

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**REFUGEES WHO STAYED BEHIND AND REFUGEES WHO**  
**WENT BACK:**  
**RECONSTRUCTING THE BORDERLANDSCAPE AFTER THE**  
**WAR**

Real return to the life they left may not be feasible or even desirable. Instead, they [returnees] may see the experience of repatriation as an opportunity to position their social, cultural and economic selves in such a way as to effectively exploit the possibilities afforded in a new era.

Hammond (1999:235)

The international borders of northeast Africa were established through the nineteenth-century partitioning of Africa by the colonial powers and bear hardly any relation to the subsistence activities, migratory movements of trade, exchange and support networks of the local people. In these circumstances, deciding where (in which country) a person 'belongs' can be an arbitrary and (for the person him- or herself) meaningless exercise.

Allen and Turton (1996:6)

Since the signing of the 1992 Rome Treaty, which effectively brought an end to the Mozambican war, many of the estimated 1.7 million refugees gradually started to return to their home country. Under a United Nations repatriation programme, refugees were returned to Mozambique and assisted in re-settling in the country. The assistance to displaced people and soldiers who decided to enrol in civilian life included food, implements and money. The United Nations transported people carrying extraordinary things, such as disassembled huts, in trains from gathering points and refugee camps in

South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania to Mozambique (Wurst 1994).

Apart from these official and organised repatriations thousands of people spontaneously returned to Mozambique. All the people who had settled in northern KwaZulu-Natal, who returned to Mozambique, belong to this group, since there were no refugee camps in the area and thus no official government or UN sponsored programmes to repatriate people from this area to Mozambique. The lack of support for people from this area to return to Mozambique greatly hindered the repatriation process. Furthermore, Southern Mozambique was polluted with landmines, many of which were only removed by ONUMOZ (*Operação das Nações Unidas para Moçambique*) in 2000.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I analyse the stories of refugees in the wake of the Mozambican war. The ethnography presented here supports the assertion of Rodgers (2002), Malkki (1995) and Hammond (1999) that refugees may not always want to return home after conflict. While they were absent, the concept of ‘home’ changed from a familiar place to ‘a new and challenging environment’ (Koser & Black 1999:11). Displaced persons do not necessarily seek emplacement in the environment they were removed from. New ties of belonging are created in time of exile as people position themselves in ‘alien’ environments. With time the ‘alien’ environment becomes the ‘familiar’ and longing to

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<sup>1</sup> Minefields have been located in all provinces of Mozambique, but the most heavily mined regions are found in the Manica, Zambezia, Tete, Inhambane and Maputo provinces. Few maps and records were kept of the mines laid during the war. Many of the mines were laid around bridges and culverts, to protect bridges from being attacked and people from blowing them up. Since the war, many of these have simply been demarcated as mined areas. The National De-mining Institute has recorded a nationwide total of 1,759 mined areas. The Mozambique Land Mine Impact Survey (2000) confirmed that the distribution of landmines and unexploded ordnances in the country is large, geographically diffuse and random. The survey measured in very basic terms the socio-economic ‘blockages’ presented by this irregular pattern of contamination and calculated that 1.7 million people are directly affected by the existence of landmines (ICBL 2000).

return diminishes. This is especially the case where the economic and other benefits of staying outweigh those of repatriation (Malkki 1995:155).

My discussion of the lives of Mozambican refugees in northern KwaZulu-Natal shows that post-war repatriation has been a slow process that is directly linked to the economic development of southern Mozambique. Mozambicans who had settled in KwaZulu-Natal had, as informants say, also ‘made a life for themselves’, after having built new homesteads, clearing new fields for cultivation and acquiring livestock in South Africa. Many of them had married men or women from South Africa and have had children who have grown up being South African. These people had more in common, socially and culturally, with people south of the international border, than with people north of the international border after the war.

I present two case-studies of Mozambicans who have adopted bi-national citizenship in the post-war era. While, according to informants, most refugees stayed in South Africa after the war, some adopted a bi-national survival strategy, constantly moving from one country into the other.

