

The subsequent narrative of the flight across the Botswana border must surely be a prototype for many subsequent descriptions of comparable episodes which though no less true are not somehow as believable as this one. The writing is economic and yet tells so much about the mixture of sickening fear, social dislocation, geographical disorientation, and occasional bathos which accompanied the Bernsteins on their lonely exodus. They lose their way, searching for the border fence, Hilda's feet hurt, they are given porridge and water at an impoverished Sechuana homestead, and finally travel to their first haven in a ramshackle cart drawn by two tired horses. The people are kind enough,

but listless, they inhabit a different world with their own problems of a different order of magnitude. The Bernsteins arrive in Lobatsi, 'two streets that meet to form a T', small, dusty and parochial, but nevertheless the spying capital of South Africa, inhabited by incompetent colonial buffoons, spiky-legged gym-slipped school-children, intimidated shopkeepers, and South African policemen in very plain clothes.

Suddenly we move from the territory of Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* to the flyblown scenarios of Graham Greene's third world tragicomedies. Once again, the Bernsteins are members of a community, some of whose members are portrayed in richly detailed

cameos. I had forgotten, from my reading of the first edition, Bernstein's sketch of Fish Keitsing, the Robin Hood of Newclare, and making his acquaintance again would, by itself, have made it worth re-reading *The World That Was Ours*. Maybe it needed a novelist's imagination to capture Mr Keitsing properly, for historians have paid him only cursory attention. But Hilda Bernstein's book is not a novel, though it reads like a very good one; the people and the place exist — the text is the product of acute observation, though as in fiction the images and symbols and people in the landscape are chosen with calculated precision.

The publication of a new and revised edition of *The World That Was Ours* is a

welcome event. I am not sure that the additions have substantially improved the text and I remember more autobiographical detail in the original which I think should have been retained. But these are minor reservations. The events which it describes have now become an international legend. Legends are all too often peopled by gods and supermen. Hilda Bernstein's book reduces the legend of Rivonia to human proportions and restores to it a sense of tragedy. As a consequence the leading characters once again become capable of moving us with their frailties and strengths. □

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An Interview with Miriam Tlali

Cecily Lockett spoke to Miriam Tlali, author of the novels *Muriel at Metropolitan* and *Amandla*, in Johannesburg on 4 September 1988. A new collection of short stories entitled *Soweto Stories* was published by Pandora Press in March this year — in South Africa it is called *Footsteps in the Quag* (David Philip)

You were the first black woman to publish a novel in South Africa, and as far as I know, you are still the only black woman novelist in South Africa. [Posing the question in this way, of course, excludes black writers like Bessie Head and Nonnie Jabavu. Ed] How do you account for this? Why are there no other black women writing? A novel is something you have to reflect on; you have to create it, you have to have characters, interplay of characters, it has to reflect what goes on in your society, and so on. For a black woman I don't think it is very easy unless you have complete peace inside, which is something that I strive very much to get. You have to analyse situations, and all that needs peace of mind and time. It needs a long time and you have to think about it. And you have to dream about it and black women do not have time to dream.

What about some of the social and economic obstacles that you have to overcome in order to be a writer?

Social obstacles are always linked to political and economic obstacles. You have to have material, you have to have typewriters, you have to read a lot. That also means that you have to have a lot of time — not that I've had a lot of time myself, or that I've read so much. When I wrote my first novel, *Muriel at Metropolitan* for instance, I had not read much. I had only read a bit when I was doing my B. A. at Wits and even that was interrupted by my lack of money and the political set-up, which made it impossible for me to do what my mother wanted me to do. So you see, all this is always linked to the political happenings in this country. Now, some of the obstacles I encountered: I finished writing the first novel, *Muriel*, in 1969, but it was only published in 1975, and even then too, very much expurgated. A lot of material was removed from it to make it acceptable to the white reader.

By whom?

By Ravan Press. Very little editing was done. It was presented the way I had written it, but the thing is, they just expurgated a lot of material from it, which they thought would not be acceptable. So the first version — the South African version — does not have all the right terms, the originality, that I had in

my manuscript. Only later on did Longman come forward to ask for the manuscript to publish it abroad — with a lot of errors in it, I'm afraid.

So are you happier with the Longman version?

Yes, certainly I am — except for the errors that I'm talking about, which are many, some of them very jarring. But I am happier with it because that is how I had written the book.

Although you are the only black woman novelist, I know of many black women who are involved in organizations with cultural sections where, as cultural workers, they produce performance poetry and drama. I'm thinking of the Cosatu poet, Nise Malange. Do you know her work?

No, I haven't had time to go to these places. The problem is always a financial one. A lot of the places I'd like to see I just read about in the papers, and that's as far as it goes. Most of the time I do not have the money, and most of these which appear in town are a bit awkward because then I have to drive back or get a lift back into Soweto, and it's very awkward for a black woman. And I still have my responsibilities at home, as a housewife.

How do you see your work, then, in comparison with this kind of performance work which is being done? How do you relate to these women, since you write novels and they perform?

