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CONTINGENT IDENTITY AND SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY IN THE PORT OF MAPUTO

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ABSTRACT

Failures of socialist revolutions in Africa are sometimes dismissed as alien to the history of socialism - attempts to gloss developmentalist nationalist projects in the discourse of socialism. This paper argues that the problematic relationship between party, state and broad-based political activism in African revolutions are not part of an incommensurate ethnicised history; they are like those that have repeatedly recurred and been debated in the history of socialism. It looks at one particular moment in the history of Frelimo's Mozambican revolution - the confrontation between the party and Mozambican port workers over the restructuring of work and pay in 1980. It argues that the ways that Frelimo envisioned its options at this moment illustrated two recurring tensions in Marxist-Leninist political practice - reluctance to confront the contingency of structure and the materiality of ideology.

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SOCIALISM IN AFRICA?

Frelimo in Mozambique, like other African national liberation movements that once declared themselves Marxist-Leninist parties, is not currently in good repute. Students of the cold war contend that their leaders cynically assumed the language of Marxist-Leninism to obtain assistance from the Soviet bloc. Post-modernists dismiss their revolutions as the failed modernist projects of culturally alienated intellectual elites. Even scholars of the left have argued that African revolutions were not socialist but anti-democratic developmentalist projects. Michel Cahen has contended that in all experiments with socialism in Africa, small urban bureaucratic elites appropriated the language of Marxism-Leninism as the discourse of power and attempted to impose nation-states and models of economic development of a European type antithetical to ethnic realities.¹

Critical analysis of African revolutions has been largely absent from the mainstream of recent Marxist reflection on the place of Marxism-Leninism in the history of socialism. This reflection, once restricted to Trotskyites, gained new sharpness in the 1960s with the inquiry of Althusser, Bettelheim and others into the roots of Stalinism. Their interrogation of orthodoxy has since been extended beyond Leninist politics to include theoretical inconsistency or at least tension within the work of Marx himself. Despite a great diversity of theoretical positions, the non-teleological reading of Marx that Althusser struggled to construct is now broadly accepted among Marxists.² So also is the recognition that teleological evolutionism did not infiltrate Marxist orthodoxy only in the catechisms of the Comintern;³ it is present in the Marx and Engels of the *Manifesto*, and has provided successive revolutionary movements with the assurance that history is on our side. Confrontation with the events of that history and with the related ascendancy of post-modernist ideology is necessary and salutary; Marxists must respond theoretically as well as politically to the distance between socialist aspirations and the lived experience of socialist revolutions.

¹ Cahen 1991, see also Mamdani 1990, p. 365. There is a certain convergence between these left positions and Bates' (1988, p. 133) argument that in independent Africa 'development coalitions' replaced the nationalist coalitions that led the struggle for independence and combined against the mass of rural interests, thus leaving the peasantry politically isolated and oppressed.

² See Althusser 1990, Elliot 1998 on Althusser, Bhaskar 1986, 1989, 1993, and Post 1996.

³ I do literally mean catechism, since historical materialism was taught to be memorised in question and answer form.

The exclusion of African revolutions from such critical Marxist scrutiny is wrong. The political and theoretical engagement of African intellectuals with Marxism has been enduring, substantive and creative; this engagement merits attention. The response of African workers and peasants to revolutionary projects was at least for a time very broadly based; the terms of this participation merit analysis. And finally the issues that defined the problematic relationship between party, state and broad-based political activism in African revolutions are not part of some incommensurate ethnicised history; they are like those that have repeatedly recurred and been debated in the history of socialism. This paper seeks therefore to contribute to an intellectual and political project initiated by John Saul, who, though obliged to dampen his once exuberant support for Frelimo, nonetheless insists that socialism in Africa must be understood as part of the history of socialism.⁴

Critical Marxist analysis of the Mozambican experience with socialism has thus far focused on the question of the class basis of the Frelimo party/state. For Saul, Frelimo did not begin as a left developmental dictatorship though it became one. He argues that through the liberation struggle a fraction of the petty bourgeoisie was drawn towards a progressive/socialist project, but Frelimo failed to forge links with those popular classes in whose name it spoke and to develop effective policies for realising the kind of socio-economic transformation envisaged.⁵ Bragança and Depelchin argued that the decisive wrong move was the Frelimo leadership's decision to shift from a liberation front to a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party.⁶ For Cahen, Frelimo was from the outset a bourgeois nationalist project dominated by a Creole elite marginalised by Portuguese settlement.⁷ Accordingly, Frelimo never made any serious attempt to break with the logic of the market; its economic policy was one of conciliation and collaboration with the capitalist world.⁸ Each position raises important but complex issues; to address them would also require an analysis of the armed aggression mounted against Frelimo and its relationship to other ongoing movements of national liberation in the region. Understanding the class basis of a revolutionary movement is surely a broad processual question rather than an analysis of the sociology of the party at particular points in time.

⁴ For the evolution of Saul's position see in particular Saul 1985, 1986, 1990, 1993.

⁵ Saul 1993, p. 149.

⁶ Bragança and Depelchin, 1986.

⁷ Cahen 1993.

The objectives of this paper are more narrowly defined, in time, space and theory.⁹ It deals only with the port of Maputo in a moment in the history of socialist Mozambique that was marked by one of the recurrent tensions within Marxist political practice and theory - the tension between the importance given to the working-class and distrust of workers for their economism.¹⁰ I show that Frelimo drew from Marxist thought to conceptualise the relationship between class and party. Its discourse, that is, was not a façade. I also show that the Marxist discourse Frelimo employed was accessible, meaningful (and manipulable) for workers in the port. Frelimo's difficulties did not stem, as the post-modernists would have it, from the imposition of an alien project. Finally, I argue that the tension that arose between the party and port-workers over the party's proposal to abolish task-work (*mala-mala*) in 1981 was implicit in the assumption of power underlying Lenin's question, 'What is to be done?' The difficulties Frelimo confronted in defining and constructing socialist democracy did not simply derive from its insecure class base. They are a recurrent part of the history of socialism, which does not make Lenin's question any less important to ask.

The paper first considers a post-modernist approach to the uneasy relationship between Frelimo and port-workers. James Scott¹¹ interprets an earlier moment of such tension - the debate between Luxembourg and Lenin over the relationship of the revolutionary party to the working-class movement. Scott's reading locates important issues in Leninist political practice that have to do with the relationship between structure and

⁸ Cahen 1986.

⁹ I also make no attempt in this paper to address the rich corpus of work on African port-workers, much of which is inspired by Marxist concerns with class and consciousness and which has in fact shaped my understanding of experience in the port of Maputo. Cf. Iliffe 1975, Hemson 1977 and 1996, Waterman 1978 and 1982, Cooper 1987, Agier *et al.* 1987, Dubbeld 2001.

¹⁰ This paper is based on a longer paper 'Dockers, stevedores and commissars: class, consciousness and revolution in the port of Maputo, presented to the Sawyer Seminar on the Politics of Culture in the Aftermath of Empire, University of Michigan, 28 February 1997. I draw on research in the Port of Maputo carried out in the early 1980s by the Centre for African Studies (CEA), Eduardo Mondlane University, under the direction of Aquino de Bragança and Ruth First. I have changed the names of the port-workers quoted in the text. I would like particularly to thank those who with whom I participated in the port studies: V. Cambaza, C. Castel-Branco, A. José, M. Mackintosh, D. Nhangumbe, A. Manghezi, D. Wield, M. Wuyts and S. Zandamela. My non-teleological credentials may be suspect. As we carried out this research, I felt that I was living on the edge of history, and I still claim for socialist Mozambique a decisive contribution to the end of political apartheid in Southern Africa. The methodological issues of critical reflexivity that such an engagement poses are important yet beyond the scope of this paper. It would be, however, naïve to treat socialists working in Mozambique as a homogeneous group, to diminish the critical edge of the work done by the Centro de Estudos Africanos under Aquino de Bragança and Ruth First, or to assume that distance and/or disengagement assured greater objectivity.

contingency, and between theory and ideology, and that bear directly on the travails of socialism in Mozambique.

