

## Are there Warlords in Provincial Mozambique? Questions of the Social Base of MNR Banditry

Colin Darch

Exploring the origins, nature and consequences of MNR violence and murder, this article argues that Renamo does not conform to the classical characteristics of warlordism. It does not represent a cession of central control to local interests; rather it is an attack on the national sovereignty of Mozambique created and perpetuated by external powers. Nevertheless, in some areas the externally imposed proxy war may have been able to achieve a certain local dynamic and so, to this extent, the warlord concept may have some limited usefulness. Darch also completely rejects the idea that the MNR can be considered to be a case of 'social banditry', even allowing for the weaknesses inherent in this concept.

This article examines some of the existing analyses of the **domestic** aspects of the MNR phenomenon, especially the question of its social base. The result will certainly be more of an agenda for research and clarification than a developed position. There is already extensive and completely convincing evidence for the fact that the MNR took on its present shape in 1980, when the South African military took it over from the defunct Rhodesian regime. At the time of writing (July 1989) there is also extensive evidence for the fact that support continues to flow from South Africa to the MNR in violation of the Nkomati Accord and other agreements. The MNR has other important sources of support, especially in Portugal, the US and West Germany.

But as the various 'peace processes' in Angola, Mozambique and perhaps South Africa creep forward, the important question becomes: to what extent is it now necessary to take the MNR seriously as a **political** phenomenon, as well as a **military** one, inside the country? That is to say, do the bandits in fact now have (and have they ever had) any kind of social base within Mozambique, apart from their role as a proxy army for the pursuit of South African policy?

At a theoretical level, the choice of the problematic within which an analyst proposes to produce his or her account of the phenomenon will largely determine the way in which this question is posed and the answers produced. Later in this chapter, we shall examine what seem to be the two major problematics which have emerged and their incompatibilities.

Whatever its nature as a **social** movement, it has always been clear to serious students that the MNR does not constitute a legitimate Mozambican **political** opposition movement, at least at the national level. This point needs to be laboured over and over again, not only because circumstances change over fifteen years, but because of the kind of circumstantial 'evidence' produced by the movement's sympathizers abroad.

Empirically, it must be said that for obvious reasons we have little direct and reliable information about the nature of the movement. The work of Robert Gersony among the victims of banditry, and of William Minter among ex-members of the MNR are clearly basic sources of a quality quite different from most other writing on the subject. The analysis and reports of Paul Fauvet, who has worked as a journalist in Mozambique for eight years, and of the Mozambican reporter Gil Laurenciano for the Mozambican News Agency, are also of major importance, as is the recently published analysis of the historical documentation by the Mozambican historian, Gulamo Taju, which provides us with a synthesis of the primary material. We shall have more to say about Taju's analysis later on.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the well-established Rhodesian and South African linkages, many writers on the subject of the MNR are clearly puzzled by their object of study. Titles such as 'What is the MNR?' or 'Who are the armed bandits?' are common. Authors speak of the 'amazing tenacity' of the phenomenon in tones of surprise, and even promise to reveal the 'special forces' behind it. But there is nothing 'special' about the forces behind the MNR; they are the same old combination of the South African security forces and the vicious extreme right in the US and, to some extent, in Portugal and West Germany (see ROAPE no.43 for list of US-based individuals and organisations that support RENAMO).

Over and above the tone of perplexity which runs through the literature, there is a serious difficulty of deciding on terminology. This is not, despite the dismissive noises made by some academics who should know better, merely a linguistic game. For many years, Frelimo and the Mozambican Government have insisted on the exclusive use of the term 'bandidos armados', usually inadequately rendered into English as 'armed bandits'. although 'armed gansters' might be a better alternative.

It was argued, with some justice, that to use an organisational name was to legitimise the political aspirations of what were, in the end, nothing more than a gang of criminals. This point should not be ignored or dismissed by academic writers in the comfort of their studies in Europe or America. Jose Mota Lopes of the Centre of African Studies in Maputo summarised the point of view succinctly to a Portuguese daily in May 1986, when he bluntly declared that 'Renamo doesn't exist. It's a fiction, serving South African policy'. We shall return to the question of legitimisation later in the article.

Nevertheless, broadly speaking, there are two modes of analysis of the phenomenon of armed banditry in Mozambique. The first, clearly favoured by Frelimo and the Mozambican Government for several years, was to insist that the MNR was simply a wing of the South African Defence Forces (SADF) and that it could be understood at local levels through Marxist class analysis. Thus, any local support for the MNR in a particular region was to be understood in terms of the dispossession, by the successful revolution of 1975 onwards, of such groups as the *regulos* or the *feiticeiros*. Opposing this view, there has emerged what we might term the 'anthropological' approach group especially around such French writers

as Christian Geffray, Michel Cahen and others, which argues for a much closer cultural analysis at the local level, in order to understand the specific features of ethnicity, economics and social organisation which might lend themselves to exploitation by those who are dissatisfied with the present order.

