

Interpretations Matter: Evaluating the War in Mozambique

BY BRIDGET O'LAUGHLIN

The success of the war waged against the Mozambican government by Renamo and its external backers has been one factor forcing a re-evaluation, amongst academics and activists alike, of the entire Frelimo project. Indeed, one body of writing on this theme has been hailed (by British academic Gervase Clarence-Smith, writing in the Southern African Review of Books) as marking a "paradigm shift" from explanations that give primacy to South African destabilization as inducing Mozambique's decline to those that emphasize the centrality of Frelimo's own policy failures, notably in the agrarian sector. A key contribution to grounding such a "revisionist" approach to Mozambique has been the work on Nampula's Erati district of French anthropologist, Christian Geffray. This work is represented

most forcefully in his recent book, *La cause des armes au Mozambique: Anthropologie d'une guerre civile*.

We asked Bridget O'Laughlin, a noted American-born anthropologist who has lived and worked for well over a decade in Mozambique, to review Geffray's book for us. Unconvinced that either Geffray's book or the facts of the Mozambican case demanded anything so sweeping as the paradigm shift urged by Clarence-Smith, she seized upon the challenge eagerly, producing, in the end a fascinating but outsized manuscript, one far too vast for us to reproduce here. Nonetheless her own critical reflections on the Mozambican experience occasioned by a reading of Geffray seemed so much more alert than anything discussed by Geffray or by Clarence-Smith to the real dilemmas and difficulties that have confronted

the Mozambican leadership that we have felt compelled to print here, with only minor cuts, the long central section of her manuscript containing these reflections. Unfortunately we have had merely to précis an equally extended opening section that gives a nuanced and informed reprise of Geffray's book and to pare away altogether a concluding section in which O'Laughlin refers to her own analysis of the trajectory of the Mozambican experiment, and draws out some of the implications of that analysis for on-going support work.

We have invited O'Laughlin to return to this latter theme in some future issue of SAR, while also encouraging her to publish her longer manuscript in Mozambique itself, in *Estudos Mozambicanos*. We begin, then, with Geffray's book — our précis of O'Laughlin's précis.

Christian Geffray's Argument

When Renamo forces moved into north-central Mozambique in March of 1984, they were welcomed by some traditional leaders who brought thousands of their followers under Renamo's control. In his book Christian Geffray, a French anthropologist with considerable experience in Mozambique, tries to explain why this allegiance was given and then traces its consequences for the peasantry in Nampula and for the course of the war.

As the book's subtitle suggests ("The Anthropology of a Civil War"), Geffray places more emphasis in his analysis on internal political and social conditions than he does on the undisputed support that Renamo has received from Rhodesian and South African forces. Geffray believes that Frelimo's plan of socialization of the countryside was politically and economically alien to rural Mozambicans and that it ignored or rejected the diverse cultural traditions of the peasantry. Left to itself, Geffray admits, peasant dissidence would not have become armed warfare. With the arrival of Renamo, however, local contradictions, which had already turned violent, provided the social base for a civil war.

Geffray addresses two main questions: why did some people in Erati district voluntarily align themselves with Renamo, allowing the rebels to develop a political base in north-central Nampula? and how does Renamo's war strategy in the countryside affect the local population?

In Erati, Geffray argues, people were forcibly removed into villages. If they resisted their homes were burned and, in one instance, a traditional chief was executed. Finally one of the chiefs invited Renamo to construct a base in his territory and other chiefs and headmen, with large numbers of their people, joined him. Geffray does suggest that ethnic divisions helped determine who went over to Renamo, the latter movement's sympathizers coming almost entirely from the Macuane who had been relatively marginalized under both the colonial and Frelimo administrations. But he argues that even those who stayed under Frelimo control shared with those under Renamo a common sense of injury towards Frelimo.

Crucial to this outcome, writes Geffray, was the consistent disrespect for the values of the peasantry implicit

in Frelimo's conception of nation-building and socialization of the countryside. Indeed, Frelimo is said to have treated the peasantry as a "blank page": ignoring traditional religious values and mocking traditional authority the party tried to imprint upon peasant society a single strategy of national development. Indeed, "villagization" is interpreted not so much as a strategy for development as a means of constructing the state apparatus in the rural areas. And, rather than the villages being based in the rural culture, the people most involved in their construction were not ordinary peasants but rather members of an urban oriented petty-bourgeoisie (carpenters, traders, primary-school teachers) who had broken with "lineage authority" and allied themselves with Frelimo's project.

