

Figure 22: Drying out fish, Mozambican borderland, 2003



Photograph by Wayne Matthews

## CHAPTER NINE

### BORDERLAND IDENTITIES: CITIZENSHIP AND ETHNICITY

#### AT THE INTERNATIONAL FRONTIER

If 'identity is always mobile and processual' (Malkki 1992:37), identity itself should hardly remain the ultimate subject of analysis. After the dangers of essentialising identities as primordial affiliations have been acknowledged, the studies of refugees and borderlands face the converse danger of exaggerating fluidity. People are often attracted by particular identities, and their capacity to change identities is a function of power relations (Ortner 1998)

Englund (2002:24)

... border studies can help to reveal the relative strength of national and ethnic identities, the gap between which may become particularly visible where closed borders reopen and vice versa.

Wilson and Donnan (1998:16)

In a well-known essay, Webster's (1991) contends that amongst the Tembe-Thonga communities living along the northern KwaZulu-Natal border, ethnic identity is structured along gender lines. Webster (1991) argues that in the social and economic realm it is profitable for men to take a Zulu identity and for women to emphasise a Thonga identity. Emphasising a Zulu identity guarantees work for men when they migrate to the cities of industrial South Africa, because white employers typify Zulu men as strong and hard workers. In the rural domestic sphere, however, he observes, women emphasise a Thonga identity, which provides them with social freedoms unknown to Zulu women.

Ngubane (1992) has already questioned Webster's (1991) claim that Thonga women enjoy more freedom in the domestic sphere than Zulu women. In this chapter, I wish to disagree with Webster's (1991) theory on another ground. Ethnicity in the

'border communities' cannot be analysed in the absence of the role that the international border plays in identity formation. Borderland identities, like other identities, are not only shaped by single factors, such as race, religion and gender. In the borderlandscape the international border fosters new identities, multiple-identities, shaped and determined by the context and side of the border people find themselves on. Taking on a Tembe-Thonga identity north of the border means something completely different from taking on a Tembe-Thonga identity south of the border. In the north Tembe-Thonga is associated with an older ethnic meaning, i.e. something that is not Zulu (Nguni). South of the border people generally view Tembe as a sub-identity of the Zulu, in the same way Mthembu and Ngubane are viewed as sub-identities within a larger Zulu identity.

Certainly, this does not always hold true due to the fluid nature of ethnicity and identity. South of the border, the Tembe-Thonga royal family and those with close ties to them deny any connection between Tembe and Zulu. They emphasise the cross-border social and kin ties of all Tembe-Thonga and the longing for a new state, free from Zulu domination. By contrast, the members of other southern Tembe-Thonga families, both men and women, highlight a Zulu identity, and an unwillingness to follow the Tembe-Thonga royal family in pursuit of an order separate from the Zulu. These people emphasise the differences between themselves and those across the border.

As stated above, one cannot explain ethnicity in the borderland by single factors (gender, 'tribal alliance', migrant labour etc.). Ethnicity, already a fluid and situational concept (Cohen 2000:1-6; Zegeye 2001:1), becomes even more fluid and contextual in borderlandscapes. In a liminal milieu that is constantly in a state of fluctuation, people are often able to shape and reshape identities to their own benefit

(Anzaldua 1999:23). People manipulate their identities as they move from one side of the border to the other. Barth's (1969; 1994) argument that ethnic groups are seldom homogenous social groups with distinct bounded cultures and that ethnic boundaries are situationally invoked in different contexts becomes clear below.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part investigates historical sources to determine what ethnicity and identity in the area was before the international border was instituted in 1875. The second part looks at the differing histories of the two sides of the borderland since 1875 and the forces that were at work which established cultural, ethnic and social differences on opposite sides of the border. I focus particularly on British and Portuguese colonial administration, Zulu influence south of the border, and on the effects of war and displacement on ethnicity and identity north of the border. Since most of the historical facts of the first two parts of this chapter have already been discussed in the previous chapters, the discussion here is brief and focussed primarily on ethnicity and identity before 1994. The third part of this chapter examines ethnicity and identity in the borderland at present. Based on interviews I conducted over four years in the area, I hope to illustrate how people identify themselves and others at present, and the role the international border plays in shaping identities in the borderland.

### **Ethnicity and identity before the border (-1875)**

Through time the people who live in the current borderland have been referred to as Tembe, Tonga, Thonga, Tsonga, Ronga, Maputa, Mabudu and Pongo. All these terms have been questioned. Tsonga is also the name of the language spoken by the Gaza and Hlengwe people further north; Ronga, as a term denoting an ethnic group,

has fallen into disuse; Maputa is sometimes remembered as the previous name of Manguzi; while Pongo is a term that was used mainly by sugar farmers for migrant labour residing beyond the Pongola River.

At the turn of the previous century, the famous ethnographer, Henri-Alexandre Junod (1962:13-16) described the historical inhabitants of the present borderland as belonging to the Tsonga tribe. Junod distinguished six groups of Tsonga clans living south of the Sabi River in south-eastern Africa (see Map 1). He called the group living in the areas surrounding Maputo Bay the Ronga. Junod (1962:13-16) identified two sub-divisions of Tembe within the Ronga group, namely Matutwen and Maputu. Thus, according to Junod's interpretation, the international border that was drawn in 1875 divided the Maputa-Tembe clan, of the Ronga sub-group of the Tsonga tribe.