LENIN, LUXEMBOURG AND COMMODITY FETISHISM

Scott's discussion of Lenin and Luxemburg is a small part of an extended critique of state-sponsored social engineering. His central question in *Seeing Like a State* is why 'so many schemes to improve the human condition have failed'. He concludes that such attempts if '...driven by utopian plans and authoritarian disregard for the values, desires, and objections of their subjects, are indeed a mortal threat to human well-being'.¹² Socialism, particularly in its Leninist version, appears especially prone to dismiss as ideology the practical knowledge of the people whose well-being it aims to improve. Scott is suspicious of generalising theories; he opposes scientific discourse to practical knowledge. He argues that people's practical, opportune and contextual knowledge does not fit the general conventions of scientific discourse, yet without it no formal schemes of order are tenable.¹³ As in his earlier work on 'weapons of the weak' and 'hidden transcripts',¹⁴ Scott contends that the ways in which people represent their condition must be accepted in their terms. There is '...no social location or analytical position from which the truth value of a text or discourse may be judged'.¹⁵ The Marxist concept of ideology is untenable, he argues, because there is no way of determining that particular forms of consciousness are 'false'. There is no way of imposing from outside people's practical knowledge a theoretically or scientifically framed answer to the question 'What is to be done?'

From a Marxist perspective, there are facile criticisms to be made of *Seeing like a State*, as of Scott's earlier work.¹⁶ His vision tends towards populism: Scott sees people and the state, but is not very interested in the complexities and contradictions of class. His states appear to 'see' with the eyes of those who staff them. Scott rightly observes that neither Lenin nor Luxemburg subjected the party to the same sociological dissection they applied to trade-union bureaucracies, but compared to current Marxist interrogation

¹¹ Scott 1998. Scott is philosophically a humanist, not a post-modernist. His reading of Lenin and Luxemburg is post-modernist in the sense that it is based in an extended critique of enlightenment conceptions of interventionist projects aimed at the improvement of the social condition.

¹² Scott 1998, p. 7.

¹³ Scott 1998, p. 323.

¹⁴ Scott 1986, 1990.

¹⁵ Scott 1990, p. x.

of the party, Scott's sociological account is shallow, focussing on the divergent interests of workers and the party intelligentsia.¹⁷ Though Scott considers contemporary global capitalism to be a major suppresser of difference, he appears to share Hayek's libertarian view that the market is an apolitical institution and the best system of distribution we have available.¹⁸ Scott's reduction of Marxist approaches to ideology to theories of false consciousness ignores a large corpus of contemporary work on the materiality of ideology.¹⁹ Scott does not himself adequately recognise the materiality of tendency, structure and misrepresentation. Thus his 'hidden transcripts' document what happens behind the scenes, but cannot deal with significant silences or errors of fusion - the typical misrepresentations of commodity fetishism, to which we return later.

Nonetheless, it seems to me important to listen to Scott and to respond. His reflections on ideology and practical knowledge probe one of the most contentious and fragile areas of Marxist political theory - the meaning of ideology and its relation to the nature of socialist democratic transition in a world shaped by the experience of capitalism.²⁰ Scott's discussion of the disagreements between Lenin and Luxembourge over the relationship between democracy and the organisation of a revolutionary party properly points to recurrent tragedies in the history of socialism and links their debate to contemporary concern with conceptions of contingency in human action.

Scott recognises the common political ground of Lenin and Luxembourge: their shared belief that the contradictions of capitalism were unresolvable and their commitment to revolutionary change.²¹ His sympathies, however, lie with Luxembourge. She had, Scott argues, both in her reflection on the mass strike and in her notes on the Russian revolution, a greater appreciation than did Lenin of the validity of practical knowledge and the limitations of attempting to impose fixed schemes of order on the processes of socialist revolution:

Lenin proceeded as if the road to socialism were already mapped out in detail and the tasks of the party were to use the iron discipline of the party apparatus to make sure that the revolu

¹⁶ Cf. Scott 1986, 1990.

¹⁷ Scott 1998, p. 169.

¹⁸ '...the command economy, however sophisticated and legible, cannot begin to replace the myriad, rapid, mutual adjustments of functioning markets and the price system' (Scott 1998, p. 256).

¹⁹ Cf. Inter alia Althusser 1971, Macherey 1966, Lecourt 1995, Balibar 1994, Bhaskar 1986, 1989, 1993, 1994.

²⁰ Balibar 1994, pp. 92 ff. notes the inconsistent analytical meaning of ideology within the work of Marx. Though he attempts to abolish idealist philosophy, Marx's conception of proletarian consciousness opposed to ideological illusion or inversion is philosophical.

²¹ Scott 1998, p. 169.

tionary movement kept to that road. Luxembourg, on the contrary, believed that the future of socialism was to be discovered and worked out in a genuine collaboration between workers and their revolutionary state.²²

Scott calls attention to the concern with contingency that marks Luxembourg's vision of socialism, her condemnation of extreme centralism and rule by decree, her commitment to the creative role of democracy and her prescient vision of perils of an undemocratic socialism:

The socialist system of society should only be, and can only be, a historical product, born out of the school of its own experiences, born in the course of its realisation, as a result of the developments of living history.... The negative, the tearing down can be decreed; the building up, the positive, cannot. New territory. A thousand problems. Only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, effervescing life falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light creative force, itself corrects all mistaken attempts. The public life of the countries with limited freedom is so poverty stricken, so miserable, so rigid, so unfruitful, precisely because, through the exclusion of democracy, it cuts off the living sources of all spiritual riches and progress.²³

Given Scott's distrust of grand theory and emphasis on practical knowledge, his appreciation of this passage is not surprising; Luxembourg verges here on revolutionary millenarianism. The contrast with the emphasis she gave to a clear theoretical understanding of capitalism in her own political work in the German workers' movement is striking. Her vision of the self-correcting process of the general strike also appears to belie the suspicion she shared with Lenin of the economistic tendencies of the German trade union movement. In texts on constructing socialism such as 'The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Government,' Lenin does not see such easy rupture; he emphasises historical continuities between capitalism and socialism. Everything under socialism is not and cannot be new; expropriation does not suddenly transform the way that work is organised or the way that workers think about themselves (including the limits of their trade-union consciousness).

There is no reconciliation possible between Luxembourg and Lenin if contingency is counterpoised to structure. Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism, the source from which both drew their understanding of the limits of trade union consciousness, undercuts, however, this opposition. It shows how contingency can be implicit in the structuring of social life. In capitalist societies, underlying relations of exploitation and immanent class unity are masked by the bargains struck with capital and competition of workers among themselves for jobs and wages. The ideological misrepresentation of

²² Scott 1998, p. 174.

²³ Luxembourg 1970, p. 390-91.

commodity fetishism is real - it arises from the organisation of capitalist production - but it masks another reality, also knowable through experience, that of exploitation and class unity. Hegemonic state controls - the apparatuses of education and law and regulation of the media - may reinforce the partial truth claims (ideology) of commodity fetishism, but they do not create it, nor can they efface the recurring possibility of an alternative understanding of class identity. The distinction between theory and ideology is not based, as post-modernists would have it, on failure to recognise the social construction of knowledge. The relative truth values of analysing the wage-bargain as a contract between equals or as exploitation is established in practice.

