

Race and Labor in Beira during the Era of Imperial Reform*

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Abstract

This article examines the history of race and labor in Beira following the imperial reforms of the 1960s. The reforms promised a new era of Luso-Tropical racial equality, and some workers gained improved conditions following their implementation. Nonetheless, the racial realities of Portuguese rule continued to limit African workers' possibilities even despite the reforms. At the same time, the rigid emphasis on non-racial rule made it increasingly difficult for workers to openly criticize colonial racism. Using letters from workers published in the newspaper *Voz Africana*, the article examines how the history of urban labor in Mozambique illuminates the broader history of race and reform in the late colonial Portuguese empire.

Keywords

Race, Labour, Beira, Mozambique, Imperial reform

Resumo

As reformas de 1961 foram inauguradas com o objetivo de estabelecer uma nova política de desenvolvimento e igualdade racial no império Português. O presente artigo analisa os efeitos destas reformas na cidade da Beira. As reformas trouxeram vantagens para alguns trabalhadores; apesar disso, as possibilidades de emprego ficaram, em muitos casos, restritas pelas práticas racializadas da sociedade colonial, ao mesmo tempo que a ideologia de Luso-Tropicalismo fez com que uma crítica aberta de racismo no império Português fosse difícil de fazer. Com base em cartas de trabalhadores publicadas no jornal *Voz Africana*, o artigo estuda a história do trabalho urbano nas “províncias ultramarinas” para elucidar a história do racismo e reforma na última fase do império português.

Palavras Chave

Raça, Trabalho, Beira, Moçambique, Reforma no império

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In March 1960, the head of the native affairs department in Mozambique, Álvaro de Gouveia e Melo, sent a lengthy circular to the district administrators to request their opinion on a proposed wage increase for African workers. It explained the need for “raising the standard of living of the native family” by warning of “parasitic” employers which had been paying wages that were “less than fair to the workers they employ,” adding that “only a defective economic perspective could justify employers being protected at the expense of sacrificing basic principles of social justice.”² The circular offered a clear signal of the growing conviction among colonial administrators that the old model of the Mozambican political economy needed to change. That economy had been built atop a vast system of forced labor, which solidified administrative control over African subjects and facilitated capitalist exploitation of African workers, and which was justified through the claim that Africans were fundamentally different from Europeans, due to a congenital disinterest in wage labor which could only be rectified by administrative compulsion.

By the dawn of the 1960s, however, reformist ideas had begun to spread with increasing urgency across the Portuguese empire, bringing into question every aspect of this model (Keese 2003, 2012; Abrantes and Berthet 2015; Jerónimo and Pinto 2015; Curto, Furtado and Cruz 2016; Monteiro 2018). The idea that the colonial administration should use mass conscription to sustain the political economy became increasingly untenable, driven by an expanding global consensus against the use of forced labor (Monteiro 2018). The idea that Portuguese colonial rulers could ignore the material aspirations of African workers became similarly untenable; instead, the empire was increasingly guided by the logic of development, spurring many changes to the economic ideas of Portuguese administrators (Castelo 2014a, 2014b; Jerónimo and Pinto 2015). Finally, the dichotomy between African subjects and Portuguese citizens which justified the forced labor system—a division that was officially based on differences in “civilization,” but had always been thoroughly racialized—was being reimaged, as the Portuguese empire adopted the non-racial rhetoric of Luso-Tropicalism to justify its continued rule (Leonard 1997; Neto 1997; Castelo 1999; Thomaz 2001; Cabaço 2009). As more African colonies moved toward independence, and the onset of the war in Angola in 1961 made plain that Portuguese colonies would not be immune from demands for African political and social rights, implementing a new model of non-racial development became crucial in securing the empire’s survival in a newly decolonizing world.

² Arquivo Historico de Moçambique (AHM), Fundo do Governo do Distrito da Beira (FGDB), Caixa (Cx) 629, Circular 1904/B/15, 22 March 1960.

This ideological shift produced a set of sweeping imperial reforms in the early 1960s, which extended formal legal equality to everyone living in the Portuguese empire and promised a new era of economic prosperity for the African population. The role of labor in shaping these reforms, and their subsequent impact on race and labor, is the subject of this article. The first part of the article traces the role of racial difference in shaping debates over the future of labor in Mozambique, showing how labor became a foundation of Portugal's new program of non-racial development. As part of that transformation, Portuguese authorities began to focus on urbanized, "stabilized" workers, seeking to both increase the number of such workers and improve their working conditions. In rural areas, many of the old mechanisms for controlling and exploiting African workers remained unchanged, as did the Portuguese conception of such workers as profoundly different.³ In contrast, urban workers could be more readily assimilated into Portuguese defenses of the empire as a "pluricontinental state" which demonstrated both the eternal genius of Portuguese racial equality and the bright promise of a prosperous, developed future.⁴ Improving urban workers' lives thus became one of the central objectives of Portuguese reforms in the 1960s.

This links to the article's second half, which analyzes the tangible impact of reforms on race and labor in the central Mozambican city of Beira, by examining letters from workers published in the newspaper *Voz Africana*. Many workers' lives improved following the reforms, obtaining higher wages and better access to urban amenities. At the same time, many workers complained about continued problems with their employment, particularly low wages. Moreover, racism within the workplace remained deeply entrenched, and the promise of racial equality remained a mirage. The Portuguese discourse of racial equality, which was heavily emphasized by the 1960s reforms, heralded the removal of legal structures that had previously prevented Africans from gaining the same positions as white workers. But those legal changes only further exposed the extent of racial discrimination within employment. Africans who tried to claim the rights of equal pay and benefits were excluded, or fired, from jobs by employers who did not see black workers as equal to their white counterparts. Nonetheless, the centrality of non-racialism to the Portuguese imperial ethos made it impossible to accurately identify or openly discuss racism within employment, and subsequently impossible to address it.

³ The same was true in other empires as well, where labor coercion remained widespread in rural areas even after the abolition of forced labor: see Wiemers (2017), Kunkel (2018), Keese (2014), Rossi (2017), and Okia (2019).

⁴ The rural-urban divide was central in shaping how Portuguese reforms were conceptualized and implemented: see Curto, da Cruz and Furtado (2016) and Monteiro (2020).

In tracing these histories, the article seeks to make several contributions. The first is to show the importance of labor in shaping the Portuguese empire during the final phase of its existence, between the reforms of the early 1960s and the ultimate dissolution of the empire. Much of the existing literature on this era has focused on the evolving Portuguese ideology of development (Castelo 2014; Jerónimo and Pinto 2015). In the Portuguese empire, as in newly independent African nations, the rhetoric of development encompassed many different possibilities: extending the rights of citizenship, expanding access to education, and effecting large-scale economic transformation—themes which have been studied by numerous historians of Africa, who have shown how the concept of development transformed political and economic relations across the continent.⁵ Nonetheless, as this article seeks to establish, reforming labor was similarly important in shaping the broader framework of development. Just as controlling labor was foundational in solidifying Portuguese colonial rule prior to the 1960s, so too was reforming labor foundational to Portuguese attempts to reimagine the empire in the 1960s.⁶

Labor was also central in translating Portuguese developmental ideology into tangible change. This points to the article's second contribution, which is to investigate the possibilities of Portuguese reform in the 1960s by focusing on the experiences of workers navigating the changing racial and legal landscape. Earlier histories of this era dismissed Portuguese reforms as a transparently duplicitous and fundamentally irrelevant attempt to shroud the obvious racism within the Portuguese empire.⁷ But the possibilities of reform were taken seriously by many people at the time, urban residents key among them, as a number of recent histories have effectively demonstrated (Penvenne 1996; Moorman 2008; Domingos 2012; Havstad 2019; Morton 2019). And while improving the lives of urban workers was central to Portuguese development policy, their experiences have been largely overlooked in existing accounts that study the Portuguese empire during the 1960s.⁸ Studying how urban workers conceptualized the new possibilities opened by Portuguese reforms, and

⁵ Among the many excellent works that discuss these themes: for citizenship, see Lal (2015), Ahlman (2017), and Moskowitz (2019); for education, see Kantrowitz (2018) and Prosperetti (2019); for economic transformation, see Isaacman and Isaacman (2013), Bamba (2016), Aerni-Fleissner (2017), and Young (2017). For a recent overview, see Decker and McMahon (2020).

