

SMALL STRANGERS AT THE SCHOOL OF FRIENDSHIP: MEMORIES OF MOZAMBICAN SCHOOL STUDENTS OF THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

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“Why,” Francisca Isidro wonders, “did we have to leave our families and move so far away, only to come back as cooks, waitresses, sales assistants, and the like?” And she recalls: “We came back from our time in East Germany with professions that were not held in particularly high regard in Mozambique. Nobody understood why we didn’t return as engineers, doctors and teachers. ‘A waitress?’, they would wonder. ‘Why, they could have become a waitress in Mozambique. Nobody needs to spend so many years in school for that.’”²

And with that, Ms. Isidro puts her finger right on a misapprehension at the heart of an ambitious state-led education migration program that saw 900 Mozambican children attend the School of Friendship (Schule der Freundschaft, SdF) in Staßfurt in the district of Magdeburg, in what today is Saxony-Anhalt, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany) from 1982 to 1988.³ Ms. Isidro returned to Mozambique as a trained salesperson for clothing, a profession she neither chose nor ever worked in again subsequently. Like her, these 900 children had to navigate the diverging values that particular environments bestowed upon knowledge. What they learned was interpreted differently in their home communities, at the SdF, and in their German host families.

Examining the memories of the former child migrants, we come to understand that the knowledge-transfer program played out differently from what both the organizers and participants expected. As the teenagers and young adults returned to a country that was turning away from socialism with professions and political attitudes that had been valued at the SdF but seemed to have little use or prestige attached to them in Mozambique, many were disappointed and felt out of place. Thus, rather than making them mediators or connectors, the program made them strangers in their own land. The young adults had been groomed as a revolutionary vanguard workforce for a socialist world that no longer existed upon their return. The end of socialism was, for the time being, the end of the dreams of many of these former students.

When Mozambique achieved independence in 1975, new routes for the circulation of knowledge opened up. Whereas the colonial Portuguese government had done much to limit foreign — including

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2 Francisca Isidro, personal conversation at the conference, “Respekt und Anerkennung” (Respect and Acknowledgement), Magdeburg, Germany, February 22–24, 2019.

3 The Mozambican children were not the only ones at the SdF, but Namibian children were also educated there from 1985–1990, albeit largely in parallel rather than jointly; see, e.g., Annette Scheunpflug and Jürgen Krause, *Die Schule der Freundschaft: Ein Bildungsexperiment in der DDR*, Beiträge aus dem Fachbereich Pädagogik der Universität der Bundeswehr Hamburg (Hamburg, 2000).

- 4 Hauke Dorsch, "Rites of Passage Overseas?: On the Sojourn of Mozambican Students and Scholars in Cuba," *Africa Spectrum* 43, no. 2 (2008): 225-44; Michael G. Panzer, "The Pedagogy of Revolution: Youth, Generational Conflict, and Education in the Development of Mozambican Nationalism and the State, 1962-1970," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 4 (2009): 803-20.
- 5 Mathias Tullner, "Das Experiment 'Schule der Freundschaft' im Kontext der Mosambikanischen Bildungspolitik," in *Freundschaftsbande und Beziehungskisten: Die Afrikapolitik der DDR und der BRD gegenüber Mosambik*, ed. Hans-Joachim Döring and Uta Rüchel, 100-109 (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), 100.
- 6 Samora Machel, "Organizar a sociedade para vencer o subdesenvolvimento" (Organize society to fight underdevelopment), *Coleção Estudos e Orientações* 14 (Maputo, 1982), 4.
- 7 See Scheunpflug and Krause, *Die Schule der Freundschaft: Ein Bildungsexperiment*; Lutz R. Reuter and Annette Scheunpflug, *Eine Fallstudie zur Bildungszusammenarbeit zwischen der DDR und Mosambik* (Münster, 2006).
- 8 Uta Rüchel, "...Auf Deutsch sozialistisch zu denken..." — *Mosambikaner in der Schule der Freundschaft*, ed. Die Landesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR in Sachsen-Anhalt, vol. 18, Sachbeiträge (Magdeburg, 2001); Tanja Müller, *Legacies of Socialist Solidarity: East Germany in Mozambique* (Lanham, 2014).
- 9 Scheunpflug and Krause, *Die Schule der Freundschaft: Ein Bildungsexperiment*; Reuter and Scheunpflug, *Eine Fallstudie*.

church — influences on the education system in Mozambique, the socialist alignment of the Mozambican Liberation Front (FRELIMO) broadened international knowledge networks spanning a worldwide web of socialist countries. Mozambican youth attended schools in Cuba and the GDR, and adults received vocational training and military training, or attended universities all over the Eastern bloc as part of state-initiated knowledge transmission migrations.⁴ The idea for a school like the SdF was born in FRELIMO leadership circles at the end of the 1970s. President Samora Machel (1975-86) prioritized professional education to provide the industrializing country with skilled labor in the seeming absence of a professional working class. This was important both ideologically and practically. Not only was the working class the revolutionary class in Marxist-socialist exegesis, but the young People's Republic of Mozambique (PRM) lacked skills across professions. Despite this revolutionary emphasis on the working class, many Mozambicans — including parents, students, and members of the Mozambican Ministry of Education — did not value vocational training as much as general education and advanced degrees.⁵ The SdF was to provide its students with both general knowledge and vocational training to return skilled socialist workers as New Men (and Women) for the Mozambican socialist revolution. According to President Machel, "Education is our principal instrument in forming the New Man; a man, liberated from old ideas, from a mentality that was contaminated by the colonial-capitalist mindset; a man educated by the ideas and practices of socialism."⁶

The East German Socialist Unity Party (SED) leadership took up the idea and developed the SdF, not least because this goal was congruent with the SED's political values, its aspiration to aid the socialist development of so-called brother nations, and its economic interests in Mozambique.