Lenin reduced the structured contingency of capitalist production to only one of its effects - commodity fetishism. He did not recognise the contingency of structure. Workers could not, he thought, transcend the limits of economism without a centralised vanguard party to break the hegemony of bourgeois ideology and bring them to recognise their real and general class interests. Luxembourge's vision of the politics of the revolutionary transition, though sketchy, is only consistent with the rest of her work if we read her not as an advocate of millenarian spontaneity but rather as recognising the materiality of structured contingency. The contingency of structure means that practice always provides many possible courses of action. Yet the structuring of contingency implies not only that alternatives are restricted but also that they have different implications. The question 'What is to be done?' must therefore be asked. Determining which answers are better than others demands analysis, not just pluralistic discussion or thick description

FRELIMO'S VISION OF WHAT WAS TO BE DONE

In 1981, Frelimo was poised for a political offensive in the port. The port, railways and stevedoring agencies were under state control, and Zimbabwe's independence had reopened regional markets. Now the issue was, phrased in the language of Lenin's 'Immediate Tasks of Soviet Government,' the socialist transformation of production. The economic debility of the port had to be addressed. The party argued that a unified and conscious working-class would make this possible. It proposed two immediate tasks, one political and one economic - the consolidation of the political organisation of the party at all levels of operation in the port and the stabilisation of the labour force.

Frelimo supporters had set up 'dynamising groups' in the various operational zones of the port during the period of transition.²⁴ These took on both political and some management responsibilities at the zone-level, and often entered into conflict with higher levels of port management. Dynamising groups did not fit with the Marxist-Leninist organisation structure Frelimo assumed when it declared itself a vanguard party in 1977. Some of the members of dynamising groups moved into new production councils set up at zone level that reported formally both to management and to the party. In 1981, the production councils were to be brought into a single trade union, subordinated, like the mass women's and youth organisations, to the party. All colonial unions had been formally abolished in 1979, but the stevedores' union, the only union with substantial numbers of black Mozambican workers in the colonial period, had lingered on, partly because of its role in recruitment. Now it would finally lose its independence. Party cells were to be established in all operational zones and the state-owned railway company was to tighten its control on management at zone-level.

Stabilisation of the working-class in the port was to be achieved through integration of casual manual workers into a single pool, the eventual fixing of all workers in a particular workplace and the establishment of a shift system to replace overtime. Stabilisation, apparently at odds with the irregularity of port movement, was justified in terms of class-consciousness. To be conscious of themselves as a class, workers had to know and control their work; this was not possible if they floated from one place to another. Stabilisation, the party argued, could be financially viable because it would cut the overtime bill and improve turn-around time.

To understand how radical and contested the stabilisation proposal was, consider how the port worked in 1981. The Maputo port is a series of zones that handle different types of cargo. In 1981, each of the zones had space on the docks, a feeder railway line, a number of cranes, office and warehouse space, and some specialised management personnel. Each was like a different kind of factory, with a different labour process, different equipment, varying regularity and intensity of work and thus different and changing demands for different kinds of workers. Each zone had its own particular organisation and history - its dangers, its disasters, and its strikes. Casual workers often knew these particularities better than did newly appointed managers, be

²⁴ Between the 25 April 1974 revolt in Portugal and Mozambican independence in June 1975.

cause of the practical knowledge they acquired as they circulated from one zone to another. This was a very masculine world; only in one section of the cold storage zone were there women workers sorting, wrapping and repackaging oranges exported by the South African Citrus Board. The steel-handling zone, where the discussions described here took place, had one main client, ZISCO, a large Zimbabwe steel-rolling plant.

Despite the diversity of their cargo, equipment and labour-processes, all of the zones depended on, and competed for, common central services and machinery: forklifts, moveable cranes, access and switching lines, wagons, locomotives, and, most importantly, workers that moved from zone to zone. Forklift and crane operators, even when they worked regularly in the same zone, were assigned through a central pool. Maintenance and repair work had to be requisitioned from a central section. Almost all manual workers were recruited on centrally a casual basis and could be sent from one zone to another, depending on where there was work to be done. Billing and payment were handled by central administrative structures. All the work at the level of zones was thus highly dependent on overall co-ordination of these central services. Whether or not the interdependence of zones became competition and conflict for central resources depended on the extent to which port management was able to co-ordinate and control the variable movement of ships and demands of customers with the services of the port. The difficulties of co-ordination made Lenin's emphasis on accounting and control in 'Immediate Tasks' seem much less technician than I had first taken it to be.

In 1981, productivity and profitability were very low in the port. Though traffic was not heavy, there were frequent fines for loading delays that held ships in berth. Cargo loss was substantial. Labour costs were high. Workers often stood idle waiting for equipment, but there were also long periods when equipment was stalled because of labour shortage. Night-shifts and overtime periods were frequently scheduled. Patterns of recruitment (as registered by pay-cards) did not correspond to the ups and downs of port movement. Both fixed and casual were drawing about 45% of their wages from overtime and night shifts²⁵. There was no apparent relationship between variation in port movement and the proportion of wages drawn from overtime and night shifts for either group. Even with the large overtime bill, there were frequent shortfalls in labour recruitment for day shifts, with recruitment sometimes falling 30 per cent below de

²⁵ CEA 1982a.

mand. The party's stabilisation proposal would assure all workers a regular monthly wage, but it would eliminate overtime pay and task-wages. It implied that extra unpaid shifts would be scheduled in periods of intensive port movement.

The competitiveness of the port was a productivist or developmentalist issue, but it was nonetheless a structural one that had to be confronted if the port were to continue in operation. Socialist autarchy was not a possibility. Not just the jobs of port-workers, but the economy as a whole depended on services to balance current account shortfalls. The port was not attracting new clients, as had been expected once sanctions were lifted with Zimbabwean independence in 1980. Regional competition was sharpening: South Africa had built a second Indian Ocean port; increasing containerisation and road-trucking favoured South African ports.²⁶

Our 1981 CEA study dealt with the relationship between labour recruitment and labour process in the zones.²⁷ As we drew on the practical knowledge of workers in the steel-handling zone to discover why the zone operated so inefficiently, we began to recognise a highly conventional account. The same terms and explanations recurred repeatedly in interviews in both Portuguese and Tsonga with very different kinds of workers - casually recruited stevedores and shore-handlers, crane and fork-lift operators, tally-clerks, the zone manager and the docks inspector. The terms were pathological (dead-time, paralysis) or technical (drop-sides, a kind of wagon) or taken from other Mozambican languages (*mala-mala*, task-work). The explanation, provided in fluent common-sense detail, was that nothing could be done at the level of the zone. The most important problem in the zone was beyond its control - an insufficient number of the drop-sided wagons need to allow steel beams to be rapidly lifted from wagons to hold. Given this insurmountable problem, the only way that the steel-handling zone (and indeed all the zones in the harbour) could possibly lessen turn-around time was to return to *mala-mala*, which had been prohibited by Frelimo as part of its stabilisation programme.

Gradually our research team came to realise that we were being told a story with both significant silences' and 'hidden transcripts '. Some would smirk slightly in complicity when they referred to 'drop-sides' and *mala-mala*, though they would not pro

²⁶ See Hemson 1996 on how radically containerisation would reduce the demand for unskilled manual labour on the docks.

vide any alternative to the common narrative of the zone in front of other workers. A common language of catch-phrases, slogans and jest, initially almost incomprehensible to the outsider, was used by all participants in the political struggles in the port, not just to baffle researchers but also among themselves. Yet this common language was charged with ambiguity; the same words evoked quite different positions and demands on the part of different groups of workers.

