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6 Agents of Decolonization? Romanian Activities in Mozambique's Oil and Healthcare Sectors, 1976–1984

Introduction

In early 1973, a memorandum sent by the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) to the Romanian Communist Party's (RCP) Central Committee detailed the impact of Bucharest's support in the Mozambican national liberation war:

Your trucks helped us to send weapons and ammunition to the front, transport medicine, school material, and agricultural tools [...] Ambulances saved many of our wounded [...] Tractors [...] contributed to the increase in agricultural production. Uniforms and weapons, of excellent quality, played a decisive role in our military progress.¹

Throughout the early 1970s, FRELIMO and the RCP built a relationship founded on the Bucharest leadership's enthusiastic support of FRELIMO's struggle against Portuguese colonial rule. Samora Machel, FRELIMO's president, described Romania as "one of the great trenches against imperialism".²

In this context, a bond developed between Machel and Nicolae Ceaușescu that exuded familiarity and was supposed to underline the special connection between the two parties and peoples. The Romanian government decided, in spring

1 "FRELIMO: Memorandum către CC al PCR despre lupta de eliberare din Mozambic. Ajutor solicitat RSS pentru 1973–1974", 1973, Fond CC al PCR, Relații Externe 238/1973, p. 7, National Historical Central Archives of Romania (ANIC), Bucharest.

2 "Stenograma întâlnire Nicolae Ceaușescu cu Samora Moises Machel", 21 June 1973, Fond CC al PCR, Relații Externe 105/1973, p. 5, ANIC, Bucharest.

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1972, to allow FRELIMO to open a diplomatic mission in Bucharest, the first of its kind in Eastern Europe. In 1973, during a meeting in Bucharest, Ceaușescu and Machel issued an official communiqué that recognized FRELIMO as “the only legitimate representative of the Mozambican people”.³ The Romanian position constituted an important precedent, as Machel underlined: “We hope that Romania’s example will be followed by other socialist countries [...] so that we would be recognized not only in Europe but also in other socialist and African countries.” He even stressed that during his trip to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the Soviet authorities granted him and his delegation “the status that we are entitled to” because of Romania’s official recognition of FRELIMO.⁴

This chapter tests the premise of the elective affinity between Mozambique and Romania by focusing on the personal experiences of two groups of Romanian specialists/medical workers in Quelimane (a seaport, the administrative capital of the Zambezia province) and Maputo (1977–1979) and oilmen at the national oil company, *Petróleos de Moçambique* (PETROMOC), sent to offer aid and assistance to the government in Maputo (1977–1984). We investigate the translation of macro, official discourses of solidarity into microhistories of experiencing Mozambique. The contribution discusses the Romanian conception of technical assistance in the context of bilateralism with an Afro-Marxist regime while comparing it with other socialist states. We stress several discursive and lived paradoxes resulting from the overlap between ideological, national, and even neo-colonial filters employed by Romanians in order to normalize Mozambican realities. Drawing on historian Young-Sun Hong’s analysis of aid from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the Third World, we argue that such premises of bilateralism inherently reproduced many of the problematic features of Western assistance, thereby diluting the anti-imperialist and counter-hegemonic rhetoric extolled by the RCP and FRELIMO.⁵ The various spaces of interaction – oil refineries, hospitals, apartments – between Romanian *cooperantes* (experts) and local officials or population are terrains where the stated Mozambican-Romanian friendship was tested by commercial and personal interests and by cultural hierarchies and complexes of superiority extolled by Romania’s representatives. The transnationality of these specialists’ presence in Mozambique was counterbalanced by paternalist narratives and practices of self-ghettoization. We show how

3 “Bogata cronică a raporturilor de prietenie și solidaritate româno-mozambicane”, *Lumea*, 26 June 1975, p. 12.

4 “Stenogramă întâlnire Nicolae Ceaușescu cu Samora Moises Machel”, 21 June 1973, *Lumea*, pp. 9–10.

5 Y.-S. Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 48.

the Romanian regime's exceptionalism trickled down to the experts' perceptions of local conditions.

By the mid-1980s, Romanian officials focused exclusively on cooperation in the field of agriculture, giving up on more investment-intensive projects requiring highly skilled labour. Bucharest had also stopped aid in the field of healthcare. The relationship between the two countries, despite the leadership's rhetoric in both parties, was characterized by clashing commercial and state-building interests. War and economic crisis transformed Mozambique into a space of liability in the Romanian perspective, fundamentally defined by its rural conditions rather than by its status as a modernizing African socialist society. Our case study reveals the gradual disaggregation of socialist internationalism at the level of state policies and individual narratives.

The contribution relies on two types of personal accounts: the doctors' activity reports from the archives of the Ministry of Health in Bucharest and discussion-interviews.⁶ These sources were combined with archival information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the RCP's Central Committee as well as collections at the Mozambican archives in Maputo. The doctors' activity reports reveal the personalization of the official discourse, which combined "socialist expert witnessing" of the Mozambican healthcare situation with projections of the self in the postcolonial context. The discussion-interviews were done by Iolanda Vasilie between August and September 2017. These were four conversations with two oilmen from PETROMOC and their wives as well as one with the wife of a former agricultural engineer who worked in Pemba (northern Mozambique) between 1979 and 1985.

There is a significant difference between the physicians' activity reports and the discussion-interviews with the oilmen and their families. The first were written while the physicians were in the country and influenced by everything that was new, with little time for reflection. The activity reports include the interactions with officials of the Ministry of Health and communist party authorities. In the case of the second source, we encounter settled memories, negotiated and conversing with each other as well as in multiple inner voices. Nostalgia over the lost years of youth, not necessarily of the experience itself or the times of state

⁶ This is a research method that uses a set of conductive questions meant to put at ease the person one is speaking with and engage her/him in uninhibited dialogue. Similar to a certain extent to the "life story" method, this practice argues that the researcher's interlocutors are not "informants" or "interviewees", but co-participants in the research. C. B. T. Peixoto, "Ser, não ser, voltar a ser ou tornar-se? Uma reflexão sobre a (re)inserção social dos angolanos de ascendência portuguesa à luz dos estudos pós-coloniais", PhD thesis, University of Coimbra, 2015.

socialism blends with the memory of making the most of a unique experience. All the while, the interlocutor is an informed researcher. We brought these sources together because this way we could balance and compare subjectivities with official accounts of this East-South interaction. We are looking at the particularities of these East-South interactions at a micro level and at the way they nuanced macro readings of bilateralism, pushing them outside of Cold War binaries. How did aid and solidarity overlap and to what extent can we speak of shared ideals between East and South as exemplified by the Romanian-Mozambican case? Did economic benefits play into these dynamics?

FRELIMO and Assisted Socialist Construction

Formed in 1962, in Tanganyika, as a unified liberation movement of three other groupings, FRELIMO led the armed struggle against Portuguese colonial rule since 1964. In 1975, once the country declared its independence, it became the ruling party under the leadership of Samora Machel.

Eduardo Mondlane, FRELIMO's president – until his death in 1969 – and the movement's "cupola" during the early years,⁷ created the initial networks of collaboration against the background of the Cold War. Outside the Frontline States,⁸ the established contacts were with countries from the socialist bloc, Cuba, and the Scandinavian states.⁹ The aid – designated for either FRELIMO or the Mozambican refugees in Tanzania – varied from food, weapons and uniforms, cigarettes and trucks to full scholarships or medical treatment. Initially,

⁷ For example, M. dos Santos (vice president and secretary of foreign affairs), U. Simango (vice president), or P. Mocumbi (secretary of foreign affairs).

⁸ The Frontline States was a political coalition born in the 1960 with the intention of fighting apartheid and white minority rule in the region. The founding countries were Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia. Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe joined after independence, although representatives of national liberation movements, such as FRELIMO, participated before 1975.

⁹ In May 1969, Sweden was the first Western country to officially support the liberation movements in Southern Africa. On Scandinavian countries' aid to Mozambique and to the liberation movements in Southern Africa, see: T. Sellström, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa: Volume I: Formation of a Popular Opinion (1950–1970)*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999; T. Sellström (ed.), *Liberation in Southern Africa – Regional and Swedish Voices: Interviews from Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, the Frontline and Sweden*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999; I. Soiri and P. Peltola (eds.), *Finland and National Liberation in Southern Africa*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999; C.M. Morgenstierne, *Denmark and National Liberation in Southern Africa: A Flexible Response*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999; T.L. Eriksen (ed.), *Norway and National Liberation in Southern Africa*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999.

the aid took the form of donations, frequently coming from Tanzanian duty concessions; the cooperation and accords established after 1975 fell under the category of bilateral arrangements that presupposed different types of contracts negotiated with each country separately. Mozambique employed foreign specialists in various fields: agriculture, healthcare, petroleum, mining, and textile industries. Due to poorly organized education and healthcare systems reserved mostly for the colonizers and the *assimilado* (assimilated) population,¹⁰ independent Mozambique was left with a difficult colonial legacy. The situation was made worse by the exodus of the *retornados* (the returning settlers), who started fleeing the country since 1974.¹¹

The first group of FRELIMO representatives visited Romania in 1966,¹² after first passing through Bulgaria.¹³ An official letter inviting a delegation led by Mondlane was sent from Bucharest in March 1968.¹⁴ In 1969, Marcelino dos Santos (the future head of planning in Mozambique), together with other African comrades,¹⁵ attended the 10th Congress of the RCP. In 1971, Samora Machel visited Romania. A year later, during Nicolae Ceaușescu's visit to Tanzania, he met with Machel. Between 1973 and 1974, there was a flurry of FRELIMO visits to Bucharest triggered by the RCP's international recognition of the movement. These interactions reflected the RCP's support for national liberation movements in general and the fact that the authorities in Bucharest strategically laid the groundwork for interstate bilateralism.

