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Angola and Mozambique: The Weight of History

PATRICK CHABAL

In trying to explain the civil conflicts which have ravaged Angola and Mozambique, most observers have focused their attention on the specificities of each case. This article will consider whether a more comparative approach would help to shed some additional light on these events. The aim, therefore, is not primarily to give an account of the internal wars in these two southern African Portuguese-speaking countries, it is to consider whether their much troubled postcolonial fortune can be made more intelligible by means of a comparative historical analysis of the two cases.¹

The two main questions are: why has the situation in Angola become so intractable, and why is it that Mozambique has managed to resolve a conflict which in many respects appeared worse than in Angola? The most common response to the first is that the situation in Angola was bound to be difficult to resolve because of the historical division of the country between the three main ethnic constituencies (Bakongo, Kimbundu and Ovimbundu). The standard reply to the second is that, following the end of apartheid in South Africa, RENAMO simply ran out of steam and had to settle. There is some truth in both of these points but I will show here why they are over-simplifications.

The article is in three parts. There is, first, an examination of the recent situation in Angola and Mozambique. There follows a discussion of a number of issues connected with the history of the colonial period and of the anti-colonial struggle. Finally, the chapter seeks to provide a re-interpretation of what has happened since independence in the light of that history.

THE RECENT SITUATION IN ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE: HYPOTHESES AND CAUSALITIES

The present condition of Angola remains precarious. Following the 1991 peace agreement, elections were held in 1992 under United Nations supervision. Contrary to expectations they returned a majority for the government in power since independence. The leader of the opposition refused the electoral verdict.² War started again. Another peace accord (the

¹ For useful background to the historical situation of Angola and Mozambique see, among others, Malyn Newitt, *Portugal in Africa* (London: Hurst, 1981) and David Birmingham, *Frontline Nationalism in Angola and Mozambique* (London: Currey, 1992).

² For an inside account of the failures of the UN see Margaret Anstee, *Orphans of the Cold War: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Angolan Peace Process* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

Lusaka Protocol) was signed in November 1994.³ Again a cease-fire was agreed and its implementation was supervised by a much strengthened UN presence — until war resumed again in late 1998.⁴

Between 1994 and 1998, an attempt was made by the international community to facilitate the execution of the 1994 Lusaka Accord: consolidating peace and establishing power sharing arrangements. UN supervision made possible the stage by stage implementation of the Protocol, encouraging both the government and UNITA to conform to the terms of the agreement. UNITA forces were at the time believed largely to have demobilized and the new integrated national army was supposed to have been set up. The distribution of posts at the local, regional, provincial and national level had been settled and both sides showed some willingness to conform to the letter, if perhaps not the spirit, of the accord. UNITA agreed to take its place in the National Assembly. Even Jonas Savimbi was reported to have accepted the position of 'Leader of the Opposition'.

The reality, unfortunately, was utterly different from this edifying assessment. Although formally there had been progress in terms of demilitarization and political integration, the situation was very far from stabilized. First, UNITA had not fully demobilized. Although it had disarmed a number of its soldiers, there is evidence both that it had kept its best troops in reserve and that it was actively re-arming. Second, the country was neither safe nor integrated. There remained areas controlled by UNITA in which normal political and economic life could not resume. Conversely, the government was slow in implementing power sharing in regions of the country where it was in control. In short, there was still much violence throughout the country that threatened the consolidation of peace.

Third, there was little evidence that power sharing, such as it was, at the regional and national levels led to collaboration, even less to reconciliation. The structure of political authority in Angola is such that, despite the notional place of UNITA in the National Assembly and other administrative bodies, authority lies firmly in the hands of the MPLA. Power sharing was simply not an effective reality — nor, perhaps, could it be. Finally, Savimbi remained as elusive as ever. There was much evidence, abundantly confirmed since, that the UNITA leader had no intention of accepting the offer of opposition leader and vice-president and that he was simply biding his time until he was in a position to relaunch his military campaign to seize power outright. The fact that he had refused to sign the Lusaka Protocol personally was a significantly ominous token of his intentions.⁵

³ Although significantly it was not signed by either of the two leaders.

⁴ Evidence of the difficulty of the peace process in Angola can be found in *Why Angola Matters*, ed. by Keith Hart & Joanna Lewis (London: Currey, 1996).

⁵ See here, among others, Karl Maier, *Angola: Promises and Lies* (London: Serif, 1996).

Moreover, and despite the overwhelming desire for peace throughout the country, there were strong indications that the government was not unanimous on the question. While the official policy was clearly geared to showing that the regime was complying scrupulously with UN injunctions and working hard for the success of the Lusaka Accord, there were perennial reports of a faction within the MPLA which favoured eliminating UNITA militarily once and for all. From their perspective, the mistakes of 1992 — when the MPLA began to disarm following the first peace accord — were not to be repeated. In short, then, there were within both the MPLA and UNITA powerful ‘war parties’ whose ultimate aim was to defeat the other side and assert sole control of the country.

