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International Homogenization or the Persistence of National Practices?

The Remaking of Industrial Relations in Mozambique

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This paper is the first systematic attempt to provide an overview of industrial relations practices at firm level in Mozambique. Through a nationwide survey of firms, the paper assesses the extent to which specific sets of practices are associated with particular regions, and/or sectors, and explores the relationship between IR practice and national institutional realities. The survey revealed that informalism and autocratic managerialism characterize the practice of employment relations. But it would be mistaken to assume a convergence towards a global systematic archetype of low wage/low skill/low security of tenure set of practices. Instead, the authors conclude, contemporary Mozambique employment relations are an example of external market pressures being channelled and moulded by the persistence of national level realities that stretch back to the colonial era. In the absence of effective institutional mechanisms, familiar conventions are likely to persist because people know how these work in practice.

A central concern of the contemporary literature on industrial relations in Africa is with the exploration of the consequences of intensified global competition and the espousal of neo-liberal policies by national governments.

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In most cases, it is assumed that this has exacerbated existing institutional weaknesses, resulting in the proliferation of labour repressive policies (Frynas and Wood, 2006; Moody, 1997; c.f. Hanlon, 1996). However, there is some evidence to suggest that, in certain cases, these pressures have been counterbalanced through the development of more pluralist and inclusivist practices at firm-level (Wood and Els, 2000; Wood and Sela, 2000). This paper evaluates the present state of labour relations in Mozambique, assesses the extent to which specific sets of practices are associated with particular regions and/or sectors, and explores the relationship between IR practice and national institutional realities. Finally, it seeks to highlight the lessons that can be drawn from the Mozambican experience for the analysis and practice of labour relations in other developing societies.

“LOW ROAD” LABOUR REPRESSION IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Global governance perspectives have argued that the growing reach of international organizations has meant that certain issues are governed across national boundaries (Haworth and Hughes, 2003: 669). However, it can be argued that global policy setting has been predominantly neo-liberal in flavour, reflecting the hegemonic influence of the United States (*ibid.*: 670). Whilst in some cases the latter has been checked by powerful regional blocs such as the EU (Haworth and Hughes, 2003: 670), tropical African nations lack the capacity and resources to defy the prescriptions of global financial institutions such as the World Bank and—above all—the IMF (Hanlon, 1996). Such prescriptions centre on the opening of markets, reduced state interventionism, privatization, and radical labour market deregulation. Whilst the operations of other transnational bodies—such as the ILO—may have had more pluralist effects (c.f. Haworth and Hughes, 2003), their interventions are to a much greater extent based on voluntarism and consent. This makes their impact rather more limited, especially in those contexts where enforcement of even national laws is weak. The opening up of markets to global competition and the weakening of national regulations is likely to make for employment relations practices that are strictly “low road,” characterized by union-busting, poor terms of employment and low human capital development (Moody, 1997).

“HIGH ROAD” ALTERNATIVES

Alternatively, it could be argued that, despite undeniable pressures towards a strengthening of the managerial prerogative and a reduction in security of tenure as a result of heightened global competition, and reduced state intervention, in certain instances, many firms have sought to

adopt more inclusivist policies in their relations with their employees. The latter may reflect a desire to develop a firm's human capital, to enhance competitiveness through the espousal of functionally flexible forms of work organization, founded on higher levels of interdependence between employers and employees (Whitley, 1999; Schuman, 1998: 21).

The real strategic choices made by firms may be moulded by the uneven consequences of interventions by transnational bodies (see Haworth and Hughes, 2003: 673). Whilst the IMF remains firmly neo-liberal, certain World Bank interventions have accorded a great weight to human capacity development (Pitcher, 2002: 214), whilst, as noted earlier, the ILO has tended to promote inclusivist and pluralist IR policies (*ibid.*: 674); even voluntary guidelines may have some impact in fluid socio-political environments. Numerous case studies on manufacturing firms in neighbouring South Africa have indicated that a significant number have adopted higher value added production paradigms and union-friendly IR policies (Smith and Wood, 1998; Wood and Sela, 2000; Wood and Els, 2000). Such an approach is characterized by the use of structured workplace training, a specialized people management function, coherent HR planning, with employment relations centring on a recognition agreement with a representative trade union (Wood and Els, 2000). The use of such strategies has, in the South African context, provided an alternative—and more durable—basis of competitiveness to the super-numerical-flexibility / autocratic management paradigm (*ibid.*; Wood and Sela, 2000).

A variation of the “high road” paradigm is the more sophisticated manifestations of “hard HRM” that combine specific forms of involvement and participation, an emphasis on highly skilled (and externally certified) labour, with low security of tenure and a hostility towards unions (Guest, 2001: 105). Such practices are typically encountered in “high tech” areas of the US economy, but may be gradually diffusing worldwide.

REGIONAL REALITIES AND THE PERSISTENCE OF NATIONAL MODELS

The above two perspectives assume that there are tendencies towards global convergence, whether in the direction of low value added practices, or the somewhat slower diffusion of high value added “best practices”, which may or may not be compatible with unions. However, a body of literature on the developing world suggests that the processes at work reflect specific choices moulded by both historical legacies and specific regional realities (Hyden, 1998).

