

## Introduction: Reevaluating Mozambique

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The 1990s was a decade of momentous change in Mozambique. Years of senseless violence the evolution of which could be traced back to the first colonial moment were finally brought to a close by the timely intervention of the international community. Democracy triumphed over armed conflict with the election of Joaquim Alberto Chissano as head of a newly pluralistic state where human rights would be respected and opportunity encouraged. Yet, behind this complacent, and neocolonially charged, rhetoric of a successful transition to peace and integration into a world community, there lurked a degree of paradigmatic repetition: the nation's self-determined future depended, once again, on interference from abroad. The hoards of international peacekeepers that flooded the southeast African state in the name of peace and development heralded the continuation of a removed and distanced decision-making process that rendered Mozambique once more the compliant periphery to a Western-orientated power base. Indeed, the similarities between the United Nations' peacekeeping operation in Mozambique and the praxis of Portuguese colonialism have been discussed.<sup>1</sup>

The complex issues that led Mozambique into a deplorable state of civil war will continue to be a source of debate and speculation. Without doubt, interference from neighbouring states like Rhodesia and apartheid-era South Africa facilitated the rise of RENAMO, an organization Margaret Thatcher once termed one of the "most brutal terrorist movements that there is."<sup>2</sup> Yet, the FRELIMO government's role in exacerbating, and to a certain extent, laying the groundwork for the conflict, must be acknowledged in any legitimate academic study of the Mozambican civil war. In the early years of the

FRELIMO regime there was a lack of academic work that critiqued the post-independence government. This may be explained by a prevalent sympathy among many Western intellectuals who were blinded by their utopian wish to see Samora Machel's brand of Marxist-Leninism succeed and so remained silent about or simply ignorant of the abuses of the regime. This silence facilitated FRELIMO's powerful propaganda machine, which projected the image of a united and revolutionary Mozambican people who, if given half a chance, would realize a true brand of socialism in Africa. Dissident voices or opposing views were agents of imperialism that the government felt could be legitimately silenced. Those foreign academics and commentators who bought into FRELIMO's rhetoric of socialist revolution failed to see the experiment that Samora Machel foisted on his young nation as yet another imposition from abroad—the replacement of one dated eurocentric system (colonialism) with yet another (Marxism). Furthermore, the hostility that the exponents of scientific socialism harboured against traditional practices in Africa echoed colonialism's contempt for what it deemed to be backwards or uncivilized. The nonsense of imposing a socialist system on a society that had failed to pass through the process of industrialization was always doomed to provoke the opposition of traditional sectors of that society. The roughshod manner in which FRELIMO dealt with that opposition should have been an immediate cause for concern among commentators and the academic community alike. Unfortunately, the hangovers of European colonialism combined with atrocities perpetrated by RENAMO and interference from South Africa to prevent an effective voicing of criticism of FRELIMO or much interrogation of innate government incompetence. Someone or something else could always be easily and attributably blamed for the mess into which the country was plunging, be it the Portuguese legacy or acts of terrorism. FRELIMO policy was never really analysed.

In fact, Mozambique, like the other Lusophone colonies in Africa, occupies the complex postcolonial position of a nation born out of five centuries of occupation by Europe's weakest colonial power. Boaventura de Sousa Santos's work has been instrumental in understanding the true significance of the particularities of Lusophone Africa's process of transition from colonies into neocolonized states. His work is a powerful rebuke to some of the excesses of postcolonial studies, which, as Hardt and Negri have convincingly demonstrated, are often mired in the fashionable politics of fetishized difference and cease to be liberatory once co-opted by the disjunctive flows of

a free-market not-so-free-for-all. Talking about Mozambique will always raise to some extent the spectre of a colonial past. But can we effectively talk about Mozambique using the theoretical tools furnished by postcolonial theory? Where precisely is the threatening discursive relevance of Bhabha's menacing mimicry to a colonial system whose rhetoric officially embraced miscegenation and disavowed racial demarcations? How effective is Spivak's voicing of a subaltern to the praxis of Lusophone imperialism in which the colonial masters were often as ignored and silenced by the metropolis as those they purported to dominate?

The peculiarity of Lusophone Africa's colonial experience, as Sousa Santos notes, is Portugal's constant discursive shifting between the role of Prospero and that of Caliban. Portugal may have been the first colonizing power to have reached Africa and the last to depart, but it never really controlled the rules of the colonial game, and spent the better part of the post-partition era playing catch-up to a hegemonic colonialism, the tenets of which were designed to serve British interests. Clearly Portugal's idiosyncratic version of imperialism profoundly affected the shape of post-independence Mozambique.

