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## URBAN POLITICS, CONSPIRACY AND REFORM IN NAMPULA, MOZAMBIQUE

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## Urban Politics, Conspiracy and Reform in Nampula, Mozambique

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### Introduction

During the summer of 2008, I was conducting fieldwork in Nampula City, where I was investigating the seeming paradox that the adoption of reforms that were supposed to ‘roll-back’ the state in fact revitalised it and Frelimo – the formerly socialist ruling party. Although Frelimo has had an ambivalent history with both the city and the province of Nampula, the party’s dominance now seemed to be deeply entrenched, even if many of the city’s inhabitants viewed the current situation with misgiving. An event that seemed to symbolise this ambivalence was a scandal that had erupted five years before that alleged government complicity in a supposed organ-trafficking ring with occult connotations headed by a foreign businessman with links to the party. The goal of this paper is to use this scandal and urban politics in Nampula City as a microcosm to discuss the practice of politics in post-reform Mozambique and some of the social tensions that have arisen from this process.

One day I was speaking with an Indian merchant about his relationship to the party.<sup>1</sup> At some point in our conversation I asked him what he thought about the organ-trafficking scandal. Although the allegations had been disproved and the causes traced to various land and political disputes, my merchant friend was not convinced. According to him:

These things happen here you know, they believe in sorcery. Just a few weeks ago they caught a Nigerian trader at the airport trying to transport 18 kilos of organs.<sup>2</sup> The government does not do anything. Every time the charges are dropped for the same reason: ‘lack of evidence’. They are being paid off and maybe they are involved themselves.

After numerous similar conversations, I noticed something quite interesting concerning opinions about the 2003 organ-trafficking scandal. Among the better-off, especially Indian merchants, popular views continue to be divided, with some thinking it was a political set-up, but many others feeling it did actually happen, even if they doubted the efficacy of sorcery. For the poorer sections of society, especially workers in the informal sector, many had either never heard of it, or thought the story was without any factual basis. While it is not surprising that different social groups hold conflicting opinions over events, I became curious as to why this story was more credible to some than others. Especially because despite the wealth of many Indian merchants and the crucial role that workers in the informal economy play in daily urban life, both are, to some degree, socially marginal.

At first glance the merchant’s comments tell a story that has become increasingly familiar in anthropology concerning the social effects of what is frequently referred to as ‘neo-liberal governmentality’. Neo-liberalism came to Mozambique as part of a wider package of reforms

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<sup>1</sup> The merchant in question was actually born in Mozambique as were many of his compatriots. I am using the term Indian here with its local meaning, which refers to people of Indian or Pakistani descent.

<sup>2</sup> I heard the tale of the Nigerian trader who was caught with 18 kilos of organs multiple times, but I did not find any official record of it.

promoted by the World Bank, the IMF and many of the major donors. The aim went beyond the introduction of a 'free market' economic system. The overall goal for the promoters of reform was to dismantle the single-party socialist state that teetered on the brink of economic collapse due to misguided policy decisions and twelve years of devastating civil war, and replace it with a liberal, democratic capitalist polity. While the backers of the reforms spoke with the current rhetoric of 'transparency', 'accountability' and 'good governance', the results were, of course, far more ambiguous (Pitcher 2006; West 2001). By the end of the socialist period the situation was desperate, with massive shortages and rising prices in the city and widespread hunger in the countryside; anything that could bring an end to the war and improve conditions was welcomed by many. It is true that the reforms did bring an end to the war in 1992, an economic growth rate averaging nearly 8 percent a year since 2004, and three, relatively peaceful, national democratic elections starting in 1994. However, this was accompanied by growing inequality, increased corruption as politicians' privatised assets and firms to themselves or associates, and the dismantling of the limited social safety net that existed for urbanites. Mozambicans often describe the current system as 'savage' or 'gangster' capitalism, and as one man once mentioned to me: 'we have created a system that is like Chicago during the time of Al Capone' (Sumich 2008: 123).

