

# REEDUCATION CAMPS, AUSTERITY, AND THE CARCERAL REGIME IN SOCIALIST MOZAMBIQUE (1974–79)\*

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## Abstract

Throughout the socialist experiment between 1974 and 1992, the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) ran a network of internment camps officially known as reeducation centers. Established in remote rural sites to mentally decolonize wayward members of urban society and putative enemies of the socialist revolution, the camps became a dumping ground for unwanted citizens accused of all kinds of wrongdoing. Although the Frelimo leaders envisioned a pedagogical institution that would undo the damage of colonialism by transforming reeducatees into new social beings, the gap between the idea of rehabilitation and the reality of detention was abysmally wide. Austerity – the order of the day throughout the fifteen years of socialist experiment in Mozambique – conditioned and defined the organic functioning of reeducation camps. Unlike internment camps elsewhere, Mozambique’s camps were not strictly regimented. The carceral regime that emerged not only set Mozambique’s reeducation centers apart from camps elsewhere, they were also far from the technocratic moralism and panoptic ambitions of the ruling party.

## KEY WORDS

Mozambique, Frelimo, reeducation, camps, internment, austerity.

In August 1976, a little more than a year after Mozambique’s independence from Portugal, a reporter from the state-run newspaper *Notícias* visited the female internment camp of M’sawize in the northern province of Niassa (see [Fig. 1](#)).<sup>1</sup> Housing more than five hundred detainees, M’sawize was one of the twenty-two reeducation camps that the Frelimo regime established in remote areas across the country, immediately upon assuming power in 1974 in a joint transitional government that had mixed Portuguese and Frelimo elements (see [Map 1](#)).<sup>2</sup>

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\* The author is grateful for research funding assistance from the Social Science Research Council, the Henry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, the University of Michigan’s Rackham Graduate School and Institute for the Humanities, and the Society of Fellows at Princeton University. This article benefitted from contributions by Anne Pitcher, Derek Peterson, David Morton, Euclides Gonçalves, Eric Allina, the anonymous JAH reviewers, and the participants of the conference ‘Intellectual and Cultural Life under Conditions of Austerity’, Maputo, June 2018. Author’s email: [bmachava@princeton.edu](mailto:bmachava@princeton.edu)

1 Arquivo do Jornal Notícias (AJN) – ‘Centro de Reeducação de Msauize: transformar pelo trabalho marginalis da sociedade colonial’, *Notícias*, 18 Aug. 1976.

2 After more than a decade battling armed struggles for independence in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique, a bloodless military coup in Lisbon brought down the Portuguese dictatorial regime on 25



**Fig. 1.** Female reeducatees welcoming the Notícias reporter in M'sawize. Their hair was cut short as an attempt to clear off the signs of urban degradation and alienation (wigs and straightened air). August 1976. Courtesy: Arquivo do Jornal Notícias.

The reporter's visit to Niassa was meant to document the progress of women detained for prostitution and to soothe the minds of those who had doubts about the righteousness of the reeducation program in Mozambique. At a time when concerns about human rights abuses were being raised domestically and internationally, the reporter's lengthy article was meant to counter the 'rumors' that the camps were sites of macabre punishment.<sup>3</sup>

The reporter was impressed with the physical features that distinguished the camp from the thick expanse of forest that surrounded the site. 'A bamboo stick and thatch mark the entrance', he wrote. 'Not far away, the first houses of reasonable dimensions plastered with clay and thatched roof; then a large open field.' He sketched out the spatial arrangement of the camp, which consisted of two parts. One area was reserved for camp overseers, with housing for warders, a secretariat, a station for radio transmissions, and a refectory. The opposite area contained the detainees' quarters, a 'series of sheds arranged

April 1974. Led by junior army officers, who included left-wing radicals, the coup began the process of negotiations to end the liberation wars which had begun in the early 1960s. The transitional government was formed on 20 September 1974, tasked with preparing the country for the declaration of national independence, scheduled for 25 June 1975. For details, see N. MacQueen, *The Decolonization of Portuguese Africa: Metropolitan Revolution and the Dissolution of Empire* (London, 1997). See Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique (AHM) – 'Recuperação de Marginais em Inhambane', *Notícias*, 30 Oct. 1974; Mozambique History Net (MHN) – 'FRELIMO cria Campos de Reeducação', *A Capital*, 20 Nov. 1974.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, MHN – M. Duncan, 'Mozambique: Machel reeducation camps teach a tough lesson', *To the Point*, 3 June 1977; MHN – J. Ramalho, 'Alarm spreads as executions continue', *To the Point*, 1 June 1979.



camps. The camps lacked any kind of erected barriers: no fences and no central watch towers. This was a general feature of the reeducation camp complex. In all camps, the number of security personnel was remarkably small in relation to the inmate population, rendering the surveillance regimen very loose indeed. Despite authorities' attempts to control the movement of people, detainees had considerable leeway inside and outside the camps. This aspect of the reeducation program impressed many people who visited the camps in the 1970s and early 1980s. The visitors were often left with the impression of having visited a typical rural settlement, or an *aldeia communal* – one of the many communal villages established in the countryside, inspired by Tanzania's *ujamaa* villagization scheme, as part of Frelimo's strategy for rural development and socialist transformation.<sup>5</sup> One key difference was that camp detainees wore black uniforms. Another was that some warders were armed with AK-47 rifles. Otherwise, there was little in the camps that resembled a penal institution.

Scholars have assumed that Mozambique's communal villages were part of the biopolitical mechanisms of state surveillance aimed at rendering peasants 'more legible and, thus, more amenable to state intervention'.<sup>6</sup> Following Michel Foucault and James Scott, Harry West suggested that 'in fundamental ways, the communal village worked like Jeremy Bentham's panopticon'.<sup>7</sup> He argued that 'the spatial concentration of the village rendered subjects directly susceptible to a monitoring eye – embodied in the Frelimo-appointed village president – that could pass unobstructed through surveillance corridors in a matter of hours'.<sup>8</sup> If free villagers were subjected to a panopticon, as Harry West (like Christian Geffray before him) claims, what to make, then, of the reporter's observation that the detainees of M'sawize lived in a semi-free regimen in a benevolent place that was supposed to be a detention camp?

What the reporter encountered in M'sawize, I argue, was neither a panoptic institution nor a benevolent carceral regime. The freedoms he observed were the reflection of the austerity – the scarce human and financial resources – that shaped all Frelimo initiatives during Mozambique's fifteen-year socialist experiment. Frelimo authorities *wanted* the camps to be strict disciplinary institutions. But they were never able to realize their panoptic ambitions of social and spatial legibility, discipline, order, and social transformation because they simply could not afford to do so. The same was true for communal villages. The anatomic sketch of the reeducation camp complex that I draw in this paper illustrates

5 Unlike the Russian Gulag or other similar internment camps – which remained terra incognita for the wider public and for scholars until former detainees produced memoirs, or the so-called literature of survival – Mozambique's camps were open to outside visitors, given appropriate approval from the authorities. From the very beginning of the reeducation program, diplomats, domestic and international journalists, filmmakers, and academics with close ties to Frelimo visited the camps, the only exception being the camp at M'telela which housed political detainees. See 'Centros de reeducação em Moçambique', *Tempo*, 26 Mar. 1976; and A. Gomes, 'O que hoje somos: dois factos', *Tempo*, 454, 24 June 1979.

6 H. West, *Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique* (Chicago, 2005), 176. See also C. Geffray, *Le cause des armes au Mozambique: anthropologie d'une guerre civile* (Paris, 1990).

7 West, *Kupilikula*, 176. West builds his claim on M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (2nd edn, New York, 1995), and J. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998).

8 West, *Kupilikula*, 176.

how far apart Frelimo's ambitions were from the material conditions in which the reeducation program was carried out. If we were to accept West's claim, that the communal villages were panoptical, then what the reporter described with awe in M'sawize was an unsighted panopticon.

Building on the archival record of Niassa's Department of Reeducation Services (DPSRN) and interviews with former detainees, this paper illuminates the nature of a carceral regime of mass internment in a context in which the state is materially constrained. Conditions of austerity, argues Laura Bear, create new forms of relationships and engagements between the state, its agents, and society, which are based on altered expectations of performance. One of the main outcomes of austerity is the expectation that those at the bottom of the socio-political and economic hierarchies must do more with fewer resources.<sup>9</sup> Without material and human resources to run the reeducation program, state officials compelled detainees to build their own detention facilities, to grow their own food, to carry out political education on their own, and, in many ways, to watch over their own carceral regimen. This sense of self-surveillance was not induced by the ever-present monitoring eye endowed with modern, biopolitical technology. Rather, it ensued from the remoteness of the camps and the state's inability to support the reeducation program. Consequently, the reeducation program in Mozambique was a do-it-yourself undertaking that produced a penal regime that was not only distinct from internment camps elsewhere but was also contrary to Frelimo's technocratic moralism and panoptic ambitions.

