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FORGETTING FROM ABOVE AND MEMORY FROM BELOW: STRATEGIES OF LEGITIMATION AND STRUGGLE IN POSTSOCIALIST MOZAMBIQUE

M. Anne Pitcher

Like those in Europe, Latin America and Asia, many scholars of Africa have focused on the importance and uses of individual and collective memory – to construct and interpret the past, psychologically to rebuild lives after a traumatic event, to reconcile victims and perpetrators, to reclaim lands or goods that were lost or stolen during periods of conflict, and to create a contemporary sense of a shared political or social identity through reflection on past experiences. But what about forgetting? In an era noteworthy for the nearly universal application of neo-liberal political and economic reforms and the global spread of icons, images and values associated with the West, what is being forgotten and what purposes does forgetting serve? What are the ways in which governments or elites in countries undergoing great change might consciously combine reform agendas, the language of the market and new coalitions of support to bury painful episodes in their past and to legitimate the transition? What political role might historical memories or consciousness play in resisting such contemporary efforts, where these efforts seek to obliterate gains or values acquired previously?

This article discusses the expression and significance of both a politics of memory and a politics of forgetting in shaping the dynamics of post-socialist Mozambique. On the one hand, I describe how government officials and business elites have engaged in what several writers in the Eastern European context have called ‘organized forgetting’ (Kundera 1980: 235; Cohen 1999). In Mozambique, official government documents as well as corporate advertisements aimed at an emerging black middle class have distorted or ignored the socialist period in order to obscure the past and build a new national identity around the main constructs of neo-liberalism. I argue that ‘organized forgetting’ has comprised a key component of a discursive and institutional strategy adopted by the ruling Frelimo party to navigate the transition from socialism to neo-liberalism. This strategy has aimed to revise the country’s ideological orientation, to build new coalitions of support among

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domestic and international investors, and to restore the ruling party's legitimacy following the abandonment of socialism. These actions have allowed the ruling party to engage in what I call 'transformative preservation', whereby it has remained in power following democratization and structural adjustment but has remade itself in the process.

On the other hand, some urban workers have relied on the politics of memory to criticize collectively and individually the effects of neo-liberalism. They have reinvented the language of socialism, and they have drawn on a (perceived) sense of agency inculcated in them through dynamizing groups and production councils formed after the liberation struggle to denounce 'exploitation', 'recolonization', 'injustice' and 'inequality'. In conscious and spontaneous ways, they have employed these tools in their struggle to understand, resist or modify the impact of structural adjustment. Although the end of socialism has allowed the more open expression of such divergent views, this discursive and strategic pluralism is characterized by increasing power inequities. The consolidation of capital and the ideological pronouncements that accompany it may ultimately silence the now dissident language of the socialist past.

By focusing on forgetting-from-above by elites and memory-from-below by some urban workers, this article confronts several theoretical, analytical and methodological challenges that historians have frequently raised regarding the study of memory. One challenge concerns the juxtaposition of memory and forgetting. Like Boyarin, I do not see the two as diametrically opposed. Rather, in the hands of elites, I see forgetting as a conscious process of dissociation from the past, engaged in for the purpose of constructing a new ideology, creating new institutions and organizing new networks to confront the present. As Boyarin notes, 'Forgetting . . . is social and historical, and viciously so. It is a given of domination. When Walter Benjamin's angel of history stares backward in horror at a mounting heap of rubble, what he perceives is certainly forgetting, not absence' (Boyarin 1992: 2).

Memory, too, is a multi-faceted process, and there are three aspects of it that I want to interrogate in the Mozambican case: first, whether a memory of socialism *per se* exists; second, if there is a memory of socialism, whether it is a collective memory; and third, how deep or widespread the collective memory of socialism is. The first feature has to do with whether we can speak of a memory of socialism at all. The adoption of socialist policies coincided with the achievement of liberation from Portuguese colonialism. The rise of a counter-revolutionary movement financed by the South African government constantly undermined their implementation and exacerbated any flaws in their design. Thus it is not easy to disentangle 'socialism' from the other processes of change that were occurring in Mozambique at the time.

Moreover, during the years from 1977 to 1983, when socialism was at its height, the government created institutions and transmitted values that were called 'socialist'. It expressed a vision of socialism through speeches and political posters. With the war raging, the visions and institutions of socialism eroded by the late 1980s. The period

was brief and tormented, and the reality did not necessarily mirror the propaganda. Thus, if people remember socialism, it is not clear whether they are remembering its everyday form or the discourse about it. Lastly, when workers protest against current working conditions, demand better wages or point to the disparities between the treatment of foreigners and Mozambicans, they may very well be drawing on socialist values. But also they could be drawing on liberal norms regarding the rule of law that have gained more recent currency in Mozambique, or even illiberal notions such as xenophobia.

On these theoretical and analytical matters, I am sensitive to Confino's plea 'that the history of memory be more rigorous theoretically in articulating the relationship between the social, the political and the cultural, and, at the same time, more anarchical and comprehensive in using the term memory as an explanatory device that links representation and social experience' (1997: 1,402). For explanatory purposes, I try to disentangle socialism as a political process from the other political, social and cultural changes that Mozambique was and is experiencing. Also, I call attention to the form and the content of socialist expression and try to distinguish it from current ideas and influences. Yet, we have to recognize the convergence of discourses of socialism and the experiences of it, acknowledge the commingling of socialist discourse with emerging liberal and neo-liberal discourses, and appreciate that memories need not make such sharp distinctions.