A political commissar had just been named for the port, a well-known former commander in the national liberation struggle who wore his military camouflage to work. The port was a key strategic area in the ongoing low-intensity war with South Africa, but the commissar's presence also reflected Frelimo's concern with possible resistance to its stabilisation agenda. Upper management vacillated in its attitude towards the proposed changes, supporting those that it felt would lead to tighter discipline and lower labour cost, worried about the direct and indirect costs of broad stabilisation. Frelimo was also having difficulties in achieving the more explicitly political part of its agenda, establishing party cells in all operational areas of the port. This was not unexpected, for Frelimo saw port-workers as divided, opportunist, and possibly hostile. The language of the party recalled Leninist conceptions of the limits of trade-union consciousness, but that does not mean that such preoccupations were irrelevant in the Mozambican context. To understand conflicts among workers, and the ambivalent relations between the party and port-workers, we must look back at the racialised organisation of work in the colonial port, at the wave of strikes that marked the transition to Independence in Mozambique, and at the ways everyday life changed for port-workers in the first years of independence.

Work in the colonial port: Black and White, fixed and floating, forced and free, mental and manual labour²⁸

Port workers' identities were shaped by their conditions of recruitment, the process of work and the overlying institutions of racial oppression characteristic of colonial regimes in southern Africa. The Maputo (then Lourenço Marques) port expanded at the end of the 19th century to handle timber for the construction of the rail-line from

²⁷See CEA 1981a and 1981b. This paper also draws on CEA 1983 and research notes on port studies in the CEA archives.

the mines of the Witwatersrand to the coast. In 1929, it came under the management of the state-owned Mozambican Railways Company (CFM). The CFM maintained and ran port facilities, recruited and managed labour for dockside work, and levied fees for port use. Private navigation agencies organised the movement of cargo in co-ordination with the shipping lines, while their associated stevedoring companies recruited workers and managed the labour process from docks to ship and in the hold.

In the colonial port, management relied heavily on forced labour to recruit the casual manual workers needed to handle irregular flows of cargo. Forced labourers, recruited in rural areas, were brought into the port for a six-months period. Paid only for the days that they worked, they were nonetheless held constantly available, fed and housed in hostels. Voluntary casual workers, living on the outskirts of the city or commuting from rural areas near the rail-line, were recruited through the municipal services of the city. They queued up each day for work - recruited and paid if there was work in the port, unpaid if there was not. After an aggressive strike by stevedores in 1949, a registration system was instituted for casual voluntary workers. Each was given a control card, without which he could not be recruited. The card provided a casual worker some job security, but also allowed management to control assiduity, discipline and docility. It was difficult for workers to avoid handling difficult or noxious cargo; all registered day workers were required to work whatever job was available when they arrived at the head of the queue. The wages, working conditions and social mobility of the Mozambican working class were constantly undercut by the co-existence of forced and free labour.

Although forced labour was used in the hold, on the docks and in the yards, the navigation agencies preferred to work with experienced stevedores and hence relied mainly on voluntary workers. There was a limited *de facto* stability of employment for stevedores, whereas forced labourers were contracted as shore-handlers, those who loaded and unloaded wagons in the yards. The greater stability and recognition of their skills seems to have made the stevedores more militant than the shore-handlers, though possibilities of open resistance were limited for all groups of workers under the repressive legislation that governed all those classed as 'natives'.

²⁸ This section on the history of the port relies on the work of Penvenne (1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1995), José 1987, Harris 1966, Rita Ferreira 1967-68, Pereira de Lima 1971, Wield 1983 and CEA port research 1981 and 1982.

Forced labour was legally abolished in 1961, though forced penal labour was still practised. For the shore-handlers in the port, the difference did not seem very great. Corporal punishment was less frequent, but contract work continued on a voluntary basis. The port already depended on a combination of contract and day-labour for manual work. Shore-handlers continued to be recruited from rural districts, housed in hostels in the port, paid extremely low wages, and still received a portion of their wages only on return to their home districts.

As in the past, skill and experience were not recognised in the wages of contract workers. Shore-handlers were recruited on the same terms as manual workers for the municipal services. Contingents of municipal workers were brought in to work on the docks in peak periods, or to break worker protest. The bargaining position of the casual (non-contract and locally recruited) section of the shore-handler labour force was limited by the existence of the large supply of contract labour held within the port. The existence of this low paid internal reserve allowed port management to respond to the irregularity of port movement without much concern for the productivity of labour.²⁹

With the development of specialised cargo handling, the intensification of regional competition, and some upward pressure on wages, port management experimented during the 1960s with schemes to stabilise shore-handlers in specialised zones. Core groups of casual workers, both clerks and shore-handlers, were taken out of the recruitment pool and assigned to specific zones. They were assured of employment, though their base wages remained the same, and they could be transferred to other zones if there was no work in the zone to which they were assigned. Management wavered over use of these schemes, starting them, cancelling them, reinstating them, while attempting to weigh increased labour costs against fines and charges for damage and delay in handling specialised cargoes. The clerks were able to translate skill and experience into greater job stability, but for the non-contract shore-handlers income continued to be unstable, rising and falling with port movement.

Stevedores, in contrast, managed to pressure the private navigation agencies into improving wages and conditions of recruitment. In 1964, after a concerted wave of work-stoppages by stevedores demanding higher wages, some Mozambican workers

²⁹Shaffer (1965) in a comparative study of the competitive position of different ports in Southern Africa, noted the bustle and confusion when large numbers of workers were summoned to complete a task in the Maputo port, but doubted that this made Maputo more efficient than Durban.

were admitted into the new union of stevedores. In return for contributions to the union, card-holding stevedores got stability of employment and pension rights and they accumulated points towards paid holidays.

But, like the shore-handlers in the yards, the stevedoring labour force was divided between a core with relatively stable income (the gang bosses or *indunas*, winch operators etc.) and a large number of irregulars. Not all (probably not even the majority³⁰) of the stevedores were allowed into the union. Some had probationary status, without a card and hence without union privileges. Others worked unofficially, using the cards of union members. At times of peak demand, or when stevedores were striking or slowing down work, shore-handlers were brought in from the railway recruitment centres to work in the hold.

Casual manual workers - stevedores and shore-handlers - were sharply set apart from administrative and skilled workers. In the colonial port, this division was subsumed by racial and cultural hierarchy. In the early years of the 19th century, Mozambicans held both white collar and skilled positions in the Maputo port, but Portuguese settlers gradually gained a monopoly on better paid and stable skilled work. Inspectors, zone managers, ship-handlers, accountants, tally clerks, foremen, crane and lift operators, engine-drivers, mechanics and electricians were almost all Portuguese. Mozambicans were allowed only into the lower levels of management, and then generally on a probationary basis so that they remained in status and pay a casual worker while in fact having a permanent job. Without cultural assimilation and patronage, it was impossible for Mozambicans of colour to cross from the world of casual labour and a daily wage to the world of a monthly salary, a pension, sick-leave, holidays, a home with light and running water, children in secondary school. Tsonga was the language of the world of the casual worker; fluency in Portuguese an essential condition for entry into the second. Still in the 1980s, dockers spoke with a combination of pride and anger when they spoke of being a *trabalhador de cartão*, a casual unskilled 'worker with a card'.

Conflicts between casual workers and skilled and administrative workers extended into the labour process itself through the wage-system. Port management based

³⁰ Among a group of stevedores who had worked as stevedores before Independence, interviewed in the port in 1981, one third had been union members. In part this represents the turnover of the labour force, since new recruits came in with probationary status, but the core-group of union members was probably no more than half of the effective stevedoring pool.

its flexible response to port movement both on a reserve of poorly paid casual labour and on the use of an overtime system. The stagnation of base-wage rates for casual workers (itself rooted in the use of forced and contract labour) contributed to the willingness of casual workers to respond to the irregularity of port movement by extending the labour day and/or intensifying work. Since casual and contract workers' income improved with overtime hours, there were strong reasons for stretching out tasks.