Foregrounding oral history interviews and biographical writings, this article takes up a migrant-centered viewpoint. The existing studies dedicated to the SdF overwhelmingly approach the case study based on the German archival record and aim to understand what this experiment can tell us about the successes and failures of schooling children from a socialist brother state.⁷ Some researchers have given particular attention to the socialist dimension of this education migration project.⁸ Education scholars focus on the education experiment.⁹ All these approaches are useful to embed the autobiographical accounts on which this article draws into a wider literature. This article builds on these studies but shifts attention to the memories of the

former migrants, through which it examines different kinds of knowledge and the formation of a knowledge community among the SdF students. My primary sources are interviews and personal conversations I conducted across Mozambique from Maputo to Beira, Quelimane, Nampula, Nacala, and Pemba, as well as in Germany, mainly in 2014.¹⁰ In addition, I draw on two published sources containing first-person narratives.¹¹ More men than women spoke and wrote about their lives, reflecting the gender ratio at the school (700 boys to 200 girls); these stories include individuals from different regions of Mozambique and from different class backgrounds. I do not claim representativeness for this set of sources; rather, these particular voices provide subjective insights into the complex memories and lived realities of these particular lives. Overall, these individuals are likely to be less critical in their reflection about their time in East Germany, given that they wrote and told their stories to be included in publications by German authors. They were also recorded more than two decades after the return of the former students and colored by their subsequent adult lives in Mozambique.

Examining this education migration from the perspective of the history of migrant knowledge makes it possible to see these Mozambican children and adolescents not only as victims of a state-led migration scheme to educate vanguard workers for the Mozambican revolution, but also to see them as actors in their own right who navigated a shifting terrain of knowledge production and consumption. This article, with its focus on the knowledge of transnational migrant children in a boarding school context, addresses an exciting new research field.¹² Paying attention to the role of children and teenagers as knowledge actors in translocal settings reveals both their contributions as well as limitations to their host and home contexts as translators and producers of knowledge.¹³ The emerging field of the history of migrant knowledge refocuses attention on the immaterial aspects of migration. Knowledge transfer was the explicit purpose of the state education migration program that sent 900 Mozambican children to Staßfurt. Migrant knowledge includes broader forms of knowledge beyond the definition of technical and political knowledge transfer envisioned by the education ministries in the PRM and the GDR. The children at the SdF created a knowledge community, which bound them together long after the SdF had ceased to exist. They had learned and lived a particular form of being in the world and were socialized into a collective, enculturated into the East German education system, and raised to become vanguard workers for an idealistic people's revolution

10 The interviews were conducted mainly in Portuguese, a few in German, in the context of my PhD research on former Mozambican workers in East Germany. All translations into English are my own. The citations have been edited for readability.

11 Hans-Joachim Döring and Uta Rüchel, *Freundschaftsbände und Beziehungskisten: Die Afrikapolitik der DDR und der BRD gegenüber Mosambik* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005); Ulf Dieter Klemm, *Moçambique — Alemanha, Ida e Volta: vivências dos moçambicanos antes, durante e depois de estadia na Alemanha* (Maputo, 2005).

12 Simone Lässig, "The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda," *Bulletin of the GHI* 59 (2016): 56–57. A special issue edited by Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg dedicated to "Knowledge and Young Migrants" recently appeared in *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2019).

13 Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*, Studies in Global Social History (Leiden, 2010).

in Mozambique. After their return to Mozambique, all contended with a reality very different from the utopian visions of the educational experiment. They remained tied to the community of thought that had developed at the SdF and established their belonging to it as a life-long identity marker of importance in post-socialist Mozambique.

Small Strangers Arriving at the School of Friendship

Tomás Justino Django, like many others, remembers his arrival at the SdF in 1982 like a dream:

I was so impressed and happy about what I was seeing; it all appeared to be a dream. The dream was interrupted when somebody saw me and took me by the hand. Together we entered one of these buildings and they said: “This is your room.” The dream continued, and I saw beds instead of mats where I slept before. I looked to my front; there was a wardrobe instead of a bag in which I had kept my clothes before. They showed me the classrooms with their lights, windows, chairs, and pencil cases of enviable quality. There was a gym close by with sports equipment. I had no idea what function they might serve. There was an elite dining hall, a clinic, a laundry room, a sports field outside, and a library. There was nothing comparable in the world from which I was seeing or dreaming. I asked myself: For whom are all these things of such high quality?

The day of answers came. At the beginning of the academic year they said: “all this that surrounds us here is due to the effort of two peoples for a single goal: The formation of the New Man. Your goal is to study and always to study.”¹⁴

The nostalgic memories of the Mozambican arrivals depart markedly from the voices of analysts of the SdF standards. The latter point out the clearly existing shortcomings of the program, such as a lack of privacy with two-to-four children to a room, the insufficient attention paid to religious needs in the dining hall, and the lack of a space for all students to come together. The exuberance of memories like Mr. Django’s becomes readable when one takes into account the previous school experiences the majority of the SdF students had had, and the experiences many continued to have with Mozambican schools up to the time they recorded their memories.

¹⁴ Tomás Justino Django, “Moçambique-Alemanha, Ida e Volta,” in *Moçambique — Alemanha*, by Klemm, 223-38, 234.