Secondly, whatever memories of socialism people may have, these are influenced by their lived experiences. As Debouzy reminds us with regard to workers, 'Workers' memory is never "ouvrière only"' (Debouzy 1990: 72). Memory has gendered, generational, ethnic and regional dimensions that complicate claims regarding a collective memory of socialism. This may mean that there is no specific 'mémoire ouvrière' or 'memoria camponesa' to which we can point in Mozambique without qualifying it extensively. However fragmented or richly textured memory may be in Mozambique, I share James's observation (drawn from Walter Benjamin) that 'Memory has an intrinsically political dimension deriving from its relationship to structures of economic, social and political power' (James 1997: 1,411). At this particular moment in Mozambique's history, when, as one worker has expressed it, a kind of 'savage capitalism' has taken root, it seems imperative that scholars evaluate the memory and forgetting of socialist principles in the context of present struggles.¹

This article addresses these issues by discussing initially the 'structures of power' that the ruling party tried to create in the workplace after independence and some of the difficulties the party encountered in these endeavours. It then explores the changing themes and language

¹ My focus on socialist memories and discourse in this article does not preclude the uses of other discourses and images by Mozambicans to interpret current social realities. On the recourse to spirit possession and its adaptation to impositions of modernity in postwar Mozambique, see Honwana (2003).

over time of the national anthem, the Constitution and official speeches at important commemorative events. It shows how discursive shifts parallel, and reinforce, the adoption of neo-liberal policies and the creation of new social coalitions that strengthen the party in power. Lastly, through an examination of selective newspaper accounts of demonstrations, strikes and protests by urban workers in and around the capital of Maputo from the 1990s until the present, it analyses the implications and effects of Mozambique's transformation.

Relying on newspaper accounts of workers' celebrations, commemorative events and strikes poses methodological difficulties when we try to address the third feature of memory raised above, which is: how widespread and deep is collective memory? This article is a first cut at these kinds of issues and therefore necessarily preliminary in its conclusions. I would like to claim only that, under socialism, workers experienced some degree of agency and developed the notion that they were accorded certain rights and respect as workers, even if these were not always realized in practice. The degree of agency and the extent to which workers inculcated the values associated with working-class solidarity varied enormously within sectors and across space. I draw attention to those differences by discussing the actions of workers in the port and railways sector and the aluminium industry. I also make the point that some urban workers in southern Mozambique are currently relying on socialist values and combining them with more recent norms in order to protect and advance their positions in the face of efforts to erode them. Future studies will have to determine whether the principles that underpin workers' actions constitute a '*mémoire ouvrière*' for urban workers or a '*memoria camponesa*' for smallholders; whether they are collective or individual; fragmented, layered or unified; gendered, ethnic or regional. For now, this article traces the contours of emerging struggles over memory and forgetting in Mozambique.

THE LIMITATIONS AND BENEFITS OF SOCIALISM²

Mozambique achieved independence in 1975 following a protracted armed struggle by the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique and a coup in Lisbon that overthrew the dictatorship of Marcello Caetano. By 1977, Frelimo had declared itself a Marxist-Leninist party and embarked on a strategy that aimed to transform Mozambique into a modern, developed, socialist nation. In the countryside, the linchpin of this strategy lay in the physical rearrangement of the living habits and productive activities of rural peoples. Communal villages were expected to improve their lives by locating them closer to services and the watchful eye of the vanguard party, while the creation of state farms, cooperatives and collectives offered a more rational, scientific

² I draw on Pitcher (2002) in the following section. For more detailed presentation of and more extensive references to the socialist period, see Chapter 2 of that work.

and efficient method of producing agricultural goods ranging from food to cotton.

In urban areas such as the capital, Maputo, or the second city, Beira, the government nationalized much of the rental property and allowed dynamizing groups (*grupos dinamizadores*) to allocate it to party members and supporters.³ The policy afforded many tens of thousands of Africans the opportunity to live in the '*cidade de cimento*' or concrete city for the first time (Sidaway and Power 1995: 1,473–75). In urban places of work, where the state nationalized – or simply intervened without establishing legal ownership – about 75 per cent of industrial production by 1981, the ruling party encouraged dynamizing groups to spread the party line and to organize workers. It also set up production councils and factory committees that were supposed to raise productivity and negotiate with management on behalf of workers. The process was meant to instill in workers a 'sense of self-confidence and collective identity', which they had not experienced during the colonial period (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983: 161–68).

Like the authoritarian high-modern schemes in the Soviet Union, Ethiopia and Tanzania on which the Mozambican approach had been modelled, what was envisaged in theory was not realized in practice. Particularly in the rural areas of central and northern Mozambique, the party-state's grandiose visions of relocating nine million people into communal villages and reorganizing production were met with apathy, indignation and later outright hostility. The policies displayed a marked insensitivity to the multiple ways in which rural Mozambicans gained a living, to the onerous demands on their time and to cultural practices regarding the location of housing and natural resource management. They overlooked the role of age, gender, status and kinship in the allocation of property, the settlement of disputes and the sowing, weeding, and cultivation of crops. While the policies only succeeded in placing about 20 per cent of the rural inhabitants into communal villages, they did disrupt productive activities sufficiently to undermine agricultural output and to alienate a large percentage of the population.

In the urban and peri-urban areas, since manufacturing depended on agriculture to supply about half of its raw materials, industrial output was naturally affected by the troubles in the rural areas. Additionally, a lack of management experience, a shortage of skilled workers, financial difficulties and the paradoxes of centralized planning also had a negative impact on output. As a result, industrial production after independence never recovered to pre-independence levels (Castel-Branco 1994: 98, 135). Towns and cities also experienced food shortages because of the disruption of production and marketing in the rural areas. Imports from soap to bicycles declined because of the boycott of Mozambique by other nations.

³ Dynamizing groups were formed by the Frelimo party or emerged spontaneously after the revolution in rural villages, urban workplaces and neighbourhoods. Their intended role was to spread the message of the party, implement policy, prevent the sabotage of factories and businesses by departing settlers, and maintain production.

However, the Frelimo government did effect changes that improved the conditions of the urban workforce following independence. For those who received the opportunity to live in the concrete cities, the state-controlled rents were low (Sidaway and Power 1995: 1,475). The government expanded employment in state-run enterprises and raised salaries and wages. It provided free healthcare and education and subsidized the purchase of consumer goods and transport. Some state enterprises offered on-site crèches for children, provided their own housing at reduced rents, fielded sports teams and constructed social clubs for leisure activities. Although the goal of increasing productivity by reorganizing workers at the firm and sectoral levels eluded it, by 1983 the ruling party had created a national trade union, the Organization of Mozambican Workers, that was mandated to build solidarity, foster discipline, respond to grievances and inculcate the values of socialism among workers (OTM 1983a, 1983b). Moreover, the ruling party did not neglect the small percentage of the workforce that was female. It supported the formation of the Organization of Mozambican Women to bring women together and to address women's concerns. The government also offered literacy classes, provided day care, authorized maternity leave and passed other legislation intended to better the lives of women (Sheldon 2002: 154–69). Although some of these efforts had drawbacks that the government overlooked (for example, literacy classes placed additional demands on women's time), they may explain why the ruling party confronted few major challenges to its rule in the urban areas and retained the loyalty of most workers throughout the period formally associated with socialism.

