

An accusing finger in the wake of Wiriyamu

7/1/74

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Did a raiding party of Portuguese soldiers run amuck in a small corner of Mozambique in December, 1972, and in an orgy of blood-lust kill several hundred innocent African villagers, men, women, and children? Or did they not? It was one of the most hotly contested questions of 1973.

Looking back at the unfolding argument more than six months later, it is hard to find evidence with which to buttress a doubt. The weight of subsequent confirmatory evidence is enormous.

Father Adrian Hastings, a hardly-known English Roman Catholic priest, stumbled across the sensational story of the events at Wiriyamu and Chawola, Tete Province, almost by accident while preparing material for an address he was to give at the Catholic Institute of International Relations.

He gave his name to the original long report which appeared in *The Times* last June, having convinced this newspaper—as he had himself been earlier convinced—that the material he had been given was accurate. Although the meeting he was to address would not have been held without the occasion of the visit of the Portuguese Prime Minister to Britain, the timing of the disclosures was otherwise quite fortuitous. In any event, such a publicity coup by Portugal's enemies would have been so brilliant as to be almost miraculous. The name of Wiriyamu reverberated round the world.

An account by the same Father Hastings of events before, during, and after both the massacre and the subsequent disclosure is published today (*Wiriyamu*; Search Press: £1.50), in which he reveals himself, not as the arch Romish conspirator, but an almost-innocent abroad in the hot-house world of press conferences, television interviews, and British parliamentary in-fighting. He also reveals himself as a man passionately and angrily committed against the Portuguese colonial machine and all its trappings.

The Wiriyamu story broke without its context, which Father Hastings now supplies for the first time in detail and in order. Relying largely upon missionary priests as his primary sources, he builds up the picture of growing hostilities between Frelimo and the Portuguese forces, a tale punctuated by progressively more disturbing reports of repression, arbitrary killings, and ultimately atrocities on a monstrous scale. The build-up gives its own kind of credibility to the climax, the events of December 16, 1972.

These, and the original evidence for believing in them, are well known. They have been combed through and disputed in columns upon columns of the British and foreign press. More tellingly, Father Hastings brings back into focus the evidence

which came out more mutedly much later, when the storm had passed. The *Johannesburg Star*, after its own painstaking investigation and using mainly Portuguese sources, independently confirmed almost all the Wiriyamu details in September. It emerged belatedly that the Roman Catholic bishops in Mozambique had expressed their own belief in the massacre reports long before they were published in the West—thus removing one of the main props of the anti-Wiriyamu lobby. Frelimo itself confirmed the story but not until October. And the subsequent behaviour of the Portuguese authorities implies—so Father Hastings maintains—guilty knowledge.

He deals at length with the various attempts by various interests—vested and otherwise—to discredit him and his story. One is left with the impression that he is either very, very crooked indeed, or straight as a die. He was plainly not in league with the Labour Party, the "world communist conspiracy", Frelimo, or any organized band of opponents of Portugal's African empire.

Father Hastings puts into his book two further parts of the Mozambique background which were largely left out of last summer's controversy about Wiriyamu—the role of western business interests in Portuguese Africa, and the role of the Roman Catholic Church.

Being a devoted member of the latter, it is not surprising that he is outraged by what he sees as its total failure to witness to the truth. The opportunist Concordat and Missionary Agreement signed in 1940 between the Vatican and President Salazar commits the church to the integration of Angola and Mozambique into Portuguese cultural and political life, in return for the salaries of the bishops, privileges over Protestant missionaries, and a host of other advantages. The Roman Catholic Church is thus pledged in formal alliance with the colonial policies of Portugal, which instead, in Father Hastings' view, it should be opposing with all its might. If Wiriyamu was an inevitable product of that policy, as he explains it was, then the Roman Catholic Church's hands are not clean of the blood that was spilt.

Secondly, he sees Portuguese policy as an indispensable plank in the maintenance of white supremacy in southern Africa. Behind this white supremacy he sees the overt and covert power of European business interests. He sees part of the prosperity of western Europe built upon the profits of African servitude, which goes hand in hand with political and military oppression. Wiriyamu, says this disquieting Englishman, was an act performed on our behalf.

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