

## ‘Here we Punish, Here we Discipline’: Forced Displacement, Silencing and the Multiple Faces of Violence in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique\*

ZACARIAS MILISSE CHAMBE

*Queen’s University Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK*

*UniRovuma, Cabo Delgado, Mozambique*

*Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Brazil*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9935-601X>

### Abstract

Forced displacement and silencing are inextricably bound for communities who have experienced different forms of violence in different contexts. This article explores the narratives about the war that began on 5 October 2017 in the district of Mocímboa da Praia, on the coast of the province of Cabo Delgado, northern Mozambique, by a group of radical guerrillas locally known as *mashababe*. Since then, from isolated attacks on remote villages, violence has spread to more districts in the region, with kidnappings of civilians, looting of barns and houses, thus imposing the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in addition to an inestimable number of dead and missing people. This article combines the history and ethnographic work carried out between 2018 and 2021 with the homeless populations from conflict regions and hosted in the ‘Nacaca Displaced Persons Camp’ (*Campo de Deslocados de Nacaca*), built in the district of Montepuez, south of Cabo Delgado, a region previously considered safe. The aim of this paper is to analyse how the multiple faces of

\* This article is the result of research carried out with the support of *Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo, FAPESP* (Process: 2022/08122-7 and Process: 2023/08584-3). Parts of the text are developments of issues previously discussed in my PhD Thesis, see Z. Chambe, ‘Entre “vientes” e nativos: Mineração, mobilidade, violências e (re) existências em Montepuez, Moçambique’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2021), <https://repositorio.unicamp.br/acervo/detalhe/1230233>, where I discuss various ways in which local communities are recurrently subjected by large mineral extraction companies, considered ‘vienté’. I am grateful to everyone who contributed to this research, including the research participants (whose names appear in the citations) and colleagues. Special thanks to Eric Morier-Genoud for earlier comments. I would like to thank Paolo Israel and the anonymous reviewers for their critical reading, recommendations and suggestions on various approaches discussed in the text. I would also like to thank Julie van der Vlugt for editing and proofreading my English.

traumatic violence (physical, psychological and symbolic) are processed in which war victims are continually exposed through silencing imposed by different actors who frequent their new places of refuge.

## **Keywords**

War, violence, memory, silence, Cabo Delgado, Mozambique

## ‘To just live’

It will be the first days of your misfortune that will be completed by men who will run through the forests, killing their fathers and mothers, eager for the time of the whip and the sleepwalking plantations. Confusion will reign for centuries and there will be tortures by fire; they will burst the pregnant bellies of innocent women, forcing the parents to eat the stillborn babies without a tear in their eye.<sup>1</sup>

– Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa

In novels, poetry or stories, terms such as *vientes*<sup>2</sup>, forced displacements and silencing seem to be a core part of the collective imagination of Mozambicans. Just walk into any city or village in the country to hear those who, after long stays in the community, call themselves ‘natives’ or owners of the land, pointing the finger at another person, and saying: ‘That one is a *viente*. He came here fleeing the war back home.’ But how are new *vientes* in the current and incessant forced displacements across the country constructed? This is not necessarily the question I intend to answer in this article. But it can serve as an interesting starting point to reflect on the current violent events that citizens of Cabo Delgado have been dealing with on a daily basis.

On 5 October 2017, a group of men whose origins and motivations were until then publicly unknown, attacked three police stations in the District of Mocímboa da Praia, on the coast of the province of Cabo Delgado. In addition to firearms, the group also stole uniforms and other police supplies. They moved into villages, kidnapping and murdering civilians and destroying public infrastructure.

In the first statements after these attacks, members of the government and the Mozambican Defence and Security Forces (FDS) alleged that the attackers were a group of ‘scoundrels’ (*marginais*) and ‘insurgents without organisation or leadership’ with the intention of ‘creating disorder in the communities to destabilise the

---

1 Excerpt from U. Ba Ka Khosa, *Gungunhana; Ualalapi; As mulheres do Imperador* (São Paulo: Kapulama, 2018), freely translated from Portuguese by the author.

2 The term *viente* is a local category commonly used in northern Mozambique to designate those who ‘came from outside’ the village. For anyone interested in delving deeper into the uses of this category in the Montepuez region, see: Chambe, ‘Entre “vientes” e nativos’. The figure and place of the *vientes* has become a category that has gained special attention in African societies, which is why it is the subject of many debates among intellectuals on the continent. The collection organised by William Shack and Elliot Skinner is an irreplaceable work in African studies on the subject. This is highlighted in the text written by Monica Wilson, with the use of the term ‘stranger in African Society’ to designate external groups from a certain community: ‘Movement of people in Africa is nothing new’ to argue how ‘the variations in the populations of different groups in Africa are like evidence of the merging of different streams’ (M. Wilson, ‘Strangers in Africa: Reflections on Nyakyusa, Nguni, and Sotho Evidence’ in W. Shack and E. Skinner (eds), *Strangers in African Societies* (London: University of California Press, Ltd., 1979), 51.

government.<sup>3</sup> What in the official government narratives was classified as a simple insurgency carried out by ‘scoundrels’ without any leadership or clear objective, over the months and years, spread to other districts of the province, leaving in each of them signs of overwhelming destruction. Women, children, young people and the elderly piled up with their bundles in private trucks or *machimbombos*<sup>4</sup> and abandoned their villages in search of new refuge. Many others fled on foot.

Those who could took refuge in the homes of family members or acquaintances, far from their ravaged villages. Others, upon arriving in urban centres, without a family member to welcome them, gathered with their bundles and younger children at public transport stations, on football fields and lined up at the doors of mosques and churches in search of shelter. Everyone was continually talking about violent attacks in their villages, burning huts, bodies with heads cut off and abandoned in the fields.

Although government authorities never confirmed the cases of these popular reports, claiming them to be ‘products of disinformation’, tensions increased when on 17 November 2017 in the villages of Mitumbate and Maculo (or Makulo), located near the municipal town of Mocímboa da Praia, the actions of the armed group escalated, setting fire to several houses and leaving 27 families homeless.

As days, weeks and months passed, more attacks were reported not just in Mocímboa da Praia, but also in Quissanga, Ibo Island and Macomia. Faced with an imminent humanitarian crisis, the government began clearing several hectares of land to establish the first centres that would welcome the new IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons). Several centres were created in districts in the southern regions of Cabo Delgado (such as in the village of Katapua in the District of Chiure, and in the villages of Nacaca and N’tele in the District of Montepuez), until then considered safe.