⁶ Comparative studies of labor and development include Lindsay (2003) and Schler (2016).

⁷ The most influential text was Bender (1978).

⁸ There is a substantial literature on the history of labor in the Portuguese empire, but most of these histories focus on the forced labor era which preceded the 1960s reforms. Most histories of labor in the 1960s focus on large rural employers, where the impact of reforms was very different; for examples, see Vail and White (1980), Isaacman and Isaacman (2013), Ball (2015), Cleveland (2015), and Mandlate (2015).

how they expressed their discontent with the barriers to realizing those possibilities, is thus vital in showing what it meant to live through this era.

Analyzing the impact of Portuguese reforms offers insights that extend beyond Mozambique. Over the course of the 1960s, the Portuguese empire was increasingly seen as an outlier in a newly independent Africa. But the policies implemented by Portuguese reforms were not so unique: the promotion of a stabilized urban workforce echoed similar policies undertaken in the British and French empires, and while Portuguese officials presented Luso-Tropical ideology as a uniquely Portuguese method of non-racial government, the broader ideal of equal citizenship had been similarly embraced by French officials prior to the empire's dissolution. The rhetorical shift of European empires toward development and imperial unity gave Africans, including African workers, new possibilities for demanding better living and working conditions (Cooper, 1996, 2014). At the same time, there were serious limitations on colonial subjects' ability to realize these possibilities. A history of labor shows these limitations very clearly: in Mozambique, as elsewhere, the evolving rhetoric of universal citizenship alongside the granting of legal equality often failed to bring any meaningful change in the lives of colonial subjects, and instead spurred the creation of new boundaries to protect the system of racial difference at the heart of European colonial rule (Cooper 2014: 184-186; Drayton 2017). A close study of how the broad ideals of development, citizenship, and racial equality both succeeded and (more often) failed to change the everyday reality of colonial workers thus offers an important counterpart to histories that examine these ideals as a terrain for political and intellectual debates.

This close study is made possible by the article's source base, consisting of letters published in the newspaper *Voz Africana* — a potentially valuable resource for studying Mozambique in the 1960s, but one which has not been widely utilized by existing histories.⁹ Edited by the journalist (and, later, anti-colonial historian) José Capela starting in 1962, *Voz Africana* took advantage of the post-reform loosening of state censorship to focus on Mozambique's African majority. It quickly gained a wide audience by publishing important debates and critiques that had been previously barred from the press.¹⁰ But the newspaper's most important section, and the one which most shaped its public profile, was *Escrevem os Leitores* ("The Readers Write"), which ran around two dozen letters from readers in every edition, usually occupying two full pages. *Escrevem os Leitores* created a vibrant new space

⁹ Exceptions include Sheldon (1999), Nascimento (2016) and Penvenne (2016).

¹⁰ The newspaper *A Tribuna* played a similar role in the capital of Lourenço Marques; see Morton (2019), chapter 2, as well as Vieira (2019). For other histories of Lourenço Marques that draw upon the African press, see Penvenne (2011), Domingos (2012), and Havstad (2019).

where Africans could detail their aspirations and expound upon their frustrations for a broader public.¹¹ This article's analysis relies heavily on *Escrevem os Leitores*, particularly letters published in 1962 and 1963. This is, in part, because Portuguese censorship grew stricter after the start of the war of independence in 1964. But it is also because focusing on the first years following the reforms shows what African workers wanted to discuss when first given the opportunity to do so, and offers a more detailed account of how workers conceptualized both Portuguese labor reforms and the broader role of race and racism in the Portuguese empire.¹² At the same time, examining how the possibilities created by *Voç Africana* were gradually limited by censorship helps illuminate the specific ways that Portuguese authorities sought to control discussions of racism and labor – not by simply erasing such discussions entirely, but rather by compartmentalizing them, so as to make them more compatible with the specific emphases of Luso-Tropical ideology (Castelo 2015).

A complete study of the letters published in *Voç Africana*, and the distortions that the newspaper introduced in transmitting the “African voice” of its readers, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article.¹³ It is nonetheless useful to note at the outset the numerous complexities that surround the letters: aside from the impact of censorship, some of the letters raise questions of authorship and authenticity, which are difficult to answer with existing sources.¹⁴ Those complications notwithstanding, the letters published in *Voç Africana* provide a singular perspective into how workers discussed racism within employment, as well as the ways that censorship altered those discussions, revealing how both colonial authorities and individual subjects understood the changing roles of race and labor within everyday life in the era of imperial reform.

¹¹ A curated selection of letters was published by Capela in the book *Moçambique pelo seu povo*; an electronic version was published in 2010 by the Centro de Estudos Africanos da Universidade do Porto.

¹² A number of important recent histories have used newspapers to investigate the urban and intellectual history of modern Africa: see Hunter (2015), Englund (2015), Peterson, Newell, and Hunter (2016), and Hunter and James (2020).

¹³ Numerous historians have examined how newspapers in colonial Africa shaped the voices of those who published in them: see Newell (2013), Frederiksen (2020) and Krautwald (2021).

¹⁴ Capela's history of *Voç Africana* (found in the introduction to *Moçambique pelo seu povo*) does not discuss censorship, nor does it acknowledge that the letters which the newspaper published were sometimes altered prior to publication. As a result, the only available method for examining the impact of censorship is by comparing the original letters that Capela published in *Moçambique pelo seu povo* against the edited versions that were published in the newspaper – a task which is made difficult by the fact that Capela's book did not cite the publication date of the letters it published, and often assigned pseudonyms to the letters' authors. Then too, this comparison cannot explain how and why changes were made, or who made them; although most were presumably forced by censorship, it is not impossible that the newspaper's editors altered some of the letters. The newspaper, for its part, denied that it ever acceded to censorship, claiming that “we publish the letters in their original format, limiting ourselves to one or another very minor correction that in no way changes them, but rather corrects a small spelling error or something similar. If it cannot be published in its original format we do not publish it.” See “Cartas,” *Voç Africana*, 17 April 1965.

From Native Workers to Rural Workers

In the years following World War II, colonial policy across Africa was increasingly transformed by political and economic reforms, driven by a discursive integration of African workers into a universal narrative of human development (Cooper 1996). The Portuguese colonies, alongside their neighboring Anglophone settler colonies, remained a well-known outlier within these broader processes of reform. The official policy of the Portuguese empire throughout the 1940s and 1950s continued to stress the profound difference between European and African workers, and contended that African workers would only accept wage labor if forced by the colonial administration—as seen in a 1942 circular from the Governor-General of Mozambique, which justified forced labor by citing “the caprices of the black man, who by temperament and natural environment is predisposed to a minimal effort, corresponding to the minimum of his needs” (Bettencourt 1945: 79-86). The ideology of fundamental racial difference was inseparable from the *indigenato*, the separate juridical regime that governed the lives of African workers. The various laws which comprised the *indigenato* were particularly concerned with controlling the lives of African workers, most notably through forced labor, which remained a profoundly important political and economic tool across the Portuguese empire throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

Toward the end of the 1950s, however, internal critiques of Portuguese labor policy began to multiply, opening a wide-ranging debate over the future of the Portuguese labor system. This debate revolved, in large part, around the question of racial difference, as an increasing number of administrators began to argue that Africans should be viewed the same as other workers and brought into wage labor through higher wages and improved working conditions rather than state compulsion. Administrators’ responses to the 1960 circular, cited in the introductory paragraph, show how this debate unfolded. Some administrators continued to present African workers as Africans, rather than workers – that is, as people with few material needs and no significant interest in wage labor. For example, the administrator of Marromeu district argued that any offering of higher wages and better working conditions to entice Africans to work would fail, because

A raise in daily wages will only bring a higher standard of living when it is absolutely necessary to satisfy indispensable needs. Civilization makes essential today what was superfluous yesterday. Among the natives, unfortunately, this still does not happen. Their needs are very limited. And for this reason, the

majority of them only work if forced, and even then only to satisfy their most pressing needs, without any ambition of social evolution or notion of savings.¹⁵

Indeed, he argued, Africans were so distinct from other workers that a wage increase would have the counterproductive impact of “diminishing the native worker’s need for work since he will more easily satisfy his needs. Everyone knows that the aborigine prefers to work less and receive less pay than enjoy greater rewards and make a greater effort.”¹⁶

During the 1940s and 1950s, this viewpoint reflected official Portuguese policy, and debates and critiques of the forced labor system were limited in their scope and even more limited in their impact. By the end of the 1950s, however, forced labor was becoming a more sharply debated topic, and the Marromeu administrator’s opinion was not widely shared. Most of his colleagues argued for a different approach, with some forcefully rejecting the idea that African workers were distinct from other workers. For example, the administrator of Gorongosa district decried the “general and erroneous belief that the native systematically flees from work as a result of temperamental or even biological stigma,” and instead argued that

The salary that is paid isn’t enough to meet the minimum of the necessities and comforts to which he aspires thanks to the contagious example of the European. Take note – for example – of the half a million men who legally and illegally flow into the Union [of South Africa] and Rhodesia in search of worthwhile salaries and you will see that the black man is not the chronically lazy person of popular consensus. In all truth, one cannot sensibly expect that men will voluntarily offer themselves for work for 65\$00 per month.