You know, it's just that I'm inclined to deal with material that is much more time consuming — longer, like a novel. But I would very much like to write plays. I have written two plays already. One of them has been featured abroad, and translated into Dutch, but it has never been shown in this country. But I'm hoping it will be. So I have written plays, and I think plays are very important and very necessary for our readers because, as I said, most black people, especially women, do not have the time to sit and read novels and so on, and to think about them, whereas other sections of the population have. So it would be better to have something like a play, so that they can think about it there and then. They don't have to go read over a number of pages, they can reflect on what they see.

It's more immediate.

It's more immediate and has a greater impact on their lives, I think.

I know you were also involved in an oral literature project with Ingoapele Madingoane and Gcina Mhlope. That was more immediate wasn't it? How did you enjoy doing that?

I enjoyed it very much. Especially because there was a lot of interaction between ourselves and the audience.

What were you actually doing? Reading your work?

Ja. Our works and from other people's works also, and reacting to performances by the drum-players and so on, and adjusting it. While they do the drum-playing we sort of read the works with it. The readers are also very much involved, and when they start shouting "Amandla!" everyone starts shouting "Amandla!" and the whole thing becomes very alive.

So you have done the kind of thing that performance artists do — involving the audience.

Oh yes. Like when we went to Cape Town, for instance, we had people like James Matthews reciting his poetry on the stage, and having the audience involved, like I say, with the artist and appreciating the work.

So you feel there's space for the kind of writing you do which needs reflection and, on the other hand, that kind of work. You feel they're both important?

Yes, I think they're equally important. Although I think there should be even more of the plays and of the dramatisation of works to make them more alive to the audience. Our people don't read much.

Do you think art is important for political ends?

Oh yes. The people are art-orientated. They are people of action, people who believe in singing and dance, in making music reflect their lives. And this appeals much more to them. You'd have to be a bit intellectual to be able to appreciate some books which are written, but you don't have to be with that kind of presentation or dramatisation.

I'd like to change the subject a bit and

talk about women's writing. Your first book, Muriel at Metropolitan, and your most recent, Mhloti, were specifically about the experiences of black women in the South African context. In fact on the cover of Mhloti you point to the subjection and oppression of women when you quote your grandmother: "to say woman is to say pot; to say woman is to say broom". Would you call yourself a feminist writer?

Well, ja, I would call myself that, but not in the narrow, Western kind of way of speaking about a feminist. Black women are very much conscious of the fact that they are in fact the very people to make the home and very little credit is given to their efforts — which are so much crucial to the running of the home and the society. And I think the South African black women are very strong. I, for one, have had a very strong grandmother, and then my own mother, and I don't think this was accidental. For instance, we spoke about our societies and about women's contribution to them, about our own backgrounds, with writers like Flora Nwapa of Nigeria, when we were in Toronto. We even decided that we should actually write about our experiences. There was so much similarity between our lives as women, as people who grew up with the guidance of older women, who are very very central in our lives.

I know Alice Walker talks about "womanist" writing rather than "feminist", because she thinks "woman-centred writing" is a better way of describing the work of black women. She considers "feminism" to have white, Western middle-class connotations.

I would agree with that, 100 per cent. I remember the very differences that you are talking about came out loud and clear in the recent Congress and Book Fair we had in Montreal and in Toronto. Because, while the white women were concerned about the problems that arise between male and female, we were aware that the real problem is not so much a question of sexism as it is the issue of power: where does the power really lie between the two sexes? And I for one feel that it is because of this very power that we have the sexist attitude of the man towards women. Because they are aware of it: everybody has had a mother and every man does not think his

mother is something which can be overlooked. What makes them later try to get out of that hold that their mother has over them, the power, the overwhelming power that the mother has over her offspring?

You don't think it's also a political thing, that black men are so powerless in this country that they feel they have to vindicate themselves by having power over women?

Yes, partly. But you look at men in general, even the white ones: why do they do it when they have political power? I think it is because of their own fears. They compare themselves with the woman, who is so powerful. She gives birth — something they can never do. And I think also they are jealous; there is some kind of jealousy which the men have to answer, especially because they are so powerful, and they realise it.

Let's talk about your work now. Many critics tend to find your work "modest" and "subdued" (to quote Richard Rive), yet I find an element of anger, especially in the protest of Muriel and the resistance of Amandla and in Mihloti too. Would you agree to that?

Yes. There is very great anger, and I'm happy that it does show. My own grandmother was a very angry woman, and my mother was. You can discover this in *Muriel*, for instance. My mother had fought the system so much. Her husband, my late father, was very much involved — he was an ANC man. And she herself was very much involved, but she grew tired of it and decided to leave. She thought Lesotho's independence was some kind of Utopia. She didn't realise that Lesotho was only part of the whole South African sub-continent. It would never be able to be free without the freeing of the whole sub-continent, but she thought it was something really significant, and she decided to leave here. She had never had a background, a Lesotho experience — the tribal sort of background. Even her parents did not have that background, they were people who were born and brought up here in Johannesburg. She thought she was going back to some kind of redemption, that she was going to be redeemed from this mess here, from this quagmire of existence in the townships where you are forever at loggerheads with the system, fighting the system of the time in trying to realise your dreams. There's anger in almost every one of us.

Do you think it was this anger that resulted in the banning of Muriel at Metropolitan and Amandla? Why do you think those works were banned?

I don't know. They ban a lot of works. They're scared of facing reality — looking at it, I think.