The resumption of war in 1998 was ample confirmation that the Lusaka Protocol had little chance of success, even with strong UN support, because neither side was willing to sacrifice supremacy for peace. The recent government assault on the UNITA armed forces has marked a decisive breakthrough in that the rebel movement has been ejected from the cities it held and its ‘conventional’ heavy weapons (such as tanks and large artillery pieces) have been largely destroyed. From the government’s point of view, it is now a matter of ‘mopping up’. Yet, there is little doubt that UNITA has not been destroyed as a guerrilla force and that, despite the enormous military setbacks he has suffered, Savimbi is fully prepared to continue his armed opposition by all possible means.

Nor is it clear that regional and international factors are favourable to peace. It is true that the United States has for some time now been putting pressure on Savimbi to settle and, to that end, has renewed sanctions against UNITA.⁶ It is also true that the South African government has used its influence to support the peace process. Yet there is no doubt that UNITA continues to be supplied with arms, in part at least through US dealers and in part by means of air supplies originating in South Africa. Furthermore, there are conflicting pressures on the Angolan government, with substantial foreign interests worried about the prospect of a UNITA regime and thereby giving tacit support to those in the MPLA who seek to defeat the enemy. Unlike in 1992, few businesses now bank on a UNITA victory. Finally, the long-term implications for Angola of Kabila’s take over are not yet clear: ostensibly Savimbi has lost Mobutu’s unconditional support, but in practice UNITA still seems to be able to operate from the Democratic Republic of Congo — large areas of which are scarcely under central control. The recent Angolan involvement in Congo (Brazzaville) will also affect regional stability.

Angola’s outlook, then, is at best uncertain and at worst unpropitious. Although the country’s economic potential is enormous and, at peace, it

⁶ But the UNITA leader undoubtedly still has powerful backers in the United States.

could rapidly develop into one of the economic giants of Africa, the political situation is far too unstable to justify much hope. Civil war has not ended. The country is still poised on a knife edge and it will take the greatest efforts on the part of those, both inside and outside, who want peace to make it happen. Unfortunately, it now looks more and more as if war will continue until the government has achieved its aim of 'eliminating' UNITA — a forlorn hope since, as history shows, guerrilla movements are rarely 'defeated'. In the end, and despite the present bullish statements made by the government, there will at some stage be a need for a peace agreement — unless, as many suspect, the MPLA regime is concerned to maintain a 'credible' enemy so as better to justify its ruthless hold on power.

The situation in Mozambique is, on the other hand, quite radically different.⁷ Here the 1992 peace accord, signed by the leaders of both FRELIMO and RENAMO, led to an orderly end to the war, the disarmament of RENAMO soldiers, the integration of both armies and the holding of successful multiparty elections — all under UN supervision. The experience of the failures of the transition to peace in Angola meant that the UN was given a mandate to support more strongly the consolidation of the cease-fire and the preparation of elections in Mozambique. These elections were held in October 1994 and, as in Angola but not as unexpectedly, they returned the same government and president to office.⁸

In Mozambique, the armed opposition accepted the peace accord and organized itself into a political party capable of contesting the national elections and prepared to function as an opposition afterwards. Perhaps because Dhlakama and RENAMO did better than most had anticipated, the party was willing not just to concede electoral defeat but also to accept FRELIMO's refusal to set up a post-election coalition government of national reconciliation. It did so, moreover, without resorting to the threat of resuming violence. RENAMO, therefore, completed a most remarkable mutation from armed outfit bent on destruction to party machine geared to carving for itself a legitimate political place in today's Mozambique. The December 1999 elections confirmed the balance of political strength and the outcome was similar to that of 1994.⁹

⁷ For an exhaustive history of Mozambique since the fifteenth century see Malyn Newitt, *A History of Mozambique* (London: Hurst, 1995). The most recent and up-to-date account of the post-colonial history of Mozambique is Tom Young & Margaret Hall, *Confronting Leviathan: Mozambique since Independence* (London: Hurst, 1997).

⁸ For an inside account of the electoral process, see the book written by the Chairman of the Electoral Commission: Brazão Mazula, *Elections, Democracy, and Development* (Maputo: Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 1996).

⁹ Chissano once again gained an absolute majority but Dhlakama increased his share from 33.7% in 1994 to 47.7%. FRELIMO won 133 seats with 48.5% of the vote while RENAMO won 118 seats with 38.8%. RENAMO took six provinces while FRELIMO secured five. FRELIMO increased its share of the vote but only at the expense of minor parties.

Of more long-term concern is the extent to which the government has been able to rebuild the country and initiate a process of economic growth which might in due course lead to sustained development. The odds here are not good. Mozambique is devoid of substantial mineral resources and, although its agricultural base for export is potentially good, its present economic condition remains alarming. There is evidence that the constraints of structural adjustment are so severe as to jeopardize the very viability of the country and thereby make virtually impossible the kind of massive investment which its reconstruction requires.¹⁰ There is evidence too that NGO involvement in the economy is so massive as to discourage government economic policy and derail long-term government initiatives.¹¹ The question for Mozambique, then, is whether it will be able to weather the stringency of structural adjustment while laying down the foundations for economic rebirth.

