

Centro de Estudos Africanos

# The Mozambican Miner: A study in the export of labour

## Contents and introduction

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EDUARDO MONDLANE  
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# **THE MOZAMBICAN MINER**

A STUDY IN THE EXPORT OF LABOUR





UNIVERSIDADE EDUARDO MONDLANE  
CENTRO DE ESTUDOS AFRICANOS

Marc Wuytse

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This project could not have been completed without the help of the following structures and services:-

- Minister of Labour
- Governor of the Province of Inhambane
- Rector of the University
- Director of the Centre of African Studies
- Governor of the Bank of Mozambique
- Ministry of Labour - the Minister's Office,  
Delegação Office
- Ministry of Agriculture
- D.I.N.E.C.A.
- Provincial authorities of Inhambane. We would like to thank in particular the head of the Governor's Office; the Provincial head of Mobilisation for the Party; the Provincial head of the Ministry of Labour; the Provincial Agricultural services; Provincial services of Surveying & Geography.

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## INTRODUCTION : THE PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

This study on the extent of labour export from Mozambique to the South African mines, and the impact of the system, is important for two principal reasons.

I. Firstly, it is a fundamental aspect of the colonial economic history of oppression and exploitation. In the later colonial economic history of this country there is no process which generated more exploitation of Mozambican labour or more distortion and under-development of the economy than the export of migrant labour. Although mine recruitment has been limited by law to the three southern provinces of Inhambane, Gaza and Maputo, the effects of the export of labour have permeated every aspect of the political economy of the entire country.

II. The second reason for the importance of a study of migrant labour grows out of, but needs to make a historical break, with the first, and is thus the more important reason by far. The system of migrant labour which was entrenched over many decades poses important and immediate questions for the destruction of the colonial economy and the formation of a socialist society. In other words, it is a central problem of the transition period.

The historical roots and impact of migrant labour should form part of a longterm project. There would be many aspects to such an investigation. A history of the labour recruitment which was organized by the South African mines with the collusion of the Portuguese colonial state would involve not only those aspects of the actual organization of the recruiting process that this Report refers to, but the process of penetration and control of peasant societies which led to the system of migrant labour being initially induced by force, but later becoming economically self-reproducing. This would involve a study of the social formations of Mozambique and the impact, in different periods, of the Portuguese colonial state. It would have to analyse the differential impact of these processes of colonial penetration within specific societies and in different regions of the south.

The export of mine labour is also part of the history of the working class of this country, of its formation, and growth, of the very specificity of this class of worker-peasants,



which is a matter we refer to later. This could and should form a study in itself.

A study requires to be done on the effects of mine labour on the health of Mozambican migrants. Records going back many years are available on the illness and injury of miners, and the derisory system of compensation operated by the mining industry.

There are the financial and more technical aspects. The wages of migrant labour have played a large part in subsidising the balance of payments and contributing to the country's foreign exchange. We have dealt with aspects of this issue in a separate Memorandum, but the area is by no means exhausted of analysis.

The ideology of migrant labour which played its part in the reproduction of the system of labour export needs to be studied. Propaganda disseminated by labour recruiters that enlistment by young men for the mines was proof of manhood has been internalised within the labour-exporting society, and to this day migrant labour is often described as a residual 'tradition'.

This study deals only in passing with the historical and other aspects mentioned above. This is not because history is not important. On the contrary. The historical research of migrant labour is to form part of the continuing longer-term work of the Centro de Estudos Africanos. But it was considered urgent to concentrate on those aspects of the export of male labour which have the most immediate policy implications for the government and the people of Mozambique.

### The Question of Transition

FRELIMO is engaged in the reconstruction of the Mozambican economy and society in order to lay the basis for the social organization of production. These tasks include of necessity the ending of the system of migrant labour and its export outside the country. Of the policy imperatives and objectives there is no question. FRELIMO has repeatedly committed itself to the ending of migrant labour.

But an economic process as old, as deeply-laid and as widespread as mine labour export can be dismantled only when it is analysed in all its implications.

Migrant labour is a colonial vestige but it is not one that can be combated on the ideological plane alone, by an appeal to the political commitment of the migrant. This is to dismiss the system of migrant labour as an act of will by a host of migrant workers. It is to miss the essence of a deep-seated economic system that has permeated the political economy of the countryside of southern Mozambique. Migrant labour was part of the penetration of the money economy, when



the social formations of Mozambique were subordinated to the purposes of the spread of capitalism. This penetration left no corner of rural agriculture untouched. The coercion of the colonial state undermined the reproductive base of the peasant economy, and in turn this undermining of the productive base forced the peasantry to seek wage work. Eight decades of the system of migrant labour made it a structural necessity for rural producers living under colonialism.

