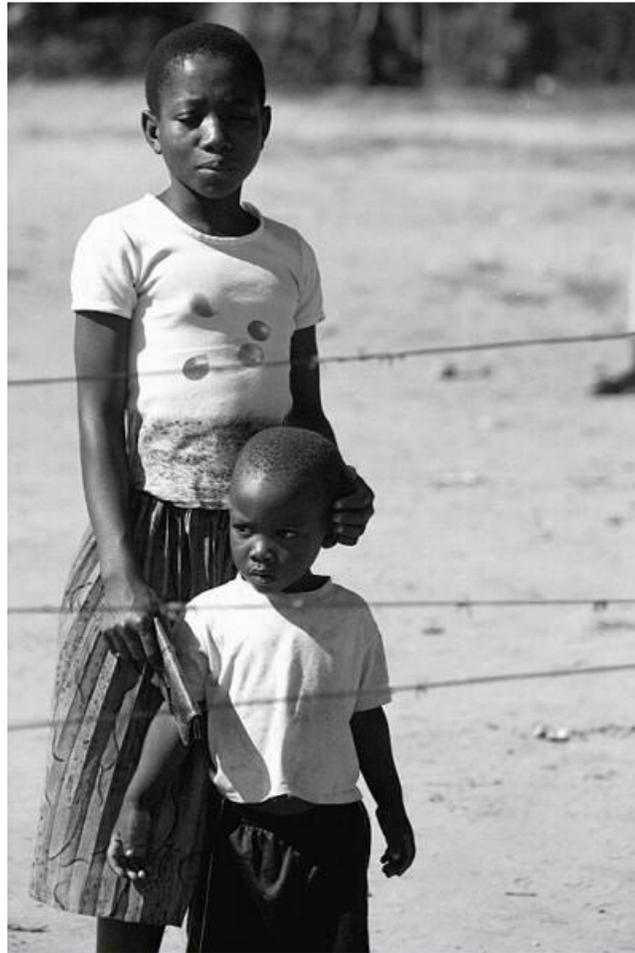


Figure 25: Photo taken from South African side of the border, 2002



Photograph by Hannie du Plessis.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order.

Foucault (1972:17)

In the conclusion to this thesis I provide a concise summary of the major findings of my research and spell out its contribution to the ‘anthropology of borders’. I also address matters relating to the arbitrary nature of national borders and consider the implications of my research for the politics of policing national borders. Beyond purely intellectual concerns about borders and borderlandscapes, I contemplate the potential insight of my research for improving administration and control of the frontiers of modern nation-states.

Lessons from the Mozambique/ South Africa borderlandscape

In this thesis I argue that the social dramas that are played out at borderlandscapes should be brought to the forefront of investigation. This landscape is typified by unique experiences as a result of its location at the frontiers of modern nation-states. No sociological investigation in an area situated close to an international border can ignore the effects of the border on the inhabitants of this landscape. This is clearly illustrated in this ethnography of the southern Mozambique/ South Africa borderlandscape.

The border that European imperialists drew across the south-east African landscape in 1875, which divided a unified political and ethnic community, still exists. However, it no longer fragments a unified community. Instead, it has become a place where two different landscapes meet and where a new landscape, or borderlandscape is formed. The borderlandscape combines the characteristics of places and spaces north and south of the border. It is neither Mozambican nor South Africa, neither Zulu nor Thonga nor Shangaan, neither Portuguese nor English, but all these things.

The history of the borderlandscape is one of warfare, suppression, trade, the immigration of people with foreign cultures and customs, failed programs of colonial administration and socialist modernisation, ethnic debates and plans for secession. This history, coupled with the current movement patterns of goods, people and ideas across the borderline has infused the once imposed colonial border with social and cultural meaning, way beyond what the European imperialists could have possibly thought.

What makes the southern Mozambique/ South African borderland different from other borderlandscapes of South Africa is that two different European powers colonised the areas north and south of the border. (This was also the case with present day Namibia where Germany tried to build its empire, but the German influence was limited to areas further removed from the South African border and short-lived.) Portugal's administration of Mozambique influenced the areas north of the border both politically and culturally. North of the border people started to speak a different language from their counterparts south of the border and also adopted fragments of Portuguese religion, custom and politics.

FRELIMO's socialist modernisation plans and the Mozambican war transformed the cultural landscape north of the border even further. The war lasted for almost fifteen years and saw the displacement of millions of people. The area north of the KwaZulu border became almost completely de-populated as people fled across the border to seek refuge amongst relatives and friends. When the war ended, demobilised soldiers, displaced refugees from different areas of Mozambique and returning refugees from Swaziland, Zimbabwe and South Africa filled the southern borderlandscape. These people brought with them languages and customs foreign to the area. This led to the creation of a social and cultural landscape north of the international border completely different from that south of the border.

