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Katto, Jonna

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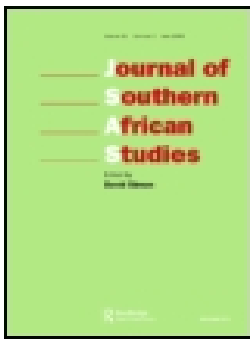
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# *Liberating Taste: Memories of War, Food and Cooking in Northern Mozambique*

JONNA KATTO

(University of Helsinki)

*This article focuses on the sensory and affective dimension of food, cooking and eating in ex-combatants' life narratives in northern Mozambique. It explores the polytemporality reflected in food memories, and the ways in which the past, present and future are connected in the present experience of remembering. For the ex-combatants, food is strongly linked to their memories of the liberation struggle (1964–74). Drawing on life history research with Ciyawo-speaking ex-combatants in the north-western province of Niassa between 2012 and 2014, this article traces the changing ideas and meanings of food and eating in their life narratives from their childhood, through wartime to the period of 'liberation'. After independence, most ex-combatants settled down as subsistence farmers with the expectation that 'finally' they would 'eat well'. Yet, for many, their experience of independent Mozambique has been that of socio-economic and political marginalisation. While food is crucial to survival, this article looks at how food is so much more than just nutrition. In the ex-combatants' memories, aesthetic aspects of food are closely intertwined with the revolutionary ideas of liberation and socio-economic justice. The meaning of food in the ex-combatants' narratives, as the article argues, is shaped simultaneously and in complex ways through their personal aesthetic experiences and memories of food as well as the changing political aesthetics.*

**Keywords:** food; liberation; war memories; Mozambique; sensory aesthetics

## Introduction

Amélia: They [the children and grandchildren] often ask what I ate. I say that we didn't have food. We didn't have food! We only ate through ... the food that came from Tanzania. Then, there in the liberated zone, there was a lot of population who were farming. They would gather the flour there and come ... they would go and deliver it there to the base. This flour we used for food. When the population didn't have food there ... there in the liberated zone, then we went to Tanzania to bring food for us to eat, yes. I used to give – I often give this history. Another time I went to sleep hungry for one week, two weeks, only drinking water that we prepared like tea. Boiling water in a big pot – a lot of water in a big pot, taking salt and putting in there. Then every person, one cup, one cup ... drinking. We didn't have [anything else]. Just plain water.

Jonna: [overlapping speech] Only water and salt?

Amélia: Mmm.

Jonna: Only?

Amélia: Mmm. We used salt like sugar. Aah ... drinking tea. Only to warm-up the stomach. Aah. I give ... this history to the children. For them to know that we were fighting.<sup>1</sup>

This article focuses on the sensory and affective dimension of food, cooking and eating in the life narratives<sup>2</sup> of now elderly female ex-combatants of Mozambique's liberation struggle in northern Niassa. It explores the polytemporality reflected in food memories<sup>3</sup> and the ways in which the past, present and future are connected in the present experience of remembering. As the excerpt above shows, food permeates the wartime memories of the ex-combatants. During the ten-year war (1964–74) led by the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique – Frelimo) against Portuguese colonial rule, the combatants and their supporting civilian populations lived in inhospitable environments in the northern bush thickets of the country. Food was a constant struggle. Due to heavy bombardments by the colonial troops, the cultivation of crops was extremely difficult, and there were periods in which the guerrillas and the population experienced intense hunger.

During the armed struggle, the guerrillas relied heavily on the support of the civilian population that lived with them in the 'liberated areas' of the northern bush.<sup>4</sup> The population lived separately from the guerrillas, but they were expected regularly to contribute food to the soldiers at the military camps (see Figure 1). Many of the female ex-combatants whom I interviewed were first recruited to carry this food (often in the form of maize flour, but also, depending on the area, perhaps cassava or sweet potatoes) to the bases. This form of recruitment started in 1965, but it did not take long before the guerrillas ordered the women to stay and cook at the bases. In the beginning the women worked in the camp kitchens, but gradually their positions changed from cooks to comrades-in-arms. Living at the bases, the women were quickly given other tasks, such as the political mobilisation of the population and the transportation of food and war material from Tanzania to the bases inside Mozambique. In 1966, Frelimo's Female Detachment (Destacamento Feminino – DF)<sup>5</sup> was officially created and, in 1967, the first group of girls and young women from Niassa was sent for political–military training in Nachingwea, southern Tanzania. This signalled women's formal integration into the guerrilla army, and, later (after 1970), the socialist discourse on 'women's liberation' became a more fixed part of the political education of both male and female guerrillas.<sup>6</sup>

This article traces the changing ideas and meanings of food and eating in the ex-combatants' life narratives from pre-wartime to the period of 'liberation'. Cooking and eating are everyday practices that powerfully evoke the sensory memories of past times and places.<sup>7</sup> Here, I

1 Interview with Amélia Omar, Lichinga, 12 December 2012. All interviews, unless otherwise stated, were conducted by the author. All interviewees requested that their real names be used. This was recorded in the oral informed consent process.

2 I understand life narratives in the sense of 'evolving series of stories [about one's life] that are framed in and through interaction'. C.K. Riessman, 'Analysis of Personal Narratives', in J.F. Gubrium and J.A. Holstein (eds), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method* (Thousands Oaks, Sage, 2001), pp. 695–711.

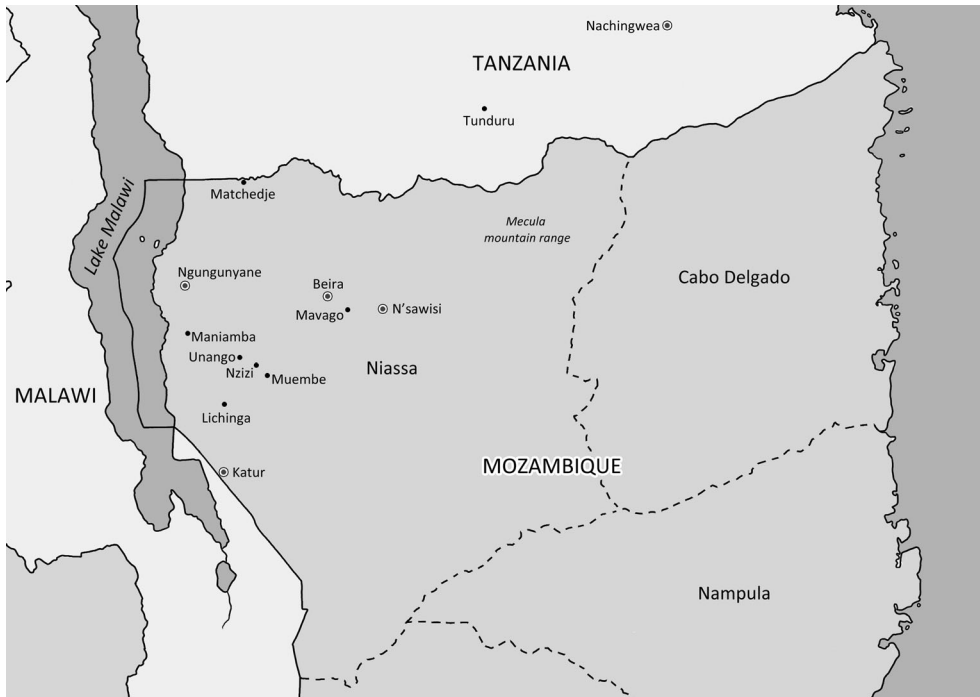
3 M.E. Abarca and J.R. Colby, 'Food Memories Seasoning the Narratives of Our Lives', *Food and Foodways*, 24, 1–2 (2016), pp. 1–8. See also C.N. Seremetakis, *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996).

4 While Frelimo also had bases and military activity in the southern part of Niassa, its stronghold was in the far north of the province, where it managed to free areas from direct Portuguese control.

5 'DF' also refers to the individual members of the female detachment.

6 See also Katto, *Women's Lived Landscapes of War and Liberation in Mozambique: Bodily Memory and the Gendered Aesthetics of Belonging* (London, Routledge, 2020).

7 See, for example, D.E. Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* (Oxford, Berg, 2001); J. Holtzman, *Uncertain Tastes: Memory, Ambivalence, and the Politics of Eating in Samburu, Northern Kenya* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2009).



