Diary of a Mozambican Family

The following is a story only about myself and my family. I could tell many more stories about many other people; in fact, about the whole nation. There are no families in Mozambique who have not suffered directly due to this ongoing terrorist activity in our country.

By Father Carlos Matsinhe, Pastor of the Anglican Church in Maputo, Mozambique

September 1982.
A group of about 30 strange, armed men appeared in the daylight at my father’s home in Cambane in Homoine district and found my mother alone. They asked her for food, salt and water. She gave them about 20 kg of rale (cassava rice) and drew one big bucket of water from the cistern for them. They sat under the shade of a Cashew tree, made a fire, prepared the food, ate and then left.

May 1983.
One day, in the late afternoon, a group of 15 armed men appeared at my father’s homestead. They stopped anyone who wanted to escape. They went from one house to another (we had four round pole-and-mud-and-grass thatched houses and two grain stores) and took every piece of clothing plus blankets and food. The food they could not carry was spilled on the ground. With the barrel of a gun they pounded on plates, tea cups and water glasses till all were destroyed—except for a few items which were, fortunately, forgotten in a cupboard. Then they went off.

A week later another group appeared early in the morning at the same homestead. They threatened to kill my father’s friend, Juliao Manhice, who had come to say “good morning” to his friend. They wanted to kill him because he had declined to identify the militia of the area. They dragged him about 25 meters and finally said, “The next time you refuse to tell us who the militia are, we will kill you in their place.” Again, they went off.

March 1985.
At night a group of MNRs (Mozambique National Resistance fighter) arrived at my father-in-law’s homestead and kidnapped him, his two wives (the boys escaped) and many of the other neighbors. They stole clothing and food and made the kidnapped people carry these to the bush for them. They traveled through the bush the whole night and half of the following day. My father-in-law was beaten nearly to death because he refused to admit that he had attended a mass rally addressed by a government minister who had visited Homoine that week. Had he agreed that he had attended the rally, the obvious result would have been death. After beating him on the head with an axe, they chopped off his left ear with a knife, placed it in his hands, then told him to run away. He did so, bleeding all over. Later in the day they released his two wives and the other peasants. They started home through the bush, convinced that Samuel (my father-in-law) had died on the way. But thank God he also reached home. He suffered a lot from his chopped ear because it would not stop bleeding.

Name: People’s Republic of Mozambique
Area: 301,543 sq. mi.
Population: 13.1 million
Growth 2.9 percent
Capital: Maputo
Religions: Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Traditional
GNP: $3.6 billion (1985)
Per Capita Income: $230
Major Exports: (by percent of total value): Prawns (30%), Cashews (15%), Tea (11%), Cotton (8%), Sugar (6%), Refined oil (5%).
for two whole weeks despite hospital treatment. Thank God he has recovered and I was able to be with him last week.


Members of the FPLM (government soldiers) beat my uncle Chico at Massalane Panda until he was close to death. My uncle had developed mental disturbances but the soldiers recognized that he was not an MNR, because after beating him they sent him to Panda Hospital where he died. The family came to know about his death three days after burial.

June 1985.

On this evening my Aunt Eugenia (who took care of me during my childhood and youth) left her home to go and visit my father who was sick. That same night the MNR appeared in the dark. They killed my Aunt Eugenia and cleared the houses of everything, including some bed sheets that covered my sick father. He watched helplessly from his deathbed. Only my mother managed to escape—at the urging of one of the men who pulled her by the arm saying, “Get away from here.” Since then my family has abandoned the homestead and moved to a more secure place; that meant leaving behind our fields, fruit trees and better houses.


While we were crossing Manhica district from Maputo to Gaza, we were under gun fire. The military convoy escorting about 200 vehicles (buses, trucks and small cars) was attacked by MNRs. In the September attack I was going to Chokwe for pastoral work. Thank God, we came out safely but some vehicles were struck by bullets and the fighting lasted about 20 minutes. In the February attack I was traveling with my wife, going to Inhambane to visit my sick father. This time the attack was more serious. It lasted 1 3/4 hours. Some people died and many were injured.