As Sousa Santos's work on Portugal's semi-peripheral status on the world stage as both an imperial centre and a European margin that failed to undergo the process of industrialization necessary for a truly Marxist revolution implies, Portugal's former colonies were immediately marked by having been the periphery of a semi-periphery. In some ways, that had political advantages: Portugal's economic and political weakness at the time of Mozambican independence prohibited the effective pursuit of a neocolonial agenda by the former metropolis. Also, the manner in which Mozambican independence was finally attained through a popularly supported coup in Lisbon made clear that most Portuguese had grown tired of, or had never wholeheartedly supported, the retention of colonies. In other words, in stark contrast to the experience of what is often taken to be the normative colonialism of the British Empire, Portugal did not have time to make arrangements to neocolonize Mozambique prior to relinquishing its imperial grasp because of the systemic and revolutionary change that simultaneously rocked the former metropolis.

However, the suggestion that Mozambique has thus avoided a neocolonial fate is an oversight. We just need to identify correctly who the pretenders to neocolonization were. The obvious initial answers were a Western-backed South Africa who vied with the Soviet bloc to influence and control the for-

mer colony. Yet, with the collapse of communism and the end of apartheid, a more concealed, and thus effective, phase of neocolonization emerged in the guise of the inexorable rise of international capitalism and an influx of NGOs with clear Western-biased agendas.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most effective aspects of the power now wielded by the mechanisms of globalisation over Mozambique is facelessness. We need look no further than Foucault to understand that power is in its prime when disguised and it really is no longer clear who controls the nation's destiny. The co-option of FRELIMO into the free-market system of globalisation even enabled the same faces who had once espoused the state-control of industry and supported the policies of Operation Production, to benefit from a volte-face, profiting from privatisations and the adoption of an extremely brutal version of capitalism.<sup>4</sup> Of course, Mozambique is not alone in its conversion to and active cooperation with the free flow of faceless capital. However, its ruling party has managed to evade much criticism once again through a very effective public relations machine that paints the alternatives as worse, and unswervingly praises FRELIMO's Mozambique as Africa's greatest success story of recent times. The resolution of the armed conflict enabled the international community, embodied in the United Nations, to claim much needed credit for bringing peace after a string of shambolic disasters on the continent.<sup>5</sup> But as Elísio Macamo and Dieter Neubert argue in their article in this volume, the peace that was negotiated in the name of the international community fell far short of what was necessary to assure a positive future for Mozambique. The concept of justice was sacrificed at the altar of expediency in a charade designed to give both parties to the peace process the scent of a legitimacy they ill deserved. FRELIMO needed to be treated as a sovereign government, while the rebel, formerly "terrorist" movement was to play-act the role of a political party with a coherent ideological agenda. In the short term, the game that both sides played bore fruit. There was a cessation of violence, a positive advance by any standards. However, as Macamo and Neubert argue, the long-term consequences of the way in which the peace was constructed are decidedly negative since they have left the FRELIMO cadres with possession of the state, and RENAMO with very little to lose.

The meaningless nature of an increasingly compromised state, whose sovereignty has been abolished by the flows of capitalism, is raised by Branwen Gruffydd Jones. Her interviews of Mozambicans further damage the rosy picture painted of the nominally independent former colony. Her article decon-

structs the economic success story proffered by the international community in relation to Mozambique. The real-life experiences of Mozambican workers and peasants gainsay vacuous economic figures espoused in support of the officially sanctioned version of Mozambican development. Gruffydd Jones also brings into stark relief the unsavoury consequences of challenging the official discourse in the newly democratic Mozambique, relating the murder of a journalist who dared to investigate corruption in high places to a trend towards remaining uncritical of the government's betrayal of its people.

There have, of course, always been independent voices critical of corruption and injustice wherever and whenever it has manifested itself in Mozambique. In colonial times, writers and poets used the power of the Portuguese language to construct damning indictments of the effects of the colonial system. A brood of anticolonial poets and writers used the power of the written word to highlight the inequity and racism of a colonial system as it functioned and contradicted its ambivalent, officially colour-blind discourse. Geoffrey Mitchell offers a reading of an important marker in the evolution of Mozambican letters, Orlando Mendes's *Portagem*. Mitchell focuses on Mendes's use of failed relationships as a means of offering a powerful critique of colonial praxis in Mozambique on the eve of the independence struggle. He argues that the image Mendes projects is one of a doomed future, forever beholden to the contradictions of Mozambique's troubled past. The creation of an educational underclass unable to articulate a different reality was one of the most damning legacies of the Portuguese colonial regime, and Mendes is uncompromising in his depiction of a faulty education system. That same faulty system marred Minho almost as much as Maputo, and the real advances both nations made in their education sectors after the Carnation Revolution were remarkable.

