

From the Idealization of Frelimo to the Understanding of the Recent History of Mozambique*

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Introduction

History is not only about the exhaustive collection of data, it is not only about the study of the past. It certainly relates to these two aspects, but must go beyond if it is going to pretend to the status of a science which seeks to understand, explain and predict the transformation of societies.

The greatest part of African history related to the process of capitalist expansion has suffered two equally devastating processes: on the one hand, the very process itself — slavery and shipment to the America of millions of Africans — acted as a powerful eraser by physically removing people and then — during the so called formal phase of colonial rule — by drilling in the heads of the colonized that they have had no history since they had no documents.

This twin process of the past is now being repeated, on a shorter scale, but just as powerfully. Destruction is perpetrated on an unprecedented scale, but what is subsequently told by the perpetrators of that destruction is not the history of the destruction, but a different one which recounts it as if it was a story of construction. This was done repeatedly: slavery was explained as being useful since it was turning savages into Christians. Formal colonial rule was imposed through so-called “pacification campaigns” in the name of bringing “civilisation”. And now in South Africa, the Apartheid Regime is defended by a US Administration in the name of “constructive engagement” while thousands of blacks are being killed.

More than ten years after Mozambique and Angola have achieved independence, both countries are at the receiving end of a deliberate strategy by South Africa and its allies to roll back a process initiated during armed struggles which lasted from the beginning of the 60s to 1975. If the past can

* The original version of this paper was presented at a seminar of the Centre of African Studies in February 14, 1986 (for publication in *Estudos Mocambicanos*, n. 5). A revised version was read at the UNU seminar in Harare. The present version is a slightly revised one of the latter. We thank all the colleagues of the Centre and participants of the seminar for their comments and encouragement.

serve as a lesson, the next stage will be dominated by historical analysis attempting to demonstrate that the attempted transformations could not succeed, because it is part of the strategy of the former colonizing powers to instill the idea that the only viable and therefore acceptable social and economic system is one which does not challenge the principles upon which capitalism has been built in Africa. And one of these principles is the inherent inferiority of black people.

While the enemies of the Mozambican revolution can deliberately distort its history, the same can be done by those who, out of sympathy, support, solidarity, seek to defend it. Unfortunately, the commitment can sometimes blind one to the realities and only make one see the idealized version of that reality.

The main objective of this essay is to examine the problematic of the revolutionary process begun by Frelimo during the armed struggle of national liberation, with the objective of showing that it is not only possible, but necessary to re-analyze Frelimo's and Mozambique's own history, as a base for more correct analysis of the contradictions that are appearing today. Because today's contradictions did not emerge in isolation from the previous historical phases.

The focus will be on two notable works published in 1984 and 1985 respectively by Joseph Hanlon and John Saul.¹ Joseph Hanlon worked in Mozambique as a journalist, correspondent of the BBC and the *Manchester Guardian*. John Saul has been for a long time a "compagnon de route" of Frelimo who was already supporting this organization when he was teaching in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the University of Dar-es-Salaam at the end of the 60s. John Saul's text is a collective product of various authors who worked — are still working in Mozambique. The areas covered are education (Judith Marshall), agriculture (Helena Dolny), industry (Peter Sketchley), physical planning (Barry Pinsky), health (Carol Barker) and women (Stephanie Urdang). The task of providing the theoretical premisses and cohesion to the text fell to John Saul who contributes three lengthy essays which make up the most significant part of the book.

Although it is the Mozambican reality which constitutes the major focus of these two texts, they do emphasize the relationship that exists between the various events which are taking place in Mozambique and those which are triggered by the struggles in Southern Africa in the context of the growing popular movement against the Apartheid Regime, and for a transformation of social and economic relations.

Both books are a testimony of Frelimo's impact on the growth of political and ideological consciousness in the region. The resulting independence of

Mozambique has had contradictory effects among South African Nationalists as well on the leaders of Apartheid who saw in the Mozambican process a direct threat not only to its hegemonic position inside South Africa, but also to its economic and political predominance in the region, not to speak of the threat it represented to the whole capitalist system in the entire region.

Thus the first chapter of Hanlon's book, quite appropriately begins with the words of the then Minister of Information, José Luis Cabaco: "We built something". The Minister wanted to call attention to the fact that despite serious errors committed, Mozambicans did achieve successes. Many will disagree and argue that the character of a revolution is not determined by what it was, but what it is. Yet, in a situation where the armed bandits of Renamo are doing everything to destroy what was built to the point of making people forget that they had indeed succeeded in building something, it is worth being reminded of those achievements. After all, one of the results of the onslaught of slavery and formal colonial rule was the almost complete eradication of the inner history of the continent upon which the occupiers constructed their own history saying at the same time that Africans did not have a history.

Both books aim at recounting the struggles which transform Frelimo from a simple nationalist movement to one dedicated to the revolutionary transformation of Mozambican society. For those who did not participate directly in this process, the Frelimo that they know is so shaken that it is almost unrecognizable. The authors are not neutral and they entirely agree with the options of Frelimo. Paradoxically, it is this commitment that constitutes one of the sources of the problems of the books.

