

RE-EDUCATION CAMPS AS AN ANSWER TO POLITICAL DIFFERENCES IN POST-INDEPENDENCE MOZAMBIQUE

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The re-education camps are the ultimate expression of FRELIMO's messianic spirit. They are used to convert the different social expressions in the country to FRELIMO's ideological cause. The Re-education Camps must be understood beyond their material and extrajudicial meaning of forcibly removing people from their family and social environment, imprisoning them in remote locations in the middle of the forest with no conditions for survival, subjecting them to forced labour, and even executing them without trial. More than that, they represent FRELIMO's most organized and open denial of the idea of social diversity in Mozambique's political, social and economic environment. They are the practical affirmation of its claim to be the only one to define who can exist in the public space in Mozambique.

Purpose of the Briefing Note

This Briefing Note looks at the re-education camps in terms of their logic in the process of building an independent state in Mozambique. The re-education camps served as spaces where people who exhibited behaviour or ideas that differed from those decided by FRELIMO were sent to be moulded, through work or torture, into the ideals of the Mozambican New Man.

Defining the term

According to the Priberam dictionary, re-education is the "act or effect of giving or re-educating, re-educating". In medicine, it consists of the "set of techniques and means to teach or recover muscular, articular, motor, psychic faculties, etc."².

Despite various names such as "re-education", "concentration", and/or "labour", these camps, in historical terms, have always been instruments used by governments to control part of their population outside the normal legal framework of the state, through executive and extraordinary measures (even if they are in the form of laws). In the past, countries as diverse as the United States of America (USA), the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Germany have resorted to re-education actions at the most repressive moments in their political history in relation to Japanese Americans in the case of the USA, and in relation to Jews, Roma, Sinti, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, political opponents and others in Nazi Germany. At present, Denmark has created its own model of concentration camps for refugees from outside the European Union

¹ Pseudônimo

² Disponível em: <https://dicionario.priberam.org/reeduca%C3%A7%C3%A3o> acessado em 23 de Julho de 2022.

(mainly aimed at refugees from the conflict in Syria). The Uighurs in China are also an example of a people suffering the effects of "*re-education*". Regardless of the motives behind re-education, in the end the result for the "re-educated" is the deprivation of the right to expression, and often to life.

Re-education" is not a Mozambican invention

Re-education/concentration camps are not just a reality of the past. Today, Denmark leads the infamous list of countries that explicitly place a specific group of people in detention camps. At the height of the Syrian refugee crisis, when Syria was being destroyed by Turkish, Russian and American bombs, Denmark decided, in the style previously only seen in Nazi concentration camps, that refugees must first hand over everything of value before they could benefit from support from the Danish government.

One measure particularly notorious for its aggressiveness was colloquially referred to as the "[jewellery law](#)". This measure "allows the government to seize the assets of asylum seekers, including their jewellery, in order to finance their stay in the country". To show the political and arbitrary nature of this type of confinement law, when the Ukrainian crisis began, the Danish government "clarified that Ukrainian refugees will be exempt from this law". Although this is a common discriminatory trend among European countries, Denmark has been notable for the level of detail in its unequal treatment of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees, "some of whom have been deprived of their basic rights and forced to stay in deportation centres, where they are left in agonising limbo with the choice of living deprived of the right to work and get an education, or return to Assad's Syria" and remain victims of the same Russia that is attacking Ukraine today³.

Depending on the political regimes of the time and the human rights defence systems, some concentration camps also became killing fields or where some people were summarily executed (Russia, Nazi Germany, Mozambique), while others only had more or less severe versions of deprivation of civil liberties, human rights and property rights (USA and Denmark). So, even if Mozambique is no exception in this sad history of humanity, we need to understand how it happened, so that we can better prevent the political dynamics that lead to this type of act from flourishing again in Mozambican society - and leading to the deprivation of citizens' political, civic and economic rights by the state, because it feels that they don't fit into the dominant vision of citizenry.

