

## A Short History of the Mozambican *Madjermanes*<sup>1</sup>

The German Democratic Republic signed about 21,000 contracts with Mozambican worker-trainees between 1979 and 1989.<sup>2</sup> The agreements governing the labor programs were abandoned when Germany reunited and the GDR ceased to exist, but the legacies of this labor migration continue into the present. I offer here a brief history of the temporary labor migration program that brought young Mozambicans to East Germany. Firstly, I explore why the Mozambican and East German governments developed the program. Secondly, I examine the motivations of the migrants themselves. Finally, I examine the consequences of the end of the program in 1990 and its reverberations into the present day.

### The international proletariat in action: labor migration from Mozambique to the German Democratic Republic<sup>3</sup>

A newly minted country on Africa's eastern seaboard, Mozambique had gained independence from Portugal on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1975, after a prolonged and bloody war. Samora Machel, the new country's president from independence until his death in 1986, was an admirer of East Germany:

We have a solid foundation for our relations: the principles of Marxism-Leninism and of proletarian internationalism, which enable us to coordinate our goals and opinions and show that there exists a harmony of interests between us. Our alliance thus has a strategic character. It does not threaten anyone. It promotes the common struggle for peace and socialism, for freedom and independence of people. This alliance contributes to the progress of the revolutionary world movement.<sup>4</sup>

Machel's Mozambique Liberation Front - FRELIMO – started as a nationalist movement, fighting against Portuguese colonial rule. It received much East German support, starting in the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup> It became the governing party after independence and adopted a Marxist–

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<sup>1</sup> The research on which I am basing this contribution was conducted for my dissertation "Socialist Solidarities and Their Afterlives: Histories and Memories of Angolan and Mozambican Migrants in the German Democratic Republic, 1975-2015" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2017). I would like to thank Pieter Cordwell and Lisa Illmer for their expert editing and insightful feedback on this text.

<sup>2</sup> The Mozambican labor ministry today estimates that approximately 17,000 workers migrated to East Germany. Chefe do Departamento de Estatística, Ministério de Trabalho, Moçambique, Armindo Mapasse, Interview conducted by the author, Maputo, Mozambique, 15.05.2014. The exact numbers of Mozambican workers who came to East Germany are probably lost because the original documents at the Mozambican Ministry of Labor are said to be destroyed and the East German bureaucracy counted every new contract, regardless of how many contracts were served by the same worker.

<sup>3</sup> Proletarian Internationalism was defined as "internationalistische, kameradschaftliche, freiwillige Zusammenarbeit und Solidarität aller Abteilungen der revolutionären Bewegung" which translates to "internationalist, comradesly, voluntary cooperation and solidarity of all sections of the revolutionary movement." Hänisch, Wörterbuch der Aussenpolitik und des Völkerrechts, 490–93. With that it evoked the auspicious idea of an international socialist world based on solidarity and comradeship. It was this spirit of fostering good relations between two "brother states" by engaging in a program that was to benefit both sides, that this labor migration program was conceived.

<sup>4</sup> "Neues Deutschland, 4 March 1983" in Brigitte Schulz, *Development Policy in the Cold War Era: The Two Germanies and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1960-1985* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1995), 20.

<sup>5</sup> For more comprehensive accounts on the relationship between the GDR and Mozambique, see Matthias Voss, *Wir haben Spuren hinterlassen! Die DDR in Mosambik: Erlebnisse, Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse*

Leninist political program at its third party congress in 1977. FRELIMO held onto its socialist tenets until about a decade later when it started to gradually distance itself from them and turned to a more free market program. This adaptability has helped to keep the party in power until the present day. In the same year as the FRELIMO decided for Marxism-Leninism, 1977, East Germany (not coincidentally) declared Mozambique to be one of its three priority trading partners in Africa. Comprehensive economic, technical, and educational cooperation ensued, culminating in a comprehensive treaty of friendship and a series of trade agreements being signed in February 1979, during a visit to Maputo by Erich Honecker, the General Secretary of East Germany's Socialist Unity Party (SED).<sup>6</sup> During that same visit, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, the two countries signed an agreement regulating temporary Mozambican labor training migration to East Germany.<sup>7</sup>

The FRELIMO government had already approached the East German government in 1977, requesting to send 2,000 workers per year in 1978 and 1979 so that they could gain one-year practical job experience, with the option for successful workers to proceed to a two-year specialized vocational training option. The GDR initially declined, explaining that it would not be politically expedient to welcome workers without having an explicit educational goal, and that employers would face organizational and technological difficulties which would be disproportionately high compared to the benefits of a small-scale program.<sup>8</sup> Just two years later, however, they had changed their mind and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the People's Republic of Mozambique (PRM) came to an agreement for much larger-scale labor cooperation.

To understand the Mozambican interest in exporting labor, we need to remember that many Mozambicans had already migrated to South Africa to work in the mining industry there. This was an important precursor to labor migration to the GDR. The program that saw

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*aus drei Jahrzehnten* (Münster: Lit, 2005); Hans-Joachim Döring and Uta Rüchel, eds., *Freundschaftsbande und Beziehungskisten: Die Afrikapolitik der DDR und der BRD gegenüber Mosambik* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 2005); Ulrich von der Heyden, Ilona Schleicher, and Hans-Georg Schleicher, *Die DDR und Afrika: Zwischen Klassenkampf und neuem Denken* (Münster: Lit, 1993); Ulrich von der Heyden, Ilona Schleicher, and Hans-Georg Schleicher, *Engagiert Für Afrika: Die DDR und Afrika II*, (Münster: Lit, 1994); Ilona Schleicher and Hans-Georg Schleicher, *Die DDR im südlichen Afrika: Solidarität und Kalter Krieg*, (Hamburg: Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> The priority trading partners were designated "ausgewählte und befreundete afrikanischen Staaten" - selected and befriended African states. East Germany started an export offensive in 1977 with Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia, which reached its climax with the signing of the treaties on friendship and cooperation in 1979. Hans-Joachim Döring, 'Es geht um unsere Existenz'. *Die Politik der DDR gegenüber der Dritten Welt am Beispiel von Mosambik und Äthiopien* (Berlin: Links Verlag, 1999), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ilona Schleicher, "Berufsbildung und Wirtschaftsbeziehungen DDR-Mosambik," in *Engagiert für Afrika: Die DDR und Afrika II*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden, Hans-Georg Schleicher and Ilona Schleicher, (Münster: Lit, 1994), 184. The agreement referred to here is the „Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und der Regierung der Volksrepublik Moçambique über die zeitweilige Beschäftigung moçambiquanischer Werktätiger in sozialistischen Betrieben der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik“, 24.02.1979. Subsequent protocols and directives (1984, 1985, 1988, 1989, 1990) modified this agreement, MFAA. Franziska Rantzsch discusses the negotiation of the initial contract in "The Negotiations of the Contract Labor Accord between the GDR and Mozambique" in *Navigating Socialist Encounters: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War*, eds Eric Burton et al. De Gruyter Oldenbourg (forthcoming), 139-166.