Why did 900 young Mozambicans have to travel thousands of kilometers northwards to become skilled workers? For the FRELIMO leadership circle, it was out of the question to establish the school in Mozambique due to the ongoing war, a scarcity of internship possibilities, and funding challenges. Under these circumstances, it did not seem possible to maintain an isolated school with elite conditions in the country itself — it was easier to transfer the children. The SdF was to be a vision of Mozambique’s scientific-Marxist future, one in which “tribalism,” “occultism,” and “poor work routine” were to be overcome and Mozambican traditions were to become nothing but folklore.¹⁵ The few hundred meters of an idealized Mozambique that the school’s campus in Staßfurt was meant to represent were entirely dedicated to the socialist venture of educating the New Man.¹⁶ The school was a political project of development cooperation in the education sector. In the language of the time, it was a symbol of international solidarity, but it also played into the political and economic interests of the GDR.¹⁷ The content and concept of the SdF were purposefully left in German hands. Mozambique was explicitly interested in East German, not Mozambican, standards.¹⁸ This produced an in-betweenness, where an idealized Mozambique was to be constructed in Staßfurt; the school remained isolated, foreign visitors were not allowed in, and, initially, the Mozambican students were only allowed to go out in supervised groups. Thus, the young migrants traversed a whole continent only to find themselves practically immobile, at least in the beginning.¹⁹ As the students became older and spoke better German, they were able to leave the premises by themselves, especially to visit their East German host families or friends on the weekends.

As the quotation by Tomás Justino Django demonstrates, many students, upon arriving in the SdF universe, perceived it as a world that was completely foreign to the social contexts from which they came in Mozambique. Minister of Education Graça Machel had the students recruited across provinces to foster the unity of the Mozambican nation-state the government was in the process of creating.²⁰ After students were approached in their local schools, they often had to convince their parents, many of whom were afraid of selling their children into slavery based on their and their forefathers’ experience with Portuguese colonialism, forced labor, and slavery.²¹ Other parents placed their trust in the FRELIMO government and supported their children’s decision to pursue their education abroad unquestioningly.²² What drew many children was a thirst for adventure and a

15 Allen F. Isaacman and Barbara Isaacman, *Mozambique: From Colonialism to Revolution, 1900-1982* (Boulder, 1983), 93-99.

16 Tullner, “Das Experiment ‘Schule der Freundschaft,’” 103.

17 Katrin Lohrmann and Daniel Pasch, “Die ‘Schule der Freundschaft’ in Staßfurt,” in *Freundschaftsbande und Beziehungskisten*, ed. Döring and Rüchel, 91-99, here 95-98.

18 Tullner, “Das Experiment ‘Schule der Freundschaft,’” 105.

19 Scheunpflug and Krause, *Die Schule der Freundschaft: Ein Bildungsexperiment*, 82, 128.

20 Tullner, “Das Experiment ‘Schule der Freundschaft,’” 103.

21 Albino Forquilha, interview conducted by the author, Maputo, September 2, 2011; Pedro Munhamasse, interview conducted by the author, Quelimane, June 7, 2014.

22 Forquilha, interview.

desire to further pursue their education.²³ Most went into the unknown: “I didn’t even know where precisely this country was located. All I knew was that it was a country of whites in Europe, and it was called GDR.”²⁴ Luis João Maconha recalls having traveled first with his finger on a map in a classroom in Mozambique: “I was exactly eleven years old, that afternoon when I first heard the name Germany. With a group of kids, we traveled on a geographic map that hung in the classroom. It only took a few moments, and our questions were clarified. There we were with our wide-open eyes, seeing the small and longish country. This consultation of the map was the fastest journey on this planet.”²⁵

Pascoa Rodrigues, on the other hand, already held prior knowledge of the GDR because extended family members worked there. She remembers: “Some jealous people came and told my father that we would be assassinated in Germany and mistreated. But he didn’t believe them because I already had four uncles there who had sent photos and letters, and that is why he was very relaxed.”²⁶ Mr. Maconha, Ms. Rodrigues, and the other children were assembled in various holding camps across the provinces until they reached the capital, Maputo, whence the international flights departed. There was quite a bit of confusion as to the destination of each child. Albino Forquilha, for instance, remembers having been recruited to go to Cuba and learning only upon arrival in Maputo that he was, in fact, destined to go to the GDR. It was too late to tell his mother.²⁷ These stories allow a sense of the enormous demands a state-led migration project like this made on the new state apparatus. From the migrants’ perspective, these experiences underscored how much the children, once removed from their home communities, were dependent on the FRELIMO government.

Who were the students who came to be recruited? As far as the administration of the school was concerned, in the summer of 1982 a collective of 900 Mozambican children between twelve and fourteen years of age, who had completed at least a 4th-grade education at home, arrived in Staßfurt. Contrary to the official documentation, the new students did not constitute a homogeneous group. Rather, 200 girls and 700 boys from all over Mozambique with various levels of education and a de facto age range of nine to sixteen years came.²⁸ The result was a potpourri of religions, languages, customs, and class origins. This diversity was all but ignored, however, as the students were to grow into socialist Mozambican citizens, overcoming ethnic and

23 Pedro Munhamasse, Pascoa Rodrigues, and Narguice Ibrahim Jamal, interview conducted by the author, Quelimane, June 8, 2014.

24 Django, “Moçambique-Alemanha, Ida e Volta,” 233.

25 Luis João Maconha, “Meninos da Minha Era,” in *Moçambique — Alemanha*, by Klemm, 169–78, 169.

26 Rodrigues, interview.

27 Forquilha, interview.

28 Reuter and Scheunpflug, *Eine Fallstudie*, 78.

religious identities, such as that of being Makonde or Makua, Shangaan or Shona, animist, Muslim, or Christian. For the students this meant that by the time they were brought together in holding centers all over Mozambique, even prior to reaching Maputo, their cultural capital had decreased markedly. As they left their home region further behind, the group diversity increased and they gradually had to communicate in Portuguese and concentrate on their shared commonality: being Mozambican citizens.²⁹ The more the children met children with other mother tongues, customs, and lived realities, the more they were encouraged to shed these distinguishing features to merge into a new whole inhabiting a common Mozambican identity. The foundations for the community of knowledge that was to emerge at the SdF were laid in Mozambique.

