

Resettlements in Mozambique: Development, Displacement, and Control in the (Post)Colony

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Abstract

Mozambique has a long history of resettling people in urbanizations that are centrally initiated and shaped by development discourses and governments' desire to control populations. This article places the recent resettlements in the surroundings of extractive projects in the country in a historical context, by comparing the *aldeamentos* created by the Portuguese colonial administration with the *aldeais comunais* by FRELIMO after independence. It focuses on successive resettlement initiatives in the Tete province, where mining-induced resettlement has recently received much attention. Despite the disparate political contexts, it demonstrates similarities between the resettlement projects, which have resulted in hardship for the dislocated populations.

Keywords

Resettlement, counterinsurgency, extractive industry, displacement, Mozambique

Resumo

Moçambique tem uma longa história de repovoamento de pessoas em urbanizações que são iniciadas centralmente e moldadas por discursos de desenvolvimento e o desejo de governos de controlar populações. Este artigo situa os repovoamentos recentes nas zonas de projetos de extração de recursos na província de Tete numa perspectiva histórica, comparando os aldeamentos criadas pela administração colonial portuguesa com as aldeias comunais pelo regime do FRELIMO. O artigo focaliza nos repovoamentos sucessivos na província de Tete onde repovoamentos recentes induzidos pelo garimpo receberam muita atenção. Apesar de contextos políticos díspares, o artigo demonstra as semelhanças entre os projectos, que dificultaram as vidas das populações deslocadas.

Palavras-chave

Repovoamento, contrainsurgência, indústria extrativa, deslocamento, Moçambique

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Introduction

“There is only one well... this is an appalling situation! . . . [T]he villagers refuse to participate in such works [as digging a well] alleging that the government dragged them out of a good area to resettle them in a new one without the minimum conditions.”

- Quote from a CNAC report from 1982, in Borges Coelho (1993: 388)

“We used to have four hectares of land, close to home. There were no difficulties. But now we are here. In the middle of these stones.”

- Woman living in Mualadzi, resettlement area, interview 1/11/2016.

These two quotes reflect experiences of people displaced by planned resettlement programs taking place over forty years apart in Tete province, Mozambique. The first quote refers to the situation in an *aldeia comunal*, a communal village, constructed in the early 1980s as part of the ambitious campaign of the Frelimo government that aimed at the socialization and modernization of the countryside. The second quote is from an interview I conducted in a resettlement area constructed by a coal mining company. The quotes illustrate the recurring implementation of planned resettlement in Mozambique and the long tradition of suffering related to this form of often involuntary displacement.

In this paper, I will analyze three instances of planned resettlement in Mozambique. First, I will concentrate on the colonial villagization program, referred to as *aldeamentos*, a large-scale operation involving around one million people and regarded as an example for other colonial resettlement policies (Borges Coelho 1993: 203). Second, I will discuss the *aldeias comunais*, the communal villages program implemented in post-independence Mozambique. Third, I focus on the contemporary wave of resettlements largely induced by “mega-projects” of the extractive industry, but also increasingly employed as a way to house refugees fleeing flooding and armed conflict. These resettlement processes took place at different times but, despite several fundamental differences, entail striking parallels and continuities. This paper aims to show how planned resettlement, time and again, has created hardship and loss for rural populations and questions why it continues to reemerge as a mode of organizing and developing Mozambique’s rural areas. This is particularly relevant as in contemporary Mozambique resettlement programs are implemented as a response to the problems faced by populations affected by land acquisition for extractive projects, disasters (such as flooding after Cyclones Kenneth and Idai), and armed conflict. More generally, the

paper shows how resettlement in a particular place and time is shaped by past occurrences of organized population displacement, and past forms of resistance against such dislocations.

