

Migrant Workers and State Boundaries Reflections on the Transnational Debate from the Colonial Past in Mozambique*

Studies on transnationalism reflect a fascination with connections without borders. For example, they say that transnational civil society makes use of social capital against the transnational financial penetration of global corporations; or that the demise of nation-states is induced by the fate of globalisation¹. A «transnational apparatus of governmentality» is said to challenge the usual vertical topography of power between African states and civil society². As has been too often repeated though, transnationalism has never been given an adequate theoretical framework of analysis³. In the last decade public opinion, as well as more specialised works, have concentrated on the tension between the «old» nation-state and the contemporary «transnational» circulation of goods, capitals, and people; between a past of territorial boundedness and a present of interconnection. As suggested by the Africanist historian Frederick Cooper however, crucial questions about the limits to interconnection are not formulated. Yet, according to Cooper, Africanists should be particularly sensitive to the historical dimension of those processes that cross territorial configurations, given the manner in which ideas, cultural movement or migrant processes spread across the boundaries of political units or even of the continent in the past⁴.

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1. Some of these themes are treated in T.M. CALLAGHY, R. KASSIMIR, & R. LATHAM (eds), *Intervention & Transformation in Africa. Global-Local Networks of Power*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
2. J. FERGUSON, «Transnational topographies of Power: beyond the state and civil society in the study of African Politics», in J. VINCENT & D. NUGENT (eds), *The Anthropology of Politics*, Oxford, Blackwell, forthcoming, 2004.
3. Vertovec only acknowledged that: «To the extent that any single "-ism" might arguably exist, most social scientists working in the field may agree that "transnationalism" broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states». S. VERTOVEC, «Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism», *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, XXII (2), 1999: 447.
4. F. COOPER, «Networks, moral discourse, and history», in T.M. CALLAGHY, R. KASSIMIR & R. LATHAM (eds), *Intervention & Transformation...*, *op. cit.*; F. COOPER, «What is the concept

Perhaps, the three phenomena of transnationalism that have most attracted the interest of social scientists and the imagination of the public have been ethnic diasporas and their hybrid identities, the agency of international civil society, and transnational migrant flows. My personal attention concentrates on the latter. Along with Cooper's call for an historical dimension, the purpose of this article is to see how some elements surrounding the discourse on transnational migration developed or consolidated in the colonial past: my intention is to enter into dialogue with current literature on transnational migration in view of the historiography of Southern Africa in general and of migration in Mozambique in particular.

Rather than applying the supposedly new theoretical approach of transnationalism to my case-study, I intend to comment on the transnational discourse in view of my research findings: on one hand to demonstrate the historical rootedness of migrant workers struggles and social networks across administrative borders, and on the other hand to address the relative strength of both international and internal borders in relation to people movements on the territory.

My research investigated labour relations and circulation.. It takes the central region of Mozambique between 1942 and ca. 1960 as a case study. Although it is not my intention to examine in full the debate about the meanings and contrasting interpretations of borders and border crossing in Africa, my work discusses the relationship between migrant people and boundaries by comparing the international border with internal ones. The main conclusion is that the position stressing how the international boundaries were «eroded» by African migrants on one hand, and the position sustaining the importance of these boundaries on the other hand, are not mutually exclusive. The balance between the two depends on whether we are considering the physical circulation of people, or the impact of state borders on the labour and social relations of migrants.

Transnational Migration in Mozambique and the Issue of Borders

Migration, and labour migration in particular, represents a central feature of the social history of Mozambique from pre colonial times to the present. It is undeniable that recent flows of people in some areas of the country embody new political and social conjunctures in the region: the relative peace and stability of Mozambique, for example, is attracting people from neighbouring countries where, on the other hand, new forms of social conflict – as in Zimbabwe – are producing the recent flows of migration abroad⁵. Nonetheless, Mozambicans' labour migration reminds us of the circular migration system which consolidated during the colonial period. The literature on migration in Southern Africa has addressed the economic power of the mining industries and the institutional power of the colonial state in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, or has attempted to emphasise

of globalization good for? An African historian's perspective », *African Affairs*, 100 (399), 2001.

5. For the latest news and analyses; see the web-site of the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP): <www.queensu.ca/samp>.

the « voice » of the migrants⁶. The central regions of Mozambique played a crucial role both as labour export areas and as territories of passage for those migrants from other places who found working conditions relatively more attractive there⁷. Recently, Eric Allina-Pisano has emphasised how in a borderland area of central Mozambique people's movements, apart from representing the Africans' strategic decision-making, were used by the communities and the African chiefs to bargain their power of control over African labour with the colonial authorities⁸. My own research work tries to move the analysis towards a consideration of internal borders too. Indeed, as recognised by Allina-Pisano, the international characteristic of borders was a secondary aspect: political and administrative boundaries represented the site of disputes between Africans and Portuguese administration even within the Mozambican territory⁹. Yet the great majority of the literature mentioned above concentrated exclusively on the international borders between the colonial states. Today these borders are taken to represent long-established power relations, and transnationalism, which involves a movement across them, as underlined by Katharyne Mitchell « *embodies an inherently transgressive quality* »¹⁰. Indeed, the literature on transnationalism has addressed extensively borders as a contested terrain where both barriers and opportunities, independent flows, transnational links, and hybrid identities developed¹¹. Regarding migrant flows, it is considered that