## THE REEDUCATION CAMP COMPLEX

On paper, Frelimo established the camps to 'mentally decolonize' and reform 'wayward' members of urban society and putative enemies of the socialist revolution. The party leadership envisioned the camps as pedagogical institutions where reeducatees would be transformed into 'new men' and 'new women' through corrective labor, political education, moral rehabilitation, and cultural enlightenment.<sup>10</sup> Although some camps interned political prisoners (so-called reactionaries or counter-revolutionaries), the overwhelming majority of detainees were arrested in police roundups for alleged anti-social behavior: prostitution, vagrancy, alcoholism, idleness, and all sorts of petty crimes. The ruling party was convinced that these social ills were obstacles to the modern and morally upstanding social order they envisioned. In this regard, leaders of Mozambique's socialist experiment were not different from other radical reformers in independent Africa for whom moral comportment, decency in dressing styles, temperance, and asceticism in one's personal conduct were key components for building political constituencies, composing civil societies, and upholding a respectable citizenry.<sup>11</sup> However, as Jocelyn Alexander

9 L. Bear, *Navigating Austerity: Currents of Debt along a South Asian River* (Stanford, 2015), 1, 198.

10 Arquivo do Gabinete do Governador da Província de Maputo – Ministério do Interior (AGGPM – MINT). Circular 6/GMI/976. Assunto: Objectivos dos Centros de Reeducação. 5 Jan. 1976.

11 For a rich scholarship on moral reform and politics in colonial and post-colonial Africa, see J. Lonsdale, 'Threads and patches: moral and political argument in Kenya', in A. Triulzi and M. C. Ercolelli (eds.), *State, Power, and New Political Actors in Postcolonial Africa* (Milan, 2004), 27–52; D. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935–1972* (Cambridge, 2012), 286–9;

and Gary Kynoch once observed, Frelimo ‘stands out’ in the continent ‘for the ideological fervor of its early years of rule’.<sup>12</sup> Mozambique’s reeducation camps are a unique case in postcolonial Africa. Despite the relatively modest size of their inmate population – estimated at ten thousand in 1980 – the camps are comparable only with internment camps elsewhere across the communist world, particularly China’s Laogai (reeducation-through-labor camps), after whose model they were conceived.<sup>13</sup>

A month before the reporter’s visit to M’sawize, President Samora Machel instructed his top cabinet officers during a meeting of the Council of Ministers ‘to give further attention’ to the reeducation program. He stated that the camps should be organized in categories, and reeducatees should be classified and interned according to their offenses. According to President Machel’s commandment, there should be specific camps for drug addicts, for prostitutes, for drunkards, for vagrants, for the undisciplined, for thieves, and so on. ‘Our general concern’, the President said, ‘is to transform the old man into the new man, to transform society. Now, all we need is to find the adequate means to achieve this goal’.<sup>14</sup> To succeed in transforming ‘old men’ into ‘new men’, camp overseers were to be diligent knowledge gatherers, observing the behavior of each detainee and recording their improvement.<sup>15</sup> What Machel was calling for was a disciplinary institution akin to a modern, well-functioning pedagogical penitentiary. The Chinese Laogai functioned exactly in the same way that Machel wanted the camps to operate in Mozambique. He was likely to have seen them during his visits to China or heard about them from Chinese military instructors in Frelimo bases during the liberation struggle.<sup>16</sup>

Initially, the Ministry of the Interior (hereafter MINT) – the state organ in charge of the reeducation program – attempted to concentrate detainees according to criminal

A. Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in the 1960s Dar es Salaam* (Durham, 2011); A. Wipper, ‘African women, fashion, and scapegoating’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 6:2 (1972), 329–49.

12 J. Alexander and G. Kynoch, ‘Introduction: histories and legacies of punishment in Southern Africa’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37:3 (2011), 410.

13 Writing for *The Washington Post* in 1980, American international correspondent Jay Ross estimated that there were 10,000 detainees in Mozambique’s reeducation camps in that year, of which 3,000 were thought to be political prisoners (MHN – J. Ross, ‘Mozambican reeducation camps raise rights questions’, *The Washington Post*, 7 May 1980). I estimate that approximately 100,000 people passed through the pipeline until its demise in 1992. This figure includes the victims of the anti-urban clean-up campaign codenamed *Operação Produção* (Operation Production, 1983–8), which are estimated at 50,000. Like Omar Ribeiro Thomaz, I do not draw a sharp distinction between Operation Production and reeducation camps. See O. R. Thomaz, ‘Escravos sem dono: A experiência social dos campos de trabalho em Moçambique no período socialista’, *Revista de Antropologia*, 51:1 (2008), 187. On the campaign, see C. Quembo, *Poder do Poder: Operação Produção e a Inveção dos ‘Improdutivos’ Urbanos no Moçambique Socialista (1983–1988)* (Maputo, 2017). On the Chinese Laogai, see A. Smith, *Thought Reform and China’s Dangerous Classes: Reeducation, Resistance, and the People* (New York, 2013). For other similar carceral regimes, see T. T. Vu, *Lost Years: My 1,632 Days in Vietnamese Reeducation Camps* (Berkeley, 1988).

14 Arquivo do Gabinete do Governador da Província do Niassa – Direcção Provincial dos Serviços de Reeducação do Niassa (AGGPN – DPSRN)/MINT – 7ª Sessão Ordinária do Conselho de Ministros de 9 de Julho de 1976. Síntese XI-Parte – Centros de Reeducação. Maputo, 9 July 1976, 4.

15 AGGPM – MINT. Circular 6/GMI/976. Assunto: Objectivos dos Centros de Reeducação. 5 Jan. 1976.

16 On the influence of China and Chinese military instructors on Machel, see H. Martins, ‘Samora na Luta Armada (1965–1968)’, in A. Sopa (ed.), *Samora Homem do Povo* (Maputo, 2001), 111.

categories. For example, in Niassa, the camps of M'sawize and Ilumba were reserved for 'prostitutes'. Naisseco, also in Niassa, was opened for 'individuals considered drug addicts'.<sup>17</sup> Chiputo and M'telela (in Niassa) and Chaimite (Cabo Delgado) were established for Frelimo's dissidents. However, this organizational scheme did not hold, and chaos rapidly descended into the reeducation camp complex. The camp of Sacudzu in Sofala province held more than 1,000 detainees, among them street children, non-convicted thieves, undocumented civilians who failed to produce ID cards during police roundups, as well as sacked civil servants (including teachers, 'undisciplined' soldiers, and police officers).<sup>18</sup> In Ruarua, common criminal offenders shared barracks with Frelimo's guerrillas who had deserted during the liberation war. The Chicomo camp in Gaza province contained a miscellaneous detainee population of 750.<sup>19</sup> Even M'telela, a camp destined for prominent political prisoners with no more than 130 inmates, received individuals detained for common law offenses. In general, the inmate population at each camp was a wide mixture of people from all over the country detained for all sorts of offenses.

With few personnel available to run the reeducation program, Frelimo vested power to detain and distribute the detainees throughout the camp complex in low-ranking officers at the ground level. These rank and file officers often dispatched suspects to camps without trial and without consulting authorities senior to them in the hierarchy. The lack of a centralized, bureaucratic body within MINT to coordinate the program from the outset created a muddled situation that continued until the end of the socialist experiment. The creation in 1976 of the *Direcção Nacional dos Serviços de Reeducação* (National Directorate of Reeducation Services, DNSR) – almost two years after the first camps were established – did little to remedy the situation. The DNSR and its provincial sub-divisions (the DPSRs) were understaffed and largely on the sidelines when it came to deciding where detainees should go.<sup>20</sup> Given that anybody in the party-state – from the highest-ranking officer to the lowest agent – could condemn anyone to reeducation without reporting to MINT and without producing any kind of documentation, there simply was no way to coordinate the process. In the end, detainees were dispatched to a designated province, and the local DPSR decided where to send them. Since most people had not been formally sentenced and therefore had no written records of their offenses, they were quite randomly distributed in the camps without any objective criteria. Proper interrogation was something that security and DPSR officers had no time for, much less qualification. Even when, in 1980, a more capable officer named José Castiano Zumbire was appointed to head the DNSR, the camps continued to apply no order in the distribution of detainees and no criteria for organizing their classification files.<sup>21</sup>

17 AGGPN – DPSRN 262/SR/76. Relatório do Mês de Abril de 1976. Lichinga, 28 May 1976.

18 Interview with Simeão Mazuze, Matola, 20 Nov. 2014; Interview with Felizardo Chaguala, Matola, 4 Dec. 2014. Interviewees whose full names are provided in this paper expressed their willingness to be identified in this way. Those who did not have had their identities concealed.

19 MHN – Ross, 'Mozambican reeducation camps raise rights questions'.

20 Interview with João Carlos Trindade, Maputo, 10 Sept. 2014; Interview with Benedito Marrime, Maputo, 9 Dec. 2015.

21 AGGPN – MINT/Boletim Informativo n° 5. Maputo, 31 May 1980.

Although MINT had jurisdiction over the reeducation program, its functions often overlapped with those of the Ministry of Defense and the secret services (*Serviço Nacional de Segurança do Estado*, SNASP). It is unclear how decisions to transport detainees to the camps were taken, but each of these institutions operated an eclectic network of military planes, trucks, and buses to carry detainees to the far reaches of the country. Private and public buses were occasionally employed to transport people to the camps. To prevent detainees from having a sense of their geographical position, transportation was often done under cover of night. Not only were detainees uninformed about their offenses, they were also kept in the dark as to their destiny. While most detainees from southern Mozambique, particularly from Maputo, tended to be sent as far away from the capital as possible, people from central and northern Mozambique tended to be distributed locally.