Frenkel and Kuruvilla (2002: 389) argue that the underlying *logics of action* adopted by different players represent strategies guided by values

regarded as important, and help explain the process by which national systems are guided in a specific direction; homogenizing external forces have complex and contingent effects on employment relations. The state is guided by the *logic of industrial peace*, by the need to ensure stable conditions for economic growth (*ibid.*). In contemporary Mozambique, the government has very little room to manoeuvre, the ability to access much needed borrowing being contingent on the adoption of neo-liberal structural adjustment policies. The latter policies have resulted not only in the opening up of Mozambican markets to international competition and privatization, but also in dramatic reductions in state expenditure, that have, in turn, weakened the latter's capacity to effectively enforce labour legislation. Labour quiescence has primarily been ensured by the "iron whip of hunger," with the omnipresent threat of repeated rounds of redundancies, in a situation where unemployment is already extremely high.

Employers are guided by the *logic of competition*, by the desire to maximize profits (Frenkel and Kuruvilla, 2002: 388–389). The influx of manufactured goods from the far East, and agricultural subsidies in advanced societies have resulted in employers generally responding by cost-cutting and down sizing; this has reinforced extremely low value added employment relations policies, characterized by short-termism, and a lack of willingness to invest in plant or human resource development. Whilst unions are guided by the *logic of employment-income protection*, and seek to maximize income and job security (*ibid.*), in Mozambique, unions have been forced into a largely defensive role, acceding to the erosion of the gains in terms of real wages and conditions of employment that were made during the years of the socialist experiment, in return for some hope that jobs will be preserved.

Similar tendencies are present throughout tropical Africa. Whilst it might be assumed that this would force firms in the direction of the "low road" model, this would discount the importance of continuities stretching back to the colonial era. The latter would include a legacy of autocratic managerial practices tempered by paternalism, the importance of personal networks both in terms of recruitment and inter-firm relationships, and a communitarian culture reinforced by mutual rights and obligations (Kamoche, 2002; Jackson, 2002; Webster and Wood, 2005). Such practices meld unitarist managerial strategies with emergent and innovative alternatives, well equipped to withstand external shocks (Jackson, 2002).

Many explanations draw on the cultural explanations of managerial behaviour, based on the works of writers such as Hofstede (1980). However, as Bacharach (1989) notes, these theories are heavily reliant on the functionalist tradition, which can make it difficult to explain how external shocks can make for ruptures and changes in national practices. Alternative, critical

institutionalism suggests that the problems associated with an adverse positioning in the global economy can be greatly exacerbated or alleviated through the limitations of domestic institutional formations (Hyden, 1998). The latter are moulded not only by external pressures, but also by quasi-independent action by indigenous elites, and the effects of durable pre-capitalist networks (Hyden, 1983, 1998). In much of tropical Africa, local firms lack access to a range of sources of capital, forcing a reliance on reinvestment and personal networks (Kimemia, 2000). Meanwhile, extended peasant-based networks of support permeate employment practices, allowing for a certain continuity, but limiting recruitment options and constraining innovation (c.f. Hyden, 1983). Finally, given that such networks extend into state structures, as well as endemic capacity problems, enforcement of legislation governing labour relations is likely to be weak and uneven (Harvey, 2002; Hyden, 1983; c.f. Pitcher, 2002). Hence, whether or not unions are present, their impact on workplace practices is likely to be slight.

A reliance on personal networks is not unique to tropical Africa; it is, for example, also a characteristic of the *guanxi*-type system found in a number of successful far Eastern economies (Mellahi and Wood, 2003: 378; Xin and Pearce, 1996). However, in much of tropical Africa, the chronic weakness of the state and associated regulatory institutions make firms particularly vulnerable both to the vicissitudes of global markets and to domestic socio-political instability. This has the effect of distorting, constraining and further localizing such networks, accelerating tendencies towards greater informalization (Frynas and Wood, 2006; Mellahi and Wood, 2003). Whilst the undeniably centrifugal tendencies inherent in such networks may be partially counterbalanced by the persistence of autocratic and patriarchal authority at firm level, the latter is again likely to stifle innovation, and make for exchange relations that are arbitrary, personal, and lacking in bureaucratic consistency.

In the state and export sectors, a combination of external regulatory weakness and patriarchal authority may contribute to the reconstitution of essentially Taylorist work systems. The latter are characterized by rigidly hierarchical lines of authority, fixed divisions of labour, limited on-the-job training, low levels of employee participation and involvement, and limited job security (Frynas and Wood, 2006). Within the indigenous small business and informal sector, control is exercised on personal-despotic lines, again characterized by a low security of tenure (*ibid.*; Kamoche, 2002). In both cases, little room is accorded to unions; at best, they are firmly subordinated to management. Within successful Asian economies, it has been possible to tailor make employment relations systems best suited to support the favourable integration of countries into the global economy (Haworth and Hughes, 2003: 667). In contrast, in much of tropical Africa, institutional weaknesses

have resulted in national employment relations systems seeking at best to find a rough *modus vivendi* with an open and increasingly integrated global economy (c.f. *ibid.*). Invariably, reactive “coping” practices mitigate against the development of a supportive regulatory and human resource development infrastructure (Mellahi and Wood, 2003).