Most of the works published so far on the Cabo Delgado war base their arguments on an analysis that seeks to uncover trends that allow the configuration of a general theory of the conflict, avoiding a qualitative descriptions and privileging economic explanations.<sup>5</sup> Based on ethnographic research among hundreds of displaced people from the northern regions of the province and carried out in the Centre of Nacaca, in the District of Montepuez, south of the Province of Cabo Delgado, this work seeks to explore the narratives of a problematic relationship between populations, displaced people and state agents. This research probably constitutes the first

---

3 The frequent use of the categories ‘disinformation and manipulation’ is common in the propaganda of government speeches and members of the Defence and Security Forces. On 25 November 2020, Filipe Nyusi, President of the Republic of Mozambique, visiting a military base where several units of the Defence and Security Forces are stationed in Cabo Delgado, said that ‘Among the threat to our unity and Mozambicanity, we see the growing trend of disinformation and the attempt to manipulate public opinion’: Cfr. <https://opais.co.mz/pr-ordena-as-fadm-a-combaterem-manipulacao-de-informacoes-sobre-cabo-delgado/> (accessed 7 September 2022). Rather than debating the origins, forms of mobility, funding sources and possible local support of terrorist groups, the government’s biggest concern centres on what is conventionally called ‘disinformation’ that prevails in population unrest.

4 A local name for collective public transport buses in Mozambique.

5 A large segment of these projects refuses the traditional qualitative stance of research of particular processes, considering these perspectives make generalisation difficult, and imprint a tendentious character on comparisons, (Cfr. J. P. B. Coelho, “Quantitative Literature” and the Interpretation of the Armed Conflict in Mozambique (1976 – 1992)” in C. R. Udelsmann and A. B. da Costa (eds), *Poverty and Peace in the Portuguese Speaking African Countries* (Lisboa: Centro de Estudos Internacionais, 2009), 88 – 89.

ethnographic work carried out among the centres that house displaced populations since the war began in the north of Cabo Delgado, and aims to reconstitute the ‘voice of those who own the word’ – those who are the direct victims of the conflict.<sup>6</sup>

While cities were still receiving an increasing number of displaced people, faced with a humanitarian crisis, the government mobilised a military contingent to begin a forced evacuation of IDPs from the various places where they were sheltering to the new Centre at Nacaca. When met with this second forced displacement, this time by the government using the Defence and Security Forces (FDS) – the Police and the Army – the displaced people found themselves once again deprived of the right to decide where to live.

The ethnographic work carried out between September 2018 and November 2022 that resulted in this article proceeded from the following questions: In what form and to what degree did these disagreements between displaced populations and State agents escalate to new forms of violence that imposed an invisibility and silencing of the voices and memory of the victims of this war? Could we attribute to each of the groups a responsibility for what would be morally linked as the main reason that justified this violence?

During my time undertaking fieldwork in the Centre of Nacaca, my first concern was to know how those many hundreds of women, men and children had managed to get out of the war-torn regions to the inhospitable centres. I learned from long conversations with Amina, a 16-year-old girl,<sup>7</sup> who left the Mitumbate village with her family and dozens of other neighbours, how they went into the forest in search of refuge.

Looking at a distant place, with her fingers fixed on the ends of her *capulana* (traditional cloth used as a dress in Mozambique and East Africa) but always maintaining coherence in her account of the dramas she had experienced, Amina told me that during the walk, many women, most of them with babies on their backs, with the few possessions they managed to carry bundled on their heads, looked around sideways without uttering a single word. They adjusted their *capulanas*, which went from the top of their breasts to below their knees, as if to claim the dignity of their bodies exposed to various gazes. There were marks of cuts and whips from the branches of thorny trees all over their bodies.

During the escape, the men who declared themselves more experienced whispered barely audible words, often about escape routes and rules of behaviour in the forest. Men and women, old people, young people and children firmly held their relative’s hand so as not to get lost in the woods. The sound of rockets and bullets that

---

6 Further on, there is a development of what I call here ‘the voice of those who own the word’, among my interlocutors. This phrase is an emic category that has several meanings. It describes, on the one hand, the manifestation of authority or ownership of discourse over their places and, on the other, the intention to be part of the debate on any issues that concern their lives.

7 I need to clarify here that all conversations held with Amina, (being under 16 years old), were duly authorised by her father (Sacoor Momade), who was present at all our meetings during my research at the Nacaca Centre. Amina turned out to be a smart and talented girl. She had a school notebook where there were several poems she had written that talked about the pain of war and the longing for her homeland. Although I had access to her texts, which would be interesting to discuss the issue between memory and silencing, I considered that I should not transcribe them here, to guarantee Amina’s property and authorship rights.

could still be heard near their villages rekindled the unhealed traumas of other past conflicts. Amina and her family followed the banks of the Montepuez River, towards the south of the province, a region until then considered safe. Between sun, rain, nights and days of walking, they arrived in the district of Montepuez, where they were faced with the chaos of the arrivals of thousands of people from other villages, who were also seeking shelter and safety in the small town.

On average, nationally and internationally, the spectacular news about the violent incursions in the north of Cabo Delgado made headlines, and were illustrated by images taken from the internet, often referring to other conflicts far from what was reported.<sup>8</sup> In academic departments, research institutes and security studies think-tanks, researchers from different areas of knowledge published a multitude of articles and reports with different approaches and understandings of the conflict. In Mozambique, one of the first academic works was only published in 2019, in which its authors focused their analytical attention on the origins of the insurgent group, its nature, and financing and reproduction mechanisms.<sup>9</sup> However, among the villages in the districts affected by violence and in those that received displaced people who arrived daily in search of refuge, far from the reach of the media and researchers who spoke and wrote about them, the direct victims of this violence also multiplied their local interpretations, which suggested a dispute of narratives about the causes, motivations and origins of the conflict.

‘There is nothing here. The government sent us here, to just live.’ This was how Amina characterised Nacaca. ‘To just live’ (*viver só*) is a phrase that expresses not simply the feeling of abandonment, but also life in the face of a lethargic and meaningless situation.<sup>10</sup> Based on this type of narrative presented by the main victims sheltered in the Centre of Nacaca, this paper combines anthropology and history to analyse the narratives told by the victims of the war in relation to the multiple faces of the violence they experienced, opposing the silencing practices imposed by the State, or by its agents.

The narrations transcribed in this paper, both those originating from dialogue with some of the displaced, and those carried out with State agents who provide assistance to the Centre in Nacaca, are mainly the result of interviews carried out in the languages Emakhuwa, Kimwani and Kiswahili, translated by me into English. It is from these narrations I argue that, although this second displacement forced by the FDS from the various urban centres to the new centres for displaced persons can be

---

8 Regarding the spectacular reproduction of war news, Edward W. Said called it ‘propaganda apparatus’ when, during the Al Aqsa Intifada, the Jewish-controlled media began to reproduce the ‘notion of that anyone who disagrees with Israeli policy is routinely called an anti-Semite’. In this way, words such as terrorist, rejectionist, extremist and fundamentalist have come to mean a vast influence of discourse, which only suits those who are able to categorise others’. See E. W. Said, *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 65–103.

