African countries today are *countries*, not nations, states or ethnic groups.’ They are:

named areas of land demarcated by international boundaries, but not necessarily possessing comprehensive state apparatuses, full administrative or fiscal coverage of the area so named, or even a coherent self-identity as such... most of Africa is countries, not nations or nation-states. Countries seem to exist as a form of nominalism: they are named, therefore they are... Unlike Europe’s countries... Africa’s countries exist because of their boundaries and not vice versa! (Thornton 1994:9, 11, italics in original).

Furthermore, as Nugent (2002:4) notes, in ‘most of Africa, boundaries were not an organic development, but neither were they the product of rolling frontiers<sup>5</sup> of colonial settlement. Instead they arose as discrete decisions on the part of European powers to divide African space between themselves.’

The colonial borders of Africa remained largely in place after decolonisation. The Organisation for African Unity (now the African Union) made a resolution in 1963 to maintain the territorial boundaries of the new states of Africa. Through various processes of nation building, Africa’s new leaders tried to entrench the borders of their states.<sup>6</sup>

A study of the literature of imposed borders reveals, as was stated in the introduction to this section, the development of three scenarios. In the first scenario an imposed territorial border is transformed into a social, cultural and ethnic boundary

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<sup>4</sup> Although Europe’s borders were also imposed from the centres of power in those countries onto their peripheries, there exists a certain amount of homogeneity (shared history, language etc.) amongst the people living in the area confined by the border. In Africa, on the other hand, borders were drawn straight through the political and cultural centres of pre-colonial communities, thus joining groups of people who do not share a joint sense of history and community. Although the borders of both Europe and Africa are arbitrary, there is a difference in the degree of their arbitrariness.

<sup>5</sup> This was the case in the American model where settler populations continually spilled over fixed colonial boundaries, thereby necessitating the need for new boundaries to be drawn (Nugent 2002:3).

<sup>6</sup> Cooper (2001), arguing in a critique on globalisation theory, highlights the linkages that used to exist across the present political boundaries of Africa and the interconnectedness of various places and spaces on the African continent before colonialism. There historically existed socio-economic and political ties across the African continent. These ties were distorted with the imposition of colonial borders. According to Cooper (2001:190-191), ‘historical analysis does not present a contrast of a past of territorial boundedness and a present of interconnection and fragmentation, but a more back -and -forth, varied combination of territorializing and deterritorializing tendencies.’

separating distinct ethnic and cultural groups. In the second the imposed political border remains devoid of social and cultural meaning. Finally, in the third scenario, an imposed political border stimulates the growth of a new cultural and ethnic landscape, or borderlandscape, which ties people on both sides of the imposed border together and separates them from people further removed from it. It is this third scenario that is most clearly visible along the southern border between Mozambique and South Africa. A new landscape has been created along this imposed border. The border has not completely been transformed into a social dividing line, nor has it remained devoid of social and cultural meaning. Instead, a new landscape has been created with its own social meanings and identities.

One does not find a case-study resembling any one of these scenarios perfectly in the literature. Instead, one finds cases that resemble one scenario more than the other at the time of investigation.

Berdahl (1997) shows how in the years immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the physical boundaries that divided East and West Germany, cultural boundaries were reaffirmed and re-created along an imaginary internal German border. In her study, Berdahl (1997) illustrates the mechanisms used by the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) between 1945 and 1989 to infuse the internal German border with social and cultural meaning. In this period, she shows that the border was transformed from an imposed colonial border, drawn by invading Allied Forces, to an accepted social border separating East Germans, as a new national group, from West Germans. However, despite the efforts of the East German state, people in East Germany kept social and cultural ties with the West

alive throughout the Cold War.<sup>7</sup> This was obviously stronger in certain parts than in others, where people, driven by Marxist-Leninist ideology, took over the new identity of the state. Furthermore, Berdahl (1997) argues that the sudden dismantling of geopolitical borders may be so destabilising as to ‘generate new cultural practices and identities’ (p.1). Accordingly, once the physical boundary disappeared and contact with the West was gradually re-instituted, people created new social boundaries separating a West from an East that no longer existed in physical space. The physical border thus became a social boundary only after it was dismantled.