### **Reason to return: the economic pull of Matutuine**

Most Mozambican refugees who returned to the Matutuine district in Mozambique after living in northern KwaZulu-Natal were enticed there by economic prospects. The argument of an economic ‘pull-factor’ is boosted by the fact that there are two main places on the Mozambican side of the borderland where people from South Africa have returned to after 1994: the Rio Maputo (Maputo River) floodplain and the coastal area

(see Map 3). These are the two most fertile areas in the region and the most abundant sources of renewable natural resources. Due to the abundant natural resources in the coastal and floodplain zones, these areas have traditionally been more densely populated than other ecological zones (see Felgate 1982:1-8 and Appendices A, B and C). Refugees could thus return to these areas because they were able to make a living there from subsistence agriculture and fishing.

The remaining area in Matutuine, between the floodplain zone and the coastal zone, is divided into the sandforest zone and the Muzi/ Futi palmveld zone (Tinley and Van Riet 1981). In the sandforest zone there is a lack of arable land and water and local people living in the area have adapted other strategies of survival such as collecting wild fruits and hunting. The Muzi/ Futi palmveld zone is dominated by swampy areas where local people have traditionally only settled for short periods to tap palm wine (Mountain 1990:47-78). It thus makes sense that people who returned to Mozambique after the end of the war chose to settle in along the Rio Maputo and in the coastal areas.

The responses of informants further substantiate the economic pull-factor argument. Most people interviewed at Ponta Malongane, Ponta Mamoli and Ponta do Ouro, areas along the Indian Ocean (see Map 3), said that they returned to Mozambique after the war to reclaim their land or to find employment. Whereas elders were more interested in land, younger people have mainly sought work. Despite viewing themselves as Mozambicans, many of them have kept their homes in South Africa and also their South African citizenship papers.

Returning to Mozambique to find work is especially common amongst eighteen to thirty year-old men. They did not go back directly after the war, but only started trickling

back from the late 1990s. This coincided with the development of the tourism industry in Ponta do Ouro (Point of Gold). Before 1975 Ponta do Ouro, with its wide open beaches and diving and fishing spots<sup>2</sup> used to be a playground for Portuguese and South African tourists. During the war the area was extensively mined by FRELIMO in a bid to halt RENAMO infiltration. As the war ended, the landmines were taken out and tourist operators flocked back to the area (McGregor 1997:4-7). At first it was small-scale operators, who sought to obtain concessions in the area from politicians in Maputo. Then, in November 1996, James Blanchard, an American businessman was granted a concession for the entire area from the Maputo Elephant Reserve to the South African border. Amongst other things, Blanchard planned to build hotels, golf courses, a marina and a railroad to improve access in the area (Koch 1997). His promise of employment attracted many newcomers to the area. People came from as far north as Quelimane, Nampula and Inhambane, but a large group also came from KwaZulu-Natal. Some of them came with their families, although the majority came alone. In 1999 Blanchard died and with him his promises for employment. But, the gap was soon filled by South African entrepreneurs.

During evenings at Ponta do Ouro and Ponta Malongane some entrepreneurs boasted openly to me about the shady deals they entered with politicians in Maputo to obtain concessions. However, these deals have undermined development in the area. Some concession areas have been granted to more than one concessionaire. There are also disputes between concessionaires and local people about land rights. This problem was evident at Ponta Malongane. The concessionaire, one Gustavo, soon came into

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<sup>2</sup> Between 1960 and 1975 European settlement in Ponta do Ouro increased dramatically as the town became a popular tourist destination (INR 1995:80).

conflict with the local chief about the influx of people into the area. Gustavo headed a multi-million rand development in Ponta Malongane and at Ponta Mamoli with plans to re-stock the area with wild animals and also to provide luxury accommodation and horse-riding adventures along the beach. When Gustavo was granted the concession, there were next to no people living at Ponta Malongane. Shortly after he started his camping eco-adventure operations, hundreds of people moved into the area to look for work, thus undermining the exclusivity and remoteness of his establishment. Whilst Gustavo wanted them out, local people claimed the right to settle anywhere they wish.

