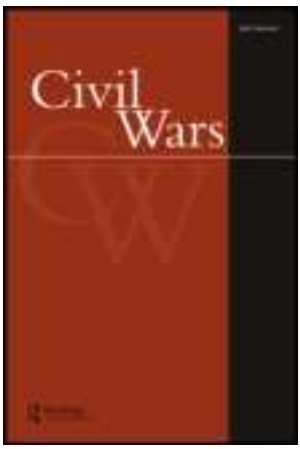

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The Wiriyamu Massacre of 1972: Response to Reis and Oliveira

MUSTAFAH DHADA

In their text published in May 2012, Bruno Reis and Pedro Oliveira proposed six theses on the massacre at Wiriyamu. They claim or imply that as a location of well-developed villages Wiriyamu did not exist; the massacre as reported might not have happened; although an atrocity may have occurred, the events are too complex to accurately unravel even today; lack of an independent or official inquiry makes the numbers of the dead as reported inaccurate; and that the exigencies of the counterinsurgency determined its context and magnitude within the framework of a civil war. This response examines these six theses, and concludes that Reis and Oliveira fail to advance the narrative. They accept at face value the Portuguese propaganda denying the existence of Wiriyamu as a place, rather than consider data that incontrovertibly proved the existence of Wiriyamu, the massacre, its context, and the overall integrity of the narrative. Finally this text sends a mixed message to its readers by contextualizing it as a case study in civil war.

INTRODUCTION

In December 1972, 400 people were reportedly slaughtered in three days in five villages in Wiriyamu, located in Mozambique's central northwest district of Tete. *The Times* of London published the story in the summer of the following year.[1] Thus began the narrative of what came to be known as the Wiriyamu massacre. Since then, several accounts have appeared in the press. Some are serious and scholarly.[2] Others are journalistic.[3] At least two have approached the narrative as works of fiction.[4] Since 1995, materials on the massacre have emerged in several other formats: as blog entries,[5] as YouTube video clips,[6] as scanned newspaper postings,[7] as undergraduate research papers,[8] as web and blog sites.[9] In March 2012, Bruno C. Reis and Pedro A. Oliveira added their own voice to the discourse.

THE NARRATIVE, ITS IMPERFECTIONS, AND ITS DENIAL

Their text asserts that it is 'difficult to establish with accuracy the events that took place around 16 December 1972' and that 'today it is impossible to know with certainty many of the details of the events.' This assertion is true if one exclusively relies on printed sources. Fieldwork, personal papers perhaps not consulted by the

authors, and oral testimonies by data handlers behind the case that this author has had the opportunity to consult tell us that the story of the killings is much clearer than suspected. Space allocated for this response disallows for further elaboration.

There are indeed two gaps in the narrative: how the Juwau villagers perished between noon and sunset of that day; and where else did the Portuguese colonial army and its secret agents go to hunt fleeing villagers in the following three days? Reis and Oliveira do indeed point out correctly that 'a company of Portuguese commandos' tortured and summarily executed villagers during operation Marosca. However, their text is murmurous on the role of the secret police. Closer inspection suggests that the secret police played a complicated role on that day. This role was intense and heavily involved in Chaworha and Djemusse; less so in Wiriyamu, where the kill was 'clinical, neat and efficient'; and even lesser in intensity in Riacho.

The text claims that the airborne assault was carried on three villages – and this is certainly correct. In fact, we now know that the Portuguese Air Force bombed five villages in total. Their aim was to herd the villages concentrically and leave a gauntlet open near Juwau for hunting down escapees heading northbound toward M'pharamadwe. The text appears muddled on the reasons why the actual events are unclear. One the one hand it says this was caused by lack of an independent inquiry. On the other hand it acknowledges some form of investigative follow-up. The 'Portuguese authorities, both before and after the military coup of 25 April 1974 did not authorize an *independent enquiry* (my italics) into Operation Marosca' in part, the text suggests because Portugal proved 'incapable of prevailing over the imposing personality of the politically powerful commander-in-chief general Kaúlza de Arriaga.' Therefore, for months 'there was no sign of such an inquiry.'[10]

Actually, Wiriyamu underwent four investigations, two headed by medics, the existence of which the text implicitly recognizes,[11] one by the military judiciary and one at the behest of the government; five if you count a dissident probe into the affair headed by Jorge Jardim; six if you include the church hierarchy's airborne visit over the site. Some of the dead had been long buried in communal graves by the time the investigation headed by de Arriaga was undertaken. In short, de Arriaga complied with protocol and did undertake an official inquiry.