How can we best explain the different outcome of Angola's and Mozambique's post-colonial transitions to peace? Can a comparative historical analysis of the colonial and anti-colonial history of these two countries help us answer that question?

THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

This section considers some of the historical factors which are most relevant to an understanding of the civil conflicts in the two countries. The main concern here is to analyse the extent to which those factors explain both the similarities and the differences in the post-colonial trajectory of these two countries. In particular, do the differentiated effects of colonial rule determine the complexion and effectiveness of the anti-colonial movements which sought independence from Portugal?

What is noteworthy about colonial Angola is the extent to which the formal colony evolved in continuity with what had happened prior to the Scramble for Africa.¹² Angola had been linked with Brazil through the slave trade since at least the sixteenth century. During that period there emerged in Luanda a commercial and administrative Creole elite — Portuguese-speaking, mixed race, Catholic, and cosmopolitan — involved in the triangular Atlantic trade. This Creole society lived in Africa but its connections with the interior of the continent were limited to the commerce which sustained the local economy. They had their representatives inland

¹⁰ On the impact of structural adjustment on Mozambique see Joseph Hanlon, *Peace without Profits: How the IMF Blocks Rebuilding in Mozambique* (London: Currey, 1996).

¹¹ On the impact of NGOs in Mozambique see Joseph Hanlon, *Mozambique: Who calls the shots?* (London: Currey, 1991).

¹² There is no single satisfactory history of Angola but see here, among others, David Birmingham, *The Portuguese Conquest of Angola* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); and Gerald Bender, *Angola under the Portuguese* (London: Heinemann, 1978).

who dealt with local Africans. The slave trade was the main, but not the only, commercial basis for this relationship between Luanda and the hinterland. Other commodities were also traded but the fact remains that, until the nineteenth century, it was the business of slavery which underpinned the relationship between Creole and African societies.

The effects of the slave trade on inland African communities varied enormously, between those which raided and traded slaves and those which were raided. It was Africans who sold the slaves to the traders acting as intermediaries for the Luanda Creole merchants. This Creole community lived in some considerable separation from the interior, turned as it was towards the Brazilian and Portuguese societies of which it felt a part — and with which indeed it had complex family, social and economic links. It is clear, therefore, that most inland Africans would, long before the colonial period, have viewed these city based Creoles as quite ‘alien’.¹³

The abolition of the slave trade coincided with the beginnings of the modern colonial period, culminating with the partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference in 1884–85. The history of Angola thereafter is that which was common to all colonial territories, namely ‘pacification’, the establishment of an administrative colonial structure and the development of a colonial economy to serve the metropolis. The effects of formal Portuguese colonization on Angola were obviously many, but perhaps the most crucial was the enforced decline of the Luanda Creole community within the newly created colonial order. By the twenties it had become clear that the former Creole elites were to be used as mere adjuncts to the new Portuguese colonial masters. Socially and economically their status was diminished. Furthermore, colonial rule created other elites, both *mestiço* and African, who rose through the ranks of colonial society to challenge the supremacy of the older established Creole society.¹⁴

The beneficial effects of colonial rule on the bulk of the African population of Angola were relatively minimal. Compelled to work by colonial legislation, Africans had little choice if they wanted to avoid forced labour or, worse, ‘contract’ work in São Tomé. They could either become ‘farmers’ and become integrated into the colonial economy or they had to hire themselves out as labourers in Portuguese agricultural or commercial concerns, of which the most successful were the coffee plantations in the northern Congo area. For historical reasons, the Ovimbundu (of the central highlands) had to seek employment on the coffee plantations as their agricultural economy was not sufficiently strong to sustain their relatively large population. As for the Bakongo, those who

¹³ For a useful discussion of race relations in the Portuguese empire see Charles Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

¹⁴ See Christine Messiant, ‘Angola, les voies de l’ethnisation et de la décomposition’, *Lusotopie*, 1/2 (1994), and 3 (1995).

did not work as agricultural labourers were chiefly associated with the business and trade which had developed in the Belgian Congo to the North. Some of them became substantial businessmen, a few owning plantations in northern Angola.¹⁵

Finally, Angola was a colony of settlement — but of a nature which marked it out from British Africa. Other than the coffee plantation owners, clearly an elite among the colonists, the Portuguese settlers were poor, unskilled, uneducated and, on the whole, they failed to succeed as agriculturists. Unable to compete with Africans and without resources, they moved to the cities and survived as best they could by doing menial jobs. Although in the sixties more dynamic Portuguese businessmen and entrepreneurs did settle in Angola, the bulk of the white population in the colony remained relatively poor and unskilled. Their presence was a continual bar to the progression of Africans into the kind of jobs which they might have expected to have in other, non-Portuguese, colonies. Their presence too was conducive to an atmosphere of petty discrimination and racism which affected the ordinary Africans and the Creoles of the cities.