9 The authors argued in their study that ‘the attacks were the result of the emergence of a group of local youth, extremists with a jihadist orientation, led by religious fundamentalists from Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia and the Great Lakes region, who maintained indirect links with spiritual leaders from Saudi Arabia, Libya, Sudan and Algeria, with interests in the transnational trafficking of precious stones and timber abundant in the region’. See: S. Habibe, S. Forquilha and J. Pereira, ‘Radicalização Islâmica no Norte de Moçambique: O caso de Mocimboa da Praia’, *Cadernos IESE*, 17, 2019, 01–62.

10 In Mozambique they say ‘*viver só*’ for someone who does not have a specific occupation, wakes up and spends the hours wandering around doing nothing useful.

seen as part of a public security policy for vulnerable populations, the government found in Nacaca a ‘place of silence’ where, far from large urban centres, public opinion could be controlled in what was being reported about the chaos created by the resurgence of violent extremism in which the FDS were losing control of the situation.

All these practices of State agents mobilised to Nacaca constitute a policy that I agree to call here ‘displacement to isolate’, which would not necessarily be new in this relationship between government agents and civilian populations when there is a demand against silencing their actions, voices and other rights in moments of violence and conflicts, as I will show throughout the text.

The exercise I set out to accomplish in this article is to reflect on how in contexts of ongoing violence, such as the Cabo Delgado War, silence can imply the absence of political, socio-cultural and even emotional conditions, conducive to the narration of certain memories of violent experiences among the victims of these events.<sup>11</sup> In Mozambique, this practice has some justification in the thesis according to which, ‘Frelimo, as a government party, has always maintained power over the mechanisms for constructing and reconstructing official memory; therefore, it is the Frelimo version that has been the dominant narrative about wars (or political violence).’<sup>12</sup> In this, I must say that nothing is new compared to what I observed in Nacaca among government officials sent to assist those displaced from the Centre.

### ‘Here we punish, here we discipline’

Right at the main entrance of the new Centre installed in Nacaca, a green tent was set up as a guardhouse for the soldiers mobilised to the location to protect the many displaced people who had arrived in their hundreds, fleeing the war in the districts of the north of Cabo Delgado. In front of this tent there is an old zinc plate with inscriptions in white paint with the phrase in Portuguese: ‘Here we punish, here we discipline’ (*‘aqui se pune, aqui se disciplina’*). Both Amina, and other displaced people who found their new shelter here, say they don’t know how the sign ended up there, but someone, who, looking attentively to the side, lowers his voice, and as if whispering, muses: ‘The way we are treated here, I am almost certain that it was placed by the soldiers who garrison the centre, as a message for us displaced *vientes*.’

Over the last ten years, I have been doing field research in rural regions in the north of the country that are experiencing pressure from significant demographic

---

11 The idea of understanding the connections between silence and speech, forgetting and memory in the contexts of war, is inspired by Paul Ricoeur on ‘reserve forgetting’, a kind of forgetting kept in reserve (*oubli de réserve*), in which the author argues that forgetting involves ‘the problem of memory and fidelity to the past’ and depends on ‘the idea of the degree of depth of forgetting’. (See P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, K. Blamey and D. Pellauer (trans.) (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), 414.

12 See, per example, the works by V. Igreja, ‘Memories as weapons: The politics of peace and silence in post-civil war Mozambique’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 3, 3, 2008, 539–556; A. M. Pitcher, ‘Forgetting from above and memory from below: Strategies of legitimization and struggle in post socialist Mozambique’, *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, 76, 1, 2006, 88–112; E. Macamo, ‘Violence and political culture in Mozambique’, *Social Dynamics*, 42, 1, 2016, 85–105 and B. L. Machava, ‘State Discourse on Internal Security and the Politics of Punishment in Post-Independence Mozambique 1975–1983’, *Journal of Southern Africa Studies*, 37, 2011.

growth, driven by new discoveries of natural resources. With them, there is an emergence of tensions between large companies, *vientes* and native communities. An example of this scenario is the town of Namanhumbir in the district of Montepuez in Cabo Delgado, where the discovery of precious stone deposits and the arrival in 2009 of a large ruby mining company (Montepuez Ruby Mining Lda.) attracted the arrival of thousands of *vientes* to ‘make a living’ both in mining and in other related areas.

The dispute over exploration areas between the mining company (which was granted several hectares of land by the Government), the artisanal miners who extracted rubies informally in the region and the peasants who were forced to leave their homes and *machambas*<sup>13</sup>, generated serious conflicts in the community. In 2017, once again, the government, through the State Defence and Security Forces, carried out a new ‘operation clean-up’ whose name reactivated in Mozambican society the traumas of violence from the operation of the same name that began in 1974, to forcibly remove vagrants and prostitutes from the streets of the capital city.<sup>14</sup> The 2017 clean-up operation, which lasted just over three months, resulted in the forced displacement of 3,672 people who worked in mining or who ‘made a living’ in activities related to ruby mining in Montepuez.

Michel Cahen argues that there existed in Mozambique a ‘national paradigm’ in the post-independence period, inseparable from the paradigm of authoritarian modernisation, which aimed to build an ideal citizen, inspired by the process of the armed anti-colonial liberation struggle led by FRELIMO.<sup>15</sup> My argument is that such a ‘paradigm’ also serves to analyse the three cases that I take here as an example. The first refers to the colonial practice of building a ‘wall of silence’ and the colonial planning action to control the insurrection movement among those resettled in the Zambezi valley during the construction of the Cahora Bassa Dam<sup>16</sup> by the Portuguese colonial administration. The second refers to the repressive actions of ‘Operação Limpeza’ in 1974 in the then city of Lourenço Marques against the new people who arrived in urban centres awaiting transformations in the country after national independence. And the third is the new ‘Operação Limpeza’ of 2017 in Namanhumbir.

From the same perspective, Anne Pitcher argues that institutional silencing (that is imposed) does indeed constitute a central feature of Mozambique’s transformation into a market economy.<sup>17</sup> Government officials consciously manipulate history to obscure the very obvious point that the same party that implemented socialism is the same party that is now trumpeting neoliberalism.

---

13 Regarding to a farm, plantation or agricultural field. The term *machamba* originates from Swahili, ‘*shamba*’, which means land and cultivation. In Mozambique, the use of the word became widespread from the north of the country, a region with a significant number of people who speak Swahili, due to the border with Tanzania, the country where the language is official.

14 On 3 November 1974, the then Minister of the Interior and national political commissar Armando Guebuza stated at the time that ‘there were only 75,000 prostitutes in Lourenço Marques (currently Maputo, capital of Mozambique), reasons more than enough to launch an operation cleaning in the City’. See B. L. Machava, ‘The Morality of Revolution: Urban Cleanup Campaigns, Reeducation Camps, and Citizenship in Socialist Mozambique (1974 – 1988)’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 2018), 5; and Machava, ‘State Discourse’, 593 – 609.