After 1983, as civil conflict mounted, the ruling party became more authoritarian. While it continued to cultivate its worker-peasant base in particular provinces, it resorted to harsh tactics elsewhere. In the countryside, for example, the motives for relocating people became more tied to control of rural populations rather than improvement of their lives, and the means of resettling rural peoples became more coercive. The government heavily guarded productive agricultural areas and valuable assets such as the railways, and restricted movement around the country owing to security concerns. The language and the means of socialist rule became militarized, and policy choices were often repressive in their consequences.

In the midst of the war, the government also began to court the West and to reduce state intervention. On the recommendation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, it decreased tariffs on imports, liberalized foreign exchange and passed a series of laws welcoming private investment. It implemented a structural adjustment package that reduced or eliminated subsidies on transport, consumer goods, healthcare and education, and it raised rents on state rental housing (Sidaway and Power 1995: 1,480; Pitcher 2002: 124–39). Collectively, these measures greatly increased the cost of living for urban residents and workers, and their discontent brought further pressure on the beleaguered regime. When the war entered a stalemate in the early 1990s, a prolonged and concerted international effort compelled

the two protagonists to begin negotiating in earnest. The signing of a peace accord in 1992 brought the war to a close and, with it, the end of socialism.

ORGANIZED FORGETTING AS CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL STRATEGY

As of 2005, the party that ushered in Mozambique's independence in 1975 continued to run the country. It has managed to weather widespread discontent, oversee the rise and demise of socialism, conclude a devastating war and survive three democratic elections in Mozambique without being unseated from power, unlike many other ruling parties in Africa and Eastern and Central Europe. How has this been possible? Certainly, the ineptitude and indiscriminate use of violence by the opposition, Renamo (Mozambique National Resistance), has contributed to its inability to succeed either in the bush or at the polls. Renamo's blunders have reduced the available alternatives for those sectors of the population who are angry or disappointed with the Frelimo party (Harrison 1996; Manning 2001, 2002).

Yet, I maintain that the articulation and projection of 'organized forgetting' by the ruling party is an important element in its retention of power. Shari Cohen has argued in her study of the previous communist regime in Slovakia that the practice of 'organized forgetting does not simply expunge historical events and information. Instead it works by constructing a new history that leaves out and distorts and, moreover, shifts in what is left out and distorted' (Cohen 1999: 39). Cohen claims that communist elites in Slovakia engaged in organized forgetting for two reasons. First, they wanted to legitimate the Communist Party and to present it as 'infallible'. Secondly, they were interested in preventing access to competing historical narratives that might offer a different and critical interpretation of their policy and behaviour and that might serve as rallying points for challenges to the regime (Cohen 1999: 39). By smothering chances for the formation of group identities that might destabilize the ruling party, the communists held on to power.

Cohen develops this argument in response to those scholars who assert that, with the fall of communism, there is a 'return of history' whereby buried memories and long-standing conflicts re-emerge from the past to shape the present in the form of nationalist movements, ethnic clashes and struggles over territory or resources. Although she does not disagree that there has been a return of history, she notes that it is weak and lacks coherence, precisely because the process of 'organized forgetting' distorted historical memory in the previous period. To understand how this process occurred, it is important to look at the characteristics of the society at the moment when the previous regime implanted communism and to analyse the regime's approach to 'nation-building' (Cohen 1999: 13-14).

A cursory examination of African countries such as Tanzania, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Benin, Ethiopia and Mozambique suggests that a similar

practice of 'organized forgetting' transpired during socialist periods in those regimes also. Yet, the practice of 'organized forgetting' by elites is not just a characteristic of socialist and communist regimes; it has equally constituted a key characteristic of the present neo-liberal regime in Mozambique. Frelimo has consciously ignored the socialist period when it nationalized the major sectors of the economy, engaged in the creation of state farms and collectives, and tried to create a 'New Man'. Instead, it has developed a decidedly neo-liberal ideology that emphasizes the benefits of private ownership, the efficiencies to be gained through participation in the market, and the growth potential behind spatial development initiatives, free-trade corridors and joint ventures.

With the implementation of structural adjustment in 1987 and major constitutional changes since 1990, the government has dropped most references to socialism. Although a 1987 document prepared by the government to secure loans from international institutions devoted three paragraphs to the difficulties with the public sector, it omitted any reference to the word 'socialism'. It presented the nationalization of properties after independence as a necessity forced on the government by the abandonment of companies and plantations by the departing Portuguese. In addition, rather than assuming any responsibility for the flaws or mistakes committed by the socialist project, it justified the decision to adopt economic reforms as a necessity brought about by forces beyond the government's control – the weather, the war and pressure from the West (Mozambique 1987: 9). This animating myth, which justifies reforms by locating their origin in 'exogenous constraints', has now become a part of the official lexicon repeated over and over like a mantra by journalists and scholars (Uaene and Tembe 1996: 21; Pitcher 2002: 67–100).

The airbrushing of socialism out of official Mozambican history intensified in the 1990s. The preamble to the constitution of 1990 makes reference to the armed struggle by Frelimo to overthrow 'colonial domination' and to achieve 'national independence' yet omits mention of the previous socialist period. Instead, its articles mimic those found in the constitutions of other nominally liberal democracies and free-market economies. This is a far cry from the claim in the 1980 constitution that one of the objectives of the People's Republic of Mozambique was 'the building of people's democracy and the construction of the material and ideological foundations of a socialist society' (Mozambique 1980: Article 4).

Furthermore, the national anthem once stated: 'Our country will be the tomb of capitalism and exploitation. The Mozambican people, workers and peasants, engaged in work shall always produce wealth' (Mozambique 1975). Following changes in 2002, there is now no mention of capitalism, exploitation, workers or peasants. Admittedly, the ruling party, Frelimo, had to change a national anthem whose first verse began: 'Viva, viva Frelimo' in order to accommodate the multi-party democracy that characterizes the current political system. But it seems ironic that the only acknowledgement of the liberation struggle is

'The sun of June will always shine!' – a reference to the month in which Mozambique officially gained independence. 'Workers and peasants' are now replaced with a more populist message about a 'People united from the Rovuma to Maputo' (Mozambique 2002).