<sup>8</sup> Stellungnahme des Staatssekretariates Arbeit und Löhne zum Vorschlag der VRM über die Ausbildung mosambikanischer Arbeiter in Betrieben der DDR, 3.11.1977. BAZ DY 190 (Büro Mittag), cited in Döring, 'Es geht um unsere Existenz,' 231.

Mozambicans travel to South Africa was an agreement between the South African government and the Portuguese colonial state. However, the Apartheid-era government had no interest in a program which would financially support an independent Mozambique – the transfer of power from European to African hands was from the South African perspective a dangerous precedent, for obvious reasons. Therefore, the South African government ended cooperation when Mozambique achieved its independence.

Mozambique's earnings from migration to South Africa therefore dropped from between \$150 and \$175 million in 1975 to less than \$15 million in 1978.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the program's cancellation resulted in a loss in income for many families, especially in southern Mozambique. The tradition of labor migration to South Africa reached back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and had become formalized and regulated as part of the South African labor market system in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Replacing this lost income was a high priority for the new Mozambican government. In addition, the country had even greater problems elsewhere because most skilled positions under colonial rule had been occupied by Portuguese workers who then left in droves after independence. This left Mozambique drained of skilled personnel just when FRELIMO was trying to develop the country through industrialization. The tradition of profiting from the export of Mozambican labor power had started in colonial times but was thus continued into the independent era. While workers used to gain precious hard currency, this was no longer the case under the socialist migration scheme. East Germany never transferred money to Mozambique for the workers' deferred wages but simply reduced the Mozambican trade deficit with the GDR accordingly. Both nations were engaged in barter exchange and debits and credits existed on paper only in a clearing system.<sup>10</sup> It was thus up to the Mozambican government to find the money with which to pay out the workers, an opaque process which was to lead to many grievances. However, exporting workers now gained an extra dimension: they were to gain invaluable work skills which they could then bring back to Africa and deploy in the planned Mozambican industrial revolution.

The labor migration program was co-designed by the FRELIMO and the East German SED. From the Mozambican perspective, the East German program not only trained the worker on the factory floor but also served to educate a socialist *Homem Novo* (New Man), steeped in real socialism as practiced in East Germany. At the time (and indeed, in the present day), a common explanation for African underdevelopment was that sub-national ethnic identities were inhibitive to national loyalty and thus to modern advancement. To that end, candidates were selected from all over the country to help create a national identity. They were also chosen from diverse family backgrounds so that there would be a new working class that had broken free of the restrictions of the old class structures.

In the mid-1970s the Mozambican economy was struggling. About 83% of Mozambicans were living in the countryside and were engaged in farming activities, often at the subsistence level. There were only about 1,800 industrial concerns in the entire country, mainly small-scale,

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<sup>9</sup> Döring, 'Es geht um unsere Existenz,' 231.

<sup>10</sup> Alves Gomes, Interview conducted by the author, Maputo, Mozambique, 16.05.2014; Döring, 'Es geht um unsere Existenz,' 232-9; Jochen Oppenheimer, "Mozambican Worker Migration to the Former German Democratic Republic: Serving Socialism and Struggling under Democracy," *Portuguese Studies Review* 12 (2004): 164.

some of which were destroyed during the Portuguese exodus.<sup>11</sup> The industrialization that Samora Machel intended to drive Mozambique's economic development was thus a herculean effort and needed a newly-forged working class. Given the scarcity of vocational training opportunities within Mozambique, the country had a choice between inviting foreigners to train workers in Mozambique or sending Mozambicans abroad. For vocational training in industries that did not yet exist in Mozambique, training abroad seemed the best option. In the case of the circular labor migration program with East Germany, the industrialization of Mozambique was to be supported in a two-fold way. Firstly, there would be a new skilled working class with a socialist outlook. Secondly, the workers would also be prepared for projects in which East Germany was to invest in Mozambique; for instance in agriculture, textiles, and coal production. Sadly, however, few of the East German economic initiatives in Mozambique materialized, and the ones that did suffered from a lack of skilled workers, mismanagement, international sanctions, and the detrimental effects of the civil wars.<sup>12</sup>

The labor migration program between Mozambique and East Germany was no isolated phenomenon. The world was divided by the Cold War but within the socialist world there was much international cooperation. State-facilitated and regulated socialist mobilities came in many shapes and forms. Africans who temporarily became internationally mobile included university students, school children, vocational trainees, trade unionists, party cadres, contract workers, soldiers, and independence fighters. These groups were united by an understanding that their individual journeys were part of a wider struggle for progress, decolonization, and development. At the same time, African states like Mozambique received foreign consultants, teachers, doctors, and military professionals.

The Mozambican men and women who came to work in East Germany also found themselves in good company. The GDR ran programs between socialist "brother nations" intended to be in solidarity with the workers of the world. People from diverse places such as Algeria, Angola, China, Cuba, North Korea, Mozambique, Poland, and Vietnam migrated to East Germany for labor and on the job training. And the GDR was not the only place to welcome contract workers from within the socialist world: Cubans travelled to Czechoslovakia and Hungary for work and training as did Vietnamese. In Czechoslovakia bilateral labor agreements were also signed with Laos, Cyprus, Angola, Mongolia and North Korea. In Hungary, a country that hosted fewer contract laborers, they also hailed from Mongolia and Poland.<sup>13</sup> All these migrations functioned according to a similar blueprint, were state organized, sent groups of migrants, combined labor with training, and were intended to be temporary. The idea that the skills acquired abroad would be used in the building of socialist nations at home was a common denominator among all of these programs.