Junod, like other anthropologists of his time (see Hamilton & Wright 1989:50-57), used the 'boundaries of ethnic classification to bring a neat, Cartesian logic to our understanding of the peoples of southern Mozambique' (Harries 1994:1). Yet, as Felgate (1982:9) and Harries (1994:3) indicate, there never existed a bounded group or 'tribe' called the Tsonga or the Thonga. Thonga was a term used by the Gaza and the Zulu to distinguish themselves from surrounding people who did not adopt their customs. Harries (1994:3) cites St. Vincent Erskine arguing that terms like Thongas, Amathonga and BuThonga 'are not tribal appellations and one might as well try to define the limits of the 'Kafirs'. Tonga simply means something [someone] which is not Zulu'.

Furthermore, since the Gaza and Zulu used the term Thonga to distinguish them from their neighbours, it became synonymous with inferiority (Felgate 1982:9). Local people therefore rejected this appellation. Instead of identifying themselves with large 'national' units like Thonga or Ronga, people formed their identities on a

smaller-scale, identifying themselves with specific chiefs and chiefdoms. In other words, a person would identify him or herself as being ‘from the land’ of a particular clan or chiefdom (Harries 1994:5). Information lodged in the Stuart Archives shows that people coming from the present-day borderland identified themselves as *abakwa*Mabudu, or ‘people from the place of Mabudu,’ the ancestor of the ruling Mabudu-Tembe lineage (Webb & Wright 1979:157). The Mabudu chiefdom was structurally, like the later Zulu state, a new type of organisation, which ultimately gave birth to a new ethnicity (see Kopytoff 1999:31). A common, shared identity thus emerged with the rise and consolidation of the Mabudu-Tembe chiefdom.

Since the early nineteenth century the strong Zulu cultural and social influence in the area had a direct impact upon identity and ethnicity, and brought about greater diversity in the Mabudu chiefdom. During the reign of Shaka (1816-1828), various individuals and groups passed through or settled in Maputaland, and introduced new languages and cultural practises to the area. Such assimilation compounded to greater ethnic diversity amongst the Mabudu (Bryant 1964:292).

As more and more people from the southern chiefdoms crossed into Maputaland, greater prestige was attached to the Zulu language, since the Zulu were politically dominant in south-east Africa. Felgate (1982) writes,

during the reign of Shaka there was, then, a steady increase in Zulu influence in Mozambique. The Zulu were the prestige nation and Zulu became the prestige language. The men had been trading with the Nguni for a long time prior to Shaka’s rise to power and when they found Zulus in their midst they had perforce to learn the language. The women, on the other hand, particularly in the southern regions, did not have the same need to speak Zulu and Junod records the fact that the women did not speak Zulu (p.11).

As the Mabudu occupied new territories, they encountered autochthonous groups, such as the Ngubane and Khumalo, who spoke Zulu and rejected Mabudu domination (Felgate 1982:11).

Trade at Delagoa Bay and migrant labour also had a tremendous effect on the manner in which people identified themselves. Felgate (1982:11) states that with the advent of trade at Delagoa Bay (around 1650) and greater contact between the people of the hinterland, Mabudu men started to identify themselves as Zulu. This gendered experience of ethnicity was further developed by men's experiences during migrant labour. In the industrial areas where they looked for work, men found it advantageous to describe themselves as Zulu to white employers who associated this ethnic group with images of power and strength.

However, despite the growing influence of Zulu, the vast majority of Maputaland residents emphasised a unique Mabudu-Tembe ethnicity (Felgate 1982:11-17). Thus, the only conclusion that can be drawn about ethnic identity in the borderland before 1875 is that the majority of people identified themselves with the Mabudu chiefs and that there was unity in identity across the area where the border was drawn. Suffice it to say, the border dissected a political community with a largely shared ethnic identity.

### **Colonialism and its legacy (1875-1975)**

Asiwaju (1985:2-3) describes the drawing of boundaries in Africa as 'political surgery', since they cut across well-established lines of communication including, in every case, a dormant or active sense of community based on traditions concerning common ancestry, usually very strong kinship ties, shared socio-political institutions and economic resources, common customs and practises, and sometimes acceptance of common political control. He goes on to add that:

Apart from the division which arises routinely from the mere location of boundaries, partitioned groups were further pulled apart in consequence of the

opposing integrative processes set in motion by the different states. Such processes have tended to make the divided groups look different political, economic and social directions... Different symbols of formal status, above all citizenship, are imposed on the same people (Asiwaju 1985:1-3).

At first, the MacMahon line, which separated the Portuguese and British spheres of political control in southeast Africa, had little effect on the ability of the Mabudu chief to exercise power over the entire chiefdom. The difference between the British and Portuguese systems of colonial administration, however, soon had a significant effect on the unity of the Mabudu (Felgate 1982:18). In terms of the British system of 'indirect rule' indigenous authorities continued to exact control and colonial subjects were allowed to practice their own customs and ways of life, provided they paid homage to the British crown (Mamdani 1996:62-71). In contrast, the Portuguese administered their colonies as integral parts of the mainland (Hailey 1938:213-216). The Portuguese believed it was their God-given task to bring 'civilisation' to the peoples of Africa, by forcing them to adopt the Portuguese culture in favour of what was perceived as a 'backward' and uncivilised way of life (Smith & Nöthling 1993:288).

In terms of social identity people living on opposite sides of the international border thus underwent different experiences in the colonial era. While the British system of indirect rule fostered ethnic (tribal) consciousness (Vail 1989:12-13), the Portuguese system of colonial administration aimed to assimilate people north of the border in the Portuguese culture. Today, this is especially notable in the language of the borderland, where people north of the border mainly speak Portuguese (the language of the colonisers) and people south of the border mainly speak isiZulu and Thonga (indigenous languages). In this way colonialism disturbed the social and cultural unity that existed across the international border.



