

Development of Nationalism in Mocambique

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Mocambican nationalism, like practically all African nationalism, was born of direct European colonialism. Mocambique's most specific source of national unity is the common experience (in suffering) of the people during the last one hundred years of Portuguese colonial control. In order to understand the development of Mocambican nationalism, we must study the main stages of the development of Portuguese colonialism in our country and note the

resulting reaction of the people.

Before I outline these stages of the development of Portuguese colonialism and their relationship to the rise of nationalism, I wish to present a definition of nationalism. By nationalism I mean 'a consciousness on the part of individuals or groups of membership in a nation or of a desire to develop the strength, liberty, or prosperity of that nation'. The above definition applies to nationalism in all circumstances or stages of development of any people. For instance, it might apply to European nationalism as a continental phenomenon, or French, American, Russian, Chinese, Brazilian, etc. — nationalisms as expressions of the aspirations of given ethnic or national entities. The African context in which Mocambican nationalism finds expression might require further refinement of the definition offered above. In view of the recent historical circumstances that have affected the lives of the various peoples within the continent of Africa, it is necessary to add that African nationalism is also characterized by the development of attitudes, activities, and more or less structured programs aimed at the mobilization of forces for the attainment of self-government and independence. In the specific case of Mocambique, these attitudes, activities, and structured programmes, shared by all Portuguese colonies in Africa and possibly by all other remaining peoples not yet free, must include the establishment of military or paramilitary schemes for the final showdown before the actual attainment of independence can be ensured.

If you could bear with me for a few more seconds in connection with these preliminary remarks, I should like to sum up the definition of nationalism offered above in the following manner:

- (a) a consciousness on the part of individuals or groups of membership in a nation — in our case, Mocambique.
- (b) a desire to develop the strength, liberty, or prosperity of that nation — the concept of FRELIMO (as we are popularly known) pertaining to the future socio-economic structure of the country and how to go about implementing it;
- (c) the specific goal of attaining self-government and independence — FRELIMO's political and military program;
- (d) a concept of the people's unity — the Mocambican people's desire to rid themselves of Portuguese imperialism and colonialism so as to be completely free to develop their socio-economic structures as they wish; and,
- (e) the establishment of more or less permanent political structures for the pursuit of national objectives in cooperation with other African nations.

In reference to African nationalism in general, it is necessary to stress four more points:

- (i) that it is a reaction against political controls imposed by Europeans upon the African peoples; and
- (ii) that it is a reaction against foreign, especially Western, economic exploitation of the African natural and human resources.
- (iii) In those areas of Africa where a combination of European and Asian populations have come to settle alongside the African peoples, African

nationalism has also had to include a reaction against local cultural and socio-economic barriers created by members of these non-African communities.

(iv) Concurrent with the rise of African nationalism, there developed another kind of nationalism – cultural nationalism – epitomized by the mushrooming of all sorts of theories concerning African man, labelled ‘African personality’ by Anglophones and ‘Negritude’ or ‘Africanite’ by Francophones.

Mocambique is one of the remnants of an old Portuguese colonial empire that was established during the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries in Asia, South America, and Africa. In Africa the remnants of this empire still include Angola, Mocambique, Guine (called Portuguese), the Cape Verde Islands, and Sao Tome Island. The largest of these colonies is Angola, although Mocambique has the largest population of them all.

Contacts between Portugal and parts of what is now known as Mocambique began at the end of the fifteenth century, when Vasco da Gama, a well-known Portuguese navigator, reached the island of Mocambique in early March 1498. Since the main interest of the Portuguese kings who had sponsored these trips was to open a route to India that would be safer than the then dangerous Near East land route, for many years the Portuguese satisfied themselves with establishing filling stations along the East African coast, thus leaving the interior untouched. The Portuguese claim that they have been in Mocambique for over four hundred and fifty years, implying that for all that time they have been controlling our country politically. If there is any truth in this Portuguese claim, it has to do with the fact that soon after the first contact with the people of the coastal region of East Africa, the Portuguese, envying the wealth and power possessed by the Arab rulers of the time, plotted, connived, organized whatever forces they could muster, and fought their way into a position of control. This enabled the Portuguese to monopolize the then very rich East African trade in ivory, gold, and precious stones. To accomplish this, the Portuguese took advantage of the rivalries then existent among the sherifs and sheiks of such city states as Pate, Malindi, Kilwa, Zanzibar, Mocambique, Sofala, etc., which were famous for their ‘prosperity and elegance’.

At that time, their wealth and cultural refinement were comparable to the best in Europe and Asia. From the reaction of the Portuguese sailors of that time, gleaned from their diaries, it is possible to suggest that East Africa as a whole ‘was a world comparable, if not superior, in material culture to Portugal in 1500’. However, political unity among these city states was no easier to achieve at that time than it is now in present-day East Africa. Let me quote Professor James Duffy: ‘Political unity among these city states was a transitory burden. Each local prince defended his city’s political and commercial independence, and at no time was there an East African nation, although the stronger towns at one time or another dominated their weaker neighbours.’

Even though the Portuguese took advantage of this unfortunate situation, they were never able to impose a lasting political control, except over a very

thin coastal strip running from Cape Delgado to the city state of Sofala. By 1700 a resurgence of Islamic influence in this part of Africa had been able to effectively eliminate Portuguese traders and soldiers, as well as scores of towns that they had held from time to time.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Portuguese concentrated on conniving and cajoling their way into control of the rich commerce of the area between Cape Delgado and the Zambezi basin, in an attempt to capture the flow of gold from the famous gold mines of Monomotapa, which the Portuguese had believed to be the proverbial 'King Solomon's Mines'. Again, in this instance, the imperialistic activities of the Portuguese affected an area that included what is today known as Zambia and Zimbabwe or Southern Rhodesia. The capital of Monomotapa's empire was located in Mashonaland and was part of the Makalanga confederacy of that time.