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6. Significant examples of this extended literature are: G. ARRIGHI, « Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: A Study in the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia », in G. ARRIGHI & J. SAUL (eds), *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa*, London, Monthly Review Press, 1973; J. CRUSH, A. JEEVES & D. YULDEMAN, *South Africa's Labour Empire. A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines*, Boulder CO & Oxford, Westview Press; Cape Town, David Philip, 1991; R. FIRST, *Black Gold: The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant*, Brighton, Harvester Press/New York, St. Martin Press, 1983; P. HARRIES, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, c.1860-1910*, London, James Curry/Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press/Portsmouth NH, Heinemann, 1994; S. KATZENELLENBOGEN, *South Africa and Southern Mozambique*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1982; N. LEVY, *The Foundations of the South African Cheap Labour System*, London, 1982; D. MCDONALD (ed.), *On Borders, Perspectives on Cross-Border Migration in Southern Africa*, Cape Town, SAMP/New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000; C. VAN ONSELEN, *Chibaro. African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933*, London, Pluto Press, 1976; F. WILSON, *Labour in the South African Gold Mines, 1911-1969*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972.
 7. J.M. Das Neves TEMBE, *Economy, Society and Labour Migration in Central Mozambique, 1930-c.1965: A Case Study of Manica Province*, Ph.D. Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, 1998; J. HEAD, « A Sena Sugar Estates e o Trabalho Migratório », *Estudos Moçambicanos*, 1, 1980; B. NEIL-TOMLISON, *The Growth of a Colonial Economy and the Development of African Labour: Manica and Sofala and the Mozambique Chartered Company, 1892-1942*, mimeo, University of Edinburgh, 1978; M. NEWITT, « Labour Migration from the Tete District », unpublished paper; C. TORNIMBENI, « Working boundaries'. Boundaries, colonial controls and labour circulation in Beira District, Mozambique, 1942 - 1960s », in M. NEWITT (ed.), *Community & the State in Lusophone Africa*, London, Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, King's College London, 2003.
 8. E. ALLINA-PISANO, « Borderlands, Boundaries, and the Contours of Colonial Rule: African Labor in Manica District, Mozambique, c. 1904-1908 », *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, XXXVI (1), 2003.
 9. E. ALLINA-PISANO, *ibid.*: 61.
 10. K. MITCHELL, « Transnational Discourse: Bringing Geography Back », *Antipode*, XXIX (2), 1997: 101.
 11. As with transnationalism in general, the attempts to find a new and coherent analytical framework for transnational migration have met with mixed results. See, for example: L. BASCH, N.G. SCHILLER & C. SZANTON BLANC, *Nations Unbound. Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, Reading (U.K.), Gordon and Breach, 1994; A. PORTES, L. GUARNIZO & P. LANDOLT, « Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls
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communities have been able to « erode » inconvenient and artificial borders by developing concrete transnational connections across them. A discourse concentrating on the social networks established between citizens of two countries, or between « countries of the same citizen », has contributed to creating the impression that today state borders are increasingly « soft »¹². On the other hand, other scholars hold that the de-territorialized nature of current socio-political processes is only one interpretative stance, and that the state continues to play an important role in the everyday lives of its own and other citizens¹³. Regarding central Mozambique, the above positions seem to surface, for example, in the works of Stephen Lubkemann and David McDermott Hughes. The former looked at the transnational terms in which the migrant people of a community in central Mozambique came to conceive of their lives: he identified the life strategies of these men as located both in Mozambique and South Africa, in contrast to the idea that citizens belong to only one nation-state¹⁴. Hughes has discussed the significance of the international border between Mozambique and Zimbabwe, showing how this border became important in local social relations during the colonial and post-colonial period. Migrants from Mozambique moving to the other side of the border were treated on unfavourable terms for land allocation¹⁵.

Today the majority of international borders in Southern Africa are not well guarded and can easily be crossed. Nonetheless, fluidity must not be exaggerated, and the extent to which the presence of an international border has become enmeshed in the social life and in the historical developments since the colonial times must not be underestimated. Underlining the historically artificial nature of state boundaries in Africa does not mean that they never gained significance over time¹⁶. According to Allina-Pisano the international border between Mozambique and Zimbabwe at the beginning of the twentieth century, only ten years after its demarcation, was already materially more significant than an abstract arbitrary boundary¹⁷. In Harri Englund's analysis of a borderland between Mozambique and Malawi the usual image of Africans transgressing artificial borders is challenged by the different histories experienced by the villages on the two sides of the border, and by the strong sense of territory demonstrated by the people moving

and Promise of an Emergent Research Field », *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, XXII (2), 1999. Two collections of essays on African boundaries are: P. NUGENT & A.I. ASIWAJU (eds), *African Boundaries: Barriers, Conduits and Opportunities*, London, Pinter, 1996 and T.M. WILSON & H. DONNAN (eds), *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998. Regarding more specifically the issue of the « new migrant spaces » in South Africa there is: J. CRUSH & D.A. McDONALD (eds), *Transnationalism and the New African Immigration to South Africa*, Toronto, CAAS and SAMP, 2002.

