‘Samora’s children’ – the celebration of (post-)socialist citizenship in Mozambique

DOI:
10.1080/00083968.2020.1839524

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript

Link to publication record in Manchester Research Explorer

Citation for published version (APA):

Published in:
Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines

Citing this paper
Please note that where the full-text provided on Manchester Research Explorer is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Proof version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version.

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Explorer are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Takedown policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please refer to the University of Manchester’s Takedown Procedures [http://man.ac.uk/04Y6B0] or contact uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk providing relevant details, so we can investigate your claim.

Download date: 14. Sep. 2023
‘Samora’s children’ – the celebration of (post-)socialist citizenship in Mozambique

Tanja R. Müller, University of Manchester

Abstract

This paper interrogates the creation and afterlife of socialist beliefs and practices in the biographies of a cohort of people educated to become homens novos, conceived of as new socialist citizens. Its empirical part is based on the case study of the School of Friendship (SdF), an education project between Mozambique and East Germany. The paper demonstrates that, the SdF was successful in creating a cohort of people for whom socialist solidarity was a key component of their identity. At the same time, they interpreted what a socialist citizen should be in their own way, thus using their education as what Bourdieu calls a strategy-generating institution. This enabled protagonists to navigate the post-socialist political order, not simply regarding socialism as the nostalgic reminder of a golden past. But the majority live and celebrate socialist citizenship among themselves, and hardly engage with political contestation in present day Mozambique.

I. Introduction

During the time of the Cold War and to a lesser degree in its aftermath, for liberation movements as well as socialist-oriented newly independent states of the Global South, education centred to an important degree on citizenship formation based on socialist values (see for example Bayly 2004; Burgess 2005; Ivaska 2005; Müller 2008). This process can be analysed as the creation of ‘personal nationalism’, an active affirmation of one’s personal and national identity combined (McCrone 1998; Müller 2012). It can also be discussed within the wider objective of creating a ‘new man’, conceived of as a new socialist personality. The concept of the ‘new man’ in a socialist context is said to have first emerged in the 1920s in the context of the socialist revolution in the former Soviet Union to describe the transformations of individuals, their aspirations and value systems brought about by the change in economic conditions (Scruton 1982). This conceptualisation has been expanded upon in the writings of Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire, where the ‘new man’ is anticipated to
emerge from the overthrow of (colonial) oppression and through the development of critical consciousness (Fanon 1968; Freire 1996).\textsuperscript{1}

In the ideology and practice of the liberation movements and post-revolutionary states in Angola and Mozambique, the ‘new man’ featured prominently in a distinct context-specific conceptualisation that combined the above elements: On the one hand, and in line with early Soviet interpretations, the ‘new man’ stood for quasi universalist developmentalism, as well as for a personality emancipated from ‘tribalist, obscurest, feudal or colonialist’ values, and at the same time committed to communal ‘socialist’ solidarity rather than individual advancement (see for example Collier 2013; Mahoney 2003). Such conceptions were also prominent within the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO), Mozambique’s liberation movement from Portuguese colonial rule and subsequent ruling party, at least during the time when Samora Machel was its leader and became Mozambique’s first post-liberation President in 1975. In Machel’s vision, articulated in the 1971 pamphlet *Produzir e aprender. Aprender para produzir e lutar melhor* the socialist citizens he aspired to create would build a new post-liberation nation to the best of everyone’s ability under the guidance of FRELIMO, driven by shared values of solidarity (Machel 1971). In parallel with other post-liberation states that followed different versions of Third World socialism, Machel also realized that for a war-ravaged post-colonial state with a small human resource base, partnerships with advanced socialist countries in relation to providing education at all levels was crucial.

Such programmes existed on a variety of levels and scales between the Soviet Union, countries of Eastern Europe and Cuba in particular, with the double aims to provide socialist-leaning states in the Global South with human resource needs while at the same time nurture a lasting commitment towards socialism (see for example Dorsch 2008; Savage 2016). In addition to university education programmes, those included worker trainee schemes and education programmes for secondary school-age adolescents. In the wider literature that
interrogates these forms of socialist cosmopolitanism, the focus is on the distinct forms of mobility created through those, and how these helped shape different conceptions of socialism as well as agency among participants (see for example Burton 2019; Dorsch 2008; Katsakioris 2017; Schenck 2016; Savage 2016). In all these endeavours, tensions between individual aspirations and socialist vanguard ideology have come to the fore in different ways, and might best be analysed with reference to the lived experiences of people who undertook those journeys and the often different variants of socialism that existed in home and host countries (Burton 2019; Müller 2014).

Together with Cuba the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) was at the forefront of establishing programmes geared towards secondary schooling of children from socialist (and other) countries in the Global South.

In these programmes, educating socialist citizens with a propensity to forgo personal advancement in order to advance the development of the nation was deemed as or more important than the teaching of academic or professional skills. Findings from programmes between the former GDR and Vietnam (in the 1950s) and Namibia (from 1979 onwards) respectively indicate that those intangible features are important lasting legacies (see Engombe 2004; Freytag 1998; Kenna 1999; Rüchel 2001).