**Figure 1.** Niassa. Frelimo's principal military bases in Niassa during the war are marked with white circles. (Map by Noora Katto.)

emphasise the performativity of memory and the continuous reinterpretation of past experiences in the present. Sensory memories, of course, frequently resist verbalisation,<sup>8</sup> but my focus in this article is on the different ways that people attempt to articulate and communicate these bodily experiences and memories. Amélia Omar's words in the opening excerpt demonstrate the importance of the narrativisation of these wartime sensory experiences for ex-combatants as they seek to transmit their memories to future generations.<sup>9</sup> As Amélia concludes, 'I give this story to the children for them to know that we were fighting'. Based on life history research with Ciyaawo-speaking ex-combatants in the northern province of Niassa,<sup>10</sup> this article explores the ways in which food is a site for remembering the liberation struggle and for renegotiating the meaning of this history in present-day Mozambique.

The life history interviews that this article draws from were conducted primarily between 2012 and 2014. My main focus was on Frelimo's DF, and I interviewed 34 DFs, each at least three times.<sup>11</sup> These interviews were complemented by individual and group interviews with 15 male ex-combatants. While my interviews were not specifically focused on food

8 Seremetakis, for instance, writes about the 'sensory and experiential fragmentation' of food memories: C.N. Seremetakis, 'The Memory of the Senses: Historical Perception, Commensal Exchange and Modernity', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 9, 2 (1993), pp. 2–18.

9 Amélia Omar was a sectoral commander of the DF in Niassa Ocidental. As Niassa has a vast area, it was divided into three sectors of combat: the western sector (Niassa Ocidental), the eastern sector (Niassa Oriental) and the southern sector (Niassa Austral).

10 I worked in the districts of Mavago, Muembe and Sanga, the municipality of Lichinga, and the village of Maniamba in the district of Lago.

11 I started with an interview on childhood memories, which was followed by an interview on wartime experience, and in the last interview we discussed their experiences of life after independence. With ten DFs, I also conducted more in-depth interviews.

memories,<sup>12</sup> food and cooking were topics that continually came up in the DFs' life narratives, especially when remembering their wartime experiences. As the women are subsistence farmers, food in their narratives involves not only eating and the preparation of food but also the cultivation of food crops. During our interviewing trips in the rural areas, my co-interviewer, Helena (herself also an ex-combatant), and I also visited the DFs' *machambas* (fields) and even conducted some of our interviews in those settings. Food preparation was, moreover, something that normally took place during the latter part of our morning interviews – sometimes by one of our DF hosts; at other times a younger female family member assumed the responsibility – and after the interview we were often invited to eat lunch together. Returning in October 2018 to visit all the DFs, I also had the opportunity to initiate additional food related conversations and clarify any open questions.

After independence, most of the combatants settled down as subsistence farmers. Their expectation was that finally they would 'eat well'. Yet, for many, their experience of independent Mozambique has been that of socio-economic and political marginalisation. Food is crucial to survival, but this article looks at how food – tied to the lived politics of 'liberation' – is so much more than just nutrition. The article is organised in four sections. The first discusses the notion of aesthetics and shows how it frames the article's analysis. The second looks at the shape that 'food time' takes in the ex-combatants' life narratives, focusing on their childhood food environments and the changes that war and army life signalled. The third section explores the experience of food, hunger and cultivation during the war. In the fourth section, I discuss the relationship between food and the aesthetics of 'liberation' in the ex-combatants' experiences of independent Mozambique. As I suggest, the meaning of food in the ex-combatants' narratives is shaped simultaneously and in complex ways through their personal aesthetic experiences and memories of food and changes in political aesthetics.

## Sensory Aesthetics of Food

Our aesthetic engagement with food is multi-sensory and synaesthetic.<sup>13</sup> The aesthetic aspects of food include tastes, aromas, visual images, sounds, touch, and even thermic and proprioceptive sensation. *Kunonyela* or *kunong'a* (to like; to find tasty, pleasurable, animating); *yaangaloondeka* (no good, disgusting); *yaambone* (good, pleasurable) were some of the common Ciyaawo terms used in the interviews to talk about finding pleasure or displeasure in food.<sup>14</sup> These terms have wide meanings that point to a multi-sensory engagement with food. They also show how our aesthetic experience of food involves what Jean-Pierre Poulain usefully calls an 'emotive dynamism': certain foods generate feelings of pleasure while others provoke negative sensations and emotions.<sup>15</sup> This intense sensorily evocative power of food makes it a significant site for remembering the past.<sup>16</sup> Through the everyday sensory world of eating and cooking, we are continuously connected with

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12 See C. Counihan, *Around the Tuscan Table: Food, Family, and Gender in Twentieth Century Florence* (New York, Routledge, 2004).

13 See also A.Y. Aikhenvald and A. Storch, 'Linguistic Expression of Perception and Cognition: A Typological Glimpse', in A.Y. Aikhenvald and A. Storch (eds), *Perception and Cognition in Language Culture* (Leiden, Brill, 2013), pp. 1–45. Their discussion shows how verbs of perception in many languages around the world often have multiple meanings that cover a range of senses.

14 On Cinyanja taste categories of pleasurable and unpleasant, see A. Huhn, 'The Tongue Only Works Without Worries: Sentiment and Sustenance in a Mozambican Town', *Food and Foodways*, 21, 3 (2013), pp. 199–200.

15 J-P. Poulain, *The Sociology of Food: Eating and the Place of Food in Society*, translated by Augusta Dörr (London, Bloomsbury, 2017 [2002]), p. 212.

16 See, for example, Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts*; Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*; Holtzman, *Uncertain Tastes*.



**Figure 2.** Food preparation in Muembe. Cooking pre-boiled beans with a bit of cabbage, carrots, green pepper and potatoes in a *refogado* of oil, tomatoes and red onion, seasoned with salt. This way of cooking is more common for urban Lichinga. A simple version of beans boiled in water with salt (and, if possible, a bit of cooking oil) is often the norm in rural Niassa. (Photograph taken by the author.)

memories of past times and places, which also shape the way we experience our relation to food in the present (see [Figures 2 and 3](#)).

In this article, I draw on Arnold Berleant's concept 'aesthetic engagement' to explore the ex-combatants' relation to food. In his environmental aesthetics theory, Berleant contests traditional ideas of the aesthetic understood mainly through the notion of 'beauty' as applied to art and nature. This concept of beauty, which has strongly influenced western aesthetics, builds on an object–subject dualism: the idea of the separation of the subject from the object of appreciation. In his theory, Berleant draws on an older meaning of aesthetics that denotes sense perception.<sup>17</sup> As he argues, aesthetic engagement is a 'body aesthetic', which involves our whole bodies and all our senses in the active perception of the environment.<sup>18</sup> This concept, moreover, is not based on an idea of 'pure' sense perception; rather, it recognises that our cultural and social situatedness and personal memories inform our understanding of our sensory experiences. This means that our cultural frames and our sensuous engagement with our environment simultaneously shape our aesthetic values. As my article will show, it is useful to conceive of these shifting cultural frames as 'aesthetic environments',<sup>19</sup> in which aesthetic values and political values are inseparably intertwined.<sup>20</sup>

17 A. Berleant, 'Aesthetic Engagement and the Human Landscape', paper presented at the international conference 'Environment, Aesthetic Engagement, and the Public Sphere', Paris, 9 May 2007. See also G.A. Johnson, *The Retrieval of the Beautiful: Thinking through Merleau-Ponty's Aesthetics* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2010), p. 39.

18 A. Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Kansas, University Press of Kansas, 1997), p. 111.

19 C. Sartwell, *Political Aesthetics* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2010). While Sartwell draws on a Kantian notion of aesthetics, his conceptualisation of aesthetic environment can be reshaped to incorporate a notion of body aesthetics.

20 See also A. Mbembe, 'The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony', *Public Culture*, 4, 2 (1992), pp. 1–30.



**Figures 3.** Our meal in Nzizi. *Wugadi* served with pumpkin leaves cooked with a bit of red onion and tomatoes, and dried *usipa* fish from Lake Niassa.

In recent years, the body and sensory experiences have gained growing attention in the study of African aesthetics,<sup>21</sup> though this has not yet included the study of food. Most contemporary literature on food in Africa still deals with food security and the biological necessity of eating. Yet there is a growing body of cultural studies research that looks beyond sustenance, at topics such as food and memory,<sup>22</sup> food and identity,<sup>23</sup> food and gender<sup>24</sup> and their various intersections. Moreover, lately, the sensory and affective aspect of

21 See, for example, A. Mbembe, 'Variations on the Beautiful in Congolese Worlds of Sound', in S. Nuttall (ed.), *Beautiful/Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 60–93; S. Nuttall, 'Introduction: Rethinking Beauty', in Nuttall (ed.), *Beautiful/Ugly*, pp. 6–29. Mbembe, for instance, in his analysis of Congolese music, argues that we cannot conceive of beauty in a disembodied way.