As a result, he argued, it was “necessary as an indispensable measure of social, moral, and economic importance to raise salaries. Only in this way will the volunteer worker become a fact and not a grotesque euphemism.”¹⁷

¹⁵ AHM, FGDB, Cx 629, Administrator Marromeu to District Secretary of Civil Administration, 1565/B/11, 20 June 1960.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* The idea that higher wages would lead to lower labor-force participation, known as the “backward sloping supply curve,” was common among European colonial powers; for a useful introduction, see Manchuelle (1997).

¹⁷ AHM, FGDB, Cx 629, Administrator Gorongosa to DSAC, 284/B/15, 19 April 1960. The definition of “volunteer” workers had a long and complex history in Mozambique; see Kagan Guthrie (2016).

The tension between these two visions – on the one hand, of African workers as sharing social and material similarities with any other workers; on the other, of specific forms of social and cultural backwardness that made African workers racially distinct – was familiar across colonial Africa and heightened through the process of postwar labor reforms (Lindsay, 2003). Sometimes, the tension between these two visions inhered within the same individual. Consider, for example, a 1960 inspection to Dondo district. The inspector, Sousa Franklin, noted that virtually all of the district’s inhabitants depended on wage labor, and in his meetings with local residents, he evinced a modernizing and universal vision of Africans’ material aspirations by stressing Portuguese development assistance, noting that “the State has, in every district, workers like doctors, nurses, technicians for agriculture and livestock, who are in charge of fighting for the material needs of the native.”¹⁸ At the same time, he enumerated many examples of the supposed cultural backwardness of Africans, from their reluctance to seek medical care to their affinity for alcohol. Labor was central to this supposed backwardness: as he told the audience, “The native thinks that labor is punishment, but he must come to understand that it is a necessity and a means of gaining wealth. Every civilized man works, without considering this fact as a punishment. Now, we are here to make your backwards customs evolve, and to civilize you. For this reason, we must put the native on the path toward recognizing the advantages of work.”¹⁹

The administrative debates over the nature and future of African workers were ultimately settled in favor of those calling for reform. Following a series of uprisings in Angola, and a growing sense that the changing international panorama required profound changes to the Portuguese imperial framework, the newly installed Overseas Minister Adriano Moreira implemented a series of sweeping measures in 1961 and 1962, which abolished the *indigenato* in favor of a new charter of universal and non-racial citizenship. Key within this transition was a dramatic change to Portuguese labor policy: the Native Labor Code, the foundation of the *indigenato*, was replaced with the new Rural Labor Code, which sought to reform both how African workers were treated and how they were conceptualized. Africans could no longer be conscripted into work, as the new Code flatly proclaimed that “no type of forced labor is allowed; there is no provision for penal sanctions for failing to fulfill a work contract.” At the same time, Africans could no longer be categorized as fundamentally different individuals, as the Rural Labor Code took pains to explicitly reject

¹⁸ AHM, Fundo da Inspeção dos Serviços Administrativos e Negócios Indígenas (ISANI), Cx 50, Report of Inspection to Dondo District, p. 79.

¹⁹ AHM, ISANI, Cx 50, Report of Inspection to Dondo District, p. 82.

“any distinction between ethnic or cultural groups,” and promised that “all workers, regardless of their cultural heritage, will begin to be regulated by the same law.”²⁰

In reality, the total shift promised by the Rural Labor Code was more limited. The abolition of forced labor was not fully realized: while administrative involvement in forced labor was increasingly limited, labor coercion nonetheless remained widespread, as local “chiefs” and recruiters continued to conscript workers who did not seek out wage labor, long after such conscription had been officially outlawed (Kagan Guthrie 2018). In 1966, for example, a news story from Buzi district highlighted the “large percentage of people who do not want to take the true path toward their subsistence” and praised “the diligence of the police in the hunt for individuals allergic to work,” reporting that they had been “imprisoning all those who do not want to work.”²¹ Continuities in the Mozambican political economy helped sustain the machinery of labor coercion. As in previous decades, the political economy of rural Mozambique remained largely oriented around the export of migrant workers to distant employers both inside and outside of Mozambique’s borders. At the same time, many employers continued to depend upon the poorly-paid labor of migrant workers to maintain their profitability (Kagan Guthrie 2017).²² Similarly, the Code’s commitment to legal equality and non-racialism was contradicted by the fact that it only applied to Portugal’s African territories, implicitly replicating the *indigenato* by segregating rural Africans into a fundamentally distinct group whose labor required a different legal code (Monteiro 2018: 341-343, 2020). Then too, many administrators continued to subscribe to the belief that rural Africans were essentially different; as the administrator of Buzi district put it, Mozambique’s African population was “still not integrated into Western civilization,” and thus “constitutes a majority for which it is important to adopt administrative measures of a specialized character,” because of the “difference in psychological, moral, economic and political structures from the country into which they are integrated.” Work remained a key indicator of this difference, and the abolition of forced labor had left the administrator “certain that an economic crisis will occur in vast regions of the province, resulting from an inevitable shortage of workers.”²³

²⁰ Código do Trabalho Rural, Decreto 44309, 27 April 1962.

²¹ “Presos por vadiagem,” *Voç Africana*, 19 March 1966. See also Letter from a Student in Mexinine, “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 6 April 1963; Letter from a 17-year old reader from Macuse living in Manga, “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 18 April 1964; Letter from Orlando Guilherme Matare, “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 17 September 1966.

²² In subsequent years, the Portuguese authorities would begin to take more interest in transforming the rural political economy, in part as a counterinsurgency tool within the evolving struggles for independence; see Jerónimo (2020) and Castelo (2020).

²³ AHM, Fundo do Concelho de Buzi, Cx 63, Annual Report Buzi 1961.

Thus, notwithstanding the grandiose promises of reform, the Rural Labor Code did not dramatically change the rural labor system, in which low-paid migrant labor remained widespread, and in which workers exercised little autonomy over their labor. Rather, the most important change of the Rural Labor Code was in redrawing the *indigenato*'s boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. The Rural Labor Code had to adhere to the Portuguese promise of non-racialism; as a result, the fact that it only applied to the African population was justified on the grounds of economic difference, with African territories needing a separate labor code because they were “regions which for a long time to come will be characterized by the coexistence of a subsistence economy with a market economy.”²⁴ Of course, the economic divisions within Mozambique had always been highly racialized, meaning that the Rural Labor Code applied to much the same population as had the *indigenato*. Nonetheless, the strictly economic rationale of the Rural Labor Code meant that, unlike the *indigenato*, it could only be applied to African workers who had specific jobs, namely those who worked in agricultural activities or “whose work can be reduced to the simple provision of labor.”²⁵

This change was potentially important; the limited scope of the Rural Labor Code when compared to its predecessor meant that a significant subset of African workers – particularly those living in cities – might realize the Portuguese promise of non-racialism and become governed, paid, and treated the same as European workers. Prior to the reforms, escaping the *indigenato* and gaining the equal rights of citizenship had required a total transformation in personal status. In contrast, the Rural Labor Code was meant to uphold the equal rights of citizenship, and thus only applied to workers who lived in rural areas and had not obtained sufficiently skilled employment. Moreover, the Rural Labor Code was joined with a new administrative emphasis on encouraging “stabilized” labor to replace the old model of importing short-term, underpaid migrant workers from rural areas.²⁶ Thus, while Portuguese labor policy continued to treat rural workers as a separate population necessitating a separate legal framework, it was also joined with policies that would successively limit the number of workers being governed under that framework, and which explicitly promised that workers whose skills transcended that framework would gain equality with their European counterparts. These changes offered important possibilities to African

²⁴ Código do Trabalho Rural, Decreto 44309, 27 April 1962.