The focus of this paper is the largest and most ambitious secondary education exchange programme between the former GDR and a socialist country of the Global South, the School of Friendship (SdF) built in Staßfurt near Magdeburg in order to produce a future professional socialist elite of Mozambicans. The SdF provides a particular interesting case for a number of reasons: In contrast to secondary education programmes on Isla de la Juventud in Cuba, who were geared towards older secondary school students and academic subjects, the SdF was built for those who completed four years of primary schooling and geared towards vocational education, thus close in line with Machel’s original thinking about the close relationship between learning, producing and creating a socialist personality as outlined in Produzir e
aprender (Machel 1971). In addition, those chosen to study at the SdF spent the decisive years of their adolescence in Germany (on average they were 12 years of age when they arrived and young adults of 18 years plus when they returned). I have argued elsewhere that this is significant because one of the major developmental processes during adolescence is the constitution of a mature sense of identity, a process partly arrived at through membership of a distinct group characterised by shared experiences or heritage (Müller 2012). They are thus an interesting group to study when investigating how their socialist education might have shaped their notion of citizenship, and potentially made them into citizens of a socialist nation, even if that nation in reality never existed. In this, I adopt a notion of citizenship that centres on the concept of citizenship as an act (Isin and Nielsen 2008). It conceptualises citizenship beyond legal status and its ritualised practices as a relational act that focuses on concrete everyday practices. As such, what Isin and Nielsen (2008: 19) call the “dialogical principle of citizenship”, citizenship as a fundamental way of being with others in the same geographical space, makes it possible to analyse citizenship in relation to actual encounters, performances or enactments (see also Willen 2007). In a further step, it allows to interrogate what makes such encounters agonistic, alienating or solidaristic (Isin 2008: 19). Taken together, understanding citizenship as a deed allows to investigate if and how the vision Samora Machel had for those educated at the SdF, to emerge as socialist citizens, has sustained their life practices in post-socialist Mozambique. Based on interview and participant observation data collected in Mozambique in 2007, 2008 and 2014, triangulated with data from the German National Archive (the Bundesarchiv or BArch, covering the years 1979 to 1992), the article demonstrates that an important part of SdF participants’ sense of themselves is built around a collective identity of what one can call socialist citizenship, as an important aspect of it are practices of solidarity grounded in a particular understanding of modernity (see also Burton 2019). Data triangulation proceeded in the following way: The project commenced with in-depth life history interviews of former SdF participants 20 years after their return to
Mozambique. Once this interview data was analysed, relevant archives were consulted in order to put individual life history data into the wider historical perspective and gauge the view of officials and other involved personnel at the time as documented in the archives. The article is organised in five parts. First, the SdF is introduced as an institution aimed at creating socialist citizens, followed by a discussion of methodology and data collection procedures. This is then followed by an analysis of conceptions and practices of socialist citizenship in some of the participants’ personal biographies, before arriving at some wider conclusions.

II. The School of Friendship and the creation of socialist citizens

The SdF was in important ways a project of Samora Machel and the wider conditions at the time of his leadership of FRELIMO and the state. When it was conceived, a number of educational exchanges and more importantly contract-worker programmes did already exist between socialist countries, including Mozambique, and the former GDR. For the GDR side, economic benefits were as much a driving force as was a vague notion of solidarity, combined with creating an emotional predisposition towards socialism in newly independent states in the Global South (for a comprehensive discussion see Müller 2014). The biggest exchange programme between the former GDR and socialist leaning countries of the Global South was the extensive contract worker scheme that under the slogan ‘solidarity through apprenticeship’ provided worker trainees in theory with a professional qualification while addressing labour shortages in key GDR industries, for which Mozambique was an important partner. While this double objective reportedly worked well until the mid 1980s, from then onwards GDR needs for cheap factory labour led to increased recruitment and dwindling importance of the training aspect, and workers who had no say in actual choice of workplace were predominately employed in unattractive and often strenuous shift work (Allina 2016; Oppenheimer 2004; Schüle 2020; Zwengel 2011).
The SdF was based on different parameters, namely the quest to educate a professional socialist elite from a cohort of young Mozambicans who would embody Machel’s vision of a socialist citizen in the spirit of *produzir e aprender*. Because before Mozambican independence GDR education experts had successfully worked in the FRELIMO education infrastructure in Bagamoyo, Tanzania the GDR was for Samora Machel the natural partner to turn to (Kruse 1994; Tullner 2005; Panzer, 2013). Thus in 1982 a cohort of 899 Mozambican children came to Staßfurt to complete six years of secondary schooling plus vocational training at the SdF in purpose built boarding facilities, with the objective to return to Mozambique as part of a socialist avant-garde.4

