

The Anti-Lusotropicalist Good Fortune of a Mozambican Dissertation¹

José Luís Cabaço, *Moçambique: Identidade, Colonialismo e Libertação*, preface by Omar Ribeiro Thomaz. São Paulo: Editora Unesp/ANPOCS, 2009, 360 pp., ISBN: 978-85-7139-952-5.

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Translated from Portuguese by Colin Darch

The book in question is the published version of a doctoral dissertation defended at the University of São Paulo (USP) by a former leader of the Mozambican Liberation Front (Frelimo). It received the prize for the 'best doctoral dissertation' of 2008 in that year's competition organised by the *Associação Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* (Brazilian Association for the Social Sciences or ANPOCS). Its success in Brazil is undoubtedly a result of the detailed analysis that tears 'Lusotropicalism' to pieces, mainly insofar as it applies to Africa.

The dissertation must be put in context, given that it was defended in Brazil after the author resumed his studies in that country, decades after having been compelled to abandon them in order to join the liberation movement. Brazil, of course, was the motherland of Gilberto Freyre, the essayist whose life spanned the whole of the twentieth century. Freyre was the author of numerous works about the ambiguous links between land-owners and slaves or 'servants' in Brazil's patriarchal slave-owning society and afterwards, and was the progenitor of the theory of 'Lusotropicalism', which was famous at that time and which he attempted to export from Brazil to the Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia. Freyre demarcated a 'cultural area', which, although extremely fragmented territorially and ethnically heterogeneous, was nonetheless unified by the 'specific methods' of colonisation by the Portuguese, who were supposedly better adapted than other Europeans to integration in the tropics. The proof of this would be 'miscegenation' (*mestiçagem*). Subsequently, in the 1950s, the Salazar regime in Portugal, after some hesitation, tried to adopt the theory, which praised cultural and even biological miscegenation (under White hegemony), in order to demonstrate that the Lusitanian project was not merely a simple imposition of Whites, but a universalist, non-colonial, non-racist project, because of the 'specificity' of these southern Europeans, the Portuguese. In addition, for a while many sociologists, anthropologists and historians – including French ones – were very keen on

1 This is a translation of an article in Portuguese that will be published in March 2014 in *Afro-Ásia*, the journal of the Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais at the Universidade Federal da Bahia in Salvador, Brazil (ISSN: 1981-1911; see <http://www.afroasia.ufba.br>). A shorter version has been published in French in *Outre-Mers: Revue d'Histoire* [Paris], 380/381, Dec. 2013.

Lusotropicalism.² Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that immediately after the Second World War the idea of miscegenation as the foundation of a new civilisation was little more than titillating, given that Europe had struggled to abandon the racial theories of the decade between 1930 and 1940. In fact, rather than miscegenation as such, what Freyre exalted was the patriarchal model of the previous colonial age, which he contrasted with the savagery of modern capitalism. This, incidentally, was why he expressed, as a young man, positive opinions about the 'Old South' in the United States. His nostalgia was aesthetic, although he had created a model of 'ethnic and social democracy'.³ A careful reading of his work reveals the explicit way in which miscegenation was conceived in the first place, although not exclusively, as an expansion of the European Portuguese character. Both in Brazil itself and elsewhere in the West, the model was successful in presenting a *likeable* Brazil.

It was for these reasons that José Luís Cabaço was obliged to show – following on precisely from the Angolan sociologist Mário Pinto de Andrade – that despite its popularity in the West, Lusotropicalism had a very feeble influence on the African generation that emerged in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, and which led the struggle in the Portuguese colonies. Lusotropicalism was immediately condemned by these anti-colonialists, who had no intention of creating 'new Brazils', not even in Cape Verde. As Omar Ribeiro Thomaz writes in his preface to the book, after the struggle began 'Lusotropicalism was not a concern for the national liberation movements. It attracted attention only for what it really was: an ideology for the perpetuation of Portuguese colonial power' (p.16).⁴ It is an historical fact that Lusotropicalism did not play an important role in the intellectual development of this generation.

