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N.B.: This is a paper in its very early stage.
It is not supposed to be concluded and would clearly benefit with further
theoretical and empirical contributions.

The late 19th century Swazi-Mozambiquan land dispute and the making of a Southern African Colonial Border.

History is not a handbook, with predestined roles and a strict guideline of successive and intertwining chain of causalities. Instead, history is produced and given a new meaningful order when read through the gaze of the actors that play it. From this standpoint, the history of colonialism lends itself to new cultural markers, shaped differently according to a specific moment in time, space and culture. The appropriation and reinvention of this cultural praxis is never the collective and homogeneous response to a system alien to it. Indeed, these explosive patterns of change depend upon particular contexts. To misunderstand this anthropological contribution to history is to overlook the meaningful context that emerges out of the diplomatic agreement over Swazi lands and the dispute that led to it. This is the specific situation I propose to consider here, through the eyes of the people that made it.

As I see it, the relevance of this particular border – protected by a double wired electric fence throughout much of the twentieth century – does not stem from Swaziland privileged location, land-locked between colonial Mozambique, the province of Natal and Transvaal, as often depicted; accordingly, I do not believe the definition of this border can be understood properly within the British strategy of granting mediated autonomy (by means of the High Commission Territories policy): the local dynamics that emerge and give rise to this situation would then remain unquestioned. Instead, I propose to consider the definition of this border in its proper location, allowing for the understanding of the equilibrium rising out of this ‘colonial situation’. Analysing the situation itself, I propose to consider the ritualised imperial practices gathered round the table of negotiations. This first section will also consider the issue of representation and native recognition; a second section of this paper will look into the margins of colonialism, thinking about shifting allegiances and in a particular circumstance that makes this case enlightening to think the issue of colonial borders in general. Finally, I

will consider in a final section the issue of colonial space, broadly speaking. Putting forward some of the interests lying behind the scene of negotiations, I propose a critique of the idea – made common sense – of what was ‘really’ at stake. As I see it, though these interests seldom surfaced the meetings, they can be traced back within the events that led to them. What was at stake, I argue, happened at the Lebombo mountains, not elsewhere.

1. Mediated sovereignty and the colonial equilibrium

In the well-known “Analysis of a social situation in Modern Zululand¹”, Max Gluckman departs from a particular event in order to scrutinize the moments of ‘equilibrium’ that defined, according to him, the pattern of modern Zululand social structure. The ceremonial opening of the first bridge to be built under the new rules of ‘Native Development’, in 1938, was his ‘social situation’². The analysis I propose of the 1888 negotiations for the definition of a sketchy borderline between what is today Swaziland and Mozambique will be my ‘colonial situation’, abusively transposing Gluckman’s ‘social situation’ into a strictly colonial setting – in the imperial dispute over Swazi lands. As I hope to make clear, this colonial situation is in itself a crystallized moment of equilibrium between imperial structures of power. And, what is more, the meaning ascribed to the ritual and performative value of this colonial situation allows for understanding the nature of imperial relations – one marked by instability and impractical reason – in their process of colonial domination. Let us keep in mind, however, that unlike Max Gluckman, I wasn’t present in the event I will describe – the meetings held between June 2nd and June 30th 1888 with official representatives of the parts in dispute and its neighbouring partners. For that reason, the story I will tell is subject to the contingent and mediated nature of a colonial archive – in this case the

¹ Gluckman, Max, “Analysis of a social situation in Modern Zululand”, in *Bantu Studies*, Vol. XIV, 1940.