Many anthropologists argue that the rise of unfettered free market forces often coincides with an increase in occult beliefs (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). Aspects of this can be seen across the world, from Latin America and perhaps the foundational text on the subject – *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism* (Tausig, 1980) – to Africa, Asia and further afield (Sanders 2008). The connection between forms of neo-liberalism and the occult is expressed in a range of ways from the seemingly counterintuitive 'modernity' of witchcraft in Cameroon (Geschiere 1997) to workers being possessed by Muslim spirits to express resistance to capitalist work discipline in Malaysia (Ong 1987). Accordingly, under conditions where the production of wealth seem divorced from actual work and people's labour seems increasingly superfluous, the new economy is understood through ideas of invisible plantations tended by zombie slaves, pyramid schemes and prosperity cults (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993). Thus, organ-trafficking rings often have pride of place in a heady mixture of freewheeling capitalism and magic. This is due both to the association of human organs with the occult, at least in southern Africa; and when the poor have nothing to sell but their body parts, a form of exploitation beyond Marx's imagination has been reached (Scheper-Hughes 2001: 4). In this manner, an organ-trafficking scandal and my merchant informant's dark hints of the complicity of the powerful appears simply as another example of the mistrust and bewilderment that have accompanied neo-liberalism's social onslaught.

Tracing the connections between the sorcery and the introduction of neo-liberalism has provided compelling arguments, so much so that Sanders (2008) has suggested that showing the association between the introduction of neo-liberalism and the outbreak of beliefs in new forms of the occult has become an anthropological orthodoxy. Although there certainly can be a connection between magical and economic practices, the idea of the occult acting as the 'people's' critique of neo-liberalism does not seem convincing in this case. Most commentators, when referring to neo-liberalism, seem to be referring a set of practices that include the fetishisation of the market as the ultimate source of freedom, the demonisation of the state and the reliance of mechanisms such as privatisation to unleash the entrepreneurial energies of the populace (Kipnis 2007: 385). This view is backed by Harvey, who argues that neo-liberalism is primarily a political project, designed to restore the power of economic elites (Harvey 2005). However, these views tend to conflate the ideology of neo-liberalism from the results of implemented policies. In fact the implementation of supposedly neo-liberal

reforms is riddled with contradictions and unintended consequences, not least of which is the much commented upon irony that the state was supposed to preside over its own dismemberment. Other scholars, such as Rose and Miller (1992) argue that neo-liberalism is a form of governmentality, at least in so-called ‘advanced liberal democracies’, whose goal is to create autonomous and self-regulating citizens that the state can govern from a distance. In the case of Mozambique though, instead of even attempting to govern at a distance, in imitation of ‘advanced liberal democracies’, the reforms allowed Frelimo to finally govern directly in areas where their control has historically been weak, by increasing the dependence of certain social groups on the state (Pitcher 2006).

The second common assumption concerning neo-liberalism is that it creates some sort of rupture, where previous social relationships, structures and moral orders are torn asunder by the unstoppable juggernaut of global capitalism (Sanders 2008). It is impossible to deny that Mozambique has undergone some profound changes since the fall of socialism in 1990. However, Mozambican history has been characterised by a brutal form of colonialism, an eleven-year liberation struggle and then civil war. Violent transitions are perhaps far more the norm than the exception and the difference between ‘neo-liberalism’ and the historical practice of capitalism in former colonial settings is not entirely clear. There is always the danger that critiques of neo-liberalism fall prey to the seductive rhetoric of what they are attacking. Whether seen as a force of progress or destruction, there is the tendency to view neo-liberalism (perhaps following the logic of advertising) as something totally new and unprecedented, while missing its equally important historicity and continuity in practice (Cooper 2005; Kipnis 2008).