Students were carriers of linguistic, religious, and cultural forms of knowledge when they arrived at the SdF; however, very little of it was valued in a school that was to educate the socialist New Man (and woman) in the heart of Europe. For centuries, education across Mozambique had referred foremost to a process of socialization regulated through initiation ceremonies and peer group associations, a tradition that had not lost its place in society until the end of colonial rule.³⁰ Not all students would have been old enough to have undergone initiation rituals prior to leaving for the SdF, and their later socialist education ensured that many came to look at such knowledge disparagingly. The cultural and religious knowledge with which the students arrived was not valued under socialism in either the GDR or Mozambique beyond folkloristic performances. In Mozambican Muslim communities, the Koranic schools not only taught literacy in Arabic but also introduced students into the cultural world of the Swahili coast.³¹ The SdF did not make it possible for Muslim students to follow halal eating rules or actively pursue their faith; the same was true for other faiths. In the state village schools or church schools that many future SdF students attended in Mozambique, they were often taught basic literacy and numeric skills. Many did not arrive with an equivalent of the knowledge of East German grade four students at the SdF, which initially posed a challenge for the curriculum. The interviews suggest that students who were recruited from FRELIMO pilot schools in Mozambique were already familiar with the doctrine of scientific socialism as the sure road to progress and less inclined to be steeped in other traditions.³² This FRELIMO doctrine has subsequently become engrained in many SdF student's perceptions of their life story. Former migrants often

29 Munhamasse, interview.

30 Malyn Newitt, *A History of Mozambique* (London, 1995), 438.

31 Ibid., 439.

32 Augusto Inácio Manuel Hapala, interview conducted by the author, Nampula, June 13, 2014; Xadrique Cafique, interview conducted by the author, Pemba, June 20, 2014.

refer to their own background and local culture in disparaging terms and thus do not perceive themselves as carriers of relevant knowledge for the SdF universe. Instead, they highlight their meritocratic achievements — they often were recruited as the best students in their class — and underscore their fast adaptation and absorption of both formal and informal knowledge at the SdF. They frame their arrival as small strangers in a foreign land but do not fail to point out how quickly they created a home away from home for themselves.

Adaptation to the doctrines at the SdF — which included reinterpreting the cultural and religious knowledge gained at home through a Marxist-Leninist lens and absorbing the new teachings they encountered unquestioningly — was the key to success. The school was not merely supposed to consist of selected future citizens, but it also aimed to form them into a community of thought and a socialist collective. And yet, the very existence of a group of young people growing up in a hybrid world between a vision of an idealized future Marxist-Leninist Mozambique and an equally idealized East German solidarity — which, in practice, often failed — was in itself an experiment in a socialist education utopia. Independently of the successes and failures of this experiment itself, the political and economic changes from socialism to a market economy that took hold in Mozambique starting in the second half of the 1980s, along with the sixteen-year war that raged from 1977 to 1992, challenged the reintegration of the migrants into their home context.

A Community of Knowledge Creation: The School of Friendship

The SdF became the students' primary community of knowledge. For seven years, their lives centered mainly on their classes, vocational training, and afterschool activities. During that time, in addition to being carriers of knowledge, students became recipients, translators, and producers of knowledge. As typical of schools the world over, both the school staff and the students saw the students as receptacles of knowledge rather than bearers thereof. Unlike schools in other nations, those in East Germany treated formal education and upbringing as equivalent.³³ Accordingly, SdF students were to be taught content knowledge in class, educated in how to behave as model socialists, and brought up as Mozambican citizens; in all these areas the students were expected to learn by absorbing the teachings offered at the SdF and ignoring alternative worldviews and ideas. Despite this holistic approach, many former SdF students remember their school

33 *Bildung* (education) and *Erziehung* (upbringing) were regarded as identical in the GDR and were subordinated to political and societal goals; see, for instance, Jane Schuch, *Mosambik im pädagogischen Raum der DDR: Eine bildanalytische Studie zur "Schule der Freundschaft" in Staßfurt* (Wiesbaden, 2013), 33.

foremost as a place of formal learning. They speak about having received four years of general education, followed by two years of vocational training and a three-month internship.

Although the school was conceptualized purposefully to follow a German curriculum in terms of general, technical, political, and pedagogical knowledge, some concessions were made to facilitate transferability of information to the students' home contexts. For instance, the standard textbooks for polytechnical classes in the East German *Polytechnische Oberschule* were expanded to include examples the authors deemed relevant to the Mozambican students' lives.³⁴ The message was clear: German competency and magnanimity would help lead a poor, rural country to prosperity through industrial development.³⁵ The underlying unidirectional concept of knowledge transfer between knowledge orders had neocolonial undertones as it implied that the global North, including the GDR, had the general and technical knowledge, whereas Mozambique was regarded exclusively as lacking such knowledge.

Upon arrival, students received intense German language training to insure that they would be able to understand their teachers. Tomás Justino Django remembers that, over time, "German became our dominant language."³⁶ Students continued to learn Portuguese from Mozambican teachers, which was a foreign language for most students and teachers alike. As a result, many returnees lament not feeling quite at ease in German, Portuguese, or their mother tongues.³⁷ Moreover, Mozambican teachers taught subjects intended to give students knowledge about their home country context, such as Mozambican geography, history, and organized cultural and political activities.³⁸ The students were, therefore, expected to learn both the dominant teachings of the East German education system but also the subjects of the Mozambican education system that FRELIMO deemed central to the creation of its ideal citizens.

