

Mozambique – Ideals and Reality**Mozambique the Revolution Under Fire**Joseph Hanlon *Zed Press*, £6.95

Mozambique the Revolution Under Fire is the first comprehensive account of what happened to the Mozambique Revolution since the end of the war of liberation in 1976. Drawing on five years working in Mozambique as a foreign correspondent, Joseph Hanlon describes Frelimo's attempts to implement socialist policies in a country weakened by ten years of guerrilla war, and living economically and morally in the shadow of South Africa's quest.

After a concise introduction to Frelimo's struggle against the Portuguese, the author examines how Frelimo took control in 1976 and its subsequent difficulties in taking the economic control transferred by the abrupt departure of nearly a quarter of a million Portuguese settlers. This volume explores their economic ideas, Frelimo's aims to achieve in health care, agriculture, new forms of democratic government, and the abolition of slavery.

The author gives a picture of human development statistics, information, and analysis, while remaining in Frelimo's path of subjective views (readers may still start well informed). Throughout the book, questions may go to the heart of the aim, of Frelimo's socialist policies in a country as underdeveloped as Mozambique and its commitment to socialism. It is the best of a continuing class struggle in Mozambique and the impact that have been made in agriculture, policy and economic strategies to control the South African market (MNR). Across the author's review of the central role of the state, the country faces its social development possible in Mozambique today.

Joseph Hanlon was the correspondent in Mozambique for the BBC, the Guardian, Observer, Africa South Africa, and various other publications from 1979 to 1984. He was a PhD in Africa and was president on the staff of the New Scientist.

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In the aftermath of a revolutionary seizure of power, all is euphoria or hatred, depending on whose side you happen to be on. Thus early writings on the Mozambican revolution tended to be either crass apologies for Portuguese colonialism, or quite uncritical adulations of Frelimo's victory (and I must confess to having written some of the latter myself). Perhaps this was inevitable when a relatively poorly-equipped guerrilla force not only defeated a NATO army, but also precipitated an anti-fascist uprising in the European metropolis itself. In the heady days of 1974 and 1975 it was the heroic – and the adjective is not an exaggeration – achievements of Mozambican revolutionaries, and of their comrades in Angola and Guinea-Bissau, that seized our attention. The last colonial empire had fallen, and the political situation in southern Africa seemed to have changed irrevocably.

Now, ten years later, the Mozambican

economy lies in ruins, tens of thousands of Mozambican peasants have starved to death in a largely human-made famine, and the Frelimo government has signed a non-aggression pact with South Africa. Clearly it is time for a cool, unsentimental assessment. What went wrong? Or was it all inevitable? Was the path followed by Mozambique dictated by the catastrophic colonial heritage, and by the sheer brute strength of neighbouring South Africa?

Joseph Hanlon is well-placed to write such an assessment. He spent over four years based in Maputo freelancing for the BBC, the *Guardian*, and a host of other publications. His book draws on a wealth of personal experience, and on an extensive network of reliable sources, official and unofficial. The result is a work which, while deeply sympathetic to the fight to build a Mozambican socialism, can point accurately to the weaknesses and contradictions in Frelimo's politics.

Perhaps the most glaring of these is the heavy dose of voluntarism in Mozambican economic policy. There is a yawning gap between the beautiful ideals cherished by the Frelimo leadership, and the harsh realities of underdevelopment. To bridge the gap spectacular plans were drawn up on paper to conquer underdevelopment in a single decade. A grandiose ten-year plan was passed unanimously by the Mozambican parliament but was then quietly shelved when it was realised that the fantastic rates of growth called for were unattainable. Indeed, even before the vote was taken the economic ministries were already working on a much more modest three-year plan.

Where unrealistic economic policies have done most harm is in agriculture. Gigantic state farms were assumed to be the quickest way of increasing production, and supplying the cities with foodstuffs. But most Mozambican farmworkers lacked the technical expertise to cope with the heavy machinery that was imported for the state farms. Lacking also were the managerial skills to deal with the organisation of huge agro-industrial complexes. So most state farms became graveyards for tractors and harvesters, never showed a profit, and remained at disappointingly low levels of production.