Since the early 1970s, Ceaușescu engineered a turn toward the developing world that was supposed to reinforce Romania's political autonomy and

10 During Portuguese colonial rule, the Indigenous Statute or Native Statute (Estatuto do Indigenato) legislated the racial segregation of the population in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. *Assimilado* – as opposed to *indígena* (indigenous), who had no legal status – was the indigenous “trained” in the linguistic and cultural habits of the European settler. Acquiring this status did not automatically benefit its recipients. The law was formally abolished in 1961 after the international situation of the Portuguese state considerably worsened, which culminated with the beginning of the armed struggle in Angola.

11 An estimate of half a million to one million people fled from Mozambique to Portugal, Brazil, South Africa, etc. (R.P. Pires, *Os retornados: um estudo sociográfico*, Lisboa: IED, 1984).

12 Marcelino dos Santos had already been to Romania in 1953, along with colleagues from the former Portuguese colonies, as representatives of the Movement of Democratic Youth Unit (MUDJ), a Portuguese youth organization, to take part in the Festival of the World Federation of Democratic Youth. Here, he claimed, they first marched not under the Portuguese flag, as it was expected, but as representatives of their own countries.

13 “No title”, 1966, FRELIMO Archive, Box 29FF, National Archive of Mozambique, Maputo.

14 Mondlane never got to make this trip. He was assassinated on 3 February 1969 in Tanzania.

15 A. Cabral (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Vert, PAIGC) and A. Neto (The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, MPLA) also attended.

economic self-sufficiency within the socialist camp and the world. Mozambique was another terrain where Romanians could strengthen sovereignty through mutually advantageous relations. The symbol of the Romanian regime's Cold War heterodoxy was its membership, since 1976, in the Group of 77 (G77), the coalition of developing states at the United Nations (UN).¹⁶ This solidarity with the South was apparent even in the RCP's definition of Romania as a European, socialist, developing country.¹⁷

Bilateral relations between Romania and Mozambique were highlighted by successive high-level visits of the two countries' leaderships after 1975, with diplomatic relations being established well before Mozambique's independence. In April 1979, during the third "friendship tour" to Africa (the first was in 1972 and the second in 1977), Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu visited Angola and Mozambique. In September 1980, Samora Machel returned the courtesy and travelled to Bucharest as part of a two-week tour that also took him to Bulgaria and the GDR. In July 1983, the Ceaușescus again toured African countries, Mozambique included, in an effort to consolidate Romania's position and economic partnerships in the Global South as the government in Bucharest had taken the radical decision a year earlier of repaying in full its foreign debt. In May 1989, Joaquim Alberto Chissano, then president of Mozambique, was one of the last world leaders to meet Ceaușescu in Bucharest.¹⁸ Despite a common declaration condemning imperialism, the main topic of the discussion was Mozambique's outstanding debt to Romania evaluated at over 100 million US dollars (USD).¹⁹ Before the meeting, the Romanian ambassador in Maputo declared that the two sides should not "idealize cooperation as it happened in the past".²⁰ The order of the day was pragmatism and efficacy as both states were confronted with extreme economic crises.

In the late 1970s, the newly established relationship between Mozambique and Romania materialized in a series of long-term agreements for economic and technical-scientific cooperation. The first was signed in 1978, and renewed

¹⁶ "No title", Fond CC al PCR, Cancelarie 12/1976, pp. 49–51, ANIC, Bucharest.

¹⁷ On Romania's membership in G77 and evolving representations of the country as a consequence of its turn toward the South and the Non-Aligned Movement, see M. Malița, *Secolul meu scurt*, Bucharest: RAO Class, 2015.

¹⁸ The other leaders who visited Bucharest in 1989 were the president of Iran, Seyyed Ali Khamenei (February), and the prime minister of Afghanistan, Mohammad Najibullah (September). In July, a session of the Warsaw Pact was organized in Bucharest.

¹⁹ "Telegram no. 047698, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 27 May 1989, 608/1989, p. 91, Ministerul Afacerilor Externe-Mozambic (MAE-Mozambic).

²⁰ "Telegram no. 047693, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 24 May 1989, 608/1989, pp. 87–88, MAE-Mozambic.

in 1980 and 1983, which was complemented by a Friendship and Collaboration Treaty in 1979. On paper, Romania was supposed to play a significant role in Mozambique's socialist construction. After all, as Chissano, at that time the Mozambican minister of foreign affairs, remarked in 1978, Nicolae Ceaușescu had been "the first leader among socialist countries who showed genuine respect to our movement in the way he treated our leader [Samora Machel] these are things that we cannot forget." He continued by underlining that "other countries with much better conditions did not respond according to their possibilities, as Romania did."²¹

Until 1982, the number of Romanian specialists steadily increased. That year, over 120 experts were active in the country's mining, agriculture, textile, and oil industries. However, the nature of Bucharest's help shifted from aid to commercialized assistance focused on extracting raw materials, such as oil, iron ore, coal, asbestos, and cotton, and receiving hard currency. As the economic situation worsened and the civil war ravaged the country, Romania, along with other states (socialist or otherwise), rapidly grew disenchanted with the prospects of investment in Mozambique.²² Between 1985 and 1989, there was no meeting of the joint commission for cooperation, while most of the Romanian personnel left the country in the second half of the decade. The last specialist returned to Bucharest in April 1989.²³

State Socialism: The Mozambican Way

The model of a planned economy and internal organization, promoted by FRELIMO even before independence in the Nachingwea training camp in

²¹ "Stenogramă convorbire Nicolae Ceaușescu cu ministrul afacerilor externe al R. P. Mozambic, Joaquim Alberto Chissano", 6 November 1978, Fond CC al PCR, Relații Externe 193/1978, p. 10, ANIC, Bucharest.

²² The civil war ravaged the country between 1977 and 1992, and it opposed the ruling party FRELIMO and Mozambican National Resistance guerrillas. Although an internal conflict that affected every aspect of the life of the Mozambican citizens, the civil war must also be seen as part of the Cold War dynamic, a regional and transnational conflict, since both parties received significant support from a range of international organizations, public and private, and there was direct meddling by other states, with significant attacks coming from neighbouring South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.

²³ "Telegram no. 047693, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 24 May 1989, 608/1989, p. 88, MAE-Mozambic.

Tanzania,²⁴ was founded on a fundamental spatial differentiation of the Mozambican society: the rural population (80 per cent of the country), the main economic provider and reservoir for the “Homem Novo” (New Men), as opposed to the urban sections, often seen as potential class enemies of the new state. After the Lusaka Accord (7 September 1974), which paved the way for independence, FRELIMO launched Operação Limpeza (Cleaning Operation), which aimed to purge the cities of immorality, from drunkenness to prostitution.²⁵ This speaks to the self-proclaimed virtuous nature of the revolution in Mozambique. The transfer of the national liberation experience into state-building culminated with the creation of *aldeias comunais* (communal villages), a blend between socialist discipline and the Mozambican particularities interpreted by FRELIMO.²⁶

The 3rd Congress of FRELIMO, in February 1977, resulted in the official adoption of a Marxist-Leninist line. The party was the supreme ruling body, and the leadership reoriented its political-economic strategies, pursuing closer ties with the socialist bloc at the expense of China, its main ally before independence. FRELIMO drew closer to the Soviet Union, with whom it signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (1977), while socialist bloc aid pledges amounted to USD 17 million (the USD 59 million offered by China remained undisbursed). By 1980, because of differing positions in various Cold War crises (Angola, Cambodia, and Afghanistan), Mozambican-Chinese relations froze.²⁷

In 1981, FRELIMO adopted Linhas Fundamentais do Plano Prospectivo Indicativo para 1981–1990 (Key Lines of the Indicative Prospective Plan for 1981–1990). It was a programme meant to end underdevelopment and poverty through simultaneous industrial and agricultural development. At the 4th Congress of FRELIMO, in 1983, Operação Produção (Production Operation) was launched.²⁸ Its purpose was to relocate people from urban areas to the *machambas* (rural settlements designed for intensive agricultural production). The largest number of displacements was to Niassa, where Romanian *cooperantes* played prominent roles in agriculture as engineers or machine operators. War and

²⁴ The camp organization of Nachingwea was the model for communal villages (O. Ribeiro, “‘Escravos sem dono’: A experiência social dos campos de trabalho em Moçambique no período socialista”, *Revista de Antropologia* 51 [2008] 1, pp. 177–214).

²⁵ See the movie *Virgem Margarida* (2012) by L. de Azevedo.

²⁶ B.L. Machava, “State Discourse on Internal Security and the Politics of Punishment in Post-Independence Mozambique (1975–1983)”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37 (2011) 3, pp. 593–609.