12. See, for example, some of the essays in P. NUGENT & A.I. ASIWAJU (eds), *African Boundaries...*, *op. cit.*
 13. T.M. WILSON & H. DONNAN, « Nation, State and Identity at International Borders », in T.M. WILSON & H. DONNAN (eds), *Border Identities: op.cit.*: 1-2.
 14. S.C. LUBKEMANN, « The Transformation of Transnationality among Mozambican Migrants in South Africa », *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, XXXIV (1), 2000.
 15. D. MCDERMOTT HUGHES, « Refugees and Squatters: Immigration and the Politics of Territory on the Zimbabwe-Mozambique Border », *Journal of Southern African Studies*, XXV (4), 1999.
 16. « Once conceptualized, [boundaries] are given meaning and sentiment by those who reside within them », L. BASCH, N.G. SCHILLER & C. SZANTON BLANC, *Nations Unbound...*, *op. cit.*: 33.
 17. E. ALLINA-PISANO, « Borderlands, Boundaries... », *op. cit.*: 67.
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from one village to another¹⁸. Thus, the crucial point in the analysis of borders in central Mozambique seems to be the social standing of border crossers. Mozambicans knew – and still know – that their movement abroad would involve a changing status. Although my interest is in physical borders rather than in borders as a place of identity formation, it is my intention to see if the dynamics related to the changing status of ‘border crosser’ applied to labour relations in Beira District in the 1940s and 1950s and, secondly, if these dynamics applied to internal movements as well.

Labour Relations in Beira District

Regarding the first point, my research in the area of the former Beira District¹⁹ shows in effect that the history of Mozambique under Portuguese colonial rule differentiated internal labour relations from those on the other side of the border with Southern Rhodesia²⁰.

The period under consideration is characterized by the development of the main policies of Salazar’s *Estado Novo* in Mozambique, and by the takeover by the colonial state, in 1942, of the former territory of the *Companhia de Moçambique* which until then governed central Mozambique on behalf of Portugal. This territory became, together with other areas, the Province of Manica e Sofala, which was divided in a hierarchy of administrative divisions: the districts, the *circunscrições* and finally the *postos administrativos*. Each of these divisions was headed by a Portuguese official called *administrador*. The bottom of the colonial structure was occupied by so-called traditional authorities, that became part of the colonial

18. H. ENGLUND, *From War to Peace on the Mozambique-Malawi Borderland*, London, Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, 2002.

19. My research was conducted in different periods between October 1999 and December 2001 and eventually produced my Ph.D. thesis «*Workers on Borders*»: *Labour Circulation and Colonial Controls in the Beira District, Mozambique, 1942-1960 c.a.* (title translated from Italian), University of Cagliari (Italy), 2003. It relies mainly on archival material, collected at the Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique (AHM), Maputo, at the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), Lisbon, and at the Public Record Office (PRO), London. Comparing the circular notes and the personal communications of the various levels of the Portuguese administration in Mozambique, in particular the accounts made by the local administrators of the former Beira District, and the corresponding documents of the British administration in Southern Rhodesia, allowed my work to cope with the colonial rhetoric of this material. Furthermore, I compared them with the opinions and memories of people I collected during field research in some parts of the current Manica Province between October and December 2001. I conducted both personal and group interviews, with the help of a local research group, with former migrant workers or their sons, and of so-called traditional authorities. I chose to limit my research to male workers. Both personal memory of events that happened more than 40 years ago, and colonial officials’ rhetoric are equally problematic. I tried to strike a balance between the two, and to compare my conclusions with the literature available and with the suggestions given to me by a number of scholars and researchers in Mozambique. I am particularly grateful to Prof. David Hedges, Dr. Joel das Neves Têmbé, and Dr. António Sopa. More details on part of the themes developed in this article can be found in C. TORNIMBENI, «Working boundaries’...», *op. cit.*; and, above all, in my Ph.D. thesis.

20. This paper assumes that at that time working conditions as well as infrastructures and services were generally better in Southern Rhodesia than in Mozambique. This seems to be confirmed by the literature available as well as by both the colonial documents I examined and the interviews I collected. More details can be found in my Ph.D. thesis and in a number of other works, such as J.M. Das Neves TÊMBÉ, *Economy, Society... op. cit.* However, it is well known that in Southern Rhodesia, too, African labourers were constrained under the prevailing labour relations of the Southern Rhodesian colonial system, and that a great number of them tried to reach, at least, the better wages of the South African industries.

administration with the name of *régulos* or *regedores*. In the Province of Manica e Sofala, Beira District covered a region outside the areas traditionally granted to recruitment by South African and Southern Rhodesian industries. In some areas a number of colonial economic activities had the potential to stimulate the development of the region, like the plantations and sugar industry of the Sena Sugar Estates in Marromeu or the port of Beira and the Beira Railways along the line connecting Beira to Southern Rhodesia. The Portuguese farmers of Chimoio, on the other hand, though always at the centre of the colonial ideology of white colonisation, remained fairly backward throughout the period, in contrast to those of the British colony of Southern Rhodesia.