From the start of discussions with the GDR in 1980 about the establishment of the SdF the Mozambican side made clear that their overarching objective was “the creation of the *homem novo*, the creator of the socialist fatherland where everybody works […] and finds personal fulfilment” (BArch, DR/2/13990, original in German and Portuguese, my translation).5 In contrast, for the former GDR the educational component and in particular the professional training that SdF students were to achieve was of equal or, some archival materials suggest, even prime importance, as the GDR was looking to gain qualified personnel able to take leading positions in joint ventures in Mozambique in the future (BArch, DR/2/13990, note from 08. 09. 1980). More generally, the timing of the SdF’s conception coincided with the most active period of the GDR’s economic involvement in Mozambique (from 1977 to 1982), a time when a number of large joint ventures plus the export of whole GDR factories to Mozambique was envisaged in the fields of agriculture, coal production, fishing, the textile industry, radio production, lightbulb production and the assembly of trucks. This enforced the GDR’s rationale in relation to the SdF as being focused on training qualified Mozambican personnel for those enterprises (Döring and Rüchel 2005; Reuter and Scheunpflug 2006; Schoeller 1983; Schulz 1995).
Ultimately, both sets of objectives were integrated into the actual workings of the SdF. Its curriculum was an adjusted version of the GDR Polytechnical Secondary School (*Polytechnische Oberschule*, POS), resulting in a leaving certificate, the *Facharbeiterabitur* (comparable to professional A-levels) that was, according to initial contractual arrangements between both countries, to be fully recognised in Mozambique and that in theory also allowed the possibility of higher (university) education (BArch, DR/2/30416). The vocational training component started only in year four, in 1986, a few months before the death of Samora Machel. By then, many of the core objectives in relation to professional qualifications had in fact become obsolete: Already from 1983 onwards many of the anticipated joint ventures where SdF graduates were meant to work had collapsed or were winding down. This process was accelerated once Mozambique – still under Machel as President, started to turn towards ‘Western’ partners and economic liberalism, driven by economic difficulties and the rejection of its application to become a full member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the trading bloc of former socialist countries (Simpson 1993; Saul 2005). These developments did not result in changes of the SdF vocational curriculum, and despite some concerns from the GDR side about future employment opportunities in Mozambique, its pupils continued to be trained in professions many of which were bound to be of little relevance in Mozambique in the future (BArch, DR/2/50682). Nor, as might have been expected, did the death of Samora Machel in 1986 change the SdF’s ideological focus on creating socialist citizens. Thus whilst under the new president, Joaquim Chissano, Mozambique turned even further to the ‘West’, and the civil war with the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO) and its foreign allies, combined with misguided economic and political strategies, led to the general collapse of many state development strategies and interventions, the SdF remained rather untouched by these developments, at least on the surface. But, largely unknown to its pupils, the relevance of the SdF as linked to a vision for the future of Mozambique became negligible.
As a logical consequence of these combined developments, for the 834 young adults who returned as successful SdF graduates to Mozambique in 1988 there was little use, and most were initially sent straight to the army with few formal employment opportunities subsequently, and no help from FRELIMO, the party that had sent them to the GDR in the first place. As late as 1987 Graça Machel in her function as minister of education against her better knowledge reassured GDR authorities that ‘each SdF graduate will be given employment upon returning to the People’s Republic of Mozambique’ (BArch, DR/2/13991, original in German and Portuguese, my translation).

More importantly for the focus of this article, their education, based as it was on the maxim “education within the collective, for the collective, through the collective and for the benefit of the collective” (BArch, DR/2/50616, file 2 from 3, note 27 May 1983, original in German and Portuguese, my translation) and the fact that the SdF cohort did live most of their daily lives in that collective at the premises in Staßfurt, made them ill-prepared for a future in which the collective counted for little and they had to fend for themselves, and where contravening the original agreement between the GDR and Mozambique, their SdF leaving certificates were not recognised. But whilst the collective was the key focus in their living arrangements and education towards socialist citizens, education is always dialectic in nature, acting as what Bourdieu (1977) calls a ‘strategy-generating’ institution, at the same time confirming and contesting internalized collective values. This ultimately enabled SdF participants to interpret what a socialist citizens was or should be in their own ways, as the following sections demonstrate.

III. Methodology and Data Collection

Collective identities are ultimately narrative constructions based on emotional and cognitive processes that allow people to demarcate boundaries and create a shared ‘we’ (Eder 2009; Yuval-Davis 2006), and the same is true for the notion of ‘socialist citizen’ among SdF
graduates. To understand such patterns of belonging, this article centres on life-history interviews that allow insights into the foundations of long-term trajectories. Interviews with SdF participants were held in Mozambique between May and July 2008, following a 2007 preparatory visit. A sample of 35 men and women (19 men and 16 women) who attended the SdF were interviewed in depth. In addition, I spent time with larger groups of SdF participants in social settings. Selection was based on purposive sampling methods taking into account four different geographical locations where large groups of former SdF students live today. Those locations were Maputo and surroundings; Beira and Chimoio/Cruzamento de Tete in Central Mozambique; and Nampula in Northern Mozambique.

In open ended-interviews, participants were asked about three broad themes: their background and upbringing in Mozambique before they went to the GDR; their time in the GDR; and their lives since they have returned to Mozambique. Interviews were mostly held in German, a language the majority were keen on speaking. In some cases, upon request, interviews were conducted in English. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed by me in the respective language, translated into English and entered into a FileMaker Pro database. A number of (sub-) themes emerged as categories for analysis, and I have written comprehensively about those in previous publications (see Müller 2014; Müller 2010). In November 2014 I had the chance to return to Mozambique and be part of events to commemorate 25 years of the Fall of the Berlin Wall in Maputo and Chimoio, adding additional insights to the focus of this article: the evaluation of the SdF and participants’ time in the former GDR from the vantage point of today.

One additional issue is important here. In a setting such as the SdF, focused on collective rather than individual parameters, the question arises how far in the process of reconstructing their past individuals identify their personal with public memories of what constitutes important events for the collective, a process that has been called ‘normative remembrance’ (Assmann 1995). Being in some way distinct as a collective was more generally a constitutive
element of the SdF according to then President Samora Machel’s agenda. Participants were regarded as part of a select few chosen to build socialism in the future, a fact that enforced the notion of being a close-knit group apart from others.