Figure 6: Photograph taken from dilapidated building of new developments at Ponta do Ouro, 2003



Photograph by Wayne Matthews

People, predominantly young men, who returned to Mozambique on their own, settled on the dunes at Ponta Malongane, and in and around the village of Ponta do Ouro. By 2000 these settlements started to resemble the informal settlements of Johannesburg and Maputo, with people living close to each other without electricity, running water or waste removal. Although the predominantly white, South African owned tourist neighbourhood reflects wealth and luxury, the back streets of Ponta do Ouro, where the newcomers have settled, looks like a shanty-town (see Figure 8).

The *lingua franca* of the area is a mixture of Portuguese and English. Since the ability to speak English can assure one employment, men who gather at drinking houses and bars in the evenings would force themselves to speak to each other in English. They learnt words and phrases from tourists, fishermen and dive-operators who visit or settle in the area. As a result I could conduct most interviews in Ponta do Ouro in English.

The economic pull for Mozambicans to return to their home country is thus directly related to the development of the coastal tourism industry. Informants with relatives in South Africa have made it clear that their relatives too will return as soon as more employment opportunities become available. One can thus expect that, if the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative were to be successful in Mozambique, more refugees who presently live in KwaZulu-Natal would return to their country of origin.

Whereas the majority of Mozambicans who have returned to the undeveloped 'rural' areas of the borderland still claim relation to the people across the border in South Africa, the newcomers to the tourist area do not. They view the international border only as a cumbersome, but nonetheless surmountable obstacle to free movement and economic enterprise.

Tourism development in Ponta do Ouro and its surroundings have not only seen an influx of Mozambicans from KwaZulu-Natal to their former homes, but also an influx into the area from people from other areas in Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Many of the latter immigrants had also been displaced by the Mozambican war. Consequently, many permanent residents of Ponta do Ouro, Ponta Malongane and Ponta Mamoli are no longer the descendants of the Tembe-Thonga, but foreigners. As McGregor (1997) states, many of the people living in the Mozambican borderland do not have historical claims to the land. 'Some arrived during the war and stayed on; others were invited into the country by RENAMO after the peace agreement; still others immigrated to the area to hunt, fish, or exploit timber or palm wine' (p.5,10).

Displacement is thus one of the major forces that stimulate difference between opposite sides of the border. Displacement has completely changed the ethnic landscape on the northern side of the border. A large part of the area's inhabitants no longer call themselves Thonga or Tembe, but refer to themselves by various other ethnic labels.

Newcomers to the Mozambican borderland have no ancestral claims to the area and are not of the same ethnic group as the people across the border. Yet even though it is easier for them to distinguish themselves as Mozambican as opposed to the South Africans across the border, they too have developed 'transnational social relations' across the border (see Rodgers 2002:4, 8). As Martinez (1994) indicates of an *interdependent* borderland such as this one, economic interdependence 'creates many opportunities for borderlanders to establish social relationships across the boundary as well...' (p.5).

Like tourism, arable land along the floodplain and the fish in the rivers and pans of the area are pull factors into the Rio Maputo area. Historically, the Rio Maputo/



Pongola floodplain was the most densely populated area in Maputaland. The river used to flood naturally. In between these floods people used to plant their crops in the alluvial soil deposits on the riverbanks. However, in 1977 the construction of the Jozini (Pongolapoort) dam by South Africa and controlled flooding has interrupted this natural process. As Derman and Poultney (1987:561) show, the dam meets the needs of cotton farmers on the Makhatini flats rather than those of local people.

However, due to the fertility of the soil in the floodplains and the availability of water people still prefer to settle there. Many returnees have settled in the village of Catuane, west of the Rio Maputo (see Map 2). Like Zitundo this area served as a safe house from attacks by RENAMO soldiers and bandits during the war, but was subsequently deserted by government forces. There are a few small villages around Catuane, most of them situated along the Rio Maputo. Whereas people east of the Rio Maputo have various connections to KwaZulu-Natal, those west of the river have stronger ties to Swaziland.<sup>3</sup> Most people who settled east of the Rio Maputo after the war come from Swaziland. SiSwati is widely spoken in the area and most children attend school in Swaziland. Local residents also cross the Lubombo Mountains to go to shops, clinics and hospitals in Swaziland.