Upon arrival, detainees were dressed in black uniforms. Each person received two pairs of khaki pants, two long- or short-sleeve shirts, a cap, and a pair of canvas boots. The black uniforms seem to have been used by the colonial security forces, most probably for recruits in training. It is possible that MINT found stocks of them in storage and repurposed them for reeducatees. No other color could have been better suited to dress the fallen urbanites sent to the countryside to be purified of their moral sins. Among other things, the black uniform symbolized the state of suspension of citizenship in which detainees were placed (as a reeducatee, one was stripped of all civil rights). At the same time, the uniform made it easy to exert control upon inmates. This was perhaps the only palpable attempt at giving the camps a sense of uniformity and rendering detainees legible. Peasant populations living near the camps were instructed to be vigilant and inform authorities whenever they saw people dressed in black, wandering about without armed guards. The uniform also gave the regimen of camp life the military semblance that Frelimo authorities wanted to see.<sup>22</sup>

However, camp authorities found it difficult to keep all detainees in uniforms (see Fig. 2). The shortage in consumer goods that characterized the Mozambican economy made clothing a luxury, especially in rural areas. When the stock of uniforms ran out in the first two years of the reeducation program, they were simply not replenished. By 1978, in most camps detainees wore whatever they could find. Only on special occasions, such as a visit by a state official to the camp, did authorities demand that detainees wear their black uniforms. On such occasions, authorities made sure that those detainees with better or well-kept uniforms sat in the front row and the more ragged ones took the back row. In the end, uniformity in the camps was a matter of performance for those higher up the state hierarchy to see. Rather than diligent reformers, austerity compelled camp authorities to become managers of the appearance of uniformity.

It also became problematic for the government to dress detainees in the extremely impoverished countryside where local populations still lived largely naked or half-naked. Most of my interviewees recalled the shocking encounters with nearly naked peasants in the

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22 The first seminar on reeducation camps held in Maputo in November 1976 determined that in order to successfully implement the political program in the camps, detainees had to be 'organized according to a composition similar to a military structure'. AGGPN – DPSRN/MINT – 10 Seminário Nacional de Reeducação. Documento de Apoio n.º. 2 – Projeto de Programa para os Centros de Reeducação, Nov. 1976.





**Fig. 2.** Detainees in a meeting at M'sawize. Some still wear the black uniform or what remained of it. 1976. Courtesy: Arquivo da Revista Tempo.

villages near their camps, and the envy with which they were often met because of their 'good looks' in black fatigues. In Niassa and Cabo Delgado, for example, detainees were known as *Mkunya Woripa*, or 'white blacks'. As former detainee Ché Mafuane told me, '*mkunya woripa* means that the person is black but at the same time he is white because he was dressed.'<sup>23</sup> The label *white* does not stand for race here, but rather for social status. For the Macua-speaking people in the remote corners of northern Mozambique, the detainees were somewhat privileged because they were dressed and 'looked good' in their black garments. On the one hand, this is a clear indication of the level of scarcity and neglect in which local populations lived. On the other, it highlights the cultural and social gap between the rural people of the northern provinces where most camps were established and the detainees who were mostly urban people. That these urbanites – who appeared privileged in the eyes of the rural populations – had to be fed and dressed by the state must have caused a great deal of confusion.

## THE SPATIAL ANATOMY AND THE FUNCTIONING OF REEDUCATION CAMPS

The location of the camps, often in the middle of remote forests, was a key feature of Mozambique's mass internment regime. All the camps were established and run after the image of Frelimo camps during the liberation struggle. With very few exceptions,

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Ché Mafuane, Maputo, 4 Dec. 2014.

detainees had to build the camps' infrastructures themselves. They collected the reeds and wooden poles from nearby forests to erect their huts. In Niassa and Cabo Delgado, the huts were then plastered with mud to fill in the open sides as local villagers would have done. But this labor-intensive task took longer to complete. In the two female camps, it seems to have never been actually completed until the camps were closed in the early 1980s. In southern and central Mozambique, the huts were simply built with reeds. Such hastily and unskillfully built huts hardly protected the detainees from nature's elements (cold in the winter nights, snake bites on hot days, and other life-threatening hazards).<sup>24</sup>

Detainees slept on bare, sandy ground. Those who were skilled enough built wooden bedframes. Although the frames were rougher than the floor, at least the detainees avoided the bites of worms, insects, or snakes. In Niassa the great nightmare was the cold. Even in male camps, where walls were plastered, the mud often dissolved with rain and then dried hard and fell off. Since detainees were not compelled to repair their lodgings – left to their own devices as they often were – few people had the will and strength to do the painstaking work of re-plastering the huts. The permanent struggle to find food in the hunger-stricken camps left little room for such work. Consequently, most lodgings were unprotected on the sides (see Fig. 3). Malarial mosquitoes and tsetse flies (responsible for sleeping sickness or trypanosomiasis) found easy ways into the huts and plenty of blood on which to feast.

The arrangement of camp lodgings was in accordance with Frelimo's high-modernist ideal of how rural settlements should look in socialist Mozambique. Geometrically aligned, rectangular or square-shaped houses replaced the traditional round huts. The *aldeias comunais* or communal villages were arranged after the Tanzanian *ujamaa* villages, with straight lines and a large central square reserved for the revolutionary activities of the people.<sup>25</sup> Reeducation camps followed the same layout, with rectangular huts aligned around an open square area known as the *rassemblement*.<sup>26</sup> Like a village's square, the *rassemblement* was the center of the camp's collective life. Meetings, roll calls, parades, cultural performances, and public punishment took place here. However, where scholars see biopolitical mechanisms of power in the orthogonal shape of Frelimo's rural settlements (from which the arrangement of reeducation camps derived its form), I see Christian missionary architectural and aesthetic ideals.<sup>27</sup> Like their Protestant missionary instructors, Frelimo revolutionaries saw the non-rectilinear shape of African dwellings – the 'circular kraal of huts' as Swiss-Presbyterian missionary Henri Junod once described them – as physical expressions of spiritual and moral damnation and backwardness.<sup>28</sup> Enlightenment, self-awareness, moral regeneration, and salvation were strictly related to the orderliness and

24 Interview with Simeão Mazuze; Interview with Felizardo Chaguala; Interview with Che Mafuiane; Interview with Beto Tembe, Maputo, 18 Jan. 2015.

25 M. Araujo, 'As aldeias comunais e o seu papel na distribuição territorial da população rural na RPM', *Fimisterra*, 28:36 (1983), 365–77; A. Y. Casal, 'Le processus de socialization au Mozambique: les villages communaux' (unpublished PhD thesis, Paris, IEDS, 1987); A. Y. Casal, *Antropologia e Desenvolvimento: As Aldeias Comunais de Moçambique* (Lisboa, 1996).

26 A French term that means assembly or gathering. It was brought into Frelimo's vocabulary by the first group of guerrillas trained in Algeria in 1963.

27 West, *Kupilikula*, 176.

28 H. A. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe. vol 1: The Social Life* (Neuchatel, 1913), 324.



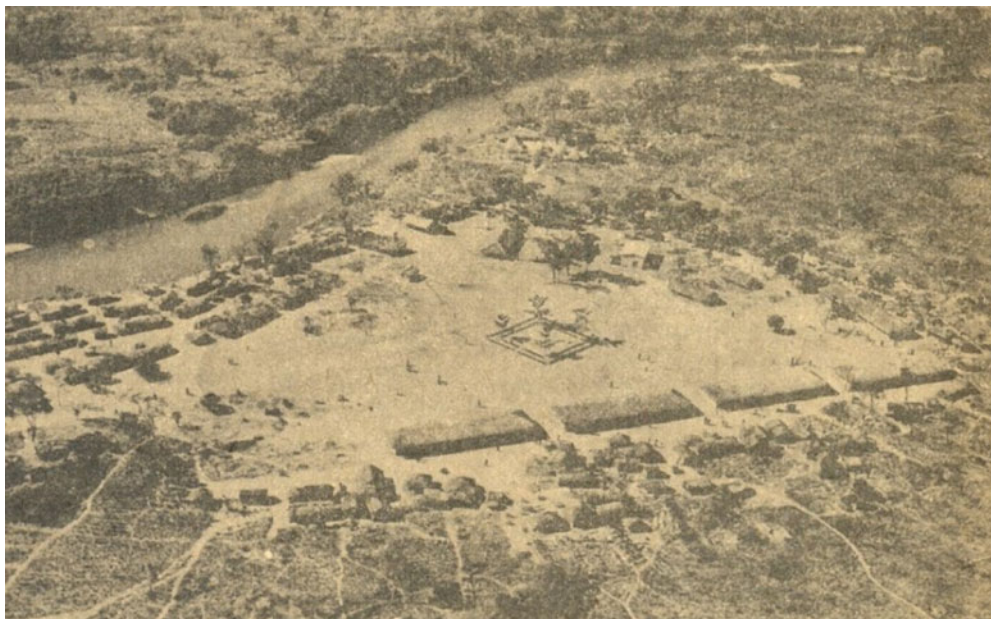
**Fig. 3.** Dormitories for female detainees and their children in M'sawize. Note the unprotected walls, which left detainees exposed to cold and nature's other elements. August 1976. Courtesy: Arquivo do Jornal Notícias

modern shape of square houses and regular lines.<sup>29</sup> As primary locations for moral purification of 'anti-socials', reeducation camps had to be organized according to this orderly form, not so much for legibility or surveillance considerations. The orthogonal shape of the camp was to express human conquest of nature according to scientific methods (an important component of reeducation). Circles were primitive, while squares were modern and rational.