15 See: M. Cahen, ‘Luta de emancipação anticolonial ou movimento de libertação nacional? Processo histórico e discurso ideológico – o caso das colónias portuguesas e de Moçambique em particular’, *Africana studia*, 8, 2005, 51.

16 See: A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, *A Ilusão do Desenvolvimento: Cahora Bassa e a História de Moçambique* (Lisboa: Outro Modo, 2019).

17 Pitcher, ‘Forgetting from above’, 105–106.



My thesis here is that civilising policies such as those pertaining to the construction of the ‘wall of silence’ in Cahora Bassa in 1968 and those emanating from the Frelimo government – the ‘Operação Limpeza’ in 1974 in the city of Maputo and the 2017 one in the Montepuez ruby mines – cannot be analysed separately. Likewise, the new actions related to isolation and silencing perpetrated by State agents against those displaced by the war and hosted in the Center of Nacaca, must be seen as the same type of strategy of political control of populations. For these displaced populations, the main victims of this violence, the practices of State agents constitute an extension of the violence experienced in their villages, perpetrated by the *Mashababe*<sup>18</sup> from whom they fled.

The actions of the State, which I call here practices that aim not so much to ‘socialise’ but to frame the population, can be understood as strategies to ‘modernise in an authoritarian way’ in the terms referred to by Michel Cahen.<sup>19</sup> One reason that may justify such actions is the fact that in the 1980s, many international organisations began to arrive in several countries on the African continent with their ‘structural adjustment’ programmes. Therefore, it was necessary to contain any media coverage of the chaos that these populations were experiencing, creating for public opinion an image of a State present and in control of the situation.

Harassment, censorship and repression are part of a ‘historical model’ by which the government of Mozambique (led by the same party since independence in 1975) uses the state machinery to control all forms of denunciation of its omission of responsibility towards society. However, ‘official silencing is considered disrespectful to the memory of the victims and an impediment to the establishment of a culture of responsibility and respect for human rights.’<sup>20</sup>

Let us now return to Nacaca, Amina, the other displaced people and their aggressors. ‘Punish’ and ‘discipline’ seem like simple words, and as they say among the new inhabitants of Nacaca, ‘no one knows how the warning sign ended up there,’ but the words express exactly their relationship with the State agents who serve there. The question that must be asked is: punish for what, discipline for whom? I ask this question because during the last five years that I have walked among the scattered tents in the new Centre, I have noticed that the displaced people’s self-identification is that of victims of a war whose causes are unknown and, equally, of victims of the State and its actors through its repressive practices.

At the end of April 2021, a few weeks after the capture and massacre in the town of Palma by the *mashababe*, hundreds of families took refuge in the district of Montepuez, and once again the local government directed them to the Centre at Nacaca. There were no more tents to house the number of people who continued to arrive daily. Trucks, *machimbombos*, bicycles and motorbikes brought countless

---

18 *Mashababe* is a local category, used by victims of the Cabo Delgado war to refer to the group of rebel guerrillas. The term originates from ‘Al-Shabab’ (which means youth in Arabic), inspired by the name of the rebel group of Islamic fundamentalists in Somalia. Although the links between the radical group in northern Mozambique and those in Somalia are not clear, the modus operandi of violent incursions and the use of flags with Arabic expressions by both groups have been indicated as the main motivation for their relationship between local communities in northern Mozambique.

19 Cahen, ‘Luta de emancipação anti-colonial’, 51.

20 Igreja, ‘Memories as weapons’, 539.

numbers of people. All the newly displaced people who arrived in Nacaca carried on their heads, or on their backs, chickens and ducks, goats and sheep, dogs and mattresses, metal and plastic basins and buckets. Women who had small babies were welcomed in solidarity in tents where there were other women in the same situation. Those whose eyes were lucky enough to meet old acquaintances were also welcomed into their tents. This created a network of solidarity in the midst of chaos. In the evenings, the glow of flames were scattered from fireplaces in front of the various tents where women cooked *xima* and beans and were distributed by 'men in colourful vests'.<sup>21</sup> To speed up the hours that seemed static, the people of Mocímboa listened in silence to the stories told in whispers by those recently arrived from Palma.

'Yes, there was a massacre',<sup>22</sup> Mansur told me speaking in Kimwani; he was a tall man with a beard on his chin that reached his chest. During the days of my stay in the Centre of Nacaca, both Mansur and dozens of other sheltered people told me, with repeated and coinciding reports, how the *mashababe* invaded the village of Palma. It is from these reports that I transcribe the scenes that follow.

In the early hours of 24 March 2021, the *mashababe* surrounded the village through the main land routes, making it difficult for army reinforcements to enter, and sabotaged the mobile phone towers, causing communication to be impossible. Palma, the district where the largest natural gas liquefaction project is located, had a large number of *vientes* who worked for companies operating on the Afungi Peninsula. The *mashababe* stormed the Amarula Hotel, which hosted a large number of expatriates, wreaking havoc. They tied their victims with their hands behind their backs, cutting the tendons in their necks, but not completely. They left the victims groaning until they died. What Amina and the other exiles in Nacaca said, was that in the days that followed, when the army finally managed to enter the village and intensify the fight to remove the invaders, there were hundreds of human heads separated from their bodies, scattered across the ground. There were abandoned dogs, birds of prey and flies feeding on human flesh.

During my years of fieldwork in Cabo Delgado, I was always interested in researching the different forms of violence to which various people are exposed by different agencies. I heard and reported the death of miners buried in the ruby mines of Namanhumbir in landslides during rainy seasons. I participated in and described the funerals of villagers who died in confrontations with the police force of mining companies. But in all these cases, the families of those who lost their lives had the sad reality of choosing a place to bury their dead. In Palma, the soldiers who arrived

---

21 When the Nacaca Centre was set up, several humanitarian assistance organisations mobilised their technicians to begin distributing cereals to the displaced. Such donations were never enough, because when the list of the number of people sheltered on a given day was collected, when the donation container arrived, it was found that there were a greater number than that had been registered. Several other organisations arrived, and they were always faced with the same dilemma. The displaced people began to have difficulty identifying the name of the agencies, and the term 'men in collared vests' was the solution found to identify them, due to the fact that they all wore fluorescent colourful vests over their shirts.

22 I need to clarify that it is not common to call the invasion and capture of the town of Palma by the *mashababe* a massacre – the categorisation is my responsibility. According to reports from my interlocutors who managed either by sea or through the forests inside, to escape the fury of the *mashababe*, this must be the bloodiest attack or with the highest number of deaths, missing and displaced people from a single place, since the beginning of the Cabo Delgado war.

after several days of fighting and attempts to recover the town, added the heads scattered on the ground to the random bodies and, without any expertise, placed them all in mass graves. Returning home, just 25 kilometres from the Displaced Persons Centre of Nacaca, while rereading my field notebook and writing my notes, I realised the emotional impact that such stories created on me. At the same time, I followed the news that arrived daily about more villages burned down, other bodies scattered, more people who had left the comfort of their home and the grain in their barns.

