

## The Kitwe Papers:

# Race Relations and Portuguese Colonial Policy, With Special Reference to Mozambique

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### Portuguese Claims and Actuality

The Portuguese have for many years tried to project a picture of themselves as a nation without racial prejudice; their government at home and overseas as never having tolerated any racial, ethnic or religious bigotries or discriminations. According to Gilberto Freyre, a well-known Brazilian historian and leader of those who support this point of view, Portugal's Roman Catholic tradition, plus her long contact with world cultures and races, uniquely equipped her to cope with peoples of various racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds without conflict. From this Gilberto Freyre goes on to propound a theory of luso-tropicalism by which people of Lusitanian (Portuguese) background were preordained to lead the world towards racial harmony and to build a far flung empire composed of peoples of various colors, religions and speaking different languages.

A few years ago Dr. Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, Prime Minister of Portugal, stated: "These contacts have never involved the slightest idea of superiority or racial discrimination . . . I think I can say that the distinguishing feature of Portuguese Africa—notwithstanding the concerted efforts made in many quarters to attack it by word as well as by action—is the primacy which we have always attached and will continue to attach to the enhancement of the value and dignity of man without distinction of colour or creed in the light of the principles of the civilization we carried to the populations who were in every way distant to ourselves."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the preambles of practically all of the frequent Portuguese ground-laws, decrees and statutes or amendments to these, affecting their overseas territories make unctuous references to the "heterogeneous composition of the Portuguese people, their traditional community . . . the Christian ideal of brotherhood, which was always (sic) at the base of our overseas expansion, early defined our reaction to other societies and cultures, and stamped it, from the beginning, with a marked respect for the manners and customs of the peoples we encountered."<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to this idyllic picture is the actual situation in all the three colonies of Portugal in Africa—Angola, Mozambique and Guinea (Bissau)—whose clearly defined socio-economic structures run along the racial, religious and linguistic lines typical of all colonial situations. The Portuguese

Government, suspecting that the facts of the situation in their African colonies may not conform to their favoured image, has assiduously blocked the efforts of social scientists who have tried to enter Mozambique, Angola and Guinea (Bissau) with the declared intent of carrying out on-the-spot researches. Therefore, evidence of race relations in Portuguese colonies cannot as yet be expected to derive from objective studies by outside social scientists.

However, during the last fifteen years a number of determined British and American scholars have somehow managed to gather sufficient initial information to continue their studies of Portuguese colonial practices to the point where they could publish important monographs. These scholars are: **C. R. Boxer**, Camoes Professor of Portuguese at the University of London, England; **James Duffy**, Professor of Romance Languages at Brandeis University, USA; and **Marvin Harris**, Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University, USA. The work of these scholars has helped not only to suggest the existence of a picture of race relations in the Portuguese colonies radically different from that presented by the Portuguese and their apologists, but also to stimulate a great deal of interest and activity among students of human behaviour in probing behind the facade of Portuguese luso-tropicalism.

In the following few pages I shall try to combine my role as a student of human behaviour with the advantage which I have as a native-born Mozambican, to present a picture of what I consider to be the true situation regarding race relations in Mozambique.

### The Social Factors

There are three social factors which are the most important forces determining relations between individuals and groups in present-day Southern African society and on the basis of which all meaningful societal relations can be understood, namely **Race**, (as characterized mainly by a person's skin color and general physical characteristics), **Politics** and **Economics**.

It is only after an objective analysis of the role played by these three factors that we can determine the form and value of any relations between groups in any country in Mozambique, Angola and, for that matter, Rhodesia and South Africa. In colonial Africa, including all of Africa before independence, the power relations between individuals and groups were, since the arrival of

the first European settlers, determined first and foremost by the color of the skin of the individuals involved; secondly by the amount of political power which they could wield, and lastly by the material possessions which they had hoarded for themselves.

Anyone who tries to describe the relations between Europeans or people with predominant Caucasoid racial characteristics and Africans or people with features tending towards Negroid characteristics will soon find himself describing power and economic relations between them.

