

Mozambique: Not Then But Now: The Present Globalist, Neoliberal Agenda

By [John S. Saul](#)

Global Research, July 12, 2010

[Socialist Project](#) 11 July 2010

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

I first knew Mozambique through close contact in Dar es Salaam with [FRELIMO](#) in the early and difficult years – the 1960s and the first-half of 1970s – of its armed liberation struggle. Then Mozambique was seeking both to unite itself and to find political and military purchase against an intransigent and arrogant Portuguese colonialism. And FRELIMO – under the leadership of, first, Eduardo Mondlane (to be assassinated by the Portuguese) and, after him, of Samora Machel – did indeed manage, by 1975, to lead the country to victory. Along the way, FRELIMO succeeded in liberating zones in Mozambique adjacent to its rear bases in Tanzania and Zambia where it built a new social infrastructure of agricultural coops, schools and health services. Equally important, it forged an impressive corps of politically conscious and disciplined leadership cadres (see Cabaço, 2001 and 2009).

Building Socialism

Then, in the very first years of Mozambique's independence, FRELIMO also launched a bold experiment in socialist development. The intention: to implement a society-wide programme that would liberate the country's economic potential while also meeting the needs of the vast majority of Mozambique's population. The result? As Norrie MacQueen, a careful chronicler of the *The Decolonization of Portuguese Africa* (1997: pp. 236-7), would firmly state of former "Portuguese Africa," the initial plans of Portugal's "guerilla enemies" did offer "a clear alternative to the cynical manipulation of ethnicity and the neo-colonial complaisance of the kleptocratic elites who increasingly defined African governance in the 1970s and 1980s." In sum,

"Whatever their fate, the projects of the post-independence regimes of lusophone Africa were probably the most principled and decent ever proposed for the continent. They have not been superseded in this regard and seem unlikely to be."

This seems to me (as I have argued at length elsewhere) to have been especially true of the new Mozambique during its first heroic decade of independence. Equally dramatic, however, has been the reversal of direction that has taken place in the country since that time. For what we have now witnessed, in Alice Dinerman's words (2006: pp. 19-20), is nothing less than a "rapid unraveling of the Mozambican revolution," with the result that Mozambique:

"once considered a virtually peerless pioneer in forging a socialist pathway in Africa, ... now enjoys an equally exceptional, if dialectically opposed, status: today the country is, in the eyes of the IMF and the World Bank, a flagship of neoliberal principles."

Moreover, as Dinerman concludes,

“predictably, many of the leading government and party officials rank among the primary beneficiaries of the new political and economic dispensation. Those who enthusiastically promised that Mozambique would turn into a graveyard of capitalism are now the leading advocates of, and avid accumulators in, capitalism’s recent, full-blown resurrection.”

There are a number of possible explanations for such an outcome, and commentators have continued endlessly to debate their relative weight and significance. Certainly the country’s inheritance from colonial domination was a poor one, reflected in such weaknesses as the paucity of trained indigenous personnel and in an economic dependence that pulled the country strongly toward subordination to global dictate despite efforts to resist it. There was also the on-going regional war that made Mozambique the target of destructive incursions by white-dominated Rhodesia and South Africa and of the long drawn-out campaign of terror waged so callously and destructively by these countries’ sponsored ward, the RENAMO counter-revolutionary movement. Finally, and despite FRELIMO’s benign intentions, there were the movement’s own sins once in power, sins of vanguardist high-handedness and impatience and of the over-simplification of societal complexities and challenges. The latter weaknesses created additional obstacles of their own to further progress.

The results, in fact, have been bleak. For what now occurred, Bauer and Taylor suggest (2005: pp. 134-5), was the extremely rapid growth and dramatic spread of corruption (more or less unknown in the initial days of independence) in Mozambique, as well as a fevered “pursuit of individual profit [that has undermined] much of the legitimacy of FRELIMO party leaders, who [have taken] advantage of market-based opportunities, like privatization, to enrich themselves.” In short, as these authors then observe:

“the election of Guebuza [as the new President in 2002, and since], holder of an expansive business network and one of the richest men in Mozambique, hardly signals that FRELIMO will attempt to run on anything but a globalist, neoliberal agenda – regardless of the abject poverty suffered by most of its electorate.”

