

**Africa: Diversity and Development**

**‘Passive Revolution’ in Africa:  
A Gramscian Analysis of Post-Colonial Mozambican History**

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This paper examines the possibility of constructing a Gramscian analysis of modern Mozambican history, with particular emphasis on the concept of ‘Passive Revolution’. It will be argued that, while the FRELIMO party that took over in Mozambique following independence in 1974 self-identified as a revolutionary socialist party that was building towards communism, the reality of changes in Mozambique’s productive capacity and relations of production in the post-colonial era more objectively match the Gramscian concept of ‘Passive Revolution’ – a transition from one form of capitalism to another. For Gramsci a passive revolution is a state-driven process that alters the social formation in order to deal with the material and ideological pressures exerted by the global system, or the formation’s constituent social classes. State-led attempts at developmental catch-up following independence were thus an internal aspect of global capitalism, rather than an attempted alternative to it. Mozambique’s period of transition and conflict from 1960 to 1995 will be considered, encompassing the anti-colonial struggle against Portuguese rule, independence under FRELIMO’s socialist government, civil conflict against the Apartheid-backed RENAMO rebel group, and the post-Cold War transition to liberal democracy.

One fundamental question to consider when discussing a theoretical perspective on History is, ‘why theorise’? What is it about theorisation that is important or necessary? Theorisation is essentially either the analysis of multiple historical examples as to allow the discernment of generally applicable commonalities; or, in reverse, the application of such established commonalities to an example in order to draw out elements that may not have otherwise been apparent. This process in itself is productive and important, allowing the locating of particular historical examples within global and transhistorical patterns. And in addition to this, if you don’t theorise yourself you can be certain someone else will, and possibly draw conclusions with which you are not in agreement. Three examples of this that exist regarding Mozambique are: 1) Cold War Anti-Communism. The broad claim that the FRELIMO party in Mozambique were communists (an undifferentiated designation), that their economic and social programme was oppressive, and thus

they were eventually defeated by resistance from their populace and the inherent unviability of their economic models. The conclusion from this is that Mozambique is another example of how communism is an anti-democratic and unnatural economic and political system, which does not work and will be resisted by populations. 2) Cold War Communism. The claim that the FRELIMO party in Mozambique were communists (of some description), that their economic and social programme was liberatory, but that they were eventually defeated by the forces of Western capitalist imperialism – in this case mediated through Apartheid South Africa. The conclusion from this is that there was nothing wrong with FRELIMO's policies and their implementation, that all Mozambique's problems were externally imposed, and that a top-down state socialist strategy of some kind remains viable and desirable. 3) Patrimonialism / Anthropologisation. The claim that regardless of whether the FRELIMO party in Mozambique were communists, what is of real importance is the autocratic or oligarchic political structure that is a cultural inheritance from the pre-independence period. This inheritance might be said to flow on from traditional African political structures, or be a result of Western impositions on African culture during the colonial period. It is this structure of patron-client networks (often related to tribal or regional groupings) that transcends the stated ideological rhetoric of the FRELIMO government, and has survived the government's transition from 'Marxist-Leninist' to 'Liberal Democratic'. The conclusion from this is that the primary struggle is between modern and pre-modern structures, and that Mozambique needs further Westernisation in order to advance democracy and the welfare of the populace.

My theorisation aims to transcend these simplistic interpretations through the application of a more nuanced and insightful analytical structure. This draws on the work of Antonio Gramsci, one of the most important Marxist thinkers of the twentieth century. An Italian writer, philosopher, political theorist, and a leader of the Communist Party of Italy in the 1920s and 1930s, Gramsci was imprisoned for eight years by Benito Mussolini's fascist government, dying shortly after his release. The more than 3,000 pages of analysis written during his imprisonment have subsequently been the subject of interpretation throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and now 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and tens of thousands of books and articles have been published regarding his work. Gramsci's theoretical structure provides an elegant and comprehensive framework that dialectically connects the social scales of local, national and international, set within a deep historical context of uneven global development and modern capitalist dynamics. It links social, political, economic and cultural structures within nations, and describes the complex interaction of varied dominant and subaltern forces in those societies<sup>i</sup>. While there is not space to discuss all Gramsci's ideas in this paper, I will introduce here the relevance of the theory of 'Passive Revolution' for the study of Mozambican history.