The text initially suggests that a massacre did occur but later changes its position. The 'killings of large number of people with great cruelty *probably* took place not in one location but in several, *probably* three closely adjoining locations…' (italics added). The thesis of denying the killings in favor of its probability is not new. The Portuguese initially put it forward when the story broke out in London. But even they quickly changed their position[12] once de Arriaga-led inquiry revealed that killings of some magnitude had occurred; and that such killings were within the acceptable framework of counterinsurgency. Since then, several texts and investigative probes, including one led by the UN, established the veracity of the story.

Furthermore, extant literature does not back the authors' speculation that the killings may have occurred in several specific locations. My fieldwork does.

The massacre occurred in phases and did happen (as the authors speculate) in and around five, not three, locations: Wiriyamu, Juwau, Chaworha, Riacho, and Djemusse. The locations for these killings exclude places where fleeing villagers were hunted in the next three days. If the latter is included, then the known number of places of killings rises up to at least four. Some of these are identified by name. Informants name several others to be 'near' locally important markers.

The text states that the 'exact location, even the existence of Wiriyamu … remain contentious.'[13] 'Wiriyamu, with that name, did not officially exist,' since such 'relatively improvised rural dwellings were not big enough or even stable enough to be registered in most maps.'[14] Again, Lisbon initially proffered this thesis which it quickly recanted, in part, because Peter Pringle (*The Times* journalist) successfully managed to circumvent the secret police to verify the facts as revealed. Since then, numerous sources have successfully identified the exact location of the site. Fieldwork provides us with even greater depth of knowledge and understanding of Wiriyamu.

Wiriyamu was 'marked on Tete mission maps,' [15] well before 1973. It was well known among the locals, certain elements of the armed forces, Portuguese veterinarians, Indian merchants, and white cattle and livestock buyers and brokers. Wiriyamu was a set of *two* organic communities: Wiriyamu and Chaworha. Wiriyamu had a small central village of 31 households. It was surrounded by Riacho, which had 36 households; Djemusse, which had 45 households; and Juwau, which had 31 households. All three fell under the authority of the Mfumu of Wiriyamu central.[16] Chaworha, approximately 1.5 km away from Wiriyamu, was headed by the Mfumo of Chaworha, which nested behind an elevated set of boulders shaped like a crocodile looped around mud huts. In other words, Wiriyamu and Chaworha were not habitats of cartographic indeterminacy. The exact locations of the two complexes were 16°18′6.55″S and 33°38′50.47″E, and 16°15′4.29″S and 33°37′21.02″E.

OF SOURCES AND THEIR LIMITS

Reis and Oliveira apparently consulted seven categories of sources: 'various missionary reports that were widely (but only partially) publicized in the media in 1973,' and 'official Portuguese documents; FRELIMO reports; the literature that appeared in the aftermath of the scandal; diplomatic documents from the British and Portuguese archives; recent media coverage; and some historical and memorialistic literature.'[17] Judging from the endnotes, of the actual sources consulted, approximately 25 appear utilized in the text, 20 of which are secondary and 5 primary. To wit, they cite Hastings,[18] Bertulli,[19] Cabrita,[20] journalists in British papers, notably *The Times* of London,[21] and Sousa Ribeiro.[22] The Bertulli text is secondary in nature as it narrates the story of the White Fathers and the church under war conditions in Mozambique. The Sousa Ribeiro text published in 1974 was in effect a Portuguese translation of a report published by International Defense and Aid Fund (IDAF) a year before Hasting's monograph. The IDAF report used as its

source a Spanish language report originally crafted by missionaries in Mucumbura in Tete.

To the best of my knowledge and understanding, the Frelimo archives and Frelimo reports contain no primary sources and are of little direct value for the Wiriyamu narrative. The Frelimo political leadership outside Mozambique came to know of the massacre after its London outing. The Frelimo reports are therefore regurgitations of the original already provided to Father Hastings – unless the authors are in possession of texts missing in the Maputo archives. General Hama Tai, the Frelimo commander who headed the region south of Tete told this author in an interview in 1995 that communication between its commanders in Tete and the main headquarters in Tanzania was limited, slow, and principally pedal up to the borders. Thereafter it turned automobilic.