22 M.P. Meneses, 'Food, Recipes and Commodities of Empires: Mozambique in the Indian Ocean Network', *Oficina do CES*, 335 (2009), pp. 1–37.

23 For example, H.M. Nyamnjoh, 'Food, Memory and Transnational Gastronomic Culture amongst Cameroonian Migrants in Cape Town, South Africa', *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 41, 1 (2018), pp. 25–40; M.C. Johnson, "'Nothing is Sweet in My Mouth": Food, Identity, and Religion in African Lisbon', *Food and Foodways*, 24, 3–4 (2016), pp. 232–54; D. Lyons, 'Integrating African Cuisines: Rural Cuisine and Identity in Tigray, Highland Ethiopia', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 7, 3 (2007), pp. 346–71; J. McCann, *Stirring the Pot: A History of African Cuisine* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2009); I. Walker, 'Ntsambu, the Foul Smell of Home: Food, Commensality and Identity in the Comoros and in the Diaspora', *Food and Foodways*, 20, 3–4 (2012), pp. 187–210; I. Cusack, 'African Cuisines: Recipes for Nationbuilding?', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13, 2 (2000), pp. 207–25.

24 For example, K.B. Hanrahan, 'Mɔn' (to Marry/to Cook): Negotiating Becoming a Wife and Woman in the Kitchens of a Northern Ghanaian Konkomba Community', *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 22, 9 (2015), pp. 1–17; A. Logan and M. Cruz, 'Gendered Taskscapes: Food, Farming, and Craft Production in Banda, Ghana in the Eighteenth to Twenty-First Centuries', *African Archaeological Review*, 31, 2 (2014), pp. 203–31; S. Arnfred, 'Sex, Food and Female Power: Discussion of Data Material from Northern Mozambique', *Sexualities*, 10, 2 (2007), pp. 141–58; J. Holtzman, 'The World is Dead and Cooking's Killed It: Food and the Gender of Memory in Samburu, Northern Kenya', *Food and Foodways*, 14, 3–4 (2006), pp. 175–200.

food has emerged as a new approach in African food studies.<sup>25</sup> My study contributes to these lines of inquiry by exploring how an analytical focus on the sensory aesthetics of food can enrich our understanding of the history of the liberation struggle and its lived politics. Food, as Maria Paula Meneses convincingly argues, allows us access to ‘a denser fabric of social realities hidden from official historiography’.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, by opening other temporalities of lived experience to our analytical attention, food memories can move us beyond the linear time of official history.

## Food Time

Our elders were the ones who farmed. We also farmed when we grew up with my older siblings. And they said: ‘you have to farm. You cannot play around when farming. Because if there is no food at home, there is hunger. Even clothing – there won’t be anything to wear because getting good fabrics depends on selling farm produce – even for you to live here at home’. And we farmed. Also my older brothers and older sisters farmed. When the sun came up, we all went to the *machamba*. Farming there, returning, and cooking. Eating is never done.<sup>27</sup>

The ex-combatants whom I interviewed all grew up in the rural communities of northern Niassa, and their narratives show how their sense of time was intimately shaped by the temporal cycles of the *machamba*. Food time – referring here to cultivation and food preparation as well as eating – is, moreover, a culturally shaped gendered temporality.<sup>28</sup> In the matrilineal and matrilocal pre-war Yaawo societies,<sup>29</sup> women were closely connected to the land and food production. The men practiced travelling polygamy and engaged in hunting expeditions, long-distance trade and migratory labour movements. While the men travelled, women stayed at home and cultivated their fields, usually living in their mothers’ villages. Men also worked in the *machambas* when at home, though they focused more on cash crops, especially tobacco. Daily life – also shaped through these histories of gendered movement – was divided into male and female spheres of activities. Cooking and all food preparation duties, such as collecting firewood and fetching water, belonged to women. Together, these tasks took a big portion of woman’s daily time resources.

Most ex-combatants remember their childhood alimentary landscapes as those of plenty.<sup>30</sup> Women ex-combatants especially had happy food memories from this time. They fondly recalled how they used to organise *masaanje* (picnics) in the bush and how these

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25 For example, Holtzman, *Uncertain Tastes*; Huhn, ‘The Tongue Only Works’; Meneses, ‘Food, Recipes’; M.P. Meneses, ‘Para ampliar as epistemologias do Sul: verbalizando sabores e revelando lutas’ (‘To Expand the Epistemologies of the South: Verbalising Flavours and Exposing Battles’), *Configurações*, 12 (2013), pp. 13–27.

26 Meneses, ‘Food, Recipes’, p. 23.

27 Interview with Assiati Muemedi, Mavago district, 8 May 2013.

28 See also Arnfred, ‘Sex, Food’; S. Arnfred, ‘Ancestral Spirits, Land and Food: Gendered Power and Land Tenure in Ribáué, Nampula Province’, in R. Waterhouse and C. Vijfhuizen (eds), *Strategic Women, Gainful Men: Gender, Land and Natural Resources in Different Rural Contexts in Mozambique* (Maputo, UEM and ActionAid–Mozambique, 2001), pp. 153–78.

29 See also Katto, *Women’s Lived Landscapes*, pp. 80–81.

30 Even in oral history focusing on the deeper past, I have not come across narratives of famine or periods of serious widespread hunger. Malawi has been mentioned in several narratives as a country prone to hunger, where people from northern Niassa would go to sell food in exchange for people. Interview with Ce-Maguda, Mavago district, 19 October 2018. On famine in Malawi, see E. Mandala, *The End of Chidyerano: A History of Food and Everyday Life in Malawi, 1860–2004* (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 2005); M. Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine: Gender and Famine in Twentieth-Century Malawi* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1987). On the gendered cultural and historical construction of hunger, see H. Gengenbach, ‘“Provisions” and Power on an Imperial Frontier: A Gendered History of Hunger in 16th Century Central Mozambique’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 50, 3 (2017), pp. 409–37.

events also marked their first experiences of learning to cook.<sup>31</sup> Their main responsibility was to help with food preparation activities – such as fetching water, gathering firewood and pounding the maize – while the adults worked in the *machambas* and *hortas* (vegetable gardens).<sup>32</sup> Life depended on farming and, growing older, they were expected (as Assiatio Muemedi's description above shows) to learn how to farm. In their home areas of northern Niassa, the staple crops included maize, *jugo* beans (Bambara groundnuts), *nyemba* beans (cowpeas), *mapira* (type of millet or sorghum), cassava, sesame, groundnuts and pumpkins. The alternating cycles of these different crops dictated the rhythms of agricultural labour: hoeing, sowing, weeding and harvesting.

In peacetime, seasonal changes shaped people's sense of food time and signalled the availability of different foods. David E. Sutton fittingly calls this the 'prospective time' of the agricultural cycle.<sup>33</sup> The predictable rhythm of these food and seasonal cycles allowed people to look forward to the abundance of harvest as well as to prepare for the time of scarcity and the 'time of hunger', before the start of the new growing season when maize and beans storage was running low. Forest foods such as fruit, honey, game, birds – and fish from the rivers – were also abundant in many areas and an important part of people's diets, especially during the seasonal gap in agricultural production. Food also played important ceremonial roles, for instance in initiation rites and funerals. Many of my interviewees spoke of how their families kept goats, chickens and ducks; yet, in many families, these ceremonies were the rare occasions on which these animals were slaughtered and prepared for food. Moreover, in communal ceremonies conducted at the ancestors' graves or at the spirit tree (*n'solo*), *mapira* (or maize)<sup>34</sup> was transformed into the sacred flour, *mbopeesi*, that the male chief together with his female counterpart, the *biibi* (his mother, sister or maternal aunt), offered to the ancestral spirits as they asked for safety and health for their people and for their crops to yield well. Traditional beer produced from maize or *mapira* was also a crucial part of the ritual food intake during these ceremonies. The people's sense of food time was further shaped by the Islamic religious calendar: fasting was associated with the month of Ramadan and feasting with *siyaala* – the celebration commemorating the anniversary of the founder of the *ṭariqa* (the Sufi way). Both were meaningful events in the yearly religious cycle of the Muslim Ayaawo.<sup>35</sup>

When the war started, it disrupted the 'prospective time' of the agricultural cycle and its associated rhythms of farming and food preparation. Fleeing their villages, people were not allowed to take even their livestock – chicken and goats – as they created too much noise. 'Running-running' – referring to non-ending, directionless movement – was the expression that the ex-combatants often used to talk about their kinaesthetic experience of the war. Of course, forced directed movement was also an integral part of guerrilla life. The female combatants' wartime movement was especially characterised by the long-distance transportation missions conducted on foot between the Tanzanian border and Frelimo bases inside Mozambique. With this wartime movement, the experience of the seasonal changes

31 For early 20th-century descriptions of *masaanje*, see Y.B. Abdallah, *The Yaos: Chikala cha Wayao*, edited and translated by Meredith Sanderson, 2nd ed. (London, Frank Cass, 1973 [1919]).