In the case of the US, the camps were set up for citizens who were considered different and whose loyalty, according to the promoters of the measure, could not be guaranteed. By Executive Order of then President Franklin D. Roosevelt, "From 1942 to 1945, it was the policy of the U.S. government that persons of Japanese ancestry, including U.S. citizens, should be incarcerated in isolated camps," given the fact that the U.S. was at war with Japan (as part of World War II). This

³ Denmark's Mismatched Treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian Refugees: Government Should Treat All Refugees Equally, [Nadia Hardman](#), Researcher, Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/16/denmarks-mismatched-treatment-syrian-and-ukrainian-refugees>



act is considered by some to be "one of the most atrocious violations of American civil rights in the 20th century"⁴.

The USSR was one of the most notorious cases. The Gulag, the name by which its concentration camps were known, is today in the political vocabulary a synonym for the oppression of political opponents. The Gulag was a system of forced labour camps established during Joseph Stalin's long reign as dictator of the Soviet Union. The word "Gulag" is an acronym for Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei, or Main Camp Administration. The notorious prisons, which incarcerated around 18 million people throughout their history, operated during Joseph Stalin's time as president, from the 1920s until shortly after Stalin's death in 1953. At its peak, the Gulag network included hundreds of labour camps that housed between 2,000 and 10,000 people each⁵.

Mozambique also had concentration camps in its colonial past. It's fair to say that the camps, as an instrument of political discipline and the execution of opponents, were not FRELIMO's invention, but are perhaps more of a gift from the colonial master to the post-independence government. According to Samora Machel,

*"To prevent the population of the areas it controlled from taking part in the armed struggle, colonialism created concentration camps, the so-called aldeamentos. These, says Samora Machel, "...as well as being real prisons, were centres for spreading the capitalist colonial ideology, for spreading the values of the enemy; they were centres for prostitution, alcoholism, banditry, tribalism, regionalism, racism, individualism. They were centres for the destruction of human integrity, centres of humiliation, the promotion of passivity, the creation of docile instruments for colonialism, the destruction of resistance and courage, centres of submission. They were centres of division, of the destruction of unity. They were centres of propaganda against independence, propaganda against freedom, centres where people were made to accept slavery, to fight against themselves, to fight against national unity, in short, to fight against FRELIMO."*⁶

The colonial concentration camps were not only ideologically opposed to the cause of freedom, but also harmful from the point of view of health and well-being, and in general, an environment of constant human rights violations. There were no schools, no hospitals, and the simplest illnesses

⁴ Japanese Internment Camps, [History.com Editors](https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/japanese-american-relocation), Updated: Oct 29, 2021, Original: Oct 29, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/japanese-american-relocation>

⁵ Gulag, [History.com Editors](https://www.history.com/topics/russia/gulag), Updated: Aug 21, 2018. Original: Mar 23, 2018 <https://www.history.com/topics/russia/gulag>

⁶ Samora Machel (1979). "Fazer do Niassa uma base sólida na construção do socialismo". Coleção Palavras de Ordem, No. 14, Ed. Partido FRELIMO. págs. 6-7



were the cause of death. On the other hand, there were also summary executions of prisoners who were considered FRELIMO collaborators⁷:

*"In the concentration camps, the whistleblowers, the PIDES, the GEs, the OPVs, the 'hunters' were trained to discover the guerrilla trails, the routes that the population used to transport material for the armed struggle"*⁸.

As such, re-education camps, both in colonial Mozambique and in other countries around the world in different historical periods, have always been spaces of political repression.

Use of the term and its relationship to the challenges of governance in the new Mozambican nation

In Mozambique, in a newly independent state, the use of the term "re-educate" becomes interesting because there was nothing previous to return to. What there was was a utopian socialist vision that had never existed before. It is through the re-education camps that two major political events take place. Firstly, it was in these camps that the power conflict that arose in FRELIMO after Mondlane's death was resolved, through the imprisonment and extrajudicial execution of Urias and Celina Simango, Joana Simeão, and countless others identified as enemies of the victorious wing. Secondly, it was from the post-independence re-education camps that the great leaders of the armed resistance movement against FRELIMO's project came out. It's fair to say that by setting up the camps to punish and "re-educate", FRELIMO sowed the seeds of destruction for its state-building project.

