

# Violent Resistance: Armed civilian protection in Mozambique's civil war

Corinna Jentsch, Leiden University

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**VIOLENT RESISTANCE**  
MILITIA FORMATION AND CIVIL WAR IN MOZAMBIQUE



**CORINNA JENTZSCH**

# Militias in Mozambique's Civil War (1976-1992)

NATIONAL  
MOZAMBIQUE

## Antonio's triumph of the spirits

*An unlikely rustic seer and his followers turn the tide against Renamo*

RACHEL WATERHOUSE  
ZAMBEZIA

**I**n a village clearing near Nicoadala in Mozambique's central province of Zambezia, "Barama" troops are preparing for battle: six or seven commanders, distinguished by guns and combat fatigues, form a line opposite rows of roughly clad "soldiers," mostly youths from the village.

Chanting songs denouncing Renamo rebels "who make people suffer," traditional healer Manuel Antonio leads his troops in a call for spirits to protect them. Then, moaning a funeral dirge, Antonio is lifted, placed in a shallow grave and covered with blankets. Earth is piled over him as a sermon is read, promising God will send saviours from evil.

Five minutes later, spitting dust, the



*Manuel Antonio (left) with his military commander: Frelimo's fortunes rise again*

# Militias in Mozambique's Civil War (1976-1992)



Naparama in Namapa, Nampula, *Vida Nova*, November 1991



# Origins of Militias in Civil War

- Militias
  - Armed organizations that exist outside of the regular security apparatus of the state and emerge as a countermovement against insurgents
  - Active in 2/3 of civil wars between 1989-2010
  - State-initiated vs. community-initiated militias
- Community-initiated militias in Mozambique
  - *When*: Expression of civilian agency during military stalemates
  - *Where*: Adoption of militia through inter-elite collaboration
  - *How*: Re-invention of prior practices mobilizes members

# Effects of armed civilian protection in Mozambique

- Protection of civilians
  - Village patrols
  - Information about immediate attacks
  - Returning abducted community members
- But protection effect is temporary
  - Revenge attacks by the rebels
  - Counter-force by rebels
  - Killing of the militia's leader

# Conclusions

- Militias as armed civilian protection
  - Civilian agency
  - Emerge during military stalemates & with elite support
  - *Importance of social embeddedness of militias*
- Protection effects often short-term
  - Information & manpower
  - Revenge violence & fragmentation of war
  - *Adaptation & learning on part of insurgents*

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- Thank you!
- Questions & comments: [c.jentzsch@fsw.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:c.jentzsch@fsw.leidenuniv.nl)