

REVIEW of:

Kenneth Hermele, *Land Struggles and Social Differentiation in Southern Mozambique; a case study of Chokwe, Limpopo 1950-1987* (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden, Research Report 82, 1988), 64 pp.

Review of African Political Economy 41 (1988):

Otto Roesch, 'Rural Mozambique since the FRELIMO Party Fourth Congress: The Situation in the Baixo Limpopo';

Signe Arnfred, 'Women in Mozambique: Gender Struggles and Politics';

Lars Rudebeck, 'Kandjaja, Guinea-Bissau 1976-86; Observations on the Political Economy of an African Village'.

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Until very recently, the literature available to the general reader who knew no Portuguese on the former Portuguese colonies in Africa was of an heroic nature, usually making very obvious the authors' commitment to the general aims of the ruling party, whether FRELIMO in Mozambique, the PAIGC in Guine-Bissau or the MPLA in Angola. For African intellectuals, these movements seemed to offer hope on a continent where the other nationalist parties had been revealed as badly compromised, if not completely unworthy of the tasks that they had set for themselves. In particular, the nationalists in the ex-Portuguese colonies seemed to be unsullied by a dubious independence bargain at the conference table, having won their freedom through an armed struggle. They were honest, incorruptible and disciplined, committed to a new national identity free of racial definition and to a thorough modernisation of society, with little truck for chiefs, missionaries, polygamy or lobola. They were scientific socialists, the real thing, not dubious 'African socialists' with a weakness for backward traditions and hands in the till.

All this is still an important part of the truth but the reality is that attempts to transform African societies root and branch have not met with real success. Today the regimes in each of these states are moving towards compromise with the realities of world capitalism. In Guine-Bissau, the original president, Luis Cabral, brother of the famous revolutionary leader Amílcar Cabral, was actually overthrown by a mainland hero of the armed struggle followed by a shift away from the revolutionary commitments of

the 1970s. In both Angola and Mozambique, the original independence leader is now dead, Samora Machel of Mozambique having perished in a plane crash of dubious origins. Their successors are pragmatists.

In Mozambique, the state accepted in 1987 the policy of PRE, the Economic Rehabilitation Programme, which centres on the restoration of a market economy. Under these circumstances, a new literature has finally begun to appear which looks at social change since independence in ex-Portuguese Africa in a more realistic light, in particular paying more attention to events on the ground and the interplay of social forces rather than the intentions of the central state. A new look could be taken at FRELIMO which considers its development, internal fissures and struggles over time. However, the main purpose of this review is to highlight this new literature and what it reveals of the broader society, in particular with relevance to Mozambique. One article considered here, by Rudebeck, is on Guine-Bissau but specifically contains comparisons with Mozambique.

In South Africa, those sympathetic to FRELIMO generally take the view that Mozambique's problems can largely be ascribed to 'bandits', set in motion by and dependent on the Pretoria regime. The sober truth that emerges is that the 'bandits' have enjoyed as much success as they have because of the problems in FRELIMO's policies. FRELIMO has operated as a vanguard party, independent of local social forces and able to deliver little to ordinary Mozambicans. It is this which gave to the 'bandits' their opening. Both Hermele and Roesch, as well as Arnfred looking specifically at the problem of Mozambican women, see a process of disabuse about the state and what it can do for the masses, taking place. Older values as well as existing class forces have increasingly come to the fore as state initiatives falter. In Guine-Bissau, this process is also very advanced although the absence of an equivalent to the Rhodesian and South African regimes amongst the country's neighbours has enabled this process to come to the fore without the violence and despair of Mozambique and Angola.

The heroic literature on Mozambique gave a great deal of weight to the impact of revolutionary change in zones occupied by guerrillas during the fighting against the Portuguese. Here a new moral and social order, dedicated, egalitarian and rational emerged, foreshadowing the policies of the party in power after 1975. There now appears to be a revisionist interpretation emerging. While Hermele agrees that the most socially conservative groupings in rural northern Mozambique were effectively expunged from FRELIMO in intense struggles at the end of the 1960s, he also stresses that effective revolutionary activity actually meant realistic compromises with local chiefs and existing social norms, as well as with the market economy. Arnfred records the impressions of activist women, who found in this period a chance to get beyond traditional social strictures

through the overriding demands imposed by the common fight against colonialism which created a certain tolerance.