The re-education camps appeared in Mozambique shortly after independence, inspired by Nachingwea, a camp established during the armed struggle in Tanzania. These were places where all those who in some way possessed an element that was to be eliminated, such as prostitutes and "sorcerers", for example, would go, as they represented both colonial domination and practices that were considered primitive and anti-scientific. In the camps, individuals would be introduced to revolutionary ideology (Marxist-Leninist), work in the fields and collective cultivation (collective labour). The inspiration for the camps is thus related to the very dynamics of the internal struggles within FRELIMO⁹, having been carried over from the guerrilla movement to the independent state.

⁷ Samora Machel (1979). "Fazer do Niassa uma base sólida na construção do socialismo". Coleção Palavras de Ordem, No. 14, Ed. Partido FRELIMO. pag. 7

⁸ Samora Machel (1979). "Fazer do Niassa uma base sólida na construção do socialismo". Coleção Palavras de Ordem, No. 14, Ed. Partido FRELIMO. pag. 7

⁹Disponível em:

<https://educapes.capes.gov.br/bitstream/capes/586674/3/A%20UTILIZA%C3%87%C3%83O%20DO%20CI NEMA%20NO%20ENSINO%20DE%20HIST%C3%93RIA%20o%20Filme%20Virgem%20Margarida%20e %20a%20Pol%C3%ADtica%20Sociocultural%20em%20Mo%C3%A7ambique%20P%C3%B3s- Independ%C3%Aancia-%20produto.pdf>



As such, they were already operating as prison centres in the guerrilla-controlled areas of FRELIMO's ruling wing. They operated in Cabo Delgado and Niassa¹⁰. It was in these camps that guerrillas and other leading cadres who had fallen out of grace with FRELIMO were executed, and it was to the re-education camps and other places established after independence that thousands of citizens were banished, in absentia of the courts.

Among the camps for political prisoners, the M'telela Re-education Camp stood out for its special category as a camp for the most notorious political prisoners. The camp was set up in a former Portuguese army garrison in the Majune district to house some of the "traitors" shown in Nachingwea. Former Frelimo vice-president Uria Simango, his wife Celina, politician Joana Simeão, and "dissidents" such as Lázaro Nkavandame, Paulo Gumane, Mateus Pinho Gwenjere, and several other prominent figures were sent to this centre in November 1975¹¹. They had in common the fact that they didn't agree with FRELIMO's official ideological line from 1970/71, during the national liberation struggle. From 1974 onwards, many of them left FRELIMO and created new parties and civic organisations in the expectation of a democratic post-independence Mozambique. M'telela was the most feared camp and the detainees feared that they would be sent to M'telela¹². And according to Machava, it seems to have been the only place where political prisoners were held¹³.

Many of the leaders who would stand out trying to build an option to Frelimo, and who would be classified as enemies, died in these concentration camps¹⁴. The relatives of many of these victims are unaware of their whereabouts to this day, and are also still unaware of where the remains of those taken there have been placed¹⁵.

In order to create the new society, Frelimo imposed a comprehensive policy of "authoritarian modernisation" which, among various elements, presupposed the creation of communal villages, as opposed to small, scattered settlements, accentuating practices imposed to create the "new man" such as the denial of traditional authorities and cultures, of religion, and the eradication of

¹⁰ Por exemplo, o Centro de Reeducação de Ruarua em Mueda, Cabo Delgado, já existia na altura da luta armada.

¹¹ Pode consultar a biografia destas figuras políticas em: <https://cepcb.org.mz/category/fig-pol-moc/>

¹² Benedito Luís Machava (2018) *The Morality of Revolution: Urban Cleanup Campaigns, Reeducation Camps, and Citizenship in Socialist Mozambique (1974-1988)*,

¹³ Benedito Luís Machava *The Morality of Revolution: Urban Cleanup Campaigns, Reeducation Camps, and Citizenship in Socialist Mozambique (1974-1988)*. A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (History) in the University of Michigan 2018, p. 259

¹⁴ Omar Ribeiro Thomaz (2016) *fala das pessoas que foram levadas para os chamados campos de reeducação*, disponível em: <https://gruposoespeciais.blogs.sapo.pt/omar-ribeiro-thomaz-fala-das-pessoas-25790#cutid1>

¹⁵ <https://gruposoespeciais.blogs.sapo.pt/tag/campos+de+reeduca%C3%A7%C3%A3o>



the supposed outcasts of society such as the unemployed, thieves, prostitutes, drug addicts, among others¹⁶.

