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Mohammad A. El-Khawas

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The Press and Mozambique

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A Study in Contrast

By Mohamed A. El-Khawas

The *Christian Science Monitor*. The *Los Angeles Times*. These are two components of what is widely known as the American press. Both are published daily in different geographical regions of the United States and — by virtue of the power of the press — play a major role in shaping public opinion on domestic and international issues. Their coverage of international events, particularly the political developments in southern Africa, has been extensive.

The American press, including the *Monitor* and the *L.A. Times*, has in the past drawn criticism for its disinterest or lack of objective reporting with respect to stories about southern Africa, Mozambique in particular.

This report, therefore, will, examine news coverage of Mozambique by the *Monitor* and the *L.A. Times* during the last phase of the Portuguese colonial administration. It is a preliminary probe of a highly complex issue that will need further research and exploration. It covers the period between 1974 and 1975, a crucial time in the struggle for independence. Crucial because it coincided with the escalation of the military campaign of the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) against Portuguese forces inside the territory. Also, it was a time immediately before and after the Lisbon coup of April 1974, a time of political turmoil which was marked by the publication of General Antonio de Spínola's book, *Portugal and the Future*, the subsequent dismissal of Spínola and Costa Gomes from the armed forces, unrest in the army, and the eventual overthrow of the old regime.

The fact that the new military govern-

ment, headed by Spínola, disassociated itself from the Salazar-Caetano colonial policy and declared its commitment to a political instead of a military solution to African problems had created new hope that a peaceful solution could be found for the decade-old Mozambique problem.

Frequency and Place of Reporting

Prior to the 1974 coup, there was hardly any reporting on the events that were shaping the future of Mozambique. In the first four months of 1974, both the *Monitor* and the *L.A. Times* did not print any news related to the liberation struggle in the territory.

The overthrow of the Caetano regime on April 24, 1974 created much interest among the U.S. media. Newspaper editors found new interest in the developments in Lisbon and their implications for future Portuguese colonial policy, particularly because the new junta promised to establish democracy at home and work toward a peaceful solution in the war-torn colonies.

The sudden change of events in Portugal provided the media with a new topic of information that was sensational, controversial, and highly speculative. American reporters were primarily concerned that the new internal development in Portugal, a member of the NATO, might turn it toward Communism. In the following weeks, lengthy articles, news stories, and, to a much lesser extent, editorials and columns appeared in all leading American newspapers. The major focus was on the turn of events in Lisbon and the rising Communist and Socialist influence during the provisional government under Spínola. Some American newspapers, including the *Monitor* and the *L.A. Times*, showed interest in the impact of Portugal's internal developments on Mozambique and other colonies in Africa.

The *L.A. Times'* and the *Monitor's* coverage of Mozambique, however, was inadequate and scanty. This can be seen in the number of days when reports about Mozambique appeared. They were, in the *Monitor*, only 8% of the days in 1974, compared to 3% in 1975. On the other hand, the *L.A. Times* mentioned Mozambique 12% of the days in 1974 and 8% in 1975. [see table 1]

On the whole, the *L.A. Times* published more news on Mozambique than the *Monitor* during the entire period.

Reporting on Mozambique continued to be crisis-oriented. News on Mozambique was occasionally included in both newspapers between May and November 1974. And a variety of reporting was found every month during this critical period in the territory's history. As one would expect, the frequency of reporting was related to major

developments in Portuguese-Mozambican relations.

In 1974, for instance, there was a sharp increase in reporting by the *L.A. Times* during May and the *Monitor* during June, following the Lisbon coup. Both newspapers also had a considerable number of reports in September, when the Portuguese government and FRELIMO concluded an agreement to end the 10-year colonial war. A similar pattern could be found in 1975, particularly on the eve of Mozambique's independence celebration and immediately afterwards.

There are some interesting patterns regarding the place from which news events were reported, particularly whether the origination point was Portugal or Africa. Both newspapers reported a considerable amount of information out of Africa and, to a much lesser extent, out of Portugal. In fact, during 1975, neither newspaper filed any news related to Mozambique from Lisbon. This was quite a contrast from the previous year when the *L.A. Times* filed many news stories and articles out of Portugal. Its extensive coverage originating in Portugal during 1974 was largely due to its interest in the rapid internal developments and revolutionary zeal evident in Lisbon.