**The entrenchment of Zulu identity south of the border (1897-1994)**

After 1896 Britain administered the area south of the MacMahon line as British Amathongaland. AmaThongaland was subsequently divided into 'crown' and 'trust' lands. The crown lands were set aside for occupation by white farmers, while the rest of the area was put in trust for the 'Mabudu tribe' (Van Wyk 1983:62). In 1897 British Amathongaland was incorporated into the Ingwavuma district of Zululand (Harries 1983:26). Thirty-seven years later, Van Warmeloo, the government ethnologist, estimated that sixty-two per cent of the people of the Ingwavuma District, comprising half of British AmaThongaland, were under the administration of the Mabudu chiefs (Harries 1983:26). The rest were presumably of Zulu orientation (Webster 1991:248).

The Bantustan policies of Apartheid, since 1948, entrenched Zulu control over Thongaland. The area became increasingly integrated in the structures of Native and later Bantu administration. According to Webster (1986):

the loss of independence, the splitting of the Tembe-Thonga chiefdom, the ravages of proletarianization, and various colonial practises, all took their toll on the Thonga, and their coherence as a society began to crumble. Most of the men now speak Zulu as their preferential language, and have adapted Thonga clan names to resemble Zulu ones. Thonga cultural practises such as traditional economic pursuits, rituals, and material culture still persist, and many women in the area insist on speaking Tsonga, and teaching the children to do the same (1986:615).

In 1976 Thongaland became part of the self-governing Zulu Homeland of KwaZulu. In the Government census the inhabitants of the area were listed as Zulu rather than Thonga. Webster (1986:615-616) states that this fact 'need not confuse us, as the government's attempts at social engineering can change a person's ethnicity, race or nationality at the stroke of a pen.'

This was clearly illustrated in 1982 when the government, in a bid to denationalise a large portion of its citizens and at the same time create a buffer state with Mozambique, tried to cede the Ingwavuma district of KwaZulu to Swaziland (Van Wyk 1983:55; Omer-Cooper 1994:59-61, 269). The Ingwavuma Land Deal reopened the debate on ethnicity and identity in Thongaland. The South African government alleged that there were strong historical and ethnic links between the inhabitants of Ingwavuma and Swaziland. Academics such as Tomlinson *et al.* (1982) and Van Wyk (1983) lend credit to this theory. A government appointed commission headed by Tomlinson asserted that the true identity of the inhabitants of Ingwavuma living west of the Pongola River was Swazi' but that inhabitants east of the river belonged to the Tembe-Thonga kingdom, which was subservient neither to the Zulu nor Swazi (Tomlinson *et al.* 1982). Van Wyk (1983:60-62) made similar conclusions, but stated that the Tembe-Thonga would be much more willing to be under the authority of the Swazi, than under the Zulu.

In Ingwavuma news about the Land Deal led to a 'paroxysm of Zulu jingoism with mass, sometimes enforced, recruitment into Inkatha' (Webster 1991:248). Successful court action by the KwaZulu and KaNgwane Homeland governments effectively brought an end to the Land Deal (Omer-Cooper 1994:269). Threats by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the leader of Inkhata, also led to the failure of the Land Deal.

According to a local story, related to me by a member of the Tembe royal family, Piet Koornhof, the South African Minister of Cooperation and Development, visited chief Mzimba of the Mabudu and asked him if he is willing to be placed under Swazi rule. Mzimba was delighted with the idea and agreed. When asked whether he feared that the Swazis would suppress his people, Mzimba answered that no suppression could be greater than that which his people are experiencing from the

Zulu. Upon hearing of Mzimba's willingness to place his chiefdom under Swazi rule, State President P.W. Botha invited Mzimba to Pretoria to discuss the plans. However, before he left for Pretoria, Mangosuthu Buthelezi visited chief Mzimba. In Pretoria Mzimba was asked three times whether he was a Thonga or a Zulu. To the surprise of P.W. Botha and Piet Koornhof, Mzimba answered that he was a Zulu, although he hesitated a long time before he answered for the third time. Thereafter, in January 1985 chief Mzimba openly apologised to chief Buthelezi for having petitioned P.W. Botha for an independent Tonga homeland, evidently with the object of seceding from KwaZulu and being incorporated into Swaziland. Chief Mzimba asked for a representative from KwaZulu to accompany him to Pretoria to withdraw his petition, which, he admitted, had been drawn up with the help of officials from Swaziland who, he said, misled him (SAIRR 1985:286). Mzimba's actions in Pretoria angered members of the Mabudu royal family who wanted to cede from KwaZulu and nearly caused a rift. Only after he explained that his life was threatened, was Mzimba forgiven, although many members of the royal family resented him for what they perceived as cowardly behaviour.

However, in November Mzimba claimed that chief Buthelezi forced him to lie about being tricked by Swazi authorities and again petitioned the South African government to cede his chiefdom to Swaziland. This time his plea was ignored (SAIRR 1985:287). In a last attempt to free his people from what he called 'Zulu oppression', Mzimba started the Thongaland Independence Party to further his goal of a Free Thongaland, but did not attain any success. At chief Mzimba's funeral, Prince Gideon Zulu (another prominent Inkhata member) was overheard expressing his delight in the chief's death, saying that at last this 'succession business' can be laid to rest. Chief Buthelezi later blamed the deterioration of relations between late chief

Mzimba and himself on ‘manoeuvres of certain manipulators who came from within this country and also from without our borders.’ At a speech he delivered in Ingwavuma in 1992 Buthelezi made it clear that the people of KwaTembe were part of the Zulu nation and that he and his party had saved them from subordination to the Swazi king. In his speech Buthelezi stated:

Between the KwaZulu Government and Inkatha, tens of thousands of Rands were spend to save the people of this district from having this district excised and given on a platter to Swaziland. I therefore saved your birth-right and prevented the South African government from taking away your right as South Africans.