I define resettlement as “the planned, physical displacement of people to a new, permanent location” (Arnall et al 2013: 468). This definition does not from the outset assume that resettlement is involuntary or voluntary and allows for a comparison of three rather diverse projects. Resettlement can be seen as part of the state’s attempts to make “populations legible” (Scott 1998), as communal villages simplify certain state functions, such as taxation, conscription, and the prevention of rebellion (Monjane 2016). In addition, the concentration of population also allows for biopolitical or developmental projects of the state, such as providing healthcare and education. This way, resettlement can be seen as a form of social engineering to establish control and promote development. In relation to the massive resettlements for the Volta dam in Ghana, Yarrow (2017: 572), for example, notes that the newly planned urban space was a modernizing project geared to promote social and economic development and “intended to literalize a new relationship between citizen and the state.” Resettlement schemes are thus generally shaped by various logics and interests. In Mozambique and elsewhere, resettlement has been employed as a counter-insurgency tactic as well as a response to economic development projects (Cernea 2004) and conservation projects (Milgroom and Spierenburg 2008). Resettlement is also increasingly a preferred approach to post-disaster reconstruction (Arnall et al 2013; Artur and Hilhorst 2014; Badri et al 2006) and is seen as a potential response to climate related disasters (Barnett and Webber 2009). In this guise, resettlement is presented as policy solution, responding to problems at hand (Arnall et al 2013). Resettlement is however, also associated with force, loss, and impoverishment (Cernea 1997 & 2004; Bardi et al 2006). It is a process that is politically highly sensitive and should be planned and understood in a social, historical, and political context (Artur and Hilhorst 2013; Monjane 2016).

In this article, I focus on resettlement programs and experiences at three different moments in Mozambique’s recent history. My analysis of the different planned resettlement programs or processes in Tete Province involves three main elements: 1) the political and economic context of the resettlement; 2) the design and rationale for the resettlement; and 3) the experiences of the people targeted for the resettlement. This analysis will allow me to compare how different relocation processes have unfolded, and to trace the continuities and particularities in contemporary resettlement programmes in Mozambique. Confirming observations made by Artur and Hilhorst (2014: 362), I will show how each case of resettlement involved an element of control by state actors as well as a particular notion of

modernity or development. I add to this analysis a comparative discussion of the experiences of *reassentados* (resettled people), which, as I will conclude, is characterized by loss and hardship, and has produced different forms of resistance and dependency on state actors. In addition, I explore the role of (extractive) corporations in designing and implementing resettlement processes.

I focus my analysis on Tete Province because this makes it easier to tease out contextual factors and draw out parallels and differences over time. Tete is particularly relevant as the province has been the locus of a variety of resettlement projects since the late 1960s. In addition, there is a methodological reason to focus on Tete: more than for other provinces, the colonial and post-independence resettlement processes have been documented in the extensive works of the historians João Paulo Borges Coelho (1993 & 1998) and Allen and Barbara Isaacman (2013). I draw heavily on these studies for my analysis of the *aldeamentos* and the *aldeias comunais*. For the discussion of the coal mining induced resettlement programs, I will draw on my own empirical work and on the work of Selemane (2010) and Lesutis (2022), among others. I conducted nine months of fieldwork in Moatize district between 2016 and 2019. I collected data through participant observation in resettlement villages and joined company community relations officers in their everyday work activities. In addition, I conducted over fifty interviews with relevant individuals, including employees of mining companies, government officials, and *reassentados*.

The paper is structured as follows: I will first discuss the dynamics of displacement, development, and control in relation to the *aldeamentos*, the protected villages established by the Portuguese colonial administration. Subsequently, I will discuss the *aldeias comunais*, and the post-independence villagization policies. This is followed by a discussion of recent resettlements. While I will focus specifically on the coal-mining-induced resettlements in Tete, I make a deliberate effort to situate this in a wider context of resettlement as a solution to control (rural) populations in Mozambique. The conclusion will be focused on that.

