NDAU IDENTITY IN MOZAMBIQUE-ZIMBABWE BORDERLAND

Marta Patrício
Centro de Estudos Africanos (CEA)
ISCTE-IUL – Lisbon University Institute[1]
marta.patricio@hotmail.com

Introduction

The Ndau are one of many African groups that show the division provoked by the establishment of colonial borders. The effects caused by this territorial demarcation to the definition of a transnational Ndau identity, as well as the evolutions around this identitarian feeling, specially affected by sociopolitical transformations in both countries (specially colonial wars and civil wars) are fundamental analysis elements to the update of knowledge about this ethnic group.

The academic debates about ethnicity have been largely discussed in the past decades, specially the ethnicity historicity, i.e., if ethnic groups are deep-rooted in ancestral identities or if they were invented by colonialism. Jean-Loup Amselle, for instance, sustains that ethnic identities are colonial creations, that there wasn't such thing as an ethnic group during pre-colonial ages and that ethnic identities were sculpted only by the colonizers' will of territorialize the African continent; after that, the local populations have reappropriated these identities[2]. However, nowadays there is an emerging consensus about the importance of looking to ethnic identities as a process of constant transformations, adaptations and negotiations previous to colonialism (although only known in this period), more than looking for exact moments of crucial construction or rupture[3].

Ndau identity is deep-rooted in Monomotapa Empire, previous to the Mozambique-Zimbabwe border establishment and prior to colonialism. So the Ndau are an example of shared common social and cultural traits over several centuries, which contributed to the emergence of a sense of Ndauness. Social structures and cultural practices related to totems, marriages, births and deaths served to bind the Ndau together across southeast Africa. Many of the conventions in place in the twentieth century, such as the burial and succession of chiefs, are similar to those practiced

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[2] Amselle, M'bokolo, 1985: 23
[3] Dorman et al., 2007: 7

centuries earlier. While some of these "little traditions" have certainly changed with time, they have also retained a coherent relevance for the Ndau today. These traditions in Ndau history serve as cultural materials that define aspects of a scripted Ndau identity[4].

This article presents some reflections about African borderland identities, focusing in Mozambique-Zimbabwe border and showing practices and representations from Mozambican-Ndau social actors about those Ndau "on the other side", considering that these practices and representations are a fundamental part of their own identity processes. So it analyzes "partitioned" Ndau in their sense of belonging, and the uses and meanings of that international border to them. It also relates Ndau identity evolution with the historical and political evolution of Zimbabwe and Mozambique. In this sense, the text begins with an approach to some general issues about African borders and is followed by an analysis of Ndau ethnic identity in Mozambique-Zimbabwe borderland, its representations and possibilities as a transnational identity. The ideias here presented are a result of Mossurize district (Manica province, Mozambique) case study.

African borders

According to Malcolm Anderson, political borders are instruments of state politics and represent the control level that the State is able to practice over its territory; they are also marks of identity, political beliefs and myths about the unity of the populations that live in the same political territory and that contribute to the construction of an «imagined community» that many call a «nation»[5]. Jeffrey Herbst sustains that all borders are artificial because states aren't natural creations as well – so borders are political creations established according to the uses intended by those who defined them[6]. On the other hand, Christopher Clapham says that the relationships between states and their borders may be of two kinds: borders that are built by states or states that are built by their borders – and most African states clearly belong to the second type[7]. Indeed, today is generally agreed that african borders are merely artificial, formal and symbolical and that's the reasons why they are porous.

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[4]McGonagle, 2007: 69
[5] Anderson, 1996: 1
[6] Herbst, 1989: 692
[7] Clapham, 1998: 79

In pre-colonial Africa, social groups (kinship groups, villages, cult groups, chieftaincies or kingdoms) were very autonomous. However, rivalries or desires for emancipation were demonstrated through witchcraft, poisoning or disagreements about succession rules and, in this cases, traditional African societies periodically «injected» people out of their kinship groups, communities and societies. These people moved to other places, the «borders», and their relationships with the «center» from where they came could be kept or permanently broken[8]. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that there was a whole new social construction in the "border" because the group that settled there carried all social, institutional and ethnic features of the «metropolis». On the other hand, inside this new group it would emerge new conflicts and tensions, causing what Kopytoff calls "structural replication" – the emigrant group settles itself in the border and gives rise to a new structured community, from which would come out another group to another border and so on[9].

