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Colonialism and Racism

While reading this book I was often reminded of the cliché, “be careful what you wish for because you might actually get it.” Decades ago, I spent months in the Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa (BNL), turning the pages of bound volumes of newspapers published in the early twentieth century in Lourenço Marques, Mozambique. I feared the volumes would barely survive my use; the pages were disintegrating under my touch and I cringed each time the staff plunked the huge volume on my desk, testing the brittle binding. I contacted my Boston University Library colleague James Armstrong to inquire about microfilming the collections. With his help, the Cooperative Africana Microform Project (CAMP) microfilmed BNL’s nearly complete run of the newspapers *O Africano* and *O Brado Africano*, the press of the Mozambican Grêmio Africano.

Thanks to the microfilms, many more scholars could engage the perspectives, politics, essays, and social news by and about the extraordinary Mozambican journalists and intellectuals for whom the papers provided a voice and forum of views. Mozambicans José Moreira, Aurélio Rocha, and Alexandrino José, as well as Portuguese and Brazilian scholars Olga Iglésias Neves and Valdemir Zamparoni completed scholarly works based in large part on the press and Mozambique’s newly open archival material. They took different but complementary approaches. We are much richer for their fine efforts. That said, however, it is occasionally as odd as it is interesting to see what happens when a scholar reads the same sources and writes about the same themes; much of it sounds eerily familiar. In many ways, I am an inappropriate reviewer for this book because I am so steeped in the material. It is difficult for me to know what will be new and fresh to the intended audience.

Reviews require attention to the basics. Zamparoni’s title and table of contents do not clearly place the work in time or space, and something clearly went wrong with the index. The book has four maps; ten photographs; and some interesting population, wage, and employment category tables. Although Zamparoni occasionally widens his lens to central and northern Mozambique, his depth and focus is southern Mozambique and the colonial city of Lourenço Marques. His doctoral dissertation, “Entre narros & mulungos: Colonialismo e paisagem social em Lourenço Marques, c. 1890–1940,” covered the conquest era to 1940. He tells us that this book is a revision of the first third of his thesis, and the other two-thirds will be revised into two books in progress. He does not say specifically which years he intended to cover in this volume. He also does not tell us much about the goals and structure of the book. As we shall see, I was still guessing up to the final sentences.

The book’s structure is essentially cross-chronological: four chapters, an introduction, a two-page conclusion, and a bibliography. Chapter 1 is the most chronological, but subsequent chapters are thematic, with supporting evidence in somewhat, but not consistent, chronological order. Chapter 1, “From the slave trade to conquest,” considers transforming slaves into contract workers. Chapter 2, “Mechanisms for dom-
ination,” highlights the moral obligation to work; the creation of natives; hut taxes; expropriation of the best or most economically attractive lands; early dispossession and monopoly crop/product schemes that supported white settlers with black land and labor; and the simultaneous disadvantaging of black farmers, workers, and businesses. Chapter 3, “Forced labor: Theory and practice,” considers prison labor, forced labor, corporal punishment, wage and benefit fraud, abuse of women and children’s labor, the relationship between forced and migrant labor, mission supported “native farmer” schemes, labor control systems, and popular strategies to evade what I called the engineering of inequality. Chapter 4, “Volunteer labor,” returns to the relationship between mine migration to South Africa and labor conditions in Mozambique, and then turns to labor in Lourenço Marques. This chapter contrasts assumptions, practices, and conditions for black and white workers whether employed or unemployed. It closes with closer attention to the specific challenges of urban African women.

In his concluding pages, Zamparoni states that his goal was to argue to a Brazilian readership that the Portuguese/Mozambican colonial/capitalist interface was deeply complex on both sides, and the articulation was contested and incomplete. Certainly he provides ample evidence of that in this study. He also attends to the fact that his major themes are largely gendered male; confirming that the challenges and strategies women faced and developed were not simply a subset of men’s. Only at the end of the book did I realize that Zamparoni’s unexplained strategy to revise his thesis into three books was not rooted in time but rather in topic.

This book mentions prostitution and urban criminality, but not in the depth and detail of Zamparoni’s other published essays. I suspect, but he does not explicitly tell us, that will be the subject of one of the projected books. He is clearer about the subject of the “other.” His last sentences tell us: “As we have seen the newspapers edited by negroes and mulattos, with some education, were strong vehicles denouncing the blemishes and brutalities of colonialism. This vigorous intellectual response, although glimpsed a bit in this text, will be the subject of another book” (p. 294). I wish he had told us that at the outset, but maybe he had not quite decided at that point!

A Brazilian readership will learn a great deal about the strategies and struggle of African workers facing colonial racism in this book. Zamparoni covers all of the usual subjects and does so with well-documented detail. At times he buries key analyses in his footnotes (for example, Patrick Harries, José Fialho Feliciano, and others in 64n106). Although he draws on Portuguese, French, and English language sources, he misses or barely mentions some important English and French analyses even in the footnotes: Bridget O’Laughlin, James Duffy, René Péllissier, Michel Cahen, Kathleen Sheldon, Olga Iglésias Neves, Alpheus Manghezi, Leroy Vail, and Landeg White, among others.

His opening chapter does not mention Duffy or Péllissier, for example, but the extensive quotations from Oliveira Martins, António Ennes, and Eduardo da Costa in the narrative are very interesting. Martins can be a caricature of Portuguese racist attitudes toward ordinary Africans, but Zamparoni allows him to speak fairly directly to the reader. Indeed, if anyone had any lingering doubts about the extent, nature, and intentions of Portuguese colonial exploitation of Mozambique’s peoples, both petty and grand, the avalanche of Zamparoni’s extensive quotations from the press, colonial regulations, and “native affairs” documentation bury them. He takes pains to highlight the range of political, social, and policy views among the Portuguese and Mozambican populations, always closely scaffolding his argument with quotations.

Zamparoni did not develop his own research on oral narratives, song, and performance, but he incorporated published work and some of the tapes and transcripts others deposited at the Centro de Estudos Africanos. I think it would have been a richer work had he done more with song and testimony—particularly given the richness of Manghezi’s work in southern Mozambique and Sheldon’s, Vail’s, and White’s in central Mozambique. That said, however, this book makes really excellent use of the nearly sixty-year run of O Africano and O Brado Africano. From my perspective, the great contribution of this book is that Zamparoni quotes extensively from the Mozambican press, bringing readers much of their richness, complexity, and contradictions. In that way, I indeed got what I wished for many years ago and I am glad.

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