Along with the extraction of most socialist legal principles from the constitution and socialist rhetoric from the anthem, national ruling elites refrain in their speeches from explicit references to ideals usually associated with socialism.⁴ Gone are the speeches denouncing the 'exploitation of man by man', 'foreign domination', 'reactionaries and imperialists'. Gone are the promises that Frelimo will create 'an independent economy to serve the working masses' (Machel 1975: 13) and use the state to direct it (Munslow 1985: 96). Gone are the references to Frelimo as a vanguard party, the party of the working classes, a Marxist-Leninist Party (Machel 1978: 9). Even on those occasions where one would expect some allusion to the past, such as May Day and Independence Day celebrations, national government officials pay only cursory homage to the ideals which they so stridently embraced twenty years ago. For example, in 2002, faced with banners that read 'Privatization is extinguishing the working class' and claims by returning workers from the former East Germany that the government owes them remittances, President Chissano stated that the government 'remains in solidarity with the struggle of Mozambican workers, and of workers throughout the world'. Yet he then cautioned workers not to be misled by 'politicians', and noted that workers' difficulties were 'just a matter of improving conditions they had already won' (Mozambiquefile 2002: 4).

Typically, at May Day celebrations over the last five years, top government officials, if they attended at all, have limited their interventions to explaining the causes of inflation, denouncing corruption, justifying the minimum wage and encouraging workers to work harder (Bie 2000; Manjate 2000; Salema 2001; *Diário de Moçambique* 2003). In their everyday discourse, government officials more often discuss the advantages offered by private investment, the virtues of economic growth, the positive effects of free trade, the benefits brought by the market and the logic of competition. Additionally, officials inundate their speeches with all of the current capitalist buzzwords, referring to 'spatial development initiatives', 'industrial free zones', 'free-trade corridors' and 'smart partnerships' between business and government. Furthermore, business journals reinforce this 'organized forgetting' by interviewing prominent businesspersons, offering detailed profiles of prosperous companies and touting the merits of capitalism through glossy, high-tech advertisements (*Tempo* 2003; *Xitimela* 1999–2001; *Moçambique* 1997–99).

As Cohen points out, however, organized forgetting does not just 'expunge' historical events, it also distorts them. The process

⁴ This may not be the case among local Frelimo officials, a disconnect that warrants further investigation. See Harrison (1996: 25).

of distortion is not yet systematic, but a return to history as a legitimating device for the new rhetoric is evident. President Chissano's statement marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of independence offers an illustration. Although it does mention that Mozambique was an ally of other socialist countries, it portrays the nationalization process that took place after independence as an affirmation not of socialism but of 'Mozambicanness' (*moçambicanidade*). Further, it stresses the similarities between policy objectives adopted just after independence and current policy goals (Chissano 2000: 3–4). The parallel implies that there is historical continuity between the two periods and that neither one is as transformative as it may first appear. Drawing such a parallel speaks to two divergent audiences. For those who condemn Frelimo's socialist project, it obscures socialism as a particular discursive and institutional moment in Mozambican history. Secondly, for those who have criticized the 'neo-liberal turn' (some of whom are in Chissano's own party), it suggests that current policies do not constitute a sharp break with the past.

The selective use of history is not confined to the top branches of government: it is also creatively employed by the management of the port and railways sector (CFM), a public enterprise that is the largest employer in Mozambique. In addition to promoting neo-liberal ideas, CFM's company magazine, *Xitimela*, which is read by both management and workers, occasionally devotes a little space in each issue to the history of CFM. One issue devoted a substantial section to the past hundred years of the company. As I have argued elsewhere, a century of existence is an important legitimating device for companies. The date is used often in advertisements to indicate to readers that a company is stable and has survived many challenges (Pitcher 2002: 236–61). In the *Xitimela* articles examining CFM's last hundred years, there is no mention of the socialist period either in the synopsis of the company's history or in interviews with past managers. Articles profile individuals – mostly managers and administrators – several of whom served the company during the colonial period, and they delineate the difficulties faced by the company over the years. The articles and interviews construct the period after independence as one dominated by war and by technical and logistical challenges, not as one where the revolutionary government was dedicated to establishing new relations of production (*Xitimela* 1999–2000: 73–137).

These historical narratives parallel official claims that the troubles faced by Mozambique in the period after independence were exogenous and externally imposed, not internally generated by decision-makers or the domestic responses by social forces to their policies. Moreover, the narratives present the adoption of market and profit-making principles as the logical conclusion of a linear process, arrived at in a natural way, not as the result of choices made by, or forced on, the government. This evolutionary, developmentalist language exonerates officials from any responsibility for the errors or commitments of the past or for the choices of the present.

Attempts either to expunge or to distort history are part of efforts by the Frelimo government to legitimate the new period and its role in it. Since it is the same government that instituted socialism and now embraces neo-liberalism, it must engage in 'organized forgetting' in order to obfuscate its own role in the failures of the past, to renege on promises made to workers and to remake itself as the party that ushered in the present period. At an ideological level, 'organized forgetting' seeks to distract citizens from the effects of restructuring such as unemployment and inequality – lest they resist. It illustrates well Ryan's more general understanding of the role of ideology. He states: 'rather than conceive of ideology as an exercise in domination that breeds resistance, it might be more accurate to describe ideology as being itself a response to "resistance"' (Ryan 1988: 484). While seeking to render some voices mute, the government can then give expression to those more supportive of its neo-liberal agenda.

The approach dovetails nicely with the government's strategy to renegotiate institutional relationships in the wake of privatization and democratization. It is buttressed by the ahistoricism and technicism of neo-liberal solutions espoused by the donor community (Hibou 2000; Ferguson 1993). Moreover, the government has assiduously wooed both foreign and domestic investors and external donors for at least the past decade. Ironically, some of the largest domestic beneficiaries of export incentives, donor-financed credit programmes and the sales of state assets have been not only loyal Frelimo supporters but also the very companies that the ruling party denounced after independence. Having survived the socialist period, they have emerged as the biggest players in Mozambique's emerging market economy (Pitcher 2003).