Having said this, it is possibly surprising that at such a late date, in 2008, this criticism of Lusotropicalism as applied to Africa could have such a loud resonance. In fact, Lusotropicalism and its political tradition of 'ethno-social democracy' have been dismissed for many years now as a denial of social and racial segregation in Brazil – or at least as an explicit attempt to 'relativise' it – and *a fortiori* without any basis whatsoever in Africa. Lusotropicalism no longer has any defenders in the international research community. On the other hand, writings that attack Lusotropicalism abound in the global north,⁵ as they do in Brazil,⁶ at least *as far as its application to Brazil itself is concerned*. In view of this, can it be possible that this critique of Lusotropicalism, exported to Africa by Freyre, can still have some appearance of novelty, as if it has broken free of its taboo status in the Brazilian social science research literature? The answer is clearly 'yes', as the history of José Luís Cabaço's book demonstrates.

As reported by the Mozambican weekly newspaper *Savana*, Cabaço completed an undergraduate sociology degree at the University of Trento, in Italy, in 1971. In 2001,

2 L. Febvre, the director of *Annales*, wrote a wildly enthusiastic preface to the French edition of Freyre's *Casa grande e Senzala* [Big House and Slave Quarters], translated by R. Bastide and published as *Maîtres et Esclaves, la Formation de la Société Brésilienne* by Gallimard in 1952.

3 Although Freyre used the phrase 'racial democracy' a few times, it was not his and he always preferred the first expression.

4 Translator's note: This preface does not appear in the Mozambican edition (Maputo: Marimbique, 2010).

5 Apart from the classic account by G. J. Bender, *Angola under the Portuguese: the myth and the reality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), see also, for example, the rich dossier 'Lusotropicalisme: Idéologies Coloniales et Identités Nationales dans les Mondes Lusophones' in D. Couto, A. Enders and Y. Léonard, eds., *Lusotopie* (Paris: Karthala, 1997), 4, 195-478, available at: <http://www.lusotopie.sciencespo-bordeaux.fr/somma97.html>; and C. Castelo, *O Modo Português de Estar no Mundo: o Lusotropicalismo e a Ideologia Colonial Portuguesa, 1933-1961* (Porto: Afrontamento, 1998).

6 To begin with, the classic work by F. Fernandes, *A Integração do Negro na Sociedade de Classes* (São Paulo: Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letra da Universidade de São Paulo, 1964).

he applied to do a master's in anthropology at the University of São Paulo (USP). However, the higher degrees committee (*Conselho Acadêmico*) of the university, after considering his resumé, offered him direct entry into the doctoral programme in anthropology. Cabaço completed the disciplinary coursework for the degree in 2002, and defended his dissertation in 2007, supervised by Professor Kabengele Munanga.⁷ It passed with the highest honours and was recommended for publication.⁸ By themselves, the quality of Cabaço's work and its subject matter, which integrates a reflection on the process of Mozambican liberation with a critique of the Lusotropicalist ideas of Gilberto Freyre, explain the high distinction awarded by USP. In any case, the year after the dissertation was defended, in October 2008, twenty works competed in Caxambu, Minas Gerais, at the 32nd ANPOCS conference, and Cabaço's dissertation was awarded the prize for the best work in the social sciences.⁹ It was published in 2009. Although the book has not attracted many reviews in academic journals,¹⁰ it is frequently cited in Brazilian articles about Mozambique.

With regard to the critique of Lusotropicalism, what we find in Cabaço's work is what we expect to find: a condemnation of the denial of racialised social relations, and so on. However, we also find another, extremely interesting element in the critique: the analysis of the profound cultural determinism of Gilberto Freyre. Cabaço describes, for example, Freyre's visit to Lunda, at that time a district of the Angolan Diamond Company (*Companhia dos Diamantes de Angola* or Diamang). The Brazilian sociologist was horrified by the conditions and exploitation of Africans, and denounced these in his book *Aventura e Rotina*. However, his protest was not based on an examination of the functioning of modern colonial capitalism: it rested rather on an analysis of Belgian influence, given that Lunda lay on the frontier with the then Belgian Congo. The Portuguese in the area had soon abandoned their mild manners because of the geographical proximity of the northern European model. Another example is Cabaço's criticism of Freyre when he discovered that blacks were forbidden to enter the Polana Hotel, where he himself was staying, in Lourenço Marques. Again, Freyre's explanation was culturally determined: it was South African influence that explained this prohibition, not a policy decision by the *Governo Geral de Moçambique*, the Portuguese colonial administration, to please its rich clients.