FRELIMO's commitment to education was one of the hallmarks of its early administration. There was a definite will on the part of Machel's government to reduce illiteracy and open up the formal education sector to the whole nation. However, the destabilizing effects of the civil war impacted extremely negatively on the education system. Schools and teachers became a favoured target of RENAMO in the darkest moments of the conflict so that in many areas of the country the system ceased functioning. Yet the system FRELIMO adopted—principally because of the need for the rapid training of teachers, but also because of the ideological dictates of its all-encompassing philosophy—was extremely directional and, in essence, flawed. The Ministry of Education wanted to con-



trol every single class from the nation's capital, and produced teachers' manuals based on rote-learning and student compliance rather than initiative and the stimulation of intellectual curiosity. Given the limited number of teachers and the consequently huge class sizes, such directionality was seen to be necessary to the rapid placement of poorly trained teachers in classrooms.

The system's greatest flaw, however, was the result of another aspect of the ideology of the early years of the FRELIMO government: the charade of unity. Unity, particularly to Samora Machel, meant that everyone had to speak the same language, Portuguese, the tongue of the nation's former Prospero, who may well have been a Caliban. Unlike Shakespeare's colonial master, the Portuguese had not done very much to bequeath their tongue to those they colonized. One of the great ironies of Mozambican history is the extent to which FRELIMO propagated the Portuguese language; the derisory efforts of the former colonizers palls in comparison. Portuguese was to be the language through which Mozambique imagined itself, and that meant its compulsory use in the classroom. Ideologically speaking, the use of Portuguese was meant to break the power of tribal allegiances and forge the identity of the socialist state. Educationally speaking, the policy was a disaster, and what is worse, it was a disaster that FRELIMO has no excuse for not having foreseen. In the 1950s, UNESCO was already publishing reports that highlighted the dangers of not using a child's mother tongue in the early years of his or her education. In Mozambique, the situation was exacerbated by the fact that the State used legal sanctions to enforce instruction in Portuguese by teachers who often scarcely controlled the language themselves, to pupils entering the system with no knowledge of Portuguese. Unsurprisingly, particularly in rural areas, the system did not work. Dropout rates were high, learning minimal, and teachers frustrated. One reason why the system was retained for so long was because the civil war could be used as a convenient excuse for its failure. Only in the 1990s, when Mozambique's educational policies became increasingly determined by donor agencies, and particularly by UNICEF, was mother-tongue education officially encouraged for the first time since independence. Time will tell if educational achievement improves in the primary sector. What is clear is that the newly pluralistic FRELIMO has stopped persecuting the use of local languages and, as Gregory Kamwendo argues in his article, this opens up a range of possibilities for cross-border cooperation between Mozambique and its African neighbours on terms that are not the by-product of linguistic imperialism.

Mozambique shares a range of languages with its neighbours, providing an opportunity, reasons Kamwendo, for political alliances that do not require the mediating role of former European tongues. He identifies the advantages of pooling linguistic resources at a range of institutional and educational levels, and exemplifies his argument through the case of Chinyanja, a language spoken in Mozambique and Malawi (where it is termed Chichewa).

Language politics in Africa have long been complicated by the arbitrary divisions that resulted from the Berlin Conference of 1884-85. In the era of liberation struggles, Lusophone African liberation movements tended towards Amílcar Cabral's position that "o português [língua] é uma das melhores coisas que os tugas nos deixaram."<sup>6</sup> The stance Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o adopted in Kenya viewed the continued use of the former colonial tongue as detrimental to a true intellectual liberation. In the case of Lusophone Africa, the cultural association of the "língua portuguesa" with the "pátria" has forever complicated the straightforward assumption of cultural independence through the use of the Portuguese language. Mozambique's great post-independence writers have had to negotiate the difficult terrain of using the Portuguese language and often having a more avid readership in Portugal than in their own nation. The most obvious example of a writer who has been read repeatedly as enriching the "língua" as "pátria" is Mia Couto, the relatively young man who has been catapulted to global prominence, and often problematically read as the voice of his young nation. The secret of his success, according to Patrick Chabal, is his ability to manipulate the medium of the short story. In his article, Chabal argues that Couto understands and appropriates the conventions of the "conto," in part, as a result of his experience as a journalist. Even in his novels, Couto essentially applies the formula he successfully uses in his shorter fiction.

Robert Moser's article focuses on another aspect of Couto's work: his use of the tropes of the epic in a quest to forge a cultural identity. Moser offers a reading of Couto's first novel, *Terra Sonâmbula*, a powerful narrative set in the darkest nadir of the civil war that plays with a number of demarcations: between the written and the oral, between sea and land, between reality and fantasy. Moser's argument that Couto draws on the predominantly Western conventions of the epic is a useful reminder of the complex cultural syncretism that is a necessary and unavoidable aspect of understanding Mozambican contemporary culture.

