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RUMINATIONS ON RENOVATION IN BEIRA (MOZAMBIQUE)

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IN BEIRA (MOZAMBIQUE)

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Ruminations on Renovation in Beira (Mozambique)

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Content

Abstract	2
Introduction	3
On ruination	4
On Beira	6
On renovation	8
(Landscapes of) leisure	10
A. The Ferroviário swimming pool	10
B. The Novocine movie theatre	11
C. The grande hotel	13
D. The riviera café	15
On reflection, an aerial viewpoint	17
References	18

Abstract

This paper explores specific sites of leisure-swimming pools, movie theatres, hotels, and cafés that were built at the height of colonial tourist aspirations in Beira, Mozambique (1950s-1970s) and that were formally reserved for colonial elites, specifically in this case, Portuguese citizens, British Rhodesian sugar plantation managers who were stationed in Beira at the time, and visiting (white) tourists, and their families. What do these infrastructures tell us about colonial urban planning, including sites of leisure and their histories of racialized restrictions? What can they say about tourism in a (Portuguese) colonial city that was once the centre of the East African corridor and an access point to the ocean for neighbouring (British) Malawi and Rhodesia? That these same swimming pools, theatres, hotels, and cafés are very much in use today by a very different set of inhabitants says something about this „reluctant city“ (Forjaz 2007, 2) in the making. Through my ethnographic observations and impressions during two visits to the city in April 2009 and February 2016 I will attempt to think productively with „ruins of empire“ (Stoler 2008) in order to chart a set of ruminations on acts of renovation in present day Beira. These ruminations are intended to show a complex city in its daily habitus by way of relationships (both of materiality and affect) between people and certain build environments. My focus suggests that these particular sites (and by way of their features such as colours, tiles, fixtures) afford a window onto Beira’s condition of postcoloniality (as well, the simultaneity of its conditions of colonialism, socialism and war) through the creative ability of its African inhabitants to take specific urban infrastructures left behind by its Portuguese colonial possessors in the wake of Mozambique’s rapid decolonization in 1975, and adapt them to their own strategic and innovative purposes.

Keywords: *Mozambique, Beira, infrastructure, ruination, renovation, Lusophone decolonization*

Introduction

A city isn't a place. It is the frame of a life. A frame in search of a portrait, that's what I see when I revisit my place of birth [Beira]... What I see again is a time, what I hear is the speech of that time. A dialect called memory, in a nation called childhood. (Couto 2015, 73).

There is an image I hold in my mind of a young girl, perhaps around 12 years old, wearing a 1970's style bathing suit, blue in color with a yellow trim and modest in its design, and which includes a matching yellow cap, poised to dive into an Olympic size swimming pool, one that appears to have been built in the 70s and in the style of her bathing costume. The pool is dilapidated in its appearance but one that is well maintained, with sparkling blue water luring her (and me) to dive in. It is the year 2009, and the place is Beira, Mozambique, and I am a first time visitor to this unfamiliar city.¹ Consider this image in its full perspective, the same length as the city's pool, one of a handful built in Portuguese Mozambique: what does it tell us about colonial urban planning, including sites of leisure and their histories of racialized restrictions? What role do swimming pools inhabit today in postcolonial African cities such as Beira? What does this positionality tell us about tourism in a (Portuguese) colonial city that was once the center of the East African corridor and which was a sea access point for neighboring (British) Malawi and Rhodesia? What does it reveal about living amidst ruination today for young Mozambican girls like the one I encountered—how much does she “live it without thinking it?”, to quote South African writer and theorist, Njabulo Ndebele.² As well, how much do these urban sites detail particular forms of renovation that take place on a daily basis to occupy such leisured spaces that in the past were formally reserved for white colonial elites—specifically in this case, Portuguese citizens, British Rhodesian sugar plantation managers who were stationed in Beira at the time, and visiting (white) tourists, and their families? Finally, taking up Mozambican writer Mia Couto's lyrical evocations on Beira, the city of his childhood—his prose opening each narrative section—, I want to ask what potential insider stories (where past, present, and future congeal) does this image of the young Mozambican girl hold?

In the following paper, I chart a set of ruminations, defined here as forms of musings or contemplations, by looking at four sites of leisure (and mobility) in present day Beira precisely because they were built at the height of its tourism aspirations (1950s-1970s). On the one hand they serve as reminders of that colonial past but on the other hand they are actively re-positioned in a largely non-touristic postcolonial African “reluctant” city of today, a point made by Mozambican architect José Forjaz (2007, 2). These four sites are the Ferroviário swimming

1 I first conducted fieldwork in Beira, Mozambique during April 2009 with follow-up interviews with two Beira architects based in Maputo in July 2010, José Forjaz and António Sopa. I then returned to Beira in February 2016 for a second stint of fieldwork at these same sites. I would like to thank Richard Rottenburg, Andrea Behrends, and their colleagues and students at the Seminar für Ethnologie, the LOST Colloquium at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg in April-June 2016 for their invaluable insights on revising this working paper. I would also like to thank Laura Matt for her precise edits on the final version.

2 Njabulo Ndebele, keynote speech, “To Be Or Not To Be, No Longer at Ease”, 40th Annual Conference of the African Literature Association conference, “Texts, modes and Repertoires of Living in and Beyond the Shadows of Apartheid”, Wits University, Johannesburg, April 9-13, 2014.

pool mentioned above, the Novocine movie theatre, the Grande Hotel, and lastly, the Riviera café. My analysis will suggest that these particular sites afford a window onto Beira's condition of postcoloniality (and the simultaneity of its conditions of colonialism, socialism and war) through the creative ability of its African inhabitants to take specific urban infrastructures left behind by its Portuguese colonial possessors in the wake of Mozambique's rapid decolonization in 1975, and adapt them to their own strategic and innovative purposes. I choose to look at these places not as sites of (postcolonial) loss but rather focus on "what [actively] remains" (Eng and Kazanjian 2002, 5) in the here and now.³ It was the image of the poised young girl on the diving board that prompted me to ponder how individuals inhabit architectural spaces leftover from the past; how does it make them imagine themselves and their place in larger social worldings, including their affective ties to past, present and future? This paper is also an attempt to take up what Ann Stoler has so poignantly suggested, that is, to "think with ruins of empire" (2008, 196) and ruination less as a form of melancholia onto a romanticized colonial past but rather as a critical lens—attuned to the "visible and visceral" (Stoler 2008, 196)—or as I consider here a productive form of rumination onto distinct forms of renovation linked very much to the politics of the (African) present.