### Third World labor in the GDR: ambition and disillusion

In part, labor migration to East Germany from within the socialist world was justified by labelling it as vocational training migration. Whereas the capitalist west, especially West

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<sup>11</sup> Ulrich van der Heyden, *Das gescheiterte Experiment. Vertragsarbeiter aus Mosambik in der DDR-Wirtschaft (1979-1990)* (Leipzig: Leipziger Uni-Verlag, 2019), 57.

<sup>12</sup> Döring, 'Es geht um unsere Existenz,' 164.

<sup>13</sup> Hana Bortlová-Vondráková and Mónica Szente-Varga, "Labor Migration Programs Within the Socialist Bloc. Cuban Guestworkers in Late Socialist Czechoslovakia and Hungary," *Labor History* (2021), 3.

Germany and its guest worker program, was said to exploit labor, East Germany emphasized the human capital development nature of its programs.<sup>14</sup> Their stated purpose was to create a professionally skilled and consciously socialist vanguard workforce. As part of the international proletariat, the workers were to return to their home countries to aid industrialization and spread the socialist revolution.<sup>15</sup> Yet, accusations of exploitation emerged. Algeria, Poland, and Cuba all raised sensitive issues such as mistreatment and exploitation of their workers. Algeria was the first to raise issues in the early 1980s. It passed a protective law “against the exploitation of Algerian citizens by foreign states” as a result of which the agreements with East Germany were dissolved.<sup>16</sup> In 1987 the Polish government demanded better treatment of their workers in East German factories and one year later Cuba threatened to annul the bilateral labor agreement on the grounds of attacks on their citizens and a concern for their safety.<sup>17</sup> It is probably not a coincidence that Poland’s and Cuba’s complaints were voiced in the second half of the 1980s, a time period by which the recruitment of foreign labor to East Germany was becoming driven primarily by economic concerns, thus neglecting vocational training and the well-being of workers.

As the East Germany economy increasingly struggled in the 1980s, foreign workers became indispensable in alleviating the East German labor deficit, aiding the three-shift system designed to fulfil production quotas. In 1987 the planning commission and the finance ministry calculated that a single Mozambican worker contributed 18,487 marks towards national income after deducting all costs.<sup>18</sup> This figure can be compared with the GDP per employee, which was 40,721 marks in 1989.<sup>19</sup> Given that GDP per employee is a “before costs” measure and the figure for the migrants’ contribution was after costs, this was a substantial per-worker

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<sup>14</sup> To contextualize guest worker programs in Europe, see Dimitria Groutsi and Lina Ventura, “Guest Worker Schemes Yesterday and Today: Advantages and Liabilities,” in *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies*, ed. Anna Triandafyllidou (London; New York: Routledge, 2015), 110-117.

<sup>15</sup> Sandra Gruner-Domic, “Zur Geschichte der Arbeitskräftemigration in der DDR: Die bilateralen Verträge zur Beschäftigung ausländischer Arbeiter (1961-1989),” *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* 32 (1996): 204-30; Dirk Jasper, “Ausländerbeschäftigung in der DDR,” in *Anderssein gab es nicht: Ausländer und Minderheiten in der DDR*, ed. Marianne Krüger-Potratz (Münster: Waxmann, 1991), 151-189; Damian Mac Con Uladh, “Die Alltagserfahrungen ausländischer Vertragsarbeiter in der DDR: Vietnamesen, Kubaner, Mozambikaner, Ungarn und Andere,” in *Erfolg in der Nische? Die Vietnamesen in der DDR und in Ostdeutschland*, ed. Karin Weiss and Mike Dennis (Münster: LIT, 2005), 51-68.

<sup>16</sup> Mirjam Schulz, “Migrationspolitik der DDR: Bilaterale Anwerbsverträge von Vertragsarbeitnehmern,” in *Transit – Transfer. Politik und Praxis der Einwanderung in die DDR 1945-1990*, ed. Kim Christian Priemel (Berlin: be.bra Verlag, 2011), 154.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 155.

<sup>18</sup> Almuth Berger, *Annäherungen - Bericht der Ausländerbeauftragten des Landes Brandenburg* (Potsdam: Die Ausländerbeauftragte des Landes Brandenburg, 2006), 37.

<sup>19</sup> East German statistics can be accessed at Statista. Source: Statistisches Amt der DDR. I calculated that number drawing on the following two tables: For a table illustrating the gross domestic product (GDP) of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from 1980 to 1989 (in billions of marks of the GDR), see <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/249230/umfrage/bruttoinlandsprodukt-bip-der-ddr/>; for a table illustrating the number of employed persons in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from 1949 to 1989 (in millions) see <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/249240/umfrage/berufstaetige-in-der-ddr/>, both accessed September 7, 2019.

contribution.<sup>20</sup> The goal of training workers to foster industrialization back home, central at the beginning of the program, had become distinctly secondary. In the case of Mozambique, it was increasingly clear that there was no functioning industry to speak of to which to send workers back, as the country continued to struggle with civil war. This led to workers being recruited who received minimal language instruction and equipment training before being plunged straight into the shift system. They remained unskilled labor and often had to undertake tasks that were unpopular with the German workforce.<sup>21</sup>

### The international proletariat experience: navigating the system

How did the program actually function for the worker-trainees?<sup>22</sup> Eligible Mozambican candidates for transnational migrant labor positions to East Germany had to be between eighteen and twenty-five years of age, be physically fit, and have completed at least a fourth-grade education.<sup>23</sup> This might not seem like much but given the dismal access to education in colonial and early postcolonial Mozambique, achieving even this low level education was not to be taken for granted. The low standard of education of some of the recruits led to problems at language school and the vocational training aspects of their programs.<sup>24</sup> While both men and women were encouraged to sign up, given the role of women across many cultures in Mozambique it was difficult to find eligible women: only 10% of Mozambican worker-trainees were women.<sup>25</sup> This gender imbalance was not limited to Mozambique as there were overall fewer female worker-trainees than male trainees. Foreign women made up only 29.8% (or about 57,000 people) of all foreigners in the GDR in 1989.