THE MOZAMBIKAN CONTEXT

Throughout the colonial era, the export of labour power—successively slaves, indentured and migrant labour—provided a major source of revenue for the colonizing power, Portugal (Hanlon, 1996; Newitt, 1996). Rather less attention was accorded to domestic development until the late nineteenth century. However, by the late 1960s, the country attracted significant foreign investment, centring on transport and related services, with Maputo serving as a major outlet for South Africa’s former Transvaal province, and Beira for the then Rhodesia (Hanlon, 1996; Newitt, 1996; BIP, n.d.). These developments were paralleled by limited industrial development, most notably in the areas of food processing, beverages, motor parts and textiles (*ibid.*).

The winning of independence in 1975 saw the Frelimo national liberation movement attaining power; this was followed by the flight of most of the white settlers, and the adoption of state socialism. Whilst, given that most enterprises had been abandoned by their owners, comprehensive state intervention was necessary, the policies chosen were increasingly rigid, particularly in the case of agriculture and the northern regions (Pitcher, 2002: 73–5). The then Rhodesian, and later the apartheid South African governments were able to harness the discontent of segments of the peasantry, and above all, traditional leaders through the establishment of the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo). This led to a bloody civil war.

The cessation of hostilities between the ruling party, Frelimo and the rebel movement, Renamo, in 1992, and the subsequent democratic elections opened the way for Mozambique’s economic reconstruction. During the closing stages of the civil war, the end of Soviet financial aid—and looming economic collapse—forced Frelimo to abandon its socialist experiment, and turn to the IMF and the World Bank for financial support (Pitcher, 2002). This, however, expectedly came with stringent conditions attached, centring on the reduction in state expenditure, the phasing out of protective tariffs and privatization, and a relaxation of minimum labour standards (Economist Intelligence Unit, 1995; Hanlon, 1996). These policies had particularly adverse consequences for industry, education and health care (*Metical*, 1 August 1997; Hanlon, 1996); it is estimated that liberalization led to

some 116,000 redundancies over the years 1987 to 1999 (*Mozambiquefile*, June 1999).

Nonetheless, a revival of the transport and service sectors led to the country recording significant economic growth by the close of the 1990s (Wood, 1999). However, most foreign investment was directed towards the capital, heightening existing regional disparities and the gap between town and country. Again, there was considerable evidence of a proliferation in corruption (Hanlon, 1996).

There are currently 21 unions in Mozambique, grouped into two federations, the OTM and CONSILMO (Rebello *et al.*, 2002; Webster and Mosoetsa, 2001). In the 1970s, the Frelimo government established production councils in all workplaces; in 1983, these were united into unions under the umbrella of the Organicao dos Trabalhadores de Mozambique ('OTM', the Organization of Mozambican Workers), but remaining firmly under the control of the ruling party. In 1990, OTM began to loosen its links with Frelimo, and has since become a persistent critic of the government's economic policies (Hanlon, 1996: 78; Nhaca, 1997; Webster and Mosoetsa, 2001). This was made possible through the government's acceding to a more pluralistic approach to employment relations in line with broader political democratization (Pitcher, 2002: 116; Gumende, 1999: 39; Webster and Mosoetsa, 2001). Currently, OTM has an estimated 90,000 members. In 1998, the Confederation of Free and Independent Trade Unions of Mozambique (CONSILMO) was formed by three trade unions that had broken away from the OTM, representing workers in the hotel, construction and transport industries (World Bank, 2003).

Mozambican labour law centres on the *1998 Labour Law*, which accords workers a degree of job security and collective bargaining rights; however, casual workers are not included under its provisions. This has led to many Mozambican firms categorizing their workers as casuals in order to escape the law (Levy, 2003). Again, whilst a tripartite negotiating forum, the Consultative Labour Commission (established in 1994) brings together representatives of the state, employers and unions, its principal area of business is the setting of a minimum wage, with enforcement being lax.

It might seem that foreign owned firms and/or those with an export orientation are more likely to adopt more formalized IR strategies and practices—even more “high road” ones—than their local or domestic market counterparts. However, within the contemporary Mozambican context, these categorizations encompass much diversity. The question of foreign ownership in Mozambique is a complex one. Many firms are foreign owned, or partially owned by foreign shareholders or a foreign company. Yet, this represents an extremely broad category, ranging from TNCs, to SMEs owned by groupings of Portuguese nationals who have strong personal or

family linkages with the country. The bulk of foreign owned companies in Mozambique fall into the latter category and are more likely to follow practices in line with indigenous ones, rather than leading edge international ones. It might similarly be assumed that “high road” practices—of one sort or another—may be more likely to be found in export orientated firms. However, this would fail to take account of large companies that do not export particular commodities—for example, the important tourism and hospitality sector—that nonetheless, seek to attain global competitiveness in terms of both the quality of the product offered and levels of customer service. The same would go for recent entrants into the increasingly competitive supermarket industry. Hence, it is more likely that specific sets of IR practices will be associated with sector rather than with ownership characteristics: traditionalist or “low road” practices are more likely to be encountered in the commercial sector, especially in SMEs (c.f. Hanlon, 1996; Webster and Wood, 2005). Given this, for the purposes of this paper, we concentrated on the effects of sectoral and other factors, rather than on ownership patterns or market orientation. However, we recognize that a fruitful area of future enquiry would be to evaluate the effects of a focus on specific market categories, and the different types of foreign ownership and relationships with parent companies.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT SYSTEMS