### **The Concept of the Warlord**

Clearly, if we are to ascertain whether the phenomenon of armed banditry in Mozambique can be usefully or even partially analysed outside the problematic of South African military destabilisation, it is necessary to step very carefully indeed. Nothing in the argument which follows should be construed, therefore, as either explicitly or implicitly attempting to legitimise the MNR's political agenda, such as it is.

It can be argued that in some areas of southern Africa, we are seeing a breakdown of civil government in the generally accepted sense. Specifically, this may be occurring in parts of rural Mozambique and Angola, as well as sporadically in some of the bantustan areas of South Africa.

Villagers in parts of Mozambique are unable to sleep in their dwellings at night, for fear of being murdered or robbed by marauding bandits. They are unable to cultivate their fields; they are driven to become bandits themselves or refugees. In some parts of Mozambique, according to published reports, this can occur without the victims ever succeeding in getting a clear idea of what has happened to them, or what is at stake.

In South Africa, particularly around the Pietermaritzburg area in Natal, the fighting between the Inkatha movement and UDF/COSATU supporters has led to a large-scale breakdown of civil order. The term 'warlord', used to describe especially the local Inkatha leaders, has entered into the day-to-day political vocabulary of the area. It is used by ordinary people, by journalists and lawyers alike.

The question is: if and when civil government breaks down, what has actually replaced it? The MNR has claimed in the past that it 'controlled' certain areas and, appropriating the vocabulary of the liberation movement, has spoken of 'liberated areas'. The MNR's boosters have even asserted at times that it represents a hypothetical 'genuine' Frelimo tradition derived from the supposedly non-Marxist leadership of Eduardo Mondlane, so it is not surprising, perhaps, that they should appropriate the terminology and slogans of Frelimo.

The idea bears examination that the phenomenon of the MNR represents an example of 'warlordism'. But what exactly do we mean by a warlord, and what are the conditions, both sufficient and necessary for his emergence? There seem to be two useful answers to the questions.

The term has not been widely used in any precise way by social scientists. Indeed, in English it may have come into common use through the literal translation of *Kriegsherr*, one of the formal titles of the German Kaisers. In practice, however, it has been used loosely and descriptively to designate a local military commander who has also acquired some civil powers, and uses them by force. Specific examples may be derived from the China of the 1920s and, in Africa, from Ethiopia during the period 1769 to 1855.

In 1915, Yuan Shih-kai, who had been president of the Republic of China since 1912, managed with Japanese support to declare himself Emperor. This attempt to restore the monarchy, and thus the central authority of a state apparatus which was rapidly falling apart, was ill-judged. Yuan's accession to the throne provoked a ferocious reaction and, instead of strengthening the state, hastened its dissolution. By 1916, Yuan was forced to cancel his decree, but it was already too late to reconstitute a centralised republic. Local leaders and their provinces began to secede, in practice if not in law. China was entering the period of the *tuchun*. Barbara Tuchman characterises the *tuchun* in a memorable passage:

Some were able governors and predators combined, others ignorant ex-bandits and adventurers tossed to the top in the general broil. Appointed military governor of a province by the nominal government in Peking, either in recognition of existing control or in consideration for support, the *tuchun* furnished and paid, or failed to pay, his own military forces. Chinese soldiers no longer served the state but feudal overlords who in constantly changing alliances traded and fought for power, gnawing like rats at what was left of the Republic. The "Government" of China recognised by the powers remained in Peking in the hands of a group of northern warlords known as the Anfu clique...who owed their hold on office to Japanese support and loans (Tuchman, 1972:59).

A similar phenomenon had occurred in Ethiopia in the period between 1769 and 1855, when the central authority of the Gondarine emperors all but collapsed. This was the period known in Amharic as the *Zamana Metsafint* — the time of the princes or judges. But the *Metsafint* were really warlords (Abir); in the words of the American historian Robert L. Hess:

Central power almost completely disappeared. At the nadir of imperial fortunes, five men claimed the throne. As in the Holy Roman Empire, power devolved to the nobles and regional rulers. The central government disintegrated, and Ethiopia divided into a number of small kingdoms as old local ruling families asserted themselves and appointed governors converting their offices into hereditary positions. From the late eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century the Ethiopian Empire ceased to exist (1970:45-50).