As the aerial photograph of Chiputo illustrates (Fig. 4), the camp had no erected barriers, and many unguarded paths led freely to the working fields and into the forest. As most of my interviewees told me, warders had little concern with keeping watch in the camp and were often interested in hunting ventures or playing games among themselves.<sup>30</sup> The small number of warders and camp overseers compared to the size of the inmate population gave the impression that detainees lived as semi-free peasants. But this shortage of personnel was often the cause of long-lasting headaches for camp authorities. In his monthly reports in 1977, André Trabuco, the head of the DPSRN, lamented that the

<sup>29</sup> For further discussion on European missionary architecture in southern Africa, see J. and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Simeão Mazuze; Interview with Felizardo Chaguala; Interview with Che Mafuiane; Interview with Beto Tembe.



**Fig. 4.** Aerial view of Chiputo. Note the river at the upper corner, the orthogonal shape of the lodgings, the square rassemblement in the middle of the camp, the absence of fences or a watchtower, and the various unpatrolled paths leading into the bush. Source: Tempo, 1979.

number of detainees in most camps in Niassa, particularly M'sawize, Ilumba, and Naisseco, was too high, while camp wardens were few.<sup>31</sup>

According to MINT directives, each camp was supposed to have five *responsáveis* (camp overseers), each with a deputy in charge of specific tasks.<sup>32</sup> These include a chief of the camp (the highest position in the camp hierarchy); a military camp commander; a political commissar (who oversaw political education and ideological indoctrination); a *responsável* for agricultural production; and a *responsável* for cultural activities. The camps were also meant to have a secretariat with at least one or two typists to produce the required monthly reports.<sup>33</sup> Generally, the chief of the camp and his deputy were police officers on the MINT payroll, as were the typists. The rest of the *responsáveis* and wardens were former Frelimo guerrillas and veterans of the liberation struggle who had had very little academic instruction. The number of wardens for each camp was never specified. But it was a consensus – even among top members of the central government – that the camps were alarmingly short of guards and qualified overseers. For example, in July 1976, the Council of

31 AGGPN – DPSRN/SR/78. Relatório referente ao mês de Fevereiro, Março, e Abril de 1977. Lichinga, 30 Apr. 1977.

32 As Barry Munslow noted, the term *responsável* (literally translated as responsible) has no 'adequate translation' and it 'bears the connotation of leadership as a responsibility rather than as a privilege, service rather than the power of officership'. See B. Munslow, *Mozambique: The Revolution and its Origins* (London, 1983), 151.

33 AGGPN – DPSRN/MINT – 10 Seminário Nacional de Reeducação. Documento de Apio n.º. 2 – Projecto de Programa para os Centros de Reeducação, Nov. 1976.

Ministers proposed the training of at least one hundred professional camp overseers. This number was indicated as an initial, urgent necessity, but in the long run the camps would need more cadres.<sup>34</sup> During the First National Seminar on Reeducation held in Maputo in November 1976, MINT proposed a two- to three-month training program for camp overseers. The training package was to include political education, sociology, psychology, administration and book-keeping, mathematics, geography, and constitutional law. The program was to be supplemented with talks by high-ranking party officers and guided visits to productive units. Camp overseers were to be versed in farming techniques (including the husbandry of small animals), production planning, techniques of storage and conservation of food, notions of hygiene and first aid, and sports and cultural activities.<sup>35</sup>

However, between intentions and actions there was a very wide gap. Austerity often had the final word, and no training program for camp overseers was actually carried out. With priorities defined elsewhere, no new professional camp supervisors were recruited. Frelimo ran short of cadres to run the massive bureaucracy left in a shambles by the fleeing Portuguese.<sup>36</sup> With illiteracy well over 90 per cent at the time of independence, the few educated people had to be employed in the most important positions in the government.<sup>37</sup> This situation was even more critical in the field of security. After the rebellion of conservative settlers on 7 September 1974 – which Frelimo saw as a coup attempt against their incoming government – and the violent riots of 21 October, the capital city needed extensive security.<sup>38</sup> The fear of an invasion by apartheid South Africa was very real, especially after South Africa's failed but bloody invasion of Angola.<sup>39</sup> All of these developments led Frelimo to concentrate most of its guerrilla troops in Lourenço Marques and on the southern border with South Africa. In addition, the ransacking and destruction of property undertaken by angry settlers on their exit also increased the demand for security personnel. Factories and economic enterprises had to be protected to avoid further sabotage.

34 AGGPN – DPSRN/MINT – 7<sup>a</sup> Sessão Ordinária do Conselho de Ministros de 9 de Julho de 1976. Síntese XI-Parte – Centros de Reeducação. Maputo, 9 July 1976, p. 3.

35 AGGPN – DPSRN/MINT – 1<sup>o</sup> Seminário Nacional de Reeducação. Documento de Apio n.º. 2 – Projecto de Programa para os Centros de Reeducação, Nov. 1976.

36 See M. Newitt, 'Mozambique', in P. Chabal *et al* (eds.), *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa* (Bloomington, 2002), 207.

37 The situation did not improve very much in the first years of independence, despite the herculean efforts by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Judith Marshall estimated that in 1984, in a total population of 13 million, seven people out of ten were still illiterate. J. Marshall, 'Making education revolutionary', in J. Saul (ed.), *A Difficult Road: The Transition to Socialism in Mozambique* (New York, 1985), 157.

38 Two episodes of violence in the capital city marked the transition to independence. The first episode was the settler's rebellion on 7 September 1974, the day Frelimo and the new Portuguese government signed the peace agreement in Lusaka. Most settlers felt betrayed by the agreement, which recognized Frelimo as the only legitimate political force in Mozambique. The bloodier events of 21 October were in some way a continuation of the crisis of 7 September, with disoriented Portuguese soldiers clashing with Frelimo guerrillas. See J. Mittleman, 'State power in Mozambique', *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 8:1 (1978), 4–11; A. D. Harvey, 'Counter-coup in Lourenço Marques: September 1974', *International Journal of African Studies*, 39:3 (2006), 487–98; B. Machava, 'Galo amanheceu em Lourenço Marques: O 7 de Setembro e o verso da descolonização em Moçambique', *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 106 (2015), 53–84.

39 On South Africa's invasion of Angola and the fears of invasion of Mozambique, see D. Martin and P. Johnson (eds.), *Destructive Engagement: South Africa at War* (Harare, 1986); M. P. Meneses, C. Rosa, and B. S. Martins, 'Colonial wars, colonial alliances: the Alcora Exercise in the context of Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43:2 (2017), 397–410.



**Fig. 5.** Detainees and a warder posing for a photograph in Unango. This photo was taken during the construction of one of the camp's barracks. The detainees wear fodder sacks during work to avoid damaging their uniforms – the only clothes they had. The fact that only one warder posed for the photo indicates that there were in fact very few armed warders in the camp. Undated. Courtesy: Arquivo da Revista Tempo.

The nationalized clinics and schools also needed security. The departure in June 1975 of the last company of Portuguese troops that had helped Frelimo secure the transition made the security situation more critical. The start of the war with Rhodesia in 1976 squeezed the army even more. As Rhodesia's aggression evolved into a civil war led by Renamo in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, the war effort consumed almost all the newly recruited cadres.<sup>40</sup>

There were few human resources left for the reeducation camps. In M'sawize, the chief commander Silência David and her deputy, Judite Florêncio, commanded a platoon of seventeen female guards. This small group was tasked with guarding and re-educating about five hundred inmates. This was the case in almost all camps, where a handful of soldiers guarded hundreds of detainees (see Fig. 5). In the Chicomo camp in Gaza province, commander Jaime Rebich had only fifteen soldiers under his command to guard 750 inmates.<sup>41</sup> Yet, it was not only guards that were in very short supply. The camps also ran very short on *responsáveis*. In Niassa, only one camp (Chiputo) had filled the five

<sup>40</sup> See J. P. B. Coelho and P. Macaringue, 'Da paz negativa à paz positiva: Uma perspectiva histórica sobre o papel das Forças Armadas Moçambicanas num contexto de segurança em transformação', *Estudos Moçambicanos*, 20 (2002), 41–90.