The worker-trainees were not free to choose their area of employment but were assigned to factories across East Germany. They were trained in heavy and light industries including ship

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<sup>20</sup> Although it would be unwise to read too much into these specific numerical values, as at these levels of aggregation they are subject to large margins of error and methodological issues, they provide a general indication of the positive economic contribution of foreign workers.

<sup>21</sup> It is notable that similar observations are surfacing for socialist contract labor programs elsewhere where foreign workers were placed in unskilled jobs and positions unpopular with the local population. The issue also led to protest from sending countries as in the case of Cuba's discussions with Hungary and Czechoslovakia on the issue of skills training for Cubans. Bortlová-Vondráková and Szente-Varga, "Labor Migration Programs", 3;10.

<sup>22</sup> I employ the term worker-trainee to highlight the connection between work and vocational training which marked the early labor migration program. Initially, few of the new arrivals identified as workers, something which changed over time as they became acculturated into the work culture and passed skills tests. Foreign workers in East Germany were called "Ausländische Werktätige" – "foreign workers" – referring to people involved in the productive process of earning their money through various kinds of labor. Officially they were also referred to as "Freunde" meaning friends, in an effort to prescribe an official welcome culture.

<sup>23</sup> See Article 3, Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und der Regierung der Volksrepublik Moçambique über die zeitweilige Beschäftigung moçambiquanischer Werktätiger in sozialistischen Betrieben der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 24.02.197, MFAA.

<sup>24</sup> See Wolfgang Semmler, „Mosambik: Mosambik: Größe und Tragik eines Staates im südlichen Afrika.“ in *Mosambikanische Vertragsarbeiter in der DDR-Wirtschaft: Hintergründe - Verlauf - Folgen*. Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2014, 33.

<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Mense, "Ausländerkriminalität in der DDR: Eine Untersuchung zu Kriminalität und Kriminalisierung von Mosambikanern 1979-1990" in *Transit – Transfer. Politik und Praxis der Einwanderung in die DDR 1945-1990*, ed. Kim Christian Priemel (Berlin: be.bra Verlag, 2011), 214, 217. In theory, socialist ideology posits that men and women were equal participants in the workforce. Yet, some work was considered more suitable to women, textile production for instance, and other professions more suitable for men, such as coal production. Female migrant workers whom I interviewed were either still uncommitted or were single mothers and motivated to be able to provide for their offspring.

and train manufacturing, electronics, clothes, and agricultural production, and food processing. The contracts were usually for four years. In the case of the Mozambicans the contracts could be extended, and some Mozambican workers served two or three contracts. The majority of those sent in the late 1980s remained unskilled labor. A number attained the level of skilled workers, although very few reached the skill level of master craftsmen.<sup>26</sup> The level at which language training and skills training was offered varied enormously between the beginning and end of the program. The quality and success of instruction and the level to which the laborers were integrated in their respective companies varied. Some regions like Berlin or Leipzig were more popular among migrant workers because of the cultural and entertainment offers. In general, worker-trainees were quite mobile during their time in the GDR and visited each other in different cities and villages. They also used their time in the GDR to acquire goods such as electronics and fashionable clothes for their time in Germany but also things like an oven or dishes with which they planned to furnish their home after going back to Africa. Because living and transportation costs were low, migrants remember having cash to spend on entertainment and preparations for their homecoming despite being obliged to transfer a part of their wages back home, ranging over time from 25% to 60%. The difficulties with getting their hands on the money was later to become the crux of bitterness for many of the workers.

In the following I focus on former Mozambican worker-trainees, known today in Mozambique as the *madjermanes*, who returned home to (re)build personal and professional lives with the goal of supporting their country's development through industrialization.<sup>27</sup> Yet, many soon realized that their dream of living life as blue-collar workers, with similar benefits and privileges as they remembered having encountered in East Germany, was to remain just that – a dream.

### Why leave home for the GDR?

Only by combining multiple approaches – an economic approach, focusing on labor history and notions of development; an approach that focuses attention on socialist education; and an approach that analyzes the impact of war and dreams – can we fully understand worker-trainees' decisions to migrate to the German Democratic Republic. Furthermore, we need all these perspectives to adequately depict how labor was interrelated with other aspects of migrants' lives. The following four categories emerge as collective drivers of migration: labor, education, war and personal reasons. These four categories are not mutually exclusive. Worker-trainees gave different weight to multiple factors in their own decision-making process.

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<sup>26</sup> John, Interview conducted by the author, Maputo, Mozambique, 02.02.2014.

<sup>27</sup> There is no standardized spelling but "Madjerman," "Madjermanes," "Madgermanes" or "MaGermanes" are common. "Madjermanes" is probably the most common in Portuguese, Mozambique's official language and national lingua franca. The name took hold in the early 1990s during the politicization of the workers' reintegration process. The term often has a derogative connotation when used in the media. It is, however, also proudly employed as a label by many workers themselves and has been used by the Madjerman activist group. According to my interview partners, it means "those who have been to Germany" or "those from Germany" in Changana and other languages of south Mozambique, see for instance, Lázaro, Interview conducted by the author, Maputo, Mozambique, 29.08.2011. Thank you to Emmanuel Kreike for pointing out that Madjerman might linguistically hint at a collective concept like "Germanhood" or doing the "German Thing." "Ba" would be the prefix for class designating people. The Ji-ma class for things is especially used with words that are borrowed from other languages, in this case "Djerman."

