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Echoes from Mozambique: Did the idea of high modernism vanish?

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Echoes from Mozambique:

Did the Idea of High Modernism Vanish?

Lars Buur and Thabit Jacob

SECO WORKING PAPER 2024: 1

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ABSTRACT

Mozambique has become a significant destination for a diverse portfolio of investments in mining, liquid natural gas, power plants, industrial complexes and large-scale agricultural schemes. Acquiring investments across sectors has re-emerged as a top national priority, though few of these projects are actually new. Most if not all of these grand plans were among the post-independence, Marxist-Leninist, high-modernism and state-led development plans that were pursued in Mozambique in the 1970s and 1980s. Given that more or less identical plans from the 1970s are enjoying a resurgence currently, this article asks whether this means they are still embedded in ideas associated with high-modernism and grand ideas of social transformation? What characterizes today's plans in contrast to those of the heyday of the big state-led ideas about industry and infrastructural development that blossomed after independence in 1975? This article argues that the present attempts to implement investments are no longer embedded in the grand visions and ideas of social transformation that characterized high modernism, but are more concerned with creating opportunities for key constituencies in order to reproduce power. Present projects therefore come closer to the positions of illiberal modernizers by emphasizing modernization and transformative state-building in order to reproduce the authoritarian ruling Frelimo party while upholding idea semblance of formal liberal democracy.

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1. Introduction

Mozambique is today's top African investment destination. The biggest investments in sub-Saharan Africa ever, expected to reach \$60 billion by 2030, are flowing into hydro-carbons, with some of the largest gas deposits being located along the coast in the north (Salimo 2022). Also mining, dominated by graphic, coal, heavy sand, graphite and precious stones, have seen billions of USD flowing into these industries (Monjane 2019; Cezne and Wethal 2022). These investments have been accompanied by others in infrastructure, such as bridge-building, harbor construction, airports and new railways. Other investments have flowed into communication networks and industrial complexes. In processing industries, these investments have primarily gone into potential export commodities, with sharp upturns in cashew, sugar, tobacco and rice investments (Saulich 2020; Buur and Beykirch 2023).

Macuane et al. (2018) have argued that Mozambique's predicament, given its abundant endowments in natural resources, including more than 100 trillion cubic feet of gas (Selemane 2013: 1), has created expectations that are difficult to live up to.¹ Exploration of these reserves alone has resulted in high expectations and elite competition over the control of future wealth and resources (Frynas and Buur 2020). Inflated expectations also indicate that Mozambique will become a middle-income country, fulfilling its long-term aspiration to break the chains of 'underdevelopment' (Machel quoted in Mosca 2011: 38 note 9) and become a 'developed' society (see Frelimo Central Committee Report 1978) equal to its former colonial master, Portugal.

In this article we suggest that present-day investments are not only tinkering² with older ideas concerning the hegemonic party- and state-guided social transformations that were formerly deeply infused with ideas of high modernism, but also that in reality they consist of projects that were planned

¹ Mozambique is the holder of the third largest gas reserves in Africa.

² Many of today's investments and projects are recycled versions of early high-modernist projects proposed in the 1970s

or started up before independence in Mozambique. First the idea of high modernism that was the key feature of James Scott's famous twentieth-century analysis of the ideology of 'high modernism' was infused with national developmental aspirations to create a new society and new people based on scientific, technical progress and state-driven industrialization (Scott 1998).³ Underpinning the ruling party Frelimo's visions of a new society at that time was an open and explicit wish to change what were seen as rural populations that were inherently 'backward', 'traditional' and 'enlightened' so they could become 'rational' and 'modern', guided by scientifically informed experts emerging in the form of the vanguards of Frelimo party cadres (Frelimo Central Committee Report 1978: 53-54). But as Dye (2022: 220) argues, we need to take 'Scott's twentieth-century analysis of "high-modernist" ideology' and relate it to present-day 'ideologies of the 21st century illiberal modernizers' that in his view covers not only Mozambique but also Angola, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Rwanda, because there has both been continuities and changes in how the ideas underpinning high modernism manifest themselves today.

It is important to explore this, we argue, because present-day investment projects are often based on earlier and older developmental projects without necessarily implementing them based on the same ideas of social change that were envisaged before. It is a striking feature of the different investment plans currently being implemented in Mozambique that, despite the relative novelty of the data and specifications related to the sizes and quantities of mining and gas deposits, agricultural fertility and, potentially, the rate of return on investments, history appears to be repeating itself. Many of the investments implemented over the last decade had already been planned or started up before

³ By ideas, we refer here to a fairly broad conceptualization of ideologies as a set of ideas with distinctive political world views that attempt to explain social life, as opposed to narrower conceptualizations which see ideologies as only denoting highly coherent, systematic, explicit, dogmatic belief-systems. Ideologies, understood as a set of ideas, can guide action by providing a normative framework that aspires to a degree of coherence and uniformity. At the same time, ideologies can be internally incoherent and contradictory (see Goodwin 2014; see also Dye 2022).

Mozambique's independence by the Portuguese colonial regime. After independence, they were in many cases expanded during the heyday when imaginaries of state-driven mega-projects dominated (Mosca 2011), before they collapsed due to a lack of resources, poor planning, international market conditions and the war of destabilization that from the early 1980s became a civil war between the ruling Frelimo party-state and Renamo (see Whitfield et al. 2015; Macuane et al. 2018; Weimer et al. 2012).

After Mozambique's independence in 1975, Frelimo pursued a socialist, state-led strategy of industrial import-substitution with an emphasis on state-led industrialization, particularly in the form of heavy industries in metallurgy and industrialized agricultural estates focusing on sugar (see Buur and Nystrand 2020) and rice (see Buur and Beykirch 2023). The aims of this strategy (see Frelimo Central Committee Report 1978: 43-48) were to feed the expansion of the industrial sector, generate exports, and provide for a growing urban populations (Diogo 2013; Interview Diogo 2009).

This article takes as its starting point this double observation. First, there seem to be many echoes of the past in the form of the attractions of high modernism in the mid-twentieth century circulating when we zoom in on the many investments flowing into Mozambique in the 21st century. Second, however, we take it for granted that this renewed interest in similar investment projects, industrialization and big infrastructure is a return to these earlier ideas of high modernism? In other words, does this trend reflect new thinking, or does it represent a resurrection of national imaginaries and an echo of the not-so-distant past dressed up as the new present – old wine in new bottles? This article considers what has survived from the heyday of the state-led, big ideas about industry and infrastructural development that blossomed after independence and have found their way into the present.