"Revolution under Fire", "A difficult road", are the two subtitles that Hanlon and John Saul, respectively, use in order to illustrate the path that took a victorious Frelimo in 1975 to one which, in 1985, is exhausted, drained, far from the image it had in 1975. Thus, they want to stress that even if Frelimo may appear today on the verge of defeat, it had, also, been victorious. The major flaw of the books is to have refrained from an analysis of the contradictions that took Frelimo from victory to the present situation.

Without eulogizing defeatism we shall try to show in this essay that it is possible to analyze the current contradictions of Frelimo, going over its own history, within the framework of the history of Mozambican society.

It is necessary to raise new questions. Still, these must be posed in a manner which encourages a study of the history of Frelimo, not as an unchangeable text, but as a contradictory process inserted in the social and national struggle of Mozambique.

Just as the struggle against colonial rule brought out a history that had been asphyxiated and negated by the colonizer himself, the struggles waged

since independence should allow us to perceive better the processes and aspect of the struggles both before and after independence, so as to improve our analytical tools and also better understand today's contradictions.

As such, these two books do not claim to provide a complete history of Frelimo. Although the focus is the post-independence period, both authors provide a summary of the period of the armed struggle and conclude with an analysis of the impact of the Nkomati Agreement.

Our purpose is not to deny the merit of the authors, but to insist on the importance and necessity to deepen the criticism if we are going to contribute towards the reinforcement of the ranks of those who are struggling for a socialist transformation of Mozambique.

These two books differ strikingly from previous ones in that, while in sympathy with the objectives of Frelimo, they do try to provide a critical analysis of the whole process. They try to avoid the trap of ideological justification. Yet, even so, their effort falls short because they do not analyse the real situation as it is, but they seek to respond to ideological positions which are portrayed as antagonistic. This is not to deny the importance of ideological and political struggles, but however sophisticated these can be, they cannot replace analyses of concrete realities.

1. Points of departure: the transformation of premises into postulates

One of the most fundamental problems of the existing history of Frelimo comes not only from the somewhat triumphalistic form in which this history is approached, but above all, from the unquestionable manner in which its historical knowledge is used. The fact that the armed struggle resulted in independence in 1975 reinforced the view of the correctness of the armed struggle thereby leading to an implicit and silent consensus concerning the real causes of the victory of independence.

Generally speaking, in the chronicling of victorious historiographies, it is rare to run into accounts which focus on "less victorious" aspects. Thus, in the history of the Armed Struggle, since the process led to victory, it is considered unnecessary to analyse in critical manner the content and limits of that victory: aspects of the victory which, in the future, could undermine or even threaten the consolidation of achieved gains are not assessed.

In both books one does not find a systematic attempt to re-think the history of liberation starting from 1962 or before for that matter. Just as the anthropologists during colonial rule were fond of isolating their villages from the overall ongoing process of colonisation, so did these authors isolate Frelimo from the society as a whole as well as from the larger historical context encompassing the period preceding 1962. What happened between 1962

and 1975 is seen as unproblematic and therefore not necessitating serious study since it cannot be pertinent to an understanding of the current contradictions. In history as in any other science it is, at times, necessary to track back and question knowledge which is considered definitive. In the case of Frelimo this does not mean going back on the question of the chosen objectives. It is a question of analyzing how the journey was achieved, and of analyzing if the manner in which it has been recounted has not generated errors of comprehension, errors of knowledge. At the level of reflections and analysis of the victory of the armed struggle, the texts are dominated by a teleological problematic. This means that the proof of the victory is in the victory itself and that, therefore, there is no necessity to introduce new questions which put this fact in doubt.

One of the maxims of Frelimo has been that "victory is something that is prepared, that victory is something that is organized". But it is also Frelimo that has said through its leaders that the 25th of April, 1974 occurred too early, thereby suggesting that victory was achieved without having been properly prepared. One could then conclude from this that the victory was not as satisfactory as it could or should have been. In other words, despite the fact that the leaders of Frelimo suggested that there were limits to their victory, the historians of that victory preferred to focus on the victory and not on the problems "left pending" from the armed struggle.

To our knowledge, there is no text which attempts to analyze objectively the content, limits and contradictions of the victory without falling in one form or another of reductionism, i.e. in giving primacy to one factor or another which ends up oversimplifying and therefore giving a distorted view of a complex process.² This, at least with regard to the texts of the left, since those of the right have the opposite tendency: Frelimo is presented as a military organisation totally infeodated to the interests of the socialist countries. Needless to say this teleological inversion had the purpose of feeding the strategy of aggression of the imperialist powers. And since Frelimo is placed in the "enemy camp" everything will be done to prevent the victory or the consolidation of that victory.³

2. History as a front of the Political and Ideological Struggle

In the current context of Southern Africa and taking into account the development of these struggles and the importance of the stakes it is extremely difficult to provide historical analysis which can at the same time be a contribution towards the progress of the struggle. Put in other words, the problem consists of managing to produce a history which is constructive and critical, without falling into academic paternalism or blind triumphalism. What is at stake is how to combat ideological propaganda from the right

without producing a "propaganda history" whose usefulness would be limited to functional counter-ideology.

Although not explicitly studied, the question of the focus is important. Can it be said that by doing the history of Frelimo one is doing the history of national liberation of Mozambique? On the basis of what is presented, the answer is at best ambiguous. The phase preceding the foundation of Frelimo is considered as belonging to a different phase altogether, neatly separated from that of the armed struggle. We are not here questioning the validity of a history of the armed struggle, what we are questioning is whether producing the history of the armed Struggle directed by Frelimo permits, automatically, an understanding of the process at the level of the country as a whole.