On ruination

Beira, which proclaimed itself 'the city of the future' in the end, appeared not to want to be a city (Couto 2015, 74).

The idea of thinking with ruins is not necessarily a new one; rather I am suggesting that a proliferation of old and new ways (Simmel 1965; Benjamin 1977; Rosaldo 1989; Stewart 1997; Dirks 1998; Boym, 2001; Buck-Morss 2002) of approaching ruination (so thinking *with* but also *in* and *about* ruins) and applying this to understudied locations and sites (here ones of privilege or leisure specifically) potentially offers much by way of analysis.⁴ For Benjamin, ruins are a "meditation on ambivalence" (1977, 177-178) while Boym points out that ruin literally means collapse, and that they "give us a shock of vanishing materiality" (2008, 1). Stoler's distinctly anthropological approach to studying ruins is also helpful. She writes: "ruination weaves its way back through racialized hierarchies and the concerted aphasia on which privileges depend" (2008, 209). We must "emphasize less the artifacts of empire as dead matter or remnants of a defunct regime [rather] we should attend to their reappropriations and strategic and active positioning[s]" (2008, 196) wherein individuals living amongst ruination today are viewed as "adept bricoleurs" (Stoler 2008, 194-203). As anthropologists we have the potential to open up

3 Part of why I am interested in what "remains" in this chapter and in my larger book project is a response or counter move to the larger discourse that the Portuguese purposely destroyed technology (rumors of infrastructural sabotage) on the way out of their colonies so that there would not be any leftovers for their would be inheritors. As an example, on the topic of rumors of cement being poured down toilets by outgoing Portuguese in Mozambique in the wake of decolonization, see Sean Christie, "The Great Unblocking of Beira," <http://mg.co.za/article/2010-03-19-the-great-unblocking-of-beira/> accessed April 16, 2016.

4 I am less invested in labelling or questioning whether or not these places in Beira function as sites of ruination, rather I work through ideas of ruination to develop an analytic of renovation.

“wider social topographies” and begin the hard work of carving out the “material and social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things” (Stoler 2008, 194-195). Stoler rightly points out that these “effects reside in the corroded hollows of landscapes, in the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes, and in the microecologies of matter and mind” (2008, 194).

Thinking with ruins evokes the multiple temporalities that people live in on a daily basis. Isabel Hofmeyr has reminded us that playing with ruins is a rather gleeful project (2009); we must understand that social time is not linear, rather it accumulates for all of us at different moments and in different dimensions (Baucom 2005; Latour 2005). Further, she suggests that the idea or condition of postcoloniality is rather a restrictive one, since we must be mindful of the fact that we are always living in a period of imperialism alongside additional temporalities wherein proliferations of pasts are dipped into to think about multiple presents and futures, both real and imagined (Hofmeyr 2009). João de Piña-Cabral (2002) makes a similar (and equally intriguing) argument in the context of Mozambique, choosing the contemplative space of a residential park located in downtown Maputo to collect three contemporary stories of the park’s patron and namesake, Dona Berta. Her fascinating (re)figurations (simultaneously colonial and postcolonial in turn), serve as an apt reminder of both Mozambique’s rich colonial history of urban planning, wherein this “neatly kept and punctilious garden was occupied by mostly black nannies and white babies”, and its residence today by largely poor blacks in a “relatively unkempt and ageing garden” (Piña-Cabral 2002, 86). As Piña-Cabral points out, these historical conditions of possibility are “processually” related to each other (2002, 88). Thus, leisured sites such as Dona Berta’s park operate as potential spaces where not only multiple temporalities but also multiple stories congeal and are rooted in a key analytic of experience. Echoing Hofmeyr, Piña-Cabral writes: “But in fact, social time is seldom linear. The past and present are constantly being re-mixed into conglomerates of experience, where each component element becomes largely indissociable from the others. The past and the present constantly visit each other in experience” (2002, 87). This point is also taken up in the recent work of Karl Schlögel who provocatively suggests that history should be more carefully read through its particular geographies, its physical spaces and places (2016). For the case of Mozambique then, its inhabitants live in a built environment and experience social time in ways that are simultaneously colonial (1498-1975), post-independent (since 1975), socialist (1977–1989) and lest we forget its more recent past, civil war torn (1977-1992), each to varying degrees.

Elsewhere I have argued for the productive force of contemplating colonial nostalgia and ruins by tourist industries and tourists alike in the context of a Unesco world heritage site on Ilha de Mozambique (Gupta 2012). Here I take a slightly different tack by looking at processes of renovation in relation to specific urban (and leisured) infrastructures in present-day post-colonial Beira. Taking a cue then from Piña-Cabral’s Mozambican ethnographic example cited above, I look more closely at formerly colonial urban infrastructures such as swimming pools, cinemas, hotels and cafes that were specifically built during a tourism boom.⁵ That they were left largely in a state of disrepair following independence (1975) and re-inhabited by different historical actors through periods of independence, socialism, and civil war –their resilience in other words— is what engages me in this paper. I also weave into my narrative comments and observations made by two former Beira based architects, José Forjaz and António Sopa,

5 Emma Hall describes Beira as a “city made very much for another people, a city which still carries this memory of the vacant owners.” “Once a Colonial Hotel, Now an Inhabited Ruin”(April 10, 2014) www.failedarchitecture.com/once-a-colonial-hotel-now-an-inhabited-ruin/ accessed March 19, 2016.

whom I interviewed in Maputo in 2010. That decolonization, as a concomitant to independence, included the rapid outgoing migration of a large portion of its dispossessed Portuguese colonial inhabitants is a historical and material process I have detailed for the city of Lourenço Marques (Gupta 2014). Here I am interested in looking at Beira, a very different place from present day Maputo, and how certain spaces function today as active sites and forms of play or leisure through processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, or as anthropologist Danny Hoffman aptly describes it for the case of Sierra Leone, of “decoding and recoding” (2005, 57).

On Beira

I speak of my Beira, the little city where I was born, located in the centre of Mozambique, on the left bank of the River Pungué. Beira is a place that was stolen from the waters of an estuary lined with mud and mangroves. A liquid city, on a ground that flows. So much so that when speaking of it, I call it my native water (Couto 2015, 73).