But such collective narratives are only one aspect in the reconstruction of individual biographies by this group of SdF participants. At the same time their narratives effectively portray the social and historical circumstances that determined their lives and illuminate the meanings of relevant events, experiences and conditions. They reveal frameworks of meaning through which participants locate themselves in the world they experience and can be seen as the product of a relationship between social reality, discourse and subjectivity. Such personal narratives thus reveal important ‘truth’ about social reality (see Abramson 1992; George 1997; Richardson 1991; Runyan 1982; Summerfield 1998), and their concrete interpretation and lived experiences of socialism expose the promises and frictions of socialist internationalism.

IV. Celebrating socialist citizenship – lasting legacies in personal biographies

In early November 2014, almost 25 years since the Fall of the Berlin Wall – in fact a few days before, three SdF graduates sit on the podium at the Instituto Cultural Moçambique-Alemanha (ICMA) in front of a packed audience to discuss what their stay in the former GDR meant for them personally. They speak vividly about how they came from poor urban or rural backgrounds in Mozambique to a country with first class railways, high rise buildings, paved roads and unfamiliar but tasty foods. Then in their early teens after having completed primary education, being chosen to continue their education in the GDR was at the time one of very few possibilities available to do so.

Immediately before this discussion, in the foyer of ICMA, an exhibition had opened with the title ‘da ditadura – a democracia’ [from dictatorship to democracy], telling the often rehearsed story of the oppressive former East German regime and its fall. But for Anna and Alfonso,
two of those on the podium, the former GDR was not the dictatorship put on display in the
exhibition, but a land full of promise for a better future, a land where they hoped to be
educated to be able to play their part in building a future socialist Mozambique where people
like themselves could thrive.\textsuperscript{6}

Their contrasting future trajectories once they returned to Mozambique in 1988 show in some
exemplary fashion the lasting legacies of their time in the GDR, the betrayals they suffered by
FRELIMO (in their own judgements), but more importantly how their education acted as a
‘strategy-generating’ institution. While Anna is one of the few SdF graduates who were part
of this study who managed to achieve her wider individual ambition, Alfonso is one of those
still struggling to do so. But in both their lives, the education they received in a modern
socialist country was a vital part – not necessarily in terms of the academic and professional
skills, but the more intangible aspects of their education in relation to value systems and
understandings of solidarity.

When Anna remembers the time when they returned to Mozambique, “it was a shock when
we were told upon arrival we had to go to the army, we did not expect that”. She went to
Germany “because our president [Samora Machel] sent us to learn something useful, we did
not know much more, we were small children […] but then our first president died, he had
many plans for us but after his death it all fell through [\textit{ist alles ins Wasser gefallen} in the
original]”. Anna was not prepared to give up on the idea to have a valuable profession that
would benefit the future development of Mozambique, but also knew the profession she had
learned, processing fish in a German factory, would not allow her to do so.

Two important things Anna had learned in Germany, to a large degree by spending a lot of
time with her German guest family, would help her realise her ambition (and indirectly fulfil
Samora Machel’s mandate for SdF participants, even if in a rather different way than
anticipated): to have a clear plan and seek the help one needed to implement it, and a different
understanding of gender roles that allowed her to transcend the perceived inferiority of
women that was still prevalent in Mozambique (for a more detailed discussion on how attending the SdF influenced gender roles see Müller 2010).

Anna was immediately after her return from the GDR, like many of her fellow women at the SdF, given secretarial work in the army and subsequently the Ministry of Defense. She recalls how “the first year was a bit difficult for me’ and she needed some time “to orient myself, also I needed to learn again how to be in Mozambique, in many ways I had lost my identity. I did not know many things about the culture of Mozambique, I needed to find people to explain things to me”.

But once Anna adjusted to the reality of life in Mozambique she knew she needed to continue her education. She obtained her secondary education certificate through evening school once it became clear their SdF certificates would not be properly recognized in Mozambique, and started a university degree at one of the new private institutions. Anna graduated successfully in clinical psychology in 2007, her dissertation project was done at the Ministry of Defense where she continues to work as a psychologist “it is a new field in Mozambique and much of our work has to do with generating an understanding of the importance of psychology in everyday life”. Her work is challenging “but I have done what I wanted to do, I have a good and useful profession, and my time in Germany had a very big influence on my life, the way I lead my life now is very much influenced by Germany, I drank a lot from the German culture”.

While this “German culture” can be simply interpreted as modernist or developmental, it was at the same time the culture of the socialist GDR that Anna and her fellow students experienced through daily encounters with the solidarity of their German teachers and guest parents. Not only testimonies of research participants, but equally archival resources document well how German teachers not only saw themselves as being examples for socialist solidarity but often went out of their way to support students and defend them against not only local racism but equally FRELIMO attempts at enforcement of discipline that was
counterproductive to socialist learning as understood within GDR pedagogy (BArch DR/2/28972).  

Anna still has strong connections to her German guest mother and those have helped her through difficult times “when I was not sure about my ambitions, when I doubted I could succeed”. In addition, Anna has drawn strength from those around her who grew up with her at the SdF, “when I need somebody I know where to find them, they are like my family”. And whilst Anna’s path looks quite straightforward from the outside, she had to fight to be able to study for her degree with her then husband, and believes what gave her strength was the way she had seen gender equality far more as a reality in Germany than she thought was possible, and that gave her the courage to fight for her ambition. Anna meanwhile has separated from her first husband and is in a new relationship with a fellow SdF graduate – a trajectory she shares with quite a number of SdF participants, many of whom (and in particular the women) found it difficult or impossible to share their lives with somebody who lacked their specific experiences of having grown up in a modern socialist country. This is an additional aspect that makes SdF graduates in many ways ‘Samora’s children’, as for Machel a socialist personality was characterised by having overcome traditional belief systems and norms, and women’s equality he regarded as a key prerequisite in advancing the socialist development of Mozambique, in line with the ideology of most revolutionary liberation movements at the time, more often than not to be abandoned once these movements had received power (see Arnfred 1988; Machel 1974; Müller 2005).