Is that what your books are? Reality? And that's why they are banned?

Yes, yes, of course. I don't think I should at this time in our history be involved in a lot of talking and dreaming about the beautiful skies and the moon, and so on, and dreaming about ideal situations when we don't have them. In the very first place I wouldn't have taken to writing. I wouldn't stick to it when it is so difficult. Except for the fact that I see in it some kind of exposure: it gives me the opportunity to expose what we feel inside.

Did you find it quite discouraging then when your works were banned?

Very very depressing indeed. It's like erecting a big iron wall between yourself and your own people, the people you are trying to reach. It's like spitting into a dead wall, where your words hit the surface and they rebound, they come back to you, and you keep on hitting back and nothing happens.

You must be very proud of your work, especially Amandla because there you have something which is by a black woman that can stand next to Serote's To Every Birth its Blood, Sepamla's A Ride on the Whirlwind and Mzamane's Children of Soweto as a definitive Soweto '76 novel.

Yes, I am very proud of this. I didn't think when I wrote it that it would have that kind of impact. It took a lot of pain to write it, but there was something driving me. I had to present things very much as they are in reality. I tried to do that, although it's all fiction.

I've also noticed, although you say it's fiction, that there's a strong autobiographical element in your work. Do you always draw on your own experiences when you write or create characters, or do you use your imagination, or both?

I do both, yes. I use my imagination a lot — like when I wrote *Amandla*. I use my imagination, but it's always stemmed from my own experiences. You know, we were very much involved in the rioting, in the Amandla riots. We were some of the victims of it. I've had many relatives who had to go and look in the mortuaries, in the hospitals, and so on. And the funerals and all that. I was reliving and reflecting also the society as a whole. People are always coming to me and telling me about their stories. They were aware that I was writing. There are others who even said to me, "Oh, my goodness, please tell the world that this is happening to me" and so on. People like Makalo Magong, who in real life were going through these experiences.

I'd like to talk about the characters in your books. There has been a suggestion that some of your characters are stereotypes. Lionel Abrahams, for example, took exception to your portrayal of Jews in Mr Bloch of Muriel at Metropolitan. How do you react to such criticism?

Lionel. It's very interesting. Ja, it's all right. I suppose he would feel like that. Funnily, not only Lionel: I remember just after it was published, some Jewish ladies invited me to their homes. In fact, I refused to at first. I didn't really want to go there, interview these people and all that. I just wanted to sit and read. Until I was forced out of my little corner. They invited me to come to a party, a small little party which they were having for me, and they were going to sell my book the following day at a fair. And then a woman appeared and said to me, "How can you write about Jews that way? How can you make your main character a Jew?" And I said, "Look around, and go to Jo'burg. Go to all the shops, all the furniture shops. Who do you find there? It's Jews. Why should I go and create somebody from Mars when we have these people?" The Jews are very very strong economically and they own almost everything — it was worse in the sixties. Now how could I

not think that way? And even the reaction of the people: they are always talking about the Jews because they are so very much involved in economic life. They are the ones who really trick. So, I don't see anything wrong with that.

So you were actually writing about what you had seen and experienced?

Oh yes, especially in *Muriel*. Mr Bloch (I changed his name) is still very much alive. And most of the things that are said there about him in fact are things that he himself said.

I bet he was surprised to find himself in a book. Did he ever read it?

No, I don't think so. I remember at one time he called a customer back who said, "You can't treat me like this. I'm educated, I'm a B.A." And he said "Look, you know what B.A. means? It means Bugger All". He was himself not an educated person. He doesn't read, he thinks it's silly, a waste of time. You should just be interested in making money. Money's the most important thing.

I know you've been quite closely involved with Staffrider magazine as one of its founders, and Skotaville press, as a member of the board. Do you think your role, as a woman, has been important in these ventures?

Yes, I think that it has been very important. I remember very clearly, because most of the people that take part in our organisations — like the political organisations — are men. You'll always find that I'm the only woman there. I remember asking them at one time, these young black people who write: "Where are your sisters? Where are your mothers? Where are your wives? Where are they? Why should you come to meetings alone?" Sometimes we have gatherings in the mornings, readings and so on, and we come together and we read at the Funda Centre, or at the offices of FUBA. We always found that I was the only one, and it was so ridiculous. Sometimes we find a trickle of them, but it was always very few. But many young men. And then they [the women] would tell me they want to be at home, they don't want to come! When they come in they say that they are so busy, that they are cooking, and so on.

So you'd actually like to see more women? I feel you are important as a woman's presence, but you'd like to see more black women becoming involved?

Yes, of course. I wouldn't like to be alone, but unfortunately I am. Or I have been until very recently. Only I now have people like Ellen Kuzwayo, who is drawing others in with her because she is such a powerful person. I've noticed that she is drawing in a lot of women who would otherwise be sitting at home knitting and cooking and ironing. They have been drawn into this thing of writing, and they realise that they have to read, they have to explore some of these areas.

I'm sure you've been a help there too. I'm thinking of the collection of short stories When the Caged Bird Sings that you're going to edit. You have also helped black women to start writing, haven't you?