Gramsci formulated the concept of 'passive revolution' in reference to the Risorgimento movement that unified Italy in 1861, and the rise of Fascism in Italy following the social upheaval of the First World War. Passive revolution essentially encompasses major political and economic

changes within a state that are driven from the top-down through government intervention. In contrast to some crude Cold War assumptions, just because there is state intervention or state-directed change within a society does not mean that it is socialist/communist or that it is not capitalist (this is especially relevant today with regards to the rise of China). According to Partha Chatterjee, passive revolution encompasses “the ways in which capitalism is forced to revolutionise itself whenever hegemony is weakened or a social formation cannot cope with the need to expand the forces of production”<sup>ii</sup>. Thus the state takes the leading role in reconstituting capitalist class relations during these periods of crisis, which come about due to either domestic contradictions of capital accumulation, or pressure from the international system. Gramsci thus wrote that the concept of passive revolution applies “to those countries that modernise the state through a series of reforms or national wars without undergoing a political revolution of a radical Jacobin type”<sup>iii</sup>. Adam David Morton argues that the international state system applied pressure on post-colonial states, and that “Imitative behaviour within such states coping with social crises generated by the circumstances of uneven and combined development therefore entailed attempts to create a modern state as the necessary precondition for the furtherance of capitalism ... [involving] state-led attempts at developmental catch-up...”<sup>iv</sup>. “Different historically peculiar national processes of passive revolution across the postcolonial world can therefore be traced as connected variants within the international conditions of world capitalism”<sup>v</sup>.

The ‘Mozambican Revolution’ can thus be analysed through the prism of passive revolution. I will argue that, while politically progressive, the programme implemented by the FRELIMO party was not ‘communist’ as such, but squarely situated within post-colonial patterns of development dictated by global capitalist dynamics. Since the time of Vasco da Gama’s voyages, though intensifying in the 1800s, Mozambique had gradually fallen under the political and economic influence of Portugal. As a Portuguese colony by the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Mozambique was corralled into three primary forms of economic activity: the export of agricultural produce and plantation crops, either for consumption or Industry in Portugal; mass migrant labour to the South African mines; and transport linkages between landlocked states and Mozambique’s ports<sup>vi</sup>. This colonial economy left much of the country infrastructurally neglected, and 95% of Mozambique’s twelve million citizens in a pre-literate state. Those workers employed in the economically vital ports and railways were overwhelming white, and overall Mozambique’s working class probably numbered less than a million (including rural, migrant and domestic workers)<sup>vii</sup>. Various forms of anti-colonial resistance had always persisted in Mozambique, and following World War Two the suppression of a number of surges of anti-colonial politics in Mozambique’s ports and on the Mueda Plateau in Cabo Delgado during the 1940s and 1950s, led to the departure of many anti-colonial activists to form opposition parties in exile. The FRELIMO party was formed in Tanzania in 1962, with their early agitation included covert industrial organising and strikes in Mozambique’s ports. However, the brutal repression of their

industrial actions and the arrests of their urban operatives smashed FRELIMO's political network and effectively forced them into a strategy of rural guerrilla warfare. Only in the guerrilla bases hidden in Mozambique's neighbours, and in small 'liberated zones' established in the northern provinces of Cabo Delgado, Niassa, Tete, and parts of Manica, was FRELIMO able to conduct political education and experiment with collectivised production before independence. On a national level, much of Mozambique's population had remained untouched by FRELIMO's politics until after independence<sup>viii</sup>.

