

SJL-5

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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White Gods, Black Mortals

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Dear Mr. Martin,

I wear my sunglasses much of the time here. Heretofore, the sun's rays really had to sting before I'd put on a pair: I don't like how sunglasses often distort color. In Maputo, however, I wear them all the time when outside, even on overcast days. If I enter a building for just a minute, I take them off only when speaking directly to someone. Otherwise, my eyes are hidden behind dark gray, aviator-style lenses.

I wear them to preserve at least a shred of the anonymity essential to a good observer. Without my little mask, I would have to return or studiously ignore every curious stare cast upon my person during the course of the day: the children's gape, old people's over-the-shoulder glances, the hollow gaze of the hungry Botanical Gardens loiterers. Behind my glasses I can maintain the pretense that my eyes are elsewhere, until the starers eventually look away. I can watch people watch me.

What do they see? I am obviously bred, fed and dressed from abroad. I am white. Everything about me suggests I have dollars or rand in my wallet, with which I command the goods and services produced by but beyond the means of the vast majority of Mozambicans. Perhaps I am accompanied by an attractive and fashionably dressed young woman. If we are promenading through the Gardens of a Sunday, I may be smiling noticeably. We stroll by debating whether or not to go over and see a video at a friend's house.

And should my observer look down at himself, what might he see? A young man lucky to be wearing the "calamity clothes" (see SJL-3) I cast off and donated on a charitable whim. His stomach is growling: he had tea and boiled cassava for breakfast, no lunch, and now it's 4 p.m. With the price of one movie ticket in his pocket, he must choose this week's enter-

tainment wisely. A sentimental, Soviet art film? Better Hollywood space-thriller "Galaxina: Woman from the Year 3,000." No need to spare change for the bus, though; he'll be walking home, to the straw hut suburbs. He has no girlfriend, nor the means to attract one. Perhaps he should have followed his older cousin's example, and "jumped the border" into South Africa to look for work. He may daydream of riding back on a big motorcycle, black letters on a yellow license plate, and wowing the girl who six months ago laughed at his mumbled invitation to the movies. She's dating a Norwegian naval school instructor.

He may look up again as I pass, my companion's skirt swishing. I am a demigod.

A demigod, as per the recent tirade of a Mozambican friend, but a paper one, to be sure. The cooperante, or foreign employee of the Mozambican government, may indeed be the reigning "King, Owner and Seigneur." But he is a one-eyed king in the land of the blind, and seeing Mozambicans know it.

I cast myself in the foregoing vignette not because I am a cooperante but because I look every bit like the best off of them, and those who know me only vaguely or not at all often assume I am. Because of the chilly reception I received among the cooperantes I met during my first two weeks in Maputo, most all the friends I've made here are Mozambican or non-cooperante Portuguese. Consequently, I have listened at length to Mozambicans' feelings about the country's new elite.

Cooperantes come in many political shades and nationalities; no one may be called typical. Nevertheless, most of them fit snugly into some combination of four broad categories: engaged in and motivated by political tasks; by technical tasks; from the East Bloc; from the West.

A cooperante is, literally, a cooperator or collaborator. The events surrounding Mozambican independence in 1975 provoked the mass exodus of some 230,000 Portuguese residents, who made up the entire skilled and most of the semi-skilled labor force. Health care was nationalized: doctors left en masse. Factories were "intervened" (i.e. taken over by the State without compensation but not declared State property): managers and engineers took off. In the chaotic days of decolonization and the abrupt political changes that followed, Mozambique seemed to hold no attractive future for thousands of Portuguese commercial farmers, carpenters and machinists, most of whom left for the metropole or South Africa. At the same time, the new FRELIMO (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) government's socialist orientation inspired it to assume responsibility for all aspects of the economy, from macroeconomic planning to retail sales and, indeed, for all

fields of human endeavor. To put its ambitious program of social transformation into practice, it solicited the support of foreign governments and individuals sympathetic to its goals. Together, they would create the "new African man."

