

Slack security measures on South Africa's borders remain

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A WOMAN with a child strapped to her back hurries through the bushes and along a dusty path downhill towards a parched Molopo River.

With two older children follow her, holding bags. She is leaving the small village of Makgori in Botswana - her home.

Her destination is less than 500m away. A few minutes later, she is standing at the border.

She is just about to enter her second home - South Africa - where she lives and works.

The woman loosens the blanket and takes the baby off her back.

She appears unfazed by our car parked on the other side of the fence.

Border patrols do not seem a common sight in this area.

The woman bends, grasps the wobbly fence and slips through into South Africa.

The other two children pass her the bags and the baby over the fence, before stealing through themselves.

Silently the woman straps the child back on her back, grabs her bags and follows the footpath into Makgori village, whose namesake is the adjacent village in Botswana.

The woman is but one of the many Batswana who live and work in South Africa.

Many of them admit that they have taken advantage of surnames similar to those of relatives in South Africa to obtain IDs so that they can find jobs here.

Most of them have dual citizenship in that they carry both Botswanan and South African documents.

It is also clear that many think it too much of an inconvenience to go through the border posts.

More often than not, these are in any case far away from their homes.

A drive down the gravelly patrol route on the South African side leads to several villages adjacent to those on Botswana side. Some even share names.

Some elderly people in these villages say the colonial boundaries cut through villages and

Two villages, two countries, just one name



NOSTALGIA: Gotsilethapi Sejong and Kabalano Bontsi in Makgobistad village, Botswana. Bontsi says South Africans and Batswana got on better before the border fences were erected.

traditional leaders' spheres of influence.

A network of footpaths meandering across the border is a clear indication that people crisscross the border illegally whenever they feel like it.

Further down, in Tshidilamolomo village, there's no need to slither through the fence.

There are gates between the two villages situated in the two countries and all you need to do is saunter through.

Tribal committee members in Phitsane Molopo, Botswana, which is the village across from Makgobistad in South Africa, explain that no passports were needed to cross the colonial boundaries many decades ago.

"I attended a missionary school in Makgobistad in the early 1940s and we all jumped a fence into South Africa.

"Then a second fence running parallel to the existing one was erected and that was when the law became strict on passports for entry into either of the countries and we were totally separated," says committee member, Gopolang Mmelesi, 77.

"The fence put a stop to the harmonious and loving togetherness we've had with our Barolong tribal counterparts on the other side of the fence. The fence led to cattle theft, which became rife."

Mmelesi is a Motswana who has acquired South African identity document and used to work in Joburg in the 1950s.

"I live in Botswana, but I'm also a South African. My child also lives and works in South Africa and that's how things have always been," he says.

Another resident of Phitsane Molopo, Kabalano Bontsi, 82, remembers how his community used to be led by Chief Tshipitota, who was based in Makgobistad, South Africa.

"Tshipitota used to plough crops right here in Botswana and when the fences were erected he stayed in South Africa and got his brother to lead us here.

"These fences spoilt what was a harmonious relationship we had with our people on the other side of our present boundaries."

Bontsi says the Batswana and their South African neighbours have become rivals.

He says the Batswana often find themselves on the receiving end of criminal acts and cite South Africans as being the perpetrators.

"My children work in South Africa and they're at times robbed when they cross the fences into Botswana.

"We've become strangers to our own people in South Africa who treat us like foreigners and even come into Botswana to steal cattle."

Sandylands Motseokhumo, the Barolong Boo Ratlou chief in Makgobistad, confirms that his great-grandfather's chieftaincy stretched deeper into Botswana decades ago.

"We're one community with our neighbours on the other

These fences spoilt what was
a harmonious relationship