On the other hand Phiri (1984), Collins (1984) and Carsten (1998) show how imposed political borders do not become socially, ethnically or culturally ingrained. Anderson (1992:135) also notes that Mozambicans pay scant attention to the borders dividing Malawi and Mozambique, ‘mixing as easily with Malawians of their tribe as with Mozambicans of their tribe’ (cited in Englund 2002:21).<sup>8</sup>

When an imposed territorial boundary neither becomes a social, cultural or ethnic boundary, nor remains a mere obstacle separating a unified cultural, ethnic and social group, a third scenario develops along the border, which prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. The borderland itself becomes a site of ‘creative cultural production’ (Rosaldo 1989: 208), where ‘displacement and

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<sup>7</sup> Berdahl (1997:104-105) illustrates the cultural influences of the West in East Germany during the Cold War through an example of nicknames people in East Germany employed to refer to their neighbours. Famous nicknames derived from American television programmes like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, which people in East Germany, who lived in the borderland, could watch – illegally – on television sets that received signals from West Germany. Social visits from West Germany to East Germany were also sanctioned by the German Democratic Republic, although it was strictly controlled and disallowed in East German villages close to the border, in the so-called *Sperrgebiet* (August 2000:3).

<sup>8</sup> Englund (2002:21) criticizes this stance. He explains that although on first arriving in the borderland he had similar expectations, he found that ‘some villagers... insisted that they belonged to a particular nation-state.’ Englund argues that ‘local understandings of the crisis (Mozambican war) [were] more complex than [what] the image of tribesmen transgressing artificial borders would suggest’ (p.21).

deterritorialization... shapes the identity of the hybridised citizen'<sup>9</sup> (Gupta & Ferguson 1992:18). This scenario has been most clearly observed along the United States border with Mexico (Anzaldua 1999; Alvarez 1995; Bernal 1978; Franz 1978; Garreau 1981; Martinez 1994; Monsivais 1978). Martinez (1996:256-257) refers to the US/ Mexico borderlands as a 'world apart'<sup>10</sup>. It is 'a world of acute contradictions, a place of pungent human drama (p. 256). Its people are 'of one, or more identities, mono or multi – national, ethnic, lingual, cultural' (p.257).

Yes, *la frontera* has them all:  
those who live behind their cultural wall,  
and those who wish to see it fall;  
those who would keep foreigners out,  
and those who want them all about;  
those inclined to alienate,  
and those who prefer to ameliorate;  
those driven by nationalistic bend,  
and those committed to a global tent.  
Martinez (1996:257).

Similarly, Flynn (1997:326) writes that inhabitants of the Benin-Nigeria borderland form a social group with a distinct identity, not related to nationality or ethnicity, but to the ties of kinship and length of residence in the borderland.

However, there is a strong tendency in the anthropology of borderlands to exaggerate the fluidity and liminal condition of the borderlands. As Alvarez (1995)

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of hybridisation of culture or creolisation is widely used in current debates on the effects of globalisation on culture and identity (Anthias 2001; Henry and Bankston 2001). Amselle (2002:216) argues, in contrast, that the idea of hybridisation of culture is based on the assumption that there exists 'discrete entities that might be called "cultures"'. In order to avoid such ideas of mixing, Amselle (2002:216) argues, 'we might try starting from the opposite position, by suggesting that *every society is mixed*; that any "mixing" one can observe is the product of the mixing of already mixed entities; and that this continuous process of cultural exchange is as old as culture itself' (own italics).

<sup>10</sup> The US news magazine, *Newsweek* published an article in 1983 entitled, 'A World Apart', in which it states that the US/ Mexico borderland is 'a third very unsovereign nation, not wholly American and not quite Mexican either, with its own customs, mores, values, and even its own language, Spanglish. Family ties, religious roots, and economic interdependence knit the border region in both countries together to the point that [US border cities] have more in common with their sister town in Mexico than they do with most of the United States (p.36).

a challenge to anthropologists in the borderlands genre is to define a border culture, a seemingly homogenous construct based on political demarcation and shared elements of history, multi-ethnic identity (Indian, Spanish, Mexican, Anglo), and binational economics and politics... As with notions of culture writ large, the notion of a border culture either glosses over or essentializes traits and behaviour, often obliterating the actual problems and conditions in the variation of human behaviour (p. 450).