Who answered the call? East Bloc governments, in the first place. The Soviets took charge of forging the ragtag FRELIMO guerillas into a conventional army. The East Germans trained the secret police. North Korea sent metallurgists to keep small foundries running; Bulgaria and Rumania sent agronomists. In addition, many Socialist countries, most notably Cuba, accepted students from the new republic for technical (and political) training.

These are the first sort of cooperantes: from the East Bloc, serving as military and civilian technicians. They are sponsored exclusively by their governments and often live in xenophobic little colonies, avoiding contact with Westerners. They travel in groups in boxy, Soviet vans and tend not to employ Mozambican servants; their wives keep their modest households. Many, especially the Russians, never learn more than a few words of Portuguese.

These cooperantes sometimes excite the contempt or pity but never the wonder of Mozambicans. When on one occasion a group of Bulgarians appeared at Maputo's most popular restaurant and disco on a Saturday night, my Mozambican tablemates were amused. Eyebrows arched doubtfully as the men, in egregiously unfashionable bell-bottom pants, and the women, in stiff-cut, below-the-knee dresses, took the dance floor. They bobbed happily, if awkwardly, in the gracefully undulating sea of Africans. "Poor fellows," said a friend, "they're probably not allowed to dance like that in their own country."

Many people feel sorry for the local Cubans as well. Apparently, Cubans' salaries are paid to their government, and the cooperantes themselves receive only cigarettes and a meager monthly stipend in non-convertible meticaís, the local currency. In some respects, they are as badly off as many Mozambicans, except that their families are half a world away. No one envies them.

No such sympathy obtains for the Soviets, who are almost universally hated here. Besides being associated by most people with "Marxism-Leninism," the popular two-word explanation for the country's economic collapse and primary cause of their personal privation, the Russians are detested as racists. One hears countless apocryphal stories about Russian housewives purposely smashing the waterglass from which a (black) Mozambican drank, and Soviet pilots ordering Mozambican passengers off otherwise empty Antonovs. (The Air Force often carries enterprising civilians and their cargo on military transport flights, since most cities cannot be reached any other way and the extra income the pilots make is always welcome.)

For some reason I don't understand, it is the rare Soviet cooperante who gets on well with Mozambicans, and rarer still is one who keeps company with them. In fact, they don't mix with most anyone outside their little community, Mozambican or otherwise. They are said to be closely monitored by their embassy, which discourages international fraternization, but it is the presumably racist motive for their isolation that black Mozambicans most resent. When President Machel's September visit to the United States was announced, many expressed the hope that upon their head of state's return, the Soviets would be declared "24/20s" -- expelled on 24-hours' notice with no more than 20 kilos of luggage. The great majority would be happy to see them go.

Although they live in worlds sealed as hermetically as possible from the Mozambicans', no mystery attaches to East Bloc cooperantes. Their clothes are often inferior to those of the best dressed city people and majonijonis (Mozambicans who work in South Africa). Their physical appearance, especially that of the women, who tend to have a muscular, aggressive look, is considered unappealing. ("I have yet to see a Russian woman here who doesn't look like a sack of potatoes," remarked a friend.) The general impression they leave is of unhappy people from an unhappy place. Racial and political attitudes aside, the sallow austerity of their public character rubs the friendly, sensual Mozambicans the wrong way.

If the Russians are detested and the Cubans pitied, if the saloios, or Portuguese peasant immigrants, are sometimes dismissed as "brancos de merda," white trash, when tempers are high, why should any mystique attach to whiteness? Why, in the post office, should the black clerk treat the black customer in front of me with unforgivable rudeness and me in turn with cloying servility?

First, color alone does not qualify a white in Mozambique for "demigodliness." The East Bloc cooperantes described above do not rate because of their relative material poverty and sullenness. The saloios, who settled and integrated into rural society, don't qualify, especially among literate blacks. Mastery of the Portuguese language was a criterion by which blacks were judged in colonial society, and those who have it retain their pride in the achievement. The often illiterate saloios are disdained, among other reasons, because "they can't even speak Portuguese correctly."