Beira, a city whose Portuguese name means “edge” literally was historically until the 1890s a minor colonial port that always lived in the pale shadow of its rival capital city of Lourenço Marques [present day Maputo].⁶ Historian Andrew MacDonald describes it as “a hot and unhealthy single street outpost on the Mozambican coast, largely cut off from the international communications and a minor pawn in imperial rivalries” (2012, 24).⁷ In 1891, land concessions were given to the *Companhia de Moçambique*, a royal trading company (financed largely by German, British and South African money) that took over the administration of the provinces of Manica and Sofala, the latter including Beira, a place that was slow to qualify as a city, a status granted only in 1907 (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 36). However, from 1917 onward the city “underwent a modernization [and tourism] drive” (MacDonald 2012, 26) as the Portuguese saw an opportunity to attract discerning white settlers from the area to its undeveloped coastline. It was still a city of wooden houses during the 1920s, a historical detail mentioned by architect António Sopa whom I met at a café in downtown Maputo in July 2010. By the 1930s, Beira’s first hotels were beginning to be constructed, its first named the Lisboa (1925) followed by the Savoy (1930) and Hotel Central (1955).⁸ Colonial officials soon realized Beira’s potential and invested in building a port and railway in order to develop it into a “tourist dream city” that aspired to “lure visitors from neighboring British Malawi and Rhodesia from the 1950s onward” (MacDonald 2012, 25-26). Faced with a dearth of modern buildings to house, feed, and entertain these consumers, many Portuguese architects saw the potential of the colonies as sites for experimentation (Stoler and Cooper 1997), a “colonial lab” of sorts (Tostões 2013, 66) and took up commissions to design the new downtown Beira, a historical detail mentioned to

6 Couto (2015, 74) also points out that Beira, the city of his childhood, always lived in the shadow of Lourenço Marques. The distance between Beira and Maputo is approximately 450 miles or 720 kilometers.

7 Mia Couto notes in his short story, “Waters of my Beginning” (2015, 73-74), that Beira was named after an obscure Portuguese nobleman, the Prince of Beira.

8 See Felipe Branquinho’s mesmerizing 9:50 min film consisting of old photograph stills of Beira’s construction and which includes several photographs of its hotels, available on YouTube, uploaded June 20, 2007.

me by both Forjaz and Sopa.⁹ By 1942, the Portuguese crown had formally taken over Beira's administration from Company rule; a new railway system was completed in 1966 in order to facilitate easy transportation between Portuguese Africa and British East Africa, and which signaled the arrival of a large number of Rhodesians in Beira to work as managers for the British owned *Fábrica de Açúcar*, which also employed a large number of Portuguese businessmen at a lower rank.¹⁰

Beira's port was ideally located at the edge of the Indian Ocean for sending large cargo shipments to Europe. Even as it was a marginalized city from the rest of Mozambique, Beira was always regionally significant according to Forjaz, a pivot point that functioned to connect different countries of the (East) Africa corridor (Malawi, Rhodesia, Zambia, and Zaire to a limited extent). It was also a city with enduring structural problems tied to its tropical climate, topography, and drainage system, according to Forjaz (2010). This was the era (1950s-1970s) when Beira's urban infrastructure – not only its railway station and airport, but also its swimming pools, cinemas, hotels, and cafes were constructed. Beira, like other colonial cities during this time frame, became a site to fulfill the modernist aspirations of the Art Deco movement, streamlined technology and industrial motifs inserted into crevices and corners as a sign of Beira's coming into being, its worldliness.¹¹ It was a tourist industry invested in catering to travelling businessmen from Portugal as well as other Portuguese colonies, British manufacturers based in Beira and their visiting families, and wealthy British, South African and Rhodesian tourists, very often arriving via Union Castle cruise liner ships (Gupta 2015). However, that Beira's tourist aspirations were not fully realized, as its wealthy patrons never arrived in the numbers planned for, makes it even more interesting to study the city today, focusing on what remains in the aftermath of this tourism bubble. Instead it was a more modest colonial middle class tourist phenomenon that took place between the 1950s and 1970s, visiting families attracted to a range of second tier hotels located in and around Beira's coastal shoreline. An added result of this miscalculation was the foreclosure of many of its high end tourist resorts, including the Grande Hotel, even prior to independence in 1975, a point I will take up in a later section. The end of colonialism led to the exodus of the majority of its white Portuguese population in the aftermath of its rapid decolonization,¹² and the closing or abandonment of

9 Both António Sopa and José Forjaz mentioned this point to me. Forjaz interview, July 28, 2010 and Sopa interview, July 29, 2010.

10 A detail mentioned to me by Samuel Azevedo, a Railway manager at the *Portos e Caminhos de Ferro de Moçambique* which was designed in 1966 by the same architect Francisco Castro who built the *Grande Hotel*. I interviewed Samuel (70 years old) on my first visit to Beira on April 23, 2009. He was insightful on a variety of topics related to the history of Beira as he had lived in the city for more than forty years. He often repeated the comment that the Portuguese in Beira were the most racist towards blacks because they were living in a city that had a large English population who managed the sugar factory. According to him, the Portuguese in Beira were in competition with them, always vying for British approval of themselves as (just as) good colonizers, a discourse that I have written about elsewhere (Gupta 2007, 2009). It was Samuel who mentioned that it was these same Portuguese businessmen who returned to Beira after the war and would hang out in the Riviera Café and reminisce about the old days.

11 Art Deco was an international design movement in the 1920s –1940s (and endured longer in the colonies), its inspiration was technological modernity, commerce and speed, and it drew on a variety of themes: archaeology, the machine age, aviation, the skyscraper and employed streamlined images, repetition, symmetry, geometry, and employed lacquer, inlaid wood, aluminum, and stainless steel in its architectural detailing. www.visual-arts-cork.com/history-of-art/art-deco.htm accessed April 15, 2016.

12 According to a state mandate, Portuguese colonial citizens were given an opportunity of several months to pack up their things and leave Lourenço Marques by June 1975, the moment of political transition to a post-independence Mozambican government. After that, they were left on their own and not granted any more

many of these iconic buildings that had defined Beira's tourism landscape. The ensuing civil war only made economic conditions worsen. According to António Sopa, during the war Beira's cement and rubber industries were single handedly destroyed and never fully recovered. It was a "difficult city to live in", he adds. Similar to novelist Mia Couto, Sopa left his childhood home for Lourenço Marques during this difficult period in Mozambique's history; he now considers Beira to be a "cidade morto"[dead city], a point I am sympathetic to but also want to counter through my ruminations on renovation. Today Beira is Mozambique's second largest city after Maputo, and with a population estimated close to 600,000 persons, it is quietly thriving.