The literature after the scandal contributes very little in a direct way to the Wiriyamu narrative or its context except to suggest lack of clarity of events on that day – see Cabrita's contribution here. Moreover, it is unclear from the text in what way the British, Portuguese, and, for that matter, American diplomatic documents (which incidentally they do not cite) advance the core or texture of the Wiriyamu narrative. Finally, because the text fails to provide precise references of the historical and memorialistic literature, it is difficult to judge their provenance and value as a new source of new contribution.

Put simply, the 'detailed discussion' that was hoped for on 'what was claimed by the different testimonies and reports at the time about the events' (Reis and Oliveria, p.81) never materializes to one's full satisfaction. The article claims that the story as revealed was based on a confidential report by 'Spanish Catholic missionaries of the so-called Burgos order.' The two missionaries mentioned here are Father Jose Sangalo and Vincente Berenguer of São Pedro Mission. Neither, when quizzed by this author, claimed the report to be theirs. Sangalo was not at the massacre site, never went there during or after the massacre, and was not stationed in São Pedro. He was in Matundo. Berenguer too played a peripheral role.

However, both agreed to put their names forward as handlers of the report, and that is perhaps why Reis and Oliveira erroneously identify them as authors. In reality the two priests allowed themselves to be the front men-of-the-cloth to protect the identity of a fellow priest, Father Domingo Ferrão, who had spearheaded the collection of data. He and his close associates on the ground constructed the narrative behind the data. Finally, the models that inspired the report and its format as a spreadsheet is complex, perhaps too needlessly complex to engage the general interest of readers here.

GETTING THE COLONIAL CONTEXT RIGHT

The text sends a mixed message to its readers. On the one hand the authors recognize Wiriyamu to be a casualty of counterinsurgency in a *colonial* military conflict. On the other hand Wiriyamu is packaged here as a case study in a special edition of the journal on civil wars. 'The colonial Portuguese counterinsurgency' treatment that

the text provides is not new, nor is the material deployed here original. Adrian Hastings already covered this ground, admirably. Kevin Parker followed Hastings with a deeper treatment of that same very context in which the massacre was seated.[23]

Furthermore, counterinsurgency alone is an inappropriate context in which to situate Wiriyamu. The nationalist role was central to Wiriyamu. The Frelimo in Tete had sent three commanders to penetrate the area.[24] Of the three, Dalepa proved to be Videira's most lethal opponent, leading him to foolishly overplay his hand. Videira and his chief and protector de Arriaga both failed to appreciate how uncontainable the use of excessive force was about to be particularly in this area, which was saturated with foreign missionaries sensitized to preaching the gospel as a text for race-blind justice under the Second Vatican Council.[25]

Furthermore, Wiriyamu is not an appropriate study of mass violence under 'civil war' either. For the latter thesis to prove tenable, it must subscribe to a legal fiction, which Portugal put in place in 1951 that turned all the colonies into overseas provinces. Technically, however, nothing changed; and here no one would dispute the imputed claim that the text could make, namely that Mozambique was a province of Portugal at the time of the massacre and not a colony; therefore, the conflict between Frelimo and the Portuguese was an intrastate conflict. In short, discussing Wiriyamu solely in the context of counterinsurgency effectively strips away the other equally valid half that governed the context of this massacre – Frelimo-led nationalism.

THE QUIBBLE OVER THE DEAD

The Reis and Oliveira text suggests that 120 victims can be identified by name, which is incorrect. My research indicates that 177 are known by name and 223 are unknown. Additional data is yet to be analyzed to determine how many unnamed victims can be identified and appropriately named.

According to the authors, the 'Dr. Rodrigues dos Santos' report suggests an estimate of casualties of around 200. The authors appear not to have seen the actual report since it 'has remained unpublished and unaccounted for to date, but is cited in various accounts.' In the absence of the original text, it is difficult to substantiate the claims that they make here. When did dos Santos visit the site: before the cleanup or after? Did he fly over the entire zone of the five villages as well as the whole triangle? In the absence of this type of evidence, it would behoove us to seriously stick to the original figure of the 400 dead since that number was arrived at by priests handling census data collectors who began their work of compiling the number of dead on that very night of the 16th of December. These were meticulously conscientious priests passionately concerned with truth.