It can be seen, therefore, that the development of Angola as a colony was both relatively smooth and potentially divisive. It was smooth because the Portuguese consolidated their hold over the colony (relatively) rapidly and integrated the whole territory under one functioning administration. It was potentially divisive because the colonial order induced — as it did elsewhere in Africa but in Angola on a larger scale — sharp dichotomies between social and, inevitably, ethnic or racial groups. Of these, the most significant were those between the Creoles and the Africans of the interior, whether in the centre or north of the country, since the Kimbundu were used to living in much closer proximity with the Creoles of Luanda.

Such divisions were sharpened by considerable social, cultural and religious factors. The Creoles were Portuguese-speaking, often (but not always) of mixed race, Catholic and urban based. As they lost ground in the colony to the newly established colonial elites, they sought to maintain their superior status by stressing even more than before those characteristics which set them apart as the true elites of the country. Though less prominent than they had been in the nineteenth century, they remained at the heart of the colonial order and were, not unnaturally, seen by the Africans of the interior as ‘collaborators’. Theirs was indeed a very Lusophone world, in culture, language and outlook. Inland things were different. Influences from foreign Protestant and Catholic missionaries, from other colonies (either Belgian or British) where many worked, were

¹⁵ For an exhaustive account of colonial Angola see René Pélissier's two volume history: *La Colonie du Minotaure (1926–1961)* and *Les Guerres Grises (1845–1941)* (Orgeval: Pélissier, 1978).

more important than those coming from Luanda. Furthermore, local African socio-political and cultural institutions, left relatively untouched by Portuguese colonial rule, continued to preside over the day to day life of the population.

In short, Angola was characterized by one sharp dichotomy — between the Creole community and the Africans of the interior — and a relatively well-integrated if poorly developed colonial order, in which the economy was very largely in the hands of the white settlers. This meant that, by the 1950s, there were two deeply frustrated social groups: the Creole elites, distinct but enfeebled; and the Africans of the interior, poor, uneducated and neglected at the bottom of a fairly rigidly stratified social order.

Mozambique was different in many significant respects.¹⁶ First, its pre-colonial history had been linked with that of Portuguese India and had (up to the last quarter of the nineteenth century) relatively little to do with the slave trade. Portuguese East Africa consisted, until the Scramble, of the Ilha de Moçambique — stagepost to India — the estates or *prazos* of the Zambezi River region, and a few Creole communities on the coast. The *prazos* became, in Isaacman's famous phrase, Africanized.¹⁷ As for the Ilha de Moçambique and the other coastal towns, they had neither the economic resources nor the social clout to compete successfully with the local Afro-Arab trading communities that dominated the region. With the decline of Goa, the Portuguese presence in Eastern Africa weakened. There was nowhere in Mozambique remotely the equivalent of the strong, cohesive, self-contained and dynamic Luanda Creole society.

Second, the clash between South African and Portuguese colonial interests resulted, following the British Ultimatum in 1990, in the creation of a Portuguese colony whose geography was inimical to easy integration. Not only is Mozambique very elongated from South to North, but its various provinces had less in common than they had with the regions immediately to the West prior to the Scramble. Indeed, except for the impact of the post-Mfecane Ngoni migration from South to North (up to the Zambezi), the main lines of trade and migration had in the past always been from East to West. As a result, therefore, the colony of Mozambique started life on very weak historical and geographical foundations.

Third, the consolidation of Portuguese colonial rule comprehensively demolished the pre-colonial Creole elites. The *prazos* were subdued by force of arms during 'pacification' and the capital of the colony was moved in 1903 from the Ilha de Moçambique to Lourenço Marques, at the

¹⁶ See Newitt, *A History of Mozambique*; and Thomas Henriksen, *Mozambique: a history* (London: Collings, 1978).

¹⁷ See Allen Isaacman, *Mozambique: the Africanization of a European Institution* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972).

opposite end of the country.¹⁸ There it developed very largely as an adjunct to the Transvaal. At a stroke, therefore, the south of the country became the heart of the colony and the new capital was created in deep symbiosis with South Africa.

Fourth, Mozambique was never properly consolidated as a colonial territory. Unable to colonize the north of the country, the Portuguese leased it to a number of concession companies charged with its pacification and 'development', in exchange for monopoly control of its economy. The result was that northern Mozambique became a labour reserve, without even the meagre benefits which Portuguese colonial rule bestowed on Africans by way of administration, education and health provision. The populations of the north, many of whom emigrated to the British territories in search of better working and living conditions, were thus further separated from those of the south, who in their turn were looking west to Rhodesia and South Africa. The main southern urban centres, Lourenço Marques and Beira, not only serviced these two interior countries but came very largely to resemble their segregated cities.