FRELIMO's guerrilla campaign had important political and economic impacts in Portugal (in combination with anti-colonial wars taking place in Angola and Guinea-Bissau), so the events that precipitated independence for Mozambique were those of the Carnation Revolution in Lisbon, which resulted in the *Movimento das Forças Armadas* (the Armed Forces Movement) taking power on 25 April 1974. The new Junta of National Salvation, led by General António de Spínola, called for a rapid end to Portugal's wars and the complete independence of the colonies under the existing anti-colonial movements. Portugal's new government thus entered negotiations with FRELIMO for Mozambican independence and the transfer of power to their leadership<sup>ix</sup>. FRELIMO now began a transition into government in a country that was particularly underdeveloped and in which they had been denied the opportunity to openly cultivate a political presence. Crisis had erupted even before FRELIMO took power, with an abortive coup attempt in the capital Lourenço Marques by right-wing settler paramilitaries, followed by weeks of rioting and clashes between various protesters and Portuguese soldiers. The violence accelerated the exodus of the white population, with 5,000 Portuguese settlers fleeing Mozambique between 11 and 17 September 1974 alone<sup>x</sup>. The mass emigration of Portuguese settlers would reduce the white community from 250,000 to around 20,000 by the end of 1976, creating an acute shortage of professionals and the skilled workers who operated Mozambique's ports and railways. The flight of the white population undercut the employment of thousands of African domestic servants, and workers in the building and tourism industries, and adding to this loss was the vandalism that many settlers targeted at goods and machinery they could not take with them<sup>xi</sup>.

As companies were simply abandoned by their white owners, long before Frelimo was in any position to take control of the country less begin nationalising the economy, the state had to take over the abandoned businesses on an ad hoc basis, and rely on the workers to learn the skills necessary to run those operations. Mozambique's fragile economy still depended on its strongest neighbours, Rhodesia and South Africa, who were intensely hostile to FRELIMO's ideology and had assisted Portugal in fighting them for a decade. Mozambique thus immediately faced punitive actions by South Africa, which lowered the number of Mozambican migrant workers it would accept, cut levels of rail traffic through Mozambican ports, and accelerated a process of containerisation of goods so they could only be handled at South Africa's more modern harbours<sup>xii</sup>. Soon FRELIMO's

support for the Zimbabwean liberation struggle would embroil Mozambique in regional conflict. Between 1976 and 1978 Rhodesian forces would make more than 400 raids into Mozambican territory, attacking both ZANLA and FRELIMO targets<sup>xiii</sup>. By 1979 the Rhodesian Joint Planning Committee (with South Africa) asserted that “the accepted strategy [was] that Mozambique should be kept completely unstable until an anti-communist government [could] be installed”<sup>xiv</sup>. As part of this the Mozambican insurgent group RENAMO was founded using Rhodesian funds, arms and training. They utilised counter-insurgency methods devised by the British and Portuguese, and were initially deployed under the direction of the Rhodesian security forces against Zimbabwean fighters<sup>xv</sup>. By mid-1979 South African Military Intelligence was supplying RENAMO with weapons and supplies, and RENAMO bases were subsequently transferred to South Africa when Rhodesia entered its transition to majority rule<sup>xvi</sup>. Throughout the 1980s the South African-backed RENAMO would thus sow chaos and destruction across Mozambique, resulting in the deaths of 100,000 Mozambicans as a direct result of the brutal conflict, and up to a million more through war-induced famine and disease. In addition, almost five million Mozambicans were displaced from their homes as refugees<sup>xvii</sup>.

A transitional FRELIMO government was established in Lourenco Marques on 25 September 1974 and in this atmosphere began its ‘social revolution’ in Mozambique. A programme of ‘socialising’ the countryside commenced, with the goal of creating state farms and transferring peasants into communal villages. The aims of these projects were the facilitation of rapid jumps in technology, the creation of a rural working class, and the construction of workable democratic institutions and social infrastructure. In reality this programme predominantly took the form of the state merely taking control of abandoned plantations and fortified villages created by the Portuguese. In the cities FRELIMO began some nationalisation in late 1975 and early 1976, but found that most of the state takeover of industry was due to the total abandonment of businesses by their white owners. In these cases, the *Grupos Dinamizadores* (Dynamising Groups) stepped in to run the businesses, maintain the functioning of infrastructure, and prevent racial conflict and settler sabotage. According to Abrahamsson and Nilsson, these ‘Dynamising Groups’ were “direct democratic organs, whose members were elected at public meetings in residential areas, factories and rural areas. For a long time it was the dynamising groups that in practice held power in the country”<sup>xviii</sup>. They were heavily influenced by FRELIMO and contained FRELIMO members, but by necessity had a large degree of autonomy<sup>xix</sup>. Hanlon writes that “In a form of workers’ control, they ran abandoned factories. In villages and neighbourhoods, they served as councils, courts, police and social workers. In rural areas, they replaced the Portuguese-appointed [administrators]. ... the GDs [introduced] Mozambique to Frelimo and to ‘peoples’ democracy’ ...”<sup>xx</sup>.

