

The state, labour migration and the transnational discourse – a historical perspective from Mozambique

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Abstract

In Southern Africa it is possible to discuss how some elements highlighted by current debates on transnationalism developed or consolidated in the colonial past. In central Mozambique the patterns of Africans' circulation and colonial controls in the 1940s and 1950s indicate that the international frontier was probably more permeable than the internal borders, if considered in relation to the independent movement of people and to the way transnational links developed. However, this international frontier effectively gained in value over time when considered for its impact on the migrants' labour relations with the colonial power. The main conclusion is that the position stressing how the international boundaries were "eroded" by African migrants on the 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 the physical circulation of people is considered, or the state's borders impact on the migrants' labour and social relations.

Introduction

In recent years, the tension between the "old" nation-state and the contemporary transnational circulation of goods, capital, and people in Africa within the context of the globalised world, has increasingly drawn the attention of both the academia and the wider public. There seems to be a consensus in the literature that the nation-state in Africa, together with the power relations it represents, is in a state of crisis and that among other factors, it is also challenged by the new forms of transnational connection. In particular, the literature on transnationalism has extensively addressed borders as a contested terrain where independent flows, transnational links, and hybrid identities develop.

No doubt, travelling around in a borderland region of a country like Mozambique, an observer's attention is attracted by a multiplicity of elements apparently confirming the influence of transboundary and

international connections in citizens' everyday lives. Thus, it seems to be important to analyse the influence of these supposedly new dynamics on local processes of development, considering that empowerment of local communities and decentralisation of politics at the local level are now at the forefront of international prescriptions for democratisation and development co-operation.

The tripartite regional division of Mozambique is a well known characteristic of this country. The political and economic imbalances that modern Mozambique inherited from its latest and less recent history have been extensively analysed. These imbalances explain why today development infrastructures are mainly located along the "corridors" linking the southern area around Maputo to South Africa and the central regions to Zimbabwe. International migration, too, has been represented as following the same directions.

Today, central Mozambique, given its apparently stable conditions, is experiencing a small but significant immigration to be set against a long history of emigration, which however, has not disappeared and still continues. The Mozambican government sees the region as central to its policy of economic growth, and tries to reshape state-society relations through new policies according to the new guiding principle of "decentralisation".¹

What seems to be missing in research is to link studies on state-society relations, that is, studies on processes of political decentralisation, local governance, and decentralised development, with studies on rather long-term and fundamental socio-economic characteristics of these regions of Africa, such as migration. My intention here is to address this research gap by discussing migratory movements in central Mozambique, within the context of the international debate on transnational relations and the issue of borders.

¹ For a critique see, for example, Galli (2003). On Development discourses and practices in Mozambique see, for example, Pijnenburg (2004).

Transnationalism between past and present

The term “transnationalism” has been widely used to describe supposedly new phenomena, as intriguing as vague, of transboundary networks, reflecting also a certain fascination by borders as “linkages” and “bridges”, transformed and imbued with new meanings by daily practices of migrants which are often taken as the avantgarde of transnationalism. By doing so, transnationalism is often portrayed as a positive force and put into contrast with the rapid and powerful capitalist transformation of global social relations resulting from globalisation. In this vein, the transnational financial penetration of global corporations is contrasted with the equally transnational civil society armed with the weapon of social capital; or, the demise of nation-states is contrasted with more positive transnational forms of governance in the era of globalisation.² James Ferguson introduces the notion of “transnational apparatus[es] of governmentality”, which challenges the usual portrayal of African states-civil society’s relations as following a vertical topography of power (Ferguson 2004). However, transnationalism has never been given an adequate theoretical framework of analysis. Stephen Vertovec suggests only a minimal definition of the concept: “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.” (Vertovec 1999, 447).

