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Shells

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ILHA DE MOÇAMBIQUE, Mozambique–The road forked a little south of Alto Molócuè. There was no road sign to direct us—there seldom was in Mozambique—but our decision seemed obvious enough. To our right, the road was asphalt. To the left, it turned to dirt. Eva turned the white pickup to the right, and we sped obliviously along the pavement.

HEYYYYYYY!

The loud yelp came from the side of the road. Eva hit the brakes. Behind us, back at the fork, a group of young men were sitting in the shade, idly passing the day. (There isn't much work in rural Mozambique.) Our passing seemed to have caused a minor commotion among the group by the roadside. They were yelling at us to come back.

Eva threw the car into reverse and backed up. A mangy kid in a dirty buttoned-up shirt jogged out to the car.

"*A ponte acabou*," he told Eva.

Eva let out an uneasy laugh, and turned the car left, onto the dirt road. I asked her what the young man had said.

"The bridge stops," she replied.

In his pidgin Portuguese, the young man hadn't been able to tell us *why* the bridge stopped, but it was easy enough to deduce. Not so long ago, the area we were driving through, Zambézia Province, was one of the hottest zones in one of

A bridge in Zambézia Province, destroyed by Renamo rebels. Reminders of the long civil war are everywhere in Mozambique.

Africa's most brutal and intractable civil wars.

Technically, the conflict pitted the government against a rebel group called the *Resistência Nacional de Moçambique*. (Commonly known as Renamo.) But, as in most African wars, the battle was not so much joined between armies as it was visited on hapless civilians in their homes and villages. During its heyday, Renamo had freely roamed the countryside, ransacking tea plantations, kidnapping countless civilians—including young boys—and forcing them into service as porters or soldiers. It turned much of the area's remaining population into refugees, living near starvation in squalid, poorly-defended camps. By most accounts, the government army hadn't been much more humane. Because of tribal affiliations with the rebels, people in Zambézia were perceived to be pro-Renamo, and to this day people in the area say many of the most vicious atrocities were committed by their own government's troops.

As for the bridge, it stopped because someone—most likely a rebel, because one of Renamo's war aims was to paralyze Mozambique's already-meager economy—had blown it up.

We proceeded down the dirt road. It was shaded by leafy green mango trees. The terrain was hilly; to our left, the mountains of Gurué loomed bluish in the distance. The road wound past congregations of square, thatch-roofed huts as it descended into a steep ravine. A stream ran through the nadir of the valley. We crossed it over a small wooden bridge.

I craned my neck to the right, looking for the other bridge, the one that stopped. I could just glimpse it, a strip of asphalt raised high above the ravine on concrete pylons. Then the bridge passed behind a grove of trees. On the other side, where it should have emerged: nothing but blue sky and puffy white clouds.

* * *

I went to Mozambique in late November, flying into the international airport in Maputo, the capital, situated on the Indian Ocean. The plane banked over Maputo's harbor on its approach to the runway, and when I looked down, I could see the hulls of wrecked ships lying in the shallows of the bay.

In the course of my travels in Mozambique, which stretched over two weeks and 1,500 miles, I came to think of it as a country of ruins, from the foundered ships to the blown-up bridge south of Alto Molócuè. Crumbling buildings, old mills and stately manor houses built in the Portuguese style stood everywhere along the roads, abandoned since their owners left in the wake of independence.

Yet Mozambique's story is no longer merely an unmitigated tale

of woe. There is hope. Over the decade since the peace deal, foreign aid has poured into the country. The economy, benefiting from South African investment, has grown at one of the fastest clips in the world. Its beach resorts are once again seeing tourists.

Most remarkable of all has been the transformation of Mozambique's politics. Warring parties have remade themselves into political parties, and Mozambique has emerged from oblivion to become a normal (or rather, "normal") African country, attended by all the turmoil, fragility and division the phrase suggests—but at peace.

A Frelimo campaign sign in Inhambane, a coastal town in southern Mozambique. The south has traditionally been Frelimo's stronghold, and the general perception in Mozambique is that southerners have monopolized power and the government's wealth since independence in 1975.

The ruling party, the *Frente de Liberacão de Moçambique*, or Frelimo, which traces its roots to a guerilla army that fought the Portuguese, has dominated the country for more than a quarter century. But since signing the peace agreement in 1992, Frelimo's Joaquim Chissano has twice contested and won presidential elections. The party, once militantly Marxist, has dispensed its old ideology like a snake shedding its skin. Frelimo leaders were once renowned in Africa for their puritanical aversion to corruption. No longer, said many Mozambicans I met, who pointed to new mansions built along Maputo's oceanfront and complained that their government, like many in Africa, had become calcified, corrupt and complacent about the country's many shortcomings.

Renamo, originally a reactionary military force supported by apartheid South Africa and white Rhodesia, has remade itself into Mozambique's only viable opposition party. This has come as a shock to many outside observers, considering the scale of atrocities attributed to Renamo: "One of the most brutal holocausts against human beings since World War II," in the assessment of a U.S. State Department official back in 1988. But Renamo has won respectability through its strong showing at the polls. In the most recent general election, held in 1999, the shadowy former rebel commandant Afonso Dhlakama came within a whisker of winning the presidency, taking 48 percent of the vote and carrying six of Mozambique's 11 provinces.

I arrived in Mozambique right about the time the country held local elections in 33 municipalities and districts. The results seemed likely to conform to the general trend of Mozambican politics, and the war: The south for Frelimo, the north for Renamo. These local elections would mark an important watershed, because Renamo victories would give the former rebels a chance to rule, at least on a small scale.

Moreover, observers of Mozambican politics were also watching the results closely because the municipal election results would provide a useful barometer to judge the relative strength of Renamo and Frelimo heading into next year's presidential election. With President Chissano due to step down, the 2004 vote will likely represent Renamo's best chance to accomplish at the polls what it never came close to bringing about by force of arms: The overthrow of Frelimo.