Such a somber conclusion seems to many observers an all too accurate one, unfortunately.

The Present Neoliberal Situation

Here, however, the main task of the present article comes clearly into focus: What is the nature of the present “globalist, neoliberal agenda”? What kind of prospects, if any, does it promise for the country? What alternatives to it exist, concretely? For it is much too late in the day for an article like the present one to stop at “mere” historical investigation or to preoccupy itself with the task of post-mortem and “might-have-beens.” Rather we must carefully assess the actually-existing moment in present-day Mozambique – while also seeking cautiously to divine the future. This is no small challenge, as we will see.

There are a number of competing paradigms that are proposed in order to shape any such assessment. One, quite straightforwardly, sees the current unapologetically capitalist project as marking a promising revival of sobriety in Mozambique. Here, at last (or so it is

argued by elites both global and local), is an acceptance by FRELIMO and by the country it governs of the beneficent logic of global capitalism and the slow but certain working of the system's developmental magic. And certain figures as to growth rate are generally cited to support this claim: for example, a report from the UNDP's International Poverty Centre in 2007 quotes a growth rate for the preceding year of 7.9%, a rather impressive figure![1]

Yet the report also states this kind of growth rate – like similar statistics that are said to signal the country's socio-economic progress since the end of the country's wasting war in 1992 and the linked introduction of ever more accelerated “free market” reforms – to be “illusory at best.” As it affirms, “most of the growth in income and consumption actually occurred among the population's richest quintile, with less than 10% of the growth affecting the country's poorest.” Indeed, in the United Nation's 2007/2008 Human Development Index, the country still ranked 172 out of 177 countries listed.

Two linked dimensions of this apparent growth stand out starkly here. First is the inescapable fact of the deep and widespread poverty thus alluded to. For even if some of the results in “growth” terms can seem mathematically positive, the national development and poverty reduction dividends of this impressive growth rate are virtually absent. In fact, the reality in terms of extreme maldistribution and its impact on people's lives is most distressing. Hanlon (2009, and also 2007) gives a particularly clear account of the social distemper which “desperate poverty and hunger” has produced in both the rural and urban spaces, and he documents the “panic and rage of the poor” as “local people make a desperate attempt to regain some power – as a disempowered group finally taking a stand to defend its very survival.”

True, the organized working class does retain some space to negotiate better wages and working conditions and otherwise act to defend itself. Unions are able to operate freely and workers are able to choose whether or not to join a union. Central labour bodies have formed a “concertation” structure for acting upon issues of common interest and to participate in national policy discussions around public policy questions like establishment of minimum wage levels and changes in the labour law. Some unions, of the security guards for example, have acted especially militantly, taking wage and hours of work issues to labour tribunals and undertaking strike actions in the face of companies like the large transnational security company, G4S, which has flagrantly refused to follow Ministry of Labour rulings in the union's favour.[2]

This being said, however, the space for workers challenges still remains severely limited, not only because of the structural factors that favour capital's interests but also because the trade unions themselves seem to have too little sense of workers' entitlements[3] – this in a context where (as Pitcher [2006] states, with impressive supportive citation) any apparent concessions to such workers must be balanced against “the reality of growing unemployment; a minimum wage that is insufficient to meet people's needs; and inadequate efforts by the government to enforce aspects of the labour law regarding paid holidays, the regular payment of salaries and the punishment of employers who violate workers' rights.”

A second dimension is the clear pattern of recolonization by global capital of the new Mozambique that is revealed. For the present salience of transnational firms and their “mega-projects” – on which the Mozambican elite has itself banked so heavily, not least in order to obtain lucrative sub-contracts for their own fledgling economic initiatives – virtually negates the presumed independence that “liberation” was said to have brought. The case of

Mozal is a particularly graphic demonstration of the pattern, an aluminum plant that is said to be

“a symbol of Mozambique’s red-hot economy, touted as [indicative] of the investor-friendly environment that has led the Wall Street Journal to declare the country ‘An African success story.’ Mozal’s exports have increased Mozambique’s Gross Domestic Product by between 3.2 and 5 percent. Its output represents almost half the country’s growth in manufacturing.”