Fifth, Mozambique was more racially complex than Angola. In addition to the mixed race and white settler population, there were in the colony Indians and Chinese. The Indian community consisted of long established Goan Portuguese and of Western Indian traders who settled everywhere in Eastern Africa during the twentieth century. The Chinese came as labourers or traders. As for the white population of Portuguese settlers, it was both less numerous and more differentiated than that of Angola. Although the bulk of Portuguese immigrants were, as in Angola, poor and uneducated, there were in the fifties a number of businessmen and professionals whose influence on the cultural and political life of the colony was far from negligible.¹⁹

Finally, Mozambique was never as rich as Angola. Although endowed with reasonable agricultural and fishing resources, it was devoid of the serious mineral wealth of Angola — of which oil and diamonds were, and remain, the two most important. Nor, by the end of colonial rule, was Mozambique as highly developed economically as was Angola. Moreover, whereas Angola had become a rapidly growing self-standing economy, Mozambique remained intimately dependent on the revenues remitted by labourers in South Africa or Rhodesia and those generated by the use which these two countries made of Mozambican railways and ports.

This, thus, is the context within which anti-colonial movements grew. On the face of it the complexities of, and the divisions within, Mozambique

¹⁸ See Allen Isaacman, *The Tradition of Resistance in Mozambique: Anti-Colonial Activity in the Zambesi Valley, 1850–1921* (London: Heinemann, 1976).

¹⁹ See here the chapter on Mozambique in Patrick Chabal *et al.* *The Postcolonial Literature of Lusophone Africa* (London: Hurst, 1996).

were far greater than those in Angola. Although both colonies appeared ill-prepared for the demands of a unified anti-colonial movement, Mozambique seemed in this respect far worse off — and this for at least three sets of reasons, which we know from the general experience of colonial Africa to have been crucial in the formation of nationalism. First, the colony was very poorly integrated as a single territorial entity. Second, there was no strong internal economy to bring Africans together in occupational groupings: the working population of Mozambique was scattered in different British colonies and in South Africa. Third, there was no cohesive educated elite capable of leading the anti-colonial movement.

And, indeed, the early stirrings of anti-colonialism seemed to confirm this view. In Angola, the MPLA had already been founded in 1956 on clear nationalist, supra-ethnic and ideologically coherent lines.²⁰ In Mozambique there were several anti-colonial groupings based in the British colonies of Kenya (MANU), Malawi (UNAMI) and Rhodesia (UDENAMO)²¹ — somewhat similar in this respect to the ethnically based Congo UPNA, which eventually became the FNLA.²² There was in addition a small band of politically conscious (anti-colonial) secondary school students in Lourenço Marques (UNEMO).²³ The key historical question, then, is why the anti-colonial movement in Angola remained divided between the MPLA and the FNLA, and eventually UNITA, while in Mozambique the majority of these relatively disparate groups of anti-colonial forces came together in 1962 in one broad coalition, FRELIMO.²⁴

This is a fiendishly complicated question, a complete answer to which would require access to documents which we simply do not have and are now unlikely ever to have. There are, however, some key explanatory points. These can be divided between external and internal factors.

In terms of external influences, the four most important are the following. First, the crucial outside country had the opposite effect: Zaire supported the FNLA and opposed the MPLA, whereas Tanzania applied the strongest pressure on Mozambican anti-colonial movements to form a single alliance. Second, the two Angolan movements were backed by the

²⁰ The most exhaustive account of the nationalist movements in Angola remains John Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: the Anatomy of an Explosion (1950–1962)* (Cambridge, MI: MIT Press, 1969); and *The Angolan Revolution: Exile Politics and Guerrilla Warfare (1962–1976)* (Cambridge, MI: MIT Press, 1978).

²¹ MANU: Mozambican African National Union; UNAMI: União Africana de Moçambique Independente; UDENAMO: União Democrática Nacional de Moçambique.

²² UPNA: União das Populações do Norte de Angola; FNLA: Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola.

²³ UNEMO: União Nacional dos Estudantes de Moçambique.

²⁴ For a sympathetic account of the formation, development and success of anti-colonialism see, among others, Allen Isaacman, *Mozambique: From Colonialism to Revolution, 1900–1982* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983); for a more critical approach see Thomas Henriksen, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution: Mozambique's War of Independence* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983).

two opposing super powers whereas no such strongly dichotomized international constraint applied in the case of Mozambique. Third, both the MPLA and FNLA had networks of support among individual, and often ideologically opposed, African countries whereas, again, the situation was not nearly as sharply divided in the case of the Mozambican groups, who merely had the tacit acceptance of their host country. Finally, the FNLA was able to get early endorsement by the newly created OAU, which in Mozambique, however, supported the coalition of nationalists represented by FRELIMO.