Yes, very much. I've tried long long ago, all these years. I only stopped in 1984, when I went to Holland for a whole year. We had a group of women which I called

"Women in Writing", and we used to have columns. I approached the *City Press*, and they gave us weekly columns in their newspaper. One time we had a woman speaking about what she was doing, the poetry she was writing. I thought it helped a lot, and we were trying even then (which is about 5 years ago already) to put together some kind of anthology. It just didn't materialise, and as soon as I left the women started, but didn't continue with the thing. But now, recently, we have had a women's publishing house, Scriti sa Sechaba, and I think that too has helped. For instance, I'm in contact with women who have been working as domestic servants in white kitchens, and even they feel, "Look, we can do it". And I encourage them to read more, to be able to appreciate things better, and to repeat what has been done.

So you think we're going to be hearing from many more black women in the future?

You know, I don't think it will be very much more. The problems are still there, lingering there. And until we are completely liberated, I don't think we shall have many. Women are not only oppressed by the men, they are oppressed by the system. They are also oppressed by the white women, who still look upon them as the "helpers". But even that keeps the black women right down there. So I don't think we shall have very many for quite a long time.

I know in the last couple of years you've travelled overseas quite a lot to talk about your work. Do you find that there's a wider critical acceptance of the importance of your work overseas than here in South Africa?

Yes. It's definitely the case. In the whole of Western Europe where I travelled I always found that a lot is known about me and many people have read the books, and so on. Of course it didn't surprise me because my books were banned here. They are still unavailable up to this day. I don't know why Longman haven't tried harder to get *Muriel* circulating in this country. It's two years since it was unbanned, but it's still not circulating in this country as much as it is circulating abroad. Even abroad I've got to areas where they find it difficult to get hold of my books. But I'm much more known ... well, I wouldn't say that. The black people, even if they don't have my book, they know about me, they're aware of my presence — they feel my presence. But the actual readership is, I think, still very much abroad. Even in this country, the people who could get my book to read it when it was first published were the white people and the Indians and Coloureds. It was still too expensive for black people to buy. They were aware of it, but when some of them tried to go to CNA to get it, it was never displayed. They would have struggled to get it even before it was banned. □

Extracted from the National English Literary Museum (Private Bag 1019 Grahamstown 6140), Interviews Series No. 4, *Between the Lines* edited by Craig Mackenzie and Cherry Clayton. The other women interviewed in the book are Bessie Head, Sheila Roberts and Ellen Kuzwayo.

Clarence-Smith on Mozambique

Dear Editor,

Gervase Clarence-Smith's review 'The Roots of the Mozambican Counter-Revolution' (*Southern African Review of Books*, April/May) does a disservice both to scholarship and to the people of Mozambique. In his zeal to set intellectual fashion with a 'paradigm shift', Clarence-Smith indiscriminately mingles genuine research results with unsubstantiated speculation. Serious critical research on such issues as the agrarian crisis and the political economy of the post-colonial state should not entail an ostrich-like avoidance of the very real war waged by South African special forces through Renamo. Clarence-Smith's stance — and his indifference to factual information about the war — promotes this false dichotomy.

My quarrel is not with the majority of scholars he cites. Such work should be encouraged, and one might cite as well Canadian and Nordic scholars such as Otto Roesch, Merle Bowen and Kenneth Hermele on agrarian issues and Bertil Egerö on the issue of democracy, as well as the recent reflection by Frelimo leader Oscar Monteiro on the experience of the people's assemblies (*Poder e Democracia*, Maputo: Assembleia Popular, 1988). One hopes that this research and reflection will continue without conforming to Clarence-Smith's ideological strait-jacket or fantasies. (For example, he chides Meyns for not advocating that the state simply 'withdraw from the economy', and Cahen and Cardoso for suggesting that 'state farms could be viable [or] play a positive role'. By labelling the 'choice of Maputo' as the capital as 'strange', he displays a most unhistorical voluntarism about the options confronting Mozambique at independence.)

It is on the war itself, however, that Clarence-Smith is most misleading. One may legitimately debate to what extent the war, as contrasted with other factors, is responsible for economic and social crisis in Mozambique. But to insinuate that the war itself is the result of these internal factors, and that Pretoria's role, falling outside the paradigm, can be considered peripheral, is to substitute innuendo for evidence.

In his remarks on the war, Clarence-Smith relies on two sources, a short article by Geffray and Pedersen, and scattered comments in several articles by Cahen. Geffray and Pedersen, as responsible scholars, make it clear that their essay is a set of hypotheses based on study of the social structure of Erati district in Nampula province. They acknowledge that they have no direct evidence on Renamo itself, phrase their hypotheses in the subjunctive even with reference to Erati district itself, and posit their possible generalization only to the rest of Nampula province. Clarence-Smith presents their tentative projections as established facts applying to the entire country. Even in presenting the counter example of the Vundiça study by Heimer and da Silva, where 'the regime remained popular enough ... for the population not to be seduced by Renamo',

he never raises the issue of how one establishes which local study is more representative.

