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Review of Sayaka Funada-Classen:

*The Origins of War in Mozambique. A History of Unity and Division*

Translated by Masako Osada. Somerset West (South Africa): African Minds, 2013, xiv + 418 pp.  
Originally published by Ochanomizo Shobo, Tokyo (Japan), 2012 (Japanese version 2008).

The Mozambican civil war remains a relevant topic for continuing study, not only as a matter of history but also because of its continuing relevance for the present and expectedly the near, if not more distant, future of Mozambique. Where earlier publications about the war stressed the rôle of the racist minority regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa, more recent analyses have tended to look (also) at the way in which Frelimo implemented its political dominance over the Mozambican population after and even before independence. Funada-Classen's book fits in with the latter trend and has added valuable data to the literature. The degree to which she has succeeded in providing wholly satisfactory interpretations of these data will have to be discussed.

The book is ultimately a result of the author's hands-on involvement with Mozambique when she was a participant of the ONUMOZ operation which guided the country from war to its first multiparty elections in the 1990s. The personal involvement has certainly helped in the quest for data. After her ONUMOZ work, the author did fieldwork in Maúa District in Niassa Province in 1997, 1999 and 2003, yielding important oral history of which much is presented verbatim to the reader. Besides, she has dug up much information from archival sources. Originally published in Japanese, the book will conceivably have reached a readership which is not very familiar with Mozambique. On the other hand, the author quotes Japanese scholars which may not be known to many Euro-American scholars. These two aspects form welcome points for enriching the academic literature.

The main part of the book consists of five chapters plus an Introduction and a Conclusion. The title of the book indicates that it is on the origins of “war”, and the reader (at least the present one) would be inclined to think that the text puts forward an explanation of the origin of the war between Frelimo and Renamo from 1976 to 1992, and in fact this is so indicated in the Introduction. There it is also already indicated that another, earlier war, that against the Portuguese colonizing state, was an important factor in bringing about the war after independence. As we will see below, Funada-Classen does not exhaust the explanatory possibilities that her own data present. A critical view on Frelimo during the independence struggle is hinted at in the Conclusion but not realized in the later parts of the book as it could have been.

Chapter 1 gives backgrounds on nineteenth and twentieth-century colonialism in Mozambique, with special attention to Northern Mozambique. Chapter 2 informs the reader in solid historical and anthropological ways about the Maúa area, whose residents are mostly from the Macua ethnic group. Chapter 3 describes Mozambican colonial society in the twentieth century and the emergence of nationalism and anti-colonialism. Chapter 4 deals with Frelimo’s anti-colonial struggle, placed within wider contexts of world politics, such as developments within the United Nations and the United States, and the Congo crisis of the 1960s. It shows how the West was unwilling to support the process of decolonization, with all the bad consequences of that attitude, and paradoxically, pushing independence movements more and more to the side of the Communist bloc, which was the very result not called for. The aspects of international relations, Funada-Classen’s specialization, are well elaborated. The parts about Frelimo’s development, however, suffer from a lack of insights different from the older literature. The information is badly organized, e.g. with details about Frelimo generally alternated with aspects of Islamic history in North Mozambique specifically. Both are relevant for the book, but working with shorter, better focused chapters could have been an advantage here. A consequence of the lumping together of so much information is that the text loses sight of a coherent description and explanation of the infamous “crisis within Frelimo”. Moreover, the text goes back and forth between years like 1968 and 1966, prohibiting a straightforward comprehension of the crisis, which had a very specific evolution over time. Chapter 5 provides Funada-Classen’s information about the Maúa area during Frelimo’s anti-colonial struggle and the countermeasures by the Portuguese colonial civil government and

army. This is the best part of the book and definitely recommended reading. The Conclusion then is only partly a wrap-up and further interpretation of the earlier information and actually goes on to give more primary data, much of it about the Frelimo-Renamo war within Maúa. The analysis about why in 1974-1975 there were so many people and organizations who did not want to belong to Frelimo in an independent Mozambique remains shallow and gets stuck in depicting people like Joana Simeão (incidentally, a prominent Macua) as some sort of stooges of the old colonial order. PIDE/DGS files show a different situation.

Given that Funada-Classen has done good work to obtain detailed information about the anti-colonial struggle in Maúa, it is remarkable that no similar effort has been put into reconstructing the troublesome history which evolved between Frelimo and the numerous opponents the movement produced against itself. She uncritically reproduces anti-Gwambe and anti-Nkavandame propaganda prevalent in older, hagiographic literature about Frelimo without scrutinizing the relevant backgrounds. The book by Barnabé Ncomo is used only to identify Uria Simango's birth place, while João Cabrita's work on early Frelimo is not mentioned at all. Yet these works contain a wealth of information about the many quarrels within Frelimo, which should have been engaged with in a book that has "unity and division" in its subtitle. Gwambe was a big proponent of armed struggle against the Portuguese and first leader of UDENAMO (as mentioned in chapter 3), one of the two organizations that merged into Frelimo. Funada-Classen writes that he was "exposed as a Portuguese agent" (p. 384); her source for this "exposure" is Newitt, who refers to Henriksen, but the latter writes about *charges* against Gwambe. To speak of "exposure" would leave us with the awkward conclusion that struggle against Portuguese colonizers was performed by an agent of those same Portuguese colonizers. The author does not show any awareness whatsoever of the absurdity of such a consequence.

Even more serious is the interpretation of the situation concerning Nkavandame and the Cabo Delgado chairmen. There can be little doubt that a main division between Frelimo was between Nkavandame and his adherents on the one hand and Machel and his adherents on the other. But Funada-Classen presents a confused time line, and insufficiently analyses (if at all) the background of Nkavandame's grievances. She writes that "[t]he internal conflict culminated in the assassination of Filipe Samuel Magaia" in October 1966. But this event is

better seen as the starting point for Frelimo's bifurcated internal conflict rather than a culmination of it (in fact the author herself seems to indicate this on p. 251). Everything points to the aggravation of problems after Machel emerged as Magaia's successor as army commander. Events like the quarrel with UNEMO (USA) students, disturbances with students at the Mozambique Institute and the assaults on the Frelimo office happened after Frelimo started to assert itself more in an authoritarian and military way. Funada-Classen mentions Nkavandame's dissatisfaction with the new trend, but does not delve deep enough concerning the source of his disaffection. If Cabrita's *Tortuous Road* book would have been duly consulted, it would have been opportune to mention that Nkavandame and his associated chairmen criticized the circumstance that combatants as well as civilians got killed by Frelimo.

This calls for closer scrutiny: why would Frelimo kill people who it says it is going to liberate? Cabrita's source for this information is a *Notícias* message of November 1969, and someone might object that such a source should not be trusted. However, Funada-Classen's own Maúa information provides support for the thesis that Frelimo did kill civilians during the guerrilla war, in this quote: "The hardship in the *mato* (bush, where people fled) was too terrible. There were some who ran away because of hunger, but if captured by FRELIMO, they were killed" (p. 304). It is a significant omission of the book that such a piece of information is not connected to circumstances that an organization like PCN demanded a multiparty political system in 1974-1975, not accepting that Frelimo would claim all power for itself, or that Renamo was not only set up by colonialists, as implied in the Conclusion, suddenly forgetting about Matsangaissa who is nonetheless mentioned in the Introduction. In these ways the book does not exhaust its own possibilities for explaining the origins of the post-independence war.

#### Biographical sources consulted

<<http://www.afraso.org/de/node/282>>

<[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sayaka\\_Funada\\_Classen](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sayaka_Funada_Classen)>