Geffray uses interviews with a number of people who were formerly under Renamo control to assemble an account of life in Renamo-dominated villages. He confirms that most Renamo recruits are captives (taken in attacks on villages or on public transport); nonetheless, he doubts that internal discipline is guaranteed merely by systematic terror. Rather the lack of alternative opportunities for young men in the countryside, together with the perks derived from becoming part of the dominant group, make staying with Renamo a better alternative than desertion for many.

Renamo bases are separated from surrounding villages while those who organize the peasantry politically are local chiefs (the mambo) generally recruited by Renamo from those regarded by the population as legitimate successors of pre-colonial chiefs. These latter set up a local police force, collect the food tax that feeds Renamo, and integrate captives into local households. (For those who are brought to Renamo areas as captives, Geffray affirms, life is much as it was for slaves in 19th century Nampula society.)

Geffray does note that civilian disenchantment with Renamo, and reaction against its parasitism and its atrocities, is virtually inevitable. But he also emphasizes that the Frelimo party and state have themselves become defensive and inept: both the army and the militias are relatively inactive (if rather less corrupt than Renamo) and Frelimo itself is increasingly less visible, allowing local governance to depend more and more on the traditional chiefs who have been given the new administrative titles of 'chiefs of production'.

O'Laughlin concludes her review of Geffray's argument by emphasizing that "the changes which the war has brought to Frelimo ideology and to the organization of the party are indeed important. The early Frelimo party congresses were preceded by wide-scale discussion and debate of the party programmes in the society at large. The political program formulated by the recently concluded Sixth Congress still has not been publicly discussed. Frelimo's conception of communal vil-



Child refugee from MNR area in Sofala province, 1987

Anders Nilsson/AIM

lages was initially linked to the socialization of agricultural production. Today the position of both agricultural and consumer cooperatives is weak and defensive. Much state farm land has been redistributed to multinational corporations, private Mozambican farmers (including military commanders) and peasants. There is a great deal of concern with ethnic and racial representation in state and party structures and little preoccupation with class. The fiscal basis of the state has become external financing and the taxing of trade and salaries also based in externally funded projects. The leadership of the Frelimo Party once spoke with almost unbreachable unity; now the Minister of the Interior and other long-time Frelimo figures are in jail, charged with participation in the planning of a coup d'état."

Can we therefore say with Geffray that to considerable extent Renamo has won its war? More immediately, O'Laughlin asks, what of Geffray's analysis of the causes of the war? "Is this Renamo's war? Is it a peasant war? A civil war? What is the social basis of this conflict that has withered and burned the pride, hope and ambition of the first years of Mozambican independence?" It is just such questions that she then proceeds to address in the second section of her manuscript.

The Anthropology of a Civil War

Socialism cannot be built on the destruction of the people whose interests it pretends to materialize. Thus a critique of the Mozambican revolution requires an identification and analysis of errors, not simply an attribution of blame. Geffray seeks to contribute to this discussion with a general theory of the causes of the war: "If that which we have found in Erati applies to that which is occurring in all of Mozambique, then things must be represented in the following way: Renamo has managed to make the opposition of people to the Villagizing State take on a violent form everywhere where people were marginalized in the colonial situation and remained so within independent Mozambique and where they thought that they could take advantage of Renamo's weapons to put themselves out of reach of the State (pp. 219-220)." How useful is this analysis? Does it raise the main questions we need to ask about the errors of the Mozambican revolution?

The essence of anthropological method is immersing oneself in the everyday life of the people one is studying, trying to see the world through their eyes. There are risks in this method. The community may be very differentiated yet we mistake a particular view of the world for a general truth. The elders may not think as do the youth; women may not think as men do; elders of royal lineages may not think as do those who have had no share in political power. Or the causes of the events we are studying may lie outside the boundaries of space and time that we have defined for our study, but this is not clear either to us or to the people we are studying.