Instead he follows Cahen in glibly presenting sweeping generalizations unsupported by evidence. Although he acknowledges that Cahen's book is 'not yet the general synthesis', he neglects to say that Cahen's comments on Renamo are, to judge from his limited footnotes, derived primarily from the Lisbon rumour mill, selective reading of *Tempo* magazine, and Geffray and Pedersen's article. Cahen even places the Renamo-Frelimo talks following the Nkomati Accord in October 1985 instead of 1984. (At first I thought this must be a simple typographical slip, but Cahen repeats it at least four times and even reads political significance into the timing. One must presume he really couldn't even get the year right in interpreting a period critical to understanding the South African role vis-a-vis Renamo.)

Among the dubious generalizations retailed by Cahen and/or Clarence-Smith are the following.

* 'Renamo flourishes in a situation marked by widespread pre-existing social banditry' (*SARoB*, p. 9) In fact neither Geffray and Pedersen nor even Cahen claim the existence of widespread pre-existing social banditry. Geffray and Pedersen say that in response to the expansion of Renamo in Nampula province in 1984, government authorities forced peasants into villages, provoking some into a wandering existence in the bush. This is certainly a counter-productive counter-insurgency tactic, but not a 'pre-existing' condition. And Geffray and Pedersen note that the activities of these peasants took violent form only 'ponctuellement et marginalement', citing one incident in Erati district in September 1984.

Cahen tells us that Renamo 'certainly controls no more than 50% of the bands of brigands roving the country' (*La Revolution Implosée*, p. 81) and says that 'it does not appear impossible that the recent massacres of Homoine, Manjacaze and Taninga' were due not to Renamo but to deserters from the Mozambican army. Clarence-Smith repeats these assertions, but neither he nor Cahen provides any evidence for either one. Given the difficulty of communication in Mozambique, the rumours circulating in urban circles do lead to uncertainty about the culprits in any particular incident, and it would be surprising if the insecurity provoked by the war did not lead to some banditry unlinked to any particular organization.

But if such independent banditry is a significant proportion of the violence, no one has yet presented any first-hand evidence to that effect. There are literally hundreds of first-hand accounts of violence by Renamo, and a handful of accounts of abuses by government troops, but virtually no cases (apart from ordinary urban robberies) in which victims themselves tell of assaults by armed men who they think are non-Renamo 'bandits'. The one systematic study that has been done (subsequent to Cahen's writings, but surely Clarence-Smith should be aware of it) is that by U.S. State Department consultant Robert

Gersony. After interviewing almost 200 refugees and displaced persons in Mozambique and four neighbouring countries between January and March 1988, he reported that of the 640 murders of civilians personally witnessed by his informants, they attributed 94% to Renamo, 3% to the government, and only 3% to others. 'Refugees were asked whether free-lance bandits, as opposed to elements of the two principal parties to the conflict, perpetrated the acts they witnessed; their responses were emphatically negative' (*Summary of Mozambican Refugee Accounts of Principally Conflict-Related Experience in Mozambique*, p. 8).

Gersony's informants included refugees from 48 districts (more than one-third of the total in the country), representing all ten provinces. The group is certainly not a random sample, and the percentages should not be taken as precisely representative. It is possible, for example, that there might be more 'free-lance bandits' in Nampula province, which is not strongly represented among Gersony's informants. But corrections should be based on some evidence from somewhere in Mozambique, and some argument as to why that evidence is more representative than Gersony's estimates.

It is particularly striking that Cahen and Clarence-Smith cite the Homoine massacre as one that might not be due to Renamo. Renamo statements issued in Lisbon and Washington did disclaim responsibility and suggested variously a cross-fire or a mutiny by local militia followed by government retaliation against townspeople. But numerous eye-witnesses interviewed by both Mozambican and foreign journalists (see *New York Times*, July 25, 1987; *London Times*, July 25, 1987; *Johannesburg Star*, July 26, 1987; *Detroit Free Press*, August 3, 1987) were unequivocal in attributing responsibility to Renamo. Mark van Koevinger, an American agricultural worker who survived the attack, interviewed dozens of survivors in the following weeks, including some who had been abducted and then escaped. None had any doubt who was responsible.

* Clarence-Smith says that Cahen 'reminds us that the majority of Renamo field commanders ... are ex-Frelimo officers' (*SARoB*, p. 9; *La Revolution Implosée*, p. 90), implying that this is an already established fact. Yet Cahen gives no source for his assertion. Similar statements have appeared in Renamo propaganda, and such well-known figures as Renamo's first president Matsangaiza and current leader Dhlakama were briefly in the Frelimo army. But it is unlikely that a majority of the several hundred commanders have such a background, nor would anyone outside the top Renamo command and their South African advisers have exact statistics. Among the 32 ex-Renamo participants (including three commanders) I interviewed late last year, none said that more than a few of the commanders were ex-Frelimo (*The Mozambican National Resistance as Described by Ex-Participants*, March, 1989). From their statements, what seemed most notable

about the commanders was the large proportion from the early recruits trained in 1978 and 1979 in Rhodesia (most of them abducted, including Zimbabweans as well as Mozambicans) and concomitantly the large proportion of Shona-speakers (not only Ndaou but also other Shona dialects). Moreover, new recruits with more than a few years of education were likely to be selected for additional training, often in South Africa, and move quickly up the command ladder.