July 1986.

My father strongly wished that when he died he would be buried in our village cemetery where some important ancestors are buried. When he died on the 28th of July, we arranged a transfer of his body from Homoine to his old home, a distance of about 15 kms. First we transferred his body to Arizapela for the funeral preparations. Arizapela has a military camp where everyone from my home area lives. The next morning we went down to the village for burial, a 4 km journey from Arizapela. Later that evening a group of MNRs visited the area. However, they did not find anybody home. They went from homestead to homestead opening the doors. At our homestead they did not find anything except 200 coconuts which they did not take for some reason.

After the funeral I stayed one whole week with my mother and relatives at Arizapela, at my uncle’s “Cabana” (small temporary sleeping house). Since the “Cabana” is such a small and precarious house, we made a big fire in the night for protection and slept under the shade of the cashew nut trees. That whole week I tried to sleep in the cabin of my landrover. One night there was a heavy shower. That was a big problem, not only for the 25 relatives who gathered every evening at my uncle’s “Cabana,” but for the 500 larger families living in Arizapela in very tiny huts. All of these families had left behind good houses in MNR affected zones.

My family and I have learned to trust in the Lord in the midst of all this. At times we have prayed while lying flat on the ground, waiting for a bullet that could take one’s life.

Thank God it has not happened yet.

(Adapted for publication by Leona Penner)

Luisa’s Story on Being a Woman in Mozambique

by Donna Macdonald

Change came with independence in 1975, the coming to power of FRELIMO and the exodus of the Portuguese. The 10-year war for independence had little effect on Luisa’s area as it took place in the northern provinces. There were stories about the new ways in the liberated areas—communal villages, cooperative stores, health posts and even a women’s detachment of FRELIMO fighters.

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These breezes passed around Luisa, only faintly touching her as she played and sang with the other children. She wasn't quite old enough to understand the changes of society, but did understand the changes of her own body. This time of initiation of the new society was her time of initiation into womanhood.

During Luisa's initiation rites she was formally instructed in the moral and social values of her society, with particular emphasis on the respect due to elders and the submission of women to men. She learned that the husband was the master of the home, the maker of decisions, the handler of money. The marriage was a grand event. Everyone was lively, except Luisa. Her glum demeanor was laughed off knowingly as the normal sadness of a girl leaving her father's home. After a leavetaking full of tears and joking, Paulo and Luisa boarded the train for the city, Maputo. During the journey, Luisa began to feel the transformation that had occurred. She was now a wife and belonged to her husband, who had been chosen by and who was replacing her father.

A year after the boy's birth, Paulo lost his job. The white helpers went back home and left Paulo helpless, but only briefly. Soon he was off to South Africa, like thousands of other Mozambican men, to work in the mines, to make real money, to buy things.

What if he buys himself another wife? What if he makes himself a new family there? That's how all the stories go. First the money will come, then it will stop. What will become of me and the children?

The money did come, for about a year, during which time Luisa enjoyed an incredible thing—leisure. She could buy charcoal instead of going to cut and haul firewood. She could buy food instead of growing it all.

And thus she could spend two hours a day in order to realize her old dream. As well as learning to write her name, Luisa learned much about FRELIMO and the OMM (the National Organization of Mozambican women). This time the words didn't go completely past her; she was no longer a peasant girl, but a woman of the city. Life was changing in the city, changes born out of the tension of old and new ideas.

One afternoon, a woman named Rosa came to Luisa's class. She was a member of the OMM and had come before to talk about FRELIMO's plans and policies for national reconstruction. This day, Rosa talked about women and what FRELIMO had to say about them: "The emancipation of women is not an act of charity, nor the result of a position born out of humanity or compassion. The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity of the Revolution, a guarantee of its continuity, a condition of its triumph."