Ethnic diasporas and their hybrid identities, international civil society, and transnational networks involving migrants, have probably been those three phenomena that have most attracted the interest of social scientists studying transnationalism. The way these phenomena are treated tends to suggest a picture which contrasts a past of territorial boundedness and separateness with a present marked by interconnection and multiple ties creating transnational spaces. However, this image is not unanimously supported. For example, the eminent Africanist historian Frederick Cooper argues that crucial questions about the limits to interconnection, and about the specific characteristics of the structures needed to make connections work, are not formulated. According to Cooper, Africanists should be particularly sensitive to the historical dimension of those processes that cross territorial configurations, given the way in which the boundaries of political units or

² Some of these themes are treated in Callaghy, Kassimir, and Latham (2001).

even of the African continent were violated by ideas, cultural movement or migrant processes in the past (Cooper 2001a; 2001b).

Following Cooper's call for an historical dimension, my purpose is to see how some elements surrounding the discourse on transnationalism developed or consolidated in the colonial past. My personal attention concentrates on the latter of the three phenomena outlined above, that is, on transnational migrant flows. My intention is to critically engage with the current literature on transnational migration in view of the historiography of Southern Africa in general and of migration in Mozambique in particular. Indeed, both the supporters and the critics of the novelty of the transnational approach would agree that past literature on circular migration systems in Southern Africa addressed the very components of what is now called transnational migration in depth.³ The case-study looks at labour migration from a central region of Mozambique between 1942 and ca. 1960, considering in more detail the origin of processes of international migration in the context of the internal circulation of labour and of labour relations more generally. 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, the study discusses the relationship between migrants and boundaries by comparing the international border with the internal ones. The main conclusion is that the position stressing how the international boundaries were "eroded" by African migrants on the 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 state's borders impact on the migrants' labour and social relations.

³ This position is maintained, for example, by Bruno Riccio, although he also believes that: "The approach via transnationalism [...] represents a positive step in the study of migration, especially [...] [for its] serious consideration of migrants' socio-cultural backgrounds, and connections to the context of origin" (Riccio 2001, 584).

Transnational migration and the issue of borders in Southern Africa and Mozambique

Mozambique's historical political and economic imbalances have never been resolved by the independent state both in the pre- and post-war period. During the time of Portuguese colonial administration Mozambique has never been developed as a homogenous entity. Indeed, during the last decades of colonial rule, the north, the centre and the south of the country were still more connected to Nyasaland, Northern and Southern Rhodesia, and South Africa than to each other.

In the central regions of Mozambique the relations between the state and society have always been shaped by the proximity of this area to the territories on the other side of the international border. Migration abroad, in particular labour migration, represented a lot more than just an escape from the harsh internal conditions. It provided people with a rational opportunity to access the closest and best social services, markets, and work-places. Recently, Eric Allina-Pisano emphasised how in early colonial times people's movements were at the centre of complex negotiations between migrants, African chiefs and Portuguese officials that eventually produced the constitution of colonial power. He demonstrates how African people and African chiefs used movement to bargain their power of control over African labour with the colonial authorities (Allina-Pisano 2003). I would suggest that if we move the analysis towards a consideration of the internal context too, we would realize how, as recognised by Allina-Pisano, the international characteristic of borders was a secondary aspect. Even within the Mozambican territory, political and administrative boundaries represented the site of disputes between Africans and the Portuguese administration.

On the contrary, the great majority of the literature on migration in Mozambique and Southern Africa concentrated exclusively on the international borders between the colonial states. This literature addressed the economic power of the mining industries or of the colonial and post-colonial states, or tried to balance these analyses with attempts to emphasise the "voice" of the migrants. The central regions of Mozambique have been frequently at the centre of the attention, given their 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 there.

Even today, Mozambicans' labour migration reminds us of the circular migration system which was consolidated during the colonial period: on the one hand, a migration process by stages whereby emigration to Rhodesia or South Africa was to some extent compensated by immigration from Nyasaland or other parts of Mozambique;⁴ and on the other hand, a life strategy in which many of the people who opted for the better employment opportunities and the overall better quality of life of the nearby British colonies ultimately returned to their original area. Conversely, recent out-flows and in-flows of people in some areas of the country embody new conjunctures in the region: the current situation of relative peace and stability in 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 inflows of migrants from abroad.