²⁵ Código do Trabalho Rural, Decreto 44309, 27 April 1962.

²⁶ For two of many examples, see Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, ISAU, A2.050.03/024.00150, Report of the Governor of Manica and Sofala, January 1961 to October 1962, and Arquivo Histórico-Diplomático, MU/GM/GNP/RNP/0040/08667, Report of Inspection to Manica and Sofala by Inspector of Psycho-Social Action Services, 19 November 1962.

workers. It was, however, incumbent upon workers to find ways of utilizing those possibilities, as the next section turns to explore.

Urban Labor and Non-Racial Development in the New Empire

While the reforms of the early 1960s were theoretically meant to transform labor relations for all Mozambicans, they were particularly targeted at expanding the ranks of urban workers and raising their standard of living. The reforms offered important possibilities to urban workers; they also offered important advantages to Portuguese officials, by helping buttress Portuguese attempts to refashion the empire into a nonracial, non-colonial “pluricontinental” state. Urban workers might theoretically benefit from Portuguese development projects, which in the first half of the 1960s focused extensively on improving urban infrastructure.²⁷ Then too, urban workers were in closer proximity to the overwhelming majority of Mozambique’s white population and more likely to speak Portuguese, helping to substantiate Portuguese claims of harmonious racial integration. Urban workers were thus central to the prosperous, unified future that Portuguese officials proclaimed themselves to be constructing in the “overseas territories,” and were crucial to Portuguese attempts to promote their new vision of nonracial development.

In central Mozambique, the overwhelming majority of urban workers were concentrated in Beira, the region’s economic and political hub. Beira’s economy had previously been sustained through the constant churn of migrant laborers, but during the late 1950s and early 1960s, economic growth and Portuguese reforms opened the possibilities of urban employment to a large and growing number of African workers. Actually realizing those possibilities, however, proved to be an uneven process. Many workers who came to Beira were able to improve their working lives by finding comparatively beneficial employment; at the same time, many other workers continued to earn low salaries, which gave them few possibilities for improving their social and economic situation. Moreover, even among those urban workers whose working lives did improve, racial discrimination within employment remained highly visible — and the rigorous commitment of Portugal’s official discourse to the ideal of non-racialism made it impossible to directly address such discrimination.

²⁷ While Portuguese urban development schemes were ostensibly targeted at all urban residents, black and white, the vast majority of development funding was targeted at wealthier, overwhelmingly white neighborhoods, and the few projects devoted to the African population were largely ineffective (Penvenne, 2011; Morton, 2019).

The vicissitudes of urban working life were a frequent topic in the pages of *Voç Africana*, a newspaper in Beira focusing on the city's black population. The newspaper was published infrequently by a small number of mixed-race individuals beginning in 1933; in July 1962, it moved to a weekly publication, in association with the Catholic Church, edited by the journalist José Capela (Nascimento 2016). The newspaper began publishing *Escrevem os Leitores* in its second issue. The inaugural edition featured a single letter; within two months, the section hosted more than two dozen letters and filled two entire pages. *Escrevem os Leitores* quickly became an important forum for public debate around many topics, providing a valuable source for reconstituting the changing role of labor in the lives of the urban black population.²⁸ To be certain, any analysis of *Escrevem os Leitores* has to proceed carefully. Much of the newspaper was written by and for the upper echelons of African society, and many of the letters were uncommonly laudatory of Portuguese rule. Then too, as will be detailed later in the article, censorship limited the ability of the newspaper and its contributors to directly criticize Portuguese rule and race relations.²⁹

Those limitations notwithstanding, examining *Voç Africana* provides valuable insights into how workers navigated the new rhetoric of non-racialism in their working lives. Chief among readers' concerns was the promise of better salaries and better living conditions – a concern that was, unsurprisingly, reflected in the newspaper's coverage, and was the subject of the first editorial of the first issue:

The social valorization of the most backwards populations is, in the current moment, the number one concern of the government, of the administrative corps, of business, and of any and every anonymous citizen with the consciousness of a responsible human being. Such valorization involves, above all, fair pay to the worker, whether he works for himself or for someone else. Rural workers, workers of every degree of skill, simple office employees, will have to be paid a fair wage, and this can be what will allow them to live and support their families in a decent way.³⁰

²⁸ While the newspaper's focus was on Beira, it was distributed across Mozambique, and many of the letters came from elsewhere, particularly central and northern Mozambique. The newspaper's total circulation was not published, but the editor who succeeded Capela claimed it was in the thousands: see Nascimento (2016), 191. For comparison, the circulation of *Notícias*, the largest newspaper in Mozambique, was 20,000 (Ferreira, 1974: 142). Circulation data on newspapers in Mozambique was limited (Fonseca, 2014: 252).

²⁹ For an examination of how *A Tribuna*, a similarly reformist newspaper published in the capital of Lourenço Marques, navigated the constraints of Portuguese censorship, see Morton (2019), chapter 2.

³⁰ "Valorização Social," *Voç Africana*, 2 June 1962.

Higher wages for African workers, the newspaper argued, were not just a way to bring about “the social uplift of less evolved peoples.” It was also a key plank in the broader program of non-racial development and would help build trans-racial national unity, an “incontrovertible affirmation of human solidarity” which would “help us build a great Mozambique for tomorrow.”³¹

Echoing this last point, a steady stream of news stories in *Voz Africana* detailed an optimistic vision of Mozambican progress, reporting on the improved working conditions enjoyed by black workers on the path toward a brighter future. Such articles tended to focus on large industrial employers, and often read like corporate propaganda as much as journalism – a reality that reflected not just the influence of large, well-capitalized employers with substantial advertising budgets, but also the fact that large employers were the exemplars of stabilized labor and were invested in burnishing their image as the pioneers of Mozambican nonracial development. For example, a story on the Companhia de Cimentos de Moçambique reported that the company was working to improve “the well-being and standard of living of its autochthonous workers, providing them every possible opportunity for their moral, social and professional self-improvement,”³² while the asbestos company Lusalite was called lauded for building “an environment of work, progress, and social promotion” to create “workers with a future, who have good jobs.”³³ Many readers published in the newspaper echoed this optimism. Joaquim Traquino Afonso, an employee of Lusalite, said that “In the 13 years I’ve been employed in the business my life has gradually improved and I expect better days, of this I am absolutely certain. I have a decent salary, a new house in the neighborhood, and I enjoy the benefits that the company provides to its workers, benefits that have never been offered before during my entire professional life.”³⁴ Albino João Joaquim Dias, similarly, wrote to say that at Lusalite, “all the workers make good salaries, and no one thinks of leaving the firm.”³⁵ Domingos Carmona, a worker in Moçambique Industrial, thanked his employer for offering paid leave, adding that if every employer treated workers as well as his did, “No one would miss their homeland.”³⁶

³¹ “Valorização Social,” *Voz Africana*, 2 June 1962.

³² “Companhia de Cimentos de Moçambique, notável obra, em profundidade, a favor da promoção social dos africanos,” *Voz Africana*, 22 September 1962.

³³ “Lusalite de Moçambique, política de fixação e assimilação dos trabalhadores africanos,” *Voz Africana*, 15 December 1962.

³⁴ “Falam os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 28 July 1962; see also “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 29 December 1962.

³⁵ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 22 September 1962.

³⁶ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 30 June 1962.