At times, implicitly at least, the history of Frelimo is considered as a concentration of the contradictions of Mozambican society. This is clearly the case when the famous struggle of the two lines is discussed.⁴ Obviously, this struggle within the leadership is a key event in the history of Frelimo. However, should one ask if this struggle permits one to understand the contradictions that were dividing Mozambican society as a whole at the time, one would be hard put to answer.

The victory of independence in 1975 did contribute significantly to the idea that the history of the struggle for independence can be reduced to the history of Frelimo. And the manner in which the Third Congress took place could be seen as a confirmation of the idea that all Mozambicans recognize themselves in Frelimo. There seemed to have been an apparent coincidence of both histories but, in reality, the history of Frelimo can only be understood if replaced in the global context of the history of Mozambican society.

For example, with regard to the ideological characterization of Frelimo, it could be argued that Frelimo was closer to revolutionary marxism, during the process of creating the liberated zones, then when it institutionalized (what was considered as a *fait accompli*) a Marxist-Leninist Party, vanguard party of the peasants and workers, at the 3rd Congress in 1977. Clearly, one of the most obvious difficulties of this kind of argument will be the question of knowing what has to be understood by Marxism-Leninism.

The question of how Frelimo came to Marxism is too complex to be treated satisfactorily in this paper. In this process, the leaders of Frelimo have acknowledged that the majority of their cadres came to Marxism through the readings of Mao. However, as President Samora once pointed out, inspiration from other revolutions and the readings of Mao were considered as methods and not as closed systems of thought. At the limit this could be

seen as almost echoing Marx's own statement to the effect that he, Marx, was not a Marxist.

Assuming that this is an acceptable theme for reflection, it will then be necessary to investigate why the inversion took place, what is it that turned Frelimo less revolutionary at that very precise moment when socialism became the targeted objective. It could be asked: had there been a casual relation between that inversion and the guerilla movement's inheritance of the enemy's state apparatus? Whatever the answer, the question is not an abstract one, and it already had been broached by President Samora when, in 1975, he pointed out that "by pulling the cadres from the liberated zones, we are pulling the fish out of the water."⁵

Given the current context as well as past attempts at suppressing the struggles of this continent against the onslaught of capitalist expansion, it is of crucial importance to preserve some of the concepts that were produced by the struggle. One of these concepts is "the liberated zones", so many times vulgarized or idealized that, to many, it has lost whatever specific meaning it had. Among the various meanings predominates the literal meaning of liberation from the physical presence of Portuguese administration. This physical liberation constitutes only one partial aspect of the concept of liberated zones. From the point of view of Frelimo, it can be deduced that the liberated zones referred to the transformation of the socio-economic relations in the zones it had under its effective control. Contrary to the liberal sense, this latter meaning implied that this process of transformation was the result of struggles whose ultimate outcome or success could not by any means be considered as automatically achieved or completed. Over and above this, it is important to stress the fact that these transformations had not reached the same level in all the various fronts of the struggle. Unfortunately, the writings of Frelimo itself sometimes fell into the tendency to generalize by starting from the most radical and exceptional transformations, thereby promoting a distorted idea of the process. Thus, the fact that in the liberated zones there was a systematic effort to struggle against the practices of the enemy should by no means mean that these practices had completely disappeared. For example, one could find almost side by side examples of exemplary women/men relationships illustrating the transformations brought about by Frelimo and examples of women being abused as objects of pleasure by men.

Despite the fact that Frelimo had always insisted on the necessity of not looking at guerilla warfare only in purely militaristic terms, the great historian and sympathizer of Frelimo, Basil Davidson, in his otherwise excellent *The People's Cause*, actually falls in this form of reductionism.⁶ Davidson concludes, correctly, that the "Gordian Knot Operation" (1970-72) ended up

in the defeat of Kaulza de Arriaga. But the analysis should not have rested there, because the objectives of Frelimo had always aimed beyond a pure military defeat of the Portuguese.

The military advances of Frelimo into Tete in 1972 had been made possible by the political and ideological solidity of the Liberated Zones in Cabo Delgado and Niassa provinces, but this progress on the ground did not mean an extension or a reproduction, as such, of the liberated zones. It remains to be asked whether it would have been possible to make the military advances coincide with the extension of the liberated zones. Did Frelimo, at the time, have the quantity and quality of the cadres to accomplish such a task? It is not possible to respond to these questions without further research, but it is necessary to raise them because the question of the lack of the cadres seems to have been used more often after 1975 than before.

The focus on Frelimo's history to the exclusion of that of the transformations it provoked on the enemy's side has also hampered subsequent understanding of the global process, as well as the inner strength of the enemy, albeit defeated. The histories of the oppressed should not be made to the exclusion of those of the oppressors, especially in view of the fact that the former's liberation can mean the liberation of the latter. The monolithic view of colonial rule is a caricatural perception which may serve useful purposes in propaganda work, but which prevents a correct understanding of the transformations brought about by the struggle on the nature of the state. The war could not obviously modify the nature of the colonial system. Yet, the progress of the struggle was forcing the colonial state to become at the same time more repressive and more reformist. More repressive towards those individuals or classes that constituted a threat to the continuation of the system, and more reformist towards those individuals and classes that were most amenable to the perpetuation of lusotropicalism.