Along the imposed political border between Mozambique and South Africa the third scenario of how territorial borders become infused with social and cultural meaning discussed above, unfolds. For a long time after its creation, the border was only an important dividing line between the influence spheres of European countries in Africa. Efforts at social engineering on both sides of the border gradually infused it with social and cultural meaning. War and displacement further confused social boundaries that were starting to develop along the imposed border. In the aftermath of the war on the one side of the border and Apartheid on the other side, a culture characterised by difference as well as similarity is evolving at and across the imposed political boundary. New social boundaries are being drawn along and away from the state border, emphasising difference at the border, yet similarity across it.

### **Research methodology**

The idea of writing an ethnography about the southern Mozambique/ South Africa borderland only came to me at the end of 2001 after conversations with my supervisor. At the time I had been living in the borderland for almost two years, having completed research on the impact of Transfrontier Conservation on borderland communities, and was busy writing a history of the Mabudu-Tembe. After devising a research problem and developing a methodology, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork between July 2002 and October 2003.

Following aspects of MacGaffey and Bazenguissa's (2000:16-17) methodology for studying transnational traders in Congo and Paris, I decided to employ a multi-sited ethnology (Marcus 1995:96-111) as opposed to a detailed study of a single location on the borderland (see Berdahl 1997:15-19). Doing ethnography in different sites allowed me to test whether my findings could be extrapolated for the borderland in general, or whether they merely reflected dynamics specific to the local research site. Naturally, as Rodgers (2002:78) also notes, there is always the fear that one loses 'depth' when one follows a multi-sited approach. Rodgers (2002:78) cites Clifford (1997:190) who asks of multi-sited fieldwork, 'multilocale fieldwork is an oxymoron. How many sites can be studied intensively before the criteria of depth are compromised?' (Emphasis removed). My own concerns about losing depth in following a multi-sited approach were partly mitigated by my previous long-term research experiences in the area, including the completion of two MA dissertations in Anthropology and History (Kloppers 2001; Els & Kloppers 2002; Kloppers 2003 and Els, Kloppers and Van Aarde 2004). This present study draws on the results of my previous research. Hence, my doctoral thesis is the culmination of four years of intensive fieldwork in the borderland.

I defined my research area as stretching from the Indian Ocean all along the Mozambican border with South Africa until Swaziland (see Map 3). This is an area of some 80 kilometres. Along this strip I did research in five different principal sites: Mbangweni and KwaMshudu (South Africa) and Shobane, Puza and Ponta do Ouro (Mozambique) (see Map 4). In addition, my research inquiries took me to other locations further removed from the borderland.

Having already worked in the area for more than two years before I started fieldwork on the international border, I had already built strong social relations with

local people and had gained the permission and trust of the local authorities to work in the area. All that remained was for me to inform people of my new subject of investigation, and to get their permission to do fieldwork around that subject. This proved more difficult than I thought, especially on the South African side of the borderland. In Mbangweni, for instance, it took me over three months to get permission from the local chief and his council to conduct interviews in the area. In KwaMshudu I was suspected of working for the police in trying to ‘sniff-out’ illegal immigrants. Since a large majority of people living in KwaMshudu originally came from Mozambique, it was very difficult to gain their trust and to put them at ease during and after interviews. My problems were exacerbated when medical scientists and students from the nearby hospital started to collect soil samples and hair and nail clippings from local people to test for Mseleni joint disease<sup>11</sup> shortly after I started fieldwork in the area. A common belief in southern Africa is that witches (Zulu: *abathakati*) can harm their victims by using a powerful potion that is manufactured from human bodily substances, such as the victim’s own hair, nails, urine and faeces (Niehaus 2001:25). Informants in southern Mozambique related that witches mix the fingernail clippings and hair of their victims with crocodile brains to make a powerful potion that can kill people. Despite all my explanations to the contrary, local residents associated me with these ‘practitioners of witchcraft’ for the entire duration of my stay in the area.

Fieldwork on covert activities proved even more difficult. I conducted many interviews with smugglers in the back streets of Manguzi, the biggest town in the area, while my guide, Michael, had to keep watch for the police. Once, after an interview with a second-hand clothes smuggler I decided to hand over my notes and

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<sup>11</sup> An extraordinary form of arthritis found amongst a large part of the inhabitants of the Mseleni area, which lies just south of the borderland, west of Lake Sibaya in South Africa (De Bruin 1987:12).



the audio cassette on which I recorded the interview, when it became clear that she, despite having agreed to the interview, became nervous and suspicious of my intentions. In some areas I was chased away before I could even introduce myself, while in other areas people accepted me with open arms, eager to tell me of their crafty and sly border crossings.

