

In the name of justice

There are two main competing explanations for the appalling social, economic political and indeed moral chaos which exists at present in Angola, and to a lesser extent in Mozambique. Both of these need to be taken seriously. Bill Minter's important new book does exactly that, and should be obligatory reading for anyone in South Africa or elsewhere with a serious interest in understanding and transforming inter-state relations on our subcontinent.

At present, the dominant explanation for the collapse of Angola and Mozambique is that the long drawn out wars which followed the collapse of the Portuguese empire in 1974 were genuine civil conflicts. They were caused primarily by such domestic factors as unpopular rural policies and ineradicable ethnic hostility. In this version, the overspill into the southern African region of the struggle against apartheid and for democracy in South Africa, had a negligible impact on what are seen as the internal dynamics of these civil wars.

At the popular level, this interpretation reproduces itself in the fundamentally racist idea, seen from time to time in the 'Letters to the Editor' column of South African newspapers, that all African countries north of the Limpopo have reverted to primeval turmoil, from which they had only been saved in earlier days by the arrival of the Europeans.

The uncomfortable alternative

The alternative is much less comfortable for those letter-writers, who mostly inhabit the cosily optimistic world of the middle class in the New South Africa and whose complicity in keeping the National Party in power for forty years has now become something not to be mentioned in polite society. Because this alternative explanation says that, on the contrary, internal or domestic factors only played a minor part in fuelling the wars in Angola and Mozambique.

William Minter. *Apartheid's Contras: an Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique.* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994. 308pp. maps. bibliography.

Reviewed by Colin Darch

They were kept going, rather, as a matter of deliberate and cynical policy by the South African government of the time, some of whose members still hold high office in the present Government of National Unity. In Mozambique, as Minter points out, "it is simply not plausible that a coherent military organisation such as Renamo

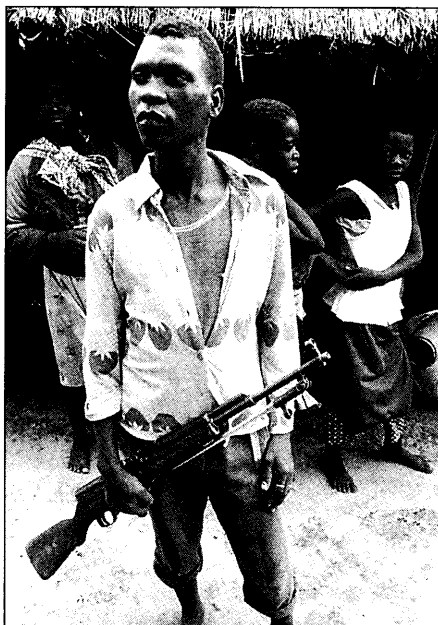
earlier this year, on behalf of the nation, to the visiting President of Mozambique, Joaquin Chissano, for the wrongs inflicted on his long-suffering people by South Africa.

A new analytical concept

Apartheid's Contras is an attempt to confront such issues as these, by examining the evidence and balancing the factors at play. Breaking new ground, Minter uses the concept of "contra warfare" as a theoretical category in an attempt to explain how brutal, anti-popular guerilla groups can survive among what might be expected to be uniformly hostile populations.

It should be pointed out that there is a danger, from an Anglophone perspective, of conflating the very different Angolan and Mozambican conflicts. Both are former Portuguese colonies in which overtly Marxist-Leninist former liberation movements succeeded to state power in 1974/5; both achieved independence after lengthy armed struggles against the colonial domination of Portugal; both have suffered debilitating economic collapse as a result of continued fighting after independence. Minter is quite aware of this danger and, by and large, manages to avoid it. He distinguishes quite sharply between the political economies of the two countries and between the specificities of the political processes at work.

There is a saying attributed in another context to Bobby Kennedy that "you should forgive your enemies but remember their names." *Apartheid's Contras* is written in that spirit: it is not a cry for vengeance but an attempt to analyse and understand. Indeed, Minter states quite unambiguously that "the post-war imperative has been and will be reconciliation."



Fighting destabilisation in Mozambique: People's militia

could have emerged without external initiative," while in Angola, "Unita might have maintained a small-scale insurgency[...]but it is unlikely that it could have posed a major threat[...]."

The extreme discomfort which this exegesis causes was evident in the cries of outrage from a section of South Africa's political class when the Speaker, Frene Ginwalla, a woman with strong family connections in Mozambique, graciously apologised

But, he goes on, "the credibility of political actors in the post-war period should have some relationship to their record during years of conflict" and this is why it is necessary to try to construct the historical record as carefully as possible.

Nor does Minter's book try to present a history of the Total Strategy or of destabilisation — indeed, neither of those now highly emotive terms appears as a main heading in the index. He provides a quick gallop through the national liberation struggles and decolonisation processes of the two countries. This leads him into a discussion of the political processes by way of which the South African

regime moved in the late 1970s and early 1980s from the isolationism of the Vorster era to the vigorous interventionism of the PW Botha-Magnus Malan cabal which came to power at that time. Fundamental to the new attempt to export apartheid's problems was a falsification, whether conscious or not, of Soviet interest in Southern Africa.

Shifting the focus

The Total Strategy, as Minter points out, "was a framework for putting together a mix of reform and repression, both internally [within South Africa] and in foreign policy." It allowed the former defenders of racist

domination to place regional conflict — between the transformation projects of FRELIMO and MPLA and South African capital — "in a global ideological context," shifting the focus away from issues of democracy and racism at home.