The guiding logics of competition (for employers) and employment income protection (for employees) can result in a number of specific policy outcomes; employers generally seek to cut costs, but they may seek to enhance their competitiveness through other means, whilst employees may, in their responses, prioritize employment protection over income or vice versa (Frenkel and Kuruvilla, 2002: 389). High value added industrial relations practices are associated with employment relations centring on a recognition agreement with a representative trade union, with both sides keeping to negotiated rules governing workplace conduct, formalized mechanisms of communication, a basic security of tenure, and an environment conducive to human capital development (Wood and Els, 2000; Applebaum *et al.*, 2000; Kochan and Osterman, 1994; Marsden, 1999; Webster and Wood, 2005). Low value added contexts would typically be associated with low job security, management not keeping to any collective agreements, a lack of communication, with little, if any skills development taking place (*ibid.*; Frenkel and Kuruvilla, 2002). Sophisticated “hard HRM approaches” would combine anti-union policies and weak security of tenure with an emphasis on effective downward communication, and ongoing skills development. Finally, critical institutionalist explanations of African

IR practice as one characterized by both rupture and continuity, would identify defining characteristics as centring on informality, paternalism, and reciprocity. Communication and training are likely to be in place, but to be *ad hoc* and unstructured, whilst employees are likely to enjoy some job security, given the central role of managers within informal networks of support (Frynas and Wood, 2006; Mellahi and Wood, 2003; Kamoche, 2002). These differences are summarized in table 1.

In the following sections, based on survey evidence, we test which of the above three explanations most closely reflects the Mozambican reality. In the survey, respondents were asked as to the type of training system they used: on the job informal and uncertified, on the job formal and uncertified, on the job certified, or certified training in a dedicated organizational training centre or via an outside provider. In the overwhelming majority of cases, training was informal and uncertified, conducted on the job; in some cases this was supplemented by formal on-the-job training. Again, respondents were asked to select the type(s) of communication system they employed, ranging from team briefings to notice boards, to irregular general meetings involving the workforce; as will become apparent, most said that the latter was employed.

METHOD

This research centres on a survey of Mozambican firms, the sampling frame being compiled from the listings of commercial firms in the official telephone directory.¹ In all, some 177 firms were surveyed and the survey concentrated on the private sector. The response rate was high, only two companies refused to be interviewed, probably due to the use of face-to-face interviews involving trained and fully briefed fieldworkers. Hence, the effects of any non-response bias were likely to be negligible. Interview respondents were the most senior person responsible for the IR/HR/personnel function within the organization; interviews were typically of a 45-minute duration.

The use of the telephone directory would exclude the informal sector, which was not covered by the survey owing to resource constraints and potential difficulties in accurate sampling. Stratified sampling was

1. The high exit rate of firms within Mozambique, and a limited number of new entrants, resulted in listings not being totally comprehensive or accurate. Extensive local enquiries eliminated those firms that ceased operations. The listing was supplemented in consultation with employer associations and the labour movement in order to ensure that newly established workplaces were encompassed. Excluded were very small enterprises that lacked a telephone and that are unlikely to be affiliated to an established employer association; whilst limiting the scope of the study, it is unlikely that such enterprises have defined industrial relations policy.

TABLE 1
Alternative Explanations of Employment Relations and Related People Management Practices in Africa

<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Employer strategies resulting from logic of competition</i>	<i>Trade union presence</i>	<i>Communication</i>	<i>Security of tenure</i>	<i>Collective agreements honoured</i>	<i>Training</i>
Low road	Cost-cutting	Rare	Few	Low	No	No
High road pluralism	Product differentiation	Widespread	Formal structures and active feedback mechanisms	High	Yes	Yes, formal certified training
Sophisticated "hard HRM"	Product differentiation	Rare	Team briefings, emphasis on cascading knowledge down	Low	N/A	Yes, but emphasis on staff taking "own responsibility for skills development"
Critical institutionalist accounts – strategies moulded by institutions and embedded practice	Mixed, cost cutting mitigated by norms, values and formal and informal rules	Mixed, little impact on actual workplace practices	Ad-hoc meetings convened by management	Mixed, mediated by notions of mutual obligation	N/A	Yes, but informal, uncertified

See Kamoche (2002); Jackson (2002); Webster and Wood (2005); Frenkel and Kuruwilla (2002: 389); Guest (2001).

employed, strata being defined by geographic locale, and within each geographic locale, by sector; this ensured representation of both key areas of industrial concentration and sector. The survey covered greater Maputo, and the other principal concentration of industrial and commercial activity in Mozambique, greater Beira. The fieldworkers were Mozambican post-graduate students from Eduardo Mondlane University and the University of Witwatersrand;² training was provided in the form of a workshop, which equipped the interviewers with applied skills for conducting fieldwork in Mozambique.³ From this data analysis is carried out, initially by simple observation of the distribution of various outcomes, then by estimating a number of probit models seeking to explain differences in employment relations behaviour.⁴

FINDINGS

A National Employment System?