Rosa took these big words and made sense of them for Luisa, talking of the importance of women and their work, of their vital and unacknowledged contribution to the survival and wellbeing of the country. She spoke with a quiet anger of how, at the same time, women were never given any power or respect in their home or community, and had remained dependent and submissive. If Mozambique was to succeed in its development plans, Rosa said, the skills of women had to be acknowledged and developed. Women must be involved in productive work, but also in management and decision-making, so at last they would realize and exercise their power.

It was 1983. FRELIMO, in an attempt to stop uncontrolled urban growth, launched Operation Production—"unproductive" people in the cities were to be relocated in the countryside, to food-growing areas which were short of labor power. It was a controversial program, ill-planned and implemented.

Among the tens of thousands of "unproductive" people was Luisa. She had no visible means of support and a peasant background besides. Clearly, the authorities thought, she belonged in the countryside where her agricultural skills would both feed her and her children, and contribute to surplus production for other parts of the country.

For those new residents who were city-bred, the work was foreign and
arduous. They had never built a mud-walled house, never cleared land, never worked in the fields all day. Still it had to be done. Thus within a few months these ex-Maputo residents were considered to be integrated into their new lives in Niassa, although this was not the unanimous view of the people themselves.

The good thing, the saving thing for me amongst these strange people of Niassa, is that there are enough of us women from Maputo, living together, having lived similar lives, that we can sing, laugh and even dance a little. I'm no longer the Mozambican woman I became seven years ago, but the experience of that closeness with other women still gives me strength.

And even as this man, this FRELIMO cadre, speaks to the men, stands with his back to us women, we are learning our strength and value. One day, in one of these meetings, we will say—Listen, brother, we are 50 percent of this revolution; you had better speak with us as well.

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**Mozambique**

by Larry Gilley

Mozambique was colonized by the Portuguese beginning in the 15th century. The Portuguese exploited Mozambique first for its gold (1505-1690), then ivory (1690-1750) and then slaves (1750-1860). The colony profited by supplying workers to the mines in Johannesburg. Portuguese companies were granted large estates on which they grew sisal, coconuts, tea, cotton, rice and sugar—crops needing abundant cheap labor. The colonial administration ensured the labor supply through taxation, forced labor and prison labor. After World War II many Portuguese were encouraged to settle in Mozambique and the government claimed that Mozambique was an “overseas province” rather than a colony.

**The Struggle Against Colonialism**

The African people of Mozambique fought against the Portuguese from the beginning. Their resistance, although often fierce, was localized. Protests were violently and ruthlessly suppressed by the Portuguese. In 1962, several nationalist organizations joined together in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, to form the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), led by Eduardo Mondlane. FRELIMO's guerrilla war against the Portuguese began in 1964 and continued for ten years.

By the early 1970s the Portuguese army had begun to tire of the protracted and unwinnable colonial wars in Angola and Mozambique. In April 1974, a group of progressive officers overthrew the Portuguese government and opened negotiations with the liberation movements in both countries. In Mozambique, a transitional government was formed to administer the country until independence on June 25, 1975.

After independence, the new FRELIMO government, under the leadership of Samora Machel, actively supported the liberation of neighboring Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Camps for 150,000 Zimbabwean refugees were established in and funded by Mozambique. In March 1976 Mozambique closed its border and joined the UN mandated sanctions against Rhodesia. The Rhodesians retaliated against Mozambique with repeated raids, disruption of transportation routes, and obstruction of refugee supply lines.

The Rhodesians also recruited, trained and equipped the Mozambican National Resistance (MNR), using the MNR as a surrogate army with which to destabilize Mozambique. With Zimbabwean independence in 1980, the MNR lost its Rhodesian bases and funding, but South Africa quickly began to rebuild the MNR in order to promote its own policy objectives in Mozambique.