²⁷ S.F. Jackson, “China’s Third World Foreign Policy: The Case of Angola and Mozambique, 1961–93”, *China Quarterly* 142 (1995), pp. 388–422.

²⁸ E. Pavignani and A. Colombo, “Providing Health Services in Countries Disrupted by Civil Wars: A Comparative Analysis of Mozambique and Angola, 1975–2000”, Report (February 2001).

economic crises reversed this dynamic in the Mozambican society, as many citizens sought refuge and work in big cities such as Maputo or Beira.

Although an active member of the Frontline States and of the Southern African Development Coordination Council (SADCC), Mozambique being one of the founding members, the country could not sustain its planned economy programme. After twice being refused membership in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), by the mid-1980s FRELIMO leadership turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank for assistance and became a structural adjustment state. Sara Lorenzini argued that the rejection of Mozambique's entry into the CMEA "signaled the collapse of the rhetoric of a special East-South solidarity: Not all Third World countries were equal; not all possessed the right level of development to integrate with the socialist system."²⁹ With the exception of the GDR, all the other socialist countries had strong reservations regarding Mozambique joining the organization. Along with the Soviet Union, they were reluctant to take on the financial burden implied by such membership, especially considering the difficulties of the assistance to actual non-European members, North Vietnam, Cuba, and Mongolia.³⁰ The "old" terms of socialist solidarity did not hold under circumstances of economic crisis in the socialist bloc.³¹ As we will show below, in Romania's case, in spite of the stated friendship proclamations from Bucharest, support for Mozambican development was constantly framed in a commercialized, self-interested fashion, which defied the Mozambican conception of special, less-monetized terms of aid from and trade with socialist countries.³²

Though assistance from Eastern Europe continued after being rejected by the CMEA, FRELIMO was forced into "an acute dialectic between sovereignty and bankruptcy"³³: on the one hand, it tried to preserve and continue the accomplishments

29 S. Lorenzini, "The Socialist Camp and the Challenge of Economic Modernization in the Third World", in: J. Fürst, S. Pons, and M. Selden (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Communism: Volume 3: Endgames? Late Communism in Global Perspective, 1968 to the Present*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 341–363, at p. 360.

30 G. Graziani, "The Non-European Members of the CMEA: A Model for Developing Countries?", in: R. Kane (ed.), *The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the Third World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 163–180.

31 C. Lawson, "The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in Southern Africa: Is There a Conflict of Interests?", *International Affairs* 59 (1983) 1, pp. 32–40; W. Kühne, "What Does the Case of Mozambique Tell Us About Soviet Ambivalence Toward Africa?", *Africa Notes* 46 (1985), pp. 2–3.

32 "Telegram no. 054022, Romanian Embassy in Maputo", 12 January 1978, 2076/1978, p. 4, MAE-Mozambic.

33 J. Cliff, N. Kanji and M. Muller, "Mozambique Health Holding the Line", *Review of African Political Economy* 13 (1986) 36, p. 10.

of the revolution; on the other hand, it was forced to adjust its policies in accordance with donors' requests (e.g. marketization, liberalization, etc.). In 1983, Mozambique obtained a considerable loan from the IMF, and a year later in 1984 it signed the Lomé Convention, a trade and aid agreement between the European Economic Community (EEC) and 71 African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries. Cooperation with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union prevented the collapse of the country's infrastructure and production, though it did not displace South Africa and Western Europe as Mozambique's main trade partners.³⁴

Romanians in Mozambique

From 1975 until 1977, the trade between Romania and Mozambique was close to non-existent: Bucharest exports amounted to the meagre sum of USD 0.2 million. By 1978, these jumped to USD 9.7 million dollars (agricultural machinery, textiles, fertilizers, cans, radios, etc.). Since July 1976, there was a mixed commission regulating the interaction between the two governments, a regular practice across the socialist bloc. The commission was supposed to meet on a yearly basis, but the frequency of its sessions depended on the volume of bilateral exchanges. The Romanian authorities considered these bodies the main instruments for regulating exchanges with developing countries. They were highly reluctant toward projects of coordination of expert missions under the CMEA umbrella.³⁵

34 Between 1977 and 1982, the share of Mozambique exports to countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) dropped from 76 per cent to 40 per cent and imports decreased from 59 per cent to 39 per cent. Simultaneously, exports from the socialist countries (China included) rose from 0 per cent to 13 per cent, while imports grew from 0 per cent to 23 per cent (A. Jinadu, "The Interplay between Materialist and Ideological Factors in Soviet Relations with Ethiopia and Mozambique", *African Journal of Political Economy* 2 [1988] 1, p. 37).

35 For early reservations on the coordination of the CMEA aid to Arab countries, see "Notă cu privire la propunerea R.D. Germane de a se examina în cadru şedinţei a XXX-a a Comitetului Executiv al CAER problema coordonării ajutorului acordat RAU, Siriei, Algeriei şi altor ţări arabe", Fond CC al PCR, Secţia Cămară, 104/1967, p. 113, ANIC, Bucharest. On a similar Romanian criticism against perceived Soviet control through the CMEA over socialist states' bilateralism with the Global South, see "Stenograma şedinţei Prezidiului Permanent al CC al PCR, 04.02.1974", Fond CC al PCR, Cămară 6/1974, pp. 25–26, ANIC, Bucharest.

An expression of the upsurge in bilateralism was the presence of Romanian specialists in various fields in Mozambique: there were 23 specialists who were paid by the Romanian state (among them 4 doctors and 1 pharmacist) and 31 specialists paid by the Mozambican state (18 oilmen worked at the Matola refinery).³⁶ The peak of this bilateralism was 1982, when the number of Romanian experts more than doubled. Even then, among socialist countries, Romania lagged behind East Germany and the Soviet Union. In 1984, GDR officials in Maputo informed their Romanian counterparts that 450 of its citizens were present in Mozambique (this figure includes the embassy personnel and the specialists' families).³⁷

The Romanian government was reluctant to grant financial loans to its counterpart in Maputo. Nevertheless, the RCP went to great lengths to present its involvement as being founded on a genuine commitment to mutually advantageous cooperation despite its different approach as compared to the other socialist countries. In 1978, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest instructed the ambassador in Maputo to inform FRELIMO's leadership that assistance "was not offered for commercial reasons" and that Bucharest was willing "to make sacrifices by taking cadres from [local] production" in order to "assign them to fields of particular interest for the Mozambican side". This, however, did not mean that Romania had "the obligation to permanently subsidize" technical assistance in Mozambique.³⁸ The objective was collaboration that would generate the structures necessary for Mozambique's socialist development while simultaneously producing the necessary income for Romanians to recoup their investment and cover economic necessities (raw materials or manufactured goods) back home.

At first glance, such reasoning seems exclusively driven by cost-benefit calculations. Indeed, the sticking point during the negotiations was the fact that Romania requested a share of the specialists' wages to be paid in hard currency that was larger than the 25 per cent that the Mozambican side was

36 "Principalele aspecte ale relațiilor dintre România și Mozambic, 31.10", Fond CC al PCR, Relații Externe 193/1978, ANIC, Bucharest.

37 "Telegram no. 078384, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 11 December 1984, 1238/1984, p. 14, MAE-Mozambic. Until 1989, over 1,200 East German citizens worked in Mozambique (M.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), p. 231). 21,600 Mozambicans worked in the GDR between 1979 and 1989 (T. Müller, "'Memories of Paradise': Legacies of Socialist Education in Mozambique", *African Affairs* 109 [2010] 436, p. 452).

38 "Telegram no. 623, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Romanian Ambassador in Maputo", 8 February 1978, 2076/1978, p. 23 (verso), MAE-Mozambic.

willing to concede. This position contrasted with the Soviet, East German, and Bulgarian authorities' acceptance of this "non-negotiable" condition requested by Maputo – a clause supposed to reflect the country's special relationship with other socialist regimes. To make matters worse, Cuban, Chinese, and Korean experts did not receive any wages or payment in hard currency; they only got per diems in local currency (Mozambican metical) and had their living expenses covered by the Mozambican government.³⁹ Officials in Bucharest described such arrangements as potential sources of dependency:

experience has shown that this so-called aid given by some countries by sending specialists without requesting remittances or at very low fares ultimately transforms into forms of pressure, a meddling that our country does not engage in [...] we cannot envisage foreign relations with a friendly state at a loss.⁴⁰

The RCP rejected veiled accusations from other socialist states (the main culprits seemed to have been the Soviets, Bulgarians, and East Germans) that it adopted a "commercial" approach when dealing with Mozambique. It projected an anti-hegemonic understanding of bilateralism based on its own emancipation within the socialist camp. From Bucharest's perspective, the proof of Romania's disinterested assistance to Mozambique's development was the allocation of medical personnel to the country as well as the participation of oilmen in the rehabilitation and expansion of the refinery in Matola (near Maputo). The experience of the latter became a model of bilateral economic cooperation. Agreements in other fields between Romania and Mozambique were constructed on the basis of the payment conditions for the oilmen. Initially only 25 per cent of their wages were paid in hard currency; by 1980, this rate had doubled. An identical clause was used for the two engineers who prospected for Mozambique's natural gas extraction potential. A year later, the same type of contract was applied to all Romanian specialists working in the country: 31 worked in the textile industry, 18 performed maintenance for train wagons and engines, as well as 64 provided assistance in agriculture.⁴¹ This situation stood in contrast to the payments for Bulgarian experts (physicians received only 40 per cent in hard currency) or Soviet experts (whose wages were exclusively in meticals).⁴² An explanation for

³⁹ "Telegram no. 054057, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 5 February 1978, 2076/1978, pp. 20–21, MAE-Mozambic.

