

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unimaginable Community: Watchwords and Frelimo's Abandoned Nationalism in Independence-Era Mozambique

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Abstract

During its decade-long war (1964–74) against Portuguese colonialism, Frelimo developed a language to express the style in which it imagined the nation. On taking power in 1975, Frelimo used this language — its watchwords — to signal the shared identity it aimed to instill within Mozambique. Frelimo asked Mozambicans to live in the future tense: to turn away from familiar idioms of belonging and embrace a sense of self and other untethered to past or present. The misalignment between this vision and its reception is most evident at local levels of administrative action, where people at lower rungs of the state received Frelimo's watchwords and creatively applied them, transforming ideas into practices. Many Mozambicans were unable or unwilling to accept Frelimo's vision, and as civil war engulfed more of the country in the early 1980s, Frelimo abandoned this nationalism, exchanging it for an idea of national community people could more easily imagine.

Keywords: Southern Africa; Mozambique; nationalism; politics; ideology; identity

“It happens with few men, as it does with you, that life is so completely mixed up with the History of your People.”¹ Marcelino dos Santos offered these words in eulogy, as Mozambique buried Samora Machel, the country's first president and leader of Frelimo, the governing party that had fought Portuguese colonial rule and delivered an independent Mozambique in 1975.² Machel confidant and long-time Frelimo member, dos Santos spoke directly to the deceased leader, using the informal, intimate *tu*. Charting Machel's life course from his youth to his political maturation and entry into Frelimo's guerrilla forces, dos Santos continued, “To speak of you, from that moment on, is to tell the History of FRELIMO, the History of Mozambique.”³ Seemingly still present, “you are

¹“Tua vida é história,” (Your life is history) *Tempo* 838, 2 Nov. 1986, 22. Here and throughout, all translations are my own.

²Frelimo came into being as “FRELIMO,” an acronym for *Frente da Libertação de Moçambique* (Mozambique Liberation Front). Later it became “Frelimo;” some observers pin the change to 1977, after its formal declaration as a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party. See John S. Saul, *Recolonization and Resistance: Southern Africa in the 1990s* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1993), *xiii*; “Mozambican History Net,” consulted 12 Feb. 2021, http://www.mozambiquehistory.net/frelimo_62-63.php. At least as late as 1982, the state-run newspaper *Notícias* still used the fully capitalized rendering. With that lack of clarity and visual distraction of the capitalized writing, I use “Frelimo” throughout, unless directly quoting a contemporary text.

³Dos Santos, “Tua vida,” 22, 23; dos Santos' formulation bears a striking resemblance to a 1978 headline in the national daily newspaper, for the observation of Heroes Day (marked on 3 February, the day on which Eduardo Mondlane, Frelimo's first president, was assassinated in 1969), “Falar do Mondlane É Falar da Luta do Nosso Povo,” (To speak of Mondlane is to speak of our people's struggle) *Notícias*, Suplemento, 3 Feb. 1978, 5.

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the undying symbol of *moçambicanidade*” (Mozambicanness).⁴ To be sure, for many, Machel’s personal magnetism had made flesh so expansive an assertion, conflating the man and the nation.⁵ Many, but not all; some who lived in Mozambique saw themselves neither in this history nor in this expression of *moçambicanidade*, and they could not imagine themselves belonging to, or in, this community. In this misalignment, dos Santos’s words exemplified Frelimo’s attempt to imagine a nation, a project laid to rest alongside Machel.

The attempt foundered, because Frelimo’s style of imagination excluded too many of the idioms of identity and belonging that might have allowed Mozambicans to see themselves reflected back from Frelimo’s vision of the nation.⁶ The nation Frelimo summoned had no place for obligations and rights derived from established notions of authority, such as chieftaincy, or familiar ideas of connection between self and other, such as spiritual belief and practice. Those beliefs and practices, so central to how people inhabited the surrounding world, had roots in the past, even as their everyday expression included sometimes recent deflections from earlier forms. In its relentless forward orientation, Frelimo rejected the past, along with many associated present beliefs or practices, unless they could be tied to Frelimo’s origin story. (One such exception: precolonial leaders who had fought Portuguese encroachment or invasions, earning the status of anticolonial resisters *avant la lettre*.⁷) Frelimo sought to unmoor people from these known relations and attach them to others that were largely unfamiliar.

For those so inclined, the unmooring could be an unburdening, but for others, to jettison what was known and familiar in favor of the strange required either a proverbial leap of faith or at least a powerful exercise of imagination. It meant to see themselves, in their mind’s eye if not their surroundings, belonging in communities and engaged in relations that for the most part did not yet exist. In this, Frelimo’s nationalism was marked by a unity it sought to create that was rooted not only in place, but in time. Like many others, Frelimo’s nationalism posed a spatial commonality among those who lived between the Maputo and Rovuma rivers (at the country’s southern and northern borders, respectively), a territorially defined nation-state like any other. While many people could imagine themselves among others who lived in the nation’s territory, the time in which Frelimo summoned them see themselves was another matter. Frelimo not only looked to a future horizon, a common enough stance among nationalists, but insisted that people live as if they already were beyond that horizon. It was a demand to live “the future *now*—as imperative rather than subjunctive.”⁸ The nation Frelimo imagined existed in a moment that had not yet arrived, and to join that nation, Mozambicans faced the tremendous challenge of attempting to live in the future tense.

As one member of a village-level group charged with carrying out the endeavor told me, “it was not easy to remove ideas that existed, and replace them with others, of a future that was not there.”⁹

⁴Dos Santos, “Tua vida”, 25. A clunkier translation would be “the quality of being Mozambican.”

⁵On Machel’s rapport with his public, see Fernando Ganhão, “Samora Machel: Um relâmpago no céu,” in *Samora: Homem do Povo*, ed. António Sopa (Maputo: Maguete Editores, 2001), 19; Teresa R. Alves, *A Minha Pátria é Moçambique* (Lisboa: Guerra e Paz, 2017), 158.

⁶Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Revised edn, London: Verso, 2006), 6. On the style of imagination in Anderson, see Max Bergholz, “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, by Benedict Anderson,” *American Historical Review* 123, no. 2 (2018): 522; and John Breuilly, “Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*: a symposium,” *Nations and Nationalism* 22, no. 4 (2016): 628; on idiom, belonging, and identity, Terence Ranger, “Studying Repatriation as Part of African Social History,” in *When Refugees Go Home: African Experiences*, eds. Tim Allen and Hubert Morsink (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1994), 289.

⁷Chief among such leaders was Ngungunhana, whose Gaza empire extended over much of Mozambique south of the Zambezi and fell to the Portuguese in 1895. Exiled to the Azores, from which his remains were repatriated, he received a hero’s welcome in 1985. “Ngungunhane viveu e morreu como grande herói do Povo,” *Notícias*, 17 Jun. 1985, 1. Scholarship on Gungunhana incudes Gerhard Liesegang, *Vassalagem ou tratado de amizade? História do acto de vassalagem de Ngungunyane nas relações externas de Gaza* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico Nacional, 1986); Hoyini H. K. Bhila, “Manyika’s Relationship with the Portuguese and the Gaza-Nguni from 1832 to 1890,” *Rhodesian History* 7 (1976): 31–37.

⁸Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 17.

⁹Interview, Nhamatanda, 24 May 2022.

In step with revolutionary movements elsewhere (Angola, Cuba, China, the Soviet Union), Frelimo's nation included a figure to guide people in making this imaginative leap: the *Homem Novo* (New Man).¹⁰ The *Homem Novo* was a personification of the future's potential, at once an object Frelimo targeted for individual change and the subject expected to carry out collective social transformation. For actual, as opposed to notional, new men, it meant to act as if the future had already arrived, requiring them to turn away from the world they knew and live in a future one.¹¹ That many Mozambicans were unable or unwilling to embrace this unstable duality in time doomed Frelimo's nationalism.

Through a close reading of the language used to style its nation, I examine how Frelimo framed the imaginative act Mozambicans were to make. I focus on watchwords, the language Frelimo used to inform, mobilize, and orient the population at large. Watchwords — in Portuguese, *palavras de ordem* — were the expression of thinking among leadership, and cascaded outward and downward in spoken, written, and graphic forms. My analysis follows their trajectory from their origins at the heights of leadership, to their broadcast dissemination in print media and other publications, and their use and implementation in village- and district-level settings. In reconstructing the chain of use and transmission, I show how different categories of people used them, in different settings, and how their meaning and effect evolved accordingly.¹² The focus is on how people used watchwords in the middle ground, the territory where Frelimo's topline goals, and their corollary strategies, became specific, concrete tactics. The middle ground — a vital space between elite vision and grassroots reception — is where local officials, cadres, and others transformed ideas into actions, determining just how ordinary Mozambicans encountered the vision of Frelimo's nation. The view shows how cadres put watchwords into the operational terms, becoming — as one person explained to me more than three decades later — “our daily bread.”¹³ In examining how Frelimo sought to style the nation as a cultural formation, its political project of nationalism, and its unimagability, comes clearly into view.¹⁴

I write of Frelimo's nationalism, and not Mozambican nationalism, for two reasons.¹⁵ First, Frelimo's vision of national community was inseparable from the self-understandings, both individual and collective, held among its leadership — something quite different from popular nationalist

¹⁰Yinghong Cheng, *Creating the “New Man”: From Enlightenment Ideals to Socialist Realities* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008); Didier Collier, “A “new man” for Africa? Some particularities of the Marxist *Homem Novo* within Angolan cultural policy,” in *De-Centering Cold War History: Local and Global Change*, eds. Jadwiga E. P. Mooney and Fabio Lanza (London: Routledge, 2013), 197–206; Michael Mahoney, “*Estado Novo, Homem Novo* (New State, New Man): Colonial and anti-colonial development ideologies in Mozambique, 1930–1977,” in *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development and the Global Cold War*, eds. David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark H. Haefele, and Michael E. Latham (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 165–96. The *Homem Novo* figures in a range of Frelimo's texts and other publications, especially in the 1970s; for the most sustained treatment, see Sergio Vieira, “O homem novo é um processo,” *Tempo* 398, 21 May 1978, 27–38; “O Homem Novo,” *Notícias* suplemento, 29 May 1978.