However, as the article continues,

“In spite of these apparent benefits this has contributed little to the country’s development. Initial investment in the project amounted to approximately 40 percent of GDP, but only created around 1,500 jobs, of which nearly a third are held by foreigners. The smelters use more electricity than the rest of Mozambique combined. The company imports most of its raw material and equipment duty-free, and enjoys an extensive list of incentives ranging from discounted electricity to a prolonged tax holiday. It also has the right to repatriate profits. The result is an isolated economic enclave that uses large quantities of scarce resources without returning revenue or jobs to the economy.”[4]

Castel-Branco (2008) and Pitcher (2006) document similar patterns, linked to mega-projects and to corporate free-booting, elsewhere throughout the Mozambican economy. Pitcher, for example, specifies the case of CFM, a public enterprise in the port and railways sector that was, until recently, “the largest employer in Mozambique,” where management has sought aggressively “to rationalize the work-force” and make other kinds of adjustments thought to be appropriate to the new era – albeit, as with related practices that Pitcher also documents for Mozal, this has not occurred without some attempted resistance from the workers concerned.

Meanwhile, Judith Marshall finds an even rawer example of the nature of the “new Mozambique” in the key role being played by the giant Brazilian multi-national, Vale, in a range of big mining, hydro-electric and transport projects in Tete Province. This is both central to the heralding (not least by President Guebaza himself) of a “Tete Corridor” initiative, but also of a new “high octane global economy that feeds China’s industrialization and in which Vale’s role is [to provide] unprocessed minerals.”[5] And what about Mozambique? All this, Marshall concludes, “has nothing to do with building a national economy – whether socialist or capitalist – or creating jobs and development for the citizens of a particular geo-political space.”[6] Recolonization by the Empire of Capital you say: you wouldn’t be wrong if you did.

Two Pillar Strategy

In practice, Mozambique seems to have come up with a two pillar development strategy. The first pillar is to open the economy to private investors to bring mega-projects to the energy and extractive sectors. These mega-projects are driven by the external demands of the industrialized countries, and include the active roles played by capital from countries like South Africa, Brazil and China. The role of the Mozambican state, the corporations

themselves and civil society in these new projects is highly problematic, as Marshall and others demonstrate.

Moreover, such mega-projects have come on stream as merely one part of the tide of neoliberal economic and social restructuring. As a result, they are very far from feeding into a strategy of national economic development, one that might highlight job creation and links to plans for expanded industrialization – with royalties and taxes then being employed to benefit the surrounding communities and to underpin a broad range of social and redistributive programmes. Instead, they have been established in a way that implicitly negates the possibility of any kind of nationalist or developmental state emerging.

Indeed, such an influx of mega-projects in the extractive sector suggests an overall trend in Mozambique that has come to mirror what has also been happening with the “mining boom” in Latin America.[7] All kinds of conditions are being created to attract foreign private investment – from tax holidays to changes in mining and labour codes, to the waiving of environmental regulations. Of course, much public discourse turns on “corporate social responsibility” and on the promise of mining company largesse for the building of schools, clinics, roads and malaria eradication. Yet, behind the scenes, high stakes negotiations turn on tax and tariff waivers, changes in land, mining and labour legislation, the easing of environmental regulations and a distinctly casual attitude toward forced human resettlement. The stakes in these less than transparent negotiations are all the higher in that the complementary business opportunities related to these mega-project investments seem all too likely to be linked to the entrepreneurial interests of various government leaders.

With mega-projects in the extractive sector as one pillar of Mozambique’s economic strategy, the other pillar of the national economy, much documented by Hanlon, is defined by Mozambique’s having become a “donors’ darling”: a country that, as an apparent reward for its eager compliance with IMF and World Bank prescriptions and the periodic holding of multi-party elections (albeit with some donor concern about “irregularities” in their execution), receives significant amounts of foreign aid in order to finance social programmes. Of course, this has even produced a significant role for the state – linked to the provision of agriculture, health and education services – albeit one heavily subsidized by western donors.