² As he witnessed it, this bridge was the common celebration of both Europeans and Zulu: “*though ... organized in two groups at the bridge, their presence implies that they are united in celebrating a matter of mutual interest*” [Gluckman: 14], a congealed equilibrium of interdependent relationships [id:28]. The matter of defining whether the inauguration of the bridge was an appropriate ‘ideal type’ as a means of attaining a full description of ‘equilibrium’ of Zululand in colonial context is not to the issue here. Although overlooking moments of conflict that also defined Zulu and Europeans relations – in his attempt to identify patterns and moments of congealed equilibrium –, let us just say that Gluckman allows for contradiction and schism to emerge according to “shifting membership of groups in different situations” [id: 29]. What is more, these temporary moments of equilibrium are but a proof of the instability of the social system that sustained them. Although overtaken by a semiotic turn, where the social situation, as public ritual and symbolic performance would come to the forefront of the analysis, Gluckman keeps valuable lessons for those concerned with the way colonialism shapes, in contradictory ways, a given social context.

Portuguese record of the meeting's official minutes and the official documents produced prior to that context. In other words, this is the Portuguese official version of the situation I propose to think about³.

Although the announced objective of this commission was the definition of the limits between Portuguese colonial territory and Swaziland, official representatives of England, Portugal, the Boer South Africa Republic and the Swaziland kingdom⁴ met by the Lebombo Mountains west of Lourenço Marques (present-day Maputo) between June 2nd and June 30th 1888. Throughout a total of 15 meetings, with a morning and afternoon session, these men debated the approximate borderline that was to separate King Umbadine's land from colonial Mozambique. And if this was a 'luso-swazi' commission, according to Portuguese official documents, can it be said that it was so at the expense of Swaziland itself, whose 'representation' had been 'delegated' in the hands of Theophilus Shepstone, key figure of the British colonialism, a sort of right hand for 'native' matters⁵?

Although the preliminary meetings – that I will look at further ahead – reveal a determined and resolute Swazi King, Umbadine is commonly depicted as a weak figure and the Dlamini dynasty as a contested and receding power [McGregor]. Concurring with this line of argument, one can't help but noticing the non-attendance of the Swazi king in the commission intended to define the eastern border of Swaziland. Except for the morning session of June 15th, when Umbadine “*is called*” to pronounce his testimony⁶, and the 19th, we can suppose that his presence was mediated only through

³ Most observations are extracted from the official proceedings of these meetings, in *Negócios Externos. Documentos Apresentados às Cortes na Sessão Legislativa de 1889 pelo Ministro e Secretário d'Estado dos Negócios Estrangeiros. Limites entre o Districto de Lourenço Marques e o Território de Mussate*, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1889. The transcription of these negotiation sessions, from their original version in English, bears a wrong date. Where it reads July 14th 1889 it should be read 1888, taking into account the Portuguese government acceptance of the terms of the concluding negotiation, by January 1889. See *Negócios Externos*, p. 43. Additional research has been conducted at the Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, Maputo.

⁴ Official members: R.E.R. Martin, and the secretary D. G. Giles, representing England; António de Azevedo Vasconcellos, governor of Lourenço Marques province, as the Portuguese delegate; Theophilus Shepstone, for Swazi king Umbadine; G. R. Von Wieligh, for South Africa Republic.

⁵ Having had key interventions as 'Secretary of Native Affairs' in Natal, between 1856 and 1877, and later in Zulu and Swaziland. He can be held accountable, as well, of an important role in the annexation of Boer provinces over to British control. Cf. "Shepstone, Sir Theophilus" (1817-1893), Boase, Frederic, *Modern English Biography: Containing Many Thousand Concise Memoirs of Persons who Have Died Since the Year 1850, with an Index of the most Interesting Matter*, Netherton & Worth, 6 vols, 1892-1921. Prior to his role in Swaziland it is noteworthy his relation to Zululand, as in Shepstone's intallation of Cetshwayo. Cf. Hamilton, Carolyn, *Terrific Majesty*.

⁶ Following a Portuguese request, the meeting proceedings declare that his testimony was accepted “*by mere condescendence ... given that he was represented by the Mussuate delegate [Theophilus Shepstone]*”, *Negócios...*, p. 24-25.

written declarations, although in prior meetings he had made use of a translator and uttered his arguments. However, this was a 'luso-swazi' commission, in Swazi lands, with Theophilus Shepstone as the king's representative: was Umbadine irrelevant for the colonial agreement, after all?