The internal factors are, to my mind, even more significant. They too can be reduced to four. The first has to do with the strength of the historical divisions between competing anti-colonial movements. In Angola, the FNLA and MPLA represented totally distinct sets of interests: respectively, the Bakongo 'African' elites of the North and the Luanda Creole community and its regional Kimbundu supporters. In Mozambique, the various ethnic anti-colonial groupings were brought together by a relatively young southern elite with little previous contact, or antagonism, with the others. The simmering hostility between the northern Makonde people (integrated within FRELIMO) and their Makua neighbours (who were not), though never resolved, did not result in the formation of credible rival anti-colonial movements. Nor did the expulsion from the party of the prominent Makonde leader, Lazaro Nkavandame, lead to the creation of a viable rival Makonde party to challenge FRELIMO.

The second, turns around a fairly clear sense of real, or imaginary, racial difference. The FNLA liked to consider the MPLA Creole leadership as a 'non-African' mixed race group disconnected from the 'real' Africa — even if a substantial number of the MPLA leaders (including its head, Agostinho Neto) were in fact black African. In Mozambique, on the other hand, the FRELIMO leadership, though it included *mestiços*, Indians and whites, was never perceived to be made of an equally homogeneous and historically distinct 'Creole' group.

Third, the role of ideology in the anti-colonial struggle movement was different. In Angola, the MPLA was from its inception strongly ('orthodox') Marxist and the FNLA equally vigorously anti-Marxist. For this reason, a number of Western countries (most notably the USA) never wavered in their support of the FNLA and their implacable opposition to the MPLA. In Mozambique, the situation was not so clear cut. The various anti-colonial groupings had little overt ideology and although the bulk of the FRELIMO elite was 'socialist', the movement was founded by Eduardo Mondlane, an American trained black Mozambican who worked for the United Nations.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, there were strong differences in leadership. It can readily be seen that in Angola the anti-colonial

movements were set up by the 'old' colonial elites, representing respectively the Creole and northern African communities. By contrast, the anti-colonial leadership in Mozambique issued very largely from a 'new' generation of southern and mestiço politicians. Secondly, both the MPLA and the FNLA were in the hands of leaders with no taste for compromise: after the failure of the attempt in 1962 to merge the two parties there was little chance that either Agostinho Neto or Holden Roberto would ever work with the other. Savimbi's decision to leave the FNLA and his rejection by the MPLA led directly to his decision to create UNITA, thus greatly exacerbating the situation.²⁵ In Mozambique, Mondlane had the vision and the skill to bring and keep together the bulk of the anti-colonial leadership, no matter how strongly the divisions between some of them might have been, or indeed remained, within the new coalition.²⁶

In Mozambique, FRELIMO pursued an inclusive nationalist campaign, seeking to bring on board all anti-colonial forces, and conducting a guerrilla campaign on what I call the Guinea model — that is, the strategy followed with great success by Amílcar Cabral in Portuguese Guinea, of which the three key elements were unity at all costs, political mobilization of the countryside, and political control of armed action.²⁷ In Angola, on the other hand, the two nationalist rivals were immersed in exile politics and in continuing internal power struggles — a policy of exclusion rather than inclusion — and they were unclear about guerrilla strategy.²⁸ Although in due course the MPLA did attempt to follow the Guinea model in Eastern Angola, this too was ultimately undermined by the intra-party political struggles which culminated in the two grave factional splits known as the Active Revolt and the Chipenda break-away.

To conclude this broad historical survey, then, it is simply not the case that the prospects for nationalist unity and success were historically better in Mozambique than in Angola. The differentiated outcome of the anti-colonial campaign in the two colonies can be explained in terms of the degree to which the respective nationalist leadership managed to overcome the most potentially damaging political constraints they faced. It is human agency rather than fate which explains FRELIMO's greater success in this respect.

²⁵ See here Marcum, II.

²⁶ One could read with profit Mondlane's own account, reprinted as *The Struggle for Mozambique* (London: Zed, 1983).

²⁷ On Cabral and the anti-colonial struggle see Patrick Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

²⁸ See Marcum, II.

THE POSTCOLONIAL ROOTS OF CONFLICT

The consequences of those differences were profound.²⁹ In Mozambique, FRELIMO, however poorly implanted it was in many regions at independence, undeniably embodied the country's national aspirations.³⁰ It was the single legitimate voice of independent Mozambique, as was demonstrated by the imperious manner of its negotiations with the post-1974 Portuguese regime. In Angola, however, the MPLA, though it controlled the capital and most of the country on independence day, was never endowed with the nationalist legitimacy which it claimed. Right from the beginning, its historical right to rule the country was contested. The problem in Angola, then, was not so much one of nationalist plurality, a situation which was found in many countries at independence, but rather an inherent lack of legitimacy in the eyes of many, both in and outside the country.