Likewise, there were re-education camps that functioned as labour camps for "marginals", converting "prostitutes", candongueiros, thieves and criminals, as part of Operation Production. These second camps emerged in the process of governance and were made possible thanks to a conscious exercise by the state leadership to create extrajudicial mechanisms to exclude citizens from the political and social life of independent Mozambique. Machava argues that this process was meticulously prepared by the leadership but that FRELIMO's base knew little about all the details¹⁷. First there was the painstaking work of registering people in the cities and introducing travel passes, which allowed the regime to control people in the cities. After registering citizens, the Ministry of the Interior had free rein to detain and deport to the countryside anyone who didn't have their papers in order.

Women suspected of being prostitutes were often arbitrarily sent to these camps, and thousands of other people, such as political dissidents, those suspected of having links with the Portuguese colonial power, alcoholics, traditional authorities (such as régulos and curandeiros) and Jehovah's Witnesses (a Christian group that refuses compulsory military service) were picked up on the streets of Mozambique, particularly in Maputo, Beira and Inhambane, according to reports in the international press.¹⁸.

The conditions in these camps were generally harsh and often totally inhumane. Firstly, they were built by the internees themselves in isolated rural areas where there was little infrastructure and no possibility of family life. In addition to the poor conditions, many former internees also claimed to have been subjected to deliberate mistreatment. It seems that it was largely up to the authorities running each camp to decide how internees should be treated and what kind of punishments should be inflicted. However, in camps such as Ruarua in the northern province of Cabo Delgado and Sacuza in the Gorongosa region of Sofala province, it is claimed that re-educated internees were subjected to acts of torture and corporal punishment in the 1980s, as shown below (Amnesty International, 1985: 4):

- 1) Lashings or flogging inflicted with a thick lash called a chamboco on the buttocks or bare back of the victim, stretched out on the ground and held by three or four guards;
- 2) A form of torture called "ropes"; it consisted of tightly tying the victim's arms behind their back with wet rope and then leaving them like this for many hours or even a day. During this time, the rope dried and contracted, penetrating the flesh. The victim's muscles would swell and their arms would become paralysed. Sometimes more pain is inflicted by soaking

¹⁶ Orquídea Ribeiro & Daniela da Fonseca, (2019) "Centros de reeducação em Moçambique (1975-1985): memórias, silêncios e discursos jornalísticos", In *Revista Lusófona de Estudos Culturais / Lusophone Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, n. 1, 2019302. p. 30, <https://rlec.pt/index.php/rlec/article/view/1867/1958>

¹⁷ Benedito Luís Machava *The Morality of Revolution: Urban Cleanup Campaigns, Reeducation Camps, and Citizenship in Socialist Mozambique (1974-1988)*. A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (History) in the University of Michigan 2018, p. 142-156

¹⁸ Rosilda Alves Bezerra & Francisca Zuleide Duarte de Souza & João Batista Teixeira (2018:140-141)



the ropes in salt water before using them, or by exposing the victim to the sun so that the ropes dry out and contract more quickly.

In the official discourse, it can be seen that the re-education camps were set up with the aim of educating traitors for social reintegration. In the words of Samora Machel,

"When we win, we'll send traitors to re-education camps here in Niassa. We'll also send marginals and bandits that we find in every town in the country. We sent them so that they could become useful citizens. We sent them, and we will continue to do so, because we believe that men can be transformed through collective work, through discipline, through raising their political consciousness"¹⁹.

After re-education, according to the government, people were integrated into society. This was the case for 553 men released from the Unango camp in Niassa, and another 600 FRELIMO military deserters. The camps were not only far from Maputo, in Niassa or Sofala. Just outside the city of Maputo there was a re-education camp in Jafar, in Marracuene²⁰.