The initial findings were able to establish the extent of common national practices within Mozambican industrial relations. Table 2 summarizes the degree to which specific sets of practices are associated with particular firms. This reveals that most firms are wedded to conservative employment progression; there is little to indicate the presence of islands of progressive employers consistently engaging in “high value added” employment relations policies.

In isolation, each of the categories shows a tendency towards low-grade strategies amongst nearly all of the firms. Of the 101 firms responding to all four questions in the survey, there are only 22 with formal training, 33 using formal information systems and 38 being accepted as mostly abiding by agreements. Redundancies are less damning with only 27 firms having made people redundant in the last two years; however, this is still a significant minority at over one-fourth of the total. Furthermore, redundancies, to a certain extent, reflect external factors, i.e. the current operating environment faced by the firm. Hence a firm pursuing “low value added” strategies may be able to expand and avoid redundancies during a period of favourable conditions in its specific market, with the reverse being possible for “high value added” firms.

2. Denise Malauene, Elize Muianga, Filipe Martins, Rachel Matavele, Crimildo Jose, and Eva Magumane. The financial support of the US Department of Labor is gratefully acknowledged.

3. The principal research assistant, Beata Mtyingizana, on a twice-weekly basis closely monitored the progress of the fieldworkers.

4. Full results of the probit models are available from the first author.

TABLE 2
Specific Practices and Firms

<i>Formal, Certified Work-based Training</i>	<i>No Redundancies in Last 2 Years</i>	<i>Formal Information Dissemination Systems</i>	<i>Abide by Agreements</i>	<i>Number of Firms</i>
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	6
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	2
Yes	Yes	No	No	5
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	1
Yes	No	Yes	No	2
Yes	No	No	Yes	2
Yes	No	No	No	2
No	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
No	Yes	Yes	No	9
No	Yes	No	Yes	17
No	Yes	No	No	27
No	No	Yes	Yes	4
No	No	Yes	No	3
No	No	No	Yes	3
No	No	No	No	10
Total				101

Consequently, by focusing upon the other three categories, i.e. those over which firms have much greater control, a clearer picture can be built up of the general view of employment relations policies held by firms in Mozambique. Collective analysis of these three areas is no less critical than on a selective basis; simple observation of table 2 reveals that the majority of firms are collected within a small number of predominantly low-grade combinations; only a minority of firms can be seen to be pursuing genuinely pluralist policies. Only height firms fell into the sophisticated “hard HRM category”: making use of sophisticated communication systems and certified training, and yet they were not covered by, or ignored collective agreements.

In contrast, over one-third of firms have no formal training, no formal information systems and do not honour agreements, with over 75% of the firms choosing the “low road” strategy in at least two of the three categories. Thus, “high value added” employment relations policies are very much the exception in Mozambique.

Hence, there is a clear tendency towards low-grade policies amongst Mozambican firms; however it is possible that this simply reflects the

immediate environment in which the individual firms operate. The rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s led to a challenging of the previous consensus that great geographical inequalities were economically inefficient or socially regressive (Peck and Tickell, 1992: 355; Wood, 2004). This led to the scaling back of policies favouring “uncompetitive” industries and regions, leading to gross disparities in performance between sectors and locales (*ibid.*). In the case of Mozambique, there is little doubt that structural adjustment has exacerbated existing regional imbalances—in favour of the capital, Maputo—and proved particularly devastating to certain sectors, such as manufacturing (Wood, 1999; Pitcher, 2002). Again, firms of a specific size and structure may be better equipped to weather changes in external markets than others (Boyer and Hollingsworth, 1997); in Mozambique, it has particularly been medium-sized and larger firms, and the manufacturing sector, that have been adversely affected by the changes that have taken place over the past decade (Hanlon, 1996). It is possible that such imbalances have encouraged a greater diversity in employment relations and human resource management practices between sectors and regions, with firms that are particularly under threat being forced to experiment with innovative forms of work organization and human resource management; we explore this possibility in the following sections.

Security of Tenure and Investment in People

Over a quarter (28%) of firms had made employees redundant in the past year. In short, contrary to the predictions of the high road model, people are treated as a readily disposable commodity, which would also weaken any notions of mutual obligation. The mode of firms (69%) employed informal workplace based training, commonly the “sitting with Nellie” model, whereby a new worker is placed alongside a more experienced colleague, in order to gain practical exposure and training in the range of tasks to be performed. In short, we found not so much an absence of training, but a predominance of informal methods. Less than a fifth of firms (19%) had certified in-firm training programs.

A binomial probit model, with redundancies as the dependent variable (1 if redundancies have taken place in the last two years and 0 otherwise) was then constructed. The explanatory variables, in this and the subsequent models, are the size of the firm (number of employees), regional dummies (Maputo and Beira, with Maputo city as the base group) and a number of sectoral dummies (with manufacturing other than metal as the base group).

All of the potential explanatory variables were insignificant with the exception of size. Larger firms were more likely to have made people

redundant in the last two years, with region and sector being not significant; this would underscore the extent to which intensified global competition and reduced levels of state protection has forced larger enterprises to downsize significantly.

Based on a similar probit model, we then looked at certified workplace based training as the dependent variable (1 if certified workplace based training takes place and 0 otherwise). Again most of the variables proved insignificant except people working in Beira are less likely to have certified training and people in agriculture are more likely. This would reflect the use of certified training by a number of large agricultural enterprises in the region; however, as will become apparent, these enterprises are no more enlightened than their peers in other sectors and regions in a range of other areas.