Mozambique in 1975 was overwhelmingly a peasant society. Under the Portuguese, it was impossible for a typical colonial cash crop export economy to flourish. The terms of trade were set against the peasants and they were pushed off some of the best land in favour of settlers and plantations. Coerced labour, poor wages and prices, remained an important part of the system. Although many Mozambicans worked for a wage, on the Rand, in Rhodesia and elsewhere, or within Mozambique, it could not be said that they were committed to a proletarian life. On the contrary, according to Hermele, what they wanted from FRELIMO was access to land and a better share in the market. Instead, FRELIMO was committed to a total reconstruction of society based on wage labour in collective farms taken over from the Portuguese and on rapid industrialisation. A great leap forward was envisioned in which the economy would grow at 15 or 20% pa (Ten Year Plan, 1980). Between the FRELIMO of the armed struggle and the FRELIMO that possessed state power from 1975 there was a big break that must be underlined.

There was neither a material or a social base for a Great Leap Forward in Mozambique. Industry, only partially able to meet even the basic consumer needs of the colony, depended heavily on the consumption patterns and the skills of white Portuguese immigrants, whom the new regime made no effort to retain in the country after independence. The decline in colonial discipline meant that productivity in plantation agriculture fell. This coupled with the falling purchase value for tropical natural commodities to create an increasingly difficult financial situation for the regime by the beginning of the 1980s. Pro-FRELIMO literature is full of praise for the schooling and health programmes of the early years after independence. However, these popular programmes were relatively expensive and their implementation helped to destabilise the Mozambican budget. Imports rose steeply in cost while export values declined. After 1982, Mozambique could not possibly service, let alone repay, her debt.

Hermele and Roesch demonstrate the impact of these policies in the Limpopo valley. Mozambican peasants were bitter at not receiving land in the old *colonatos* which were rather worked as state farms. The Portuguese settlers felt abandoned and largely (not entirely) emigrated. Production fell off drastically and the state farms, intended to produce rice for the urban masses, failed badly. For the middle peasantry (the class from which Machel himself came in this region), FRELIMO's answer was to 'renounce their own status as middle peasants by handing over their cattle, ploughs, tractors or whatever means they might possess'. This 'was a complete negation of what independence meant to them' (Hermele, p27). Nor were poorer peasants pleased to be reduced to the position of wage workers on

poorly-run state farms, partly through coercion. Hermele thinks such policies occurred on a big scale. Although none of the writers go this far, it does not take much imagination to see where and how it was possible to recruit a force of 'bandits'. To the end, Samora Machel, the arch-vanguardist, seemed to feel that, if necessary, the best policy would be to re-enforce on the peasantry the forced planting and forced labour policies of the Portuguese and he actually re-introduced the former in one province! In practice, all this meant a very sharp break with the pre-independence policies of FRELIMO in the liberated zones, which had been relatively successful because of their compromises.

The harvest that FRELIMO reaped was a bitter one. Production fell drastically. Drought and war beset the countryside and the peasantry became completely alienated while the cities starved. The intention of the state was to go for incorporation into COMECON on the model of Cuba or Viet Nam but COMECON, with the concurrence of the Soviet Union, refused to bring Mozambique, seen as a lumbering liability, into the Communist Common Market. Hermele suggests that this was an early sign of the Russian retreat from militancy in the Third World that has become so much more pronounced in the Gorbachev era.

Finally, a desperate Mozambique made a sharp about-face signalled by the Nkomati Accord, whose main impact was to welcome the West back to Maputo. Mozambique has not taken up an overtly pro-Western political posture but IMF concessionary financing and foreign aid have brought back a functioning market to Mozambique. War Communism under Lenin lasted at most two years in Russia before the party accepted NEP in 1920. In Mozambique, the equivalent of war communism was pushed for something like eight years and the retreat into a NEP equivalent, albeit under less favourable material circumstances, is the more drastic. Half the state farms were abandoned by 1986. 'The near-complete hegemony of the black market' has been replaced by the legal revival of an economy over which the state appears to have little sway.

PRE is just letting Mozambique survive; the authors reviewed here see little hope of imitating the relative prosperity of the Soviet Union in the 1920s. In a separate report, Hermele has quoted a peasant woman, 'Before we stood in line to buy the few products that were available; today we queue just to look at all the things we cannot afford' (Hermele, *Country Report*, 1988:1). Mozambique is mired in a deep debt trap. There is little prospect of a renewal of welfareist policies. Foreign aid devotes very little to health or education (4% in 1986!) and the state cannot conceivably afford to devote all its limited resources there. Recent party literature suggests that social welfare may increasingly permit the private sector to be involved. Post-Nkomati Mozambique is ensnared in a deep debt trap.