32 Ciyaaawo – *ditiimbe*, pl. *matiimbe*: wet lowland fields by rivers that require a considerable amount of work but produce vegetables of all sorts during the dry season.

33 Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts*.

34 When maize became the staple crop, it began to be used in the ceremonies. On the spread of maize cultivation into south-eastern Africa, see M.P. Miracle, *Maize in Tropical Africa* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

35 Islam spread to the area through Yaawo trading contact with the Swahili coast, especially in the 19th century. See, for example, L. Bonate, 'Islam in Northern Mozambique: A Historical Overview', *History Compass*, 8, 7 (2010), pp. 573–93; E.A. Alpers, 'Towards a History of the Expansion of Islam in East Africa: The Matrilineal Peoples of the Southern Interior', in T.O. Ranger and I.N. Kimambo (eds), *The Historical Study of African Religion* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976), pp. 172–201.

also altered. The rainy season was no longer associated with the beginning of a new growing cycle and the end of the time of scarcity. Many ex-combatants spoke of how the rainy season created more painful conditions in the bush.

War also brought some changes to the gendered time of food. Food time in war was shaped by army practice and by Frelimo's socialist discourse on 'women's liberation'. In the liminal space of the liberation struggle and the army, food shifted from women's domain into a joint sphere of activity and responsibility. As Fátima Aquili remembers:

in colonial times, there was work just meant for women: cooking; women carrying firewood, going to fetch water to cook ... while the man just sat. But now, during the war, the experience that I gained – because this did not exist; we all worked together. Be it in the kitchen ... also the men entered. [This is] the experience that I gained.<sup>36</sup>

During the war, the female combatants' role shifted from cooks to comrades-in-arms. In the female and male ex-combatants' narratives it was often emphasised that, during the war, there was no women's or men's work but all work was done together. As Fátima continues her narration: 'men cooked, women cooked. Men went to the *machambas*, the women also went to the *machambas*. In the childcare centres, the men also – there were men and also women. This is what I observed'. While Frelimo's political narrative of 'working together'<sup>37</sup> is strongly emphasised by the ex-combatants, there are instances in their interview accounts that point to the existence of other gendered experiences. For instance, as many DFs said, on combat missions, women's main job was often to transport the ammunition, but, instead of engaging in the fighting, they would stay behind to cook for the male guerrillas. Another DF's account shows that men did not pound maize because they usually received it already ground.<sup>38</sup> This means that women in the supporting civilian population continued doing this female-coded task during the war. One DF told how, at the central base of N'sawisi, there were many days when only women went to the *machambas*, as the men stayed behind waiting to go to combat.<sup>39</sup> Many interviewees also recognised the important role DFs played in mobilising the population to cultivate food for the guerrillas. This suggests that, while men entered the bush kitchens to share control and authority over food during the wartime, women still continued to play a crucial role in the cultivation and provision of food.

## Memories of Food, Cooking, and the Liberation Struggle<sup>40</sup>

### *Inhumane Hunger and Thirst*

The experience of hunger stood out in my interviews with ex-combatants as one of their most intense memories. There were times when the guerrillas were forced to eat and drink whatever they could find. When there was no food, they focused on drinking water to fill their stomachs. Still, the lack of water and extreme thirst often accompanied hunger. The availability of water varied across the vast area of Niassa and also depended on the season. Especially when on mission, as many narratives show, guerrillas experienced not only hunger but also thirst, even going many days without drinking. At times, these extreme circumstances forced the guerrillas

36 Interview with Fátima Aquili, Lichinga, 28 November 2013.

37 See also I.M. Casimiro, 'Repensando as relações entre mulher e homem no tempo de Samora', in A. Sopa (ed.), *Samora: homem do povo* (Maputo, Magueto, 2001), pp. 127–35.

38 Interview with Assiati Muemedi, Mavago district, 5 August 2013. They often received roughly ground maize that had not been soaked in the process, which required a lot of water to cook.

39 Interview with Catarina Mbuana, Mavago district, 24 June 2013.

40 Some of these excerpts also appear in Katto, *Women's Lived Landscapes*, where I explore how the 'haptics of the bush' (in which food also plays a role) influence the ex-combatants' sense of socio-spatial belonging. Here I focus on how the history of the liberation struggle is shaped through the ex-combatants' food memories.

to drink dirty, insanitary water. As Teresa Macotoa remembers her experience: ‘uhmm ... and we did that there ... and we suffered that there, that way of doing that. To eat, we ate with suffering! ... When you find water ... [continues in very low voice] that the pigs bathed in, we drank. For us to have strength!’ Fighting dehydration, Eduardo Nihia<sup>41</sup> mentions how the DFs would sometimes even squeeze liquid out of fresh elephant dung to have something to drink.<sup>42</sup> Near the mountains of Mecula (in north-eastern Niassa) in the dry season of 1965, Mateus Pius Abiyembale also remembers having to drink water from a puddle that was a mixture of elephant dung, urine and water.<sup>43</sup> In a similar way, lack of food forced the guerrillas to eat things considered inedible, as Teresa continues her narrative:

we didn’t choose the food ... starting with the animals. Now we are saying: ‘Ah, I don’t eat pig meat’. ‘Ah, we, that thing we don’t eat – aah, monkey’. We, that’s what we did ... in our work group for our work. Coming across a monkey, killing it, eating. Like that we got *wugadi* ... Coming across a lion, killing it, like that we got *wugadi*.<sup>44</sup>

As Teresa’s account shows, suffering from hunger, the guerrillas did not have the luxury of following Islamic dietary restrictions, even though they were considered important for their religious identity as Muslim Ayaawo. Many DFs, for instance, spoke of how, before the war, their parents had refused to send them to school at the missions for fear that they would ‘eat pork meat’. Yet intense hunger during the war forced the guerrillas to eat animals considered inedible according to Islamic religious beliefs, such as monkeys, lions and wild pigs.<sup>45</sup> Also, fasting during the month of Ramadan and other religious practices were put on hold during this time. No ban by Frelimo was mentioned, but my interviewees spoke of how war movement made these rules impossible to follow.

Hunger caused much suffering during the war. Before the war, Niassa was already Mozambique’s least densely inhabited province, but with the war it experienced further depopulation.<sup>46</sup> Accounts by military commanders traversing through Niassa on mission speak of the challenges the guerrillas faced, not seeing any people for days on end and thus suffering from hunger and dehydration.<sup>47</sup> Mateus Pius remembers a long march walking for ten days from the Tanzanian border through Mecula to N’sawisi, during which his group encountered not one single person; for half of this time, the guerrillas had no food.<sup>48</sup> Finally, they managed to get some sustenance when one combatant spotted a gazelle carcass hanging

41 Eduardo Nihia served as commander in the region of Niassa Oriental from 1966 to 1969.

42 E. Nihia, *M’oto: combatente pela liberdade* (Maputo, UEMA, 2016), p. 133.

43 Quoted in D.F.X. Ndegue, *A luta de libertação na frente do Niassa*, volume 1 (Maputo, JV Editores, 2009), p. 137.

44 Interview with Teresa Macotoa, Sanga district, 7 June 2014.

45 Although Ian D. Dicks suggests that these animals, which all belong to the Li-Ga noun class, were not considered edible even before the spread of Islam among the Ayaawo. I.D. Dicks, *An African Worldview: The Muslim Amacinga Yawo of Southern Malaŵi* (Zomba, Kachere Series, 2012), p. 387. Monkeys and lions, for instance, belong to the category of tabooed animals among the neighbouring non-Muslim Nyanja. See A. Huhn, ‘What is Human? Anthropomorphic Anthropophagy in Northwest Mozambique’, in I. Banerjee-Dube (ed.), *Cooking Cultures: Convergent Histories of Food and Feeling* (Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 177–98. Huhn also suggests that eating animals that people can turn into through sorcery, such as lions and snakes, is prohibited, as it holds the danger of cannibalism: see A. Huhn, ‘Sustenance and Sociability: Foodways in a Mozambican Town’ (PhD thesis, Boston University, 2013), pp. 125–35.