3. The Theoretical Framework of the Official Sources

Hanlon and the authors of John Saul's book resort extensively to official speeches and sources in order to buttress their arguments, but hardly any author systematically attempts to problematize these sources. The problematic of the speeches or of the official sources is unquestionably accepted. Ultimately, it seems that the major difficulty was the incapacity to raise other questions than the ones that had already been raised. Without exception the predominant mould is the following: the problems that were confronted by Frelimo did not only come from the exterior, some were the results of internal errors. These were detected and — with quotes from the speeches — it is argued that efforts were made to correct them.

One of the results of this practice of resorting on official sources has been a recounting of Frelimo's history by way of key events. Among these are of course the congresses. The authors do not succeed to free themselves from this formalistic use of their sources. Thus, for example, the idea that Jorge Rebelo and Marcelino dos Santos were moved from State functions to full-time Party duties is uncritically seen as a proof of the concern expressed during the 3rd Congress to give priority to the reinforcement of party structures over those of the state. In reality what happened was different. From 1977 to 1983, as noted by the authors, the party structures grew increasingly weaker in comparison with those of the state. The efforts made to modify the situation, from the Political and Organizational offensives to revitalizations, could in fact be viewed as proofs of the failure to transform the relationship between the party and the state, and as fruitless attempts to implement decisions taken at the Congresses.

Then the task should be to seek to find out why this was so. This may of course lead to the kind of critical analysis of the State that is thought to be unnecessary since the state is meant to represent the interests of the workers and the peasants. But does what it is meant to be coincided with the reality?

When formulating criticisms, the presidential speeches constitute one of the privileged sources because they are seen as the best irrefutable proof of the self-critical assessment that Frelimo is capable of, and because their origins act as a shield against possible accusations of ultra-leftism and/or "confusionismo". For example, the speech against illegalities of the state repressive apparatus is used as a serious proof of the intention of the state to continue to fight for the establishment of people's power. In addition, the context in which that speech was made — the Political and Organizational Offensive — is also used as proof of the will to resort to, and implant the lessons of the armed struggle: treat the people as the source of reference and inspiration for the exercise of power.⁷ The intentions do demonstrate the existence of the formal desire to establish people's power, but they were not implemented. Why? If one cannot raise this question and analyze the reasons for the non coincidence between the intentions and the reality, the field will remain wide open for the enemy's answers; answers which will not be interested in the promotion of social and economic transformation.

4. 1975: Continuation or Rupture?

Chronologically, both books focus on the period after 1975. The weakness of both precisely resides in the use of 1975 as the point of departure. The problematization of simply drawing attention to the differences between Frelimo in 1975 and other African neo-colonial regimes is not sufficient.⁸

Obviously, Frelimo was different from many other movements, but the best proof of this difference cannot be based on an idealization of Frelimo.

John Saul, despite the fact that he does confront this problem of idealization, does not succeed in establishing the bases for critical and objective analyses.⁹ For John Saul, the difference between Frelimo and other parties which called themselves Marxist-Leninist resides in the practice. According to him, Frelimo managed to avoid almost all of the negative aspects normally related to various kinds of Marxism-Leninisms, and even on those occasions when it was slipping into one of those defects, it immediately showed promising signs of correction. Thus, Frelimo avoided the pitfalls of African Socialism and of hypercentralisation typical of the socialisms of Eastern European countries.¹⁰ However, when confronted with some of the serious difficulties currently impeding progress towards socialism, the authors fall into subjective descriptions of the personalisation of power.

On this aspect, Hanlon's text, less preoccupied with a discussion of marxism-leninism, ends up being closer to the dominant tradition of Frelimo which arrived to its marxism by an empirical method of trial and errors.¹¹ What mattered was whether or not the struggle was defending the interests of the majority. As Marcelino dos Santos graphically put it: "Our main objective was to stick to the people". Obviously, "the people" could quickly become an empty formula, but at least it did have the merit of relating to a concrete reality. Wishing, apparently at almost any cost, to demonstrate the revolutionary quality of Frelimo's marxism. Saul ends up producing a discussion which is closer to casuistry than to a marxist methodology.

At the heart of the discussion on Marxism, stands out the question of the nature of the state, which means, automatically, the necessity to discuss the character of the class relations within Mozambican society. Although not entirely satisfactorily, Hanlon goes much further than John Saul. Hanlon argues that "members of the aspiring bourgeoisie" are those who come from the more privileged strata of colonial times and who are nostalgically lamenting the absence of the consumer society.¹² But one of the problems of this approach and of referring to an "aspiring" bourgeoisie is that it automatically implies that the bourgeoisie cannot exist because it does not have the economic means. Clearly, even if this was so, it should not mean that because this aspiring bourgeoisie had seen itself stripped of the socio-economic basis, that they would not attempt to create this basis by the means at their disposal. These means did not have to be economic ones.

It is true that Frelimo's accession to power made it difficult for this group to manoeuvre, but once it realized that these means could be acquired through the occupation of key positions within the Party and the State apparatuses, they slowly transformed these institutions to serve their interests rather than those of the workers and the peasants. The best illustration of this transformation is the manner in which the state bureaucracy can be more easily cir-

cumvented by members of this group than by the workers and the peasants because the latter have less chances of “knowing somebody higher up”.