The strength of FRELIMO as the ruling party of a newly independent country was reinforced by the unity, coherence and collective will of the leadership. By contrast, and in direct continuation with the past, the MPLA was from the start riven by divisions, both personal and ideological, and eaten by political rivalry. The extent of the differences between the two was illustrated in the early years after independence. Although both parties were to identify themselves officially as Marxist-Leninist in 1977, that political move had different implications for each.³¹ In Mozambique it was primarily a practical political decision meant in part to placate Eastern donors and in part to initiate a path of 'socialist' development. In Angola, it was all that but, above all, it was a way for the ruling clique to mark out their ideological differences with their political competitors. The result of such intolerance was the 1977 Nito Alves coup attempt which split the MPLA asunder, unleashed savage repression, fed political paranoia and moved the party firmly in a Stalinist direction.³²

In Mozambique, ideology was viewed pragmatically: when it proved to fail, it was discarded, as it was by 1979 in respect of a collectivizing approach to agriculture. In Angola ideology was a weapon for power and served to identify those who were close to the regime and those who were dangerous to it. Thus, although in 1977 the two parties were ideologically and politically at one, by 1980 they had very little in common except their position as a single ruling entity. The government in Mozambique was by then already embarked on some radical changes in policy while in Angola

²⁹ See Birmingham, *Frontline Nationalism in Angola and Mozambique*.

³⁰ In 1974, FRELIMO was only seriously politically active in three provinces and had made little real impact in the cities.

³¹ On the 1977 party congresses that led to these changes, see Luís Moita, *Os Congressos da FRELIMO, do PAIGC e do MPLA* (Lisbon: Ulmeiro, 1979).

³² On the coup attempt see David Birmingham, 'The twenty-seventh of May', *African Affairs* (1978).

it was entirely preoccupied with what might be called the 'politics of hegemony'. In comparing the MPLA and FRELIMO, then, ideology was of little consequence. The main difference lay instead in the extent to which they differed in terms of the coherence, unity and quality of their respective leadership.³³

Of the four factors which best explain the differences in the post-colonial evolution of both countries, and consequently the distinct outcome of the civil war, the most important one is undoubtedly that which separates the two parties in terms of legitimacy and coherence. Throughout this period, FRELIMO worked as a united and cohesive ruling party, and for this reason overcame the death (in 1986) of Samora Machel with relative ease. They were able to adjust policies as the situation required. The MPLA ruling elite, by contrast, was forced to assert its view against both external and internal opposition, defining policy more in terms of the 'correct line' than in respect of what was best for the country. No change of policy could be made without attacking those who were supposed to be against it. In short, despite its socialist ideology FRELIMO was essentially pragmatic whilst the MPLA remained obdurately Stalinist.

Beyond this crucial difference there were three other specific sets of factors which impinged on the post-colonial fate of the two countries: their economy; their position in regional and international relations; and the nature of the armed opposition. Economically, first, the Angolan government could exploit its most valuable asset, oil, throughout the civil conflict and was thus always able both to sustain its (largely urban based) client population and to finance the astronomical cost of the war. It could ignore all other sectors of the economy and still survive. Even when it lost control of the diamond fields to UNITA, it was still able to uphold its considerable military budget. Conversely, UNITA found in diamonds the means to increase military expenditures for its campaigns. As a result, the government only considered a move towards more liberal policies when it became politically expedient to do so, particularly in term of the changing foreign policy of the Soviet Union.

Mozambique, by contrast, was bereft of serious mineral resources and was left at independence with a wrecked infrastructure. Although in the first three years the government managed, with much foreign aid, to increase agricultural production, the economy began to collapse thereafter under the repeated assaults of a RENAMO bent on wanton destruction. Drought, misguided policies and war virtually brought the regime to its knees, prompting thereby the signing in 1984 of the Nkomati Accord with South Africa. The regime in Mozambique was thus compelled to temper

³³ On Angolan politics see, among others, Keith Somerville, *Angola: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Pinter, 1986); on Mozambique, see Young & Hall.

its socialist ambitions according to the very considerable economic constraints under which it laboured — all the more so when, in the mid-eighties, it became obvious that the Eastern Bloc was no longer going to continue to bankroll the economy of its far-flung ideological friends. From 1986 onwards, Mozambique entered the long road to Damascus that was eventually to lead to the IMF and structural adjustment.

The second determinant had to do with the fact that Angola had been from the beginning a pawn in Cold War politics whereas Mozambique, although seemingly in the socialist camp, was never viewed in the same light. The effect was that, as soon as UNITA had been embraced as the champion of anti-communism, it was supported, armed and supplied by the West as a counterforce to the 'Soviet-backed and Cuban-protected' MPLA state. Once the US had adopted 'constructive engagement' vis à vis South Africa, the conflict in Angola was only ended by Gorbachev's change of foreign policy — leading to a settlement in Namibia, the departure of Cuban troops from Angola and the opening of negotiations between the MPLA and UNITA. Nevertheless, and this gives a good indication of US intentions, the MPLA government was not recognized until UNITA's resumption of the civil war in 1992. UNITA, however, continued to be able to rely on Zaire's support and supplies from, or via, South Africa.