Workers who commented upon their improved working conditions frequently linked those improvements to the reforms being implemented by the Portuguese administration. Rosário Manuel Coelho said that “Mozambique will soon see better days for Africans, everyone will have hopes for changing their lives thanks to the improved direction of the government”; David Xicanha said that “With the recent legislation, I am sure that the African will experience a new life in the Lusophone world.”³⁷ *Lusalite* was credited for having “transformed the employees and workers of *Lusalite*, whatever the task they perform, into employees and workers conscious of their duties as citizens and their duties toward their family and the community to which they belong,” an approach which “is truly following the civilizing actions of Portugal in its overseas territories.”³⁸ At a company event honoring the founder of the *Companhia de Cimentos de Moçambique*, a worker named Henrique Josue gave a speech thanking both the company and the government for instituting a new program that provided loans to employees to build their own houses, saying that “only someone who does not have their own house can appreciate the value of this important assistance, which is unique in our Portuguese Province of Mozambique, and is one more example that Portugal, via Your Excellency, is giving to the world,” and offering “our profound gratitude for the enormous effort that our Company is making in support of the moral, social, and economic development of its autochthonous workers, contributing in the highest degree to the continuation of Portugal in Africa.”³⁹

Letters from workers extolling their employers and Portuguese rule would not have been unknown in Mozambique, given the longstanding paternalistic model of labor in the Portuguese colonies (Vail and White 1980; Cleveland 2016; Ferguson 2013). Nonetheless, such effusive praise might invoke questions about the letters’ authenticity. Aside from the impact of censorship, there were occasional suggestions that the letters which appeared in *Voz Africana* were not always what they appeared to be. Debates between readers sometimes featured accusations of ghostwriting, and a retrospective opinion piece marking the newspaper’s first year of publication casually asserted that some of the letters were written by whites who adopted pseudonyms to appear black.⁴⁰ In a few instances, the newspaper

³⁷ “Falamos os leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 16 June 1962.

³⁸ “Lusalite de Moçambique, política de fixação e assimilação dos trabalhadores africanos,” *Voz Africana*, 15 December 1962.

³⁹ The founder being honored was the wealthy industrialist António Champalimaud: “António Champalimaud, conhecido industrial, em visita a Moçambique,” *Voz Africana*, 11 August 1962. For more on urban housing in late colonial Mozambique, see Morton (2019).

⁴⁰ For a representative example of the first, see the many letters submitted by and against Bahi Napinhoso in September and October 1966; for the second, see “‘Voz Africana’ ou sinal de contradição?” *Voz Africana*, 29 December 1962.

published the same letter twice, several months apart, while crediting them to different authors, without providing any further explanation – inviting speculation about a range of possible scenarios, from plagiarism by readers who wished to see their names in the newspaper to the invention of correspondence by newspaper staff. Nonetheless, the volume of letters published by the newspaper – the editor, Capela, later wrote that “letters rained down on the editors,” while the newspaper published a note describing the “avalanche of letters we receive” – makes it difficult to dismiss them out of hand.⁴¹ Then too, a narrow focus on the provenance of the letters risks ignoring the larger truths which their publication helped to unveil.⁴²

Moreover, while many readers of *Voz Africana* subscribed to Portuguese promises of a better future, many others complained that future had yet to arrive. Grievances over low wages were common, and were presented in the same language of material improvement that Portuguese officials used when promising to improve the lives of the urban workforce. Thus, many readers specifically argued that their expenses as modern, urban workers — housing, clothing, school fees — far exceeded the low wages they continued to earn. In July 1962, a reader named Almeida Arlindo Viegas wrote to demand that employers start providing “reasonable salaries, so that the African can have a decent life.”⁴³ In August, Miguel José Come complained that the average urban worker “does not have enough money, because his earnings are meager, and only represent 25% of the cost of living” – an assertion that was not outlandish in a context where workers bore the many costs of supporting families and dependents, particularly those living in Beira.⁴⁴ In September, Come’s point was echoed by Francisco Tauanja, who wrote that his job with an insurance company did not allow him to raise his family according to the model of stabilized labor: “I am the father of two young girls, and I greatly regret that I do not have a salary that allows me to raise them appropriately, as is my desire. ... Children in this era need good food, and it is a shame, a sad thing for the head of a household.”⁴⁵ In October, Manuel Jacinto wrote that his life as an urbanized office worker who “made sacrifices for the education of my two children” was impossible because “as a parent of two children and a Portuguese citizen, the meager salary that I receive per month isn’t enough for anything.”⁴⁶ In November, Rafael Frei wrote to complain that despite

⁴¹ Capela (1971), 12; “Cartas,” *Voz Africana*, 17 April 1965.

⁴² This point is made effectively, in a different context, by White (2003). See also, among other sources that discuss writers and their audiences, Peterson (2004) and Newell (2013).

⁴³ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 14 July 1962.

⁴⁴ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 11 August 1962.

⁴⁵ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 8 September 1962.

⁴⁶ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 6 October 1962.

having had a stable job working in a print shop for 16 years — a long time, by the standards of 1962 — “I haven’t been able to gain anything! ... I have done everything possible and various gymnastics to try to save even 50\$00 monthly, to buy a suit and clothes for my wife and shoes for my sons, but it is not possible for me. But all of this tragedy of my life comes from my very meager earnings.”⁴⁷ In December, João Queiros wrote that his many responsibilities as a skilled worker were not matched by a “corresponding salary for my work. What I am making is not enough for anything.”⁴⁸

Workers’ complaints about low salaries had important political implications; the long history of administrative control over labor, as well as the Portuguese regime’s attempts to highlight improved working conditions as a marker of its political legitimacy, meant that such complaints were inevitably connected to Portuguese rule. Thus, Viegas argued that the colonial administration was directly responsible for increasing Africans’ wages, and requested that the newspaper contact the Governor-General so that this problem “could be resolved without delay.”⁴⁹ Jacinto said that, according to Portuguese rhetoric, he should be earning a higher salary, explaining that “I do not have the customs and traditions of Kaffirs. Nor do I have 5 or 8 wives. In this situation I think that I meet the necessary conditions to be integrated into Portuguese citizenship. For this reason I think that my salary ought to satisfy these [living] conditions.”⁵⁰ Come similarly argued that low salaries rendered Portuguese rhetoric of development hollow: “The African fights for the development of his life ... although he wants to achieve this privilege, how can he succeed if he doesn’t have enough resources for this goal?”⁵¹ Tauanja called himself “proud to be Portuguese of the strongest character,” but added that he was “frustrated” by the fact that his request for “a raise, not very high” had been ignored for five months.⁵² Queiros put it most plainly: instead of Portuguese reforms having improved the lives of African workers, “everything is going backward.”⁵³

Developmental rhetoric, in Mozambique as elsewhere, presented the future as one of linear forward progress. But as the complaints published in *Voz Africana* made clear,

⁴⁷ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 3 November 1962.

⁴⁸ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 22 December 1962.

⁴⁹ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 14 July 1962.

⁵⁰ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 6 October 1962.

⁵¹ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 11 August 1962.

⁵² “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 8 September 1962.

⁵³ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 22 December 1962.

many workers were unable to realize such progress.⁵⁴ These complaints undermined not just the rhetoric of development; they also undermined the broader edifice of Portuguese rule that development was meant to support. In a decolonizing world, it was necessary (in the words of the reformist official Homem de Mello) that Portugal decisively repudiate the compulsion and exploitation of black workers of the previous decades by demonstrating “to an ever-greater degree, to a population dissatisfied and desirous of progress, that in Portuguese Africa there is a place for everyone, not just for Europeans and European descendants.”⁵⁵ The inability of the Portuguese to meet the demands for progress among urbanized African workers risked undermining both sides of this equation: not just the promise of economic progress, but also of non-racialism, as Africans earning low wages frequently found cause to compare themselves to their white counterparts. In that way, the uneven impact of Portuguese reforms served to highlight, rather than obscure, the ongoing problem of racism within employment, as the next section details.

The *Indigenato*'s Afterlife: Racism and Labor in the Era of Non-Racial Citizenship

African workers who complained about continuing low salaries posed a formidable challenge to Portugal's developmental rhetoric. The reforms had presented the promise of higher salaries and better working conditions as a universal possibility, available to all who sought them. Previous arguments by Portuguese officials that such enticements did not need to be offered to African workers, because they were innately uninterested in the material possibilities of wage labor, were no longer viable. But while Portuguese reforms ostensibly aimed to offer the possibilities of well-paid employment to all Mozambicans, they frequently had the opposite impact. Employers who had never viewed African workers as the equal of Europeans did not suddenly change their minds after the *indigenato* was abolished. As a result, Africans who sought to claim equality within employment faced serious difficulties in doing so: African workers were consistently blocked from obtaining high-paying work, and fired if they tried to exercise the equal rights that they theoretically now enjoyed.

The Portuguese rhetoric of non-racial development thus quickly revealed its own limits. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Portuguese non-racialism was a principle that existed mostly in theory, limited to a tiny subset of “assimilated” Africans. As a result, it was

⁵⁴ Complaints about the comparative material deprivation of Mozambique were not limited to the low salaries paid to workers; dozens of readers wrote in to complain about not having received the benefits of development, particularly complaining about the chronic absence of roads, schools, and healthcare facilities.