¹¹Patricia Hayes writes of another relation in time, in describing ZAPU guerrilla life in Zambia-based training camps. The ceaseless anticipation associated with a guerrilla insurgent's *raison d'être*, combined with the bounded nature of the camp, meant that life in “war's anteroom” left them living in the “future present.” Patricia Hayes, “Zenzo Nkobu, ZAPU Photographer: Exile, Visibility and the Anteroom of War in Zambia, 1977–1980,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40, no. 5 (2020): 941–64.

¹²Here I draw on Sidney Tarrow, *The Language of Contention: Revolutions in Words, 1688–2012* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12.

¹³Interview, C. L., Maputo, May 2016.

¹⁴I borrow this formulation of nation and nationalism from Marissa Moorman, *Intonations: A Social History of Music and Nation in Luanda, Angola, from 1945 to Recent Times* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), 11.

¹⁵Work on Mozambican nationalism includes Lorenzo Macagno, “Fragmentos de uma Imaginação Nacional,” *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 24, no. 70 (2009): 17–35; Jason Sumich, “An Imaginary Nation. Nationalism, Ideology & the Mozambican National Elite,” in *Sure Road? Nationalisms in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique*, ed. Eric Morier-Genoud (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 127–47; Luís de Brito, *A Frelimo, o Marxismo e a Construção do Estado Nacional 1962–1983* (Maputo: IESE, 2019).

sentiment that may exist parallel to and even in tension with state-promoted forms.¹⁶ Frelimo's idea of the nation imagined Mozambicans not as they were, but as they might become, and with its watchwords, Frelimo summoned them to enter its nation or face exclusion from it. In this, Frelimo engaged in a struggle "over the form and meaning of nationhood," a struggle that had started before and continued on after formal independence.¹⁷ Second, while Frelimo leaders believed their understanding of national community was, or at least could become, coequal with the population living within the country's borders, they were wrong, and the skew of the mismatch left their idea of the nation unimaginable.

Finally, in writing of an abandoned nationalism and unimaginable nation, I mean something different from the understanding that all nationalisms are, inevitably, incomplete struggles that cannot achieve closure. Noting the pivot Frelimo made in the later 1980s, Alice Dinerman writes of an "ideological reorientation," a process that began around the time of Machel's death and continued to the country's first multiparty elections in 1994. At that point, the party's stance differed hardly at all from positions held by its mortal enemy, Renamo, the group it had battled since 1977.¹⁸ In letting its nationalism go by the wayside, Frelimo abandoned the demand that people live in the future tense, offering a more easily imagined vision of the nation. A new path ahead beckoned, and Frelimo invited any Mozambican who lived in the national territory — no matter their sense of self and belonging — to choose a future with Frelimo.

Watchwords

From the first years after its formation in 1962, Frelimo developed hallmark phrasing to signal the sharply drawn boundaries of its politics. After all, for an armed insurgency that recruited from urban settings surveilled by the secret police, operating in rural areas increasingly occupied by the Portuguese military, it was crucial to determine who was in and who was out. Leadership relied on such phrasing to express the affinities they sought to establish and often closed with "Independence or Death" over their signature, irrespective of their proximity to battlefield action. When, in 1966, Pascoal Mocumbi — a future prime minister — sent a hastily penned letter from Baku to Dar-es-Salaam, tracing his itinerary from Cairo to Moscow and thence to Leningrad and onward (seeking to shore up support from Frelimo's Soviet allies), he ended with a truncated "Indep. or Death!"¹⁹ The knife's-edge imagery was characteristic of Frelimo's watchwords, the language it used to style the contours of the nation.²⁰

Watchwords have their origins in armed conflict, but they may also cross into other terrain. For Frelimo, watchwords call to mind its military struggles as a guerrilla force, when lines were not clearly drawn and friend and foe not easily distinguished, either owing to poor visibility or lack of clearly observable differences between opposing forces.²¹ On the battlefield, a watchword allows passage, admitting the person who speaks it behind the frontline, entering a privileged space of

¹⁶The latter is the subject of Moorman, *Intonations*.

¹⁷Miles Larmer and Baz Lecocq, "Historicising nationalism in Africa," *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no. 4 (2018): 893–94.

¹⁸Alice Dinerman, *Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Revisionism in Postcolonial Africa: The Case of Mozambique, 1975-1994* (London: Routledge, 2006), 11, 10.

¹⁹Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, Fundo da Frelimo, Departamento das Relações Exteriores, Caixa [hereafter AHM, FdF, DRE, Cx.] 29EE: Pascoal Mocumbi to Marcelino dos Santos 12 Nov. 1966; also, even earlier, Marcelino dos Santos to Mário Matsinhe, 18 Dec. 1964.

²⁰João Paulo Borges Coelho notes Frelimo's embrace of binary oppositions, emphasizing the efficiency of their either/or quality; "Politics and Contemporary History in Mozambique: A Set of Epistemological Notes," *Kronos* 39 (2013): 23. For a version in Portuguese, "Abrir a Fábula: Questões da Política do Passado em Moçambique," *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 106 (2015): 153–66. The following discussion of watchwords amplifies my ideas in "Bright Lines and Faultlines: The politics of refuge in independence-era Mozambique," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 55, no. 3 (2021): 475–96.

²¹On the military context for watchwords in a different time and place, see Frank S. Russell, *Information Gathering in Classical Greece* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 182–3; Jonathan Eaton, "The Political Significance of the Imperial Watchword in the Early Empire," *Greece and Rome* 58, no. 1 (2011): 48–63.

security and trust. In the decade-long fight with Portugal's military, Frelimo's strategy depended on alliances with and support from the rural population — one subject to forced concentration in strategic villages (villagization, or *aldeamento*) as the Portuguese military sought to deny Frelimo guerrillas access to a vital resource and also pursued counterinsurgency “hearts and minds” tactics.²² To know one's allies was, without exaggeration, a matter of life and death. As a kind of encoded speech, watchwords guarantee identity and a common allegiance.

Away from the battlefield context, a watchword serves political, rather than military, ends, signaling shared purpose and loyalty between trusted allies. Watchwords may also be spoken to a newcomer — someone otherwise unknown or not yet accepted as a fully vested member of the community. For these people, it is as much an invitation to join as it is a key that provides access. In a fundamental sense, watchwords ensure that each party to a conversation speaks the same language, with the familiarity and sense of common experience that comes with a shared lexicon. A common vocabulary can also shape a single political vision, with exclusive and inclusive purpose, recognizing allies and enemies alike.²³ In this context, the watchword possesses a heuristic quality that projects the speaker's position, anticipating the mindset of those to whom it is proffered. To usher them into the political community, a watchword must allow them to imagine other, not-yet-met, members of the group they may join at a future moment.²⁴

From 1975, the context for Frelimo's watchwords was more political than martial, yet still summoned the battlefield origins, a legitimating source for those newly experiencing popular political participation under a revolutionary leadership. “The struggle continues,” “Independence or death,” “Unity, work, vigilance” all drew upon everyday language, with a potential to resonate for a broad audience, and readily expressed no matter who was speaking: “*Independência ou morte!*”, exchanged between those who had attended Christian mission schools and used Portuguese, just as easily as “*Uhuru ao kufo!*”, among Kimwani-speakers, the Swahili variant that prevails along the country's neglected northern coast, where opportunities for formal schooling were scarce under the Portuguese.²⁵ Watchwords were a repertoire from which cadres could select certain elements, and which they expressed with a symbolic tone tuned to the middle-ground terrain on which they worked.²⁶ Delivered with the right voicing, they could achieve the desired resonance — uniting or dividing, purging or welcoming — and allow people to imagine the nation Frelimo aimed to create.²⁷ By the time Frelimo took power, some of its watchwords had been in use for a decade or more, making them familiar to anyone who read its newsletters, saw the banners at its rallies, or heard Machel speak. In their ready transfer from the martial to the political context, watchwords also showed a modularity, carrying their symbolic resonance from one arena of action

²²João Paulo Borges Coelho, “Protected Villages and Communal Villages in the Mozambican Province of Tete (1968-1982): A History of State Resettlement Policies, Development and War” (PhD dissertation, University of Bradford, 1993), especially chs. 5 and 7.

²³On the politics of enmity in Tanzanian nationalist discourse; see James Brennan, “Blood Enemies: Exploitation and Urban Citizenship in the Nationalist Political Thought of Tanzania, 1958-75,” *The Journal of African History* 47, no. 3 (2006): 387–413, especially 391 and 398.

²⁴On semiotics and rhetoric, see Christopher Stroud, “Portuguese as ideology and politics in Mozambique: semiotic (re) constructions of a postcolony,” in *Language Ideological Debates*, ed. Jan Blommaert (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 1999), 345; Colin Darch and David Hedges, “Political Rhetoric in the Transition to Mozambican Independence: Samora Machel in Beira, June 1975,” *Kronos* 39 (2013): 32–65.