"This is Renamo's election to lose," one politically-connected resident of Mozambique told me.

Living in Africa, I find myself thinking a lot about reconciliation. I continually marvel at things people here seem capable of forgiving. In Uganda, I have seen young children, kidnapped into a rebel army and forced to slaughter their own tribesmen, accepted joyfully back into their home villages. I have seen top lieutenants to Idi Amin living free, and even serving in the government. In a village in Rwanda, I saw piles of bones stacked in a crypt beneath a church where Hutus massacred Tutsis in 1994—knowing full well that Hutus and Tutsis were once again living side-by-side.

Yet Mozambique's case seemed an order of magnitude stranger. It's one thing to make your peace with the very people who tortured you, pillaged your villages and killed your relatives. It's another thing to bring yourself to vote for them.

I didn't leave Mozambique with any definitive explanation for Renamo's political ascendance. But I did gain a fuller understanding of how this war, and this peace, defies easy generalization, or any reckoning of good guys and bad guys. Person after person told me

that Renamo's electoral vigor is just one indication that the forces that animated the civil war—among them the legacy of colonialism, ethnic rivalries and resentment of the country's rulers, who have always come from the country's south—have not dissipated. The theater of conflict has moved from brigandry to the ballot box, but the grievances remain the same.

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On my first full day in Mozambique, I braved the sultry heat to traverse Maputo on foot. The capital has a justified reputation as one of the more pleasant cities in Africa. Built on a bluff overlooking the Indian Ocean, Maputo's relation to the rest of Mozambique, one of the poorest countries in the world, has always been that of a rich distant uncle. The city enjoys a proximity to South Africa that makes it a center of commerce. (That was the reason the capital was moved there in the late 19th Century.) Its restaurants serve enormous grilled prawns, and its nightclubs stay open until early in the morning.

I walked along Maputo's wide, European-style avenues, escaping the sun in the shade of flowering trees. The streets are still named for communist luminaries like Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin and Kim Il Sung, but the stores along them sell Finnish cell phones and Japanese stereos. It was election time, and everywhere I looked—on posters pasted to walls or tacked to telephone poles, emblazoned on the t-shirts of taxi drivers—I saw the same image, an ear of corn superimposed over an African drum, over a bright red background. It was the symbol of Frelimo.

But on this day, at least, I was more interested in the past than the present. I was looking for the notorious Vila Algarve.

The villa, when I found it, was a bit worse for wear. Windows were missing, railings along its balconies were rusted, an ugly corrugated metal fence had been erected around it to keep out intruders. But it still had an air of dignity. Intricate blue-tile friezes adorning its façade were still intact, as was the eloborate archway that once led onto the mansion's grounds.

In its day, the villa had been one of the most feared places in Mozambique. It was the headquarters of the Portuguese secret police, known as the PIDE. It was here that Mozambicans who dared speak out in favor of independence were taken to be tortured or killed.

Of all Africa's colonizers, the Portuguese are generally considered the worst. "To refer to Portugal's colonial history as disgraceful would be to give Lisbon the benefit of the doubt," writes journalist David Lamb in his book *The Africans*. "Portugal stood for all the evils of colonialism and none of the good. It took but did not give. It milked its two largest African colonies, Angola and Mozambique, as dry as a dead cow and bequeathed them nothing but the guarantee of economic disaster."

Mozambique was given to Portugal in the 1890s, as part of the great continental carving-up known as the Scramble for Africa. Portugal's claim to Mozambique dated back to that country's brief golden age, in the exploratory 15th century. But by the time Africa was divided up, Portugal's glory days were long over. Wretchedly poor itself, the mother country decided to address its consider-

Election graffiti adorns the metal fence surrounding the Vila Algarve, a crumbling architectural treasure that was once home to the feared Portuguese secret police.

able social discontents by shipping its impoverished, its misfits and its malcontents to sunny Mozambique. These settlers, many of whom arrived penniless and illiterate, took all the good jobs. Blacks were banned from participating in trade and subjected to forced labor laws.

Things got only worse in the late 1920s, when the fascist dictator Antonio Salazar took power in Portugal. Salazar ruled for more than 50 years. In the 1950s and 1960s, when other European powers were looking for ways to divest themselves of their colonies, Portugal's dictator tightened his grip. The torture chambers at the Vila Algarve stayed busy.

In 1962, a group of Mozambican exiles founded Frelimo in the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam. Two years later, on September 25, 1964, a group of about a dozen Frelimo guerillas crossed the border from Tanzania and attacked the northern town of Chai. They killed the Portuguese *chefe do posto*, who was seated on the front porch of his house, along with about six other colonial administrators. Then they stole away, back over the border. This attack marked the beginning of Mozambique's independence struggle, and today, virtually every town in Mozambique has an Avenida 25 de Setembro.

My walk took me along Maputo's Avenida 25 de Setembro, down to the waterfront, where stood the ruins of a fort originally built by the Dutch, who were also active explorers in this area of Africa. Turning back north, I walked up to the city's rather patchy botanical gardens, outside of which stood a statue of Samora Machel, the rebel leader who became Mozambique's first president.

The statue depicts Machel in military uniform, one hand on his hip, the other raised, his index finger shaking, as if he is being caught in mid-lecture. It seemed an appropriate pose for a leader who tried by sheer force of personality to remake Mozambique into a socialist utopia—and nearly destroyed the country in the process.

I continued my walking tour along Avenida Ho Chi Minh, passing a shopping mall, and made my way to the weathered building that housed the Museum of the Revolution. The museum's exhibits contained the dusty relics of a long war: archival photos of happy rebels marching, glass cases filled with boots and machine guns.

