

# The Displaced People of Mozambique

by Diana Cammack



Mozambican "displaced persons" meet to discuss shortages, 1986. JENNY MATTHEWS/ICFAM (UK)

The crisis in Mozambique which has recently captured the world's attention is the result of a number of factors, some of long duration. Mozambique, a country about half again as big as California with a population of about fourteen million and a GNP per capita (1984) of US \$210, was left by its Portuguese masters with only US \$1 million in foreign reserves and gold, an annual GNP per capita of not much more than US \$100 and a population with an illiteracy rate approaching 98% and largely unskilled. All but 15,000 colonialists fled, many to South Africa, and in their bitterness they destroyed and paralyzed machinery. As they left they often simply removed a vital mechanical part; other times they destroyed repair manuals and business records in an effort to sabotage the Mozambican economy.

Mozambique tried to man its important industries and service sectors with local "dynamizing groups" and in the mid-1970s it was not uncommon to find people with only elementary school education running whole provincial health programmes or serving as bookkeepers for factories. In an effort to raise food production levels quickly by building

upon the abandoned plantations, the government decided to create and fund state farms. The peasant farming sector, on the other hand, was ignored.

Scarce foreign exchange was spent on importing large farm equipment, but the expertise necessary to run such farms was missing. Hence, yields necessary to make the projects cost-effective were not realized. Not only were state farms expensive, but they also diverted scarce resources away from other sectors of the economy. Consumer goods were not produced and so the peasantry, without such items as bicycles, radios, cloth or processed foods to buy, were unwilling to produce for the market. When they did generate a surplus, much of it was bartered directly for food and other scarce items. In this way, much of Mozambique's excess production crossed into Zimbabwe and Malawi where items were available for purchase.

By 1983 the government had realized its mistake. Since then it has tried to boost peasant production by making inputs more available and by increasing production of consumer goods. Currently the government is

negotiating loans with the World Bank and the IMF which will be used specifically to foster peasant production.

But it is two other factors which have seriously worsened Mozambique's already difficult situation. One is drought and the other is war. Rainfall in Mozambique, as elsewhere on the continent, has been abnormal since 1977, with years of flooding (such as 1978) and of serious drought, such as 1981-84, continuing in some places into 1987.

Drought victims began leaving in 1981, but it was not until 1983 that masses of displaced people began entering neighbouring states. They came by the thousands, arriving with dysentery, cholera, typhoid, malaria, bilharzia, leprosy and a host of other diseases. The journey through the dry bush was often fatal. A Zimbabwean aid worker said of the Mozambicans:

Some said they left their children on the way, dying of hunger and thirst . . . They could carry them, but they didn't have anything to give them. So the children died in their arms. [Then] they just [went] near the river [bed] where there is this sand that is thrown off by the rain. So they just do this with their hands [indicating a digging position] and they bury their children there then go away. And when a baby dies on a dry place where there is no river, the mother just goes behind a tree and puts the child down.

In Zimbabwe these people found shelter under trees, around mission hospitals, at bus stations, on farms and along roads. Initially they were fed by local communities and indigenous aid agencies. The food situation in Zimbabwe itself was already critical due to the drought, but still the government felt it had a duty to help the people who had sheltered Zimbabweans during their war against Ian Smith. By mid-1984 the government decided to move the people into government-run and internationally assisted camps. Today there are four camps in Zimbabwe and discussions are underway about a fifth. These shelter some 30,000 people, though at least that many live outside, on farms, in the bush, villages and towns of Zimbabwe.

Had the Mozambicans only to contend with the drought, it is likely that they, like others in

similar circumstances in Africa, could have done so with the assistance of outside aid. But the Mozambican situation is seriously complicated by war. This is the result of South Africa's regional policy, implemented by the MNR.

The MNR (also known as "Renamo" or "armos bandidos"), was created in the mid-1970s by the Rhodesians in an effort to combat the liberation forces of the now-ruling party in Zimbabwe, who had their rear base in Mozambique. It originated when the Rhodesians, with the approval of the Portuguese, brought together several reactionary elements. In 1978, following orders from Salisbury, it set up bases deep inside Mozambique and began to attack the country's infrastructure of roads and bridges as well as its railway.

By 1980, when Zimbabwe achieved independence, the Mozambican army had routed the bulk of the MNR. What saved it from collapse was the transfer of responsibility for it from Rhodesia to South Africa. Planes were sent to pick up personnel and equipment, which were ferried to a new base in the Transvaal. Its new orders were basically the same: to attack the Mozambican infrastructure so as to cripple the Zimbabwean economy by destroying its lifeline (the "Beira corridor"), through Mozambique to the sea. SADCC was also a target. South Africa did not want to see the nine states gain enough economic independence, especially transport and trade independence, to be able to survive sanctions against South Africa. The MNR leadership sought to undermine the Maputo government, force it into a coalition where several key ministries and provincial posts were held by MNR leaders and post-colonial legislation and policy decisions overturned. To undermine the Maputo government the population had to be alienated, the economy ruined and the will to fight destroyed.