Representation and Communication

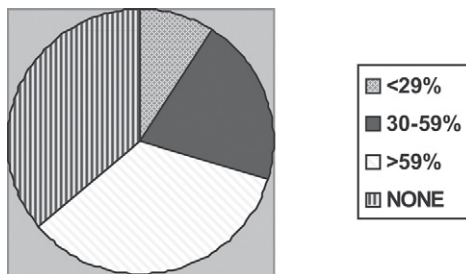
The preferred method of information dissemination in the case of 77% of firms was through *ad hoc* mechanisms, such as verbal communications from managers at irregularly-held general meetings. Few firms (15%) made use of mechanisms such as cascade briefings that allowed for the structured flow of information from top to bottom, with some room for feedback from below. In short, rather than a total absence, we found that the predominant forms of communication are those that would be associated with traditional paternalist approaches to people management.

Whilst 22% made use of shopsteward or worker representative briefings, in many cases, these were the same firms that made use of cascade briefings. Again, few firms made use of systemic forms of employee consultation: only 6% made use of suggestion boxes, 4% workplace surveys and 15% team briefings. The survey similarly revealed little in the way of financial participation, other than practices associated with traditional piecework or jobbing systems.

We then conducted a similar probit model with information sharing as the dependent variable. Beira-based firms proved less likely to have formal information sharing systems in place; despite the higher incidence of certified training, Beira does not seem to be a locale especially associated with progressive employment relations policies in other areas. Again, transport firms were less likely to have structured information-sharing systems in place, reflecting the spatially dispersed nature of the industry. A similar pattern was apparent when it came to consultation: Beira firms were somewhat less likely to have formal mechanisms for employee consultation or participation in place. However, there was no association between firm size or sector on the one hand, and employee consultation on the other hand.

The mode of firms surveyed (36%) had no union presence whatsoever. However, 34% of firms had a relatively high rate of unionization, with more than 59% of the workforce belonging to a union; 20% of firms had a union presence of between 30% and 59%, whilst 10% had 29% or less (figure 1).

FIGURE 1
Union Penetration Rates



In covering formal sector employers, the survey encompassed what remains a diminishing area of employment; union penetration in other areas remains slight, although there is an association of market traders operating in the informal sector. Similarly, Mozambican unions seem to have had little success in reaching out to more marginal categories of labour in the formal sector. The survey revealed that, in only 20% of unionized workplaces, short term contract/casual workers belonged to a union; as noted earlier, many employers classify a large proportion of their workforce as casuals, in order to escape the provisions of the Labour Law. Unionization amongst part time workers was even lower; in only 4% of unionized workplaces did any part-timers belong to a union.

In 64% of firms, bargaining was confined to individual workplace, and in 22% at enterprise level. The highly decentralized nature of bargaining makes unions dependent on the goodwill of local managers, and on their capacity to weather the adverse consequences of redundancies, changes in recruitment and retention practices or similar managerial actions, and, indeed, the targeted victimization of employees who are active in the union. Hence, in most cases, the physical presence of unions has not made for the effective collective representation of workers or the erosion of managerial autonomy.

In 46% of workplaces, a collective agreement was in force. However, only 39% of managers surveyed believed that their firm actually abided by the agreement. This would underscore the highly decentralized nature of Mozambican industrial relations, and the absence of effective institutional restraints on managerial actions.

A final probit model had the same explanatory variables, but with bargaining effectiveness as the dependent variable (1 if there is recognition and the employer satisfactorily abides by collective agreements and 0 otherwise). In this case, all of the variables are insignificant; in other words, the behaviour of firms is unaffected by size, locale or sector.

In summary, the various probit models reveal that, with a small number of exceptions, firms' employment relations and human resource management policies are shown to be independent of size, sector and locale. Consequently, it is evident that the predominance of specific sets of practices—informal communication and training, a tendency not to abide by collective agreements and low security of tenure reflect not only external pressures on specific sectors that are particularly exposed to global competition, but embedded national practices.

MOZAMBIQUE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: CONTINUITY OR CHANGE?

In Mozambique, there is little doubt that the pressures of transnational financial institutions and the weakness of national ones have contributed to a situation where a relatively large number of firms have become locked into super flexibility (c.f. Wood, Harcourt and Harcourt, 2004). There is little evidence of clusters of more progressive practices in particular sectors or locales, or in firms of a specific size, despite variations in the performance of different sectors and between firms of different sizes, and gross regional imbalances. There is similarly little evidence that the activities of the ILO have encouraged better practices; most firms ignore or avoid large bodies of Mozambican labour law (Levy, 2003), irrespective of whether or not the latter has been framed in accordance with ILO guidelines.

