

Conflict in Southern Africa

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Review Essay

Conflict in Southern Africa

Hume, Cameron. *Ending Mozambique's War: The Role of Mediation and Good Offices*. Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace Press, 1994.

Minter, William. *Apartheid's Contras: An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique*. London: Zed Books, 1994.

Notwithstanding some obvious shortcomings due in part to the newness of the material discussed, Cameron Hume's work is a welcome addition to the growing literature on Mozambique. A former deputy of the Mission at the US Embassy to the Holy See, Hume represented the US at the talks held between the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and the Mozambique National Resistance Movement (RENAMO) in Rome in 1990 -92. Stemming from his close involvement in the negotiations, Hume provides the most interesting and the rarest insights into the peace talks. A major point he makes is that Mozambique's peace agreement constitutes a rarity in conflict resolution, namely, as one of the few cases where the initiative, the pace, and the resolve of negotiations were determined not by diplomats but by the offices of the men and women of good will from Sant'Egidio, a Catholic lay order in Rome's Trastevere district and by the clairvoyance and determination of a formerly imprisoned Mozambican Catholic Bishop, Jamie Pedro Goncalves, Archbishop of Beira. *Ending Mozambique's War* is a detailed account of the negotiations that led to peace and eventually to democratic elections in Mozambique in 1993.

Throughout the book, the reader is reminded of the major stumbling blocks to the peace negotiations in Rome: the difficulty of implementing a ceasefire due to mutual distrust; the problems related to the disposition of the old army and police, and the creation of new security forces that would satisfy both sides; the laws that would govern a new electoral process, since RENAMO was not a party; the contentious involvement of Zimbabwe in the war on FRELIMO's side, and Kenya's overt support of RENAMO; the future role the United Nations would play; and the initially divisive issue of who should be the mediator(s). Hume gives much credit to the positive role played by Archbishop Goncalves and the well meaning members of Sant'Egidio, who from the outset had persuaded the parties to focus more on what united them than on what distanced them, the unswerving determination of the Italian government to see a negotiated settlement, and the unexpected constructive role that Robert Mugabe played in arranging important face-to-face summits between the two leaders, Joaquim Chissano of FRELIMO and Afonso Dhlakama of RENAMO, and interested African Heads of State.

Hume provides a brief backdrop to the conflict, writes in an easy flowing style, and entices the reader to find out how one step led to the next in the difficult negotiation process. Because Hume's immediate interest is helping the reader to follow the day-to-

day negotiations from beginning to end, he has little time to do a thorough analysis of his theme, except in the short last section of the book. As a result, his work is more descriptive than analytical and relies on fewer sources than one might expect. Also disappointing is the fact that he spends little time on the background of the individuals who participated in the talks. While, on the one hand, a satisfactory picture of one of the most important figures in the talks Dom Jaime Goncalves is lacking, the constant intrusion of Chester Crocker in the narrative, who did play a role in the steps that led to the negotiations is, on the other hand, problematic. Ironically, Crocker, who serves as a board member of the US Peace Institute that published the book, wrote the foreword to the work. These legitimate questions, however, do not diminish the volume's value, especially for those who, for almost twenty years, have followed with interest the issue of war and peace in Mozambique. Indeed, until someone else ventures to write a definitive work on the peace negotiations, *Ending Mozambique's War* remains the only reliable and informative source at present. Hume must also be commended for steering away from ideological leanings as he recounts this extraordinary and dramatic diplomatic story.

Unlike Hume's book, the focus of William Minter's work is more familiar to the students of Lusophone and Southern Africa. The value of *Apartheid's Contras* rests mainly in its comprehensive and comparative approach. In this volume, Minter definitely demonstrates mastery of his subject matter, namely, Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa, and brings to bear his social science training and his enviable writing skills. He provides a relatively detailed background to the former Portuguese colonies, which places the conflicts in their proper context. The narrative is replete with unique insights. It is refreshing that this work, unlike some of Minter's earlier works, is neither an *apologetica* of FRELIMO and the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) nor a blank indictment of any opposition to the ruling regimes in Luanda and Maputo, as is common practice in the US media. Minter does indeed catalog FRELIMO's past errors and shortcomings, and does not blindly regurgitate, for example, all that has been said about UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) or RENAMO. If he indicts one party, he does it only after carefully weighing the evidence as he sees it. Yet, unlike Hume, Minter, try as he may to the contrary, seems to betray his impartiality: the reader can easily detect where his passionate sympathies lie in the various Southern African conflicts. FRELIMO and the MPLA remain the parties that house his heroes, although it is clear that he has less contempt for UNITA than for RENAMO. Whether this imperils his objectivity is for the individual reader to determine.

Moving from the ideological to the academic level, it is clear that Minter's story is backed with a wealth of solid written sources and first-hand knowledge of the situations and people he describes, although some of the conclusions based primarily on interviews could have been strengthened by a larger sample (see pp. 174ff, for example, which rely on interviews with only 32 persons). Overall, Minter skillfully deals with a wide range of theoretical issues that very few Lusophone Africanists have dared to tackle in a single volume: the concepts of insurgency and guerrilla warfare in the Angolan-Mozambican context, conventional and non-conventional war, South Africa's evolving diplomacy and strategy in Southern Africa, the lingering effect of the Portuguese colonial legacy, particularly in the administration of the new Lusophone states, regionalism as an obstacle

to nation-building in the former Portuguese colonies, the pernicious but not inevitably bellicose role of ethnicity in the Southern African context, the Cold War and its impact on Mozambique's and Angolas' internal crises, the region's economic difficulties caused by war, mismanagement, and natural phenomena, such as drought and flooding, and the crucial role played by the frontline states. As expected, the villain in the whole saga, is the apartheid regime whose sole diplomatic purpose, as Minter tells us, was to destabilize the regimes in the neighboring states, especially in Angola and Mozambique, and to maintain its hegemony and its racist policies in South Africa proper and Namibia. Indeed, this is the volume's underlying theme.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that, unlike Hume's work, Minter's volume, with the obvious caveats, is much more analytical, far more comprehensive in scope, much more informative, and easily adaptable as a graduate class textbook. Yet, both works are useful to anyone interested in acquiring a holistic picture of the paradigm that has plagued the former Portuguese colonies and in understanding those most recent events that have made the African subcontinent unique.

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