That is why the quality of anthropological work is dependent on the way that anthropologists theorize their questions. It is theory that draws attention to the contradictory

positions of different social groups and obliges us to look for differences in their experience and views of the world. It is theory that allows us to decide how much history we need to know to understand the present, and how far in social space we need to go to understand why people act as they do.

We are forced to rely on Geffray's considerable experience in Nampula and in Mozambique and his feel for context in his interpretation of events since his book does not actually present much empirical evidence to back up its arguments, particularly in its discussion of Frelimo's errors; there are few examples presented, there are no numbers, there is no bibliography. It is unfortunate, then, that his work is heavily informed by a theoretical perspective based in a certain anthropological tradition, for it is a perspective that limits him, conditioning what he sees and doesn't see in the war in Nampula and the way in which he analyzes the strategy of socialist construction in Mozambique.

I think that there are two principal weaknesses in the theoretical tools which Geffray uses in his analysis of the war in Mozambique: (a) he dichotomizes internal and external class forces and (b) he dichotomizes the traditional world of the peasantry and the modern world of the cities. These misleading divisions are part of the theoretical baggage with which many anthropologists survey the world. At the same time, Geffray ignores the classical concerns of Marxists and socialists in the analysis of revolutionary situations. He also fails to treat problematically the nature of the political, economic and cultural structure formed by colonialism which any strategy of socialist transition had (and has) to confront. These are mistakes.

Many of the problems which Gef-

fray tries to understand have indeed been analyzed and debated by revolutionary movements themselves (including Frelimo) and by socialist analysts of many and diverse tendencies trying to understand where things went wrong. There is sometimes a tendency to place African revolutions outside world revolutionary traditions, because African peasants are viewed as being bound up in a pre-historic world of clan, tribe and magic. However, I think that many of the difficulties Frelimo met in building socialist democracy in the countryside are part of the general heritage of socialist revolutions that we must be willing now to confront directly and to critique.

Inside/Outside

Geffray sets to the side what he calls "the war of the secret services" in order to concentrate on the internal political and social conditions underlying the establishment and spread of hostilities. He recognizes that Renamo was set up by the Rhodesians and sustained by the South African security forces, but he argues that this aspect of the war is well known and thus he does not deal with it.

This seems to me a very dangerous abstraction to make, precisely because the development of class forces within Mozambique and their effect on Frelimo ideology and practice are so intimately related to the dynamic of external aggression - economic and political as well as military. For the war in Mozambique is one of a recent series of conflicts in which internal forces have been promoted, financed, trained and logistically supported by the United States, U.S. backed regimes like South Africa, and various other capitalist states, to undermine socialist governments through low intensity rural guerrilla warfare.

Generally the foci of attack have been chosen precisely to exacerbate



or create conflicts between the socialist government and the peasantry rather than to confront directly the power of the state or to construct a counter-power. The targeting of road transport and the consequent breakdown in mercantile relations between town and country and between different regions of the country is an example. Such low intensity warfare is generally accompanied, as it was in Mozambique, by the imposition of economic sanctions, political isolation and limited intervention by conventional forces. But there is little investment in the political future of the counter-revolutionary guerrilla force; its purpose has been served when the socialist government is either removed or redefines its objectives.

Abstracting his analysis from any consideration of imperialism as a system articulating external and internal forces leads to a number of particular problems in Geffray's account of the war in Mozambique. Firstly, he strains to find explanations for Renamo activities which seem incompatible with the build-

ing of a political base. But his arguments only clarify that those who formulate Renamo strategy have not been until recently particularly concerned with its political legitimacy. Geffray asks at one point, for example, why Renamo undertakes the random massacres on the roads. His answer: "Almost all travellers are people from the town and cities or they are country-folk with a network of urban contacts, caught out precisely when they were coming or going to town. These people belong to the strata of the population whose conditions were profoundly transformed in the colonial situation: employees, workers, traders, artisans, wealthy businessmen engaged in tri-lateral or quadrilateral trade, the unemployed living on odd jobs and dealing, women visiting their rural in-laws or coming back with a sack of cassava, families looking for a cousin who has made it in town . . . In other words, the travellers in the convoys are people whose condition is opposed to that of those marginalized by the colonial state and left to fend for themselves by the independent state, those who entered into dissi-

dence against this state and placed themselves massively under the shelter of Renamo's weapons" (p.216).