Today, Southern African international boundaries are generally taken to represent long-established power relations. The concept of transnationalism, which involves a movement across these boundaries, and therefore "*embodies an inherently transgressive quality*" (Mitchell 1997, 101), has often been used to characterise current migration dynamics and, by implication has often been regarded as challenging the power relations embodied by borders.⁵ In this view, communities develop concrete transnational social networks across inconvenient and artificial borders that are increasingly "soft".⁶ A discourse emphasising such processes of de-territorialisation of social and political phenomena, considers migrants as citizens of more than

⁴ What Boeder described as the ripple effect of Southern African labour migration, consisting in people moving to the next neighbouring countries and replacing indigenous workers themselves migrating to more developed areas (Boeder, 1984). In this process, generally migrants were also accessing jobs (for example, farm work) that local workers were leaving to reach more remunerable ones (for example, mine labour) within the same country.

⁵ However, 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: Basch, Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994); Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999). Two important collections of essays on African boundaries are: Nugent, and Asiwaju (eds.) (1996); and: Wilson, and Donnan (eds.) (1998a). Regarding more specifically the issue of the "new migrant spaces" in South Africa there is: Crush, and McDonald (eds.) (2002).

⁶ See, for example, some of the essays in: Nugent, and Asiwaju (eds.) (1996).

one country. On the other hand other scholars sustain that, notwithstanding the multiple transnational links maintained by both migrants and non-migrants, the state continues to play an important role in the everyday lives of its own citizens and non-nationals residing on, immigration to or crossing its territory.⁷ Regarding central Mozambique, an example of the above positions can be found in the works of Stephen Lubkemann and David McDermott Hughes. The former analyses the transnational terms in which migrants of a particular community in central Mozambique came to frame their lives: in this community, migrant men used transnational forms of polygamy to constitute parallel “total life strategies” both in Mozambique and South Africa, and their sense of community came to be defined by the transnational nature of their migratory projects.

“The transnational terms in which such men conceive of and enact their lives thus defy the pretensions of the nation-state, which privileges the idea that citizens “belong” to only one territory. Machazian men are highly resistant to the imposition of statist notions of “return” that threaten to “displace” them from their own preferred transnational life-strategies.” (Lubkemann 2000, 51).

On the other hand, Hughes, addressing the significance of the international border between Mozambique and Zimbabwe, demonstrates how the border became important in local social relations during the colonial and post-colonial period. This border both physically and socially presenting the perfect conditions for transnational migrant processes and community networks, in reality marked the divergence between different socio-political cultures. “In the process of permitting travel”, it differentiated “among categories of people” (Hughes 1999, 537). Zimbabweans, used to bargain over land, and Mozambicans, used to political conflict based on the control of people and of their labour. When Mozambicans moved on the other side of the border, they found themselves in a blatantly unfavourable position in respect to land allocation:

“The river and the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border separated those who negotiated for land from those who simply accepted the terms given them. Vastly different colonial and post-colonial histories, again distinguished by the border, prepared Zimbabweans to bargain over land

⁷ See, for example: Wilson, and Donnan (1998b).

and Mozambicans to pledge themselves to headmen.” (Hughes 1999, 551-552).

State boundaries are all historically artificial, and, no doubt, African state’s boundaries are not an exception: they have been drawn both as a colonial imposition and as a result of local renegotiations between the European powers and a number of local political actors (including local kingdoms where these existed). Still today, the majority of these boundaries are not sufficiently 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. For example, Allina-Pisano explains how the international border between Mozambique and Zimbabwe in the beginning of the 20th century, when only about ten years had passed since its delimitation, was already materially more significant than an abstract arbitrary boundary (Allina-Pisano 2003). In a more contemporary context, the usual image of Africans crossing artificial borders, and of the “African tribe” as “the locus of a more primordial, more entrenched, affiliation than the nation state” (Englund 2002, 21) is challenged by Harri Englund’s analysis of a borderland between Mozambique and Malawi. He points to the different histories experienced by the villages on the two sides of the border, to the strong sense of the territory demonstrated by the people moving from one village to another, and to the capacity of borderland inhabitants to make use of the international border in creating distinctions and constraints. In general, the uprootedness of the refugee’s status too, would be questioned by the complex dynamics of social relationships and by historical contingency (Englund 2002).

