

MIGRANT LABOUR AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MOZAMBIQUE

by

M. Newitt

Introduction

The profitability of the South African gold mining industry has long been believed to depend on the ready supply of cheap labour, and a large part of this labour has always come from Mozambique. Up to 1906 Mozambique consistently supplied over 60 per cent of the mine labour force; in 1926 it was providing 44 per cent and in 1969 27 per cent was coming from Portuguese territories. (1) The importance of Mozambique labour is all the more striking when one learns that a large percentage of underground work has always been done by Portuguese Africans. In 1923 Pedro Muralha (2) claimed that 80 per cent of rock face working was done by Mozambique workers, while many people have referred to the unwillingness of Africans from other areas to work underground. (3)

This labour is obtained under a series of agreements between the Portuguese and South African authorities. The first of these dates from 1897 when, for the first time, labour recruiting was put within a legal framework; the second is the so-called modus vivendi of 1901; the third is the Mozambique-Transvaal Convention of 1909; finally, there is the Convention of 1928 and the subsequent adjustments made to it. (4)

Meanwhile, other industries in South Africa were recruiting Mozambique labour, and they were followed in 1908 by the S. Thomé cocoa planters. Then, in 1914, Mozambique signed an agreement with Rhodesia to allow the recruiting of 15,000 labourers. Although this number was never reached, the 1936 census in Rhodesia showed that 10 per cent of the work force came from Mozambique. (5)

Although numbers are hard to estimate, there can have been few years since 1900 when less than 100,000 Mozambique workers have been abroad under contract - and this number is very much below the full total because of the illicit emigration that has always taken place. Marvin Harris in 1959 estimated the number at nearer 200,000. (6)

It is well known that the supply of labour is only one aspect of the mutual dependence of the economies of South Africa, the Rhodesias and Mozambique. As well as supplying labour, Mozambique provides port facilities, railways, oil-pipelines, and now hydro-electric power, thereby creating an economic substructure which intimately links the separate areas of south-eastern Africa. However, although Mozambique's part in this development has been crucial, she has always been a somewhat reluctant partner, and a strong body of opinion, which includes some of Portugal's best known colonial statesmen, has strongly opposed the South African connection. It is possible that in this tradition of hostility may lie, ready to be unearthed, a new road which Portuguese policy in Africa might follow.

The relationship of labour migration to Portuguese policy was studied in a famous article by Marvin Harris in 1959, but he limited himself to the southern part of Mozambique, and it is the aim of this paper to try to place the subject in the context of the development of Mozambique as a whole.

Labour Migration and the Economy before 1891

To a certain extent labour movements in south-eastern Africa are a "traditional" feature of the economy. Mozambique labour was recruited throughout the nineteenth century to build railways, to supply Natal sugar plantations and to work in the diamond mines, long before there was any Portuguese administration in southern Mozambique and long before there were any gold mines in Johannesburg. So popular were the Diamond diggings that the word diaman apparently entered the southern Mozambique languages as a word to apply to all mines. (7)

Marvin Harris suggested that the social structure and the communal division of labour among the Thonga encouraged the migration of males in search of work. Rita Ferreira discounted this and placed greatest stress on market forces and the attraction of relatively high wages and the material goods they could purchase. By 1895, he maintained, sterling currency was already circulating among the Thonga and such things as bride-price were often calculated in sterling. (8) When the embryo Portuguese administration was set up following the defeat of Gungunhana in 1895, labour migration was found to exist on such a scale that the administration tried to prohibit it without any success whatsoever.

Further north the export of labour was equally traditional, but followed more closely the pattern of the Swahili slave-trade. Mozambique Africans forcibly migrated for centuries throughout the Indian Ocean, and played a considerable part in the peopling of Madagascar and the smaller islands. Forced labour migration occurred inland as well, and contractors supplied slaves to the Barotse and Matabele kingdoms and to the Portuguese senhors in the Zambesi valley.