***Aldeamentos*: Concentrated Settlements and the Anticolonial War**

The first large-scale resettlement program in Mozambique was the creation of *aldeamentos* by the Portuguese colonial administration.² The *aldeamentos* have been described as “protected

² There were already attempts at planned resettlement during the regime of Salazar in the late 1940s and 1950s, which attempted the “social and economic organization of native populations” and referred to this as “a project for native villagization” (Borges Coelho 1993: 120; Gallo 2016: 18).

villages” and were part of the counter-insurgency strategy of the Portuguese to counter the military advances and popular support of Frelimo, the Mozambican Liberation Front (*Frente da Liberação de Moçambique*), whose armed struggle against the Portuguese colonial administration started in 1964 (Borges Coelho 1993; Isaacman and Isaacman 2013: 96; Jundanian 1975). Concentrating the population was a military strategy, as the villages would isolate the population from the guerrillas, and it allowed the Portuguese army to employ scorched-earth-type operations outside of the controlled areas (Borges Coelho 1993: 202–204). In addition, the villagization programs were also concerned with social and economic development, with “a ‘psychological’ purpose of ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of their villagers” (Borges Coelho 1993: 204). The rationale behind the *aldeamento* program was thus both military and developmental.

The first *aldeamentos* were founded in 1965 in the northern parts of Mozambique, south of the border with Tanzania, from where Frelimo operated in the first years of its war for independence (Jundanian 1975: 522–523).³ In Tete, the *aldeamentos* program was initially slow, but in 1970 it gathered momentum due to the more intense Frelimo activity in the area (Borges Coelho 1993: 222). Frelimo’s presence was partly due to the interest in the works on the Cabora Bassa dam, which was at the time one of the largest dam projects in the world (Borges Coelho 1993: 179–180; Jundanian 1974: 525). The dam, which Frelimo aimed to capture, was a symbol of potential nationalist pride (Borges Coelho 1993: 180–181; Isaacman and Isaacman 2013). The development of the Cabora Bassa project also warranted the eviction of 25,000 people living close to the Zambezi River (Isaacman and Isaacman 2013). Planning for the forced eviction of people for the Cabora Bassa project paralleled the *aldeamento* policy. As Isaacman and Isaacman (2013: 95) report, the relocation was presented by government officials as a “social transformation” that would elevate “the quality of life” of Africans. The long-term advantages of the dam would far outweigh the disruptions involved in displacement, the government anticipated (Isaacman and Isaacman 2013: 95).

At the height of the *aldeamentos* campaign, over fifty-eight percent of the total population of Tete (estimated population of 492,233) was confined to these villages, as was nearly seventy percent of the rural population (Borges Coelho 1993: 231). Borges Coelho (1993: 230) lists 251 communal villages in Tete. For the Portuguese administration, a

³ Jundanian (1974) describes two other relocation programs in Mozambique during the war for independence: the *colonatos*, European settlements to which migration of Portuguese settlers was relatively unsuccessfully encouraged, and the *colonatos dos militares desmobilizados*, settlements of ex-service men of the Portuguese military, who were also rather unsuccessfully encouraged to settle together. These relocation programs show the “many-tiered Portuguese relocation of peoples in Mozambique” (Jundanian 1974: 534).

successful *aldeamento*, in theory, was supposed to offer fertile land, abundant water, communication lines, and defensive conditions (Jundanian 1974: 526–527). The *aldeamento*'s security was typically arranged by “small African militia detachments headed by a European police or military element” (Borges Coelho 1993: 210). As Frelimo forces advanced, the construction of *aldeamentos* was rushed, and in many cases, military criteria received priority over proper consideration of land and water availability (Borges Coelho 1993: 210). Services and infrastructure, such as health posts, schools, and electrical generators, were also not given the highest priority (Jundanian 1974: 527).