Following these views, the crucial point in the analysis of borders in central Mozambique seems to be the social standing of migrants rather than the extent to which borders are permeable to people’s movement or community networks. An examination of the old Beira District of Mozambique in the 1940s and 1950s allows to investigate to what extent the above considerations on the changing status of border crossers applied to labour relations and to people’s movement on the territory in a crucial period for the formation of the Mozambican state, when Salazar’s phase of Portuguese colonial rule both consolidated and altered past trends in people’s relations with the state’s institutions and the territory.

Comparing external and internal borders in the old Beira District of Mozambique in 1940s and 1950s⁸

Colonial documents indicate on several occasions the extent to which the central Beira District of Mozambique was affected by labour migration abroad. However, some *circunscrições* – the lowest level of the colonial administrative division – like Mossurize, Sofala, and Bárue (the labour-reserve areas), remained on the periphery of economic and political development, while other areas, like Búzi, Chimoio, Cheringoma, and Marromeu, hosted significant economic colonial activities. These differences were reflected in the internal division of labour between the various economic interests, as well as in the different patterns of employment. Even within the *circunscrições*, the areas with some infrastructures like roads and shops contrasted with other areas almost completely isolated, where people emigrated in large groups. The colonial administration in Beira District tried to impose limits and boundaries on almost every aspect of Africans' lives. High mobility was generally the most common response to colonial rule. At the same time, however, the pass-system and the system of labour reserves, though not completely effective, reinforced internal boundaries between the *circunscrições*.

In 1942, the *Regulamento de Identificação Indígena* stipulated that Africans needed an authorisation by their local administrator for any movement beyond their *circunscrição*. People's mobility was controlled through the obligation for all African men of productive age and of adult women in administrative centres to hold a personal document called *caderneta indígena*. In 1946 a new regulation allowed Mozambicans to move freely within the entire district, but the previous system was re-introduced only two years later after local administrators had repeatedly asked the colonial government to do so.⁹ Freedom of movement within the district was formally reinstated only in 1959.¹⁰ This vacillation of policy and the

⁸ For more details on the elements espoused in this section, see also: Tornimbeni (2003)

⁹ AHM. FGDB, Cx.683. "Administração da Circunscrição do Buzi. N°917/B/17, Nova Luzitânia, 29 de Julho de 1947"; AHM. FGDB, Cx.683. "Repartição Central dos Negócios Indígenas. N°678/B/4, Lourenço Marques, 27 de Fevereiro de 1948".

¹⁰ AHM. FGDB, Cx.683. "Direcção dos Serviços dos Negócios Indígenas. Informação Confidencial, N°82/A/54/9, Lourenço Marques, 27 de Agosto de 1959".

confusion generated among the population is reflected in the contrasting views expressed by the people interviewed in Manica and Chimoio.¹¹

Although the implementation of the legislation was not as rigorous as the letter of the rules stipulated, the limitations on Africans' movement, complemented by similar measures in urban areas like Beira,¹² represented a crucial tool in the hands of Portuguese administration to enforce forced-labour provisions: forced recruitment could be imposed on vagrants (*vádios*), that is, on those found outside their *circunscrição* without proper authorisation.

The forced-labour system was reintroduced in 1942 by *Circular 818/D-7* and issued by the Governor-General of the colony, a circular note that profoundly affected labour relations in the following years.¹³ The entire colonial documentation is pervaded with what seemed to be the biggest problem for under-capitalised colonial employers all over Mozambique: the disposal of cheap labour, given their inability to attract Mozambican workers:

"The general interest compels that private enterprises are disposed with labour for their normal activity. [...] if there isn't other mechanisms to arrange labour to maintain the regular activity of private enterprises, it is legitimate to turn to the obligation to work." (da Silva Cunha 1949, 193).¹⁴

The African people who did not comply with the requirements of the new regulations could be captured as *vádios* 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 Portuguese. The result was that 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 degree of compulsion involved in labour recruitment in the various *circunscrições* varied depending on many factors; among them, it depended on the local

¹¹ 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.

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

¹³ AHM. FGDB, Cx.622. "Governo Geral da Colonia de Moçambique, Repartição do Gabinete, Circular n.818/D-7, 7 de Outubro de 1942".