The flow of migration is conditioned to a certain extent by more severe agricultural crises, but, on the whole, despite contingent variables of this kind, it has remained remarkably stable and constant over the years from 1895 onwards and especially from 1902 to 1977, as the records analysed in this Report show.

Of the total Mozambican work force, 25 to 30 per cent is exported outside the country. (See below the Note on the Statistics).<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. The Problem of Statistics

Statistics of wage employment in Mozambique present problems, due to the fact that various statistical sources provide data which is inconsistent. Thus: the 1970 Census gives the distribution of the Total of Active Population as 2,873,822. This figure possibly includes workers absent on wage employment outside the country i.e. miners in South Africa, but this is not explicitly stated and has to be deduced (see below). The breakdown is as follows:

Agricultural sector	454,385
Mines	123,772
Manufacturing industry	155,996
Construction	81,468
Services	
Hotels/commerce	82,482
Banks	5,919
Transport	62,724
Domestic service	126,138
Public service	97,823
	<u>375,086</u>
	1,190,707

This total in wage employment constitutes almost 80 per cent of the active male population, and is probably a considerable over-estimate. Furthermore, these statistics are certainly at considerable variance with the industrial statistics which give a work force of 85,050 for 1970, which figure is probably far closer to reality than the general census. However, the agricultural statistics for 1967 (the last year when figures were published) gives a total of 129,000 workers in agricultural wage employment, which is almost certainly an underestimate.

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The ending of this labour export is part of the creation of a material base for the construction of socialism. The re-integration of this work force within an autonomous system moving towards socialism could take two forms, which are complementary and combined:

- (1) the re-integration of formerly exported labour in the agricultural sector. Forms of transformed agriculture are critical here. This is because the prior system in fact continuously generated and reproduced a labour surplus for the mines. Transforming agriculture raises fundamental questions, which we can only pose, about forms and methods of such transformation.
- (2) the use of the workforce and the skills it acquired in Mozambique's industrialisation programme in the industrial transport and mining sectors.

The economic priorities of the first part of the transitional period are formulated in the Economic Directives adopted by FRELIMO's Third Congress. Contingent policy decisions will be made within the political structures of FRELIMO and the Government. The purpose of this study is to collect and analyse evidence on the extent and the effects of mine labour in order that this system can be more effectively combated by a socialist alternative.

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1. (Continued from previous page)

But a more realistic assessment of the agricultural workforce would have to account for the fact that much of it is seasonal labour only, (and very badly paid).

The general census probably under-estimated the country's active population by about half a million. A rough estimate would therefore put between 20 and 30 per cent of the population in wage employment. (This is high for the region : Tanzania is less than 15 per cent; Rhodesian Africans constitute 16 per cent). Of this total in wage work, perhaps 35 per cent was employed in the agricultural sector, only 10 per cent in manufacturing, less than 10 per cent in construction, over 10 per cent in mining, though here the vast majority are working outside Mozambique. In fact, of the numbers employed in mining, of the census total of 123,772, only 6,800 are employed in Mozambican mines. In 1969 there were about 7,000 Mozambicans in the Rhodesian mining industry, and in 1970 there were 113,000 Mozambicans in South Africa's mining industry. Thus a very substantial part of the workforce was absent in South Africa up to the end of the colonial period and even in the midst of the Mozambican economic boom of the 1970s.



The study concentrates, thus, on two principal aspects:

- A. An analysis of the labour flow to the mines in the period 1902 to 1977, though with special emphasis on the later period; and an investigation into the character of the mine labour force.
- B. An investigation into the peasant economy from which mine labour has been recruited.

As the Notes for Field Investigation<sup>1</sup> issued to our Research Brigades stated, the two sides of the study are intimately connected. This is because the miners are, by law, migrants. Behind every miner is a family household in the peasant economy. Primitive accumulation in Southern Africa has not relied throughout on the separation of labour from the means of production, leaving it with no other means of subsistence than the sale of its labour-power. Rather the system has depended on the maintenance, and the re-structuring to varying degrees, of pre-capitalist relations. Thus individuals are not proletarianised for permanent wage labour but the communities from which they come are under pressure to send the men of working age out to labour.