**Economy**

At independence, FRELIMO inherited an impoverished country. A quarter of a million Portuguese settlers—including most of Mozambique's civil servants, managers, skilled workers, doctors, engineers, farmers and
Churches in Mozambique? Yes, Indeed!

by Jim Shenk

Soon after our family began working in Mozambique, an errand took me to the neighboring country of Swaziland. I went into a small bookshop there and asked the clerk to help me find an English-Portuguese dictionary.

"Are you going to Mozambique for a visit?" she asked.

"No," I replied. "I work there."

That seemed to surprise her. "What is your work?" she wanted to know.

When I said I worked with the churches, she was visibly shocked.

"There are churches in Mozambique?" she exclaimed. "I thought they had a communist government there."

I often encounter such comments. Although most church and development agency representatives who visit Mozambique are better informed than the general public, they usually ask at least, "What is the relationship between church and state?" Some of them have heard the allegations of church "persecution," church closings, and restrictions on church activities. Others who are less informed simply assume the worst about communism.

It is true, some of these questions are justified. Following almost 500 years of Portuguese rule, Mozambique achieved independence in 1975 through a 12-year armed struggle. The liberation movement formed a Marxist government which proceeded to radically reorient societal and economic patterns and relationships.

In 1977 health and educational institutions were nationalized. The churches— which until then were the primary operators of these institutions— were told to do their religious work and leave the secular tasks to the government. The constitution guarantees freedom for the individual to "believe or not to believe." In other words, there is freedom of religion.

However, in conjunction with the nationalization of schools and hospitals, churches on the same grounds were closed. The apparent justification was that the proximity of these churches to institutions, which were to be central to the "creation of the new man," was disruptive to that process.

Until that time many of the missionaries had been running these institutions. As life became more difficult, all but two single female Protestant missionaries left the country. Church leaders have told me that none of these were actually expelled, although some who left have said they were. Unfortunately, it appears that some used the opportunity to relieve their consciences and at the same time generate misconceptions about what was really taking place.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that things were not difficult for the church. Young people were encouraged not to participate in something as irrelevant as church. Church leaders, as well as many others, were restricted in their domestic and international travel. Official statements condemned the churches for supporting the Portuguese colonial regime.

Justification

There was no doubt some justification for this accusation, especially in terms of the Catholic Church, which was wed to the Portuguese regime. This union was symbolized by cathedrals and government administration centers built side by side at provincial and district levels throughout the country. A cathedral in Maputo was partially built with forced labor of adult males who were jailed by the government for not paying the head tax.

In spite of the difficulties, there were positive factors for the church. For the Protestants it meant no longer having to be subservient to the Catholics. Some rather severe restrictions had been placed on Protestants by the government for not paying the head tax.

A Letter to Those Who Understand With the Heart: The Role of the Church in Mozambique

Dear Jim,

You have asked me to share some of my thoughts about the role of the church in the current situation in Mozambique. One can talk about what should be the role of the church, but certainly it is not easy to give that role to the church. Therefore, what I believe is the role of the church in relation to the political, social, and economic situation of my country takes into consideration what I see happening in the churches now.

Without having to elaborate on the above, and believing that the political instability and the suffering of the people in my country is known widely, I will go straight on to say that I believe that the church inside Mozambique and the church outside Mozambique (this includes those Christians everywhere in the world who have a great concern for Mozambique) have two distinct and different roles.

The church inside Mozambique must, at this moment of crisis, be on the side of her suffering people and speak out in their favor to those who have the power to decide on matters that cause the suffering. The Mozambican church has indeed taken steps to do this by advising the government on what is the best solution for our crisis but, as always, the road pointed to by the churches seems hard for the government to follow. It was already like this with the prophets of Israel but they never lost heart; they always put themselves at the stake in favor of those who were perishing, and in favor of the land (soil, trees, cistern, water, etc.). Their hope was that destruction might cease and that people would once again enjoy, in peace and in fullness, the wonders of God's creation.

Con't on p. 10
Catholic-government duo. Now all religious groups were to be treated equally.