In these descriptions of the historical phenomenon of the warlord, several common features start to emerge. First, large monarchical and/or feudal political systems had begun to fall apart, with a corresponding loss of authority at the centre of the system. But the weakened centre had held on to its legitimacy, if not to its power. Second, the warlords were themselves legitimate local rulers, either by tradition or appointment. In return for their autonomy, they respected the legitimacy of the centre. Third, their autonomy was based on the fact that the armed forces in their areas owed allegiance to them, the warlords, not to the centre.

Virtually none of these conditions are paralleled or reproduced in present-day rural Mozambique. Clearly, the country is not in an immediately post-feudal or post-monarchical situation. The disintegration of central state power in those rural areas most affected by banditry is not, for example, matched by a corresponding growth of the power of the provincial governors. Indeed, in this respect, since Mozambican local government is directly dependent on the central ministries in a pyramid-like structure, there is probably less real local autonomy in Mozambique than in Zimbabwe, for instance, where city and town councils are locally elected.

Nor do we have any real knowledge of powerful local bandit 'bosses' running local administrations as power bases, nor, more importantly, of running their own armies. 'General' Calisto Meque, the commandant of the main MNR base in Zambezia province, fled to Malawi in June or July 1988 and was killed at Gile on

11 September during an MNR attack on the town, apparently launched from Malawian territory. Meque had been one of the most feared of the local bandit chiefs, and was one of the few MNR 'personalities' to emerge from sympathetic press coverage. Yet there was no claim that he occupied any position other than that of a high commander in a centralised 'command, control and communications' system.

The nearest thing to a warlord faction within the MNR has been the splinter group led by former *Africa Livre* commander Gimo Phiri, who reportedly took about three battalions of men off to central Zambezia in mid-1988, to set up his own organisation, UNAMO. Reports of fighting between UNAMO and the MNR surfaced in May last year. But there is no evidence that UNAMO is anything more than a separatist faction, based on ethnic resentments, nor that it has any kind of autonomous social or military base apart from private financing, allegedly through Malawi or Portugal.

Meanwhile, the Mozambican central party government structures in Maputo continue to function. They have not, in practice, ceded control to local leaders, and have retained their ability to hold widespread general elections, for example, in 1986-1987, or to call district and provincial party conferences in the run-up to the 5th Congress in July 1989. But the war remains, by and large, a war without fronts, a war in which the MNR, for whatever reason, does not seek to **take and hold** towns, and continues to operate on a hit-and-run basis in the countryside.

There are, of course, local situations in which an equilibrium, a *modus vivendi*, has established itself. In Cabo Delgado, for instance, it appears that MNR groups cross the north-south coastal road, coming from the interior to pick up supplies of ammunition delivered by sea. It also appears that they do this without interference from the local population or, apparently, militia. In other parts of the country, the MNR may have been able to take advantage of existing local problems to gather some support along the line of: if X and his supporters are Frelimo, then Y and his supporters by default will be MNR; but this is on the margin. We shall examine the dangers of deriving any general principles from such local squabbles below.

The usefulness of this particular version of the 'warlord' paradigm in analysing present-day Mozambican reality is therefore limited. But it is still perfectly legitimate to investigate the extent to which an externally imposed proxy war is able to **gain** a local dynamic, which may vary from area to area, and which may then be erroneously presented as the original cause of the fighting. In this sense, to examine the concept of the warlord as the local chieftain who controls the men with the guns, not necessarily always within the highly centralised 'control, command and communications' structure described by Minter, may be helpful. For the question of the autonomy of MNR groups will obviously be crucial to the effectiveness of any cease-fire which may emerge from the peace initiatives. But this does not mean that it is permissible to project such situations of local autonomy which have emerged from the chaos of the war, backwards in time in order to find in them the origins of the fighting.

### **The Roots of the MNR**

Some excellent work has already been published describing the historical origins of the bandit movement, including an article published in this journal in 1984 (*ROAPE* No.29). Unfortunately, the piece by Paul Fauvet, was stripped of its

footnotes in the published version, making it less useful to other students of the subject than it might otherwise have been. A well documented account, in Portuguese, of the origins of the MNR has appeared recently in Maputo, by Gulamo Taju (noted above). A detailed circumstantial account of Rhodesian and South African involvement, by David Martin and Phyllis Johnson, appeared in their book *Destructive Engagement* (1984:1-41). Let us rapidly summarise the agreed facts, and then look at differences in interpretation.

Former Rhodesian security officials have admitted that they set up the MNR, which to begin with recruited 'desesperados setembristas' (i.e., defeated right-wing elements from the attempted coup in Lourenco Marques on 7 September 1974) from South Africa, Rhodesia and Portugal, plus elements from Portuguese special 'intervention' troops, paramilitary repressive groups, Fascist police and Frelimo deserters (Lima, 1981).