Apart from the critical analysis of Lusotropicalism and its annexation by the Salazar regime in its African colonies, another theme probably caught the attention of the ANPOCS selection committee:¹¹ the subject of relations between blacks and whites, not only in general terms, but also in the details of daily life. Indeed, this was absolutely correctly understood by L. M. Veiga, in one of the book reviews already mentioned:

7 All the members of the examining committee – Wilson do Nascimento Barbosa, Beluce Bellucci, Lourenço Joaquim da Costa Rosário and Carlos Moreira Henriques Serrano, as well as the supervisor, Kabengele Munanga – have a sensibility toward the problematic of anti-colonial struggle in Africa.

8 *Savana*, Maputo, 5 Oct. 2007.

9 M. S. Ridenti, *Relatório Técnico-Científico, 32º Encontro Anual da ANPOCS* (Caxambu, Minas Gerais, 27-31 Oct. 2008).

10 I am aware of three reviews, all of them published in Brazilian journals: L. M. Veiga, 'Uma Obra de Referência sobre Moçambique', *Revista Crioula* 8, Nov. 2010; S. M. de Almeida-Santos, 'A Invenção de Moçambique', *Revista de Antropologia da USP* 53, 2, 2010, 779-786; P. Fry, 'Pontos de Vista sobre a Descolonização em Moçambique', *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, 26, 76, Jun. 2011, 207-211.

11 ANPOCS did not publish a report explaining its reasoning in selecting the best dissertation – or at least I have not found one, despite trying; hence the provisional phrasing of this sentence.

Another way of reading this book, taking into account the work of Albert Memmi, is as a new portrait of colonized and coloniser, but now focussing on the case of [S]outhern Africa, and with both similarities and differences from the portrait of colonialism mainly in north Africa. One of the similarities that we can see in the work of the Mozambican José Luís Cabaço, the Franco-Tunisian Albert Memmi and the Martinican (and we can also say Algerian-African by adoption) Frantz Fanon is the fact that we find, apart from political, sociological and anthropological reflections, signs of the authors' own experience, personal testimony woven into the subject matter.¹²

There is no doubt that the book has its strong points. It is interesting and easy to read, which is in part due to the fact – as Veiga correctly points out – that the author is able to rely on his own memories as a Frelimo militant, but which he always uses openly and scrupulously. Nevertheless, his arguments against Lusotropicalism are not all that new, if, as we have already emphasised, we take into account the international historiography – and not just Brazilian work – of the last twenty years. Any reader who is a specialist in this field will be disappointed, although the book must be recommended to the wider community of social scientists as an invitation to reflection.

As a former Frelimo leader, Cabaço's virtue is that he has not followed the example of many of his colleagues, who have in the last few years published multiple 'memoirs' without so much as a hint of reflection on the history of their movement. At the same time, they have allegedly done so in order to 'not leave it to outsiders to write our history', and they all finish their stories exactly in 1974-1975, the date of decolonisation. José Luís Cabaço does not like memoirs, which is a pity. Nonetheless, he wanted to think about his experiences, after many years of political activity, from an academic viewpoint. While the entire work tends to confirm completely the ideas of Frelimo, the vision is nevertheless a nuanced one, since the genesis of his ideas and the difficulties of implementing them are subjected to analysis.

While the book may be convincing with regard to the analysis of Lusotropicalism and race relations on the one hand, it raises serious questions, on the other, about several aspects of Mozambican history. I shall begin with a methodological criticism. The history of Frelimo was not linear, as the author himself shows, and there were serious crises during the early years, although the party has remained surprisingly stable since 1975 despite sudden changes of circumstances. In fact, apart from the text by the Front's then vice-president, Uria Simango denouncing its internal practices, written at the time that he became a dissident and which Cabaço only mentions in passing, the book relies on written and oral sources only from the side of the victors, and hence favourable to them. Cabaço's entire analysis of the defeated dissidents rests exclusively on texts and accounts written by the victorious tendency within Frelimo. However, after the change to political pluralism from 1992 to 1994, it became possible to interview surviving opposition figures, or to research their writings in the

12 Veiga, 'Uma Obra de Referência'.

archives of the SCCIM and the DGS in the *Torre do Tombo* archive in Lisbon.¹³ The imbalance regarding sources would have remained obvious, but it would have been reduced had the author followed such leads; in any case, the methodological problem should have been taken into account.