²⁵AHM, FdF, DRE, Cx. 29CC: Serapiao to Kamati ya Frelimo, Kibiti Branch, 5 Jan. 1966. On the ordinariness of the language and resonance, Tarrow, *The Language*, 17–18. “Unity, Work, Vigilance” — the message Machel delivered when Frelimo took control of the transitional government in 1974 — was a troika of watchwords that prevailed in the run-up to independence.

²⁶This stands in contrast to Basto's “dictionary of ready-made ideas,” which she sees as a canon with stable meanings, reaching for a “discursive hegemony.” Maria-Benedita Basto, *A Guerra das Escritas: Literatura, Nação e Teoria Pós-colonial em Moçambique* (Lisboa: Vendavel, 2006), 176–78, 178–82.

²⁷Tarrow, *The Language*, 12.

into another. As Frelimo made the transition from fighting force to government, this quality could ensure continuity, bringing forward past loyalties and affinities.²⁸

In his June 1975 independence speech, Machel sounded a familiar theme, speaking of the unity imperative and of the need to draw “an ever firmer dividing line between us and the enemy.”²⁹ Easily excluded were allies or enablers of Mozambique’s enemies, as Frelimo saw them: white supremacists in South Africa and Rhodesia; agents of imperialism, largely in western Europe and the United States; and bourgeois capitalists, wherever they might be found. The enemy within was less easily identified but no less a threat. Seeking to make the lines clear, a year after taking power Machel warned his compatriots that the enemy would not betray himself by “mere words, his color, or his clothing.” Vigilance was a guiding watchword, and Machel urged a scrutiny to penetrate appearances, for while “the enemy can use our words, can use our clothing,” he “cannot adopt our way of being.”³⁰

The language of unity and enemies would grow in importance, as Frelimo soon found itself pitted against an armed group — supported initially by the white supremacist regime in Southern Rhodesia and later by South Africa’s apartheid state — in a conflict that eventually became a fully-fledged civil war.³¹ The emphasis on unity, to the exclusion of diverse, let alone dissenting views, went hand-in-hand with defining who would be in, and who would be out, of Frelimo’s nation. Within the single-party system Frelimo created, exclusionary messages and practices fostered, for some, a sense of being unserved by Frelimo’s government. Others have written of Frelimo’s missteps of governance (ill-planned state farms, misbegotten efforts of urban renewal) and even more of the war; my interest lies not in Frelimo’s errors and still less the war, fueled by the decolonizing tensions of Southern Africa’s Cold War crucible.³² Rather, I trace ideas that underpinned Frelimo’s vision of the nation, looking at their use in the hands of local officials and village-level cadres who carried Frelimo’s ideas into the middle ground.

Watchwords is the title Frelimo gave to one of its signature publication series, *Palavras de Ordem*. The series was a repository for the messages that emerged from the tight circle drawn around Machel and his interlocutors. Ideas in the series enjoyed a double or even triple life: delivered in one form and at one time, reappearing in another form and a later time, a deliberate repurposing of what Frelimo saw as its “most powerful weapons.”³³ Some first emerged in speeches Machel

²⁸*Ibid.*, 17–19.

²⁹Machel, “The People’s Republic of Mozambique: The Struggle Continues,” *Review of African Political Economy* 4 (1975), 20. As Yusuf Adam has argued, the “unification narrative” had been present since Frelimo’s foundation in 1962; Adam, “Trick or Treat: The Relationship between Destabilisation, Aid and Government Development Policies in Mozambique, 1975–1990” (PhD dissertation, Roskilde University, 1996), especially 41–46.

³⁰Departamento da Informação e Propaganda da Frelimo (DIP), *Tarefas Concretas e Imediatas a Realizar* (Maputo: DIP, 1976), 9. Rather than “behavior,” I translate *comportamento* as “way of being,” which better captures the fully expressive sense in Portuguese. On how attempts to reshape people’s behavior and thought brought great suffering via forcible displacement, isolation, and abuse in Frelimo’s reeducation camps, see Benedito Luís Machava, “The Morality of Revolution: Urban Cleanup Campaigns, Reeducation Camps, and Citizenship in Socialist Mozambique (1974–1988)” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2019), chs. 5 and 6.

³¹Studies on the war include Dinerman, *Revolution*; Christian Geffray, *La Cause des Armes au Mozambique: Anthropologie d’une guerre civile* (Paris: Karthala, 1990); Margaret Hall and Tom Young, *Confronting Leviathan: Mozambique since Independence* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1997); Eric Morier-Genoud, Michel Cahen, and Domingos Manuel do Rosário, *The War Within: New Perspectives on the Civil War in Mozambique 1976–1992* (Suffolk: James Curry, 2018). The scholarship is extensive; Morier-Genoud and his co-authors include a twenty-six page bibliography of secondary sources.

³²Dinerman, *Revolution*, Sergio Chichava, “‘They can kill us but we won’t go to the communal villages!’ Peasants and the Policy of ‘Socialisation of the Countryside’ in Zambezia,” *Kronos* 39 (2013): 112–30; Borges Coelho, “Protected Villages,” Carlos Quembo, *Poder do Poder: Operação Produção e a Invenção dos “Improdutivos” Urbanos no Moçambique Socialista 1983–1988* (Maputo: Alcance Editores, 2017), Machava, “The Morality,” chs. 2–3.

³³Euclides Gonçalves, “Orientações Superiores: Time and Bureaucratic Authority in Mozambique,” *African Affairs* 112, no. 449 (2013): 608, quoting Machel, *O Partido e As Classes Trabalhadoras Moçambicanas na Edificação da Democracia Popular* (Maputo: Departamento do Trabalho Ideológico da Frelimo, 1977), 38. Texts in the *Watchwords* series enjoyed an afterlife slightly different to the one Emma Hunter and Derek Peterson describe; see *African Print Cultures*:

delivered in internal Frelimo settings in the early 1970s, taking written form for distribution, and published after independence — with some also serialized or excerpted in the national daily newspaper, *Notícias (News)*, or the weekly news magazine *Tempo (Time)*, the illustrated weekly news magazine that chronicled many Frelimo endeavors.³⁴ Certain titles in the series came out in pamphlet form — some with watchwords broken out as bullet points on the inside cover, for easy reference³⁵ — intended for close study with party cells and other groups, at times leading discussions within their communities.³⁶ Frelimo's Department of Ideological Work, responsible for their reissue, called them “indispensable elements of study,” above all for those who had not lived through the earlier years of armed struggle.³⁷

Frelimo ensured that those who carried its ideas of the nation into the middle ground had a broad and varied repertoire at their disposal, of which the *Watchwords* series was but one.³⁸ My focus is on the written texts used to circulate Frelimo's ideas, yet these were simply some among the instruments Frelimo used. Radio Mozambique, the state broadcaster, ran “This Day in History,” a program that recounted signal moments in the country's history, closely scripted around events and people who had significant roles in Frelimo's self-narration.³⁹ Other ways included newer versions of longstanding vernacular expression in dance and music. Frelimo relied on some, such as the musically accompanied dance form *makwayela*, to spread its watchwords in schools, neighborhoods, and churches.⁴⁰ Other such forms of popular culture, including the masked dance practice (*mapiko*) that prevails among Makonde communities in northern Mozambique, had a recent history during Frelimo's war with the Portuguese, when its guerrillas used *mapiko* performance to convey watchwords in sung and embodied ways. After 1975, Frelimo drew *mapiko* and other performative practices into its campaign to mobilize existing cultural forms in service of its vision.⁴¹

Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century, eds. Derek R. Peterson, Emma Hunter, and Stephanie Newell (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 7. Their afterlife unfolded alongside Frelimo's assertions of an unbroken line that reached back to the early 1960s, making for a simulacra of continuity that overlay sometimes significant transformations. Adam, “Trick or Treat,” 35–49.

³⁴On *Tempo*, Emídio Machiana, *A Revista “Tempo” e a Revolução Moçambicana: Da Mobilização Popular ao Problema da Crítica na Informação, 1974-1977* (Maputo: Promédia, 2002).

³⁵For example, Machel's speech, “Enraizar a Escola na Sociedade,” in *Notícias da Beira*, 1 Mar. 1977, 6; and Machel, *Estruturar o Partido para Melhorar a Vida do Povo* (Maputo: Imprensa Nacional, 1983), the back cover shows, “Defender a Pátria, Vencer o Subdesenvolvimento, Construir o Socialismo” (Defend the homeland, Defeat Underdevelopment, Build Socialism).

³⁶Carole Collins, “Dynamising the People,” *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 8 (1978): 1.

³⁷Machel, *A Libertação da Mulher É uma Necessidade da Revolução, Garantia a Sua Continuidade, Condição do Seu Triunfo* (Maputo: Spanos Gráfica, 1979), 5.

³⁸Another long-running series was *Estudos e Orientações (Studies and Instructions)*. For a survey of Frelimo publications, see Colin Darch, “As Publicações da Frelimo: Um Estudo Preliminar,” *Estudos Moçambicanos* 2 (1981): 105–20.

³⁹At the “exhortation” of Frelimo's Central Committee, Radio Mozambique published a series of texts to accompany the program. *Uma data na História: Textos da Rádio Moçambique* (Maputo: Notícias, 1984). On Radio Mozambique more generally during this era, Marco Roque de Freitas, “Sounding the Nation, Sounding the Revolution: Music and Radio Broadcasting in Post-colonial Mozambique (1975-1986),” *Journal of Radio and Audio Media* 29, no. 1 (2022): 80–103.