Equally important to the creation of cultural diversity in the borderlandscape was the British, and later South African, administration of the area south of the border. The British and South African governments embraced the preservation of indigenous authorities. However, until the 1970s Thongaland (Maputaland) was ignored and even 'forgotten.' Then, in line with its Apartheid politics, the South African government awarded the area to the KwaZulu 'homeland'. This planted the seeds for an ethnic debate that reached a climax in the 1980s when plans were made to cede Thongaland to Swaziland. The end result was a dominant Zulu political and cultural influence in the area that undermined the Thonga heritage of the past. The Zulu cultural influence was not only a break from history, but also meant that the area south of the imposed international border became vastly different from the area north of the border.

However, in the zone extending across and away from the border a new landscape had started to develop. The borderlandscape is formed and transformed through constant interaction and exchange between people living on opposite sides of

the international border. This interaction is nursed by the economic opportunities presented by the international border and through transnational kinship ties that survived despite the Mozambican war. Since 1992, when the Mozambican war ended and the border was opened, contact across the border has proliferated. Increased contact has made people more aware of both the differences and similarities between themselves and the people on the other side of the border. Increased contact, spurred on by economic need and social factors, also fosters an image of union, social solidarity and cultural homogeneity across the international border. Borderlanders move with ease from one side of the border to the other, from one world to another, as they manipulate their identities and change their behaviour to remain undetected by the mechanisms of the state that try to control their cross-border movements.

In the borderlandscape boundaries are constantly created and destroyed. This landscape is characterised by ambiguity, fluctuation, equivocation and uncertainty. It is essential that social analysts take cognisance of the fluid and uncertain nature of borderlandscapes. Although the borderlandscape does not determine the lives and experiences of its inhabitants, it creates incidents, circumstances and opportunities that directly influence peoples' lives. This study suggests that any sociological inquiry into the lives of people in the borderlandscape needs to recognise their unique location at the frontiers of modern nation-states.

What chiefs want, what commoners want

Throughout this thesis I argue that from the perspective of Africans, the border of modern nation-states, especially those of post-colonial Africa, are arbitrary. The exact position of borders is the result of historical processes that have elevated certain

groups into positions of power, while others have been made powerless as a result thereof. In Africa nation-state borders reflect a colonial past, rather than a pre-colonial political and cultural order. The question that beckons is why these borders were not re-drawn in the post-colonial era to better reflect older African political communities. Put simply, the answer is that the new elites of post-colonial Africa benefited (and benefit) from the state mechanisms and territories they inherited from the colonial era. Although many local people, living along the borders of African states, may still view these borders as arbitrary or artificial divisions between kin and larger social groups in certain contexts¹, Africa's post-colonial elites have come to accept these borders as markers of the territories of new 'nations'.

The history of northern KwaZulu-Natal aptly illustrates some of the tensions between elites and commoners within the borderlandscape. On the one hand, the old (Mabudu) Tembe chiefs who are still an elite group in northern KwaZulu-Natal, have, as a result of the border, lost authority over areas in Mozambique and became subservient to the Zulu king. Among this group there is still a strong drive to augment the borders that surround them in a bid to become part of the Swazi nation-state. On the other hand, commoners have no interest in becoming part of Swaziland - a state which is unable to grant them the same social benefits of citizenship as South Africa (For example, old age pensions, child maintenance grants, housing, medical facilities and educational resources). This group embraces South African nationality and subservience to the Zulu king.

The tension between these two groups plays out in small, but connected incidents that continuously stress the arbitrary nature of geo-political borders. For

¹ The anomaly of the situation is that, although many local borderlanders view Africa's borders as arbitrary impositions in certain contexts, in other context, especially where borders act as barriers to economic competition (i.e. labourers from neighbouring countries are prohibited from competing for certain jobs), they don't typify these borders as being artificial.

instance, ten days prior to the South African national elections a small crowd of about thirty people set fire to the South African flag at the municipal buildings at Ingwavuma and hoisted the Swazi flag in its place. Police officers were dispatched from Mkhuze. The officers lowered the Swazi flag and reminded the locals that KwaZulu-Natal is Zulu country, ruled by the Inkatha Freedom Party.

A few days later Inkosi Israel Mabudu Tembe married a Swazi woman from the Ingwavuma region. The Zulu royal house failed to send a representative. The Swazi royal house sent a contingent to the wedding that included a prominent prince and the former head of the Swazi armed forces. A few days after the wedding, the Tembe royal family attended the birthday of King Mswati III of Swaziland in Mbabane. At the function they were not treated as subjects of the Zulu, but instead given the same respect as the Zulu representatives.