Frelimo's war against the Portuguese lasted ten bloody years. Finally, in 1974, Portuguese military officers, disgusted by mounting casualties in a war so far from home, overthrew Salazar. In a ceremony held after midnight on June 25, 1975, in a heavy rainstorm, Portugal formally handed power to Machel, a former nurse who had become Frelimo's military leader.

Dressed in military fatigues, Mozambique's new president spoke of establishing "a people's democratic state, in which all patriotic strata under the leadership of peasants and workers engage themselves in the struggle

The Avenida 25 de Setembro in Mocuba, a northern town. Everywhere you look in Mozambique, from the national seal to murals painted on the walls of recreational centers, you see representations of machine guns, the legacy of years of militant socialism and civil war. This gun fetish seems to be on the wane, though. These days, Frelimo's campaign symbol consists of an ear of corn superimposed over an African drum.

to destroy the vestiges of colonialism and imperialist dependence." No mention of elections: Machel had made it clear in negotiations that only Frelimo would rule post-independence Mozambique.

The entrance to the first floor of the Museum of the Revolution is dominated by a gigantic oil painting, purporting to depict the scene in downtown Maputo on Independence Day. In the finest agitprop tradition, it shows Machel marching down an avenue, a phalanx of smiling Frelimo soldiers behind him, with the city's skyscrapers rising in the background. People along the parade route are dancing; children are running out to the waving Machel, offering him flowers.

The joy, however, was not to last for long. Within a few months, war would break out again—and this time the enemy, though supported by outsiders, would be Mozambicans themselves.

* * *

The morning after my walk through Maputo, I woke

up early, packed my backpack, and made my way to the hotel where Eva Sandberg was staying. Eva was a family friend. We had gotten in touch a few weeks before because she had just bought a pickup truck and needed someone to share the long drive north to her home on Ilha de Moçambique, a tiny island that was once the colonial capital.

A bubbly woman with short blond hair, Eva is in her 50s and full of interesting stories. Among other pursuits, over the years she had worked at a Swedish newspaper, had owned a disco on a Danish island, and had traveled through Central America and Mongolia. Later in life, she had taken a job running foreign-aid programs in the Cape Verde islands, another former Portuguese colony off the west coast of Africa, which had led her to a similar job in Mozambique.

The two of us had coffee at the hotel and then went to pick up our third travel companion, Abdullah. He was a Mozambican friend of Eva's who had come to Maputo to buy some stereo equipment for a disco he was opening in Ilha de Moçambique. Eva had promised him a ride home.

We picked Abdullah up near an old bullfight ring that has been converted into an automotive repair center. At a house nearby, we loaded Abdullah's boxes of stereo equipment onto the truck. Then we set off north.

Outside town, the usual African urban sprawl—gas stations and open-air markets—dissipated, and we abruptly found ourselves in another world. We passed vast groves of gnarled cashew nut trees, their leaves tinged with red, and clusters of thatch-roofed huts. The high-rise apartment blocks of Maputo seemed very far away.

About an hour outside of town, we came upon a stretch of crumbling masonry buildings. They had once been the shops and homes of Portuguese merchants, but today, were nothing but deadened shells. Looking inside one shop, through the empty hole where once had been a door, I could see weeds growing up among chunks of concrete. Through my travels in Mozambique, I would see many similar ghost towns. They were all that remained of a disappeared world.

Most black Mozambicans welcomed Frelimo's sudden ascension to power. Portuguese settlers, on the other hand, were petrified that the new black leaders would, in the words of one merchant quoted in David Lamb's book, "rape our wives and eat our daughters." After independence, roughly 90 percent of the Portuguese fled. On their way out, they destroyed what they could not take with them, including such things as tractors and farm equipment.

The Portuguese exodus left Mozambique in terrible shape at the precise moment Samora Machel was about to embark on his plans to transform the society. As journalist William Finnegan recounts in his book about Mozambique, *A Complicated War*, the country at independence had just six economists, two agronomists and no geologists. There were three lawyers and no judges. Fewer than a thousand black Mozambicans had graduated high school. Just ten percent knew how to read.

Machel signed aid agreements with the Soviet Union and Cuba, and immediately embarked on a series of ambitious projects aimed at rejuvenating the economy and remaking society along socialist lines. The government launched crash-course programs to teach people to read and to train doctors to work in the countryside. Other ideas were ill-conceived. A rural collectivization program, which was supposed to quadruple agricultural production, was a disaster. Before long the country was producing only a fraction of the food it needed to keep its people from starving.

Most damaging over the long term may have been Machel's efforts to create a "New Man" in Mozambique. Frelimo would sweep away all vestiges of traditional African culture, replacing them with the structures of an enlightened socialist state. Local chiefs, who possessed great authority in their villages and thus represented a threat to Frelimo's total control, were deposed. Polygamy was outlawed. All forms of religion, including traditional

A derelict mill along the roadside in Zambézia Province. Mozambique is full of such ghost towns—places that looked like they'd been hit by a neutron bomb 20 years ago. In a way, they were. First the Portuguese left at the time of independence. Then, during the civil war, the old Portuguese buildings were a target for Renamo rebels. Anyone who could moved away to secure towns or wretched refugee camps.

A giant painting of Samora Machel, Mozambique's first president, stands at the entrance to the first floor of the Museum of the Revolution. A visionary and autocrat, Machel died in a plane crash in 1986. Many Mozambicans remember him fondly today—he may have been cruel, but he was not corrupt.

animist rituals still practiced by many Mozambicans, were denounced as *obscurantismo*.

Machel was a charismatic leader and a rousing speaker, and he is still much-adored in Mozambique. He was a frugal man, Mozambicans like to point out, and in his time there was little corruption. Thing would have turned out differently, many suggest, if Machel had not died in a mysterious plane crash in 1986.