On renovation

In spite of everything, a map puts us at ease: there is the city [Beira], the second biggest in Mozambique. That's where concrete, iron, asphalt and the usual vestments of an urban space, were instated (Couto 2015, 73).

Following Achille Mbembe (2001), we must write against an African postcolonial legacy that is one of duress as we take into account that every African city is changing, rapidly and dramatically. As well I take up his recent point that Africa has been disfigured by the dichotomy between reason and emotion or affect and that we need to address the latter.¹³ There is much work to be done *on* and *in* African cities precisely because (and in the face of) these ethnographic possibilities. Nor can we be paralyzed by or restricted to a stereotyped image of Africa even as the reality is that many ordinary people live under extreme circumstances on a daily basis. Anthropologist William Bissell writes:

We must shift to engage African cities as they actually exist, embracing and drawing upon those elements that actually make city life worth living: the improvisational, the unknown capacity to surprise, the other unpredictable arts of the everyday (2011, 334).

A city's problems should be viewed less strictly as such—as Bissell does for Stone Town, Zanzibar—but rather as inherent to its creative and aesthetic features, as sources of strength, resourcefulness, and individual and collective ingenuity (Bissell 2011). And lest we forget, it is people who drive these forces of creativity in cities all over the world, individuals who carry with them "urban imaginaries", following Andreas Huyssen (2008, 3), including the girl at the pool who endearingly captured my attention. Meanwhile, Huyssen's concept provides a useful way of understanding Beira, and its multiple residents who occupy or utilize its colonial era buildings on a daily basis. Here I am interested in studying the "leisured spaces" (Urry 1990) that make up this port city and give it a sense of place today—its swimming pools, movie

help from the (outgoing) Portuguese. An estimated 450,000 colonialists left during this time by ship, plane and overland (Gupta 2014), assisted by Portuguese troops stationed there to assist with the transfer of power.

13 Achille Mbembe, introductory comments at the WISER launch of the first African edition of his book, *On the Postcolony* (Wits University Press, 2015), Johannesburg, South Africa, Wiser June 11, 2015.

theatres, hotels, and cafés. Often these sites, and particularly in African cities, are not studied precisely enough because they function less as places of bare life (and work), but rather of play and pleasure and publics. They can also be understood as marked by experiences of transit (both real and imagined) and as embodying aesthetics and the sensorial “[infra]structures of feeling” following Larkin (2013, 333). I have purposely chosen sites that were built in Beira during the tapered end of this period of heightened activity (both in terms of construction and tourism) and with a particular white colonial public in mind. That these leisure- and consumer spaces remain, but in a city whose tourism drive has been lost in the wake of decolonization, socialism, and war, and are actively “domesticated” for use (Prestholdt 2007) is what I find compelling, worthy of study. Beira is a city where what is available, or what has endured (its “corners, window gratings, and banisters” according to Italo Calvino quoted in Bissell 2011, 7) is taken up for purposeful and creative use by Beira’s African residents on a daily basis. These features – or what I focus on here: tiles, colours, and fixtures¹⁴ – in turn tell us something about this city’s enduring sense of self, its city-ness today.

I have chosen the idea of renovation to think through what is happening at these deeply historical leisured sites in rapidly expanding African cities, Beira as well as many others. If we take the idea of renovation at its basic level of definition, we can see that it conveys two different practices and sensibilities: one is to “restore to an earlier condition, through repair or remodeling”; the second is “to impart new vigor, to revive”.¹⁵ I want to suggest that the dual meanings of renovation are very much being put to use in Beira today, its urban infrastructures layered sites of ruination, repair and revival, all going on at the same time. And tied to this material layering is a methodology that includes multiple visits (as layers) to the same place at different historical moments. My two visits to Beira, in 2009 and 2016 respectively, focus on pools, movie theatres, hotels, and cafes as integral to the city as a living, working, and breathing space. As well, these sites are consistently being renovated (revived and restored both) over time in interesting and unpredictable ways, details that my ethnographic ruminations will showcase. I focus on different forms of renovation taking place seven years apart, both those that are more hopeful and those that are less so, more despondent perhaps, but directly tied to the conditions of possibility of certain historical moments.

Renovation then becomes the theory and method for approaching Beira’s postcolonial urban landscape, or as Forjaz described it to me, “the possibility of a city from inside the city” (Forjaz, 2010). I look to those residents who sensorially engage with and embody it in their daily habitus. If, following Akbar Abbas who, at a recent Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism conference (www.jwtc.org.za/ accessed August 2, 2016), on the future(s) of nature, provoked the audience to think about material objects as a “form of landscape” (Abbas 2012), then why not do so with swimming pools, movie houses, hotels, and café’s? Following Anna Tsing, can we think of landscapes less as “backdrops for historical action”, but rather as “themselves active” (2015, 152)? In the following sections, I introduce each site and its distinct forms of renovation amidst ruination, based on my two ethnographic visits to Beira, in 2009 and 2016. Each place also acts as a window onto certain aspects of Beira’s history and its layered contemporary features, old and new and past, present and future sitting aside one another.

14 In a parallel manner and echoing my own argument, Emma Hall points out that these examples of high modernism lining all of Mozambique’s major cities still retain “almost all of their original features, from furniture, fittings and switches”. www.failedarchitecture.com/once-a-colonial-hotel-now-an-inhabited-ruin/ accessed March 24, 2016.

15 www.dictionary.com/browse/renovation accessed April 13, 2016.

(Landscapes of) leisure

Beira always had difficulty organizing its space in the colonial manner [...] it was difficult to expel Africa from the place. The settlers would like to have pushed the Africans far away. But the blacks invariably remained there, on the other side of the street (Couto 2015, 77).