This transformation of the Party and State apparatuses was facilitated by the widespread conception according to which the Party and the State could be analysed in isolation from the rest of society. On the one hand one speaks of the necessity to “waterproof” (impermeabilize) the Party and the State, but on the other, the President himself has explained over and over again how various family links, class ties and friendly relationships have led to a situation whereby those who are supposed to implement the laws of the state are in fact the very first to violate them. Objectively, this is not surprising for the Party and the State are not isolated from the rest of society. In a situation of scarcity of resources, their distribution will be influenced by the socio-economic forces operating in the entire society. The contradictions that operate in the civil society will clearly have their impact on all institutions whether or not these are trying to protect themselves from these contradictions.

The widely used concept of “infiltrated”, to refer to the enemy penetration inside the Party and the State, is the reverse side of “impermeabilization”. In both cases, the concepts focus on individuals rather than on classes and groups tending to reinforce the idea that fundamentally the State and the Party are defending the interests of the peasants and workers. Cases which show the opposite are exceptional. Yet, if it is agreed that it is social and material conditions that determine social conscience, then it should follow, as indeed pointed out by President Samora, that just as people can alter situations, new situations and institutions can transform people, including the most revolutionary ones.¹³

Both books came out in a general context of various anniversaries: 1982, the twentieth anniversary of the founding of Frelimo; 1983, the 4th Congress; 1984, the twentieth anniversary of the beginning of the armed struggle and, finally 1985, the tenth anniversary of independence. Then in addition to all this, there was the signing of the Nkomati Accord on March 16, 1984. All of which contributed to providing the ground for approaching the whole topic with a balance sheet in mind. As such, there is nothing wrong with balance sheets, except that they do require rigorous parameters so that one knows exactly what is being measured and what for.

Despite the great strides and progress, John Saul does express serious reservations: “at the risk of overstating the case, one might argue that the revolution has become weaker rather than stronger at the base in the years since independence. Frelimo has, quite simply, failed to institutionalize ‘people’s power’ to anything like the degree which its experience and its ideology might suggest to have been its goal.”¹⁴ None of the authors questions the advances

made, but Hanlon certainly writes and expresses what millions of Mozambicans must have been asking themselves, at least since 1983: "Has the alternative civilization been destroyed? Will South Africa, the West, and Frelimo's aspirants to the bourgeoisie allow it to re-establish socialism and people's power as its goals?"¹⁵

Could it be argued that one of the reasons why John Saul has difficulties in making an objective assessment comes from the fact that, from the times of the armed struggle, he has written on Frelimo, more often than not projecting what the aims were rather than focusing on the actual realities. This mode of writing does have a tendency to produce an idealized vision of what is taking place. As long the dynamic of the process is not stopped, this idealized vision will not be completely or drastically out of step with the reality. In this context it is worth recording the warning voiced by President Samora against rushed idealisation made on the basis of past victories:

"We wonder why it is that veteran responsables of the struggle, who have made us what we are through their many sacrifices, should allow themselves to be overtaken by events, so to speak.

The prime cause of this situation is the spirit of victory, of over-confidence.

The great victories we have won, not only on the battlefield but also in wiping out reactionary forces and eliminating enemy infiltration in our midst, and also in national reconstruction, have led certain comrades to see only continuous victories, to underestimate the enemy tactically and to regard every situation as 'normal' and 'fine', never learning from setbacks or studying how to overcome our limitations.

These comrades therefore stop studying our line, believing that they already know it well enough, as the victories prove. As a result political analysis is abandoned, we become less perceptive to deviations, contraventions of the line and are thus unable to detect and nip in the bud the enemy's ideological, moral and physical infiltration."¹⁶

To draw a balance sheet only from 1975, introduces distortions which impede a full understanding of the trajectory and the transformations which affected Frelimo throughout its existence. One of the implications of this kind of approach is that the Frelimo of 1975 is the same as the Frelimo of the semi-liberated zones and of the liberated zones. Our knowledge of Frelimo up to 1975 is considered definitive when, clearly, there is a necessity to go over the whole process, reexamine the struggles and the contradictions that transformed Frelimo from a movement first merely interested in nationalist objectives, to a movement dedicated to the radical transformation of relations inherited from Portuguese colonialism.

And since it is assumed that Frelimo before 1975 and Frelimo after 1975 was more or less the same, no serious attempt is made to study the differences

that are patently obvious, whether it be at the level of congresses (the differences between the Second and the third) or at the level of the use of the repressive state apparatuses.

Interestingly, one of the major characteristics of the preparatory phase of the fourth Congress was precisely to draw its inspiration from the lessons of the 2nd Congress which managed to uphold the objectives of Frelimo and overcome the internal crisis of 1968-69 by defeating the so-called "new exploiters" who struggled to stir Frelimo towards a more nationalistic course.

The so-called struggles between the two lines which went on practically from 1962 to 1970 did not stop with the victory of the revolutionary line. This victory was more like an episode of a prolonged struggle. When Frelimo assumed power in 1975, it found again a situation which was not entirely dissimilar from the one it had confronted in the liberated zones between 1962 and 1966, but this time at the level of the country. With the defeat of Kaúlza de Arriaga other Nkavandames preferred to fall in line behind Frelimo, not because they had made theirs its political and ideological objectives, but because they saw Frelimo winning its battle against the Portuguese. Others, it is true, did attempt to challenge openly Frelimo's leadership by creating new political parties, but a large group opted for the opportunistic strategy of following the victors, biding their time.

