

## RE-EDUCATION CENTRES IN MOZAMBIQUE (1975-1985): MEMORIES, SILENCES AND JOURNALISTIC SPEECHES

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### ABSTRACT

In the post-independence period, Frelimo's goal was to "free Mozambican society from damage related to the colonial, bourgeois and capitalist world, towards the creation of a New Mankind that would necessarily go through a process of 're-education', pursuant to which individuals would be inserted into a new order" (Thomaz, 2008, p. 179). This new order implied "disciplined work, material detachment, overcoming old loyalties (ethnic, religious, class, racial, regional) and unassailable moral behaviour" meaning the "ideal of a New Mankind" (Thomaz, 2008, p. 179). Articles published in Mozambican newspapers at the time contrast with international media texts. In *Entre as memórias silenciadas* [Between silenced memories] (2013), Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa portrays Mozambique in the first years of post-independence through fiction, alerting to the need for challenging and retrieving the silenced memories of the re-education camps, implemented by Frelimo's leaders, to build/educate a "new Mankind". Ba Ka Khosa (2013) seeks to demystify and exorcise the history of a recent past with a work that (re)visits Mozambican reality in the post-independence period, which, to the re-educated, was synonym of violence, suffering and exclusion from history and memory. As one of the most provocative authors of Mozambican contemporaneity, Ba Ka Khosa "blurs the past with the present, fantasy with reality, transforming literature into a live space for political debate" (Gallo, 2013, p. 293). This paper has the purpose of analysing the work of Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa and, simultaneously, the pieces published in national and international mass media.

### KEYWORDS

Re-education centres; Mozambique; memory; Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa; press

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## CENTROS DE REEDUCAÇÃO EM MOÇAMBIQUE (1975-1985): MEMÓRIAS, SILÊNCIOS E DISCURSOS JORNALÍSTICOS

### RESUMO

No período pós-independência, o objetivo da Frelimo era "livrar a sociedade moçambicana de mazelas associadas ao mundo colonial, burguês e capitalista, rumo à construção do Homem Novo, que passava necessariamente por um processo de "reeducação", no interior do qual os indivíduos seriam introduzidos numa nova ordem" (Thomaz, 2008, p. 179). Esta nova ordem implicava "trabalho disciplinado, despojamento material, superação de antigas lealdades (étnicas, religiosas, de classe, de raça, regionais) e comportamento moral inatacável" sinónimo do "ideal de Homem Novo" (Thomaz, 2008, p. 179). Os artigos publicados em jornais moçambicanos da época contrastam com os textos dos media internacionais. Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa apresenta, em *Entre as memórias silenciadas* (2013), um retrato de Moçambique nos primeiros anos do período pós-independência com a ficção a alertar para a necessidade de desafiar e recuperar as memórias silenciadas dos campos de reeducação instituídos pelos dirigentes da Frelimo para construir/educar um "Homem novo". Ba Ka Khosa (2013) procura desmistificar e exorcizar a história do passado recente com um texto que (re)visita a realidade moçambicana no período pós-independência, que para os reeducandos foi sinónimo de violência, sofrimento e exclusão

da história e da memória. Como um dos autores mais provocadores da contemporaneidade moçambicana, Ba Ka Khosa “dilui o passado no presente, a ficção na realidade, fazendo da literatura um vivaz espaço para o debate político” (Gallo, 2013, p. 293). Neste artigo propõe-se analisar a obra de Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa em paralelo com os textos publicados nos meios de comunicação nacionais e internacionais.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Centros de reeducação; Moçambique; memória; Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa; imprensa

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#### INTRODUCTION

The work presented here focuses on analysing the reception of the re-education camp themes in Mozambique, in the newspapers of that period (1975-1985), comparing the content edited by the Mozambican and the international press and drawing parallels, while comparing them with *Entre as memórias silenciadas* (2013) by Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa.

In the post-independence period, Frelimo’s goal was to “free Mozambican society from damage related to the colonial, bourgeois and capitalist world, towards the creation of a New Mankind that would necessarily go through a process of ‘re-education’, pursuant to which individuals would be inserted into a new order” (Thomaz, 2008, p. 179). This new order implied “disciplined work, material detachment, overcoming old loyalties (ethnic, religious, class, racial, regional) and unassailable moral behaviour” meaning the “ideal of a New Mankind” (Thomaz, 2008, p. 179).