All of the writers emphasize a new dominance of old social forces and values. Roesch reports that 'the most intriguing aspect of this re-emergence of the private sector was the rapidity with which a new class alliance was beginning to take shape in the Baixo Limpopo between capitalist farmers, merchants, miners and state bureaucrats' (p88). Crucial to this re-emergence are gold miners, whose wages are much better and whose numbers are much fewer than in the time of the Portuguese. Miners from this region are the main source of consumer goods, soap, cloth, farming implements, all of which are now available again - at a price. The most enterprising of these miners find ways of buying lorries in the Transvaal which have now become the basis of local transportation. There is little left of the state farms in the Baixo Limpopo and the co-operative movement is now largely restricted to poor, elderly women. Instead the traditional family farm is again dominant. PRE has gone together with a resurgence of alcoholism and home brewing, with independent Christian sects and witchcraft (*curandeirismo*).

Further up the Limpopo, the Mozambican regime dismembered the giant CAIL, the state farm complex on which such hopes were built and much of the irrigated land now falls into private hands. The remnant Portuguese are the most successful and prosperous owners. The population is extremely differentiated and again access to mine work on the Rand plays a major defining role. The surviving state farms which occupy some of the land are more successful than before, perhaps, according to Hermele, because the peasantry now include a section who are desperate enough to accept becoming pure wage-workers.

Arnfred reports that despite the apparently progressive position towards women that FRELIMO has taken, women supported the party and its women's organisation less and less over time. Modernisation of family structures ('the nuclear family') and the position of women was consistently interpreted in a way that worked against women's interests. Uneducated women particularly counted for little. As a result, women have turned to traditional forms of protection and association, which offer some kind of solidarity and sustenance, for instance initiation ceremonies, and to the retention, where they exist, of matrilineal inheritance rights. Women's collective enterprises are most dramatically marked by the Green Zone co-operatives. Of these petty producers, linked together to market vegetables for Maputo city, some 95% are women. The UGC co-operative women merge traditional solidarity with some support for the aims and political discourse of FRELIMO but they have defined their politics themselves rather than accepting what the party tells them to do or think.

It is important to compare this work with that of Rudebeck. The Muslim savanna village in Guine-Bissau that he has visited over more than a

decade is a very different kind of place than the Mozambican communities studied above in many ways. It has always known a more structured class system and a more internally developed market economy. Since 1974 there has been peace and no 'bandits' are to be found. Yet Rudebeck was struck with similarities when he visited Mueda in northern Mozambique, a place in fact redolent with associations of the start of armed struggle in the 1960s.

The main point in his essay is the irrelevance of the Bissau state with its fine pronouncements and ideological line. The village school has almost disappeared in favour of traditional Koranic schools and the outsider teacher cannot even speak Mandinka, the local language. The clinic of revolutionary days is gone and so is the state store. The prosperity of the village, greater than before independence, is now based on cross-border smuggling. The political office-holders all belong to the same family that ran the show in colonial times and before. And the state itself has retreated. 'Policies of planning and state controlled economic development are being limited or outright abandoned' (p27).

In Mueda, the economy is also partly based on smuggling. The social services offered by the state have declined in significance and were never much respected by the people. Rudebeck found peasants who had deserted the communal villages, into which FRELIMO had insisted that they move, for autonomous villages deep in the forest which FRELIMO could not control. Local officials complain of the resurgence of pre-revolutionary inequities and superstitions but, to the locals, it is rather a question of an oppressive and ineffective state enforcing its will. 'Party and state are seen as sources of promises never fulfilled' (p28).

The verdict of history on the Machels should not be entirely harsh. One must admire their energy, their impatient enthusiasm for the reconstruction of their own societies into productive, modern communities based on healthy values. However, one cannot help but recall Guine-Bissau's Amílcar Cabral's strictures about the gap between creating the kind of alliances that would allow a war against the Portuguese to go forward effectively (and the war in Guine-Bissau was most effective) and actually transforming the same society in peacetime. It seems less possible to share his hope that a politicised petty bourgeoisie might square this circle somehow by committing 'class suicide'. Instead, if there is a lesson to derive from all this, it is that the way forward for progressive politics must lie in a thorough study of actual social forces and a willingness to establish conditions under which people can in an organised way propel their world onwards. The idealism of a vanguard of philosopher-kings acting in isolation from the actual class forces on the ground can easily come to grief.

REFERENCE

Hermele, Kenneth (1988) *-Country Report Mozambique* (Swedish International Development Authority, Studies from the Research Division).

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