¹⁴ My own translation from Portuguese.

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 generally violated by the employers, in whose enterprises working conditions were generally very poor for African labourers. The role of forced labour was crucial in this regard, given that on the whole, colonial employers could rely on a minimum of forced African labour secured to them by the administrators of the *circunscrições*. Thus, apart from some minor variation, the forced-labour system was a common threat to all Africans in the district, as were the poor conditions at the work places.

Local administrators spent much time trying to reconcile competing demands for labour made by the employers in the territory. Those in need of the administrators' support were the smaller farmers of Chimoio, as they were unable to pay the costs for recruitment. As a consequence, the regional division of labour within the district was renegotiated almost every year. In 1943, the Governor of the Province of Manica e Sofala (to which Beira District belonged) invited the local administrators to favour first the public service, and second the rural activities of Chimoio.¹⁵ Then, in the following year, the *circunscrições* with labour shortages had other areas reserved for recruitment.¹⁶ The division of 1944 was reshaped in 1947.¹⁷ Finally, in 1950, partly in response to mounting international pressure against forced labour in the Portuguese colonies, 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. However, the administrators continued to allocate the labour they could control in their territory to employers of their choosing, and the labour-reserve system was reintroduced only two years later.¹⁸

¹⁵ AHM. FGDB, Cx.622. "Provincia de Manica e Sofala. Direcção Provincial da Administração Civil; Circular N°3936/B/9, Beira, 2 de Outubro de 1943".

¹⁶ AHM. FGDB, Cx.622. "Provincia de Manica e Sofala. Direcção Provincial de Administração Civil. Circular N.2651/B/9, Beira, 17 de Junho de 1944".

¹⁷ AHM. FGDB, Cx.639. "Direcção Provincial de Administração Civil de Manica e Sofala. Circular N°7876/B/14. Beira, 11 de Dezembro de 1947".

¹⁸ AHM. FGDB, Cx.639. "Governo de Manica e Sofala, Despacho do Governador, Beira, 8 de Abril de 1952".

African workers regarded the denial of a legitimate choice to Africans, for example, by restricting physical movement and limiting the right to change one's employer with increasing intolerance. In Chimoio, people were particularly frustrated for having no reasonable choice in their territory.¹⁹ A reason why people moved is that recruitment for contract labour and forced cropping was not uniformly enforced in the territory. Africans in Beira District became adept at finding the best deal for themselves circulating within the district; however, 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 Beira,²⁰ to Mutarara in the north, where people absconded in order not to be conscripted for the construction of the railway line passing through Tete.²¹ The colonial authorities' controls were often eluded by various methods, like using false authorisations for movement and false personal documents.²² But the key role was played by traditional authorities. A case in point is Búzi, where the failure of the local chief to exert pressure on his community to answer colonial labour and tax demands resulted in considerable inflows of Africans from elsewhere in the territory. When he was replaced by a chief more compliant with colonial directives, people began to leave the area.²³

Among the population there was no common perception of colonial territorial controls in Beira District. At times, the internal boundaries between the *circunscrições* resembled the external boundaries with Southern Rhodesia, and they offered to Africans a relative freedom of movement.²⁴

¹⁹ Interview 4/b: Fumo Luís Seda. Distrito de Gondola, Posto de Matsinho, October 2001.

²⁰ AHM. FGDB, Cx.622. "Circunscrição de Sofala. N.1902/B/9, Nova Sofala, 10 de Novembro de 1943".

²¹ AHM. FGDB, Cx.670. "Administração da Circunscrição de Mutarara. N.614/B/15/3, Mutarara, 28 de Abril de 1947".

²² A number of colonial documents of the Beira District administration give details about the methods used. For an example in Chimoio see: AHM. FGDB, Cx.677. "Administração do Concelho de Chimoio. N.º2162/B/12, Vila Pery, 16 de Junho de 1959".

²³ AHM. FGDB, Cx.618. "Administração da Circunscrição do Búzi. N.º3591, Nova Lusitânia, 7 de Dezembro de 1960".