The question of the transition from guerilla warfare to state power is raised, but not discussed, in both books. One of the reasons behind this reticence comes from the already mentioned tendency of the authors of not making a problematic analysis of their sources. As a result of this failure they do not analyse critically the theorisation that was made of the defeat of the "new explorers". One of the aspects of this theorization was to see the defeat as a healthy sign of the capacity of the movement to purify its ranks from non-revolutionary elements. And it was assumed that this capacity would automatically reproduce itself over the years. Yet, on this specific point, of how to maintain a revolutionary line, Frelimo has been crystal clear:

"The lessons we learn from these errors should be discussed by the masses, so that they can gain this new experience. Violations of our line and discipline should be the subject of discussion and public criticism by the masses. In so doing, on the one hand we use our mistakes to deepen our political consciousness and, on the other, we put the defence of our line and discipline in the hands of the people, where it belongs."¹⁷

Still, it seems that because of the spirit of victory, certain ideas concerning the nature of the state and its relation to civil society have been practised and accepted as postulates, among these:

1. The state apparatus could be used as the privileged tool for transforming Mozambican society;
2. This postulate contained another, namely, that the state can be seen as an administrative entity separable from the rest of Mozambican society. In other words, the state is no longer perceived as reflecting as well as being the object of struggles rooted in class conflicts in the civil society, and that, therefore, the power that emanates from the state should not automatically be seen as defending the interests of the workers and the peasants.
3. The inability of the state to carry out the orientations of the party has been attributed to various reasons, lack of cadres, insufficient technical preparation, but rarely, and certainly not systematically, to actions determined by class positions. The social and material position of those who have the function of implementing decisions is not seen as being in potential contradiction with the social and material position of the workers and peasants. And so, errors which are made in the implementation process are attributed to incompetence when they could also be seen as objectively reflecting class positions unequivocally opposed to defending the interests of the workers and peasants.
4. Finally, the conception that class struggles can somehow be controlled, checked from the control rooms of the party and state apparatuses.

While these conceptions have increasingly dominated, it is worth recalling that this was not always the case. At the end of a seminar of the Department for Ideological Work, its First Secretary, Jorge Rebelo, made a scathing critical assessment of the party and how it functioned in the following words:

“Imbued with the bourgeois spirit of institutional prerogatives, many cadres of the party have isolated themselves from the masses, thinking erroneously that contact with the masses might make them lose a presumed respectability. For these members of the party, to be chief, to be in charge, necessarily implies to live far from the masses and to be feared by them.”¹⁸

The resolutions that came out of the third national meeting of the Department for Ideological Work raised fundamental questions concerning the transition and functioning of a revolutionary party which wields state power. These resolutions read like an inventory of the various problems confronted by Frelimo in 1974 and 1975, and at the same time they demonstrate the complexity and difficulty of the problems that had to be tackled. That balance sheet clearly points out the relationship that exists between the position and practice of party members and the masses.

Still, as on so many occasions, the fact that the problems were clearly indicated, was not sufficient. This third meeting did not succeed in creating class based organizational structures aimed at combating the so-called

bourgeois spirit within the party. This failure is a serious structural one and ought to be studied further. As the phase of the armed struggle showed, it is not sufficient to boot the enemy out, new institutions, new organisations have to be created, technically and administratively designed to serve and defend, first of all the interests of the producers.

The periodic offensives constitute one of the most vivid manifestations of this failure. The offensives cannot be a substitute for permanent institutions which would ensure the reproduction of the advances, and contribute towards the complete and total destruction of the inherited colonial state structures. And here, too, failures are perceived as the results of individual shortcomings, and not as the result of the direct outcome of the relation of forces, in class terms.¹⁹

On the question of the relationship between ideology, party and state, John Saul reduces it to a mere technical and pedagogic problem of finding the best method of teaching and inculcating Marxism-Leninism.²⁰ Thus, when referring to the closing of the Faculty of Marxism-Leninism, John Saul identifies the problem as having to do with the inherent inability of the teaching staff which had very little knowledge of Mozambican realities. This may very well be the case, but the difficulties of drilling a revolutionary ideology into the heads of students cannot be understood if they are analysed in isolation from the larger contradictions and struggles of the society as a whole.

Marxism is not abstract by definition, its abstraction surfaces if its theoretical concepts are unable to explain and apprehend social realities. The inability of the teaching staff must be related also to Jorge Rebelo's criticism mentioned above. If the practice diverges from the theory, no teacher, however brilliant, will make the two coincide. The emergence of "Marxism-Leninism" as a growingly abstract body of concepts must be linked to the already mentioned distancing between the party and the masses. After all, it is well to remember that it was Frelimo itself which propagated the idea that revolutions are not taught in books, but are taught in the process of doing them.

It is conceivable that, having taught in that Faculty, John Saul was led to believe that the root of the problem was a question of method. And this perception was reinforced by the fact that, indeed the teachers from the GDR did have fairly superficial knowledge of Mozambican realities. However, as already pointed out earlier, John Saul's knowledge of Frelimo tended to suffer from the opposite tendency of idealizing Frelimo's achievements. The idealization and consideration of Frelimo as a microcosmic, but reliable representation of Mozambican society led John Saul to another form of abstraction.