The old elites of Maputaland still express a very strong desire to re-draw the southern Mozambique/ South Africa border and to cede the northern borderland areas of KwaZulu-Natal to Swaziland. According to representatives of the royal family, their primary aim is still to get the MacMahon line augmented, either by uniting northern KwaZulu-Natal with Mozambique or by getting Mozambique to relinquish southernmost Mozambique to South Africa. By regaining authority over this vast traditional chiefdom the royal family believe they would finally be free from Zulu 'oppression', and, would once again have the status taken away from them by Britain and Portugal in 1875.

The Tembe royal family have received the greatest amount of support from the Swazi monarch. The ruler of this landlocked country has made countless promises to acknowledge the Tembe chiefs as rightful rulers of Maputaland if the area was united with Swaziland. Such a move would give the Swazi state access to the sea, where it

planned, since the late 1970s, to build its own harbour. Local chiefs even suggest that a dual monarchy could be established if northern KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland were to be united. However, commoners who are recipients of South Africa's well-developed social welfare programme,² oppose the old elites. Although local people might view the international border as an annoyance that prohibits them free access to family, friends and natural resources, most benefit from being citizens of South Africa, rather than Swaziland or Mozambique, as the case would be if the border were to be re-drawn. South African residents of the borderlandscape have benefited from the positioning of the border, which has placed them in a relatively wealthy country. By contrast, Mozambican residents of the borderlandscape perceive the border as a barrier that denies them access to shops, schools, employment opportunities and an array of social grants. They can be likened to the borderland inhabitants of Lesotho along the South Africa/ Lesotho border of whom Coplan (2001) writes,

the majority of workers/ peasants straightforwardly desire the abolition of the border and an end to formal independence, which they see as an obstacle to local development and their own economic development. Such people do not identify the Basotho nation with Lesotho as a nation state. On the contrary, they regard the Lesotho government, the senior aristocracy, and the army as existing only to serve their own interests (p. 111).

By considering the perspectives of these different interest groups, I believe that the current location of the international border should not be altered. Despite my sympathy for the Tembe royal family, I believe that it would be suicidal for South African residents of the borderland to be placed under Swazi rule. All my research indicates that Maputaland cannot sustain its large population without direct government assistance. Agriculturally the area is extremely poor, it has no industries

² A census conducted by the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge (see discussion on methodology in the introduction this thesis) found that as many as ninety per cent of households in northern KwaZulu-Natal receive some type of social grant (pension, child support etc.) from the South African government.

other than tourism and it does not have any substantial mineral deposits that can be mined. Perhaps another way can be found for the Tembe chiefs to 'rid' themselves of perceived Zulu 'oppression', provided they have popular support. The government of South Africa has actually shown a willingness to support traditional chiefs, who have the support of their people. Perhaps the best way for the Tembe chiefs to move forward would be within a larger provincial and governmental entity that supports the chiefs and, more importantly, their people.

Towards a recognition of borderlanders

The governments of South Africa and Mozambique have made good progress towards enabling the residents of the borderland to move more freely across the international border. Initiatives discussed in this thesis, like cross-border access to health care industry, make the border less of an imposition to life in the borderlandscape. However, much can still be done to accommodate the special needs of the inhabitants of the borderlandscape. For instance, the introduction of special passports for borderlanders that will allow them easy access across the boundaries of the state can vastly improve peoples' lives.

The misperception that most local people are involved in cross-border criminal activities legitimates rigid state control of the border. Instead, as this research suggests, cross-border criminal activity is primarily orchestrated by persons and syndicates outside the borderlandscape who only use the area as a space which they infiltrate temporarily to conduct their crimes. Borderlander crimes are directly related to the nature of the borderlandscape and mainly restricted to 'illegal' cross-border movement (mainly to visit kin) and cross-border trade in harmless articles like

second-hand clothes, crafts and food. Instead of pursuing borderlanders for these petty crimes and regarding them as enemies, those who police the border can benefit greatly from a positive partnership with the inhabitants of the borderlandscape. People in the borderland know the movements of criminals in their space and, if the authorities were able to access the knowledge of borderlanders they would be in a better position to track criminals and contain crime in the borderlandscape. However, before that can be done, perceptions will have to change. If the authorities were to take steps to facilitate the cross-border movement of borderlanders, they would ensure goodwill and partnership. In turn borderlanders would be keener to assist the authorities in tracking criminals who utilise the borderlandscape to commit their crimes. The greatest insight this thesis can give for the policing of borders is that borderlanders need to be involved in the process to ensure effectiveness.