Therefore, in Mozambique, according to the **Junta de Investigacao do Ultramar**, a Portuguese Government agency, in its monograph **Promocao Social em Mocambique**,<sup>3</sup> there are three distinct socio-economic strata, distributed in a pyramidal manner; thus,

(a) A minority population quantitatively—about 2.5 per cent of the total population. This group is composed of Europeans (Caucasoids), Asians (Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, etc.), the lighter-complexioned and better educated Mulattoes, and a very few Africans (including a very small number of comparatively well-educated Africans). In this group are a thoroughly Europeanized population, most of whom live in the urban areas or in the modern agricultural and mining areas. Most are in either the public service, the business trades or in enterprises from which the State derives a greater proportion of its public revenues.

(b) A numerical minority—3.5 per cent—composed of elements of various races, but above all Africans, tending to live in the peripheries of the most important cities. Practically all the Africans composing this population are of rural origin, still in the throes of detribalization, i.e., abandoning at least partially the cultural and social habits of their origin. Being wage-earners they represent an incipient proletariat.

(c) The largest group—94 per cent—is composed of the Africans, we might as well say all of the African population. They are all peasants, living on a basically subsistence economy, supplemented from time to time by some wage-work, mostly of a migratory nature. Among this group are a small number who are cash-earning peasant farmers. These are residents of the tribal regions, governed by tribal chiefs following traditional law.<sup>4</sup>

As can be seen, the Mozambican multiracial/multicultural population is distributed in about the same way as all populations living in a typically colonial situation in which there is a politically, economically and therefore socially dominant group, usually a minority, who control the means of production and distribution and enjoy the fruits of the labor of the majority. All of Southern Africa, the Portuguese colonies, South Africa and Rhodesia, is in this kind of situation.

### **The Historical Process**

The historical process which preceded this racial-socio-economic structure follows the same lines as that of similar situations in Southern Af-

rica. Its main features in the special case of Mozambique are as follows:

Early in the 16th century the Portuguese decided to build a maritime and commercial empire for the purpose of getting an upper hand in the flow of spices from the East. In carrying out this mission, the Portuguese kings discovered not only new continents and peoples but also new and probably more lucrative sources of wealth: the slaves of West Africa, the ivory and gold of East Africa and the sugar, tobacco and gold of the New World. Because the peoples of the countries in which these sources of wealth were found were not willing to hand them over to the Portuguese intruders, it became necessary to attack the natives and destroy their political machinery, before the empire could be built.

In this connexion it might be interesting to note, following Professor Boxer, that "for centuries the most common official term for the Portuguese overseas possessions was **As Conquistas**", meaning **The Conquests**, regardless of how they were acquired.<sup>5</sup>

From the first hours of their arrival in Mozambique in 1498, the Portuguese sought to establish themselves as a power over the various East African communities which they found. Since their main purpose in coming to East Africa was to find new sources of wealth and control its flow to Europe, it was necessary that they should identify and destroy the military or political power of whoever was in control before them. At that time the people of Mozambique were divided into the following three socio-economic classes: the Arabs, who controlled most of the trade between the hinterland and the outside world; the Swahilis, who were the main traders between the continental Africans and the coastal and insular Arabs, and the Africans, who composed the majority of the population. First the Portuguese clashed with the Arabs. In 1508, a Portuguese official wrote to the king, from the island of Mozambique, advising him to use every means possible to do away with the "respectable Moors" from East Africa, since they were dangerous competitors. The same official found the Swahilis acceptable and thought they could remain without damaging Portuguese interests, since "they are like animals, and satisfied with gaining a handful of maize, nor can they harm us, and they can be used for any kind of work and treated like slaves."<sup>6</sup>

After a number of years the Portuguese had managed to establish control over the East African coast from Malindi to Sofala, using every means then available to them, from being friendly to the African people to using force where peaceful means failed to achieve their purpose.