Salazar's phase of Portuguese colonial rule played an important role in this region, as it both consolidated and altered past trends in people's relations to the state and territory²¹. A most important aspect of this development was the reintroduction in Mozambique of the forced-labour system in 1942 through the norms contained in the *Circular 818/D-7*, issued by the Governor-General of the colony²². African people who did not comply with the requirements of these new regulations could be captured as *vádios* - vagrants - and forced to work. However, the system of forced labour was shaped more by the effective practice of labour recruitment than by the various laws and circular notes of the Portuguese²³.

A form of coercion by a recruiter or a colonial administrator was involved in every form of labour envisaged by the colonial law, and real volunteer labour was discouraged. The effective process of labour recruitment always involved a form of coercion by a colonial administrator or a recruiter, and real volunteer labour was discouraged. The degree of compulsion involved in labour recruitment in the various *circunscrições* varied depending on the local socioeconomic context, on the particular administrator's methods and ideology, and on the extent to which African reaction influenced the implementation of policies. It also depended on the local traditional authorities, who generally maintained a difficult and ambiguous balance between trying to please colonial officials and trying to protect their areas of influence among the population. Moreover, colonial regulations on the treatment of workers were usually violated by the employers, who provided very poor working conditions for the African labourers. The role of forced labour was crucial in this regard: since colonial employers could generally rely on a minimum of forced African labour secured to them by the administrators of the *circunscrições* (thanks to the

21. Old and new imbalances in the political economy of the territory were consolidated in this phase of colonial rule, favouring the centres of colonial development like Beira and Chimoio to the detriment of distant areas like Mossurize and Bárue, which were mainly structured as labour reserves.

22. This famous circular note imprinted labour relations in the following years. See C. TORNIMBENI, «Working boundaries'...», *op. cit.*

23. There is a large literature on this aspect. See, for example: *História de Moçambique, Vol. 3. Moçambique no Auge do Colonialismo, 1930-1961*, Maputo, Departamento de História - Faculdade de Letras, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, 1993; M. NEWITT, *A History of Mozambique*, London, Hurst & Co., 1995; L. VAIL & L. WHITE, *Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique: A Study of Quelimane District*, London, Heinemann, 1980; J.M. PENVENNE, *African Workers and Colonial Racism. Mozambican Strategies and Struggles in Lourenço Marques, 1877-1962*, Portsmouth, Heinemann/Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press/London, James Curry, 1995.

provisions of the forced labour system), many of them could avoid providing attractive labour conditions for the African workers.

Labour Migration Abroad

The structures of labour emigration were shaped first of all by the elements specific to local and social life in Mozambique. Forced labour, forced cotton or rice growing, and labour recruitment practices were the single most important factors determining decisions to migrate to neighbouring countries in search of better working conditions²⁴. Some administrations occasionally called on higher-level authorities to mitigate harsh recruitment regimes²⁵. The lack of choice in employment was another major factor for emigration throughout Beira District. Working conditions were reported to be particularly hard on the white farms of the *circunscricção* of Chimoio, and to a lesser extent on those of the *circunscricção* of Manica. Comparison with conditions abroad is a constant theme in the memories of people today when discussing the cause of migration²⁶. The same can be said of wages, although the crucial factor behind many of these claims seems to be the lower purchasing power of the salaries in Beira District, where the cost of living was higher²⁷.

If borderland communities were attracted by superior market opportunities abroad²⁸, younger members also migrated to benefit from Southern Rhodesia's education facilities, as in the case of Mossurize and Manica described by das Neves Têmbé²⁹. Finally, certain communities, for example in Manica, fluctuated across the border following cultural or family links, and it may be that they did not interpret their movement as emigration³⁰. Others kept following old migrant routes which pre-dated the establishment of Portuguese colonialism, as in the southern *circunscricção* of Mossurize, which had been a centre of the Gaza kingdom in the past³¹. People coming from the inland areas of Búzi (Chibabava), Sofala (Machanga), and Mossurize (Machaze) and joining the same employer for a contract work, influenced each other in choosing South Africa as their preferred final

24. This is generally recognised by the literature as well as by a number of Portuguese and British colonial documents and by the almost totality of the people I interviewed.

25. For example: AHM. Fundo do Governo do Distrito da Beira (FGDB), Box 622. «Administração da Circunscricção de Mossurize, nº 113/B/15/2, Espungabera, 15 de Fevereiro de 1944».

26. For example: Interview 1/b: Manuel Mbaimbai. Distrito de Gondola, Posto de Cafumpe, October 2001; Interview 9/c: Lourenço Chivo, Distrito de Manica, Vila de Manica, November 2001.

27. For example: AHM. FGDB, Box 692, «Administração da Circunscricção do Buzi. nº 1152/B/17/1, Nova Luzitânia, 4 de Setembro de 1947»; AHM. FGDB, Box 608, «Administração da Circunscricção de Bãrué. nº 819/B15, Vila Govueia, 20 de Julho de 1948».