After independence, Frelimo endeavoured to deploy a “utopian protocol for social regeneration” (Serra quoted in Moreira, 2010, p. 112) to create a new mankind with the purpose of “fighting the reactionaries” and ideological deviation, “retrogressive political structures”, economic sabotage, unemployment, vagrancy, massive access to cities, etc. “Infiltration”, “detection” and “report” of the “infiltrated elements” were taken into particular consideration (Serra quoted in Moreira, 2010, p. 112). To “fight” the social deviation indicated by Frelimo’s government, re-education centres/camps were created, but were, in reality, forced labour camps. These are part of a chapter that is yet to be written in the history of Mozambique. To these places of repression, located in areas distant from the capital, mostly in the north, were sent the “enemies: members of colonial ‘puppet’ organisations, Portuguese secret police agents, economic saboteurs, ‘psychological operators’, capitalism supporters, advocates and practitioners of any type of exploitation of man by man, racists, tribalists, regionalists, imperialism agents, venal and corrupt individuals (mainly prostitutes), anyone who criticised Frelimo’s politics, strike promoters, ‘easy money’ division adepts” (Serra quoted in Moreira, 2010, p. 112) and where the “edification of a new moral based on beliefs that were fabricated in the moment” was operated (Ba Ka Khosa, 2013, p. 65).

For the creation of the new society, Frelimo imposed a comprehensive “authoritarian modernisation” policy that implied, among others, the establishment of communal

villages, as opposed to the small and disperse villages, emphasising practises for the creation of the new mankind as a refusal of traditional authorities and cultures, religion and the eradication of the alleged society outlaws, such as the unemployed, thieves, prostitutes, drug addicts, etc.

In this sense, this paper has the purpose of triggering a reflection on the facts that occurred and the retrieving of the silenced *memories* from the *re-education camps*, deployed by Frelimo's leaders to build/educate a "new mankind", starting with a confrontation between the work of Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa and the local and international press publications.

Mixed, quantitative and qualitative methodology is used, resorting, in particular, to documentary research and content analysis as a hybrid tool for the data collection and processing. This technique enables the obtainment of relevant information regarding the topic at issue, according to what was published by the local and international newspapers at the time and to the novel of the Mozambican writer and historian Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa.

#### ENTRE AS MEMÓRIAS SILENCIADAS

In *Entre as memórias silenciadas* (2013), Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa portrays Mozambique in the first years of post-independence through fiction, challenging and retrieving the silenced memories of the re-education camps, implemented by Frelimo's leaders, to build/educate a "new Mankind". Ba Ka Khosa incorporates the history of the country's recent past in a work that (re)visits a [dark] chapter of the first years of freedom, which meant violence, suffering, injustice, history and memory exclusion for the re-educated. As one of the most provocative authors of Mozambican contemporaneity, Ba Ka Khosa fights oblivion "blur[ring] the past with the present, fantasy with reality, transforming literature into a live space for political debate" (Gallo, 2013, p. 293).

To put it simply, *Entre as memórias silenciadas* presents the relationship between three prisoners of a re-education camp located in the province of Niassa, in parallel with the relationship between four friends that live in Maputo, portraying rural and urban worlds in the post-independence period. From the group of prisoners, Tomás stands out, a comrade (former Frelimo soldier) who has fought for freedom, a respected memory keeper who leaves the trace of the silenced ones, dignifying the deceased with strokes and drawings on the walls of the houses in the camps:

by the dignity he gives to the deceased, he renews those strokes whenever the memory of time insists in blurring them with rain and wind beating against the walls. (...) it is comforting to see the old man with his tangled cotton strings on his head and chin, leaning against the wall of the deceased, restoring the signs of the dead. (Ba Ka Khosa, 2013, p. 51)

Tomás embodies injustice, he was arrested without accusation or trial, the result of a badly organised system, stained by illegalities, misuse of power and authoritarianism,

a victim, as many other re-educated, of the lack of communication between the government of Maputo and the re-education camps/centres' representatives.