Research of this nature unsurprisingly elicits some ethical concerns. I had to undertake certain controls to ensure that the research I conducted could be ethically justified. Therefore, before conducting any interview I explained to informants precisely how I would use the information obtained for research and possible publication purposes. I assured them that they could end the interview at any time they wanted to, and could refuse to answer any uncomfortable questions. To ensure their anonymity I did not record any personal names or items of information that could reveal their identities in my notebooks and I made use of pseudonyms in recording data. I also informed my interviewees that I would use these pseudonyms in my thesis and in any publications that may result from it. Since many people I worked with were engaged in illicit activities, such as illegal border crossings and smuggling, I refrained from asking them to sign forms of consent for conducting interviews. Furthermore, since most people I worked with were illiterate, or did not completely comprehend the use of consent forms, I did not get written consent for conducting interviews, but instead relied on verbal consent.

The primary research methodology I used was participant observation. Apart from this, I also conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews, a census, questionnaire-based interviews and made use of remote sensing methods, especially maps and aerial photographs.

**1. Participant observation.** According to Bernard (1994:136) the aim of participant observation is ‘getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives.’ This method is especially valuable when conducting research on topics people do not usually discuss with ‘outsiders’, such as ‘illegal border crossings’ and ‘illegal cross-border trade’. Once people accepted my presence and understood what it was that I was planning to research, I learnt a lot about life in the borderland simply by being there. I spent long periods of time sitting at official and unofficial border crossing points and at border-markets merely observing rituals of border crossings. As time went by, people started to approach me and initiated conversations about their lives and the difficulties and opportunities the border provides for them. As a result of just being present there, I gained valuable information about life in the borderland.

**2. Interviews.** Throughout the research period, I conducted informal, unstructured, semi-structured and structured<sup>12</sup> interviews in all the areas I visited. Since I can only speak a very basic Zulu and am not able to communicate in Portuguese and Thonga (the other main languages of the borderland) at all, I made use of various translators and interpreters in the conduct of my research. In South Africa I was aided by Amos Tembe, a young Zulu speaker, George Tembe, an older man, Vusi Vumase, a teacher, and Michael Tembe, a Mozambican refugee who had settled in South Africa during the 1980s. I conducted most of my interviews with the aid of

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<sup>12</sup> According to Bernard (1994:209) there is a continuum of interview situations – ranging from informal interview to structured interview - based on the amount of control exercised by the interviewer over the responses of the informant. In an informal interview there is a total lack of structure and control, the researcher merely tries to remember conversations heard during a day’s fieldwork. An unstructured interview differs from an informal interview since both interviewer and informant are aware that they are engaged in an interview and not just a casual conversation. The interviewer has a minimal amount of control over the informant’s responses in this case. In a semi-structured interview the interviewer employs an interview guide in an interview consisting of a list of questions and topics that need to be covered during the interview. In a structured interview the interviewer has the maximum amount of control over the responses of the informant. Informants are usually asked to respond to as nearly an identical set of stimuli as possible.

Michael who was fluent in both Zulu and Thonga (as was the case with Amos, George and Vusi), and also spoke Portuguese. In Mozambique I was assisted by Osvaldo Ferreira, Nkosana Machisa and Raphael Fakude.

The majority of the unstructured and informal interviews resulted from chance meetings with informants at border crossing points, or at markets and at other places in the communities. The aim of unstructured interviews was to gain an *emic* insight into the lives of the borderlanders and to discover the issues regarding the border and borderland they saw as important. The ‘clear plan’ that I constantly kept in my mind (Bernard 1994:209), was merely to converse about the border, the borderland and the people on both sides of the divide. In most cases informants themselves led the interviews and determined the direction they took. Since I spent a substantial amount of time in the borderland and knew that I would see most informants again, I did not need to exert much control over the interviews and could patiently wait for informants to relate information to me in their own time. Over the course of the research period I interviewed over four hundred informants.