Where, I asked the South African government, would the thousands upon thousands of men in this district have been able to find work in Mbabane or Manzini? Where... would the medicine come from for Manguzi hospital? How... would the people of this district fare if they turned their back on their great ancestor, Ngwanase Tembe, and give his land away to the Swazi king? How... would the people of this district live if their ancestors folded their arms, turned their backs on their people, and looked the other way, while all manner of evil came in to destroy the people?

Stop and think about these things. Stop and think about the might of the Zulu nation of which you form part. Stop and think about the founder King of KwaZulu, Shaka Kasenzazakhona. Remember how even people, who were not conquered joined King Shaka to become part of the Zulu nation, because that is where they would find support and protection (Buthelezi 1992).

The question that needs to be answered is how all these events influenced ethnicity south of the border. Did the people of Ingwavuma accept their status as a subservient chiefdom within the Zulu Kingdom? Did they adopt a Zulu identity, or, did they continue to assert their Thonga identity?

The teaching of Zulu in local schools, use of Zulu as official language of government, and the issuing of Zulu identity documents strengthened the Zulu cultural influence in Maputaland. Felgate (1982:9) and Webster (1991:254) argue that men were most inclined to adopt a Zulu identity. This choice was influenced by men’s experiences of working on South African mines and farms. Felgate (1982:9) attributed this to the fact that men have closer contact with Zulu speakers in trade and migrant labour and, because of the higher status attributed to being Zulu in these

fields; men take on a Zulu identity. Similarly, Webster (1991:254) suggests that white employers held a stereotypical view of Zulus as ‘strong, masculine, militaristic and reliable, whereas most have never heard of the Thonga.’ For, Webster (1991:254), ‘migrant labour and Zulu identity have become necessary equivalents’.

In contrast to men who readily adopted a Zulu identity, Webster (1991:246) suggests that women identified themselves as Thonga. Webster (1991) asserts that people in northern KwaZulu-Natal who ‘present themselves in terms of different ethnic criteria send messages of social difference not for delimitation of ethnic boundaries, but to draw the battle lines in a struggle between the genders’ (p.246). According to Felgate (1982:9) and Webster (1991:246), women do not need to take over a Zulu identity since they have minimal contact with Zulu-speakers and do not migrate to the mines or farms where status is attributed to Zulu people.

Hence, we can conclude that in the period between 1875 and 1994, when the borderland was re-opened, people on the South African side of the borderland increasingly adopted a Zulu identity. My research, presented below, indicates that the ethnic boundary between Zulu and Thonga shifted northwards from the Mkhuzi River to the international border, as people came to see the international border as an ethnic boundary between Zulu and Thonga.

### **War, displacement and identity north of the border (1975-1992)**

At the same time as Zulu socio-political influences dominated south of the border, important changes in ethnicity and identity took place north of the border. The Portuguese colonial policies of cultural assimilation deliberately sought to erase

existing ethnic loyalties and to impose a new Portuguese identity amongst the inhabitants of Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique).

In 1975 FRELIMO took over with its own agenda of social engineering. FRELIMO viewed traditional ethnic identities as ‘obscurantisms’ that stood in the way of nationalism (Englund 2002:8). According to West (2001) FRELIMO aimed to dramatically transform Mozambican society and the operation of power within it. This required, the ‘liberation of constituent communities and their members- in short, the decolonisation of individual minds and the creation of what FRELIMO referred to as the new man’ (pp.191-121). Shortly after independence FRELIMO started to implement Marxist-Leninist principles in Mozambique. According to informants, all schools, clinics, legal practises, funeral parlours, all land, most privately owned businesses and other property were nationalised. FRELIMO also planned to do away with traditional chiefs, replacing them with Party Secretaries. The president of Mozambique, Samora Machel, triumphantly announced, ‘We killed the tribe to give birth to the nation.’ (Munslow 1987:160-161).

That which was left of ethnic identities after the social engineering projects of the Portuguese and FRELIMO came under attack during the Mozambican war, which commenced shortly after independence and lasted until the signing of the Rome Peace Accord in 1992. The war caused the large-scale displacement of people, turning thousands into refugees. Communities were uprooted and traditional ethnic boundaries confused. When the war ended, soldiers and ordinary people settled where they found themselves. As McGregor (1997:5, 10) states of the inhabitants of the border areas along the southern Mozambique/ South Africa border,

they do not have historical claims, being former migrant labourers and soldiers from elsewhere in the country and people invited back by RENAMO. These people were not ‘locals’, did not have historical claims to land, and were involved in disputes with returnees. Some arrived during the war and stayed on;

others were invited into the country by RENAMO after the peace agreement; still others in-migrated to the area to hunt, fish, or exploit timber or palm wine.

A large part of the 'new' inhabitants have recently moved into the Mozambican borderland from Maputo and areas further north. They were attracted to the area by the creation of many formal and informal employment opportunities by the tourist industry. Mozambicans who lived in South Africa during the war, as well as South Africans with no real ties to Mozambique, have also been attracted to the area by economic prospects. These people are mostly young men in their twenties, like Luis (see pp. 99-100). Many new migrants constantly move from South Africa to Mozambique as they are pulled by economic and social factors (see Case 9.1.).

Colonialism, the Marxist-Leninist policies of FRELIMO and displacement caused by the war had a dramatic effect on the ethnic landscape of Mozambique. The current inhabitants of the borderland in Mozambique are a mixture of ex-soldiers, people who stayed behind during the war, returnees, South African immigrants, work seekers from Maputo and elsewhere in Mozambique and travellers from other African countries making their way to South Africa. Although there are still people swearing allegiance to the Mabudu chiefs, inhabitants of the borderland are no longer the Mabudu people described by Bryant (1965) and Junod (1962).