The article cites, 'it seems likely that it was Hastings' intervention that was critical; he persuaded the editors of the *Times* of the authenticity of the reports, which he had read while attending a religious meeting in Spain' (Reis and Oliveria, p.81). The story is a bit more nuanced. Hastings heard of the massacre first when he

was attending a religious meeting in Southern Rhodesia, where he was told to obtain details from the Burgos hierarchy in Spain, which Hastings did on his way to another meeting elsewhere in Europe. The report was in Spanish, a language Hastings did not know. The report was eventually sent to him when he returned to England where it was translated for his review.

Louis Herren, a 'feisty' journalist,[26] who was in charge of the foreign news-desk was in large part responsible for the Wiriyamu outing in *The Times*. He really needed little persuading. Herren had returned from a stint as *The Times* foreign desk correspondent in Washington DC where he saw *My Lai* unfold at close quarters. Hastings' contact with *The Times* on that day could not have been more fortuitous, he said in an interview with this author in 1996. The Editor in Chief was not in, Herren was in charge as his deputy, and it was his call whether to run the story. To him Wiriyamu smacked of Portugal's own *My Lai* in Mozambique.

His subsequent call to Hastings that evening proved ominously thunderous for the story's outing. 'We have to run the story tomorrow,' he said to Hastings. 'The typesetters are threatening to go on strike and we do not know when we will be in print again!' That threat of strike combined with a hunch to tell truth to imperial power did it for Herren!

CONCLUSION: WHICH VERSION?

Reis and Oliveira state, 'What can also be stated with an equal degree of certainty is that all the parties involved in this bloody event had conflicting interests that made it likely that they would tell different stories about the atrocities – and indeed they did…' The majority of the sources to which the authors allude in this text provide only three versions of the story: denial, doubt, and definitive truth. Portugal authored the first version in a booklet, Wiriyamu: A Mare's Nest, which it published almost immediately after *The Times* story came out. Portugal also authored the second version of the story. In the face of overwhelming evidence in the press and in reports it commissioned internally, Portugal admitted killings but these were, it stated, within the framework of counterinsurgency, thereby casting doubt on several aspects of the story including the magnitude of the event. This version appears to have been revisited in parts of the Reis and Oliveira text. However, this version lacks solid credibility, given that the thesis was based on Portuguese military and airborne evidence, which was incomplete, gathered long after the event, and, it appears, without the benefit of an official on-site investigation. Further, at the time the Portuguese had a vested interest in denying the massacre or minimizing its magnitude because they wanted so desperately to hang on to their empire and eschew any publicity suggesting excessive use of force well beyond the limits of acceptable measures in anticolonial counterinsurgency.

That leaves us with the third version: the abject truth albeit imperfect but told as it was witnessed, felt, seen, and lived; and as gathered as a narrative by Padre Domingo Ferrão and his data collectors who went to work on the very night of the massacre. Portuguese archives, if they exist, will have very little to say on this

narrative from the ground below. Their forces, their men, their church hovered above as a colonial agency. They were too busy either engaging in the blood-soaked opera or obsessing on how to counter the story's outing in London. In the scheme of things Operation Marosca was 'small potatoes' according to its commander on the ground. 'We had carried many such clean ups,' he said to this author in 1995. The real questions remain: Does the Reis and Oliveria text truly advance the Wiriyamu narrative as a case study in civil wars? Does it make a case for denying the veracity of the Wiriyamu narrative as revealed by casting doubt on aspects of its details as we know them? I think not.

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The research for this text relies on the printed and archival materials appropriate for this case; fieldwork on site in 1994–1995; interviews with some of the killers, survivors, religious personnel connected with the massacre; the catholic hierarchy in both the Archbishopric of Maputo headed now by the Búzi-born Capuchin Friar Francisco Chimoio and the Bishopric of Tete; missionary personnel at the Maputo-based main offices for the Jesuit, Verona, and Comboni orders; former missionaries at the Seminário Maior de S. Pio X; and the White Fathers active at the seminary at Zobue before its handover to the Jesuits in 1972; and last but not least, military personnel on both sides of the divide.