I followed a more structured interview schedule in the cases where I knew I would not be able to meet up with informants again or when following up previous informal interviews. This was especially the case when I met with cross-border smugglers who allowed me only brief meetings, during which I had to elicit as much information as possible. For instance, I had to interview a craft smuggler in my car, while giving him a ride from the border to the nearest town. I had to make it clear that I would still provide transport even if he would not speak to me to ensure that he did not feel forced into the interview. What made the interview more difficult was driving on the sandy roads while trying to write down what the informant said, since he would not allow me to make use of my voice recorder. It also proved to be

extremely difficult to follow the interview guide while driving, but I managed for the most part. Soon after I dropped him off in the nearest village I rushed to a place where I could sit down and record everything that I had been told.

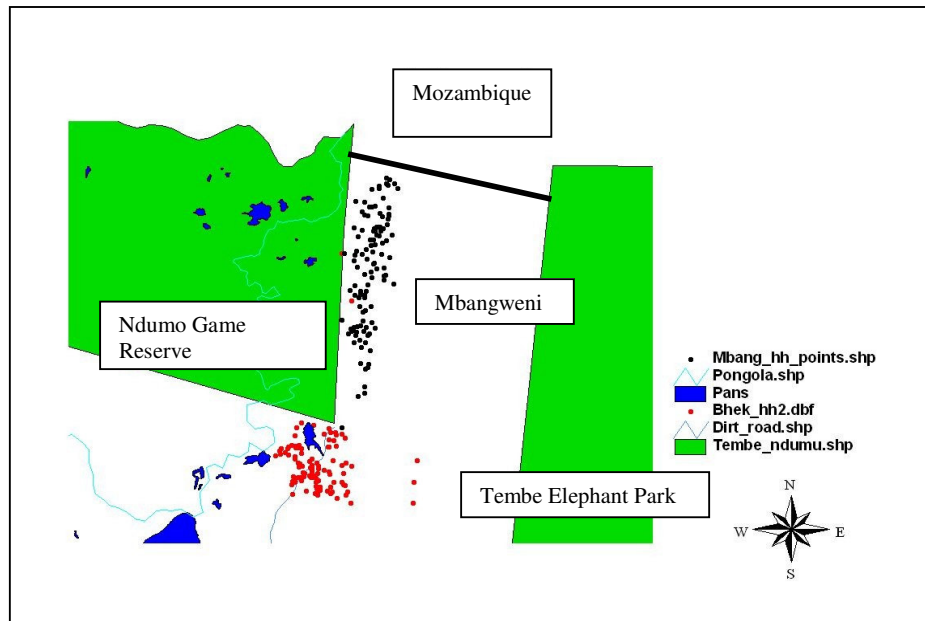
I also collected life histories from sixty of my better-known informants. Here I used interview guides to document standard details about their lives and to collect more detail, especially dates, of certain events that took place.

Finally I conducted structured interviews in two adjoining borderland communities. Using an interview schedule I conducted random interviews with one hundred interviewees in South Africa and a hundred interviewees in Mozambique. I asked informants on both sides of the border identical questions to enable me to compare the results. The aim of these interviews was to gather quantitative data on kinship ties across the border (i.e. how many people on one side of the border have kin on the other side), the extent and frequency of cross-border social interaction, as well as perceptions of the border and of those who reside on the other side of the border. I also made use of the structured interviews to test the validity and distribution of qualitative data gathered through participant observation and interviews.

**3. Census.** In Mbangweni, a village in South Africa (see Map 4), I did a complete census of all the homesteads. The census was conducted as part of a larger programme on rural livelihoods by the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge of the University of Pretoria. Fortunately, I was able to include some of my own research questions into the census and to gain valuable information from it. In this census I asked similar questions to those asked in the structured interviews in the census. All interviews were conducted at the homesteads of informants and a GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) reading was taken of each homestead. This presented a visual

and spatial analysis of the Mbangweni borderland community, illustrating the proximity of people to the border (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Positioning of homesteads in Mbangweni



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

In addition to the material that I obtained from the structured interviews and the census, the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) provided me with information on the number of immigrants, stolen vehicles, drugs, weapons and other contraband articles that came across the Mozambican border into South Africa. The Superintendent in charge of the police station at Manguzi allowed me to access the cell registers from which I could determine the amount of immigrants crossing the border as well as their countries of origin. I only conducted research at the police station and at the SANDF headquarters towards the end of the research period as I was afraid that local people might

associate me with the police if they had seen me there before I visited their communities.