War and displacement have created new identities on the northern side of the borderland in the same way that Zulu political dominance has shaped ethnicity on the southern side of the borderland. These new identities can be seen in the case study of Fernando Tembe below.

*Case 9.1: Fernando's changing identity*

During my stay at Campo Paradisimo at Ponta Malongane I employed a young man to look after my campsite during the day and to chase the monkeys away from my foodstuff. He was born in Mozambique, but grew up in South Africa. He speaks fluent Portuguese and Zulu, but not a word of Thonga. While in Mozambique he goes by the name of Fernando Tembe (a traditional Thonga identity), but in his South African Identity book his name is Jabulane Mthembu (a traditional Zulu identity).

Fernando is but one of many young men I met who change their names as they cross the border. On top of changing their names, they also hide other aspects of their identity that would give them away as belonging on the other side of the border. For instance, when I first met Fernando I tried to communicate with him in isiZulu. He acted as if he didn't understand a word, and it was only on my third stay at Campo Paradisimo that he started talking back to me in isiZulu. He later explained that in South Africa he never speaks Portuguese and introduces himself there as Jabulane Mthembu, a Zulu, South African man.

For borderlanders like Fernando the international border is almost a portal through which they move and when they come out on the other side they have changed identities. The fluid and liminal space of the borderland enables and, to some degree, forces these borderlanders to have multiple ethnic and national identities. They are forever moving from one identity to the other as the situation demands.



## **Ethnicity and identity after the opening of the border**

Cohen (2000:1-6) has argued that studying ethnicity is similar to studying literature: one learns about a character by what he says about himself and about what others say about him. To understand how, and if, the international border shapes identity in the borderland, I conducted interviews on both sides of the border, in areas close to and removed from the border. The interviews revolved around two themes: peoples' views of their own identity; and, peoples' views of the inhabitants on the other side of the international border.

**1. Views of own identity and ethnicity.** Since ethnicity is situational people might identify themselves in a particular way in conversation with a white anthropologist that may differ from how they might identify themselves in other situations.

Therefore, I acknowledge that the results presented in the following two tables cannot, on its own, be taken to show that people identify themselves as Thonga or Zulu. It illustrates merely the way people identified themselves to an outside researcher with the aim of understanding peoples' views of the border, themselves and of people across the border.

The results presented in the following two tables were obtained by asking people directly what ethnic group they belong to (*Ungowasiphi isiswe?*). Using a random sample I interviewed as many men as women on both sides of the border in Puza and KwaMshudu. The results presented here wrongly assume that people have single ethnic identities and do not indicate which identities are sub categories of which. At first I did not contemplate this prediction. Through open-ended interviews and participant observation it became clear to me that people had multiple identities

and that South Africans who identify themselves as Tembe do not necessarily deny a larger identification with the Zulu.

Table 10: Primary ethnic identity of people at KwaMshudu (South Africa), 2002

Ethnicity	Male	Female	Total
Thonga	37	33	70
Nyembane	1	0	1
Zulu	9	14	23
Shangaan	3	2	5
Swazi	0	1	1
Total	50	50	100

Table 11: Primary ethnic identity of people at Puza (Mozambique), 2002

Ethnicity	Male	Female	Total
Thonga	37	31	68
Nyembane	1	1	2
Mulato	1	0	1
Shangaan	2	11	13
Zulu	11	5	16
Total	50	50	100

The data contained in these tables does however demonstrate that Webster's (1991) argument is incorrect in asserting that men identify themselves as Zulu whilst women adopt a Thonga identity. Webster (1991) argues that women reject a Zulu identity, not just due to a lack of contact with Zulu-speakers, but as a deliberate defence mechanism in the gender conflict. Thonga women, according to Webster (1991), have had much more freedom than Zulu women. These traditional freedoms were: 'husbands could not maltreat wives... wives had the right to sexual gratification... they had the right to luxury items... they could dissolve a marriage'

(1991:259). Webster's argument is thus that a Thonga identity affords women many benefits in the domestic sphere.

Ngubane (1992:72-73) criticises Webster's argument on two grounds. First, she argues that t Zulu women are not more oppressed than Thonga women, and enjoy similar freedoms. Second, she attacks what she perceives as technical weaknesses in Webster's argument. She disputed his conclusion that there is no point in trying to unravel the mystery of true identity of the people of Maputaland 'as if these people were born with a given identity and ethnicity... (p. 70)'

In reading Webster's (1991) thesis and Ngubane's (1992) critique, it is important to bear in mind the different political philosophies and agendas of these authors. Webster was an anti-Apartheid activist affiliated with the United Democratic Front and the African National Congress. In his argument he was determined to illustrate that ethnicity was not primordial as advocated by the South African government. Ngubane, on the other hand, was a Zulu ethnic nationalist and an IFP member of parliament who wanted to illustrate the viability of a Zulu identity.

I nonetheless agree wholeheartedly with Ngubane's (1992:72) suggestion that most of 'these [Webster's] gyrations could have been avoided by simply saying that these people are in a typical border situation with consequently ambiguous ethnic identity...' Although Webster's (1991) article is sub-titled 'Ethnicity and Gender in a KwaZulu Border Community', he gives scant regard to the influence of the border on identity formation. Felgate (1982:165) already mentioned the multiple identities of the people of the borderland who life in Mozambique, but keep South African identities to secure work in South Africa. When moving into Mozambique these men would adopt the identities of kinsmen from the area, or would act like complete strangers with no ties to the area.