We suggest that a good starting point in investigating this question is to revisit what was proposed and planned in respect of past policies and projects before taking a closer look at similar present-day

investments and asking what their aim was and is today. This suggests that we need to consider the ideational and ideological underpinnings in which both past and present-day investments are embedded in order to grasp the difference between investments that seem to be similar. We argue that, by using constituent ideas related to high-modernism as a starting point, it becomes possible to see the continuity of some ideas particularly related to state-led development, namely that technological change is equal to progress and development and that expert designs still rule, but also that ideas related to social transformation have become less important today or have totally vanished. We suggest that some ideas that were key to high-modernism projects and investments are continuing in the reincarnation of old investment projects with new ideas related to the role of private investments, the inclusion of new foreign actors, and more interest-based political motives related to clientelism and patronage. The last-named take the form of providing for key constituencies in what is formally an increasingly liberal and democratic competitive climate but as the recent 2024 elections clearly show based on massive election fraud, killing of opponents and use of state resources to win and control the elections. This argument is explored by analyzing one past and one contemporary manifestation of high-modernism investment efforts under Frelimo rule after 1975 and during the 2000s.

The first section of this article discusses our understanding of high modernism and its relationship to the concept of illiberal modernizers, before turning to how high modernism was understood in Mozambique after independence by exploring how the New Society, embodied by a ‘New Man’, was to be freed from the shackles of its former colonial master. We use Mozambique’s post-independence economic plan to remove under-development in ten years – the Prospective Indicative Plan (PPI) – and the PPI’s most prominent project, the Industrial Complex Project in Chokwe (CAIL) in the upper Limpopo valley, as an example of the ideas concerning social transformation that were embedded in the project. After focusing on the CAIL state project, we follow it after 2010 to its most recent

iteration, the Industrial Complex in Chokwe (CAIC). This allows the main differences between the past and present projects to be analysed.

2. A note on high modernism and its limits

In Mozambique, the ideas and aspirations of high modernism are not entirely new, as they had informed Frelimo after the Second Congress in 1968, when a clear Marxist turn became prevalent in the aftermath of the congress (Opello 1975; Henriksen 1978; Panzer 2015). After independence, based on the ideology of scientific socialism, ideologically Frelimo clearly followed Marxism-Leninism, with the Frelimo party placing itself in charge of the state and society, although in practice a good deal of forced pragmatism guided planning and attempts at implementation. Although numerous authors (see Hall and Young 1997; Sumich 2018; see also Panzer 2019 for an overview) have argued that Frelimo never really embraced Marxism but instead drew inspiration from Tanzania's softer mixture of Pan-Africanism and native socialism (Ujamaa), which was claimed to be rooted in 'African philosophy' (Jacob 2020) and practice rather than in the tenets of scientific Marxism. This is to some extent correct, but for a certain period before and after independence and with consequences for the future understanding of state, society and the economy, Frelimo did flirt seriously with different forms of Marxism.

Our starting point is that, in order to understand key differences, continuities and lacunas between past and present investments in Mozambique, we need to focus on Frelimo's understanding of the set of ideas captured by the ideology of high modernism. The ideal of universal development that this notion embedded recalls James Scott's (1998: 89-90) well-known definition of high modernism as:

‘a strong (one might even say muscle-bound) version of the beliefs in scientific and technical progress that were associated with industrialization in Western Europe and in North America from roughly 1830 until World War I. At its centre was a supreme self-

confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws.’

Two intertwined core ideas underpin this understanding of high -modernism. First of all, the world can be divided into two contrasting types of society: the modern, rational and developed society and the traditional, superstitious and backward society (Dye 2022: 220). The second core idea is an unfettered belief in ‘the authority of scientific knowledge about the improvement of the human condition and [disallowing] other competing sources of judgement’ (Scott 1998: 93). As we shall see, this made the ‘expert’ or party ‘vanguard’ the only legitimate source of knowledge. This involved simplifications of reality that in Scott’s words (1998: 2) made ‘a society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions’, and allowing for the transformation of society from above.

Both of these core ideas are relevant to Mozambique, as we shall see when it comes to Frelimo’s early understanding of its mission and how to transform Mozambique after independence. We would argue that the Marxist-Leninist roots of Frelimo’s approach to social transformation at independence comes close in terms of what Donham (1999), writing on Ethiopia, has termed ‘Marxist Modern’.

Scott’s theorization of high modernism has received considerable criticism, as it tends to homogenize the various experiences of modernism, making it singular and omnipotent as an ideology with an over-emphasis on the state’s authoritarian ability to act in concert.⁴ What is clear from these critiques is that one set of ideas usually coexists and competes with other ideas and ideologies. This

⁴ See, for example, Dye 2022 and Schneider 1997 on Tanzania.

is in part the case because, however coherent and authoritarian are regimes that evolve alone, in attempting relentless social transformation from above, they also had to learn, react and act pragmatically, which in itself would undermine their chosen ideology. Thus, high modernism's 20th-century peak was not only defined by unyielding states with single, rigid ideological programmes, but also states that had to confront a reality they themselves had attempted to change through their programmes. Frelimo's Mozambique was no exception to this conundrum. As a consequence, as Berman asserts, 'in [...] countries where the process of modernization has yet to come into its own, modernism, where it develops, takes on a fantastic character, because it is forced to nourish itself not on social reality but on fantasies, mirages, dreams' (Berman 1982: 235). As we shall explore in the following sections, fantasies, mirages and dreams can have a long-lasting effect and continue an afterlife that far exceeds high modernism's official expiry date.

It is therefore important, when exploring the high-modernism tenets embedded in Frelimo's understanding of social change, to follow Freeden's (1994: 140) suggestion that such ideas are best thought of as a 'thought edifice'. In this understanding, ideologies consist in specific clusters of ideas and interpretations that explain the state of the world and legitimate particular sets of beliefs ontologically, as well as matching political actions (Dye 2018: 26).⁵ Ideologies are best conceived as 'thought-practices' (Freeden 2005: 20) or idea-practices that propose ideal ways of organizing society (Goodwin 2014: 29). As Dye suggests (*ibid.*), ideologies are organized around a 'hierarchy of core, secondary and more applied ideas within a conceptual cluster [that] should aspire to coherence and yet are broad conceptualisations that may include contradictions rather than being highly

⁵ Following Freeden (2003: 21-23) and Dye (2018: 26) a good starting point for the concrete analysis of ideology is key ideas, as well as their associated practices. This is what Freeden (2005: 20) call the 'thought-practices' or idea-practices, that Dye (2018: 26) identify as the building-blocks of ideology that 'intermesh with and inform material, observable practices and acts' (Freeden 2003: 21). This means that evidence of ideology or ideational thinking is manifested as much in practice as in speech and writing.

systematised, consistent and dogmatic'. This clearly suggests that our understanding of ideologies or idea-practices should be dynamic rather than static wherever new configurations of change and continuity over time are to be expected. As structural conditions change, different actors come to the fore, and new practices take shape.