During a period of two hundred years, the Portuguese were able to obtain a great deal of wealth because of the simple fact that they had been able to control the flow of commerce from the interior of the country to the coastal city states and abroad. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Portuguese authority was firmly enough established in the northern and central parts of Mocambique so that it was possible to introduce Catholic missionaries – first the Dominicans, then the Jesuits, who were the first to introduce Christianity in East Africa. However, whatever success crowned this first missionary effort was almost completely destroyed in the eighteenth century by the corrupting effect of the marriage that had naturally resulted from the association of commercial, religious, and political activities of the Church and the State. It was during this time that the *prazo* system was introduced in Mocambique. *Prazeiros* were Portuguese white and mulatto settlers and land-owners who, not unlike European feudal lords, ruled those Africans who had the misfortune to fall under their authority and control. These Africans' lot was worse than that of slaves. The *prazeiros* often controlled whole districts as personal properties and recognized no law but their own – and only occasionally paid their vassalage to the king of Portugal. Jesuit and Dominican missionaries of the time also came to own vast tracts of land, administering it like any *prazeiro*, collecting head taxes and, when slavery became more profitable, dealing in slaves. It was out of the *prazo* system that the great land companies, such as Nyasa and Manica e Sofala companies, developed. It can also be presumed that the heartless and peculiarly Portuguese concessionary company system, which typifies the major economic enterprises of Portuguese colonialism, derived its refinements from the *prazo* system of this period.

Corruption in the *prazo* system was so rampant that by the third decade of the nineteenth century even the Portuguese government felt compelled to outlaw it. Among other reasons for its abolition by the Portuguese colonial government, the *prazo* system was notorious for fostering insecurity for person and property, and for the excessive number of Africans who were compelled to leave the area altogether due to the slaving practices of the manor lords. All of this resulted in the almost complete collapse of the Portuguese administration. However, in order to reimpose Portuguese authority, it

was necessary to seek the cooperation of some of the *prazeiros*, which meant their reinstatement; therefore, the vicious circle!

All along, however, the financial benefits that accrued from the slave trade were so great that the *prazeiros* of central Mocambique had become the reservoirs for slaving. It must be noted here, even in passing, that although the slave trade was one of the most characteristic Portuguese economic activities, slavery *per se* in East Africa was practised long before Vasco da Gama touched this coast of Africa. Most of the slaves from East Africa were sold in the Middle East and in South East Asia, including India.

Most of the above colonialistic-imperialistic activities in East Africa took place primarily on the thin coastal strip, involving mostly contacts with the Arabs and the Swahilis, and only very superficial contacts with the bulk of the Bantu-speaking people of present-day East Africa and Mocambique.

The Portuguese conquest of what is now Mocambique originated with the proverbial scramble for Africa, which began in the second half of the nineteenth century. After the partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, Portugal was impelled to capture and solidify what had been dished out to her. To accomplish this, the Portuguese used every technique known in the history of colonial conquests. Where it was possible, she used infiltration by Portuguese traders, who disguised themselves as simple businessmen interested in the exchange of goods between equals; but later on, after having thoroughly spied upon and mapped out a whole region, they invited in their military forces, which subsequently wiped out whatever resistance might have been put up by the local rulers. At times, the Portuguese used white settlers, who pretended that they needed land to farm, but who, after having been kindly accommodated by the naive traditional rulers, claimed possession of communal lands and forcibly enslaved the African peoples who were originally their hosts. Sometimes even Portuguese missionaries were used as pacifiers of the natives, using the Christian faith as a lullaby, while the Portuguese military forces occupied the land and controlled the people.

Where the traditional political authority was strong and the military machinery was adequate to offer serious resistance to European conquest, the Portuguese were more subtle in their techniques of initial contact. For instance, under these circumstances, the Portuguese were prepared to begin their contacts with strong African states by establishing diplomatic relations, sending Portuguese 'ambassadors' to the courts of the most important traditional rulers. Then, after having sufficiently spied out the internal strengths and weaknesses of the government, they proceeded to attack, using the traditional excuses of 'provocation' or 'protection of the security of the white settlers or missionaries', etc.

This is the way in which the war against the last of the Mocambican traditional empires, the Gaza Empire under Gungunyana, was justified. The war against Emperor Gungunyana began in 1895 and ended in 1898 with the death in battle of General Magigwane and the capture and deportation of the Emperor to Portugal, where he died several years later.

With regard to the kind of government that the Portuguese established

after they had subjugated all parts of the country, we have already presented descriptions which have been published elsewhere.

As is clear from the foregoing, the success of the Portuguese in controlling the whole of Mocambique was due mainly to the lack of a cohesive political force to oppose them. Right from the first days of contact with the East African coastal city states in the fifteenth century, when the Portuguese were able, albeit temporarily, to defeat and control many of them, through the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, when they captured the main commercial wealth of northern and central Mocambique, up to the nineteenth century, when they proceeded to conquer and keep the present territory of our country, the reaction of our people was fragmentary. It was a piecemeal reaction that encouraged a piecemeal conquest of our people. Even as late as the second decade of this century, in 1917 and 1918 to be exact, when the Makombe of the Barwe – in an attempt to reestablish some of the power of his legendary predecessor King Monomotapa – staged a successful revolt, his success did not last long, for it was not a national Mocambican uprising: it was confined to one or two tribal kingdoms.