But Machel was also a dictator, and his regime could be as arbitrary and inhumane as any totalitarian regime. The government created a Revolutionary Military Tribunal to try political prisoners and set up reeducation camps modeled on Vietnam's. In 1983, upset by the number of people he saw loitering around Maputo's streets, Machel ordered the police to round up the unemployed, who were deported to collective farms in the north. Some 50,000 people were uprooted, many of them simply on a police officer's whim. These forced farmers, Finnegan points out, would provide an ideal pool of recruits for the rebels of Renamo.

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Our second day on the road, we entered central Mozambique—the start of Renamo country. The national highway wound up the coast, past bleached beaches and azure ocean, and then moved inland. The land flattened and sea breeze died away. We drove past fields of cassava and corn and thick-trunked baobab trees, through grasslands where huge swarms of white butterflies danced about.

Traffic had thinned. Occasionally we'd come upon a little blue pickup truck crawling along the road, with a dozen people on back—sitting, crouching, or standing with one hand against the cab to steady themselves, crammed in together like Manhattanites on the 4 Train.

We crossed the Save River, which the dry season had reduced to a stagnant stream running through a wide riverbed. From there, the terrain became desiccated scrubland. We drove for a half-hour at a time without seeing a single hut. Every so often we would see some slight sign of life: a man would jump out of the bush at the side of the road, waving a chicken at us by one of its hind legs, or we would pass an old mission church. Or a solitary village would appear. Often, outside one of the huts, a flagpole flew a familiar red banner: the Frelimo flag.

Frelimo today claims 1.4 million dues-paying members—close to ten percent of the population—and 30,000 cells across the country. Some joined out of genuine gratitude for the independence struggle or real enthusiasm for socialist ideals. Others signed up because the party provided the best way to gain access to government services and the only route to power.

People generally joined Renamo because they had to. A group of armed men might come to your village

one night, burn down all the huts, take you captive, and, if you were a man (or, sometimes, a child) force you to take up arms with them. According to one estimate, 90 percent of Renamo's troops were kidnapped into the army in this way.

As I drove along, I kept an eye on the needle of the gas gauge, which was sinking fast. A small town appeared, but the only gas station was long abandoned. We negotiated with a couple kids who filled our tank from jerrycans of diesel they had siphoned from some sleeping truck driver the night before.

Driving through this desolate countryside, I thought to myself that it was little wonder Renamo had eluded the army for so many years. The sheer vastness of the country was stunning; its empty spaces seemed an ideal place to disappear. During the war, Mozambique's army numbered only 30,000 men.

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On the third day of our drive, we set off early from Chimoio, a town near the Zimbabwean border where we had spent the night. We were hoping to make it to the Zambezi River by noon. We had heard there might be some problems with the crossing. One of the two ferries had recently sunk, which meant that if there was any problem with the remaining ferry, as there often was, we would be stuck on the south side of the river.

Along the road north toward Mount Gorongosa, girls in colorful sarongs walked, carrying umbrellas to ward off the sun. It was before 10 a.m., and already it was blazing hot.

As we neared Gorongosa, the terrain enlivened. Hills of naked rock rose up from the open plain. Then, the road wound into a forest. The temperature cooled noticeably. After so much brown countryside, I was heartened to see the color green again.

We saw the sign for Gorongosa National Park and, having made good time so far, decided to turn inside and have a quick look around. The dirt road into the park ran beneath a canopy of trees. The drive was shady and pleasant but, I thought, eerily lifeless.

In the old days, Gorongosa was known as one of the best game parks in southern Africa; hunters came from all over the world to shoot its many lions. But the war destroyed the park, as it did so much else of Mozambique. Gorongosa was a Renamo stronghold; the rebel army's headquarters were in the area. There had been much fighting, and the area was heavily mined. Rebels poached much of the park's game.

Through much of the civil war, Renamo was portrayed by outsiders as little more than a group of "armed bandits" (as the government invariably referred to them), propped up by the white supremacist regimes who ruled two of Mozambique's neighbors, Rhodesia and South Africa. There was truth in this portrayal; certainly Renamo had started out as a puppet army. Rhodesia originally assembled and armed a collection of Mozambican refugees, many of them former Portuguese soldiers and Frelimo deserters, and sent them over the border. After majority rule came to Rhodesia and the country was renamed Zimbabwe, South Africa took its place as Renamo's benefactor. All along, the aim was to destabilize Mozambique, which was providing safe haven to Robert Mugabe's guerrillas, who were fighting Rhodesia's white government, and support to the African National Congress, which was agitating against South Africa's.

However, if Renamo owed its creation to southern African *realpolitik*, it managed to persevere by capitalizing on very real resentments. Frelimo's top membership came almost entirely from the south of the country, and all three of its leaders—Eduarado Mondlane, Machel, and President Joaquim Chissano, who took over after Machel's death in 1986—have hailed from the same southern district, Gaza. Many people in the rest of the country felt that Portuguese colonialism had merely been replaced by southern domination.

Renamo gained notoriety for its massacres—which were not indiscriminate, and mainly committed in the south—and its practice of recruiting by abduction. But the rebels' lousy reputation obscured the fact that many Mozambicans, while perhaps not approving of all the kill-

A Frelimo flag flies in front of a hut in a desolate part of the central province of Sofala. The party's saturation of the country is wide, if not deep. In recent elections, Renamo has given the party a run for its money, shocking many who remember its history of brutal violence against civilians.

ing and pillaging, secretly cheered their resistance to the southern clique that ruled the country. Renamo, writes Giovanni Carbone of the London School of Economics, "became an outspoken defender of traditional rules and leadership, of religious beliefs and of (especially non-southerner) rural communities—in other words, the protector of all those who had been penalized or marginalized under Frelimo's rule."