However, after the political and economic influence of the Arabs had been thoroughly eliminated, the Portuguese turned against the Swahilis, whom they had earlier considered harmless. They were now in a position to deal directly with the mainland Africans who brought the gold and ivory from the interior. But they did not succeed,

for the Swahilis had been firmly established along the coast for several hundred years, had intermarried with the people from the hinterland, and were therefore far better integrated than the Portuguese.<sup>7</sup>

From time to time even the services of missionaries were harnessed to help pacify the native populations through conversion into the Christian religion; failing this an excuse was always found to justify the use of force. General J. J. T. Botelho, an official historian for the Portuguese Government, tells of the 16th century military expedition which was sent to East Africa under the leadership of two famous Portuguese navigators, Pedro Alvares Cabral, the discoverer of Brazil, and Bartholomew Dias, the first European to round the southern cape of Africa, which he named Cape of Storms and later renamed the Cape of Good Hope. It is interesting to note the composition of the military expedition and its norm of procedure as given by the king. Aside from its two outstanding captains the expedition was accompanied by a Father, who later became Bishop Henrique, six Franciscan friars, ten chaplains and military forces. Although the expedition's main purpose was to conquer East Africa, the king's orders for its procedure included, *inter alia*, the following specification: that the regiment of Pedro Alvares Cabral had "to convert the idolatrous (sic) Moors to Catholicism, and if spiritual arms should not succeed, to utilize the material power of the sword."<sup>8</sup> (Botelho, J. J. T., *Historia Militar e Politica dos Portugueses em Mocambique das Descobertas a 1883*; Lisbon: Centro Tipografico Colonial, 1934, p. 51).

By the middle of the 18th century the control of East Africa by the Portuguese, especially of the central part of present-day Mozambique, was so definite, and the real purpose of the "conquest" of the area was so certain, that Alexander Hamilton, a British chronicler of the time, had this to say of the relations between the Africans and the Portuguese:

"They (the Africans) have large, strong bodies and limbs, and are very bold in war. They'll have commerce with none but the Portuguese, who keep a few priests along the sea coasts, that overawe the silly Natives and get their teeth (elephant tusks) and gold for trifles, and send what they get to Mocambique (Island)."<sup>9</sup>

Lest someone distrust the opinion of a Briton such as Hamilton, being a potential competitor with the Portuguese for the same market, note what Joào Baptista de Moutaury, a Portuguese, had to say about the relations between the same people some seventy years later:

"In general, all the Kaffirs of Sena, who are either slaves of the settlers or else tributary vassals of the State, are docile and friendly to the Portuguese, whom they call Muzungos. They dislike anyone who is not a Portuguese, . . . This dislike derives from a superstitious fear that the Portuguese have spread among them, telling them that all the Mafutos (non-Portuguese white for-

eigners) eat the Negroes, and other absurd tales which they implicitly believe, and this is one of the chief reasons why they are so friendly to us, for they say that only the Muzungos are good and that all others are bad."<sup>10</sup>

In order to underline the political and economic value of the good relations which existed between the African and the Portuguese, Moutaury goes on to remark:

"It is to be hoped that this conviction will



endure in the minds of the said Kaffirs, for in this way we will always be able to dominate them and to live undisturbed. They are most obedient and submissive to their masters and to all the Muzungos in general."<sup>11</sup>

The same Portuguese observer, after giving an example of the loyalty of the Africans in foiling an attempt of the Dutch to replace the Portuguese at Quelimane, while the latter were under Spanish control, sounded a warning note, which may serve as another illustration of the master-servant relations then obtaining between the two racial groups, thus:

"On this occasion, the loyalty of the Kaffirs saved that State, because the port of Quelimane did not have then (nor has it now) any fortification whatsoever. Still, who can be certain that this friendship will last for ever, and that it will never change; the more so, since these same Kaffirs are treated with excessive harshness by their masters? May not this affection be changed into hatred, owing to the ill treatment they receive? May they not do in future to the Muzungos what they formerly did to the Mafutos? This is worth thinking about, and it is not very sound that we should continue to rely solely on the good faith of these Kaffirs."<sup>12</sup>

During the years between the beginning of the 18th and the end of the 19th century the history of the relations between the Portuguese Muzungos and the Africans steadily evolved through the various stages of conquest and control, to the exploitation of everything that could be bought, grabbed by force, plundered and sold, and reached its climax with the actual capture and selling of the vanquished Africans as slaves.