My argument is that his 'spectral' presence, voiced by Theophilus Shepstone, allowed for the 'equilibrium' between imperial powers. Carolyn Hamilton's *Terrific Majesty*, provides new insights on this polemic British figure, particularly of his use of local 'native'/traditional structures of political representation. Her general argument states that Natal's native policy was decisively informed by Shepstone's researches on Zulu past and moulded according to what was believed to be Shaka's figure. This new track of research would push towards a necessary revision of what is commonly held as the impact of colonial intervention: to be more exact, it would imply that colonial structures of domination were, in certain cases, fundamentally shaped according to native structures of power, thus limiting the determining role of the 'colonial invention'. What to make of this in the context of the discussions over Umbadine's sovereignty?

Hamilton's argument seems hard to transpose directly to Umbadine's condition in these negotiations, given its imperial concurrent nature. Although the nature of Shepstone's mediation cannot be imputed over a respect of traditional Swazi structures of representation, it is my argument that Umbadine – embodied in Shepstone, and as him only – had a fundamental role to play during these negotiations. *In absentia*, Umbadine had brought these colonial administrators onto the table of negotiations – with his territorial claims to sovereign control of the area around Lebombo Mountains setting the terms of the negotiating process. The fact that his statements were presented in a written form added in legitimising potential from a colonial point of view; furthermore, they were also the mediating element that separated the imperial performance from a colonial conflict. The 'equilibrium' was not disturbed. *In presence*, on the contrary, Umbadine would be the disruptive element in the process of maintaining imperial equilibrium, as in the June 19th meeting, when King Umbadine allegedly threatened the Portuguese entourage⁷. Put differently, "King Umbadine" – not king Umbadine – provided the legitimising and abiding character of these negotiations. The double paradox lies, first of all, in "King Umbadine's" rejection of previous

⁷ According to the Portuguese official protest, the threats were meant for the Matola people that accompanied the Portuguese delegation, for not having allegedly followed King Umbadine's authority. However, as the proceedings from the negotiations make clear, Umbadine's European staff can be held responsible for the event. Cf. *Negócios...*, p. 51 and 27.

treaties⁸ (presented by Portugal during the meetings as an evidence for defining the border by the Lebombo mountains and not further east, as the other parties argued for) by discarding the possibility of “*another chief cut[ting] my lands without my presence...*” [Negócios: 46]. As the meeting went on, Umbadine was a mere distant witness of this process. Secondly, the imperial paradox lies in the fact that Umbadine’s ‘spectral’ presence – mediated, represented, written and only indirectly voiced – was a condition for the possibility of imperial ‘equilibrium’.

This was the performative nature of the colonial situation. The same can be applied to the use of ‘native witnesses’, employed throughout the negotiating sessions as a means of holding proof of each party’s sovereignty. Nothing but the colonial power was at stake when these Boer, English and Portuguese men discussed the Swazi sovereignty by resorting to the authority of ‘witnesses’. The staged sequence of contradictory testimonies, each party presenting their own witnesses – both European and local, most of them having been chosen hazardingly on the spot – as living evidence of a political allegiance to each side of the dispute, was the ritualising practice of these negotiations. The signified dialectical empowerment of this imperial practice, in a mutually fed maintenance of equilibrium, sustained the negotiating claims at stake and their respective imperial spaces. At the same time, we shouldn’t overlook the instable and unequal forces that allowed this crystallized moment of balance between imperial forces. Let us take this question of balance a little further, thinking on the implications it may have on the history of colonialism. If this ‘colonial situation’ was truly a performative moment, to what does it refer back to? Bear with me in briefly considering the preliminary context that led to these meetings – were not for their relevance, I would spare the reader to this otherwise boring diplomatic digression. It is my belief that they can help us understand what happened at the Lebombo mountains.

