

Mozambique is gradually ceasing to be (as in the past) only a paradise of prawns and Polana, or (as at present) a devastating zone of war and illegal emigrants. By showing the existence of the strong and creative literature of a country with which South Africa shares frontiers, languages and cultures, this collection contributes, far more than political discourses do, towards the idea of southern Africa.

Accordingly, one must express gratitude to COSAW and the Camoes Institute of Portugal for helping Richard Bartlett's work come to fruition. Despite the deficiencies referred to, the result is a praiseworthy one. Further initiatives would be equally welcome, particularly an anthology along similar lines, devoted to poetry. We have reason to hope that people will no longer find it necessary—to adapt the words of Albie Sachs—to ask the question of whether it was advantageous to have been colonised by the British or the Portuguese, but rather will feel more proud of being themselves, Mozambican and South African together, as Samora (still an important point of reference) once said.

Frontline Nationalism

Frontline Nationalism in Angola and Mozambique

by David Birmingham

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Reviewed by Richard Bartlett

CSSALL

University of Durban-Westville

The temptation to compare Mozambique and Angola often appears to make sense because of their shared heritage of Portuguese imperialism and armed struggle against it. The almost simultaneous independence in 1975 and civil wars which followed would tend to emphasise the similarities. It is these similarities which allow Birmingham to draw the two countries together in a study of front-line nationalism. But the emphasis of Birmingham's work is on nation building rather than nationalism.

Simply put, nationalism is about identity. And identity encompasses far more than a straightforward maintenance of a country after the colonial machinery has departed.

The need and desire to construct a state from the borders determined by European colonial powers is nation building. The discourse of individual and common identity which develops into nationalism is what determines and drives that need and desire.

Birmingham does not attempt to differentiate between the two; they both fall under the same banner of Nationalism. For the purpose of his study this is perhaps adequate. He does not attempt to provide an in-depth analysis of the development of nationalisms in Lusophone Africa; what he rather provides is a brief study of the difficulties Mozambique and Angola faced in building a nation with South Africa as a neighbour and Portugal as a coloniser.

The birth of African nationalism in the two Portuguese colonies is dealt with in the first two chapters. The realms of Mbundu in Angola and Mutapa in Zimbabwe are mentioned as examples of 'recovery of pride in the African past'. He also mentions the resistance of Queen Nzinga who fought against European encroachment of her land in the first half of the seventeenth century. There is a historical character as important for Mozambique as Queen Nzinga is for Angola: Ngungunhane. In the late nineteenth century he successfully held the Portuguese and British at bay for many years until his kingdom was destroyed by a Portuguese colonial military force. Unfortunately, Ngungunhane does not warrant a mention in Birmingham's book.

Factors outside of armed struggle which nurtured the nationalism of the two countries were the development of an African press, the marginalisation of educated Africans due to European immigration (especially after the Second World War), religion and the labour policy of the colonies.

Oppressive labour policy fuelled anti-colonialism, as Birmingham points out, but labour policy was implemented in significantly different ways. Enforced contract work was the bane of an Angolan's life but for Mozambicans in the southern half of their country there was a choice, albeit limited: they could migrate to the relatively well paid work in the mines of South Africa.

Birmingham presents the South African option as one of two evils, but for many Mozambicans the mines were as much an escape and source of learning and riches as they were a necessary evil. Patrick Harries (1994)¹⁵ has shown this dual nature of Mozambican migrant labour in his book, *Work*,

¹⁵ See his book *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa. c.1860-1910*, published in Johannesburg by Witwatersrand University Press.

Culture and Identity. In her study of labour in the colonial capital of Lourenço Marques, Jeanne Penvenne (1995)¹⁶ illustrates the journey many Mozambicans made to South Africa in trying to escape the limited choices open to the victims of colonialism.

South Africa is a central feature of Birmingham's study as it defines the title of the book—'Frontline'. Yet, South Africa plays a relatively minor role in Birmingham's narrative. The role of destructive engagement that South Africa played in both Angola and Mozambique is well known and Birmingham relates it to the struggle the newly independent states had undertaken in building a country from the shambles of the colonial departure.

The conjunction of the title is never suitably resolved. Does the fact that nationalism in Angola and Mozambique developed on the front-line make it front-line nationalism?

The violence of the apartheid state did play a part in impressing the urgency of nation building on the independent states, but how did this violence seep into nationalist discourse, in literature for example?

A significant amount of space is devoted to discussion of the Luanda Carnival and its role in recent Angolan nationalism. In its fascination it makes Mozambique seem a terribly dull and violently unenticing place. While this is not the case, Birmingham does not seem to be able to discuss Mozambique nearly as intimately as he can discuss Angola.

For all its brevity, Birmingham's work is a useful introduction to the origins and difficulties of nation building in Angola and Mozambique. As a study of intra-regional relationships, however, many more borders still have to be crossed before one can arrive at a convincing and comprehensive argument concerning the effects of the front-line on Angolan and Mozambican nationalism.

¹⁶ See her *African Workers and Colonial Racism: Mozambican Strategies and Struggles in Lourenço Marques, 1877-1962*, published in Johannesburg by Witwatersrand University Press.