⁵⁵ Manuel José Homem de Mello, *Portugal, o ultramar e o futuro* (Lisbon, 1962), 109.

easy to shroud the role of racism within a broader discourse of civilization, because incidents of racial discrimination against nominally equal black citizens were limited when only a small number of “assimilated” Africans qualified for the equal rights of citizenship. Once the legal framework of the *indigenato* was abolished, and citizenship was officially extended to everyone living in Mozambique, the limited impact of formal non-racialism in eroding racial discrimination became much more apparent. At the same time, the emphasis on non-racialism as Portugal’s singular contribution to global society foreclosed the possibility of combating racial discrimination. African workers were under no illusions about the importance of race in employment – and said so in the pages of *Voz Africana*. But these complaints could not be addressed by a political and social system whose legitimacy was premised on being colorblind.

The unacknowledged racism within Portugal’s non-racial policy was, of course, evident long before non-racialism was elevated into a core principle of Portuguese rule. During the 1940s and 1950s, even the rarefied group of “assimilated” Africans who had achieved the rights of citizenship – and upon whom the Portuguese claim of a non-racial empire largely depended – were rarely able to translate the legal promise of racial equality into equality in the workplace. The same was true of mixed-race individuals: like the “assimilated” population, they theoretically enjoyed the equal rights of citizenship; like the “assimilated” population, they were highlighted in Portuguese claims of non-racial rule; like the “assimilated” population, they often found themselves highly disadvantaged within the labor market. Discrimination against “assimilated” Africans and mixed-race individuals was particularly visible within Mozambique’s trade unions, which served as important bastions of white economic power: unionized workers commanded vastly higher salaries and received a broad array of lucrative benefits (including health care, family allowances, and paid vacations to Portugal), but unions were closed to “native” workers, as well as most mixed-race and “assimilated” workers, and the benefits provided by unionization were the nearly-exclusive preserve of whites.⁵⁶

Discrimination within the unions, in turn, reflected the fact that most employers deemed black and mixed-race workers to be undeserving of the salaries and benefits provided to white workers. Thus, many African workers who were “assimilated” into the equal rights of citizenship were fired, or simply not hired, by employers who refused to pay them the

⁵⁶ Trade unions in Mozambique were nominally organized under Portugal’s corporatist model, but as Michel Cahen has clearly demonstrated, they were fundamentally racial institutions. Indeed, union membership in Mozambique had a higher percentage of whites than did the “civilized” population as a whole. See Cahen (1983), 402. See also Capela (1977), 263-8, and Hedges and Rocha (1996).

higher wages that their “assimilated” status conferred. A 1960 report explained the problem forthrightly, noting that “after the ‘African’ has obtained citizenship, he sees himself having significant — almost always insurmountable — difficulties finding a job. (There are even cases of such people requesting to return to their previous state).” The reason for this, the report explained, was that assimilated Africans were legally entitled to the same wages as Europeans but “do not produce, nor know how to produce, nor provide through their work, that which is currently demanded of a European. Nor can their knowledge of their professional responsibilities put them at the same level as the latter.”⁵⁷ The administrator of Beira similarly reported that a “native who acquires citizenship” frequently faced “serious difficulties in obtaining work”; as he explained, “since the law gives them equality in every way with the European, employers naturally prefer — given an equality in salaries — to offer a job to a European, who offers more guarantees of profitability, professionalism and knowledge.”⁵⁸ Indeed, so widespread was the practice of firing newly “assimilated” Africans rather than paying them equal wages that the provincial Governor started responding to Africans’ petitions for citizenship by “taking the care to ‘ask the boss if he is willing to pay the salaries that, by law, are the right of a non-native,’ in order to avoid his subsequent dismissal.”⁵⁹

These reports, on the eve of reforms which abolished “native” status and extended citizenship to everyone, showed the limitations of reforms based on a professed policy of racial equality. According to the official logic of Portuguese race relations, Africans who had proven themselves to be sufficiently “civilized” had always enjoyed full equality with whites; consequently, extending this equality from a small group of elite Africans to everyone living in the Portuguese colonies would theoretically suffice to eliminate the racial distinctions of the *indigenato*. In reality, posing legal equality as the solution to the racial system institutionalized by the *indigenato* foreclosed any discussion of the actual problem of racial discrimination. “Assimilated” Africans were a select group of individuals who were released from their “native” status, and in their selectivity should theoretically have been immune from the broader racial distinctions which underlay the system of assimilation. But as the administrators’ reports made clear, achieving juridical equality had frequently served to heighten, rather than erase, racial distinctions within employment.

⁵⁷ AHU, ISAU, A2.050.03/021.00133, Inspection to Province of Mozambique 1960-1961, Volume 2, 81.

⁵⁸ AHM, FGDB, Cx 664, Administrator Beira to District Secretary of Civil Administration, 1084/A/30, 10 March 1961.

⁵⁹ AHU, ISAU, A2.050.03/021.00133, Inspection to Province of Mozambique 1960-1961, Volume 2, 82.

This dynamic was particularly visible in union employment, which became a key example of the divide between the promises of non-racial development and the realities of employment in Mozambique. Following the early 1960s reforms, Portuguese and union officials promised to end the unions' previous role as the institutional guardians of white economic superiority, and vowed that newly deracialized unions would play an important role in building Mozambique's non-racial future. As one union official put it, in a speech commemorating a new work contract with the Trans-Zambezi Railway:

To win the great national battle – that which foresees integration and pluriculturalism – we fight the battle of social justice in labor relations, combating all forms of selfishness, of exploitation, of abuse, recognizing rights, establishing obligations and imposing rigorous fulfillment of the law, of contracts, and of agreements. ... We fight the battle of social justice in labor relations by not recognizing differences in color or creed, but solely as a result of professional aptitude and moral values. We fight the battle of social justice in labor relations by fighting for everyone: for fair wages, hygienic housing, the possibility for educating one's children according to their intelligence and aptitude, free medical assistance, paid holidays, retirements for disability or age and other rights and prerogatives inherent to the dignity of labor and of man.⁶⁰

In presenting the benefits of unionization, provisioned equally to both black and white workers, as a vital tool in making Portugal's non-racial future a reality, the union secretary was echoing Portuguese pledges of non-racial development. The pages of *Voz Africana*, however, told a markedly different story, as readers complained that union employment remained profoundly segregated. In fact, some of the first complaints about racial discrimination in the unions to appear in the newspaper centered on the Trans-Zambezi Railway, the very employer the union secretary had cited as pointing the way toward a prosperous, racially egalitarian future. A railway worker named Lourenço Licunha, for example, wrote that "I work night and day, to see if I can improve my situation, and since I earn very little, my life has gone from bad to worse," adding "To say that Africans in this

⁶⁰ "Os trabalhadores – quaisquer que eles sejam e seja qual for a sua qualificação – são homens, têm de ser tratados como homens e têm de viver como homens," *Notícias da Beira*, 12 April 1961.

province [Mozambique] make a good living does not correspond to the truth.”⁶¹ Licunha’s complaints about his wages reflected the extreme wage differential within the Trans-Zambezi Railway’s workforce: as Michel Cahen has calculated, unionized workers earned between 4,196 and 14,666 escudos per month, while non-unionized employees earned between 201 and 741 escudos per month (Cahen 1984: 10). And while the union secretary had promised that differences in wages would be based solely on “professional aptitude and moral values,” Licunha argued that the distinction was instead racial, noting that while the Trans-Zambezi Railway had many well-trained African workers, none of them earned high salaries, and “none of them have a car, not even a motorcycle.”⁶²

Nor was the Trans-Zambezi Railway anomalous in touting its commitment to nonracial development while maintaining racial exclusion within its unionized workforce. For example, at the same time that *Voz Africana* was lauding the Companhia de Cimentos de Moçambique for having “Europeans and Africans working together side by side, in the best Portuguese tradition of racial harmony and coexistence,” an official inspection to the company’s factory outside Beira found that only two of the roughly 200 African workers had achieved the qualifications necessary to join the union.⁶³ A reader named Luís Anselmo Martins put it plainly: “By law, employing entities are required to unionize their employees, and so why do these employers comply by only unionizing European workers and not also Africans,” adding “This exclusion causes us to not be paid fair wages according to the law of Unions, in accordance with the professional activities of each one.”⁶⁴

The persistent racial difference in employment was not lost to the readers of *Voz Africana*, many of whom wrote to complain of being blocked from jobs where they might earn the same pay and benefits as European workers. In particular, numerous readers reported being passed over for employment if they had a Bilhete de Identidade, the national identity document which had previously marked assimilated Africans as citizens who would be expected to receive equal wages as their white counterparts.⁶⁵ A worker named João Conforme dos Santos wrote that, after starting a job at the coal company Companhia Carbonifera de Moçambique, “As is customary the bookkeeper of the Company asked for

⁶¹ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 18 August 1962.