In mid-1976, after several abortive attempts, the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) began to put together a small group of black Mozambican dissidents, under the leadership of the cashiered former quartermaster, Andre Matsangaissa. The objectives of the group were quite clear: they were to conduct intelligence-gathering operations on ZANLA activities inside Mozambique, and when possible, to carry out sabotage operations. This included providing a cover for direct interventions by the Rhodesian armed forces, which were then claimed by the MNR itself. The most dramatic example of this was the Rhodesian SAS attack on the Beira fuel tanks in March 1979, in which even the semi-official history of the SAS allows the MNR only a minor role (Cole, 1984:264-70). Martin and Johnson cite interviews to show that the operation 'had nothing to do with the MNR'.

The attack on the oil tanks at Beira was undertaken in revenge for ZANU's having blown up the Salisbury tanks. According to one account, a Mozambican guide was shot dead in cold blood near the Beira site, wearing 'MNR' insignia on his uniform.

In October 1979 Andre Matsangaissa was killed in a contact with Frelimo soldiers at Gorongosa town, and was replaced as commander of the MNR by Afonso Dlakama. The Rhodesians had little respect for Dlakama, describing him as a 'weak character' who disliked military action and who lacked leadership qualities (Johnson and Martin, p.11).

According to Martin and Johnson, Ken Flower, the head of the Rhodesian CIO, had asked for South African support for the MNR in 1978 or early 1979, when the P.W.Botha/Magnus Malan axis rose to power. The South Africans appointed an SADF liaison officer, and committed themselves to financial support in 1980. After the Lancaster House agreement which led to the ZANU-PF victory in the 1980 independence elections in Zimbabwe, the British administration gave the MNR seventy-two hours to get out of the country. A planned three-phase transfer of the entire MNR operation to South Africa took place. This involved the staff of the propaganda radio station *Voz da Africa Livre*, seven military vehicles, and about 250 men with their weapons (Johnson and Martin, p.15).

In early 1980, South Africa was prepared to receive the Selous Scouts, Muzorewa's auxiliaries, and the mixed bag of international mercenaries who had been thrown out of a job by the ZANU-PF victory. These were to become the instructors and the new recruits for the MNR. The MNR groups put South Africa's anti-Mozambique strategy into practice — it was no accident that ANC attacks on power stations

inside South Africa were answered by the knocking down of power lines in central Mozambique.

At the same time, the MNR was looking for support in conservative circles in Lisbon, Madrid, Paris, London, where Orlando Cristina, Evo Fernandes and Even Domingos Arouca were to emerge. The propaganda radio station started up again, this time from the Transvaal, where the main MNR bases were located. The bases were protected by the SADF and were near to airfields. They were also near to the frontiers of Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Transport planes and helicopters provided the logistical support for operations inside Mozambique. Even at this late stage, it was planned to use southern Zimbabwe as a transit corridor.

From the beginning, the MNR and its controllers were desperate to dispel the image of the organisation as a wing of the SADF. In August 1982, it was reported from Lisbon that an MNR delegation which was to have left Portugal had been delayed for 'organisational reasons'. The group was to have visited France, West Germany, and perhaps the United Kingdom, to ask for 'increased arms supplies'. But Fanuel Mahluza, a member of the 12-man MNR 'Executive Council', was more forthcoming. He said that the objective was to modify the impression that the MNR was a South African-backed group.

Mahluza claimed that the MNR controlled four of Mozambique's ten provinces, but that it did not attempt to hold towns. The movement's strength was '12,000 well-armed men'. He denied that the MNR received weapons from South Africa, saying that they came from unidentified Western countries. An MNR government would improve trade relations with South Africa and would ban any ANC presence; the organisation was opposed to apartheid, however. Mahluza said that the MNR have no alternative but to attack economic targets, since they had no support from Mozambique's black neighbours (*International Herald Tribune*, 24 August 1982).

The story of continued South African control of and support for the MNR is extremely well known. Damning documentary evidence was captured by the Mozambican army at the MNR base in Garagua, in Manica province, in December 1981. In the minutes of an earlier meeting with South African security and the CIO, Afonso Dlakama is quoted as saying: 'You South Africans are like my parents...everything depends on you'.

Another document, the minutes of a meeting with SADF Col. Cornelius 'Charlie' van Niekerk on 25 October 1980, has the South African ordering the MNR to 'interdict rail traffic (in the south of Mozambique), establish bases inside Mozambique adjacent to the South African border, open a new military front in Maputo province'.