The Frelimo party, then, has managed to construct as well as control a 'break' without actually being unseated from power. It has forged new alliances and ingratiated itself with external donors. It is one of the few formerly socialist parties to have engineered such 'transformative preservation', and stands in stark contrast to many of the fallen regimes in Eastern and Central Europe. These efforts have allowed the party to survive the transition and to secure victory in three democratic elections.

MEMORIES FROM BELOW

The ruling party may share the same intentions as those of the former Communist Party in Slovakia. That is, it has sought to preserve or enhance its legitimacy and to smother competing legitimating narratives that might threaten its position in power. However, it has done so in a context very different from that of its own socialist period and the eras when communist parties exercised hegemonic control in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Mozambique is far more pluralistic than it once was. It has a multi-party political system and has held regular national elections every five years since 1994. Mozambicans in the urban areas have access to a wider variety of opinions and means of expression than in the socialist period, due to the presence of

independent media, the availability of the internet in urban areas, and the expansion of cellphone use. Although not always acknowledged in practice, the constitution allows the right to strike – and trade unions, however weak, are widespread.

This pluralistic environment has encouraged the emergence of competing discourses to that of the government – and, judging from the newspapers and reports, there has been plenty to complain about. Those workers who have remained in newly privatized companies and in restructured state firms have faced stagnant or deteriorating working conditions. With more changes anticipated, resistance has increased. Most workers did not resist the shift to a market economy; in fact, according to surveys, many workers supported privatization policies (de Vletter 1998). But they have challenged the manner in which change has taken place.

As in other postsocialist or postcommunist societies, several of these discourses employ ‘return of history’ arguments. In the urban areas, some workers are expressing their discontent in a language that draws on the promises made in the past, the rights accorded to them under socialism, and the principles articulated by the previously Marxist-Leninist party. By employing these symbolic frameworks, workers are not attempting to return to that historical moment just after independence when they ran factories and participated in decision-making, nor do they have the power to do so. But their discourse does serve as a powerful reminder to the ruling party that it still depends on workers for political support, particularly in the capital Maputo, but also in some of the heavily populated northern cities. Moreover, workers have their representatives within parliament and within the ruling party. Thus, the substance of workers’ discontent and the way that they express it can have an impact on the politics of the country. I discuss these issues below by examining worker responses to firm-level surveys, their demands during strikes and celebrations, and a worker’s letter to a local newspaper.

The context for the current grievances by workers is one in which the position of workers vis-à-vis management and the state has consistently eroded over the last fifteen years. Following the adoption of structural adjustment policies in the mid-1980s, legislative changes have reduced the power of workers on the factory floor and within the Frelimo party. Whereas after 1983 the Organization of Mozambican Workers (OTM) was the sole representative of worker interests in the country, the changes have allowed union branches under the umbrella of the OTM to operate with a great deal of autonomy. Moreover, they have enabled a number of independent unions to break away from the OTM, reducing its coherence and bargaining power (Sheldon 2002: 241; Matusse 1997). In addition, the government has elevated the bargaining power of the private sector by forming an Advisory Labour Commission that brings together the government, employers and union representatives in a tripartite arrangement that rarely results in substantive gains for workers (Matusse 1997).

Furthermore, despite expectations to the contrary, conditions in privatized companies have not improved for a majority of workers. A 1998 survey of approximately 1,000 workers in state and private companies in numerous sectors of industry throughout the Mozambican economy found that the majority of workers in recently privatized companies (51 per cent) felt they were worse off than they had been in the state companies. A majority reported that the working environment and benefits were either worse than or about the same as they had been in the state companies. Salaries had not improved either, although many workers in state firms thought that they would increase with privatization. Most workers felt that relations with management were about the same as or worse than they had been in state companies (de Vletter 1998: 20–22). In addition, the withdrawal of subsidies on basic consumer items and the introduction of fees for healthcare and education at a time when salary increases have not kept pace with inflation have aggravated an already difficult situation for workers. Lastly, since the government fully committed itself to the privatization of state assets following elections in 1994, estimates are that approximately 120,000 employees have lost their jobs to restructuring, thereby further weakening an already fragmented labour movement (*Notícias*, 1 December 2001).

As ‘post-Marxist entrepreneurial capitalism’ has relentlessly proceeded, workers’ complaints have escalated, and militancy has increased in many sectors. Strikes have taken place in traditional branches such as agro-processing that employ mostly semi-skilled labour as well as in new non-traditional sectors that employ skilled, highly literate workers. In spite of the differences in the skills, age, location and gender of workers in these branches, values from the past have resurfaced in their demands. A brief examination of two very different companies, CFM and Mozal, where strikes have taken place recently, illustrates some of the themes that are common in both instances. CFM is, as we’ve seen, the state port and railways company, and is over a hundred years old. CFM was the quintessential state company in the 1980s: it provided housing and medical care for its employees. It had a sports team and owned tourist complexes where workers could go to relax. Jobs often passed from parents to children, and employees were fiercely loyal to the company. The salaries that CFM paid were above the national average, and the company provided good benefits. For many of the male employees, (about 92 per cent of the workforce is male), their first, last and only job was at CFM (Correia 2003). According to a survey in 2000, about one-third of CFM’s workers had worked for the company for over twenty years (Saúte and António 2001: 31).

Since the mid-1990s, management contracts, Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) schemes and public–private partnership arrangements have restructured the organization of the company (now called a public enterprise) and altered the relationship between management and workers. Before ‘restructuring’ began, or rather, before CFM began laying off workers to make the enterprise more ‘efficient’, it had a workforce of around 18,000 (*Interview* 1999: 3). CFM’s management, in the company magazine *Xitimela*, conveyed an acute awareness of the

importance of this workforce and repeatedly claimed that management would not 'abandon' the workers. In 1997, when the government and the administration of CFM were finalizing the details for a new partnership with the private sector in southern Mozambique, an administrator for CFM asserted in *Xitimela* that, 'The alternatives CFM is seeking are to ensure that the weight of privatizing the CFM-South management does not all fall in a crushing manner on the backs of the workers' (*Xitimela* 1997: 24).