This error leads roughly but systematically to the reproduction of the official version of history as it has been promoted by the top Frelimo leadership, a version that presents the confrontation of the late 1960s between Marxist political combatants ('urbanites') and the so-called 'pure nationalists' ('ruralites') as being a conflict between modernity and agents of tradition such as chiefs. However, this is contradicted by the facts. Lázaro Nkavandame, the Makonde chieftain¹⁴ who broke with Frelimo and subsequently surrendered to the Portuguese, was not a traditional leader but a perfectly modern trader and businessman who had learned from his experience of British colonial capitalism during a period of emigration in Tanganyika. The Makonde 'traditional chiefs' – who had, moreover, extremely low hierarchical status in the almost leaderless polity of the Makonde – were not all that 'traditional' given that (as Cabaço notes, quoting Luís de Brito), many of them remained loyal to the 'radicalised' Frelimo after Nkavandame's desertion. Uria Simango, the Frelimo vice-president already mentioned above, who also became a dissident although he never surrendered to the Portuguese, was not a 'traditionalist' in any sense, whether politically or in terms of his social connections. He was a Congregationalist minister trained in Mozambique and Rhodesia, whose career, moreover, was 'urban' and completely comparable, in fact, to that of Eduardo Mondlane, the first president of Frelimo who was assassinated on February 3, 1969. It is perfectly possible, of course, that there were tensions between modernisers and traditionalists. But such a contradiction, which has yet to be documented, does not explain the serious crisis of 1968 to 1970. The crisis had more to do with differences about *alternative paths to modernity* between the politicised combatants (Portuguese-speaking, urban, often southerners, coming from the lower levels of the service sector or the Portuguese colonial civil service), and a tiny urban or commercial elite (who were not civil servants, were sometimes peasants, spoke Portuguese badly or spoke English, having been trained in British colonies, and often came from the central or northern parts of the 'country').¹⁵ The strength of Eduardo Mondlane, apart from his obvious personal qualities, was his ability to unite these tendencies. He was a southerner, but had not worked in the colonial civil service; he was the son of a traditional chief, educated mainly in South Africa and the United States; he had the support of the US State Department, but he was an ally of the 'modernisers' who were becoming more and more Marxist. This very ability to unite was the main reason that led the DGS to assassinate him.¹⁶

The book, which concerns itself with the dialectic between the liberation struggle and identity, might, therefore, have been much richer and better documented on the

13 SCCIM (*Serviço de Centralização e Coordenação de Informações de Moçambique* or Mozambican Information Centralisation and Co-ordination Service) and the DGS (*Direção Geral de Segurança* or General Security Directorate), and the former PIDE (*Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado* or International and State Defence Police) were respectively the intelligence service and the feared political police of the Portuguese dictatorship.

14 The Makonde are a people in northern Mozambique and southern Tanganyika who were early recruits in the struggle.

15 The quotes around the word 'country' may be justified by the fact that we are dealing at this time with a colonial space and not a national one, the relevance of which was non-existent for a large proportion of the population.

16 It is worth noting that Fry, in his review, completely accepts the distinction between a traditional and racialising 'rural revolt', and a modern and anti-colonial 'urban protest'. See his 'Pontos de vista', 208.