<sup>41</sup> MHN – Ross, 'Mozambican reeducation camps raise rights questions'.

required positions. In the rest of the camps, overseers had to combine two or more positions, often serving as commanders, political commissars, and *responsáveis* for production.<sup>42</sup> Whereas the political leadership in the capital dreamed of specialized and professional reeducators, austerity forced camp authorities to improvise. This not only meant that people had to combine various responsibilities, but also that the very hierarchical structure of the camp was erratic.

In many camps, to alleviate the shortage of guards, the overseers appointed detainees to serve as auxiliaries of patrol units. These detainee-guards were pejoratively called *Gatos Vermelhos* or red cats by their fellow reeducatees.<sup>43</sup> Other fortunate detainees were appointed to positions as camp administration assistants, teachers, and heads of working platoons.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the environment that the *Notícias* newsman found so reassuring in M'sawize – with detainees moving in and out of the camp at will – was a reflection of the shortages that shaped and conditioned the organic functioning of Mozambique's reeducation camps, not the magnanimous nature of Frelimo and its government.

However, this does not mean that detainees were under no kind of control. There were other forms of authority to keep the internees within the vicinities of the camps and to prevent escape attempts. The semi-free women that the *Notícias* reporter saw along the road linking M'sawize with the nearby village could only travel in that open stretch of Mavago district. The remote location of the camps, to which detainees were transported in the dark, managed to keep them in line. Like most camps in Niassa, Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Sofala provinces, M'sawize was established in an unmarked forest within the perimeter of the country's largest hunting reserve (*Reserva de Caça do Niassa*). The reserve is well known for its man-eating lions and other wild animals.<sup>45</sup> The camp was some three hours' walking distance from the nearest village. Walking to the provincial city of Lichinga generally took two to three days. The area had been one of Frelimo's *zonas libertadas* during the armed struggle, and a military base (Base Central) was maintained hundreds of miles away from the camp. Local communities were often instructed to report to authorities if detainees showed up in their villages.

Many detainees attempted to escape, and some successfully navigated the wild forests and met the freedom they longed for. Generally, the leading escapees were locals who were somewhat familiar with the area. With their fluency in local vernaculars, they could convince villagers to let them go or even alleviate their thirst and hunger along the perilous journey.<sup>46</sup> But these were exceptional cases. Most detainees did not dare

42 AGGPN – DPSRN/Efectivo dos Campos de Reeducação – Relação dos responsáveis e pessoal em serião nos campos de reeducação. Lichinga, sd.

43 The name derives from the red arm band that the *Gatos Vermelhos* wore. Interview with Felizardo Chaguala.

44 Interview with Felizardo Chaguala; J. Pinto de Sá, 'A História inédita dos "centros de reeducação" em Moçambique: os campos da vergonha', *Público Magazine*, 277, 25 June 1995, 28. The Red Cats were detainees trusted with keeping watch on their fellow inmates, and they seem to have only existed in selected camps, such as Sacudzo, Chaimite, and Bilibiza.

45 On lions in northern Mozambique, see P. Israel, 'The war on lions: Witch-hunts, occult idioms and post-socialism in Northern Mozambique', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35:1 (2009), 155–74.

46 Interview with Ana Maria, Matola-Kongoloti, 23 Dec. 2014. For example, a walk from M'sawize to the nearest village of the same name in Mavago took two and a half hours, and only if the walker was using the road opened by detainees. Escapees avoided open paths and ventured through the thick bush that

brave the unknown wilderness, for they had no sense of geography and could not speak local languages. The dangers of the forest and the fear of predators often kept detainees in line. In 1976, the administrator of the district of Majune in Niassa informed the DPSRN that on 17 June, eight detainees fled from Naisseco. One of them, João Manhiça, was ‘eaten by a lion and we do not know about the other seven’.<sup>47</sup> Camp overseers publicized these chilling cases among detainees to prevent further attempts. Sometimes they forced detainees to bury the incomplete and disfigured remains of their devoured companions to stir more fear of the bush.<sup>48</sup>

‘Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap.’ This is how Michel Foucault described the necessary elements in the working of a panoptic institution.<sup>49</sup> In Mozambique’s reeducation camps, the features of a modern penal institution were upside down. This was a blind panopticon that relied on the remote location of the camps, their wild surroundings, and the terrifying dark of the bush night to keep its subjects in line. The roaring of lions, the growling fights of hyenas, and the singing of owls in the bush night was something that few urbanites would dare confront. The camps’ geographical location was largely enough of an obstacle to curb escapes. Therefore, the range of control in the camp did not rest on the ‘monitoring eye’ of the representatives of the state, nor did it lie on the ‘architectural apparatus’ of the camp with its square-shaped huts and the wide open *rassemblement*. It did not even rely on armed guards. Rather, it rested on the remoteness of the camps’ locations and the state of ignorance about the geographic location of the camp in which detainees were kept. This was why it was crucial that detainees not be informed about their destiny when they were transported. This was why, inside the camps, geographical maps were kept out of sight. In most cases, they were simply forbidden, even among wardens. As one former detainee in Sacudzo recalled, even lectures on Mozambique’s geography were delivered without a map.<sup>50</sup> Here was another layer of the combined effect of austerity and a fragile carceral regime. Hiding, concealing, and darkness: these were the techniques of surveillance at work in Mozambique’s reeducation camps. In the context of extreme austerity, the dangers of the wilderness did the work of surveillance.

## WORK AND THE CAMPS’ DAILY ROUTINE

Despite several attempts to produce a centrally-coordinated program for the camps, MINT was never able to pass any regulations with detailed rules on how the camps ought to operate on a daily basis. The ministry was short of capable people to elaborate such rules, and the administrative capacity of the ministry was overstretched, given its ample responsibilities. Consequently, camp supervisors had to come up with their own plans on how to keep

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covers much of Niassa. Under such circumstances, it took half a day to reach Mavago. Escaping to Lichinga on foot could take three to five exhausting days, during which the escapee would need water, food, and sometimes shelter.

47 AGGPN – DPSRN/Mensagem N° 346/SR/76, do Administrador de Majune ao GPN, Lichinga, 22 July 1976.

48 Interview with André Macovo (Picuane), Maputo, 22 Dec. 2014.

49 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.

50 Interview with Pedro Comissário, Maputo, 6 July 2019.



the detainees busy. Although a tentative program was introduced later in 1980, when José Zumbire was appointed director for the DNSR, the program still left much of the daily camp routine up to supervisors to decide.<sup>51</sup> The consensus was that detainees had to work in the fields (*machambas*), which was supposed to be the source of their food. But unlike penal labor camps elsewhere, where productivity and outputs were often prioritized over other activities, in Mozambique the camps had no economic relevance whatsoever.<sup>52</sup> There were no production quotas and no defined number of hectares for the fields. The produce from *machambas* was entirely destined for the inmates' subsistence – and even here they often fell very short. Not only did the camps lack appropriate implements for agriculture (hoes and axes were the only tools available), but they also had no qualified experts in this field. Therefore, the camps were not self-sufficient. They depended almost entirely on rations from respective DPSRs, which often failed to arrive. Hunger was a permanent condition in the camps. As M'sawize chief commander told the *Notícias* visitor, food shortage was the main problem in the camp. 'We go very hungry here', she said. 'Rations hardly reach us. Trucks break down in the rough roads and the food rots and never reaches us here. Many people have anemia. Even now, we only have rations for just one meal in the barn. In addition, the food quality is very poor. Usually we only have beans and maize flour.'<sup>53</sup>

Decrepit infrastructures, rough roads, and shortage of spare parts to keep the few vehicles running meant that camps were isolated for months without rations. Although austerity meant that the entire country faced chronic shortages in food and other basic consumer goods, the remote locations of the camps amplified the crisis. In his report to MINT in May 1976, Francisco Taibo noted that the Naisseco camp 'is full of malnourished and weak people due to insufficient food'.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, every weekday, detainees were marched in working brigades to the fields, where they grew a few rain-dependent crops that provided the camps' staple food: corn, manioc, and beans. Small vegetable gardens, which could only be worked on the banks of nearby rivers, were often left to individual initiative. Although in some camps detainees collected timber and produced charcoal, subsistence agriculture was the most serious work in which they were engaged. With no established production quotas, the work regime was relatively mild.

Despite the hardship of farming, detainees were subjected to very little regimentation in reeducation camps. The daily routine in most camps began very early in the morning. 'Dawn at 4:30 in the morning. Cleaning and breakfast. Then farm. Lunch. Farm again.' This is how Silência David summarized the daily program of M'sawize as she guided the *Notícias* visitor around the camp. 'In the evening, they eat again', she continued, 'however, we do not always have enough food, so sometimes nobody eats at night'.<sup>55</sup> As in Frelimo's former training camps, the day often started with a whistle, at which sound

51 AGGPN – MINT/Boletim Informativo n° 5. Maputo, 31 May 1980.

52 For comparative analysis of similar labor camps, used as a model by Frelimo authorities, and the role of production, see Applebaum, *Gulag*; Viola, *The Unknown Gulag*; Ros, *La UMAP*; and Smith, *Thought Reform*.