Before 'Operacao Leopardo' in 1980, when the MNR base at Sitatonga was captured by the Mozambican army, the MNR had some room for manoeuvre. It attacked the unpopular *Lojas do Povo*, agricultural cooperatives, state farms, collective farms, administrative posts, political headquarters, trains, lorries and main roads from the south to the centre and the north. Typical of this first phase were attacks on Re-education Centres in Manica and Sofala to get recruits. Most of the MNR recruits captured by the Mozambican army in 1980, in the big Manica sweeps, were young abductees. The weapons used were the same type as the Mozambican army's obtained by South Africa from international arms dealers.

In 1982, Mozambican army commanders were testifying that they had found European corpses at the captured MNR base in Chidogo, as well as South African passports and documents at other bases. The Mozambican army said that the MNR were regularly supplied at night in Tete and Manica by air drops.

The MNR attacked civilians, terrorising them if they refused to collaborate. Civilians were abducted to remote areas; political or administrative figures and their families were killed as 'communist agents' or had their lips, ears, or sexual organs cut off. Western diplomats estimated that the MNR had about 5000 men at this time, the middle of 1982, most of them coerced into joining; one said that he found reports of widespread MNR barbarism 'credible' (A and B Isaacman, 1982).

South African control and support continued well past the date of the signing of the Nkomati Accord in March 1984. The publication in September 1985 of the Gorongosa diaries, captured during a joint Mozambican-Zimbabwean assault on the MNR base at Casa Banana, showed beyond doubt that South Africa had systematically violated the Nkomati Accord by continuing to supply the MNR.

Since the publication of the Gorongosa documents in September 1985, and South Africa's admission that they were genuine, we have been presented with a steady stream of evidence of Pretoria's continued involvement in supporting and supplying the MNR. Both captured and amnestied former bandits continue to testify, up to the present, that they have seen South African supplies coming in. In April 1989, eyewitnesses say that South African soldiers were directly involved in an attack on the border town of Ressano Garcia in Maputo province. In June 1988, US Ambassador to Mozambique, Melissa Wells, went on record as saying she believed that there was still 'a pattern of continuing communication and support' for the MNR by South Africa (Askin, 1988).

So much, then, for the MNR's autonomy. But there remain significant differences in the interpretations of its origins. Gulamo Taju states bluntly that:

Samora Machel dated the roots of Renamo back to the actual foundation of Frelimo in 1962, arguing that "there are problems, which Frelimo dragged along with it right up to the day it won, and which were taken on board by the ultra-racists who used to be around here" (Taju, 1988:6).

This view of the continuity of the warfare in southern Africa was, oddly enough, recently confirmed from the other side, by the former Portuguese Minister of 'Overseas', Adriano Moreira, on 13 April 1989, when he commented that it is a mistake 'to think that the wars in the former Portuguese colonies have finished; they are continuing on a larger scale' (*O Seculo Joanesburgo*, 17 April 1989).

Taju pays considerable attention in his lengthy article to the role of Jorge Jardim in the search for a neo-colonial solution to the colonial question, to the attempt to set up an 'internal front', and to all the manoeuvres which took place in the period 1973-1975. His interpretation agrees broadly on this point with that of Fauvet, who also highlights the origins of the *constituent elements* of the MNR and, oddly, with the MNR sympathizer Andre Thomashausen. However, Jose Mota Lopes, in a piece published in *Africa Report* in 1986, states bluntly that the MNR 'was initially created by the Central Intelligence Office (CIO) of Southern Rhodesia in 1968'. Colin Legum is equally emphatic: 'The MNR was set up in 1976 by Rhodesian intelligence.' Martin and Johnson's account confirms this.

These differences are ones of emphasis, rather than of substance. Nevertheless, it is important to take into account the point made in what we may assume is an official version of Frelimo's most recent position paper on the subject:

Armed banditry in Mozambique and its development are thus an extension of colonial occupation, part of the same historical process that saw . . . particularly aggressive opposition to the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of southern Africa [to] freely choose their own destinies ('Who are the armed bandits?', p.3).

It is this process which provides the **domestic** dynamic of armed banditry, which was set in motion by the Rhodesians, and continued by the South Africans. Unless we take into account the historical developments which allowed the enemies of Mozambique to set up the MNR, we run the danger of falling into the error of attributing everything to an autonomous internal process.

#### **Social Banditry**

'The attacks near Beira itself are mostly social banditry, among us, not Renamo', William Finnegan reports that he was told by a 'government planner' in the Beira corridor. The attackers might be People's Militia or soldiers from the corridor who are bored and have guns, so they 'decide to head toward the city and take whatever they can find there'.