⁴⁰ "Telegram no. 623", p. 23 (verso).

⁴¹ "Telegram no. 079034, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 19 September 1981, p. 23; "Telegram no. 079145, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 22 December 1981, 1336/1981, p. 96, MAE-Mozambic.

⁴² "Telegram no. 054276, Romanian Embassy in Maputo", 5 August 1978, 2076/1978, p. 55, MAE-Mozambic.

this differentiation is the fact that FRELIMO as well as the other governments from SADCC countries had become apprehensive toward overdependence on personnel from socialist countries, opting to preserve their options for tapping into other assistance resources beyond Eastern Europe. At the second SADCC conference, held in 1980 in Maputo, Mozambican officials argued that “we do not want underdevelopment and we do not want perpetual economic domination by foreign powers. But there is a way to pull all that behind us. We have the raw materials, you have the technology – let’s do some exchanging.”⁴³ Considering Mozambique troubles with joining the CMEA, the assistance from Romania reinforced FRELIMO’s own non-aligned position, especially at a time when its leadership expanded the search for assistance to more countries because of growing economic difficulties.⁴⁴

The Romanian medical team departed for Mozambique in two stages: July and November 1977. The first group of oilmen (14) left in April. In both cases, there was little official preparation for the trips.⁴⁵ The doctors received a two-week course at the party’s school Ștefan Gheorghiu Academy, but the oilmen only had a one-day briefing and no knowledge about the language or the realities of the country they were about to embark to. The medical workers were specialized in radiology (2), paediatrics, ophthalmology, and pharmaceuticals. The first three worked at the Maputo Central Hospital, the main healthcare institution in Mozambique. The fourth was in Maputo for a month, and then she was moved to Quelimane, a provincial hospital, where the fifth team member worked as well. The doctors were part of Romania’s aid to Mozambique, so Bucharest covered their plane tickets and other travel costs (e.g. transportation of medicine). For the oilmen, who were part of a joint enterprise agreement, the Romanian state received monthly payments from Mozambique of around USD 1,500 per month for each person of which 50 per cent was transferred directly in hard currency to the Romanian Foreign Trade Bank and the other half was

43 Agência de Informação de Moçambique (AIM), “No title”, Information Bulletin 53 (November 1980), p. 2. Present at the SADCC conference were 38 countries and 17 international organizations, including the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the European Economic Community.

44 In 1982, at the National Seminar on International Cooperation held in Maputo, “it was decided that a specialist firm should be set up to handle the recruitment of foreign technicians and negotiate technical assistance deals. This is aimed at avoiding problems caused by recruiting poorly trained or low-level technicians from abroad who then take jobs from equally qualified Mozambicans. It will also eliminate situations of overstaffing with foreigners when suitably trained Mozambicans exist” (AIM, “No title”, Information Bulletin 75 [September 1982], pp. 10–11).

45 As it appears from the discussion-interviews, the company Industrial Import-Export was an intermediary, facilitating the sending of the Romanian oilmen to Mozambique.

paid in meticals to the workers directly.⁴⁶ Their plane tickets were paid by the Mozambicans, including the trip for a one-month leave per year. Another significant difference between the two groups lay in fact that the doctors were not encouraged to bring their families. The Ministry of Health in Bucharest justified it by arguing that they would stay for only one year and sending family members to Mozambique incurred additional expenses for the state, which, in the context of the economic difficulties at home, had to be avoided.⁴⁷

In contrast, the oilmen were joined by their wives and children a few months after settling in. The expenses of such dependents were covered by the government in Maputo. Medical aid was seen from the beginning as only a short-term commitment. The assistance in the oil industry was a long-term engagement that reflected the strategic economic interests of both sides. The Romanian authorities encouraged specialists to bring their families because this was a method to optimize their work and to insure the commitment to their mission overseas. The spouses were supposed to find jobs in the host countries, but only with the prior approval of the Romanian state.

The accounts about living conditions differ according to the nature of each group's activity. The oilmen and their families associate their experience in Mozambique with the nostalgia of lost youth, or, as one wife put it: "Truly, a beautiful time in our lives. And we were so young."⁴⁸ While the men were picked up by van or car to work every day, the wives often visited each other or the former colonial spaces, for example Hotel Polana and Hotel Cardoso, for the amenities (e.g. swimming pool). However, their contacts with foreigners were carefully tracked by other colleagues who had been given the task of surveying and informing on the group's activities. The fear of secret police informers that dominated Romanian society at that time was transferred into the social relations of specialists sent to Mozambique.

The three doctors working at Maputo Central Hospital were assigned similarly comfortable apartments close to the institution. The Romanian experts'

⁴⁶ Because of Mozambique's high inflation and price fluctuations, the Romanian embassy in Maputo complained that the part of the wages paid in meticals "cannot be used" and advised, in 1981, a renegotiation of the oilmen collective contract so that at least 75 per cent, if not all, of their wages be transferred in hard currency ("Telegram no. 079145, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 23 December 1981, 1336/1981, p. 96, MAE-Mozambic). A year later, the officials at the embassy complained that the payments in hard currency had not been wired for six months ("Telegram no. 078095, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 20 April 1982, 1635/1982, p. 19, MAE-Mozambic).

⁴⁷ "Untitled document", 28 September 1977, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980 (the folder has no page numbers; the page numbers below refer to individual documents).

⁴⁸ Interview with G. family, August 2017, Ploiești.

living conditions in the capital reflected their unequal status in comparison with the locals. The quasi-colonial subtext of such situation is reinforced based on the reactions of the ophthalmologist and the pharmacist in Quelimane, who were not as lucky as their colleagues in Maputo. The pharmacist received “a one room-apartment well below the necessary minimum, without water and electricity, full of 15–20 cm long bugs in an apartment building with no security”.⁴⁹ The ophthalmologist complained about having her bag, money, and passport stolen. According to her, this was not a singular event, because other foreigners complained about having things stolen from their homes.⁵⁰ These radically different accounts are a reflection of the conditions within Mozambique at that time: a job in Maputo meant access to better and safer living conditions; being in the provinces exposed *cooperantes* to higher levels of insecurity and poverty.

The special status held by the oilmen situated them and their families in hierarchical relations with the locals. Mrs. G. fondly remembers her life in Mozambique, the “fine and honest people, although not that educated.”⁵¹ She keeps a vivid memory of Maria, the girl who helped them in the house and how she always refused to sit with them at the table since they were the *patrão* (bosses), a reminiscence of former colonial relations. Although, she insisted: “I told her in our country there is no *patrão*. We are all the same. [...] At the end of the day I would give her whatever food was left or whatever I could. When we left we gave her everything from the house.”⁵² Outside of work, the oilmen were reserved in terms of interactions with non-Romanians, a rule drilled into them before departure, an expression of the draconian regulation of any communication with foreigners implemented at the end of the 1970s by the regime in Bucharest.

The activity reports of the medical workers conspicuously lack any reference to personal entanglements with specialists of other nationalities. In fact, the two working in Quelimane (over 1,500 km from Maputo), who were more isolated from the Romanian embassy and their fellow citizens, underlined the fact that they had no contacts with locals or other foreigners outside of work. In contrast, the three doctors at Maputo Central Hospital were at the heart of the transformations that were taking place in Mozambique’s healthcare system (see below).

A general feature of the discussion-interviews and the activity reports is the shock with the scarcity of essential goods. An oilman remembered that he had

49 MT, Raport de relații, 26 July 1978, Ministerul Sănătății-Direcția Coordonare, Control Personal și Învățământ (MS-DCCPI) Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, p. 2.

50 FC, Raport de relații, 30 July 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, p. 1.

51 Interview with G. family, August 2017, Ploiești.

52 Ibid.

to borrow a car and drive to Swaziland to buy necessities (a bed, clothes, and food) for their newborn due to the shortages in Mozambique.⁵³ The oilmen were aware of the socioeconomic situation in Mozambique – extreme poverty and famine after 1982. Despite experiencing some of these conditions, their positions were privileged. An excellent example of this status divergence is the story of Mrs. G., who had her third child, the “Mozambican” as the family calls him, at the Maputo Central Hospital in 1979. The birth was assisted by a Mozambican midwife and a Russian doctor.⁵⁴ A far more positive account of her birth experience, in 1983, was given by Mrs. S. Her case was exceptional as she was giving piano lessons to the sons and daughters of the FRELIMO elite at the Center of Cultural Studies in Maputo. She was therefore offered VIP treatment at the behest of Pascoal Mocumbi, then the minister of health.⁵⁵

These two stories stand in sharp contrast with the conditions at the Maputo Central Hospital, as described by the Romanian doctors, further showing the hierarchical relationship between the experts and the locals. The paediatrist reported that the section where he worked had no air conditioning and extreme humidity increased the danger of infection and contagion.⁵⁶ He stressed the high rates of mortality: “among the 1600 patients hospitalized every month, the mortality in some sections was 10–15 percent, sometimes even 18 percent, of which approximately 6–8 percent in the first 24 hours since hospitalization.”⁵⁷

The two medical workers in Quelimane emphasized the absence of basic products such as meat, sugar, or milk as well as the long queues at local stores. The paediatrist in Maputo bemoaned the lack of bread for two months (June–July 1978). Combined with the difficult climate, the intense workload, and extensive responsibilities given to them by local authorities, the physicians reported states of depression and over-exhaustion. Only a few years later, the medical personnel would face a cruel irony. In the second half of the 1980s, the Romanian *cooperantes* experienced queues and rationing at home as well, encountering everyday hardships that in late 1970s only seemed possible in a postcolonial context.