Many left-wing Western observers welcomed FRELIMO’s project of ‘scientific socialism’ and ‘popular democracy’, with the assumption that a project of transition to socialism was taking place.

Though no revolution had occurred in Mozambique, FRELIMO had a revolutionary rhetoric, and the Dynamising Groups held potential to become structures for workers' control of the economic and political direction of society. However, some critical observers such as Michel Cahen note that FRELIMO were centralising power when they "announced the dissolution of the elected workers' committees which had emerged, and replaced them with "dynamising groups", which were party structures. ... unions democratised after 1975, were also dissolved in 1979, having been progressively replaced since 1976 by 'production groups'"<sup>xxi</sup>. While party activists had attempted to mobilise the population and instil a revolutionary consciousness they lacked, as Mark Simpson describes, "[b]y 1977... FRELIMO had lost faith in these mass mobilisation processes, and at the Third Party Congress held in February a decision was taken to rein in [the dynamising groups]"<sup>xxii</sup>. This was also a period in which FRELIMO established itself as a government and imposed its control over the remnants of the colonial state. Soon the functions of the Dynamising Groups were divided up between new state bodies and departments. 'Production Councils' responsible for increasing both production and productivity were created inside workplaces, and official mass women's and youth organisations were formed. Peoples' assemblies were also created to provide varyingly democratic representative structures spanning the local to national levels<sup>xxiii</sup>. FRELIMO declared its transformation from a 'mass party' into a 'vanguard party', reducing its membership and increasing the elitist nature of the party machine<sup>xxiv</sup>.

From the late 1970s global and regional conditions became even less amenable to FRELIMO's aims. Globally the 'Volcker Shock' of October 1979 signalled the end to favourable economic conditions in the developing world, and a rise in interest rates that would initiate the Third World debt crisis of the 1980s. With the encouragement of US President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the IMF and the World Bank began using their global leverage to

propagate neoliberal economic policies through conditional loans and Structural Adjustment Programmes. These shifts generally resulted in a transfer of wealth from the 'global south' to the 'global north', and fostered conditions of economic stagnation in large parts of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa particularly<sup>xxv</sup>. Politically, the US reasserted its military might in the 1980s under President Reagan, through an acceleration of arms build-up and a more aggressively anti-communist foreign policy. This included the promotion and facilitation of right-wing guerrilla movements and their supporters – such as Apartheid South Africa, and its RENAMO proxies in Mozambique<sup>xxvi</sup>. Mozambique was kept in a state of perpetual instability and crisis through RENAMO's destruction of social and economic infrastructure, and eventually submitted to political concessions to South Africa, in the Nkomati Accords, and eventually IMF structural adjustment<sup>xxvii</sup>. As I have argued elsewhere, FRELIMO's radical leadership was finally sidelined with the death of President Samora Machel, and

would complete its adoption of neoliberal economic policies under the leadership of Joaquim Chissano<sup>xxviii</sup>.