However, it would be mistaken to assume that Mozambican employment relations simply reflect part of a possible global convergence towards low wage/low skill/low security of tenure policies and practices. Rather, as suggested by *critical institutionalism*, they reflect not only international pressures, but also the persistence of domestic institutional structures and distortions. Contemporary Mozambican employment relations are at least partially path dependent, with external market pressures being channelled and moulded by national level institutional realities (c.f. Traxler, Blaschke and Kittel, 2001); clearly identifiable continuities stretch back to the colonial era (Pitcher, 2002; c.f. Newitt, 1996). A central aspect of the latter is a durable informalism: management tends to be on personal and patriarchal, lines, in contrast to the rational-bureaucratic procedures dominant in advanced societies. The survey revealed that managers preferred informal approaches to training and communication—rather than either (high road)

formal procedures or a (low road) neglect—but were reluctant to have their freedom of manoeuvre limited by collective agreements. On the one hand, the type of informality that characterizes Mozambican employment relations and people management is dysfunctional, making for weak and unstable rules governing social interactions within and between firms (c.f. Marsden, 1999; Phelps Brown, 1983); product markets are characterized by cut-throat competition, and security of tenure is low. The latter would undermine mutual commitment, limiting the effectiveness of informal networks that, potentially, could compensate for the lack of effective formal institutional mediation. On the other hand, it has made for an inherent dynamism, enabling many firms—and cohorts of managers—to survive external shocks including rapid decolonization, a state socialist experiment, civil war, and neo-liberalism. Whilst employers may be guided by the *logic of competition* (c.f. Frenkel and Kuruvilla, 2002), the desire to cut costs does not necessarily result in global homogenization towards the “low road” model; specific national variations persist, reflecting both historical experiences, present day regulations and the nature of regulatory failings.

The Mozambican colonial experience was a particularly traumatic one, involving both the large scale use of forced labour and extremely lop sided development geared towards servicing the exploitative demands of a metropole that had itself been gradually marginalized in the global economic system since its heyday in the sixteenth century. Decolonization was followed on by civil war, and then the imposition of poorly planned and largely destructive structural adjustment policies. These events—uneven and exploitative colonial development, post-independence political instability, and the sweeping adoption of neo-liberal macro-economic policies—mirror and magnify the experiences of many other tropical African states. Yet, it would be over simplistic to assume that, as a result of such an historical legacy, the dominant industrial relations paradigm in large areas of the developing world simply represents a reversion to the sweatshops of early capitalism; rather, such systems embody both paternalism and autocracy, low security of tenure, but also informal training and communication and the extensive use of personal networks in areas such as recruitment (c.f. Webster and Wood, 2005). Future research priorities could include documenting varieties in such practices across the continent, highlighting common grounds and difference, and assessing the extent to which there exists a tropical African industrial relations paradigm, that is distinct both from the “low road” sweatshop model and higher value added approaches.

CONCLUSION

The survey revealed that informalism and autocratic managerialism characterize the practice of employment relations in Mozambique, characteristics that cut across sectors, regions and firm sizes. On the one hand, there is little doubt that the practice of Mozambican employment relations has been greatly affected by external shocks; most recently, the implementation of structural adjustment policies has had the effect of greatly reducing security of tenure (Hanlon, 1996; Pitcher, 2002). Again, privatization has strengthened managerial autonomy;⁵ within newly privatized firms, there has been a growing tendency to opt out of the *Labour Law* by categorizing employees as casuals (Levy, 2003).

On the other hand, the *ad hoc* patriarchal authoritarianism that permeates managerial practice represents a continuity stretching back to the colonial era, the socialist experiment of the 1970s notwithstanding (Pitcher, 2002); employers continue to make widespread use of informal training and communication systems. It would be mistaken to assume that what is happening in Mozambique is simply a process of convergence towards a global systematic archetype of low wage/low skill/low security of tenure set of practices. Instead, contemporary Mozambique employment relations are an example of external market pressures being channelled and moulded by the persistence of national level realities that stretch back to the colonial era. As Marsden (2001) notes, any innovations will spread slowly in the absence of effective institutional means, with familiar conventions being likely to persist because people know how these work in practice, and what outcomes to expect.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Whilst there is an extensive body of research dealing with the nature and consequences of labour regulation in colonial era Mozambique (see Newitt, 1996; Pitcher, 1993; Saul, 1985), the survey represents the first systematic attempt to gauge the nature of contemporary labour relations practices at firm level. Hence, whilst it is possible to identify specific systemic characteristics, such as informal paternalism, it is not possible to accurately gauge the manner in which IR practices are replicated or abandoned, and the extent to which they may be converging across firms. A series of follow-up surveys conducted at regular intervals would be valuable in this

5. Whilst the reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s also led to unions gaining autonomy from the ruling party, they have generally failed to capitalize on these gains owing to a lack of effective legal protection and a shrinking employment base.

regard. This would shed further light on whether the practices encountered in Mozambique constitute a definable systemic archetype (c.f. Katz and Darbshire, 2000), or simply represent a “default” cluster of incoherent reactions to persistent institutional and regulatory failures. Again, comparative studies employing a similar measuring instrument in different national contexts would shed further light on the nature of, and degree of uniformity in, IR practices across tropical Africa, and tendencies towards convergence or difference within and between nations, regions and continents (c.f. Katz and Darbshire, 2000).