The connection between the rural and urban worlds is conveyed through characters from the re-education camp and characters related to the city of Maputo.

The re-educated were internally and forcefully displaced to camps in rural areas, distant from their places of origin, without any formal accusation nor the right to defend themselves, sometimes without even knowing the reason why they were being forced to do so. In the camps, they were afflicted by the awareness of not having an identity, a glaring situation for the re-educated, present in the work of Ba Ka Khosa:

we weren't anything. We were nothing. We had nothing. Our threshold of existence lied between humanity and animality. By day, we had Men at our guard. By night, we were at the mercy of nature rules. We were in the place of nobody. (...) We were people without the stage of existence they call society. (...) our lives were on the line. (2013, p. 59)

It is evident in this work that the events that took place in the re-education camps/centres will not be registered in the collective memory:

tomorrow, nobody will remember this gruesome act of throwing us into these desolate places with the purpose of creating a new mankind. (...) Nobody will keep these failed times in their memory. (...) We are a number, flesh for slaughter. People without name or record. There is no history for us. There is no memory. (...) Here, there will be no records, no witnesses. This time will be like a dream, a fantasy. (...) There will be no memory of these times. (Ba Ka Khosa, 2013, pp. 122-123)

*Entre as memórias silenciadas* (2013) portrays the forced deterritorialisation promoted by the Frelimo State, resorting to massive deportations to the re-education camps or to work camps far from the capital, in remote provinces such as Niassa, in order to clean up society, elevating the new mankind, free from colonialism and ready to build the nation. After the operations in the re-education camps, investments were made towards the building of communal villages – Unango is mentioned in the work (Ba Ka Khosa, 2013, p. 193) – as an adequate space for the new Mozambican reality, where former re-educated were encouraged to reunite with their families and rebuild life, supported by the collective. The inclusion in production activities, which would be collectively developed by the population, contributed to tackling underdevelopment in rural provinces and to recover unruly individuals, whose behaviour would have been harmful to society.

## **JOURNALISTIC CORPUS**

The selected *corpus* for this empirical analysis, from the content analysis, is based on the pieces produced by the Mozambican newspapers of the time and by the international newspapers that have also published about the subject, with an estimated total of

twenty-six journalistic pieces, distributed across different literary sub-genres: *short pieces*, *editorials*, *opinion articles*, *reportages*, *news*, *interviews*, *chronicles* and others. The newspapers considered for analysis were: *Notícias* [Maputo]; *Tempo* [Maputo]; *A Capital* [Lisbon], with a piece referring to the *Daily News* of Tanzania; *Daily News*; *Afrique-Asie* [Paris]; *To the Point* [Johannesburg]; *Washington Post* [Washington DC]; *Los Angeles Times* [Los Angeles]; *Summary of World Broadcasts* [London], *The Review* [International Commission of Jurists] [Geneva].

The chronological scope contemplated in this study is from 1976 to 1985. In the *corpus* at issue, the predominant journalistic genre is the *reportage*, followed by *short pieces*, one *editorial*, two *opinion articles*, a few *news pieces* and an *interview*. It should be noted that some journalistic pieces that are part of the *corpus* were considerably difficult to categorise according to the respective genre, given their multiple possibilities. More often than not, some reportages were complemented by the journalist's personal opinion. It should be highlighted that the national pieces identify with the government's hegemonic speech and slipped through the sieve of censorship.

After the *corpus* is presented, some key objectives will be answered in this work: a) understanding which repeated subjects occur most frequently in Mozambican journalistic publications; b) which journalistic genres are used the most in those publications; c) what are the differences between the work of the local and international press, in order to reach conclusions and establish potential comparisons related to the work developed by the writer Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa.

This study uses the content analysis as the preferred methodology and technique for data collection. Thus, it is believed that any object-text of any study must allow the establishment of inferences from a real *corpus*.

Using the content analysis as the preferred methodology and technique for data collection, the chosen object of study is the "Mozambican and foreign journalistic publications on the re-education camps"; after the *corpus* is established, the intended object for analysis in the text was defined, choosing a more open approach of the newspapers, without having an initial hypothesis. After this, there was the selection of the main topics mentioned along the *corpus*, in order to integrate them in a later frequency counting process.