28. AHM. Fundo da Inspeção dos Serviços Administrativos e dos Negócios Indígenas (FISANI), Box 39, «João Mesquita, Relatório das Inspeções Ordinárias às Circunscricções de Chemba, Sena, Marromeu, Gorongosa, Manica e Mossurize, do Distrito da Beira, 1946».

29. J.M. Das Neves TÊMBÉ, *Economy, Society...*, *op. cit.*

30. AHM, Secção Especial, José Alberto Gomes de MELO BRANQUINHO, «Prospecção das forças tradicionais: Manica e Sofala», Relatório Secreto para os Serviços de Centralização e Coordenação de Informações, Província de Moçambique, Lourenço Marques, 1967.

31. AHM. FGDB, Box 692, «Administração da Circunscricção de Mossurize. Confidencial, nº 372/B/17/1, Espungabera, 16 de Abril de 1949».

destination abroad and in following the old routes leading to this country³². This may explain why in certain areas migration was predominantly toward South Africa, and in others toward Southern Rhodesia.

The majority of migrant workers crossed the frontier independently, without meeting big obstacles to their unauthorised migration. In some cases Portuguese officials' complicity with clandestine migration, seen as a source of taxes in valuable foreign currency and as an alternative form of control of the African population and of the traditional leaders, was crucial. In general though, the border between the Beira District and Southern Rhodesia was very extended, and effective control was not possible for the Portuguese authorities. Furthermore, Mozambican workers on the other side of the border were welcome by the Southern Rhodesian employers and local authorities, who some times regularised them on condition that they signed a contract with a British employer. This extended international frontier has been considered extremely porous and favourable to the kind of clandestine labour migration that allowed African people to exercise their choice more effectively and find better labour conditions. This frontier has been regarded as representing very ideal conditions for transnational relations. Das Neves Têmbé demonstrated to what extent, in the borderlands of the *circunscrições* of Manica and Mossurize, easy access to infrastructures and services located in Southern Rhodesia was structurally part of people's daily lives³³. People would often live on the Mozambican side of that border and trade their products in Southern Rhodesia:

« We were crossing over to the other side to sell our products, because at that time there were no borders »³⁴.

In general migrants developed a network that allowed them to keep in close contact with their families and communities. Some of them even chose to establish more permanently in Southern Rhodesia and to split their families over the two territories. Transnational polygamy was already part of the social and economic life of some migrants at that time³⁵. However, the border between the Beira District of Mozambique and Southern Rhodesia was not only an artificial line between social networks or family links. As previously noted, another dimension of that boundary surfaces when considering the completely different histories of socio-economic development in the two colonies. That border came to represent the line of demarcation between internal labour relations in Mozambique, based in short on forced labour recruitment, and the Southern Rhodesian colonial experience, characterised in brief by land alienation. Mozambican workers experienced different social and power relations with African and Portuguese authorities on the two sides of the border. This reality gave an important significance to a state boundary that was otherwise physically weak.

32. AHM, SE, José Alberto Gomes de MELO BRANQUINHO, *op. cit.*

33. J.M. Das Neves TÊMBÉ, *Economy, Society...*, *op. cit.*

34. Interview 8/b: Silvestre Chabai. Distrito de Manica, Vila de Manica, November 2001 (My translation).

35. AHM, FGDB, Box 617, « Intendência do Distrito de Tete. Confidencial n° 1578/ B/8, Tete, 26 de Junho de 1950 ».

The Internal Circulation of Workers

Regarding the second point framed at the beginning of this article – the status and internal movements of African workers – my examination of Beira District brought to the surface the structural differences dividing the *circunscrições* as well as the institutional constraints on Africans' circulation in the territory.

In 1942, the *Regulamento de Identificação Indígena* stipulated that Africans needed an authorisation by their local administrator for any movement beyond their *circunscrição*. A personal document called *caderneta indígena* was imposed on all African men of productive age and on adult women in administrative centres to control their mobility. In 1946 a new *regulamento* allowed Mozambicans to move freely within the entire district. The new rules recognised the incongruity of forcing people to reach distant administrative centres to ask for the required permission, but the change of policy confused the administrators, and the majority implicitly or explicitly asked to return to the previous system³⁶. This request was satisfied two years later by the Governor-General of Mozambique³⁷, and the freedom of movement inside the district was formally resumed only in 1959³⁸. This oscillation of policy and the confusion generated among the population is reflected in the contrasting views expressed by the people I interviewed in Manica and Chimoio³⁹.

These limitations on Africans' movement, complemented by similar measures in urban areas like Beira⁴⁰, were crucial in facilitating the enforcement of the forced-labour provisions: forced recruitment could be imposed on vagrants (*vádios*), that is, on those found outside their *circunscrição* without proper authorisation. However, the norms were implemented with flexibility according to the context, and some administrators turned a blind eye to the practice of regularising people who had come from outside their area to work for a local employer without proper authorisation or documentation⁴¹.