3. Frelimo's idea of high modernism

Frelimo's project after independence and its promotion of the investments we are discussing from the 1970s until today were, we suggest, rooted in Frelimo's core ideas about high modernism. Even though Frelimo's post-independence attitude to high -modernism varied over time, certain tenets have been remarkably similar, such as ideas about the relationship between party, state and society, trust in industrialization and social transformation. All three ideas have underpinned Frelimo rule and have to varying degrees continued into the present, which has succeeded the increasingly authoritarian formal liberal democratic period after 1994.

When Frelimo came to power in 1975, it promised a new socialist and ultimately egalitarian and radically modernist social order that would have dwarfed Scott's (1998) example of Ujamaa in Tanzania as an instance of high modernism, at least in its foundational aspirations. While Frelimo's understanding of modernity was inspired in part by the Tanzanian experiment, it did not follow TANU (and later the CCM) in its neighbour's attempts to establish a new type of African socialism. This was particularly the case after 1968, when a younger generation of more radical leaders took control of Frelimo who envisaged nothing but the entire re-creation of society. Frelimo progressively sought a more radical version than TANU, where the aim was to yield something new that had no traces of what had existed before colonialism. As Hall and Young (1997) point out, it had to be *completely new* (see also Mateus 1999; Newitt 1995; Sumich 2005). This idea of newness found its primary inspiration in Marxism (Frelimo 1978: see in particular pages 34-36). Frelimo's first

President, Eduardo Mondlane, who few would call a diehard Marxist, argued in 1969, just before his tragic death, that:

‘Now, however, there is a qualitative transformation in thinking which has emerged during the past six years which permits me to conclude that at present FRELIMO is much more socialist, revolutionary and progressive than ever and that the line, the tendency, is now more and more in the direction of socialism of the Marxist-Leninist variety. Why? Because the conditions of life in Mozambique, the type of enemy we have, does not give us any other alternative’ (Mondlane, quoted in Hermele 1988: 19).

As Sumich (2005), in his close reading of the Frelimo leadership, and Donham (1999) writing on Ethiopia have both suggested, socialism and Marxism were highly attractive to the new aspiring post-independence nationalist elites because they were ideologies of modernity and progress that emanated from the west. At the same time, however, they were also astutely critical of the capitalist logic and inbuilt racism that underpinned the oppression meted out by colonial empires. Here we will point at three aspects and ideas embedded in high modernism that in different ways exist as traces today in Mozambique: the vanguard party, the idea of a ‘new society’, and ideas related to the role and potential of industrial transformation.

The idea of the vanguard party

Over time, different parts of the leadership aligned themselves differently to socialism, Marxism or Marxist-Leninism. For this reason, it has been suggested that the party only used ‘Marxism’ in a rather instrumental way to gain military and economic support from the Soviet Bloc or earlier on from China (for discussions, see O’Meara 1991; Henriksen 1978; Hall and Young 1997; Chabal 2002).⁶ However, while there is no doubt that Frelimo kept all its options open, after 1968 the party

⁶ Ottaway (1988), for example, suggested that the relationship to socialism was merely ‘symbolic’.

leant more and more towards a Marxism-Leninist understanding of the relationship between party-state and society in ways that had consequences after it took power in 1975. In 1977, two years after independence, Frelimo formally declared Mozambique a Marxist-Leninist state run by a vanguard party, that is, run exclusively by FRELIMO (see Frelimo 1978: 33). In the Central Committee Report to the Third Congress of Frelimo a whole chapter was dedicated to explaining what this implied (see ‘The Party: vanguard and leading force’, Frelimo 1978: 33-43). Its high-modernist inclinations drew on examples from the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, when in both cases a small elite, acting as a vanguard, could seize power in ‘backward’ countries and thus become able, through discipline and organization, to ‘catch up’ with the former western oppressors (Hall and Young 1997). This required first of all ‘The need for the Party’, as the Third Congress so amply formulated it (Frelimo 1978: 33): ‘in order to abolish definitely all forms of exploitation of man by man, the labouring classes must impose their own power in society’ (ibid.). The idea of Frelimo as a vanguard party was also the idea of ‘a party of a new type’ based on the ‘universal principle of Marxism-Leninism, particularly with regard to its principles, organization and methods of work’ (ibid.: 34). A key component in this was that the cadres of the ‘vanguard Party [were] capable of leading’ the masses through the right ‘ideological education’ (1978: 40). The idea of the vanguard leading the masses with the ‘Party [as] the highest form of political organization’ (1978: 42) was embedded in a foundational and paradigmatic idea of ‘national unity’ achieved by and through the Frelimo party (Hodges and Tibana 2005: 133; Salimo et al. 2020). Despite the liberal reforms of the 1990s and 2000, this idea continued to be dominant despite the direct reference to Marxist-Leninism and the idea of Frelimo as a vanguard party becoming more and more distant.⁷

⁷ Sumich (2005) argues that, as the Frelimo leadership became more insulated, the idea of being a vanguard party produced real policy effects. Thus, there was a widening gap between the educated revolutionary elite’s ideas about what we are calling here high-modernism and the expectations of the fruits of independence among large segments of the population that did not necessarily share this ‘new’ vision.

Homem Novo and Sociedade Nova

The idea of a revolutionary elite transforming society was not based on some watered-down idea of just taking over political and economic power (Fanon 1963): it meant changing society profoundly by ‘wip[ing] out the colonial and capitalist mentality which is deeply rooted in the urban areas, as well as the feudal traditional mentality which is pre-dominant in the rural areas’ (Machel 1975: 20). This should be done by the creation of a *Homem Novo* (New Man), a new postcolonial subject who, over time, would become a citizen in a new society free from capitalist exploitation (see Buur 2010). The vanguard cadre was supposed to wage ‘a constant internal battle with himself to overcome the reactionary inadequacies and influences’ (1978: 35).⁸ Mozambique’s first president, Samora Machel, explained Frelimo’s motivation as follows:

‘When Frelimo took up arms to defeat the old order [...] we felt the obscure need to create a new society, strong, healthy and prosperous, in which people freed from all exploitation would co-operate for the progress of all. In the course of our struggle, in the tough fight we had to wage against reactionary elements, we came to understand our objectives more clearly. We felt especially that the struggle to create new structures would fall within the creation of a new mentality’ (Machel, quoted in Davidson 1984: 800)

The quest to produce a *Homem Novo* was by extension related to the creation of a *Sociedade Nova* (New Society)⁹ – Frelimo’s leaders envisaged creating this new society through a sweeping drive to

⁸ As Sergio Vieira famously argued, ‘The New Man is a Process’, Second Conference of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Maputo, December 1977 (see also Ottaway 1988).