There is some evidence that the transition from slave trading to labour contracting was a smooth one. Henry Nevins argued cogently that contract labour was recruited through the traditional slaving contacts and marched to the coast by slavers along the old slave trails. In Zambesia, labour contractors from British Central Africa were operating in the 1890s in areas of Mozambique as yet hardly under government control, and were contracting with the prazo senhors and captain-majors for labour. (9) One of these, H. Crawford Angus, spent five months trying to recruit labour in 1895, and recorded that

The price of slaves averaged about 4s to 6s each,
and children from 3s to 5s each; the chief market

is Tete, on the Zambezi, the Portuguese headquarters there, where a ready sale is found among the Portuguese police and servants, and among the officers even and other inhabitants. (10)

The transition was made all the more smooth by Ennes' law perpetuating the old forms of the prazo system.

It is arguable, therefore, that the weak and disorganized Portuguese colonial administration inherited a situation and was forced to regularize and accept an extensive movement of labour which it could not do anything to prevent. In fact, so weak was Portugal's position during the 1890s with widespread African resistance, bankruptcy at home, and powerful and greedy British and German neighbours in Africa, that she was forced thankfully to accept any kind of settlement that would stabilize her colony.

In this light must be seen the heedless granting away of half of Mozambique to two chartered companies, one of them wholly and the other partly foreign owned. The Niassa and Mozambique companies adopted different tax structures, different land laws, different tariffs and different labour practices from the other parts of the territory.

Fiscal Policy and Transvaal Labour

In this gloomy picture the prosperity of Lourenço Marques and its hinterland was the one bright spot. In the year 1896-7, out of total receipts of 2,934 contos, Lourenço Marques accounted for 1,880 contos; in 1906 the proportion was even more pronounced, with Lourenço Marques providing 3,280 contos out of total receipts for the colony of 4,813 contos. (11) The railway from the Rand to Delagoa Bay was finished in 1894, and with the great expansion of the gold mines at the same period there was a readily growing movement of goods and labour between Mozambique and the Rand. To encourage these economic links with South Africa and warm in the golden prosperity of the mines was an obvious policy for colonial statesmen faced with an empty exchequer.

In 1897 labour recruiting was placed under government control in southern Mozambique, and in 1900 a monopoly of labour recruiting was given to the WNIA. In 1901 a comprehensive agreement was signed with the British administration in the Transvaal, which secured considerable economic advantages for Mozambique, including a fee on every labourer recruited and a guarantee of half the rail freight from the coast to the Rand. By subsequent agreements these advantages were extended to include a repatriation payment and a deferred payment of part of a miner's wages. Attempts made to secure a monopoly of the sale of alcohol to the Portuguese African miners were, however, defeated. (12)

These agreements with South Africa have always provided the Portuguese with substantial returns, comfortably visible in the accounts of the colony. Apart from the development of the port of Lourenço Marques, Freire de Andrade listed the advantages as threefold: hut taxes were easier to collect and their yield rose; African purchasing power was increased and this particularly benefited the Portuguese wine trade; and direct payments on the labour contracts improved sterling balances. (13)

It is clear, however, that the economic links with South Africa and Rhodesia, coupled with the fragmentation of the colony in the early part of the twentieth century, have led to considerable distortions in its development. Mozambique, until 1960, was a country of sea-ports and railways. It had a developed coastal region and bands of development along the railways and, to a lesser extent, the rivers, but it had no communications system linking different parts of the country. The only bridges across the Zambesi were in British territory or took the railway to British territory, and up till the present it is still impossible to drive from north Mozambique to south without crossing former British territory. Modern Mozambique reflects in its development the role it has played as port, transit route and labour pool for central and southern Africa.

Critics of the Labour Migration

Critics of the labour conventions fell into two groups. The first group was made up of those who thought that Portugal had not driven a hard enough bargain. The mines could pay more for their labour and the workers could spend more of their money in Mozambique. Freire de Andrade contrasted the 516 contos spent by Africans in Johannesburg with the 187 contos they spent inside Mozambique.

Associated with these arguments were those which pointed to the denationalization of the Portuguese Africans on the mines. Africans would learn to respect the efficient and uniformed officers of WNLA and this would subtly undermine Portuguese authority. It is no coincidence that the 1928 Labour Code forbade foreign labour contractors to wear uniform like that of the military or the police. (15) Freire de Andrade also expressed concern at the appearance of bibles in the luggage of returning Africans, which indicated missionary influence, and recorded with alarm that dissident Gaza chiefs were living in the Transvaal out of the reach of Portuguese police. (16)

The second group of critics were the most important. They maintained that, although the labour contracts with South Africa and Rhodesia brought in much needed sterling and helped to balance the colonial budget, nothing was being done to develop the economy of Mozambique itself. They argued that if the labour used by the South African gold mines were available for domestic employment Mozambique would soon overcome her labour needs and develop a thriving agriculture and industry.