I argue that instead of destroying the previous social order and causing a complete rupture, it appears that in the Mozambican case the adoption of a wide range of reforms intended by foreign backers to restrict the role of the state actually revitalised it. The major result of political and economic reforms was to create a space on the lower levels of the social hierarchy, where actors – many of whom already occupied at least a relatively privileged position – could then jockey for power. While it has become almost an anthropological orthodoxy to see events, such as the Nampula organ-trafficking scandal, as a critique of emerging inequalities by the oppressed expressed through an occult narrative, this incidence points to a different conclusion. Instead it appears that the scandal was designed to speak to the poor as part of a political campaign of ‘dirty tricks’ in the run up to an election. However, as a tactic it backfired. I argue that this is because the scandal was designed by those who are comparatively privileged, but with an ambivalent relationship to Frelimo’s structures of power; and it spoke more convincingly to their fears of the party’s growing dominance than to those of the wider population.

### **Nampula City**

To understand how the organ-trafficking scandal sheds light on the practice of power in Mozambique, we must first briefly discuss the city where it erupted. Nampula is Mozambique’s third largest city, with an estimated population of 477,900 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2007).<sup>3</sup> The city is situated inland in a rich agricultural region and is the provincial capital. In addition to the city’s political functions, it is an important trade hub for both internal consumption and international products that enter Mozambique through the

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<sup>3</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estatística, available at <http://www.ine.gov.mz/>

nearby port of Nacala and then are shipped to central Africa. The city is home to a thriving Indian merchant community and is often referred to as the ‘Indian capital’ of Mozambique.

Frelimo has an ambivalent history in the province of Nampula. Although it was a theatre in the eleven-year liberation struggle against the Portuguese, the party’s hold was tenuous in large areas of the province. The effects of Frelimo’s post-independence socialist modernisation programme were contradictory and often unwittingly exacerbated local conflicts in many rural areas of the province (Geffrey 1991; Hall and Young 1997; Pitcher 2006). Due to the party’s mistakes, the Renamo rebels were able to take advantage and entrench themselves in parts of the province, leading to fierce fighting during the civil war (Geffrey 1991).<sup>4</sup> Nampula City’s population surged as peasants fled the war-torn rural areas for the comparative safety of the town. However, Renamo developed a social base throughout the province, especially amongst the poorest and most marginalised.

Sixteen years after the end of the war Nampula City’s economy is booming, but the benefits seem to be monopolised by a select few. Many of the plantations and factories (especially cashew-nut production, one of the largest cash crops) that managed to survive the war and economic crisis of the socialist period were finally shut during the post-war structural adjustment programme, creating even more unemployment (Hanlon 1996). A frequent complaint heard from the well-off and the poor alike is that despite the construction of a cement plant, a Coca-Cola bottling factory and the O’Connor’s industrial chicken farm, much of the economy is based on trade and commerce, which can create great wealth, but relatively few jobs for the poor and little stability for the better-off. The fall of socialism has not ended the antagonism of powerful local actors, such as the provincial hierarchy of the Catholic Church, which was singled out during the revolutionary period as being the church of the colonial state and thus lost land and influence. Dissatisfaction manifested itself during the first two national elections, where Renamo won the majority of provincial votes. The organ-trafficking scandal broke out in the run-up to the first municipal election that Renamo decided to contest. After Frelimo obtained an overall electoral victory in 1999, despite suspicions of ballot rigging, it had become clear that the centre of power was to remain inviolate. In spite of this, Renamo is able to compete at the local level and Frelimo was worried that it could lose control of the second most economically important city in the country. Thus, to understand the scandal one also has to be aware of the larger social context, which included political tensions and growing resentment as the effects of the much lauded economic boom seemed to be largely limited to just a few social groups, including Indian merchants (or *monhes* as they are derogatorily known), Frelimo party bosses, well-connected people from Maputo (the national capital) and foreign investors.

### **Politics, Nuns and Organ Traffickers**

I first met Gary and Tania O’Connor in 2008, when I had been told by members of the municipality that the O’Connor’s and Farm Fresh Chicken were the perfect example of what could be achieved when the government and foreign investors work together. It was hard to believe that just five years ago the O’Connors were at the centre of a scandal that received international attention. In addition to numerous Mozambican articles written about the subject, lurid headlines such as ‘Organ Trafficking is Undeniable’ (Associated Free Press, March 3, 2004) or ‘Organ Traffickers Threaten Nuns’ (BBC, February 13, 2004) appeared on major news services.