53 AJN – 'Centro de Reeducação de Msauíze.'

54 AGGPN – DPSRN, No 262/SR/76. Relatório do Mês de Abril de 1976. Lichinga, 28 May 1976.

55 AJN – 'Centro de Reeducação de Msauíze.'

detainees had to form a line in the *rassemblement*. The chief commander called the roll and gave the instructions of the day. Organized as brigades of twenty-five to forty people, some groups would work the *machamba*, others would cut and collect wood, and still others would fetch drinking and cooking water from nearby rivers. Others would build the huts and, in the case of M'sawize, continue working on the opening of the road linking the camp with the nearby village (to allow trucks to deliver rations and bring more detainees).

After the roll call, detainees had a cup of sweet tea (if there was sugar) and a piece of manioc or cornmeal porridge for breakfast. They then joined their working platoons and marched to the fields (see Fig. 6). Other work consisted of felling trees for local construction, firewood, and the production of charcoal, which was then sold in the local markets. In some camps, such as M'telela and Chiputo, there were groups of artisans who were excused from the hard labor of tilling the land. These artisans produced woodwork (such as benches, doors, and bedframes) and carried out minor carpentry and masonry maintenance work inside the camp. Other artisans produced utensils such as baskets and mats. In camps such as M'telela and Chiputo, some of these utensils were sold in the local markets. As with charcoal production, artisanal products were only destined for the market. Yet this often depended on the enthusiasm and organizational skill of the *responsável* for production (who might also be a detainee), as well as the support of camp overseers who sold the products and used the money to buy food.<sup>56</sup>

After work, detainees returned to the camp for lunch. A team of selected detainees prepared the food. These teams seem to have been rotated daily or weekly, but detainees renowned for being good cooks often held their positions permanently. Cooking was the most sought-after job in the camp because it allowed detainees to be closer to the source of food and guaranteed more generous portions compared to the meager ones that the majority received.<sup>57</sup> The staple food was cornmeal pap or *chima* (in other places in Africa it is known as *ugali*, *sadza*, or *uswa*), and beans. Generally, the food was poorly cooked and unseasoned. The beans – which grow everywhere in Niassa – were only prepared with water, salt, and cooking oil (sometimes it was only water and salt, because oil was often unavailable). For urbanites used to a more refined diet, the roughness of the camps' rations was trying. As Carlos Fumo recalled of Ruarua, 'we practically lived like savages, we had no food.'<sup>58</sup> Occasionally, on good days, game meat was served. But this only happened in certain camps near hunting reserves such as M'sawize and Sacudzo. (In Sacudzo, detainees were also served dried fish, as the camp was located along the main corridor of the dried fish trade between Beira and Zimbabwe).<sup>59</sup> Skilled and resolute detainees often supplemented their meager meals with a piece of fresh fish from nearby rivers. However, given the lack of fishing hooks and nets, catching fish in the camps took great skill and patience. For those with access to vegetable gardens, the unpalatable taste of *chima* and beans could be improved by the addition of some green leaves.

56 Pinto de Sá, 'A história inédita'; Interview with Ché Mafuiane.

57 Interview with Ché Mafuiane; Interview with Ana Maria, Matola-Kongoloti, 12 Dec. 2014.

58 Interview with Carlos Fumo, Matola, 4 Dec. 2014.

59 Interview with Felizardo Chaguala.



**Fig. 6.** Detainees at work in Inhassune, 1976. Courtesy: Arquivo do Jornal Notícias.

There was no order to eating time. As soon as their rusty iron dishes were filled, the reeducatees sat wherever they found appropriate in the vast open camp in the company of close inmates or friends (see Fig. 7). In his Kafka-esque novel *Campo de Trânsito*, Mozambican fiction writer and historian João Paulo Borges Coelho captured the eating time in the reeducation camp with satirical yet very informative detail.<sup>60</sup> Most detainees were modern urbanites who had assimilated the Portuguese colonial notion that cutlery was a symbol of civilization. For most urban southerners, eating with at least a fork or a spoon was the norm, whereas eating by hand was tantamount to backwardness. In the camps, detainees had to learn how to eat by hand, for cutlery was a luxury that only few – often senior detainees – could afford. Like other metal tools (such as knives), forks and spoons were markers of hierarchy inside the camp. Those who obstinately maintained their ‘civilized’ ways of eating used bark or hardened leaves in place of spoons.<sup>61</sup>

Camp overseers ate the same unpalatable food, but theirs was often prepared in separate, smaller pots by relatively better-skilled detainees acting as cooks. At times, they ate in the open, like their captives. At others, they concealed themselves in a less visible spot which detainees were not allowed to approach.<sup>62</sup> As much as some camp overseers attempted to keep a kind of hierarchical and statutory distance from detainees, the camp offered few options. The differentiation was in the uniforms, the firearms that warders bore, and the undisputed reality that some were captors and others were captives. The camps were so

<sup>60</sup> J. P. B. Coelho, *Campo de Trânsito* (Maputo, 2010), 46–9.

<sup>61</sup> Group Interview with Simeão Mazuze (aka Salimo Mohamed), Ché Mafuiane, and Felizardo Cuaguala, Matola, 8 Dec. 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Carlos Fumo.



**Fig. 7.** Detainees sharing a meal inside their hut in Unango. Note that one detainee (front right) has a spoon, while others eat with their hands. In some camps, cutlery was a symbol of status. Undated. Courtesy: Arquivo do Jornal Notícias.

resource-poor that overseers had to go to certain lengths to distinguish themselves from the captives.

In most camps, where farming was only done in the morning, lunch marked the end of daily work for most detainees. They spent the remainder of the day very much on their own. With their hungry bellies appeased (at least for the time being), most detainees spent the afternoons chatting or daydreaming under the cool shade of a tree during the hot summers, or warming up in the sun in the open *rassemblement* during the chilly dry season. Some detainees spent the free time patching up their ragged uniforms or sewing their worn shoes. Others, the most industrious, tended their small vegetable gardens or fixed their lodgings, which needed permanent repair, given their rudimentary features. Except for the female camps of Ilumba and M'sawize-1, where political education seemed to have been mandatory from the outset, in most camps it was optional (at least until the late 1970s). Therefore, those thirsty for knowledge spent the two hours after lunch attending the political commissar's lectures. Those allowed to hunt braved the forest with a couple of guards on their heels. The less sober found a shady spot to smoke hemp or to gulp *cajulima*, a locally distilled and highly intoxicating brandy. In many

cases, affluent detainees sneaked to the nearby villages for alcohol or to alleviate the urge for a smoke, even at the risk of being caught and punished. However, punishment for smoking hemp or drinking only happened in cases where a mean guard decided to enforce a camp rule that was often overlooked, particularly if camp warders were themselves frequent visitors of the village for the same reason – and this was the case in most camps.<sup>63</sup>

The most creative detainees joined the folklore groups known as *Grupo Cultural Polivalente* or Multipurpose Cultural Group. These were highly selective groups, and membership was a free pass to the elite class of detainees excused from the heaviest labor. These groups were responsible for cultural production and entertainment of all sorts, including plays, choirs, dancing, and poetry. They spent most of the day rehearsing the numbers to be presented on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, or during one of the many revolutionary holidays on the calendar. Occasionally they rehearsed to perform for the reception of an important visitor.<sup>64</sup>

There was no strict time to return to the camp in the afternoon. Hunger led everyone to the kitchen line for supper as the falling sun cast its last reddish rays from above the trees surrounding the camp. The meal was invariably the same one eaten at lunch. Sunset marked the end of the day. With no electricity and no lights, at night the dense darkness of the camp was often dotted with sparks of fire where detainees gathered for a last chat, trying to warm up before bedtime during the cold months. Smaller lights could be seen shining inside the lodgings of camp overseers, the only privileged camp dwellers to have a candle or a paraffin lamp – some of the few luxuries that differentiated detainees from their captors. If there was a permanent ‘monitoring eye’ in the camp, surely it went totally blind at night.

## THE ‘FAÇADE’ OF POLITICAL EDUCATION

Despite the elegant rhetoric around political and ideological (Marxist-Leninist) education, which Frelimo leaders frequently claimed was at the heart of the rehabilitation of Mozambique’s anti-social elements, there was little in the camps’ educational program worthy of such designation. In Niassa, for example, DPRSN officers saw the education program as a façade, or at most a meaningless activity.<sup>65</sup> The camps were deprived of basic didactic materials, classrooms, and qualified cadres to carry out the program. Political commissars were responsible for the educational program. However, not all camps had a political commissar. Camp overseers were often forced to take up this task, combining the responsibilities of camp commander and political commissar. Yet, very few overseers had the qualifications necessary to instruct detainees in politics or any other academic matters. In many reports, DPRSN directors lamented the shortage of cadres to run the camps in Niassa and the lack of a clear program for reeducation other than compulsory manual labor and the ‘pointless’ sessions of political education.

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63 Interview with Ché Mafuiane, Maputo, 4 Dec. 2014; Interview with Felizardo Chaguala.