2. Negotiating on the margins of colonialism

On 14 April 1886 – that is, two years before the commission declared the need to define a borderline –, two Portuguese delegates (J.J. Monteiro Liborio and José Apolónio de Carvalho) met Umbadine, the Swazi King, in representation of the

⁸ In 1869 and 1875, both treaties recognizing Portuguese sovereignty over Delagoa Bay. The second agreement was named after MacMahon, French President, responsible for the arbitration favouring the Portuguese. See Newitt, Malyn, *A History of Mozambique*, pp. 327-328.

Portuguese government. According to the Portuguese record of the meeting, the purpose of the visit was to request a concession of coal, west of Lebombo mountains, in Swazi territory. As the imperial diplomacy traditionally went, the Portuguese delegation carried some gifts that the sovereign would reject under the argument that they had been bought with money obtained by the latter from the sale of Swazi land to Transvaal [Negócios: 11; 28]. Approximately a month later, on 22 May 1886 to be precise, a delegation from the Swazi kingdom arrived in Lourenço Marques. Their request was simple: that the “*Portuguese government would remove the foreigners living in Lebombo mountains, for they stole and molested his people*”⁹. This negotiating claim would be further developed in the following meeting – and the last before the beginning of the ‘luso-swazi’ border commission.

Two versions – both emerging from Portuguese records – can be held accountable for this meeting, taking place in October 1887. The first version, attached to the Portuguese official record of the ‘Luso-Swazi’ commission (a document produced in 1889), presents Theophilus Shepstone as the Swazi intermediary with the Portuguese delegate. The other version, entitled “*Notes of the interview between Leut. Col. Machado R.E. and Umbandini King of Swaziland regarding the boundary question*” (undated manuscript, Mozambiquan Historical Archive, originally in English) transcribes a dialogue where the Swazi King comes, interestingly enough, to the forefront of the negotiating process, making use of an interpreter. This variation entails necessarily the issue of representation and recognition, as I have tried to illustrate, and the likelihood of a necessary revision of this ‘powerless king’. In one thing, however, both documents present coincident versions: the Portuguese delegates would ground their case on the need to include the tops of Lebombo range (eastern border of Swaziland) under Portuguese rule as to face the ‘white’s threat’. Machado’s surprising argument went as follows:

“*From time immemorial the land has belonged to the Portuguese, and since white squatters have come crime has become rampant and we must assert our rights and interfere. Why we want the line settled now is for the purpose of establishing a police force*”¹⁰,
adding that

⁹ [My translation, as the following ones when originally in Portuguese], *Negócios*, p. 44. It is not clear who composed this new delegation from the Swazi king to Lourenço Marques.

¹⁰ “*Notes of the interview between Leut. Col. Machado R.E. and Umbandini King of Swaziland regarding the boundary question*”, Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, Fundo Século XIX, Sala 8, Cx.162, M1 (71).

“While pacific black people lived there [Lebombo mountains], the government has let them freely be, but since mischievous whites have established there, committing murderers and robberies, escaping justice due to the inexistence of flawless data on where lies the borderline ... [the Portuguese government] has found necessary to entrust me to define the frontier¹¹”.

The protective wing provided under Portuguese authority would help safeguard the ‘Mussuata nation’ [Swaziland]¹² from “*improper behaviour of any respectable white*¹³”, a duty as useful “*to him [king] as to Portugal*¹⁴”:

“You Swazies do not seem to be able to control the white people in the Lebombo, who are a turbulent lot. Crime is rife, and you do nothing to prevent it. The Portuguese government wishes to establish law and order and to assist in bringing round a better estate of things...”¹⁵

The irony of Joaquim Machado’s account to the colonial authorities as well as in the “*Notes of the interview between Leut. Col. Machado R.E. and Umbandini King of Swaziland regarding the boundary question*” lies in the complete reversal of any previous territorial claims. Turning conventional colonial arguments upside down, the ‘civilizing mission’, so frequently pointed out as the discursive grounding of imperial sovereignty claims, would have improper ‘whites’, at first sight, as the driving force for the urgent definition of a borderline. If one is to consider this argument seriously – and nothing should stop us from doing so – two questions become necessary: the first is what distinguishes the Swazi-Mozambiquan border from similar colonial frontiers in that whites – presumed Boer, English and Portuguese – are invoked as both an obstacle