Most Mozambicans who came from KwaZulu-Natal resettled east of the Rio Maputo. They chose to do so because these areas were better watered and therefore more suited to growing crops than areas in KwaZulu-Natal. There were also ample amounts of fish in the pans and rivers and small antelope in the forests. McGregor (1997:16) confirms this. Most people around Shobane are involved in fishing in the Rio Maputo

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<sup>3</sup> The reason being that the Usuthu River forms a natural boundary that separates the areas and peoples in Mozambique from areas in South Africa, although the Mathenjwa clan has in the past settled on both sides of the river (Van Wyk 1983:60).

and the pans surrounding it. Some of the fish is used for subsistence purposes, but the largest part is sold at markets in South Africa.

The area east of the Rio Maputo in Mozambique is sparsely populated, in comparison to the South African side of the border. Although some people have gone back to settle permanently in order to use the natural resources in Mozambique, most prefer to stay in South Africa and visit Mozambique temporarily to cultivate fields there, fish, hunt wild animals or to collect water. People prefer to live in KwaZulu-Natal because of the better infrastructure, schools, shops and clinics.

### **Case studies**

The two case studies presented here offer a glimpse into the lives of Mozambican refugees in Matutuine shortly after the war. In both cases the refugees adopted dual-citizenship. In these cases, both Lucas and Luis returned to Mozambique after the war. However, neither of them settled there permanently or gave up their lives in South Africa. This is the case with most repatriated refugees I've met in Matutuine. Although people returned to Mozambique for economic or, as in the case of Lucas, for political gain, they kept the door to South Africa wide open.

#### *Case 5.1. Lucas Michangula returns to Mozambique*

Lucas Michangula, who was introduced in the previous chapter, returned to Mozambique shortly after the war to settle political business that remained unresolved during the war.

Lucas was a member of FRELIMO and, due to his relation to the chiefly family in Zitundo, was made secretary of the area in the 1980s. However, when his involvement in a financial scandal came to light, he was summoned to Maputo. Fearing for his life, Lucas fled to Mahlungulo in South Africa. Once there he switched alliances and joined RENAMO, who had a base at Mahlungulo.

When the war ended, Lucas returned to Zitundo and laid claim to the chieftaincy, although he was not legally entitled to it. In Lucas's absence, his mother's brother (*malume*), who was the chief of Zitundo, died. Since his uncle's son was still too young, Lucas' mother (who was the most senior living member of the ruling family) appointed her cousin as regent. The regent however abused his power and did not pay homage to Lucas' mother and other members of his family.

Using a connection he had made with members of the Mabudu-Tembe royal family (who traditionally ruled the entire area), during his stay in South Africa, Lucas demanded that the regent step down. The regent protested, claiming that he was the real and rightful chief of Zitundo. Lucas called on his connections. At a mass meeting at Zitundo four *abaMntwana*, or, as they called themselves, 'Kings of Thongaland', instated Chavier Tembe, Lucas' mother's brother's son as the chief of Zitundo. Lucas maintains his homestead and family in Mahlungulo in South Africa, although he spends much of his time in Zitundo where he has also married.

The intervention by the 'Kings of Thongaland' in the settlement of a succession dispute in the Mozambican part of the old Thonga or Tembe-Thonga kingdom is significant and emphasises similarities in the borderland despite the territorial divide. Rumours are rife that the Mabudu-Tembe royal family tried to re-enforce their authority

over the former territory. There are constant meetings between chiefs in Mozambique acknowledging the Mabudu royal family and representatives of the Mabudu royal council. It is no secret that chiefs, alienated by FRELIMO, were amongst the people who fled Mozambique during the civil war to settle in South Africa. These people were welcomed by the Mabudu royal family. Local people treated them as any other members of the royal family and respectfully addressed them as leaders. Now, after the war has ended, these people are using their connections to the royal family in South Africa to return them to chieftaincy in Mozambique. The Mabudu royal family is currently working to re-establish the authority of the old Tembe chief at Bela Vista, who has been living in Manguzi since 1975, through the appointment of a relative of his to the chieftaincy. According to 'Prince' Teka Tembe, people as far north as Catembe know him and his family as the kings and want to be under the rule of the Mabudu-Tembe once again. There is thus a large group of people in the borderland who highlight the unity that historically existed across the border and who play down ethnic and cultural differences that have developed since the creation of the border in 1875.