⁹ The New Society was modelled in accordance with a romanticized idea of ‘liberated zones’ from which colonial administrative control had been ‘eliminated’ and ‘replaced’ by a new polity based on people’s power, mobilization and active participation. These zones, mainly based in the remote Northern Niassa and Cabo Delgado provinces, were very limited in area and population. Nonetheless, in Frelimo’s future-oriented mythology they became ‘extremely important nurseries for the emerging FRELIMO policy that would later be attempted nation-wide’ (Hermele 1988: 22).

uproot the old society. This was to be followed by rational and ‘scientific’ socialism’ (Frelimo 1978: 35), involving engineering all aspects of social life in order to create a new human condition through the unrestrained use of the power of the modern state as an instrument of the party. To do this required top-down technocratic efforts in the direction of state-led social engineering. The focus of the revolutionary elite’s vanguard project of social engineering was at first the countryside and later the urban bourgeoisie. The country’s backward and traditional ‘rural society had to become urbanized’ (Interview with Director of Sugar Plant during the 1980s, Sofala 2008) by producing a series of ‘cities in the bush’ (Sumich 2005: 38) from thousands of scattered villages and hamlets (Mosca 2011: 91-97). The rules for this radical transformation were based on two fundamental, interlinked principles: the *concentration* of the rural population in ‘communal villages’ or villagization, with access to basic social services (schools, medical care, drinking water); or alternatively the *modernization* of the countryside through state farms and producers’ cooperatives (see Mosca 2011: 91; Hermele 1988: 25-26; FRELIMO 1977).

Through a process of concentration, the aim of the villagization program was to transform ‘the peasants [so they] would gradually become labourers, and the countryside would move up the ladder of modernization and wage work, finally approaching socialism’ (Hermele 1988: 26). This would ‘free’ rural inhabitants from feudalism and the traditional power structures in which they were embedded (see Fry 2000; Hall and Young 1997; West 1997). This high-modernist dream on which Frelimo based its policies after independence resembles modernist versions of the ‘dream of purity’ (Bauman 1997: 5),¹⁰ where a blank slate for a new inscription emerges after the removal of unwanted, traditional and backward traits. As Machel argued: ‘Everything is directed towards liberating man,

¹⁰ For a reading of purity as part of the modernist dream, see Bauman (1997, Chapter 1, ‘The Dream of Purity’).

serving the people [. . .] there is nothing to divide us' (Machel 1981: 43), thus allowing a new society to be build up.

The discussion so far largely recalls Scott's arguments in relation to high modernism. However, in contrast to what Scott (1998: 89) suggests, the aim of uprooting the old society was *not* directed at 'a weakened or prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans'. For Frelimo, 'civil society' was not an issue in Mozambique, where the aim was really the creation from scratch of a New Society. This New Society, in which the People were to be created in the image of the vanguard Party, would not need repression at first, as it would be egalitarian and unitary. One of the central requirements of creating a New Society was to 'catch up' with modern societies (Mondlane 1969) and become a unified industrial state. This would be done in part by creating heavy industry as the driver of an industrialized society built upon scientific and rationalistic principles. Like Donham's 'Marxist Modern' in Ethiopia, the turn towards Marxist-Leninism was, as it were, a way to 'cut history off at the pass' (1999: 130). In the case of Mozambique, this became a way of cutting the old society off at the same pass so that a new society could be imposed. This grandiose project involved a vast reform of society as a whole, and this required a Plan.

Plano Prospectivo Indicativo

The Indicative Prospective Plan, known as the PPI in Mozambican Portuguese by insiders, was drawn up in 1979 and approved in 1981. It was a direct answer to the Marxist-Leninist turn, its aim being to bring Mozambique into the modern world in the space of only ten years by removing 'underdevelopment' in a 'Decade of Development' from 1980 to 1990 (Cumbe 2010: 27). The PPI is a good example of the conviction and perspective of high modernism that embodied a series of goals—largely material and quantifiable—which could be achieved through sacrifice: savings, hard labour and sweeping, large-scale investments that would make the state and state-owned or state-run enterprises the engine of the New Society that would modernize the Mozambican nation (Hermele

1988: 28). In line with the PPI, in 1981 a specific program for state-driven industrialization was officially adopted, aiming at the construction in ten years of the essential bases of basic modern industry (Castel-Branco, 1994). The PPI set an annual economic growth rate of 14.7% based on maximizing exports from agriculture so that industrial imports could be paid for (O'Meara 1991: 95). As in the Soviet Union, it would be the peasantry who would produce the agricultural exports, a process requiring the 'total socialization of the rural areas' (Mosca 2011: 38, note 9) to be brought to its full conclusion so that state farms and industries could benefit from imports on a very large scale. These imports consisted of fertilizers, tractors and industrial machinery, the kinds of inputs that fitted the high-modernist image of development that transformed society.

However, the PPI was quite unsuccessful¹¹ due to a combination of interrelated factors: national, regional and international (Hall and Young 1997; Castel-Branco, 1994). Many projects that were conceived in the light of the PPI are coming back today in the areas of transport, ports, aluminium smelters, textiles and agricultural production (Sonne-Schmidt et al. 2009; Whitfield et al. 2015; Dava and Tamele 2011; Mosca 2011; Buur and Beykirch 2023; Castel-Braco 2010). One such project was the post-independent CAIL industrial complex in Chokwe in the south of Mozambique, which we discuss in the next section before following it into its present incarnation today.

4. CAIL: Chokwe

In 1977 the Chokwe irrigation scheme, which forms part of the Limpopo valley where the *Complexo Agro-Industrial de Limpopo* (CAIL industrial complex) is located, was officially named 'the Breadbasket of the Nation' (Hermele 1988: 37; Mosca 2011). This irrigation scheme had been taken

¹¹ Any suggestion that the PPI, was a pipe-dream came up against the incarnation of the New Man, President Machel, who had 'declared that its objectives were realistic and achievable "because we have a vanguard party and are determined"' (O'Meara 1991: 95; for the full quote, see Mosca 2011: 38, note 9).

over from the Portuguese authorities, who had started investing in Chokwe in the 1920s. In the 1950s and 1960s investments were rapidly expanded in what became the *Colonato de Chokwe*, whose aim was to settle 75,000 poor Portuguese families in the valley. This did not happen, but a substantial number of Portuguese families did settle in Chokwe, where they competed with upcoming African farmers over land and resources provided by the colonial state. This competition would later become important when Frelimo took it over after independence in 1975 and nationalized the land and the Colonato irrigation scheme (Hermele 1988: 40-42; 44) because in whose name was it being nationalized? The African farmers or the independent African state? Nationalization nonetheless worked as a push factor for the Portuguese farmers, most of whom left the Colonato and Mozambique (Mosca 2011; Hall and Young 1997). When they left, African farmers moved in and took over what they felt was their land.