¹¹ Report, Joaquim José Machado, October 27th 1887, in *Negócios Externos...*, p. 2-3. The same argument would be later referred to by the Portuguese official delegate to the mixed commission assigned to define the territorial limits. See *Negócios Externos...*, p. 51, António de Azevedo Vasconcellos. See following note.

¹² The differences in Portuguese and English stem from different deviations of ‘Mswati’, Swazi king who succeeded Sobhuza [U’Sabusa in the Portuguese records] in 1839. About political mutations in this period, and its consequences in the definition of today’s Swaziland, see Bonner, Philip, “Factions and Fissions: Transvaal/Swazi politics in the Mid-Nineteenth century”, *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 19, n. 2, 1978, pp. 219-238. His article is particularly relevant in the critique of a ‘Royal version of Swazi history’ [Bonner: 221] as a whole and unified political unit. Instead, he proposes the analysis of the shifting political allegiances and oppositions that defined ‘Swazi’ relations with the neighbouring Boer province of Transvaal.

¹³ According to the official’s Portuguese delegate, António de Azevedo Vasconcellos, June 19th 1888, *id.*, p. 51.

¹⁴ Joaquim José Machado, *id.*, p. 3.

¹⁵ “*Notes of the interview between Leut. Col. Machado R.E. and Umbandini King of Swaziland regarding the boundary question*”, Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, Fundo Século XIX, Sala 8, Cx.162, M1 (71).

and immediate cause for setting down the exact frontier line; the second question, more obvious though no less necessary, becomes this: who are these whites, living on the edges of colonialism?

While not too clear from the proceedings of these 1888 Swazi meetings – hence another of its limitations, if taken by itself – it seems these ‘whites’ (some of whom testified in these sessions) were Boer, English and also Portuguese (‘os Fonsecas’) traders, with shifting allegiances to the different political structures at stake. According to JoAnn McGregor, it was common for white colonists to pay tribute to both sides of the disputing parties. Although it was not possible to find evidence of such tributes, it seems a very likely possibility – one that would require a thorough analysis of colonial documentation. One thing seems for sure, though: some of these ‘mischievous whites’, played a key role during the negotiation process. Let us look at the example of the French citizen C.E. Dupont more carefully.

During the first encounter between Portuguese and the Swazi King, Umbadine reported to be aware of a public announcement for the sale of farms in the Lebombo Mountains, allegedly promoted by the Portuguese. Although the Portuguese delegation promptly dismissed the accusation, some witnesses called to stand for the Swazi king, during the 1888 negotiations, presented another version of the event. C.E. Dupont was one of those, claiming to have witnessed this meeting from a neighbouring hut¹⁶, “*to listen to what was going on*”. Theophilus Shepstone backed up this testimony¹⁷. What remains interesting about Dupont, however, is that though living on the margins of colonial occupation, he permeates different colonial spheres of influence. If, on the one hand, this ‘colonial mercenary’ was assigned certain diplomatic missions by the Swazi king, being sent, for instance to Natal in order to report the results of a preliminary meeting with the Portuguese¹⁸, on the other hand his story does not end there. Indeed, this figure reappears in the colonial archive on a 1900 note to the ‘Governador Geral’ of Mozambique. According to this report, the “*French Dupont*” was seen in Lourenço Marques. As stated by the owners of ‘Hotel Europa’, Dupont was actually living in

¹⁶ “I was present at the meeting between the king [*régulo*] and the Portuguese mission; the King placed me in a hut next to the Portuguese secretary [J.J. Monteiro Libório] to listen to what was going on”. *Negócios...*, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Id.*, p. 47: Shepstone’s letter, 25th May 1887, and Louis de Bois’ written account, both handed in on the June 4th 1888 official meeting.