**4. Remote sensing.** I made use of aerial photographs and topographical maps as remote sensing methods. According to Jones and McCusker (2004) ‘visual media, such as maps and aerial photographs are versatile techniques that allow numerous types of data and issues to be presented in a variety of ways. A unique strength of visual media is the ability to draw people into discussion, often referred to as “speaking to the map”’. I obtained aerial photographs<sup>13</sup> from the South African Chief Directorate: Surveys and Mapping of the southern Mozambique/ South Africa borderland for 1942<sup>14</sup>, 1960<sup>15</sup>, 1975<sup>16</sup>, and 1991<sup>17</sup> (Appendix A, B, C and D). These maps provided a visual representation of the changes the borderland has undergone since 1942. What is especially interesting is the manner in which these photographs highlight how the Mozambican side of the borderland became de-populated as a result of the war between 1975 and 1991 and how it is now gradually becoming re-populated after the war’s end.

I made use of these aerial photos, together with 1:50 000 topo-cadastral maps<sup>18</sup> obtained from the Chief Directorate: Surveys and Mapping in South Africa and from the Survey General (*Direcção Nacional de Geografica e Cadastro de*

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<sup>13</sup> The benefits of using aerial photographs in conducting social research include ‘consistency of information, non-literate media, authenticity and facilitation. Although they have traditionally been more used in gathering quantitative information, they have gained attention as tools that ‘solicit qualitative spatial information about events on the ground’ (Jones & McCusker 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Job 470, strip 3/ 019, 021, 023, 025, 027, 029.

<sup>15</sup> Job 167, strip 2/ 745, 47, 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 59, 61, 63, 65, 66.

<sup>16</sup> Job 751, strip 1/ 1288, 89, 90, 91, 93, 95, 97, 99, 1301.

<sup>17</sup> Job 942, strip 2/ 027, 028, 029, 030, 031, 033, 035, 037, 039, 041.

<sup>18</sup> Topographic maps have, like aerial photographs, recently become more used in the collection of qualitative data. According to Jones and McCusker (2004), topographic maps are especially useful in allowing people to relate their knowledge, identify issues and to mark places and ideas on the map.

*Mozambique*) in Mozambique in two ways. First, I used it to create a visual landscape, drawing a picture for myself of what the borderland used to look like, where people used to stay and how the Mozambican War affected this. I used this information in interviews with informants, asking them to explain in more detail the patterns and trends I could see on the aerial photographs and maps. Second, I used the aerial photographs and maps directly in interview situations as a tool to elicit conversation and responses to questions. For instance, I would first orientate people and explain to them where things were on the aerial photographs and once they became familiar with the photographs, I would ask them to show me places of interest. For example, I asked refugees to show me where they used to live in Mozambique before they fled from the country. Then I would gradually trace the route they took with them from Mozambique to South Africa on the photograph. This in itself elicited new conversations as informants started to remember important places and events that took place. In this way I found remote sensing an invaluable research tool in researching border crossings.

### **Organisation of this study**

This thesis is essentially about the creation of social boundaries along imposed territorial borders. It is both a history and ethnography. It tells the story of colonialism and the partition of African ethnic, political and cultural groups, of de-colonisation and destabilisation in south-east Africa and of how these events have impacted on the lives of people living on the borderland. The organising metaphor of this thesis is borders, boundaries and borderlandscapes: their creation and their destruction.

In the next chapter I discuss the history of the borderlandscape. Starting in the seventeenth century, I illustrate how the Tembe-Thonga clan established control over the wider Delagoa Bay hinterland and forged new ethnic identities, ties of kinship and allegiance and new cultural forms. The chapter follows the fragmentation of the Tembe chiefdom in 1875 and the establishment of Portuguese control north of the border and British control south of the border. I suggest that throughout the following century the imposed border gradually became a social and cultural divide. Portuguese efforts at assimilation north of the border clashed with British and later South African efforts at indirect rule and Apartheid south of the border. North of the border Tembe people assimilated Portuguese language and culture, thereby setting them apart from their former clan members to the south, who increasingly became subject to Zulu influence and domination. The aim of the discussion is not only to provide the necessary context for the following chapters, but also to illustrate how historical forces led to the creation of social and cultural differences between the Mozambican and South African sides of the borderland.