My research furthermore shows that ethnicity in the borderland is not organised along gender lines as Webster (1991) argues. The vast majority of people in the borderland identify themselves as Thonga. In fact, more men than women in South Africa and Mozambique identified themselves as Thonga. Only a very small minority identified themselves as Zulu. Yet, in other situations these same people interviewed might identify themselves as Zulu. Ethnicity in the borderland is not simply determined by gender, although that may in some instances (as when men are seeking work on the mines) play a role. It is important to keep in mind however that Thonga and Tembe in South Africa is oftentimes seen as a sub-Zulu identity, in a similar manner to Ngubane and Khumalo. Tembe and Thonga identities are seen by many as a smaller identity within a larger Zulu ethnicity.

Instead of seeing the people in the borderland as adopting a single identity based on gender, age or economic status, one should rather see the existence of multiple identities. As was illustrated above in the case of Fernando (Case 9.1.), people in the borderland continuously shape and reshape their identities as they move from one side of the border to the other. The same person can at any one time identify himself/ herself as Thonga, Shangaan, Zulu, Mozambican or South African. People use their access to multiple identities to extract the greatest amount of social and economic benefit for themselves. In certain situations it is beneficial to emphasise the link with people across the border, while in other situations it is beneficial to emphasise the differences with people across the border.

The fact that similar customs are practised on both sides of the border enables people to move more easily from one identity to the other. These ‘cultural markers’ do not signify identity for the people themselves. A person claiming to be Zulu practises traditional Thonga customs even if some of these are considered taboo

amongst the Zulu. Although it might seem trivial, fish is the most important source of protein in the borderland. Yet fish is considered an absolute taboo amongst the Zulu (Krige 1988:388; Harries 1994:40). People who eat fish in the borderland deny this taboo, claiming they are ‘true Zulus’, giving yet more weight to Barth’s argument that ethnicity is not determined by the ‘cultural stuff’ found inside ethnic boundaries, but in the boundary itself (1969:15). Webster (1991:250) has gone so far as to draw a list of ‘cultural markers’<sup>1</sup> that make the people of the borderland Thonga, although he does state that ‘producing a check-list of traits is not a satisfactory means of establishing identity.’

What is puzzling in the borderland, especially south of the divide, is that whilst some people use ‘Thonga’ customs as markers of ethnicity, others who practise the exact same customs deny any relationship between a particular custom and Thonga identity. In other words, people can participate fully in all the customs and rituals used, sometimes aggressively, to prove Thonga identity, despite claiming adamantly to be Zulu.

This is nowhere better illustrated than during the annual first-fruits festival. The festival, called *mtayi*, revolves around the ripening of the marula (*Sclerocarya birrea*) fruit in early February. The fruit is fermented to produce an intoxicating liquid called *buganu* south of the border and *bukanye* north of the border. According to Junod (1962:399), great importance was placed on brewing marula beer in the past, not only in this area, but amongst the larger area he described as being inhabited by the Tsonga. *Mtayi* differs markedly from the first-fruits festival traditionally practised

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<sup>1</sup> Webster (1991:250) lists the following as markers of Thonga culture in the borderland: ‘place names, and names of natural phenomena (trees, soil types, fish, animals, birds and rivers) are Thonga; homestead structure is distinctive with most huts in a line (not a circle) and facing east; the cattle byre is never in the homestead, but set outside its boundaries; fish forms an important part of the diet, and hunting and gathering are important food supplements; inter-cropping, swidden-agriculture and field rotation are practised, men and women often share agricultural work and people tenaciously adhere to the tradition of planting three or four maize seeds in one hole.’

by the Zulu (Krige 1988:249-260) and should not be confused. Felgate (1982:61) recorded in the 1960s that the marula festival, which he knew as *ukuluma*, was no longer honoured. It was therefore interesting to see the revitalisation of this ritual on both sides of the border (see Figure 23 and 24).

Figure 23: Women bringing marula beer to the festival, February 2000



Photograph by Callie Pretorius

On the southern side of the border *mtayi* is practised in some wards, but not in others. There is also a clan wide *mtayi* where all the local headmen gather at the royal kraal. After the ‘royal’ festival has taken place, the headmen initiate similar rituals in their own wards. The ritual is usually accompanied with the slaughter of chickens and goats and lasts for several days. In some of the poorer wards where I attended *mtayi*, marula beer was the only item on the menu. Those who can, bring beer to the house of the headman, others, like me, pay R5. Everybody, from the oldest women to

the young kids gets extremely intoxicated and, usually by around 4am the celebrations wind down.

Figure 24: Dancing at Mtayi festival, February 2000



Photograph by Callie Pretorius

The revitalisation of *mtayi* is relatively recent and only started after the death of the previous chief of the Mabudu in 1999. In my conversations with them people identifying themselves as Thonga often pointed to the *mtayi* festival as a marker of their identity. They said it is Thonga and shows that they are not Zulu. Yet, at the same time others, claiming they are Zulu, participate in the ritual, and play down any connection between *mtayi* and being Thonga. This is almost similar to Jewish people celebrating Christmas.

North of the border, in the village of Zitundo I found a similar revitalisation of *mtayi*, called *chikanye* in Mozambique. There, under the leadership of the local chief, who was instituted with the help of members of the Mabudu royal family, people have

started to practise this old custom once again. According to the chief, the ‘people of Tembe’ have always practised *chikanye*, even in the time of the Portuguese. During the war it was stopped. Now, after the war, it is the chief’s responsibility to see that people remember this ritual and their own identity. The link between *chikanye* in Zitundo and the Mabudu is clearly illustrated by the fact that the ritual is held at the gravesite of Makhaza, an old Tembe chief, who died in 1952. As with *mtayi* south of the border, *chikanye* is also a veneration of the ancestors. During *mtayi* beer is poured on the ground around the *ingandelo* (shrine for venerating the ancestors). At *chikanye* in Zitundo the praise names of the old Tembe chiefs are recited, illustrating the ethnic bonds between people on both sides of the border.