In a country devastated by hardships, war, and famine, the self-ghettoized Romanian families from PETROMOC lived a decent life and managed to make the proper connections to have access to goods otherwise difficult to obtain. The G. family was buying their merchandise at a local shop owned by a French

⁵³ Interview with Mr. S., August 2017, Ploiești.

⁵⁴ Interview with G. family, August 2017, Ploiești.

⁵⁵ Interview with Mr. S., August 2017, Ploiești.

⁵⁶ VF, Raport de relații, 30 June 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, p. 2.

⁵⁷ VF, Raport de activitate, 1 July 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, p. 2

family, not at the *loja popular* (people's shop). Sometimes, through the embassy, they would change money so that they could buy goods from the diplomats' shop. They recalled the queues for food and how a simple rock meant someone had reserved a place in line for something. And, as Mrs. G. put it, although she felt bad to ask for eggs or flour to be put aside for her and take it through the back door, while the local population was queuing, that was the reality she had to adapt to.⁵⁸

A detail that stands out in the discussion-interviews and the activity reports is the absence of any reference to the civil war. One explanation is that, with two exceptions, the pharmacist and ophthalmologist in Quelimane, the two groups of Romanian *cooperantes* lived in Maputo mostly shielded from the military conflict. One hint from the doctors' activity reports was the excessive number of patients and their dreadful medical condition at the Maputo Central Hospital – a possible indication of displaced persons in the capital from the war-ravaged territories. The oilmen witnessed the bombardment of Matola by South African planes in 1981.

Documents from the archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs tell a different story. In 1982, the embassy in Maputo reported to Bucharest that local authorities instructed *cooperantes* to take preventive measures in order to insure their personal safety because of a surge in “delinquent acts” targeting foreign citizens.⁵⁹ The attacks of the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), FRELIMO's main antagonist during the civil war, against 270 East German specialists working at the coal mine in Moatize forced the authorities in Berlin to withdraw the experts' families. For similar reasons, the Bulgarian government decided to remove its agricultural personnel in the Angonia district (both locations in Tete province).⁶⁰ The situation reached a boiling point in 1984, when 11 *cooperantes* (8 East Germans, 1 Yugoslav, 1 Swede, and 1 Portuguese) were killed by RENAMO forces. Most foreign governments, including socialist ones, completely withdrew some of their specialists, while others' activity was limited to urban centres where the presence of the Mozambican military was strong and their safety could be insured.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Interview with G. family, August 2017, Ploiești.

⁵⁹ “Telegram no. 078112, Embassy of Romania in Maputo”, 7 May 1982, 1635/1982, p. 24, MAE-Mozambic.

⁶⁰ “Telegram no. 078250, Embassy of Romania in Maputo”, 25 October 1982, p. 37, MAE-Mozambic.

⁶¹ “Telegram no. 078391, Embassy of Romania in Maputo”, 17 December 1984, 1238/1984, pp. 4–6, MAE-Mozambic.

Since 1982, Romanian authorities worried about the geographical dispersal of their experts, because it made them more vulnerable to attacks. In some cases, such as those working in agriculture in Southern Mozambique (Catuane and Salamanga), they were relocated to other provinces.⁶² In general, Romanians remained committed to their mission in the country. In 1984, Alberto Chipande, minister of defense and governor of the Cabo Delgado province (where a large contingent of Romanians were employed), thanked the ambassador that Romania did not withdraw its specialists as other socialist countries had done.⁶³ Nevertheless, the civil war (fuelled by South Africa and Southern Rhodesia) rapidly destabilized Romanian-Mozambican bilateralism. The oilmen left Matola at the end of that year, and the specialists working in agriculture (104 out of the 106 left) were removed in the following years. Extreme poverty, combined with domestic turmoil, transformed postcolonial Mozambique into a space of untenable interaction from Romania's standpoint.

Romanians as Agents of Decolonization

Doctors

The Romanian specialists were tasked with providing assistance in two crucial fields for socialist construction in Mozambique: the healthcare and oil industries. Their responsibilities and activities could be subsumed under the label of decolonizing agents in the newly independent state.

The medical team showcased Romanian medical knowledge and practice with potential developments in pharmaceutical and technological exports. They symbolized Bucharest's commitment to the betterment of Mozambican society and willingness to transfer socialist modernity into the postcolonial context. However, a degree of desynchronization developed between the authorities in Maputo and the Romanian medical workers' vision of socialist medicine. Before independence Mozambique had 550 doctors, out of which only 87 stayed after independence. Another source paints a much more dire picture: after 1975, there were only 30

⁶² "Telegram no. 078392, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 20 December 1984, p. 3, MAE-Mozambic.

⁶³ "Telegram no. 078384, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 11 December 1984, p. 32, MAE-Mozambic.

physicians for a population of 11 million people.⁶⁴ Besides providing much needed treatment, foreign physicians were also tasked with preparing new cohorts of local medical workers. As Machel pointed out in one of his many speeches concerning the health sector, “the doctor comes principally to train cadres for the new system of health we are building.”⁶⁵

In October 1975, Mozambique nationalized all health institutions and abolished private medicine. A year later, during a speech at the Maputo Central Hospital, Machel initiated a process of democratization and collective administration through ward councils, which was his expression of his pre-independence conception of the “FRELIMO hospital”. The latter was not an institution focused solely on offering medical service but was also a centre for the education of patients as well as for production with staff and patients tending to plots for vegetables. The “FRELIMO hospital”, an expression of the anti-colonial struggle, was a “center of national unity, a center of class unity, a center of clarification of ideas, a center of revolutionary and organizational propaganda, [and] a combat unit”.⁶⁶ This vision of healthcare carried over into the postcolonial state. Machel argued in 1976 that medicine had to be politicized so that “it will not be transformed into a dangerous instrument against the people and undermine our political line.”⁶⁷ The ward councils were a way of insuring collective leadership among medical workers, while hospital committees were controlled by FRELIMO.

Two years later, in December 1979, Machel, a trained nurse himself, who had worked at the Lourenço Marques Central Hospital⁶⁸ before joining FRELIMO, moved away from what he termed “leftism” and “petty bourgeois radicalism with a revolutionary facade” in healthcare. Again in a speech at the Maputo Central Hospital, the Mozambican leader insisted that the previous dispersal of power caused by overemphasis on ward councils affected decision-making in hospitals.⁶⁹ By 1980, the director of the Enlarged Consultative Council of the Ministry of Health argued for significant reform along three directions: a better balance between curative and preventive medicine (previously, the latter was emphasized); a reduction of the number of paramedical training centres and an

⁶⁴ A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, *Mozambique: From Colonialism to Revolution, 1900–1982*. Boulder: Westview, 1983, p. 139; C. Barker, “Bringing Health Care to the People”, in: J.S. Saul (ed.), *A Difficult Road. The Transition to Socialism*, New York: Monthly Review, 1985, p. 323.

⁶⁵ Excerpts from a meeting Machel held with health service personnel (AIM, “No title”, Information Bulletin 42 [December 1979], p. 5).

⁶⁶ Quoted in: Barker, *Bringing Health Care*, p. 322.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

⁶⁸ The pre-independence name of Maputo.

⁶⁹ Barker, *Bringing Health Care*, p. 329.

elevation in entry qualifications for trainees; and local doctors had the right to specialized training in order to create a “core of national specialists”.⁷⁰ This was the final step in the progressive turn of the Mozambican medical system towards specialist, hospital-based care.

The summary above reflects the shift in healthcare models in the country that mirrored the alternation of FRELIMO’s allegiance from China to the Soviet Union within the global socialist camp. By the late 1970s, Mozambique officials gradually moved away from a nearly unilateral embrace of the Chinese template of horizontal, revolutionary medicine built around community-based paramedical workers drawing on the model of “barefoot” doctors trained for rural settings. This model was centred on the principle of fundamentally democratizing medical practice and extending basic preventive medicine and healthcare provision to remote rural areas.⁷¹ However, since 1980, Machel started emphasizing the Soviet healthcare blueprint, which was hierarchical, centralized, and specialist-oriented. This transformation happened for several reasons: first, as part of their overtures to the CMEA, Mozambican authorities attempted to adjust their healthcare system, at least partially, to the Soviet model;⁷² second, after Mao’s death and Deng Xiaoping ascent to power (1978), the Chinese government adopted less ideological and more pragmatic assistance policies in Africa, disengaging from Mozambique;⁷³ and, third, the government in Maputo adopted a hospital and specialist-centred approach once the initial global support for primary healthcare (PHC) waned.⁷⁴

The hybridity of Mozambique’s medical system was fundamentally defined by its enthusiastic adoption in 1978 of PHC as a state policy. The government controlled and took over the pharmaceuticals trade. There were crash courses for medical and paramedical personal. Authorities implemented preventive medicine activities through community participation in order to counterbalance the nearly exclusive focus on curative practices and the racial segregation of patients

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 331.