46 J.P. Moiane, *Memórias de um guerrilheiro* (Maputo, King Ngungunyane Institute, 2009). See also ‘Bernardo Moisés Goy-Goy’, in A.B. Mussanhane (ed.), *Protagonistas da luta de libertação nacional* (Maputo, Marimbique, 2012), p. 222.

47 See, for example, quote by Samora Machel in Oficina de História, CEA, ‘Resenha histórica sobre as zonas libertadas – a experiência da província do Niassa’, in Y. Adam (ed.), *Não vamos esquecer!: boletim informativo da oficina de história*, 4 (Maputo, Centro de Estudos Africanos, 1987), p. 13; interview with Eduardo Silva Nihia, Maputo, 2 July 2014; ‘José Pahlane Moyane’, in Mussanhane (ed.), *Protagonistas*, pp. 465–6.

48 Quoted in Ndegue, *A luta*, p. 139. This area belongs to the Niassa Reserve, established in 1954.

from a tree, probably dragged there by a leopard for safe keeping. But, to be able to prepare gazelle soup for lunch, the guerrillas had to move to another location to avoid confrontation with the leopard, the feared ‘owner of that animal reserve’. Even though there were many animals in the bush, the guerrillas were at times afraid to shoot because it might alert the enemy to their movements in the area.

The guerrillas depended on the civilian population for support, but the intense bombings and lack of food caused masses of people to flee to neighbouring countries.<sup>49</sup> Cultivation of crops was extremely challenging during the first three–four years of the struggle in Niassa, and the population as well as the guerrillas suffered from extreme hunger. As Assane Ali Mataka, an elder in N’sawisi in eastern Niassa, remembers, masses of people starved to death in 1968 as there was ‘absolutely nothing to eat’.<sup>50</sup> Not only the supporting population fled: soldiers also deserted, even entire companies.<sup>51</sup> At this point, Frelimo started receiving food aid from supporting countries such as China and the Soviet Union. More arms and ammunition were also distributed to hunters who traded game meat for other food items at the border.<sup>52</sup> Yet transporting this food from the Tanzanian border to the bases inside Mozambique was a perilous task: the guerrillas with the accompanying civilian population had to travel on foot through the bush for many days carrying the heavy loads (for example, maize, rice, cans of meat, beans, sardines) on their heads and backs, accompanied by a constant fear of the enemy.<sup>53</sup>

At Base Katuri (located in Niassa Austral and very close to Malawi), as Fátima Aquili remembers, they had ‘no food in the bush’, but the guerrillas received food deliveries from Mozambican refugees in Malawi who had been mobilised to support Frelimo.<sup>54</sup> Even in situations when they had food, eating was difficult with all the attacks; as Fátima remembers, sometimes they would prepare food, but, before they could eat, the shooting started and they had to ditch their food and run. While the food situation improved after 1969, eating was described as often being a hurried affair that could be interrupted at any moment. Maria Issa speaks of how the year in which General Kaulza de Arriaga initiated his military campaign<sup>55</sup> and started to build his roads into the bush was the year that really hurt. During these times, there was no place in the bush to hide. The guerrillas had no time to find food, only drink water and move. As she describes: ‘the year that the war was very difficult, yes, was the year that Arriaga entered. Yeah, as soon as that Arriaga came ... he came with force’. A little later, she went on:

now there is no way of doing anything, not even to eat ... We didn’t eat. We only moved. We only drank water. Other times not even food we didn’t have! We just lived as if ... we are not people. The war like this hurt because people suffered ... the war hurt a lot.<sup>56</sup>

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49 They fled to Tanzania from the eastern and western regions and to Malawi from the southern region of Katur.

50 Interview with Assane Ali Mataka, N’sawisi, Mavago district, 17 October 2018. See also Nihia, *M’toto*, p. 135.

51 See also J.A. Raimundo, ‘Frente do Niassa’, in J. das Neves Tembe (ed.), *História da luta de libertação nacional*, Volume 1 (Maputo, Direcção Nacional de História, Ministério dos Combatentes, 2014), pp. 530–31.

52 Oficina de História, CEA, ‘Resenha histórica’, p. 14.

53 See also interview with Mussagy Jeichande, conducted by Claire Bertaud with questions by Igor Cusack, Maputo, 17 April 2016, in I. Cusack, ‘Jungle Food: Revolutionaries in Lusophone Africa’, *Dublin Gastronomy Symposium*, available at <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1062&context=dgs>, retrieved 30 June 2020.

54 Interview with Fátima Aquili, Lichinga, 23 November 2013. Also Moiane, *Memórias de um guerrilheiro*, p. 87.

55 Arriaga organised a massive campaign called the Gordian Knot Operation, which deployed 100 helicopters and 35,000 soldiers in northern Mozambique. M. Newitt, *A History of Mozambique* (London, Hurst, 1995), p. 531.

56 Interview with Maria Issa, Lichinga, 15 August 2013.

The Portuguese army constantly sought to destroy the food supplies of the guerrillas and their supporting population.<sup>57</sup> Hunger was thus made a deliberate tool of political violence.<sup>58</sup>

### *Unappetising, even Dangerous Food*

In the years that neither the population nor the guerrillas had time to cultivate, many spoke of how they were forced to eat roots and other ‘things that didn’t have names’. Rosa Mustaffa speaks of how they ate ‘things of the bush’ that were not suitable for human consumption.<sup>59</sup> She explains that they ate just to ‘get rid of the feeling of hunger’ during the war. She also tells of how they would try just about anything that happened to be in their path. As she remembers, ‘it was enough to confirm that it wasn’t bitter, I don’t know what, we took it as food for us to nourish our bodies’. Sometimes they had to observe the monkeys to see what they were doing when digging for roots: if it did not kill the monkey, it was considered suitable for humans to eat.<sup>60</sup> Generally, food during the war is not remembered as having taste/smell; it did not animate one’s senses. Fátima Aide Namboka, for instance, remembers how they had to eat the roots of banana trees.<sup>61</sup> They dried the roots and then pounded them into flour, which they cooked into *wugadi* (stiff maize porridge). As she argues, many people died during those years, as the food ‘did not agree with their bodies’. Eduardo Nihia mentions a type of nut called *ikoso* that grew by the river and which the DFs first cooked all day to remove the toxins before serving it as ‘type of beans’ to the soldiers. During the war, the guerrillas received salt from Tanzania, but many remember hard times when they returned to using the ash salt of different tree and plant species in the bush (for example, *diisale*, *n’guungwi* and *n’jelela*, a river plant),<sup>62</sup> much the same way their ancestors had done in the past<sup>63</sup> before trade with the coast brought them sea salt.

In the war, food also became associated with danger; the ‘things of the bush’ could kill a person. These poisonous fruits included *ngweegwe*, *madiga*, *m’pama*, *n’kulumu* and *dikwaanya*.<sup>64</sup> According to my interviewees, it was only during the war that many of these fruits received names.<sup>65</sup> Helena speaks of how the guerrillas cooked these dangerous things that they used as food during the war:

we ate unknown fruits ... that even now ... that we are seeing that ‘eh, but this here we ate’. These days, a person to take that and eat – dies. The person doesn’t live ... But that time of the war we ate. But ... the way of cooking it is different. We cooked another way.<sup>66</sup>

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57 For instance, the Portuguese torched granaries. Interview with Ali Bonimali *et al.*, conducted by Gerhard Liesegang and Teresa Oliveira, Nazimhendje, Unango, 18 July 1981, AHM, catalogue reference C146/NI047. Poisoning as a way of destroying water and food supplies was not mentioned in my interviews or the testimonials that I read.

58 Meneses, ‘Para ampliar as epistemologias do Sul’.

59 Interview with Rosa Mustaffa, Muembe district, 30 May 2014.

60 Account by Lourenço André Cumbe in R. Matusse, *Coronel Mateus Óscar Kida: na sua voz e na dos seus camaradas e outros próximos* (Maputo, Ciedima, 2018), p. 96.

