



"REMEMBER TO HAVE SOME HEART," SHE SAID, REFERRING TO THE IMPACT OF THE WAR. ANGOLAN GIRL IN HOMELESS CAMP

CHAPTER 4

FINDING THE FRONT LINES

The "real" business of politics is taking place where analysts are often not looking.¹

There are essentially two types of armed conflicts in contemporary Africa: the political and the criminal. They are in effect nothing but the continuation by other means of the violence of everyday life.²

I made my first trip to Mozambique in 1988. The country was embroiled in a war that had taken nearly a million lives, most of them civilians. I can't say what images of war I thought I would first encounter, but I can say that my first encounter with violence wasn't at all what I expected. I flew into Maputo, the capital, from Harare, and checked into my hotel after evening had fallen. Settling into my room, I heard pounding at what I thought was my door. The hotel had hallways that led to short corridors with doors to two rooms side by side, and a shared bathroom. I opened my door and saw that a man was knocking on the door next to mine. He turned to me abruptly and told me to go back inside my room and shut my door. I did. A bit later I went out to wash up in the shared bathroom. I found a man lying in the bathtub, bleeding and clutching the remains of the shower curtain. Kneeling next to him, I saw he had been stabbed a number of times. I told him to hold on, that I would go find medical help. I went down to the front desk and told them there was a man in my bathtub who urgently needed medical help. When I returned to my room, he was gone.

At breakfast the next morning I asked the hotel staff who the man was

who had been stabbed the night before and how he was. They looked at me blankly and said, "No one has been stabbed here." I replied that I had seen the man, that in fact I had found him in my bathtub.

They responded with the same closed expressions: "Really, no one was stabbed here." I rephrased my question: "OK, no one was stabbed here last night. But *if* someone had been stabbed here, who would they have been and how are they?" "Ahh!" The men relaxed and smiled, "That guy would have been the Angolan. Another Angolan came through and carried out their war here, the one guy stabbed the other — different sides of politics, you know. The guy, we don't know how he is, he disappeared, maybe he ran off, scared; or maybe he was carted off — he just disappeared."

In the middle of the war in Mozambique, the war in Angola intrudes. It intrudes not on some distant battlefield, not in the bush savanna, not on streets cordoned off, but in a hotel room, and in my bathtub. And each act of violence, even if it involves Angolans, affects the war in Mozambique, with reverberations that can travel across borders and political causes as easy as sound waves do. I was left wondering: where, exactly, are the battlefields, and who are the players in any war?

I was tempted to subtitle this chapter "Looking for War in All the Wrong Places." Before beginning a study of war, a researcher must decide where to look for it. In much of academe, I have been encouraged to find war in libraries amid tomes of second- and third-hand accounts of "politics by other means." These tomes themselves (mis)locate war in a powerful way. Military science locates it in the acts of rational soldiering and political science locates it in the acts of mostly rational political elites — and both do it in a largely irrational world. If there is even an iota of truth in Alfred Vagts's claim that military history is consistently written with "polemic purpose for the justification of individuals or armies and with small regard for socially relevant facts,"³ then an analysis restricted solely to the institutions of war and politics will not provide a comprehensive understanding of the realities of war and peace.

Of course even an institution-based analysis of political violence raises the question: which institutions, which leaders and supporters, whose ideas and policies? The men and women in the military I have met who are dedicated professionals seeking to protect their homelands from violence? The troops who are engaged in drug running, weapons black marketeering, even cattle poaching? The soldiers who are torturers, who burn entire villages, who drink themselves into oblivion after raping women in front of their children? The child soldiers carrying guns bigger than

they are? The kindly veterans who set up orphanages for war orphans? The troops who secretly warn villagers that an attack against them is pending so they can flee to safety? The generals who grow rich on war while others go broke? Those who go insane, or those looking for a brighter dawn?

While military power is instrumental in crafting national security ideology and action, a caveat attaches to this. The idea circulates in popular culture that interviewing political and military representatives in their offices (that is, away from the front lines) represents an accurate portrayal of the events taking place. There is often an implicit assumption that military and political leaders may not admit to certain forms of warfare taking place under their jurisdiction, but that they do know of it. This may be crediting people with more knowledge than they in fact have. Few people pass easily between the borders of power politics and front-line realities. Most grunt soldiers and civilians do not have free access to the corridors of power; if they do, many are loath to talk openly of battle-front truths that give lie to the carefully crafted belief systems about "the war" that circulate in society. And at the higher levels, people begin to believe their own propaganda.

The Mozambican photojournalist Joel Chiziane brought this fact home to me. In 1988, Maputo, the capital city of Mozambique, was largely devoid of consumer goods and public services; but there was an exhibit open to the public. It contained Chiziane's photos documenting the war in his country. The photos were riveting.⁴ What struck me the most was how Chiziane had humanized the face of war. It had something to do with the way he captured eyes, and the human spirit:

- A hungry child sitting on the dirt floor of a mud hut war-emptied of all possessions except for an empty cooking pot over an unlit fire. The child has found a single grain of rice, and as he picks it up to eat, he stops and looks up at the camera, his eyes reflecting his knowledge of the depths of suffering and the size of hope that can fit into a grain of rice.
- A refugee mother who has set up a "home" under a parked train car between the tracks trying to coax a fire to warm her two young children while reaching out to caress her youngest, who has burst into tears. In mid-gesture, she looks up to give Joel a poignant smile; a mother, somehow any mother, who continues to cherish the idea of family love and a better day in the midst of a bad one.

