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Ana Bénard da COSTA, *O Preço da Sombra. Sobrevivência e reprodução social entre famílias de Maputo*

Lisbon, Livros Horizonte, 2007, 183 p.

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- 1 Making a life and a livelihood in Southern Mozambique has never been a particularly easy proposition – cyclical drought, flooding, and windstorms complicated agro-pastoral endeavors. Competition for land and market, service and job opportunities with politically privileged insiders and better skilled and capitalized outsiders meant people always had to have, at the very least, a ‘Plan B’. In the 1980s when armed violence combined with a killer drought to harrow the region, many people who had managed on the land for generations sought refuge in the capital city’s already stretched peri-urban and suburban *bairros*. Within greater Maputo, people needed cash to fill even their most basic needs, thus the inspiration for Bénard da Costa’s title, “The price of some shade” – what did one have to do to get relief, even from the unforgiving sun.
- 2 In the early 1990s, Sociologist Ana Bénard da Costa was moved by the suffering and resourcefulness of greater Maputo’s residents and refugees. She, Cristina Udelsmann Rodrigues, and others participated in a larger project on “Accelerated Urbanization in Luanda and Maputo” anchored by Jochen Openheimer, and then spun off their own research. The fruit of that work is now coming to print. Throughout the 1990s Bénard da Costa focused her Master’s and Doctoral work on family survival strategies in three contrasting *bairros*: Polana Caniço A, Mafalala and Huelene B. Although these *bairros* are

internally diverse, overall they have their own character and history. Mafalala is the oldest, while both Hulene B and Polana Caniço A grew in part from displacements elsewhere. She developed both surveys and more narrowly focused interview and personal narrative projects in each *bairro*.

- 3 Since independence, the people and spaces that were scripted invisible in colonial Mozambique have eventually become visible. Despite continuing efforts to scrub out what the colonial era called 'clandestine markets,' the early Frelimo government called parallel markets, and most people call *dumba nengue*, they are where most people do their shopping. When they were uprooted in one area they popped up in another, and many returned to their original areas when the police got bored. The majority of ordinary men, women, and children, the places they live, the way they understand, talk about and seek to deal with the conditions of their day-to-day existence are finally receiving their scholarly due. The picture that is coming into focus is neither simple nor pretty, but it is essential and long overdue.
- 4 Bénard da Costa structures her book on key sociological issues: mobility, claims staking on the basis of authority (ethnic, familial, marital, gender, education, spiritual, ritual) and uses quotes from participants in the study for the titles of her seven chapters. The titles and the quotes reflect that, although people spoke Portuguese, it was generally not their first language and they had not had upper level language study. Taking the larger projects and her own work together, she has a fairly broad base, but she quotes a small number of people extensively. That has the advantage of giving the reader a better sense of those particular people, but also potentially the disadvantage of presenting a limited range of personalities. Bénard da Costa does not allow her reader to assume her speakers view is either straightforward or that it is the only viewpoint to consider – quite the contrary.
- 5 This book has three important strengths. The first picks up on the tension just mentioned. Bénard da Costa makes it clear that family life in these bairros is enormously complex, and that virtually every choice and strategy to survive and get ahead can and probably will have contradictory implications. Every effort to alleviate one problem may well feed into yet another. Poverty is expensive, anxiety producing, and destructive of personal relationships, while at the same time that it tends to drive people apart, it may as easily force them back together out of the need to pool and leverage what little they have. Often strategies remind us of the cliché about necessity being the mother of invention. Speaking of mothers, Bénard da Costa also consistently interrogates gender implications, although her favorite narrator Josué holds sway in his polygamous family, he is nonetheless surrounded by women, all of whom eventually have their say.
- 6 The second is the attention she pays to the depth, the importance, and again the complexity of peoples' spiritual lives and the lives of people who have assumed spiritual leadership. If you cannot sustain your spirit, you will never be able to feed your body, and when you can barely feed your body, sustaining your spirit becomes ever more important. The proliferation of healers, spiritual specialists and communities of believers are an important component refugee, displaced and desperate communities in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century Southern Africa. Instead of writing off the whole large and diverse range of spiritual and herbal practitioners as quacks or "obscurantist," they have finally received attention from scholarly, policy and practice based groups – like so much else they have come into the

scholarly purview. The benefit of that, at the very least, is that it helps sort out who is and is not a “quack” and why.

- 7 Finally, as underscored in the title of her first chapter, Bénard da Costa and many social scientists insist on shattering the tenacious and yet historically fictive divisions within the city’s geography and economy. She not only titles her chapter, “the *bairros* are the city,” she sustains and confirms her assertion in her research. In her classic economic geography of Maputo before Independence Maria Clara Mendes asserted her intention to include the *bairros de caniço* in her larger study. João Sousa Morais echoed Mendes, and both were able to work in important information and perspectives from what Amâncio d’Alpoim Guedes, called “The *Canião*”, but all worked largely from colonial documentation and patrimony. Only by accumulating a depth of survey and field research rooted in these neighborhoods and their populations will scholars actually be able to approach the city as a whole and escape the contradictory pattern that defined the city’s most populous neighborhoods as somehow ‘marginal to’ or ‘a ribbon around’ the real city.
- 8 I learned a lot from the extensive testimony quoted throughout the book, and Bénard da Costa’s thoughtful interrogation of virtually every aspect of the research. I have only two small caveats. First – and this is often true of survey data – why is so little made of the fact that around a third of the survey sample falls into the category, “don’t know” or “don’t reply”? I noticed, in part, because several colonial era surveys in Bairro and Posto de Munhuana also revealed between a third and a half in those categories. In those cases part of the problem was researchers conducting surveys in Portuguese with minimal knowledge of local languages. The researchers actually attributed the poor survey participation by African women to their minimal knowledge of Portuguese. The second caveat is that publishing the footnotes in 10 font or smaller made it very difficult for me to read without a magnifying glass and very good light. Africa is a very young continent, so perhaps this will not be a major marketing problem outside the aging professoriate.

November 2007