Although Lucas returned to Mozambique to settle unresolved political issues he did not settle there permanently. He still has a house in South Africa and regularly moves to and from Mozambique.

*Case 5.2: Luis Mandade's return to Mozambique*

One of the people in Ponta do Ouro I came to know very well is Luis Mandade. Luis is typical of the young men who had left KwaZulu-Natal and settled in Mozambique after

the war. However, although his main reason for returning to Mozambique was to look for a job, he also left KwaZulu-Natal to escape angry ‘in-laws’.

Luis left Mozambique with his mother and father in 1985. They settled in Manguzi where Luis went to school until he was in Grade 7. Life in South Africa was unpleasant. The police regularly harassed his family and his mother was deported as an illegal immigrant on three occasions. In those days, Luis remembers, if the police caught you, they would take you all the way to Ressano Garcia (Komatie Poort), since there was no border post along the KwaZulu border with Mozambique. Once released, you had to walk all the way down from Maputo to Manguzi, and risk your life by crossing the border again.

Luis’ parents returned to Mozambique in 1996. His father had set up a small business (*baracas*) in Ponta do Ouro that sold bread, tinned fish, cooking oil and beer to the local people. Luis stayed in Manguzi where he tried to continue his schooling. He had his own little house in Manguzi close to the school. Twice a month he would visit his mother in Mozambique to get food and money. Then his girlfriend in Manguzi, Zodwa Nyembeni, became pregnant. Zodwa’s father did not allow her to marry Luis and demanded one cow as payment for reducing the amount of bride wealth (*lobola*) his daughter would one day get from a suitable man. Shortly afterwards, Luis and Zodwa crossed the border and went to Ponta do Ouro. Luis found work first at the dive-camp at *Campo Paradisimo* and later at the Marine Hotel. In holiday seasons jobs are easy to get. Luis has done everything from washing dishes to cleaning diving gear to guarding tourists’ tents from monkeys. Then, when there are no tourists coming Luis does ‘piece-jobs’ or any other thing that can keep him busy and earn him some money. Luis still has

friends and kin in South Africa whom he regularly visits. Using her South African citizenship, Zodwa also crosses the border to collect a child-welfare grant once a month.

## **Conclusion**

According to people I interviewed in the borderland, only a very small minority of Mozambican refugees who settled in KwaZulu-Natal during the war returned to Mozambique after the war. As the two case studies presented above illustrate, even those that went maintained strong ties and even homes in South Africa as the gains of dual citizenship far outweigh those of singular Mozambican citizenship. Refugee studies and repatriation agencies assume, as Rodgers (2002) shows, far too often that the main aim of refugees in a post-war context is return to their 'home' country. Mozambicans who live in northern KwaZulu-Natal benefit from a state social and welfare support programme that is far superior to that which is available in Mozambique. Furthermore, they share more socially and culturally with people in northern KwaZulu-Natal than with the new inhabitants of Matutue who represent a wide range of different cultural groups and ethnicities. As the quotation by Allen and Turton (1996:6) at the beginning of this chapter indicates, it would be an arbitrary and meaningless exercise to determine in which country these 'Mozambicans' belong. They share a life-world with the South Africans amongst whom they have come to life. For many of these people Mozambique has become a foreign country and South Africa has become home.

With the picture of the borderlandscape now drawn, I discuss in the following chapters the manner in which inhabitants of the borderland engage one another. In the

next chapter I look specifically at patterns of border crossings in the post-war, post-Apartheid era. I show that new social ties are created and old ones are revoked as people engage one another in the bi-national environment of the borderland.