Many white Mozambican intellectuals have tried sincerely to "demystify" themselves, and attempt not to let their color work to their advantage. They identify with revolutionary Mozambique, where the color of a person's skin, in theory and more often than not, in practice, is not allowed to determine

his place in the social order. Carlos Cardoso, the white director of the official Mozambique Information Agency, took great satisfaction at his son's recent remark upon returning home from elementary school. "Oh Dad," the child reportedly said, "my hair is worthless. Why can't I have nice, kinky hair like João?" (his black schoolmate). The inversion of the scale of physical beauty among children confirmed for Cardoso that colonial criteria of physical attractiveness have no validity among the newest Mozambican generation, and are not likely to acquire any as the children become adults.

Cardoso's prophecy notwithstanding, the little child does not yet lead them. Western whiteness inarguably retains a certain mystique for many black Mozambicans. Such feelings derive both from race consciousness left over from the colonial era and from events after decolonization.

The power whiteness has in people's imaginations expresses itself in many ways. Some months ago I was strolling downtown with a Mozambican friend. We passed "Trinta e três andares," the straightforward sobriquet of a 33-story residential tower, the tallest building in Maputo. The tower, begun in colonial times and intended as the last word in urban luxury for wealthy settlers, retains its aura of elegance in the popular mind despite the fact that it has become a high-rise tenement. It is occupied almost exclusively by diplomats and cooperantes. Anibal looked up at the building and remarked, with more wonder than rancor, that "whatever the system, whites always stay on top."

On another occasion, a young mestiço man wondered aloud why I defended the principle of the equality of the races. "Look at all the inventions of any worth," he reasoned with me. "How many of them were invented by blacks?" No argument, from the tired "George Washington Carver" defense to sharper forensic devices, could cut through his hardened opinion. He had seen what had happened to Mozambique "since the whites left," and that was all the empirical evidence he needed.

One tragic irony of Mozambican independence is that the events of the past ten years may have lowered black Mozambican self-esteem more than the euphoric flash of new nationhood raised it. The positive correlation between the white exodus beginning in 1974 and the gradual and, later, precipitous fall in the country's economic fortunes is mistaken for causation. Although the flight of the skilled and semi-skilled whites was undoubtedly a rude blow to the country's economy, national equilibrium could probably been recovered if their farms and businesses had been given or sold to private black citizens. Radical political and economic policies drove abroad not only the Portuguese settlers but also many, if not most, of the competent black Mozambicans. And what bad management did not

destroy, the war did. It is necessary to remark that no special gift for economic management inheres among whites only because so many confused and embittered black Mozambicans believe it.

But one need not mourn the "good old days" (when, however much blacks were held back by colonial policies that favored white labor, everyone had enough to eat) and apportion the blame for their passing to understand why whiteness seems like a divinely-issued meal ticket to many black Mozambicans. The relatively luxurious lifestyle of the Western cooperantes and aid officials, almost all of whom are white, reinforces the "white is empirically better" school of thought on the subject. Alvaro Moreira (not his real name), a mestizo businessman and a friend whom I consider a "seeing" Mozambican, i.e. not awed a priori by whiteness and without any related race delusions, recently enumerated the reason the cooperante seems like a natural "King, Owner and Seigneur." His ringing denunciation of their privileges sounded like Jefferson's Declaration of Independence list of grievances against King George:

He rides in a modern car while we ride in sucata, junk.

He eats from the Interfranca (the government supermarket).

He talks about the "great sacrifice" he's making by working here.

He is paid in divisas, hard currency, and far in excess of what he'd make in his own country -- if he could find a job there.

He buys furniture in precious wood and exports it tax-free.

He corrupts our wives and daughters.

Although most of these charges are overblown and hardly apply to all cooperantes, many of whom are women, bicycle riders and competent professionals with better prospects at home, they express what "seeing" Mozambicans envy and what many others find awesome about the new white elite.