⁶² “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 18 August 1962.

⁶³ AHD, MU/GM/GNP/RNP/0040/08667, Report of Inspection to Manica and Sofala by Inspector of Psycho-Social Action Services, 19 November 1962, 32

⁶⁴ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 8 December 1962.

⁶⁵ Prior to the reforms, only “assimilated” Africans could obtain the Bilhete de Identidade; afterwards, it could be obtained by anyone who requested it. Initial demand was so high that it overwhelmed the Portuguese bureaucracy, leading the authorities to loosen the requirements for its emission; see Decreto 44555, *Diário do Governo* 1, 205, 6 September 1962.

my Caderneta” — a reference to the Caderneta de Identidade, which replaced the Caderneta Indígena, the “native identity card” which had previously distinguished Africans as “natives,” rather than citizens. But dos Santos instead showed the bookkeeper his Bilhete de Identidade, “which he found very strange. Because I find myself in these conditions different from others, I was fired the same day. What the bookkeeper said is that they would have to fire more of the people who have documents the same as mine.”⁶⁶ A reader named Trindade Mutare Jorge offered a similar account of being hired as a telephone operator; like dos Santos, he had a Bilhete de Identidade, but “When I got the job, they did not require any documentation from me. This leads to the conclusion that they wanted to pay pennies to a worker who does not deserve it [a higher salary], or who might be unionized.” As a result, his pay was a paltry 450\$00 per month, leading him to ask “How can I pay the income tax? And the professional tax? And the unemployment assistance fund? How is 450\$00 enough to buy clothes and food?” adding that he was “very frustrated” by the “inferiority of my salary.”⁶⁷ The discrimination against hiring Africans who might earn the equal wages of citizens was so severe that some workers who had acquired a Bilhete de Identidade subsequently obtained a Caderneta de Identidade in order to get hired: in 1965, a reader named Santos Fróis Maúta Nhangue wrote that for companies “to hire citizens is difficult, for this reason many people arrange private cadernetas even though they are citizens, so that they can get jobs without difficulty.”⁶⁸

Employers also fired African employees who dared to claim the rights of equal pay. Martins, in the letter cited above, had noted that “If someone demands the rights [of unionized employees] that he has earned he will no doubt be put ‘out on the street’ (fired from work), and the bosses exercise over us the freedom to fire us without any justification, often alleging that someone is a malcontent for correctly claiming their rights, and when they fire us they do not give us any compensation which could remedy our hunger during our period of unemployment.”⁶⁹ A lengthy account by a woman named Maria Guli, published in 1965, described the travails of her husband, a driver who had recently been “fired from the firm where he had been working as a driver for more than 10 years. The cause of him being fired was because of the fact that he had gotten it in his head — despite me having warned him many times — that now is when he would take care of the necessary documents to obtain a Bilhete de Identidade!” He had done so with the optimistic belief that it would bring

⁶⁶ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 23 March 1963.

⁶⁷ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 12 January 1963.

⁶⁸ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 20 August 1966.

⁶⁹ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 8 December 1962.

about a “possible improvement of his situation.” He was aware that employers did not look kindly on African employees who obtained the *Bilhete de Identidade*, and would not be inclined to pay the increased salary “given his new situation of citizen.” Nonetheless, “he was confident that his bosses would take into consideration his 10 years of service, in which he spent the best of his youth transporting cotton, around 2,400 kms per week.” Moreover, when “he presented himself to his bosses and asked, in the face of his new official document, that he be unionized, pure and simple,” he did so very cautiously. Thus, he did not demand the full range of benefits provided to unionized workers: he did not demand the right “to go to the Metropole, to enjoy paid holidays ... much less the increase of 1,800\$00 monthly” that white workers received. Instead, he just wanted “the right for him and his family to receive medical consultation and purchase medication, because the firm acquires medications in a pharmacy that offers considerable discounts and, as a union member, he could see a doctor in the union.” Even so, “the request was denied. And, so that he would have a lesson for the rest of his life, for daring to request rights that he does not deserve and so that he also does not provide an example to his other coworkers, he was fired.”⁷⁰

The practice of firing, and not hiring, Africans who might demand equal wages reinforced the inequality in salaries earned by black and white workers – a reality which prompted many complaints from *Voç Africana*’s readers. Martins’ letter had observed that “It frequently occurs in a Firm or Company or Landowner where there are European and African employees, everyone doing the same work, that the salaries are always different. Can a fair salary not be provided to those who have the right to it?”⁷¹ Another reader named Chale Guente wrote to complain about “the lack of equality in salaries. There are individuals who do the same job, with the same efficiency, but their earnings differ.”⁷² João Queiros, similarly, when writing about the low salaries offered to African workers, noted that “Many people think that it’s our fault” for not obtaining better jobs, adding that this “is not correct, we have the capacity to work and we like to work. They simply do not pay us the salaries to which we have a right. Thus we have to subject ourselves to earning far less than we deserve.”⁷³

Readers’ critiques of racism within employment gave rise to critiques of the broader edifice of Portuguese non-racialism, as witnessed in two long and controversial letters published at the end of 1962. Both letters argued that African workers were forced to

⁷⁰ “Carta aberta à minha sobrinha,” *Voç Africana*, 20 March 1965.

⁷¹ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 8 December 1962.

⁷² “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 4 August 1962.

⁷³ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 22 December 1962.

disavow their race, abandon their communities, and reject their compatriots in a misguided attempt to obtain better jobs — and further argued that this reality exposed the racism inherent within Portugal's supposedly non-racial system. The authors argued that the antidote was to promote black pride among Mozambicans — a vision that they framed as being fully compatible with Portuguese multi-racialism, but which nonetheless clashed with the non-racial discourse of Luso-Tropicalism, which emphasized racial harmony and national unity and offered little space for expressions of racial pride or solidarity.

Both letters are worth quoting at length. The first came from Davide da Costa Lameira Chingore, who wrote that:

I know some boys who after becoming a little educated already disrespect their birthplace, and when they are a little lighter-skinned than others they shave their kinky [carapinhado] hair and say that they are mixed. From black to mixed! Why? Because they have no pride in being black! I take pride in being purely Portuguese. But black Portuguese. Why shouldn't I be black, being black?! ... I think that these boys who want to be mixed, maybe it is to earn good salaries. Because yes, to tell the truth, when you become mixed, you earn more money. It would be better if salaries were based on the occupation and capacity of each person, so that many boys do not make themselves into mixed blacks. Which is, for me, very shameful. Dear black readers, let's take pride in being black Portuguese! Because the blood that pumps and runs through our veins is Portuguese blood! But of black Portuguese!⁷⁴

A second letter published a month later, from a reader named Pedro Francisco Manga, reinforced Simango's argument:

I am proud to be Portuguese. But black Portuguese. Why should I not be black, being black? I know some young men who stop talking to their friends when they find themselves next to some white. I believe that these young men do this just to be able to have good salaries. Because many of them think that this way they will earn more money. It would be better if salaries were given according to the occupation and capacity of each individual, so that

⁷⁴ "Escrevem os Leitores," *Voz Africana*, 29 September 1962.

these young men would end this terrible habit, which is disgraceful for everyone. Assimilation is not to stop speaking to your friends. This is just disgraceful. We should stop this habit.⁷⁵

Both Chingore and Manga argued that the failure to secure racial equality in employment had led black Mozambicans to reject their identity, and in the process revealed the problems with the Portuguese Luso-Tropical ideal. Thus, just as the low wages paid to African workers led workers to question Portuguese promises of economic development, so too did racial discrimination within employment bring damning critiques of Portuguese non-racialism.

