

PROJECTO OCEANO – SEPTEMBER 2011 REPORT



The start of September came as a relief following the end of the quiet month of Ramadan. We had managed to maintain classes and structure in the Project, but as explained in August's blog, it was difficult to count on full student participation given religious commitments during the month. September started with a bang (literally), as one of the island's 3 main roads (the *contra-costa*) inexplicably sunk into a supermassive black hole. Skirting the eastern edge of the island, and repaved relatively recently, a 3m x 3m hole appeared one morning in the middle of this road! This freakish occurrence is perhaps due to the strong winds we experienced during September,

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bringing the heavy tides crashing against the wall separating the *contra-costa* road from the sea. Many buildings along that road shake when the tides are strong; but few were the people who predicted a collapsing road!

The second weekend of September saw the Dia da Cidade (the annual celebration of the island's municipality), and many a celebration over the long weekend. Activities ranged from organised foot-races and canoeing competitions around the island to the less formal (and arguably more popular) consumption of cold Manica and 2M in the evenings. Having had a slower tourism season than usual in 2011, it was fantastic to see the island replete with Mozambican visitors and foreign tourists alike. A carnival-like atmosphere ensued over the three days, giving a much-needed boost to local businesses and entrepreneurs, ranging from the smart hotels to the poorest of fishermen. Such were the numbers that the local *barracas* ran out of ale – a rare occurrence indeed on Ilha de Moçambique. Projecto Oceano's participation was indubitably more focused on formal day-time activities as opposed to informal nocturnal alcoholism, and we once again successfully installed our shop to sell the Project's artwork. A troop of circus clowns all the way from Nampula briefly threatened to distract attention from Gito and his *capoeira* team's presentation, but inevitably Projecto Oceano's class shone through and the spectators enjoyed another great *capoeira* show. The gaiety of the occasion evidently got to a couple of our students, as a beautiful presentation of local tufo dancing unexpectedly had to compete with an impromptu version of Shakira's *waka-waka*, performed not-so-elegantly by Shany and Zito from Projecto Oceano. Unsurprisingly, there was no call for an *encore*...!

Within the Project's classrooms we re-started our language classes in earnest, moving from basic numbers and 'self-presentation' exercises to some more complicated grammar in French, Spanish and English. It remains a challenge to keep the concepts I teach both challenging and comprehensible given the range of ability in our language classes. Those students who have been with Projecto Oceano for a number of years have benefited enormously from the language classes given by Freddie, Max and Margarida. Linguistically speaking we have a couple of very talented language students; Manuel Domingos has a fantastic eye for Spanish and French grammar, and picks up new concepts very quickly in English. His biggest rival is the ever-improving Tino (our newspaper editor), whose insatiable appetite for improving his English led to a one-to-one session reading *The Economist* together. Although he naturally struggles with some of the more specific vocabulary, it is important for him, as editor of *Voz Jovem*, to see how a well-written publication such as *The Economist* is presented and structured. The challenge for me lies in keeping students such as Tino and Manuel motivated and challenged whilst not covering ground too quickly for our newer students. Ideally we would run separate language classes split on current ability of the students, but we are operating a pretty full timetable at present and cannot find time to squeeze this in.

September's social debate was based on our very own Projecto Oceano. It was a closed debate for Project members only, and gave us a much-needed hour or so to reflect and debate our work to date. It was a great opportunity for me to learn more about the early years of the Project, and more about how the structures and classes I inherited on arrival here were initiated by Wilbert, Beatrix, Freddie, and Max and Margarida. It was also an opportunity for the team to learn about how AZLera, as a wider organization, is supporting our work here on the ground. Given the paucity of efficient or affordable communication on Ilha de Moçambique, it is difficult for our members to stay in touch regularly with past volunteers and managers once they leave the island. One of AZLera's main strengths as an organization is our commitment to and belief in our Mozambican students at Projecto Oceano; the guys here were very happy to see the continued involvement of old managers and friends.

October will be a frenetic month for all the AZLera team, both on Ilha de Moçambique and in London. We must continue the momentum that has been building in our classrooms since the end of Ramadan whilst also focusing much effort on the annual On'Hipiti Festival. An island-wide event, this 3 day cultural festival is one of the highlights of the year for all involved, and draws cultural groups and visitors from as far-a-field as Maputo. Max and Margarida, the old

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management team here on Ilha, worked their flip-flops off to ensure the Festival was a success in 2010, and have left some big shoes to fill. The Festival has to be organized this year without the external funding it previously enjoyed, so volunteerism is the name of the game in 2011. In (dare I say it) typical Mozambican style, the planning of the festival has been left rather late this year, so it is a case of all hands on deck to ensure that the 27th and 28th October 2011 is a weekend to remember. Projecto Oceano will once again be at the forefront of the festival, providing more activities than most other organizations. We will focus this year on language games for children, sand sculpture competitions, *capoeira* presentations during the grand opening, volleyball tournaments and quizzes on the island's history and culture. In addition, this is a major opportunity for us to make some money through selling our handicrafts, so a lot of time will be put in over the coming weeks on designing and painting. Regarding our monthly newspaper, *Voz Jovem*, we have delayed publication of this month's edition to coincide with the advertising push for the On'Hipiti Festival. Devoid of funds as the Festival coordination team is, Projecto Oceano has offered to use our pages for a lead article promoting the upcoming event. To be loaded onto the website shortly...

On a personal level, I will be combating the recent ravages of malaria, Glandular Fever and the trauma of an early English exit from the Rugby World Cup whilst trying to make sure that Oceano's efforts succeed this month! I will be relying on our salaried Project members to share the work-load during the lead-up to the festival; now is the time for them to deliver! As if that wasn't enough on my plate, my mother is also visiting the island for a few days; I fully expect to be forced to shave my Mozambican beard and rediscover some European manners. Luckily the same will (hopefully) not be required when Freddie Brunt arrives to visit the Project at the end of the month...Ilha de Moçambique is excited by the return of its favourite English son!

We are extremely excited about AZLera's upcoming event in London on 20th October; if you haven't registered to attend or would like more information, please contact Freddie Brunt on freddie@azlera.com or +44 7725 213 034. The event will comprise of Mozambican food, art and music, as well as some presentations on AZLera's work on Ilha de Moçambique. For all those attending, we in Mozambique hope that you have a memorable evening and enjoy learning more about our work, our students and the mystical island on which we are based. For those who have not yet confirmed attendance, read the following instructions:

1. Clear the evening of the 20th October in your diary
2. Contact Freddie Brunt to make a reservation
3. Head for the Brunei Gallery at School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in Russell Square for a great evening!!