

Rechtsgeschichte Legal History

www.lhlt.mpg.de

<http://www.rg-rechtsgeschichte.de/rg30>
Zitiervorschlag: Rechtsgeschichte – Legal History Rg 30 (2022)
<http://dx.doi.org/10.12946/rg30/283-284>

Rg **30** 2022 283–284

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The Workings of Private Colonization in Mozambique

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fach herangezogen, wobei aus Sicht des Rezensenten in der konkreten Wortlaut-Analyse die Stimme des Verfassers durchaus deutlicher herausgehoben hätte werden können. So aber findet man auf zahlreichen Seiten lange Passagen zitiert, die nicht wirklich interpretiert werden. Auch die zeitgenössische Völkerrechtswissenschaft wird umfassend herangezogen und auch dabei gilt das Argument des Verfassers: Gerade Völkerrechtler aus der Region haben insbesondere in den Fallstudien 2 bis 4 eminent zur Normentstehung beigetragen, und die Liste der Namen ist lang und umfasst sowohl bekanntere als auch unbekanntere Gelehrte. An einer Stelle des Buches lautet die Aufzählung Dimitrij Ivanovič Kačenovski, Vladimir Bezobrazov, André N. Mandelstam und Fëdor Fëdorovič

Martens, Vaspasian Pella, Ludwik Ehrlich, Raphael Lemkin und Nikolaos Politis (57). Angemessenerweise zieht Skordos Primärquellen jenseits der sonst in der Völkerrechtsgeschichte dominierenden westeuropäischen Sprachen heran. Hier sind es beispielsweise auch Serben, Rumänen oder Griechen, die in den Fußnoten auftauchen. Ob sie wirklich und ausschließlich Mitglieder einer »transnationalen Gelehrtenengesellschaft« (57) waren, scheint jedenfalls einseitig. Hat doch die Studie von Anthea Roberts gerade die nationalen Prägungen der Völkerrechtswissenschaft herausgearbeitet.² – Übrigens fehlen von der Monarchie bis zur Republik viele wichtige zeitgenössische österreichische Völkerrechtler. ■

Raquel R. Sirotti

The Workings of Private Colonization in Mozambique*

Control over land lies at the center of colonial history, not only because access to land is usually considered the quintessential symbol of territorial domination, but also due to its relevance in colonial enterprises. Through land policies, borders were formed, native populations were relocated or even exterminated, labor exploitation was regulated, and taxes were imposed and charged. Put differently, land was (and still is) a synonym for power. In Africa, disputes over land were also a geopolitical affair. In the late 19th century, the so-called »Scramble for Africa« determined the effective occupation of African territories by European colonial powers. Land policies therefore became an instrument for guaranteeing the maintenance of sovereignty over overseas territories.

Apart from shedding light on these and other issues, Barbara Direito's book brings another layer

of complexity to the topic. It covers the land policies applied in the territory formerly governed by one of the most powerful and long-lasting charter companies in African history, the Mozambican Company (*Companhia de Moçambique*).

A common practice since the beginning of European colonial expansion, the resort to charter companies went into decay from the mid-19th century onwards due to the spread of liberal ideas that argued for commercial monopolies to be replaced by increased state investment in colonization projects. However, the principle of effective occupation, determined by the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, provoked a resurgence of charter companies in Africa as part of a strategy of »cheap imperialism«, that is, of the control of colonial possessions at low cost to the colonial powers.

2 ANTHEA ROBERTS, *Is International Law International?*, Oxford 2017.

* BÁRBARA DIREITO, *Terra e Colonialismo em Moçambique. A região de Manica e Sofala sob a Companhia de Moçambique, 1892–1942*, Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais 2020, 306 p., ISBN 978-972-671-622-8

In the Portuguese case, the conflict with the British over the Zambezi valley made the charter model especially attractive. As Direito explains, the granting of a large part of Mozambican territory to private colonizers was related, amongst other things, to the threat posed by the British magnate Cecil Rhodes, head of the British South African Company, who intended to extend British domination towards the Manica region. In an attempt to guarantee an active and profitable presence in the area, the Portuguese government granted state-like powers to the *Companhia de Moçambique* in early 1891. From then on, the Company acquired, among other rights and privileges, the power to lease, explore, and colonize all the territories under its concession.

But *Terra e Colonialismo em Moçambique* is not only about charter companies and land policies in Portuguese Africa. Direito's research provides a detailed analysis of how access to land was essential for social control, and therefore for the implementation of a broader colonial project involving public and private initiatives. For this reason, she argues that land policies can only be understood in connection with the regulation of agricultural activity and labor exploitation. This core argument guides the book's structure, which is divided into three parts and seven chapters.

Part one deals with the origins of Company rule. Its two chapters alternate descriptions of social, cultural and economic elements of the regions colonized by the *Companhia de Moçambique* with information on the reasons why the Portuguese government gave over the colonization of a great share of current-day Mozambican territory to two private companies (the *Companhia de Moçambique* and the *Companhia do Niassa*, which was active in the northern part of the colony). The chapters provide an overall picture of how company institutions worked on the ground and how officials navigated their operation. Although the *Companhia de Moçambique* was strongly criticized by Portuguese officials since its very creation, Direito shows how it managed to build a structured and pervasive governance regime in its territories.

Part two discusses the three pillars sustaining the power over land exerted by the *Companhia de Moçambique*: land grant policies, labor policies, and agricultural policies. Tensions and conflicts

between the Company and multiple sub-concessionaries as well as between African populations, European settlers and Company officials are presented as the connecting thread between the ways in which the Company regulated land, labor, and agriculture. Direito also demonstrates the great power that company officials and other agents on the ground – such as surveying directors – had in processes of normative production, e.g. in land demarcation and distribution.

Part three covers the effects and repercussions of these policies. Its two chapters are especially enlightening, as they try to bring African voices into the equation. The topic of indigenous reservations (in what context and for what reasons they were created, how long they lasted, and what functions they served) stands out as a crucial element in the relationship between land ownership and indigenous populations. Yet, more information on how Africans actually disputed access to land would have been interesting. Direito does not use court cases or other sources which could contain further traces of African voices. Requests by Africans for land possession and acquisition are only mentioned in passing, and usually used as a reference for showing which elements were considered by county chiefs in the process of awarding land titles.

Despite demonstrating that the Mozambican Company regulated access to land in a fairly autonomous manner, Direito's study implies that these regulations were very much in line with the land policies applied in the territories ruled directly by the Portuguese government. Furthermore, the comparison with other African colonial states such as South Africa, Kenya and Southern Rhodesia leads to the conclusion that Company land regulations were also embedded in a broader African landscape. But still, was there anything special or unique about the charter companies' rule and the way land access was granted and regulated in their territories? These questions remain unanswered. While offering a sizeable, compelling, and original case study on land policies in the regions colonized by the *Companhia de Moçambique*, the emphasis on regulations and practices performed by a private institution might also interest the reader in potential correlations with other charter companies active in Mozambique (such as the Nyassa Company) and elsewhere in Africa. ■