In a section headed "Why Explanations Matter," Minter argues convincingly that: "in wars with no clear winners, the cost in human suffering stands out, with few offsetting accomplishments. The question of blame is inescapable — and divisive[...] it touches fundamental questions of historical identity as well as political credibility."

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Recent events in Angola

Angola's recent political history is a saga of betrayal and double-dealing worthy of Renaissance Italy. The complex peace process, which led to the ill-fated general elections of September 1992, was followed by the subsequent collapse of the peace agreement and a resumption of hostilities by UNITA, quite possibly with South African encouragement, although the evidence on this point is thin.

The fighting has continued up to the present, accompanied by a series of mistrustful attempts to renegotiate another peace accord amidst the ruins of the country's economy and social structure. The world's media have largely lost interest in this complex story and pay only desultory attention to a war between black factions which they scarcely even bother to try to understand. In such a labyrinth, even the best-informed journalist or scholar can sometimes stumble or lose the way.

There is a clear need for a handy, reliable, accurate and up-to-date reference summary of the identifiable facts: a need which Dias, an Angolan-born exile and librarian has correctly identified. Unfortunately, the work that he has produced goes only a short distance towards meeting that need.

The work's organisation is

Joffre P F Dias, Angola from the Estoril Peace Agreement to the Lusaka Peace Accord, 1991-94. Geneva: the Author, 1995. 72p, coloured map, bibliography. (Available from the author at 21 Chemin de Bezaley, 1247 Anieres, Switzerland) reviewed by Colin Darch

idiosyncratic, to put it mildly. Dias obviously remains undecided as to whether he is writing an analysis or producing a reference work. As an analyst, he is old-fashioned, enthusiastically embracing the largely discredited "tribal" characterisation of Angola's three historical liberation movements (the MPLA, UNITA and the FLNA, in a largely unnecessary section on historical background.

Part I of the book consists of an extremely short series of paragraph-length sections, starting abruptly with the Gbadolite meeting of June 1989 and progressing jerkily through to the agreement to hold elections and the MPLA's formal abandonment of Marxist-Leninist ideology. There is no analysis to speak of, and not enough hard fact to warrant calling this part a reference resource.

The second part does include some useful information, such as a list of the thirty Angolan political parties before 1992, but with no indication as to their success in the elec-

tions. Oddly, Dias devotes a whole paragraph to attacking the UNITA-aligned Forum Democratico Angolano as ambitious and opportunist, but does not comment on any of the other formations. Dias also includes some brief remarks on the main points of the Lusaka Agreement of November 1994: the full text would have been preferable.

There is a short chronology running from March 1991 to November 1994, but it only occupies three pages and is so brief and selective as to be of little utility. Similarly, the bibliography indiscriminately mixes references to Swiss newspaper articles, not normally considered primary resources by researchers on Angola, with scholarly monographs and journal articles.

Those who are familiar with Angola's recent history will find little of interest in this amateurish volume: while for those seeking an introduction it might prove positively confusing.

Reviews

The heart of the book is a series of chapters dealing with complex issues such as the relationship between nationalism, ethnicity and decolonisation; perceptions about revolution and counter-revolution; and the contextualisation of these issues in the later, Reaganite, Cold War period. Minter also summarises and expands on his findings from earlier research on how Renamo and UNITA recruited fighters and controlled them.

Minter concludes by cautiously arguing, and here lies the reason for his choice of title, with its direct reference to US involvement in Nicaragua, that contra-type guerilla warfare is qualitatively of a different type than older leftist guerilla strategies. Because of the massive and adventurist outside support given to them, Renamo and UNITA never really needed to build constituencies among their own people, he writes.

Minter is an activist and scholar whose earlier works are well-known to students of southern African affairs, especially with regard to Portuguese-speaking countries. His classic study *Portuguese Africa and the West* (1972) remains a useful account of mainly American collusion in supporting

Portugal's empire. His *King Solomon's Mines Revisited* (1986) is an account of the role of Western interests in Southern Africa which both broadens and updates his earlier work. His detailed research reports on Renamo (1989) and UNITA (1990) were criticised when they were published on methodological grounds but have not been invalidated or improved upon since. Unlike many self-proclaimed North American and European 'experts' on Angola and Mozambique, he knows Portuguese well and makes extensive use of sources in that language.

Personally, I have no doubt that Minter's past commitment as an activist — he was a teacher in the FRELIMO school in the early 1970s and has worked in the US anti-apartheid movement — will be used by some as an argument impugning his objectivity or even his honesty. But such manoeuvres must be seen for what they really are. In truth, *Apartheid's Contras* is both dispassionate and committed, to use the words of an earlier reviewer, and its arguments must be refuted, if it is possible to do so, on their own scholarly terms or not at all.

Father Michael Lapsley, an ANC member who lost both hands and one eye in a parcel bomb attack in Zimbabwe weeks after Mandela's release, remarked in a recent newspaper interview that in South Africa, "the perpetrators have the audacity to tell the victims: it is your job to forgive and forget while at the same time refusing to acknowledge that they have been party to evil." Minter's book reminds us that such convenient forgetfulness is just as morally objectionable in terms of the South African State's relationship to neighbouring countries as it is in terms of the state's relationship to its own individual citizens.

Truth and reconciliation demand that South Africans face up to and acknowledge what was done outside their borders, by their government, in their name, just as frankly as they must face up to the crimes committed in defence of apartheid at home. Minter's sober study provides a solid foundation for the beginning of that process. The slate must not yet be wiped clean.

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