The revitalisation of *mtayi* and *chikanye*, orchestrated by the Mabudu royal family, is part of an attempt of the Mabudu royal family to re-institute their authority over the traditional chiefdom in Mozambique. It is also a sort of ethnic revival, people reclaiming their traditional customs and way of life. This interpretation is not mine, but that of the many people I interviewed in the borderland. Informants present the marula festival, together with such strange things as *fonya* (thrust-basket fishing), palm wine and the fish-kraals at Kosi Bay as evidence of their Thonga identity and allegiance to the royal family. Yet, at the same time, people claiming no allegiance to the Mabudu chiefs or Thonga identity participate in all these rituals. Many of these people assert that the Tembe clan forms part of a larger Zulu nation.

**2. Views of people on the opposite side of the border.** My research showed that both South Africans and Mozambicans saw a difference between themselves and people on the other side of the border. They primarily defined the differences in terms of language and their economic status. My respondents only referred to



ethnicity when specifically asked to define the ethnicity of those on the opposite side of the border.

Eighty-two per cent of my respondents at KwaMshudu (South Africa) and ninety-five per cent of respondents in Puza (Mozambique) believed that the border was a marker of social, physical or cultural differences.

Mozambicans would argue that South Africans differ from them because they 'use money.' South African respondents, on the other hand, would describe Mozambicans as 'subsistence farmers.' South African respondents will tell me: 'There are no cars, shops or proper houses in Mozambique', 'they [Mozambicans] have no clinics... they are poor... they don't have livestock... they wear second hand clothes.'

In general, Mozambicans are perceived as sexually less inhibited.<sup>2</sup> South African as well as Mozambican men described Mozambican women (or Shangaans, as they referred to them) as sexually liberated. Michael, my field-guide, who had fled from Mozambique in the 1980s and settled in Manguzi, told me that his wife in South Africa accused him of treating her like a whore when he asked for the same sexual favours he used to get from his previous Mozambican sexual partners. Other South African men complained to me that if you want to sleep with a Zulu wife you always have to do it in the dark. The man has to stay outside while the woman undresses and gets under the covers. Before he comes into the room the woman will blow out the candle and he has to stumble around in the dark before he can sleep with her. Men

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that, in contrast to this stereotype of Mozambican women, Rodgers (2002:151) found that Mozambican women living in refugee communities on the north-eastern border between South Africa and Mozambique actually portrayed South African women as sexually more promiscuous than themselves. Mozambicans further stereotyped South African women as lazy, money-hungry fans of television soap operas. In this situation Mozambicans are seen as more traditional and pure, whereas South Africans have adopted more Westernised lifestyles. On the southern border between Mozambique and South Africa in turn, Mozambican immigrants to South Africa are often perceived as more Western and decadent, whereas local South Africans are truer to the traditional (Zulu) ways of life.

also told me that Zulu women will never have sex while men face their backs, arguing that only dogs and monkeys have sex that way. Zulu women also saw oral sex as disgusting.

Shangaan women or 'girls from Maputo' are not only perceived as far more promiscuous, but as more loving than Zulu women. South African men explained to me that Shangaan girls will allow a man to hold her hand in public or to kiss her in front of people. With Zulu girls you always have to be secretive. 'You always have to sneak around like a criminal, even just to talk to her.' Wiseman Vilane, who has two wives in Mozambique and one wife in South Africa, explained to me that he married twice in Mozambique because Thonga women 'give better sex', whereas he married his South African wife only to have children.

On the other hand, I found a strong liking for Zulu women among Mozambican men. According to one informant, Raphael Gumende, 'women in Mozambique are all sluts'. Most of them have lost their virginity, either having been raped during the war or having had sex with soldiers for money. Although Raphael has children with two different Mozambican women, he would like to marry a Zulu wife because they are more pure.

Apart from differences in sexual behaviour, many South Africans also highlight physical differences between themselves and Mozambicans. South Africans are quick to point out that Mozambicans have vaccination marks on their forearms, whereas South Africans are vaccinated on their upper-arms. They also say that when South Africans walk they always lead with their right feet, whereas Mozambicans lead with their left feet. These differences are trivial and do not in any way imply a derogatory image of Mozambicans. The following descriptions of Mozambicans, given to me by South African informants, are however extremely derogatory, 'They

(Mozambicans) are not neat', 'They do not wash themselves', They are not beautiful, they are too dark (black)', 'We are much taller than them', and, 'They are ugly'.

South Africans also use custom, language and ethnicity as identity markers between themselves and Mozambicans. South Africans responded that 'They speak Thonga, we speak Zulu'<sup>3</sup>, 'They behave differently from us', 'We are Zulu, they are *Shangani* and *amaJapan*', 'They are of mixed races (*mulatto*), we are all African (black)', and 'The kids don't respect their elders.'

Religion is also used as a marker of identity. Mozambicans are revered as powerful diviners and healers. It is the place where the Ndau spirit comes from and where all the best healers have been trained. It is also a place with much stronger medicine than South Africa. 'Mozambique is a place of traditional religion; South Africa is a place of churches.' Informants are quick to point out that there are no churches or temples in Mozambique for worshipping God, 'They are witches, who use the thunderstorm and we are Christians.'

Another way in which South Africans usually describe the differences between themselves and Mozambicans is by saying Mozambicans like to make war and 'Mozambique is the place of fighting.' South Africa in contrast is a place of refuge for those tired of the fighting, fleeing to save their lives. This view is obviously the result of the war in Mozambique and the flight of refugees, many of whom settled in South Africa. For many South Africans the only contact they had with Mozambicans was with those fleeing the war in Mozambique. Therefore, they portray Mozambique as a place of war and its people as prone to warfare.