Alfonso even more so than Anna returned to Mozambique in line with the SdF’s original objectives: a professional with much needed skills committed to use those for the country’s development. As one of the best students at the SdF, he was given a limited choice in choosing his profession, and in consultation with his teachers decided to train as a metalworker “because it was said at the time that a tractor factory was to be opened in Mozambique so we could produce our own tractors in the country, and I could work there in
the future, that sounded good to me”. He was the best of all apprentices in his factory, Mozambicans and Germans combined, and three times in a row received the socialist workers award and 500 GDR mark in prize money, at the time quite a lot of money, “then they switched me to another enterprise because they said ‘others are getting jealous, they also want to have a prize’, and in the new factory they paid for my driving license, that made me very happy”. When the apprenticeship ended in 1988, many German colleagues told me it would be better for me to stay in Germany, and also the director of the factory said he would support me if I wanted to stay because of my performance, I would not have any problem to develop my profession […] but even though we knew there was still war in Mozambique we still believed we were meant to rebuild the country […] and I thought it was better to return and I was ready to help my country.

But once he had returned and realized they were sent straight to the army he had his first doubts and started to regret his decision:

When I heard about the army, I thought maybe it would have been better to stay in Germany, my boss said I should stay and also the parents of my girlfriend wanted me to stay [he had a girlfriend for four years in Germany and her parents were very fond of him as well], there were a lot of tears at the airport when I left […] now I said to myself why did they [the FRELIMO-party] sent me to Germany to learn, I thought I would come back and fight the poverty but now they send us to the army, there are many people here [in Mozambique] who do not have any profession and do nothing, why do they not send those to the army.

After his initial six-months military training he was sent to the navy, but it turned out there was nothing to do for him, “we simply sat around doing nothing, absolutely nothing, and the general living conditions were terrible”, and he still believed that in the near future somebody from the government would come and allocate him a meaningful task for the development of the country. He waited for a year and nothing happened, “so I just left the army and nobody cared”, and he went illegally to South Africa in order to find work. While it turned out to be
easy to find work for a Portuguese employer, he also realized that he was not paid in line with his qualifications and that life for black people in South Africa was difficult in the still apartheid state. He returned to Mozambique where salaries for skilled workers like himself were even worse than in South Africa, and people in addition were reluctant to employ those who had been abroad, so he embarked on various import-export and trading businesses over the years. Alfonso likes his profession as metal worker and regrets the fact that it has been impossible to find adequate work in his profession, “it is the same for many of us, many work as a guard or something, even then they earn more money, even though we all have professions many of us don’t have any opportunity to work in our profession”. Whilst his various business ventures have on the whole been successful and have allowed him to secure decent living conditions for himself and his family, he would prefer to work as a skilled professional instead of “simply doing business, as this is not what we were sent to the SdF for”. Alfonso thus still has the ambition to embark on a proper professional career, and hopes to be able to save enough money through his business activities to go to university like many of the ex-SdF graduates have started to do, but time seems to be running out.11

Overall, and in line with a majority of the participants in this study, he feels the time in the former GDR has been decisive for how his life has developed:

When I compare myself to those who were children with me [growing up in a rural area in the North of Zambezia province] they are farmers now, I was lucky to have been able to go to Germany even though I cannot use what I learned there here in Mozambique at the moment […] but through my time in Germany I know many things and can do things with my life, it was very good that I could go there.

Those dynamics, frustrations about the inability to use the skills and expertise acquired in Germany as once anticipated in the SdF vision for the wider development of Mozambique, is combined among SdF graduates with an underlying belief in ‘socialist’ values, the latter most visible in showing practical solidarity towards each other as a group, while being conscious of
having values different from the ‘capitalist’ agenda prevalent in contemporary Mozambique, as expressed here by Mano:

In the world we grew up in [in Germany] this utopia, socialism, it was good, I always used to say ‘I am a socialist for ever’ and up to this day I believe in socialism […] Mozambique now, OK there is development, but you need money and many people cannot buy anything … the good thing here now is there is no war, people are free … but the economy is only good for some, many people cannot eat … that is capitalism, we know exactly how capitalism works or imperialism, we have seen all that, and so I still believe in socialism.¹²

Mano is part of a group of former SdF students who live in the provinces of Manica and Sofala in Central Mozambique, and who for more than ten years now hold regular meetings, usually in or around Chimoio, and more generally try to support each other in any way possible. I attended such a meeting in June 2008, and in November 2014, after the ICMA event in Maputo, was invited to another such meeting at the Lamimos Lodge near Cruzamento de Tete, a space that also runs cultural events and is owned by two SdF alumni. The event was partly a joint celebration of their time at the SdF, coupled with a public discussion of my book about the SdF, a music show and a photo-exhibition of a Mozambican photographer exhibiting black and white photography from the time of the civil war. At events like this and the networks that are being re-affirmed through them, what socialist citizenship means to the SdF cohort comes particular to the fore, as the following section will discuss (see also Müller 2018).