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RÉSUMÉ

L'uniformisation à l'échelle internationale ou la pérennité des pratiques nationales ? Le remodelage du système des relations industrielles au Mozambique

Cet essai se veut une tentative systématique de présenter une vue générale des pratiques de relations industrielles au niveau de l'entreprise au Mozambique. Une préoccupation centrale des études actuelles sur les relations industrielles en Afrique porte sur les effets de la concurrence mondiale accrue et l'adoption de politiques néolibérales par les gouvernements nationaux. Dans la plupart des cas, on postule que cela est venu aggraver les faiblesses institutionnelles actuelles, entraînant ainsi une multiplication des politiques répressives à l'endroit du travail. Néanmoins, il existe un minimum de preuve à l'effet que, dans quelques cas, ces pressions ont connu un contrepoids avec la venue de pratiques plus inclusives et pluralistes à l'échelle de l'entreprise.

Par contre, un certain nombre de travaux sur les pays en voie de développement nous incite à croire que les processus à l'œuvre reflètent des choix spécifiques façonnés à la fois par un héritage historique et par des réalités régionales particulières. En s'appuyant sur une enquête à l'échelle nationale auprès des entreprises du Mozambique, cet essai analyse la nature particulière des relations industrielles au niveau de l'entreprise en cherchant à vérifier s'il existe une convergence dans les pratiques d'adaptation concurrentielles vers le haut (*high road*), i.e. vers une meilleure productivité et de meilleures conditions de travail ou vers le bas (*low road*), i.e. en réduisant les conditions de travail, ou si un modèle de relations industrielles spécifiques au Mozambique persiste vraiment. L'essai cherche de plus à vérifier dans quelle mesure des ensembles spécifiques de pratiques sont liés à des régions ou à des secteurs particuliers et il tente de saisir la relation

entre la pratique des relations industrielles et les réalités institutionnelles nationales.

Au Mozambique, il n'y a pas de doute que les pressions exercées par les institutions transnationales et par la faiblesse des institutions nationales ont créé une situation où un nombre relativement important d'entreprises se trouvent enfermées dans un état d'hyper-flexibilité. L'enquête a trouvé très peu d'indices de la présence d'un amalgame de pratiques plus progressistes dans des régions ou des secteurs particuliers, ou encore dans des entreprises de taille particulière, malgré les changements au niveau de la performance de divers secteurs ou entre des entreprises de tailles différentes et malgré des déséquilibres flagrants. Dans la même foulée, il y a peu de preuve à l'effet que les actions de l'Organisation internationale du travail (OIT) aient favorisé le développement de meilleures pratiques; les entreprises ignorent ou évitent des pans entiers de la législation ouvrière du Mozambique, que les lois aient été élaborées ou non dans le respect des directives de l'OIT.

Cependant, il ne serait pas juste de postuler que les relations du travail au Mozambique reflètent en partie un mouvement de convergence vers des politiques et des pratiques de maintien en emploi caractérisées par des bas niveaux de salaires, de qualification et de sécurité au travail. Au contraire, comme semble l'indiquer *l'institutionnalisme critique*, les relations d'emploi reflètent non seulement les pressions internationales, mais également la pérennité des structures institutionnelles et des distorsions internes.

Les relations actuelles d'emploi au Mozambique sont au moins en partie dépendantes du cheminement suivant : les pressions du marché externe canalisées et façonnées par des réalités institutionnelles au niveau national, alors que des continuités clairement identifiables s'étendent jusqu'à l'ère coloniale. L'aspect central de ce phénomène se traduit par une dimension informelle et durable des relations : la gestion tend à être personnalisée et patriarcale, contrairement aux procédures rationnelles et bureaucratiques qui dominent dans les sociétés développées. L'enquête a révélé que les dirigeants préfèrent des approches informelles en matière de formation et de communication interne, au lieu d'emprunter des procédures formelles (*high road*) ou pas de procédure du tout (*low road*). Ces mêmes dirigeants n'apprécient pas de voir leur marge de manœuvre limitée par des contrats de travail.

D'un côté, le caractère d'informalité qui caractérise les relations du travail et la gestion des ressources humaines au Mozambique n'est pas fonctionnel à cause des règles instables et faibles qui encadrent les interactions sociales à l'intérieur des entreprises et entre ces dernières, le marché des produits étant caractérisé par une concurrence féroce et la sécurité d'emploi étant faible. Le marché va ainsi miner toute notion d'engagement mutuel, limitant en passant l'efficacité des réseaux informels, qui pourraient

compenser l'absence d'une médiation effective, institutionnelle et formelle. D'un autre côté, ce caractère d'informalité a favorisé l'émergence d'un certain dynamisme en permettant à de nombreuses entreprises et à des cohortes de dirigeants de survivre aux contrecoups externes, incluant la décolonisation rapide, l'expérience d'un socialisme d'État, la guerre civile et enfin le néolibéralisme. De là, pendant que les employeurs peuvent être guidés par la logique de la concurrence (voir Frenkel et Kuruvilla, 2002), le désir chez ces derniers de couper les coûts ne se traduit pas par une uniformisation globale d'un modèle empruntant les stratégies d'adaptation vers le bas : des variations nationales persistent, qui reflètent une expérience historique particulière, la régulation courante et les manquements aux règles.

Il est probable qu'on retrouve plusieurs similitudes entre les pratiques de relations du travail et de gestion des ressources humaines au Mozambique et celles qui ont cours dans d'autres pays tropicaux africains. Les instruments que nous avons mis au point pour cette étude pourraient servir à suivre l'évolution des réformes institutionnelles et aussi être utilisés pour des études comparatives.