In fact, all rural families whom I have met in Mozambique, including in those areas of north-central Nampula which Geffray considers marginalized, have kin and friends on the roads. By stopping the movement of people and goods in the country Renamo does more than, in Geffray's phrase, "gravely affect the material and social living conditions of the urban and peri-urban milieu." He does not see how debilitating the breakdown of trade has been for rural people themselves (even though he has previously noted that this is one of the factors that has led to disenchantment with Renamo in its occupied zones). If we do not assume that Renamo has been concerned with building a popular base in the first place, then the reason behind the attacks on rural transport are transparent. Stopping trade will certainly undermine any programs of social or productive investment and undermine Frelimo's popular base by worsening the standard of living in both country and city.

Secondly, Geffray's abstraction from the relationship between external and internal forces leads him to look at the evolution of Frelimo with a particularly jaundiced and ahistorical eye. The Frelimo that emerges in Geffray's work is a parasite, a creature of false fronts and empty promises. Yet the evolution of the war itself had created new class forces both within Mozambique and within Frelimo well before Geffray's arrival. If we abstract from this history, we tend to see only the defensive measures of the 1980s and forget the optimism, sense of reconstruction and broad mass participation in activities organized by Frelimo, in both rural and urban areas, during the first years after Independence.

When Geffray began his fieldwork in Nampula, a large part of the neighbouring province of Zambezia, Mozambique's most populous and most productive agricultural area, was occupied by Renamo forces and road transport was paralysed. The forced movement of the population of Erati into villages was dictated principally by military considerations. These villages were more like the familiar, and often similarly ill-advised "strategic hamlets" of the Portuguese than Frelimo's original conception of communal villages ("aldeias comunais") based in the building of common social infra-structure and new forms of agricultural production. By the mid-80s, Frelimo was indeed concerned with the building of a defensive local-level political apparatus in the context of a successful internal military opposition.

Earlier, however, there was much greater importance given by Frelimo to mass political participation *per se*. In 1979, for example, I worked with a Centre of African Studies (CEA) research brigade close to Nacaroa in southern Erati district. It was evident that most families were not particularly interested in moving their houses to the site of the new communal village (where our

own brigade also camped), but they were interested in the better common social services on offer there. Moreover, the youthful members of the local dynamizing group did go out and talk with the families in their area; people were frank and the dynamizing group heeded what was said.

When Geffray began his fieldwork in Nampula, however, parallel markets were well developed in rural areas and commercial profit was being rapidly accumulated by the new traders, many of them with links to the state apparatus and the army. Of course, parallel markets did not develop only because of the war, but the speculative accumulation of capital is probably endemic to any war economy. The state and army became bases of recruitment for new class forces that parasitically came to leech from both peasants and workers, and to sap the efficiency of both government and defence.

Thirdly, Geffray falls into thinking at several points of Renamo as an autonomous force. He speaks of Renamo having won its war, of Renamo as an armed social body functioning on its own account. This emphasis on the autonomy of Renamo influences Geffray's analysis of how the conditions of war are reproduced. He offers, for example, an explanation of the localization of Renamo bases: "Every Renamo base is thus like a 'metastasis', favouring the eruption in the Mozambican social fabric of a pathological pattern of development of the conflicts upon which it parasitically feeds. Thus we can explain the strange spatial configuration of the hostilities, like a leopard's coat." Yet what of the importance of the rearguard support lines in the establishment and maintenance of Renamo bases. Local conflicts are significant - Renamo is indeed a force within Mozambican society - but note that the leopard's spots have at various times been concentrated most dramatically along (and some-

times over) the Rhodesian, South African and Malawian borders. The waging of the war continues to depend on support from outside.

Peasant society in Nampula

Geffray tends to assume that in Nampula there is a homogeneous peasantry sharply differentiated from townspeople and living within a traditional world dominated by traditional cults, rules and practices. The clearest voices in this world view are those of the lineage elders. Others, like migrant-workers, masons, tailors, traders, and the travellers in the road convoys massacred by Renamo, are treated as urban intruders. For Geffray, Frelimo ignored or rejected the traditional world of the peasantry and found its base among the urbanized. Thus the peasantry rejected Frelimo.