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<sup>4</sup> Since the peace agreement in 1992 Renamo has become the nation’s major opposition party.

Gary O'Connor is from Zimbabwe, and had previously worked in South African and Malawi, where he met his wife Tania, then working for an NGO. When they heard of the boom conditions in Mozambique they decided to relocate. They initially set up a business selling seafood from the coastal city of Angoche to Zimbabwe, but as the Zimbabwean economy began to collapse their market disappeared and they moved to Nampula city to open an industrial chicken farm.

In the beginning the move to Nampula worked out well. In one of the richest agricultural regions in the country, many of the basic foodstuffs are imported, including chickens, which came from Brazil. The Mozambican government was eager to attract foreign investors, and the municipality gave them land a few kilometres out of town, neighbouring a Catholic mission, for the farm. Financing for the O'Connors comes from a state-owned bank that charges close to 30 percent interest, but in Gary's view this is an advantage as it makes the state something akin to a silent partner and offers a degree of political protection. The farm currently produces around 96,000 chickens per year and the O'Connors have a contract system with various small farmers that produce another 36,000 chickens per year.

The actual running of the O'Connors' operation, though, is far more difficult. The Mozambican system is heavily bureaucratic with strict labour regulations. Strikes and pilfering are constant problems with the workers and, according to Gary, it is very difficult to actually fire anyone. His overall relationship to the government is generally good. While neither he nor Tania are particularly political they prefer Frelimo because: 'They may be dictatorial, but they know how to keep things under control'. Unlike the government, the O'Connors' relationship with their neighbours can be more antagonistic. Renamo is strong in the area near the farm and some local leaders lost land when Farm Fresh Chicken was established. These leaders have since organised the local peasants to engage in frequent land invasions. There have also been acrimonious land and boundary disputes with the neighbouring Catholic mission. Long simmering local disagreements and the run-up to municipal elections formed the social context when the O'Connors were first accused of kidnapping local children and harvesting their organs. One of the common assessments of the scandal, which is also Gary's opinion, is that the local Catholic hierarchy took advantage of the accusations to try to damage the O'Connors and Frelimo, and enlisted Renamo as foot soldiers to back up their claims.<sup>5</sup>

The scandal began when a Brazilian Catholic lay missionary, Maria Elilda dos Santos, accused the O'Connor's of running a ring that kidnapped local children and trafficked their organs. The scandal quickly spread as the accusers claimed that many members of the municipal and provincial government were complicit. Sister dos Santos claimed she had information that proved that dozens of local children who had supposedly disappeared had been murdered and their organs and body parts removed. She claimed that staff at the local airport was allegedly complicit in the transportation of body parts, and the police were actively involved and engaged in a campaign of intimidation towards those who spoke out against the organ-trafficking ring. The police investigated and found nothing, but the story continued to grow, despite or because of police denials. Gary and Tania first realised that the accusations were being taken seriously when their movements were monitored by a car full of nuns from the neighbouring mission that followed them wherever they went. However, it still took them by complete surprise when a detachment of police officers carrying AK-47s arrived

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<sup>5</sup> Due to political constraints and the way the scandal eventually played out, it was very difficult to get the point of view of the Catholic Church and members of Renamo. While I acknowledge the lack, I have tried to speak to as many different people as possible and consult a wide variety of sources.

at their farm with a warrant to search the premises. The search turned up nothing, and disproved Sister dos Santos's claims of a private airstrip on the farm where the O'Connors would load crates of arms severed from local kidnapped children. However, Gary had a good relationship with the provincial police commander. Their friendship was taken as evidence of further police complicity. Various international media outlets, Amnesty International and the Spanish Embassy all carried out investigations. Even the national prosecutor-general in Maputo sent a team to investigate, but they also turned up no evidence. Despite this, the scandal did not abate, perhaps, in part due to a power struggle within the ranks of Frelimo. Mozambique's president of 18 years, Joaquim Chissano, was standing down in favour of a long-time party veteran, Armando Guebuza – a former internal and transport minister. With both national and municipal elections approaching there was the prospect of a shake-up in the hierarchy. According to Gary, the provincial prosecutor-general decided to make his name with this case. He also claims that the prosecutor-general was Sister dos Santos's lover:

We were driving through Nampula with our daughter when we were stopped in the middle of the street by a man in plain clothes and a gun (who turned out to be the provincial prosecutor-general). He opened the door and grabbed my wife. He was very nervous and his gun accidentally went off twice. No one was hit, thank god. Two security guards saw this and ran over to try and help us and that is when he showed his ID and told us we were under arrest. They left my car sitting in the middle of the street with the doors open and my daughter still inside as they took us to prison despite interventions from Maputo and the Danish embassy (Tania is Danish). I was put in a cell with 60 people and my wife in a cell with 15, she was lucky, she got to share a thin mattress with the cell leader. We did not have any trouble there; if anything everyone was curious. The police commandant came in and looked at us and then gave some orders and a guard went to my wife and asked 'What's going on?' She did not understand and asked what the guard meant. The guard looked a bit confused and asked why they had been given orders that we were not to be beaten. We spent a weekend in jail, I guess the protests from the Danish ambassador and Maputo finally reached the right person. The charges by now had spread all the way down to Beira (a major city, where Renamo was very strong in the central province of Sofala). From what I hear Chissano had enough. He told the arch-bishop that the church was to stay out of politics or things would go back the way they were under socialism and then everything died down.

Surprisingly for a story of such magnitude, unless one specifically asked about it, it was rarely mentioned in Nampula. If it did come up in conversation, as previously mentioned, opinions tended to be divided among the better-off, especially the Indian merchants. Responses from those who were poorer, especially workers in the informal sector, tended to be quite different. Surely some also believed in this underground trade, and I was not able to carry out a comprehensive survey. Gary told me that on a couple of occasions during the scandal, people from the *bairros* had offered to sell him people they claimed were relatives. However, most of the people I spoke to during my research had never even heard of this scandal. For those who had, they tended to be dismissive. The response of one informal trader was especially revealing: 'Our problem is that we do not go to school, so I guess people believe stupid stories like this'. Those who found it the most credible tended to be the people who are included in the networks of power, but like Indian merchants, still marginal to a degree. Although they enjoy the benefits of the new economy, this is dependent on a precarious relationship with those in power.

I do not mean to argue that the occult never serves as a criticism of unequal relationships of power. West (1997) has shown how sorcery forms a popular discourse for the understanding of power and governance in Cabo Delgado. Teixeira (2003) has demonstrated how vampire beliefs in the Nampula province also have connections with long-established inequalities between villagers and urbanites and party members and the rest. Luise White (1993, 1997, 2000) has developed a rich body of work chronicling the emergence of vampire stories in central and eastern Africa during the late-colonial period. She argues that these stories tend to appear in times of political and economic stress, where the former order is being overturned and people are trying to negotiate their position in an emerging and still uncertain new hierarchy (White 1993). As demonstrated by Murray (2005) for the ‘muti’ murders of Lesotho, and Pratten (2007) for the man-leopard murders in Nigeria, these anxieties do not necessarily stay confined to the realm of discourse. Furthermore there has been a history of lynching and attacks in northern Mozambique when villagers accused the better-off of poisoning their wells with cholera (Serra 2003).

However, to claim that there has been an increase in occult beliefs as a critique of the oppressed of the current economic order is far less convincing. Due to the growth of forms of fundamentalist Islam in Mozambique, many of the Indian merchants who did find the story credible claimed not to believe in sorcery. When they alleged that the organ scandal did happen they were asserting their cultural superiority over those who do believe in these practices and arguing that Frelimo has become so corrupt that they will engage in any sort of business as long as a profit can be made. For the informal traders that I spoke with, this scandal appeared as just another incidence of various kinds of elites fighting it out between themselves. This was not a story made by the people, but made up for them and if its goal was to appeal to popular imagination it largely failed. Frelimo won the municipal elections and none of the officials implicated were punished, some were actually promoted and no charges were ever filed. Maria dos Santos left the country shortly after (she claims this was under duress) and one of her chief co-accusers, Sister Doraci, was found murdered, – although this appears to have been the result of a dispute over money she had embezzled (BBC, February 27, 2004). As Gary told me when I asked him if he thought people believed the story:

Look around, I am about six kilometres out of town and there are no police here. I am surrounded by little villages and if they really thought I was killing their children do you think I would still be alive? I would have been lynched long ago.

