

BOOK REVIEWS

HISTORY

Tanja R. Müller. *Legacies of Socialist Solidarity: East Germany in Mozambique.* Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014. xvi + 205 pp. List of Figures. List of Tables. List of Acronyms. Appendixes. Bibliography. Index. \$85.00. Cloth.

Ulrich Van der Heyden, Wolfgang Semmler, and Ralf Straßburg, eds. *Mosambikanische Vertragsarbeiter in der DDR-Wirtschaft: Hintergründe–Verlauf–Folgen.* (Mozambican Contract Laborers in the GDR Economy: Background–Course–Consequences.) Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2014. Appendix. Index. €39.90. Paper.

While doing field research in 2007, Tanja Müller was surprised to hear a Mozambican woman reminisce about her “memories of paradise” as a pupil in the School of Friendship (Schule der Freundschaft, or SdF) in Straßfurt in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Her sentiment contradicted the prevailing view of recent German scholars that the school had essentially indoctrinated rather than educated its students. Curious, Müller went on to investigate the experience of Mozambican children at the SdF, their lives after returning home, and the legacy of socialist values in present-day Mozambique.

Müller’s insightful study, *Legacies of Socialist Solidarity: East Germany in Mozambique*, is the first to examine the reintegration of nearly a thousand Mozambican adolescents, students at the SdF between 1982 and 1988. Their lives confronted an anachronism: at the behest of President Samora Machel, the children were immersed in values of socialism and solidarity in hopes of their becoming the vanguard of a postcolonial nation of workers. But when they returned home, Mozambique had moved on politically and economically. These youth were drafted into the military, their school diplomas were not acknowledged, and the returnees were left to fend for themselves.

This case study is of interest on several counts. First, this state-sponsored education project, aimed at creating the New Man (*Homen Novo*) to contribute to the development of a young independent Mozambique, is a story of transnational cooperation between two socialist nations. Zooming out further, the book can be read in the context of literature decentering the Cold War, highlighting the pervasiveness of the political in everyday life and the

challenges posed by transitions to and from socialism. Zooming back in, it explores how an elite, state-led education program—an expression of “socialist cosmopolitanism” (4)—played out in individual lives in quite unforeseen ways. Second, this case study reveals how socialist legacies persist in shaping the identity of former SdF students in postsocialist Mozambique. Müller interprets continued attachment to values identified as “German” and “socialist” not as a sign of outdated nostalgia but as a reasonable response to negotiating the present reality in Mozambique. And third, this book offers an alternative reading from below of Mozambique’s postindependence history.

Müller introduces her project in terms of socialist legacies, discussing the scope of her sources, delineating her treatment of oral history, and stating the work’s two constitutive theories: Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualization of education and Nira Yuval-Davis’s theory of belonging. Chapter 1 provides a general background, embedding the history of the SdF within an analysis of socialist internationalism, GDR foreign politics, and solidarity toward the Third World. Chapters 2–4 depict the lives of the cohort before leaving for the GDR, while at the SdF, and after returning to Mozambique. We learn who these children were, where they came from, how they were selected, what their expectations were before leaving Mozambique, and what changed during their upbringing in Germany. At the SdF they learned such secondary values as discipline, patriotism, respect, courtesy, and comradeship in addition to receiving their academic and vocational training, and they grew together to form a family collective despite ethnic, linguistic, and class differences. The penultimate chapter traces education in the GDR based on five life stories, exploring how socialist values and emotional attachment were sustained years later. After a brief conclusion, five appendixes offer a glimpse into daily life at the SdF.

The book draws upon thirty-five in-depth interviews with former students conducted in different locations throughout Mozambique in 2008. In addition, the author spent time as a participant observer and conducted informal interviews in larger groups of SdF graduates. With fond memories of their time in Germany, all those approached were keen to participate, resulting in “stories full of hope and excitement, but equally full of betrayal and despair” (xii). The analysis is guided by the interpretation of the interviews, later triangulated with archival material from the German National Archive in Berlin and secondary literature. The book’s strength is also its limitation. While the focus on individual life stories is enlightening, perhaps the narrative would have benefited from more varied sources, including interviews with Mozambican government officials responsible for the program, parents, and fellow students who continued their education in Mozambique. Moreover, Mozambican archives could have been consulted about FRELIMO’s education policy.

This is an important and timely study. A rising interest in the socialist world of the twentieth century has led to examinations of Africa’s links with other (post)socialist regions. The book’s focus on the legacy of socialist

values adds to this relatively uncharted territory. I highly recommend this book to those interested in development studies, transnational education programs, international contacts in the socialist world, reintegration, and the effects of transitions and changed political landscapes on individuals.