Once the categorisation was done, a registration unit was established, meaning that the signification base unit is introduced into the categories and is subsequently listed. As an example, in some cases, the selected registration unit is "reference to Portuguese capitalist society", a term that would encompass other definitions similar to this one, such as the "Portuguese bourgeois ideology".

Therefore, this study has three larger categories incorporated: a) territorialities; b) regime ideology; and c) ideological narratives. Each of these categories will have their own subcategories, some of which will have positive/negative dimensions, based on the journalistic pieces consulted.

Regarding category no. 1, defined as "territorialities", there is predominance, in the *corpus*, of the existence of three focal geographical spaces: Portugal, Mozambique and Russia.

Regarding category no. 2, “regime ideology”, it was important to determine how the subcategory “re-education camps” was scored from the Mozambican and international media points of view, highlighting two dimensions of said subcategory: a *negative dimension*, related to the definition of re-education camps, set according to several indicators, such as the issue of torture, physical exhaustion, direct reference to deaths in the camps, among others; and a *positive dimension*, based on how journalists, editors and commentators would give feedback on the work performed by Frelimo, relating the re-education camps to the new mankind political reportages, to the clemency measures, to the argumentation of the need to punish the “vagrants”, offenders, prostitutes, strays and other marginalised groups of Mozambican society.

NEGATIVE DESCRIPTIONS ASSOCIATED TO THE RE-EDUCATION CAMPS	FREQUENCY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY
Torture cases	8	20%
Abuse and physical exhaustion	15	37.5%
Bad technical and structural conditions of the camp	3	7.5%
Deaths in the camp	2	5%
Daily suffering in the camp	12	30%
Total	40	100%

Table 1: Negative descriptions associated to the re-education camps

It is noticeable that the press emphasises topics and descriptions associated to the prisoners’ exhaustion, without defining them, frequently and particularly, in the case of Mozambican media.

POSITIVE DESCRIPTIONS ASSOCIATED TO THE RE-EDUCATION CAMPS	FREQUENCY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY
Praise of clemency measures	7	10%
Arguments based on the battle against underdevelopment	3	4.28%
Positive strengthening of the new mankind policy	12	17.1%
Praise of driving groups	2	2.85%
Reference to the delivery of money and agricultural tools for rebuilding	2	2.85%
Tackling the marginalised, prostitutes, vagrants, strays, thieves and political dissidents	40	57.14%
Positive direct reference to the re-education camps	4	5.71%
Total	70	100%