The 1977 Third Congress decision on the creation of ‘state farms and the erection of communal villages’ (FRELIMO 1977) in the Limpopo valley was given special impetus when a major flood hit southern Mozambique and large areas of the valley were inundated by the Limpopo river immediately after the Congress. This prompted a Special Commission led by the then infamous hardline Minister of the Interior and later President Guebuza to fast-track the decisions of the third congress. Accordingly, the inundated populations were forcibly resettled so that they could ‘facilitate the transformation of the [individual] Colonato into collective moulds’ (Hermele 1988: 47).

Chokwe was one of the few places in Mozambique where the Marxist-Leninist socialization of the countryside would be carried out ‘in its most naked form’ (Hermele 1988: 48). The aim, as Frelimo argued in the weekly state-controlled magazine *Tempo* (1977. No. 342, April 24), was a comprehensive reorganization of the Colonato aimed at ‘the proletarianization of the countryside’ and simultaneously the containment of the ‘growth of a rural bourgeoisie’, that is, doing away with any aspirations black farmers might have of becoming independent farmers or taking over private

Portuguese farms (see also the special issue of *Noticias* celebrating the first year of Independence, *Noticias Numero Especial*, 25 de Junho de 1976: 10-12). The fact that such measures would create resistance, with many peasants refusing to leave their homes and fields, is less important here. For present purposes, the point is rather to clarify the extent to which, from the 1970s and early 1980s, Frelimo's policies had a clear high-modernist imprint aimed at social transformation, or as Mosca (2011:35-103) calls it the 'socializing the rural areas'. Here was an example of 'the state as cornerstone of the Frelimo project', as Pitcher (2002: 58) aptly called the high-modernist approach to socio-economic change.

The main vehicle for this social transformation in Chokwe was the formation of CAIL, the most important state farm not only in the south of Mozambique, but most probably in the whole country (Bowen 1989). The aim of CAIL 'was to integrate farming, livestock breeding, processing plants, and warehousing and marketing facilities' (Bowen 1989: 362).¹² In its planned reality, the industrial complex was organized around the largest irrigation scheme in Mozambique in the 1970s and 1980s. This consisted of 25,000 to 33,000 hectares of potentially irrigated land complete with storage facilities, a rice factory, the main monocultural grain crop and a tomato-growing plant. CAIL introduced formally a completely new level of mechanization, with not only harvesters and tractors, but also more complex, high-modern techniques such as pesticide-spraying by airplanes and very high levels of fertilizer use when it was available. This 'modern' production system, which was embedded in the nested form of a state farm written large, with collective production units in the form of cooperatives and wage labour for the poorest peasants, was introduced by means of a bilateral technical assistance agreement between Mozambique and Bulgaria (Hermele 1988: 51).

¹² While CAIL was a state farm, it did not have full control of its resources even formally. Maintenance, water supply and management of the irrigation scheme were formally carried out by the government-created SIREMO (*Sistema de Regadio Eduardo Mondlane* or 'Eduardo Mondlane Irrigation System', which became HICEP in 1997).

Between 1978 and 1983, 90% of all agricultural investments went to the state sector (Mosca 1991: 177; Mackintosh and Wuyts 1988; Buur et al. 2011). The concentration of resources saw the Limpopo valley alone, with Chokwe and CAIL at its epicenter, consume 50% of all investments in Mozambique (Mosca 2011: 177).¹³ The Limpopo valley, and in particularly the Chokwe area, therefore absorbed most of the agricultural investments after independence. To President Samora Machel, CAIL embodied the essence of Frelimo's agricultural strategy. In 1982, speaking in Chokwe, he stated that CAIL was 'the centre of a class struggle. Therefore, imperialism is watching, hoping that the CAIL experience fails in order to prove that socialism cannot triumph in Africa' (Machel, quoted in *Noticias*, March 4, 1982).

The failure of CAIL

However, despite presidential support, fail it did, and in similar ways to other high-modernist projects pursued in Mozambique (Pitcher 2002). In many ways, CAIL could be read as a prime symbol of the breakdown of the wider Frelimo grand project in the 1980s. What brought CAIL to its knees? According to Hermele (1988: 56) this was due to an internal class struggle between party-state officials and peasants wanting access to the land: 'probably [...] the downfall of CAIL was facilitated by the inappropriate manner in which the state farm was set up and run'. But there were many other intertwined processes and structural conditions that came together in the downfall.

This was due in part to Frelimo taking over a country and economy with few human resources and in part to its ideological fixation with Marxist-Leninism. This 'led to the creation of a state sector much larger than FRELIMO had ever envisaged, and way beyond its capacity to manage or keep

¹³ The last 10% mainly went to the cooperative sector, with hardly any resources directed towards the peasant or family sectors, which made up the vast majority of farmers in Mozambique at that time (just as it does today) (Mosca 2011: 177-178).

functioning, draining resources and – perhaps even more damagingly – sapping its capacity to conceive of alternative, more flexible economic strategies’ (O’Meara 1991: 90).

Furthermore, while the ideal of universal development embedded in this version of high modernism certainly had a powerful hold on the imaginations of many people and the elite itself, it was not shared by the majority of the newly established nation, despite claims of the existence of a collective understanding. Hall and Young (1997) have rightly suggested that only a relatively small minority of the population understood the Frelimo party’s ideology and political program. Thus, for these and other reasons, the Frelimo leadership’s attempts to create a completely new Mozambique inhabited by a transformed New Man encountered significant difficulties. Not only were the PPI and other plans tremendously ambitious, the accelerated economic transformation and social engineering program would have been difficult to attain even under the best of circumstances – and the situation at independence was far from perfect. As academics writing on the post-independence period have remarked, overall Frelimo inherited a state that was verging on bankruptcy, with very few qualified personnel to carry out the party’s plans and commands.¹⁴ To this dire situation should be added marked progress in the dominant export sectors, pressures from international financial institutions for liberal reforms and less support from the COMECON block than expected (Hanlon 1984; 1991; 1994).

Those resources that were available were wasted on grandiose and badly thought-out mega-projects that were intended to create industrialization and high-productivity agriculture in a linear fashion. From 1977 the leadership’s vision of the modernization of society had set it against large

¹⁴ The odds were against the Frelimo project of radical transformation from the outset. As Finnegan aptly concluded: ‘Frelimo was left to run an effectively bankrupt country with virtually no trained people. The illiteracy rate was over 90 percent. There were six economists, two agronomists, not a single geologist, and fewer than a thousand black high school graduates in all of Mozambique. Of 350 railroad engineers working in 1975, just one was black and he was an agent of the Portuguese secret police’ (Finnegan 1992: 30).

sections of both the rural and urban populations. The civil war that unfolded from 1978 to 1992 started out as a war of destabilization by the then Rhodesian and apartheid governments inserted in the texture and intricacies of the Cold War.¹⁵ In this situation a common mantra in Mozambique to explain what could have been became '*falta de*' – which typically included the lack of inputs, finance, manpower, leadership, technical knowledge and so forth – the lists were endless.