The end of the war didn't do much to alleviate these historical resentments. A Mozambican I met told a story one night that illustrated this rather starkly. This Mozambican was from the south, but he had worked in the north of the country for years. One night a few years ago, he said, he was out to dinner in Maputo, when he ran into an old acquaintance, a Frelimo man. They had not seen each other in some time. The Frelimo man asked my friend where he'd been. My friend replied he was working up north, in Caia.

"Caia?" the Frelimo man replied, disbelievingly. "That's the end of the world."

"That was when I knew Frelimo was finished," my Mozambican friend told me. The party leadership, in his view, had become disconnected from the country outside Maputo, the rural expanse that is still home to 80 percent of the population. A place like Caia—it might as well have been another country to Mozambique's well-fed leadership.

Caia, as it happens, is on the south side of the Zambezi River, right where the ferry crosses. We reached there a little after noon, and I had to admit, it *did* look a little like the end of the world. On the approach to the river, you pass a collapsed railroad bridge, sabotaged long ago by Renamo. At the ferry crossing there was a desultory collection of reed huts—the African version of a truck stop. Out on the riverbank, a lone man was washing his shirt next to a herd of thirsty goats. People who didn't care to wait for the ferry were crossing the swift river in small canoes.

The ferry wasn't much more than a wooden platform three cars wide and two cars deep, with a motor. In addition to our truck, the ferry would be carrying another pickup, a panel truck, a small passenger bus, an enormous tractor trailer loaded with timber, and 30 or so human passengers. I crossed my fingers and put my trust in the law of percentages—it seemed unlikely that another ferry would sink so soon.

The ferry lumbered across the river. Finally, with a jolt, it beached itself on the far riverbank. We had entered northern Mozambique.

* * *

Up north, everyone was waiting for rain. But the dark clouds had yet to appear, and people were starting to wonder what was keeping them. On Ilha de Moçambique,

A street in Ilha de Moçambique. Founded by Portuguese explorers at the end of the 15th Century, the island subsequently became the colonial capital. In 1991, it was declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Despite the worldwide recognition of its architectural treasures, the island fell into a state of disrepair during the war, and is only slowly recovering.

the local conspiracy theory held that the salt merchants on the mainland, who harvest their crop from evaporating pools of seawater, had cast spells to hold off the rainy season. The longer it stayed dry, the more salt.

It was dusk as we approached Ilha after four days of driving, and the road was illuminated by billowing brushfires. People were going hungry while they waited for the rains to come, Abdullah explained. They had set the fires to smoke out bush rats, which they would kill and eat. He pointed out the men with machetes standing watch at the edge of the flames.

Not so long ago, Eva told me, we would have never dared to drive this road at dusk, or even in the middle of the day. The rebels were fond of setting ambushes along the Ilha. People who had to go there traveled in military convoys, or flew.

A little after nightfall, we dropped Abdullah off at his house on the mainland. Then Eva and I drove the short distance to the narrow bridge that led to the island.

Slowly, we crossed the channel, which is three kilometers wide and shallow enough that people walk across it at low tide.

Ilha de Moçambique is an ancient place. Vasco de Gama, looking for trade routes to India, landed on the island in 1498, and for several hundred years it served as the capital of Portuguese East Africa, as Mozambique was known in colonial times. The tiny, vaulted Chapel of Nossa Senhora de Baluarte, built in 1522 on the island's northern tip, is the oldest European building in the southern hemisphere, according to the *Lonely Planet* travel guide. The north end of the island, known as Stone Town, is famed for its old merchants' mansions, built in an Arab-influenced architectural style.

Ever since the 19th century, when the Suez Canal opened, the slave trade was banned and the colonial capital was moved south to Maputo, Ilha's importance has been declining. Today it has the decadent air of a place that knows time has passed it by.

It was only recently, though, that Ilha began to decay physically. As usual, the war is largely to blame. Renamo never made it to Ilha, so the population swelled with refugees seeking a haven from the rebels. By the early 1990s, more than 20,000 people were living on a piece of land roughly three kilometers long and three city blocks wide. They crammed into small concrete houses on the poorer south end of the island and squatted in Stone Town's historic buildings. Much of the old Ilha was dismantled: Windows were looted and sold to buy food; century-old ceiling beams were burned as firewood.

The bridge deposited us at the south end of the island, the poor side. Today, some refugees have moved back to the mainland but the island is still terribly overcrowded. It was a Friday evening, and the narrow alleys of the south end were filled with people. Some were out enjoying a weekend night, others were dozing on mats—it was too hot to sleep inside.

We were staying on the north end of the island. Eva, a relatively new arrival, hadn't started renovating her house. We were putting up at the home of a friend of hers who was out of town, another Swedish aid worker.

In recent years, word has gotten out that unrestored houses on Ilha can be had for a few thousand dollars as fixer-uppers, and the island has become home to a small colony of affluent Europeans. Two Italians, one a doctor and the other an architect, have lately opened bed-and-breakfasts, hoping to capitalize on a hoped-for tourism boom that may or may not materialize.

Eva's friend's house, like all of these newly-restored residences, was fabulous. Painted canary yellow and fronted by a wide colonnade, it had had high ceilings and a verandah that looked out on the channel, and was decorated in tropical-chic style: exposed wooden ceiling beams, muted colors and batik tapestries. But reminders of the island's generally dilapidated condition are never far away in Ilha. Just

Fishing dhows along the beach in Ilha de Moçambique. The island, just three kilometers long and a few blocks wide, contains the extremes of African life: On its north end, historic houses and tourist hotels; on its south end, shanty towns.

across the street from where we were staying, an old corniced prison was home to a family of squatters. At night, through paneless windows, I could see their cooking fires flickering against its smoke-stained ceiling.