Even if one knew the proportion of ex-Frelimo among Renamo commanders, its political and social significance would depend on the route they took to get there. In neighbouring Rhodesia, the Selous Scouts pioneered the recruitment of 'turned terrorists' by giving captives the option of joining rather than being killed. Portugal's counter-insurgency forces also included ex-guerrillas recruited in this way, and some of these were reportedly among Renamo's initial recruits. Presumably there are at least a few ex-Frelimo officers among Renamo's commanders who left one army and joined the other from motives of ideology, ethnic sentiment or other discontent. But some evidence on this point should precede drawing general conclusions.

* 'Renamo rather exploits all the anger and resentment that Frelimo has created in the countryside through its policies' (*SARoB*, p. 9).

Insofar as better policies would encourage the population to become more active and energetic in defending themselves and the government, Renamo of course benefits from any Frelimo failures, whether based on individual errors or structural problems. But to imply that Frelimo's policies have promoted positive support for Renamo in the Mozambican countryside, with peasants joining Renamo because of their discontent with the government, is unsupported by the facts.

It is, of course, a legitimate hypothesis to investigate. And, as one high Mozambican government official told me in 1984, such political recruitment might have been possible if Renamo had acted differently, if it had been a different kind of organization. But in fact there is no empirical indication that Renamo has gained significant number of recruits in this way. Not even Geffray and Pedersen provide any evidence to that effect, although they say that Renamo has recruited 'certains de leurs hommes parmi les populations locales, et pas seulement par le rapt'.

Both logically and empirically, lack of support for Frelimo in rural Mozambique does not imply support for Renamo. Ordinary people in the rural areas make comparisons. While there may be a range of opinion about Frelimo (positive, negative and indifferent), evidence to date reveals an overwhelming negative consensus about Renamo. If the Frelimo state has often verified Hyden's image of an 'uncaptured peasantry', Renamo has captured a certain proportion, by force, and imposed a level of repression that is extraordinarily high and bitterly resented. A very small proportion of Renamo's own forces — and probably virtually none of the rank-and-file fighters — are

recruited by political appeals or appeals to discontent.

According to Gersony's interviews with victims of the war in Mozambique, 'the relationship between Renamo and the population appears to revolve solely around the extraction of resources, strictly by force, without explanation, with no tolerance for refusal, and without reciprocation'. This is hardly an atmosphere for voluntary recruitment, whatever the population may think of the government.

According to my interviews with ex-Renamo combatants, speaking not only of their own experience but of others who trained with them, the overwhelming majority of Renamo recruits are abducted at gunpoint, often in the course of raids, and are kept in the Renamo ranks by the threat of execution or other severe punishment. According to several who were abducted as early as 1978/79, this was consistent practice from the beginning; abducting new recruits was considered by all my informants to be a part of routine military operations.

The acknowledged military effectiveness of Renamo in destruction seems to derive not from their political appeal, but from the specifically military advantages of guerrilla operations unencumbered by the need to win 'hearts and minds', with a highly professional command, control and communications system, and with smoothly functioning logistics for arms and ammunition organized by the South African military. With good radio communications (each company-level unit of approximately 100 men is so equipped, with regular resupplies of batteries and replacements) Renamo can group two or three companies to attack a village or outpost defended by a handful of government soldiers. Even a far better equipped and more professional army than that of the Mozambican government could not consistently defend the countryside of Mozambique (the size of France plus the Federal Republic of Germany), or block the secret delivery of arms by small aircraft or by ship along a coastline equivalent to that of Europe from Denmark to Spain.

It is in the nature of a covert war, particularly one carried out in a large country with numerous impediments to good communication, that many aspects remain obscure. This is all the more reason that researchers or commentators should present evidence, be clear about their sources and carefully distinguish hypothesis and verification. Cahen and Clarence-Smith's generalizations about Renamo do not meet that test.

William Minter

Washington, USA.

Gervase Clarence-Smith replies

William Minter's reply to my review, 'The Roots of the Mozambican Counter-Revolution', provides some important information and some useful correctives, even if there remain some points of disagreement between us. We are clearly united in the desire to end the terrifying state of violence and famine devastating Mozambique, but in my view the attribution of blame primarily to South African destabilization contributes to the prolongation of the sufferings of the Mozambican people, by taking attention away from the more important topic of domestic reform. Nor is this my view alone. Bill Freund has recently reviewed some of the work by the 'Canadian and

Nordic' authors recommended by Minter, and comes to the following conclusion: 'The sober truth that emerges is that the "bandits" have enjoyed as much success as they have because of the problems in Frelimo's policies' (Transformation 8 (1989), p. 86).

My purpose is certainly not to deny the existence of the war waged by South African special forces through Renamo; rather, I would like to contribute to an understanding of why that war has succeeded beyond South Africa's wildest dreams. I simply do not believe that one can explain this in terms of the military hardware provided to Renamo by South Africa. It strikes me as odd to describe Renamo as a smoothly functioning military machine, in view of what has been learned from captured documents about Renamo's military inefficiencies and inadequacies. At the same time, it seems axiomatic that a guerilla force has to be 'like a fish in the water'.