V. Practising socialist acts of citizenship

When I conducted the main part of my fieldwork into the legacies of their education at the SdF in 2008, twenty years had passed since participants’ return from the former GDR. By the time I met most of them, they had lived through the rejection by their government that saw no other way of dealing with their return than sending them straight to the army. For the vast majority demobilisation only came after the 1992 peace accord that ended the civil war.
Initially most were even happy to accept those conditions in the spirit of contributing what was necessary to the Mozambican cause, even though they experienced many personal difficulties, as Paulino explains:

At the beginning we believed what they had told us, we will go back to our provinces and work there [...] and when we came back [to Mozambique] they told us ‘we have this war, so if you go to the provinces and the bandits [RENAMO as referred to by FRELIMO] come you need to know how to protect yourself. So we will give you training for 45 days and then you will go’. We said ‘no problem’, but after 45 days a military chief came and said you have to stay another three months and we will split you up, some to the navy, others to the air force. They were afraid if we stay together we will unite and protest. [...] I stayed for four years [in the army] and by then I knew the government had no plan for us, we had to look after ourselves.\textsuperscript{13}

Archival materials confirm this evaluation but also add some additional aspects. The first cohorts of students who returned were indeed told that at the moment the only alternative to do something useful for the country was to join the army, a fact their teachers back in Germany were in disagreement with and discussed critically with the SdF FRELIMO representative.\textsuperscript{14} But when they realized that they were not allowed to see their families first and all their valuables were taken away to be stored safely somewhere (often to be lost forever subsequently) they became suspicious, and news travelled back to later cohorts who tried to avoid being conscripted, often successfully, in that they simply disappeared from the army processing camp (BArch DR/2/50621).

As a result of the prolonged war, by the time the SdF youth who did army service were demobilised, Mozambique had become one of the world’s most impoverished countries offering few opportunities for formal employment, and most of the joint ventures with the former GDR for which they had been educated had ceased to exist or where never even started (Hall and Young 1997; Penvenne 1998). While this state of affairs began to change slowly after the 1992 peace accord when qualified personnel was needed for the process of
reconstruction, there were scant opportunities for the SdF-cohort who had acquired technical skills most useful for industries that no longer existed. In addition their SdF leaving certificates, that according to the original agreement should have been equal to the completion of secondary school after grade 12 in Mozambique, were recognised as completion of grade ten only.\(^\text{15}\) This denied SdF graduates access to most formal schemes for further education in Mozambique. Also, the post-1992 reconstruction process, predominately financed by foreign aid and based on structural adjustment programmes, market capitalism and democratisation had resulted in the monopolisation of political and economic power in the hands of a small elite (Hanlon 2004). These elites were predominately concerned with their own narrow self-interest while ignoring obligations to the wider population (Sumich 2007).

It was partly this discrepancy between the socialist code of conduct that they internalised during their schooling in the GDR and a Mozambican reality characterised by personal enrichment and corruption, devoid of moral constraints and concern for the common good that re-enforced a distinct socialist identity among former SdF participants, an identity that constitutes one of the most important legacies of their time in the GDR and makes them act in solidarity with each other to this day. After demobilisation, when they were scattered all over the country many SdF participants lost contact with each other and only many years later with the advance of mobile phones it has become easier to get in touch again. But if any former SdF member turns up on the doorstep of a former schoolmate they are welcomed just like family members. In addition, regular meetings like the ones referred to in Chimoio above are held among all SdF participants in particular locations and networks have begun to take shape almost twenty years after their return, roughly coinciding with the time when I conducted my research. Many by then had settled down to a family life and career and were thus in a position to help those who still experienced difficulties. Mateus puts it that way: “It was good that I was in Germany, as now we have a different culture […] and we still live solidarity. We
try to help each other. The socialist idea is still in our head. We do not say to each other you must see for yourself. We say we will try to find something for you”.

These acts of solidarity take different forms, but are not simply rhetoric but have concrete repercussions for the lives of SdF graduates. Hipolito for example explains how his SdF inheritance influences the relationship with his (non-SdF-educated) wife. When he got married, one of the first things he told his wife was that he had family all over Mozambique (referring to the SdF cohort), and whenever they came she needed to welcome them as such:

I had to tell her I have family all over Mozambique and people who have been in Staßfurt with me will come to our house and you will treat them as family, and my wife accepted that […] such contacts are good, my neighbours say about me “what type of person is that, such a big family, almost every week somebody comes from Beira, from Maputo, from other places” … but I think it is very good.

Those networks can also have concrete material benefits, and in that are a perhaps nostalgic reminder of a better past, but a reminder that at the same time acts as reaffirmation of important aspects of participants’ identities (and with that indirectly as a critique of the present, as outlined in Schenck 2018 with regard to former worker trainees). In some locations for example, engagement has centred on small-scale business development to benefit former SdF out of work, as Sousa explains: “After 20 years, some of us have succeeded and if I have something I can help you, I can motivate others to do something […] now that we meet regularly we can also do something good”. And Paulino explains: “It is important we keep in touch with each other and we help each other, for example if I hear about a possibility for work and I know one of us who is unemployed I can fetch him and give him this opportunity”.