A. The Ferroviário swimming pool

Swimming pools evoke fond memories of idyllic days during my childhood in the 1970s, of hot American summers spent lazing around, doing laps, and eating homemade sandwiches of peanut butter and jelly. This all came back to me on my first visit to Beira in April 2009. It is my first day there; I am walking its streets, the pavement hot and dusty when I see its Municipal pool from a distance. I immediately feel drawn to it for I can see patches of blue in the gaps of the wooden boards of the makeshift fence that surrounds it. I can also see its imposing and weathered diving boards from across the crowded street. Upon entering its grounds, I find a fully functioning Olympic size swimming pool, the aforementioned girl poised to dive in. Lessons are taking place – the coach blows his whistle at a young boy not listening to his instructions. I see renovation at work in both senses of repair and revive – the old wire hanging baskets, rusted but still very much in use, swinging as they hold the personalized items (flip flops, towels, goggles) of the swimmers nearby. I see a brand new set of blue Styrofoam kickboards at the pool's edge. I walk through the 1970s brown and green tiled female changing area and find two teenage girls giggling as they undress and change into their swimsuits. I jump in, taking care of the old plastic lane dividers still in use, and go for a leisured swim.

It is only on my second visit to Beira, in February 2016 that I start to ask more questions about this leisured space. I am hot from my walk, and ask the person on duty if I can enter the pool – it is crowded, with a group swimming lesson underway. I am told to come back on the weekend during the allotted time when it is open (and the cost is free) to the public. I learn from the two male lifeguards on duty that the Ferroviário swimming pool was named after the adjoining Ferroviário social club that had opened its Art Deco inlaid wooden doors in 1924 to its elite Portuguese members. The two of them debate the pool's opening date, one telling me that it was during the late 1960's, the other lifeguard saying that it was inaugurated in 1974. He seems more certain of himself. That would have been on the eve of decolonization. I wonder what happened in the interim between then and now – if its doors had remained open during Mozambique's socialist period, but then closed amidst the civil war years. I learn that Beira's first Olympic size pool was not in fact its Municipal pool, but rather the one built in 1954 on the grounds of the Grande Hotel, and that was available to its guests as well as to all white Portuguese citizens and their families living in Beira.¹⁶ Even after the hotel was shut down prematurely in 1963, its pool remained open to Beira's colonial residents. I also visit Piscina Goro, a 1960s colonial era Olympic size swimming pool that is located across the city closer to

16 www.messynessychic.com/2013/05/22/anywhere-but-here-the-grande-hotel-of-mozambique/ accessed April 16, 2016.

the beach, and that is in pristine condition; I see a *fechado* [closed] sign across the front gate. I talk to the caretaker on the premises; he tells me that it is no longer open (and hasn't been for the last five months) to the public because they have recently run out of their stock of cleaning fluids; nor is there a plan to get additional supplies in the near future. I save my last day in Beira for a visit to Clube Náutico, a swimming pool complex that was built in the late 1950s located outside its city limits and directly on the beach; it also has a restaurant next door.¹⁷ I see that the swimming pool is in prime condition despite it being empty. Black and white photo displays of carefree smiling white Portuguese social groups in 1950s style swimming outfits line the walls of the restaurant; its prime viewing seats fill up rapidly with locals and tourists as the sun slides over the horizon.

Returning my tourist gaze onto the Ferroviário swimming pool, I am pleased to see that in postcolonial Beira, swimming pools are no longer “contested waters” (Wiltse 2007), segregated spaces where divisions between black and white are strictly adhered to. Instead society has changed alongside politics, even as its colonial era pools are still very much in use by a different group of participants. I see green and brown colored tiles and rusted hanging wire baskets amidst a group of young girls and boys, jumping, laughing, and shrieking and most easily swimming.

B. The Novocine movie theatre

One cannot miss the Novocine movie theatre as one walks the city streets of Beira, for it is centrally located on Rua António Enes. Its cement grey colored placard with yellow (and blue side) lettering announcing its name is enormous; a smaller set of black letters on a white board advertises the latest feature film on show. It is April 2009. I walk up the front steps of the Art Deco façade and see that *Transporter 3* (2008), a French action film starring Jason Statham, is playing, with daily timings of 15, 18, and 21 pm. I am between movie showings. I step inside the near empty marble lobby and once again see renovation hard at work, remnants of an earlier era being put to productive use; its gilded box office and old popcorn maker are both fully operational. I peek inside the theatre and see row upon row of red cherry leather seats. I am reminded of the materiality of movie halls that Brian Larkin writes about for Nigeria, and the fact that they operate as “translocal spaces, sites of anonymity that open up the world in some sense” (Larkin 2002, 324). I see cinema’s “enchantment” (Larkin 2002, 328) hard at work in this moment.

The manager, a middle aged woman whose name I forget to ask at the time, comes forward and asks me if she can help me with something. She takes me on a quick tour, saying that the cinema house was one of several in Beira built in the era of the 1950s, and that in its heyday it was packed full every night. I easily imagine a crowd of Portuguese families, all dressed up, eating popcorn and watching the latest feature film brought over from the United States and with Portuguese subtitles. She tells me that post-independence, there is no longer a culture of cinema. She seems melancholic about this last point. They even removed several rows of the red leather seats, she quietly adds. They were never near full capacity on a given night and thus no longer needed. She does not allow me take any photographs inside. I leave quietly with the intention to come back to watch *Transporter 3* another evening.

17 www.clubenauticobeira.com/ accessed April 22, 2016.

I return to the Novocine movie theatre in February 2016 and see the same oversized placard of yellow (with blue side) letters, only it looks more weathered this time around, its edges of peeling blue paint visible. Neither a film title nor show timings are on display. Instead, I see the words *Auditório Municipal* in small lettering located directly underneath the name of the cinema hall. I talk to Apingar, the caretaker on duty. He tells me that in fact, as a functioning movie theatre, it was shut down in the year 2010. Its Portuguese owners returned to Portugal and it was taken over by the Beira city Municipality which re-opened it soon thereafter as a cultural center open to all sorts of activities. It has a different feel now, seven years later, more open to the city and its inhabitants perhaps. I see the same signs of its now faded glory, its geometrically designed wooden ticket counter still intact but no longer in use. I gaze at a taped printed notice for karate lessons taking place twice a week inside the lobby. On my way out, Apingar excitedly informs me that the Novocine will soon be closed once again for about a year while it undergoes a full renovation. It will be restored to its original purpose as a movie theatre once again, with plans for a fancy café to be built next door. I leave, hopeful that people will return to the practice of going to the movies not only here in Beira but more generally, and that the Novocine will become a thriving social space once again, only for a different set of Beira residents this time.