To combat slow-downs, port managers used a quota or task-wage system, *mala-mala*. A work period was defined by a certain task to be accomplished - so many wagons to be unloaded, so many loads to be bundled for the crane. When workers finished the task, they could quit, but when the port was very busy they were urged to do another task, in which case they would be paid for a second shift. The system gave rise to 'binge work' with teams working two or three days running, giving rise to accidents. Management incurred no labour-cost from long periods of dead-time resulting from delays in the arrival of a train or a ship or the breakdown of machinery; the worker was only paid for what he did, not for the time spent waiting to work. *Mala-mala* was the essence of the way colonial authorities addressed the inherent irregularity of work in the port of Lourenço Marques: maintain a reserve of cheap casual labour and forms of payment that induce speed-up and intensification.

The cultural and political apparatus of racial subordination defined sharp boundaries between mental and manual labour, permanent and casual employment, day-wage and salaried workers. Almost all Portuguese port-workers left Mozambique in the turbulent transition to independence in 1974-1975, but Lenin would have noticed, as did Frelimo leadership in the port, that these divisions remained embedded in the organisation of work, recruitment and wages.

Mistrust between Frelimo and port workers: strikes and wage-gains

As in other African ports, conflicts between workers and port management was intertwined with anti-colonial struggles. Soon after its formation in 1962, Frelimo³¹ opened an operational sector in southern Mozambique, which had as its principal focus the co-ordination of nationalist opposition in Maputo. Shore-handlers and stevedores

³¹ FRELIMO was the abbreviation for Mozambique Liberation Front. In this paper I will use the form Frelimo adopted after Independence.

called in their work songs for help from nationalist figures, Eduardo Mondlane,³² later Samora Machel, and, because of India's successful expulsion of the Portuguese from Goa in 1961, Nehru.³³ The Portuguese workers answered in kind, calling the Mozambicans 'terrorists', tauntingly suggesting that they were waiting to be saved by 'Vovô (Grandpa) Mondlane.' The strikes and slow-downs of the 1960s, mainly isolated short-term actions in particular zones by small groups of workers around forms of payment and conditions of work, inevitably took on a political character for colonial authorities, for port-management and for port workers themselves.

Frelimo never successfully established, however, an organisational base in the port. Frelimo cells in the southern operational sector were identified and destroyed by the Portuguese political police (PIDE).³⁴ Frelimo cadres, the leaders of strikes, and other nationalist figures were executed or incarcerated for long periods. As in most areas of life in Maputo, PIDE established a broad network of informants in the port and detained everyone who was thought to sympathise with either the anti-fascist or nationalist opposition to the Portuguese regime. The extreme level of repression made it difficult to protest; 'You had to hold in your bitterness and it gnawed away at your heart,' said one stevedore who worked in the port during those years.³⁵

Frelimo took power after a protracted armed struggle and a lengthy period of negotiation. The military coup of 25 April 1974 in Portugal overthrew the Caetano regime, but did not lead to an immediate withdrawal from the colonies. Frelimo's armed struggle continued until September 1974, when the Lusaka accords negotiated both a cease-fire and the transition to power for Frelimo. Until this transitional government was formed, integrating both Frelimo and Portuguese representatives, it was not clear under what terms Mozambican independence would come, nor even how much longer it would take. Some in the new Portuguese regime thought the colonial system could be

³² CEA Archive, Port Investigation, 21.10.81, interview by S. Zandamela and A. Manghezi. Eduardo Mondlane was the first president of the Mozambican Liberation Front (Frelimo).

³³ CEA Archive, Port Investigation, 21.11.1981, work songs sung by Alfredo Konjo et al and recorded by A. Manghezi and S. Zandamela.

³⁴ In *Struggle for Mozambique* Eduardo Mondlane (1969 :123), claimed that in 1962-63, underground cadres of Frelimo organized and coordinated political work in the ports which contributed to a wave of port-strikes in 1963 in Lourenço Marques, Beira and Nacala. Research on this subject on this subject by the Mozambican historians, Teresa Cruz e Silva and Alexandrino José (José 1987), was not able to confirm this coordination, nor even the existence of the Beira and Nampula strikes. This does not necessarily mean that Frelimo did not play a co-ordinating role, but neither can we assume that it did. The politically most significant fact was that, for reasons which will be discussed later, it was very difficult to get workers to talk about the politics of the strikes.

reformed by granting more autonomy to the colonies or by extending the civil rights of the colonised. Various kinds of political groups appeared in Maputo under the provisional government - ultra-right white settler factions, conservative nationalist groups, left-aligned students groups. Frelimo underground cadres and supporters worked to consolidate support for Frelimo demands for immediate and unconditional independence.

In small enterprises abandoned by settlers, workers took over management. In larger private and state-owned firms, managers remained but faced growing worker militancy with demands by Mozambican workers for wages and working conditions equal to those of Portuguese workers. Workers saw these strikes as inspired by and certainly compatible with the aspirations of the nationalist struggle. *Ad hoc* workers' committees were set up to co-ordinate the strikes since Mozambicans were excluded from most of the settler unions and had no trade-unions of their own (the stevedores' union being an important exception). The port was a particularly turbulent focus of strikes. The stevedores, who had struck for wage increases in 1973, pressed new demands. In 1974, they got a pay rise from the navigation companies: from 60 escudos for a day shift to 190 escudos for the day shift and 570 for the night shift. Following the successful strike of the unionised stevedores, reserve stevedores struck to become union members. Frelimo activists filled out cards to make them union members.³⁶

This wave of strikes corresponded to Luxembourg's description of the general strike as a process rather than a single event - spontaneous, sometimes chaotic, inspired by Frelimo's success and sometimes loosely guided by its activists, but not under its control. Despite their contribution to the independence process, Frelimo came to see the strikes as opportunist in Lenin's terms, limited to the narrow economic demands of certain groups of workers and antithetical to the interests of the peasantry who did not share their wage-gains.

Bragança and Depelchin observed that suspicion of working-class politics is a long-term ideological tendency within Frelimo.³⁷ A rural-based guerrilla movement with intellectuals dominating its political leadership, Frelimo had little organisational experience with the working class. Its distrust mirrored broader left suspicion of small

³⁵ CEA Archive, Port Investigation, 21.10.81, interview by S. Zandamela and A. Manghezi.

³⁶ CEA Archive, Port Investigation, 1981, interview by S. Zandamela and A. Manghezi.

³⁷ Bragança and Depelchin 1986.

working class 'aristocracies' in post-colonial African countries.³⁸ The behaviour of the urban working-class, and particularly of the stevedores, during the period of transition, also seemed to the Frelimo leadership to confirm Lenin's view that in itself the working class is inevitably limited to opportunistic trade union consciousness. The wage-demands won by a small group of workers left heavy wage-bills to be supported by the weak economy of the newly independent country. Frelimo accused workers of unconsciously collaborating in economic sabotage:

Because of the low level of development of their class consciousness, workers were sometimes vulnerable to the manoeuvres of the enemy, falling into pure wage demands and becoming undisciplined, unconsciously collaborating with the economic sabotage organised by the enemy.³⁹

The party attributed this low level of consciousness to two aspects of colonial history: fierce repression that prevented any sustained and profound political work with the working-class; and attempts made by the colonial regime to corrupt an elite section of the urban working class, both materially and ideologically (e.g. the stevedores brought into colonial unions).