Nevertheless, not everything the students experienced was planned by the comprehensive school and afterschool program; they were also confronted with situations that the authorities sought to shelter them from and denied the existence of, chief among them racism. A formative instance that left an indelible mark on the collective psyche of the SdF students was the death of one of them, Carlos Conceição, who drowned in the River Bode in 1987 in the course of a fight that erupted after he had visited a local discotheque. His manslaughter was recorded by the authorities as the deed of an antisocial youth

34 Rüchel, "...Auf Deutsch sozialistisch zu denken...", 43-44.

35 Lohrmann and Pasch, "Die 'Schule der Freundschaft' in Staßfurt," 99.

36 Django, "Moçambique-Alemanha, Ida e Volta," 234.

37 Tomas Django, interview conducted by the author, Maputo, March 11, 2014.

38 Tullner, "Das Experiment 'Schule der Freundschaft,'" 104.

rather than as racist act, reflecting the official anti-racism policy of the GDR, which maintained that racism existed only in the West.³⁹ Many former students describe the confrontation, as in Emilia Francisco's short story, as exemplifying the fractured relationships with some of the local East German youth.⁴⁰ The death of Carlos Conceição serves as a collective memory that illustrates what racism meant for the Mozambican children in the GDR. Alongside this collective remembering, many of the students recall other racist acts that were committed by those they interacted with, such as one East German family having a problem with a daughter dating an African, host siblings who made cruel remarks based on skin color, or people who had never seen a black person before unsolicitedly touching them.⁴¹

One example of racism is the story of Augusto Inácio Manuel Hapala and his German girlfriend Carmen, whom he met during a school visit to a museum in Magdeburg. When he first came to her house, her father called him the n-word, albeit in jest, but Mr. Hapala clearly felt that he was not welcome.⁴² The two teenagers, however, had nowhere else to meet because Mr. Hapala was also prohibited from bringing his girlfriend to the SdF. In the end, his girlfriend's mother talked to her father, and Mr. Hapala was able to come over. Even so, as he tells it, "The first day, when I came to eat lunch, [her father] didn't eat with us. I sat down with her mother and her, and he entered with a long face and left." Young Augusto persisted and came to spend weekends with Carmen. The relationship with her father slowly changed. Mr. Hapala recalls: "In the end, we became good friends. In the beginning it was really difficult with him because he would say in the middle of a lot of people that he didn't want blacks at his house, but afterwards, when we had become good friends, he even came to pick me up in Staßfurt on the weekends. ... I still exchanged letters with him until [his death in] 1997." Contrary to the violent collective memory of racism centered around what is remembered as Carlos Conceição's murder, many stories like this one that former students tell about their personal experiences deal with overcoming racism. These stories frame racism as a moment of learning, with friendship ultimately prevailing. Yet they also show that encountering racism of all kinds was an integral part of being black, even in a state where racism was declared to be illegal.

In the literature, migrant children are often conceptualized as translators between the host and home country contexts.⁴³ The SdF students had little opportunity for such translations. On the contrary, their

39 Müller, *Legacies of Socialist Solidarity*, 9; Rüchel, "...Auf Deutsch sozialistisch zu denken..." 92-96.

40 Emilia Francisco, "A Presença de Skinheads em Staßfurt?," in *Moçambique — Alemanha*, by Klemm, 81-84.

41 Custodio Tamele, interview conducted by the author, Maputo, March 12, 2014; Hapala, interview.

42 Hapala, interview.

43 Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg, "Knowledge on the Move: New Approaches toward a History of Migrant Knowledge," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43 (2017): 313-46, 343.

immersion in the SdF universe let the home context recede for seven years, just as the East German context, in turn, receded when they reintegrated in Mozambique. School authorities monitored what little contact they maintained with home during their seven-year absence, which was also marked by the difficulty of obtaining information about their families and news about the deteriorating situation in Mozambique. When their families sent amulets and other means of protection deemed “occult” by FRELIMO, these were kept from the students, as was bad news about the health of family members.⁴⁴

Likewise, communication and travel home to Mozambique were very limited for the students, so that they were unable to convey much about their new lives to their families. Many parents were illiterate and/or did not speak Portuguese, the language in which writing was taught. In addition, the transportation situation in Mozambique had deteriorated on account of the war, so that mail was unlikely to be received in the middle and northern parts of the country. Only the best students were able to travel home during the holidays. Due to the raging civil war there, even these lucky students were not always able to reach their families. One student died trying to visit his family despite explicit warnings.⁴⁵

Sometimes, visits home were more successful, and communication could flow more easily. Augusto Hapala was able to meet some of his family in 1985 when he went on holiday to his home province of Cabo Delgado. For security reasons, the governor had arranged for the parents of the students from the countryside to spend a few days with their children in the provincial capital of Pemba. Mr. Hapala's father, an aunt, two brothers, and a sister were accommodated in a hotel for five days. Mr. Hapala reported, “They always sat down with us and asked whether we were studying and living well. I had time and they were curious, especially my father was very curious. They liked that I came back with three suitcases and brought clothes for them and many photographs that I had taken there with teachers and friends. That is how they discovered that I really was studying.”⁴⁶ He was finally able to tell his family about his life at the SdF and was able to bring items from abroad that would make their lives easier. In return, he received news from his family and better understood the contemporary political and economic context in Mozambique. Yet such visits were the exception: belonging to multiple communities and cultures in Mozambique and East Germany, SdF students generally lacked possibilities for exchange and translation across cultural

44 Reuter and Scheunpflug, *Eine Fallstudie*, 121–22, 44.

45 Hapala, interview; Forquilha, interview.

46 Hapala, interview.

and generational divides; not much knowledge was on the trans-continental move during the school years. Students typically could merely reflect with one another about their experiences and carry on conversations about the new perspectives they came to share.