In subsequent issues of the magazine, managers repeatedly addressed, and sought to assuage, the concerns of workers regarding redundancy. But, in spite of assertions to the contrary, the developing relationship with private-sector actors *has* fallen on the backs of workers. Over time, port and railway managers and administrators shifted from saying that workers would not be abandoned to saying that 'to achieve the best size and full employment demands from us a separation from a very important part of our labour force' (Fonseca 2001: 5). The justification for this 'separation' was that CFM was 'overmanned', and therefore the workforce needed to be 'rationalized' from 18,000 down to an optimum level of 6,000–7,000 (Saúte and António 2001: 43). Yet it is not workers at the managerial level who have been cut primarily but the least educated, least skilled employees who occupy the low-end jobs at CFM. Moreover, the majority of the cuts as a percentage of the overall workforce have taken place in the centre of the country, where the ruling party has the least to lose politically. The opposition party, Renamo, controls most of the parliamentary seats in the region (Saúte and António 2001: 30–5; Hanlon 2005).

As the management of CFM has continued its efforts to 'rationalize the workforce', it has confronted strikes and protests by both retained and dismissed employees, notably in the southern part of the country. In August 2001, a wildcat strike in the capital brought the port and railways to a standstill for nearly a month. Striking workers issued a host of demands, which included payment of a minimum salary of US\$100 a month, overtime pay and the improvement of medical benefits (Xinhua News Agency 8 and 13 August 2001). Many of their demands were grounded in rights they felt they used to have and wanted restored, such as the right to subsidies for consumer items, housing, transport and holidays, bonuses, prizes after two years of work, and free funeral services. According to one news account, 'All that the workers want are guarantees that their rights will be respected' (*Notícias* 31 July 2001). A few years later, retired workers strategically drew on the principles embodied in a general state statute that had governed employment in state enterprises before 1989 to insist that they were entitled to additional benefits following their dismissal earlier in the year (Rungo 2002; *Notícias* 17 January 2003).

One can argue that the values that underlie the implementation of a liberal democracy such as now nominally exists in Mozambique include a language of rights, and workers may very well be drawing on this language in their demands. Indeed, other complaints by CFM employees include the condemnation of corrupt practices that they feel

are carried on by CFM management. Calling attention to corruption and pledging to eradicate it have been standard features of most neo-liberal agendas (a part of their implicit puritanical moralizing) in developing countries, and government officials in Mozambique have addressed the issue in one way or another over the last five years. However, the substance of the demands by CFM workers suggests that they are recalling an earlier time when bonuses and subsidies were part of a standard package of employment at a state enterprise. Although there were numerous instances where these forms of remuneration were pledged but not paid, the memories of the promise are resurfacing in demands today.

One might also claim that CFM, with its houses and its sports team, was a special case where workers had a sense of agency and a collective identity borne out of a very long connection with the company. These signs of a collective identity wrought from a socialist past may not be shared throughout the country or may not be as deep in other sectors. The limits of the present study permit only a brief consideration of these important points regarding collective identity across geographic or professional spaces. First, a recent survey of public opinion found significant differences regarding the extent of, and satisfaction with, democracy in the south, centre and north of the country. Surprisingly, in spite of the fact that the southern part of the country has witnessed the most growth and received the most investment in the last decade, the survey found that the majority of southerners expressed greater dissatisfaction with Mozambique's democracy than other parts of the country. It surmised that, because the south had been (and continues to be) the government's stronghold,

perhaps Frelimo supporters in the South hold a more substantive, socialist-derived view of how democracy should change their lives. They may consequently judge the political system primarily in terms of the persistent poverty and growing inequality they are experiencing, rather than in terms of the expanding political rights and freedoms that appear to dominate perceptions of democracy in the North and Central regions. (Pereira et al. 2003: 12)

Furthermore, a majority of respondents from urban areas (again, where Frelimo is historically strong) stated that they were either 'not very' or 'not at all' satisfied with the way democracy works (Pereira et al. 2003: 12). While more thorough investigation of differences across regions and in urban versus rural areas is warranted, the actions of CFM workers in the urban south reinforce these suppositions.

In addition, evidence from another company, Mozal, suggests that at least a consciousness of socialist values permeates other sectors, and workers elsewhere are employing them to mediate current challenges. The history of Mozal could not be more different from that of CFM. It is a three-year-old aluminium smelter built just outside the capital, Maputo. It is a private company, mostly owned by foreigners, and it employs about 800 workers, many of whom are skilled metalworkers. Constructed at a cost of US\$1.2 billion, it is the largest investment

project in Africa in recent years and was judged the world's best project for 2001 by the International Project Management Institute (South African Press Association 2001).

By Mozambican standards, workers are well paid and highly skilled. Therein lies the similarity with CFM. Mozal workers went on strike twice in 2001. Like the CFM workers, the substance of their demands against Mozal consisted of requests for goods and services that were considered standard during the socialist period. During their strike in October 2001, Mozal workers wanted the restoration of benefits such as rent subsidies and coverage for their children's education (Agence-France Presse 2001). They also objected to the differences between what they were paid and what foreigners were being paid. This last demand taps into a long-held resentment that Mozambicans have towards better-paid expatriate workers. There are elements of xenophobia connected to it, but it speaks also to the growing gap between the salaries of foreign and Mozambican workers. Mozambicans rightly see this gap as unfair, and government officials repeatedly used to tell them so until well into the 1980s.

Like the workers at CFM, employees at Mozal are relatively well treated when compared with other workers in the country. President Chissano made this point in a speech during the eighteenth anniversary of the founding of the OTM, which happened to coincide with the Mozal strike. He took the opportunity to castigate those on strike at Mozal, noting that 'the workers who say they are suffering injustice at Mozal are not the poorest workers', and he argued that Mozal was key to bringing foreign investment into the country – 'but now there is a danger that this will all be brought down' (Xinhua News Agency 12 October 2001). President Chissano may not be aware that often the more highly skilled, better-paid sector of the workforce is also the most militant. Many labour historians have found that, in particular, machinists and metalworkers (both of whom are employed in considerable numbers in CFM and Mozal) often led radical labour movements. The organization of their labour, their high literacy rate and their long-term residence in urban areas help to explain their militancy (Perry 1994; Koenker 1981; Hobsbawm 1963; Aminzade 1981). As fragmented as the labour force in Mozambique is, the actions by workers in these two sectors suggest that, if private enterprise is not to be 'brought down' as President Chissano put it, then the government and the growing private sector will have to respond to the demands of the country's most organized, most stable and most literate workers. As Gerald Creed has illustrated in the case of Bulgaria, these demands are not just a reactionary form of 'resistant socialism', an obscurantist legacy of the former period, but also a form of 'socialist resistance', a redeployment of the language and moral consciousness of socialism to address a new political and economic dynamic (Creed 1999: 223–43).