⁴⁰João Soeiro de Carvalho, “Makwayela: Choral Performance and Nation Building in Mozambique,” *Horizontes Antropológicos* 5, no. 11 (1999): 145–82. According to Carvalho, *makwayela* had origins among the long-distance migrants from southern Mozambique who spent years, even decades, working in South African industry. On this, which dates to the last third of the nineteenth century, see Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1880-1910* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994); Luís António Covane, *O trabalho migratório e a agricultura no sul de Moçambique (1920-1992)* (Maputo: Promédia, 2001).

⁴¹Paolo Israel, *In Step with the Times: Mapiko Masquerades of Mozambique* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014), especially chs. 7 and 8. Maria Paula Meneses gives a close reading of song lyrics to reveal people's shared experience amidst Frelimo's “instrumental use of culture.” Meneses, “Singing Struggles, Affirming Politics: Mozambique's Revolutionary Songs as Other Ways of Being (in) History,” in *Mozambique on the Move: Challenges and Reflections*, eds. Sheila Pereira Khan, Maria Paula Meneses, and Bjørn Enge Bertelsen (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 254–78, here 255.

Frelimo's watchwords rang out in Machel's speeches and limned public spaces — on banners affixed to building façades and hung along major thoroughfares — through which people passed every day. In closing his speeches, Machel would recite up to two dozen watchwords, acknowledging “the People,” the party, workers, students, youth, and others. Machel was without doubt Frelimo's principal herald, and its watchwords were often associated with his tone and style of speech.⁴² Even when there was internal disagreement, Frelimo's commitment to consensus, above all in public discourse, meant that “The party had to speak in one single voice.”⁴³ Or, as Lorenzo Macagno puts it, “When Samora spoke, the Party/State did, too.”⁴⁴ Nor were watchwords and their expressions of ideas, beliefs, and ways of being limited to Machel or Frelimo leadership: others emulated the practice.⁴⁵ At a district-level meeting in the central province of Manica, convened over four days in September 1979, the organizer closed the final session with a recitation of ten watchwords and improvised on Machel, whose earlier counsel to be mindful of “infiltrators” became “Down with the infiltrators in the communal villages.”⁴⁶

Even before taking power, Frelimo grasped the significance of mastering the middle ground, the space in-between the leadership that authored a vision of the nation and the people targeted for its reception. During the yearlong transition (1974–75), when it was a government-in-waiting and its members were able to move openly within the country, but without the powers of state, Frelimo created the dynamizing groups (*grupos dinamizadores*, or GDs).⁴⁷ After independence, the GDs became ubiquitous in the middle ground: in workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, and communal villages.⁴⁸ Composed of a dozen or so people, the GDs existed in parallel to party cells as a highly local mechanism of education and outreach: “an arm with which the Party reaches and shapes the masses.”⁴⁹ Frelimo often conveyed its watchwords directly to the GDs and others in the middle ground, issuing them directives that included detailed instructions for their implementation.

In advance of Frelimo's third congress in 1977, the Department of Ideological Work published booklets on the theses developed for delegates' discussion. Explaining each thesis, the booklets referred to a full range of resources for study: specific titles in the *Watchwords* series and citations

⁴²Basto, *A Guerra*, 183.

⁴³Machava, “The Morality,” 64.

⁴⁴Macagno, “Fragments,” 25.

⁴⁵For some examples: AHM, Comissão Nacional das Aldeias Comunais (CNAC), AC/5: Manica Seminário Provincial Agosto 1977, 7; Manica Comissão Provincial das Aldeias Comunais (CPAC), Maio 1979; AHM, CNAC, AC/145: CPAC Guro Setembro 1978, 3.

⁴⁶DIP, *Tarefas Concretas*, 9; AHM, CNAC, AC/19: República Popular de Moçambique (RPM), Prov. Manica, Distrito de Sussendenga, Seminário Distrital das ACs, Comunicado final.

⁴⁷Collins, “Dynamising the People;” Judith Marshall, “Literacy and People's Power in a Mozambican Factory,” *Comparative Education Review* 34, no. 1 (1990): 61–84; Olívia Maria Faite, “Grupos Dinamizadores e Autoridades Tradicionais: O Caso de Moatize, 1975–1992” (unpublished *licenciatura* thesis, Eduardo Mondlane University, 2001). By 1980, Luís de Brito suggests, Frelimo had subordinated the GDs to formal party structures; “O Poder entre a Utopia e a Realidade,” in Sopa, *Samora*, 41–2. The yearlong transition remains a thinly understood stage in the Mozambique's independence. See Benedito Machava, “Galo amanheceu em Lourenço Marques: O 7 de Setembro e o verso da descolonização em Moçambique,” *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 106 (2015): 54–84; Aquino de Bragança, “Independência sem descolonização: A transferência de poder em Moçambique 1974–1975. Notas sobre os seus antecedentes,” *Estudos Moçambicanos* 5–6 (1986): 7–29.

⁴⁸Interview, M. C., Maputo, 6 June 2017; field notes, Maputo and Manica, May 2022. AHM, CNAC, AC/255: RPM, Ministério de Estado na Presidência, Organização dos Grupos Dinamizadores e Bairros Comunais.” It was an ambitious endeavor, and while there is a risk with mistaking aspiration with results, the GDs had a significant impact, not only immediately on daily life, but over the longer term, including on popular culture, as indicated in a dialogue illustrating a “Moçambicanismo” (a term for local uses of Portuguese): “Your husband beats you? Not on your life! If that happened, I would go to the GD.” (“O teu marido costuma bater-te? *Aikona!* Se isso acontecer, vou ao GD.”) Armando Jorge Lopes, Salvador Júlio Siteo, and Paulino José Nhamuende, *Moçambicanismos: Para um Léxico de Usos do Português Moçambicano* (Maputo: Livraria Universitária, 2002), 19.

⁴⁹AHM, CNAC, AC/243:1a Reunião Nacional sobre Cidades e Bairros Comunais, Resolução sobre a Organização dos Grupos Dinamizadores e Bairros Comunais, 2.

to recent articles published in *Tempo*, together with page number references, quotations, and exegesis.⁵⁰ On the second thesis — “Class struggle: Motor of history” — the author explained the idea of the peasantry as a distinct class, referring to a Central Committee resolution on communal villages (published in a stand-alone collection and in *Tempo* the previous year) and guiding readers to specific passages on “The experience of the liberated zones” and “The current situation in the countryside.”⁵¹ Far more than an introduction to Marxism, the approach drew a clear line from the anticolonial war of the past — for which the “liberated zones” (areas Frelimo controlled during its war with the Portuguese military) were foundational — to the continual struggle of the present. To explain the worker-peasant alliance — celebrated in the full, front-page headline of *Notícias da Beira* (*Beira News*) — and in particular the “historic role of the working class as the leader of the alliance,” it recommended a speech Machel had delivered a few months earlier to workers gathered in Maputo, also published in *Tempo*.⁵² A similar endeavor, aimed at a wider readership, appeared in the daily newspaper published in the country’s second city, Beira: a double-page spread, setting out the forty watchwords prepared for the congress (for example, “Long live the communal villages, basis of rural development!” and “Down with imperialism!”), with commentary on each.⁵³ For Frelimo’s fourth congress, held five years later, the Department of Information and Propaganda produced a list of 191 watchwords, instructing members to encourage their use and spread via radio, the press, newsletters, “down to posters and signs made with local resources.”⁵⁴ Aiming for broader reach, in the months leading up to the congress, the national daily paper published a series of comic strips on the eight theses developed for it, offering still another formula for expression.⁵⁵

Attention to how people used watchwords in the middle ground brings what Borges Coelho has called Frelimo’s “navigation chart” — the self-narration used to legitimize its dominance — into higher resolution. He explains Frelimo’s will to dominate meaning-making via what he calls the “Liberation Script,” an apparatus that legitimizes and renders unquestionable Frelimo’s authority.⁵⁶ He refers to how people spoke of orders going “down to the locality,” though his essay’s sweeping conceptual quality neither traces that path nor examines the points of contact.⁵⁷ I follow the path and consider the place of contact in the communal villages Frelimo created, examining district- and village-level documentation on the guidance given to cadres for mobilization at work and in their communities. Dinerman and Sergio Chichava read similar sources to understand villagers’ rejection of Frelimo’s policies; my reading focuses on just what it was that villagers rejected — which was not the bold-faced headline in *Notícias*, “Down with superstition,” but rather attempts to attach meaning to those policies via village-level initiatives to unmake the world they knew.⁵⁸ Such attempts are most evident in commonplace encounters, as cadres gathered with “the People” in meetings held in far-distant districts, offering the watchwords they imagined would usher them into the nation, exhorting them to live in a desired future rather than an inherited present.

⁵⁰DIP, *Explicação das Teses do Congresso: Textos de Orientação para Monitores, Teses 1 a 3* (Maputo: n.p., n.d. [1977]), 24–25, 36–37, 46–48.

⁵¹DIP, *Explicação*, 36; Frelimo, *Documentos da 8a Sessão do Comité Central* (N.p., n.d. [1976]); *Tempo* 293, 16 May 1976, 34.

⁵²“Viva a Aliança Operário-Componesa,” *Notícias da Beira*, 16 Jan. 1977, 1; DIP, *Explicação*, 36; *Tempo* 316, 24 Oct. 1976, 16–28.

⁵³“Explicação das palavras de ordem para o III congresso da Frelimo,” *Notícias da Beira*, 23 Jan. 1977, 4, 6.

⁵⁴*Boletim da Célula* 20 (1982), 5–10.

⁵⁵The strips ran on the front page of *Notícias* between 29 Oct. and 6 Nov. 1982, in advance of the Apr. 1983 congress.