The situation of Mozambique was different. For a host of historical reasons, some undoubtedly subjective, the West never construed the FRELIMO regime as ideological foe, an ally of the Cold War enemy. Nor did South Africa, even at its most aggressive under P.W. Botha, consider removing the FRELIMO government. It used RENAMO to weaken the country so that it would settle down as a docile neighbour and, following the 1984 Nkomati Accord, stop giving the ANC logistical support. Finally, Machel was able to cultivate the 'Thatcher connection' to gain access to the US and seek aid for his desperately poor country.³⁴ In sum, then, Mozambique was wooed by the West, not ostracized, so that the move towards economic liberalization and political pluralism occurred gradually under the leadership of a party increasingly keen to end the conflict with RENAMO. The changes in South Africa ushered in by the release of Nelson Mandela put pressure on RENAMO to negotiate with FRELIMO and end the war.

Finally, the factor which most influenced the evolution of the civil conflict in both countries was the very different character of the two opposition forces: UNITA and RENAMO. Although UNITA was born a genuine anti-colonial political organization and RENAMO a foreign bred

³⁴ Margaret Thatcher was grateful to Samora Machel, who had been instrumental in persuading Robert Mugabe to accept the Lancaster House Accord for the independence of Rhodesia, and she repaid her debt in diplomatic terms.

armed engine of destruction, their evolution was to turn them into their very opposites.³⁵ UNITA eventually became a military machine, bent on seizing power at the barrel of a gun, while RENAMO transformed itself into a political party willing and able to compete in the electoral game.³⁶ Why? There are essentially three reasons, of which the first, Savimbi's absolute will to power, is paramount. The other two, UNITA's access to foreign support and its control of Angola's diamond resources, merely served to fuel the instrumental purpose to which the party was put: namely, making Savimbi the undisputed ruler of Angola.

Above and beyond this undoubtedly critical personal factor, there is little doubt that Savimbi's unbending determination to overthrow the Luanda regime stems, in part at least, from the fact that the MPLA was never endowed with full legitimacy at independence.³⁷ By contrast, however much RENAMO sought to destroy Mozambique's infrastructure and eliminate FRELIMO cadres, it never seriously entertained the belief that it could itself challenge FRELIMO's historical place in contemporary Mozambique.³⁸ Indeed, politically RENAMO always defined itself in relation to, and as a mirror image of, FRELIMO. Its future acceptance as a legitimate political organization depended entirely on its eventual recognition by the FRELIMO state. UNITA wanted to eliminate the MPLA; RENAMO wanted to be given its place in the political order established and dominated by FRELIMO.

It is for this reason that the two sets of negotiations had such radically different outcomes. UNITA only settled because Savimbi believed that the elections, which he was utterly convinced he would win, would be the most economical way of seizing power. Once it became clear that UNITA had lost the elections, he resumed war. By contrast, RENAMO saw the elections as the best means of legitimizing its place as opposition party and thus to gain access to the resources which political participation was likely to make available. Savimbi wanted total power; Dhlakama wanted a share of the spoils. This difference is likely to continue to affect the future of both countries.

Although these contrasts in opposition leadership appear merely to be idiosyncratic, it can be argued that they have much to do with the weight

³⁵ On UNITA and the war in Angola see W. James, *A Political History of the Civil War in Angola: 1974–1990* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1991); and Fred Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1986).

³⁶ On RENAMO and the Mozambican war see Christian Geffray, *La Cause des Armes au Mozambique* (Paris: Karthala, 1990); and Alex Vines, *RENAMO: From Terrorism to Democracy in Mozambique?* (London: Currey, 1996).

³⁷ Some argue that Savimbi's death would put an end to UNITA's political and military ambitions and would make possible a swift transition to peace.

³⁸ See here an intriguing article on RENAMO's political discourse: Michel Cahen, 'Entrons dans la nation': notes pour une étude du discours politique de la marginalité— le cas de la RENAMO au Mozambique', *Politique Africaine*, 67 (1997).

of history. The division of Angola's nationalists into enemy political factions was not, as is so often argued, the inevitable outcome of the colony's ethnic 'divisions' but rather the result of the inability of its elites to form a broad anti-colonial coalition. Conversely, the unity of nationalist purpose in Mozambique was achieved against considerably larger odds than in Angola and it was maintained as the absolute priority throughout the war. Consequently, the two parties which took control at independence (the MPLA and FRELIMO), though superficially similar in ideology, were in fact endowed with distinct political attributes, of which nation-building legitimacy was cardinal.

It is to be feared that the weight of history will continue to blight Angola's future for years to come. Mozambique, though weakly integrated and economically destitute, can at least set about re-building a country on more solid foundations. Angola may well have to see its very political foundations destroyed before it can begin re-construction.³⁹

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³⁹ A revised version of this article will be published in Patrick Chabal, *et al*, *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa* (London: Hurst, forthcoming).