⁷¹ On the complexities of Chinese revolutionary medicine, see Fang Xiaoping, *Barefoot Doctors and Western Medicine in China*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012.

⁷² In 1975, a Standing Commission on Collaboration in Health Protection was organized within the CMEA. Until the mid-1980s, Mozambique had attended the Standing Commission based on its observer status within the organization (“Comisia permanentă CAER pentru colaborare în domeniul ocrotirii sănătății. Cele mai importante sarcini în perspectiva apropiată”, CAER-Materiale Informative MS-DCCPI-Relații Externe 1975–1984, pp. 3–4).

⁷³ I. Taylor, *China and Africa: Engagement and Compromise*, London: Routledge, 2006.

⁷⁴ R. Packard, *A History of Global Health: Interventions in the Lives of Other Peoples*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016, pp. 259–266.

during the colonial period.⁷⁵ According to a Mozambican report submitted in 1981 to the World Health Organization (WHO), “health deliveries and most drugs are virtually free, since only ambulatory care is paid for, and that at a symbolic price”.⁷⁶ After the creation of Medimoc, a state company that monopolized the import and export of medicine, “the proportion of the health budget spent on drugs is to be maintained within the range of 10–20% regarded as ideal in the international literature compared to 30–40% for most Third World countries.”⁷⁷ During the second half of the 1970s, there was a strong sense that FRELIMO was engineering a radical transformation of the Mozambican healthcare system. However, as the accounts of Romanian doctors will show, the results and reception of this reform were mixed.

One of the central issues in the Mozambican medical system was the integration and status of *cooperante* doctors. After independence, FRELIMO extensively relied on foreign expertise. In 1980, there were 302 physicians in Mozambique, the majority of them at the Maputo Central Hospital and in the surrounding region. Two-thirds of them were expats from some 20 different countries.⁷⁸ In 1978, the Soviet Union and China sent the most doctors, another sign that Mozambique was a site of competition between the two countries: 44 versus 35, respectively. This rivalry was complemented by Cuba and North Korea, a reflection of these two countries’ individual allegiances to the two socialist hegemonies: 10 versus 12. Eastern European involvement was significantly lower: 5 each from East Germany, Bulgaria, and Romania; 4 from Hungary; and none from Poland or Czechoslovakia. The total number of Italian physicians was higher than that of all Eastern Europeans: 22. There were 10 Chileans as well as personnel from the US, Brazil, England, Portugal, the Netherlands, France, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Australia, Tanzania, Ghana, India, Zambia, and Guinea-Conakry.⁷⁹ While financial gain should not be overlooked, an important motivation of these medical workers was political: personal or state solidarity with Mozambique’s reconstruction.

Foreign doctors had to comply with the horizontal, activist vision of medical practice promoted by FRELIMO. Romanian specialists reported back home about their participation in the ward councils, the practice of collective leadership in hospital decision-making, and the periodic collective, educational

75 E. Onori, “Report on a Mission to Mozambique”, 17 February–13 March 1982, SJ1, WHO7.0027, Mozambique 1964–1982, p. 26.

76 “Mozambique: National Health Development Strategy 1980–1981”, SJ1, WHO7.0027, Mozambique 1964–1982, p. 283.

77 Cliff, *Mozambique Health Holding the Line*, p. 10.

78 Onori, “Report on a Mission to Mozambique”, p. 27.

79 MM, Raport de activitate, 16 November 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, p. 2.

meetings with patients and their dependents. Their activity reports contain negative assessments of the local auxiliary and mid-level personnel. In a reassertion of hierarchies – which were muddled in Mozambique – the doctors complained about their lack of discipline and cleanliness, unreliability, “their delayed reflexes”, and “low cultural level”. They contrasted these accounts with an emphasis on “the great respect shown by locals to doctors”.⁸⁰ The same differentiation was made by Machel in 1979, when he lambasted the absence of respect toward physicians and asked that they be addressed with the title *Senhor Doctor*. WHO reports also flagged the questionable quality of the newly trained auxiliary staff. A WHO expert underlined in 1982 that “although a consistent number of new technicians has been produced, their performances cannot be expected to correspond to their terms of reference.”⁸¹

Mozambique’s dependence on foreign medical personnel was seen by one doctor as an opportunity for the Romanian state. He recommended that Bucharest could export pharmaceuticals and medical instruments to Maputo.⁸² Romanian authorities attempted to participate in bids on the Mozambican medical market. In 1979, the economic section of the embassy forwarded an offer sheet of 16 different types of pharmaceutical products. They competed with firms from West Germany, the US, France, Switzerland, and South Africa as well as from the GDR, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, China, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. The range of products provided by Romanians was woefully inadequate as Maputo had requested no less than 500 different types of medicine. Some of Bucharest’s competitors were more comprehensive in their response to these requirements. Unsurprisingly, the bid was not successful, further diminishing Romanian involvement in the Mozambican healthcare system.⁸³

In an attempt to avoid economic exploitation and expand affordable care to larger sectors of the population, between 1975 and 1980 FRELIMO issued several national formularies. These documents reduced the number of pharmaceutical products for use in the health services from 13,000 to ultimately 355 medications. Moreover, Mozambican authorities imposed on doctors specific plans of treatment for the most recurrent diseases in the country.⁸⁴ This focus on cost-efficiency and self-reliance generated dissatisfaction among Romanian and other foreign doctors. A radiologist complained that he was forced to limit

⁸⁰ VF, Raport de relații, 30 June 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, p. 2.

⁸¹ Onori, “Report on a Mission to Mozambique”, p. 31.

⁸² VF, Raport de relații, 30 June 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, p. 4.

⁸³ “Telegram no. 054018, Embassy of Romania in Maputo”, 15 January 1979, 1530/1979, p. 35, MAE-Mozambic.

⁸⁴ Barker, *Bringing Health Care*, p. 324.

the use of film while noticing the reductions in the medicine allocated to patients in the Maputo Central Hospital.⁸⁵ The paediatrist reported that “it was sometimes difficult to accept” the treatment plans for the most encountered diseases imposed by the Ministry of Health. He considered this focus on “the cheapest therapeutic schemes” to be questionable. He underlined that the government focus on using only the generic name of medicine prevented information to be obtained on the best pharmaceuticals available on the market.⁸⁶ The pharmacist in Quelimane added that despite the existence of a national formulary and of treatment manuals for certain diseases, there was no planning, which made distribution very difficult.⁸⁷ Constant shortages across the country showed the inability of the centrally planned economy to ensure the type of health coverage that FRELIMO aimed at. The ophthalmologist working in the same city criticized the local bureaucracy, seeing it as significant roadblock to the improvement of the healthcare system. She considered that the authorities’ search for the most advantageous contracts for pharmaceuticals and medical instruments generated extreme differences in the quality and profile of medical products. This affected the physicians’ ability to provide appropriate treatment.⁸⁸

Romanian doctors’ criticism of the Mozambican medical system reflected a larger battle ongoing in global health at that time: Maputo’s focus on free and generic “basic medicine” and formalized treatment plans reflected two elements of a PHC-structured reform: the emphasis on “appropriate technology” (technology effective in a given circumstance) and the WHO’s essential drug programme.⁸⁹ Romanians as well as other foreign doctors disliked the fact that local authorities were overriding their expertise by drastically regulating their ability for to provide prescriptions and treatments. Ironically, a similar development would take place in Romania during the second half of the 1980s. Ceaușescu’s decision to repay the country’s foreign debt in full forced the government to forgo most imports of foreign medicine (which required hard currency). The communist leader urged self-reliance, that is to say by focusing on domestic production, while also significantly limiting the list of medicine available on the market.

Romanian doctors complained about the malfunctioning or unusable machinery available in the hospitals. In fact, they were confronted with yet another

⁸⁵ MM, Raport de activitate, 16 November 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, p. 3.

⁸⁶ VF, Raport de activitate, 1 July 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, p. 2.

⁸⁷ MT, Raport de relații 26 July 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, pp. 4–5.

⁸⁸ FC, Raport de relații, 30 July 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, p. 1.

⁸⁹ M. Cueto, “The Origins of Primary Health Care and Selective Primary Health Care”, *America Journal of Public Health* 94 (2004) 11, pp. 1864–1874.

colonial legacy: on the eve of Mozambique's independence, the medical personnel, knowing that there would be little accountability because of the regime change, ordered very expensive technology for their institutions. After 1975, the government did not have the money required for their upkeep. For instance, in 1977 the Maputo Central Hospital had top-of-the-line Siemens X-ray machines; some of them stood idle because the ministry did not have the hard currency for spare parts. Simultaneously, the existence of this sophisticated technology created a two-sided perception of hospitals: sometimes they were ambivalently perceived as postcolonial spaces⁹⁰, and other times, from the standpoint of their endowments, they were considered a site of medical modernity comprising up-to-date specialized machineries. According to a Romanian medical worker, the laboratory in Pemba "could compete with any laboratory in England, France, or Germany" as some of the machinery had been donated by socialist or Western states.⁹¹ For the Romanians, they had the opportunity to participate in such technological progress and get accustomed to new equipment on the market.