¹⁸ King Umbadine, 1887, “*I knew perfectly well what was said [in first 1886 meetings] and I did not take present from your last envoys because I knew you wanted my land. Your last message was not misinterpreted and Mr. Dupont went to Natal on an errand from me on the subject.*” *Notes of the interview*, Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique.

Tembe, by the border with Swaziland “preparing coal”. Here again according to the note, this was nothing more than a “pretext”, as he was indeed “meeting with Boers”¹⁹.

Two concluding remarks should be taken out of this Dupont’s ‘ideal type’. On the one hand, it should be reasonable to assume that this shifting group is not a homogeneous one, making their ‘errands’ according to circumstantial desires and wills. On the other, however, and thinking about the particular dispute at stake here, one should be careful not to judge King Umbadine’s role under the action of these men. Instead, it should seem clear that he also maneuvers the influence this group of ‘white mischievous’ could play, for his own benefit and for the sovereignty he wished to keep. In one sense, this ends up by answering the other set of questions regarding the presence of these whites as both an obstacle and immediate cause for establishing the Swazi-Mozambiquan border. Given the particular type of Swazi sovereignty since 1881, it would be of utter importance to define – thus controlling, separating and setting apart – the spaces of influence of each party at stake. This group of ‘disrespectful whites’, uncommitted to any colonial project besides their own, should be quickly discarded.

What seems interesting, therefore, can be pointed out by means of two contrasting examples. On the one hand, one possible contrast to the arguments put forward by the Portuguese delegates, under the sway of a “white’s threat”, can be better understood if we look at the narrative put forward by a document edited in 1881 in Lisbon – one example amongst many of a particular rhetoric device. This ‘national subscription for the establishment of ‘civilizing stations’ stated that “[for the Africans]...*we are the true whites. The others are English, French, Dutch; whites, only Portuguese; white language, Portuguese only*²⁰”. The other contrasting example is a common story in many other land disputes over the exact limits and responsibilities of each neighbouring colonial power. If we take Angola’s borderline in Lunda with the ‘Independent State of Congo’, by the end of the 19th century, or the dispute between colonial authorities in Zumbo, on the margins of Lake Malawi, the common element lies on the rebellious action of native Africans. The Swazi-Mozambiquan case, for this reason, should give us a reason to think over the construction of a colonial space: why was it that for the Portuguese delegates during these negotiations, “*the Swazi had a lot to win and nothing to lose with the definition of a frontier line; at least the whites would*

¹⁹ Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, Fundo Século XIX, Cx 8. 162, P. 1 (47).

²⁰ Ao Povo Português, p. 6.

*stop committing crimes, killing the blacks that lived in the Lebombo mountains and stealing their cattle*²¹”.

3. The making of a Colonial Border

It would be far too simplistic to suggest that England’s strategy over Swaziland was conducted merely on the basis of an Anglo-Boer rivalry. This argument is often put forward in face of a growing opposition between neighbouring British and Transvaal provinces, on the one hand, and their respective access to the sea [Lemos: 107]. Pushing this argument to the limit it would imply that both Swaziland and colonial Mozambique were simple witnesses of a larger process outside their influence. And if it seems clear that these meetings were nothing but another stop on the road to the definition of the ‘Swazi’ space, a process concluded in 1895 with the sketchy demarcation of Swaziland’s southeast borderline²², one should not put aside the larger issues at stake.

These are related with two fundamental issues: firstly, the railway construction between Lourenço Marques and the Transvaal and secondly but closely related to the first, the issue of migrant labour supply. Although these issues permeate the entire negotiating process, it is needless to say that none of these imperial interests surfaced the meetings: that was the suspended quality of imperial compromise. If not, consider this: the Portuguese delegate appointed to the 1887 preliminary meetings, Joaquim Machado, was also a known engineer, head of the Public Works Service (Obras Publicas) in Mozambique. He was the author, under that condition, of a critical – and particularly known²³ – report on the state of the colony. More importantly, Machado was also partly responsible for the definition of the ‘Transvaal railway’ path. Interestingly enough, by the time he was being sent to the Lebombos in 1887, in representation of the Portuguese colonial government, trains began circulating on the first 80 km of this same railway track – which makes it even more striking the fact that this was not a matter under debate during the negotiations.