Second, as the uncommitted left the church, the numbers decreased but the body increased in strength.

Third, the departure of the missionaries allowed local leaders to emerge and to redefine how the church should be church in this changing society. Worship patterns became more African. Some theological questions (i.e., what to do about ancestors) which remained troubling in spite of, or perhaps as a result of, pat missionary answers could now be addressed.

And fourth, a radically changed political, social and economic milieu, combined with the departure of the missionaries, necessitated a coming together of church leaders for encouragement, assistance in understanding what was happening, and searching for new vision for the church.

While denominationalism is still very visible, some of the labels we tend to place on certain denominations are less than descriptive. There are less clear lines drawn between word and deed. (Mozambicans have a hard time understanding this dichotomy drawn in the West.) And, in general, there are better relationships between the denominations.

In the past several years relations between church and state have improved dramatically. In December 1982, President Somora Machel met with religious leaders for five days to discuss various issues, admit to some mistakes in relations with the churches, and invite them to join in helping to address human needs in the country.

While healthy tension between church and state remains, there is also the realization that there needs to be cooperation in addressing a wide range of pressing needs in the country.

Possibilities

Since 1982, a large number of possibilities for rounding out the mission of the church have emerged. Responding to the immediate needs of the population has been a pressing concern. Drought and war have necessitated distribution of relief goods, as well as agricultural inputs. Now the churches are beginning to respond to longer-term needs in food production and hope to develop programs in skills training, health and so forth. The only limiting factor is the lack of trained persons to carry them out.

Gradually the churches will invite personnel from outside the country to help fill these gaps. We hope this will happen only as fast as local church structures can handle and direct these resources. It is a temptation for sister churches to press these resources on to the Mozambican churches when they see the “need” for them. But they fail to understand and value the tremendous strides made by the local church in the past decade.

Perhaps even more dangerous are the church groups who, having heard about significant government policy shifts (i.e., toward capitalism), rush in on the coattails of improved relations between their government and Mozambique to do “mission work.” These groups often attempt to do their own thing as though a local church does not exist or because they assume it is standing idle. This is an embarrassment to the local church.

Some of the evangelism techniques are less than helpful in this context. One American group I met had brought Bibles collected at a service in South Africa the previous night. These people were well meaning, but unfortunately, totally uninformed. Not only are English Bibles of no use, but Bibles in the vernacular are readily available in shops run by the Mozambican Bible Society.

Does the church exist in Mozambique? Indeed it does!

One church in Maputo has experienced 40 percent growth during the past year. Young people in particular are helping to invigorate the churches. Many are showing interest in working for the churches, willingly leaving better-paying jobs.

Just today a church leader friend returned from one of the provinces where he had found churches overflowing as the buildings are too small. He believes the reason for this growing interest in the church is that in this time of extreme difficulty many
people are discovering that only in the church can life be found. People are seeing the power of God at work. Another pastor friend notes that "the church's message represents a constant amidst the turmoil."

Today I no longer hear discussions on church/state relations. The energies of the church can now be directed toward the broadening and strengthening of its mission to promote life in its fullness.

A Book Review

by Peter Penner


“When people spend time in Mozambique they soon lose all their critical faculties.” - Rajan Soni

Joseph Hanlon, the author of *Mozambique: The Revolution Under Fire,* spent five years in Mozambique as a correspondent for the BBC, *The Guardian,* *The Observer* and various other publications, and I'm sure that the above quotation, to some extent, holds true for him as it does for me. It is obvious that he cares deeply for the people of Mozambique. But this, rather than resulting in a biased story of what has happened to the revolution in Mozambique, has helped him to write a warm and sympathetic, as well as reasonably objective account of the Mozambicans struggle to rebuild their country. His book is well written, informative and interesting. It contains a wealth of statistics and other hard to obtain information. These are made alive with interesting analyses and stories of courage and hope.

