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978-1-107-11122-6 - Zimbabwe's Migrants and South Africa's Border Farms:

The Roots of Impermanence

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## Zimbabwe's Migrants and South Africa's Border Farms

*The Roots of Impermanence*

During the Zimbabwean crisis, millions crossed through the apartheid-era border fence, searching for ways to make ends meet. Maxim Bolt explores the lives of Zimbabwean migrant labourers, of settled black farm workers and their dependents, and of white farmers and managers, as they intersect on the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa. Focusing on one farm, the book investigates the role of a hub of wage labour in a place of crisis. A close ethnographic study, this book addresses the complex, shifting labour and life conditions in northern South Africa's agricultural borderlands. Underlying these challenges are the Zimbabwean political and economic crisis of the 2000s and the intensified pressures on commercial agriculture in South Africa following liberalisation and post-apartheid land reform. But, amidst uncertainty, farmers and farm workers strive for stability. The farms on South Africa's margins are centres of gravity, islands of residential labour in a sea of informal arrangements.

Maxim Bolt is Lecturer in Anthropology and African Studies at the University of Birmingham and a Research Associate at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of the Witwatersrand. His doctoral thesis, completed after the research on which this monograph draws, was awarded runner-up in the biennial Audrey Richards Prize by the African Studies Association of the UK. He has published in the leading African Studies and anthropology journals, and serves on the editorial boards of *Africa* and the *Journal of Southern African Studies*.

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Maxim Bolt

*University of Birmingham*

International African Institute, London

*and*



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## List of Key Characters

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### **The Grootplaas Farming Family**

- Koos: founder of Grootplaas, now retired  
 Willem: Koos's son-in-law, who now runs Grootplaas  
 Jacques: Willem's son, who manages an estate up the road  
 Paul: Koos's son, who until recently helped Willem run Grootplaas

### **The White Border Farmers and Managers**

- Jan: Koos's neighbour, and farming partner in the 1980s  
 Thinus: one of three brothers on the border, and producer of tomatoes for ketchup  
 Jim: Thinus's partner in one of his land portions  
 Dirk: formerly a border farmer, who went bankrupt. Now Jan's manager  
 André: the Grootplaas production manager

### **The Grootplaas Workforce and Compound Residents**

- Michael: personnel manager  
 Holly: Michael's partner  
 Marula: foreman  
 Benjamin: storeman  
 Hardship, Ezekiel: members of Marula's Lands Team and harvest-time supervisors  
 Norman: senior driver  
 Sarah: Norman's wife  
 Joyce: Norman's partner at the farm  
 Margaret: former teacher, and the wife of a security guard  
 Alex, Vusa, Simon, Tendai: young, educated Zimbabwean men working as pickers  
 George: educated Rastafarian, whose shop was destroyed in *Murambatsvina*, now a picker

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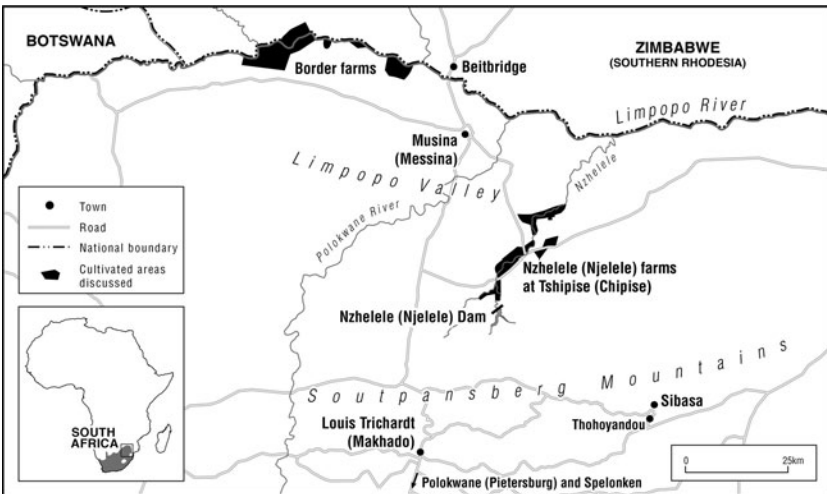
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- Chipo: cigarette salesman and picker  
Jameson: former teacher, with university education, now a picker  
Jenny: Jameson's wife  
Daniel: tractor driver  
MaiJimmy: Daniel's sister, a semi-permanent worker who runs a *shebeen*  
Josiah: owner of a rival *shebeen*  
Cornelius: taxi driver

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Map 1. The Zimbabwean-South African border in the region.



Map 2. The Soutpansberg and Limpopo Valley. (Previously used names are given in brackets.)