The sexual component of this envy is perhaps the most interesting and explosive, for more than food or transport, it touches what is arguably the epicenter of the male ego. Men have always competed for women, and the current competition in Maputo between non-white Mozambican and white foreign men may be among the most absurdly mismatched in the world. A cooperante can offer a young woman countless advantages a Mozambican can't: food, clothes, entertainment and, as warp to the foregoing weft, the social status that attaches to such a liaison. Moreover, the transience of so many cooperantes

and the consequently short duration of these relationships often gives them an especially lively, courtship quality.

But long or short, and whatever their genuine romantic content, such affairs cannot but be affected by the extraordinary economic and sexual expectations the parties bring to them. They are further complicated by the way they are often perceived. A foreign white man is considered such a prize that black women are commonly supposed to do any and everything in their power to hold on to him. One hears innumerable apochryphal stories about this or that fellow with a wife and family in Europe who came to Mozambique on a two-year contract in 1977 and hasn't been back since. Why? His black Mozambican girlfriend put a certain powder, concocted by a curandeiro, or traditional healer-cum-diviner, in his dinner. Enough said. The power of the curandeiros and the frequency with which black women with white bed-partners are supposed to resort to their arts is legendary. My Portuguese friends attributed my own stomach problems to the presumably doctored cuisine I sometimes enjoyed in the home of a black woman friend: I was considered naive to write them off to too much curry and bad nerves. When I told them the doctor had warned me to cut out fried foods and alcohol, they suggested I visit their curandeiro for a second opinion.

Moreira's remark about cooperantes "corrupting our wives and daughters" was more the bombast of the moment than an expression of Mozambican puritenism (which is a contradiction in terms). In fact, few white men in Mozambique seek out black women: they don't have to. In the struggle for survival, many poor Mozambican women, at least those with the cultural prerequisites (including command of Portuguese and Western clothes) and necessary physical charms, throw themselves at cooperantes. The tacit quid pro quo of these liaisons -- foreign currency or food in exchange for sexual favors -- makes them a thinly disguised variety of the prostitution to which poor women throughout history have resorted. Whatever its demeaning effect on Mozambican women, not commonly a topic of male conversation or concern, this traffic enrages and demoralizes Mozambican men. "There are husbands," said Moreira one day in his office, "who don't dare ask where the potatoes or the money is coming from. I have no respect for such men." I would venture that these cuckolds don't feel very happy with their circumstances either. But the extra food or income their wives bring home often means that the family will eat more than boiled rice and "se não fosse eu," a kind of cabbage, during the last ten days of the month, until the new ration period begins. ("Se não fosse eu" is the popular nickname for the cabbage many Mozambicans subsisted on during the very lean winter of 1985. It means "if it weren't for me," (you'd starve).)

Mozambicans, especially those from the South (Moreira is a northerner), are pacific people, and male rage at these circumstances only rarely finds expression in practice. In the summer of 1984, however, there was a rash of vandalism against Italian property in Maputo. Italian cooperantes, especially those living in "Trinta e três andares," found their car tires repeatedly slashed and their windshields shattered. This occurred after rumors began circulating in Maputo about a young Mozambican woman who was injured while performing in a homemade pornographic film shot in an Italian cooperante's apartment. True or false, the rumor, universally believed in Maputo, won the Italians a reputation as licentious exploiters. They are closely followed by the Swedes, whose reputation for libertinism is by now well-established in Maputo, and by the Zaireans, from whose embassy the city's largest prostitution ring is allegedly run (according to credible American Embassy sources).

Another fact about the cooperantes that antagonizes "seeing" Mozambicans is that some of them are poorly qualified for their jobs (and, by extension, their salaries). A Mozambican technician in Namputa complained to me about a Russian cooperante purporting to be a plant pathologist who had never seen a hand-held pesticide sprayer until he came to Mozambique. "He was so excited that he took it apart and sent the pieces back to the Soviet Union." On another occasion a Russian "agricultural engineer" wanted to bulldoze flat a hilly parcel of land before plowing. "I told him it wouldn't work because the topsoil here was thin, and he'd bury it. But he said that's how they did it in his country, and went ahead." This technician, a man with many years' experience in the province, showed me a newspaper clipping in which local Russian experts using "a new technique" claimed to have harvested a phenomenal amount of cotton per hectare. He was skeptical, and visited the site. It turned out that the "new technique" was used on eight cotton plants overdosed with fertilizer and cared for under conditions hardly reproducible in the field. Soviet agriculture in Mozambique, it seems, owes much to Trofim Lysenko.

