

'The Unhappiest Nation on Earth'

ALEX VINES writes about war in Mozambique and electoral prospects after the proposed cease-fire on October 1

Some would describe what is now happening in Mozambique studies as a new wave of revisionism. At least seven books in English will reach the book shelves in 1993, ranging from Landeg White's *Bridging the Zambezi* (a history of the lower Zambezi bridge) to Margaret Hall and Tom Young's *Crisis and Transformation in Mozambique*. This new wave begins with two books on what is clearly the central issue in Mozambique — the war. William Finnegan and Hilary Andersson are both American journalists, writing sophisticated journalism which captures the atmosphere and emotion of the moment. Unlike previous writers they are not committed to any interpretation of Mozambique's history, but have been moved by their travel experience to write about the country.

Finnegan spent two months in 1988 visiting Zambezia, Beira, Malawi, Maputo and Manhiça in Gaza province. *A Complicated War* is a compilation of travel accounts he wrote as a result of his trip. What is disappointing is that of 257 pages of main text, only the 25 on Malawi are new. Most of the book was published in 1989 in two issues (May 22 and 29) of the *New Yorker* as 'A Reporter At Large: The Emergency' or as a small piece in the *SAROB*. The notes are well constructed but read like padding, adding little to the text, probably designed only to make it acceptable for the University of California's Perspectives on Southern Africa series. It is unlikely to reach many more readers in its new book form; it will be read, perhaps, by those few Africanists who do not take the *New Yorker*. Andersson visited Mozambique, more recently than Finnegan, in 1990. Her focus is on the human displacement caused by the war with interesting chapters on Mozambican refugees in Malawi and South Africa.

Although both Finnegan and Andersson discuss Renamo, neither travelled in the rebel's 'liberated zones'. Finnegan describes the problems of those who did: (p. 75)

The journalists saw an African Potemkin village, and most of their stories, even those that had struggled to be more than Renamo propaganda, ended up in the press packet issued by the external wing in Washington. Although the man in Zambezia who was interviewed by the Englishman spoke perfect Portuguese, his captors, he told me, insisted that he answer the journalist's questions in

Lomwe, a local language, so that a Renamo interpreter could censor his answers.

Despite censorship and restriction another American journalist, Karl Maier — who recently ended a five-year assignment in Mozambique writing for the *London Independent* — and I have tried several times since 1990 for permission to enter, but these formal requests have been rejected although verbal invitations continue. It looks as if Renamo is afraid to let journalists or academics into its zones, unless they are regarded as already sympathetic. The majority of journalists entering Renamo's 'liberated zones' have therefore been carefully chosen, a number because of past Rhodesian connections. Several I have interviewed know little of the complexities of Mozambique (one particular British journalist with Rhodesian experience continued to call Mozambican locations by their Portuguese colonial names).

vides marvellous, almost photo-like, descriptions of what he saw. Take his visit to Morrumbala town in Zambezia after recapture from Renamo occupation:

A Complicated War: the Harrowing of Mozambique
by William Finnegan
University of California Press (Berkeley),
344pp, \$25.00 cloth, 17 April 1992,
0 520 07804 7

Mozambique: a War Against the People
by Hilary Andersson
Macmillan Press Ltd. (London),
195pp, £35.00 cloth, 7 August 1992,
0 333 56811 7

Every window, every window frame, every door, every door frame, every piece of plumbing or wiring or flooring had been ripped out and carried away. Every piece of machinery that was well bolted down or was too heavy for a man to carry — water pumps, maize mills, the generator in the power station, the pumps outside the gas station — had been axed,



Nevertheless, Finnegan makes up for where he did not go with the quality of reporting on those areas where he did. His eye for detail pro-

shot sledgehammered, stripped or burned ... There were few signs of battle — only a spatter of bullet holes in walls and pillars — but a thousand relics of annihila-

tive frenzy: each tile of mosaic smashed, each pane of glass-block wall painstakingly shattered. It was systematic, psychotically meticulous destruction. The only building in town with its roof untouched was the church. (pp. 11-12)

What Finnegan reports here is much more than simple looting or instructions to destroy any symbols of the state. It points to a deeper hatred of all forms of outside authority and the rejection of any independent entrepreneurship or new comprador capital.

Finnegan's observation touches upon a whole series of issues, many of them interlinking and to do with current speculation over future electoral mathematics. In Renamo's June 1989 congress (what they now call their first congress, although their first congress was actually in South Africa in 1982) private commercial initiative was welcomed as the engine for economic growth. Renamo also committed itself to reducing state intervention, giving priority to the flexible functioning of the economy and to defending competition and favouring private initiative. On paper at least.

Since December 1990 government reforms have weakened the effect of this policy as propaganda. Frelimo has tried to re-attract capital. The old *comerciantes* have attempted in many areas to re-establish themselves, re-vitalising their past lineage and commercial networks. Sometimes this has worked, with both warring factions being paid to assist the enterprise. But in others the *comerciantes* have found themselves in direct competition with Renamo interests or those of a government official.

Renamo's new line since mid-1992 is that, although Frelimo has ditched Marxism-Leninism, it is a highly corrupt regime, concerned only with accumulating wealth for its leadership, representing get-rich capitalism with little concern for the people. As one Renamo sympathiser put it to me the other day, it's a 'gangster regime'. This is a major shift, which will attract far more domestic sympathy than blaming it for being Marxist. It will also make the government's task more difficult internationally, as the reports of government corruption grow.