As the migrants' memories reveal, it was not clear to all young people where they were sent and why, and it is important to keep in mind that their decisions were often based on hearsay and imperfect information. Economic considerations, which fuel labor migration the world over, predictably played a significant role. Migrants dreamt of material independence and preparing for marriage and the founding of one's own household. Another motivation was filial duties, of helping to support larger family networks eking out a living in a country still marked by poverty. Young people were also drawn by the promise of education, of laying the foundation for their own careers and of social upward mobility. While some sought to become blue-collar laborers, others harbored dreams of going to university once abroad. Many felt inspired by the charismatic Samora Machel's speeches to do their part in aiding their native country's development. But concerns for personal security were a strong motivating factor, too. While independence in 1975 had ended the war with Portugal it did not bring lasting peace. Between 1977 and 1992 FRELIMO fought RENAMO (the Mozambican National Resistance) in a civil war fueled by regional and Cold War interests. Escaping the risks of regular military service or abduction into military service and the violence of combat seemed like a good reason for many to sign up for any programs that promised to foster migration elsewhere. The fighting claimed more than one million lives, displaced several million people in the region and destroyed much infrastructure such as rail lines, roads, schools, and hospitals. Not surprisingly, the privations of the conflict economy also featured prominently in the interviews I conducted with former labor migrants. Finally, emotional motivations were important to some migrants, who followed personal ties abroad to reunite with a partner or family member, or who signed up for a second contract to return to be with their newfound family in East Germany.<sup>28</sup> In the future migrants' imagination, East Germany was also part of a notion of Europe as an imagined space of possibilities that bundled notions of adventure, prosperity, and the good life.

One of the migrants who I interviewed, Fabião, summarized these myriad factors:

The advantages [of going to East Germany] were many. First of all, you were occupied. You could go and work and receive technical training, which was better than doing nothing. Secondly, we had a sixteen-year war in this country, and life here was very difficult. It was a chance to escape the insecurity. Also, to escape the poverty because here in Mozambique we faced a lack of jobs, a lack of security, a lack of schools, no free movement of people and a severe lack of things. There were so many refugees and displaced people, but there were no safe spaces. Thirdly, it was a real benefit for my personal life. I had the ability to work to support myself and my family. I learned a

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<sup>28</sup> It is important to note, that officially family reunification was not possible. Worker-trainees had to sign up as single individuals, could not bring their children or partners, and even if partners signed up together no accommodation was to be made to locate them in the same workplace, see article 4 of the agreement. Marriages between foreign workers and East Germans were also generally discouraged. In the name of worker productivity, until almost the end of the program, female labor migrants had to decide between terminating pregnancies and returning to deliver at home; there were no consequences for the fathers. Despite all these restrictions, a second (and already a third) generation of children of the worker trainees are now part of German society. See for instance, 2. Generation/2. Geração, <https://vertragsarbeit-mosambik-ddr.de/2-generation/>, accessed 24.02.2021.



lot about a different way of life. I learned how to be organized and it was my first work experience. I liked it.<sup>29</sup>

We will return to the theme of personal gain in the last section of this text. It is important to highlight the different life experiences which led to many returnees to Mozambique remembering East Germany as a sort of El Dorado. This stands in contrast to the equally misleading image of the GDR often held in the West as a country of monotonous rows of prefabricated concrete blocks of flats, unreliable Trabant cars, and the Berlin Wall looming over everything. Patricio describes the economic contrast between his Mozambican and his German life like this:

Before we went to Germany, there was war in Mozambique. We had nothing to eat. And I mean there was nothing to buy, not even sugar. The stores were completely empty. Money was not the problem but there were simply no goods to buy. We just ate cabbage with salt. If you wanted to have bread you had to get up at 4:00 am and start queuing, but even then, you were not guaranteed bread. At some point the government introduced rations but what we got per family was nothing, like 2 kg rice for a whole month per family. You could not buy things like clothes, and what existed was disproportionately expensive. Now in Germany, we had everything, more than enough of everything.<sup>30</sup>

Roughly a quarter century after their return, many Mozambican migrants portray their decision to migrate in individualistic terms. The ideal of the independent person in search of new possibilities created a tension with the socialist ideal of contributing to a vanguard workforce for industrialization at home, and with family obligations. For the migrants, there was often mismatch between individual desires and collective duties, between becoming socialist *New Men* and not losing sight of their own motivations.

### The end of the GDR, the end of the *madjer*man dream

With the political transition and German reunification in 1989/1990, worker-trainee lives changed immensely. What is known in Germany as a peaceful revolution was not experienced as a peaceful time by contract workers. Many workers were sent back home prematurely, sometimes without receiving information on how to stay or receive compensation benefits. Alongside this economic restructuring, a rise in overt expressions of racism made life very difficult as it posed a threat to the workers' security. Of the 15,100 Mozambican worker-trainees who were registered in 1989, only 2,800 Mozambicans were left in East Germany at the end of 1990. This was a messy and unforeseen mass return of workers that overstretched the capacities of the East German and Mozambican states alike.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Fabião, Interview conducted by the author, Maputo, Mozambique, 13.03.2014.

<sup>30</sup> Patricio, Interview conducted by the author, Maputo, Mozambique, 27.01.2014.

<sup>31</sup> Almuth Berger, "Annäherungen - Bericht der Ausländerbeauftragten des Landes Brandenburg," (Potsdam: Die Ausländerbeauftragte des Landes Brandenburg, 2006), 38; Andreas Müggenburg, "Die ausländischen Vertragsarbeiter in der ehemaligen DDR: Darstellung und Dokumentation," ed. Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für die Belange der Ausländer (Berlin: Bonner Universitäts-Buchdruckerei, 1996), 18.

Key goals for the East German delegation that travelled to Mozambique to negotiate the end of the socialist labor migration regime were that East German companies gained the right to terminate individual contracts, that no new labor migrants were to be taken on, and that the rights of those currently in East Germany were to be redefined. Due to the chaotic circumstances of 1989-90 in many East German companies, not all workers were informed of the possibility of staying on outside of the labor and training program. Further, some companies took the law into their own hands, chartered airplanes and flew workers back. For instance, the Mozambican newspaper *Tempo* reported that on September 17, 1990, an airplane full of returning worker-trainees landed without the airport authorities or any other Mozambican agencies having been informed.<sup>32</sup>

In East Germany all workers felt the general insecurity of the political, economic, and social changes of *die Wende* (The Turn), as the transition is known in Germany. Mozambican workers did so from an especially vulnerable position as foreigners with only vague rights of residence and as targets for racists and xenophobes. Open expressions of racism were reduced during the socialist regime by the anti-racist official ideology.<sup>33</sup> However, towards the end of the GDR, openly expressed racism became so prevalent that it was among the primary reasons - if not the primary reason - that motivated workers to return to their home countries after the collapse of socialism in Germany.