Such charges of incompetence and professional deceit attach most commonly to Russians, Cubans and Portuguese. Soviet military doctors are said to prefer amputating to healing an injured limb; many Mozambicans believe they are here to polish up their surgical skills, and refuse to be attended by them. Soviet cooperantes also labor under the charge of exceptional cupidity as avid buyers of all manner of merchandise for the Antonov export trade. In the Indian Ocean port of Nacala, such business is transacted on the beach. A Mozambican will arrive at the customary point of exchange, place an item of commercial interest to his Russian opposite

on a rock, scratch a price in the sand and retreat a safe distance. The Russian will then approach and either scratch a new, lower price, his offer, in the sand, or leave an item in exchange -- often a wristwatch or a pair of shoes. He too then retreats to within viewing distance of the merchandise. This little commercial pas de deux repeats itself until the exchange is either consummated at the agreed price or the intransigent parties collect their wares and go their separate ways. No words are spoken.

Cuban cooperantes are considered hopelessly lazy, but their sideline hustling is not resented because, like the Mozambicans, they do it to get by on their worthless metical salaries. "Seeing" Mozambicans are familiar too with the unemployment situation in Portugal, and often assume that Portuguese cooperantes are here because they couldn't get jobs in the former metropole. "Those guys complain about the "sacrifice" they make by coming here, but they're earning in divisas," sneered Moreira. Mozambican professionals who do the same jobs as cooperantes get paid an infinitesimal fraction of their foreign colleagues' salaries, in non-convertible meticaïs.

For myopic Mozambicans, however, the illusion of white competence persists and is reinforced by the social distance between themselves and the new elite. At a party I attended at a cooperante's apartment, a rare example of Mozambicans and cooperantes mixing socially, the latter sat around the living room while the former crowded in the kitchen, waiting for the feijoada, or bean stew, to come off the stove. (Beans are a delicacy unavailable in Maputo outside the Interfranca, the hard currency supermarket.) Many Mozambicans, who are extremely hospitable people, no longer invite guests to their homes: they have nothing to serve, and little enough of that. "I'm ashamed," remarked Venceslau, an Air Force lieutenant. "If someone showed up at the house at dinner time, we invited him to the table. Now, we tell him to wait in the living room." Some Mozambicans no longer accept dinner invitations from cooperantes because they cannot reciprocate.

Even the Interfranca schedule discriminates. In the morning hours, Mozambicans and foreigners alike may shop; in the afternoon, however, no matter how crisp their dollars or rand, no Mozambican may enter. (In practice, only black foreigners need show their passports to prove they're not Mozambican; a white face is pass-partout enough to get you in after 3 p.m.) Of this policy was born the vespertine Interfranca spectacle of clutches of Mozambicans approaching Western-looking whites and pressing foreign money into their hands for a last minute loaf of bread or bottle of cooking oil. They're apologetic about it, but nervous too: what if this white fellow accepts my two rand, forgets the bread, leaves the store and drives away? (Before the recent troubles

in South Africa, two rand bought about 1500 free-market meticaais, or more than two-thirds of a minimum wage worker's monthly salary.) The irony is that no petitioner need seriously worry that a cooperante who accepts two rand is venal enough consciously to pocket it and walk away; the sum is so piddling that the Mozambican's significant loss represents too petty a gain to tempt any but the kleptomaniacal resident foreigner.