There are many monographs and texts on the slave trade during the last two centuries. In this connexion, the least that can be said for or against the Portuguese is that they were no better or worse than any other imperialist power of that time.<sup>13</sup>

From the beginning of this century to the present day, Portuguese policy in Africa has been marked by an attempt to soften the unpleasant implications of the master/slave relations which typify the relations between Europeans and Africans in all their colonies by emphasizing the use of such terms in their legal jargon as "contract labour" (contratados), or "voluntary labour" (voluntários), or by using the following terms: "the dignity of labour", "spiritual assimilation", "cultural evolution" and "black Portuguese citizens", etc., when trying to make their colonial policy palatable to the outside world. In fact the reality of the situation is, as Professor Duffy succinctly puts it, "pretty much the same today as it has been for four hundred years: the indiscriminate use of the African for Portuguese profit".

Concerning this Duffy goes on to make the following meaningful comment:

"Had this vision of the African shown any marked change in these centuries, beyond the final abolition of slavery and the creation of an

ambiguous legal language to define the African's status vis-a-vis the colonial administration, a discussion of slavery and contract labour would be only a historical exercise; but there has been no such change, and a study of this aspect of Angola and Mozambique should contribute to an understanding of present tendencies. Whether the African has been an export commodity, a domestic slave, a *liberto*, *Contratado*, or *voluntario*, his fundamental relationship with the Portuguese has remained the same—that of a servant. When the African is supposed to emerge from his centuries-old apprenticeship and tutelage into the role of responsible citizen of Greater Portugal cannot be known, . . . but the idea of an Angola or Mozambique for the African seems to have about as much significance in Portugal's colonial plans as the notion of a United States for the Indian has in American deliberations."<sup>14</sup>

### Legal Stipulations

The main features of the Portuguese legal manoeuvres to normalize relations between the two main racial groups in Mozambique included the promulgation of a series of laws instituting a judicial system known as the *indignato*. Under this system the bottom group in the pyramidal socio-economic structure described above, composing the overwhelming majority of the African people, was designated as "*indigenas*" or *natives*. According to the *Estatuto Indigena das Provincias de Guine, Angola and Mozambique*, 1954, "*natives*" (i.e., the members of the lowest stratum) are "persons of the negro race or their descendants who were born or who habitually reside in the said Province and who do not yet possess the learning and the social and individual habits presupposed for the public and private law of Portuguese citizens".

On the basis of the above law, a person of the Negro race is an individual without citizenship and without civil rights. Also all the persons falling under the category indicated above were subjected to a complex of administrative procedures and controls which virtually limited their freedom of movement. For example, while this law existed, no "native" could attend Government-controlled schools, except those run by Catholic or Protestant missionaries, which were inferior in every respect; no "native" could join a labour union; no "native" could seek employment anywhere without first obtaining a special permit from the administrator, who was always a European; no "native" could visit another country except South Africa and Rhodesia, and even in these two countries the purpose of the visit had to be to work under contract in the gold or coal mines of the Witwatersrand or in the tobacco farms of Rhodesia. In order to make these controls on the movements of "natives" effective, this law stipulated that all such persons should carry special "passes" wherever they were, including their own villages, and were prohibited from being seen in public places after certain hours of the evening. Native African economic activities were so restricted that in some cases they could not even slaughter their own cattle, sell them or give them

away without a special authorization from the Portuguese authorities. They could establish bank accounts, but could not withdraw their money without the permission of the local administrator, etc.