The turning point was the signing of the Lusaka Agreement (September 1974) which set in motion the transition to an independent Mozambique. With independence on the horizon, there apparently was less need to report out of Lisbon since the destiny of Mozambique was now in the hands of FRELIMO. The shift in interest resulted in more coverage coming from Africa, but not necessarily out of Mozambique. For both newspapers, 57% or more of news reports came out of Mozambique and neighboring countries. However, there are individual differences between these newspapers.

Table 2 shows that the *Monitor* filed a much higher percentage of reports out of Mozambique than the *L.A. Times* did. In 1975, the *Monitor* reported all of its news either out of Mozambique or written at the home office. At no time during 1974 and 1975 did any news stories or articles on Mozambique come out of South Africa or Rhodesia. Other African countries where reports on Mozambique were filed from included Kenya and Congo (Brazzaville).

Unlike the *Monitor*, the *L.A. Times* published fewer articles and news stories out of Mozambique than from neighboring countries during 1975. In fact, twice as many articles and news stories were filed from South Africa as from Mozambique during that period. All were filed on the eve, and in the aftermath, of Mozambique's independence.

American correspondents in southern and eastern Africa find it much easier to work out of South Africa and Kenya, where they seem to enjoy relative freedom of press.

Foreign correspondents observe that most African officials and newsmen are often reluctant to criticize their governments because their first loyalty and responsibility are to the regimes. It is not easy, according to foreign journalists, to work out of Africa. Correspondents are caught between African governments who "want a tap on the back" and their editors who are more or less interested in stereotyped stories about Africa. Catch 22.

Types of Coverage

There are at least four types of press coverage on Mozambique: editorials, columns, articles, and news briefs. They vary in nature, purpose, size, and depth. Editorials and columns are important because they are analytical, highly opinionated and often reflect the general stance of the newspapers on the issues under examination. They are written in the home office by the editors, columnists, or experts who freely express their opinions.

In contrast, articles and news briefs require obtaining information through interviews between a reporter and informants, opposition leaders, and diplomats in Mozambique, neighboring African countries, or Portugal. Major news syndicates are another source used in varying degrees by the *Monitor* and the *L.A. Times*.

In 1974, the *L.A. Times* — more than the *Monitor* — relied on international news agencies such as United Press International (UPI), Associated Press (AP), and Reuters for its overseas reports. More than half of the news items and stories reported in the *L.A. Times* came from these agencies. In contrast, about one-fifth of the news in the *Monitor* was obtained from Reuters and no other agencies were used. The *Monitor*, instead, used brief edited news reports on Mozambique. One-third of the news was included in a section called "Inside the News — Briefly." Such reporting was always less than five paragraphs in length. It was factual, with no interpretative statements.

It is interesting to note that the *L.A. Times'* dependence on outside news agencies diminished the following year. In 1975, none of the two newspapers used independent sources at all in printing news items about Mozambique. This may be due in part to the changing nature of events. The signing of the Lusaka Agreement on September 7, 1974 ended the 10-year-old colonial war, consequently resulting in less controversial news reportage out of Mozambique or Portugal. At this point,

there was more need for in-depth analysis of FRELIMO, the future government of Mozambique, its leadership, and its ideology since Portugal had already agreed to turn the government over to FRELIMO after a brief transition period.

Editorials and Columns

Editorials usually focus on major international and domestic issues and often reflect the views of the editors. It is expected that editorials will only appear whenever, in the editor's view, major events took place that altered the long-standing relationship between Portugal and Mozambique. The first event was the military coup in Lisbon. The second was the Lusaka Agreement between Portugal and FRELIMO. The third was the independence celebration that marked the birth of free Mozambique, ending almost 500 years of colonialism.

During 1974, there were three editorials in the *L.A. Times* related to Mozambique, though not exclusively. The first appeared on May 5 (a few days after the coup in Lisbon) when the military government's policy toward the colonies had not yet crystallized. It was felt that the coup had "the potential of being a very good thing" for both Portugal and Africa. It was hoped that "the new steps toward civil rights and establishing democratic government in Portugal will be matched by an orderly extension of self-determination to the colonies." In the editor's view such action would be "a positive force to speed an end to the racism that rules Rhodesia and South Africa."

The second editorial appeared on June 16 and focused on the broader issue of decolonization of Portugal's African empire. It dealt, specifically, with the junta's promise to grant self-determination for African peoples. It urged Portugal to speed up the process of decolonization, particularly since it had not yet suggested or initiated any measures to implement self-determination. The editorial argued that it was urgent "to move the colonies to self-determination on a multi-racial basis," so that the emerging African states could become "the homes of the Portuguese who choose to stay." There was a danger in waiting because whites, out of fear of losing their privileged position in Mozambique, might block the majority rule by unilaterally declaring independence, as the Rhodesians did in 1965. It was felt that a peaceful transition to independence and the founding of multi-racial nations could have "enormous impact on Rhodesia and South Africa."