61 Interview with Fátima Aide Namboka, Muembe district, 13 February 2013.

62 Also mentioned as the ‘salt of the old people’, in Abdallah, *The Yaos*. See also S. Davison, ‘Saltmaking in Early Malawi’, *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa*, 28, 1 (1993), pp. 7–46.

63 Especially, the population living in the liberated zones used ash salt throughout the war. Interview with Régulo Mangolowe Saide Ndaala, Bibi Ce-Suula Adeweale and Apepo Ajame Chisando, N’kalapa, Mavago district, 18 October 2018.

64 As my interviewees claimed, finding some of these plants these days requires one to go deep into the bush. I was not working with a botanist, hence the botanical names of these plants are not included.

65 In societies where wild plants are already a part of people’s diets, the variety of plants that people consume increases during times of scarcity. See, for example, R. Huss-Ashmore and S.L. Johnston, ‘Wild Plants as Famine Foods: Food Choice under Conditions of Scarcity’, in H. Macbethuhun (ed.), *Food Preferences and Taste: Continuity and Change* (Oxford, Berghahn, 1997), pp. 83–100.

66 Interview with Helena Baide, Lichinga, 23 May 2014.

Helena then continues to describe the long process of how they cooked, changing the cooking water continuously throughout the day. During this detoxification process, ash was also added to the cooking water to mitigate the taste of bitterness associated with the poison.<sup>67</sup> Taste, as these examples show, was considered important in wartime in helping to determine what was poisonous and what was edible.

The bush also had many edible things that people knew by names such as *n'kuta* (a green leafy vegetable); the fruits *ndava*, *masuku*, *mbiinji*, *nguju*, *matoonga*, *yiindogoodya*; also *wuvaasi* (mushrooms).<sup>68</sup> Honey was a valuable source of nourishment, though some ex-combatants laughingly remembered how they sometimes unintentionally got drunk on honey that had fermented in the heat. At times, in other areas, game meat was the guerrillas' principal food, although meat without *wugadi* is not, in peacetime, considered a proper meal. Even hunting posed challenges, as the hunter had to go far away from the base and the population so as not to attract the attention of the enemy to their location. Cooking itself was also dangerous, as the noise of the pestle or the sight of smoke from the fire could draw the attention of enemy planes.<sup>69</sup> To hide the smoke, cooking was often done at night under the cover of trees. Madyatu Issa remembers how they had to move camp when the leaves of the trees under which they were hiding started to fall owing to the cooking fires.

#### *Cultivating, Transforming Bush into Human Space*

Even before the war, the bush was considered a dangerous place. It belonged to animals, not people; people would clear bush, build houses and cultivate crops in order to expand their living environment. In the ex-combatants' interviews, the 'bush' is often described as the opposite of a habitable space. During the war, the bush's violent tactility was enhanced. Many compare the guerrillas' life in the bush to the life of animals. Hunger and eating 'bad things' played an integral role in this dehumanising experience.

At the beginning of the war, as my interviewees remembered, people thought that it would be over in just a couple of months.<sup>70</sup> In the first phase – when Frelimo mobilised people to follow them into the bush – the guerrillas harvested the population's abandoned *machambas* for food,<sup>71</sup> which they consumed to the point of even eating the roots of the banana trees. Later, as they were forced deeper into the bush, the people cleared small fields in their new locations, but, owing to the heavy fighting and the abduction and killing of people working in their *machambas*, production was very low.<sup>72</sup> A poor harvest led to a total lack of food in Niassa Oriental in 1968. By this time, it had also become clear that it would be a prolonged war, and efforts to mobilise the population to create fields and cultivate crops were intensified. For instance, Bernardo Moisés Goy-Goy, commander of the provincial sub-base in Niassa Oriental at the time, recounts that an order was issued by Frelimo leader Samora Machel to the effect that cultivating crops was to be one of the priorities alongside fighting and studying.<sup>73</sup> In addition to family plots, collective *machambas* were opened; bush hospitals, schools and child care centres, for example, had their own *machambas*.<sup>74</sup> Supporting countries sent seeds and hoes,<sup>75</sup> and the female

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67 Compare to the process of cooking cassava.

68 Interview with Madalena Bitete, Lago district, 30 July 2013.

69 For how women managed these dangers in the Angolan liberation struggle, see I. Brinkman, 'A War for People': *Civilians, Mobility, and Legitimacy in South-East Angola During the MPLA's War for Independence* (Cologne, Rüdiger Köppe, 2005), p. 161.

70 See also Ndegue, *A luta*, p. 98.

71 Oficina de História, CEA, 'Resenha histórica'.

72 *Ibid.*

73 'Bernardo Moisés Goy-Goy', in Mussanhane (ed.), *Protagonistas*, p. 222.

74 See also Oficina de História, CEA, 'Resenha histórica'.

75 *Ibid.*

combatants played a crucial role in mobilising the population. Yet, as many ex-combatants remember, Frelimo had a difficult job trying to convince people to cultivate and not desert the war areas. Moreover, the guerrillas, together with the population, had to develop new strategies of how to cultivate and safeguard food in wartime. They learned to cultivate on small, dispersed fields on riverbanks, partially under the cover of trees, and the harvested food had to be hidden in various locations away from the fields.<sup>76</sup> As Teresa Amudi describes, the DFs taught the population to cut the trunks of cassava plants when they grew too high in order to hide the visible signs of a *machamba* from enemy planes.<sup>77</sup> Hearing the noise of aeroplanes, the people would flee the *machambas* to bunkers built nearby, but farming continued whenever there was calm. At times, they cultivated at night in the moonlight. This is how, even during the military campaign of Kaulza de Arriaga, when the terrifying sound of bombers and helicopters dominated the soundscape, food production did not stop.

The bombardments, the fleeing and not having time to eat, as many remember, became the new normal for the guerrillas. The war lasted nearly ten years, from 1965 to 1974, in the areas where my interviewees lived. Through this time, the intensity of the bombings and war effort varied, and the war affected the different areas unevenly. Some interviewees also spoke of short periods in the midst of the war that were so calm that, for the week or two that it lasted, the guerrillas even ‘forgot that they were in war’.<sup>78</sup> During these quieter periods, the bases even started to feel like ‘home’. Maria Yassine, for instance, spoke of a time when she felt ‘like at the village again’.<sup>79</sup> This points to experiences of the positive aesthetic engagement with place that evoked memories of village life before the war. In some areas, the guerrillas even managed to cultivate *machambas* near the bases. Fátima Mombajia remembers living well in Matchedje, where she worked at the childcare centre. There the population had a *horta* (vegetable garden) where they planted pumpkins, and the guerrillas had pumpkin leaves and flowers and pumpkin to eat.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile Fátima’s memory of Base Ngungunyane is that they had food only at the end of the war, when they planted cassava plants there. This points to how the type and availability of food varied between the bases. The bases that were closer to Tanzania could more easily get food from across the border. Many ex-combatants spoke of how, when cultivation started, they no longer suffered from hunger. According to Mateus Oscar Kida, during his time as political commissar in N’sawisi from 1970 to 1973, agricultural production was intensified; both guerrillas and the population were producing an abundance of maize, and the guerrillas were no longer solely dependent on the population for food.<sup>81</sup> They even produced enough sesame and beeswax to trade at the Tanzanian border.<sup>82</sup> Helena Baide, working in N’sawisi at the time, speaks of going back to a two-meals-per-day routine at this point. It was also during these quieter times that some ex-combatants spoke of guarding the population as they held *siyaala* celebrations.<sup>83</sup>

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76 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

77 ‘Teresa Amule’, in Mussanhane (ed.), *Protagonistas*, p. 728.

78 Interview with Ana Alane, Lichinga, 18 February 2013.

79 Interview with Maria Yassine, Lichinga, 25 March 2013.

80 Interview with Fátima Mombajia, Lago district, 30 July 2013.

81 Matusse, *Coronel Mateus Óscar Kida*, p. 95.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 97. See also Oficina de História, CEA, ‘Resenha histórica’, p. 14.

83 See also the Ngoda song, in P. Israel, ‘The Formulaic Revolution: Song and the “Popular Memory” of the Mozambican Liberation Struggle’, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines*, 197 (2010), p. 187. This song, played to the rhythm of the wartime drum – a rattle made of a used can refilled with *ngodo* (dried maize) – speaks of the (dangerous) experience of singing and dancing in the war in Cabo Delgado.