²⁴ For example: Interview 4/b: Fumo Luís Seda. Distrito de Gondola, Posto de Matsinho, October 2001; Interview 6/b: Joami Chipoi. Distrito de Sussundenga, Sede, October 2001.

More often, controls were applied with much more severity, and there are people, too, who recall being conscripted for contract labour for having tried to move without the proper authorisation issued by their local administrator.²⁵

From the beginning of the 1950s the local administrators were asked by the central colonial government to produce regular figures on each administrative division's African labour force "available" for the colonial enterprises.²⁶ Although colonial data for internal as well as external migration is not reliable, 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, Báruè 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 employment.

There is a broad consensus that the structures of labour migration abroad were shaped first of all by the elements peculiar to local and social life and that it, in a sense, represented the last step of the internal circulation of people. A number of factors generated an internal differentiation of the territory of Beira District, and this fact in effect contributed to shaping Africans' preferred destinations abroad, generally South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Forced labour, forced cultivation of cotton or rice, and labour recruitment practices were the most important factors determining the decision to migrate to neighbouring countries in search of better working conditions.²⁷ Throughout Beira District the lack of a choice of employment was probably a major factor for migration abroad. Working conditions were reported to be particularly hard at white farms of Chimoio, and to a lesser extent those of Manica, and a comparison with conditions abroad is a constant theme in the narratives of people.²⁸ The same can be

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ AHM. FGDB, Cx.641. "Mapas das Disponibilidades de mão de obra indígena".

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ 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.

The fact that at that time working conditions as well as infrastructures and services were generally better in Southern Rhodesia than in Mozambique seems to be confirmed by the

said of wages, although the crucial factor behind many of these claims seems to be the lower purchasing power of the wage in Beira District, where the living costs were higher.²⁹

When emigrating, some people followed old routes which had developed before the establishment of the modern Portuguese colonial state. The southern *circunscrição* of Mossurize had been a centre of the Gaza kingdom in the past.³⁰ The inland areas of Búzi (Chibabava), Sofala (Machanga), and Mossurize (Machaze) formed an area where people under one contract with the same employer influenced each other in following the old routes leading to South Africa.³¹ This may explain why in certain areas migration was predominantly directed towards South Africa and in others towards Southern Rhodesia.

The majority of migrant workers crossed the frontier independently, and they never met big obstacles in their unauthorised emigration. Generally, the Portuguese officials' reports reveal a genuine anxiety vis-à-vis clandestine emigration, which they saw as a problem for the development of the colony. However, in some cases, the Portuguese officials' complicity with clandestine migration was crucial: from the practical and local point of view, Africans' emigration was beneficial for the colonial economy, because migrants' incomes and remittances (in valuable foreign currency) resulted in higher tax proceeds, just as colonial employers benefited from the restrictions on internal movement through the forced recruitment of cheap labour. In general, the extensive border between Beira District and Southern Rhodesia rendered the effective control of border crossings impossible.

literature available as well as by both the colonial documents I examined and the interviews I collected. 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.

²⁹ For example: AHM. FGDB, Cx.692. "Administração da Circunscrição do Buzi. N°1152/B/17/1, Nova Luzitânia, 4 de Setembro de 1947"; AHM. FGDB, Cx.608. "Administração da Circunscrição de Bàrué. N.819/B15, Vila Govueia, 20 de Julho de 1948".

³⁰ AHM. FGDB, Cx.692. "Administração da Circunscrição de Mossurize. Confidencial, N°372/B/17/1, Espungabera, 16 de Abril de 1949".

³¹ AHM, SE, 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.

Furthermore, Mozambican workers were welcomed by Southern Rhodesian employers and local authorities on the other side of the border, who sometimes regularised them on the condition that they signed a contract with a British employer.