The essence of my argument is that most of the rural population of Mozambique has been so antagonized by Frelimo that it has been quite apathetic towards infiltration by Renamo rebels. Minter is right to stress that it is dangerous to generalize from a limited number of case studies, but it is not true that I arbitrarily declare the Erati case to be more 'representative' than that of Vundiça. In Erati, Frelimo imposed one set of policies, and this was quickly followed by full-scale war. In Vundiça, Frelimo was persuaded not to implement such policies, and peace was maintained. And the papers by Geffray and Pedersen and Heimer and da Silva are particularly good at demonstrating the logical connections between policy and political outcome in these two case studies. When one then considers that, by and large, policies of the kind applied in Erati have been the norm, while the Vundiça situation of benign neglect remains the exception, it does not seem to me to be stretching the evidence too much to suggest that interventionist rural policies have been the chief cause of rural alienation from Frelimo. More case studies are clearly needed, but all the work which has been done on the far north and the far south confirms this hypothesis.

If one turns to the question of active support for Renamo, I would like to make it very clear that this was not the main concern in my review, although it is a problem which needs to be tackled. Minter is undoubtedly correct in stressing the violence used by the rebels to recruit soldiers, but this is not the whole story. His contention that 'the overwhelming majority of Renamo recruits are abducted at gunpoint ... and are kept in the Renamo ranks by the threat of execution or other severe punishments' is problematical, even if abduction is undoubtedly commonly practiced by Renamo. For a start, what else does Minter expect Renamo defectors interviewed in Mozambique to tell him, for all the precautions which he says he employed to keep the interviews neutral? More importantly, Minter admits that Geffray and Pedersen state that abduction is by no means the sole source of recruits, but he tries to deny any validity to this statement, on the grounds that they do not footnote this particular point. A forthcoming book by Geffray is expected to provide a great deal more detail on this crucial matter, but there can be no doubt that Geffray and

Pedersen's article does not support Minter's position on this matter.

Similarly, the notion that villagers are always terrorized into supporting Renamo does not fit the evidence. Again, I certainly do not deny that Renamo has frequently used appalling violence to obtain particular forms of support. I simply wish to say that that is not always and uniformly the case. Geffray and Pedersen show quite clearly the kind of promises that Renamo uses to obtain positive support, notably that villagers will be allowed to return to their ancestral lands, and that the powers of 'legitimate' chiefs and lineage elders will be restored. This is backed up by Sharon Behn's reports on areas held by Renamo in Zambezia (*The Independent*, 26 & 27/3/1987), in which she provides an eye-witness account of families allowed to till their own lands under their 'traditional' *mambo* (headmen). The Gersony Report, for all its documentation of Renamo atrocities, confirms that in the areas securely held by Renamo the peasants are allowed to live in the dispersed settlement patterns which they prefer, and are not particularly badly treated. And Minter himself quotes local Frelimo officials as saying that: 'in some areas local people had at first welcomed Renamo, disillusioned with the economic and political policies of the government' (*The Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo) as Described by Ex-participants*, 1989, p.8).

On the question of pre-existing social banditry preparing the way for Renamo, Minter wrongly attributes to me the repetition of the statement that the Homoine massacre may not have been the work of Renamo, and misrepresents Geffray and Pedersen. They do not say that peasants were reduced to 'a wandering existence in the bush'. What they actually say is: 'Pushed off their lands, but refusing to join the communal villages, a minority of peasants moved over into total marginalization, indulging in an economy of pillage. These people have spears and machettes, but no firearms, and they probably had not had any contact with Renamo when the men were killed by the FPLM ...' (my translation). To deny the existence of non-Renamo social banditry altogether is to fly in the face of numerous reports. It may be impossible to estimate the extent of this type of social banditry, and it is obvious that such ill-armed bands are far less likely to be the perpetrators of terrible atrocities remembered by refugees. But the key point made by Cahen and Geffray and Pedersen is that this type of social banditry, provoked by Frelimo policies, does a lot to explain the astonishingly rapid spread of Renamo through the whole country.

This said, Minter's evidence on the centralized and effective command structure of Renamo is a useful corrective to earlier accounts of the movement as a loose federation of semi-autonomous bands, and his research findings on Renamo field commanders are precious. The preponderance of Renamo commanders drawn fairly broadly from Shona-speaking peoples, and not just from the Ndau, is especially revealing, as is the very mixed ethnic composition of Renamo soldiers, drawn from all over the country. I would accept that my assertion that 'the majority of Renamo field commanders ... are ex-Frelimo officers', taken from Cahen, is difficult to

substantiate and may be wrong. But Minter corroborates the fact that at least some of the Renamo officers are former Frelimo men. And the exact background of Renamo officers seems to me to matter less than the fact that Renamo has often been reported as presenting itself as the 'true Frelimo', the bearer of values which the régime is said to have abandoned.

It is surely in the interests of the suffering population of Mozambique that a repetition of the spectacular national reconciliation which has just occurred in Angola should take place in Mozambique. The revelation in *The Independent* (23/6/1989) that Frelimo has produced a new plan for making peace with Renamo, promising a revision of the constitution to ensure a 'more democratic political system', is potentially a big step in the right direction. But reconciliation has to be far broader than just peace between the government and Renamo. Frelimo must reconcile itself with the peasant masses by hastening the process of ending unpopular and counterproductive rural policies.