⁵⁶Borges Coelho, “Politics,” 21. His choice of “apparatus” is deliberate, for its Foucauldian and Agambist sense.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁸*Notícias*, 19 Mar. 1975, as cited in Sergio Chichava, “Le ‘vieux Mozambique’. Étude sur l’identité de la Zambézie” (PhD dissertation, Université Montesquieu-Bordeaux IV, 2007), 373. Others, especially Dinerman and Chichava, examined similar documentation, largely in pursuit of grasping villagers’ perspective. It is on the basis of their work, especially, that we know how thoroughly many people rejected the communal village program. Dinerman, *Revolution*.

“The nation in the village”

Taking possession of the state in 1975, Frelimo left the rural areas that had long been the locus of its power and relocated to cities and towns. The shift distanced it from Mozambique’s overwhelmingly agrarian, rural population. Maputo, the capital, was about as far south as one could travel from the northern strongholds that had sustained Frelimo during the war with the Portuguese and yet still be in Mozambique. Any government — especially one so attached to the idea that its time waging a rural insurgency had been an important source of revolutionary wisdom — as ambitious as Frelimo’s would have been concerned with how to reach the countryside. One of its most expansive endeavors in the first years was to resettle the rural population into communal villages, a plan that at once served socialist traditions of collective production, extended state capacity into areas where it was largely absent, and connected Frelimo to the rural spaces it saw as central to its ontology.⁵⁹

Launched in 1976, the creation of communal villages shared something in common with other ventures, such as *ujamaa* in Tanzania, above all its boldness and top-down planning. Frelimo’s effort is most distinctive as a mirror held up to its politics, more so than as a strategy for rural development.⁶⁰ The communal villages were “the spinal column” for Frelimo’s plans to transform the country, a “political instrument” that would make “it possible for us to exercise successfully hard-won power.”⁶¹ That watchword, offered by Machel to Frelimo’s Central Committee in 1976 (and included in a national assembly resolution in 1977), still echoed three years later, as an official in the central province of Manica evoked Machel (the “maximal leader of the Mozambican Revolution”), speaking of the communal villages as the “spinal column” of the entire country.⁶² In Frelimo’s understanding of the state and the nation, each part was indissoluble from every other, or in Machel’s phrasing, “The Nation is not the sum of the provinces, nor are these fractions of the Nation.... The Nation is in the Communal Village and in the capital of the country, it is Nation in the Communal Village, in the district, in the capital.”⁶³ In this imagining, the most-distant village held the same valence as Maputo.

Frelimo created communal villages on a mass scale: within three years, over a million people, nearly fifteen percent of the rural population, had moved into more than a thousand villages.⁶⁴ As central as resettlement and collectivized production were, the effort went beyond moving people into “well-organized villages” and introducing different methods of collective cultivation.⁶⁵ The drive also targeted people’s “ways of being,” above all as markers of their position in Frelimo’s

⁵⁹On the significance of the rural-to-urban relocation, Borges-Coelho, “Politics,” 23; also Maria Paula Meneses “Xiconhoca, o inimigo: Narrativas de violência sobre a construção da nação em Moçambique,” *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 106 (2015): 44.

⁶⁰Priya Lal makes an analogous point for Tanzania, and points out the limitations of analyses that reproduce a top-down view; *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania: Between the Village and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4, 15. On Mozambique, Borges-Coelho, “Protected Villages” is the most complete work; see also Chichava, “Le ‘vieux Mozambique;” Yusuf Adam, “Mueda, 1917-1990: Resistência, Colonialismo, Libertação e Desenvolvimento,” *Arquivo* 14 (1993): especially 44–57; Joseph Hanlon, *Mozambique: The Revolution under Fire* (London: Zed Books, 1984), 221–31; Merle Bowen, “Peasant Agriculture in Mozambique: the Case of Chokwe, Gaza Province,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 23 (1989): 355–79; M. Anne Pitcher, “Disruption without Transformation: Agrarian Relations and Livelihoods in Nampula Province, Mozambique 1975–1995,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, no. 1 (1998): 115–40; Harry West, *Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 163–79. On shortcomings and resistance, see especially Chichava, ““They can kill us;”” Jessica Schafer, “Guerrillas and Violence in the War in Mozambique: De-socialization or Re-socialization?” *African Affairs* 100, no. 399 (2001): 215–37.

⁶¹Frelimo, *Documentos da 8a Sessão*, 81.

⁶²On the resolution, *Tempo* 363, 18 Sep. 1977, 52–53; on the echo in 1979, AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, CNAC, Acta da Reunião de Estudo das Resoluções da 1a RNAC, 1.

⁶³Machel, *Organizemos*, 6–7.

⁶⁴Chichava, “Le ‘vieux Mozambique;” 362. Borges Coelho shows that communal village creation began before the formal policy launch in 1977. Borges Coelho, “Protected Villages,” chs. 9–10.

⁶⁵AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Prov. de Manica, Distrito de Guro, Comunicado Final, 1º Seminário Distrital das Aldeias Comunas [1979], 1–3.

nation. Toward that end, the officials and cadres who oversaw the formation and organization of communal villages targeted beliefs and practices seen as inconsistent with Frelimo's style of imagining the nation. Throughout the endeavor, Frelimo used its watchwords to reposition the future in the present. For those tasked with doing so, especially middle-ground actors such as the GDs, this meant "sowing the seeds of a future that did not exist" — no small matter.⁶⁶

Much of what we know about the communal villages in Mozambique centers on how the endeavor fell short of its aims, at least as motors for agricultural output, or how people rejected Frelimo's ham- or heavy-handed actions to overcome their reluctance to resettle and reorganize their household production along collectivized lines.⁶⁷ Indeed, some argue that Renamo drew support in direct measure from people's rejection of Frelimo's plans.⁶⁸ During the war for independence, Frelimo had urged people to accept the possibility of death in pursuing the future Frelimo sought to bring (Independence or Death!). With Frelimo in power, as Chichava writes, people inverted that formulation: when faced with the watchword, "Long live the communal villages, base of rural development!", some declared a readiness to die rather than settle in communal villages.⁶⁹ It is difficult to separate, at least from 1982 (when the war intensified and spread in scope) onward, social or political dynamics in rural Mozambique from the war, because it was precisely in villages all over the country where the leading edge of Frelimo's imagination gave way to the bleeding edge of Mozambique's descent into war. Chichava, Christian Geffray, and Dinerman have each explored the connection between the communal villages and the war, yet we know far less about the communal village experience outside the war as such.⁷⁰

When people arrived at the locations chosen for communal villages, they found the very places themselves named anew to reflect the style of Frelimo's imagination. Many village names drew on foundational elements of Frelimo's independence narrative: "Julius Nyerere," Frelimo's host and patron during the war with the Portuguese, whose steadfast support was inseparable from the movement's success; "September 25th," the day in 1964 on which Frelimo celebrated its first armed attack on the Portuguese colonial state; "February 3rd," when Eduardo Mondlane, known as Frelimo's martyred founding president, was killed by parcel bomb in Dar-es-Salaam in 1969; "Josina Machel," Machel's first wife, a celebrated leader of Frelimo's Women's Brigade; "Lusaka Accords," the 1974 agreement with the Portuguese that ended the war and paved the way for Frelimo's assumption of sovereignty; "Vigilance," which called to mind a watchword (Unity, Work, Vigilance) Machel offered in his 1974 speech marking the transitional government's assumption of power. Others had origins outside Mozambique's road to independence — "May 1st" or "Marien N'Gouabi," the Congolese soldier who established a Marxist-Leninist state in 1968 — yet whose meaning in Mozambique reflected Frelimo's self-narration of its path to power.⁷¹ These new names were at times layered over others, some rooted in long-standing linguistic geographies that located people within networks of affect or authority.⁷² In renaming these places, Frelimo sought to remake the ways in which people saw themselves in relation to the world that surrounded them.

⁶⁶Interview, Nhamatanda, 24 May 2022.

⁶⁷Chichava, "Le 'vieux Mozambique,'" Borges-Coelho, "Protected Villages," Dinerman, *Revolution*.

⁶⁸Chichava, "They can kill us;" Geffray, *La Cause des Armes*; and Dinerman's critique, "In Search of Mozambique: The Imaginings of Christian Geffray in *La Cause des Armes au Mozambique*. *Anthropologie d'une Guerre Civile*," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20, no. 4 (1994): 569–86.

⁶⁹"Explicação das palavras de ordem para o III congresso da Frelimo," *Notícias da Beira*, 23 Jan. 1977, 4; Chichava "They can kill us," 118–19.

⁷⁰See note 31 for references to scholarship on the war.

⁷¹A partial selection of names; see AHM, CNAC, AC/5, 12, 19, 99, 140, 145, 155. "Vigilance" comes from "Moamba: Aldeia Comunal É Vigilância," *Tempo* 444, 15 Apr. 1979, 26–27.

⁷²On placenames in Mozambique, see Saul Dias Rafael, *Dicionário Toponímico, Histórico, Geográfico e Etnográfico de Moçambique* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, 2002).

The discussion here focuses mostly on the center and north-central provinces, parts of the country that cleave toward a mean, at least in how people received the communal village project. This distinguishes them from the enthusiastic embrace of Cabo Delgado in the north and Gaza in the south and from the vigorous opposition it saw in the Zambezi-valley province of Zambezia.⁷³ The provinces of Manica and Nampula offer a midline context — suggesting neither the program’s embrace or its rejection, though even these province-level generalizations cover significant variation.⁷⁴ Moreover, north-central Nampula’s Muslim communities and west-central Manica’s Christian adherents present illustrative instances of how middle-ground actors enacted Frelimo’s watchwords in the spiritual realm.