### **To Belong and to be Excluded**

The Nampula organ scandal seems quite different to the standard narrative of occult economies as it appears to speak more convincingly to the fears of the rich than the poor. The questions this section will examine are: what does this tell us about both the disjunctures and historical continuities of neo-liberal reforms in Mozambique; and what does the adoption of ‘free’ market economics, privatisation and democratisation tell us about people’s positionality in the social system.<sup>6</sup> The adoption of reforms has allowed Frelimo to co-opt and include social groups on whom it had difficulties imposing its will during the socialist period, and thus allowed the party to pursue its long-held goal of constructing national unity. Nevertheless, even with the period of revitalisation that has strengthened Frelimo’s hold, this still only encompasses a comparatively small percentage of Mozambique’s population, even

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<sup>6</sup> While aspects of economic liberalisation preceded democratisation in Mozambique, the two are commonly seen as deeply interconnected due to the overall timing, and the tight association between these projects and western donors and international institutions (West 1997).

in urban areas. As the organ-trafficking scandal allows us to see, the adoption of reforms has opened up some space for elites to jockey for position, and these struggles are viewed with fear by some of the better-off as they can have direct effects on their lives. For many others, though, the battles of elites are viewed as something far distant and perhaps as a matter of indifference to themselves.

However, trying to maintain a social base including important allies means Frelimo has to engage in a delicate balancing act. In a recent article Pitcher (2006) argues that a process of 'organised forgetting' is taking place in Mozambique where the government deliberately downplays or distorts the socialist period to enable it to court new allies amongst business communities and to build a new 'neo-liberal' national identity amongst an emerging black middle class. This effort is contested by industrial workers who make use of socialist rhetoric, rights and obligations to advance their own struggles. Pitcher makes a very valuable argument, incisively documenting the change of strategy and rhetoric from a 'worker and peasant' state to one that encourages entrepreneurial vigour. Furthermore the social contract has changed. Where urbanites once could demand that the state take care of their (bare) minimum needs for subsistence, it has now become the right of a lucky few to be rich. Nevertheless it can be misleading to assume a smooth trajectory of state obligations receding in the face of 'neo-liberal' opportunities. Frelimo did try to actively recruit and ally itself with business communities it previously antagonised, but as the party's power has grown, these mercantile groups increasingly have few other options. On the other hand, the party has recently passed pro-worker legislation, which a former minister explained to me is both because it is a populist move to win votes and because the party leadership still feels a responsibility towards factory workers. Instead of championing one group or the other, in practice it appears as if Frelimo equally penalises everyone. I asked an official of the nationwide official trade union OTM (Organisation of Mozambican Workers) whether he felt the current labour laws favoured workers and capital. He replied by laughing and then saying: 'The law does not favour anyone. Its like the laws of nature, it favours the one who survives'. To illustrate some of the social complexity of the urban social hierarchy in Nampula, I will now give examples from two groups that at first glance appear to be the embodiment of the new economy, Indian merchants and informal traders.

Although the vast majority of Indian merchants I met in Nampula are members of Frelimo, or at least supporters, the fact they tended to give more credibility to the organ-trafficking scandal is not surprising, considering their history with the party. Almost all of them had tales of how their family suffered during the socialist period. Homes and businesses were nationalised, and family members had to flee the country, or in other cases were arrested for what was then known as economic sabotage. Stories of Frelimo's assumption of power often sounded like an invasion of the barbarians. Many continued to stay in Mozambique, though, and not all suffered at the hands of the party. Nationalisation was not universally employed; only those businesses that the party felt were exploitative, or those abandoned by their owners after independence were directly taken over (Pitcher 2002). Small shops were generally left alone and Indian merchants gradually began to take over this sector during the socialist period, as the previous Portuguese merchants often fled the country after independence. Nevertheless it was very difficult to import stock during socialism and as the civil war grew in intensity businesses were often at risk of being looted by one side or the other, or sometimes both. The fortunes of Indian merchants have improved considerably since the end of the war, but merchant complaints against the government are still legion, with 'corrupt' and 'half-socialist' being amongst the most prominent. Those difficulties did not appear to

overtly affect party support. As I was told by one merchant:

Renamo? They do nothing and they do not really have the capacity to do anything. They make all sorts of promises, but they could not deliver anything. The peasants and the marginalised support Renamo because they have no capacity to think about the future. They just want something now regardless of the consequences. Renamo would just come in and take something and then try to sell it to somebody else. That is how Dhklama [Renamo's president] got his house in Maputo. Someone else had the legal title, but he just took it. We, the businessmen and the middle classes, we all vote for Frelimo. We have the capacity to think about the future and the peasants do not.

In addition to fears over property rights and the larger population, especially as the militant non-racialism of the socialist period fades, political dependence is also a factor. An Indian businessman told me that they had to support Frelimo. One can run a family shop largely independently, but if one has greater ambitions it is extremely difficult to do this without the support of the party.

Indian merchants have been one of the most visible winners of the new economy in Nampula City. Many were able to consolidate the economic base they built in the socialist period and have gone on to become major financial players under capitalism. Despite their wealth, though, their success to a large degree depends on the goodwill of Frelimo, a party they have had an ambiguous history with. Many merchants are engaged in what can be described as a structural relationship with the party, as it does not depend on bribing a single official, but instead has links to the leadership in Maputo, at least for the larger businessmen. Despite the growing alliance, though, the relationship between the party and Indian merchants remains fraught and characterised by distrust. Popular feeling against *monhes* is strong as they are perceived by many party members and the wider population as dishonest and exploitative. Furthermore, several Indian merchants have first hand experience of the corruption and unscrupulousness of certain party officials. Members of Frelimo also view Indian merchants with considerable distrust, as the fortunes of some of the leading businessmen were based in various illegal activities. The fact that many Indian merchants believed that party members would be complicit in organ trafficking makes sense when viewed against this backdrop. They are included in the structures of power, but in a relationship based on mutual benefit, distrust and fear.

The informal traders I spoke with gave the scandal far less credibility and occupied a very different social position. They have become a ubiquitous symbol of capitalism as every urban street is now full of people selling various commodities. It is misleading, however, to view informal traders as an entirely new phenomenon or as a single unified group. One of Frelimo's major mistakes during the socialist period was to view the population as members of single categories, workers or peasants, and not to take into account the large variety of strategies people employ to make a living when formulating policies (Hall and Young 1997; O'Laughlin 2000; Pitcher 2006). This tendency has survived into the capitalist period. Numerous people combine trading on the informal market with farming, or as something to earn extra money while they study, as we shall see in the following examples. Helder is a 21-year old street vendor. He sells mobile phone top-up cards he buys from the state-owned national mobile service provider, MCEL, through an Indian-owned shop with links to MCEL for a small discount. His average profit is about 50MTN per day.<sup>7</sup> Helder was born in a village 20 kilometres outside of Nampula and his mother survives by farming the family

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<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing it is around 29 MTN to \$1.

*machamba* (small plot of land). He came to stay with his brother and cousin who were already in the city; they live in a *palhota* (shack) in a peri-urban area on the outskirts of town with his cousin's pregnant girlfriend. Other street vendors engage in the informal sector simply to raise funds for school fees, or to get some pocket money. Sergio is 20-years old and also sells MCEL cards with Helder. He was born in the city and lives with his parents. His mother is a waitress at a coffee shop and his father used to work for the national railway, but is now unemployed. Unlike Helder he is still studying and is in the 8<sup>th</sup> class.