Despite their relative isolation, students were also producers of knowledge. What students learned and the independent conclusions they drew from the SdF experiment sometimes varied considerably from the script. For instance, some adolescent students attempted increasingly to break out of the strict schedule, monotony, and ideological straitjacket at the SdF, which hints at an underbelly of active and passive dissent. Class president Albino Forquilha remembers:

At the end of the course, there were students who had the worst grades, who were undisciplined, some who became pregnant ... and were sent back. ... Others started to drink; some even took drugs. Others had problems with petty crime because they were in contact with African traffickers who went to West Berlin to buy things and sell them, and some of my colleagues got involved in this type of crimes. ... Some even turned into some kind of political rebels. Their lack of discipline was directed against some forms of political organization that existed in the school. Some even burned the Mozambican flag.⁴⁷

The youth revolts at the SdF are discussed in more detail elsewhere.⁴⁸ Among the reasons that the young people rebelled was the dissonance between their personal aspirations and the collective opportunities available to them at the SdF, such as that Francisca Isidro mentioned at the beginning of this article. The best primary school students had been selected to come to the GDR not to become doctors, engineers, and teachers but to be trained as masons, electricians, and waiters. They felt frustrated by their lack of opportunities to determine their careers themselves. Moreover, they foresaw that their return home would not bring them a stable and prestigious working-class future in Mozambique in its revolutionary circumstances. That is, rather than having insurance and retirement benefits, they would, on the contrary, be greeted by war and political uncertainties. Their deviant behavior can be read as protest and their individual choices to opt out of the SdF universe with its strict discipline and ideology, in the process creating and relying on new forms of knowledge that were not part of the SdF curricula.

47 Forquilha, interview.

48 Reuter and Scheunpflug, *Eine Fallstudie*, 117–20; Rüchel, "...Auf Deutsch sozialistisch zu denken...", 64–67.

Despite these examples of rebellion and knowledge creation, overall, students were neither perceived nor perceived themselves as producers of independent knowledge prior to their return to Mozambique. Yet when they returned home, the knowledge they carried, received, translated, and created became geographically mobile and expanded rapidly.

The Possibilities and Impossibilities of Transferring Knowledge to Mozambique

The East German neighbor of Benedito Augusto Mualinque's host family made a statement that stayed with him. He quotes her as having said: "I think that your government thought about this well because the best help that a nation can give to the other is exactly this kind of help. In this way, you won't have to import technicians; you, as pioneers, will transmit the knowledge to your countrymen, so soak up everything and don't forget anything."⁴⁹ This was the same argument that many young migrants heard throughout their seven years at the SdF. Many had worked hard at school and in the companies, endured separation from their families, and looked forward to returning home. They clung to a vision that already looked questionable from the mid-1980s onwards. The SdF neither adjusted its program to the political changes in Mozambique nor to those in East Germany but anachronistically continued to pursue what the planners in the late 1970s had envisioned as being Mozambique's future. When the adolescents and young adults (now between sixteen and twenty-three years of age) duly returned in November and December of 1988, suitcase and diploma in hand, formal knowledge and varied experiences of living abroad in their heads, they experienced life as anachronistic.⁵⁰ Reintegration was a complex process because socialist model citizens educated abroad had to integrate themselves into a country that most had not seen in seven formative years. Moreover, they encountered it in a state of political transition to free market and multiparty democratic structures. Skilled laborers had to find their bearing in a war economy characterized by militarization and a shortage of formal employment opportunities. Migrants returning from Europe and the comforts at the SdF struggled to adjust to a Mozambican society marked by a shortage of consumer goods and food after eleven years of war. These children, now grown, searched for their families and tried to find ways to bridge the loss of sharing their teenage years with them once they located them.

The translation of knowledge from the SdF universe into a Mozambican war economy was not an easy feat for most returnees. The Mozambique

49 Benedito Augusto Mualinque, "O Meu Primeiro Natal na Alemanha," in *Moçambique — Alemanha*, by Klemm, 45-52, 49.

50 Lohrmann and Pasch, "Die 'Schule Der Freundschaft' in Staßfurt," 91.

they found was a far cry from the Mozambique the politicians and education specialists who had planned the SdF had envisioned. Mozambique was ravaged by a sixteen-year war that saw one million dead, one million temporary squatters, two million refugees and three million internally displaced out of a total population of just 15 million.⁵¹ Food supplies were disrupted, and the formal economy had all but come to a halt. Instead of being assigned to work on GDR-PRM agricultural and mining projects, or even working in the various professions for which they had been trained, the students were collectively conscripted upon arrival. Tomás Justino Django remembers feeling incredulous: “I returned to my birth country full of hope and knowledge that I collected on the other side. How flabbergasted I was, upon awakening from this dream ... [to find] I was a soldier.”⁵² Only those who were considered inept or maintained strong relationships with people in important positions were able to escape the compulsory military service. This was a tremendous shock to many young people who believed that suffering through military training was a waste of their knowledge and education. In Carlos Alberto Maconha’s words: “As we were instructed, suffering made itself felt; the bodies were rolling over on pointed stones that were absorbing our fresh blood from our bodies full of the fertile knowledge that we brought.”⁵³ Even after completing their military service, many students struggled to make ends meet. As Jaime Faque Suldane put it: “Upon completing the military conscription, we ... [were left] as technicians who knew nothing. So we stayed in the streets, unemployed, and dependent on the luck of the draw to do whatever!”⁵⁴ Disillusioned returnees who had been conditioned to believe that the state took care of their life decisions, from recruitment to the SdF to the choice of their training specialization, needed to take their lives into their own hands. The state failed to allocate most of the returnees appropriate job postings due to a mixture of the effects of the sixteen-year war, the resulting limited capacities in Mozambican industries, and the government itself, as a shift was underway towards individual responsibility on an open labor market.

Under these circumstances, a few former SdF students returned to Germany as contract workers in the hope that they could live life there in accordance with their education, values, and social ties.⁵⁵ Augusto Hapala, for instance, remembers: “I was severely unhappy at the time ... I would have never considered working for any ministry that has anything to do with armament because of that culture of peace I brought from Germany.” Therefore, he planned to return

51 K. B. Wilson, “Internally Displaced, Refugees and Returnees from and in Mozambique,” *Studies on Emergencies and Disaster Relief*, No. 1, ed. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1-62 (Uppsala, 1994), 1.

