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EDITORIAL

TALKING TO MAPUTO

The recent contacts between South Africa and Mozambique and the sporadic meetings between South African and Angolan representatives, followed by the recent pull-back of South African forces in Southern Angola, and talks of a ceasefire there, raise the question – if South Africa has been engaged in a policy of destabilising its neighbours, is this policy now beginning to achieve something? And if it is, what is the real aim of this highly dangerous exercise?

It seems now to be generally accepted by competent observers overseas and by many at home that, since the collapse of the Portuguese Empire, South Africa or its proxies have been increasingly active in covert operations of a military nature over most of the Southern African region. The South African authorities have consistently denied any such involvement. What they have not been able to deny have been their raids on Maseru and Maputo, and the land attacks in Southern Angola which have seemed, in recent years, to be becoming regular annual

events. Instead they have insisted that, in the first two instances, these were raids on ANC bases and, in Angola, that these were pre-emptive strikes to forestall plans for major SWAPO infiltrations into Namibia. Support for UNITA and the Mozambique National Resistance has never been admitted. Nevertheless many commentators are emphatic that it is taking place on a large scale. The position with regard to Zimbabwean dissidents is more obscure but there is at least some evidence that they have been given help.

The important question is this. If there is clandestine support for anti-government movements in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, is it merely an extension of the ANC/SWAPO raids with the limited objective of persuading those of South Africa's neighbours who harbour people hostile to her to stop doing so? Or does the policy go much further? Is it really aimed at toppling unfriendly regimes in the region and replacing them with friendly

ones? The question takes on a new significance in the light of the Russian reaction to the most recent Angolan incursion which carried the clear warning that South Africa could go so far in its raids into and occupation of Southern Angola but that any attempt to topple the Angolan government would provoke a much greater Russian commitment to that country. This commitment might not be militarily significant for the moment but could have important long-term consequences for the whole Southern African area.

If South Africa's aim is simply to eliminate ANC and other bases from near its borders then it has achieved considerable success this past year. Lesotho has been obliged to get rid of many of its South African exiles and in Swaziland the palace coup has brought to power a group which is not likely to provide a haven for cross-border raiders. The first indication of whether it is "terrorist bases" or "unfriendly regimes" which are the South African target should come as the motive behind the recent Angolan moves becomes clearer and as the talks between Pretoria and Maputo develop. For however much **tourism** may be on the Maputo agenda, **tourism** and **terrorism** just don't mix, and we can surely take it for granted that what both sides will really be talking about will be the threat to their security. If South Africa agreed to withdraw its rumoured sponsorship of the MNR in return for Samora Machel agreeing to close down bases for armed attacks on South Africa, even though neither admitted to it publicly, the

setback to those involved in carrying the "armed struggle" into South Africa would be enormous. It is highly unlikely that Zimbabwe would provide alternative bases, and Botswana has never shown any inclination to do so. Only Angola would remain committed to supporting armed attacks on South Africa and even there recent events suggest (not for the first time, of course) that some sort of accommodation may be coming closer, and this commitment withdrawn.

It is possible then that South Africa's military power may soon achieve for it a buffer zone around its borders through which raiders from outside will find it increasingly difficult to penetrate. If hand-in-hand with that goes an increase in trade and a boost to the economies of countries like Mozambique, South Africa may have won for itself a respite from armed attack which could last quite a long time.

But will it last for ever? Surely not, unless whatever time is won is used quickly to create conditions here which will satisfy the reasonable aspirations of most of our people. We have a very long way to go in an entirely new direction before we will do that. And if the real aim of South African policy is to topple unfriendly regimes and the recent moves over Angola and Maputo are just an elaborate ploy to silence some of President Reagan's critics as he seeks re-election, then you can be sure that there will never be peace on our borders. □

reviewed by CAROLYN HAMILTON

RETRIEVING THE PRE-COLONIAL PAST

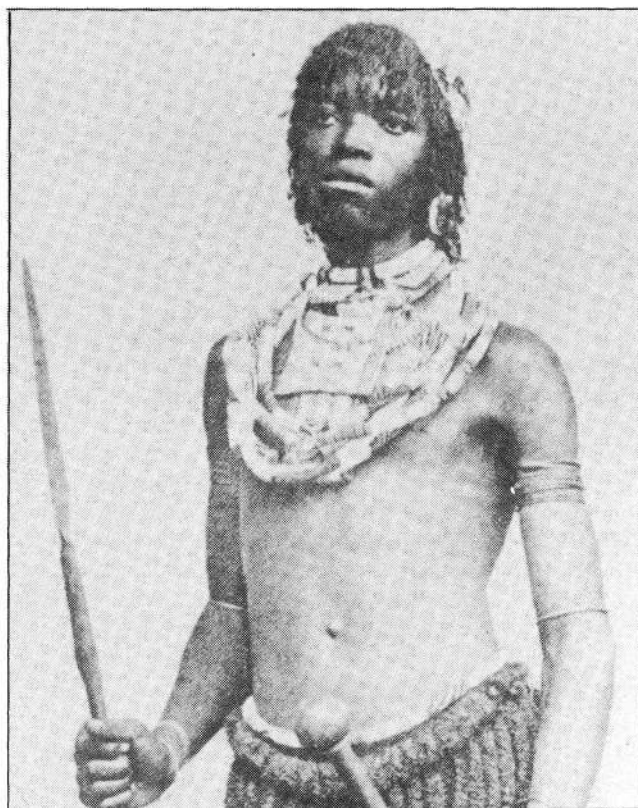
THE HLUBI CHIEFDOM IN ZULULAND-NATAL

John Wright and Andrew Manson
Ladysmith Historical Society
1983
Tugela Press, Ladysmith
R6,00

This slim history (only 99 pages) of the Hlubi chiefdom of Zululand-Natal was first commissioned in 1974 to illuminate the 'Hlubi side' of the Langalibalele 'rebellion' of 1873. In the course of research its scope has been considerably broadened. Wright and Manson have both extended their account back in time to examine the genesis of the chiefdom, and have situated the events of 1873 within a historical analysis of the changing material conditions of the Hlubi people over time.

The account illuminates the uniqueness and significance of the Hlubi experience, within the wider context of events in Zululand and Natal. This balance is achieved by integrating a systematic exposition of intra-Hlubi relations with an account of the chiefdom's external relations with the Zulu kingdom, the colonial state and the settlers.

In the early chapters, Wright traces the evolution of the chiefdom from its earliest origins over two centuries ago.



A Hlubi youth with his hair done in the iziyendane style.