While the exiles listened to the stories of the newcomers, at the Centre's main entrance the smell of cigarette smoke that was expelled into the air betrayed the presence of four men. They were soldiers with Kalashnikovs on their backs who had the task of manning the place. On Fridays you could hear the sound of music coming from the stalls selling *kabanga* (craft beer fermented with maize bran) in the nearby neighbourhood. Between the nostalgia for their abandoned homes and the passivity of remaining in their new space, whoever expressed the desire to reach the music district, had in front of them the grim faces of the soldiers with their Kalashnikovs in their hands and a verbal order: 'no one leaves here'. Or their eyes would come across the sign with the inscription: 'Here you punish, here you discipline'.

### War and forced displacements by the voice of the 'owners of the word'

My son, we were not consulted at all about these projects that are being implemented here. In my papers, I have records that the population of the village of N'seue is 326 families. Today when I go to meet with them, I learn that half was taken to a village that I, as the leader, don't know. So, I ask: who did they consult? Who were they informed by? What are local leaders for, anyway? Just to bring the population together when it's time to vote? It's not quite like that. Owners need to be given a voice. This land is ours too. This thing about making people silent was a colonist thing. Now that the land is ours, we need to give a voice to those who own the word.<sup>23</sup>

In Namanhumbir, while investigating the process of the dispossession of land from local peasants to make way for the expansion of the industrial camp of the Montepuez Ruby Mining Lda. in 2016, *mwene* (leader) Mafugiage, leader of the headquarters village of the Administrative Post, repeatedly explained to me the feeling of the local community, regarding their exclusion in the debate in the process of implementing projects by large companies that mine rubies in their villages.<sup>24</sup>

---

23 *Mwene* Mafugiage, leader of the village of Namanhumbir-Sede, August 2016.

24 Montepuez Ruby Mining, Lda. is a company originating from a joint venture between Gemfields Lda. (with British capital) and Mwirit Lda. (with Mozambican capital), with authorisation to explore an area of 36,000 hectares. The authorisation for prospecting and subsequent exploration of Montepuez rubies was issued in the name of the Montepuez Ruby Mining Lda. Company, through Mining Licenses number 4702 and 4073, on 24 February 2012 and valid for 25 years, from 11 November 2011. Subsequently, in 2015 the process of joining the Concessions was completed, and a single Concession No. 4703C was granted for the same area (36,000ha), valid until 11 November 2036. In this area with 36,000ha, residential infrastructure, schools, markets, mosques and churches, and a cemetery were destroyed to begin ruby exploration of rubies; therefore it is not necessarily true that the 'available and unoccupied' land is free for occupation by newly arrived displaced people in the village. See Chambe, 'Entre "vientes" e nativos', 34.

It is based on the conversations I had with him that I use here the expression ‘return the voice to the owners of the word’ (*devolver a voz aos donos da palavra*), an emic category that has several meanings. It describes, on the one hand, the manifestation of authority or ownership of speech over their places and, on the other hand, the claim to become part of the debate on any issues that concern their lives. In fact, by saying ‘it is necessary to give a voice to the owners [...] this land is ours too’, *mwene* Mafugiage seeks to make a voice heard from those who, for several decades, have been relegated to a marginal position even in an issue as sensitive as land for communities whose supply activity is agriculture, which is essentially family-based.

At another point in the dialogue, when *mwene* Mafugiage said ‘this thing of keeping people silent, it was a settler thing [...] now that the land is ours, we need to give a voice to those who own the word’. This was expressed by a claim to the authority to speak about their lives, as I mentioned previously. But it also takes us to the concept of ‘bifurcated State’<sup>25</sup>, inspired by an experience of colonial administration systems (direct and indirect) in Africa, which contained a duality of powers, one in the urban sphere and the other in rural areas.

In Nacaca, far from academic debates and what is described in the mainstream press about their life stories and the situation in their villages of origin, my interlocutors worry about explaining the causes or reasons for armed violence. Their reports mixed the stories of the traumas of other violence in past conflicts; related the current transformations taking place in their villages with the large development projects of gas and oil companies; and spoke of the suffering present in the Displaced People Centre and their uncertainties about their future and their families. The following conversations, narrated by three displaced people who recently arrived in the Centre of Nacaca, show the reader how the armed violence of the past in general and that of Cabo Delgado in particular are understood:

See my age, my son! I am over 50 years old. My whole life has been spent just watching wars. I buried my parents because of the war between armed bandits. Peace came, but it wasn’t peace per se. Because after the elections the guerrillas always returned to the bush, cut roads and ambushed vehicles. I grew up, I have children, I built my own house, I had my *machamba* where I harvested cassava, maize and beans. But when the companies came, they took our land from us. We went to another place, learned to grow new things, and just as we were adapting, these *mashababe* arrived. Our life here is always running from one place to another. Now we are here, unable to even sleep properly. They just sent us here, to live alone.<sup>26</sup>

Here in Nacaca, we seem to be safe. But from what we’ve seen, we don’t have much hope. One day we will have to leave here too. The government

---

25 M. Mandami, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 354.

26 Abudo, born in the village of Mitumbate, Mocímboa da Praia, sheltered in Nacaca. April 2021.

stretched out these tents for us to shelter in, but they don't fit all of us. The men all sleep outside and let us women and small children enter the tents. But we all have our homes, with warm beds and blankets that we left behind in our villages. Those people in colourful vests usually come here to distribute food. It's also never enough for all of us. And we are not used to sitting idly by to receive food. We know how to cultivate farms and produce food for ourselves and our families. But here, where are we going to cultivate, and what? We just want this war to end, so we can go home and resume our lives, because this is not life.<sup>27</sup>

Whenever a new war starts, many things in our lives are ruined, because we had to abandon our homes and villages to live off favours in other places. I was a boy when the war between Renamo and Frelimo started. But I remember everything that happened very well. My family and I lived in Mitumbate. One day armed bandits came to burn down our entire village, and we had to flee to the next village. When that war ended, we returned there, because we had *machambas*, but we found nothing. We started all over again. My parents died and were buried in Mitumbate. Years passed; these gas companies arrived. So, we thought we would finally have development. But we were fooled again. The companies took away the land where we had farms. Then came this war that sent us away for good. We are here, without a house, without a farm, without hoes, experiencing this suffering that you see.<sup>28</sup>

After the invasion of the village of Mocímboa da Praia and the Afungi Peninsula by the *mashababe* at the end of March 2021, in the first weeks of April, not only Abudo, Mariamo and Amisse, but many other men, women, children, young people and the elderly arrived in Nacaca looking for refuge.