In chapter three I examine changes in the borderland milieu as a result of the Mozambican war between 1975 and 1992. The chapter provides a macro context of the Mozambican war and the international relations between South Africa and Mozambique during this period. I argue that a macro-analysis of the war suggests that in the aftermath of Mozambican independence the borderland changed from a typical integrated borderland to an alienated borderland. This had a dramatic effect on social relations across the border as it hampered contact between people on opposite sides of the divide. The chapter illustrates the effect relations between the centres of power in neighbouring states have, on people who live at the territorial periphery of the modern nation-state.



In chapter four I consider the micro-context of the Mozambican war. Life histories of people who lived in the borderlandscape during the war are analysed to present a history of the borderland between 1975 and 1994. The cases studies illustrate how Mozambicans utilised old ties of kinship to gain refuge across the border into South Africa. It also depicts the misery and tragedy of the war and the effect it had on the wider borderlandscape. The micro analysis illustrates the vibrancy of the borderlandscape in the fact that cross-border contact continued despite the alienated environment created by the war.

In the fifth chapter I discuss the return and non-return of Mozambican refugees in the aftermath of the war. I argue that refugees do not necessarily wish to return home after a period of exile and the establishment of peace. I show how the majority of refugees in KwaZulu-Natal stayed behind after 1992 and only started to return home once economic development in Mozambique enticed them there.

In chapter six I analyse current patterns of border crossings. The end of the Mozambican war in 1992 and the abolishment of Apartheid in 1994 inaugurated a new era in foreign relations between South Africa and Mozambique. These countries were no longer opponents, but became partners in regional development. In 1994 an official border post was opened along the southern border and the movement of people across the border became officially regulated. Despite the fact that some refugees moved back to southern Mozambique, they kept alive the ties with South Africans with whom they had stayed during the war. This trend contributed to the breakdown of social boundaries. People increasingly organised themselves along ethnic and cultural ties rather than loyalty to the nation-state. The end of the war also saw the influx of hundreds of displaced soldiers and other civilians into Southern Mozambique with no ancestral ties to the land or its people. As tourism development

increases in the borderland, so too does the influx of refugees from northern and central Mozambique and from countries further to the north, such as Tanzania. This creates a new identity and culture on the northern side of the border, breaking with the old unity that existed before the war, which tied the people north of the border ethnically and historically to the people south of the border. Current patterns of border crossings thus contribute to the making and the breaking of social boundaries along the international border.

In chapter seven I focus specifically on the movement of goods across the international border. I argue that cross-border trade enables and fosters social interaction between South Africa and Mozambique. In order to tap the economic advantages offered by the existence of the border, people have to engage in trans-national social contact. This is globalisation on a small scale: economic interdependence creates cultural exchange across state borders. An interesting phenomenon in this regard is the establishment and growth of markets along the southern Mozambique/ South Africa border. The border-markets do not only serve as places where people trade across the border, but also places where relatives and friends from opposite sides of the border can meet and cross the border legally under the supervision of the police and defence force.

The eighth chapter of this thesis deals with the union between people, land and ancestral spirits. I briefly revisit the period between 1975 and 1992 when the Mozambican war caused the displacement of refugees south of the border. I consider how this physical displacement disturbed the relationship between people, their ancestors and their land and how this was exacerbated by the impermeable nature of the international border. I try to illustrate how the international border created disunity, not only between the living members of society, but also between the living

and the dead. In this context, alien (*ndau*) spirit-possession was used to demonstrate a shared kinship between people north and south of the border.

In the penultimate chapter I investigate ethnicity along and across the international border. This chapter could almost act as a conclusion to the study, since I illustrate what the effect of the factors discussed throughout the thesis have been on peoples' views of their own identity and on the identity of others across the border. I seek to illustrate the effect that colonialism, socialist modernisation, the Mozambican war and South African Apartheid has had on peoples' ethnicity. I argue that in the liminal borderland, where life is constantly in a state of transition, ethnicity itself is fluid and contextual. Ethnicity is constantly manipulated as people move from one side of the border to the other.

In the concluding chapter to this thesis I summarise the events and processes that have led to the creation and destruction of social boundaries along the imposed colonial border. I show that these processes are still at work and that their affects can still be seen. The imposed political border has not become a social boundary separating Mozambicans from South Africans or Shangaans from Zulus, neither has it remained without cultural meaning as some people do in fact typify the border as an ethnic, social and cultural divide. The border symbolises both social division and the lack thereof. In the frontier-zone, stretching away and across from the border, people share, to a greater and lesser extent, a sense of identity, community and culture that is both similar and different from that found on either sides of the divide.