The man whose name is chiefly associated with the early attempts to develop the economy of Mozambique is Antonio Ennes. He sat on the commission of inquiry into the prazos in 1888; he drew up the prazo law of 1890 and went out as royal commissioner in 1892 to implement it; he sat on the colonial commission of 1898 which drew up the revised native labour code of 1899. In his book, Mozambique, which was first published in 1893, Ennes admits that there were few encouraging signs in 1892 for anyone who wanted to see Mozambique develop her economy. Not only were there serious disorders in every district but there was a shortage of funds and virtually no industrial or agricultural enterprises in existence except a few coconut and oil-seed plantations and some stills for palm spirit. Moreover, the trade of the territory was entirely in Asian hands. "Portuguese commerce", he wrote, is a matter of tins of sardines and tots of liquor." (17)

But Ennes believed that what was needed for the development of Africa was the proper organization of labour, not the investment of capital in vast mining enterprises. It was the philosophy of a poor country faced with urgent development problems, and although the imperialist assumptions of Ennes now have a hollow and unhealthy ring, the rest of his thought has a great deal of relevance to the contemporary problems of Africa.

Ennes had to plan for a fragmented country. South central Africa was not only partitioned among the European imperial powers but Mozambique itself had been disastrously fragmented. The Niassa and Mozambique Company concessions were outside government control, while the rest of the colony was divided into those areas under the old prazo system of administration and land tenure and those areas directly administered by the government. Even in the government areas there were differences, some parts being under civil and some under military control, while in some areas a head tax (mussooco) and in other areas a hut tax (palhota) was collected from Africans.

In 1890-92 Ennes revised the prazo legislation and in 1899 he produced a labour code for the areas under direct government control. Ennes' ingenious plan for the self-development of the Zambesi valley has been frequently described. (18) Briefly, it laid on the concessionaires the obligation to collect half the African head tax in the form of labour and to use this labour to develop specified proportions of the prazo. In addition, the concessionaire had to administer, police and generally supervise his concession. The prazo thus became a plantation supported by a pool of labour among the population of its hinterland.

Ennes believed that labour services would be popular with Africans and that the prazo legislation was strong and definite enough to ensure that its provisions were carried out.

Under the prazo law the Zambesi valley only developed slowly. The area was not pacified until 1902 and then communication problems made all attempts to grow export crops away from the immediate delta area next to impossible. The companies which rented the prazos in blocks were undercapitalized and ill-equipped to carry out their obligations. Throughout much of the area the only financial returns the companies could realize were the African head tax payments. The prazos were sublet to contractors among whom feature some of the slave traders of the old regime and these collected the taxes and exploited to the full the fiscal privileges of the concessions. (19)

Nevertheless, some development did take place near the coast. In 1914 it was estimated that there were some 27,584 hectares under cultivation, with one and a half million coconut trees, 800,000 rubber trees, 5 million sisal plants, and sugar cane producing 25,000 tons of sugar. (20) A list of the major agricultural exports of Mozambique in 1915 shows the extent to which the economy was still dependent on forest products and African grown grains and oil-seeds. In order of magnitude the exports were sugar, groundnuts, copra, whale-oil, kaffir-beans, oil-seeds, maize, wax, rubber, mangrove bark, skins and hides, kaffir corn, and ivory. Of these only sugar can really be ascribed to systematic economic development. (21)

The lack of development was laid by the prazo companies firmly at the door of labour shortage. If the 100,000 labourers who trekked abroad every year to South Africa could be made available to Mozambique, then the economy would develop. Freire de Andrade gave some support to this plea when he listed among the disadvantages of the Transvaal labour migration the resultant high price of

labour. (22) Certainly in the areas directly under government control there was no economic development at all. The prazos, however, did not send many servicais to the mines - in 1906 less than 5 per cent of labourers came from Zambezia and Niassa together - so that alleged labour shortage had really to be ascribed to other factors.