Some of the 80 burnt and ruined vehicles scattered along the country's main north-south highway at Maluana, 50kms north of Maputo, after the MNR bandit ambush of 29 November, 1987.

The claim that there is 'social banditry' in Mozambique is increasingly heard. A recent exchange between Gervase Clarence-Smith and William Minter in the pages of the *Southern African Review of Books* (of which more below) banded the expression about. But there are two problems with the use of the term, one with the concept itself, and the other with the direction in which it leads us. It is essential to analyse the content of the term if we are to produce anything more than a descriptive sociology of the MNR and its effects.

The attempt to produce a general theory of social brigandage was made by the British social historian Eric Hobsbawm in the 1950s and 1960s, with particular reference to such European examples as Sicily. Hobsbawm coined the term 'social banditry' and characterised this as a primitive form of organised social protest, by peasants, against changes in the social order. Social bandits cannot be classed simply as criminals, argued Hobsbawm, since they remain (and here is a crucial point) within the limits of the system of morality of the peasant community. Peasants see social bandits as heroes, who right wrongs by defying the representatives of an oppressive state. They are reformist, since they want to restore a traditional order; they are rendered obsolete by modern political organisation. Hobsbawm identified three main categories in a typology of social banditry: the 'noble robber', the primitive resistance fighter, and the avenger.

Hobsbawm's conceptualisation was submitted to serious criticism at the time, and it is greatly to be regretted that it has resurfaced in the Mozambican context. The most obvious point is that **all** banditry is 'social'. Another is that the bandits' loyalty is **not** to the peasantry; their main objective is to find ways of creating upward mobility for themselves. Hobsbawm's concept also over-emphasises social protest as an element in rural banditry.

In the Mozambican context, to use the term to describe the criminal activities of supposed 'non-MNR' bandits merely muddies further waters which are murky enough to begin with. In what sense do robberies committed in the Beira corridor remain within the bounds of a Mozambican rural moral code? In what sense do they represent a 'Robin Hood' principle of robbing the rich to give to the poor?

Again, the introduction of the term social (i.e. non-MNR) banditry serves to turn the situation on its head, by confusing the results of the war in Mozambique with its causes. The chaos in rural Mozambique is **not** the result of 'pre-existing social banditry', as Gervase Clarence-Smith has claimed. If non-MNR banditry does exist now, or if it did exist before the war — and there is little evidence for either proposition — then we would still need to look at the motives of its protagonists as possible contributory factors in the war.

It may well be that, at a local level, Frelimo's sometimes authoritarian counter-insurgency tactics have created gangs of brigands who prey on the adjoining populations. Just as often though, such instances are a consequence of the MNR-created crisis.

### **The Destabilisation Problem**

Historically, all South Africa's neighbours were subordinated to the needs of South African capitalism. They functioned as labour reserves, as suppliers of raw materials or services such as transport, and they provided a nearby market for South African manufactured goods. It is an underlying assumption of this article

that South African regional policy has, as one of its major long-term objectives, the continuation of this subordination.

It has long been established that the use of proxy armies such as the MNR, UNITA in Angola, 'Super'-ZAPU in southern Zimbabwe, and the LLA (Lesotho Liberation Army) in Lesotho had its origins in the period of the later seventies and early eighties, when South Africa's regional policy was posited on the concept of the 'total strategy', a response to a supposed 'total onslaught' by 'world communism'.

Knowing this, the Mozambican government has for many years maintained the position that the armed bandits are merely South African proxies with no political programme of their own; they do not constitute an 'opposition' at the ideological level. This position has not changed. In a 12-point document (the so-called 'non-paper' circulated in 1988 to the Maputo embassies of the permanent members of the Security Council, among others, and made public in June 1989 after being reported in the foreign press) Frelimo argued that 'we are faced with a situation of destabilisation, which must not be confused with a struggle between two parties'. This echoes earlier Mozambican statements: 'we are in a decisive battle in which the real enemy is South Africa'.

If we accept that 'destabilisation' consists of extreme military and economic pressure on a neighbouring state, with the objective of weakening and subordinating, but not necessarily overthrowing the government, the question naturally arises, why Pretoria would maintain such pressure on Maputo for such a long time. The answer, in its simplest form, can be put into two words: transport diplomacy.