The more cynical suggest that, even were quite modest levels of taxes and royalties demanded of investors, the Mozambican government could itself readily finance all the social programmes that it desired. Yet it chooses to establish no such taxes and royalties and to suffer instead the indignity of western donors who hover at the elbows of the Ministers of Health, Agriculture and Education. In fact, this pattern – low taxes, little government oversight – seems designed to clinch investment deals while also permitting government leaders to ingratiate themselves with investors, thereby laying the groundwork for such leaders, in their entrepreneurial capacity, to then seal lucrative private partnerships. Meanwhile, foreign donors wind up funding social costs: in such a way Canadian taxpayers – and those in other donor countries – find themselves subsidizing transnational mining companies in Mozambique![8]

Are there countervailing trends to these disturbing patterns – and ways of interpreting them – that bear more promise? As seen, Hanlon is both a clear-sighted observer of the cruel inequality between elite and mass that has come to mark contemporary Mozambique and has also been a sharp critic of the overall multinationals-driven economic strategy

championed by the country's elite in recent decades. Now, however, he seems to have come to a rather startling conclusion. As he and his co-author Teresa Smart (Hanlon and Smart, p. 3) put it, "in the contemporary world, development tends to be capitalist in some form." Hence they endorse the view of President Armando Guebuza that, in their words, "Mozambique cannot wait with hands outstretched for mythical foreign investors, but must create, support and promote its own business people" – people, it bears emphasizing, like President Guebuza himself and other such members of Mozambique's fledgling national bourgeoisie!

In his more recent writings Hanlon has, rather surprisingly, continued to make the case – if not entirely convincingly – for the developmental vocation of such a "national bourgeoisie" (his erstwhile elite of Mozambican robber barons to now suddenly be transformed into captains of industry and of genuine development, a startling notion from Hanlon the articulation of which I register in an Appendix, below). Make no mistake. Hanlon is, of course, massively well-informed and also cares deeply about Mozambique, about its prospects for genuine development, and about the fate of its numberless poor. But would it not be possible for him and for us, instead, to look downwards, to the impoverished populace itself, instead of upwards, to the indigenous bourgeoisie, for any real promise of realizing fair and meaningful change? In sharp contrast to Hanlon's vision, at once nationalist and bourgeois, there remains a final scenario to be considered, a prospect that pins its hopes on a revival of the country's progressive vocation.

Is this any less fanciful and fugitive a hope than is Hanlon's? Certainly the immediate prospects along these lines are not great – though not any less so, one senses, than are those for an heroic and developmental future forged by a national bourgeoisie! Yet Anne Pitcher (2006) – though herself well aware of the growing wealth and power that the Mozambican elite is creating for itself – can still talk hopefully about the negative impact of elite self-aggrandizement on the attitudes and actions of those many millions of citizens, abandoned and often quite desperate, who seem consigned to languish "at the bottom" and well "below" the status and comfort afforded those at the top of Mozambican society.

Indeed, she goes further, suggesting a particularly tantalizing way of thinking about this reality. On the one hand, Pitcher finds that the elite is busily rewriting history and recasting its public pronouncements, in ways she documents extremely clearly, so as to block any popular recall – especially any positive recall – of an earlier socialist and progressive FRELIMO. Yet, she continues, the ordinary Mozambicans are not so easily convinced, sickened by and angry at the dramatically escalating corruption and rampant greed they see to be everywhere around them in the "new Mozambique," while also both holding on to their own memories of a more promising time and manifesting their continued expectations of a state that protects its citizens.

Pitcher places more hope than may be warranted in the Mozambican trade unions perhaps, some of whose weaknesses we noted above. Nonetheless, she does forcefully argue the importance of widespread worker protests that centre on demands for "benefits and subsidies that the government guaranteed to them in the past." And she also emphasizes the importance of other realities like

"the robust sales of the recorded speeches of President Samora Machel, who oversaw the implementation of socialism from 1977 until his death in 1986 [that] reveal an ongoing popular dissatisfaction with the current mode of governance and lingering attachments to another time."

