

Reported massacre in Mozambique: how it was made known

From Father Adrian Hastings

Sir, The massacre of Wiriyamu took place about 25 kilometres south of the town of Tete on December 16, 1972. Anyone who has lived in African rural areas knows that it is next to impossible at this distance to indicate with absolute precision how one arrives at a particular village off any main road. *The Sunday Telegraph's* map does in fact continue even today to put it in the wrong place. Wiriyamu is, or rather was, a village within the triangle made up by the Zambezi, its tributary the Mazoe river, and the Tete-Beira road. Consequently it is east of that road not west of it. Father Miguel Antoni, a senior priest who has worked for years in the San Pedro mission and knows the village well, has told me personally that he is willing to identify it to an international commission. He only left Mozambique (he was not expelled) in March of this year.

Being fairly close to the town of Tete, Wiriyamu had something of the character of a dormitory village—a number of its inhabitants worked in Tete and its population was of somewhat mixed origin but its language was of course ChiNyungwe.

The report which was published in *The Times* of July 10 was not written by me nor in Madrid. It was completed by January 6 in Tete. As many other reports of similar barbarities it was sent both to the bishops and to the authorities in the missionaries' own society, in Madrid. In the past the missionaries have also gone repeatedly to the civil authorities in cases of this kind but the uselessness of such action has become too obvious. The whole episcopal conference of Mozambique knew of this massacre and the fathers waited hoping for some action on the part of the Church's authorities. That was one reason for delay in publication.

A second was, not so much the danger it would bring to the priests still in Mozambique, but the fact that expulsion brings to an end the work to which they have dedicated themselves and the very slight measure of protection their presence may still afford to the people around them. In fact, besides the two priests of the Burgos society, who have been in prison for 18 months, four have been expelled this year and one escaped. There are some 15 left.

A third general reason for delay in publication was that all the members of the society are Spanish and publication outside Church papers whose influence is rather slight is hardly possible in Spain. Publication took place now for the simple reason that I received it now. I visited Spain from June 18 to 22 for an ecumenical meeting at Salamanca. On my way through I lunched with the Burgos Fathers in Madrid. I had heard previously of their difficulties in Mozambique but only then did I learn that they had such detailed documents. They had no spare available copies but promised to send them to me.

I received them at the end of June. As they were all in Spanish, a language I do not read easily, it took me some days before I realised that the account of the Wiriyamu massacre was uniquely significant—because of its size, the precise list of victims, the relatively recent date and the absence of any public report hitherto (accounts of the earlier Mucumbira massacres which were also included had already appeared in several places including *The Observer*). I had then to make the difficult decision to take full personal responsibility for the publication of what I realized would be dynamite. I did this on July 5, cabled to Madrid for confirmation of the permission previously given to publish, and gave the document to be translated. The next day I received the reply from Madrid and phoned *The Times*. You received the text on the 9th and published it on July 10. No one read it in Britain before you received it other than myself and my translator. I have had no connection at any time with either Frelimo or the Labour Party.

I had and have the fullest confidence in the document, first because

of its general character: I may say that I am an historian who has lived in east African rural areas for many years. Secondly, because I knew the Burgos Fathers well and have the greatest respect for their integrity and ability as missionaries. They are outstanding in their devotion to duty, the simplicity of their lives and their care to learn African languages. Thirdly, because many other comparable atrocities, if on a smaller scale, have been already well documented and some were in fact clearly accepted as facts even in a Portuguese court—the trial of Fathers Sampaio and Mendes early this year.

In considering the wider field, it is essential to realize that such charges have now been made by priests working in Mozambique of at least three different missionary societies—the White Fathers, the Verona Fathers and the Burgos Fathers—and by diocesan priests. They have been made by priests of Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Dutch and other nationalities. If the charges are untrue, what conceivable explanation can be given of such men making them? By doing so, they bring their own work to an end and at the same time are hardly even believed abroad. They have not, are not, and will not be paid for the stories they publish. Most are men who have been some 12 years at work in the field. Catholic priests, from southern Europe above all, are not accustomed to turning to the press. All our discipline and training has been to the contrary. They have been driven to this by the desperation of the situation and the failure of higher authority in the Church to do anything much about it. The wild counter accusations of absurd Jesuit/terrorist conspiracies and the rest appear in large part as an expression of anti-clericalism singularly out of place when dealing with a group of priests who have no power, ecclesiastical or other, beyond the assertion of the truth.