It was soon realized that, far from welcoming the provisions of Ennes' prazo law, Africans were illegally migrating in large numbers to avoid it. So serious was the situation reported to be that the secretary for native affairs, Castello Branco, was sent in 1908 to make a report.

This report, published in 1909, shows the conditions under which fiscal labour was being exacted in Zambesia, describes underpayment for work, the forcing of Africans to provide their own food, the exacting of unpaid labour, the forcing of Africans to accept payment in kind, common housing for girls and men on the plantations, corporal punishment, compulsory service in the police, and the seizure and imprisonment of hostages. Castello Branco's findings were hotly disputed by the prazo companies but they were only reiterating the criticisms that had already been made by Freire de Andrade and Carl Wiese - the latter a sub-contractor and former slave and ivory trader. (23) All agreed that the emigration of Africans to British territory or the territory of the Mozambique Company was going on at an alarming rate.

It was the volume of this illegal emigration, coupled with the failure of the prazos on the upper river to show any development, that probably led the Portuguese authorities to allow Rhodesia to recruit labourers there on a contract basis in 1914.

Faced by what they believed to be a critical labour shortage, the prazo companies reacted by demanding a whole range of reforms. They demanded and obtained an extension to their leases; they successfully had the powers of the prazo inspectorate abolished and they bombarded the government with demands that they should be allowed to recruit servical labour alongside WNLA and the Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau in government administered territory. A number of these contracts were in fact made - Freire de Andrade refers to one when 12 per cent of the contracted labourers died and the rest deserted - and the most famous of them was the Hornung contract negotiated between Sena Sugar Estates and the governor-general, Brito Camacho, in 1921. By this contract the government agreed to supply 3,000 labourers from the Maganja da Costa district. (24)

Portuguese Labour Legislation

Early in the twentieth century, therefore, the few areas of Mozambique under direct government administration were subject to very heavy labour requirements. Contractors from S. Thomé, Rhodesia, South Africa, and from the prazos were all demanding labour and expecting the government to supply it. However, the government also had labour needs of its own. It had to build roads, public buildings, harbour works, etc., and therefore found it essential to mobilize every available hand.

This is the background to Ennes' labour law of 1899. This act, which was renewed in 1914 and remained substantially unchanged until 1928, was couched in the strong moralistic terms with which all imperial legislation of the period was flavoured. Portugal had a civilizing mission and work was the most

civilizing experience that she had to offer the Africans. The law imposed the obligation to work on all but the young, the old, the chiefs, and the self-employed. Those who would not work could be contracted by the government, and if they still refused to work they became liable to correctional labour. The labour could be contracted to private firms as well as to public authorities and chiefs and officials could assist in the forming of the contracts. In addition, Africans were all liable to unpaid corvee labour on government public works. (25)

The full impact of this legislation can only be appreciated when it is realized that the Portuguese did not consider that ordinary village agricultural routines amounted to work. Marvin Harris estimated that only 7 per cent of the Africans in the Gaza district would qualify as workers if they merely remained in their villages and followed their traditional way of life.

The full effect on African society of the excessive labour demands and the uncontrolled abuses of the prazo system was not really felt until the first world war, when, in addition to all the other labour demands, the government raised an enormous number of carriers - some 25,000 from Zambesia alone. (26) Carrier service was highly unpopular and the exactions of the government and the brutal way they were levied led in 1917 to the outbreak of rebellion in Barue and Zumbo.

Barue technically formed part of the Mozambique Company's concession, but it had been directly administered by the government since its reconquest in 1902. It had become a prime area for labour recruitment and Brito Camacho, when he toured the area in 1921, freely admitted that the callous and brutal behaviour of the administration and its police had been to blame for the rising. (27)

Little changed immediately after the war, though pressure from the League of Nations and such domestic storms as that over the Hornung contract led Portugal gradually to reconsider her policies. In 1927 the Niassa Company's charter came to an end and in 1930 the government of Antonio Salazar put an end to the prazo system and brought Zambesia finally under direct state administration. In 1926 the government began to experiment with the compulsory growing of cotton by African farmers. In 1927 cotton constituted 4 per cent of Mozambique's exports, but from this time it began to replace sugar as the major product of the territory and in 1956 totalled 26 per cent of all the exports. The system of forced cotton growing was only wound up in 1965. Finally, in 1928, came a new labour code which, with modifications, was to remain in force until 1962. This retained the obligation to work and the forcible contracting of labourers but it ended unpaid labour and ended the involvement of officials in labour contracts. It also nominally tightened up the supervision of contracts and working conditions.