African boundaries current outline corresponds to the sharing of African territories between some European powers institutionalized during the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference and local populations hadn't interfered in this process, which radically subverted the pre-existed way of spatial organization. If, in certain cases, the new demarcation corresponded to previous ones, such as Rwanda[10], in other cases the new boundaries had suddenly cut the social and political units already existed and compelled to new identity reordering. In any of these cases, the new outlines followed European powers ways of thinking, and their own power relations, which had totally excluded local societies from demarcation processes.

When African independences took place, the 15th and 16th UN General Assembly sessions, in 1960 and 1961 respectively, approved resolutions favorable to the maintenance of colonial borders outline. In the same way, OAU stood up for maintaining colonial borders since the time it was created, in 1963. This meant that the new African independent states could built their sovereignty in the same territorial basis that their predecessors, which was also the opinion of the new African political leaders, who feared they could lose their power if they decided to start trying new kind of political organization[11]. African borders have had few changes since the end of

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[8] Kopytoff, 1989: 18
[9] *Idem*, 27
[10] Florêncio, 2001: 5
[11] Herbst, 1996-1997: 121

decolonization, except only in some cases as the Bakassi peninsula, Cameroon and Nigeria or Eritrea.

In most cases, new African political elites couldn't enlarge their legitimacy to general population and that population also began to look at the elite formation process as clearly related to ethnic, regional or religious loyalties. In the other hand, most states were lacking technical, material and human means, so they couldn't totally incorporate the entire populations in the feeling of national unity and belonging[12]. The need of reinforce nationalism, as well as modernization and economic development needs, also lead the elites to choose authoritarian political models, such as single party regimes or military regimes, which became extremely "exclusives" to a large part of the population, leaving rural populations away from power centers.

In 1980's, the end of Cold War and international geopolitical alignments left the African continent to itself. However, the structural adjustment politics contributed to emphasize the economical crisis and to the impoverishment, marginalization and alienation of most part of rural populations and their local elites[13]. These features, along with international pressures towards political liberalism introduction, caused African central States retraction and their withdrawal from the peripheries, and so elites in power could radicalize their positions because they feared losing their privileges and places within the State apparatus[14].

So these African states political options had consequences to the populations living in borderlands, who feel culturally more close to others living in one or more neighboring states than to their country fellows, also due to their ancestral and pre-colonial connections. This means that, in these populations daily routine, crossing an international border is just an administrative matter because that movement isn't understood as a cultural territory shifting. In fact, people can cross an international boundary only to do agriculture in one's farm, to go to the school, to the market, to participate in the same ethnic group weddings or funerals… This happens in almost every African borderlands[15].

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[12] Florêncio, 2001: 6
[13] *Idem*: 7
[14] Clapham, *op.cit.*: 82-83
[15] Tomàs, 2010: 36

There is a list of African cultural areas that were "partitioned" by international borders[16]. In this list, one hundred and three African international borders "cut" one hundred and thirty one cultural areas, some of which are "partitioned" by more than one border. The distribution cross-cuts the continent because each international border in Africa "cuts" at least one cultural area. But this doesn't mean that borders are walls to those "partitioned" ethnic groups; in fact, these borders are mainly channels by which people, goods and ideas flow[17]. And despite being referred in 1985 Asiwaju's list, the Ndau didn't claim the restoration of a common territory.

Ndau ethnic identity

Mozambique can be considered an "invention" of Portuguese colonialism because it is a political-territorial unit that didn't exist before the "effective occupation" process settled in Berlin Conference. African societies didn't take part in the outline of their own country, so it can be said that the concept of «mozambicanity» has often be seen as a foreign imposition and not a will or desire of the people who previously lived there[18].

Mossurize is a Mozambique district in the borderland with Zimbabwe and its habitants belong to Ndau ethnic group. Ndau origins and history are related with the fragmentation of Monomotapa Empire and Mbire kingdom and to the expansionary cycles of the Rozvi, a Shona-Caranga lineage group, who moved from the Zimbabwe hinterland highlands around the fifteenth century, and that successively occupied the central stripe between Búzi and Save rivers, dominating the Tonga populations that previously lived there and settling small political units (chieftaincies) relatively autonomous from each other but related by kinship[19].

Ndau was the name that invaders from the south, the Nguni, gave to the people living in the region between Save and Búzi when they invaded them during the second half of the nineteenth century. This word is related to the way by which these people greeted a chief or an important foreigner: they kneel, clap their hands and repeatedly and rhythmically scream «*ndau ui ui, ndau ui ui*». So the Nguni invaders called these people Ndau to represent them as population and also their condition of subservience

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[16] Asiwaju, 1985: 256-258
[17] Tomàs, *op.cit*: 14-15
[18] Florêncio, 2001:10
[19] Florêncio, 2005: 79

and submission to Nguni lords. Nowadays, the hypothetical origin of this designation is widely accepted by Ndau people and is deeply rooted in their oral history, despite not knowing if it was Ndau oral history that influenced the authors or if the authors' proposals were accepted and interiorized by the people[20]. Nguni domination was first leaded by Sochangane (also known as Manicusse), who established its capital city in today's current Mossurize district, and ended in 1889 under the leadership of Gungunhane (Manicusse's grandson) when he retreated towards South. Two years after this event, the 1891 Treaty between Portugal and Great Britain formally gave birth to Mozambique.