While the state farms devoured the lion's share of investment, peasant farming, in which the vast majority of the population is involved, was neglected. By the time agricultural policy was officially reversed in 1983, much of the peasantry

was simply refusing to market its surpluses, since the state had not channelled basic consumer goods to the countryside, and the currency had therefore become effectively meaningless.

Democratisation is another thorny issue. A commitment to grass-roots democracy has co-existed uneasily with authoritarian practices, some of them deriving from the state of war in which Mozambique has lived for 20 years, some of them survivals from colonialism, and some deeply embedded in the 'orthodox' Marxism-Leninism that Frelimo has inherited. Democracy in Mozambique is also constantly under threat from a nightmarish bureaucratic system, not much modified from Portuguese days, but now operated by a parasitic layer of timeservers and technocrats, rightly described by Hanlon as 'neither red nor expert'.

Yet despite formidable obstacles, democracy does function, albeit fitfully, in Mozambique, and Frelimo still shows a remarkable capacity for self-criticism, as demonstrated at the Party's Fourth Congress in April 1983. There are few other ruling parties in which a Congress delegate could tell the President to his face: 'We have been infiltrated. Some of our enemies are sitting on the Central Committee and on the Council of Ministers'. There are even fewer in which the critic would then be elected to the new Central Committee.

But independent Mozambique has largely been shaped by the experience of war – first against the Smith regime in what was then still Rhodesia, and then against South Africa and its surrogates of the 'Mozambique National Resistance' (MNR). It was the ravages of the MNR that turned the 1983 drought into a disaster, and condemned an unknown number of Mozambicans to death by starvation (assisted, it should be said, by the tardy response of western food donors to Mozambique's appeal for aid).

Mozambique survived the South African onslaught – in itself no mean achievement. But it survived desperately weakened, with its economy shattered, and obliged to seek a rescheduling of its foreign debt. By early 1984 there was little option but to sign a non-aggression pact. Far from being a 'sell-out', as proclaimed in ultra-left quarters, the Nkomati Accord was the best deal that could be negotiated after months of tenacious Mozambican diplomacy, first with South Africa's allies, then with the apartheid regime itself. But that was not how it was presented in

Mozambique. Putting on a brave face, Frelimo described the Accord as a 'victory for our socialist peace policy'. A perfectly legitimate compromise with the enemy was thus exaggerated into a triumph – to the visible annoyance of Mozambique's allies. The virtue of the Nkomati Accord is that it may give Mozambique a breathing space, may give the embattled socialist republic the chance to fight another day. But that is not what the official speeches say.

Hanlon does not shrink from the most damaging result of the military confrontation – the tendency towards increasingly repressive measures. The death penalty was introduced in Mozambique, first for treason and related offences in 1979, and was then extended to cover serious economic crimes in 1983. Also in 1983 an astonishing law reintroduced the hated colonial practice of flogging, and a hasty evacuation of the unemployed from the cities was organised, with predictably unpleasant results. Such measures fly in the face of Frelimo ideals, but Mozambican leaders would doubtless argue that they had little choice. The great danger is that acts of this nature will undermine Frelimo's claim to be building an 'alternative civilisation' to that of apartheid South Africa.

One of the undoubted triumphs of the Mozambican revolution has been the creation of a health service accessible to all citizens. Hanlon devotes an entire chapter to health policy and the class struggles it generated. Another recent Zed publication *Mozambique: towards a People's Health Service* is also a very valuable account of these developments.

After ten years of independence the health sector has changed out of recognition. A network of rudimentary health posts covers the rural areas; the views of the consumers of health care are now listened to; in drugs policy the international pharmaceutical companies have been taken on and defeated; links have been built between hospitals and communities, and more health workers have been trained than in the entire 500 years of the Portuguese presence in Mozambique.

As Information Minister Jose Luis Cabaco said in summing up the revolution, in the remark which Hanlon uses as an introduction to his book: 'The number of errors we have made is enormous. But our success is that, despite the errors, we have built something'.

Paul Fauvet