In examining how people used watchwords in the communal villages, I locate their origins within Frelimo’s senior ranks and consider the resonance they then held when used in district- and village-level gatherings. This view is vital to understand how most Mozambicans encountered watchwords, because when people rejected Frelimo’s ideas, it was less in reaction to one of Machel’s speeches, an article in *Tempo*, or a publication by the Department of Information and Propaganda, if only because those sources were removed from everyday life, above all in rural areas, where these forms of communication were less common and people were less likely to be readers. Bold-face phrases in the newspaper were where the topline message appeared, the vehicle local party members used to deliver watchwords to GDs and others.⁷⁵ When local officials, other cadres, and GD members transformed watchwords into practices of governing that would touch people’s “way of being,” they did not do so merely by declaring “Long live the collective organization of the people!” or “Down with polygamy.”⁷⁶ To be sure, they often opened and closed their encounters with these declamatory recitations — but in between they worked through just the sort of “creative applications” that Frelimo urged.⁷⁷ And when certain “malcontents,” as local officials called them, aimed to “demobilize” villagers and even destroyed new homes being built for the communal villages, they did so not in reaction to ideas in one of Machel’s speeches or an article in the daily paper, but on seeing the people who lived alongside them taking actions — such as surveying land for communal village allotments — that touched qualities of ordinary life.⁷⁸

What happened to watchwords in the hands of Gustavo Francisco, a thirty-three-year-old GD leader in the communal village September 25th (one of many so named to commemorate the first attack of Frelimo’s armed struggle) in Nampula, northeast of the Zambezi valley?⁷⁹ A married father of two, Francisco had completed six years of formal schooling and was a trained literacy instructor. He tuned in to broadcasts of Radio Mozambique and held a subscription to *Tempo*. It was individuals such as Francisco whose access to print media and ownership of a radio allowed him to keep abreast of “the most important events in the life of the Nation,” briefing village residents on Frelimo directives.⁸⁰ The work he did meant that those without access to news sources — those not literate in Portuguese, or peasants who would never hear radio news broadcasts in the local language (rather than Portuguese), because they aired in mid-afternoon, while they

⁷³On Zambezia, Chichava, “Le ‘vieux Mozambique.’” In Cabo Delgado, the enthusiasm came across clearly in a letter sent from a communal village, in which the writers not only embraced collective cultivation as a way to work for unity, but also celebrated Frelimo for having ended “fifty years of colonialism” and ushered in the “total independence of Mozambique.” AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Aldeia Communal Ntete, 22 Feb. 1979.

⁷⁴For analysis of resistance to communal villages in Cabo Delgado, Bertil Egerö, *Mozambique: A Dream Undone. The Political Economy of Democracy, 1975-84* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1987) 155–65.

⁷⁵Interview, Nhamatanda, 24 May 2022; Interview, Messika, 25 May 2022.

⁷⁶AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Prov. Manica, Distrito de Sussendenga, Seminário Distrital das ACs; Comunicado final; RPM Prov. de Manica, Comissão Distrital das Aldeias Comunais, Rel. do Sem. do Distrito de Mossurize, 4.

⁷⁷“Aplicamos Criadoramente as Palavras de Ordem da Frelimo” (N.p: n.p., n.d. [1976]), 9–10.

⁷⁸AHM, CNAC, AC/5: RPM, Província de Sofala, Distrito de Buzi, Relatório da Comissão das Aldeias Comunais no Distrito de Buzi (Jan. 1977), 1.

⁷⁹AHM, CNAC, AC/140: Província de Nampula, CPAC, Relatório 1978, 3.

⁸⁰AHM, CNAC, AC/140: Província de Nampula, CPAC, Relatório 1978, 3.

were at work in their fields — would still know of Frelimo's plans and vision, at least in the terms Francisco used to convey them.⁸¹ Reports or correspondence that emerged from the meetings he convened with others in the communal village — or from the uncountable others held in communal villages created throughout the country — make visible the connective thread that linked capital and communal village in the fabric of Frelimo's nation. This is the terrain on which some Mozambicans did the work of conveying watchwords to others, and where people made meaning, engaged in "political work," and "hashed out" solutions to the challenge of living an unknowable future in the present.⁸²

"The village in the nation"

Taking their cues from Machel, who spoke of a "permanent battle of the New against the Old" in which there was no place for "old habits, old ideas, old ways of thinking," officials, GD members, and others occupied with the communal villages targeted practices and beliefs seen as the wellspring of superstition and ignorance that imperiled the nation.⁸³ Those who held onto the "old ways" — not merely incompatible with the future Frelimo imagined but also associated with the colonial past on which Frelimo wanted all to turn their backs — were, at worst, potential agents of the neighboring white minority regimes and stalking horses for imperialism, but even otherwise harbored values incompatible with the continuing revolution, potential carriers of disintegrative influences. Middle-ground actors, bringing Frelimo's watchwords "down to the locality," worked to steer the wayward back to Frelimo's line.⁸⁴

Two years into the effort, district officials gathered in September 1979 to discuss progress, together with communal village residents of Guro district, lying close by the border with what would become Zimbabwe in the coming year. In opening the meeting, they explained that to live in a communal village meant to "fulfill the watchword and in so doing, fight the vestiges inherited from the old society."⁸⁵ To take up the watchwords was to line up with Frelimo, where there was no space for keepers of those "old ways," including chiefs and other holders of "traditional authority," such as healers and spirit mediums. When, in a neighboring district, a discussion focused on health promotion in communal villages, some mentioned spirit mediums known as *macangueiros*, practitioners of certain forms of traditional medicine. Calling them "liars and confusionists" who "keep the people in ignorance," those leading the discussion concluded that they should be opposed and "their instruments put in museums, and those who are obstinate must be punished."⁸⁶ Antagonism toward such respect or attachment to a world of ancestral spirits was not new; two years earlier, the regional daily newspaper had run one of the famous Xiconhoca cartoons targeting that attachment.⁸⁷ Xiconhoca — an oafish, caricatured enemy of the people who opposed all that stood in the path of his self-gratification — was depicted inciting fellow villagers not to relocate to a communal village (despite devastating floods), because to do so would be "to abandon the land of our

⁸¹AHM, CNAC, AC/12: Assunto: Relatório da Viagem de Trabalho à Província de Nampula, 6.

⁸²AHM, CNAC, AC/12: Assunto, 4–5.

⁸³Machel, *Estruturar o Partido*, 18; Machel, *Fazer da Escola uma Base para o Povo Tomar o Poder* (Maputo: Imprensa Nacional, 1979), 28–29.

⁸⁴Borges Coelho, "Politics," 24.

⁸⁵AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Prov. de Manica, Distrito de Guro, Comunicado Final, 1º Seminário Distrital das ACs, 1.

⁸⁶AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, Seminário Provincial Preparatório da 1ª Reunião Nacional das Aldeias Comuns, 11. On Frelimo's anti-sorcery stance, Harry West, "Sorcery of Construction and Socialist Modernization: Ways of Understanding Power in Postcolonial Mozambique," *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 1 (2001): 119–50.

⁸⁷The name is an amalgam of "Xico", a diminutive of Francisco and "nhoca" (sometimes rendered *nyoka*), meaning snake in a number of southeast African languages: Frank the Snake. Work on Xiconhoca includes Elísio Macamo, "Violence and Political Culture in Mozambique," *Social Dynamics* 42, no. 1 (2016): 85–105; Meneses, "Xiconhoca;" Lars Buur, "Xiconhoca: Mozambique's Ubiquitous Post-Independence Traitor," in *Traitors: Suspicion, Intimacy, and the Ethics of State-building*, eds. Sharika Thiraganama and Tobias Kelly (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 24–47.

ancestors.”⁸⁸ The cartoon format hardly softened the critique of those whose attachment for the “old ways” kept them from stepping toward Frelimo’s future.

Frelimo’s antipathy toward spiritual belief and practice did not end with ancestor veneration, which was often associated with chieftaincy and traditional healing; its opposition was ecumenical: Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and African-rooted belief and practice all came in for criticism.⁸⁹ As early as 1970, Machel had spoken of religion as a “false solidarity;” for Frelimo cadres, “the only religion was to serve the masses.”⁹⁰ But Mozambicans did not need to hear Machel speak — in person or broadcast on Radio Mozambique — or read *Palavras de Ordém* or the newspapers to get the message. Those responsible for communal villages conveyed the sentiment openly, using a variety of approaches to make the faithful feel unwelcome, if not to ban their practices outright: discouraging open expression of faith or observance of practice; attempting to prevent inculcation of faith among children; excluding religious institutions; and, finally, advocating for practices that would drive the faithful out of the communal villages themselves.