The frequent contacts with societies on the other side of the border and the proximity with the foreign trade centres constituted remarkable opportunities for Mozambicans in comparison to the absence of attractive alternatives inside their country and to the fragile internal commercial networks.³² In some cases certain communities, for example in Manica, were fluctuating across the border following cultural or family links, and it may be that they did not interpret their movement exactly as emigration.³³ This extended international frontier has been considered extremely porous, and has been regarded as representing the very ideal conditions for transnational relations. For example, people would often live on the Mozambican side of the border and trade their products in Southern Rhodesia:

“We were crossing over to the other side to sell our products, and this because at that time there were no borders.”³⁴

Some migrants 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 time.³⁵ However, the border between the Beira District of Mozambique and Southern Rhodesia was not only an artificial line between social networks or family links. Another dimension of the boundary surfaces when considering the completely different histories of socio-economic development in the two colonies. The border came to represent the line of demarcation between the internal labour relations in

³² AHM. FISANI, Cx.39. “João Mesquita, Relatório das Inspeções Ordinárias às Circunscrições de Chemba, Sena, Marromeu, Gorongosa, Manica e Mossurize, do Distrito da Beira, 1946”.

³³ AHM, SE, José Alberto Gomes de Melo Branquinho, *op.cit.*

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

³⁵ AHM. FGDB, Cx617. ‘Intendência do Distrito de Tete. Confidencial N°1578/B/8, Tete, 26 de Junho de 1950’.

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 both African and colonial authorities on the two sides of the border. This fact gave an important significance to a state boundary otherwise physically weak. Instead, looking at physical movement, the circular migration system in Beira District allows us to easily compare the internal workers' movement in the Portuguese colony to the migrant processes abroad, and hence internal borders to international ones. An emblematic example is the view expressed by an administrator of Cheringoma. Commenting on the flow of African workers moving from Zambezia to the *circunscrição* of Marromeu, attracted by the higher wages of the Sena Sugar Estates, he 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.”³⁶

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 district.³⁷ Furthermore, in the British colony they could be easily regularised by the local authorities, 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 due to the lack of local workers: for example, in Manica, Bárue, and other areas some migrants were allowed to return and to settle in new lands. They were even exempted for given periods from taxation or contract

³⁶ AHM. FGDB, Cx.667. 'Administração da Circunscrição de Cheringoma. N°1698/B/15/2, Cheringoma, 11 de Junho de 1947' (my translation).

³⁷ See: das Neves (1998), Newitt (1995), Scott (1954).

labour recruitment.³⁸ By contrast, I showed how the Africans circulating for work inside Beira District could be conscripted for cheap contract labour in virtue of the restrictive Portuguese norms limiting Africans' movement. An official of the central government of Mozambique commented:

"It seems neither right 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."³⁹

Conclusion

The article looked at the colonial past in Mozambique with regard to some elements of current debates on state's borders and transnational relations in Southern Africa. A main conclusion is that the patterns of Africans' circulation and colonial controls in Beira District in the 1940s and 1950s show internal and external borders 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 to the way transnational links developed. However, this international frontier effectively gained in significance over time if considered for its impact on the migrants' labour relations with the colonial power.

Indeed, the central Beira District under Salazar's phase of Portuguese colonialism was differentiated into labour reserves and centres of production. The regulations on the limitations of the African population's movement frustrated the workers' free choice within the labour market as well as their circulation from one *circunscrição* to another. Mozambican

³⁸ AHM. FGDB, Cx.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, Cx.692. "Administração da Circunscrição do Báruè. Confidencial, N°1253/B/3, Vila Gouveia, 31 de Julho de 1952". For the significance of similar dynamics in a previous period, see Allina-Pisano (2003).

³⁹ AHM. FGDB, Cx.683. "Direcção dos Serviços dos Negócios Indígenas. Informação Confidencial, N°82/A/54/9, Lourenço Marques, 27 de Agosto de 1959" (my own translation).

labour migrants were often confronted 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. On the other hand, the same workers could enjoy comparatively better working conditions and different labour and social relations in Southern Rhodesia, where they could easily get to 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 had differentiated the lives of the people on both sides of the border.

Without any intention of addressing the different understandings of transnationalism and the transnational theory, in view of the above conclusions it can be argued that the value of borders and the impact of state power on people's lives are not necessarily undermined by a discourse which concentrates on transnational links. This discourse, providing a different analytical perspective on both old and new phenomena of international migration, simply looks at how people were able to develop social and economic networks across those obstacles perceived as weak or as constraining, depending on the local context and on occasion.

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