The impact of the villagization policy on rural life in Tete was significant as it changed people's settlement structures, administration structures, agricultural practices, and much more. The relocation into fortified villages altered the settlement pattern for most of Tete's population, which generally had a dispersed pattern of habitation. Borges Coelho (1993: 284–285) concluded that the villagization process was met with “deep reservations” by those targeted for relocation, as it “implied abandoning their ancestors' land and the places where they had been buried, abandoning the *machambas* [agricultural land] sometimes before harvest, and leaving behind most of their belongings” (see also Jundanian 1974: 539). In addition to these losses, the relocation also meant the destruction of family ties and changes to the political organization, as different traditional authorities were placed in the same area, which resulted in higher levels and new forms of social, cultural, and political conflict (Borges Coelho 1993: 285; Gallo 2016: 22; Isaacman and Isaacman 2013: 96). Isaacman and Isaacman (2013: 96), drawing on interviews with residents of *aldeamentos*, describe the forced evictions for the dam as traumatic. They also note “the control over physical space, access to critical economic and cultural resources, and the power to decide where and how to live” as causes of suffering (Isaacman and Isaacman 2013: 96).

One of the most prominent grievances was the lack of access to fertile land and water (Borges Coelho 1993; Jundanian 1974: 523), which continues to be a recurring problem in relocation processes in Mozambique (and elsewhere). Generally, families received less land than they had previously worked. The land was often less fertile and lacked water resources.⁴ It did not allow for the slash and burn agriculture that most of Tete's rural population employed (Borges Coelho 1993:13). The *aldeamentos* increased pressure on the land in the surroundings of the villages, as well as on other resources such as wild fruits and wildlife.

⁴ Generally, a household would receive 0.5 hectares of cleared land, depending on family size, polygamous families were entitled to 300 square meters extra per wife and status; *Régulos* (chiefs) were entitled to double sized plots (Borges Coelho 1993: 209–210). This was often less than the land a family previously owned (Gallo 2016: 22).

Using the *aldeamento* N'cungas as a case study, Borges Coelho (1993: 322) concludes that by 1974, it was “a village of diseased and malnourished people, deprived of their basic means of subsistence and almost entirely dependent on external food aid.” It is interesting to note N'cungas was situated close to another *aldeamento*, Cateme, which is the area where now the coal-mining resettlement villages Cateme and Mualadzi are located (Gallo 2016: 23).

Borges Coelho (1993) concludes that while the *aldeamentos*, in terms of strategic military purposes, were relatively successful, in terms of bringing development they were a failure (see also Jundanian 1974). The impact of the *aldeamentos* should not be underestimated, as it changed the lives of over half of Tete's inhabitants dramatically (Borges Coelho 1993: 213). It caused massive suffering and loss of life and, in addition, the *aldeamento* campaign influenced how the post-independence Frelimo government designed its communal village program. Frelimo saw the *aldeamentos* as the enemy and one of their tactics in war was to free people from *aldeamentos*, encouraging them to join the guerrilla movement and to inhabit what Frelimo called “liberated zones.”

***Aldeias comunais*: Post-independence Communal Villages**

After independence, the Frelimo government embarked on an ambitious program to consolidate the presence of the government's structures throughout the territory and to reeducate the population into socialism and to become “new men” (Borges Coelho 1998: 62–63; Chichava 2013). The “socialization and modernization of the countryside” included various policies including resettlement programs, collective *machambas*, and cooperatives (Chichava 2013: 112).⁵ The Frelimo government regarded the dispersed population settlement pattern of Mozambique's peasant population and related spiritual attachments as signs of backwardness and as alien to the idea of the modern nation (Chichava 129; Gallo 2016: 25). Therefore, starting in 1976, Frelimo implemented a strong campaign of *aldeias comunais*, communal villages which occupied an essential place in Frelimo's vision of a modern socialist society (Chichava 2013: 113). The communal villages were a vehicle of state formation, nation building, re-education, and development (Lunstrum 2009).

A total of 1,360 villages were constructed, and the program displaced almost two million Mozambicans (Borges Coelho 1993: 345). The villagization campaign was based on

⁵ The resettlement programs included the creation of rural villages for former combatants called *centros de produção dos antigos combatentes* (Taju 1992) and the infamous *operação produção*, operation production, which targeted designated marginalized people largely from urban centers and forcibly relocated them to state farms in the provinces of Niassa and Cabo-Delgado.

two pillars: population resettlement and the transformation of production relations (Borges-Coelho 1998: 61; Lunstrum 2007). Generally, the characteristics of a communal village included collective or cooperative production as the basis of the economy, a planned physical setting different from the traditional villages in its separation of residential and productive areas, and institutions of local administration (Borges Coelho 1993: 372).