Moreover, it is the case that industries in the extractive sector – some of which, as in mining, also have an insatiable appetite for land – often find themselves increasingly to be in conflict with rural communities. Indeed, with the withdrawal of the state from regulating and protecting its citizens' rights, the companies and such communities are actually advancing quite different and competing visions of development! Local demands for job creation, for localized control of new business opportunities such as transport, food services and security, for adequate compensation to those displaced, for environmental protection of water sources, and the like: around each of these issues there is the likelihood of growing resistance.[9]

In fact, drawing on recent evidence of protests, strikes and other instances of overt resistance in present-day Mozambique, Pitcher concludes that, even if a recent letter of protest (which she quotes) to the editor of *Noticias* in Maputo may be “somewhat romantic about the good old days, it [does show] that a counter-hegemonic strategy rooted in socialist ideals may be (re)emerging in Mozambique.” Aiming not so much, it would seem, to revive FRELIMO's original project as to imagine the possibility of recasting the present in order that it might again embody something that will be (for them) much more positive. Grasping at straws? Note that this sometimes populist strain of resistance to penury and oppression can often be randomly violent, xenophobic and malfocussed, as Hanlon has emphasized. Moreover, it is, even in its very best expressions, still a long way from embodying the principled and organized force for change that could expect soon to present an alternative – and winning – counter-hegemonic “strategy” (such as Pitcher evokes) to the FRELIMO elite's now self-indulgent and largely self-serving rule. But perhaps it can at least be said that, at the present grim time in Mozambique, the struggle for a more genuine liberation is far from being wholly moribund.

Appendix:

From Robber Barons to Captains of Industry?

In his most recent writings Joe Hanlon has continued to make a strong (and, for him, novel) case for the developmental vocation of a “national bourgeoisie.” Thus, with Mosse, he asks, startlingly, whether “Mozambique's elite [is] moving from corruption to development?” (2009b). In another recent article he sees that elite to be “finding its way in a globalized economy” (2009c). In these articles, he explores, revealingly, the precise make-up of that elite and the wide range of their various holding and economic interests. Writing with Mosse, for example, he places particular emphasis on the role of the President and the “Guebuza family companies,” noting Guebuza's aggressive business sense and the roots of the degree to which he and other key members of the elite (former President Chissano for example) have built on bases derived from their stake in the “gangster capitalism,” and “greed is good” days, of the 1990s when they were able “to expand their interests under the party and state umbrella.”

And the list of the holdings of Guebuza, his immediate family and other relatives (and of other close associates like Celso Correia), is quite staggering. But the Guebuza group is also distinguished, says Hanlon, by a less “predatory,” more “developmental,” approach than many others of the elite – a development he sees to be most promising. Recall that Hanlon was once amongst those who more effectively excoriated that very Mozambican elite as it became, over time, more and more visibly corrupt and opportunist in the seizing of all

manner of market opportunities. Now such is Hanlon's attraction to Guebuza's charisma, to his nationalism and to his savvy, that, by means of his (Hanlon's) authorial magic, Mozambique's elite of robber barons is suddenly to be transformed into captains of industry – and of genuine development! Indeed, the key questions Hanlon and Mosse now wish to pose seem to be

“whether the development of presidential companies should be more openly encouraged as a way of creating firms and groups which are dynamic and effective enough to be competitive and developmental. Can these presidential companies through their privileged access to the state, potentially grow to a critical mass allowing them to become major players in the development of Mozambique and southern Africa, as happened with the privileged companies in the Asian Tigers, Latin America and South Africa?”

And whether “the Mozambican elite [can] develop the culture of hard work, saving and delayed consumption that was central to the economic development of the Asian tigers?”

But even if some such transformation were to occur (and he and his co-author by no means convince the reader that it can) to whose benefit would it be in any case? To the “robber-barons” own, self-evidently. And what of the impoverished mass of the population? It would surely take a pretty powerful “trickle-down effect” to see Mozambique move up from no.172 on the world table to be able to establish any convincing comparison with the Asian Tigers as Hanlon implies to be possible. Nonetheless, this kind of capitalist transformation, driven by just this kind of indigenous bourgeoisie, seems to be the best scenario, the best hope, that Hanlon can conjure up for Mozambique and for Mozambicans (but see also, rather paradoxically, Hanlon's most recent paper [Cunguara and Hanlon, 2010] entitled “Poverty is Not Being Reduced in Mozambique”!).