Another Mozambican author who is receiving considerable international attention is Paulina Chiziane. The fact that she shares the same Lisbon-based

publisher as Couto, the prestigious Caminho, in part accounts for and, simultaneously, problematizes her success. While Portugal has never been able economically to neocolonize, in the cultural sphere, Portuguese publishers increasingly determine who are the successful Lusophone African authors. Of course, every writer aspires to the widest possible readership, and Caminho's success in promoting Mozambican writers is a positive aspect of the process of globalisation in that their distribution network enables a greater dissemination of Mozambique's cultural richness. Russell Hamilton discusses Chiziane's intended transnational audience, one that encompasses all seven nations whose official language is Portuguese. Hamilton argues that Chiziane's most recent novel *Niketche: Uma História de Poligamia* communicates a decidedly feminist message and reflects through the author's language, particularly her choice of characters' names, a certain degree of hybridisation characteristic of the processes of globalisation in Mozambique.

Hilary Owen's article focuses on Paulina Chiziane's first novel, *Balada de Amor ao Vento*, and also discusses Chiziane's relationship to the language she uses. For Owen, Chiziane destabilizes a hierarchy that places a nationalist, male discourse in apposition to an essentialized "mother tongue." A result of this destabilization is that Chiziane permits the feminine to transgress into the traditional preserve of what Owen characterizes as male contact zones, and simultaneously transfers part of the blame for a loss of paradise over to men.

Ana Mafalda Leite draws on works by Mía Couto and Paulina Chiziane, as well as Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa, to argue that Mozambique's foremost contemporary authors inherit a poetic paradigm from the voices of a previous generation, most notably, José Craveirinha. The model they adopt foregrounds the restitution of a memory anchored in a localized orality.

The interplay between the oral and the written has long been the polar axis over which debates about what literature from Africa is have been structured. Ana Maria Martinho asserts that the selection of the national canons in Mozambique and Angola is a problematic, but nonetheless often undertaken, exercise precisely because of the important existence of two traditions: the oral and the written. The process of fixing a literary canon has been constantly subject to the vagaries of political fashion, and often tells us more about those wishing to determine what a nation's literature is than about the literary output of a nation.

One Mozambican author of outstanding merit who has been neglected until recently, despite her long literary career, is Lília Momplé. In sharp con-



trast to the fantastic universes that both Chiziane and Couto create, the work of Lília Momplé, the subject of Claire Williams's article, is grounded on a non-sentimentalising realism intent on portraying and thus critiquing the iniquities of the range of systems, from colonialism through to capitalism, that have been imposed on the Mozambican nation. Williams argues that Momplé's work furnishes an impressive array of social and historical characters, a kind of interlocking jigsaw that, without lecturing or badgering her readers, lays bear the stark injustices under which ordinary Mozambicans have repeatedly laboured.

Despite the critical tone of many of the articles in this collection, today's Mozambique has the potential to become a true success story, not as designated by the outside world, but as determined from within. The fact that critical voices are now raised, as much in the rich cultural output of the nation as in the structures of civil society, raises the possibility of a tangible improvement in the lives of ordinary Mozambicans, since every problem must be recognised before a solution can be reached. Chiziane's interrogation of patriarchal practice, Momplé's portrayal of corruption and abject poverty, Couto's depiction of senseless violence, refashion our image of Mozambique away from the utopian paradise-in-the-making that it never was towards a more profound questioning of the problems that this very young nation faces. What remains to be seen is whether Mozambique will finally be allowed to determine its own destiny or whether that small window between the fall of communism and the obliterating rise of the hegemony of world trade was too brief to permit a meaningful Mozambican identity to come into being.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See particularly Synge's account for the neocolonial overtones of the UN operation.

<sup>2</sup> Qtd. in Vines, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Hall and Tom Young have pointed out that even when the perpetrators of NGO discourse employ radical terminology, their underlying beliefs are fundamentally the same as those of the World Bank and Western states. All have "doubts about the capacities of Third World governments" and show "contempt for cultural traditions that do not square with Western notions of 'rights' and 'justice'" (225).

<sup>4</sup> Operation Production was a policy enforced by the Frelimo government, whereby those in urban areas deemed to be engaged in what the state considered to be undesirable activities such as prostitution or vagrancy were forcibly relocated to reeducation camps in the countryside.

<sup>5</sup> The less-than-satisfactory UN operations that immediately preceded the ONUMOSZ mandate were the Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, the UN operation in Somalia, and the UN verification mission to the Angolan peace process.

<sup>6</sup> Cabral 101.

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