Since 1995 Ulrich van der Heyden has edited the LIT series “The GDR and the Third World,” a must-read for those interested in historical encounters of the Second World with the global South or in the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Following a bilateral government agreement, about twenty thousand young Mozambican men and women came to the GDR between 1979 and 1990 to work and undergo vocational training. Written in German, this latest volume, *Mosambikanische Vertragsarbeiter in der DDR-Wirtschaft* (Mozambican Contract Laborers in the GDR Economy), gathers many voices: interviews with former Mozambican workers who stayed on in unified Germany, comments of their German colleagues and friends, impressions by GDR workers in Mozambique during the 1980s, reports by former GDR government officials, and analyses by academics and practitioners.

In his introduction van der Heyden describes the book’s intention to counter narratives of social control and surveillance in an authoritarian state by challenging accounts of segregation, racism, and discrimination. He argues that the dominant discourse neglects the agency of workers and denies any development of meaningful intercultural relationships in the GDR.

Part 1, “Background and Conditions of the Assignments of Contract Laborers from Mozambique to the GDR Economy,” gives a historical perspective. Wolfgang Semmler sketches Mozambican history in the twentieth century. Van der Heyden provides background on the Mozambican contract laborers in the GDR. Herbert Graf’s retrospective shows how the history of Mozambique interconnected with that of the two Germanys in the later twentieth century. Finally, Ralf Straßburg describes his work as program manager of the Mozambican contract laborers at the State Secretariat for Work and Wages (Staatssekretariat für Arbeit und Löhne).

Part 2, “Differentiated Viewpoints of the Contract Laborers,” explores the rationale of the contract labor program with Mozambique as both states understood it. Jörg Roesler contextualizes the GDR’s attempt to become an immigration country rather than an emigration country, framing these policies in the context of Comecon debates on labor migration. Landolf Scherzer, a well-known GDR author, cites excerpts from a speech he gave in the 1980s about his experience working in Mozambique. Anna Mavanga, a German married to a Mozambican student in the GDR, tells of her acquaintance with contract laborers and reviews the overall program. Van der Heyden writes against one-sided interpretations of the contract workers’ lives in the GDR.

Part 3, “Personal Experiences and Memories: Living and Working in the GDR,” delineates the lives of the contract laborers themselves. This section contains four interviews conducted by Ralf Straßburg with former

Mozambican workers. José Chirindza, Serafim Manhice, Julio Mussane, and José Reis each recollect their preparation for and life in the GDR, covering work, free time, and private life, and illustrate the experiences and feelings of foreigners in the GDR. Luis Mazuze describes his education and life path from contract laborer to food engineer. Amina Candida Selemene provides a female perspective on the experience of contract labor. Karl Heinz Seidel remembers working alongside Mozambicans and establishing a friendship with Faz Bem Zimando despite cultural differences. Alexandre Mutambe writes about the forgotten Mozambicans in Germany.

Part 4, “Personal Experiences and Memories: Surviving and Living after the GDR,” explains the impact of German reunification on the Mozambican contract laborers. Most returned to Mozambique. Wolfgang Zropf details how a private friendship led to several mutual visits and finally to development projects financed by various small German organizations and organized with the help of returned contract laborers. Wolfgang Lange, who himself worked in Mozambique in the 1980s, describes the problematic return of many contract laborers in the absence of any orchestrated government reintegration program, leading to the eventual marginalization of many returnees. Theresia Ulbrich argues that the returned contract laborers, now often known as *Magermanes*, have established a collective identity, cemented by their traumatic experience of failed reintegration and expressed through collective life in a park in Maputo. Lastly, in another interview we hear from Faz Bem Zimando himself about his experience in the GDR.

The appendix contains the full text of the initial agreement between the GDR and Mozambique on contract laborers from 1979. This is a valuable collection of autobiographical essays and interviews, though the analytical chapters vary in quality. The volume would have benefited from a more thorough discussion of what it meant to be black and foreign in the GDR. (see, e.g., Eva-Maria Elsner and Lothar Elsner, *Zwischen Nationalismus und Internationalismus: über Ausländer und Ausländerpolitik in der DDR, 1949–1990: Darstellung und Dokumente* [Rostock, 1994]).

The volume’s authors emphasize its contribution to an intra-German dialogue about ways of writing GDR history, as a corrective to work that needlessly disparages the GDR. Their point about the hegemony of German historiography and public remembrance discourse is important, but the discussion is too parochial for an international readership. Alternatively, *ASR* readers might well study this primary source material as documents of an international socialist world, connected through migrations, both of Mozambicans to the GDR and GDR citizens to Mozambique, and shaped by myriad intercultural interactions.

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