In the weeks that followed, I paid more attention to the newly displaced people, talking to as many as I could. In the long lines waiting for humanitarian aid trucks, or on the way to the fountain to bring water, when asking each man or woman, young or old, about the experiences of war in their villages, refuge and life expectations in the new lands, they told me through their voice several stories. They told me not only the physical and brutal violence experienced, but also the lack of time for the ritual mourning of murdered family members, the 'lack of control over the new space of vital activities,'<sup>29</sup> hunger, poverty, in some cases uncertainty and, in others, the hope of reuniting with family members missing. Now they lived under torment and permanent scarcity not only of their 'domain spaces,' but also of the comfort or freedom of becoming masters of their own word.

---

27 Mariamo, born in the village of Makulo, Mocímboa da Praia, sheltered in Nacaca. May 2021.

28 Amisse, born in Mitumbate, Mocímboa da Praia, sheltered in Nacaca. May 2021.

29 The lack of 'domain of living space' refers to the limitations to which a group forcibly displaced or for other reasons arrive in a new location, where the common techniques for provisioning the new location are unfamiliar to them, (Cfr. Wilson, 'Strangers in Africa' 62).

In this dialogue, my intention was to explore with my interlocutors their stories of violence experienced in three important temporal moments: the beginning of the war in their villages, the moment of fleeing in search of safe places and, finally, life in Nacaca. As can be seen in the transcripts, their speeches, more than just interpretations about the causes or motivations of the war, express common questions about a feeling of exhaustion in the face of the long duration of armed conflicts in the country. From these transcriptions, I selected questions that express common understandings about displacements and present them briefly below:

I am over 50 years old. My whole life was spent just watching wars ... Our life here is always running from one side to another ... Peace came, but it wasn't peace at all. Because after the elections the guerrillas always returned to the bush, cut roads and ambushed vehicles ... Whenever a new war starts, many things are ruined in our lives.

In general, in all the narrations of my interlocutors, there are expressions and phrases that refer to the feeling of abandonment by the State, an institution that they believe should protect them, and that does not provide dignified conditions for their permanence at the Displaced Persons Centre.

In the dialogue of what I considered to be called 'the third temporal moment of the war' (about the life in Nacaca), in addition to talking about the conditions that the displaced people consider unworthy, they also talked about the lack of land to cultivate to guarantee their autonomy and thus become independent of donations from 'men in colourful vests'.<sup>30</sup>

As we saw previously, the allegation of the lack of land to cultivate takes us to the concept of 'dominance of vital space' and the need for the end of the war to restart their lives in places where they can carry out their activities. This narration takes us to the notion of ways of living in time and space, and Sharika Thiranagama's writings of internal displacement as the creation of new social landscapes.<sup>31</sup> One cannot think about the ongoing violent events, the nostalgic feelings about places lived in the past, the forced departure from a certain place of origin (not just coming from a place, but, more importantly, the place of birth), the maintenance of their relationships, belonging and exercise (physical, mental and symbolic) and adaptation to new places of arrival, are in themselves the keys to the intersection between time and space. Because the loss itself provides historicity and displacement; it is like an orientation to a way of inhabiting the world.<sup>32</sup>

---

30 It is important to explain here that although Nacaca is considered a region with still extensive areas of 'unoccupied' land, this village is part of the Administrative Post of Namanhumbir, a region where the company Montepuez Ruby Mining Lda. was granted concessions to many hectares of land for prospecting and extracting rubies. Therefore, there are large areas of land, yes, but a significant part of these areas, including especially regions with easy access to water from streams, their right of use and exploitation is reserved for exploitation by this company. Conflicts between local communities and MRM are dealt with in detail in my PhD thesis. (Cfr. Chambe, 'Entre "vientes" e nativos', 2021.

31 S. Thiranagama, 'Moving On? Generating Homes in the Future for Displaced Northern Muslims in Sri Lanka' in J. Carsten (ed), *Ghost of Memory: Essays on remembrance and relatedness* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 126–149.

32 See Thiranagama, 'Moving On', 129.

## ‘Displaced people can also be terrorists’

After just over a year of fieldwork, where the focus was based on dialogue with those displaced by the war and arriving in Nacaca between May and July 2021, I decided to extend my dialogue by also engaging with the military and police officers who worked manning the Centre. It was very difficult to establish a rapport with any of them, not necessarily because of the undisguised rigidity of communication, but because there was no specific group that was allocated to remain permanently in Nacaca. Each group of soldiers, consisting mainly of four private soldiers and one captain, worked for a maximum of five days and were then relieved by another group with the same characteristics. It was almost impossible to cross paths with them again. Twice, two soldiers returned to Nacaca, but with two other new colleagues and also a new commander. Conversations interrupted by the call of duty were left incomplete. It was the *Hiena Negra* (Black Hyena) commander,<sup>33</sup> an army captain who, on one of the few nights he was available to talk, justified the reasons for these rotations among the military.

We in the army have something we call military intelligence. The situation in this war is very complex. I’ve fought in 3 wars, and in all of them, we always knew who our enemy was. You understand? In the first war, was the colonist. We win! Then came armed Renamo bandits who wanted to destabilise independence. We went to the Rome agreement, everything was signed, but they caused confusion again. But at least we knew who our enemy was [he repeats]. But this war is complex, because the enemy has no face [he pauses, lights his cigarette, and expels the smoke into the air]. And with a faceless enemy, no matter how fragile he is, we are always at a disadvantage, because we don’t know who he is, but he knows us. You understand? You understand? [I’m startled by the repetition of the question and without saying a single word, I nod my head affirmatively.] Therefore, we need to be attentive. We need to deploy men who not only come here to protect our population, but also study the behaviour of everyone here, because displaced people can also be terrorists. There is no one who can be trusted. Displaced people can also be terrorists. Therefore, we really need to use intelligence.

In a situation like this, even though the army considers it an intelligence strategy to control the movement of new people arriving in Nacaca under suspicion of the

---

33 I did not fail to express my curiosity regarding the origin of the commander’s nickname ‘*Hiena Negra*’. His soldiers say that during the Sixteen Years’ War, after a battle that saw many casualties among his group, the man disappeared from the barracks and went to consult a famous sorcerer in the region. Upon his return, he brought a bucket of water mixed with dark mud to the barracks from the banks of the Messalo River. He ordered all the soldiers in his battalion to wash their faces and grease their weapons with it. Then, one night when armed bandits invaded their barracks, the soldiers transformed themselves in the eyes of the enemy, into dark-skinned hyenas, with glowing eyes that dazzled the enemy and made it difficult for them to fight. And so, the name came up. It is common in Mozambique for soldiers and commanders of military battalions to use the names of ferocious animals as their war nicknames.

existence of terrorists infiltrated among the *vientes*, it causes other problems to emerge among the latter.

Amina told me that there was once an unusual movement in a tent that housed a family that had arrived from the village of Mute in Mocímbo da Praia. The mother of a teenager suspected that a soldier had harassed her daughter in exchange for cereal donations.