Local administrators spent much of their time trying to reconcile competing demands for labour made by the employers in the territory⁴². Those more in need of the administrators' support were the smaller farmers of Chimoio, unable as they were to pay the costs of recruiting. Not far from Chimoio the *Companhia Colonial do Búzi* would also often seek help from the institutions to get cheap labour, or to prevent others from recruiting in its

36. For example: AHM. FGDB, Box 683, «Administração da Circunscrição do Buzi. n° 917/B/17, Nova Luzitânia, 29 de Julho de 1947».

37. AHM. FGDB, Box 683, «Repartição Central dos Negócios Indígenas. n° 678/B/4, Lourenço Marques, 27 de Fevereiro de 1948».

38. AHM. FGDB, Box 683, «Direcção dos Serviços dos Negócios Indígenas. Informação Confidencial, n° 82/A/54/9, Lourenço Marques, 27 de Agosto de 1959».

39. For example: Interview 1/c: Francisco Sande. Distrito de Gondola, Posto de Cafumpe, October 2001; Interview 9/d: João Careca. Distrito de Manica, Vila de Manica, November 2001.

40. *Regulamento dos Serviçais Indígenas*, Portaria n° 5565, 12 June 1944; *Regulamento dos Serviçais Indígenas*, Portaria n° 7798, 2 April 1949.

41. For example: AHM. FGDB, Box 683, «Província de Manica e Sofala. Direcção Provincial de Administração Civil. n° 8805/B/17, Beira, 26 de Dezembro de 1949».

42. Competing demands for African labour, as well as national and international recruitment policies, originated numerous debates between the different levels of the colonial administration, and became a sort of obsession for the local Portuguese officials. For more details see C. TORNIMBENI, «Working boundaries' ...», *op. cit.*

area. In consequence of these and many other demands, a regional division of labour within the district was renegotiated almost every year. In 1943, the Governor of Manica e Sofala invited the local administrators to favour first the public service, and second the rural activities of Chimoio⁴³. Then, the following year, the *circunscrições* lacking labour had the other areas reserved for recruitment⁴⁴. The division of 1944 was reshaped in 1947⁴⁵, while in 1950, as international pressures against forced labour in the Portuguese colonies were mounting, the system of labour reserves was formally abolished, resulting in a reservation of only 20% of the labour of each *circunscrição* for the colonial state. In general the administrators continued to apportion the labour they could control in their territory to employers of their choosing, for example by denying Africans the necessary authorisation to leave a *circunscrição*, and the labour-reserve system was reintroduced only two years later by the Governor of Manica e Sofala⁴⁶.

During the 1940s African workers became increasingly unhappy with colonial barriers to their movement in the territory, to their movement from one kind of employment to another, and to their legitimate exercise of a choice. In Chimoio, people were frustrated for having no reasonable choice in their territory⁴⁷. Similarly in Manica, migrant workers returning from Southern Rhodesia were afraid to stay at home because they could be immediately conscripted there for contract labour⁴⁸.

A reason why people moved is that recruitment for contract labour and forced cropping was not uniformly enforced in the territory, although no area escaped completely from these threats. Internal circulation was always directed at finding a better place of employment, but the choices were very limited, and the preferred direction remained towards the other colonies. Internal movements for labour-related reasons were reported almost everywhere in the district, from the southern *circunscrição* of Sofala, where people tried to avoid compulsory labour for the administration of the city of Beira⁴⁹, to Mutarara in the north, where people absconded in order not to be conscripted for the construction of the railway line passing through Tete⁵⁰. The most common form of movement was probably communal rather than singular. The colonial authorities' controls were often eluded by various methods, like false authorizations for movement and false personal documents⁵¹. But the key role was played by the traditional authorities, as in Búzi, where a local chief who chose not to exert a proper pressure on his

43. AHM. FGDB, Box 622, «Provincia de Manica e Sofala. Direcção Provincial da Administração Civil; Circular n° 3936/B/9, Beira, 2 de Outubro de 1943 ».

44. AHM. FGDB, Box 622, «Provincia de Manica e Sofala. Direcção Provincial de Administração Civil. Circular n° 2651/B/9, Beira, 17 de Junho de 1944 ».

45. AHM. FGDB, Box 639, « Direcção Provincial de Administração Civil de Manica e Sofala. Circular n° 7876/B/14. Beira, 11 de Dezembro de 1947 ».

46. AHM. FGDB, Box 639, « Governo de Manica e Sofala, Despacho do Governador, Beira, 8 de Abril de 1952 ».

47. Interview 4/b: Fumo Luís Seda. Distrito de Gondola, Posto de Matsinho, October 2001.

48. Interview 7/b: Filimone Supea. Distrito de Sussundenga, localidade de Monhinga, October 2001.

49. AHM. FGDB, Box 622, « Circunscrição de Sofala, n° 1902/B/9, Nova Sofala, 10 de Novembro de 1943 ».

50. AHM. FGDB, Box 670, « Administração da Circunscrição de Mutarara, n° 614/B/15/3, Mutarara, 28 de Abril de 1947 ».

51. A number of colonial documents of the Beira District administration give details about the methods used. For an example in Chimoio see: AHM. FGDB, Box 677, « Administração do Concelho de Chimoio, n° 2162/B/12, Vila Pery, 16 de Junho de 1959 ».

community brought on an in-flow of people to his territory. When he was replaced by a chief more compliant with colonial directives, people began to leave the area⁵².