To accomplish this the MNR adopted a policy of destruction and fear. For instance, mutilation -- cutting off noses, ears and breasts of opponents -- became official policy and is still practiced to a large extent today. People are abducted from their villages to serve in bandit units as fighters, porters, farmers and prostitutes. There has never been a real attempt by the MNR to "win the hearts and minds" of the peasantry or to build an alternative socio-economic or political structure. The goal, instead, is to destroy.

And destroy they have done. For instance, in

1982 alone, nearly 500 schools were closed, turning out nearly 100,000 students. One hundred health posts were destroyed along with 140 villages, which affected over 100,000 people. By the end of 1985, one quarter of Mozambique's health facilities had been ruined and 40% of the primary schools abandoned or destroyed, putting 20% of the pupils out of school. In 1982-83, some 900 rural stores were closed, which disrupted the supply of goods to over four million people. Between 1980 and 1985 the national cattle herd, half of which belongs to the peasantry, was reduced by 40%. Special targets are health workers (hundreds have been killed or maimed), teachers, priests and party officials. Overseas volunteers (*cooperantes*) are also targeted, as are their aid and development projects: between 1981 and March 1986 over one hundred of these people have been kidnapped, wounded, killed, or all three. The situation has continued to deteriorate since, especially in the central and northern provinces.

Naturally the Mozambican army and the militia try to protect the people, but this sometimes has mixed results. A Canadian volunteer working in Mozambique explained that: "... what was happening in terms of the peasants was that in rural areas, the bandidos would be coming into the villages in the night, holding meetings and saying to the villagers: 'you have to stop being involved in any kind of structures attached to FRELIMO [the ruling party] and then we don't want to see you selling things, we don't want you going to health posts, or attending party meetings or things like that' and telling the villagers that 'if you stay in these villages [which are FRELIMO inspired] we are going to come in, burn them down and kill you. We want you to go and disperse yourselves in the bush, and live like you used to, before FRELIMO came'. But, said the *cooperante*, what happens to these people is that when FRELIMO comes back into the area, FRELIMO would say: 'We want you to go back into the villages and if you go to work on your *mashambas* [plots], you go out and work only in the day, and at night, as far as we are concerned, people walking in the bush are bandits.'"

He then provided an example of a village in the north where the MNR came in, burnt down three or four huts, killed a half-dozen people and left. The rest of the villagers fled into the bush. Not long afterwards the army swept through the area, rounded up the people and put them back into the village and stationed a militia there to protect them. Things went

well for several weeks and so the militia was removed and the bandits returned, killed a lot more people, burnt some more huts, and sent the people back into the bush. In a situation such as this, people are likely to leave in search of security.

A Mozambican woman seeking refuge in South Africa explained why she had left: "Ten Renamo men came to our village and left with all our food. At night five returned and locked forty of us in one building while they stole everything else in the settlement. Later they handcuffed our husbands and forced them to lie face down on the ground. They crushed their heads with mealie grinders while we and the children watched. Nineteen people were killed. We were not allowed to bury our dead, but were told we must leave them to rot."

It is a war such as this that has forced an estimated quarter-million Mozambicans to flee into neighbouring states while nearly four million more remain, displaced and facing starvation. In Zimbabwe, the Mozambicans are welcomed, as they are in Zambia, where at least 20,000 have joined the 90,000 Angolans. Mozambicans are less welcome in Swaziland, Malawi and South Africa.

The trip into South Africa is fraught with dangers. Many people must walk across Kruger National Park, a wild game park known for its predators. Near the border they face off mines and then an electrified fence. Skeletons litter the border and farmers on the South African side report hearing mines going off day and night.

Once inside the country they are considered illegal aliens and only when they reach one of the "homelands" are they safe. There -- in Gazankulu, kaNgwane or KwaZulu -- they are provided with food, blankets and medical aid at reception centres, and land is allocated to them by local headmen. If caught outside the homelands they are liable to be repatriated: some 1,500 are sent back each month. Yet some 50,000 have managed to reach one of the homelands to be registered, while another 20,000 await registration. An estimated 150,000 others are living illegally outside the homelands (in the "white areas"), and because they are considered illegal work seekers, they can be repatriated when caught.

But not everyone arrested by the immigration squads is sent back. Some, like Sam Ngomane,

# On Repatriation: Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

by Barbara E. Harrell-Bond

are taken to prison and from there sent to work on white farms. Sam Ngomane, for instance, was arrested in October 1983 and, after several days detention, was turned over to white farmers, for whom he worked for a year for an average salary of R 30 (about US \$15) per month.

Refugees who find their way to Swaziland are, upon arrival, screened to determine that they are political refugees and not just seeking work. About half are turned back. The rest are sent to Ndzevane, where today there are about 5,000 Mozambicans. Naturally, some try to settle in villages with members of their extended family, but because the government is opposed to their integration into Swazi society, they are generally rounded up and sent to reception centres. Some others have found work and housing on the large sugar estates that dot Swaziland's countryside.