The question of distancing from the masses is crucial and deserves greater study. In addition to internal errors, it is obvious that the old enemies did

not relent. There were forces that were determined not to let it concretize its ideals. And they operated at all levels, with the support of the South African government in collusion with Western powers still “nostalgizing” about their colonial past. The emergence of the armed bandits could be considered as the most destructive manifestation of this strategy, whose ultimate aim is to prevent the building socialism next to a country which proclaims itself the bastion of western civilization.

5. The Study of the Enemy

Allusion has already been made to the fact that the focus on Frelimo’s history has often been made to the detriment of the transformation of the enemy brought about by Frelimo’s struggles on that very enemy. This, despite the insistence by Frelimo to keep studying the enemy. Thus, the armed bandits are mentioned and described, but not analyzed. Once again, one cannot help but refer to criticism voiced by President Samora concerning those cadres who let themselves be influenced by the spirit of victory:

“They stop studying the enemy in the belief that they already know enough, as the victories prove. But the enemy’s manoeuvres are continually changing, their attitude becoming more and more criminal and desperate with each defeat. If we do not constantly study the enemy and if we underestimate him tactically, we fall into a routine and are therefore taken by surprise by the enemy’s new shemes and crimes. Thus, instead of maintaining the offensive, instead of destroying the snake in the egg, we go back on the defensive, discovering the snake only when it is full grown and lifting its venomous head to kill us.”²¹

When the name of the armed bandits was officialized, Frelimo had not stopped concerning itself with rigorously defining what distinguished its objectives from those of the colonialists, with what distinguished its conception of a more just and egalitarian society from that of the colonial fascist. With regard to the armed bandits it seems that one of the first preoccupations was determined by the necessity to react against their attempt to give themselves an aura of respectability, calling themselves first Renamo (Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana) and before this “Africa Livre”.

But at the same time there seems to have been an underestimation of the armed bandits’ capacity for destruction and external political alliances. It is possible to see in the strategy of destruction for destruction’s sake the typical practice of reactionary fascism. As the peasants say, the armed bandits behave themselves like hyenas; but this should not make one forget that they were men who had been armed not so much to create a political party (although this, now, seems to have become a primary concern), but to destroy and ultimately to demoralize. The use that has been made of the armed bandits

obeyed the same principle that was applied by the infamous PIDE/DGS and is currently used by the South Africans: to torture and to main till the victim breaks down. And afterwards proclaim that the fall of the victim provides one more proof of the inherent incapacity of the blacks to run a state, and of socialism to be incapable of developing a functional economy.

The strategy of destruction for destruction's sake is not so illogical as it may appear at first sight: it would not be the first time that warfare and destruction have been at the origin of well known fortunes. In this case, the fortunes of those who were forced to leave Mozambique in 1975, and are trying by any means to get it back.

It could be said that the armed bandits do not have a social base, but it could also be said that these same armed bandits constitute the very narrow social basis of the fascist financiers whose sole objective is to recuperate what they lost in 1975. It might seem illogical to see in an a-social group a social base for another, but then it could be argued that this has precisely been one of the major defining characteristics of regimes of the extreme right: the narrowness of their social basis combined with the use of violence to secure and maintain their position.

There are sufficient reasons to doubt the armed bandits' interest in building a political opposition, but their mentors (now Americans of the Heritage Foundation in addition to the South African Defense Forces to cite the most important ones) certainly hate socialism or anything which comes close to it. Whether or not they are representative, it would not be the first time in the history of confrontation between a progressive regime and imperialist powers that the latter manage to piece together, out of thin air "a government of national reconstruction", submitted to their interests, as was seen recently with the case of Grenada.

The armed bandits have roots, at least in terms of characteristics, that go as far back as the early years of Frelimo. In those years, and especially later, during the Second Congress in 1968, they were identified ideologically and politically as reactionaries and direct allies of the Portuguese colonialists. To speak of, as some have, social bandits, is senseless: whatever the society one is dealing with a bandit is by definition a-social. To speak of social bandits (therefore good) is the same thing as talking about good nazis.²²

Conclusion

What was attempted here was to show that it is possible to produce a problematized history of Frelimo, from within that very history. And this history can help to reflect and study the current phase. The texts of Frelimo can provide a guideline for constructing a mobilizing history, but the texts do not contain this history. In order to produce a mobilizing history, it is

necessary, as President Samora has pointed out to abandon the spirit of victory because:

“The spirit of victory is a manifestation of left opportunism: it makes us underestimate the enemy tactically, and leads to adventurism. Sooner or later the spirit of victory will exact sacrifices, making us pay dearly, in heavy futile losses, for the errors we have committed. The spirit of victory is the twin brother of the spirit of failure and defeatism; left opportunism is the other side of the coin of right opportunism. When there are setbacks as a result of errors committed in the spirit of victory, the adventurists fall into defeatism fearing the enemy strategically, starting to analyze only failures and ceasing to see the advances of the struggle. Because they believed in rapid victory, the war now seems “interminable” to them. The victories which have been won were fortuitous isolated cases, as far as they are concerned. With this attitude they start to carry out their tasks with evident lack of interest, completely abandoning an overall view of things and seeing only mistakes in other comrades’ work but refusing to point out and discuss mistakes or propose correct solutions. They prefer backbiting to criticism and self-criticism, intrigue to open discussion, they create their own tiny groups, their allies . . . Their bodies continue to live in our zone but their spirits are already installed in the enemy zone, dreaming of comfort and corruption, now regarded as marvellous things.”²³