'Once upon a time it was the first of May'

Additional research must probe the extent of workers' collective memories and the current uses to which they are put, but I

want to conclude this section with a 1997 letter to *Notícias* that eloquently captures the concerns expressed in the strikes. While it is somewhat romantic about the old days, along with the strikes it shows that a counter-hegemonic strategy rooted in socialist ideals may be (re-)emerging in the new Mozambique. Like the striking workers at CFM and Mozal, the letter-writer has a formal education. The context for the letter is the May Day celebrations that have taken place in Mozambique every year since independence. During the socialist period, workers gathered in Workers' Square and marched in the streets carrying banners that praised their struggle or called attention to international worker solidarity. May Day was an occasion for the President of the Republic and Frelimo party officials to boost morale among supporters by condemning capitalist exploiters and stressing the worker-peasant alliance that constituted the base of the revolution. Government officials would declare victory over underdevelopment, praise the work of dynamizing groups or exhort workers to produce more goods.

Since the 1990s, May Day has lost its celebratory character and taken on a different purpose – as a vehicle to express grievances. Workers from various sectors with a variety of complaints have used the occasion to challenge the nature of the privatization process, to denounce 'salaries of hunger' (*salários de fome*) and dismissals, and to protest against the growing gap between rich and poor in the country (Gémo 1997; Simbine 2000; Salema 2001). It is this transformation in the purpose of the event that the letter-writer captures. The letter, entitled 'Once upon a time it was the first of May', begins by saying:

After the independence of our country, the first of May was a very special day for our workers. They went onto the streets to demonstrate, to express their happiness and to reflect on their activity in each sector and on those who depended on them.

Those were golden moments, and it is with great nostalgia that many workers like me remember those moments. There were parades all over the country, and especially in Maputo, where the demonstrations were of great importance. Thousands of workers from various sectors marched along holding signs, and there was no lack of floats that tried to tell a little what each unit of production did. (Salela 1997)

The writer goes on to state that management and the heads of trade unions used to participate in the demonstrations on 1 May and that there was a certain degree of camaraderie between labour and management. 'Today, the situation is totally different as a result of the introduction of the market economy', the letter-writer says. Following privatization, there was a rise in unemployment as new owners restructured their companies. The writer accuses trade-union leaders of being co-opted by the new owners and forgetting the demands of ordinary workers. Further, he blames the state for not forcing owners to honour their obligations and not addressing the 'irregularities' that have arisen as private ownership increases in Mozambique. The result has been

unemployment, the growth of the informal economy and a 'fight for survival'. Thus:

The first of May no longer has the significance that it had in other times. Some can argue that now there is multi-partyism and before there wasn't. I don't argue with that fact: this process has brought benefits for citizens, such as freedom of expression, of association and of information.

However, what I vehemently contest is the savage capitalism that we have adopted which has resulted in rapid changes in our society. We have made a 180-degree change, that is, we have left socialism for a radical form of capitalism, and the consequences are that we have a society where there is a degradation of moral and civic values. (Salela 1997)

The moral degradation of colonial capitalism was a favourite theme of President Samora Machel's (Hall and Young 1997: 66), and the letter-writer's mention of it suggests that he/she assimilated Machel's criticisms and the language he used to convey them. The letter is quite nostalgic. To borrow from Buck-Morss, it may be less about a world that was than 'a world that was supposed to be'. But its message is no less significant for that. Collectively, the views and values that workers are expressing during strikes, surveys and commemorative events indicate that they are employing the vocabulary and lessons of socialism to challenge the hegemony of neo-liberalism. As Buck-Morss suggests in another context, this may constitute a 'political awakening' in Mozambique, where collective desires instilled in workers during the socialist period are rescued from certain oblivion in the new era (1995: 23).

Have workers' efforts affected the trajectory of capitalist development in the urban areas of Mozambique? There is some evidence that they have. The government has slowed down the privatization of strategic enterprises and generally retained a larger percentage of ownership in those large companies that it has sold, preferring public-private partnerships to outright sale through competitive tendering. The government regularly consults with labour about pending legislation and has promised to create special labour tribunals to deal with the backlog of disputes that currently clog the judicial system. The labour law still makes it difficult to fire Mozambican workers and places restrictions on the use of foreign workers. However, these concessions must be balanced by the reality of growing unemployment and inequality; 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 (Bie 2000; Manjate 2000; *Noticias* 2000, 2002; Sitori 2002a, 2002b, 2002c).

CONCLUSION

I have argued that 'organized forgetting' is a central feature of Mozambique's transformation into a market economy. Government

officials have consciously manipulated history to obscure the very obvious point that the same party that implemented socialism is the very one that is now trumpeting neo-liberalism. Along with the withering away of state farms and communal villages, the discursive emphasis on the 'end of capitalist exploitation' and the creation of a 'new man' has vanished. Aided by advertisers, companies and donors, the government has fashioned instead a new ideological vision that rests on entrepreneurialism, social harmony through market participation, and the shared goals of business and the state. It has forged new institutional relationships with the private sector and powerful external donors to promote public-private partnerships, spatial development initiatives and, a distant last, poverty reduction. The strategy seeks to legitimate the Frelimo party's metamorphosis into the party of business and to strengthen its grip on power.