The informal sector contains many different social categories within it, and this does not preclude various types of connections to the party held by individual members. Frelimo officials, though, tend to view it as a singular entity, that is uncontrolled and possibly a threat. This view has historical antecedents, ever since colonialism, when urbanites without fixed employment were viewed as possibly subversive. During the socialist period there were efforts to mobilise the entire population for the heroic effort of constructing a modern nation. However, many urbanites, especially those who would now be termed workers in the informal economy, were viewed as lazy idlers and a criminal element by the leadership (Hall and Young 1997). This distrust increased as the economy faltered and the parallel, or 'black market', economy grew. In desperation the party resorted to coercive measures. The most infamous being 'Operation Production' in 1983, where those who could not prove employment and urban residence were rounded up and shipped to rural areas in the far north to 'build cities in the bush'. Between 30,000 to 50,000 were exiled (Cabrita 2000). Since the fall of socialism and the onset of structural adjustment the number of people that survive to one degree or another on the informal economy has grown. The ruling party still seems to be unable to incorporate these people in their structures, and party leaders and municipal authorities speak worriedly of ways in which they can restrict urbanisation. Although the informal economy is interlinked with the formal in a variety of ways, especially as most vendors buy their goods from shops and warehouses, there is a palpable sense of disconnect. When asked what they thought the social hierarchy in Nampula is, Helder and Sergio broke it into specific ranks. First are the Indians, then the people from Maputo, then the local government, followed by Nigerian merchants, and those who live in the cement city. Finally comes everybody else, where they included themselves. It is not surprising that the struggles for power symbolised by the organ-trafficking scandal seemed irrelevant. For them it appeared as something happening very far away.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has used a scandal that broke out in Nampula City in 2003 and how it relates to politics after the implementation of 'neo-liberal' reforms. The reform package that was largely imposed on Mozambique by powerful international institutions, such as the World Bank, the IMF and the nation's major donors, is part of a wider process of 'neo-liberal' governmentality that has swept through Africa since the mid-1980s. The goal was to dismantle existing political structures that donors and international institutions had come to see as 'pathological' and create liberal capitalist polities based on ideas of 'transparency' and 'good governance' that would bring prosperity to their people and hopefully be able to pay back ever increasing debts. Much of the analytical attention has been focused on the sweeping changes that, for good or ill, these reforms ushered in. However, I have argued that we should pay more attention to the equally important historical continuities (Sanders 2008).

By focusing on one specific scandal in a particular place and social context, I have tried to view Nampula City as a microcosm of the practice of politics and power in Mozambique. In

this case we do see aspects of social disruption as the state abandons some of its previous obligations to its citizens. Equally important, though, are the ways in which the effects of reform have revitalised the structures of power. Instead of viewing the discourse of the occult as a subtle critique by the excluded and oppressed, more attention should be paid to why certain stories appear at particular times. In fact, the organ-trafficking scandal was a story crafted by elites for a political effect that was interpreted differently by specific social groups. For some of those who are included to varying degrees in the networks of power, aspects of it might be plausible, but for mass consumption, especially by social groups that have long proved difficult for the state to incorporate, it seems to have largely passed them by. Instead of 'neo-liberal' governmentality being a project to create autonomous subjects, as Rose and Miller (1992) contend for the case of 'advanced western democracies', or destroying the state in the interests of economic elites as argued by Harvey (2005), something very different is going on in Mozambique. Here neo-liberalism among wider reforms has been reclaimed by the party as a state project that increased the dependence of certain social groups on Frelimo, while allowing the party access to outside resources as a reward for reform. Even Gary O'Connor, the symbol of the almost mythical foreign investor in the current rhetoric, found himself enmeshed in relationships very similar to those of Indian merchants. He too is dependent on the government to ensure relatively smooth operations and is currently looking for ways to strengthen his connection to the party. The overall result has significantly bolstered the power of the party state, even if there is now more recognised space for local elites to jostle for position on the lower levels. I have argued that we should not view neo-liberal reforms strictly as an epoch-changing event, or a unified set of changes. Instead, much like the organ-trafficking scandal, it is something brought about as elites attempt to consolidate their status and power.

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