Relations between individual Africans and Europeans were regulated by the same rules as prevail in any master/slave society; e.g., it was obligatory for an African to stand up whenever a European appeared or passed by; Africans (including women) were obliged to give the fascist/Roman salute (raising one's right hand up to a 45 degree angle) whenever a car driven by a European passed by; whenever an African addressed a European he had to use the word "senhor" or "senhora", while the white man always said "rapaz" (boy) and "rapariga" (girl or maid); whenever there were a limited number of seats it was the white man who had to be seated first, regardless of the sexes involved. At public stadia, cinemas and theatres African spectators were confined to special sections and restricted to certain cinemas exhibiting especially censored films.

In order to make certain that the African, as a labour force, could be made available for the white man to use as cheaply as possible, the Portuguese Government promulgated laws defining the areas of economic activity which were open to Africans, in this way cutting off a large proportion of the traditionally subsistence economic pursuits of the Africans, from the legally approved economic activities. Furthermore, millions of Africans, men, women, and often children were forced by local Portuguese administrators, deriving authority from the same laws, to cultivate large tracts of land and to plant cotton, instead of their own traditional subsistence crops, in order to enable some monopolistic concessionary companies to realize unusually high profits.

### **Loss of African Political Power**

In view of what has been said so far about the **Indigenato System**, one might conclude, as some students of Portuguese colonial policies have, that it was these laws which produced the extremely unfair conditions of life which still prevail in Mozambique today. I do not share this point of view. I believe, as I have tried to point out earlier in this paper, that the real factors which make for the development of the racial socio-economic structure typifying the Portuguese colonial society today are, first and foremost, the fact that the African people have lost their political power from the very beginning of their relations with the Portuguese. In other words, Portuguese settlers are on the top of the pyramidal structure principally because their ancestors have wrested political power from the ancestors of the African majority. The rest of the relationships which developed followed like night follows day. Europeans came to this part of the world not to "civilize" or "evangelize" or "make the African Portuguese", as the Portuguese Government and its apologists would like the world to believe. All the Portuguese settlers who, throughout the centuries, have flocked to Africa, came to better themselves materially. And in arriving here they

discovered, if they did not know it before leaving Europe, that they belong to the race that possesses the real power in its hands, by dint of conquest made several centuries before them.

What are the symbols of the power of the white man in Mozambique? What does a European newcomer, who may not have left Europe with racial prejudice towards the African, see when he first arrives in Mozambique? He sees the following facts which are advantageous to himself:

(a) that on arriving at any port all the administrative authorities with which he had to deal are of his own race,

(b) that all the black people whom he sees are engaged in activities of a servile kind, working as stevedores, on the boats, as carriers and sweepers at the airport terminals, as porters, waiters, cooks, servants, cleaners in the hotels, or auxiliary police (not police officers!),

(c) that all commercial institutions are manned at all administrative levels by persons of his own race,

(d) if he happens to fall ill and has to go to a hospital he will discover that all the doctors are either Europeans or Asians, and occasionally Mulattoes; but not Africans. That the only Africans working in hospitals are auxiliary nurses, orderlies and ordinary servants,

(e) When he goes to the market he will find that all the nice stalls are manned by either Europeans or Asians, while the African traders are sitting on the ground, selling little mounds of the third or fourth grade of whatever is being sold by Europeans or Asians, and

(f) if he were an economist he might finally discover that no African owns any land on which the city stands, nor any buildings or businesses, etc., etc., etc.

It would be an unusual person who would not sooner or later succumb to the temptation of identifying himself with the rest of the minority of Europeans who are enjoying the privileges deriving from this favourable situation.

Those Portuguese idealists who dream of the existence of a multiracial empire in which peoples of all races, cultures, religions and what-not live happily in harmonious conviviality; who believe that the Portuguese administration and settlers so love their black subject (subditos) that they are willing to allow them to share the political, economic and social power which they possess are either fools or cynical liars.