There was no common perception among the population in Beira district of colonial territorial controls. At times, the internal boundaries between the *circunscrições* resembled the external boundaries with Southern Rhodesia, and they offered to Africans a relative freedom of movement⁵³. At other times, controls were applied with much more severity. Some people recall being conscripted for contract labour for having tried to move without the proper authorization issued by their local administrator⁵⁴.

As with emigration, colonial data for internal migration is not reliable. However, from the beginning of the 1950s the local administrators were asked by the central government of the colony to produce regular figures on each administrative division's African labour force «available» for the colonial enterprises⁵⁵. These figures can be taken as significant in looking to identify at least the main trends, which clearly demonstrate how some *circunscrições* (like Sofala, Mossurize, Bárue and Mutarara) can be considered as labour exporting areas, while the areas of the district which hosted the greater colonial economic activities recorded contrasting figures of employment⁵⁶.

Comparing External and Internal Borders

A number of colonial documents, like those mentioned above, indicate that all the *circunscrições* of Beira District suffered from labour migration abroad. However, labour-reserve *circunscrições* like Mossurize, Sofala, and Bárue remained on the periphery of economic and political development, while other areas, like Búzi, Chimoio, Cheringoma, and Marromeu, saw significant economic colonial activities. These differences were reflected in the internal colonial division of labour between the various economic interests, as well as in the different patterns of employment. Even within the *circunscrições*, the areas reached by some infrastructures like roads and shops contrasted with other areas almost completely isolated, where people emigrated abroad in large groups.

The structures of labour migration abroad represented the last step of the internal circulation of people. A number of factors, not least the incidence of migrant routes that had already developed before the effective establishment of Portuguese colonialism, contributed to differentiating the territory of Beira District between areas where people's preferred destination abroad was generally South Africa, and other areas where Africans usually chose to emigrate to Southern Rhodesia. Apart from some general divisions that can be identified in the territory, like the Punguê river or the

52. AHM. FGDB, Box 618, «Administração da Circunscrição do Búzi, n° 3591, Nova Lusitânia, 7 de Dezembro de 1960».

53. For example: Interview 4/b: Fumo Lúis Seda. Distrito de Gondola, Posto de Matsinho, October 2001; Interview 6/b: Joami Chipoi. Distrito de Sussundenga, Sede, October 2001.

54. For example: Interview 9/d: João Careca. Distrito de Manica, Vila de Manica, November 2001; Interview 6/c: Elias Chiposse, Distrito de Sussundenga, Sede, October 2001.

55. AHM. FGDB, Box 641, «Mapas das Disponibilidades de mão de obra indígena».

56. C. TORNIMBENI, «Working boundaries'...», *op. cit.*

«corridor» linking Beira to Southern Rhodesia, each *circunscrição* had usually some local areas traditionally linked to one or another destination in the neighbouring British colonies. For example, in the southern *circunscrições* of Mossurize, Manica, Búzi, and Sofala, people in the administrative centres in general either contracted for local activities or they managed to go to Southern Rhodesia, while those in the «inland» areas migrated in large numbers to South Africa.

The colonial administration in Beira District tried to impose limits and boundaries on almost every aspect of the life of Africans. Movement was generally the people's favourite response to colonial state impositions, but the pass-system and the system of labour reserves, though not completely effective, reinforced internal boundaries between the *circunscrições*. These boundaries, on the other hand, often conflicted with the local population's affiliations and frequently produced further population movements.

We have seen the factors that pushed people to migrate within the district initially, and then abroad. This circular migration process by stages allows us to compare the incidence of the different levels of boundaries. It seems that in many cases it was easier to migrate to Southern Rhodesia than to move within the territory of the Portuguese colony. Independent migrant workers from Beira District could find rest camps, depots, and other facilities in Southern Rhodesia, in contrast to the absence of such structures within the district⁵⁷. In the British colony they could be easily regularised by the local authorities too, given that their regularisation meant cheap labour for the Southern Rhodesian economy and taxes in valuable foreign currency for the Portuguese authorities. Moreover, colonial officials in Beira District would often facilitate the return of emigrants from abroad, because of the lack of local workers: for example, some migrants were allowed to return in Manica, Bárue, and other areas and to settle in new lands, and were even exempted for given periods from taxation or contract labour recruitment⁵⁸. By contrast, I showed how the Africans circulating for work inside Beira District could be conscripted for cheap contract labour by virtue of the Portuguese norms limiting Africans' movement. An official of the central government of Mozambique commented:

«It seems neither just nor justifiable that we are dispensing so much severity to those who confine themselves to moving within the national territory, and that we are tolerating the natives moving without pass outside their administrative areas when they are going abroad»⁵⁹.