What worker-trainees originally envisioned as a euphoric return, enjoying their social and economic capital as comparatively wealthy returnees, soon turned into disappointment and marginalization. The workers relate their return through the prism of loss: loss of the goods they had bought in East Germany, their deferred wages, their ties with friends, partners, and their children in East Germany, and of their professional and personal dreams. For many, the fall from their status as the vanguard of Mozambican workers and the loss of their fleeting social standing on their return proved to be a shock from which they did not recover.

Adevaldo captures this narrative. He remembers his jubilant homecoming:

The astonishment was great. Everybody wanted to see the 'madjermanes,' as we were called affectionately. We were people who possessed economic respect, who faced the future. At the first chance I left my poor, crooked reed hut behind. ...The new house was already made of stone and the first electric appliances arrived from Germany: TVs, fridges, radios, video recorders and much more; the famous MZ [an East German motorcycle brand], the German figurehead in Mozambique. It was an ambassador for economic interests and represented so much for a returnee. Family members and

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<sup>32</sup> *Tempo*, October 14, 1990, 22-26.

<sup>33</sup> Many interviewees relate a sense of order and surveillance during their stay in the GDR proper that benefitted their personal security. Many report having felt safe moving about during the early and mid-1980s, noticing a rise in overt racist expressions culminating in verbal and physical attacks of foreigners before and after the *Wende*, see chapter 3 of my dissertation, "The Social Life of Socialism: Real Intimacies, Real Racism and Real Socialism" in *Socialist Solidarities*, 133-177.

friends celebrated. There were so many of them, some entirely unknown, who visited me to share in the joy that the Marks created.<sup>34</sup>

But then:

The days became darker, day after day even darker, no compensation money, nothing. The time had already arrived to look for work, but not even work appeared. I still recall those sad moments when I separated from the goods, day after day, piece after piece. The TV, the radio, finally the much-esteemed MZ, I had to say goodbye because I had to live...<sup>35</sup>

Adevaldo's story is one of initial prosperity followed by rapid decline; a narrative arc echoed by most returnees. Initially many workers dreamed of a life as wage laborers in Mozambican industries, allowing them to build their own houses and families while contributing to the economic development of their home countries. This had worked to an extent for the earliest generations of worker-trainees, as they found work in industry such as in harbors, coal mining, or in textiles. For most workers of the later generations there was no hope to employ the experience gained abroad as mostly unskilled returnees found themselves in a conflict economy unable to provide stable employment.

The shrinking of the socialist word during the late 1980s and early 1990s did not leave Mozambique unaffected. After socialism lost its attraction and Mozambique reorganized around market principles and the framework of a multi-party democracy, the returnees faced a government that neither had an interest nor the ability to place them in appropriate jobs. These workers had been raised in a system in which the socialist state was to provide for them, but now they had to show initiative to fend for themselves, without any instructions as to how to function in this new logic. This feeling of disorientation, which the Mozambican workers shared with many people in young post-socialist societies, was exacerbated by their adaptation to life in a different cultural context. Elke Ahrens and Sigrid Müller, who spoke with returnees in Maputo in the early 1990s, concluded that "they cannot really identify with their home country, they do not feel capable of proactively taking initiative and they place high expectations in help from the outside."<sup>36</sup>

The returnees criticize the FRELIMO government for exploiting them. The core bone of contention was that when they came home, they had not been paid most of the wages which they had been compelled to send to Mozambique when they were working in the GDR. A protest movement began forming in the early 1990s that saw organizations representing the *madjermanes* campaign to get what they saw as their money back from the government. To this end they appropriated the famous FRELIMO anti-colonial struggle slogan "*a luta continua*"

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<sup>34</sup> Adevaldo Banze, in Ulf Dieter Klemm, *Moçambique - Alemanha, Ida e Volta: Vivências dos Moçambicanos antes, durante e depois de estadia na Alemanha* (Maputo: Instituto Cultural Mocambique – Alemanha, ICMA, 2005), 37-38.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>36</sup> Elke Ahrens and Siegrid Müller, "'Ohne Perspektive' Zur Situation der Rückkehrer aus der ex-DDR in Mosambik," in *Schwarz-Weiße Zeiten*, ed. Ahmed Farah, Eva Engelhardt and Bernd Bröskamp (Bremen: IZA, KKM, tdh, BAOBAB, 1993), 130. These tendencies were still noticeable when I conducted my interviews.

– the struggle continues. Their grievance was not the deferred payment policy in itself but rather the repayment process, or lack of it. One worker in Maputo remembers:

We thought it was a good thing because we would receive the money after our return. It was better only to receive 40% of our wages there because we didn't have a future in that country [East Germany]. So, it would have been better to get the other portion here and live very well but that never happened.<sup>37</sup>

This was a system with which Mozambican workers were familiar through grandfathers, fathers, uncles, or brothers who had previously migrated to South Africa. The issue was that most workers with whom I spoke could not access the transferred wages upon return home. For those in the provinces it became even more of a bureaucratic burden, but also for those in the capital it proved futile. Even when payments were made and received workers could not relate the amounts received to what they were owed because they had not been adjusted to inflation. This led to strong criticism of the government which they saw as corrupt and opaque. It is also important to note that Mozambicans were not the only group of foreign contract workers in the GDR who did not receive their full wages, and neither was the GDR the only Eastern bloc host country to have arranged a system of deferred payments with the sending countries. Rather, there are several cases of workers having mobilized after their return to reclaim transfers, for instance in Angola where former worker-trainees in the GDR successfully negotiated with the government.<sup>38</sup> For Cuban workers in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, 60% of their salary, too, were deposited in a 'special savings account' back home, money that was to be paid out to workers after their return and "after deducting the cost of travelling ..., of acquiring work clothes and of accommodation" a process that did not always function well, as even the Cuban communist party acknowledged.<sup>39</sup>