Zimbabwe's Prospects

Dear Editor,

I was gratified to read Elizabeth Schmidt's kind review of *Zimbabwe's Prospects*, the collection I edited last year. I do, however, want to defend one of the contributors from a charge that was probably more my responsibility than his. Referring to Danny Weiner's chapter on land and agricultural development, she writes that he 'overlooks the critical problem of gender differentiation'. However, there is another chapter that she doesn't mention — by Lionel Cliffe — that deals with this in some detail. Apart from passing on a request from the authors of the chapter specifically on women that gender issues be integrated into other chapters (which I think we achieved rather better than she does), I had the job of eliminating overlap, so that Weiner's treatment of this issue became implicit rather than explicit. Incidentally, two of the chapters Elizabeth Schmidt thinks have 'surprisingly little direct reference to women', those on education and health, had women authors, who, as I recall, were inclined to oppose having a chapter specifically on women at all. I count myself a feminist, but realize that as the book was subtitled 'Issues of race, class, state and capital in southern Africa', omitting 'gender', some women may think I ought to try harder.

Colin Stoneman

Centre for Southern African Studies,
University of York, UK

Dear Editor,

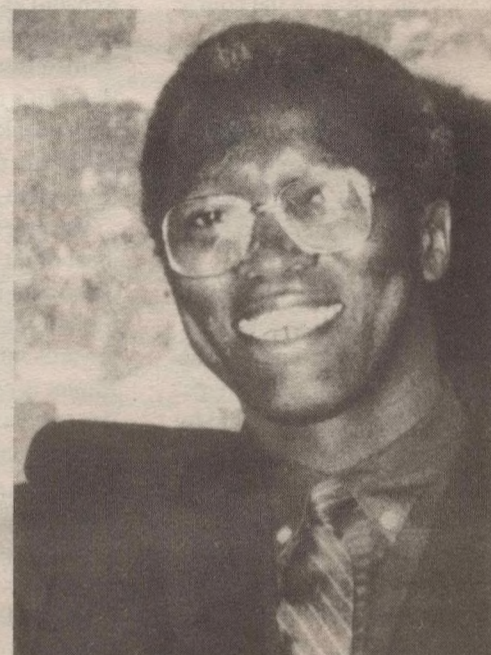
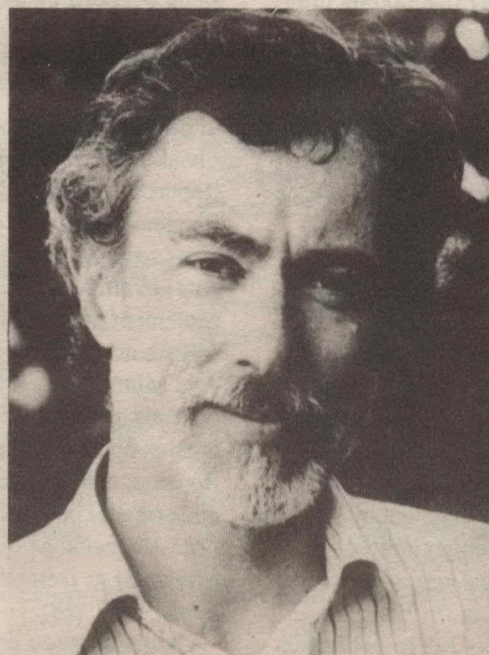
I am a keen reader of the Review with an interest in history and statistics. I find that you have a limited number of tried and tested reviewers — a point of which I approve — but that a disproportionate amount of what you print is either by or about Colin Stoneman. By my reckoning this makes Colin Stoneman number one southern Africanist scholar. I would be keen to know the key to his prolificness; or maybe all those other academics in the UK are not keeping up with their leader.

Ralph Gwala

Harare, Zimbabwe

Literature in Another South Africa

[Somerville College, Oxford, England
21-23 March 1990]



Keynote speakers include: the novelist and pro Vice Chancellor of the University of Lesotho, **Njabulo Ndebele**; the novelist, critic and Professor of Literature at the University of Cape Town, **John Coetzee**; and the novelist, critic and former Professor of English at the University of Zambia, **Lewis Nkosi**.

The Conference

21-23 March 1990, Somerville College, Oxford

The Conference will be divided into a number of sections: **Critical Theory; Language; Women; Publishing; South Africa in African Context; Exile Writing; Pedagogy and Curriculum Development.** Conference participants are invited to submit papers on these themes. Conference participants are not restricted to those who contribute papers or chair plenaries. There will be space for the discussion of individual authors, but our preference is for papers which engage with new discourses of cultural transformation.

Date for submission of provisional topic title

30 September 1989

Date for submission of abstract (not more than 500 words)

30 November 1989

Date for organizers' response to offer of papers

Christmas 1989

The conference will be residential and the fee (accommodation as well as full board for the period 21-23 March 1990) is £90.00. A deposit of £30 should accompany each registration and reach the organizers before the 15 January 1990, with the remainder payable on registration. Somerville College will only be able to accommodate 120 participants.

Application Form

Name

Address for Correspondence

.....

* * *

I should like to participate in the SARoB-sponsored conference, 'Literature in Another South Africa' and enclose a deposit of £30.00, the balance to be payable on registration day, 21 March 1990.

I shall require/shall not require special facilities (please specify):

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I should like to present a paper under the provisional title of:

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