## The Liberating Taste of Food

‘I will cook with cooking oil, build a house, and open a big field to eat food with my children’.<sup>84</sup> The future that the DFs spoke of imagining and hoping for during the war was that of settling down to farm one’s own fields and producing an abundance of food to sustain one’s family. This was also the expectation projected upon the DFs by their commanding officers when they were demobilised, usually a couple of years after independence. Celina Saide remembers being given ‘30 *meticais*’ and told to ‘go to [her mother’s] village and farm now’.<sup>85</sup> Those DFs who had got married continued life with their husbands, but the others moved to live close to family. During the war, families had been broken apart and dislocated from their villages, many people had died, and others had fled to neighbouring countries. Returning home to family and starting to farm was more complicated for some than for others. Many DFs were so young when they left for war, they had not learnt, for instance, how to farm and cook properly. After the war, some of them – especially in the more rural areas – felt mocked by their neighbours and others in their new communities for not knowing how to perform fluently the different gendered tasks expected from them as adult women. Many DFs spoke of receiving food help from their family members. Celina Saide said that she learned how to farm from her mother, but it still took three years for her fields to start yielding crops.<sup>86</sup> Those who were older found it easier to adapt. As Amelia Omar, in her 70s at the time of the interview, describes continuing with the work of her ancestors:

there in the *machambas* ... what we here in Niassa ... the principal food that we the *Majawa* [Ayaawo] – only maize, sweet potatoes, regular potatoes, beans and cassava. And bananas, only. Groundnuts and *jugo* beans. Mmm. That is what the elders, our ancestors cultivated. So we also are repeating. Like the things that the elders used to do to work, such as ... managing to produce that – we also are producing.<sup>87</sup>

These days, the idea of good farming land dominates people’s perception of the Niassa landscape. As Helena Caisse exclaims: ‘the place that is very beautiful here in Mozambique – leaving construction aside – if it is about food, my friend, it is here in Niassa!’<sup>88</sup> Food, importantly, shapes a positive sense of regional attachment. Niassa as a good place to cultivate is not only an idea linked to the post-independence period; it also comes up in the women’s childhood narratives in which they remembered their male relatives talk of more difficult food conditions in the neighbouring territories of Tanzania and Malawi. These days, Niassa is experienced as having much to contribute to the agricultural development of the country. These ideas are also shaped by socialist modernisation and the memory of the ‘golden age’ of socialist collectivism and its vision of the rapid development of the landscape through large-scale state farms. In those days, Niassa – the least populated province in Mozambique – was in the forefront of the post-liberation Frelimo Party’s modernising scheme. Many ex-combatants still remember the first years of independence with special nostalgia. For them, it was a time when the state took care of them, providing them with clothing, shelter and food. They farmed, but on state and collective *machambas*. These days the ex-combatants’ experience is that everyone is left on their own to fend for themselves. Comparing the present time of neoliberal economic

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84 Interview with Assiato Muemedi, Mavago district, 5 August 2013.

85 Interview with Celina Saide, Mavago district, 7 August 2013.

86 *Ibid.*

87 Interview with Amelia Omar, Lichinga, 29 November 2012.

88 Interview with Helena Caisse, Sanga district, 21 July 2013.

policies and practices with the remembered time of the socialist past and its imagined future,<sup>89</sup> many find the present lacking.

Helena Caisse's words also point to how food (in its extended sense of farming, cooking and eating) mediates the ex-combatants' aesthetic engagement with landscape. When compared with the extreme experiences of hunger and the danger of food during wartime, food in peacetime, as the ex-combatants' narratives show, has been in many ways a 'liberating' experience of pleasure and fulfilment.<sup>90</sup> While their work in the *machambas* is arduous and even backbreaking, it is not comparable to the hectic strain of war.<sup>91</sup> Farming sets the rhythm for a peaceful engagement with landscape. As some DFs mentioned, keeping active and productive in this way also helps to alleviate negative feelings.<sup>92</sup> Food self-sufficiency through agricultural production is highly valued. As many of my interviewees expressed, in peacetime they can rely on their *machambas* to produce food and sustain their children and grandchildren. While men also work in the *machambas*, food is still considered to be women's gendered domain. Many women also expressed pride in being able to produce enough food crops to last until the next season of growth and not having to buy food at the market.

The experiences of 'eating well'/'not eating well' play an important role in the ex-combatants' aesthetic engagement with landscape. The meaning of 'eating well' is, of course, culturally and historically constituted, and within one country there can be various competing ideas.<sup>93</sup> For the ex-combatants, 'eating well' includes, importantly, regular mealtimes and non-hurried eating. Generally, in the Yaawo communities of northern Niassa, a proper meal consists of *wugadi* made from maize flour, and relish (an accompanying dish). The relish is often vegetarian, and, depending on the season and one's financial situation, the main ingredient can be leafy vegetables (such as leaves of pumpkins, bean, and sweet potatoes when in season) or legumes (for the most part common beans, but also peas and peanuts). Sometimes a meal includes dried fish brought from Lake Niassa<sup>94</sup> or insects such as fried grasshoppers. Occasionally people eat chicken and red meat (goat and, rarely, game). Rice is also grown and eaten but far less often than *wugadi*; as one male ex-combatant commented, rice does not fill one's stomach the same way as *wugadi*, and one does not sleep well eating it before going to bed. Sweet potatoes, cassava and pumpkins are not usually part of the main meal but eaten as snacks. For most DFs, the principal food that

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89 Janne Rantala befittingly refers to this as an 'alternative future' of a past that for the most part was never lived by anyone. Janne Rantala, 'Public Memory and Political Ancestors through Mozambican Rap Music', paper presented at the South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar No. 524, Centre for Humanities Research and Department of History, University of the Western Cape, April 2019.

90 On the connection between food and liberation, see also S.W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1996).

91 Also, the civil war (1977–92), which spread to Niassa in the early 1980s, disrupted people's lives and livelihoods in many ways. My interviewees spoke of the difficulties they faced cultivating crops due to attacks perpetrated by the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Renamo). Some of them had to change the location of their fields during this time, but no one spoke of abandoning farming altogether. Overall, while these were very challenging times, these difficulties do not compare, in the DFs' narratives, with their experiences of the liberation struggle.

92 See also Igreja *et al.*, who argue that agricultural work and the sense of purpose it gave helped to alleviate symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder among civil war survivors in Gorongosa, central Mozambique: V. Igreja, W. Kleijn, B. Dias-Lambranca, D.A. Hershey, C. Calero and A. Richters, 'Agricultural Cycle and the Prevalence of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Longitudinal Community Study in Postwar Mozambique', *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 22, 3 (2009), pp. 172–9.

93 T. Bildtgård, 'What it Means to "Eat Well" in France and Sweden', *Journal Food and Foodways*, 18, 4 (2010), pp. 209–32.

94 Known as Lake Malawi on the Malawian side and Lake Nyasa on the Tanzanian side. There is an ongoing dispute between the two countries over the inherited colonial borders; also, Mozambique and Malawi have sought to reaffirm their borders in order to avoid future conflict. See, for example, M.Y. Yoon, 'Colonialism and Border Disputes in Africa: The Case of the Malawi–Tanzania Dispute over Lake Malawi/Nyasa', *Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies*, 1, 1 (2014), pp. 75–89.

defines Niassa as *wugadi* made from maize eaten with beans. Generally, these meals were not spoken of as being unappetising or bad; rather, it is the food the DFs speak of missing when visiting or living away from Niassa.

Yet the foodscape of 'liberation' is associated with both positive and negative sensory and social aesthetics. Many ex-combatants, especially, bemoan their limited access to meat. Meat, while generally the desired relish, is not an affordable part of many people's diets in rural northern Niassa, where protein comes chiefly from beans. Even the numerous goats that roam the villages are regarded as highly monetarised goods rather than part of daily cuisine. Game meat, moreover, can no longer be hunted freely, owing to government control of the bush in the name of wildlife conservation, although, as a group of male ex-combatants in Mavago lamented, foreigners from rich countries are flown in and allowed to buy special hunting permits. Teresa Macotoa, speaking in Matchedje (the site of Frelimo's second congress in 1968), talked of the sadness she feels because, even on days of national remembrance, the ex-combatants are not allowed to hunt game, even though it was a crucial part of their nourishment during the war.<sup>95</sup> Eating this meat together on these special days would be, according to her, an important way to memorialise the liberation struggle, making it into a celebratory event. Importantly, these commemoration ceremonies involve both remembering and forgetting: Teresa's account suggests that food plays a significant role in also allowing one to forget the 'bad things' that one ate in the bush, evoking more positive sensory memories.