Missing deferred wages are not the former Mozambican worker-trainees' only complaint. In retrospect, Fabião is critical about the professional value of his East German training:

We received training there that could not be applied in Mozambique because the factories did not exist here. I, for instance, worked in a factory that produced glass for glasses, binoculars, specialized telescopes; we did not have such specialized machinery here in Mozambique. The formal education was thus of questionable applicability, but on the personal level we learned a lot and benefited tremendously from having been employed in East Germany.<sup>40</sup>

Fabião correctly points out the mismatch between tasks in East German factories and possibilities on the Mozambican labor market, a disparity that, as we have learned above, worsened as more labor migrants were recruited in the second half of the 1980s to support the East German economy through sheer labor power. Furthermore, Fabião raises an important distinction, namely that between learning technical know-how and soft skills. Many

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<sup>37</sup> Group Interview with Pinto, Rafael, Bacal, Fortunado, Interview conducted by the author, Maputo, Mozambique, 21.04.2014.

<sup>38</sup> Marcia C. Schenck, "Socialist Solidarities and Their Afterlives: Histories and Memories of Angolan and Mozambican Migrants in the German Democratic Republic, 1975-2015" (Ph.D. Princeton University, 2017), Ch.5.

<sup>39</sup> Bortlová-Vondráková and Szente-Varga, "Labor Migration Programs", 12.

<sup>40</sup> Fabião, Maputo, 13.03.2014.

returned migrants highlight the personal benefit from having lived abroad and having successfully adapted to East German work culture. At the same time, they acknowledge the limited applicability of their vocational training in the absence of specialized equipment such as was used in East Germany or the absence of entire industries. Technical knowledge did not transfer as easily as authorities had envisioned. The disastrous effects of the decades-long civil war had not been factored in. Skills like driving, welding, or painting came in handy, and some workers came home with the tools that allowed them to open (for example) an informal repair shop.

While I heard stories of returnees getting a job because they spoke German or had been to Germany, a much more common experience has been exclusion because of affiliation with the *madjermanes*. Adevaldo, whose voice we have already heard speaking about initial prosperity followed by quick disillusion, describes *madjerman* as an affectionate term. This was to change over the years as returned workers kept up with protests in the capital and were increasingly perceived as troublemakers. At the height of their protest in 2004 they entered the parliament building in Maputo and occupied the German embassy for several days. Ilda describes the impact on her own life:

I worked as a governess in a family and as soon as they discovered that I was a *madjerman* I was sent away. ...We don't have the right to work, they don't want to pay us and on top of that they are discriminating against us. When I go to look for work, I can't write on my CV that I am *Madjerman*.<sup>41</sup>

Even three decades post-return, *madjermanes* stand out in the public eye as a distinct group. What this perception of the *madjermanes* misses is the heterogeneity of the group. In the public mind the term stands for those who vocally demand their rights in the capital - depending on the occasion about 100 people were congregating in Maputo as of 2014 although no regular demonstrations were held during my fieldwork period. However, the majority has moved on and built new lives. They reminisce privately and often approve of the activist work of their erstwhile colleagues but are mainly engaged in making a living. What this perception also misses is that the *madjermanes* are not the only Mozambicans who left and who still maintain an active group identity. For example, there are also the former children at the school of friendship in Staßfurt, who maintain active alumni groups all over Mozambique.<sup>42</sup>

#### The international working class today: what being a *madjerman* means now

Returnees came back from Germany with a group identity that binds them together and provides those in need with a community.<sup>43</sup> Many of those who returned have adapted their worldview to incorporate new ideas based on what they encountered in the GDR. Examples of this are attitudes to gender roles, sexuality, and partnership. Some women spoke of greater

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<sup>41</sup> Ilda, Interview conducted by the author, Maputo, Mozambique, 04.09.2011.

<sup>42</sup> Marcia C. Schenck, "A Chronology of Nostalgia: Memories of Former Angolan and Mozambican Worker Trainees to East Germany," *Labor History* 59, no. 3 (2018): 352-74.

<sup>43</sup> There are also some former Mozambican worker-trainees who stayed in Germany, some of whom are liaising with their former colleagues back in Mozambique to mount pressure on the German government to bring about compensation payments to all former Mozambican contract workers. The *madjerman* group identity is therefore arguably becoming a transnational identity.

freedom to express a desire for an emancipated life; discussions about the naturist movement in East Germany (*Freikörperkultur*) serve to trace shifts in opinions.<sup>44</sup> The usual reaction upon arrival in East Germany was to abhor it, but some came to enjoy the freedom it suggested, and many came to tolerate it with a wink as a German cultural idiosyncrasy. And finally, the *madjermanes* found agency as a group and successfully negotiated some repayments. Their experiences with life under socialism heightened their political consciousness as civic actors, taught them the skill of protest and allowed them to envision the possibility of an alternative present.

The central gathering place in Maputo is the *Jardim 28 de Maio*, colloquially known as the park of the *madjermanes*. Situated in downtown Mozambique, close to the Labor Ministry, the park serves as the bureau of the umbrella organization of returned workers in Mozambique, ATMA, and as the central rallying spot for demonstrations that generally take place on Wednesdays.<sup>45</sup> In 2014, the park also serves as a social, economic and protective space for various *madjerman* groups: the destitute, those who sleep in the park and spend their days living off the alcohol and food their colleagues share, and the traders and informal businesses along Av. Ramao Fernandes Farinha.<sup>46</sup> *Madjermanes* support each other in this space with connections and advice. This is also a space where they recuperate and anchor their collective memory of their shared past, expressing solidarity with each other and giving weight to their collective claims.

The money and benefits claimed by the *madjermanes* are a product of their labor in East Germany. Their methods draw on the legacy of the active protest culture they witnessed in East Germany, most importantly the Monday demonstrations in 1989-91 and their participation in and leadership of company strikes.<sup>47</sup> The workers' immediate demand is for the governments to honor their promise to return withheld funds and deliver employment opportunities. Their broader concerns are transparency and inclusive development.

