

**Kathleen E. Sheldon. *Pounders of Grain: A History of Women, Work and Politics in Mozambique*.  
Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002.**

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This history of women in Mozambique, seen through the lens of women's work and political activism over the last century, represents a very valuable resource for anyone working with feminism and gender issues in the fields of literature, cultural studies, women's studies, history, politics or anthropology in southern Africa. Sheldon's central premise, using a materialist feminist approach, is to explore how women as workers wove "the fabric of Mozambican nationhood" (xxiii). Although research on gender issues in Mozambique has proliferated over the decades since national independence, this has tended to be dispersed across edited volumes, political pamphlets and humanities journals. Sheldon's volume provides the first comprehensive full-length study available in English of women's working patterns, poverty, economic survival and political movements in Mozambique. Representing the fruit of more twenty years research, the book is divided into seven chapters, some of which are based on work previously published in journals or edited volumes. The ordering of the chapters follows a chronology from the early colonial period at the end of the nineteenth century, through to the 1990s with the post-Peace Accord transition to democracy, structural readjustment and the effects of globalization.

The opening chapter provides a valuable context for the rest of the study by reviewing women's work in the early colonial period in terms of the complex ethnic and cultural interrelations between the matrilineal traditions of the northern and central regions, and the patrilineal societies of the south. Taking issue with the contention that "women have no tribe" (2), Sheldon compares different regions, focusing on the material effects of these kinship arrangements for women's work, land tenureship and family life. She thus demonstrates how the cultural practices surrounding kin and inheritance are dynamic and changeable in relation to shifting historical and economic circumstances. Chapter two looks at urban and rural contexts, exploring the changing circumstances of women workers in relation to the impact of Portuguese colonialism. Starting from the Conference of Berlin, this chapter

charts the increase in European trading companies and the involvement of women in the *prazos* holders' revolts against them. Tracing the intensification of settler colonialism during the Salazar dictatorship, Sheldon reviews the effects of *chibalo*, the colonial forced labour policy on African women and their families, as well as discussing the consequences for women of male labor migration to the South African mines, and noting women's role in urban agriculture, alongside their limited opportunities for waged work under colonialism. Chapter three provides an account of women's experiences in mission education, tracing the history of mission schooling from the 1880s to the 1960s and contrasting the cultures of Portuguese Catholic and Swiss and English Protestant mission schools, as they related to women's opportunities. This section discusses the construction of idealized Catholic domesticity for African women under the Portuguese colonial system at the same time as it observes how the mission schooling system provided new skills and increased opportunities for a very small number of African women.

Chapter four explores the role of women in the Armed Struggle for Independence, the theorizing of their position in the revolution, and their involvement in building the new Marxist-Leninist state. It looks at the birth of Frelimo women's organizations, such as LIFEMO and subsequently OMM, at the OMM's negotiation of women's rights within Frelimo and at the focus on women's liberation through waged work. This chapter discusses the difficulties arising from the patriarchal culture within Frelimo and offers a valuable critical perspective on the conflict between the benefits of modernity and the loss of women's traditional rights and privileges, which was a particularly marked issue for matrilineal northern cultures. Chapter five reviews the major shifts in women's rural and urban working practices brought about by the Frelimo commitment to emancipation through economic independence, requiring the integration of women into the workforce. Comparing the Beira and Maputo experiences, Sheldon explores the famous Green Zones initiatives centred on and led by women, which transformed their involvement in urban agriculture. It notes the positive changes brought about by Frelimo rule in some workplaces, such as increased childcare provision and maternity leave, and it makes the case for women's success in actively influencing key aspects of Frelimo policy on work. At the same time, Sheldon notes the difficulties that arose from attempting to alter traditional male attitudes towards women in the workplace, and demythologizes the popular image of the new woman under socialism routinely taking on conventionally male-gendered work.

Chapter six looks at the impact of the post-Independence war and South African destabilization tactics, which severely damaged much of the Frelimo social and physical infrastructure from which women specifically had stood to gain. It looks at women's experience of rape and sexual abuse in the Renamo camps, at the same time as it notes the evidence of some female leadership within Renamo. It also reviews the effects of internal displacement and loss of community on women's involvement in family agriculture, and their ability to sustain their families. Frelimo policy changes in the wartime context are explored with particular attention paid to the controversial 1989 decision to extend membership rights to polygamous men. There is a discussion of the 1994 elections (for which Sheldon was a UN observer) leading to an analysis of women's representation in the new government, and the issues that were prioritized by women in this context, focusing on two particularly symptomatic debates about sexual harassment and the laws pertaining to land ownership rights. The chapter concludes with a section on women's organizations, reviewing not only the work of the OMM and its changing relations with Frelimo, but also the growth of new campaigns and women's interest groups such as the Fórum Mulher coalition.

Chapter seven provides a detailed critique of the ways in which the structural adjustment programme implemented by the World Bank and IMF in the 1990s led to a general increase in poverty with particular implications for women. It notes the loss of work opportunities, child care and social services which had benefited women under state socialism, as well as the disregard for women's legal rights as firms became privatized. It also points to an increase in urban women surviving through work as street vendors. The rise of independent trade unions and the industrial action of the early 1990s are covered, and although women's involvement in strikes is hard to ascertain, it is noted that women continued to remain active in workers' organizations. A case study of women in the newly privatized cashew processing industry is used as specifically symptomatic of how IMF policy indirectly created unemployment for women. The chapter ends by exploring women in agriculture in the 1980s and 90s, noting the difficulties they continued to experience in earning income to supplement their traditional survival through family food cultivation. The conclusion of the volume, written after the catastrophic floods of 2000, points to the patterns of repetition and change, which have characterized the history of Mozambican women's work over the last century to affirm that women's "inclusion will determine the success of any project" (269) in the country's future development.

Sheldon has clearly conducted painstaking archival research as well as extensive oral interviewing, in order to reconstruct the histories of women's lives, which are often obscured by fragmentary sources or lost in the small print of mainstream historical accounts. Sheldon's overall validation of Frelimo's policy on women during the Marxist period is evident, but the study makes an honest endeavour at striking a balanced position, and does not shrink from providing necessary and nuanced critique. This book is certainly a must for university libraries. It will provide a defining point of reference for serious scholars and researchers in the field, as well as a useful learning resource for students.

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