In the DFs' narratives, the sensory aesthetics of food are closely tied to their own farming activities. Good lands with rich soil are still relatively accessible, and even the DFs living in Lichinga have *machambas* in the countryside outside the city. As many of the DFs expressed, they hoped at independence to open big *machambas* to produce food to eat with their children. Yet not everyone has succeeded. Moreover, more than 40 years have already passed since the war ended, and the DFs are beginning to find that their bodies no longer have the strength to work in the *machambas*. Some women link the pain and loss of strength in their body to the hard work and poor diet of the war and argue that that work was finally catching up with their ageing bodies. As Fátima Aquili describes:

the work that we had during the war was very intense. It was a lot of work. Carrying big baggage on our heads, big baggage on our backs, in front our weapons. *Kuchu-kuchu-kuchu-kuchu* all days from one side to the other. The body becomes tired. With this age – it doesn't match with that of being able to cultivate a *machamba*. And, as we see, the money is little, not enough.<sup>96</sup>

Many DFs realise that they will soon be unable to rely on the strength of their own bodies to cultivate land and create their own well-being in food. They already rely on hiring casual labour during agricultural peak seasons, for instance when preparing the fields for the planting of maize with the start of the first rains. In the ex-combatants' narratives, while Niassa holds a lot of potential in terms of farming and food, their ideas about their own future trajectories are rather pessimistic and even imbued with melancholy. They still express belief in the Frelimo Party's ability to bring development to the country, but in their talk it is a future that no longer includes them. As Maria Ajaba argues, taking measure of her 'movements these days', she cannot expect that all her dreams will be fulfilled.

With the economic possibilities afforded by their veterans' pensions, most of the ex-combatants are better off than many of their neighbours in rural northern Niassa. For instance, even female ex-combatants are able to invest in building brick houses and expanding their fields to increase their agricultural production. With their pension

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with Teresa Macotoa, Sanga district, 7 June 2014.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Fátima Aquili, Lichinga, 4 December 2013.

money, they can pay people to work in their fields during peak season. Still, limited market opportunities make it difficult for people to make money out of this surplus produce.<sup>97</sup> Access to more money has not significantly changed their diets, and their staple food has stayed much the same, although new foods, such as spaghetti or macaroni, have made an entry into people's meals. Extra money is spent on additional ingredients to enhance the flavour of their food, such as cooking oil and Benny's powdered chicken stock. On occasion, they also buy meat. While most of the ex-combatants have veterans' pensions,<sup>98</sup> a few DFs still had not started to receive theirs at the time of the interviews. Many of them spoke of having to buy food during the seasonal break. There are others who have not been able to farm enough and thus regularly resort to buying food. They are the ones who lament not being able to feed their children.

In the ex-combatants' narratives, the idea of 'bad food' is closely associated with negative social aesthetics. Food has a distinctly social character; as Elias C. Mandala argues in his research on famine in Malawi, food is about people's social ties to one another.<sup>99</sup> In the ex-combatants' narratives, the equality of social relationships during the war, especially in connection to food, is a deeply nostalgic memory. This speaks of their experience of the growing inequality in Mozambican society. Over the years, there has also been a discernible stratification of food habits and tastes among the former comrades-in-arms who fought in the Niassa forests. This reflects the post-independence distribution of power within the 'new' society. The ex-combatant community that used to 'eat together' during wartime is these days strongly divided along spatial, educational and class lines. In Niassa, the nationalist elite in Maputo is criticised for eating well at the expense of the majority of their former colleagues, who have not been able to participate in this new consumerist modernity. While there is a supply of different food items at the village markets these days, people's access to them is limited. Finally, the ex-combatants' ideas of what it means to 'eat well' is influenced by the imagined diets of the nationalist elite, which have come to symbolise freedom and liberation.<sup>100</sup> Yet, for many ex-combatants in Niassa, food is a negative marker of social distinction,<sup>101</sup> displaying an unequal national foodscape structured by class, education, age and region.

## The Dense Fabric of Liberation

The ex-combatants' narratives point to how aesthetic values attached to food are shaped not only by sensory experiences and memories but also by changing political aesthetics. 'Liberation' as an aesthetic and political concept has acquired various meanings through changing aesthetic environments. This has not been a linear movement from socialism to neoliberalism; moreover, older cultural ideas of well-being continue to inform people's understandings of what it means to be free, liberated and at peace (the term in Ciyaawo encompassing all these ideas is '*wuteendeele*'). As their narratives show, many ex-combatants now experience freedom to cultivate in peace, freedom to eat in peace together with family, freedom to buy basic items from

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97 See also S. Handa and G. Mlay, 'Food Consumption Patterns, Seasonality and Market Access in Mozambique', *Development Southern Africa*, 23, 4 (2006), pp. 541–60.

98 The size of the veteran's pension depends on recognised military rank; for most women, it is at the minimum level. The men who have higher pensions have also been able to take better advantage of commercial opportunities.

99 Mandala, *The End of Chidyerano*, pp. 204–5.

100 See also Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*.

101 Sutton fittingly calls these 'badges of class distinction': Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts*, p. 3. See also P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2000 [1984]).

nearby markets; on this level, there is fulfilment. In addition to this, freedom is often associated with the remembered wartime discourse of social equality. In the ex-combatants' memories, they ate well during the first years of independence partly because they ate together. The experiences of 'eating together' and sharing the little food they had during the war are also emphasised. In this wistful remembering of wartime social relationships, the gendered hierarchical relations that also constituted military life are glossed over. Yet, listening closely, one can also hear the more quietly spoken stories of how the male military command ate separately and sometimes had access to better food. But this is not the 'eating together' that is usually remembered in the ex-combatants' oral history accounts. In the ex-combatants' narratives, wartime 'eating together' becomes merged with almost equally idealised childhood memories of extended families eating together from the same pot, sharing the same food and ensuring that no one goes hungry. This in turn is juxtaposed with the experience of the negative social aesthetics of today, with everyone eating separately, each in their own corner.

Exploring the intimate relation between liberation and violence is crucial to better understanding the lived histories of the Mozambican liberation struggle. Through an analysis of the sensory aesthetics of food, we have in this article entered into the deep texture of history. Doing so, we have also moved beyond the linear temporality of national histories. In sensory experiences and memories of food, different times intersect and intertwine. The ex-combatants' narratives show how the lived history of 'liberation' is a continuous negotiation over the senses and meanings of past and present experiences (and even future anticipations) of violence. The ex-combatants whom I interviewed still speak of how the bad things that they ate during the war are affecting their bodies in peacetime. For the female ex-combatants, 'eating well' also means having one's own *machamba* and control over food and thus not having to rely on a husband. This is not a new meaning introduced by any idea of 'women's liberation' (socialist or NGO talk); rather, it shows how these elderly women's gendered relation to food is still strongly framed through matrilineal history and practice. Among the DFs and male ex-combatants in Niassa, there is a bodily anticipation of another phase of development – better infrastructure, and thus better access to markets, and the mechanisation of cultivation – to further transform their sensory relationship with landscape. The ex-combatants' narratives show that, while food again animates one's body, liberation has, for many, a slightly bitter aftertaste. The words of a male ex-combatant in Maputo in 2011 are very telling of the spatial and class differences and the sensory shaping of the memory of the liberation struggle.<sup>102</sup> As this ex-combatant remembers, 'it was a sweet hunger' that we suffered during the war, as 'we knew that we would overcome the hunger by fighting'. Meanwhile, my interviews with ex-combatants in Niassa suggest that the corporeal memories of food-related violence persist in ways that make a narrative of sweetness impossible.

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102 Meneses, 'Para ampliar as epistemologias do Sul'.

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JONNA KATTO

*African Languages and Cultures, Ghent University, Blandijnberg 2, B-9000 Gent, Belgium. E-mail: [jonna.katto@ugent.be](mailto:jonna.katto@ugent.be); African Studies, Department of Cultures, University of Helsinki, Finland. E-mail: [jonna.katto@helsinki.fi](mailto:jonna.katto@helsinki.fi)*