This helps explain while CAIL failed, but former party and state cadres we interviewed who had taken part in managing the irrigation scheme and industrial complex also pointed to the incoherent way in which the CAIL was put together. It was made of different 'parts' taken from the Portuguese era and consisting of farms and smaller industrial units that did not join up properly to create a 'whole' when new industrial units were added to the mix. These cadres particularly pointed to the fact that a 'big industrial complex' that could 'promote' and 'absorb' rice and horticultural production never materialized as had been planned, despite promises from development partners from the COMECON block. And when inputs, whether in the form of fertilizers or machinery, came from partners, it always came at the wrong time and place.

5. Reemergence of CAIL as CAIC

Although the planned larger industrial rice-production complex was not realized for 35 years, the project was resurrected in the form of its successor, the *Complexo Agro-Industrial do Chókwè* (CAIC), constructed with Chinese funding. The resurgence of CAIL as CAIC took place in a very different socio-economic context. Socialism and the single-party state were formally abandoned in 1989-90, a General Peace Accord was signed with Frelimo's old foe Renamo in 1992 to end the sixteen-year long civil war, and the first multi-party democratic elections were held in 1994. A large-

¹⁵ This destabilization war turned into a full-blown and devastating civil war pitting the Frelimo state against *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (Renamo), supported by apartheid South Africa.

scale privatization program was introduced (Pitcher 2002), first cautiously after 1986 just prior to Samora Machel's tragic death, and with more intent after 1992. Even through the Frelimo-state avoided selling off strategic industries (see Whitfield et al 2015; Buur et al. 2012), CAIL was broken up in different phases from as early as 1984, with some land going to small producers in part to steer them away from shifting their allegiance to Renamo during the civil war (Mosca 1991: 108). After 1984 the majority of land and companies were passed on to different private investors, primarily of foreign origin, but also some that were trusted by Frelimo, such as Tiny Rowland, who owned various companies like LOMACO and LONRHO with the state as minority owner providing access to land and water in exchange for capital and technology inputs (see Mosca 1991: 68). However, large areas of land in the Chókwe area and companies that were part of CAIL were handed over to party elite groups to support the clientelism of the governing Frelimo Party.¹⁶

While CAIL emerged in an era of high modernism, CAIC was embedded in the era of controlled liberalization that allowed the Frelimo party to maintain control over the state and economy (see Pitcher 2002; Whitfield et al. 2015). In the 2009 draft strategy for increased rice production, the vision for the sector had changed from the high-modernist focus on 'transformation' to 'market integration', that is, promotion of:

‘[...] a competitive sector in a productive smallholder farming system integrated with the commercial sector and capable of increasingly meeting the domestic demand and generating exportable surpluses of quality rice to supply the southern African region.’
(Ministry of Agriculture 2009: 9)

¹⁶ On the privatization in Mozambique see Pitcher 2002 and Hanlon 1991).

The 2009 draft version of the rice strategy also speaks about the need to ‘balance the commercial agricultural sector’ in a way that ‘is consistent with the country’s overall strategy for poverty reduction through a competitive and commercialized rice system based on increasingly productive farmers, a milling industry and the marketing system for agricultural inputs and outputs’ (ibid.). This is very different from the former ideology of creating a New Society with a New Man. Furthermore, as only 9% of rice is produced in the south of the country, the strategy speaks explicitly about supporting rice production in the central and northern regions, where extension services and milling capacity were previously extremely limited. Interestingly enough, in the draft 2009 strategy and the final approved National Rice Development Plan or strategy of 2015-16 (NRDP 2016), setting up industrial units in the south of the country is not mentioned. There were already old, but functioning mills in Palmeiras, eighty kilometres, outside Maputo that did not have enough paddy for milling. A new plant would also be set up from 2012 as part of the WanBao Chinese rice investment in Xai-Xai (see Chichava 2015; Buur and Beykirch 2023) further down the Limpopo valley. Finally, besides smaller mills there was a recently closed private plant – Moçfer Food Industry (Moçfer Indústrias Alimentares or MIA) – in Chokwe that went bankrupt after the 2012 floods, the plant and storage facilities having been flooded due to the failure of state investments in dike protection.

Like an echo of the past, in the 2016 version of the approved NRDP a new industrial complex in Chokwe is nonetheless mentioned, if mutedly:

‘Through financing by EXIM of China, the government has built an agri-industrial complex at Chokwè that has a strong component for the storage and processing of rice. Further mobilization of funds and soliciting investments from the private sector will help implement the various components envisaged under this NRDP. Wherever necessary, government will establish public–private partnerships under which part of the financing will have specific budget support.’ (NRDM 2016: 28)

The ‘agri-industrial complex at Chokwè’, or CAIC, was financed by a \$60 million loan from the Chinese EXIM bank, built by a Chinese construction company and fully equipped with Chinese milling technology and other Chinese horticulture technology. The official owner of CAIC would be IGEPE (Institute for the Management of State Holdings), making the CAIC-company a state-owned company. Officials interviewed in the Ministry in Maputo and in Chokwé in 2015 and 2016 saw CAIC as the successor to the unrealized ambition of the CAIL industrial complex:

‘we have been waiting for a long time. Now we can finally realize what we promised after independence, now we can finally deliver something to Chokwé. They have been waiting for a long time’ (Interview with state official from Ministry of Agriculture, Chokwé 2016).

One can ask whether CAIC was really needed, as industrial milling capacity existed in the vicinity further down the valley in Xai-Xai as part of the WanBao project (see Buur and Beykirch 2023; Chichava 2014a; Chichava 2014b). As mentioned there was another facility close to Maputo at Palmeiras, so it was unclear whether there would even be sufficient paddy production to make the industrial complex sustainable in short to long run. Taking the NRDP as the starting point, and based on interviews with ministerial staff who had participated in drafting the rice strategy, the answer is that there was going to be no need for such a big plant in the south of the country in the near future: there was simply not enough paddy production, and there was excess industrial capacity in the south. This shows that, despite the presence of other large-scale and arguably more viable alternatives further up country, CAIC was chosen in preference to other big plans and ideas elsewhere that were more pertinent. So, why did it materialize, and what were the ideas behind it?