His purchases and those of his petitioners made, the foreigner who lives close by may walk home, but not without being accosted by a crowd of barefoot street children eager to carry his groceries in exchange for anything he cares to give. Strolling through the evening cool, a shopping bag-laden child on either side, he may stop to inspect the art work two young men surreptitiously pull from a burlap sack, murmuring "amigo." The tableau: five figures in a silent cluster under a glowing streetlamp -- the bag boys, the salesmen and the white foreigner. The last considers the items in question critically: a statuette of a man with a hoe and a crudely carved crocodile. The price has been quoted; no further comments are made, no sales chatter to profane a moment of commercial silence. He doesn't like the statuette, or the crocodile; he already owns one of each; he would buy them only out of pity, and he's done his share of good deeds for the day. No. He hands them back to the disappointed peddlers and starts for home, the bag boys following wordlessly behind.

Few people resist the call of class. If all stimuli in an environment tell us we belong to a particular group, we all, with few exceptions, will behave accordingly; it is a corollary to that law that defines man as a social animal. This seems perfectly natural when the result of "breeding" or, at least in America, social climbing: you either were high-born into the "right" schools and firms or hacked, clawed and computer-chipped your way to the top. But an elite that is a heterogeneous hodgepodge whose only social adhesive is an epic political tragedy, one called into existence by that tragedy, is a bizarre thing. Such is the new elite in Mozambique.

How else can one explain the table talk at a formal dinner I attended at the home of a Cape Verdian diplomat in Maputo? We were nine of us: a professor from Swaziland, two cooperantes, a trio of American and Canadian aid officials, our host and hostess and me. The conversation was about how difficult it is to get good help nowadays; all the best servants, it was concluded, had emigrated to South Africa. Those that remained lacked initiative, would never put a second helping on your plate nor even clear the previous

course unless specifically ordered to do so. Dinner had been delayed, our hostess apologized, because she had sacked the cook that afternoon -- he stole too much from the larder -- and only managed to "borrow" another one at the last minute. The cook's theft turned the talk of the meat course to the privations of the average Mozambican, of how rarely he ate meat, how his children went barefoot to school (assuming there's a teacher), how hopeless his prospects were. By dessert, all agreed that noblesse oblige entitled the servants to steal up to 10% of the house supplies, but not to touch the liquor.

I do not mean to hold these people up for ridicule. They are neither witless nor hypocritical, and all are in Mozambique for the best of motives. The diplomat is a specialist in refugee affairs; his wife and her aid official colleagues are dedicated professionals whose work has saved thousands of lives. The cooperantes, Westerners of the "motivated by political tasks" variety, presumably came to Mozambique to help make it a better place. And yet here they all were, lamenting the shortage of good servants and generally behaving as the idle rich have probably done since time immemorial. Even an elite whose reason for being is a combination of natural and political catastrophes in a remote corner of Africa, a quirky little iron strike force soldered together on a caprice of Western altruism, behaves like a natural aristocracy. Its sincerest good intentions notwithstanding, that myriad of things that separates the new elite from the people it came to serve -- its clothes, cars, passports and full stomachs -- makes it behave as a class unto itself.

After that evening, I felt a little better about my sunglasses, my little public mask. There are times in Mozambique when it feels good to keep some distance between myself and the stares that follow me. In May, I made a short, unauthorized visit to the "Air Force Base Reception Center" in Lichinga, capital of Niassa Province. The abandoned Portuguese facility is a holding camp for some 230 escapees from "Operation Production," a Pol Pot scheme concocted by the government in the summer of 1983 to solve two nagging social problems at once. The problems: the cities were deemed overcrowded, and food was in short supply. The solution: round up the "unproductive" city dwellers and send them to fertile, underpopulated Niassa Province, where they would grow food for the remaining urban residents and build healthy, worthwhile lives. People caught in Maputo without all the requisite documents -- identity card, residence card and employment card -- were summarily picked off the street, bussed out to the airport and flown up to Niassa. There, they were driven (or marched) out to the virgin bush, given hoes and seed (when such were available) and told to build

homes and start farming. In all, some 15 to 20,000 people were deported, hundreds, if not thousands of whom died of hunger, exposure (July is the coldest month of the year in mountainous Niassa) and wild animal attacks. Governor Matsinhe explained regretfully during my interview with him in May that the government ran out of airplane fuel before the target of 50,000 "resettled" was reached.