²¹ *Negócios...*, p. 4.

²² Cf. Masson, J. R., “The first map of swaziland, and matters incidental thereto”, in *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 155, n. 3., Nov., 1989, pp. 335-341. The first official map of Swaziland would be printed, according to the author, in 1896, one year after its definitive limits had been ‘agreed’ upon.

²³ Andrade Corvo, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, 1872-1877, and a key figure of the ‘modernizing’ tendency of Portuguese colonialism, quotes extensive parts of this 1877 report in his *Estudos sobre as Províncias Ultramarinas*, Vol. II, pp. 380-428.

What is noteworthy, therefore, is that both in terms of transports and, more significantly, in relation to working labour circulation – or Dupont’s personal story, as I tried to show –, the definition of this colonial border contradicts the ‘cracks’ on this ‘trans-colonial’ space. Indeed, with the clear demarcation of Swazi, English, Boer and Portuguese spaces, what history told us, on the contrary, is that circulation through these spaces increased to levels never previously witnessed. Can we say, therefore, that the imperial interests in the area (both the safeguard of the recently discovered gold and diamond mines and, for the Portuguese, the settlement of a definitive borderline that didn’t endanger Lourenço Marques and the potential of its emerging port) are nothing but part of the question? Would the railway track, migrant labour force and the definition of the Swazi-Mozambiquan border be simple instruments in face of these ‘superior’ interests?

This is the legitimising equilibrium historical anthropology should challenge. And this is why the epistemological boundary rose between a strict diplomatic history, or a study focused exclusively on the ‘effect’ of world-system models of domination over (passive) populations, or, finally, an anthropological study that overlooks the constitutive nature of these phenomena – in redefining time, space and cultural contexts, the ‘colonial invention’ after all – is necessarily condemned to failure. In one word, colonial studies need complexity, not easy answers. If these meetings, held over the Lebombo Mountains, should be useful as a reminder of the limitations of a colonial archive, in its official dispositions, it should be clear as well that they allow for new insights to emerge, out of the contradictions built around different colonial projects. Adding in complexity, we would have to call to stand other accounts and perspectives, scratching off the layers of grayness that support this colonial equilibrium. There is where this colonial equilibrium is first of all defied, for it is the historical anthropologist’s task to search for contradiction where coherence is sacralized, to look for the conflict when consensus are forced, to bring to surface the multiplicity, where unity and unanimity go hand in hand.

“What was really at stake”, to conclude, was a multiplicity of events, situations and historical actors. From Dupont to King Umbadine, Machado and Shepstone, or railway tracks and gold mines, migrant labour and access to sea ports, history also told us that the definition of this border opened Portuguese colonial expansion in Southern Mozambique, with a series of violent military campaigns meant to commence colonial presence. For that reason also, the definition of the Swazi-Mozambique border should

be seen as what it was: imperial forces preparing for war in a ritualised and shared celebration of equilibrium. Part of the history of the Southern African borders was beginning in the Lebombo Mountains.

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"Notes of the interview between Leut. Col. Machado R.E. and Umbandini King of Swaziland regarding the boundary question", *Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique*, Fundo Século XIX, Sala 8, Cx.162, M1 (71)

Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa, *Ao Povo Portuguez em nome da Honra, do Direito, do Interesse e do Futuro da Pátria. A Commissão do Fundo Africano creada pela Sociedade de Geographia de Lisboa para promover uma Subscrição Nacional Permanente destinada ao estabelecimento de Estações Civilizadoras nos Territórios Sujeitos e Adjacentes ao Domínio Portuguez em Africa*, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, [1881]