But equally simply getting together over food and drinks, speaking German and listening to and singing popular music from their time in the former GDR, including then forbidden ‘Western’ music, reaffirms a celebration of their distinct identity that when interrogated
always leads back to the ideas Samora Machel had for Mozambique and themselves as important potential actors in it. Those gatherings – and I have visited a number of these in Beira, Chimoio and Nampula in 2008 and 2014 – serve as important rituals in celebrating themselves as ‘Samora’s children’. As exemplified in the remarks by Lourenco and Alex, in many ways the SdF cohort still shows a propensity towards building a better, a more socially just Mozambique, even if the only way they might contribute to that now is to educate their children in a similar spirit as they were educated in. Lourenco says:

We students who were at the SdF, if all of us would work in the professions we learnt we could build up an industry, and perhaps we could have sent other groups to Germany in the future and really develop our country […] but it all developed differently […] when we were there Samora Machel wanted to industrialize our agriculture, but when he died those projects died […] because he died we are in this difficult situation, in the Third World life is always so complicated.20

And Alex reflects:

For me personally it was good that I learned something new in Germany, it was a good experience, the sad thing is I came back here and my government did not have work for me, and they also did not recognize the diploma, but I know why that happened, when we went to the former GDR that was under Samora Machel, he had something else on his mind, he really wanted that the country develops, therefore he made this contract with the GDR that we as children should learn the right things in a socialist country, at that time it was a good idea, but those who were left after his plane crash in South Africa did not accept that any longer, therefore everything went wrong, and we felt after Machel had lost his life that our future would be different, that was sad, for us and also for Mozambique.21

In fact, in what has been called a process of ‘organised forgetting’, a FRELIMO-instigated re-evaluation of Mozambique’s socialist period has taken place aimed at creating a reformed national history that celebrates private ownership and market efficiencies within the parameters of ‘a sort of one-party social democracy’ (Pitcher 2006; Hall and Young 1997, 203). In this process, groups of people tightly bound up with the former socialist agenda like
the SdF cohort are effectively written out of Mozambique’s official history.\textsuperscript{22} The different and much bigger group of former Mozambican contract workers in the GDR to this day contests this forgetting through political demonstrations and other forms of civil disobedience, in their case to an important degree driven by real economic grievances related to withheld past wages that were pocketed by the Mozambican government (for details see Van der Heyden et al. 2014). The SdF cohort’s contestations, in contrast, are self-proclaimed socialist beliefs outside of active political engagement, but lived among themselves and in relation to their children. Mia says in this respect about important legacies of the SdF: “We have learned in particular how we should live and how we can help each other. […] All the things I do now, the way I approach things, how I educate my children […] we try to educate them the same way we were educated there […] If something like the SdF would still exist, I would send my daughters there with my eyes closed”\textsuperscript{23}

VI. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the creation and afterlife of socialist beliefs and practices in the biographies of a cohort of people educated to be new socialist citizens in the framework of an educational exchange programme between the then People’s Republic of Mozambique and the former GDR. The paper has shown that the SdF was successful in creating socialist citizens as envisaged in the writing of Samora Machel (1971; 1974) – based on a socialist ideal that even during the lifetime of Samora Machel was in many ways different from the reality within the Mozambique he governed and the FRELIMO party. The SdF educated a cohort of people who came to regard the different versions of socialist modernity they were exposed to in Mozambique and the GDR as a key component of their identity. At the same time, they interpreted what a socialist citizen is or should be in their own way, thus using their education as what Bourdieu calls a strategy-generating institution. Their understandings of socialist citizenship enabled many of its graduates to navigate the post-
socialist political order, thus it is not simply a nostalgic reminder of a golden past, but exposes the frictions between ideals of socialist solidarity and the political reality of a post-colonial state in the Third World. The narratives and practices of the lives participants shared with me can thus be understood as the result of ‘negotiations of diverse and multiple socialist modernities’ (Bayly 2004: 321; see also Burton 2019). A core product of these negotiations is a morality or emotional disposition centred around a distinct understanding of being socialist, made up of memories, life experiences and concrete acts of citizenship in the past and present. More generally, an evaluation of the SdF through the lives of some of its participants re-enforces findings from other post-liberation states that pursued youth-centred socialist-inspired nation building projects like for example Tanzania, Zanzibar and Eritrea (Burgess 2005; Ivaska 2005; Müller 2008) that have shown the successful creation of commitment to serve the collective entity by youth only to be jeopardised by subsequent political action that denied those youth a real stake in the nation’s future. It also speaks to the wider literature that interrogates forms of socialist cosmopolitanism during the time of the Cold War and distinct avenues of mobility created through those (see for example Dorsch 2008; Katsakioris 2017; Schenck 2016; Savage 2016).

In conclusion, the SdF was a unique opportunity for those who participated in it, not in terms of offering education and training, but in transporting socialist values as a strategy-generating institution into their future lives. The SdF graduates who commemorated the Fall of the Berlin Wall in Maputo and Chimoio have prospered in a way that would not have been possible at the time without socialism and its interpretation of solidarity, a solidarity that found its material expression in the creation of the SdF and other educational exchange and scholarship programmes – however flawed this concept of solidarity was on the edges, partly based on the self-interests of the ruling parties and their elites on all sides. In that sense the GDR, too often simply judged as in the ICMA exhibition as a past dictatorship, provided an important way for freeing the mind and opening new avenues of
learning and understanding the world for those who attended the SdF, which makes the SdF an important example of socialist cosmopolitanism. Unfortunately, this part of Mozambique’s history is not only largely ignored in Mozambique itself, but equally in united Germany. The last word here shall thus be with Mano, who before we meet in Chimoio in November 2014 had a visit from his former East-German guest-parents. They visited Gorongosa National Park together. As it happened, while in the park some other (West-) German tourists heard them speak German and asked Mano why he spoke German so well. When he answered he went to school in the former GDR they said that must have been horrible. No, Mano replied, it was wonderful, he received a good education, caring second parents, learned many new skills, got new ideas – and those from the West who now spoke so negatively were not the ones who helped a country like Mozambique and a poor child like himself at the time to get an education, thus they should rather not pass judgement.