Inside Mozambique then, though FRELIMO successfully raised production levels until the early 1980s, investment into heavy industry at the expense of other sectors of the economy absorbed much of Mozambique's foreign currency, and this led to shortages of consumer goods and the rapid growth of a black market<sup>xxix</sup>. In the countryside collectivisation of agriculture was not very successful, and up to half of all rural produce circulated through small black market traders. The disintegration of the Portuguese trading network left farmers without many of the consumer goods they previously relied upon. Meanwhile, plans for rapid technological advancement were undercut by a lack of currency to buy spare parts, fuels and chemicals, and a lack of technical expertise<sup>xxx</sup>. FRELIMO's economic experiments thus had mediocre outcomes. The debate surrounding has focused on why they were a failure. Was it the overwhelming economic and military pressure from antagonistic superpowers, neighbours and internal enemies? Was it intrinsic to FRELIMO's socialist project? Was it due to its implementation by an incompetent and/or self-serving political elite? More important for this paper is the question of what FRELIMO's project actually was. Despite the FRELIMO leadership's high ideals, the lack of the appropriate material conditions for a 'socialist revolution' in Mozambique, and the lack of a revolutionary consciousness amongst much of its population, had led FRELIMO to focus on Mozambique's material advancement: a rise in the productivity of enterprises in both the city and countryside; the creation of a rural working class; industrialisation and the improvement of technological expertise; and the widespread development of social infrastructure. Though the radicalism of the Dynamising Groups has been abandoned, the construction of workable democratic institutions and a more egalitarian distribution of the nation's wealth were also key aims. But these economic and political goals are really equivalent to those that took place in most post-colonial societies in the aftermath of independence. While subjectively these processes were seen by (at least radical elements of) the FRELIMO leadership as building the social and material conditions for the advancement of socialism, objectively FRELIMO was attempting to use the state apparatus to carry out the political and economic transformation necessary to operate as a modern nation state in the capitalist world system. FRELIMO was overseeing a process of 'passive revolution' – in this case the transition from settler-dominated colonial capitalism, based on mercantilist primary product extraction and racially determined exploitation, to modern free market capitalism with a liberal democratic political order.

Gramsci identified the passive revolution as a state-driven process that alters the social formation in order to deal with the collapse of a social formation due to external material and ideological pressures, or the formation's constituent social classes. This is what had

eventuated in the political and economic context of the 1960s and 1970s, leading to the liberation movements in Africa, and the revolution in Portugal – eventually ending Portuguese colonialism, and the colonial state in Mozambique. In the absence of a real revolutionary situation in Mozambique, or revolutionary consciousness amongst its people, the state-led attempts at developmental catch-up by FRELIMO following independence were thus an internal aspect of global capitalism, rather than an alternative to it. By the mid-1980s the pressure of external forces, acting on FRELIMO's modernising rather than socialist goals, coerced a virtually seamless transition from socialist rhetoric to the adoption of capitalist reform via IMF structural adjustment programmes. Those free marketeers within the FRELIMO government were swimming with the tide of history and the predominant global forces of the day. While international financial institutions have hailed liberalisation of the Mozambican economy as a success story, authors such as Joseph Hanlon reveal that they have in fact overseen a 'recolonisation of Mozambique', in which "[p]overty has increased along with huge increases in the gap between rich and poor. The economy has become import-dependent, mainly for luxury goods but also for basics. Industrial production is falling"<sup>xxxix</sup>. With Hanlon and Smart demonstrating that by 2002 Mozambican real income was lower than in 1996, and that, "chronic malnutrition actually increased between 1997 and 2003"<sup>xxxix</sup> Understanding this process of passive revolution, and examining how it has structured much of the developing world day, remains an important element in determining the path forward for political and economic justice today.

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<sup>i</sup> David Alexander Robinson, "Gramsci in Africa: The Relevance of Gramscian Concepts to a History of Mozambique", *African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific 36th Annual Conference Proceedings*, February 2014, accessed at <http://afsaap.org.au/assets/david-robinson.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, London: Zed Books, 1986, p43.

<sup>iii</sup> Adam David Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy*, London: Pluto Press, 2007, p67.

<sup>iv</sup> Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci*, p155.

<sup>v</sup> Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci*, p71.

<sup>vi</sup> Hans Abrahamsson and Anders Nilsson, *Mozambique: the Troubled Transition; From Socialist Construction to Free Market Capitalism*, (London: Zed Books, 1995), pp18-20.