Mozambique-Zimbabwe border and transnational identity

One of the issues that generally appears in almost every analysis about African borders is about the division settled by colonial borders in pre-existed social and ethnic groups. The debate about identity issues and the border settlement is almost always related to ethnic division produced ever since and kept by African independent states.

In the past decades African borderlands and ethnic identity have occupied a central place in the academic debate. Since the Berlin Conference, most part of international African borders hasn't changed. However, some "mistakes" were done during the territorial partition because they didn't account for demographic, ethnographic or topographic factors that Europeans didn't have the knowledge of[21].

The border that separates Mozambique from Zimbabwe "is approximately 765 miles in length (…). The alignment which resulted from the Anglo-Portuguese agreements of 1891 and 1893, together with the Arbitral Award of 1897 concerning the Manica Boundary, gave rise to a prolonged sequel of demarcations and modifications ending in 1940"[22]. The extensive boundary was settled by taking into account four main points which corresponded to the rivers in that region: the tripoint between the Zambezi river and the Mazoe river, from the Mazoe river to the Honde river (Barue section), from the Honde river to the Save river (including the Manica Boundary) and river Save to the river Limpopo[23].

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[20] Florêncio, 2002: 52
[21] Herbst, 1989: 674
[22] Brownlie, 1979: 1219-1221
[23] *Idem*: 1221-1222

So the 1891 Anglo-Portuguese Treaty settled the border between Mozambique and the then called South Rhodesia, but Ndau populations that lived in the borderland weren't immediately set apart: that separation was only formalized when Portuguese administration could set a regular presence in Mossurize region, by creating an administrative office in Espungabera in 1900. However, during the colonial period, this separation was never effective: despite the creation of an administrative office the administration didn't have effective means to control the entire border, so this line never truly got in these borderland people's minds or practices[24].

The international borders establishment wasn't indeed enough to break the set of political relations between Ndau chieftaincies in Mozambique and Rhodesia, which had an important magical-religious feature and a complex chain of political hierarchies and subordinations. Despite Portuguese colonial authorities' efforts to break them, these relations have been maintained and, even nowadays, for example, Mozambique Ndau chiefs are subordinated to Ndau Zimbabwe chiefs in what concerns the magical-religious issues[25].

The Portuguese colonial state couldn't control people flows in Mozambique borderland, which also included escaping from hut taxes and forced labor, illegal migrations to South Africa mines and Rhodesia plantations, and also wasn't able to refrain the spread of Rhodesia religious cults or the nationalist ideas sustained by the leaders of that churches (like Kamba Simango)[26].

Mozambique independence didn't change this situation and even promoted transboundary flows because the new state didn't have the necessary means to supervise the flows of people or goods. On the other hand, and only two years after the independence, 1977 Ian Smith's war against Mozambique[27], followed by FRELIMO and RENAMO armed struggle, contributed to increase the state weakness in controlling national territory and the populations. In fact, RENAMO had early occupied vast areas in Mossurize district, settling in 1978 its first military base in Mozambique near the

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[24] Florêncio, 2001: 11
[25] Florêncio, 2005: 129
[26] Branquinho, 1967
[27] The government of South Rhodesia, former British colony, was ruled by a white minority and Ian Smith was its leader. Smith had unilaterally declared the country's independence in 1965 and a civil war between the white army and the guerillas of ZANU (*Zimbabwe African National Union*) and ZAPU (*Zimbabwe African Popular Union*) has followed. When Mozambique became independent (1975), it decided to close the border with Rhodesia and to give support to ZANU, which attacked Smith forces from Mozambican territory. As a consequence, Smith retaliates and starts its own attacks against Mozambique.

border with South Rhodesia, obliging the state to retreat to Espungabera (district head office) and in Dacata e Chiurairue administrative offices[28].