Some ideas just stick even in a new context

It is clear that the CAIC industrial plant was not a priority promoted by the rice strategy, as more relevant needs in other regions had been identified. Actually, those in charge of the rice strategy did not initially include information about the plant, but once it had been constructed they had to do so, ‘as it now existed, but we did not push for it. We were surprised that \$60 million USD could be found for it when Mozambique has debt problems and we all have to cut budgets’ (interview, Ministry of Agriculture October 2016). Speaking to a CAIC financial assessor in October 2016, roughly a year after the plant had been inaugurated by President Filipe Nyusi in 2015, the first words we were met with during the interview were:

‘CAIC is not rentable. We have no *matéria prima* (raw material in the form of paddy) for rice-processing. We have freezing capacity but irregular access to electricity, and what’s the use of cold-room storage when the Maputo and South African markets are next door? Our storage capacity is used for stocking fertilizer, but there are no buyers, as people are used to getting it for free from the government.’ (interview, CAIC, October 31, 2016)

The assessor rightly wondered how CAIC could be ‘economically self-reliant as a state-owned enterprise’. This has become particularly relevant since 2016, as in that year the government decreed that all state-owned enterprises had to generate their own revenues, given the debt crisis that had engulfed the country since 2015 (see Macuane et al. 2018).

Despite planning for over twenty thousand hectares of irrigated land, no significant paddy production took place in Chokwe. This was partly because the irrigation system was left dry due to a fault with a dam further up the Limpopo River. This problem existed for many years, but the government had focused on new investments like CAIC instead of maintaining old investments in

order to demonstrate ‘progress’ and its ability to deliver new infrastructure projects that could be ‘inaugurated’ when there was election campaigns, thus ‘showing that Frelimo could provide for its supporters’ (as a civil-society representative formulated it in Chokwé in 2016).

But it was not only the broken irrigation scheme that undermined production. A large share of the production of paddy should have come from small and medium-size paddy farmers who were expected to produce a large part of the paddy and other products for CAIC. Many medium-scale farmers did produce paddy despite a lack of irrigation water as they pumped ground water for their fields using petrol- and diesel-driven pumps on their farmland. They had high yields but blamed the low prices CAIC set for selling their production, so they moved the products elsewhere in order to increase prices. These farmers had been given access to land in the irrigation scheme during privatization at the end of the 1990s, which evolved from the postcolonial Frelimo party-state practice of accessing land through family and party ties. They were individual farmers but were organized in voluntary ‘associations’ as required by the government in order to access privileges, instead of ‘cooperatives’ that were considered a type of forced organization of the past based on pressure and involuntary participation. Through their ‘association’ they could still act collectively when needed; for example, they negotiated with both CAIC and the local Frelimo party-state over access to credits, water (when available), fertilizers and market access. But they did not want to sell to CAIC due to low prices for paddy and other agricultural products like tomatoes. As a result, the associations sold their produce directly on the Maputo market and marketed their paddy in Palmeiras (a mill existed there close to the Maputo market) or even Xai-Xai, where Chinese investments had installed milling capacity (see Buur and Beykirch 2023), instead of in Chokwe. This was done in order to obtain better prices, as members of the different paddy and agricultural production associations again and again expressed it to us during fieldwork in 2016.

The politics of CAIL

If there was no real need for the plant and there was no '*matéria prima*' paddy for it to process, why was it implemented in the first place? Put simply, three different explanations, which all seem to intersect, were put forward by farmers, CAIC officials and state officials in Chokwé and Maputo.

First, an industrial plant had featured in state investment plans since the late 1970s (or even earlier, during Portuguese colonial rule). After the democratic turn and privatization in the 1980s and early 1990s, the idea of the 'industrial plant' continued to live on in state investment plans, even though the requirements had changed. In this way, 'CAIL' continued to exist as a relic of the past and was ready to be implemented as 'CAIC' when the state managed to obtain financing from the Chinese EXIM bank. CAIC demonstrates how the future can become a return to the past through specific investment plans forming part of what historians (Mahoney and Schensul 2009) have discussed as path-dependence. However, it is also a very specific form of this that is less about how the past constrains the present and more about how the past is imbued with plans and scripts that can be enacted in the future. The point is that when first conceived they can, as the double of CAIL/CAIC illustrates, gain a momentum of their own and even, so to speak, take on a life of their own. This is the case because the plan continued to exist as a potential or as something that might happen in the future. As a farmer in Chokwé suggested in 2016 during an interview and field visit:

'they [Frelimo/state] always spoke about Chokwé and how we were special. They also spoke about the industrial plant and how it would change our life. We heard about CAIL when Samora spoke here, we heard about it from Chissano who has land here, and Guebuza came here and spoke about it again. The '*chefé grande*' [big guy, presently President Nyusi] came and opened it, so you can say it has always been with us, and now it is here'.

Secondly, EXIM bank funding became available at a time when the Mozambican government under President Guebuza's regime (2005-15) was increasingly turning away from traditional Western donors and leaning towards the east; it approached China in particular to fund state investments and development plans (Macuane et al. 2018). CAIC fitted Guebuza's aim of implementing what Mozambique's first President, Samora Machel, never managed. As Guebuza stated in 2011, 'the Chokwe irrigation scheme is not being properly exploited and is still not fulfilling its function within the government's plans for food production' (Chokwe Irrigation Scheme Remains a Sleeping Giant, *AllAfrica*, 2011), a reference to the idea of the high-modernist period of Chokwé being the 'breadbasket of Mozambique'. Thus, Chinese funding gave political leaders the potential to deliver and realize long-held party-state ambitions, thereby claiming actual and historical legitimacy for their ad hoc and specific promotion of random projects.

CAIC was not the only large infrastructure project to be financed by EXIM during Guebuza's period of office. Other Chinese construction projects included airports, bridges, a ring-road, agricultural demonstration sites, and new buildings for ministries and other state organizations (Chichava 2010; Chichava et al. 2013; Amanor and Chichava 2016), which became part of the Mozambique that had 'progressed'. EXIM bank funding also financed investments targeting surplus Chinese industrial sectors such as state-of-the-art rice-processing equipment, which filled the plant in Chokwe. The old idea of Chokwé as 'the breadbasket of Mozambique' and Chinese interests in it therefore linked up in interesting ways, allowing the Frelimo-state of today finally to have CAIL become a long-held priority for the Frelimo party-state financed as CAIC, even if it made little economic sense.

Thirdly and lastly, as one state official in Chokwé put it, EXIM's funding could 'probably have been used more wisely in other regions', but he hinted that due to 'politics' this did not happen, as 'our leaders need to make the people of Chokwé happy, they need to feel loved'. If the people of

Chokwé did not ‘feel loved’, if they did feel something had been done for them, ‘they will come running to *Cidade* (Maputo the city) and complain’ (interview with local state official Chokwé, October 2016). Here this CAIC state official was hinting at the electoral rationales of the ruling Frelimo party. Vertically this referred to intra-ruling elite coalitions between the top and lower-level factions, and horizontally to the relationships with excluded factions of the ruling Frelimo elite (Behuria et al. 2017; Salimo et al. 2020).