This point of view has recently gained considerable credence in Mozambique. Strategic choices made by Frelimo, such as the abolition of the system of *regulos* (chiefly functionaries within the Portuguese administrative system), are viewed as errors. Inversely, the integration of traditional chiefs, spirit mediums and healers into the system of governance is viewed as a key to Renamo's success. For some within the army Frelimo's rejection of tradition thus explains why it was not possible for Frelimo to win the war militarily.

Yet the peasantry of northern Mozambique was dominated for much of the colonial period by forced cotton cultivation, while cash-cropping by the peasantry expanded and diversified from the 1960s on. Moreover, for men who came of age in the 1960s in Nampula some period of wage-labour was also very common, the construction of the Nacala-Malawi railway, expansion of the port and the presence of Portuguese military bases both in the city of Nampula and in Nacaroa all having their impact in this respect. And many women and children worked the Portuguese farmers' own cotton fields.

The expansion of the settler community and increasing dependence on wage labour and/or cash-cropping led to greater social differentiation in Nampula, as in the rest of Mozambique. There were conflicts over ownership and use of land; some families had the labour to expand commercial production while others worked in their fields or depended on remittances; lineage elders generally had an advantageous position in the expansion of cash-cropping, but so also did well-paid migrant workers who could use their wages to recruit labour from outside their families. In sum, rural life in Nampula at the end of the colonial period was contradictory and these contradictions were further compounded by the presence of returned migrants (and would-be migrants) who became trapped in the countryside with the collapse of the economic base of the cities of Nampula and Nacala at Independence.

Rural political structures and peasant ideology at the end of the colonial period reflected these contradictions. We cannot simply distinguish elements which were legitimate and acceptable to all of the peasantry and those which were imposed from outside. As in any society, the peasantry's cultural beliefs are both systematic and internally contradictory, reflecting the present terms of their social life. It is thus impossible to distinguish political structures which are legitimate and untainted by colonialism because they are rooted in pre-colonial systems. For example, it is true (as Geffray points out) that the colonial administration often overlooked or replaced legitimate title-holders when it named its *regulos*. But the language and organization of the system of local administration which underlay forced labour and forced crops appropriated and compromised the positions of traditional chiefs and clan headmen.

Abstracting from this social differentiation and looking so intently

for the traditionalism of the peasantry leads Geffray to analyze the question of peasant opposition to, and support for, Frelimo in a very partial way. I think that the base that heard and embraced Frelimo's language in the period from 1975 to around 1980 was much greater than Geffray records. I do not think that it is accurate to describe this base as essentially urban. Even Yamaruzu - a defender of traditional rituals and a critic of Frelimo who is much cited by Geffray - says that those who destroyed the paraphernalia of ritual practices were "our sons"!

Frelimo's practice: terms for a critique

I want to consider just three aspects of Frelimo policy which meant a direct and deliberate assault on the existing organization of rural life: local level administration, cultural policy and economic policy. In each of these areas, Frelimo met substantial support as well as some opposition in rural areas. In each of these areas today a particular critique of the past is being used to put forward a view of the future. Although I am not prepared to analyze thoroughly these questions here, I do propose to show why I think that Geffray's rural/urban dualism is not a useful way to understand what happened.

(a) The "Villagizing State" or the administrating party?

Here we must return to Geffray's critique of what he terms the "Villagizing State." He notes that in Zambezia, a major Renamo target, very few communal villages were actually formed. He argues, however, that villagization was a corner-stone of Frelimo's political strategy, whether or not villages materialized. This is because the state and the party are only present in the rural milieu through the village secretary, the village party-cell, the national youth organization (OJM) of the village. What is really in question, then, is Frelimo's system of local-level administration, one which made a di-

rect and frontal assault on political dualism.

In colonial Africa, French, English or Portuguese, the lowest level of political administration integrated legitimate local kings and chiefs (or, where others were named in their place, the accoutrements of power were reestablished on traditional lines to promote legitimacy). But these local chiefs were subordinated to the colonial administration and the tasks of local level administration profoundly altered: collection of the head and hut-taxes, recruitment of forced labour and implementation of forced cotton-cropping. In sharp contrast, the European code of law and system of administration applied to urban areas, and to capitalist farms and mines where most Africans were legally only visitors (and workers).