This civil war caused huge population flows to refugee camps or family units in the "other side". Almost everyone living today in Mossurize district has a father or a grandfather who escaped to Rhodesia during the Mozambique independence war and remained there during the conflicts that followed or that escaped only during the civil war. Those people sank for refugee within their families, studied and got jobs in Zimbabwe and returned to Mozambique only after the peace agreement of 1992; some felt so integrated in Zimbabwe and never returned. The ineffective control over borderlands during this period created some *no man's land* between the two countries which were used to settle networks of illegal trade to supply Mozambique local markets which faced a shortage of goods[29].

The end of the civil war in 1992 brought the desire of state's stabilization and consolidation. However, this is a fragmentary and unfinished process because Mozambique still state can't have effective control over the entire territory. So the Ndau still cross the border like they did in the past and go to Zimbabwe to visit their family, to consult healers and traditional authorities, to go to school and to take part in ceremonies. It seems these people don't feel the impacts of the international boundary demarcation in their daily lives - not in colonial times, not even today.

The only formal Mozambique border office in Mossurize district is Espungabera, which is located about 3 miles away from the village center. It's a "historical" border, with few flows of people or goods and people only cross it more often by the end of the year, "when Mozambique workers in South Africa use this border to return home for vacations"[30].

In most part of the cases, the people of Mossurize district enter in Zimbabwe "illegally" through "cross-country paths" which are all over the borderline. They do this because most of them don't have a passport or because it's closer to arrive to Zimbabwe through these paths than by walking until the official boundary[31].

The word that designates "border" in the local language (ciNdau) is *mugano*. But *mugano* means "limit" or "end" and it's used to designate any territorial limit (*nyika*)

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[28] Florêncio, 2001: 15
[29] I*dem*: 16
[30] Interview with JB, Espungabera, 10-5-2011
[31] Crossing the Espungabera checkpoint, the nearest Zimbabwe village is located about 13 miles away.

and not only the specific case of State limits. So it can be said that there isn't an idea of strict separation between two different political units in Ndau vocabulary. In fact, as Elizabeth McGonalge sustains, many Ndau elders in both countries do not cite any firm boundaries for the Ndau region, perhaps because their sense is that they are *between* borders with an unbounded sense of Ndau territory[32].

Transboundary flows in Mossurize district have changed through time but only due to political or economical events, and not to any cultural affinity change among people on both sides. In fact, during Mozambique independence war and civil war, most part of the borderland illegal flows was of Mozambican refugees or smugglers entering in Zimbabwe. With Zimbabwe current economic crisis, which has escalated since year 2000, it's the Zimbabweans turn to seek consumer goods and fuel in Mozambique. The currency previously more used in this borderland was Zimbabwe dollar, but recently Harare abandoned it (due to severe Zimbabwe's inflation) and now allows the use of different foreign currencies to trade operations and business transactions, including the United States Dollar (USD). This has contributed to reduce Mozambican flows to Zimbabwe for shopping. Nowadays, Mossurize habitants often go shopping to Chimoio (Manica's province capital) instead of going to Zimbabwe, making a much longer journey through some troubled roads (a travel of about 240 miles for each side) but they consider this is a better option than the costs of exchanging Mozambique money (metical) to USD[33].

If there weren't these recent economic events, that obliged this Ndau from Mozambique to change their shopping habits and created a "barrier" to transboundary trade, it could be said that this border is nothing but an "imaginary line" and its outline is more symbolic and relevant for central States than for borderland populations, who have, in this case, a huge cultural and social homogeneity. In fact, in the past, the borderline wasn't seen as "real" thing: Ndau family and political units were located in both sides of the border and people kept maintaining their interactions during the colonial period and they do it even now, after the independence of the two countries[34]. In other words: it's not possible to study the history of Mozambique provinces of Manica and Sofala without taking into account the history of Zimbabwe province of Manicaland. So it can be considered that this ethnic identity equally shows some

[32] McGonagle, *op.cit.*: 109
[33] Interview with IL, Espungabera, 08-05-2011
[34] Beach, 1989: 347

outlines of a transnational identity, rooted in Monomotapa Empire and in the submission to Gaza Empire, both of them previous to the border settlement. This idea of oneness with those "in the other side" is noticeable through the existence of common symbolic places, like "Lugar de Gungunhane" (*Place of Gungunhane*): a place in Espungabera, in the road to Machaze district, where there is a huge tree and a rock below that tree, and where Gungunhane, the last Gaza Emperor, allegedly sit and rest when he was moving South with his troops. There is a exact same place in Chipinge (Zimbabwe), with the same name and where people say that Gungunhane also sit and rest[35]. This oneness prevails also in the words of the Ndau living in Mossurize: «there's no such thing as two countries separated, Chipinge [Zimbabwe] and Mossurize [Moçambique] is all Ndau[36]; «we get there and we all speak the same language, everyone understands each other, it's not like going to a different country»[37].