As I continue to wander the streets of Beira, I seek out its other colonial era cinema halls. My hotel, appropriately named VIP Inn Beira is located on the same street *Luís Inácio Rua* as the white with blue trim Olympia cinema hall that was built in 1955, a date confirmed in an old postcard image included in Felipe Branquinho's beautiful short film on Beira.¹⁸ The Olympia is now a Pentecostal church. I peek inside and see that the old movie seats have been removed; instead I see rows of perfectly lined alternating blue and white plastic chairs with fresh flowers displayed on a table in the front, a makeshift podium nearby. I return at 6 pm for evening mass; it is half full as the priest delivers his sermon. The café next door with its pine green and white block print flooring—more than likely it had once been attached to the lobby of the theatre but is now closed off—is full of people, eating, drinking and talking. I walk past the imposing *Ciné Nacional*, with its oval shaped dome standing out on *Avenida Poder Popular*. Its Art Deco features are intact even as it appears permanently shut; I peek inside the gilded edge glass doors into a dimly lit foyer where I see two pool tables side by side carefully covered with separate cloths. I learn that at one point, there used to be an Indian curry restaurant called *Restaurante Nacional* housed inside; it was still in operation when Lonely Planet travel writer Mary Fitzpatrick visited Beira in 2007.¹⁹

If we think about the naming of these three movie houses—Novocine, Olympia, and Nacional—and imagine them as “encoding imperial splendor into the spectacle promised by the experience of cinema” following Larkin (2002, 326) then we might have a glimpse of the function these cinema halls had during Portuguese colonial times. We can also invoke their names once again in the here and now, that is, at a much later historical moment, to consider that Beira's movie theatres have experienced colonialism, socialism and war in the interim. Did its residents seek solace in ‘going to the movies’ during times of war? Perhaps then we might be more mindful of their layers of renovation amidst ruination that have taken place during this

18 See Felipe Branquinho's mesmerizing 9:50 min film consisting of old photograph stills of Beira's construction, available on YouTube, uploaded June 20, 2007: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iae6_nKi4C8/ accessed on April 20, 2016.

19 Mary Fitzpatrick. *Lonely Planet Guidebook: Mozambique*. 2nd edition (London: Lonely Planet Publications, 2007).

60 odd year period – that is their resilience – and that are in active use by a diverse group of residents, cinema lovers as well as karate players and church goers.

C. The grande hotel

The first time I see the Grande Hotel in 2009, I stand in awe for it is architecturally imposing; I immediately sense its grandeur back in the day, its name evoking exactly that sense of splendor it once inhabited. It is a fitting example of one of the forgotten masterpieces of African modernism that Oliver Wainwright writes about.²⁰ However, the many historic photographs of the hotel I have viewed online have not prepared me for the bare bones open-air structure that is in front of me.²¹ I walk inside and look at what once was the foyer with its sweeping balustrades on each side.²² A mix of clothing – children’s underwear, men’s pants, and faded *capulanas* [Mozambican sarong] are drying on temporary lines strung between structural posts. I am surrounded by a refugee squatter’s camp of men, women and children, eating, drinking, and sleeping inside the cavity of what was once a luxury hotel that maintained 116 rooms and where attention to detail included a personal operator for each elevator.²³ It has a lively atmosphere despite the dire circumstances; one man is using a balcony to dry fish, another has a makeshift tuck shop of basic produce items – tomatoes and a few onions; some of which are innovatively grown in the cracks of the hotel roof (Hall 2014). Whole families have claimed stairwells for homes as well as built temporary shelters consisting of concrete blocks, woven reed, and timber.²⁴ Children are laughing and playing in the background and at the edges of the Olympic size swimming pool, which has now been turned into a bathing facility. Many of the residents I see today arrived in the wake of Mozambique’s civil war (from 1981 onward) and have stayed on, with nowhere else to go.²⁵ Additional waves of migrants continue to arrive in a country that is slowly recovering from years of violence, war and deep impoverishment. I know and understand that renovation is hard at work to transform this hotel turned “concrete landscape” (Hall 2014) into homes, but I find the scene of deep impoverishment before me hard to see and walk away.²⁶ On my second visit to Beira in 2016, I return to the hotel grounds and find it much unchanged from

20 Oliver Wainwright, March 1, 2015, www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/mar/01/african-modernist-architecture, accessed March 19, 2016.

21 Perhaps this is in contrast to Emma Hall who describes her experience as “ruin lust” for in the case of the Grande Hotel she “was seduced by the familiarity of modernism transformed so beautifully by nature.” “Once a Colonial Hotel, now an Inhabited Ruin,” April 10, 2014. www.failedarchitecture.com/once-a-colonial-hotel-now-an-inhabited-ruin/ accessed March 17, 2016.

22 Emma Hall describes the staircase as comparable to the one in *Gone with the Wind*. “Once a Colonial Hotel, now an Inhabited Ruin,” April 10, 2014. www.failedarchitecture.com/once-a-colonial-hotel-now-an-inhabited-ruin/ accessed March 17, 2016.

23 Messynessy, “Living in the Art Deco ruins of the Grande Hotel, Africa,” May 22, 2013. www.messynessychic.com/2013/05/22/anywhere-but-here-the-grande-hotel-of-mozambique/ accessed April 16, 2016.

24 Emma Hall, “Once a Colonial Hotel, now an Inhabited Ruin,” April 10, 2014. www.failedarchitecture.com/once-a-colonial-hotel-now-an-inhabited-ruin/ accessed March 17, 2016. The author gives an estimate for the number of squatters inside the hotel of 2500 persons in 2014.

25 Refugees first arrived in the wake of Mozambique’s civil war, in 1981 after Zimbabwe’s newly independent leader, Robert Mugabe took advantage of the war (and since Zimbabwe was land-locked) and set up Beira as a neutral zone for international trade, with people fleeing the violence following soon thereafter. <http://sometimes-interesting.com/2013/05/21/the-grande-hotel-of-beira-mozambique/> accessed April 22, 2016.

26 In some sense the Grande Hotel has been “over” represented in the media. See Brazilian filmmaker Licínio Azevedo’s award winning documentary film on the Grande Hotel Beira, entitled “Hóspedes da Noite”(Night

my previous visit. I am less shocked this time around. I take a few photographs and walk away once again.