The third editorial appeared on September 12, a few days after the signing of the Lusaka Agreement. It dealt with white un-

rest' in Mozambique. The *L.A. Times* praised Lisbon for the "wise and steady program" of decolonization and "the firmness" with which it put down white rebellion. It took the stance that it was wrong for the whites to try to set up a racist structure along the South African or Rhodesian model because it "would not only be a violation of human rights but also would invite the same terror and tension evident in the white-run nations" in southern Africa. It was hoped that it was not "too late to lay a foundation for racial harmony with independence."

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Unlike the *L.A. Times*, the *Monitor* had only a single editorial published in 1974. It appeared in September and welcomed the Lusaka Agreement but warned the whites against "adventurism, insurgency, or cross-border violence" which, in the editor's view, "would create instability that would serve neither the interests of the whites themselves nor the interests of neighboring white-ruled South Africa and Rhodesia." It urged them "to give the new accord a chance to work." It hoped that "all parties in Mozambique will accept the transitional government in a . . . spirit of conciliation rather than violence."

In the following year, the *Monitor* did not include any editorial on Mozambique. As a result, the day of national independence in Mozambique went unnoticed. The *L.A. Times*, on the other hand, found this occasion a worthwhile event to discuss in its editorial page. It described President Samora Machel, as a man with "limited education and experience," who chose "to brandish his commitment to Marxism."

The major portion of the editorial speculated on FRELIMO's future foreign policy. First, it mentioned that Machel might close the border with Rhodesia "to support the struggle of the Rhodesian Black majority for full political rights," with no mention that such action was in compliance with the United Nations sanctions against Rhodesia. Second, the editorial was quick to point out that the U.S. was not officially invited to participate in the independence celebrations, although two congressmen would attend as private guests. Further, it noted that the U.S. had not yet received a reply for its request to open an embassy there. Third, it concluded that it might not be too long before the FRELIMO regime would "discover the disadvantages of depending on Moscow and Peking."

Unlike editorials, columns on Mozambique were few. The *Monitor* did not publish any in 1974 and 1975. The *L.A. Times* published two during the two-year period. They were written by well-known Africanists affiliated with the African Studies

Center at the University of California in Los Angeles [UCLA].

The first column, appearing only a few days after the Lisbon coup, was prepared by Michael Lofchie, professor of political science and then-assistant director of the center. He addressed Portugal's colonial problems, analyzed Spínola's stance, and discussed various options before the junta. He stressed two principles that General Spínola, head of the military government, would follow in shaping his future African policy. The first principle was that a military solution for the African problem was out of the question. Portugal could not win the war but could only reach a stalemate on the battlefield, possibly at a high cost in the face of FRELIMO's mounting attacks. Second, a solution must be political. It was believed that sociopolitical reforms might help Portugal to win the African majority away from FRELIMO. This was a necessity because Portugal's economic dependence on the colonies was "so great that the junta is certain to rule out, for the foreseeable future, any possibility of full independence for the African territories."

Lofchie also dealt with reaction of whites to Spínola's colonial policy. He felt that there was a slim chance that white settlers might join right-wing elements in the Portuguese army or with South Africa to launch a preemptive coup "to prevent greater political freedom" for African people. Consequently, they were likely to "see in Spínola's political strategy their only hope for economic survival in Africa." He admitted that there was no easy way out for Portugal because acceptance of the political solution by whites might "virtually insure its rejection" by the Africans. This possibility might discourage the junta from offering significant freedoms for its African colonies.

The second column was written a year later (and a few days after Mozambique's independence) by Gerald Bender, former director of the UCLA interdisciplinary research program on Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. He responded to criticism by the U.S. media concerning the ruling party, FRELIMO, and President Machel of Mozambique. He accused the media of being "myopic and ethnocentric" to dismiss Machel "as a mere Marxist guerrilla who has little or no apparent preparation for leading the new nation." In Machel's defense, Bender argued that other leaders' credentials should not be criticized, "considering the background and preparation of our founding fathers" and we should "judge people by their achievements, not by their backgrounds."