various trajectories of anti-colonialism. Apart from this, some shortcuts might have been avoided, such as the ‘tribalism-was-invented-by-the-colonialists’ thesis – as if African societies needed to wait for the arrival of the Europeans to recognise a wide variety of identities and their consequent divisions. Incidentally this approach creates a serious difficulty with regard to the district of Zambézia. The author recounts how the Portuguese only tried to recruit the Muslim elites of north-eastern Mozambique quite late, but quite effectively, in a move that created severe problems for Frelimo’s penetration to the south of Cabo Delgado district (further north), and in Nampula district (also further north, and bordering Cabo Delgado to the south).¹⁷ However, he includes Zambézia in this story in order to explain Frelimo’s weakness there; the Front would consequently have been obliged to ‘jump over’ these three areas in order to deploy in Tete in the centre-west, and then advance southwards into what was then the district of Manica e Sofala. However, the Islamic community is very much a minority in Zambézia, with the exception of the area around the former Sultanate of Angoche. Frelimo opened a military front in Zambézia in 1964, but failed to sustain it. This was, on the one hand, because of its inability to protect the populations in western Zambézia that supported it right from the beginning, and on the other, because of the highly specific colonial social formation in Lower Zambézia, which supported assimilatory anti-colonialism – reminiscent in a different context of Aimé Césaire – but which was not separatist. While it is true that few people in Zambézia supported the liberation struggle, and that many continue even today to vote for the opposition, this has absolutely nothing to do with Islam or with ethnicity as such. Apart from some advances, such as the dissertation of Sérgio Chichava, to cite an example,¹⁸ the history of the associative movements of Zambézia, which were reformist but not separatist, has still to be written. The author, like many others, completely ignores them, and mentions only the African associations of the capital in the far south.

One question is never posed – nor even simply mentioned – which is nevertheless fundamental to the dynamics of identity, and that is the question of the single party. Indeed, it was clear from the outset that the unity needed for the struggle could not be anything other than a sort of mandatory uniqueness as a crucible of ‘nationhood’. The ideology of the single party was implicit in Frelimo right from its very foundation in 1962.¹⁹ The dissident groups did the same thing: we are dealing with a competition to see which one would be the single party. The fact that ‘it was like that’, and that in this period the Western democracies, the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity – and not merely the wicked communists – all supported the single-party principle, especially as a way of exclusively recognising this or that movement as the ‘only legitimate representative of the people of ...’ which made financial and military support viable – all this should not prevent a historian or a sociologist from analyzing the deleterious effects of this principle during the struggle and after independence. This is extremely important, given that the discussion about the single-party principle is almost a replica or transference of the discussion about

17 In this regard, see the fascinating book by A. Vakil, F. Amaro Monteiro and M. A. Machaqueiro, *Moçambique: Memória Falada do Islão e da Guerra* (Coimbra: Almedina, 2011).

18 S. Chichava, ‘Le “Vieux Mozambique” : l’Identité Politique de la Zambézie’ (Ph.D. thesis, Université Montesquieu Bordeaux 4, 2007).

19 Significantly, FRELIMO adopted, from its very first statutes, the Stalinist concept of ‘democratic centralism’ even though it only became a Marxist-Leninist party some 15 years later.

the kind of nation that is to be constructed: either a homogenous nation, produced in quick time by the 'new man' from a model of authoritarian modernization that denies the earlier, pre-colonial nationhoods, or the nation produced by a slow merging of diverse identities in the bosom of the Republic, experienced as a guarantee of freedom and social progress? One has the impression, moreover, that the 'nation' simply appears on Independence Day. The book reproduces the confusion – widespread in the social sciences – between anti-colonialism and nationalism, between Republic and nation, between nation and nation-state.²⁰ The nation is not considered to be the historical crystallisation of identity/identities: it is Frelimo which appears as the creator of the nation – and not merely of the State and the independent Republic – overshadowing the dialectic between identities experienced in pre-colonial nations (which are habitually called 'ethnicities') and the community of anti-colonial sentiment, generated by the struggle waged by Frelimo. In different words, this is what S. M. de Almeida-Santos argues in his review:

The political agenda of Frelimo aimed to eliminate 'tribes' in order to create space for the 'nation' (p. 280), but the invention of a nation-state did not eliminate the old relationships between African lineages, and on this point, the research leaves something to be desired. What was the contribution made by African traditions to the social history of Mozambique, to its identity, to its liberation? The complex relationships between the African population and the so-called 'traditional authorities', as well as the relationship between these same 'traditional authorities' and the colonial authorities are only explored superficially. The macroscopic view of 'Mozambique' may have prevented our author from being able to see microscopic 'Mozambiques'. Some passages in the book seem to say that African peoples are mere passive populations who only watch while their 'culture' is annihilated by the White colonizers.²¹