In Mozambique, the longing for East Germany situates individuals in a countrywide web, linking *madjermanes* across time and space. Regardless of the origin or generation of a particular worker, their *madjerman* identity links them together. This network tentatively spreads beyond the nation, including former workers and allies residing in Germany.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> FKK culture, as it is known in Germany, was not originally East German, but garnered a large following there as it became an expression of personal freedom in an unfree society. It has a complicated history with colonial roots, see for instance Saskia Köbschall, "German, Natural and Naked? The Colonial Entanglements of the Life Reform," *Art Education Research* 10 no. 15 (2019): n.p, [https://blog.zhdk.ch/iaejournal/2019/02/26/n15\\_deutsch-natuerlich-und-nackt-die-lebensreform-und-ihre-kolonialen-verflechtungen/](https://blog.zhdk.ch/iaejournal/2019/02/26/n15_deutsch-natuerlich-und-nackt-die-lebensreform-und-ihre-kolonialen-verflechtungen/).

<sup>45</sup> ATMA, the Association of Mozambican Former Workers in Germany, is a countrywide organization representing returned worker-trainees as of 2014. Enough *madjermanes* continue to be committed to the fight to carry out active protests. Yet, Maputo is the only location with irregular public demonstrations.

<sup>46</sup> The gentrification of the park also started in 2014, with new buildings and cafes supplanting the more informal *madjerman* spaces bit by bit. At the time of my research the new and the old co-existed in a tacit truce.

<sup>47</sup> Hundreds of thousands of East Germans came out in peaceful protest for a democratic reordering on Monday nights between 1989-1990.

<sup>48</sup> Contacts between former workers residing in Germany and Mozambique are of varying natures. Many are of private nature. But there are also those engaged with the two major topics of the legacy of the migration. Firstly, the compensation payment issue, and secondly the children of former laborers looking for their fathers. In Germany too, the movement to reclaim compensation is becoming reenergized. In 2019 an

The Mozambican form of nostalgic longing critiques the present-day government in two ways: first, through an evocation of *eastalgia* by comparing the former worker-trainees' experiences after their return to their time in the GDR. Secondly, they express a longing for the times of President Samora Machel.<sup>49</sup> Today, *eastalgia* is an anachronistic annoyance for the FRELIMO government. The Mozambican government has long moved on from the socialist development dream that once propelled its citizens abroad to gain technical training to help with the construction of an imagined industrialized People's Republic. *Madjermanes* deploy positive memories of East Germany to criticize the Mozambique of today for what they perceive as the failed Mozambican modernization project. The interviewee Juma relays the point of view of many returned workers:

I remember those days. It was a calmer time. The country was clean. Today the country might have developed but it is dirty and unorganized. ... Samora Machel loved his people. He was the only president that had a love for his nation, his people. For the country, for the infrastructure, for everything. This country used to smell of perfume, of cologne.<sup>50</sup>

Where post-reunification histories often see decay and underdevelopment in East Germany, Luís remembers communist Germany as a progressive and livable alternative:

You cannot compare Maputo and [former East] German cities. There is just simply no comparison. Look around and you will see garbage everywhere [in Maputo]. ...Nothing works here, and everything has been decaying since independence even here in the city of cement. ...No, you cannot compare that with the clean, modern, well-lit, and organized [East] German cities.<sup>51</sup>

It is through nostalgic memories like these that many *madjermanes* express their feelings of betrayal. The overwhelming majority of returnees in Mozambique express disappointment and anger. Only some still hold hope for the future when it comes to the tense relationship between them and their government.

There are several factors that continue to motivate some *madjermanes* to continue their protests. Chief among them is a life at the margins of society without much prospect for improvement. There is a feeling of injustice, which together with past successes of repayment

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international conference took place in Magdeburg at which the Referendum of Magdeburg was adopted to investigate open questions concerning the legacies of the labor migration. See the website accompanying the project: <https://vertragsarbeit-mosambik-ddr.de>, accessed 24.02.2021. Reencontro Familiar: Moçambique-Deutschland is a group of persons concerned and allies that seek to locate family members in Germany and Mozambique <https://reencontrofamiliar.wordpress.com>, accessed 24.02.2021. There are also other groups like the Facebook group Afropa-Solibabys, <https://www.facebook.com/AfropaSolibabys/>. Contact between Germany and Mozambique is maintained via Facebook, WhatsApp and phone conversations, and of course visits when possible.

<sup>49</sup> I coined the term *eastalgia* to define the returnees' nostalgia for aspects of their lived experiences in East Germany. This is a distinct nostalgia from *Ostalgie*, which refers to the longing for East Germany within Germany. For a more in-depth discussion, see Marcia C. Schenck, "Small Strangers at the School of Friendship: Memories of Mozambican School Students to the German Democratic Republic," *Bulletin of the GHI* 15 (2020): 41-59.

<sup>50</sup> Juma Madeira in Jack Davis, Marcia C. Schenck, "A Republic of the Mind," short film, (<https://vimeo.com/1473234882015>), accessed February 18, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Luís, Interview conducted by the author, Maputo, Mozambique, 02.09.2011.

payouts perpetuates the byzantine repayment saga. In contrast to life in a shanty town and eking out a living with informal and irregular employment opportunities, the memory of the living conditions the workers enjoyed in East Germany becomes ever more nostalgic. Contrasting the expectations that Samora Machel outlined for their involvement in the development of Mozambique and the dreams the *madjermanes* once harbored with the invisibility they are accorded today renders visible an unfulfilled political promise. It is also inspired by the peaceful transition in East Germany. Some see the demonstrations in Maputo as part of a political tradition along the lines of the East German Monday demonstrations, of civil society standing up to the FRELIMO government. All of this encourages some *madjermanes* to don their German hats, T-shirts and flags, grab their *vuvuzelas*, whistles, drums and homemade protest signs and share in the Wednesday demonstrations in Maputo, more than a quarter of a century after their return.<sup>52</sup> The returnees' gaze upon their home country changed after their homecoming. The former socialist cosmopolitans are forever comparing the post-socialist Mozambican development with an increasingly *eastalgitic* picture of their East German lives.

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<sup>52</sup> A *vuvuzela* is a plastic horn that exudes a monotonous sound when blown and became famous around the world through the soccer world cup in South Africa in 2010. It is also used in protests.



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