#### The Peasant Base

The extent and impact of mine labour export must therefore be measured not in the individual work choices of individual migrants nor in statistical totals. Rather it must be seen in the impact on the peasant economy. This research project accordingly tried to trace the extent of mine labour export from various regions and the pressures behind it, and it tried to question whether there were any discernible correlations between the extent of mine labour and the condition of agricultural production. In other words, did peasant households from different regions respond differently to the possibilities and pressures of mine wage labour? And, within peasant communities in a specific area, did peasant households of differing economic conditions, poorer or somewhat better-off, react differentially?

This opened up an important area of peasant investigation: What is the extent of peasant differentiation in the countryside? And to what extent does participation in the wage economy, via mine labour and mine wages, explain and contribute to these differences?

There were two possibly discernible trends. One was that mine wages served as a means to purchase consumer goods and thus merely to reproduce the family; that the impact of

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1. See Appendices.



wages had become indispensable in the process of reproduction because agriculture itself had been so diminished or undermined that it could no longer support the family. The importance of money wages for reproduction of the family would thus be an important index to the extent of regression of peasant agriculture. The second trend was that mine wages were used not merely for consumption needs, but that remittances were fed back into agriculture. In other words that the mine wage system was the source of a certain degree of domestic agricultural innovation and growth. The kinds of questions formulated and the evidence collected are dealt with more fully in the chapters dealing with the Peasant Base.

Throughout we attempted to keep in mind the larger questions which could inform planning in the transition period :

To what extent and under what conditions can the agricultural economy absorb labour formerly exported on a large and regular basis? In other words, during the transition period, how should the economy best cope with what will be, in the immediate period, a phenomenon of labour surplus in the economy?

Since migrant labour has been the most important part of the penetration of the money economy, how will its phasing out in the countryside affect the series of other activities, in the petty commodity sector, of artisan skills and trades and services which grew and were stimulated by the money economy?

### The Mine Labour Force

The study of the mine labour force investigated several aspects. Interviews with miners were used to construct employment histories. How many contracts had been worked? Had there been other industrial work experience? How did these miners fit into the work process? What skills had they acquired? (How could these skills be mobilised in the transformation of the Mozambican economy is the obvious extension of that question).

The regularity of mine contracts also raised questions of class analysis. In many cases successive contracts were interrupted by extremely temporary stays in the countryside. Are these peasants or workers or both? How to deal with the specific instance, under the conditions of migrant labour, of the proletarian-peasant? What is the consciousness of this class? Did it, between mine contracts, regard itself as 'unemployed' or simply 'back home'? Where would this class of workers, with considerable experience of proletarianisation, take its place in the struggle alliance of workers and peasants for a transformed Mozambique? We revert to these issues in subsequent chapters.



### The Research Team and its Methods

The Centro de Estudos Africanos, (section which deals with contemporary problems), comprises 8 staff-members, all of whom except the Director of this Project were engaged in full-time teaching in various faculties of the University throughout the six-month period of the Project.

The initial perspectives of the Project were established during a weekly Seminar which studied the impact on Mozambique of South African capitalism, beginning with attempts at the periodisation both of the South African and the Mozambican political economies, and proceeding then to discuss the character of capital and labour within the mining industry, and the making of a Southern African labour supply, and especially a Mozambican one. Subsequent sessions of the Seminar evaluated the existing, mostly bourgeois, literature on migrant labour and the literature on peasant economies in labour reserve areas, including such material on Mozambique as has been produced.

Concurrently with the Seminar, members of the Research Team searched archives and Ministry records, especially in the Instituto de Trabalho (Ministry of Labour), and conducted interviews with representatives of labour recruiting organizations in order to build as comprehensive a background picture as possible. The analysis of the labour flow to the mines and related material on mine labour is based on official statistics of WENELA, which are deposited with the Instituto de Trabalho, and on additional material supplied by WENELA on request.

In preparation for a study of the peasant base, the Research Team acquired from the Ministry of Agriculture the original questionnaires completed during the agricultural censuses of 1965 and 1973. These were extensively re-analysed for the areas of Inhambane selected for field investigation.

Two questionnaires were used on the project, one for interviews with miners, and the other as part of the investigation of peasant households. The preparation of the questionnaires was done through collective working group discussion, and the miners' questionnaire was subsequently tested for use in preliminary interviews with miners.

In all 358 miners' questionnaires were completed. These included interviews conducted by the team during successive visits to WENELA compounds and recruiting stations in Ressano Garcia, Xai Xai, Alta Maé in Maputo and Maxixe, and also miners' interviews conducted in the Inhambane countryside with ex-miners or miners at home in the intervals between contracts.