NOTES

1. Mustafah Dhada, 'Contesting Terrains Over a Massacre: The Case of Wiriyamu' in George C. Bond and Nigel C. Gibson (eds.) *Contested Terrains and Constructed Categories: Contemporary Africa in Focus* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press 2002), pp.259–77.
2. Adrian Hastings, *Wiriyamu: My Lai in Mozambique* (London: Search Press Limited 1974); Adrian Hastings, 'Reflections upon the War in Mozambique', *African Affairs* 73/292 (1974) pp.263–76; Dhada, 'Contested Terrains', pp.259–77; Kevin Parker, *Wiriyamu and the War in Tete, 1971–1974*, MA Thesis, University of York, York, England (1982).
3. Felícia Cabrita, 'Os Mortos Não Sofrem', *Revista Expresso* (5 Dec., 1992); 'Wiriyamu, Viagem ao Fundo do Terror', *Revista Expresso* (21 Nov., 1998); *Massacres em África* (Lisbon: A Esfera dos Livros 2008).
4. Williams Sassine, *Wirriyamu* (London: Heinemann 1980); José Rodrigues dos Santos, *O Anjo Branco* (Lisbon: Gravida 2010).
5. See entries under 'Wiriyamu', *Choppertech Blog*, http://choppertech.blogspot.com/, accessed 15 Jun. 2012; 'Wiriyamu e Outras Polemicas', *Macua Blogs*, http://macua.blogs.com/, accessed 10 Jun. 2012; *The Delgoa Bay Blog*, http://delagoabayword.wordpress.com/, accessed 13 Jun. 2012; 'Wiryamu. . .o que foi?', *Cuamba Blog*, http://cuamba.blogspot.com/2010/01/wiriyamu-o-que-foi.html, accessed 17 Nov. 2012.
6. See for instance, 'Massacre de Wiriyamu (01 de 07)', http://youtube.com/results?search_query=wiriyamu&oq=wiriyamu&aq=f&aqi=&aql=&gs_l=youtube.3...3042.3340.0.3770.8.3.0.0.0.0.96.176.2.2.0...0.0.JQXlkOM0_mw, accessed 15 Jun. 2012.
7. 'Mozambique History Net: Atrocities and Massacres, 1960–1977: Wiriyamu, Mueda and Others, Dossier MZ-0354', http://www.mozambiquehistory.net/massacres.html, accessed 15 Jul. 2012.
8. A sample of these in the author's possession include two sets of research papers: one submitted at California State University Bakersfield (CSUB) in partial fulfillment for the BA HIST 418; and the other set submitted at Bard College, Master of Arts in Teaching Program, Delano Campus, California, in partial fulfillment for History 501.

9. 'Massacre de Wiriyamu Chawola e Juwau Dezembro de 1972,' http://massacredewiriyamu.blogspot.com/, accessed 17 Nov. 2011.
10. Bruno C. Reis and Pedro A. Oliveira, 'Cutting Heads or Winning Hearts: Late Colonial Portuguese Counterinsurgency and the Wiriyamu Massacre of 1972', *Civil Wars*, 14/1 (2012) pp.80–103, p.83.
11. Ibid., p.98.
12. *The Times* 17 Jul. 1973, 1f.
13. Reis and Oliveira (note 10), p.80.
14. Ibid.
15. Harry Derelius, 'Wiriyamu is marked on Tete mission maps', *The Times*, 16 Jul. 1973, 1d.
16. Mustafah Dhada, Preliminary census data gathered during 1994–1995 field work at Wiriyamu.
17. Reis and Oliveira (note 10), p.81.
18. Adrian Hastings, *Wiriyamu: My Lai in Mozambique* (London: Search Press Limited 1974).
19. Cesare Bertulli, *A Cruz e a Espada em Moçambique* (Lisbon: Portugália Editora 1974).
20. Cabrita (note 3).
21. The text does not indicate the extent of the research undertaken in *The Times* of London archives. See, *The Times Annual Index* (es) for a complete set of articles related to the case between 1973 and 1975.
22. António Sousa Ribeiro, *Terror em Tete: Relato Documental das Atrocidades dos Portugueses no Distrito de Tete, Moçambique, 1971–1972* (Porto: A Regra do Jogo 1974).
23. Parker, *Wiriyamu and The War*.
24. Interviews with General Gruveta, Maputo, Mozambique (1994) and General Hama Tai, Maputo, Mozambique (1995).
25. The essential document pertinent here is 'Dignitatis Humanae', *Vatican II – Voice of the Church* (7 Dec. 1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html, accessed 10 Jun. 2012.
26. Interview with Michael Knipe, London, 1996.