What we saw that day was very strange. There was a lot of confusion in that tent [points to the tent]. Then the lady, the girl's mother, got up and went to talk to their commander. But it only made the situation worse. Then the commander asked why you don't control your daughter. He also asked why she didn't go to the line in person to receive donations and had to send her daughter. We hear everything and don't understand anything. And these kinds of things make these soldiers not afraid of anything, because no one pays attention to them. This family abandoned this place. Everyone who gets another opportunity to earn a living, leaves here and buys land and makes their living far away. Even my family just doesn't go out because we can't afford it. No one likes to rely on donations here. We know how to cultivate and do other things. Because here we are treated differently. For them, a displaced person can also be a terrorist. But we came here because of suffering.

In a situation like the one I describe above, for a family in vulnerability like the one mentioned by Amina, having protection from the State made all the difference. However, after being forced to leave their home in their village of origin, Nacaca was at first a symbol of hope and security, but the reality proved to be the opposite; so the only solution was to leave the Centre and try to make a living in another place. The sentence 'displaced people can also be terrorists', which I heard frequently spoken by soldiers, also conveys how such an assertion of permanent distrust is presented head-on to the displaced people, without taking into account their personal traumas due to their experiences as victims of the acts they are accused of being responsible for.

Therefore, leaving the Center (certainly not voluntarily) to earn a living elsewhere manifests a form of silencing that these people sometimes prefer to take as a way of guaranteeing their own protection when they do not have it from the State (or their State agents). Staying silent and setting out in search of another place is also a journey of many secrets, unspoken words and endless traumas.

An inevitable question here would be: what about those who are unable to move and cannot tell their narratives? When walking through the corridors that emerge between the tents of Nacaca, the expression on the face, the choked voice, the downcast look, reveal several secrets. In Grace Cho's words, 'secrets have a way of revealing themselves even when the person carrying the secrets never talks about them.'<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> G. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, secrecy, and the forgotten war* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 17.



Such situations can justify the fact that the blatant violence perpetrated in Nacaca by State agents – police and members of the army forces – is also being extended to researchers, journalists and activists who research, report and work on monitoring the integration process of displaced people in the Centres, where they tend to denounce serious situations of human rights violations perpetrated by these agents.<sup>35</sup>

### ‘Here, silence saves!’

Every morning, Amina joined other women of the same age group, before the sun even rose, to fetch water from a box that had been placed near the soldiers’ guardhouse. The older men, to escape the unbearable heat that increased with the dawn of day, abandoned their nylon tents and gathered in the shade of a native tree that stood firm in the centre of the courtyard. Even with the hangover from the nights spent awake, they exchanged chatty conversations between *kabanga* tables that helped to pass the time, the minutes of which seemed like an eternity due to the lethargic situation to which they were subjected. Whistling and lascivious glances at the girls wrapped in *capulanas* with buckets of water on their heads were mixed into their conversations.

Mama Fátima and other older women sat in front of their tents and watched the hustle and bustle of morning life that resumed a cycle that was already habitual. I often sat next to them and listened to their stories about their experiences in Nacaca. They talked about the long journeys from their villages to take shelter in Nacaca. Mama Fátima told me about the visions that appeared to her every night of the faces of her acquaintances who she left behind riddled with bullets when the *mashababe* arrived in her village. She talked about life in Nacaca, the long lines to receive beans and maize flour, and she remembered her barns full of dried cassava that she left behind. She sobbed, recomposed her *capulana* and remained silent for a long time with her distant gaze. When the men whistled at the girls returning with buckets of water on their heads, she broke the silence and spoke again:

We watch this every day, but what are we going to do? To our men, we even gain courage and say that we can’t keep calling girls little, because it’s a lack of respect. It’s disrespectful to their wives, but also to these girls who could be their daughters. But there are other men who come from other villages, and we don’t know them. Then it gets difficult, because we can’t create confusion here, otherwise everything will come back to us. Because it’s not just these men who are sitting there in the trees. The soldiers who are there in the guardhouse also have their games. But these are harder to talk

---

35 MISA Mozambique, in its 2020 report on Freedom of the Press and Expression, talks about the kidnapping of a journalist by the State Defence and Security Forces that occurred in 2020. In the same report, it can be read that ‘it was in fact, the Mozambican Defence Forces that took the journalist from Palma to Mueda, where the Armed Forces have an interrogation room’. See <https://www.misa.org.mz/index.php/destaques/noticias/77-relatorio-sobre-o-desaparecimento-do-jornalista-ibraimo-abu-mbaruco-em-palma-cabo-delgado> (accessed 17 April 2020). To date, the afore-mentioned journalist remains missing, joining other names of local leaders, activists and others who have been victimised by the State.

to, because they are the ones in charge here. Once, I and those two ladies from that tent there [points with her hand] went to talk to their commander about this behaviour of the soldiers, because they were feeling the skirts of three girls who had gone for a walk in the neighbourhood. We all saw that. It was a very embarrassing thing. We don't like it. When we went to tell their boss this, it seemed like we had committed a big sin. They asked us why we let the girls leave the centre. We were almost going to be expelled. So we just shut up because we have nowhere else to go. Here, silence saves.

The forms of silencing narrated here by Mama Fátima awaken an old problem that is not uncommon in armed conflicts: the place of women. In the tent of a make-shift medical center, there is Assa, the nursing technician with whom I spoke repeatedly at the Center. During our conversation, she explained to me the frequent reports of girls who were victims of assorted types of abuse perpetrated by men. She told me with a pious tone: 'In a single war, women always face many other wars, and they often have no one to share these stories with.'<sup>36</sup> When war affects civilians, the female population is disproportionately affected. In contemporary so-called 'new wars', the civilian population represents 70% of war-related victims;<sup>37</sup> however women and children always constitute the largest percentage of these victims.<sup>38</sup>

This reality should not be seen as an isolated case in the Centre of Nacaca. There is an extensive bibliography produced on this topic that refers to this practice in different parts of the world. In a study that presents an analysis of types of conflicts, from the case of the genocide in Rwanda to the civil rights movement in the United States, Earl Conteh-Morgan addresses the place of women in situations of terrorism, peacekeeping and environmental security. Conteh-Morgan argues that inequalities, deprivation and a sense of injustice help to motivate many manifestations of collective violence. This is a useful corrective to the tendency of some scholars to ignore the human aspirations and anger that dispose people to join ethnic, revolutionary and terrorist movements.<sup>39</sup>

This is not a matter of placing the victims of the same war on a scale to find out who suffered most. Another woman who remained silent during my conversation

---

36 Assa was telling me about the suspension of a nursing technician for sexually harassing a young woman, for exchanging cotton to use as a panty liner, at a Reception Centre for Displaced Persons in Metuge. In another centre, located in the X Pavilion of the Frelimo Congress in the city of Pemba, two soldiers had been denounced by women for sexual abuse against displaced young people. There were also countless cases of men, who were victims of the same causes of displacement, who abandoned their families in their respective tents, to harass other younger women.