For some committed to modernization, religious belief was dangerously close to superstition, with its elements of irrationality and backward ways of thinking. For those more committed to socialism, spiritual belief represented an unscientific mindset incompatible with historical materialism, and membership in a faith community a potential competition to class identity in general and the worker-peasant alliance in particular. Still, leadership and cadres alike were aware that religious belief — in Islam, Christianity, and ancestral spirits — persisted even within their ranks.⁹¹ Within the milieu of the communal villages, such awareness was evident in the day-to-day, given the proximity in which people lived, but also simply because cadres, members of the dynamizing groups, and ordinary villagers were well-familiar with each other’s “ways of being.” During periods when the faithful were fasting, officials in Nampula noted that amidst political meetings, when people paused for refreshment, “ten or fifteen people might not hesitate to leave the meeting as it was time for prayers, even when we are considering members of the Dynamizing Groups who are religious believers.”⁹² Spiritual practice and observance endured in the face of Frelimo’s open skepticism. Some lived contradiction in the quotidian, condemning Christianity in the morning and then leaving early from afternoon meetings to take their children to catechism classes.⁹³

Unlike some other lightning changes Frelimo introduced — such as the nationalization of housing stock in 1976 or the 1977 declaration that all students in the eighth year of formal schooling would end their studies and enter the workforce — the approach to religion was not so immediate or sweeping, reflecting perhaps internal ambivalence or realization that so rapid a change might not be feasible.⁹⁴

⁸⁸*Notícias da Beira*, 4 Mar. 1977, 3. The strip spoke to a reality: after floods destroyed some existing rural communities, the government resettled environmental refugees in communal villages. Xiconhoca was, in ways that go far beyond the discussion here, the absolute inverse of the *Homem Novo*. Eric Allina, “‘New Men’ and ‘Lone Wolves’: The politics of socialist labor in southern Africa and central Europe,” paper delivered at the African Studies Association, 2019.

⁸⁹More generally, see Alexandrino José, “Samora e as Confissões Religiosas: Um diálogo inacabado,” in Sopa, *Samora*, 149–60. At times Frelimo singled out Christianity, and especially the Catholic Church, owing to its close relationship with the colonial state. See Eric Morier-Genoud, “Of God and Caesar: The Relationship between Christian Churches and the State in Colonial Mozambique, 1974–1981,” *Le Fait Missionnaire* 3 (1996): especially 51–55; Morier-Genoud, *Catholicism and the Making of Politics in Central Mozambique, 1940–1986* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2019), especially ch 6. For Frelimo’s heightened attacks on the Catholic Church, see, for example, Machel, *Fazer Viver a Linha do Partido em Cada Trabalhador* (Maputo: Imprensa Nacional, 1979), 21. Frelimo initiated a partial rapprochement, at least with some institutional leadership, in 1982; Macagno, “Fragmentos,” 28.

⁹⁰Machel, *Compreender a Nossa Tarefa*, 9.

⁹¹Interview, M. C., Maputo, 6 June 2016; AHM, CNAC, AC/12: RPM, Prov. de Nampula, Distrito de Mogovolas, Relatório dos Trabalhos Desenvolvidos de 13 a 23 de Novembro de 1978.

⁹²AHM, CNAC, AC/12: RPM, Prov. de Nampula, Distrito de Mogovolas, Relatório dos Trabalhos Desenvolvidos de 13 a 23 de Novembro de 1978, 4.

⁹³Interview, M. C., Maputo, 6 June 2016.

⁹⁴On nationalization of housing, David Morton, *Age of Concrete: Housing and the Shape of Aspiration in the Capital of Mozambique* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press: 2019).

This was evident in the concluding remarks at a district-level seminar held in Guro (not far south of the Zambezi) in September 1979, where the discussion addressed how religious residents might be permitted to engage in their practices. Believers were to be included in the organization of village life, yet “when it is time for prayer, they must do so alone,” proposed an official, and should not proselytize — in the phrasing used, “make propaganda” toward — others in the village.⁹⁵ In a neighboring district, officials proposed similar restrictions. Believers, it was suggested, should pray only in the confines of their own houses, and should not join together with others in prayer. Still more, officials proposed action against “religious exchanges,” and that believers should be “prohibited from going from one district to another with the purpose of prayer.”⁹⁶ Aside from an inability, or unwillingness, to recognize the essentially social and collective element of many practices of prayer, the stance also revealed Frelimo’s opposition to propagation of the faith. Although they did not say in so many words, the officials sought to constrain believers’ expressions of faith and to curtail any effect they could have on others, imagining the arrival of an unreligious future in the present.

For believers themselves, it would have been hard to see Frelimo’s interest to control religious belief and practices as anything less than an effort at their outright elimination, for statements against proselytizing were not limited to the social sphere, but also the familial. At an August 1979 meeting in Angoche, a coastal district north of the Zambezi, officials gathered representatives from the communal villages in preparation for an upcoming national meeting. In discussing religion, they reached the conclusion that children “should not participate in religious groups.”⁹⁷ They did not elaborate on their reasons, but their counterparts in Guro justified the same restriction, expressing concern that children might arrive at school “wiped out” from having been up late at prayer.⁹⁸ They called on village authorities to oversee the children of believers “step by step.”⁹⁹ Some officials — starting with Machel himself — tied religion to other elements of the legacy of colonial capitalism, such as polygamy, the transfer of bridewealth, and what they called “premature marriage,” all of which they saw as leading young people astray.¹⁰⁰ Eliminating such practices was part of their effort to mobilize young people and elevate their “political level,” all to counter enemy action and influence.¹⁰¹ Those who gathered at the district level expressed the ultimate goal, indirectly if not quite obliquely: that if they pursued such efforts successfully, religion “might remain something only for the elderly.”¹⁰² The message sent was that religious belief could be only a millstone that would hold back the nation’s youth, keeping them tethered to the past rather than anchored in the future.

Operating in the middle ground, cadres came up with strategies that fulfilled the exhortation to develop creative applications of the watchwords.¹⁰³ In bringing Frelimo’s ideas down to the locality,

⁹⁵AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, Distrito de Guro, Comunicado Final, 1º Seminário Distrital das Aldeias Comunaes, 3.

⁹⁶AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, Distrito de Barué, Síntese dos trabalhos do 1º Seminário Distrital sobre as ACs em Fase preparatório da 1ª Reunião Nacional das Aldeias Comunaes, 2.

⁹⁷AHM, CNAC, AC/12: RPM, Província de Nampula, Distrito de Angoche, Fase Preparatória de 1a Reunião Nacional das Aldeias Comunaes, 2.

⁹⁸AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, Distrito de Guro, Comunicado Final, 1º Seminário Distrital das Aldeias Comunaes, 3; AHM, CNAC, AC/19: Prov. de Manica, Gabinete Provincial Preparatório da 1a Reunião N.A.C., Síntese das Actividades Desenvolvidas Durante a 1a Fase da Preparação da 1a Reunião Nacional das Aldeias Comunaes, 6. Machava notes similar criticism, in urban settings around Maputo; “Morality,” 123–24.

⁹⁹AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, Distrito de Guro, Comunicado Final, 1º Seminário Distrital das Aldeias Comunaes, 3.

¹⁰⁰AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, Distrito de Manica, Acta da reunião com as estruturas do distrito, 1. Machel, *Sobre os Problemas Função e Tarefas da Juventude Moçambicana* (Maputo: Imprensa Nacional, 1980), 15; Machel, *A Libertação da Mulher*, 20; Machel, *Fazer da Escola*, 29.

¹⁰¹AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, Distrito de Manica, Acta da reunião com as estruturas do distrito, 1.

¹⁰²AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, Distrito de Manica, Acta da reunião, 1–2.

¹⁰³“Apliquemos Criadoramente.”

they gave living color to the simple declaration “Down with superstition.”¹⁰⁴ At an October 1979 meeting, the leadership in the central province of Manica gathered at a secondary school (named after Joaquim Mara, a celebrated hero who had died in the war with the Portuguese) with local agricultural staff, village authorities, and communal villagers themselves to discuss progress made over the previous two years and difficulties still to be overcome. In considering the nature of the communal village itself, those gathered agreed that it was “where the people, organized, consolidate national unity.”¹⁰⁵ More concretely, they addressed how to counter religious activity: the communal village was a “liberated zone” and as such, no “physical structure of religion could exist in it.” The reference to the liberated zone, considered a fundamental source Frelimo’s revolutionary wisdom, was a rhetorical move that worked to put the idea beyond debate.¹⁰⁶ Organized religious activity was unacceptable, though “spontaneous practices” could be tolerated. They also debated specific strategies to counter religious practices. One participant brought up how, in a province north of the Zambezi, where Muslims made up a significant proportion of the population, staff had introduced rabbit and swine husbandry in the communal villages “as a way of fighting religious activity.”¹⁰⁷ Aware of Islam’s dietary prohibitions and beliefs on pork as a contaminating element to be avoided, seminar participants in Manica suggested the approach “could be adapted in our province to fight religious actions that still persist.” Manica had only a small Muslim population, but it was home to adherents of a number of apostolic Christian sects — Johane Marangue, Johane Massoe, and the Zion Christian Church — for whom pork and rabbit were prohibited.¹⁰⁸ Encouraging communal villagers to raise pigs and rabbits may have been principally appealing as a food production strategy, but their discussion focused on the additional beneficial effect of repelling followers of the three sects, since their adepts “cannot even approach a corral” holding these animals.¹⁰⁹ If successful, the outcome would have been no unintended consequence or product of ignorance. It was a proposal to render the communal villages profane, a contaminated, unwelcoming space from which believers should flee.

Unlike the efforts that Benedito Machava and Eric Morier-Genoud have examined in other settings, the strategy pursued in the communal villages was less to purge faith from people’s minds, than to discourage its expression and transmission, first, and second, to encourage the deeply devout to leave.¹¹⁰ Considered alongside the reeducation camps, the tactics were comparatively mild, even if they were evidence of no less fierce an intolerance of religious faith. Lacking the violence of the camps, or an equivalent coercive displacement (many of those in the camps had been seized in distant urban street sweeps), the approach in the communal villages was no less visceral an attack on spiritual belief nor less clear a desire to remove the religious from the nation.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴“Na Zambézia—Abaixo à superstição é a palavra de ordem” (In Zambézia—The watchword is down with superstition), *Notícias*, 19 Mar. 1975, as cited in Chichava, “Le ‘vieux Mozambique,’” 373.