In Tete province, the organization of *aldeias comunais* did not take off as fast as in other provinces. Borges Coelho (1998: 63) found that in 1977 there were only three small communal villages, of which two were former *aldeamentos* and one a former Frelimo war base. The delay in the campaign was due to the scattered settlements in Tete, often difficult to access because of bad roads and landmines from the war for independence, the incapacity of the government institutions, and the security situation in the region. Soon after independence, the security situation in Tete became unstable because of military attacks from Southern Rhodesia and later the presence of Renamo (the Mozambican National Resistance, *Resistência Nacional de Moçambique*), the insurgency movement that fought against the Mozambican state from 1976 until 1992 (Hall and Young 1997).

The communal village policy of the government gathered momentum in Tete in 1978 when the provincial commission was created, and heavy flooding affected central Mozambique, displacing close to 90,000 people (Borges Coelho 1998: 68–69). The government response to the emergency relief was coordinated by an “Inter-Provincial Commission of Natural Disasters and Communal Villages” linking the emergency response to displacement to the villagization policy (Borges Coelho 1998: 69). The aim was to resettle people from the lower, floodable areas in new communal villages on higher grounds. The plan was assigned to the National Housing Directorate in Maputo, whose team formulated the criteria for the new settlements and swiftly demarcated nine future communal villages in Mutarara district (Borges Coelho 1998: 69–70).

The new villages faced resistance from the targeted residents, who were reminded of the experience of the *aldeamentos*, which was still fresh in their memory and were considered exploitative (Borges Coelho 1998: 70). Yet, the main reason for the community resistance was that the residents would be swapping the fertile lowlands of the margins of the Zambezi River (and several other rivers) for less productive land placed on higher ground (Borges Coelho 1998: 70). In fact, many people returned to their former riverine areas of residence. The government, in turn, made sure that emergency aid was only distributed to communal villages and not to others (Borges Coelho 1993: 383). “These strategies led on occasion to

the new authorities being compared with their colonial predecessors: both were keen to villagize people against their will,” Borges Coelho notes (1998: 70).

The flooding-induced resettlements marked the start of a wider campaign to establish communal villages in Tete, however without much success. In his comparative study, Borges Coelho (1993) shows that the hardship experienced by residents of the communal villages was not altogether different from what the peasants experienced years before in the *aldeamentos*. One of the main problems of the communal villages was also the availability of fertile land, as Tete has only small, scattered pockets of fertile soil. *Machambas* were often located at a considerable distance from residences and the most fertile parts of the land were used for the cooperative (Borges Coelho 1993: 415). Water availability was also a problem in the communal villages, resulting in serious health problems (Borges Coelho 1993: 388). As residents of the *aldeamentos* had also experienced, the water availability in Tete does not allow for large human agglomerations, as many of the province’s small rivers are dry during part of the year and the region suffers regular droughts (Borges Coelho 1998: 71–72).

The *aldeias* were supposed to be community-driven, but soon they became a top-down project, characterized by “a paternalistic character and the lack of respect for local social realities” (Chichava 2013: 121). Political guidelines called for people’s participation but were, due to the haste of the government actors, often not considered. The district or provincial authorities in most cases chose the location of the habitation sites and the communal villages were generally built by the government. Borges Coelho quotes one of the officials involved who said: “[a]fterwards, we would say to the villagers: ‘Everything is ready now. Here you have your house. Let us distribute them’ . . . The villagers would only watch. Everything was supposed to be done by the state” (1998: 71). The inhabitants also received much state support in setting up the collective agricultural production. Borges Coelho (1993) notes that companies were involved in capacity building sessions to implement modern technology. However, such assistance was not structural and did not forge different agricultural practices (Borges Coelho 1993). Generally, there was a lack of ownership of the communal villages and related elements, such as the collective *machambas*. As Gallo (2016: 28) cites from a government communication from 1987, these were in some instances called “*machambas do governo*.”