The vertical politics relate to the 2014 elections, when Frelimo felt under pressure, as for the first time they were running with a Frelimo candidate for the presidency who did not come from the south of Mozambique, from which most of Frelimo’s leaders had come from since independence. Nyusi came from the northern province of Cabo Delgado and was not well known among key constituencies in the south, of which Chokwé had historically formed a part. Making sure that southern constituencies felt included was therefore key to Frelimo’s electoral strategy, so that the Frelimo could maintain its grip on power. Here CAIC came in handy in the traditional Frelimo stronghold of Chokwe, where it needed a signature patronage investment after the 2012 floods, when the state’s response had been lacklustre. The Moçfer Food Industry’s (MIA) bankruptcy saw workers laid off, as the Mozambican owned company was not aligned to the Nyusi or Guebuza factions but to the party networks of the first President Machel and second President Chissano. The company therefore did not receive any state support or protection (Interview, cadre, Ministry of Agriculture 2016).

There was therefore a need to show that the Frelimo party-state could still provide for those who were expected to support it. Chokwé had traditionally been a Frelimo stronghold since independence. Even though historically it had been favoured and spoiled with investments in the years after independence, with most of Mozambique’s investment going into Chokwé, criticism over unfulfilled promises and neglect from medium- and large-scale farmers was taken seriously. Investments such as CAIC therefore had become important in maintaining clientelist relationships between the higher

and lower levels of the Frelimo factions. In other words, CAIC was also pursued in order to reward Frelimo loyalists, who made up an important part of its electoral base in the south. In contrast, the horizontal politics were opposed to this distributional logic. In contrast to other dominant parties like the CCM in Tanzania (see Pedersen and Jacob 2018), Frelimo would usually starve regions in the central and northern parts of the country of funding and investments, as they traditionally supported the opposition (Buur and Salimo 2018; Macuane et al. 2018).

In summary, CAIL and its new instantiation CAIC were thus pursued for a mixture of ideational, path-dependent and distributional logics. This was not because of its feasible development potential. CAIC went bankrupt in 2017, as the \$60 million in loans could not be serviced, and the plant still lacked *matéria prima* (Interview CAIC 2016) and could not, as demanded by the government, ‘become competitive and be a source of income for the tax administration and stop being a “burden” on the state treasury’ (quote by Economy and Finance Minister Adriano Maleiane 2017).¹⁷

After trying out different private partners with a view to becoming competitive, and entering another round of investments, including work that had gone into the irrigation system, IGEPE sold CAIC in 2023 to the Saudi company Jampur Mozambique, Lda, with the aim of producing feed for the poultry and fish sector. As the governor of Gaza, Margarida M. Chongo, argued at the re-opening:

‘the arrival of the investors in CAIC is an added value for boosting the province’s economy and creating more job opportunities, especially for young graduates in various areas of technical and vocational education, but also for valuing the efforts of producers who have been complaining about the lack of a market for their produce.’ (Massango 2023)¹⁸

¹⁷ <https://furtherafrica.com/2017/08/22/mozambique-introduces-management-contracts-for-state-owned-companies/>

¹⁸ <https://aimnews.org/2023/09/04/saudi-company-to-produce-feed-and-fertilizer-in-chokwe/>

In this way, history seems to have reproduced itself, with CAIL still alive in its new instantiation as CAIC, but without the former's focus on complete social transformation. Now the focus is to present opportunities for important key constituencies. CAIC is therefore no longer part of any high-modernist projection but instead part of an illiberal modernizing strategy for staying in power and rewarding loyalists.

6. Conclusion

The high modernism of the past in Mozambique had a double mission. First, it sought to transform a traditional society so it could become a modern socialist society known as the New Society characterized by new industrial relations and technological progress. Second, it aimed to produce a New Man who was schooled, disciplined and principled to inhabit this New Society. We have argued that this double project has vanished, even though ideas about the Frelimo party's control of the state and society by and large has continued to be the structuring principle of the Mozambican state today (see Macuane et al. 2018; Salimo et al. 2020), even through a new logic could be emerging (see Macuane et al. 2025 forthcoming). Nonetheless, as illustrated above using the example of CAIL and CAIC, projects and ideas from this radical high-modernist past still linger on, continuing to reemerge under new reconfigurations and names, and still with a belief in Say's Law: the idea that, once something has been built, economic demand for it will follow. The continuity and realization of grandiose, financially questionable agro-industrial projects in Chokwé has continued and most probably will continue to drive investment plans, but importantly they are being inserted into a very different political context. This present incarnation lacks any transformative social engineering ideas as envisioned by the more radical high-modernist visions of the past. The table below shows this in schematic form.

Table 1. Transformations of high-modernist logics

	1970-1980s	2000-2018
Ideology	Socialist egalitarian	Multiparty democracy and capitalism
Unit	Rural/tradition/bourgeois State-owned enterprises Collective	Individual Private companies Associations
Spirit	Radical social transformation	Become competitive and profit maximizing
Transformation	Persons: New Man Society: New Society Capitalist to socialist/state	Linking private and public enterprises
Financing	COMECON and friendly northern European countries	China, Brazil, Multilateral funding, Donor Aid, Financial markets

Source: Authors

In pointing out some of the continuities in Mozambican politics since independence, we do not mean to deny that dramatic changes have taken place in recent years. Since the 1980s, the principles of market logic, privatization and private ownership have become mainstream, even though the Frelimo state still maintains a stranglehold on state-owned companies as milk-cows for rent-seeking (see Salimo et al. 2020; Macuane et al. 2025 forthcoming). However, the ambition to create a new society through top-down state-led development continues to be an underlying thread in how Frelimo sees itself and in how political discourses relating to, for example, ideas of *progresso* (progress) are expressed. But despite the continued reiterations of *progresso*, these ideas are not static and have been transformed considerably since independence, first with the democratic turn in the 1990s under the leadership of Chissano, with a focus on privatization, though controlled privatization, and then during the Guebuza regime, with its renewed focus on state-owned enterprises, investments and infrastructure construction. The most striking discontinuity in the resurrection of projects like *the Complexo Agro-Industrial do Chókwè* (CAIC) is the absence of any traces of social engineering. In its present incarnation, if there is any agenda besides the regime maintaining its power using investments like CAIC, it is to perpetuate patronage as a way of building links to key constituencies

that can be relied on to help reproduce Frelimo's power. Today's Frelimo under Nyusi has followed the precedents set by former Presidents Chissano and Gubueza. Even under the stress of the current youth rebellion in the north and the debt crisis, past ideas of socialist egalitarianism have vanished, being replaced by vague discourses of economic development in and through foreign investments as the main mantra. The ideas influencing discourse around CAIL and CAIC suggest that modern-day projects and investments represent memories of what should or could have been in the heyday of the Marxist past. Based on the Mozambican example, we suggest that this calls for further interrogation of the ideas and strategies of African leaders and their backers in order to understand what exactly motivates present-day ruling elites and the kind of efforts being undertaken today to reproduce or pursue older investment ideas in a newly reconfigured context.

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