In a 1976 address in the port launching production councils, Machel recognised that many who participated in the strikes thought that they were expressing a nationalist position, but, he said, they were limited by their economic demands:

A stevedore could say: I won't unload these crates because they don't pay me enough. The crates held arms, ammunition and bombs that the colonial army used to fight Frelimo. But if they paid the stevedore more, then he would unload them. Who got something out of that? The Mozambican people because of the stevedores' wage-rise or our enemies who ended up with more bombs to massacre the Mozambican people?⁴⁰

When Frelimo assumed full governance in 1975, strikes were declared illegal. Official historiography wrote out contingency; the 1974 wave of strikes became a moment of disorder mastered by Frelimo on its inevitable route to Independence. In fact, the Lusaka Accords negotiated the transition from a provisional government, within which the terms of independence were not at all clear, to a transitional government whose task was the transfer of power to Frelimo. Behind these accords were the advances of the Frelimo armed forces and the organisation of Frelimo support groups across the country, but also the series of strikes and protests which proved that Mozambique was indeed ungovernable by a colonial regime.

³⁸See the critique of labour aristocracy theory in Waterman 1975.

³⁹General Resolutions of the 8th Session of the Central Committee, February 1976.

Changes in everyday life between 1975 and 1981

Independence brought a revolutionary sense of new possibilities in many aspects of urban life. With the exodus of the Portuguese, some workers moved from the suburbs to better housing in the central city, where subsidised rents were now pegged to salaries. New health posts and schools were built and electricity and water grids were extended into the suburbs where most manual workers lived and where their wives cultivated small plots. Fees for schools and health services were set low enough to make them accessible to all. Literacy classes and night-schools for workers were set up all over the city. A food-rationing system gave urban residents access to a basic food bundle at subsidised prices. Yet at the same time, there were difficulties: time-consuming queues for almost everything; persistent shortages of many of the commodities that had come to constitute the historic wage-bundle of the urban worker - bread, milk, rice, kerosene; street corner food-vendors (seen as petty bourgeois) swept away from the downtown area around the port; the uncertainty of train and bus-service from the outlying areas where many workers lived. How port-workers and their families experienced these changes varied in ways that had to do with the old divisions of the colonial port - particularly those having to do with how they were recruited and paid.

With the nationalisation of the stevedoring companies, all port-workers were recruited and paid by state-owned companies subordinated to the Ministry of Transport. Yet wages and terms of employment varied widely for the same kinds of workers, reflecting *ad hoc* settlements in moments of crisis between workers and management. The most fundamental division was between 'workers with a card', those with wages calculated on the basis of a working day and paid weekly, who were not considered permanent workers, and those, paid on a monthly basis, who were permanent employees of the port, the stevedoring companies or the railroad.

The permanent salaried workers inherited or gained after Independence some of the privileges only Portuguese workers had enjoyed in the colonial port. With the exodus of Portuguese managers, administrative workers and machine operators, some Mozambicans literate in Portuguese passed qualifying tests and moved into jobs as zone managers, office workers, ship foremen, cargo controllers, crane-operators, mechanics and engine drivers. Literacy and adult education classes organised in the port made it possible for some manual workers to move into skilled jobs. They had fixed full-time

⁴⁰ Machel 1976.

employment in a particular zone or sector of the port, a regular monthly salary, a month's holiday, sick leave and pension. With regular monthly salaries, many in this group could afford to move from the suburbs to rent-controlled flats in the central city. This group of workers was busy taking courses, they were at home in Portuguese, and their children were going on to secondary school or university. This was the group from which most party activists came. The party secretary, a former casual worker, got his primary school certificate after Independence.

Despite their upward mobility, there was considerable discontent within this group. Their first problem was what was called in the 'practical knowledge' of the port the difference between status and function. Many had come up from the ranks of casual workers. They followed courses to move into more specialised positions, but had not passed the required examinations. Their classification within the port and hence their wages reflected their formal qualifications and exams they had passed (their status), not the salary defined for the job they were actually doing (function). The head of the steel-handling zone, for example, was already a permanent tally-clerk before Independence. He had passed exams and moved up a level in formal 'status', but was still being paid as a clerk rather than for his real 'function' as zone manager. Others had not yet even been formally admitted to the permanent labour force. They had permanency, a monthly salary and holiday, but no pension; formally they were still 'workers with a card.' Machine operators trained after Independence had been promised that they would become permanent salaried workers of the port, but, as one told us, they lived off the promise. The casual worker, the worker with a card, he concluded bitterly, is a manual worker, a shore-handler, even if he has a fancy name. These workers pointed out that they were not being paid in accord with socialist principles; they demanded that they be paid in accord with the work they did - their 'function,' emphasising the skill differences that separated them from manual workers.

The second major grievance of the skilled workers was that they did not (except for crane-operators) receive overtime pay. When there was cargo to be moved quickly in a zone, night-shifts and overtime hours were scheduled. Fork-lift operators and administrative workers - zone managers and cargo controllers - had to work extra shifts and overtime hours without extra pay. They accused the stevedores, shore-handlers, and the crane-operators of deliberately holding up work to force recruitment for the night shifts and the scheduling of overtime hours. They vacillated in their demands, some

times insisting that they be also should be paid overtime, other times insisting that extra shifts were not needed.

United in their grievances, skilled workers were nonetheless divided among themselves. Machine operators were contemptuous of the tally clerks, many of whom, like them, had come up from the ranks of the manual workers. One told us, 'We, machine-operators, engine-drivers and stevedores and shore-handlers, we can work very well without the tally clerks. But what can the tally clerk do without us? I carry the bundled steel to the dock. The shore-handler prepares the lift, the crane-operator takes it to the hold, and the stevedore packs it in. What does the tally clerk do? He writes on his paper, batch X, batch Y. He doesn't even know what work we do'.

On the other side of the stable/casual worker divide were the 'workers with a card'. Most were manual workers, stevedores and shore-handlers, recruited when they were needed and paid weekly according to the number of shifts they worked. Night shifts were paid higher than day shifts, with premiums for handling difficult or dangerous cargo. They were also paid overtime for hours worked between shifts. They had a certain permanency in that they belonged to a pool of recruitable port workers (i.e. they had a card); the contract recruitment of shore-handlers from rural areas had ended and the floating external reserve had in principle been abolished. They had, however, no guaranteed stability of employment nor security of earnings. They could be assigned to one zone on one day and a completely different zone the next. They could be recruited for work one day and not the next.

Casual workers were a culturally distinctive group within the port. Often illiterate, they used Tsonga rather than Portuguese as their working language among themselves. Given the irregularity of their earnings, they did not move into rental housing in the cement city. They continued to live in the outlying suburban areas or in rural districts along the rail-lines where their wives could cultivate a small plot of land. They preferred to work as long as possible at a stretch and then spend time off at home. They were not interested in interrupting work for adult education classes. This casual labour-force was ageing. The recruitment pools were more or less frozen and younger workers were either taking courses to move into skilled positions or moving on to South Africa. Cleaning, guarding, and working the winches were tasks reserved for the older or less healthy casual workers. Casual workers rejected the skilled workers' charge that they were responsible for the long delays in the port. They criticised management and administrative workers for the disorganised style of work. One stevedore told us: 'We are

the first ones paid, but we don't know why we are paid. With the boats in berth as long as this, we know the port isn't earning anything'.

Despite their common suspicion of management and the apparent similarity of their work, stevedores militantly maintained the difference between themselves and shore-handlers. They resisted all attempts by port management to have shore-handlers fill gaps in stevedoring crews that slowed down turn-around time. Stevedores' base-pay was still better than that of shore-handlers, though by stringing together night and day shifts, shore-handlers could earn almost as much in a day. Stevedores presented themselves as rough, hard-drinking and particularly sceptical about management promises, literacy campaigns, and stabilisation. They argued that their work in the hold was difficult and dangerous, requiring special skills that shore-handlers lacked. A stevedore, Pedro Mandlate, explained that the inside of a boat is like a prison. 'You have to be able to work closed in, and cannot go roaming around the railway wagons.' 'Roaming around the wagons', in the language of the port, was a reference to the shore-handlers being able to rest or sleep in the yards while on the job. He ventured that it might be possible to unify the two groups of workers some day, but that it could not be done quickly. 'The change from white hair to black hair is difficult,' he said, 'because the white hairs have to be plucked out one by one'.