¹⁰⁵AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, Seminário Provincial Preparatório da 1a Reunião Nacional das Aldeias Comunaes, 3.

¹⁰⁶The liberated zones were sometimes cast as a model for the communal villages; “Crônica,” *Tempo* 432, 14 Jan. 1979, 18.

¹⁰⁷AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, Seminário Provincial Preparatório da 1a Reunião Nacional das Aldeias Comunaes, 4.

¹⁰⁸All three sects had origins in colonial Zimbabwe and South Africa, where Mozambican labor migrants encountered them, some establishing local branches upon return home. Joel Maurício das Neves, “Economy, Society, and Labour Migration in Central Mozambique, 1930-c.1965: A Case Study of Manica Province” (PhD dissertation, SOAS, 1998), especially ch. 9; Joel Maurício das Neves, “A American Board Mission e os desafios do protestantismo em Manica e Sofala (Moçambique), ca. 1900-1950,” *Lusotopie* 5 (1998): 335–43.

¹⁰⁹AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Província de Manica, Seminário Provincial Preparatório da 1a Reunião Nacional das Aldeias Comunaes, 4.

¹¹⁰Morier-Genoud, “Of God,” 51–55; Machava, “Morality,” this is not to say that the effort succeeded. See also Benedito Machava, “Reeducation Camps, Austerity, and the Carceral Regime in Socialist Mozambique (1974-79),” *The Journal of African History* 60, no. 3 (2019): 429–55 but especially 449–55.

¹¹¹On the urban “clean-up” campaign, Machava, “The Morality,” chs. 2–3; Quembo, *Poder do Poder*.

As ill-disposed as some Mozambicans were to leave behind such beliefs, the leap Frelimo expected them to make was just as stark in material life. The residents of the communal village May 1st (this one somewhat south of the Zambezi and not far from the Zimbabwean border) got a good sense of this at a meeting in September 1979, when a cadre explained how villagers should adopt new methods for processing the foodstuffs they produced. In particular, he advised, they should cease spreading pounded grain to dry on the lengths of cloth known as *capulanas* (typically used as a body wrapper, and often as well to secure an infant or small child to one's back), since they were also used for bathing and were thus "dirty."¹¹² Instead, he suggested they should use manufactured cooking implements, without appearing to grasp that such items were rarely available and, when they were, beyond the very modest means of most. His advice, offered to villagers so poorly served by commercial networks that they often lacked clothing for daily use, made sense only in a world that did not yet exist.¹¹³ For some within Frelimo's inner circle, such thinking reflected a conviction that the future was as real as the present, while for many Mozambicans, this way of thinking was not merely unimaginable, but a cruel indifference to material reality.¹¹⁴ The future, whatever potential it held, could not displace people's attachment to, or need to confront the struggles of, the present.

Conclusion

Frelimo's nationalism was unable to evoke a community for many Mozambicans. It is hard to know, probably unknowable, how much the war that wrecked the country from 1977 onward was responsible.¹¹⁵ A war that destructive dooms almost any project. Yet even absent the war — or the loss of Machel in 1986, when his plane flew into a mountain in then-Swaziland — the style in which Frelimo imagined the nation could never have caught on with many Mozambicans. Frelimo insisted that people imagine themselves in a community that did not yet exist, one that could exist only in the world Frelimo aimed to summon into being. Frelimo's nationalism required Mozambicans to live in the future tense: the message — from Machel, the maximal leader, down to neighborhood- or village-level cadres — directed them to a future unhitched from past and present. Whether such a future was within reach, or was one toward which they wanted to turn, seemed at times to be an unconsidered question. Frelimo's style of imagining the national community heralded ways of thinking about relationships between self and other, about authority, about "ways of being," at times not even reminiscent of those their parents or previous generations had known. Save for its own history, or that of Portugal's colonial crimes, Frelimo was unerringly forward-looking. After all, "Independence or death," one of Frelimo's earliest watchwords, discounts the present, with its concrete risks, in favor of the future, with its unsecured rewards.

For Frelimo and others fighting colonialism, that watchword, with its wartime origins, evoked a choice only in rhetorical terms: to fight for independence or die in the effort. Who would not fight for freedom? Two decades later, as many of the dreams of independence were coming undone, for those who had yet to join Frelimo's nation, the exhortation became an ultimatum.¹¹⁶ In earlier

¹¹²AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Prov. de Manica, Distrito de Guro, Comunicado Final, 1º Seminário Distrital das Aldeias Comunas, 3. Though he did not single out women, his comments were gendered, for is it women who pound grain and the *capulana* is a woman's garment. For analogous gendered aspects of Tanzania's villagization project, Priya Lal, "Militants, Mothers, and the National Family: Ujamaa, Gender, and Rural Development in Postcolonial Tanzania," *The Journal of African History* 51, no. 1 (2010): 1–21, especially 15–19.

¹¹³AHM, CNAC, AC/19: RPM, Prov. de Manica, Comissão Provincial de Apoio às Aldeias Comunas, Relatório Síntese das Actividades desenvolvidas no mês de Setembro, 2, 3.

¹¹⁴On this formulation of future, present and reality, Timothy Snyder, "Crimea: Putin vs. Reality," *The New York Review*, 7 Mar. 2014, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2014/03/07/crimea-putin-vs-reality/>.

¹¹⁵For those who believe the war was fundamentally internal in origin, a rejection of Frelimo, this formulation is nonsensical.

¹¹⁶My phrasing draws on Egerö, *A Dream Undone*.

stages of styling the nation, Frelimo often aimed to win over the wavering through suasion, or in its terms, “moral combat” and “ideological struggle.”¹¹⁷ Yet as the war with Renamo spread, its home-grown quality imperiling Frelimo’s sovereignty, Machel spoke in more martial terms. In a December 1984 speech, he deplored the ravages of the war. He referred to those fighting the government as armed bandits, supported by South Africa’s white supremacist government, but also as “our children,” underscoring their origin from within.¹¹⁸ Those fighting Frelimo had become a mortal threat, Machel explained, even as their actions also helped Mozambicans to understand that “our child... can also be our enemy.” In a quick lexical shift, he cast them out not only of the nation, but of humanity, evoking the language of contagion and parasites, calling them “lice in the blanket.” Directly addressing his audience, he asked what was to be done and received the response, “Kill them!” Not yet satisfied, he asked again, “what do you want?”, receiving the reply, “We want to kill them, as they also kill us! We want weapons so we can kill them!”¹¹⁹

The open incitement to violence, while perhaps shocking, also reflects the singular ferocity with which civil wars are fought.¹²⁰ Many fled the spreading intensity of fighting, generating enormous numbers of refugees and internally displaced. Yet this was simply the evolution of a dynamic already underway: some Mozambicans had withdrawn a decade earlier or more, at least in political terms, withholding their participation in Frelimo’s endeavors.¹²¹ Others did so literally, abandoning or refusing to move to the communal villages, distancing themselves from Frelimo’s indivisible “Nation in the Communal Village.”¹²² Shortly after independence ceremonies in 1975, Machel had condemned those who left the new nation, suggesting they lacked conviction in the country’s future and “had no *pátria*.”¹²³ Lacking a homeland, they also had no access to the identity and rights associated with membership in a nation, which itself is as rooted in time as it is in place.¹²⁴ Frelimo’s nation, situated in the future tense, was inaccessible to those unable or unwilling to imagine it.

In the years after Machel’s death, Frelimo abandoned its nationalism, exchanging the vision of national community born exclusively in revolution and shorn of familiar “ways of being” for one open to any citizen in the national territory, even their enemies.¹²⁵ This vision, more accessible, had its own orientation toward the future, but it was one with fewer barriers to imagination, allowing people to look forward from the present. Neatly framed for the 1994 national elections — the first open contest the country ever had — Frelimo offered a message that could elicit a popular nationalist sentiment, taking the present as point of departure. So, too, after years of war that wrecked the country, many were glad to excise that recent past from memory.¹²⁶ No longer telling people how to join the nation, Frelimo presented them a choice to make it their own: “the future is in your hands.”¹²⁷

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¹¹⁷Machel, *Compreender*, 16.

¹¹⁸Machel, *Venceremos Também Hoje o Inimigo de Sempre* (Maputo: Notícias, 1985), 27.

¹¹⁹Machel, *Venceremos*, 27.

¹²⁰Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5.

¹²¹On this prologue to political displacement, Allina, “Bright Lines,” especially 480–81.

¹²²Machel, *Organizemos*, 6–7. For Chichava, the refusal was “peasant resistance to socialization of the countryside,” 118.

¹²³Frelimo, *Documentos da 8a Sessão*, 139.

¹²⁴Ranger, “Studying Repatriation,” 289. James Brennan uses a different vocabulary to make this point, in his distinction between houses and homes; *Taifa: Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), 5.

¹²⁵Dinerman notes this ecumenical turn in Frelimo’s ideological position, *Revolution*, 10.

¹²⁶Anne Pitcher, “Forgetting from Above and Memory from Below: Strategies of Legitimation and Struggle in Postsocialist Mozambique,” *Africa* 76, no. 1 (2006): 88–112.

¹²⁷Frelimo, “A Frelimo e as eleições” (N.p.: n.p., n.d. [1994]), 5. In another phrasing, “In your vote, the future of Mozambique,” (No seu voto, o futuro de Moçambique) *Tempo* 1246, 6 Nov. 1994, 18–21.

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