In most of Africa after independence, this legal and administrative dualism was maintained, although the boundaries between the two systems and movement between them were made more flexible. Looking at 15 years of African independence, Frelimo saw this dualism as divisive, anti-democratic and responsible for maintaining economic backwardness in the countryside. I agree. I think it would be a fundamental error to conclude that the war in Mozambique shows that Mozambican peasants need colonial-style *regulos*.

Of course, Geffray's argument is not that Mozambique needs *regulos* but rather that people want respect and recognition for their traditional chiefs. He notes that many of the ex-*regulos* stayed in Frelimo zones and that Renamo tried to recruit the true traditional title-holders. In a recent interview, he suggested that Frelimo must implement three measures to break the present impasse in the countryside: let people live outside the villages, maintain the amnesty law, and honour the authority of traditional leaders who were not on the side of the Portuguese. But this last measure seems to me politically naive. Per-



Alirio Chiziane/AIM

Villagers training for local militia, Zambezia province, 1986

mit people to respect and honour religious figures and title-holders, to be sure, but the underlying question of how local governance and political power is to be organized cannot be conjured away. Instead it opens up a series of complex considerations that Geffray does not even begin to consider. But these must be part of the Marxist debate on socialist transition and, indeed, were continually discussed by Frelimo itself. I will refer only to a few of them here.

(i) **Didactic politics** All colonialism was fascist, but Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique, based as it was in a fascist regime in Portugal, was politically very repressive. There was thus little political experience and organization upon which Frelimo could base its conception of people's power. The political pro-

cess at the base was therefore viewed as largely didactic. There was mass participation and a great deal of discussion and debate, but decisions made at the base considered to be politically incorrect were, as Geffray notes, sometimes annulled by higher authority. Nonetheless, the question of how to build political experience seems to me a real one and was directly confronted by Frelimo in the first years of the revolution. It is now largely pushed aside by the assumption that Mozambique has become democratic simply because the new constitution has introduced a multi-party system.

(ii) **Double subordination** In Marxist theories of socialist transition, the party should constitute a force separate from the state and capable of entering into opposition to

it. Frelimo talked about the need for the party to throttle the colonial state and to construct an alternative based in people's power. In practice, however, it opted for a system of public administration in which the party secretary at a particular level was also the top official in the government hierarchy. The provincial first secretary was always the governor of the province. The district administrator was the first secretary of Frelimo at the level of the district. In situations of contradiction, such as labour shortage on a state-farm or abuse of power by a public official, this system tended to make the party the defender of the state in its existing form. It also meant that the power of the local elected people's assemblies, to which the government was theoretically accountable, was very weak.



Sergio Santimano/AIM

(iii) **Restricted role of mass organizations** Mass organizations in Mozambique were created by Frelimo. Coming out of colonialism and fascism, it is hard to imagine another political or social force which could have done so. The problem that then emerged is one which other socialist revolutions confronted: should such organizations be autonomous from the party?

Mozambique never did develop a peasants' association. It was thought that the mass of the peasantry would move quickly into cooperatives and thus organize through cooperative unions. The tight control exercised by Frelimo over unions and the women's and young people's organizations would seem to indicate, however, that even if a peas-

ants' organization had been formed it would not have been allowed to operate as an independent political forum. Frelimo never allowed democratic institutional forms aimed at reaching the broad mass of peasants and workers to develop outside the party.

There is a related issue in Frelimo political practice which Geffray does address quite thoroughly and sometimes passionately. This is the blank slate problem: the tendency to impose an ideal pattern without any attention to how rural people actually organized their lives. Geffray attributes this problem to Frelimo's weak rural base. This seems to me to be a simplification of a complex problem. For the urban and, I would say, bourgeois bias, in Frelimo's approach to the peasantry ac-

tually sprang from the weakness of the party and democratic organizations vis-à-vis the state.

Given the educational biases of the colonial system, technocrats were often recruited from among the sons and daughters of the liberal bourgeoisie, often settler in origin. Most thought of themselves as enthusiastic supporters of the revolution and were tireless in their work. Their class and cultural perspective was not, however, consistently tempered by political intervention based in democratic discussion and debate on the part of those who were the objects of state policy.