Besides the suspicious absence of rain, the main topic of conversation on Ilha was the result of the local mayoral election. The vote had been held just before we arrived, and had been attended by all the tumult and revelry that usually surrounds African elections. For days beforehand, Frelimo had staged marches through Ilha, loud shows of strength set to the beat of African drums. Its posters were plastered everywhere. Yet Renamo, which ran a comparatively low-key campaign, had won. The former rebels' victory had shocked everyone, Frelimo supporters most of all.

"For the first few days," one Ilha resident said over dinner our first night there, "everyone was just walking around like zombies."

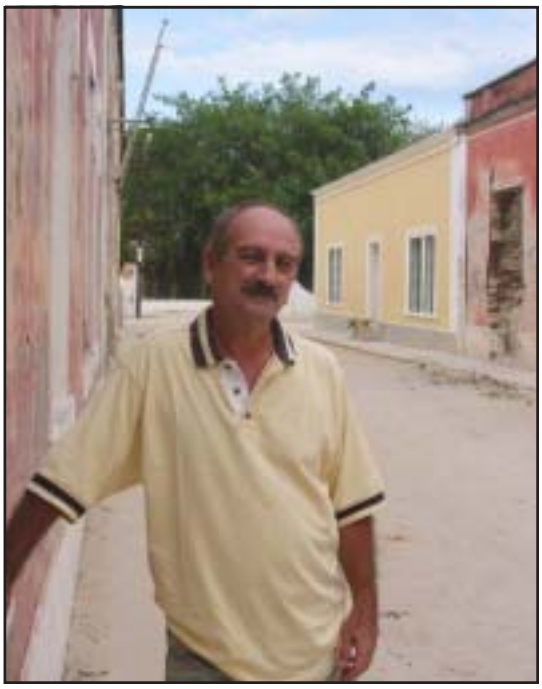
Ilha has plenty of problems, chief among them overpopulation and a lack of running water. In my time on the island, I saw women bathing children in the alleys of the south side from small plastic pails, and girls washing clothes up at the old stone fort built by the Portuguese, using water from the centuries-old cistern. Residents also use the beach as a toilet, which has a dampening effect on tourism. In addition to the island itself, the municipality also encompasses several villages on the mainland, where two thirds of its population of 46,000 reside. Living conditions there are even more atrocious.

Yet during the election, neither party showed much serious intent about making life better in Ilha de Moçambique. Frelimo produced a nine-page pamphlet detailing its platform, which included rehabilitating the bridge, building more schools, planting trees, and picking up garbage piles that accumulate along the island's scenic streets. Many voters sensibly questioned why the ruling party hadn't been able to accomplish any of these things in the previous 28 years.

Frelimo's candidate, a fat-faced apparatchik, had until recently been in charge of a house-building program funded by a Swiss foreign-aid agency. Everyone knew the project had been a boondoggle, and that the Swiss financiers had pulled the plug on suspicion that most of the money was being diverted into someone's pockets.

Renamo produced a one-page election manifesto, which attacked Frelimo for promoting corruption and decadence. "There is no development," it read in part. "The children don't respect their parents. There is no morality." The manifesto promised to fight crime, and to clean up both the government and the environment. But it was silent on specifics.

Renamo's mayoral candidate, a diminutive man, was best known around town as the former toll collector on the bridge. He had once been a Frelimo cadre, and it was even said he studied spycraft in the Soviet Union for a time. Nonetheless, most people took him to be more Mr. Bean than James Bond.



"People are fed up with this party, Frelimo," said Jorge Simões, a restaurateur who ran as an independent candidate for the mayoralty of Ilha de Moçambique. He put up a spirited fight but lost to the former rebels of Renamo.

Ilha's election was a bit different from most of those in Mozambique, however, in that there was a strong independent candidate on the ballot. His name was Jorge Simões.

* * *

Simões is a white Mozambican, one of Portuguese ancestry. He had come to Ilha in the early 1990s, when the war was still on, for a job in the international-aid industry. But if he came to do good, he ended up doing quite well. In the mid-1990s, he opened a restaurant in Stone Town catering to a tourist and expatriate crowd. He was a big man on a small island, and popular, as restaurateurs tend to be.

For the election, Simões created his own political party, called *Unidos Pela Ilha* ("United for the Island"), with a symbol—a confabulation of a Catholic steeple, a Muslim minaret, and a thatched hut—that was designed to suggest the proverbial big tent. Like the other parties, he proposed building more housing on the mainland to reduce overpopulation on the island, and improving the water and sewage system, to end "this problem of people shitting on the beaches," as he put it. But his strongest selling point was what he was not.

"I am not Frelimo, I am not Renamo," Simões told me when we met one afternoon. "I am not Muslim. I was

baptized, but I'm not really a Catholic. I'm not supporting Sporting or Benfica." (Portuguese soccer, broadcast on satellite TV, is popular in Mozambique. Sporting and Benfica are the league's two traditional powers.)

A few days before, I had left a message for Simões with the manager of his restaurant, Relíquias, and he had agreed to get together with me at his home, a faded pink-painted building near the island's Catholic Cathedral and *Tribunal*. His housekeeper had let me in, leading me through a long corridor to his boss' office in the rear of the house, and offering me a wicker chair. After a few minutes' wait, Simões had appeared, pulling on a blue t-shirt as he walked into the room.

He was a deeply-tanned man, with thick eyebrows and a bushy moustache. He spoke in clear but accented English, sometimes substituting gestures (a waved hand, a stuck-out chin) for words in a way that seemed distinctly southern European. As he spoke, he sipped a glass of yellow cashew juice, a bitter and (yes) vaguely nutty-tasting drink. He smoked one Peter Stuyvesant Light after another.

"I love very much this island," he said, by way of explaining how he came to run for mayor. "I decided to spend the rest of my life in Ilha. This is my house. I own it. I have my restaurant. And I have plans for the island."