These manoeuvres have not gone unchallenged. As we observed, striking workers and survey respondents from state enterprises, private companies and the general public have drawn on values and rights from the socialist period to express their fears about privatization and their dissatisfaction with democracy. Workers have demanded benefits and subsidies that the government guaranteed to them in the past. Their criticisms, coupled with robust sales of the recorded speeches of former President Samora Machel, who oversaw the implementation of socialism from 1977 until his death in 1986, reveal an ongoing popular dissatisfaction with the current mode of governance and lingering attachments to another time.⁵ Although the Frelimo party retained the presidency and its parliamentary majority following the controversial elections of December 2004, the struggles by workers have brought concessions and may shape the kind of 'market democracy' that Mozambique will ultimately have.⁶

There is an historiographical conclusion we can draw from the Mozambique example too. Stephen Ellis has argued that historians of Africa have neglected the study of contemporary history, and there is scant attention to it in most academic journals. He surmises that the reason for the inattention to this period is that it is too susceptible to moral judgements, to narratives of triumph or failure. This is because early commentators on African independence as well as politicians made idealistic promises and predictions about what the future would bring. These ideals have shaped analyses of the contemporary period, and invariably they invite negative assessments of the past. The response by historians, according to Ellis, has been to avoid examining the recent period at all (Ellis 2002: 6–8).

For the reasons that Ellis states in his article, scholars need to come to terms with the socialist period in Mozambique and to view

⁵ I wish to thank the anonymous referee for this journal for the observation regarding sales of Samora Machel's speeches.

⁶ Errors and misconduct undermined the credibility of election results across the country, though apparently not enough to alter the results; see Hanlon (2005).

it through the lens of contemporary challenges. The task will not be easy since a celebratory, developmentalist language is still present in the official discourse. Yet, we need to examine socialism's contributions and its hardships and to recognize the ways in which Mozambique's contemporary history helps to explain competing discourses and struggles. It seems that workers are trying to apply some part of that history to current struggles; the work of scholars might be to reveal what that history was or was supposed to be, since that too constitutes memory. As an editorial in *Metical* stated following a wave of strikes, 'Mozambique needs to wake up from the beautiful but illusory triumphalist discourse of the last eight years' (*Metical* 2000).

Scholars might wish to take seriously the argument by Ellis that 'the examination of the past-in-the-present together with the turning-points at which history failed to turn is an original contribution that contemporary history can bring to the literature concerning our world today' (Ellis 2002: 4). Future accounts will have to assess more comprehensively the multiplicity of memories that surround socialism as a moment in Mozambican history. That study might include, for example, detailed ethnographies of individual and collective, rural and urban experiences of socialism, life histories of smallholders, and extensive interviews with workers in sectors such as mining, manufacturing and transportation. Among the many excellent studies of Mozambique, the works of Leroy Vail and Landeg White (1980), Jeanne Penvenne (1995), Allen Isaacman (1996) and Arlindo Chilundo (2001) that highlight the struggles of urban and rural workers during the colonial period, and Kathie Sheldon's (2002) study of urban women workers after independence, access different bodies of evidence and employ diverse methodological approaches that might guide additional research. Recent works by Heidi Gengenbach (1998, 1999, 2000) and Lloys Frates (2002) directly address issues of memory through their examination of women's recollections in rural and urban contexts during the colonial and postcolonial periods. Harry West's (1997) rich ethnographic study of the complex cultural logics employed by the Makonde to navigate and interpret the exercise of power on the Mueda Plateau during the twentieth century also draws our attention to the myriad strategies people use to shape and survive violence, instability and transition. The insights of these scholars might usefully be applied to future research on memory, forgetting and power.

Many countries around the world have undergone transitions to market economies and liberal democracies in the last few years. These transitions have resulted in the renegotiation of relationships between the state and labour. In some countries, urban workers are weak and fragmented. Unemployment and harsh new labour laws have decimated their unions. Other countries are confronting well-disciplined labour movements that have adopted creative tactics of confrontation and formed global links with other organizations fighting for social justice. In some cases, states can afford to ignore the demands of labour, and in other cases they do so at their peril. For scholars who are studying the current relationships between state and labour in formerly socialist

countries, memories of the past offer guides to understanding the relationships that are being forged today. Finally, examining the 'past in the present' undermines the social amnesia produced by organized forgetting (Isaacman 1997).

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ABSTRACT

This article examines two opposing strategies – one used by government officials and businesses, the other expressed by urban workers – that have emerged in postsocialist Mozambique. On the one hand, government officials and businesses have pursued a deliberate strategy of what several writers in other contexts have called 'organized forgetting', whereby they seek to airbrush the socialist past from history. They have revised the country's ideological orientation, built new coalitions of support among domestic and internal investors, and remade the ruling party's legitimacy following the abandonment of socialism and the transition to a free-market democracy. On the other hand, some urban workers have revived and repackaged the language of socialism to

protest against the effects of neo-liberalism. Relying on collective and individual memories of socialism, they denounce 'exploitation', 'recolonization', 'injustice' and 'inequality' as they struggle to understand, resist or modify the impact of structural adjustment and privatization. I argue that, although the end of socialism has allowed a plurality of voices to surface in Mozambique, such discursive pluralism is characterized by increasing power inequities. The consolidation of capital and the ideological pronouncements that accompany it may ultimately silence the now dissident language of the socialist past.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine deux stratégies opposées, l'une utilisée par les fonctionnaires et les entreprises, l'autre exprimée par les travailleurs urbains, qui sont apparues dans le Mozambique postsocialiste. D'un côté, les fonctionnaires et les entreprises ont poursuivi une stratégie délibérée de ce que plusieurs auteurs dans d'autres contextes ont appelé l'«oubli organisé», dans laquelle ils cherchent à effacer de l'histoire le passé socialiste. Ils ont révisé l'orientation idéologique du pays, formé de nouvelles coalitions de soutien parmi les investisseurs domestiques et internes, et refait la légitimité du parti au pouvoir après l'abandon du socialisme et la transition vers une démocratie de marché. De l'autre côté, certains travailleurs urbains ont relancé et mis à jour le langage du socialisme pour protester contre les effets du néolibéralisme. S'appuyant sur les mémoires collectives et individuelles du socialisme, ils dénoncent l'«exploitation», la «recolonisation», l'«injustice» et l'«inégalité», alors qu'ils s'évertuent à comprendre ou à modifier l'impact de l'ajustement structurel et de la privatisation, ou à y résister. L'article soutient que, bien que la fin du socialisme ait permis l'émergence d'une pluralité de la parole au Mozambique, ce pluralisme discursif se caractérise par un accroissement des inégalités de pouvoir. La consolidation du capital et les déclarations idéologiques qui l'accompagnent risquent à terme de réduire au silence le langage aujourd'hui dissident du passé socialiste.