The communal villages were not militarized as much as the *aldeamentos* had been and were a target for Renamo attacks and looting, as they were rather vulnerable symbols of the presence of the Frelimo state (Borges Coelho 1993: 430; Chichava 2013; Lunstrum 2009: 885). In the early 1980s, the civil war intensified and in many parts of Tete, people suffered

famine. The communal village program halted and many people left the villages for safer areas, both in Tete or in neighboring countries. In the end, Borges Coelho estimated that the communal villages at their height only included about thirteen percent of the population of Tete. By 1982, most of the communal villages had ceased to exist.

By and large, the communal villages were a policy that was experienced as disruptive rather than transformative and did not result in the envisioned agricultural revolution (Pitcher 1998; Borges Coelho 1998; Chichava 2013). In the late 1980s, Frelimo abandoned its socialist project and moved toward a “state of structural adjustments” (Obarrio 2014: 87) in which governance became characterized by the interventions of NGOs (McKay 2012: 290; West 2005: 262). Engagement with rural populations and service provision, such as health care, happened largely through the implementation of “projects” by non-state actors (McKay 2012). Resettlement became one of these projects with the continued focus to control and concentration of populations (Monjane 2016).

Resettlements and the Extractive Industry

The resettlement of rural populations in Mozambique continued to be a common practice. Examples that stand out are the building of new villages in response to flooding (Artur and Hilhorst 2014; Arnall et al 2013) and as a response to conservation projects, such as the resettlements in Massingir district for the creation of the frontier peace park at the border with South Africa and Zimbabwe (Milgroom and Spierenburg 2008; Otsuki 2019). The largest resettlements in the 2000s have happened in connection with extractive projects. The extractive industry has boomed in Mozambique in the last fifteen years. One of the direct consequences for people living near mining projects has been displacement and the loss of housing and livelihoods. The preferred response of companies and the state has been large scale resettlement projects, to which I will refer as mining-induced resettlements. These have occurred in relation to coal mining projects in Tete Province. In addition, there have been significant resettlements efforts around the ruby mines (Cabo Delgado Province), the mineral sands extraction projects (provinces of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Zambezia, and Gaza), and the Liquid Natural Gas projects (Cabo Delgado). These resettlements have affected tens of thousands of people across Mozambique and are bound to affect many more.

The mining-induced resettlement projects are often paid for and instigated by the foreign extractive industry. According to the mining law and the regulation for “the resettlement resulting from economic activities,” the state, in many guises and through

multiple agencies, oversees the exchange deals made between the companies and the communities (Diphorn and Wiegink 2022; Salimo 2018: 105). The main reason for resettlement is to make way for extractive or infrastructural projects. In this way, resettlement is regarded as a sacrifice necessary for national development (Wiegink 2020). However, increasingly, resettlement itself is presented as an opportunity for sustainable development in Mozambique (Milgroom and Spierenburg 2008; Wiegink 2020) and elsewhere (Yarrow 2017: 570). In accordance with the standards of the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank Group, Mozambique's resettlement regulation (Decree nr. 31/2012) stipulates that people should be compensated for their loss of land, residence, and other possessions, and should be better off after resettlement than before.⁶ Mining-induced resettlement thus surfaces as a developmental project of centralizing populations for the sake of offering services, infrastructure, and control. At the same time, resettlement is also often the most controversial part of extractive operations in Mozambique and elsewhere (e.g. Borrás and Franco 2013; Hilson et al 2007; Owen and Kemp 2015: 583; Peluso and Lund 2011).