However, in Beira District, people could also find places where local employers would contract unauthorised workers from other areas and

57. J.M. Das Neves TÊMBE, *Economy, Society...*, *op. cit.*; M. NEWITT, «Labour Migration...», *op. cit.*; P. SCOTT, «Migrant Labour in Southern Rhodesia», *The Geographical Review*, 44, 1954; C.TORNIMBENI, *Labour Migration in Central-Southern Africa and Tete District, Mozambique, 1890-1945*, MA Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1999.

58. AHM. FGDB, Box 692, «Concelho de Manica. Posto Administrativo de Mavita. "Relatório sobre o despovoamento da sede do Posto de Mavita ...", 1 de Abril de 1950»; AHM. FGDB, Box 692, «Administração da Circunscrição do Bárue. Confidencial, nº 1253/B/3, Vila Gouveia, 31 de Julho de 1952». For the significance of similar dynamics in a previous period, see E. ALLINA-PISANO, «Borderlands, Boundaries...», *op. cit.*

59. AHM. FGDB, Box 683, «Direcção dos Serviços dos Negócios Indígenas. Informação Confidencial, nº 82/A/54/9, Lourenço Marques, 27 de Agosto de 1959» (My translation).

subsequently regularise their position with local authorities⁶⁰. This practice, together with the Africans' independent circulation, contributed to challenging the colonial system of limitations on movement in the late 1950s.

In general it is easy, when looking at physical movement, to compare the internal workers' movement in the Portuguese colony to the migrant processes abroad, and hence internal borders to international ones. An emblematic example – underlying to what extent the internal migration in Mozambique between different provinces resembled the migrant processes abroad – is the view expressed by an administrator of Cheringoma. He commented on the flow of African workers who, despite colonial barriers, moved from Zambezia to the southern bank of the river Zambezi, attracted by the higher wages of the Sena Sugar Estates in the *circunscrição* of Marromeu, and said:

« This situation is similar to that which came to pass at the end of the last century with clandestine emigration to the mines in the Rand, a problem which the great Mouzinho solved in the only way possible, then as now, that is: by legalizing and regulating such emigration »⁶¹.

* * *

In this work, intended as a reflection on the present « febrile fascination » with transnationalism and movements across borders⁶², I looked at the colonial past in Mozambique with regard to some elements of current debates on state borders and transnational relations in Southern Africa.

Along with Frederick Cooper's call for an historical dimension of current processes that cross territorial boundaries in Africa, my work showed how phenomena currently recognisable as elements of transnationalism existed in the colonial period, long before the recent debate on transnational relations tried to fit them on an autonomous theoretical framework. People's identity and social relations were already contrasting with physical boundaries in colonial times, and Africans in the old Beira District of Mozambique were already adept at finding the best deal for themselves circulating on the territory and establishing economic and social networks across artificial borders.

Secondly, my analysis of the late colonial period in Mozambique addressed in particular the issue of boundaries within the transnational debate, trying to evaluate the relative strength of both international and internal borders in relation to people's movement for work.

Portuguese colonialism under Salazar consolidated socioeconomic distortions in the relationship between the African population and state power over the territory. The central Beira District was differentiated into

60. AHM. FGDB, Box 600, « Repartição Central dos Negócios Indígenas. Circular n° 1152/E/10, Lourenço Marques, 10 de Maio de 1943 »; AHM. FGDB, Box 608, « Província da Zambezia. Direcção Provincial de Administração Civil - Quelimane, n° 2388/B/15, 14 de Julho de 1950 ».

61. AHM. FGDB, Box 667, « Administração da Circunscrição de Cheringoma. n° 1698/B/15/2, Cheringoma, 11 de Junho de 1947 » (My translation).

62. K. MITCHELL, « Transnational Discourse... », *op. cit.*: 101.

labour reserves and centres of production, and the norms on the limitations of the African population's movement frustrated the workers' free choice within the labour market and their circulation from one *circunscricão* to another. Mozambicans' migration for work often met with obstacles in the borders of the internal administrative areas; however, all Mozambican workers in general experienced the same kind of labour relations, frustrations, and ambitions throughout the territory, shaped by the forced-labour system of Portuguese colonialism. Forced recruitment for contract labour was a common threat for all African people in the district, as were the poor conditions in the place of work, whether they had to avoid hard colonial controls, or whether their movement was facilitated by magnanimous colonial officials and employers. On the other hand, the same workers could enjoy comparatively better working conditions and different labour and social relations in Southern Rhodesia, which they could easily reach by deserting their work, crossing the international frontier, and heading for the farms and mines on the other side of the border. The historical development of the two colonies differentiated the lives of the people on each side of the border.

A main conclusion of my analysis is that the patterns of Africans circulation and colonial controls in Beira District in the 1940s and 1950s show borders, internal and external, to be either hard and constraining or weak, depending on which element of the debate we choose to focus on. The international frontier was extremely permeable, and even weaker than the internal borders if considered in relation to the circulation of people and the way transnational links developed. However, this international frontier effectively gained in value over time if considered for its impact on the migrants' labour relations with the colonial power. The value of the borders and the impact of state power on people's lives is not necessarily undermined by a discourse which concentrates on transnational links: the latter simply looks at how people were able to develop social and economic networks across those obstacles perceived as weak or constraining depending on the local context and the occasion.

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