Furthermore, Frelimo's tremendous confidence in the support that it had from the peasantry was used to justify ambitious programmes of

rapid political and economic change. It was initially expected that people would be living in communal villages within five years, and thus the political structures appropriate to urban areas would also work in the countryside. Gradualism was considered to be a defeatist dirty word which the then minister of agriculture asked us to remove from a document prepared in 1980 by the CEA on planning in cooperatives.

When radical strategies did not work, Frelimo often closed its eyes and allowed local compromises to determine what kind of political system really worked. One of the reasons I find Geffray's general analysis of the war unconvincing is that in many areas headmen early reasserted their control of local level politics. Yet this was not necessarily an unqualified good. Geffray argues that traditional chiefs entered the war not to reclaim the privileges that those who had been made regulos enjoyed in the colonial period, but rather to reconquer their dignity and the exercise of their authority which had been repressed by Frelimo. The problem is that dignity and authority were enmeshed in a system of local governance which any socialist political strategy would have to alter.

(b) Frelimo's cultural nationalism

Dualism also characterizes the cultural heritage of colonialism. Here, too, Frelimo declared an assault on dualism, attempting to build a single national culture which would meld the experience of diverse groups of Mozambicans. In the period immediately following Independence, the Mozambican Revolution was culturally very radical. There was a strong sense that colonialism had kept the people in ignorance, superstition and fear, and a corresponding affirmation of their right to education (adult literacy, for example) and science.

The other side of this positive policy was a tendency to try to crush



The "Mapico", a Maconde dance, Nampula 1988

or suppress values and beliefs that were viewed as anti-scientific, separatist or unprogressive, like consulting a diviner, identifying oneself by one's ethnic group of origin or paying lobolo (bride-price). This did not mean a general assault on peasant culture. The national music and dance festival, for example, brought

together groups from all over the country, army recruits sang drills in many different national languages, and school-books were rewritten to make them more relevant to rural children.

Religion was generally viewed as reactionary in itself during the first years of the revolution. Nation-

Fernando Lima/AIM

alization of health and education meant that many mission schools and hospitals were taken over by the government, but churches and mosques were also closed and sometimes vandalized. Traditional healers and ancestor-cults were treated with similar disrespect. This period is referred to by Yamaruzu, and was discussed and criticized at length in the meeting between religious leaders and Samora Machel in 1982.

Geffray sees these events as a reflection of Frelimo's petty bourgeois and urban bias. This seems to me a misreading of the problem. A good number of the worst abuses were carried out by members of the FPLM, generally recruited from peasant households. The notion of the total rupture with the past, the sense of redefining the world in a revolutionary context, is not alien to the peasantry and not specific to the Mozambican revolution. Rather, as in the case of the political restructuring of the countryside, Frelimo's problem in the area of cultural policy was that it expected to effect so rapid a restructuring of rural and urban life that it was not necessary to have a strategy for getting from where people were to where Frelimo dreamed they could be. The way people thought and felt and talked was to change in accord with the changes in the organization of material life.

In consequence, as the literacy campaigns slowed, as economic problems deepened, as the communal village program stagnated, Frelimo found itself without any clear cultural policy. Although the truce with the institutionalized power of the Christian churches and with Islam took longer, a tacit truce with peasantry's values and beliefs was declared early on. I simply did not find in my work in rural areas, as Geffray asserts, that the peasantry lived in a world of shame, afraid to show their allegiance to traditional beliefs. In Gaza in 1979, for example, middle-aged rural women argued in a public meet-

ing that exchange of lobolo protected women's interests and Zionist preachers openly tied their symbols on their roof-tops. In 1982, one night in Angonia, our research brigade was invited to see the nyau, danced with full knowledge (and attendance by some) of village authorities. In 1983, young soldiers told of officers in their units who were bullet-proof and entered into conflict with local spirit-mediums. All of this was troubling for Frelimo, which never resolved its attitude toward the ideological training of its own cadres and even less the meaning of Marxism for the broad mass of both peasants and workers.