The first large scale resettlements for mining projects took place in the district of Moatize in Tete province. Since 2013, over ten thousand people have been dislocated for the mine and hundreds of families are still awaiting resettlement (Lesutis 2022; Wiegink 2018). The coal mining companies facilitated the construction of new neighborhoods and two entirely new villages to house the people who were dislocated. The first village, Cateme, was constructed for the people resettled for the mine owned by the Brazilian mining company Vale. The second village, Mualadzi, was constructed for the people who were resettled for the Benga mine, which was subsequently owned by the Australian company Riversdale and Rio Tinto, currently owned by the Indian consortium International Coal Ventures Limited (ICVL).

The geographical location of resettlement villages was chosen by the government, yet the mining companies and their subcontracted firms were in charge of the design and construction of the resettlement area. The companies provided for new housing and additional infrastructure of the village such as electricity (considered one of the main perks of resettlement), a water supply system, roads, lampposts, a market, government buildings, a hospital, a school, an orphanage, a police station, housing for civil servants, roads, and a cemetery. The companies also took care of the compensation awarded per household as, in

⁶ https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/topics_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/sustainability-at-ifc/policies-standards/performance-standards/ps5, last accessed 8 September 2021.

the initial phases of the resettlement process, the relocated families received a furniture set for the house, one hectare of land, and a sum of money—119,000 meticaís (equivalent of approximately 4,000 USD at the time), a fortune for most (Lillywhite et al 2015). The *reassentados* in Mualadzi also received for a while a *cesto básico*, a basic food basket, containing flour, oil, and sugar. Furthermore, the companies organized a series of capacity building workshops on agriculture and several young men were given internships in the company, though the mining activities did not result in jobs to the resettled people. As one male *reassentado* from Mualadzi recalled in an interview in 2017: “The company did provide us with work in the beginning, one month. Unpaid though. It was a kind of internship. Then the company, Riversdale at the time, would give us jobs. As brick makers, and so on. But that never happened. . . We are just sitting here” (interview, Mualadzi, 21 November 2016).

The experience of resettlement reflects generally a feeling of loss and a sense of being treated as lesser Mozambicans (see also Lesutis 2022). At the same time, it increased people’s sense of dependency on the company and the state. During fieldwork from September to December in 2017 in Mualadzi, most people were experiencing a food crisis. While this was part of a drought that impacted the lives of many people in central Mozambique, people in Mualadzi attributed their poor harvests to the aridity of the agricultural land allotted to the resettled families. As aptly captured in the title of the Human Rights Watch Report published in 2013, people wondered, “What is a house without food?” The inhabitants of Mualadzi, came from an area called Capanga, situated along the banks of the Rovubue and Zambezi rivers (see map). The *machambas* on the banks of the rivers allowed for several harvests a year. The *machambas* the families received in Mualadzi were regarded dry and “stony” and generally of poor quality.

In Capanga, people had gained extra income by selling stones or sand along the road for construction purposes, cutting wood or making bricks. Because of its remote location, in Mualadzi there was no one to sell sand, stones, wood, or bricks to, and for most people, transportation to Moatize (approximately forty kilometers away) was unaffordable. Basically, in many ways people’s lives and means of livelihood had become jeopardized by the resettlement to Mualadzi. In addition, people reported an insecure water supply and worried about the inability to bury the dead in ancestral lands.⁷ Residents of Mualadzi also recalled the lack of consultation prior to the resettlement process, but also their anticipation, the

⁷ There are multiple reports on and academic studies of the resettlement areas of Cateme and Mualazi, some key works are: Human Rights Watch, (2013); Lesutis (2019a, 2019b, & 2022); Lillywhite et al (2015); Mosca and Selemane (2011); Osório and Cruz e Silva (2017); Selemane (2010); and Siteo and Queface (2015).

promises of the companies, which shaped their hope for a better life in the resettlement area (Wiegink 2018). However, their expectations were not met. Lesutis has called the resettlement areas in Moatize “spaces of suffering,” describing people who are “doing nothing” and who feel as if they are considered “nothing” (2019a: 121–122).