The letters from Chingore and Manga are not only interesting because of what they said, but also because they subsequently revealed what could not be said: in the years that followed, almost no letters in *Voz Africana* criticized racial discrimination within employment, likely due to increasingly strict censorship. This is not to say that debates over race, or critiques of working conditions, disappeared from the newspaper. To the contrary, Manga's letter spurred a lengthy and intense dispute over the role of race and racism in Mozambican society, while numerous readers continued to complain about low wages. But the two topics were rarely joined. Thus, the debate over race inspired by Manga's letter focused on the alleged social estrangement of wealthier black Mozambicans, particularly those identifying as mixed-race, from their African brethren. Meanwhile, critiques of economic inequities avoided making direct allegations about racial discrimination. For example, when a young man named Armando Guebuza – who would soon leave Mozambique to join the anti-colonial movement, and later become the country's President – wrote a sharp denunciation of economic conditions in Beira, he only glancingly mentioned the role of race:

Instead of the economic conditions of the population (especially the African population, a case that deserves special attention) improving through the commercial and industrial development of this magnificent city, they have been worsened by the alarming crisis of unemployment that reaches every corner. There are many situations of people with wives and children to support, wanting to contribute to recent aspirations of cultural progress, who see themselves suddenly thrown into poverty, without any means of survival

⁷⁵ "Escrevem os Leitores," *Voz Africana*, 27 October 1962.

and with children crying day and night for bread – which is the most painful thing – just because there are not enough jobs.⁷⁶

Aside from his parenthetical mention of the “African population,” Guebuza’s critique of the Portuguese colonial economy was officially colorblind. The racial dynamics of Guebuza’s criticism were obvious — no one reading the newspaper would ever imagine European children facing starvation — but the racial component of economic inequality could not be openly identified.

Guebuza’s skirting of Portuguese racism was replicated in other letters that addressed race and labor, which affected a self-consciously colorblind analysis, even as the subtext of racism remained blindingly obvious. A 1964 letter from a reader named António Simbine, for example, criticized the working conditions of restaurant employees who worked 19-hour shifts. The reason, Simbine noted, was that “lots of people think that a servant [criado] doesn’t do anything.” Simbine argued that such workers “need rest like other workers also have,” adding “Let’s remember that every Mozambican or European ought to have the same rights as any other worker.” The paean to non-racialism aside, Simbine’s use of the racialized term “criado,” and the fact that a worker had been expected to work for 19 hours, left little doubt about the race of the workers he was talking about.⁷⁷ A similar letter, from a reader named Rafael Diogo Selemene, lamented the difficulties of workers who earned 15 escudos per day, and who went around “with dirty, stained overalls, with their feet barely covered in rotten sneakers. On their face you can read frustration, dissatisfaction.” As with Simbine, Selemene went out of his way to profess a non-racial worldview, saying that Portugal “knows to embrace all of its children, without distinction of race or color,” and that “We should study (and study well) the situation of the working classes, constituted by blacks and whites in Mozambique, blacks and whites in Portugal”; as with Simbine, the racial subtext was abundantly clear, as there could be little question about which workers earned 15 escudos per day.⁷⁸

Indeed, even readers who had previously complained about racism within employment published later letters that omitted any mention of race. Thus, João Queiros, whose first letter to the newspaper condemned employers which “do not pay us the salaries to which we have a right,” wrote a subsequent letter which sharply criticized the mostly-

⁷⁶ “É Triste!” *Voç Africana*, 15 June 1963.

⁷⁷ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 11 July 1964.

⁷⁸ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voç Africana*, 10 August 1963.

white unions for failing to represent black workers – but which did not explicitly mention race. Instead, he said that “union authorities ought to fight for those who are working, that is in respect to salaries, if in fact what we are earning complies with the law.” He then sarcastically asked “Have the union authorities by any chance ever worried about this detail? There are many people who have enormous family expenditures and who are very unfairly earning wages that we could call ‘poverty wages.’” Queiros’ criticism of unions’ disinterest in equal pay, his concern for “family expenditures” (an oblique but clear reference to African workers who supported extended families), his reference to “poverty wages,” and a closing argument that higher wages would help propel “evolution” were all obvious signals that he was speaking about black workers, as in his previous letter. But the official emphasis upon Portuguese non-racialism meant that race could not be openly mentioned within his critique.⁷⁹

Queiros’ letter was reprinted, almost to the word, two months later by another reader named Gouveia dos Santos.⁸⁰ The relationship between Queiros and dos Santos, and the reasons that their letters were almost entirely the same, was never addressed by the newspaper – a mystery which offers a valuable reminder of the complexities of using the letters published in *Voz Africana*. Nonetheless, while there are many questions about the letters which are difficult to answer with existing sources, it seems justified to conclude that the increasing absence of any discussion of racism and employment in readers’ letters was due to heightened censorship. The freewheeling debates that marked the first years of the newspaper’s publication were gradually (although unevenly) limited in subsequent years, and a comparison between readers’ unedited letters that were later published by Capela with the versions actually published in *Voz Africana* reveals multiple instances in which criticisms of Portuguese racial discrimination were deleted or rewritten prior to publication.⁸¹

The inability of workers to openly discuss racism within employment, in turn, helps clarify the limitations of Portuguese promises of nonracial development. Workers could complain about low wages, as well as criticize the broader inequities of the Portuguese economic system. Such critiques were made possible by the possibility of resolving them: the economic travails of poorly paid workers could theoretically be rectified at some future moment after Portuguese development policies were fully implemented. In contrast, openly

⁷⁹ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 1 June 1963.

⁸⁰ “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 3 August 1963. Dos Santos had published a previous letter, under a slightly different name, about migrating to work in Beira: see “Escrevem os Leitores,” *Voz Africana*, 16 February 1963.

⁸¹ For one representative example, compare the letter from Francisco Domingos Savane published in *Voz Africana* on April 10, 1965 with the original published in *Moçambique pelo seu povo* on page 95.

identifying the role of racial discrimination within the economic system was not possible, since such critiques suggested a congenital failure of the Portuguese system; if an empire which had (officially) always been non-racial was in reality riven by racial discrimination, then economic growth was unlikely to resolve the grievances of African workers. This dichotomy meant that while some of the problems confronting African workers could be criticized, racial discrimination was not one of them. Instead, racism within employment remained a topic that could not be openly discussed, and still less adequately addressed.

Conclusion

The Portuguese reforms of the early 1960s promised significant changes to colonial rule. The new rhetoric of non-racial development explicitly rejected prior conceptions of Africans as fundamentally different workers whose lack of “civilization” made them uninterested in, and unfit for, wage labor’s material rewards. In abolishing formal distinctions between “natives” and citizens, Portuguese reforms offered African workers the previously-denied possibility of joining the ranks of well-paid urban workers and achieving equality with their white counterparts within Portugal’s Luso-Tropical framework.

Portuguese reforms focused more on articulating a solution than analyzing the problem. The improved lives of black urban workers would show that Portugal’s commitment to non-racial development was being realized, rather than an acknowledgment that Portuguese policy of past decades had been based on racial exclusion and economic exploitation. In stressing the possibilities of forthcoming development, the Portuguese colonial regime was certainly not unique; many governments across and beyond Africa adopted the same tactic. But Portuguese officials faced the added complication that their newfound emphasis on development had not been accompanied by meaningful political changes. Postcolonial rulers elsewhere in Africa framed development as a way to remedy the problems inherited from their colonial predecessors, and could thus identify and condemn various aspects of colonial governance in their promises to create a post-colonial future. That approach could not be readily utilized by Portuguese officials; any attempt to clearly define the social ills being targeted by the reforms would have further highlighted the obvious reality that these reforms were to be implemented by the same colonial political system responsible for creating those ills in the first place.

Non-racialism was the solution to this problem. It provided a supposed element of colonial continuity that would reinforce, rather than undermine, Portugal’s continued right

to govern. But the juxtaposition between the changes implied by the new rhetoric of development, and the continuities implied by the redoubled commitment to Luso-Tropicalism, made it difficult for Portuguese officials to explain what specific aspects of the colonial system would actually change. The divergent outcomes of urban workers made plain this difficulty. The reforms eliminated the requirement that African workers prove themselves sufficiently “civilized” to enjoy equality in wages and treatment, opening a path toward better employment and a more developed future. But that change coexisted with the claimed continuity of non-racialism as the bedrock foundation of Portuguese colonial society. As a result, Africans who were blocked from capitalizing on the promises of reform had no recourse with which to contest their continued racial exclusion. Thus, as the number of Africans who unsuccessfully sought the promise of equality grew, so too did the realization that the problem of racism within the Portuguese colonies had not only been a problem of legal discrimination.

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