In addition a shorter version of the miners' questionnaire was used in interviews of a larger sample of 716 miners altogether. The interviews with the miners were conducted



over a period of four months, from June to September 1977. As will be seen from the copy of the miners' questionnaire in the Appendices the investigation concentrated on the frequency and length of contracts, and thus on material for the construction of employment histories, on the acquisition of work skills, as well as miners' family commitments and their earning capacities, and the uses to which mine wages were put after successive contracts.

The selection of areas for field research took place after reconnaissance visits in both Gaza and Inhambane provinces and after discussions with members of the political and administrative structures there. The field research could take place only in mid-July, when students, teachers and administrative staff of the University are organised in Brigades to carry out tasks of national reconstruction. During 1977 this period of Brigade work lasted five weeks, from 10 July to 14 August. It meant that the field research, except for periodical visits to mine recruiting and repatriation centres, was restricted to this period.

The scope of the field investigation was also heavily restricted by the size of the Brigades allocated to the Project. The great majority of the members of the University Brigades were delegated to work in Gaza Province, on the recently constructed communal villages (*aldeias comunais*) which had been founded after the flooding of the Limpopo Valley during February. For the reasons that our Brigade force was limited to 27 members, and that the transport and other logistical support facilities able to be offered by the administration of Gaza Province were already taxed to their limit, the Centro de Estudos Africanos project was concentrated on Inhambane Province.<sup>1</sup> General information about the Province and its agricultural condition is contained in the chapters on the Peasant base.

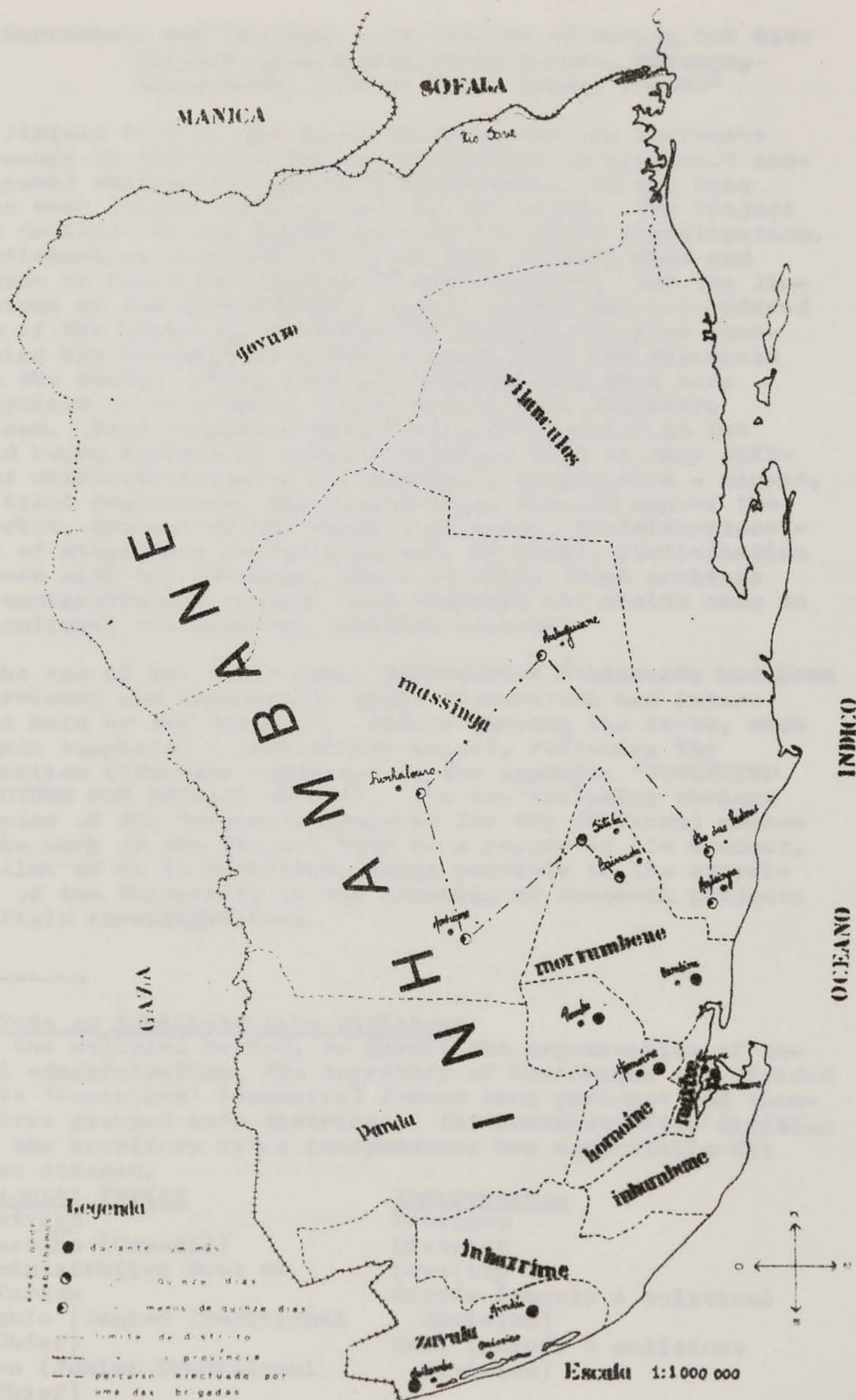
Within Inhambane Province, the Project selected five areas within which Brigades were located. They were:

1. Quissico-Zavala - two cells within the circle of Canda and the cell of Mindu in the circle of Zavala
2. Pembe - The cells of Como, Sefane, Vavate and Zacanha
3. Homoine - the cells of Meu and Machava
4. Cambine - the cells of Buvane and Maimela

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1. The questionnaires used by the Brigades in Gaza Province included questions on migrant labour.







5. Morrembene and Massinga - the circle of Sitila but also  
 briefer investigations in Mavume, Chicomo,  
 Muluguiana, area de Gumo, Queme, Tevele<sup>1</sup>

The limited size of the research teams and the shortness of tenure in the field made it impossible to construct conventional statistical sampling procedures. In any case these were judged inappropriate to the study. The Project Team devised its own guidelines for its field investigation. Questionnaires were used in order that certain data and methods of field work should be systematised. But the limitations of the questionnaire method - that the pre-ordered form of the questions prevents the interviewer from questioning his assumptions - were acknowledged and discussed from the start. Other ways of investigating what were recognised to be complex social issues were therefore devised. They consisted of a preliminary period in the field being devoted to open discussions with as many different representatives of the community as possible - miners, political organisers, school-teachers, the old men of the district, members of the women's movement, administrators - also of attendance at meetings and, at times, participation in work with the peasants. Where possible local archives and administrative records were searched and visits made to agricultural stations and training schools.

By the end of the field work, 372 Peasant Households had been interviewed and innumerable group discussions and interviews held by the Brigades. Before leaving the field, each Brigade completed a preliminary report, following the suggestion structure contained in the Appendix 'SUGGESTED STRUCTURE FOR BRIGADE REPORT'. (We are including various examples of the documents prepared for the different phases of the work of the Project both as a record of its conduct, and also so as to contribute where possible to the experience of the University in the planning of research projects and field investigations.

#### 1. A Note on Administrative Divisions

In the colonial period, to permit the organisation of local administration, the territory of Mozambique was divided into 'concelhos' (councils) formed from parishes and themselves grouped into districts. The administrative division of the territory after independence has essentially not been altered.

<u>Colonial Period</u>	<u>Independence</u>
District	Province
Concelho (Council)	District
Administrative Post or Parish	Locality
Regulo (Senior Traditional Chief)	Circle (purely a political division)
Cabo (Junior Traditional Chief)	Cell (purely a political division)



In this Report the Brigade reports have not been reproduced in full. Sections of them have been incorporated in the text, and instances of some of their detailed investigations are offered. This was judged necessary in order that the main report should be as comprehensive and at the same as coherently organised as possible. The full Report will be available to students in the Centro, and for teaching purposes.

The Brigades or research teams came out of the field in mid-August. The next stage of the Project involved the analysis of both the miners' and the peasant household questionnaires (about 800 in all, not including smaller samples of a more limited character); discussion in seminar of the reports written by the Brigades; the organization of the statistical material; the preparation of a scheme for the production of a Report; and the writing of the Report itself. These tasks were performed over a period of six weeks from August 22 to September 30. Once again all the members of the team except the Project Director and one other member had fulltime teaching commitments. Some deficiencies in the Report could be attributed to the conditions under which it had to be produced. Other weaknesses will be due to more analytical failings and the Centro de Estudos Africanos hopes that this Report will prompt serious but comradely criticism which will lead to an improvement in its future work.

### Sources and References

Where possible explanatory footnotes have been placed on the relevant page. General attributions to a growing volume and quality of work on migrant labour, on mine labour in particular, and on the effects on the peasant economy, are listed in the general Bibliography at the end of the Report.

### A note on the currency equivalents

Throughout the Report wages and deferred pay are given in Mozambican currency of escudos and contos (1000 escudos). The equivalents are as follows, as of September 1977:

R1	-	38.5	escudos
£1	-	58	"
US\$	-	33	"