Simões, 52, is a third-generation Mozambican. One of his grandfathers was a soldier, the other a sailor. His father worked for the colony's national bank. He was born in Maputo, but the family moved north when he was young. He grew up playing with black kids and speaking the local African language. He actually spent part of his childhood on Ilha, where his father lived and worked for a time, and has childhood memories of days spent swimming off the island's beaches.

I asked Simões why he stuck it out in Mozambique when most other whites left. He said he never really questioned whether he belonged. "For me, Portugal, it is a foreign country," he said.

In the late 1960s, Simões went to Maputo to attend college. It was a time of ferment; the independence war was just beginning. Like a lot of white kids his age, Simões sympathized with Frelimo. They clandestinely gathered on campus to listen to Frelimo radio broadcasts.

"I was a hippie," he explained. Some friends of his had been drafted into the Portuguese army, to be killed or maimed in a fight they saw as pointless and immoral. Simões also knew firsthand the brutality of colonialism. Some of his family members owned plantations, where black Mozambicans worked in conditions of near-slavery. He had seen colonial administrators render terrible beatings for minuscule offenses.

Simões left the university to try to join Frelimo in Tanzania. It was unsafe to try to go through Africa—some friends of his, Portuguese army deserters, had been captured in Zambia and turned over to the secret police back home. So he went to Europe. He got sidetracked there, and ended up spending the war in Belgium and Italy, dodging the Portuguese draft.

After independence, Simões returned to Mozambique just as all other Portuguese were leaving. Hardly any schoolteachers were left in the country, so he was quickly pressed into service teaching at an agricultural school, despite the fact he didn't have a university degree. A few years later, when he was still in his mid-20s, he was put in charge of a school in Maputo. After that, he became an education-ministry official.

In the mid-1980s, Simões was made the director of education for the northern province of Zambézia. The civil war was at its height at the time. Renamo's aim was to cut Mozambique in half and make a new country, with its capital in the port city of Quelimane. Quelimane happened to be where Simões was stationed. The area was under constant assault; a teacher-training center not far from the city was attacked three times in the course of his stay.

"I could not go anywhere," he recalled, chuckling. "For one month I slept completely dressed … with my boots nearby."

The rebels weren't the only danger. Once, just as he was about to depart Zambézia, Simões went with some friends to say goodbye to a friend of his, an old schoolteacher. His car was stopped by a group of Tanzanian soldiers, who were stationed in Mozambique to help the government troops. They thought Simões, a white man, had to be a South African mercenary. "They said we were Renamo commandos," he recalled. "They beat me, they almost shot us. They broke my nose and two ribs." Only the serendipitous intervention of Simões' schoolteacher friend saved his life.

He arrived in Ilha in 1992 to work on a project teaching people basic trades, to be masons, plumbers or shipwrights. He loved it and he stayed, selling his house in Maputo. He bought an old building in Stone Town, which had once been a bank and more recently a fish market. He opened up Relíquias there.

Simões, a man of cosmopolitan tastes, renovated the fish market in a deliberately unfinished style. On the walls, he hung black-and-white pictures of Stone Town in the old days. One, from the 1960s, shows the square on which the restaurant is located looking prim and well-kept. It makes an implicit contrast to the present-day scene: The building neighboring Relíquias is falling down, and out front there was a heaping pile of trash—a product of Frelimo's indolent garbage-collecting—which scavengers often pick through.

"People are fed up with the party, Frelimo," Simões

told me. The trash on the streets was just part of it. "There is so much corruption, so much violence. You are not safe. The police rob you." In November 2000, a friend of Simões', the journalist Carlos Cardoso, was gunned down on a Maputo street after reporting on the shady business dealings of high-level Frelimo figures. At trial, Cardoso's assassins claimed that President Chissano's son gave the order for the killing, but he has never been arrested.

By that time, Simões' youthful support of Frelimo had long since turned into disgust. As for Renamo, he just rolled his eyes. "Renamo, I don't know its program."

Simões ran his campaign on a shoestring budget. He and a group of volunteers mounted stereo speakers on his pickup truck and drove it over to the mainland to spread the word. He challenged the other candidates to debates, which they declined.

The election itself was marred by the usual skullduggery. On the day of the election, Frelimo sent a delegation of supporters to areas thought to be Renamo strongholds to "fix" the vote. Hundreds of older women, allegedly bussed in from the countryside outside the boundaries the municipality of Ilha, came onto the island to vote for Renamo, the guardians of tradition. In one precinct, Renamo received 70 more votes than there were registered voters.

In the end, Simões got more than 1,000 votes, about 14 percent—not bad for an independent, but considerably less than he and others had expected. Renamo's candidate won with about 4,000 votes.

Simões treated Renamo's victory philosophically. "In the end … I don't know," he said, with a jut of his chin. "An independent in the heads of the people … It was a short time."

The problem with Mozambican politics, he said, is that it is a zero-sum game. "If you are not Frelimo, you must be Renamo. If you vote for Renamo you vote for Renamo because you expect that now that Renamo is in power you will all be civil servants." Simões was obviously biased, but his cynical assessment of Renamo's aims was repeated by many other residents of the island I met. "These are just revenge-seekers," said one.

"What they offer," Simões continued, "they don't say 'If we govern, we are going to be different.'… What they say is that now it's our time to do the same. Our time will come … to have good cars and houses and so on."

* * *

Simões had a point. When I first came to Africa, the question nagged at me: Why do politics here tend to be so bitter, and wars so brutal? Time and again, in Uganda and elsewhere, my conversations have led me back to one crucial difference between African society and my own. Here, the margin between wealth and poverty is scant. There are no K Street jobs for losing politicians, no CNN gigs for discarded generals. Winning means you

Outside Renamo's headquarters, supporters hung around all day, celebrating their victory and waiting to hear how the spoils of victory were going to be split.

get rich. Losing means you go hungry.