Notes

- 1 Joseph Hanlon, *Mozambique: Revolution Under Fire*, Zed Books, London, 1984, 292 p. John Saul, (editor), *A Difficult Road: The Transition to Socialism in Mozambique*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1985, 420 p. By focusing on this single work of John Saul we do not wish to argue that it is representative of his work as a whole. What is currently taking place in Mozambique is clearly not only relevant for Mozambique alone, but for the whole region. See his “Mozambican Socialism and South African Aggression: A Case Study in Destabilization”, prepared for the African Studies Association Annual Meeting held in New Orleans, November 23-26, 1985.
The problematic that has informed this essay comes from long standing concerns with the promotion of critically researching and teaching the histories of liberation movements, both in lectures given by Aquino de Braganca in the History Department, and in the History Workshop of the Centre of African Studies in the Eduardo Mondlane University. One of the principal concerns is to nurture analytical debates which will help to feed and encourage greater research because we strongly hold to the position that debates should never be considered closed. And the principal merit of both books under review is that they share this preoccupation.
This concern is not limited to this specific case of Frelimo’s history. See, for example, J. Depelchin, “Towards Problematic History of Africa”, *Tanzania Zamani* (Bulletin of the Historical Association of Tanzania), mimeo, 18, 1976; and “Towards a Reconstruction of pre-colonial Central African History”, *Ufahamu*, 1979.
- 2 In this respect there is no distinction to be made between books coming from the left or from the right as can be seen from the following examples (taken at random): Barry Munslow, “State Intervention in Agriculture: The Mozambican Experience” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 22, 2 (1984), pp. 199-221; Horace Campbell, “War, Reconstruction and Dependence in Mozambique”, *Journal of African Marxists*, 6 October, 1984, pp. 47-73; Michel Cahen, “Etat et pouvoir populaire dans le Mozambique indépendant”, *Politique Africaine*, 19, Septembere 1985, pp. 36-60; Thomas H. Henricksen, *Revolution and Counterrevolution*, Greenwood Press, 1983, 289 p.

- 3 Henricksen's book is typical of this problematic presenting Frelimo as a military organization which, to him means *ipso facto* an essentially repressive organization, and therefore automatically incapable of developing a democratic society, Henricksen, like so many other American and European observers who clamour against the "military regimes" of the Third World tend to forget that many of those countries got their first taste of militarization through the so-called "pacification campaigns" (read state terrorism), carried out by the imperialist powers to establish themselves. And today, these same countries have been transformed willy-nilly into purchasers of military hardware from those same countries which accuse them of being too militaristic.
- On the question of teleology and history, one of the most stimulating works has been written by Pierre Raymond, *La résistible fatalité de l'histoire*, Paris, 1984(?).
- 4 The best summary of the struggle of the two lines can be found in one of the documents of the 3rd Congress (3-7 February 1977, Maputo), which was originally drafted for the Central Committee meeting of Frelimo on 21 April 1969: "Os graves acontecimentos de 1968 e as divergencias ideológicas ao nível da direcção". The reactionary line envisioned the struggle as a mere means of achieving national independence; whereas the revolutionary line had already concluded that the struggle had to aim towards transformation of socio-economic relations and not towards mere passing of power from the whites to the blacks.
- 5 Interview given to Pietro Petrucci and Aquino de Braganca, *Afrique-Asie*, n. 109, 17-30 mai 1976. This quote does not appear in the published interview, but was taped. It is also in this interview, among others, that President Samora explains the reasons for his antidogmatic understanding of Marxism.
- 6 Basil Davidson, *The People's Cause*, Longman, 1981, pp. 127-8.
- 7 John Saul, *Op. Cit.*, p.88.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p.9.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 24-29.
- 11 J. Hanlon, *Op. Cit.*, p. 28.
- 12 *Ibid.*, chapter 18.
- 13 Samora Machel, *Establishing People's Power to Serve the Masses*, TPH, Dar es Salaam, 1977, p. 36.
- 14 John Saul, *Op. Cit.*, p. 101.
- 15 Joseph Hanlon, *Op. Cit.*, p. 265.
- 16 Samora Machel, *Op. Cit.*, p. 37-8.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 18 *Noticias*, Maputo, July 6, 1981.
- 19 After the end of the last offensive by the President sometime around September 25 1985, the pervasive opinion of the people who were interviewed by Televisao Experimental was that the idea was a good one, but they could not understand why it had to be done by the President himself.
- It seems that the original idea of the offensives was for them to become a means of permanently challenging the institutions left over from colonial times.
- 20 John Saul, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 137-147.
- 21 Samora Machel, *Establishing People's Power . . .*, p. 38.
- 22 We beg here to disagree with that part of E. Hobsbawm's theorization of social banditry, which has led to the romanticization of resistance in African historiography, contradicting, in our view, the objectives of Hobsbawm's work on this question, which we share.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9. After reading this, some may conclude that we are promoting the spirit of defeat. The only thing we would wish to encourage is an approach to history in which nothing is automatically predetermined.

Maputo,
September 15, 1986.