64 Pinto de Sá, ‘A história inédita’, 28; Interview with Simeão Mazuze (aka Salimo Mohamed).

65 AGGPN – DPRSN/SR/78. Relatório referente ao mês de Fevereiro, Março, e Abril de 1977. Lichinga, 30 Apr. 1977.

MINT made the poor state of political education the main subject of its First National Seminar on Reeducation, which was held in Maputo in November 1976. The seminar concluded that while manual labor was undoubtedly a crucial component of reeducation, a meaningful political program had to be created, one informed by scientific socialism. 'For example', it was stated, 'production has to be studied' and detainees had to learn that it was 'through production that humanity evolved'; they had to learn the 'role of the surplus and the emergence of class division in society'. They also had to study the 'current revolutionary process in Mozambique' and the pursuit of a 'classless society'.<sup>66</sup> Learning the history of Mozambique's colonial domination, the rise of Frelimo, and the struggle for liberation were key steps in the transformation of detainees into awakened, conscious new women and new men. It was determined that the 'implementation of a meaningful political program implied the organization of reeducatees according to a military structure'. Camps ought to have a monthly plan that dictated all activities. Each Saturday afternoon, camp overseers were to meet and meticulously study the execution of the plan and establish new programs. The daily program mandated two hours for political study.

Political education was supposed to include lectures, the production of a camp journal, and the collective study of newspapers. There were detailed instructions on how the two hours of political education had to be spent. One hour was to be dedicated to lectures; half an hour for debate and clarification of doubts; and the remaining half hour for commentaries on daily news and such issues as 'the definition of the enemy, the behavior and erroneous ideas among reeducatees, exposition of new initiatives', and so on. For the program to be successful, a designated group of detainees had to listen to the 12:30 p.m. news from a battery-powered radio set, then explain it to all detainees in the general parade. Austerity meant that only one radio set could be allocated to each camp for this purpose. The size of the radio set also meant that only a few detainees could listen to the news. In the absence of loudspeakers, the few listeners were to serve as amplifiers and broadcast the news to others. In addition, camps were instructed to introduce gymnastics, sports, and cultural activities. Professional training was to be implemented in crafts such as carpentry, mechanics, and arts. In their capacity as chief political instructors, political commissars had to create a group of aides among exemplary detainees, who were to prepare – under their supervision – the materials for the lectures. Each class was supposed to have twenty to forty students. Political commissars were to inform detainees that participation in these activities was a 'decisive step towards their freedom'.<sup>67</sup>

Austerity limited the party's ability to realize its reformist ambitions. These detailed instructions were part of a wider culture of wishful governmentality that characterized Frelimo's socialist regime, in which policies were decided upon and implemented first. Planning and calculations, which were often ambitious and unrealistic, came later.<sup>68</sup> In the end, the high-minded instructions on reeducation remained a dead letter. Little if

66 AGGPN –MINT/1º Seminário sobre Reeducação. Documento de Apoio nº. 2: Projecto de Programa para os Centros de Reeducação. Nov. 1976, 3.

67 *Ibid.*, 3–4.

68 See B. Egero, *Mozambique, a Dream Undone: The Political Economy of Democracy, 1975–1984* (Uppsala, 1987).

anything changed in the educational program inside the camps. DPSRN officers continued to be greatly concerned about the level of education of many camp overseers in Niassa. In April 1977 – six months after the Seminar on Reeducation recommended special training for camp supervisors – the new director of the DPSRN, André Trabuco, noted that the ‘political and technical capabilities’ of Niassa’s camp officers ‘are minute’.<sup>69</sup> He sadly informed his superiors that in Ilumba, for example, ‘the various programs are being implemented with much difficulty due to lack of personnel in quantity and quality to materialize the instructions.’ The main deficiencies were noted in literacy and political education. ‘The camp lacks personnel capable of understanding the instructions through political documents, *Tempo* magazine and newspapers, and interpreting them’, he wrote.<sup>70</sup>

In fact, the only didactic materials that camp overseers had to work with were newspapers (especially the weekly magazine *Tempo* and the daily *Notícias*). Speeches by Frelimo authorities (President Machel’s in particular) were the primary and often the only guiding tools for political education. Often, these ‘precious’ materials arrived in the camps several months after they had been published. School books were in short supply in the country and none could be sent to camps. Oriented by people with ‘minute’ education, it is not difficult to imagine the theatrical nature of lectures on political and ideological education that reeducatees were compelled to attend every day after returning from the fields. Seated under the shade of a tree, as was often the case because there were no huts to serve as classrooms, detainees listened as their political instructors read aloud a section of a speech by the president or a piece of news. A discussion of the content of a months-old news article would then follow. If the commissar happened to be versed in Frelimo’s socialist maxims or had a certain knowledge of the history of the armed struggle, she or he would throw in some ready-made slogans about the virtues of collective labor, the class struggle, the heroic saga of the liberation war, or the actions of global imperialism and internal enemies seeking to undermine the revolution. Instructors kept no records as to who attended the lectures and made no assessment of inmates’ pedagogical progress. With no training for instructors and no didactic materials, political education amounted to nothing more than propaganda, ‘mobilization’, and moral exhortation. This is how Silência David, the chief of the women’s camp in M’sawize, explained her political work among putative prostitutes:

Political education is part of our working methods. At first, if we said ‘Viva Frelimo’, nobody responded. Nobody understood why they were brought here, why they had to suffer this much and endure these life conditions. To explain what the lives of these women represented in the colonial society, to explain the kind of society we want to build in Mozambique, to explain why they are in this isolated place, a political explanation was necessary.<sup>71</sup>

Like her colleagues in other camps, Silência David measured the success of her political work by the unison shouts of *Viva Frelimo* with hundreds of arms in raised fists, as well as the military discipline that detainees seemed to show in the roll calls and parades.

69 AGGPN – DPSRN/SR/78. Relatório referente ao mês de Fevereiro, Março, e Abril de 1977. Lichinga, 30 Apr. 1977.

70 *Ibid.*

71 AJN – ‘Centro de Reeducação de Msauíse.’

For most camp authorities, all that reeducation aimed for was that detainees should understand why they had to endure isolation and suffering in such remote places. Obedience to camp commandments and military orderliness in parades was often the only measure of detainees' submission to the reeducation program. Ana Maria, who was detained in a dance club in Maputo at the age of eighteen and spent two years in M'sawize, told me sarcastically: 'I learned to be a soldier. I did not need any reeducation, but I was re-educated, I did not dance anymore, for example.'<sup>72</sup> Another former detainee, who was seventeen when he was sent to Sacudzo, said to me in anger: 'I don't think I was re-educated. Quite the opposite, I cultivated hatred and resentment.'<sup>73</sup>

Four years after the first seminar on reeducation, the government recognized that little had been done to implement an effective educational program in the camps. During the Second Seminar, which was also held in Maputo in January 1980, the new interior minister, Mariano Matsinhe, urged participants to find solutions to improve the situation by listing the same tasks defined in 1976. Nevertheless, he lauded the 'successes achieved', and claimed that they 'attest to the righteousness of Frelimo's political line and the measures taken by the government for the reeducation of thousands of vagrants and delinquents who swarmed the urban areas of the country'.<sup>74</sup> The minister's statement reveals not only the inability of the state to accept its shortcomings, but also the blind belief in the idea of reeducation. Other aspects of everyday life in the camp reflected the contradictions produced by a carceral regime functioning under extreme conditions of scarcity and the gap between high-minded ideals and reality.

## SOCIAL LIFE INSIDE THE CAMPS

Apart from the harsh labor conditions, poor diet, and the pretense of reform, life in Mozambique's reeducation camps was also governed by unwritten rules about temperance and abstinence. Detainees were expected to cultivate austere moral habits, to stay away from inebriating drinks and drugs, and to remain chaste. For the architects of the reeducation program, life in the camps had to be close to monastic. However, much of the social life inside the camps revolved around drinking, hemp smoking, and sex. The dormant panopticon of Mozambique's penal colonies could not tame these idiosyncrasies of nature. Under conditions of extreme want, both detainees and warders created new forms of sociability inside and outside the camps. Drugs, alcohol, sex, and all kinds of illicit trades subverted the monastic ambitions of Frelimo leaders. As Ana Maria told me in our interview, 'If you did not smoke you had to learn to smoke. If you did not drink, there you had to drink. Otherwise you would go crazy and die alone'. And she added: 'many people began smoking in the camps'.<sup>75</sup>

Throughout Mozambique, rural populations had always planted hemp in their gardens. The distillation of *cajulima* from sugar cane or other fruit-based spirits was also a

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Ana Maria.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Felizardo Chaguala.