52 Django, “Moçambique-Alemanha, Ida e Volta,” 237.

53 Maconha, “Meninos da Minha Era,” in *Moçambique — Alemanha*, by Klemm, 169-79, 173.

54 Jaime Faque Suldane, “Nas Terras do Tio Honecker,” in *Moçambique — Alemanha*, by Klemm, 101-104, 103.

55 Forquilha, interview; Marcia C. Schenck, “From Luanda and Maputo to Berlin: Uncovering Angolan and Mozambican Migrants’ Motives to Move to the German Democratic Republic (1979-1990),” *African Economic History* 44 (2016): 203-34.

to East Germany. A friend, an army major, provided him with the necessary documentation.⁵⁶ While a return to East Germany offered a road out of a country engaged in civil war and sometimes a return to loved ones, it rarely meant employment as skilled laborers, as East Germany began its own tumultuous transition to joining the Federal Republic on October 3, 1990.

After realizing how their skills failed to fit the market, many former SdF students who stayed in Mozambique wanted to create a better future by investing in higher education. Yet, the Mozambican Ministry of Education did not recognize the SdF diplomas as either enabling access to schooling in the preparatory level for university, or directly to university. Many former SdF students felt discriminated against and punished for having served the socialist system. Albino Forquilha remembers: “This situation created great problems and frustrations. First, because we left knowing that we would work in a company upon return, but none was available to receive us. Second, because the level of training we concluded there was not accepted for working or going to study at the universities. ... I, because I was the president of the association of students, proposed that we organize to interact with the government, and we wrote several letters. We were received by the minister, and the decision was made that our education was not comparable to *nível médio*.”⁵⁷ Katrin Lohrmann and Daniel Pasch have compared the German and Mozambican school systems and their changes in the 1980s and concluded that the state’s refusal to accept the SdF certificate and skilled labor diplomas for access to grade 10 and higher, or directly to university education, contradicted the agreements signed between the two governments.⁵⁸ In the end, each student found an individual solution, and some continued their formal education and attended universities.

Despite the difficulties most SdF graduates faced, a few were able to draw upon their education and training to establish a successful career in Mozambique. Elsa Vurenda and Bacar Madane are among the SdF returnees who began working for the Mozambican Railway Company (CFM) upon their return and still work there today.⁵⁹ Ms. Vurenda, for instance, was trained as mechanical designer and was found unsuitable for military service upon her return. She presented herself at the Ministry of Education in Maputo and then returned to her home province of Zambezia. The directorate of education there recommended, among others, a job placement as a mechanical designer with CFM. CFM accepted her application, and she began to

56 Hapala, interview.

57 Forquilha, interview. At the time, *nível médio* referred to tenth- and eleventh-grade vocational training and should have been sufficient for university access; see Lohrmann and Pasch, “Die ‘Schule der Freundschaft’ in Staßfurt,” 93.

58 Lohrmann and Pasch, “Die ‘Schule der Freundschaft’ in Staßfurt,” 93–94; see also Tullner, “Das Experiment ‘Schule der Freundschaft,’” 105.

59 During my visit to the Beira headquarters of the CFM with Bacar Madane on June 4, 2014, I met several former SdF students who worked at the CFM at the time.

work in the area for which she had been trained. Later, she qualified further to work in civil design. Today, she is able to support her extended family, and she also brought several of her family members to work for CFM. For her parents it paid off to send a daughter abroad who now forms the financial backbone of the family.⁶⁰ For his part, Bacar Madane himself owed his career in PR with the CFM to a fortuitous circumstance. A film crew from the Netherlands had left its equipment in Mozambique, but the only instruction manual was in German, and he was called in to translate. Since then, he has provided jobs for several other former SdF students at CFM.⁶¹ These stories illustrate both that some career paths worked out according to the scheme devised by the GDR and PRM, and that other SdF graduates had acquired some skills that gave them a competitive advantage for working within the formal sector.

Other returnees also successfully applied the technical knowledge they had gained in East Germany to work as entrepreneurs in the formal and informal economy. Domingos Dali, for example, began working as an electrician at various construction sites around the country. He then established his own company called “Elektroblitz” based on the East German company where he had trained, and still works in this sector today.⁶² Pedro Munhamasse, in turn, still works in construction and applies the technical knowledge he received in East Germany to building projects. He frames his work as serving the mission of the SdF to contribute to the development of Mozambique.⁶³ Finally, Xadrique Cafique works as locksmith and employs three people. He also invests in training new people, but since he is not formally able to provide diplomas, people leave after having acquired the necessary skills.⁶⁴ Some of the former students I met struggle to make ends meet, and all of them know of friends and classmates who depend on help as they fight to wrench an income from the informal economy, juggling multiple odd jobs or taking on temporary work as drivers and security guards whenever available.

The experience of having lived abroad made a lasting impact on the returnees, regardless of whether their training benefited them professionally. Most, like Pascoa Rodrigues, concluded that they had changed on a personal level: “From a cultural point of view, I learned many things, like to respect and value people, punctuality, to value friendships, and much more, but in terms of vocational training I can say that it wasn’t a great success. ... I had no benefit from that vocational training there.”⁶⁵

60 Elsa Vurenda, interview conducted by the author, Quelimane, June 9, 2014.

61 Bacar Madane, personal conversation, Beira, June 4, 2014.

62 Domingos Dali, interview conducted by the author, Nacala, June 18, 2014.

63 Munhamasse, interview.

64 Cafique, interview.

65 Rodrigues, interview.

Moreover, many of the young Mozambicans that returned had become estranged from the country they had been asked to leave behind seven years before. After being inundated with East German pedagogy and cultural values all this time, they had become East Germanized. In the words of Luís João Maconha: “We shouldn’t obscure the fact that these people [East Germans] already had transmitted their way of being, they had already implanted their rich and vast history and culture in us.”⁶⁶ Additionally, some students were no longer able to find their families, others had almost forgotten their mother tongues, and all of them had to bridge the years they were gone as well as the end of childhood and adolescence in their relationships. Many struggled to adjust to Mozambican society, where they often encountered envy and bitterness from those who alleged they had left the country when life became difficult during the war and were therefore not deserving of special treatment.