The main intent of Hanlon's book is to look at Marxist Mozambique in the context of its position as a front-line state to South Africa. Mozambique illustrates dramatically how the well-being of all of the countries in central and southern Africa is affected by South Africa's racist policies and her successful efforts to destabilize her neighbors. It is in this context that Hanlon examines FRELIMO's struggle to transform Mozambique.

He looks at how and why key choices have been made and also at the peoples' courageous attempts to build new and better lives for themselves.

Hanlon appropriately introduces Mozambique to the reader by telling a few stories which illustrate why one so quickly loses ones critical faculties when exposed to the lives of the people of Mozambique. He tells stories of young, eager and committed people who, despite a serious lack of experience and training, a debilitating war and the ever-pervasive bureaucracy, have managed to rise to the demands of almost impossible jobs. Also, in the first section, he introduces us to the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR, also known as RENAMO). Their brutal attacks on civilian targets are a part of South Africa's destabilization efforts. Hanlon's description of a terrorist attack on a young school boy is a fitting introduction to any look at life in Mozambique. Terrorism is an everyday fact of life for Mozambicans as is illustrated by the following story:

“I was on my way back to school after the holiday,” said Joao Dedus, a student at the Agricultural Institute at Chimoio, “when they attacked the bus with machine guns. It crashed, and they shot at us as we climbed out. The 'bandits' stole clothes, shoes, watches—anything. I was hurt so I was slow, and they did this,” he said, pointing to his face. A big gash had been cut up the side of his face and his eye plucked out. “Then they set fire to the bus. At least ten people were killed in the original machine gunning and crash and three more were burned to death in the bus.”
After a concise introduction to the earlier history of Mozambique as a Portuguese colony and an overview of FRELIMO’s struggle against the Portuguese, Hanlon looks more closely at how FRELIMO eventually took power and how it attempted to halt the economic collapse exacerbated by the abrupt departure of 90 percent of the white population. Successive chapters examine FRELIMO’s goals, successes and failures in various areas such as health care, agriculture, grass-roots democracy and the emancipation of women. In all of these chapters, I feel, Hanlon manages to avoid a starry-eyed recitation of the lofty ideals of FRELIMO, objectively examining both their advances (of which there are a good number) and also the many failures.

The one area in which I might fault Hanlon is in his rather optimistic belief that if the socialist tenets of FRELIMO had been more consistently adhered to, things would be better. For example, at one stage he quotes Information Minister Cabaco with obvious approval: “Clearly we made many errors, but allowing the Portuguese to leave was not one of them. Keeping industry going by maintaining privilege was too high a price, and we could not accept it.” Later Hanlon criticizes Robert Mugabe’s (Machel-inspired) concessions in Zimbabwe. He writes, “... if a large number of settlers had stayed (in Mozambique) they would have blocked a socialist transition, as they have in Zimbabwe.” At times Hanlon seems to feel uncomfortable with the pragmatism of former President Machel. I feel that Machel’s ability to work with reality helped make him the great leader he was and that Zimbabwe benefited by not repeating the mistakes of FRELIMO.

The concluding chapter, “Destabilization Works,” takes us full circle and in a sense, together with Hanlon’s opening description of MNR atrocities, forms a parenthesis for the current reality of Mozambique. Terrorism has the upper hand and as Hanlon writes, “However many mistakes FRELIMO may have made, it is hard to blame it for trying to make one great leap out of the economic pit. But destabilization ensures that it was never given a chance.”

In the end all the analysis and discussion of Mozambique’s education, health and other policies seem irrelevant. The brutal terrorist war determines everything. It really would have made little difference if FRELIMO policy had been more moderate, if there had been less bureaucracy, if fewer Portuguese had left—it is in fact the South African destabilization program that is the all-determining factor in the outcome of the revolution in Mozambique.

Mozambique: The Revolution Under Fire is definitely worth reading. For those who want to make a serious attempt to understand what has and is happening in Mozambique (now classified as the poorest country in the world), it should be on the required reading list.