With regard to the quite absurd red herring of the film I brought back from Madrid which *The Sunday Telegraph* is still playing with, I would ask the BBC to admit publicly that (1) the Superior General of the Burgos Fathers refused to allow their man in Madrid to take it to show on the news because of my advice; (2) that I told both that man and their representative who met me unexpectedly at Heathrow that the film had no news value and could only be used as background material; (3) that it was I who informed them that it was several years old—made in August 1969: how could they have seen that for themselves anyway? (4) that I gave them no permission to show the film but only to see it and then discuss it with me if they wanted to make use of it. Why then did they issue a public statement at all?

The massacre of Wiriyamu, terrible as it is, is only one of very many atrocities committed by the Portuguese army in Mozambique. Probably it is not even the biggest—although it is the biggest of which we have detailed evidence. It just happens that its proximity to Tete and the escape of a few people has enabled the world to know of this episode when we know nothing of so many others.

Where do we go from here? The published report must be substantiated by local investigation but it is absurd and arrogant for journalists to think that they can hurry into a war torn and terrorised country and expect the local people to trust them and in the presence of the Portuguese army and through official government interpreters inform them of such events. Even *The Sunday Telegraph* admits that the Portuguese army commits "acts of great brutality". The problem is how to collect even the beginnings of evidence within a situation where the army remains but the foreign investigators do not. The problem cannot be resolved by an individual newspaper, but it could perhaps be by the intervention of the British Government whose guest Prime Minister Caetano will now be, and of the Vatican whose Concordat links the Catholic Church in Mozambique

extremely closely with the state. Not only the reputation of Portugal but also that of both these other bodies will be forever linked with the name of Wiriyamu.

Yours,
ADRIAN HASTINGS
College of the Ascension,
Weoley Park Road,
Birmingham 29.
July 15.

From Mr David Crouch, Conservative MP for Canterbury

Sir, You have reported that Conservative MPs were pressing for a strong line to be taken with the Opposition when the alleged atrocities in Mozambique are debated in the House of Commons.

What does that mean? Should we condemn your newspaper for publishing an unauthenticated report? Have you been guilty of timing the release of this story as part of a deliberate attempt to sour the visit of Dr Caetano and the celebration of our 600-year-old alliance with Portugal? Should we condemn the Leader of the Opposition for his indelicate haste in using an unproven story as a reason for criticizing an ally and seeking to do so when the head of that country is our guest?

I find it hard to answer these questions. Supposing you were right? What line should we take then? I am not really concerned with journalistic niceties or parliamentary tactics. Surely our concern must be to find the truth and not to look the other way. I would be firm about that.

Yours faithfully,
DAVID CROUCH,
House of Commons.
July 13.

From Mr Geoffrey Lewis

Sir, How coincidental that a massacre which is supposed to have taken place in Portuguese East Africa in December 1972 should only now come to light, within days of the visit of the Portuguese Prime Minister to this country. Could the Labour Party's eagerness to have this visit stopped have anything to do with their own involvement in the financing of terrorism in Africa? After all, last year they sent a large sum of money to so-called "Africa Freedom Fighters".

They will, perhaps, be proud to know of some of the achievements of the people they are financing. For example, to date 46 employees of the Benguela Railway, which runs across Angola, have been killed by terrorist activities while engaged in their normal peaceful duties. How grateful their families must be that the Labour Party has helped to take such solicitous care of them! With friends like the Labour Party what need have they of enemies?

Yours faithfully,
G. LEWIS,
71 Sunnyside Gardens,
Upminster,
Essex.
July 12.

From Mr J. P. Miller

Sir, I am glad the Prime Minister has refused to cancel Dr Caetano's visit, not because I hold any particular brief for this visitor, or his government, but because it will be a sad day when our affairs of state are ruled by newspaper reports of hearsay.

Yours faithfully,
J. P. MILLER,
Thwaite Hall,
Bungay,
Suffolk.
July 11.

From Miss M. Rashleigh Toome

Sir, I regret to have to ask you to print a correction to my letter published today, as I seem inadvertently to have written the Zambezi instead of the Rovuma—which, of course, forms the frontier between Tanzania and Mozambique.

M. RASHLEIGH TOOME,
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3 Cyprus Road,
Exmouth,
Devon.
July 13.