Bender cited many examples to illustrate FRELIMO's accomplishments under

Machel's leadership. Machel conducted a successful national war of liberation, defeating Portuguese generals who had graduated from top military academies. He is a "man of the people" who "understands their problems and is capable of helping them unite and advance through their efforts." Thanks to FRELIMO, the transition from colonialism to nationhood was "remarkably smooth," despite the presence of potentially disruptive groups such as members of the former secret police, militia and African soldiers in the Portuguese army.

Bender noted that the FRELIMO government was faced with tremendous problems during the period of reconstruction. For instance, "FRELIMO has inherited a debt of almost \$650 million, a treasury that is practically bankrupt, and an economy that was rigged to enrich the coffers of Lisbon rather than develop the colony itself." Moreover, its economy is "heavily linked with the racist regimes of South Africa and Rhodesia."

He urged Americans to go beyond "Marxist rhetoric" and objectively examine FRELIMO's tracts that, in his view, are "more realistic than offensive" if they were looked at in the Mozambican context. Arguments recognizing that Mozambique was exploited economically for centuries "should not be instantly labeled 'Marxist,' nor should the desire to end 'man's exploitation of man' be considered a monopoly of Marxists."

He pointed out that if the U.S. was not invited to participate in the independence celebrations, and was not extended diplomatic recognition right away, this was not the result of FRELIMO's "Marxist rhetoric" but of "America's long-standing complicity with Portuguese colonialism." It was a demonstration of FRELIMO's displeasure with past American policy. He indicated that there was a need "to gain the respect not so much of the Mozambique people as that of all Africa." He advised the U.S. to "become more sensitive to the goals of Africans living under white domination. Once this is done, U.S.-Mozambique diplomatic relations are sure to follow."

Articles and News Stories

In 1974, the *Monitor* and the *L.A. Times* had almost the same number of articles and news stories on Mozambique. In the following year, however, the *L.A. Times* had three times as many articles as the *Monitor*. Neither newspaper filed stories out of Portugal at any time during this period. Except for two items, all were dispatched from Mozambique or other African countries.

The turn of events in Lisbon in April 1974 resulted in both the *L.A. Times* and the

Monitor sending their own correspondents to Mozambique to report new developments directly from the scene. Between April and August, both Henry S. Hayward of the *Monitor* and Dail Torgerson of the *L.A. Times* filed their news stories and articles from Africa. There was some tendency for the *Monitor's* correspondent to work out of Kenya during 1974 and for the *L.A. Times'* reporter to file articles from South Africa in 1975. Both were generally interested in broad issues, including political developments in Mozambique in the aftermath of the Lisbon coup, internal opposition to FRELIMO's control over the country, the attitudes of white-ruled South Africa and Rhodesia toward FRELIMO's ascendency to power, and the Mozambican economy.

In the period between the Lisbon coup (April 1974) and the signing of the Lusaka Agreement (September 1974), the *Monitor* and the *L.A. Times* probed into the attitudes of various segments of the Mozambican society — Africans, Mestizos, and European settlers — with regard to possible self-government for the territory. They also examined the impact of majority rule in Mozambique on white-ruled neighboring countries. On both topics, the *Monitor's* coverage was broader and more analytical. For instance, it provided detailed information on the political groupings and parties that sprung up in the territory following the overthrow of the Caetano regime. These organizations included the Mozambique Democratic Movement (Modemo), the Group for the Unity of Mozambique (GUMO), the Independence for the Continuation of Western Civilization (FICO), and Independence Mozambique Movement (MIM). They mushroomed overnight in an attempt to block FRELIMO's ascendance to power and to challenge FRELIMO's claim for leadership inside the territory.

It should be noted, however, that the correspondents for both newspapers did not have access to FRELIMO leaders prior to the signing of the Lusaka Agreement. As a result, their coverage lacked fresh information on the changing attitudes of FRELIMO toward the peace initiatives being offered by the new military government in Lisbon. In most cases, they had to settle for information obtained through informants or Western diplomats. This was often deficient and outdated.

On the other hand, the opinions of FRELIMO opponents were well presented in their writings. For instance, Miguel Murupa of GUMO, who had defected from FRELIMO during the struggle, was interviewed and his views were widely expressed in one of the *L.A. Times* articles. A great deal

of exposure was given to the white settlers' views, particularly their reluctance to see control of Mozambique pass to FRELIMO as well as their fear of losing their privileged status in the territory.