The sharing of a common language (ciNdau) contributes to maintain and reinforce a transboundary Ndau identity in this region. However, either in Mozambique as in Zimbabwe, the national languages prevail in the government communications or in school, so the Ndau in each side of the border also use their national language(s) along with ciNdau. The exception (in Mozambique) are those who never went to school and that live deeply in Mossurize woods, away from Espungabera center: those only speak ciNdau and scarcely understand portuguese (or don't understand it at all).

These language and culture features, which are traditional aspects, are very important to the maintenance and consolidation of Ndau identity in the region and are reinforced by other cultural elements such as the common history of this partitioned group. The submission to Gaza Empire strengthened those ties and they weren't shaken not even during liberation wars or civil wars in both countries. This deep sharing of these common elements is daily infatuated by the circulation of the Ndau in the borderland and give them a sense of freedom that overlaps any constrain: "I feel free because I am Ndau"[38].

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[35] Interview with GS, Espungabera, 09-05-2011
[36] Interview with IL, Espungabera, 08-05-2011
[37] Interview with TSM, Espungabera, 11-05-2011
[38] *Idem*

Conclusions

In pre-colonial years, borders were defined according to the distance in which one political unit could extend all its power, considering that this distance fluctuated during time according to the conquest or loosing of territories. The main change that colonialism brought to this *status quo* was a new system of fixed territorial boundaries, which the post-colonial African States decided to keep.

The Mozambique-Zimbabwe borderland, which settled some social, economical and political differences at a national level such as language and geography, wasn't the outcome of ancestral and historical diversities. In fact, the border derived only from the 1891 Treaty as the result of territorial rivalries between Portugal and Great-Britain in southeast Africa by the end of the nineteenth century. Before that, such a border wouldn't have any meaning because there were old connections between the people and economies of the Zimbabwe plateau and the people and traders of the Mozambican coast[39].

The conquest by the Nguni in the nineteenth century acted as a foil for the Ndau to re-create their identity and assume a sense of Ndauness with a powerfull salience that reverberated into the twentieth century. However, this nineteenth century episode of common suffering at the hands of others reinforced a sense of being Ndau as earlier relationships had not. The "other" came to rule over the Ndau in a more direct manner in the nineteenth century and this harsh reality continued into the period of formal colonialism under the Portuguese and the British[40].

During fieldwork near the border it was clear that the international boundary separating Mozambique and Zimbabwe is an artificial border that runs through the Ndau-speaking area dividing kin, culture and speakers of the same language. Most people on or near the border in the 1990s were oriented toward Zimbabwe, partly due to the infrastructure on that side. With better roads and more frequent transport, well-stocked shops and greater educational opportunities, Zimbabwe lured Ndau speakers residing on the Mozambican side of the border. Children crossed the border to attend school in Zimbabwean communities and some Mozambican residents used only Zimbabwean currency. Since then the situation has changed and taken a reverse turn. The currency used in the borderland changed for USD or South Africa Rands, a visit to

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[39] Beach, 1993: 5
[40] McGonagle, *op. cit.*: 91

the Mozambican city of Chimoio in the province of Manica, for instance, revealed well-stocked stores in Mozambique frequented by former residents of Zimbabwe, including relocated white farmers[41]. However, Zimbabwe schools are still considered as being better than those in Mozambique and children still prefer to attend classes there[42].

From what has been exposed, it can be concluded that this case shows that African borders, and specifically Mozambique-Zimbabwe borderland, does not represent a true political, religious or cultural rupture line between States. On the contrary, this borderland allows, and fosters, the maintain of flows between both sides due to the weakness of their own central States in controlling the territory and due to the weak identification of the people with their State – the State is understood as a foreign entity and, for the vaNdau, as where southern ethnic groups as the Shangana prevail.

Bonds of marriage, language and culture tie Ndau speakers to one another across the border and they share common interests and a common identity. But people refer to it in conversation and acknowledge its existence, what makes of it a hard border in some respects. Yet, it can't be denied that it's also a border with soft edges as well.

For the vaNdau people of Mossurize there is an idea of belonging to a space called Mozambique, people know they are Mozambicans and they share a feeling of belonging to a Mozambican idenity. However, they look to this identity as secondary, and, in a certain way, as imposed by the State. And this identity doesn't overlap nor annihilates more important identities, such as local or family identities, which were not suppressed by the outline of international borders.

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[41] McGonagle, *op. cit.*: 21
[42] Interview with FA, Espungabera, 09-05-2011

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