Mozambicans gave similar reasons for why people across the border were different from them, paying attention especially to economic differences between

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the informant who gave this response identified himself as Thonga in the questionnaire survey. This again alludes to the fact that Thonga is seen as a sub-Zulu identity in South Africa.

people on opposite sides of the border. Mozambicans also complained that South Africans were extremely arrogant.

When asked about the differences between them and the people across the border, Mozambicans answered that ‘they have shops, electricity, development, clinics and schools’. On the other hand they will describe themselves as poor and miserable, living a life full of hardship. Mozambicans are hunters, palm wine tappers, fishermen and agriculturalist who have to work hard for their food, unlike the people in South Africa who get pension from government.

Unlike South Africans, Mozambicans did not use religion or physical appearances as markers of difference between themselves and South Africans. Whereas most South Africans tell fantastical stories about witches and spirits in Mozambique, Mozambicans do not have similar stories about South Africans. Mozambicans, however, produced more tales of sacred sprits and sacred forests in their country than in South Africa. Mozambicans also spoke much more openly about witchcraft, spirit possession and ancestor worship than South Africans. The influence of the Christian church probably has a role to play in South Africans’ unwillingness to talk about these subjects or even the belief in forests where sacred spirits dwell and large snakes in sacred rivers, which Mozambicans are fascinated with.<sup>4</sup>

Mozambicans also highlighted cultural and ethnic differences between themselves and South Africans. ‘South Africans are Zulu, we are Shangaan’, ‘they speak a different language from us’, ‘They have different customs (*amasiko*)’, and,

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<sup>4</sup> Informants related that there are four sacred forests in the vicinity of Zitundo. They are all named after great *izinduna* who were buried there. *Mato de Makhaza e Madingi* literally means the bush of Makhaza and Madingi and is the place where these two leaders were buried. Mystery and ambiguity surround the forest of Makhaza and Madingi. Informants say that only the tribal elders are allowed to enter the forest. They go there to *phahla*. The elders assemble in a circular formation in the centre of the forest. If the ancestors are pleased with them, a large snake, which looks like a cobra, slithers around the group of men until it has encircled them. They then put snuff on the snake’s head to calm him. If the snake calms down, it means that the ancestors will grant the requests of the men. If the snake does not calm down it is necessary to sacrifice a chicken or goat to appease the ancestors.

‘Chiefs (*amakhosi*) in South Africa are strong.’ Mozambicans would also argue that South Africans have lost their tradition, that they’ve become urbanised and that they sit the whole day and wait for ‘whites’ to help them, whereas Mozambicans do things for themselves.

Although most people did not use ethnicity as a marker to highlight the differences between themselves and people across the border, when asked specifically about it people did indicate that the international border was also the ethnic line between the Zulu and the Thonga/Shangaans. Table 12 and Table 13 illustrate peoples’ views of the identity of those on the other side of the border.

Table 12: Inhabitants of KwaMshudu’s (South Africa) ethnic classifications of people across the border, 2002

Ethnicity	Total
Thonga	86
Shangaan	54
Nyambane	8
Ndau	3
Zulu	3
Chopi	1
Total	155

Table 13: Inhabitants of Puza’s (Mozambique) ethnic classifications of people across the border, 2002.

Ethnicity	Total
Zulu	98
Thonga	4
Total	102

As can clearly be seen in these two tables, people in South Africa classify people in Mozambique as Thonga or Shangaan, while people in Mozambique classify

South Africans as Zulu. In fact, very few Mozambicans could tell me the names of other ethnic groups, beside Zulus that live in South Africa. In quite a few interviews informants were adamant that the only people found in South Africa are Zulu. When I asked whether that makes me Zulu, they laughed and said ‘No, you are from America.’ The figures in these tables are quite interesting when one compare them with the figures in Table 10 and Table 11, which showed that the majority of people on both sides of the border classify themselves as Thonga. This again alludes to the fact that Tembe-Thonga is seen as a sub-identity of Zulu in South Africa, while it is seen as an independent identity in Mozambique. Most people see the international border as an ethnic dividing line between Zulus in the south and Thonga/ Shangaans in the north.

## **Conclusion**

Apartheid only ended in 1994 and Mozambique is still recovering from a long and devastating war and socialist modernisation programmes. At present there are various processes at work that emphasise a new unity in the borderland. This unity is not only drawn on shared ethnicity and history, but on a shared way of life, a borderland culture. Throughout this thesis I tried to illustrate that there are certain experiences shared by people, in various parts of the world, who live in borderlandscapes. These experiences are the result of their proximity to international borders. Borders do not only divide and unite; they also give life to a new person, a borderlander, constantly moving from one side of the border to the other. In the process the borderlander amalgamates life on one side of the border with life on the other side of the border. Similarly, the identity of the borderlander changes constantly as he moves from one

side to the other, in this case being neither Mozambican nor South African, neither Zulu nor Shangaan, but none of these things, and all of these things at the same time.

Ethnic identity is 'open-ended, fluid and constantly in a process of being constructed and reconstructed as the subject moves from one social situation to another, resulting in a self that is highly fragmented and context-dependent (Zegeye 2001:1). In the borderland, which is a place 'in a constant state of transition' (Anzaldua 1999:25), ethnicity becomes even more fluid as the borderlander constantly finds himself in a situation betwixt and between two states.

Furthermore, my research shows that ethnic labels have different meanings on opposite sides of the border. Whilst Tembe-Thonga is seen as a sub-Zulu identity south of the border, north of the border it is equated with an older ethnic meaning, and, even as part of a Tsonga or Shangaan identity. One thing is certain: single factors, such as gender, social status and custom cannot account for the multitude of identities in the borderlandcape. Instead, all these factors simultaneously influence the way people view themselves and people across the border.