The correspondents also examined various options before the whites to block FRELIMO's takeover of the government in Mozambique. One option was to divide the country into two parts, north and south, with white settlers retaining the southern half, including Beira and the capital in order to "maintain close ties with South Africa and Rhodesia." Another was for the whites to initiate a preemptive coup and declare independence, as Ian Smith did in Rhodesia in 1965. The *L.A. Times* reported in late August 1974 that mercenaries were recruited to fight in the territory and that Pretoria and Salisbury had contingency plans for moving into southern Mozambique "either to suppress chaos or back a coup."

Both newspapers reported unrest in Mozambique during this period. The *Monitor* reported wide unrest among Portuguese settlers following the news of the signing of the Lusaka Agreement. It criticized Machel because he considered his opponents to be a "bunch of bandits, hooligans, and reactionaries" and promised that they would be "very quickly neutralized and annihilated." It argued that FRELIMO must deal with the roots of the problems because white settlers "had genuine grounds for concern," although it also admitted that their concern was "more with the prospect of losing their economic status than with the fear of racial retaliation."

Conclusion

The U.S. press is a mirror reflecting the mood, the values, and the interests of the American public. Newspapers are guided by public interest toward domestic and international news. The editors make decisions with regard to the publication of material, the availability of space, and the location in the newspaper.

Like all news on Africa, coverage of Mozambique in American newspapers, is infrequent, insufficient, and inadequate. Usually, it is crisis-oriented, appearing only when there is a news item that can appeal to American readers.

Due to human, logistic limitations, and the expenses involved, foreign correspondents focus their attention and energy only on major happenings in the region. Thus, when Mozambique was on the road to independence, correspondents were sent by the *L.A. Times* and the *Monitor* to cover the news. Once independence was achieved, press interest subsided. To make up for not having their own staff writ-

TABLE 1

Frequency of Reporting

	1974		1975		Total No. days	%
	No. days	%	No. days	%		
Monitor	26	8	9	3	312	100
L.A. Times	42	12	28	8	365	100

TABLE 2

Place of Reporting

	Year	Mozambique		Africa		Portugal		NP****		Cuba		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Monitor	1974	15	57.7	5*	19.2	2	7.7	4	15.4	-	-	26	100
	1975	6	66.7	-	-	-	-	3	33.3	-	-	9	100
L.A. Times	1974	17	40.5	7**	16.7	8	19.0	10	23.8	-	-	42	100
	1975	7	25.0	16***	57.1	-	-	4	14.3	1	3.6	28	100

*Congo-Brazzaville (1); Kenya (4).

**Kenya (1); Tanzania (1); Zambia (1); South Africa (1); Rhodesia (1).

***South Africa (14); Rhodesia (1); Uganda (1).

****No place mentioned.

ers in that country, American newspapers relied on news syndicates and independent agencies for news items about Mozambique.

In 1970, for instance, international news agencies had about 126 news bureaus in Africa, accounting for about 78 percent of foreign correspondents in the region. Another source is borrowing feature stories from each other. The *L.A. Times* borrowed from the *Washington Post* on August 13, 1974 and from the *Guardian* on October 11, 1975. In contrast, the *Monitor* did not borrow any news stories during this period.

All in all, the U.S. press showed little interest in Mozambique, a fact which may be a reflection of the general attitude of the American public and government. Mozambique has little or no constituency in the U.S. Many factors might have contributed to this situation. There was only a single letter to the editor of the *L.A. Times* (none in the *Monitor*) written on November 7, 1974 by a Mozambican who disagreed with the use of the word "granting" independence. Instead, he stated: "I 'gained' independence. I kicked the intruder out."

Geographically, Mozambique is located in East Africa and the U.S. has little economic and strategic interests in that country; this is reflected in figures on trade and investment.

Politically, past American policy that supported Portuguese colonialism in Africa has resulted in cool relationships with independent Mozambique. It has alienated FRELIMO leadership, drawing them closer to the Russians. This in itself has hardened the positions of some Americans toward Mozambique because they are still holding the cold war torch. Ideologically, the two countries are at the extreme ends of the

spectrum. Machel's drive to establish a truly Marxist-Leninist state in Mozambique does not please those Americans who would like to weaken, if not eliminate, Soviet influence in Africa. The U.S. Congress has up to now refused to approve the Carter Administration's aid allocations for Mozambique.

Culturally, Mozambique and the U.S. do not share mutually meaningful political, economic, and sociocultural attributes or values. This lack of cultural proximity adds to the scarcity of news on Mozambique as well as the lack of general interest in that country. □

Mohamed El-Khawas, Ph.D., is professor of history at the University of the District of Columbia.