The legacies of this education migration continue to reverberate in the lives of the returned migrants even today. As adults, they reminisce together about their adolescence in East Germany. The time they spent in the SdF community generated a group identity that continues to mark them out as a collective, a group with shared social capital and migrant knowledge. They maintain an active group identity as a “big family.”⁶⁷ “I not only was, I am a Staßfurter,” maintains Sérgio Clemente Taero nearly thirty years after he returned to Mozambique; he argues that the only thing he can vouch for that worked in the SdF pedagogy is that the students overcame tribalism and grew into a unit: the notorious “Staßfurters.”⁶⁸ Domingos Dali founded mutual aid systems in Tete and Nacala among the local SdF returnees to materially support those who are struggling.⁶⁹ Custodio Temele acknowledges that the collective marks him even now: “The collective, the discipline to always have to watch out for the others, I don’t think these are bad characteristics of your average socialist.”⁷⁰ Moreover, international networks continue to exist, but contrary to the expectations of those who planned the SdF, these are solely of a private nature. Some maintain contact with their host families up to the present, including the occasional transnational visit of both former host families and former students.⁷¹ Others who live in Maputo maintain contact with German institutions like the embassy. But most lost all contact to Germany over the years.

Conclusion

The SdF school program was intended to transmit formal knowledge, both general and technical, to the students. Further, it was supposed to instill political values through the students’ socialization in the

66 Maconha, “Meninos da Minha Era,” 173.

67 Narguice Ibrahim Jamal, interview conducted by the author, Quelimane, June 8, 2014.

68 Sérgio Clemente Taero, “Ich bin ein Staßfurter,” in *Freundschaftsbande und Beziehungskisten: Die Afrikapolitik der DDR und der BRD gegenüber Mosambik*, ed. Döring and Rüchel, 110–14 (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), 110.

69 Dali, interview.

70 Temele, interview.

71 Vurenda, interview; Custodio, interview; Madane, personal conversation.

socialist collective. Students were to absorb these different bodies of knowledge and transport them to Mozambique, where they were to implement what they had learned in their professions, in training others, and in embodying the ideal of the socialist New Man. At least that was the theory.

This education migration was characterized by the encounter of unequal knowledge systems wherein the FRELIMO leadership circle had identified the German approach to vocational training as an example to follow in the development of socialist skilled workers for Mozambique. At the heart of this education migration thus lay an uncritical knowledge transfer from North to South. Age-related hierarchies compounded the geographic knowledge hierarchy. In many autobiographical accounts, the former child migrants speak of themselves as learners more so than as bearers of knowledge. Yet, students did not arrive as empty vessels; they were carriers of certain kinds of ideas and customs that were partly forgotten and partly integrated into their new everyday lives. They also translated the ideas they encountered abroad into their own worldview, in the process building the community of knowledge they continue to share with the other SdF students; through their collective everyday experiences at the SdF, their friendships, the ideology and teachings received and discussed, they formed a knowledge-sharing community, to which they continue to belong almost thirty years after their return, utilizing it as an identity marker still. In the process they made and remade their worlds several times over.

Their opportunities to translate the new worldview and technical expertise formed at the SdF into their former lives in Mozambique were limited as these worlds remained separate: their East German families stayed in Germany; their Mozambican ones were in Mozambique. Over the seven years of their stay, they became more and more Germanized and were able to experience life outside of the SdF universe more independently. Yet, the transnational migration experience created a group of Mozambicans that would always stand apart as Other, both in the East German context and in their home contexts across Mozambique.

Upon returning to Mozambique, the young adults had to negotiate a new knowledge landscape; they had to translate between the old (socialist) and brave new (post-socialist) world and between their experiences abroad and the exigencies back home. In this process, it becomes apparent that the value of knowledge remains tied to the system in which it is created. The children were selected in Machel's

socialist People's Republic and returned to what became the Republic of Mozambique based on market and democratic principles under Joaquim Chissano. Their socialist personalities were of limited use in an economy that shifted to market structures; they were rarely placed in formal employment as skilled workers in the area of their training; to make matters worse, their SdF diplomas were not recognized according to the agreements established between the two governments, which restricted their access to higher education. While some former SdF students managed to fend for themselves and continue their studies to attain a Mozambican middle-class life, others joined the sixty percent of the Mozambican population who live in poverty.

This then is a case study about the mobility and immobility of knowledge, which, on the basis of former migrants' memories, sheds light on the difference between the planned and actual movement of different bodies of knowledge. It has addressed how and why general and technical knowledge was supposed to be transferred, which borders and barriers it overcame and which it did not, what roles the migrants and state policies but also language, age, and the kind of knowledge produced played. Some knowledge remained intact and was transferred, other ideas were changed and adapted in the process of circulation, yet others were forgotten; what remained was the community of knowledge that continues to bind the former students together. The young Mozambicans who went to East Germany were not only at the mercy of the SED and FRELIMO education ministries and their educators, but as they grew up, they increasingly navigated the shifting ideological terrains they came to inhabit both actively and critically. The socialist education experiment groomed a socialist vanguard prepared for a future that was never to be. The returnees were disappointed by what the transformed Mozambique had to offer, in which there seemed to be no special place for the socialist New Men and Women.

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