Is this where the experience of both the failure of Mozambique's socialism and the subsequent recolonization – both socially damaging and, in any transformative sense, economically unsuccessful – of the country by global capitalism must drive the well-intentioned observer: into the arms of the country's local elite who have, in fact, themselves been amongst the chief architects of the country's present sorry situation?

John S. Saul is professor emeritus of political science at York University, Toronto. His latest book is [Revolutionary Traveller](#). This article originally published at [At Issue eZine](#).

Notes

1. This report, itself readily available, is summarized in the article “[Mozambique: What price the benefits of foreign investment](#).”
2. Interestingly, some of the staunchest defense of workers' rights in recent years has come not from the unions but from the FRELIMO Minister of Labour, Helena Taipo. Acting on her own conviction that the role of the government is to maintain balance and mutual respect amongst the main actors in the economy, she has intervened on multiple occasions where workers' rights have not been respected, coming down hard on employers ranging from large transnationals like the G4S security company and Mozal to Chinese state companies and senior government leaders turned businessmen.

3. True, the unions themselves sometimes seem to act in such a way as to mediate labour conflicts away rather than to take a militant stand for workers' rights to a living wage, a safe workplace and dignified treatment. Moreover, many workers seem to read the strong government support for new mega-projects like those of BHP-Billiton and Vale and the modest government role in defending those whose lands and livelihoods are lost to these projects as an indication that fighting these companies for better wages and working conditions is almost tantamount to anti-government activity.

4. Op. cit. (footnote 1).

5. On Vale's egregious role in Canada, since 2006 the owner of Inco (now Vale Inco), see Bryan Evans and Greg Albo, "Celebrating and Struggling This May Day: The Long, Hard Haul at the Vale Inco Strike," [*The Bullet*, #349](#), May 1, 2010.

6. Judith Marshall, personal communication. Here and elsewhere in this text Marshall's advice and assistance have been particularly important to its preparation, helping me to ground it firmly in contemporary reality. Comments from both Noaman Ali and Jesse Ovadia have also been of great assistance.

7. While the following (in Liisa North et. al., *Community Rights and Corporate Responsibility* [Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006]) was written about Latin America, it has much relevance to contemporary Mozambique; it warrants quoting *in extenso* here:

"In response to the new incentives created by the neoliberal state, the mining industry has enjoyed a new boom. Production has been reactivated in many traditional mining areas, and operations in new zones have been aggressively pursued. But in many respects the new incentive under which these enterprises were established signaled a return to the conditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Reduced taxation, reduced regulation, and forced labour-market flexibility meant that the countries where mineral exports grew in importance received a small share of the wealth generated by corporate mineral extraction regimes. As capital markets were liberalized, profits could be more easily transferred to, and invested in, outside countries rather than in communities and nations in which the mining operations were located. Since the new mining was even more capital-intensive and employed more sophisticated technologies than did mining operations in the past, it created even fewer jobs than before and often those jobs went to highly specialized or skilled workers brought to the mines from outside. Meanwhile local people experienced the environmental contamination and social disruptions created by mineral extraction."

Joan Kuyek underscores, in her article "Legitimizing Plunder: Canadian Mining Companies and Corporate Social Responsibility" in the same volume, a firm (and ugly) Canadian connection to such dismaying realities in the Global South.

8. The previous several paragraphs draw heavily on the suggestions and formulations of Judith Marshall, as cited in footnote 6, above. She further notes that even "the donors" began to become uneasy with the Mozambican elite's behaviour. Thus "the beginning of 2010 found these arrangements fraying at the edges. The donors delayed their transfers to the social ministries until such time as the Mozambican government was prepared to introduce changes in its electoral law and regulations regarding conflict of interest"! (personal communication).

9. For there is also the promising fact that transnational mining companies are not the only

players that have begun to establish complex multinational linkages: civil society networks concerned with mining issues are also connected. Indeed, as the African experience comes to mirror that of Asia and South America where these kinds of new mining investments are more advanced, Mozambican organizations will, in all likelihood, soon be sharing even more experiences and strategies with other communities in resistance around the world.

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