(c) Frelimo's economic policy

In sum, I think Geffray's tendency to attribute the spread of the war to Frelimo's rejection of traditional politics and cultural values to be simplistic. I also think it somewhat dangerous, since arguments of this type are now being used to justify the need to re-institute dualist systems of political administration. However, the most serious analytical failure resulting from Geffray's own conceptual scheme is not so much what he says, but what he doesn't say. For Geffray does not discuss the implications for the peasantry of Frelimo's strategy of rapid accumulation based in wage-sectors of the economy. Here he seems to me to neglect a fundamental element, a link between economic and political contradictions, that did help shape the social basis of the war.

Interestingly, an earlier report co-authored by Geffray (with Mogens Pedersen, 1984) on peasant discontent with Frelimo in Erati provides a good example. They told how a consumer cooperative sold much sought after consumer goods only to a privileged few who were part of the traditional hierarchy in the area where the cooperative was situated. The form of rationing was based in the local structure of power, but the source of the contradiction was a fund of consumer goods so limited for the country-

side that market incentives ceased to function in the state's relation to the peasantry. The state sometimes tried to intervene politically to recruit casual workers for the state-farms or to increase peasant marketing. Geffray gives quite a lot of credit to the former governor of Nampula in the mid-1980s, Gaspar Dzimba, for agreeing with him that people should not be forced into communal villages. This was indeed commendable, but this same Dzimba is the governor who made himself infamous by declaring that the peasants of Nampula should recognize that cultivating cotton was not a favour but an obligation they owed to the state.

The goods shortage in the countryside reflected Frelimo's development strategy of concentrating investment in public sector enterprises and aiming for an extremely high growth rate. The war exacerbated this goods shortage but it did not initiate it. Peasant discontent with the state has reflected the unfavourable movement in the terms of trade. However, this type of problem falls outside Geffray's field of vision, even though his own dissertation research gives much evidence of increasing peasant involvement in the market at the end of the colonial period.

The question of economic strategy is also central when trying to understand the processes of uneven development which lie behind what Geffray calls "marginality." It is true that Renamo often entered first into areas that had been marginalized by the colonial government and continued to be so after Independence. Yet the vulnerability of these areas is not necessarily rooted in the strength of traditional authority or looser dependence on the market. In its attempt to implement a policy of rapid accumulation, Frelimo tended to concentrate investment in the same areas where colonial capital had invested. It also invested more in the defence of these areas once the war began.



Alfredo Mueche/AIM

Unemployed Mozambicans, returned from the GDR, sell their possessions, Maputo 1991

"Marginal" areas were often labour reserves, with little investment in infra-structures and defence. Their basic social institutions were nonetheless deeply affected by colonialism. Structural unemployment of young men was a major problem in these areas after Independence, the 1980 census showing high rates of out-migration by them in many of these labour-reserve areas. In turn, the young and unemployed were frequent targets for Renamo recruitment, forced and voluntary, inside and outside Mozambique. But how best to interpret developments like this? Surely they represent less the "revenge" of traditional society than the negative fall-out from weaknesses in Frelimo's own application of "modern," socialist policies.

* * *
For O'Laughlin, interpretations

matter. At the very outset of her manuscript she worries Geffray's analysis will help fuel a rewriting of Mozambican history that is all too convenient for many who now hold political and economic power in that country. If the Mozambican crisis did indeed spring in significant measure from internal errors, such Mozambican notables now suggest, the problem was the socialist option itself - at best the projection of an impossible dream, at worst a plot to impede the development of national capital. To continue the struggle, the left in Africa and elsewhere must therefore present an alternative critique, one grounded in a rigorous evaluation of the errors and successes of the experience of Mozambique and other socialist revolutions but one cast in its own terms and grounded in its own principles.

In her concluding section, entitled "Where do we go from here?", O'Laughlin reverts again to the issue of the practical implications of our interpretations of the Mozambican situation - although here it is the implications for solidarity activists that concern her. She underscores the changes in Frelimo's policies - stated openly enough at the party's Fifth Congress in 1989 when Frelimo "defined itself as a broad mass party engulfing all classes" and presented a programme which, in O'Laughlin's words, "no longer includes the end of exploitation as a strategic objective." For her, the question is thus posed as to whether "Frelimo today represents class interests that we as socialists can continue to support?" As noted earlier, we hope to return to her thoughts on this question in a future issue of SAR.