In spite of economic hardship and professional difficulties, the Romanian doctors' activity reports ultimately exude optimism rooted in narratives of personal, heroic, and civilizing stories emerging from their double mission of treating illness and training specialized local cadres. Among the multiple medical schools available in Mozambique, in their view the Romanian one stood out. The radiologists detailed how they brought discipline within their wards, while imposing physical and haematological check-ups for the hospital's employees in order to prevent irradiation. The paediatrist claimed that his colleagues and subordinates became interested in Romanian practices, even studying, with his help, textbooks from Bucharest. He introduced the "Romanian method of oral rehydration for newborns", a practice that was in general use across the entire country.⁹² The pharmacist and ophthalmologist insisted that they had a central

⁹⁰ We see postcolonial spaces as physical and symbolic terrains where various actors, domestic and foreign, in our case experts and politicians, engage in activities and interactions aimed at overcoming and resignifying colonial legacies specific of certain localities, occupations, and economic sectors. Postcolonial spaces are characterized by ongoing negotiation and cross-fertilization between different types of agency conditioned by national and international economy and politics. That is why we opt for writing the term in a single word, since the "post" has not been yet overcome, and we do not see it standing for a mere chronological separation. For further reference on this conceptualization, see L. Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998; B. de Sousa Santos, "Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Inter-identity", *Luso-Brazilian Review* 39 (2002) 2, pp. 9–43.

⁹¹ Interview with Mrs. G., September 2017, Bucharest.

⁹² VF, Raport de activitate, 1 July 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, p. 5.

role in some of the treatment plans designed by the authorities. An additional aspect of the Romanians' modernizing mission was their teaching, which took two forms: mass "sanitary enlightenment" of the people and training of mid-level personnel or specialization of their Mozambican peers. The paediatrist even stated that he drafted the curriculum for his professional specialty for local higher education.

The motif of Romanian exceptionalism is obvious in one account of the departure of the three people working at the Maputo Central Hospital. They received from the institution's director an official document (*declaração*), which expressed the high esteem these professionals were held in throughout Mozambique. During a formal meeting with Samora Machel, the latter told his audience that "wherever they worked, Romanians always rose to the occasion."⁹³ Echoing the stories of oilmen, it appears that, despite their criticisms of local conditions, the doctors were eager to point out the alleged unique position of Romanians in Mozambique. The nationalization of solidarity narratives in the South reflected the individualization of state socialisms in Eastern Europe.⁹⁴ However, the exceptionalism embraced by physicians from Bucharest was a result of the Romanian regime's self-definition in a global context: it aimed to stand out among the socialist camp, where it jealously defended its individuality and righteously claimed to defend the anti-colonial and anti-imperial cause of developing peoples. As this chapter shows, such self-representation was only selectively backed by reality; bilateralism often broke down beyond the pomp of high politics.

Exceptionalism and solidarity did not blend well. Perceptions of the postcolonial space among the physicians were permeated by a socialist complex of superiority based on cultural hierarchies. Romanian doctors saw Mozambican hospitals and the population as loci of maximum contagion and hygienic illiteracy. They argued that the difficult health situation in the country was made worse by the population's "obscurantism", "mysticism", lack of education, "dubious habits", and "superstitions".⁹⁵ Their assertions echoed FRELIMO's self-colonizing modernization mission, as Mozambican officials attempted to civilize

⁹³ MM, Raport de activitate, 16 November 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980.

⁹⁴ B.C. Iacob et al., "State Socialist Experts in Transnational Perspective: East European Circulation of Knowledge during the Cold War (1950s–1980s)", *East Central Europe* 45 (2018) 2–3, pp. 9–11.

⁹⁵ See, e.g., V.F., Raport de relații, 20 January 1978, MS-DCCPI Relații Externe 1/1976–1980, 3; Interview with Mrs. G., September 2017, Bucharest.

their own people to rid them of perceived backwardness. Its leadership simultaneously aimed at “the postcolonial state’s tentative *construction* of a strict party and cadre structure steeped in an ideology of state centralism,” and the “attempted *eradication* of what they saw as traditional structures, agrarian practices, and bodies of knowledge.”⁹⁶ In a re-enactment of the Romanian medical personnel’s practices back home during the 1950s and 1960s, when they were engaged in a similar civilizing mission within Romania, they embraced FRELIMO’s campaign against “obscurantism” while questioning the possibilities of socialist progress in the country.

Romanian-Mozambican medical bilateralism ended in 1979, just two years after it started. The joint governmental commission negotiated the continuation of healthcare assistance and 19 professionals were selected. This time, however, Maputo was supposed to pay the wages of the larger team. The salaries offered, USD 750/month, were far from Romanian expectations. Bucharest had set a payment threshold of USD 1400/month. No common ground was found and the programme was cancelled. Between 1982 and 1984, two Romanian medical workers were active in Mozambique, but they were hired on individual contracts upon arrival in the country as spouses of specialists working in other fields. The outcome of Romanian medical assistance indicates the RCP’s pragmatic approach to mutually advantageous cooperation. In contrast with the partnership in Matola, the physicians only benefited the Mozambican side; they were not a source of hard currency for Bucharest. Romania’s solidarity with FRELIMO would go only as far as the cost effectiveness of their bilateralism.

Oilmen

The team of oilmen shared the same task as the healthcare personnel: they were agents of decolonization with the mission of nationalizing PETROMOC, one of Mozambique’s most lucrative companies. The story of their journey to Mozambique indicates that their mission was classified in the context of the Mozambican Civil War, which was fuelled by South African and Southern Rhodesian military meddling. As a result, there was no spare money for the Romanians; the authorities did not give them any for the trip and they did not allow them to carry hard currency. They had canned food, which proved useful when they had an unexpected layover of five days in Dar es Salam. The oilmen

⁹⁶ B.E. Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings: State Formation, Sociality, and Power in Mozambique*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016, pp. 10–11.

travelled dressed in sportswear, carrying football equipment. They were supposed to pass as a Romanian football team going to Mozambique for a friendly game. Their mission was part and parcel of the wider nationalization measures taken in 1977 by Mozambican authorities, who attempted to establish control over the country's economy and resources – an essential step in the consolidation of its newly acquired independence. While agriculture was considered the base of Mozambican economy, industry was meant to be the dynamic and decisive sector of development. The nationalization of previously colonially owned companies was vital, in FRELIMO's perspective, for anchoring the role of the newly independent state in the economy. At the 3rd Congress of FRELIMO, the leadership proclaimed that this new stage of the class struggle went hand in hand with the formation of a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party, a new FRELIMO capable of achieving economic development, independent of foreign monopolies. In this respect, "the formation of cadres qualified politically, scientifically and technically" became a crucial task of the new party.⁹⁷

The 14 Romanians replaced 34 "French bosses" that controlled the oil company Sociedade Nacional de Petroleos (SONAP) and helped with the training of Mozambicans that were supposed to replace them when the time came. The group was supposed to prepare the establishment of the new national oil company, PETROMOC, on the country's independence day (25 June). They were ridiculed by their French colleagues, who did not believe that such work could be done by a much smaller number of people. As Mr. G insisted, they had no choice. He remembered fondly his Mozambican colleagues who were crucial in the Romanians' adaptation to the new working environment. Since they had no knowledge of Portuguese, with the help of a dictionary and of one Mozambican colleague who had been previously trained in Romania and spoke the language, they managed to communicate with the local workers after the French left.

PETROMOC, the entity that owned the refinery in Matola, had its roots in SONAP. The latter was founded in 1933 and was one of the most notorious Portuguese oil companies. With 13 per cent of French capital from the Compagnie Française des Pétroles (CFP, later renamed Total), SONAP was chaired by the Galician Manuel Bulhosa, who was highly influential within the high ranks of the new fascist Spanish state. The proposal to open a refinery in Matola was made in 1958; in 1961, it was officially inaugurated. It had distribution points in Mozambique, South Africa, and Malawi. With the

⁹⁷ Mozambique Information Agency, "3rd Congress of FRELIMO", Bulletins 9 and 10 (Congress Special Issue), p. 13.

international ban against the government in Salisbury (Southern Rhodesia),⁹⁸ Portugal, via Mozambique, became one of the main oil providers for Ian Smith's regime.⁹⁹

At the time of its inauguration, PETROMOC had three facilities: the refinery in Matola and extraction points in Beira (central Mozambique) and Nacala (northern Mozambique). According to an audit from the World Bank in 2001, before its closure in 1984, the refinery produced 17,000 barrels a day. From 1984 onwards, the refinery was only used for distribution. Though working in Matola, the Romanian oilmen provided assistance in the other two locations. They drafted pre-feasibility plans for a planned refinery in Nacala (in competition with Czechoslovakian experts), but the plan never materialized.¹⁰⁰ The civil war was the main culprit for this outcome, but the Romanian side has also been slow in finalizing the research required for the new refinery.¹⁰¹

Romania's ambassador in Maputo best expressed Bucharest's interest in Mozambique's oil, gas, and mining industry. In 1979, he wrote to his superiors at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that swift action was required in terms of assisting PETROMOC because

as you well know [...] nowadays there is a bitter struggle for energy sources and raw materials [...] Here, many efforts for breaking through have been and are made by the USSR, GDR, USA, Sweden, [and] Italy.