One sunny morning, I walked to the south end of Ilha, down sandy streets speckled with dried mango pits, past the hawkers waving fish and the dhows bobbing along the waterfront, to Renamo's headquarters. The bare front room of the party's offices was packed with people, most of them traditionally-dressed women, who sat cross-legged on the floor. The crowd spilled out the door, where men were loitering, presumably waiting to learn who was getting what job in the new city government. The atmosphere was loud and convivial.

"We are having a *festa*," said one woman, who wore a vibrantly-colored sarong and Muslim headscarf.

A few blocks down the road, at Frelimo's headquarters, the scene was different. The ruling party's quarters were considerably grander, if faded, like most every other building on Ilha. The red timbers of the ceiling were buckling, and there were cracks in the plaster walls. The place seemed empty. I shouted, but no one appeared. Up a wide staircase, I found a meeting room decorated with a red flag and a large portrait of Machel. It was disordered, its chairs knocked over, as if everyone had cleared out in a hurry.

I poked around a little more, finally locating a group of four somber Frelimo officials in a back room, where a woman was cooking them lunch over a charcoal fire.

Momad Ibrahim, the local party's portly secretary for organization, blustered on for a while about fraud at the polls, complaining that the election had been swung by bumpkins from the countryside. Abdul Ali, another party official, asserted that the former rebels had scared people into voting their way. "Renamo says that if people don't vote for them, they will start the war again," he claimed.

But their protests seemed perfunctory. The Frelimo loyalists had the crumpled postures and sullen expressions of defeated men. In Ilha de Moçambique, at least, the party seemed to be a spent force, a shell of the grand thing it once was—as much a ruin as any of the crumbling limestone masonry façades along the streets of this vestigial town.

Its victory in Ilha aside, Renamo didn't have much reason to celebrate the local elections, either. Whereas many analysts had expected the party to sweep the north, it won only five municipalities, and lost in several places where it had trounced Frelimo in the 1999 presidential elections.

I'll leave it to others who better know this intriguing nation to predict whether Mozambique will make it in the end. Still, seeing what transpired on this one small isle, during this one slight moment in time, made me think that Mozambique had advanced in at least one way—and no small way it was. Frelimo did hand over power, however grudgingly, based on the will of the voters, however few they were. Simões and others might be justifiably cynical in believing that the new rulers were likely to be just as bad as the old ones. But there *were* new rulers, selected without resort to bombing bridges or burning villages or planting land mines. There seemed to be a basic acceptance of a fundamental rule of democracy, which is that there are winners and losers, and that losing means you wait 'til next time.

There were long faces at Frelimo's headquarters after their party lost the local elections. (l-r) Sumail Ahmad, Abdul Ali, Abdul Rahman, and Momad Ibrahim, the party secretary in charge of organization.

That day at Frelimo headquarters, I asked Ibrahim what he was planning to do now that his party had lost. He gave a stoic shrug.

"We are democrats," he said. "We will accept the result." ❑

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With a B.A. in History from Yale in 1998 and a Master's degree in China Studies and International Economics from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Alex in China, focused on the impact of a new government and a new membership in the World Trade Organization on Chinese citizens, institutions and regions both inside and far from the capital.

Cristina Merrill (2004 - 2006) • **ROMANIA**

Born in Bucharest, Cristina moved from Romania to the United States with her mother and father when she was 14. Learning English (but retaining her Romanian), she majored in American History at Harvard College and there became captain of the women's tennis team. She received a Master's degree in Journalism from New York University in 1994, worked for several U.S. publications from *Adweek* to the *New York Times*, and will now spend two years in Romania watching it emerge from the darkness of the Ceauscescu regime into the presumed light of membership in the European Union and NATO.

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A former staff writer for the *New York Observer* and a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the Washington Bureau of *Newsday*, Andrew is spending two years in east-central Africa, watching, waiting and reporting the possibility that the much-anticipated "African Renaissance" might begin with the administration of President Yoweri Museveni. Andrew won a B.A. in Government from Georgetown (minor: Theology) in 1997 after having spent a semester at Charles University in Prague, where he served as an intern for *Velvet* magazine and later traveled, experienced and wrote about the conflict in the Balkans.

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Having completed a Cornell Ph.D. in International Relations , Matt is spending two years as a Phillips Talbot South Asia Fellow looking into the securitization and development of the Indian economy.

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A former research assistant for the Rand Corporation, Matt is spending two years looking into proposals, plans and realities of regional integration (and disintegration) along the Mekong River, from China to the sea at Vietnam. With a B.A. in liberal arts from Sarah Lawrence and an M.A. from Harvard in East Asian studies (as well as a year-long Blakemore Fellowship in Thai language studies) Matt is also examining long- and short-term conflicts in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.

Jill Winder (July 2004 - 2006) • **GERMANY**

With a B.A. in politics from Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA and a Master's degree in Art Curating from Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, Jill is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at Germany through the work, ideas and viewpoints of its contemporary artists. Before six months of intensive study of the German language in Berlin, she was a Thomas J. Watson Fellow looking at post-communist art practice and the cultural politics of transition in the former Soviet bloc (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine).

James G. Workman (January 2002 - 2004) • **SOUTHERN AFRICA**

A policy strategist on national restoration initiatives for Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt from 1998 to 2000, Jamie is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at southern African nations (South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and, maybe, Zimbabwe) through their utilization and conservation of fresh-water supplies. A Yale graduate (History; 1990) who spent his junior year at Oxford, Jamie won a journalism fellowship at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies and wrote for the *New Republic* and *Washington Business Journal* before his years with Babbitt. Since then he has served as a Senior Advisor for the World Commission on Dams in Cape Town, South Africa.

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