The stevedores worried that they would lose the advantages of union membership if the two pools of casual workers were joined. Their union ran a rotating number system for recruitment which, given the small pool, allowed them to avoid queuing and minimised the possibility of wasting a trip into the port without finding work. In a common pool, they, like the shore-handlers, would have to queue every day at the personnel section. The stevedores also had putative right to their union benefits fund. The writing out of cards for the probationary and irregularly working stevedores during the transitional government had brought them into the scheme of pension, holidays and funeral benefits that union members had enjoyed during the colonial period. There was not, however, sufficient money in the union fund to cover all stevedores, let alone bring in the shore-handlers if a common pool were formed. Stevedores were quick to pull out their cards to show the stamps that marked their accumulated unpaid holiday leave. Elderly stevedores kept on working as guards and cleaners while waiting for the pension to which they had contributed.

Shore-handlers argued that stevedores were like all other casual workers. They insisted that shore-handlers should earn the same high night shift wage as the steve

dores, and should have the same rights to pension, holidays and sick leave. They claimed that the stevedores often procrastinated in the hold, and then attributed delays to the workers in the yards. Shore-handlers also complained about the administrative and skilled workers in the zone who, they said, treated them without respect and did not recognise how hard their work really was. They thought of manual workers just as numbers on a card, and excluded them from any meeting or discussions of work in the zones. Summoning the language of the party, one shore-handler told us: 'The bosses don't want us to know why and for whom we're working because then we would develop our knowledge and take over their places'.

Party membership in the port reflected the differentiated concerns of port workers. After the initial enthusiasm and worker initiative in the setting up of the production councils, Frelimo made slow progress in attracting political activists in the port. There were production councils and party members in all the operational zones of the port, but most of these were permanent skilled workers, literate, Portuguese speaking, available for political meetings. Some production councils dealt with complaints against work-conditions and defending workers in disciplinary cases, but others were reduced to bureaucratic writing of monthly reports on production. Party members included no women and very few casual workers. Stevedores and shore-handlers were seldom available for political meetings and literacy classes. They lived in outlying areas, were intermittently present in the port, were not based in any particular zone, and wanted to work as many hours as they could.

In contrast, in 1981 some managers were joining the party. In the earlier round of recruitment of party members in the port, very few managers, at either central or zone level presented themselves as candidates. Those who did were often rejected after fierce criticism from workers (not exclusively party members) for collaboration with colonial authorities, racism or abuse of power. By 1981, however, state-ownership and Frelimo's increasing tendency to make everyone a potential representative of the working classes signified a shift in party policy. Managers were encouraged to become members of the party. Candidate members were subject to evaluation by their colleagues in the workplace and had to be involved in a programme of political study, but criteria for entry in the party had become increasingly negative: one could not have collaborated with the colonial security policy, nor be polygamous nor religious. Educated members of the liberal colonial bourgeoisie often found it easier to pass than workers did.

The issue of the stevedores' union blocked any move towards the development of a port workers' union out of the production councils. Recruitment of stevedores had been moved out of union headquarters to the port itself, and integration of the casual pools was expected soon. Stevedores were obdurate in their defence of the autonomy of their union, and particularly of their benefits fund. The mutual distrust generated by the 1974 strikes and Frelimo's response had not abated. Shore-handlers and (particularly) stevedores had a collective practical knowledge, honed under the restrictions of the fascist colonial rule, of ways of confronting management without recourse to open strikes.

CONTINGENCY AND CONSCIOUSNESS: THE DEFENCE OF *MALA-MALA*

Given management hesitance, hostility from the stevedores, and resistance from many groups of workers to its plans for stabilisation, the party was moving very cautiously ahead. Port management had made two limited experiments with fixing and stabilising manual workers in zones, on the lines of schemes implemented in the colonial port. A small crew of shore-handlers and stevedores was fixed in particular zones to do regular loading, though they remained in status 'workers with a card'. They were available for literacy classes and political work (taking a change of good clothes to wear to classes and meetings). They received a fixed weekly wage based on the day-shift rate, but could improve their salary by working night shifts and overtime at the same rates as casual workers. Though they had a regular assured base salary, they, like the casual shore-handlers, complained that they had no rights to pension, sick leave or paid holiday.

The second experiment was the introduction of a shift-system for manual workers fixed in the Ore Zone, which functioned continually and thus had a relatively constant demand for labour. To break a worker slow-down in protest against the loss of overtime pay, (with an accumulation of over a thousand wagons in the zone, in part provoked by the deliberate retention of wagons by South African railways), management sent the workers who had been fixed in the zone back to the casual pool. New young workers, mainly recent migrants to the city, were recruited from the municipal council. They were set to work on a circulating three shift system with no night-shift pay or overtime, a restriction they also came rapidly to contest.

Given resistance to the terms of stabilisation, the party committee proposed a measure that they thought would be a step towards stabilisation, and to which they expected workers to agree: the prohibition of *mala mala*, task work. Workers doing

mala-mala had died in an accident in one of the zones. The party attributed the deaths to *mala-mala*; exhaustion and haste had made the workers careless. *Mala-mala*, the party secretary said, was a system designed to intensify labour, to deepen the exploitation of workers, a colonial way of working. The party was unprepared for the unified opposition to abolition of *mala-mala* by management and all groups of workers. It continued to be practised surreptitiously in the zones, and the new younger workers taken on under the shift system were now demanding that they be allowed to do *mala mala* as well. In a seminar on the introduction of 'socialist emulation' for members of production councils,⁴¹ appreciative laughter and applause met one worker's observation that *mala-mala* was socialist emulation and could be used to meet production targets. The proposed scheme of competition among groups of workers to find ways to meet targets was precisely the way the port had worked in the past, i.e. *mala-mala*.

There was mockery in this suggestion, but there was also strong conviction in the port that only *mala-mala* could reconcile the interests of different groups of workers with management (and the party's) concern with reducing dead-time in the port. Our research team met with the production council of the steel-handling zone to discuss why it took 21 days to load 14,000 ton of steel beams, rather than the seven days planned. During most of the three weeks, which overlapped with our research time in the zone, the zone was in 24 hour-a-day operation. Control data for the zone registered 130 hours of dead-time, hours when workers were present but could not work.

The zone manager began. He explained that most of the problems resulted from factors outside the control of the zone: the slowness of the stevedores and problems of co-ordination between the shipping line, the client, and the railways. He repeated the explanation initially offered to us by all groups of workers in the zone - there were not enough of the proper type of wagon with drop-sides for off-loading the beams. We then asked about the explanation that had surfaced in individual and small-group interviews with skilled workers: that some manual workers were deliberately slowing down work.

Cumbe, the representative of the shore-handlers fixed in the zone, answered aggressively. His response invoked both the intransigence of management and every one of the major oppositions among workers in the colonial port: skilled vs. unskilled,

⁴¹The actual proposal set targets for crane-rotations, following a system then employed in GDR ports. The language corresponds closely, however, to Lenin's thinking on how competition could be used to

manual vs. administrative, casual vs. permanent. 'The tally clerks and machine operators say that the shore-handlers deliberately slow down work in the zone so we can earn more overtime, but that's not true'. The problem was the stop and start irregularity of work in the zone. 'If we weren't there working overtime', he said, 'who would unload the wagons when they arrive?' He argued that the zone manager did not recognise the opinions and expertise of the manual workers. He put them in groups of six, though managing a sling of iron beams had always required eight workers.⁴² The zone would work more rapidly if there were a smaller number of larger groups. More manual workers needed to be recruited in peak periods to fill out work-groups, but the direction of the port would not let the zone do it. Work would go more rapidly if the tally-clerks would take on some manual tasks. They needed extra hands just to close the doors of a railway wagon, but the tally clerks, some of them former manual workers and still paid as 'workers with a card', would not even touch the doors of a wagon. As for the machine operators, they refused to transport the manual workers when they were sent to load in a general cargo zone, making them walk the length of the port despite the delay it meant in doing the work.

