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## Book Review

**Schafer, Jessica. 2007. *Soldiers at Peace: Veterans and Society after the Civil War in Mozambique*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. xi + 244 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4039-7503-4 (hb). Price: £40.00.**

by Bjørn Møller (31 March 2008)

One of Africa's oft-referred to success stories is Mozambique's 1992 peace agreement which ended its protracted civil war. Begun in 1975, a protracted struggle for independence from Portugal followed. War-sponsors included first the white minority regime in the present Zimbabwe and then apartheid-South Africa. One of the explanations frequently offered for the success of war-termination — no relapse into war has occurred — is that RENAMO transformed itself into a political opposition, and that a determined effort was made by the United Nations and other external actors to ensure the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, from both sides.

While not denying the significance of the DDR process, Jessica Schafer questions some of its premises, that is, “the dominant perception of veterans ... as an undifferentiated group of soldiers who posed a danger to society through their capacity to abrogate the peace agreement, cause political instability and threaten social and economic progress” (p. 4). This leads her to question the inherently plausible belief that rebel combatants had been generally brutalized and desocialized by war, and, more generally, to criticize some of the all too prevalent assumptions of what Mary Kaldor called “new wars” and Robert Kaplan has referred to as “new barbarism.” In Schafer's analysis, what the combatants, and especially the RENAMO fighters, did is best understood not as irrational behavior, but as social adaptation to changing circumstances. She thus aligns herself theoretically with authors such as Paul Richard or Mark Duffield, to both of whom she does defer, or David Keen to whom she does not, even as Keen's analysis of the war in Sierra Leone might have illuminated hers on Mozambique.

That joining RENAMO appeared to be, and may in fact have been, a rational choice was due to the marginalization of rural and otherwise marginalized areas. For this the colonial power may have carried most of the responsibility, perpetuated by the FRELIMO government, at least until the 1992 peace agreement. Depending on the military dispositions of the two sides, whether to join the rebels or not was an uncomfortable choice facing all inhabitants in the affected regions. Those who joined, according to the author, did so “more in sorrow than in anger.” They felt compelled to join in order to obtain the slight improvement of personal and collective security which the possession of arms afforded in a war environment. Hence most combatants yearned for a restoration of peace. They tended to maintain links with their families and communities throughout the war, and this immensely facilitated their postwar reintegration.

Whereas one might have expected a fierce postwar struggle to emerge between the two groups over the limited resources available for pensions, and so on, Schafer finds that former combatants, now in their capacity as veterans, have bonded to a surprising extent. In essence, they form a joint pressure group demanding equal treatment for former RENAMO and

FRELIMO fighters. Articulating demands vis-à-vis the state, they are united by what the author calls “a negative sense of citizenship” (p. 170). Presupposing that the Mozambican state would be willing to concede to their joint demands, however, the veterans would find themselves up against “the prevailing neoliberal economic consensus” and its conditionalities and structural adjustment programs (with which Mozambique has generally complied quite well). Improving veterans’ benefits would not really please the donor community, especially not in the light of what has happened to the Zimbabwean economy since President Mugabe gave in to the demands of his war veterans.

The empirical parts of Schafer’s book are mainly based on field research and interviews with former combatants back in 1975/76, the evolving context of which is fully updated, and also on some comparative material drawn from Zimbabwe and elsewhere. However, the reader still wonders why these findings have not been published earlier or, alternatively, why they have not been really updated, for example, with more recent interviews of the same former combatants ten years after the first round of interviews. This might have yielded some important insights into the robustness and durability of the DDR efforts.

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