In the end, the government had to accept that the camps were sites of serious violations of human rights and the right to life, and they accepted that ways would have to be found to frame the re-education process within the dictates of legality in the country. Until 1985, the re-education camps had not yet been integrated into the Ministry of Justice. They remained under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior, something which, according to the government, led to great arbitrariness and human rights violations by prison structures in absentia of the central government²¹.

However, soon after independence, both citizens and the Catholic Church wrote to complain about the excesses of the government. Responding to these criticisms, Samora Machel accused the Catholic Church of being an agent of Portuguese imperialism and attacking the Catholic Church, he said in his famous speech *Making Niassa a Solid Base for the Construction of Socialism*: "However, now that we have won, they arrogate to themselves the right to define the content of our freedom, they want to teach us what freedom is"²².

It should be noted that at that time the government reintroduced the colonial practice of chamboco through law 5/83, something that Samora Machel considers to be a positive practice of colonialism in order to maintain social order in Mozambique. In 1980, Samora Machel had condemned chamboco for violating the "benign" spirit of socialism. In 1983, at a rally in Chibuto,

¹⁹ Samora Machel (1979). "Fazer do Niassa uma base sólida na construção do socialismo". Coleção Palavras de Ordem, No. 14, Ed. Partido FRELIMO. pags. 15-16

²⁰ Marracuene: reeducandos produzem para auto-suficiência, José Moiane visita Centro de Reeducação de Jafar. *Notícias* [Maputo], 2 July 1983. <https://www.mozambiquehistory.net/reeducation.php>

²¹ Para o centro de reeducação só se vai depois de julgado e condenado. *Notícias* [Maputo], 4 January 1985. An interview by António Souto with Mário Mangaze. Click [here](https://www.mozambiquehistory.net/reeducation.php) to view or download a PDF, size 235 kb. <https://www.mozambiquehistory.net/reeducation.php>

²² Samora Machel (1979). "Fazer do Niassa uma base sólida na construção do socialismo". Coleção Palavras de Ordem, No. 14, Ed. Partido FRELIMO. pags. 11



he argued that "violence is necessary in the exercise of power", and praised the colonial authorities for their foresight in using the chamboco: "The Portuguese knew how to use power" (...). "We have to use power to punish with severity", he said at the rally²³.

In this context, the illegalities committed there are still alive for survivors in the memories of family and friends, despite the fact that in 1988 Joaquim Chissano, then President of the Republic, declared the end of *Operation Production*²⁴ in Niassa without an apology for the abuses committed. Nothing was said about how to obtain information about those who suffered in the camps.

As such, re-education was essentially a gigantic exercise in the forced assimilation of part of a diverse people into a single hegemonic vision that had replaced that of the colonial state.

Connection with current reality

FRELIMO closed the re-education camps in 1988, but to this day has not "opened up" the state to those who think differently. The idea that only a certain group of people can be entrusted with the bureaucratic power of the state continues. There is an obvious danger that closing the camps without a process of introspection within the party and reconciliation between the party and the people it attacked will lead to the exclusionary dynamics behind the opening of the camps continuing in other disguised forms. For example, it can be no coincidence that as early as 1989, at its fifth congress, the FRELIMO party decided that the criterion for belonging to the state was dependent on party membership, and demanded the creation of party cells at all levels of the state apparatus. Unable to maintain "re-education" as an open process, it now takes place as a process of party socialisation, with the prize being the right to be part of the state apparatus. The violence is no longer direct but structural, a violence of exclusion and marginalisation of those not aligned with the cause.

END

²³ Benedito Luís Machava *The Morality of Revolution: Urban Cleanup Campaigns, Reeducation Camps, and Citizenship in Socialist Mozambique (1974-1988)*. A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (History) in the University of Michigan 2018, p. 138-139

²⁴ Benedito Luís Machava *The Morality of Revolution: Urban Cleanup Campaigns, Reeducation Camps, and Citizenship in Socialist Mozambique (1974-1988)*. A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (History) in the University of Michigan 2018, p. 154