Once a cease-fire comes into being (and let us hope it will on 1 October) Renamo's electoral campaign is likely to be two-pronged. While focusing mainly on government corruption, it will also claim that only a vote for Renamo will bring peace. As early as December 1990, following the partial Rome cease-fire agreement, Renamo used this line of argument in central Mozambique. It is a combination which could well be a Renamo vote winner in Manica and Sofala provinces and parts of Zambezia.

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Renamo supporters now speak a lot about the so-called Nicaragua or Angola factors. Their eyes are closely focused on the 29-30 September elections in Angola, where the result will

be determined not only by ideological, ethnic, economic, and intimidatory factors, but also by a simple desire to see a change of government. Since no third force has appeared in Angola, UNITA is the only alternative to a vote for the government. But UNITA is no Renamo in its history, structure or ideology. Angola has not experienced the widespread brutalities that have become the mark of the conflict particularly in the southern Mozambican provinces of Maputo or Gaza. Renamo will find few voters in these areas.

In the light of the involvement of the Catholic Archbishop of Beira, Dom Jaime Goncalves, (he is also mediator in the Rome peace talks) in a dispute over church liturgy in the city, Finnegan's chapter on Beira makes especially fascinating reading. Goncalves wants the liturgy to be in the vernacular Ndaou, although a large percentage of the city's population speak Sena. The issue has prompted some unrest in the shanties, with the government quietly claiming that this shows that Dom Jaime is leaning towards Renamo leader Dhlakama, who is also a Ndaou speaker. Dom Jaime claims that it was the government's encouragement of such percep-

tions that has made the choice of liturgy an emotive issue in the city. The truth is elusive. But it is interesting that Goncalves has preached against what he sees as the new get-rich quick orthodoxy taking over in some government circles. Whether Renamo can gain from this and win votes in Beira is still unclear, particularly as the unregistered opposition National Convention Party (PCN) has been making significant gains in the city in the last six months which can only be at Renamo's expense.

So has Renamo benefited, in an electoral sense, from this cruel war, which it has waged since 1977? Although it was created by the Rhodesians and taken over by South African intelligence, it is now clear that it very rapidly took on a Mozambican dimension as well. It is also apparent that Renamo violence increased as outside support diminished. In some areas peasants and others talk reasonably well of a first Renamo, complaining bitterly of a later bastardised version. Insufficient research has been done so far on this to reach any firm conclusion. But rejection of the rebels does appear to be on the increase. Ken

Wilson, Christian Geoffrey and myself, amongst others, are finding that rejection became more pronounced in the late 1980s.

The over-riding wish in the rural areas now is for peace. But the problems of institutionalised warfare and access to guns are widespread. Finnegan cites a Mozambican saying: 'A gun is your money; it's a system'. Andersson says (p.169): 'It would be hard to imagine a country of over 15 million people, of whom many have lived lives of war, and survived by looting their enemies and civilians for the last two decades, settling down to peace and democracy with any speed while weapons continue to be readily available.'

While this is as true of Renamo, as it is of most bandit groups, it is also true about the government's armed forces. To those with access to weapons, the war gives prestige and wealth. Although a Declaration of Intent was signed by Dhlakama and President Chissano in Rome on 7 August committing them to sign a cease-fire on 1 October, operational commanders on both sides may well be reluctant to obey. Government forces are themselves responsible for some of the vio-

lence against civilians. Finnegan gives an example, when a man in a bar told him (p. 227): 'They do it. And they are the most dangerous, because they don't want to leave witnesses, so they try to kill everyone. The massacre on the Third of February — that was soldiers'.

With the widespread hunger in Mozambique, it will be important to set up schemes to buy up the surplus weaponry once a cease-fire is signed. Food, hoes or seeds for gun schemes could be successful if implemented quickly, especially if food aid is flooded into the country and relatively evenly distributed. This should ensure that the incentive to pillage for food by force of arms is undermined. A failure to do this could also have a serious affect on neighbouring states, particularly South Africa. The end of conflict in Angola produced a massive increase in weaponry circulating in Namibia, moving down to South Africa for sale as well. Mozambique, so much closer, will be a source of even cheaper weapons flooding into South Africa's townships for a few Rand.

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The task of reconstruction in Mozambique is enormous. Both books provide insights into the enormity of the task ahead in rehabilitating a traumatised people, ending gun culture and rebuilding a devastated infrastructure. Settlement patterns and even vernacular architecture, have also been changed by the war. Andersson notices how deeply these scars of war penetrate. She writes:

Walking through a black township in South Africa, something strange soon became apparent to me. Some of the huts had no windows ... I asked a local priest why people would build solid unbroken walls to their hot, smoke-filled and unfit huts. He replied simply that they were Mozambicans. On questioning the inhabitants it transpired not that it was a tradition of some kind, but quite the opposite. They had built their huts like this in their village in Mozambique so as to provide extra security against Renamo attacks. They had become accustomed to living this way, and, once refugees, continued living this way out of habit. It also made them feel safer from the hostile South African officialdom ... It represents the everyday terror with which these people live. (p. 81)

Few people if any fully, understand how the civil war in Mozambique developed into what it is now. Some South African Defence-Force (SADF) officials may indeed understand the dynamics up to the mid-1980s better than most of us. Reading Finnegan or Andersson helps to focus attention on the size of the calamity which has befallen Mozambique. □

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