Table 2: Positive descriptions associated to the re-education camps

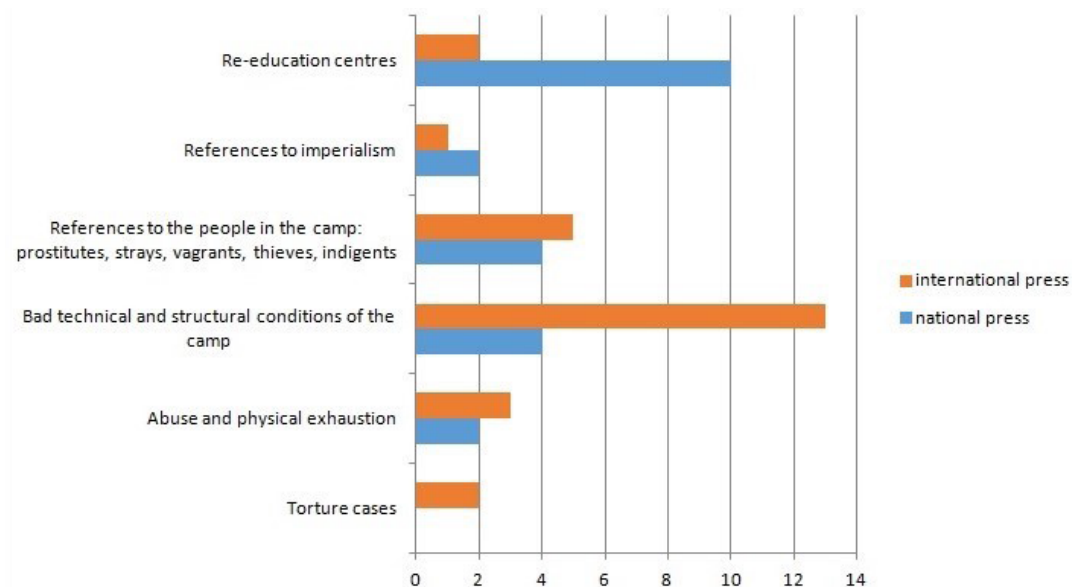


It is unsurprisingly noticeable the prevalence of arguments that lead to a relation between re-education camps and the series of problems of the Mozambican society, described in terms of marginal groups, prostitution and idle life.

Regarding category no. 3, defined as “ideological narratives”, there are subcategories such as socialism, Marxism, Leninism and capitalism. In the proposed subcategories, there is a glaring difference between the frequencies related to socialism and the kind of capitalism attributed to Portugal in the newspapers.

It is also important to mention that, regarding its positive and negative dimensions, capitalism is seldom given a positive meaning.

When paying attention to the themes related to the *corpus*, it is possible to point out the preference for topics associated to the positive/negative dimensions in the re-education camps and to the differences between the Mozambican and the international press.



Graph 1: Comparison between the most frequent topics in the Mozambican and international press.

Regarding the explored thematic fields, it is also found that the Mozambican press positively explains the issues related to re-education centres, elevating Frelimo’s ideology in its multiple aspects, while the international press significantly points out the bad technical and structural conditions of the re-education camps. There is also another topic where the difference between the international press and the Mozambican press is evident: the reference to the those in the camps, such as prostitutes, indigents and other definitions.

## CONCLUSION

In the articles from the newspaper *Notícias*<sup>1</sup> of Maputo and from the magazine *Tempo*<sup>2</sup> the government's hegemonic speech is noticeable, even when questioning the purposes of the camps; articles in the international media [*A Capital* with an article referring to the *Daily News* of Tanzania; the *Daily News*; *Afrique-Asie*; *To the Point*; *Washington Post*; *Los Angeles Times*; *Summary of World Broadcasts*, *The Review [International Commission of Jurists]*] have pieces that call attention to injustice and human rights violation. The national journalistic speech subsequently changes, especially after Samora Machel visited Niassa and Cabo Delgado in 1981, and begins including information regarding inaccuracies in the re-education process. This change arose from “international public opinion pressure”, leading the president to demand “confidential inquiries on the life conditions in the camps” (Pinto de Sá, 1995, p. 26).

The pieces analysed here show that “the [Mozambican] homeland rose with the voices of those who came from the woods. (...) They made the rules. They buried everything and everyone who clamoured for plural voices” (Ba Ka Khosa, 2013, p. 101); the journalistic corpus analysed and the novel *Entre as memórias silenciadas* (2013), by Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa, complement each other, portraying Frelimo's revolutionary resistance in the first decade of post-independence, alerting to the need for tackling oblivion and retrieving the silenced voices, contributing, therefore, to the creation of a chapter in the Mozambican history that includes several voices.

Translation: Helena Antunes

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<sup>1</sup> *Notícias* is a daily newspaper published in Maputo, Mozambique, founded by Manuel Simões Vaz on 15 April 1926, succeeding *O Correio de Moçambique* (Hohlfeldt, 2010, p. 3).

<sup>2</sup> The magazine *Tempo* was founded in 1970 by a journalist who was close to Frelimo. “After the independence of Mozambique, the new information policy entrusted mass media, especially the magazine *Tempo*, the commitment of supporting female emancipation, requiring the publication of news of ‘women’s interest’, apart from news related to Organização das Mulheres de Moçambique [*Organisation of Mozambican Women*] (OMM). Despite the government's hegemonic speech and the censorship bestowed in its editions, the fight for press freedom transformed this magazine into a field of gaps, with contradictory and judgemental speeches to those in the government at the time” (Santana, 2009, p-83). For more information on the magazine *Tempo*, refer to Machiana (2002).



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