Mano’s statement sums up well some of the wider dynamics observed in educational exchange programmes and resulting networks between the Third World and socialist and capitalist countries alike (for examples from former West Germany see Slobodian 2012): All these networks shaped patterns of solidarity and created affective, often socialist-inspired, communities among their members, but ultimately failed to connect and transform wider politics and societies (Müller 2018). Lasting legacies are thus largely confined to the level of individual biographies.

**Acknowledgement:** I gratefully acknowledges funding from the Nuffield Foundation (Grant No: SGS/35446) that made this project possible. I also acknowledge the funding from the German embassy in Mozambique that made my trip in November 2014 possible.

**References**


1 It should be noted here that the concept of the ‘new man’ had relevance beyond the socialist context, encompassing a plethora of theoretical concepts and social norms and aspirations linked to ‘modernity’ in a broad sense, and emerging in different geographical settings. It goes beyond the focus of this paper to discuss this in more detail but see for example Bromber and Krais (2019).

2 Archival material at the Bundesarchiv is I believe as complete as can be. In addition to material from the various GDR ministries and the GDR secret service, the Stasi, it has copies of most documents produced by the Mozambican side and in Maputo in the Portuguese original. A mainly archive-based study conducted in 2006 by two German academics, who also consulted the archives in Maputo, confirms this: The authors describe how little additional relevant material was found within Mozambique (and what was found they discuss in their study), and that more generally many documents relating to that time and the SdF in particular were rotting away on a balcony in Maputo (see Reuter and Scheunpflug 2006).

3 Between 1979 and 1989, a total of 22,161 Mozambicans worked in the former GDR under that scheme, the third largest group by nationality. The largest group, 68,826 workers, came from Vietnam, followed by 25,360 workers from Cuba. Workers from Algeria (8,060), Angola (1,656) and below 1000 workers each from China, North Korea and Mongolia made up the rest of the programme (Zwengel 2011; Van der Heyden et.al. 2014).

4 As no complex existed that was big enough to host a cohort of 900 students, a new boarding facility was built in Staßfurt, a small town near Magdeburg, complete with
Mozambican artwork in the dining hall, where students lived and studied together and spent, as least in the initial years, much of their free time (for an in-depth description of the facilities and daily routines see Müller 2014; Reuter and Scheunpflug 2006).

One of the first documents here is a memorandum from the Ministry of Education and Culture of the People’s Republic of Mozambique under Graça Machel from 1 September 1980 to consider the creation of special technical secondary schools in the GDR. At that time, 2 schools with 1000 students each or 4 schools with 500 students each were envisaged (BArch DR/2/50686). This was later scaled down to one cohort of 900 as it was otherwise deemed to expensive. A second agreement was signed on 26 May 1989 that envisaged a staged subsequent cohort to follow from 1990 onwards, with 100 new students each being admitted over three consecutive years (BArch DR/2/13992), but these plans fell victim to German reunification.

All names have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.

Anna, interview 3 June 2008 in Maputo.

While the SdF had a German director and most pedagogic staff was German (there were a few Mozambican teachers teaching Portuguese language and Mozambican history and culture), a FRELIMO representative was a quasi co-director who had power over certain issues, mainly in relation to behaviour and discipline (BArch DR/2/28972; see also Müller 2014). As SdF students got older and mingled more with local youth and the local population more generally, they also experienced some of the racism in GDR society as well as the solidarity of standing up to such racism. It goes beyond this paper to discuss this in more detail but see Müller (2014, pp. 86-90).

Conversation with Anna, 5 November 2014 in Maputo.

Alfonso, interview 31 May 2008 in Maputo.

Conversation with Alfonso, 5 November 2014 in Maputo.
German pedagogic staff at the SdF even went as far as drawing up a concrete list of employment opportunities in GDR joint ventures in Mozambique for each SdF graduate, and sent this list to the Mozambican partner with a request to comment by 18.8.1987, so there would be enough time to alter arrangements that were not deemed feasible. The Mozambican side never returned with any concrete comments or alternative suggestions (BArch DR/2/50625). This list is still available in the German National Archive and it caused great amusement when I told some of my research participants where they might have worked.

The original agreements between the GDR and the People’s Republic of Mozambique clearly stipulates that the SdF leaving certificates are of the same value as a secondary school certificate obtained in Mozambique (BArch DR/2/13992). But after secondary school reform within Mozambique this was no longer the case, a fact not communicated to SdF students and their German teachers alike that became a big shock for SdF graduates when they returned. For a detailed discussion of these dynamics and their consequences see Müller (2014).

Interestingly, various efforts I made to get my book on the SdF translated into Mozambican Portuguese in cooperation with Mozambican research institutes have
failed. At the same time I am told that copies of my book have been widely read including by people who had active roles in the wider education infrastructure at the time, some of whom have contacted me. Others have been encouraged to consider writing about their experiences themselves, something I hope will happen in the future (various email exchanges, 2017).

23 Mia, interview 9 June 2008 in Chimoio.