

Cardoso assassin re-enacts his escape

Convicted murderer Anibal dos Santos Junior "Anibalzinho" on 1 September showed that it was indeed possible for him to have escaped from prison last year through his cell window. Anibalzinho is the man who recruited the death squad that murdered Mozambique's top investigative journalist, Carlos Cardoso, on 22 November 2000, and who drove the vehicle used in the assassination. His mysterious "escape" from the Maputo top security prison meant that he was tried in absentia.

At the end of the trial, on 31 January, Anibalzinho was sentenced to a jail term of 28 years and six months. By then the South African police had re-arrested him, and he was repatriated to Maputo a few hours after the sentence had been read out.

The hypothesis that Anibalzinho left his cell via the window was raised at the time, but discarded because the space did not seem large enough for someone as bulky as Anibalzinho to slip through. The window is secured with a lattice of iron bars - but at one of the bottom corners, two of the bars had been sawn off.

In the current trial of seven policemen accused of illicitly releasing Anibalzinho, the prosecution argued that Anibalzinho in fact walked out of his cell door, which corrupt police officers unlocked. When he gave evidence last week, Anibalzinho insisted that he had climbed out of the window.

To ascertain whether this was possible, the trial of the seven policemen switched venue on 1 September: presiding judge Carlos Caetano, and the prosecution and defence lawyers, went to the Maputo maximum security jail, where Anibalzinho was ordered to re-enact his escape. Coincidentally this reconstruction took place exactly a year after Anibalzinho was smuggled out of the prison on 1 September 2002. First, Caetano told him to start sawing through another bar, in order to discover how audible the sound would be. The court brought along four brand new saws, but initially Anibalzinho was reluctant, saying they were not the same type of saw as the one he had used (which, he claimed, had been provided by Momade Assife Abdul Satar, one of those who ordered Cardoso's assassination).

But eventually Anibalzinho took one of the saws to a bar - and the sound carried several metres. In other words, it would have been impossible for him to have removed two bars, requiring four separate cuts, without prison guards hearing the racket. Then Anibalzinho demonstrated how it is possible to squeeze out of the window - even though the space made by removing the bars is only 41 centimetres by 26. Anibalzinho climbed up to the window via a colman placed on top of a table in the cell: he then wriggled out head first, taking about 30 seconds to leave the cell.

"See - I told you I got out via the window, not the door", exclaimed Anibalzinho jubilantly. While this spectacle was taking place, prisoners watching from other cell windows cheered on Anibalzinho. The assassin seemed to be enjoying himself immensely.

So the court has established that escape via the window was possible - which does not necessarily mean that this was how Anibalzinho made his getaway. Even if he did exit the cell via the window, he would then have had to slip across the prison and out of the main gate. Anibalzinho claims that prison guard Manuel Macuacua was waiting for him and accompanied him as he crossed the prison. At the corner of cell block seven, they were joined by a second guard, whom he did not name. It was Macuacua, he alleged, who slipped him the saw provided by Abdul Satar.

Anibalzinho said that, once he had crossed the yard, he waited at an abandoned and darkened area for 40 minutes, before making his way out via the main gate. On his way to the gate he met a prison guard named Abel: Anibalzinho claims that Abel was so drunk he did not recognise him. Throughout the escape, Anibalzinho added, he was in constant cell-phone contact with Abdul Satar.

Macuacua was listening to all this, but insisted on his innocence, and called Anibalzinho a liar. He admitted that, on the night of the escape, he was supposed to be guarding Anibalzinho's cell, but claimed he had heard nothing.

Macuacua challenged Anibalzinho's account of his route out of the prison. Anibalzinho claimed it was all at ground level, and that Macuacua had accompanied him as they rounded cell block seven. But Macuacua claimed that in reality Anibalzinho had climbed a mango tree in order to get over the fence separating the cells from the administrative part of the jail. When the prison authorities found Anibalzinho was missing, they also noted a trail of footprints leading to the tree, he said.

This mango tree has subsequently been cut down and no-one knows who ordered its removal. Neither Anibalzinho's nor Macuacua's version can be reconciled with that of Paulo Estevao "Dangerman", a prisoner who told the court on 29 August that he witnessed Anibalzinho's escape.

He said he saw Anibalzinho leave by the cell door, and cross the prison accompanied by five police officers. A vehicle then drove into the prison premises to pick him up.

On 1 September, judge Caetano took the opportunity to ask Dangerman to prove what he had said in court. Giving indications of where he was, and of the route taken by Anibalzinho, Dangerman reaffirmed that he saw the assassin leave, escorted by five men, among whom he recognised Bufalo Matos (commander of the Presidential Guard unit stationed at the jail), Balide Muteta (commander of the ordinary police platoon), and Macuacua. (On 29 August Dangerman said he did not know the names of the other two - but he could point them out in court. They are Luis Maquene and Paulo Murriquia.)

A policeman went into the cell, climbed to the window, and confirmed that there was a good view over the yard.

Armando Ossufo, who has been director of the top security prison for over a year, cut a poor figure, when Caetano asked him about how the prison functioned. He seemed

ignorant of his own job, and was forced to admit he had no answer to the court's questions. He had to refer the judge to some of his subordinates in the prison management.

Satar denies claim

Momade Assife Abdul Satar on 2 September denied that he had organised the escape of Anibalzinho. Satar was taken from the cell where he is serving a 24 year sentence to testify at the Maputo provincial court. Satar claimed that the people who really conspired to release Anibalzinho were two high-ranking officers in the Presidential Guard, whom he named as Vascolino and Vamuto, who had done so "together with Nyimpine Chissano", the businessman son of President Joaquim Chissano. Satar said that Nyimpine had also contacted him to persuade him to leave the prison at the same time as Anibalzinho.

Satar has repeatedly alleged that Nyimpine was involved in the murder of Carlos Cardoso. During the murder trial, which ran from November to January, Satar claimed that he had lent the money for the murder to Nyimpine, who asked him to pay it to Anibalzinho. He showed the court seven post-dated cheques signed by Nyimpine Chissano, which he claimed were the guarantees for the loan.

Satar submitted various documents to the court, and said they included two mobile phone numbers used by Anibalzinho and his mother, Teresinha Mendonca. He stated that from the records of the phone company M-Cel, one could deduce who they had been in contact with on the eve of the escape.

Satar insisted that the evidence he was submitting be investigated by "impartial" prosecutors, since only thus would the truth of who released Anibalzinho come to light. Satar was presumably attacking the credentials of the Maputo provincial chief prosecutor, Arone Nhaca, who is handling the case: he declared to the court that "in this country there is a strong alliance between political power and judicial power".

Anibalzinho also claimed that the house where he initially lived in South Africa after the release belonged to a relative of Satar, named Ismael. This too Satar denied: but he said somebody called Ismael had come to the prison to visit Anibalzinho prior to the escape. A further denial concerned the money used to bribe the guards. Anibalzinho claimed that Satar gave him five million meticaís (about \$200) to bribe the guards, and again Satar denied the story.

Despite the central role of Satar in the Cardoso murder, and despite all the claims made over the past year that Satar was involved in Anibalzinho's escape, the prosecution did not include him on its list of witnesses. The defence lawyer for the seven policemen, Boavida Zandamela, initially called Satar as a defence witness, but then changed his mind, presumably fearing that Satar might incriminate some of his clients. It was the presiding judge, Carlos Caetano, who, after hearing Anibalzinho's testimony, decided that Satar must be questioned.