When I had first asked architect José Forjaz about the Grande Hotel, he had described it to me as a huge “wedding cake” that was good for nothing (Forjaz, 2010). In 1954, the *Companhia de Mozambique* had commissioned Portuguese architect Francisco de Castro to build a luxury hotel with an Olympic size swimming pool overlooking the Indian Ocean.²⁷ It opened its Art Deco styled doors in 1955, only to close them in 1963. During this eight-year period, it never realized the wealthy clientele it had hoped for and was closed for business due to a continuing loss of profits, including the fact that construction costs had been three times the initial budget.²⁸ However, the hotel was still available for hosting large events and conferences²⁹ including its swimming pool, which was used to train Mozambique’s Olympic swimming team and remained open to its Portuguese swimming public.³⁰ It was then abandoned at the end of colonialism, like so many other buildings throughout the city. However, after independence and during Mozambique’s overlapping periods of socialism (1977-1989) and civil war (1977-1992), it found a new purpose and gained a set of new residents: it was strategically employed as a military base for fighting FRELIMO³¹ soldiers who slept in the guest rooms and bathed in its luxury bathrooms, the pool bar becoming their Headquarters, and the basement a prison for their enemies of state.³²

At one level, the layered ruination and repurposing of the Grande Hotel over this fifty-year period is an example of creative yet disturbing (and not failed) renovation hard at work. At another level, this historical layering points to something more extreme, to something that anthropologist Danny Hoffman suggests for Sierra Leone and that is particular to the modern hotel. He writes:

Hotels are the creations of empires [...] now that global capital has entered its own imperial phase, the hotel space is where contests over the monopoly on legitimate violence enter the cash nexus of globalization. The hotel is also the domicile of the nomad [...] it is a space of deterritorialization – understood not as the erasure of place but as one half of the process of decoding and recoding [...] a space of production without limits (Hoffman 2005, 56).

Lodgers), 2007, 53 minutes and Belgium filmmaker Lotte Stoops (Grande Hotel), 1 hour 10 minutes, 2010. As well it has been famously photographed by South African photographer Guy Tillim.

27 Emma Hall, “Once a Colonial Hotel, now an Inhabited Ruin,” April 10, 2014. www.failedarchitecture.com/once-a-colonial-hotel-now-an-inhabited-ruin/ accessed March 17, 2016. This same architect also designed Beira’s train station.

28 Messynessy, “Living in the Art Deco ruins of the Grande Hotel, Africa,” May 22, 2013. www.messynessychic.com/2013/05/22/anywhere-but-here-the-grande-hotel-of-mozambique/ accessed April 16, 2016.

29 Ibid. It was only re-opened twice in the period before the end of colonialism, once for a visiting group of US Congressmen and another for a political wedding that demanded a venue large enough to house two hundred guests.

30 Ibid.

31 FRELIMO (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*) founded in exile in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1962, was Mozambique’s leading liberation party (and came out of the merging of various earlier groups) fighting for colonial independence under the direction of Eduardo Mondlane, who was assassinated in 1969. See Allen Isaacman and Barbara Isaacman, *Mozambique: from colonialism to revolution, 1900-1982* (Boulder: Colorado, Westview Press, 1983).

32 Messynessy, “Living in the Art Deco ruins of the Grande Hotel, Africa,” May 22, 2013. www.messynessychic.com/2013/05/22/anywhere-but-here-the-grande-hotel-of-mozambique/ accessed April 16, 2016.

Something new is emergent inside this concave hallowed structure that was once a luxury hotel. Architectural writer Emma Hall — she visited the Grande Hotel in 2014 — provocatively suggests, very much evoking what Ndebele is thinking and writing through, that “people are able to understand and alter the buildings [of the Grande Hotel] in a completely new way, unencumbered by any nostalgia or reverence.”³³ She describes the hotel as shifting successfully from a formal building to a “concrete landscape” to be “freely used and torn up.”³⁴ Following Hall, it is relevant to understand the Grande Hotel’s newest residents as less burdened by Beira’s colonial past (in the way that many of us are, including myself), but instead as able to embrace its potentiality, its remaining infrastructural elements hard at work for active repurposing.

Perhaps the reading of hotels (by Hoffman and Hall) is not so distant from Beira’s hotel landscape that I experienced on these two different visits in 2009 and 2016. It is during my second stay that I discover that several new hotels have been built in the course of those seven years. This includes the VIP Inn Beira, a new Mozambique owned business styled hotel where I am staying and which is doing comfortably well. There is also the newly built (as of 2013) Hotel Golden Peacock, a Chinese financed five star hotel complex which includes a casino, a disco, multiple conference rooms, and an artificial lake overlooking the Indian Ocean.³⁵ Possibly it is the Chinese, and no longer the Portuguese, who are set to become Beira’s latest (imperial) investors.

D. The riviera café

The Riviera café is located on an ideal corner off the main Praça de Município in downtown Beira. I am immediately drawn to it on my first visit in 2009 and sit down at one of its outdoor tables with its French styled wicker chairs where I proceed to order a *galão* [milky coffee] and a *pastel de nata* [cream pastry] and spend a leisurely afternoon. I notice that it is full at this time, a mixed crowd of young Mozambican hipsters and ageing Portuguese men. I return the next day, only this time in the morning and see the same group of old Portuguese men hanging out, smoking, talking and drinking coffee. I overhear snatches of their conversations, mostly about local politics and certain public figures. Over the next few days, I continue to stop by the café on my way elsewhere and see that it caters largely to an expatriate Portuguese clientele, mostly male. It is a place where political deals are brokered and memories are reminisced over — I see and feel it happening. I learn that in fact the Portuguese are returning to their former colonies (and specifically its African ones) in large numbers, it is a form of reverse migration that is a recent phenomenon (since the end of 2008 and the global financial crisis) and is a direct result of the lack of growth in Portugal’s recession riddled stagnant economy and the exponential capitalist growth in Angola and Mozambique.³⁶ Africa is once again the land of opportunity, a position it held before, only during colonial times. Perhaps the irony of the situation is not lost

33 Emma Hall, “Once a Colonial Hotel, now an Inhabited Ruin,” April 10, 2014. www.failedarchitecture.com/once-a-colonial-hotel-now-an-inhabited-ruin/ accessed March 24, 2016.

34 Ibid.

35 Estimated costs are at 150 million USD. See www.macauhub.com.mo/en/2013/12/26/hotel-in-beira-mozambique-built-with-chinese-capital/ accessed April 18, 2016.