98 Salisbury, nowadays Harare, was the capital city of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), a British colony that declared its unilateral independence in 1965, under the white minority government of Ian Smith. In 1968, Portugal, South Africa, and Southern Rhodesia created the Alcora alliance meant to protect white minority interests in the region and fight local national independence movements, especially in Angola and Mozambique. Zimbabwe held its first general elections in February 1980 (M.P. Meneses, C.B. Rosa, and B.S. Martins, "Colonial Wars, Colonial Alliances: The Alcora Exercise in the Context of Southern Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43 [2017] 2, pp. 397–410).

99 L. Barroso, *Salazar, Caetano e o Reduto Branco: A manobra Político-Diplomática de Portugal na África Austral (1951–1974)*, Porto: Fronteira do Caos Editores, 2012, p. 221.

100 More than one team of specialists or *cooperantes* worked in the same area, hospital, or community, so common agendas as well as conflict were inevitable. In 1982, Romania and former Yugoslavia signed with Mozambique protocols on military cooperation (AIM, "No title", Information Bulletin 75 [September 1982], p. 23). Romanian authorities (either embassy representatives or party officials in Bucharest) constantly depicted their bilateralism in Mozambique in competition with similar initiatives by other socialist countries.

101 "Telegram no. 054153, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 5 April 1979, p. 81; "Informare privind schimburile comerciale și cooperarea economică între RS România și RP Mozambic, 30 June 1979", 1530/1979, p. 112, MAE-Mozambic.

He asked that Bucharest would redouble the efforts to consolidate the “positions won” in the oil and mining fields. Otherwise, “the country’s long-term interests” would be ignored.¹⁰² Persevere they did: the same year, Machel approved the Romanian proposal to negotiate with US companies (e.g. Gulf Oil) a partnership for prospecting and extracting Mozambique’s oil deposits.¹⁰³ Since 1948, Gulf Oil had been allowed to prospect the Mozambican coast for oil and natural gas.¹⁰⁴ A trilateral meeting was scheduled for 1980, but the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs do not offer further information about the fate of this East-South-West partnership.

Oil was a recurrent topic in bilateral meetings between the two leaderships. On the one hand, ever since the late 1950s, expertise in oil extraction was one of the main Romanian know-how exports to the Global South. On the other hand, Mozambique was eager to take advantage of such knowledge available from one of its allies. Furthermore, in 1979, because of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Romania lost its main oil supplier (Ceașescu had an excellent relationship with the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi),¹⁰⁵ which increased Bucharest’s urgency in finding alternative import resources.

As early as 1973, two years before independence, Machel enticed his hosts by saying: “we have a lot of oil, we are very interested in how Romania developed its oil and chemical industry.”¹⁰⁶ A year later, Ceașescu boasted to Machel about the presence of Romanian oil specialists in over 15 countries.¹⁰⁷ Oilmen were the first category of *cooperantes* proposed by Romania to Mozambique during bilateral negotiations in 1976. Voicing the RCP leadership’s attempt to evade Western markets and superpower economic interference, Ceașescu declared during a Politburo meeting in 1979 about the state of Romania’s relations with African countries that

102 “Telegram no. 054003, Embassy of Romania in Maputo”, 2 January 1979, pp. 3–4, MAE-Mozambic.

103 “Telegram no. 033385, Embassy of Romania in Dar Es Salaam (Maputo)”, 22 October 1979, pp. 125–127, MAE-Mozambic.

104 M.P. Meneses and C. Gomes, “Regressos? Os Retornados na (des) colonização portuguesa”, in: M.P. Meneses and B.M. Sena (eds.), *As Guerras de Libertação e os Sonhos Coloniais: Alianças Secretas, Mapas Imaginados*, Coimbra: Almedina, 2013, pp. 59–109.

105 M. de Bellet, “L’Iran dans la politique extérieure du Régime Ceașescu”, *Revue Roumaine d’Histoire* 38 (1999) 1–4, p. 210.

106 “Stenogramă întâlnire Nicolae Ceașescu cu Samora Moises Machel”, 21 June, Fond CC al PCR, Relații Externe 105/1973, p. 23, ANIC, Bucharest.

107 “Stenogramă întâlnire Nicolae Ceașescu cu Samora Moises Machel”, 16 December, Fond CC al PCR, Relații Externe 307/1974, p. 21 (verso), ANIC, Bucharest.

the Ministry of Mines, Oil, and Geology was “the most important sector in Africa both for our needs in general and for the implementation of our policy of cooperation”.¹⁰⁸

The mutual importance of the refinery in Matola was obvious during a meeting between the Romanian ambassador in Maputo and Marcelino dos Santos (FRELIMO’s secretary of the economy) in May 1982. As the contracts of the oilmen were about to expire, dos Santos insisted on the continuation of their activity. According to the Mozambican ambassador’s account, the refinery was of “vital importance” for the country’s economy and “it could not function” without them. Despite the worsening domestic situation, the oilmen’s contracts were renegotiated and the authorities in Bucharest obtained full payment of wages and per diems in hard currency. The total amount of the agreement was of USD 480,000 for (now) 12 specialists.¹⁰⁹ Bilateralism with PETROMOC, spear-headed by the refinery in Matola as the most important space of economic interaction between the two countries until 1984, fulfilled two interrelated roles: it helped Mozambicans to take control of national resources and strengthen the state economy, and it offered Romanians direct, unmediated access to raw materials and hard currency, which reinforced economic self-reliance at home.

Conclusion

The story of Romanian-Mozambican cooperation and the particular account of physicians and oilmen show that the elective affinity, which characterized the RCP-FRELIMO relationship, was fundamentally affected by the teacher-pupil theme of this bilateralism. A tendency that existed before Mozambique’s independence had now become state policy. Machel and his colleagues saw Romania, alongside other socialist countries, as Mozambique’s path to achieving its long time goals of development and stability. In 1974, Machel told Ceaușescu that Mozambique was in the same situation as “Romania thirty years ago” and that FRELIMO had to emulate the RCP’s success in constructing socialism.¹¹⁰ Romanian *cooperantes* operated within a similar hierarchal mindset: they were harbingers of socialist civilization and “agents of modernity” in a decolonizing

¹⁰⁸ “Stenogramă ședinței Comitetului Politic Executiv”, 27 April, Fond CC al PCR, Cancelarie 32/1979, p. 26 (verso), ANIC, Bucharest.

¹⁰⁹ “Telegram no. 078104, Embassy of Romania in Maputo”, 1 May 1982, p. 22; “Telegram no. 078120, Embassy of Romania in Maputo”, 15 May 1982, 1635/1982, MAE-Mozambic.

¹¹⁰ “Stenogramă întâlnire Nicolae Ceaușescu cu Samora Machel”, 16 December 1974, Fond CC al PCR, Relații Externe 307/1974, p. 3 (verso), ANIC, Bucharest.

context. Such discursive and practical scales of socialist agency generated their own hierarchies, which perceived Mozambicans as struggling under the weight of cultural, economic, and political backwardness, with Romanians generously imparting the wisdom and experience of their advanced socialism.

In spite of Romania's recognition of FRELIMO as sole representative of the Mozambican people before independence, regardless of the warm relationship between Ceaușescu and Machel, the government in Bucharest and the experts it sent to the Southern African country manifested superiority complexes rooted in what they saw as their "civilizing" mission and different development stages in the construction of socialism. In this context, solidarity and affinity between Maputo and Bucharest were selective in accordance with contextualizations determined by self-interest. Such unequal relationships were compounded by Bucharest's cost-benefit approach to cooperation. Particularly since 1980, the RCP aimed to engage in a bilateralism that eliminated any possibility of financial and investment loss. This approach did have a socialist flavour because Romanian officials still perceived such assistance in terms of genuine, mutually advantageous collaboration. In their opinion, the better conditions and subsidies granted by the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Cuba, or the GDR potentially destabilized Mozambique's sovereignty, an interpretation not shared by their Mozambican partners.

The involvement in PETROMOC and the Mozambican hybrid healthcare system shows that Romanian experts were conscious of their participation in projects that aimed to counter the encroaching capitalist globalization from the West. These initiatives were cut short by severe economic crisis and civil war. The interaction between the two governments and immersion of Romanians in postcolonial spaces (e.g. the refinery and hospitals) were mired in ambivalence: anti-imperial solidarity was subordinated to a particular understanding of commercial interest and by hierarchies founded on Romanian exceptionalism and claims of civilizational superiority. Unsurprisingly, in May 1989, a Mozambican TV report condemned "the very disadvantageous cooperation" with Romania. At this time, the elective affinities of the past morphed into debt management.¹¹¹ Even though the Romanian-Mozambican friendship and cooperation had been devised as factors of decolonization, they remained anchored in North-South structures of dependency.

¹¹¹ "Telegram no. 047696, Embassy of Romania in Maputo", 25 May 1989, 608/1989, p. 90, MAE-Mozambic.