One has the impression, to some degree, that Cabaço did not know, or did not want to know, 'how far is too far'²² – in order not to have to deconstruct his own life, which was, unusually, that of a young White man who joined the African anti-colonial struggle in 1967. This is not only an outcome of the methodological difficulties entailed in his having been a direct witness and a participant, given that he was fully aware of them when writing his dissertation, scrupulously indicating what is based on sources and what is based on memory – which is what gives the book its richness. The fact is that in analysing the political history of Frelimo up to 1975, Cabaço does not distance himself – or at least does not distance himself sufficiently – from the Front's paradigm of authoritarian modernisation (modernity versus tradition). This paradigm was a veritable *political culture* that travelled through the transformation from 'nationalism' to 'revolutionary nationalism', from this to 'Marxism-Leninism' and finally to the 'self-esteem' of the current neo-liberal discourse.

20 See my critique of these confusions in my article 'Lutte Armée d'Émancipation Anti-coloniale ou Mouvement de Libération Nationale? Processus Historique et Discours Idéologique : le Cas des Colonies Portugaises, et du Mozambique en Particulier', *Revue Historique*, 315, 1, 637, Jan. 2006, 113-138, available at <http://www.cairn.info/revue-historique-2006-1-page-113.htm>.

21 S. M. de Almeida-Santos, 'A invenção de Moçambique', 784.

22 Translator's note: in the original French: '*jusqu'ou ne pas aller trop loin*'.

From this point of view, it is a pity that the narrative stops in 1975. The reader of these lines should know that within Frelimo Cabaço was, when he was a leader, one of the extremely rare personalities who attempted to develop a *social* understanding of the internal conflict that was ravaging the country and that was caused, among other things, precisely by the effects of authoritarian modernising processes. A second volume is therefore needed beginning in 1975 and continuing up to, let us say, 1991, the year when Cabaço left active politics, and which would make possible the discussion of the question raised by Peter Fry, in the course of a highly favourable book review:

[...] it would have been better if the author had treated the concept of emancipation as relative. After all, it can be argued that while Mozambicans freed themselves from Portuguese colonial rule, in the sense of winning political independence, they did not stop being subsequently submitted to other forms of coercive government control. Frelimo's socialist option produced a highly centralised and planning-oriented regime that was, perhaps even more insistent about the 'truth' of socialism than the Portuguese settlers had been regarding their Catholicism. As I have argued, I do not see much difference between the assimilation policies of the Portuguese during 'colonial times' and the policy of turning Mozambicans into socialist 'new men' throughout the 'Samora times'.²³

José Luís Cabaço is 'opposed to memoirs' and therefore chose to express himself through a doctoral dissertation. But it is exactly because he himself is able to draw a distinction between history and memory/memoirs – which his old fellow travelers, who are now writing their life stories by the dozen, absolutely cannot do, convinced as they are that they themselves *are* history – that he must write his own, dare I say, memoirs, and by no means end the story in 1975. Would it be taboo for a Mozambican who remains loyal to the 'great family' of Frelimo, to say nothing of the party as a party, to reflect on the questions and processes of post-independence identity, and to do so through an autobiography?²⁴

23 Fry, 'Pontos de vista', 208-209.

24 Fry prints a private letter from Cabaço in which he recounts his activities in the directorate of the *Associação dos Naturais de Moçambique* ('Pontos de vista', 208-210). Other 'analytical memories' of colonial times by Cabaço can be found in his article 'Violência Atmosférica e Violências Subjectivas: uma Experiência Pessoal', *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, 26, 76, Jun. 2011, 213-218. See also the interview 'A PIDE não Desconfiava de um Branco da Polana' in the newspaper *O País*, Maputo, 28 Feb. 2012, available at <http://opais.sapo.mz/index.php/politica/63-politica/19231-a-pide-nao-desconfiava-de-um-branco-da-polana.html>. On the post-colonial period, some information may be found in another interview with Cabaço, in the same newspaper for 29 Apr. 2009: 'Machel Assumiu um Cariz Autoritário', a title clearly assigned by a sub-editor, available at <http://www.opais.co.mz/index.php/entrevistas/76-entrevistas/902-machel-assumiu-um-cariz-autoritario.html>.