The resettlement processes in Tete were met by protests by the local populations, in confrontational and less confrontational ways (Lesutis 2019b). In January 2012, inhabitants of the resettlement village Cateme blocked the railroad that transports coal from the Vale mining site to Beira port (Human Rights Watch 2013; Lillywhite et al 2015). The demonstrators were violently dispersed by state security forces and several people were detained and beaten (Human Rights Watch 2013; Lillywhite et al 2015; Lesutis 2019b; Marshall 2015: 8). The reaction from the government security forces reflects broader tendencies of the criminalization of criticism and the securitization around extractive projects (Brock and Dunlap 2018; Middeldorp et al 2016). The protests and the violent response of state security forces should also be situated in the wider political context of central Mozambique, which was from 2012 onwards characterized by a political armed conflict between insurgents of Renamo and the security forces of the Frelimo government. During fieldwork in 2017 and 2018, residents of Mualadzi expressed fear of protesting, as this could be regarded as an act of opposition and spark violent responses from state security forces (see also Lesutis 2019b).

Generally, the resettlements in Tete are largely considered as having resulted in the impoverishment of already vulnerable populations and are considered—to a certain extent—as failures (Wiegink 2020). This is illustrated by the fact that many people in the resettlement areas have left or sought (or maintained) other residences elsewhere. Nevertheless, planned resettlement continues to be a common practice for dealing with dispersed populations.

Conclusion

In this article, my aim has been to analyze three resettlement programs that occurred at different moments in Mozambique’s recent history and to delineate certain continuities and differences. The *aldeamentos*, *aldeias comunais*, and mining-induced resettlements differ profoundly in their historical moment and in the actors pursuing the planned relocation, but each is also in some ways a continuation of its predecessor.

Resettlement surfaces in all three cases discussed as a policy that is both driven by agendas for development and control (see also Artur and Hilhorst 2014: 362). The *aldeamentos*

were largely a counter-insurgency effort, but also aimed at modernizing and centralizing services, such as electricity, health posts, and schools. The *aldeias comunais* were explicitly oriented toward development through a socialist idea of modernity. Yet at the same time these were also attempts to extend the presence and authority of the state. The more recent corporate-led mining-induced resettlements were also regarded as opportunities for development. At the same time, resettlement planning was also considered as part of the soft security measures of the company (see also Buur and Sumich 2019). Especially after protests in 2012, the resettlement efforts were also geared at preventing protest or sabotage in the surroundings of the mine to safeguard the operations.

In each case, the resettlement process was planned and implemented without significant participation of the rural populations who were to be relocated. In quite similar ways, the resettlement programs envisioned the advantages of centralized settlements, which included access to electricity, proximity of health posts and schools, and centralized government administration, among many other things. Both the *aldeias comunais* program and mining-induced resettlements particularly emphasized the advantage of “proper” housing. Yet, each resettlement program disregarded the importance of easily accessible fertile land, preferred housing arrangements, access to water ancestral burial grounds, and the linkages of traditional authority structures to the land. The top-down implementation of the resettlement also resulted in a lack of ownership of local populations and a dependency on the state or company to solve things. In this sense, there is not much difference between resettlement programs initiated by government actors or corporate actors.

Each of the resettlements resulted in suffering and hardship for those who were dislocated. Resettlement did not affect all people in the same way, of course, and this paper does not allow for much discussion of how experiences differ along the lines of, for instance, gender, socio-economic status, and age. But what can be concluded is that these resettlement projects have resulted in loss of the means of livelihood for many. In addition, while none of the processes was presented as forced, most were experienced as such. Each case also shows the politicization of resettlement and different forms of resistance, explicit by protesting or joining an armed movement, but also more passive forms of resistance, such as leaving the resettlement area (Lesutis 2019b).

Resettlement surfaces as a planned form of displacement in Mozambique that is often regarded as both necessary and as an opportunity for much wanted development, but that has also repeatedly failed in bringing development and security, and has caused suffering and fueled popular resistance. Generally, this comparison reveals resettlement to be a top-

down practice of social engineering with often devastating consequences. This analysis thus calls for caution to regard resettlement as a vehicle for development and as a panacea for dealing with displaced populations caused by armed conflict and other disasters.

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