The representative of the machine operators, Mabunda, responded irritably that it was the port management that forbade them to transport other workers on their machines. His explanation returned to the diverging interests of workers implicit in the organisation of overtime. There was so much dead time in the zone because those who earned overtime and extra pay for night shifts delayed the work during the day so that extra shifts would be scheduled. He received the same no matter how long he worked, without overtime or bonus pay, so he wasn't slowing down work. Many of the things Cumbe had said about work in the zone were true, he told us, but then he turned to Cumbe and said, 'You've got an arrangement with the zone manager to mark your card and let you go home when there is little work in the zone; I can never do that.' Cumbe was not defensive. It was true, he said, that head of the zone marked his card so that he could be paid for days off after long shifts, but if not, he would never have any time-off. It was wrong that the tally-clerks and machine operators were doing so much unpaid overtime.

develop innovative ways of working and to the long-term debates in socialism on the relationship between moral and material incentives.

There were no representatives of casual workers - stevedores and shore-handlers - in the production council because they belonged to no single zone. So we asked those present about the explanation they had given for the delays in the zone, the prohibition of *mala-mala*. All the members of the production council agreed; the only way for casual workers to earn overtime without extending the working day and forcing the fixed workers to do extra shifts. Was there no alternative to either extending or intensifying the working day? Mabunda responded:

That crane-operator gets paid well for his overtime, but doesn't get much chance to enjoy his money. I suppose that he would like to spend some time at home as much as me. But for me there are only two possible ways to end *mala mala* - pay me overtime for the hours I really work, or recognise that I am a skilled permanent worker, and put me on a monthly wage. The boss would not have to fiddle the shifts to give Cumbe paid days off if shore-handlers and stevedores had holidays and sick leave and pension like monthly workers.

Cumbe's and Mabunda's explanations of how the zone worked exemplify both the strengths and limitations of the kind of practical knowledge that Scott has in mind. Each had a very detailed understanding of work in the port, but each view was also partial, reflecting the grievances of a particular group. It is not surprising that different groups of workers had a different take on the same reality. What was interesting in this production council meeting was that all ultimately agreed with Mabunda's contingent understanding - both the ways things were and alternative ways of organising work were possible in the zone. They also all agreed that there was no way of addressing the organisation of production without dealing with the world of commodities - the terms of the wage-bargain.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? THE LEGITIMACY OF LENIN'S QUESTION

The structure of profitability in the colonial port depended on intensifying (*mala mala*) or extending of the working day (overtime) to meet peaks of port traffic. As Lenin would have observed, the flight of Portuguese managers and workers and the nationalisation of the navigation companies and the transfer of state-ownership from a colonial to a socialist regime did not itself transform these ways of working and managing work, nor how workers understood their condition and their relation to each other.

⁴² Dubbeld (2001) notes that use of fork-lifts and palletisation provoked struggles over crew size in Durban; the same shift in labour-process underlies this conflict in Maputo.

There was great wit and wisdom in the practical knowledge of workers in the port of Maputo. Yet there was also (particularly in the wit) ambiguity, partiality and the real but misleading images of commodity fetishism. Stevedores and shore-handlers were not really so different, for example, as black and white hairs. Yet no group of workers had a single understanding of their condition. They could assume that things would continue as they were and focus their attention on the terms of the wage-bargain, pressing for the privileges of permanent workers, more paid overtime and nights shifts, or the exclusion of other workers from their union. These demands were, as Frelimo (following Lenin) claimed, economistic and opportunistic. But workers could also envision a broad process of reform in the organisation of production that would reconcile the demands of different groups of workers, giving all a chance to enjoy the security of a regular wage and time with family outside of work. They recognised that if the port could work better, it would benefit the rural families from which almost all port-workers came. Workers defended *mala-mala* and resisted Frelimo's stabilisation plan because they knew the shift system proposed could only mean *unpaid* overtime in periods of peak port movement. Without an explicit reform of how people were paid as well as the how they worked, the party's proposal was just another of the repeated stabilisation experiments of the colonial port.

The question then is not why workers were limited by trade-union consciousness, but why Frelimo's proposal cloaked a typically capitalist solution in the language of socialism. Scott would find the answer in the sociology of the party; a Marxist answer requires an analysis of the broader processual question I have bracketed here - the class basis of the Frelimo party/state. The proposal was not dictatorially imposed from above, at least not in any simple way. The party's stabilisation project was broadly discussed and openly criticised in meetings in the port. The party ultimately backed down, and employing the ambiguities of language so prevalent in the port allowed *mala-mala* to be interpreted as 'working to the plan'. Nor does Scott's emphasis on the interests of technocrats and the intelligentsia provide an adequate explanation. Managers were reluctant to join the party; both the party secretary and the political commissar were from peasant families and were formed as intellectuals within Frelimo itself. The absence of women and the presence of few manual workers in party structures in the port perhaps explains why the party attended so little to the scheduling and transport problems that made workers from outlying areas anxious to work repeated shifts and prevented their attending political meetings and literacy classes. Bettelheim's argument that state-

capitalism is not the appropriate basis for building socialism⁴³ raises perhaps the most relevant issue of all; Frelimo's suspicion of port management yielded over time to taking political responsibility for management decisions. Yet whatever form of property that determined how decisions were made in the port, these decisions would have to be concerned with 'development,' with making the port competitive within a regional transport market.

There were no easy answers in the port. The routines of labour discipline and division were rooted in the past. In the colonial port, the irregular demand for labour was resolved through a racist and repressive system which took all dignity from the casual manual worker. Should the autonomy of the stevedores' union have been recognised, deferring the integration of casual workers? Should the wage structure have been formally equalised, leading inevitably to wage-demands in other industrial sectors in Maputo? The answers could never come only from below, through the spontaneity of local struggles and the politics of affirmation and identity. But Frelimo, burdened both by its own history of distrust of the stevedores after the strikes and the baggage of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy on workers' economism, asked the dockers what should be done, then dismissed their answers as unacceptably defensive, and employed not Marxist theory but the ambiguous and complicit collective rhetoric of the port to mask the terms of difference. When *mala-mala* became 'working to the plan', it truly meant that nothing could be done.

The consciousness which grows from the organisation of production is contingent, possibly contradictory and inconsistent. It includes conceptions based both on work as it is and work as it could be. For workers to engage in a process of revolutionary restructuring of the labour-process the latter conception must become more real and powerful than the former. Workers' assessment of the realism of a strategy of transformation of the labour-process in Mozambique depended not only on their conception of work itself but also on the organisation of everyday life (how they got to work, whether their children had schoolbooks, if they could afford to buy bread) and their assessment of the state, the party, and their own role in the political process. The united defence of *mala-mala* represented a realistic assessment by workers of the party's capacity to define and carry out a strategy for a socialist transformation of the organisation of work.

⁴³Bettelheim 1982, p. 306.

Competition among workers and the divergent interests, skills, and aspirations that marked particular histories arose from the organisation of work in the port. Yet so also did forms of consciousness, bits and pieces of meaning, through which an alternative shared vision of immanent class identity could be analytically constructed. Forging local resistance and struggles into a movement of coherent opposition to a world that remains deeply capitalist and colonial in its organisation and forms of representation requires more than deconstruction. It demands a shared analytical vision of the use of power. To say we make history, but not necessarily as we think, means that outcomes are contingent, but they are also better and worse. We cannot excuse ourselves from asking 'What is to be done?' Nor can we sort out better and worse answers without resort to Marxist theory.

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