### **New Interest in Situation**

During the last fifteen years, or since the early 1950's, there has developed in Portugal a certain interest in the study of the true facts of the situation prevailing in the colonies, stimulated mostly by the evolution towards independence in the rest of Africa. The fact that Portugal is a member of the United Nations where the question of the status of non-self-governing peoples is constantly being studied and discussed, is slowly shaking some Portuguese people into raising

some meaningful questions concerning the relations between their own fellow-countrymen and the majority of the African people. The best example of this interest is found in some of the studies or analyses published during the last decade or so in the social science series of the **Instituto Superior de Ciencias Sociais e Politicas Ultramarina** of the Technical University of Lisbon. (These series began with a compendium on **Angola 1963-64** followed by another on **Mocambique 1964-65** to be completed by one on **Cabo Verde, Guine e Sao Tome 1966-67.**)

The reaction of those wielding political and economic power in Portugal, however, has not been too encouraging so far. Instead of reviewing the whole political structure upon which the socio-economic pyramid is based, they tend to resort to reformist policies, reforms which are typically legal, that is, on paper only (for the English to see, as the traditional Portuguese saying goes). Either they were impossible to apply, or else the Portuguese had no intention of implementing them. Meanwhile the old traditional colonial practice goes on as before.

Since the beginning of this century the history of Portuguese legislation is full of case after case of laws aimed at stamping out practices which had been outlawed many times before but to no avail. Most of these relate to the regulation of labour relations affecting the majority of the African people. How can remedies which deal with the symptoms of a disease be expected to cure it? When there is a class system which clearly runs along racial/cultural lines as is the case in Mozambique, and in all Portuguese colonies, there are bound to be sharp conflicts between groups also following the same racial grooves. When finally the explosion takes place it will necessarily be mainly between the members of those communities which have the most extremely antagonistic and contradictory interests. In Mozambique today, the most contradictory interests are those of

the settler class, which is a small (2.5 per cent section of the total population and those of the overwhelming majority of the African people).

It is on the basis of these incontrovertible facts that one must understand the development of the nationalism in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea (Bissau). In summing up, the peoples of Mozambique, as those of the rest of southern Africa, have at some point in their history lost political power to the Europeans. As a consequence they also lost their right to control their land (which represents the Africans' only means of eking out a living), and with it all, control of the natural resources, the means of production, and the right to buy and sell the fruits of their labour. As if all this were not bad enough, they lost even the freedom to sell their labour where it can earn them the best living. Thus, there was no alternative but for the Africans to occupy the lowest social position in the pyramidal scale.

The question as to how to get out of the present situation has already been answered: **through changing the political machinery imposed by colonialism.**

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Salazar Says. Portuguese Problems in Africa. SNI, Lisbon, 1962, p. 6.
2. Decreto-Lei No. 43893, 6 Sept. 1961, Boletim de Mocambique, LM, No. 36, pp. 1098-9.
3. PSM, JIU, Lisbon 1964.
4. A. Lima de Carvalho, Reflexoes para uma analise dimensional da estrutura de Mocambique, from Mocambique, Instituto Superior de Ciencias Sociais e Politicas Ultramarina, Universidade Tecnica de Lisbon, 1964-65.
5. Boxer, C. R. Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, 1415-1825, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963, p. 2.
6. Quoted by Boxer, C. R., op. cit., p. 43.
7. Boxer, op. cit., p. 42.
8. Botelho J. J. T., Historia Militar e Politica dos Portugueses em Mocambique das Descobertas a 1833; Lisbon: Centro Tipografico Colonial, 1934, p. 51.
9. Hamilton, A. A New Account of the East Indies, 1727; Foster, W., editor, London, 1930, Vol. I, pp. 16-17.
10. Boxer, C. R., op. cit., p. 47.
11. Ibid.
12. Boxer, C. R., op. cit., pp. 47-48.
13. For the role of the Portuguese in the slave trade, see James Duffy, Portuguese Africa, Harvard University Press, 1961, and C. R. Boxer, op. cit.
14. Duffy, James, op. cit., p. 131.