<sup>vii</sup> Alex Vines, *RENAMO: From Terrorism to Democracy in Mozambique?* (London: James Currey, 1996), p8; Peter Sketchley, "The Struggle for New Social Relations of Production in Industry", in John S. Saul (ed), *A Difficult Road: The Transition to Socialism in Mozambique*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985), p260.

<sup>viii</sup> Allen Isaacman and Barbara Isaacman, *Mozambique: From Colonialism to Revolution, 1900-1982*, (Boulder (CO): Westview Press, 1983), p66; Joseph Hanlon, *Mozambique: The Revolution Under Fire*, (London: Zed Press, 1984), p24; Eduardo Mondlane, *The Struggle for Mozambique*, (London: Zed Press, 1969), pp112-116; Margaret Hall and Tom Young, *Confronting Leviathan: Mozambique Since Independence*, (London: Hurst and Company, 1997), p14.

<sup>ix</sup> Hall and Young, *Confronting Leviathan*, pp36-39.

<sup>x</sup> William Minter, *Apartheid's Contras: An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique*, Zed Books, London, 1994 p11; Colin Legum, *Africa Contemporary Record 1974-75*, (London: Rex Collings, 1975), pB393; Hall and Young, *Confronting Leviathan*, pp44-46.

<sup>xi</sup> Vines, *RENAMO*, p8; Isaacman and Isaacman, *Mozambique: From Colonialism to Revolution*, p161; Hall and Young, *Confronting Leviathan*, p50.



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- xii Hanlon, *The Revolution Under Fire*, pp98, 216.
- xiii Luis Benjamin Serapião, "Mozambique's National Interest in the Regional Conflict of Southern Africa", *Conflict*, Vol 9, No 4, 1990, p352; Layi Abegunrin, "Soviet and Chinese Military Involvement in Southern Africa", *A Current Bibliography on African Affairs*, Vol 16, No 3, 1983-84, p202; Ian Smith, *The Great Betrayal*, (London: Blake, 1997), p184.
- xiv "RJPC Brief No 2", Rhodesian Joint Planning Centre, 26 April 1979, South African Foreign Affairs Archive, file 144/5/1/1/4, Vol 1, p4.
- xv JoãoM.Cabrita, *Mozambique: The Tortuous Road to Democracy*, Palgrave, Basingstroke, 2000,p154.
- xvi Vines, *RENAMO*, p18; xvi Paul L. Moorcraft, *African Nemesis: War and Revolution in Southern Africa 1945-2010*, (London: Brassey's, 1990), p261.
- xvii Robert Gersony, *Summary of Mozambican Refugee Accounts of Principally Conflict-Related Experience in Mozambique*, (Washington D.C.: Bureau for Refugee Programs, US Department of State, April 1988), p41; Vines, *RENAMO*, p1.
- xviii Hans Abrahamsson and Anders Nilsson, *Mozambique: the Troubled Transition: From Socialist Construction to Free Market Capitalism*, (London: Zed Books, 1995), p78.
- xix Abrahamsson and Nilsson, *Mozambique: the Troubled Transition*, p78.
- xx Hanlon, *The Revolution Under Fire*, pp49, 98.
- xxi Michel Cahen, 'Check on Socialism in Mozambique – What Check? What Socialism?', *Review of African Political Economy* , vol. 20, no. 57, 1993, p.51.
- xxii Mark Simpson, 'Foreign and Domestic Factors in the Transformation of Frelimo', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1993, p317.
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- xxiv Marina Ottaway, 'Mozambique: From Symbolic Socialism to Symbolic Reform', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1988, p.222.
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- xxvii David Alexander Robinson, *Curse on the Land: A History of the Mozambican Civil War*, PhD Thesis, University of Western Australia, 2006.
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- xxx Hanlon, *The Revolution Under Fire*, p110.
- xxxi Joesph Hanlon, *Peace Without Profit: How the IMF Blocked Rebuilding in Mozambique*, (Oxford: James Curry, 1996), p83.
- xxxii Joseph Hanlon and Teresa Smart, *Do Bicycles Equal Development in Mozambique?*, London: James Currey, 2008, pp59-61.