36 Palash Ghosh, “Portuguese in Mozambique: A Study of Reverse Migration”, *International Business Times*, February 21, 2012. www.ibtimes.com/portuguese-mozambique-story-reverse-migration-214108 accessed April 20, 2016.

on those Portuguese who are arriving anew and making Beira their home. Snippets of an earlier conversation with Samuel the Beira railways manager come back to me; it was he who first mentioned to me this group of colonial returnees also included many Portuguese expatriates who had previously been employed at the nearby Rhodesian owned *Fábrica de Açúcar* and who had left at the first signs of civil war only to return once the situation improved.³⁷ They had arrived with their memories and experiences of a very different colonial city in tow, and would frequent this particular café according to Samuel. It was as if they were waiting impatiently in Lisboa, ready to return as soon as the economic situation had improved, he says. Perhaps over the years, the Riviera café had become an estranged home of sorts; a prized public spot in the *praça* [city square] to watch the world go by during increasingly insecure times and that had accumulated layers of colonialism, independence, socialism, and war, adding (for better or for worse) to its landscape in the process.

I can see from the zigzagged black and white tiled features inside the café that it was most likely built during the 1960s, its history very much tied to Beira's past, as a Portuguese colony where a culture of cafés is part of everyday life, as a site of sugar and coffee production for export, as a last *Renamo* holdout during the civil war,³⁸ and finally as a space for experimental architecture and tourist consumption. I learn from a customer that the Riviera has survived Café Minerva, a similarly styled Art Deco café that had been built during roughly the same era and that had previously been located diagonally across the *praça*. Only the name has survived, its old lettering repurposed to announce the appliance store currently housed inside.

When I return to the Riveira café in February 2016 with the intention to interview the Portuguese owner about the history of this leisured space and to follow-up on all the questions I did not think to ask on my first visit, I find that it is not open for business. I peer inside hoping that perhaps I have arrived on the one day of the week it is closed, as restaurants typically are. I recognize the French styled wicker chairs neatly stacked up in one corner, and a pile of industrial equipment in another. I notice a small handwritten note taped to the front of the glass door that says that it is currently under renovation. I chat with two guys loitering outside who tell me that I will miss its grand opening in two weeks' time. That it is undergoing the very process of renovation that I am attempting to write about is fitting I think as I walk away.

37 Also, Samuel had identified to me that those Portuguese who had previously worked for the Rhodesians at the sugar plant in mid management positions prior to independence, and who had left during the war and returned in its aftermath, were largely the same men hanging out in this particular café. Interview, Samuel April 23, 2009.

38 RENAMO (Reistência Nacional Moçambicana) was a guerrilla rebel movement that emerged after independence in opposition to FRELIMO, and was backed by anti-communist (and white) Rhodesia and South Africa. Mozambique's civil war would be waged between RENAMO and FRELIMO forces between 1977 and 1992. See Allen Isaacman and Barbara Isaacman, *Mozambique: from colonialism to revolution, 1900-1982* (Boulder: Colorado, Westview Press, 1983). One can visibly see the popularity of RENAMO in Beira, where it has a stronghold; at one point it had the only RENAMO party elected mayor in all of Mozambique.

On reflection, an aerial viewpoint

Nowadays, the urban spirit has only partially become woven into the first generation of Mozambicans, born in cities. This process of appropriation by the city is still going on. And it will take various generations (Couto 2015, 75).

If I were to add another layer to Beira's landscapes of leisure discussed in this paper, it would be the *Aeroporto Internacional da Beira*, located on the outskirts of the city. Built in 1967, it has all the requisite Modernist features of the colonial era – elaborate tile work in brown and orange colored hues, elegant light fixtures, and geometrically lettered signs that are all very much in use today. Mozambique's national carrier *LAM*, starting in the late 1940s, brought passengers from near and afar to experience the tourist dream city in the making.³⁹ The same could be said in the here and now. The airport is bustling with a range of people – Mozambican businessmen, Portuguese expats, international tourists, and Chinese workers – all coming and going, more so in 2016 than when I first visited Beira in 2009. Beira's airport, like the *Ferrovário* swimming pool, the *Novocine* movie theatre, the *Grande Hotel*, and the *Riviera* café are all part of a wider complex of leisured infrastructures built during Portuguese colonialism specifically for white expatriate recreation, a point also made by Larkin for Nigeria's cinema halls and hotels (2002: 324). And similar to Hoffman's *Brookfields Hotel* in Sierra Leone, these sites have been actively decoded and recoded (2005: 57) by Beira's residents (old and young, white and black, male and female) and put to work to define the city's postcolonial landscape, one where colonialism, independence, decolonization, socialism and war are all part of its embodied experiences and where multiple pasts, presents, and futures cohere.

I want to end my ruminations on ruination and renovation in Beira by turning to a postcard that I found in the Maputo postal office in 2010, on a day when I wandered in after my interview with architect José Forjaz. It is an aerial viewpoint of Beira and features many of the tourist attractions under discussion here. It is a bit worn at the edges, its image slightly overexposed. It looks like a photograph that was taken in 1970s but I am not sure. I turn it over and see that it is credited to Ricardo Rangel, the famed Mozambican photographer who is also featured in my larger book project on ethnographies of decolonization in Southern Africa. The next day I show architect António Sopa the postcard by Rangel and ask him about it. He tells me that very few of Rangel's images became postcards, and that this rare one was most likely taken in the 1980s during the height of the civil war, hence its distancing from what was happening on the ground. As a souvenir, the postcard belies Beira's multiple pasts at the same time as it gestures to its potential presents and futures, showcasing a city whose (tourist) landscape is easily filled with swimming pools, movie theatres, hotels and cafés.

39 *LAM (Linhas Aéreas de Moçambique)*, The airline was established by the Portuguese colonial government in August 1936 as a charter carrier named *Direcção de Exploração de Transportes Aéreos*, and was renamed in 1980 following reorganisation. In April 1938, the eight-hour-long domestic Lourenço Marques-Inhambane-Beira-Quelimane coastal route was opened. A Beira-Salisbury (present day Harare) route was launched in February 1947, with scheduled services to Durban and Madagascar also starting by the end of that year. In November 1965, a service linking Beira with Lourenço Marques was launched. www.lam.co.mz/en/About-LAM/Company-History/ Accessed April 20, 2016.

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