I toured the abandoned base, a collection of crumbling former barracks, with Camp Commandante Makarate. I was not prepared for the misery it contained. Tubercular men, curled up and shivering with fever, lay scattered about on filthy straw mats. Those less ill squatted outside in the sunshine. The women, emaciated, one with a new-born child about the size of my fist and swaddled in rags, sat quietly in the shadow of a separate building. A few inmates picked listlessly at a solid, white block of chima, the corn meal porridge that was, in better times, the abundant staple of the area. It looked spoiled. Later, at a private charity distribution of peanuts and dried fish, I got a glimpse of the camp residents' worldly possessions. The fortunate few owned a pan or wicker sack; the others received their portions in pieces of dirty plastic, or in their cupped hands.

I prompted various inmates to explain how they had ended up in the camp. One gap-toothed young man had been employed at a shoe repair store in Maputo, but didn't have an employment card; he was picked up and shipped out the next day. An older man named Mateus, with legs wrapped in a dirty, blue blanket and eyes bright with fever, just nodded and repeated "obrigado," or thank you, to my questions. (This is a common response made by black Mozambicans who don't speak Portuguese.) The woman with the new baby, head bowed and whispering, said she had come North to look for her mother, who had been deported from the capital. Caught without documents in Lichinga, she too was arrested and sent into the bush. (Many of the women caught in Operation Production were "second" and "third" wives of polygamous husbands. The "first," or principle, wife is entitled to marriage and residence documents. But because the government does not recognize polygamous unions, other wives get no papers. Thus, many married but "undocumented" women with children were arrested, classified as prostitutes (since they had no documented means of support) and deported to Niassa.)

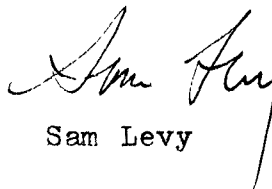
Walking through the main street of the camp with dozens of eyes fixed on me, I suddenly become aware of the figure I cut. I have overdressed for the occasion, with a jacket and tie and, by chance, a gleaming new white shirt. With my good clothes, new straw hat and sunglasses, I must look like an apparition from another world. People rise spontaneously as I approach.

One young man, however, does not stand up until Makarate orders him to. He is a mestiço, in a dirty but once fashionable

tan turtleneck and courduroy pants. His toes peek through holes in his socks; he no longer has shoes. When I ask what he is doing at the camp, he begins to explain, in excellent Portuguese, that he is an employee of the experimental television station (TVE) in Maputo, that he was "denounced" by a vicious colleague, that he is innocent of any crime and was sent to the North by mistake. Makarate interrupts him. "You were caught fishing at the Lake," he says in his heavily accented Portuguese, meaning that the fellow had illegally abandoned his nascent "village" in the bush to try his luck angling at Lake Niassa. The young man shoots the Commandante a brazenly disdainful look and continues his story. It is obvious that he sees in me something that does not immediately occur to the others: I am white, Western, powerful enough, perhaps, somehow to help him, to intercede with the authorities on his behalf, to get him out. In him, I do not inspire a priori, illiterate awe; I am, rather, a white flash of hope, to be seized to best advantage. "I have a family in Maputo," he pleads quickly, filling the space between us with words, spilling out memories of his home and job in a last, desperate entreaty. I listen, silently grieving for him. I know I can do nothing to help him, that my bright, white shirt and white face have kindled false hopes in his race-conditioned mind. The special grace he attaches to me is as shallow as a layer of dead skin. Finally, Makarate cuts him off. "You were fishing at the Lake, and you didn't have a guia de marcha" (an internal passport). A serious charge. He turns to me, smiling solicitously. "We're setting up a committee to judge cases like this."

I am grateful just then for my sunglasses. In the gloom, behind their dark lenses, no one sees my eyes swell with tears.

Sincerely,



Sam Levy

Received in Hanover 12/30/85