Reg Green has been one of the most persistent advocates of the view that control of southern African transport links is the dominant underlying motive for South Africa's continued sponsorship of the MNR. In an article written jointly with Carol Thompson they argued:

Security hegemony interacts with economic. Economic hegemony reinforces South African security because it renders attempts at effective liberation in any sphere difficult. This is especially true in respect to transport, where denial of access to South African routes could at present (i.e. 1986) throttle the economies and state apparatuses of Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Malawi and probably, Zambia...but dominance in the key transport sector is neither geographically nor economically natural. Ultimately it can be ensured only by action to keep other southern African routes wholly or partially non-functional...South Africa has used sustained violence, as well as direct economic means, to ensure that the transport links to Lobito Bay, Maputo, Beira and Nacala have been intermittently available, limited in capacity, or closed entirely.

### **The Villigisation Problem**

Times passes, and as William Minter has pointed out, scholars can make or enhance their reputations by being in the vanguard of a 'paradigm shift'. The entirely sufficient explanation of the role of the MNR as a proxy army acting for South African regional policy is no longer of interest. The fact that Mozambique is an economic and military weakling located next door to a regional super-power, that the social and economic devastation which has been visited upon it has been shown repeatedly to be the direct result of its neighbour's intervention, can be dismissed. The economic errors of Frelimo's agricultural policy, and the Government's refusal to recognise the traditional 'tribal values' of the countryside, are now put forward as 'causes' of a war which has become, in this mode of

thought, a 'civil war' between Mozambican factions, rather than a war of aggression by South Africa against its neighbour.

Economic problems and 'tribal values' were admitted by the Government as factors in rural discontent, even as early as 1980. Yet the early accounts show that support in most areas for the MNR was short-lived as looting and terrorism alienated the peasantry (see A and B Isaacman).

Recently, the work of two anthropologists in particular, has been carelessly used by less cautious analysts to advance the view that the MNR benefits from widespread opposition to the government's policy of villagisation. At the beginning of 1983, and again in November and December 1984, the French anthropologist Christian Geffray, together with Mogens Pedersen, conducted fieldwork in the district of Erati, in Nampula Province. Two documents emerged directly from this research. Geffray and Pedersen are very cautious in the hypotheses which they advance about the nature of the war and the nature of banditry (as the title to the Portuguese version shows most clearly). In essence their argument is that, in Erati district at least, there is evidence that Renamo may have been able to secure some sort of social base because the government's villagisation policy created a social crisis. This set up marginalised traditional leaders against those who had managed to get a village located in their traditional territory, and was provoked by social and inter-lineage differentiation which arose from villagisation. Since guns were available in a situation of banditry, an explosive situation was created.

According to Geffray and Pedersen, former regulos in Erati were forced by the army to play an active role in the security of their areas, and were threatened with automatic imprisonment if the MNR should attack in their location. These threats, they write 'may have favoured a pooling of interests between ex-chiefs and certain strata of the displaced population, which might perhaps not have happened otherwise' ('Sobre a Guerra', p.310).

Geffray and Pedersen are extremely careful not to derive generalisations about the war from their research in a particular district. Ironically, the department in which they worked at Eduardo Mondlane University was criticised precisely for arguing the necessity of more such detailed anthropological micro-studies in order to understand the nature of the war in different areas.

Unfortunately, in the review article referred to above by Gervase Clarence-Smith, the caution of Geffray and Pedersen is not so evident. Clarence-Smith, who has done research on southern Angola, writes that their work (and that of others) shows 'that it is the policy of villagisation which has contributed to the present **civil war** [sic] in Mozambique'. Begging one question — the nature of the war — we leap to a sweeping conclusion about its origins, unsupported by any generalised evidence.

The war began in 1980, and for villagisation to have made a major causal contribution, one would expect there to be some sort of geographical correlation between the extent of villagisation in a given area, and the spread of the fighting. Unfortunately for Gervase Clarence-Smith, this is not the case. In 1980, according to official government figures, the percentage of the rural population living in villages (only living, not involved in collective production) in the provinces most affected by MNR activity was low. In Manica it was six per cent and in Sofala it was eight per cent.

The provinces where villagisation was most advanced were Gaza (as a result of extensive floods along the Limpopo Valley in 1977), with 37 per cent of the rural population living in concentrated settlements, Niassa with 13 per cent, and Cabo Delgado (Frelimo's heartland) with 89 per cent. Clarence-Smith quotes one of his authors as citing some Centre of African Studies fieldwork on villages in Cabo Delgado. The villages were unpopular with some of the peasants because they were perceived as 'surveillance posts' which people could not leave. But the example of Cabo Delgado is the weakest which could be chosen to establish a linkage between dissatisfaction with villages and hostility to Frelimo. A later study by the same work-group of the CEA focuses exactly on the question of 'desagregacao' or the drift away from the villages back to dispersed settlements in Cabo Delgado, a process which the state was unable to reverse, but which did not have any organic link to the rise of banditry. Indeed, it was not until 1983 that the MNR appeared in the province; a long wait indeed, if villagisation is a major factor. It is also worth noting that, in Cabo Delgado, during that same fieldwork, the question, 'are you a member of Frelimo'? elicited the reply 'member of Frelimo? We are Frelimo'.