Forced labour was still finding an eloquent defender in 1955 when Silva Cunha published his closely argued study of Portuguese labour laws.

Africans and Labour

In the final paragraph I want to return to the question of the relationship of Africans and African society to the frenetic demands of white colonists for labour. How did Africans respond to these demands and how did they influence them? Marvin Harris thought that originally a number of factors influenced the migration of African workers from southern Mozambique - the labour pattern of their own society which gave the man a small role in agriculture, the

inheritance traditions which left younger sons short, the pressures of Portuguese labour laws, and the low wages available in Portuguese employment. Rita Ferreira argued that the tradition of labour migration existed before Portuguese administration and that it was simply a response to market forces. The only real point of disagreement between them which concerns this study is the effect of Portuguese labour laws on African migration.

There does appear to be strong evidence for the theory that employment on the mines is relatively a very attractive prospect for many Mozambique Africans and appeared so to them before they had much direct experience of Portuguese control. In spite of the poor working conditions and high death and injury rates, very large numbers of workers from southern Mozambique made the journey more than once. Freire de Andrade estimated that 50-60 per cent of workers returned to the mines, while Sheila van der Horst says that in 1933 up to 95 per cent of Mozambique mine workers had had previous experience. (28) Pointing in the same direction are two other facts. In the first two decades of gold mining 77 per cent of Portuguese African labour came from the three southern provinces of Inhambane, Gaza, and Lourenço Marques and 50 per cent from Gaza alone. (29) Yet Gaza remained exceptionally rebellious and free from Portuguese control. After the war of conquest in 1895 there was a serious rebellion in 1897 and disturbances in 1900, 1902, and 1905. On the face of it, therefore, there does not seem to be any direct relationship between oppressive labour laws and emigration, though the high emigration from Gaza might certainly be a result of military repression and disturbance. The second fact is the high rate of illegal emigration which certainly shows Africans anxious to avoid the restrictions of the formal contracts, the loss of earnings and freedom, etc., but may also indicate a surplus of supply over demand.

In Zambesia there is a much closer and more obvious relationship between the oppressive labour laws and police methods of the Portuguese and the migration of whole populations to British or Mozambique Company territory. Wiese, Freire de Andrade, and above all Castello Branco show the overwhelming African resentment at the performance of unpaid labour of any kind, even labour in lieu of taxes. Castello Branco gives a number of cases of Africans in a body refusing to work for inadequate wages, and he shows unequivocally that the Zambesi Africans knew the "rate for the job" and would not work beneath it.

Other grievances are also of a recognizably economic nature. Africans in Zambesia were well aware of the restrictive practices of the prazo companies and the swindling involved in the truck system of payment. Wiese said that a major problem was the different tariffs that existed in central Africa which made goods purchased in British territory much cheaper than those in Portuguese. Considerable smuggling took place across the frontier, with the attendant disorders. There was also the difference in tax. The head tax on the prazos was not only high in comparison with taxes in British territory but involved personal inquiry and assessment by the company police which was resented and led to all sorts of abuses.

On top of these economic complaints were the more personal ones: corporal punishment, the taking of hostages and burning of kraals to enforce payment, compulsory service in the police, but above all the ceaseless demands for labour and more labour. Brito Camacho said that in Barue the Africans used to say that monkeys did not talk or live in houses like humans because they were afraid of having to do forced labour for the Portuguese.

In Zambesia African resentment at the system led not only to complaints but to rebellion, to evasion of every kind, and to migration.