37 See F. Ali, 'Women's Agency and Violence against Women: The case of the collusion on violence against women in Kenya', *African Conflict and Peace Building Review*, 7, 07, 2017.

38 Regarding Cabo Delgado, one of the first works published on the subject is the article by J. Feijó, 'The role of woman in the conflict in Cabo Delgado: Understanding vicious cycles of violence', *FES Peace and Security Series*, 44, 2021. However, there is further research carried out in other contexts that present us with the same perception. See per example the works by P. Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: Women and Political Violence* (London: Routledge, 2016); the work of E. Rhen and E. J. Sirleaf, *Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment of the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Roles in Peace-building* (New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2002); L. De Pauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

39 See the work of E. Conteh-Morgan, *Collective political violence: An introduction to the theories and cases of violent conflicts* (London: Routledge, 2004).

with Mama Fátima, with her low voice as if whispering so as not to be heard somewhere further away, told me that generally women from her village are always more welcoming, traditionally trained to smile, even when their hearts are torn with pain inside. By focusing on their paths in life, the war that moves them from their homes and the wars they have to face to protect themselves in the Centre of Nacaca, they have built several networks of sisterhood, and it has helped them to gain the courage to tell their stories.

As Manuela Cruzeiro observed, when analysing the place of women in the anti-colonial war, 'in fact, this talk about oneself, dispersed, fragmentary, free and distracted, is almost always the other side of a silence that one wants to preserve. Our society is full of chattering noises and heavy silences. Both hide small or large nameless tragedies, but that doesn't mean they are lesser tragedies, or perhaps even the most refined and incommunicable of tragedies.'<sup>40</sup>

The various women sheltered in the Centre of Nacaca, as if having become aware of their forced concealment and silence in various places and moments in history, among long lines waiting to receive a kilogram of flour and beans, some with babies breastfeeding on their backs, created small groups according to their place in the line and talked to each other about their individual stories, their grief, pain and suffering.

## Final considerations: new places and old memories

Leaning on the tent that has become her new home, with a wooden spoon in her hands kneading a large pan that cooks *xima* for lunch, Amina, although with frequent smiles on her face, does not hide the discomfort of being in that place, wearing only a *capulana*, in front of the eyes of many men. She looks around with a permanent feeling of distrust, gets up, picks up thin branches of small wild trees and chews them to clean her teeth. She says it is the only way she has found to guarantee her oral hygiene. She chews the branches, turns to the side, spits out the fibres and continues repeating the same exercise, as she walks through the centre enclosure towards the older women's tent to greet her mother.

For people who have not conducted research in a violent context or among traumatised people, it may seem surprising that an investigator can obtain any type of personal information. These assumptions are valid in many ways, but they are not always correct, as shown in the various transcripts from my interlocutors in Nacaca, but also seen in Veena Das's<sup>41</sup> work (on 'the need to talk and talk' that characterises victims of violence in India) and Carolyn Nordstrom<sup>42</sup> (on 'the need for communication and the complexity of what is communicated' among victims of the civil war in

---

40 See M. Cruzeiro, 'As mulheres e a Guerra Colonial: Um silêncio demasiado ruidoso', *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 68, 2004, 31–41.

41 See V. Das, 'Anthropological Knowledge and Collective Violence', *Anthropology Today*, 1, 3, 1985, 4–6 and V. Das, 'Our Work to Cry: Your Work to Listen' in V. Das (ed), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi: OUP India, 1991), 345–398.

42 See C. Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1997).

Mozambique). These three examples, although distant (in time and space) show us how for these people, telling their stories validates the existence of those who died and those who lived to tell. This exercise is considered interesting because the interpretation of the origins of the war in Mozambique has often been attributed by some scholars to external conspiracies. Michel Cahen argues that too much importance was given to the secret actions of South Africa and the United States, rather than to the internal governance model adopted by the Frelimo government. Consequently, the extreme violence perpetrated against civilian populations was relegated to Renamo, a group with external origins. In contrast, there was 'considerable silence about the violent policies of the Frelimo army during the civil war'.<sup>43</sup>

Many African intellectuals or those who have researched the wars that took place in the post-independence period came out in defence of the need for local agents, victims of a particular event, to tell their own stories about specific events, and to pay special attention to their understanding about them. The African philosopher, Achille Mbembe, for example, talks about the need to understand and resolve the various levels of African problems based on local proposals and insists that deeper innovations are necessary for such an exercise.<sup>44</sup>

It was this exercise that I dared to develop in this article, 'giving the word back to the owners of the voice' so that, through their mnemonic practice, they would let us know their understanding of the multiple faces of violence to which they are exposed in the centres built to shelter those displaced by war.

As I observed in the Centre of Nacaca, Amina, Mama Fátima and hundreds of other exiled women who sought refuge there, with their *capulanas* tied between their breasts and down their bodies, fix their gaze on the many wars they have to face in the middle of a major war, in front of the undisguised stares of other women's men and their minor children with whom they now share the same spaces. They look at the immensity of a land, whose red soils differ from that of their original villages, and everything seems strange to them. Back in their land, where these women fled the war, the soil is white, and they know what and when to plant. In the late afternoon the fishermen always brought them fish and oysters for their curry.

The situation in Nacaca is inhospitable for its new inhabitants, whose objects of memory are summed up not only in melancholy, sadness, silence, mourning and

---

43 Among Frelimo's 'violent policies' after independence, Michel Cahen argues that in the first years of independence, the newly formed government will aim not so much to 'socialise' but to frame the population to modernise it in an authoritarian way, to nationalise it, (See Cahen, 'Luta de emancipação anticolonial', 51). However, he argues that the populations' engagement in war does not mechanically result from their opposition to the State (or its violent policies). The motivation for dissent is indeed linked to the conflict with the State, but the polarisation of populations in the war also results from historical oppositions, sometimes very old, that divided them long before Frelimo intervened and built its State in the countryside. (Cfr. C. Geffray, *A Causa das Armas: Antropologia da Guerra Contemporânea em Moçambique* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1991), 24.

44 Several authors have deepened the debate on this topic. See per example, A. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001). Another researcher who paid special attention to the topic is P. Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997). But also H. Englund, *From war to peace on the Mozambique-Malawi Borderland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2002) and the article by J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, 'Etnografia e imaginação histórica: breve introdução sobre as relações entre a antropologia e arte, desafios analíticos e (in) segurança', *Revista de Antropologia e Arte*, 01, 02, 2010.

ineffectiveness, but also in the search for hope and a meaning to give to their lives in that place. Now, as simple fugitives from a war, unaware of its causes, they no longer have land to cultivate, no sea to fetch fish and oysters to cook or dry to sell in another village. They are the only ones who are lucky enough to have escaped this war with their lives. As demonstrated throughout the paper, all these sensations take us beyond the notions of memory and silencing, but also about time and space, history and territory, because all these processes should not be thought of separately.