<sup>74</sup> 'Trabalho da reeducação foi positivo – Constata II Seminário efectuado em Maputo', *Tempo*, 27 Jan. 1980, 2.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Ana Maria.



centuries-old tradition.<sup>76</sup> The presence of detainees near rural villages provided a market – incipient as it was – for the intoxicating and inebriating produce that was never wanting in most rural homesteads. Generally, detainees exchanged with villagers the few but very precious goods that they received as part of their rations – mainly soap and clothing – for alcohol and hemp. As Felizardo Chaguala recalled, in Sacudzo, a small group of detainees often combined to go to the village during or immediately after work in the fields, entrusted with goods collected from several detainees, such as bars of soap, pieces of cloth, and occasionally money. Although the drinks were consumed in the villages, since bottles were harder to conceal, the group would bring the hemp back to the camp and distribute it to their comrades.<sup>77</sup> Although smoking and drinking were forbidden, and one could be flogged if caught red-handed, camp warders often ignored this unwritten rule. Some warders and camp commanders had a taste for *cajulima* and hemp as well. Sometimes detainees and warders ventured together to purchase hemp and *cajulima* in nearby villages. It was common for warders to send detainees to procure the goods for them, or for detainees to bribe warders with hemp to avoid punishment.<sup>78</sup> As Ana Maria and Ché Mafuiane pointed out in our conversation about M'sawize and Chaimite, these schemes between detainees and warders put all camp dwellers on the same plane. 'We did not sit at the same table with the camp commander', Ana Maria told me, 'but I can say that we smoked with them'.<sup>79</sup> In fact, some camp warders were not simple smokers. They were also engaged in the hemp trade inside and outside the camps. As former SNASP operative Silva Santana told me, many soldiers bought the hemp from rural villagers and transported it to urban areas in Soviet-made airplanes, which were rarely inspected at airports. Austerity could also provide camp authorities and security officers connected to the reeducation program with an opportunity for accumulation. Silva Santana was himself a prosperous hemp trader in the 1970s and 1980s. As he boasted to me, 'I built a very nice house with the sale of hemp'.<sup>80</sup>

This was one of the many contradictions of the reeducation program. For people detained for smoking, drinking, or 'sexual corruption', the reality of life inside the camps was a bitter irony. For those who never smoked and did not drink, the camps initiated them. Although not all detainees led unrestrained lives, few – captives and captors alike – lived up to the monastic aspirations that political authorities envisioned in the high seat of power in the capital. President Machel was incensed when he first visited the camps of Niassa in 1979 and Cabo Delgado in 1981. In Naisseco (Niassa) and Ruarua (Cabo Delgado), the President recognized that, among many other things, drunkenness and recklessness were the order of the day. Reeducatees and reeducators all lived in the most 'disgusting' of conditions and unruliness. Although the supreme leader attributed the

76 On alcohol in colonial Mozambique, see J. Capela, *O Alcool na Colonização do Sul do Save, 1860–1920* (Maputo, 1995).

77 Interview with Felizardo Chaguala.

78 Group Interview with Simeão Mazuze, Felizardo Chaguala, and Ché Mafuiane.

79 Interview with Ana Maria.

80 Interview with Silva Santana, Maputo, 18 Jan 2015. It is therefore unsurprising that the military neighborhood in Maputo, near the headquarters of Frelimo, was for many years the center of illicit trade in drugs. To this day the area is known by its well-fitting nickname, Colombia.

chaos in those two camps to an internal enemy deliberately seeking to undermine a revolutionary program, he acknowledged that reeducation was ripe with contradictions that reproduced the very social ills that the program was meant to eliminate.<sup>81</sup>

The President's findings could not be truer in the two female camps of Ilumba and M'sawize. Here there was little that the female camp supervisors could do to prevent the frequent visits of soldiers and paramedics stationed in the military garrisons several miles away from the camps. The lists produced by the DPSRN in 1976 of pregnant detainees in the two camps illustrate the extent to which the situation was out of control. In May 1976, forty-six children were born in M'sawize, and thirty-one in Ilumba. Although some women were already pregnant when they arrived in the camps, most must have gotten pregnant while they were there.<sup>82</sup> The archival record is largely silent about how detainees got pregnant. But one case was recorded in August 1977 because of the shocking castigation that the offenders met. The case involved an employee of Niassa's reeducation services contracted to build a brick house in M'sawize. The unnamed fellow was caught having sex with an unnamed reeducatee. According to the report, it was the fourth time that the couple were caught, and this time they were punished. The camp commander forced the offending couple to repeat the act in the *rassemblement* in front of everyone in broad daylight. Although the couple refused, they were forced to push a barrel of oil round the *rassemblement* completely naked, as all the detainees sang a revolutionary anthem and clapped.<sup>83</sup> Although this was a case of a civilian who could be subjected to such chastisement, most soldiers who visited the camps were powerful commanders, and women in the camps recalled how they compelled detainees and also female warders to have sex with them. As Ana Maria told me about M'sawize, female warders were also involved with soldiers. Pregnant warders were immediately removed from the camp and replaced.<sup>84</sup>

But this was not simply a story of men forcing women into unwanted affairs. As one paramedic put it in an application letter to Niassa's Governor Aurélio Manave, 'love happened'.<sup>85</sup> In September 1976, a twenty-four-year-old nurse named António Muianga wrote to Governor Manave to ask for his permission to marry Filomena Matangue, a reeducatee at Ilumba. The two had met in Base Central Ngungunhana, a military garrison near the camp, where António had been temporarily stationed. In Niassa and Cabo Delgado, these military garrisons were often used as distribution points for rations destined for various camps. Given the terrible state of the roads leading to the camps, the vehicles from the provincial reeducation services often unloaded the rations at a military garrison, and

81 MHN – 'Machel's speech on unjust detentions in reeducation camps', *Summary of World Broadcasts*, London. 6.10.1981. Part 4, The Middle East and Africa: B. Africa, page ME/6846/B/1.

82 AGGPN – DPSRN/SR/76. Relatório Referente ao Mês de Maio de 1976. Lichinga, 26 June 1976; AGGPN – DPSRN/No 322/Sr/76/Relação das camaradas em estado de gravidez, campo de Reeducação de M'sawize, Lichinga, 13 July 1976.

83 AGGPN – DPSRN/No 514/SR/77. Lichinga, 16 Aug. 1977.

84 Interview with Ana Maria. I discuss elsewhere in detail the implications of the unchecked sexual life of reeducation camps, particularly for female detainees in Ilumba and M'sawize. Given the lack of medical assistance and constant crisis of hunger, pregnancy was in some cases a death sentence for women, and in many an ill-omened condition, often ending in miscarriage or stillbirth. B. Machava, 'Narratives of wretchedness: everyday life in Mozambique's reeducation camps', forthcoming.

85 AGGPN – DPSRN/No 458/SR/976, Lichinga, 22 Sept. 1976.

detainees were then marched to carry them on their heads back to their respective camps. A walking trip from Ilumba to Base Central could take two or more days.<sup>86</sup> It was most likely on one of these trips that António met and fell in love with Filomena, who was in detention for smoking hemp. In his petition, António promised the authorities that if she continued with her vice after their marriage he would send her back to the camp himself.<sup>87</sup> The archival record is silent on the verdict regarding António's heartfelt request. Other requests to wed female detainees were less poignant.<sup>88</sup> But they all reveal how complex the world inside Mozambique's reeducation camps was. Here the elusive power of a modern 'seeing machine' and technicians of behavior was almost nonexistent. Romantic affairs, sexual licentiousness, drinking, and smoking characterized the carceral regime. In the context of extreme scarcity in which the reeducation camps functioned, an unintended and peculiar form of carcerality emerged beyond the control of the ruling party and its reformist ambitions.

## CONCLUSION

Life inside Mozambique's reeducation camps was anything but orderly and regimentally strict. The conditions of austerity in which Frelimo implemented its revolutionary program produced a particular mode of carceral regime that was not dictated by technologies of disciplinary surveillance. Camp supervisors and detainees themselves defined the kind of internment regimen that prevailed in ways that subverted the aspirations of Frelimo leaders. Rather than being secluded institutions where supposed wayward misfits were reformed, reeducation camps were porous, indulgent, and lacked any kind of social hygiene. Although they were located in remote sites, there was no complete separation of 'anti-socials' or enemies of the revolution from society. In the rural areas where the camps were established, detainees were often in contact with local communities, where they exchanged their meager belongings for food, alcoholic drinks, hemp, and sex. Despite the panoptic ambitions of Frelimo authorities, it was not the 'architectural apparatus' and the unfailing eye of camp supervisors that 'induced in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' in reeducation camps.<sup>89</sup> Here that role was played by something else: the remote location of the camps and the wilderness that surrounded them. Rather than the backlighting effect of a watchtower or armed guards with dogs, it was the roar of lions and other wild beasts that kept detainees in line. This was a different kind of panopticon, one that was regulated not by a modern 'seeing machine' with its abstract mechanisms of biopolitical power, but by the very untamed nature that defied modernity. This was a panopticon that had no regard for bodily legibility, not because the regime was uninterested in controlling people, but because the regime had little capacity to do so, given the conditions of austerity in which it had to operate. Surveillance, discipline, order, and social reform require resources that the Mozambican government did not possess.

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86 AGGPN – DPSRN/No 262/SR/76. Relatório do Mês de Abril de 1976. Lichinga, 28 May 1976.

87 AGGPN – DPSRN/No 458/SR/976, Lichinga, 22 Sept. 1976.

88 AGGPN – GPN/No 986/SC/78. Requerimento de Mário Francisco. Lichinga, 9 June 1976.

89 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201.