Conclusions

- a) The export of labour to South Africa was a policy which the Portuguese government had no option but to accept.
- b) Excessive labour demands were localized in areas under direct government control. This led to a complete failure to achieve economic development in those areas and, in Barue, to serious rebellion.
- c) The prazo system, which was an imaginative attempt to develop Mozambique's own potential, failed largely through maladministration and the flight of Africans to the relatively better prospects and conditions in British territory - a fact which materially contributed to the decision to allow Rhodesia to recruit labour under contract in 1914.
- d) The view expressed by many writers, and by Silva Cunha for the Portuguese as late as 1955, that Africans would not work and did not respond to wage incentives is not borne out by the facts. At an early period Africans showed an acute appreciation of the state of the market and for labour and for goods.
- e) By refusing to offer their services and by illegally emigrating, Africans materially influenced the development of Mozambique and the policy of the Portuguese.

-----oOo-----

Notes

- (1) Francis Wilson, Labour in the South African Gold Mines (Cambridge, 1972), 70.
- (2) Pedro Muralha, Terras de Africa (Lisbon, 1925), 367.
- (3) For example, Thos. Burt, A Visit to the Transvaal (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1905). A. A. Freire de Andrade, Relatorios sobre Mocambique, 2nd ed. (Lourenço Marques, 1949), Vol. 1, 57.
- (4) S. van der Horst, Native Labour in South Africa (Oxford, 1924), 102-112.
- (5) Lord Hailey, An African Survey (Oxford, 1938), 653-4.
- (6) Marvin Harris, "Labour Emigration among the Mocambique Thonga: cultural and political factors", Africa, xxix, 1959, 50.
- (7) J. Mousinho de Albuquerque, Mocambique (Lisbon, 1899), 103.
- (8) A. Rita-Ferreira, "Labour Emigration among the Mocambique Thonga: comments on a study by Marvin Harris", Africa, xxx, 1960, 146.
- (9) W. V. Brelsford, "Harrison Clark: king of Northern Rhodesia", The Northern Rhodesia Journal, 1954, 13-31.
- (10) H. Crawford Angus, "A Year in Azimba and Chipitaland ...", Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 1898, 317.
- (11) Freire de Andrade, Relatorios ..., op. cit., 118.
- (12) For a discussion of the negotiations leading to the modus vivendi and the Mozambique-Transvaal Convention, see J. Duffy, A Question of Slavery (Oxford, 1967), 141-159.

- (13) Freire de Andrade, Relatorios ..., op. cit., 70.
- (14) Ibid., 256.
- (15) J. M. da Silva Cunha, O Trabalho Indigena (Lisbon, 1955), 249.
- (16) Freire de Andrade, Relatorios ..., op. cit., 257-9, 289.
- (17) Antonio Ennes, Mozambique (Lisbon, 1893), in 1913 ed., 16.
- (18) Ennes' prazo legislation in printed in Regimen dos Prazos da Coroa (Lisbon, 1897) and it is extensively discussed in R. Hammond, Portugal and Africa (Stanford, 1966), and in M. Newitt, Portuguese Settlement on the Zambesi (London, 1973), chaps. 19 & 20.
- (19) Freire de Andrade, Relatorios ..., op. cit., 244-51.
- (20) A de Portugal Durao, "O Districto de Quelimane", Bol. da Soc. de Geografia de Lisboa, v-vi, 1914, 175.
- (21) Mozambique (London, HMSO, 1920), prepared by historical section of the Foreign Office, 85.
- (23) F. X. F. de Castello Branco, "Relatorio das Investigacoes ..." in Relatorios Anneixos ao Boletim Official, 1909. Carl Wiese, "Zambezia", Bol. da Soc. de Geografia de Lisboa, vii, 1907, 241-7.
- (24) A discussion of the Hornung contract in Brito Camacho, Mozambique Problemas Coloniais, 73-116.
- (25) There is a full discussion of Portuguese labour legislation in Silva Cunha, O Trabalho Indigena.
- (26) F. Gavicho de Lacerda, Cartas de Zambezia, 2nd ed. (Lisbon, 1923), 14.
- (27) Brito Camacho, Terra de Lendas (Lisbon, 1925), 176, 200-201.
- (28) Freire de Andrade, Relatorios ..., op. cit., 68; van der Horst, Native Labour ..., op. cit., 214.
- (29) Freire de Andrade, Relatorios ..., op. cit., 62-5, 289, 297.