The war shifted north in 1986 after the bulk of the MNR moved into Malawi and the MNR headquarters at Gorongoso were captured by a joint Mozambican-Zimbabwean army operation. This accounts for the decline in the number of refugees reaching Swaziland recently and the massive influx of Mozambicans into Malawi and Zambia.

Permanent settlement of Mozambicans inside Malawi is discouraged by the government there. Already overcrowded and with one of the highest child malnutrition rates in the world, Malawi does not wish to play host to refugees created by a war which it has fostered by supporting the MNR. By the end of 1986 some 200,000 Mozambicans had had to take refuge there, but most returned as soon as possible, complaining of inadequate food rations and high child mortality rates.

While the situation facing Mozambicans in each of the neighbouring states is difficult, the millions who remain and who have been displaced by the war face death, torture and starvation. Here crops are burnt or stolen, transport of goods and relief supplies disrupted, hospitals and orphanages poorly supplied. But the Mozambican, Zimbabwean and the Tanzanian armies are on the offensive, clearing areas of bandits. International aid agencies have begun a major relief effort and grain, abundant in Zimbabwe, is being purchased by international donors for delivery in Mozambique. Agricultural implements and inputs, along with fuel, clothes and household necessities are needed. But most of all, it is peace that is in short supply and until Mozambique gets this much-deserved peace, refugees will continue to pour across the borders.

In October, I visited Uganda and spoke with Banyarwanda refugees who have been there since 1959. Uganda is considering offering citizenship to these people, and one of my interests was to ask people I met just how they might respond to such an offer. As one put it, "Even if I can never go home, why should I deprive my children and my grandchildren of their homeland. I will never become a Ugandan." While it may not be "pragmatic" or "practical", every refugee I know longs for all of those symbols which are bound up in the notion of home.

It is interesting how strong is the tendency for Europeans to forget their own recent history. Today, however, there are not only differences in scale and locality, but also in the attitude of the wealthier host and donor nations. Then, countries outside of Europe were willing to receive large numbers of refugees, and vast amounts of capital were poured into Europe to promote its rapid recovery. Another, and very important, difference between post-war Europe and many refugee-producing parts of the world today, was that the promise of political stability encouraged investment and the rebuilding of Europe.

Humanitarian refugee agencies often lament their own lack of a "institutional memory" and their tendency to re-invent the wheel each time they are called to respond to a new refugee crisis. It is only through the publication of independent research that such a memory will be developed. It is through an analysis of past mistakes and successes that progress can be made.

We believe that historians have an important role to play. As Howard Adelman has noted, "... historical research into past attempts to solve refugee problems is invaluable if mistakes are not to be repeated. In that sense, refugee research shares a kinship with the refugees themselves. For it operates, if it does so at all, with little sense of its own history. Milan Kundera, the famous Czech exile writer, ... describes the function of forgetting or repressing one's history. It allows the past to be invented and old solutions to be 'reinvented'. In all the invention and artifice, culture is destroyed. We live in a fabricated world, rootless in time and in space, floating in a dream world of fantasy and not reality."

Let us think a bit more about the role of independent academic study of refugees and why up to now there has been no accountability for the work undertaken by the humanitarian community -- and, why the incredible resistance to inde-

pendent research. During your meetings you will be talking about forced repatriation after the Second World War. You will be discussing events in which many of the actors are long dead if not forgotten. For your data you have relied upon interviews with survivors and upon archives which contain materials which would not have been available to you at the time these events were taking place. You will be exposing actions and events which will reveal enormous injustices and breaches of basic human rights which happened some forty years ago. You will be seeing the results of actions which were designed to serve political "interests" rather than the needs of people. Some of these actions were taken by those who were called humanitarians as well as by the politicians.

What if you had written your papers at the time these crimes against humanity were being committed? What were scholars doing at that time? What are they doing today? Very few people are aware that the same practices continue today. How many of you are aware that even while we talk in this open forum about the past, secret meetings are taking place at which much more ambitious plans are afoot to "solve" today's refugee problem? The strategy, once again, and which is already being implemented in Africa, is repatriation. It is called voluntary, but one of the incentives for people to agree to go home, is that ration cards have been taken away from the refugees.

I believe that you will find that contemporary approaches to repatriation differ very little from the period you are studying at this conference which you have so bravely labelled "forced", not voluntary repatriation. The challenge I would like to put to you as historians is to ask you to point your readers towards the contemporary situation and to make your findings accessible to aid practitioners in the field. Refugee research must be rooted in history. The historical material exists to provide those roots and your work during this conference will belie the claims that the material is lacking. Though no two refugee situations are comparable, there are lessons we can learn from the past.

*The above are excerpts from Barbara E. Harrell-Bond's address, "Forcible Repatriation: The Continuing Relevance of the Subject" which opened the Canadian-funded symposium "Forcible Repatriation After WWII" held at the Oxford University Examination Schools, Oxford, England, March 20-22, 1987.*