If the war in Mozambique is a struggle against an undemocratic Frelimo government and against forced villagisation, we should expect locally-based fighters trying to get their land back. But no: 'the final form of control is a systematic process of transferring recruits away from their home areas', according to William Minter's research. Minter goes on to say that 'almost all (recruits) described marches of at least two days from the point of capture to the training base. One commander in Manica province specifically said that they had a policy of transferring soldiers in order to make it harder for them to run away'.

It is interesting to note that the MNR's spokesmen abroad make very little mileage out of the question of forced villagisation as a hypothetical cause for peasant resentment of Frelimo. This is what one would expect, of course, if the movement is simply an arm of South African foreign policy; but it is clear that the politics of the MNR, at least for foreign consumption, is oriented towards a petty-bourgeois and European idea of what democracy and freedom actually mean. Nowhere in the several published and unpublished interviews with Evo Fernandes which I have consulted, for instance, does he attribute special importance to rural policy, rather than to such questions as freedom of assembly, freedom of worship and so forth.

In an article which may be the only outright defence of the MNR to be published with even the minimal of academic respectability, Andre Thomashausen asserts that

the main attraction of the resistance broadcasting was its information on deportations and arrests, which at the end of 1976 had reached enormous proportions.

If the MNR does have a rural social base, it would be hard to find it in this image of the urban petty bourgeoisie listening to their radios for news of their relatives in jail.

Thomashausen was by his own admission a close personal friend of Evo Fernandes, former secretary-general of the MNR, and his affectionate memoir after Fernandes' murder was circulated by the Washington-based International Freedom

Foundation on 31 May 1988. His paper may therefore be considered to represent an insider's view of the MNR's own self-perception.

What is interesting is that nowhere, in a paper written in 1983, and which purports to 'trace the origins of the current civil war in Mozambique' and to explain 'the amazing tenacity of the MNR', does Thomashausen mention rural policy or rural conditions, apart from a casual remark that 'the marketing of food crops has been seriously affected'.

In fact, such economic reasoning is not a part of the mode of discourse of the movement's spokesman, for the very good reason that none of them thought of it and none of them have any real contact with the rural populations which supposedly constitute their social base. If opposition to villagisation was a generalised motive for recruitment to the armed bandits, surely the news would have leaked out at some time in the last eight years?

### **The Peace Process**

It is clear that the Mozambican people as a whole are tired of the war. In the preparatory meetings for the 5th Congress of Frelimo, some speakers at both the public meetings for the discussion of the theses, and at the district and provincial Party conferences for the election of delegates, appealed repeatedly for negotiations to end the fighting. The appeals provoked surprisingly fierce opposition from other participants, some of whom argued that the government's policy of amnesty should not be extended and that any compromise with the MNR would constitute a 'betrayal' of the bandits' earlier victims (Askin interview 1988). The official response to the appeals was to ask, 'with whom should we negotiate, and what should we negotiate about?' We are already talking to the South Africans'.

The MNR has held a 'congress' in the bush, at which the external leadership was systematically replaced by local elements, and at which all the talk was of 'dialogue'. But the Mozambican government is apparently maintaining its line that it is the South Africans who can end the war by stopping their support for the bandits, and that reintegration of former MNR elements into an increasingly participatory and open political system can solve domestic contradictions.

Church leaders such as Mgr. Jaime Goncalves of Beira have been making contact with MNR spokesmen, with the authorisation of the government. This authorisation consists mainly of an assurance that such contacts would not be regarded as criminal by the government. At the same time, the twelve-point 'non-paper' mentioned above has been released, opening the way to a 'dialogue' between Mozambicans within the existing social order.

We can only speculate about the international and domestic pressures behind these initiatives. It seems possible that there is some US and Soviet pressure for a regional settlement, which probably includes some inducements for the South Africans to genuinely pull the rug out from under their Mozambican proxies. If this is in fact the case, and if some sort of peace comes to the region as a result, then the true nature of this war will have been demonstrated for all to see. But we have also witnessed, since Nkomati, several commitments by the South Africans to stop their support; none of these commitments have been honoured, because the pursuit of the South African regime's perceived regional interests have not

warranted it. The warlords of Mozambique, if the truth be known, have been sitting in SADF headquarters in Pretoria all along.

#### Endnote

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