- Burned-out cars reduced to pieces of twisted metal lining what was once a major national highway, now unsettlingly devoid of life and movement, like a scene from a post-apocalypse movie.
- A young girl lying on a hospital cot who has been burned over her entire body in the last attack on her village looking at the camera with the eyes of an adult and the humanity of childhood.
- A man gunned down in the doorway of a train car: all the photo shows is the view of the entrance taken from outside that shows the dead man's foot in the doorway as he collapsed back into the train, and his briefcase fallen open at his feet — the personalized generic death — any one of us.
- A soldier walking down the road with his assault rifle over his shoulder and his cooking pot dangling from it, who somehow reminds you of your brother or your neighbor.

Chiziane didn't glorify war; he didn't preach against it: he simply showed the realities of war on the front lines in a way that no one could dismiss or propagandize. He showed not generic images of casualties or perpetrators, but living, breathing people and the tragedies of death. It was a powerful indictment of war. I asked Chiziane how he had come to do this show. He was one of a handful of journalists who traveled out to the front lines at considerable risk, for this was at a time the rebel forces were targeting professionals, especially those exposing the war's severe human rights abuses. He replied: "The government and the people here in the capital don't really know what the war is like for the people in this country. They need to see it, to understand what it is really like out there, before they can broker a real peace accord. This is the best way I know to bring the truth of war home to them."

Chiziane challenges us to question what is taken to be the objective work of war: Where, exactly, do we get our statistics on war-related policies and casualties? On human rights and their violations? No researcher I know walks battlefield after battlefield counting casualties. No grunt soldier I know who does walk on battlefields walks through firefights, napalmed towns, and military prisons documenting casualties, or has the power to oversee what officers do with the reports he or she turns in. Political and military leaders do not want to advertise their own vulnerabilities in battle or the ways they ignore the Geneva Convention.

One of Chiziane's pictures portrays a woman in a tattered wrap standing in a recently dug hole several meters deep, trying to scoop up a bit of

water collected at the bottom. This makeshift well commands the center of the image, and reaching out into the horizon in all directions from the well is a parched and barren landscape, broken only in isolated places by single shriveled stalks of corn, unable to bear food.

Wars don't occur in isolation from other tragedies of human existence. Indeed, they often provoke them. Under normal circumstances, the impact of a drought can be lethal to humans and livestock alike. But in war, resources are often channeled away from civilian support and into the war effort. In Mozambique, untold numbers of people perished from the drought, deaths that might well have been prevented in peacetime with adequately functioning infrastructure and resources. Deaths were further provoked by "the other side" disrupting emergency aid supplies to the drought victims — a military tactic to undermine "the enemy's" ability to support its own population. Drought deaths/war deaths — the dividing lines are indistinct and politically blurred. Where do these people, Chiziane would like us to ask, fit into the larger picture of war's impact and its reporting? These people, he fears, are left uncounted — their lives unrecorded, their deaths invisible in formal reckoning.

Many, perhaps even most, of the war-related casualties I have seen will never be recorded as such. Yet all represent the nucleus of war. The day after I first met Joel Chiziane, I had an experience that widened these considerations. I had met a group of people working in the Ministry of Tourism — a ministry that had little work during the war. They declared that since I was the closest thing to a tourist they had seen in years, I should accompany them on a multi-day trip to inspect a crumbling and largely unoccupied "tourist resort" on an island. About eight of us made the trip. At lunch, we were eating alone in a cavernous empty restaurant built to feed hundreds. A man who I had never seen before and who wasn't traveling with us came up during the meal, leaned over a woman in our group, and whispered something in her ear. There was a strange combination of friendly camaraderie and menace in his behavior, and Gella, the woman, seemed to shrink into herself, terrified. He briefly showed a knife, and I heard him say, "I can cut you, I can do the same to you." What was perhaps most disconcerting was that in complete contrast to his words, he leaned over her as a friend would when talking to a good acquaintance. He smiled and clapped her on the back, she turned gray, and he sauntered off. Everyone gathered around Gella to support her; everyone except me clearly knew what was going on. As she calmed down, one of the men looked at her, she gave him a nod of approval, and he began to explain:

That man killed Gella's brother recently. He killed him with a knife and threw his body in the street. He threatens Gella now, perhaps to keep her quiet, perhaps just to show his power, perhaps because he moves in a world of violence.

He is not a soldier, but he is not really not a soldier either. He's not in government, but in a way he is. You see, while he isn't in uniform—maybe he once was, or maybe he still is, it really doesn't matter—the point is, he has strong friends and contacts in the military, and they back him. He really doesn't hold a government job, but he has very strong alliances there too. He does "business" here. People in the government, in the military, they benefit from his work, his "business" associates, his ability to get things done. He's one of those people who has access to both daytime hallways and nighttime paths. He's a petty thug, he works the war.

Gella's brother knew him, they were friends. He's dead now maybe because of this man's jealousy over Gella's brother, maybe because of some business gone bad, maybe because Gella's brother found himself on the wrong side of a political argument, or the wrong side of a military line, maybe all of this.

The worst thing is, Gella can't get away from him. Every time she sees him her brother's death and her own fear become like a raw wound. Gella's war.

For this group the death of Gella's brother, and the threat to Gella herself, all existed within the framework of war. It was war that made such deaths and threats possible, and if the threat wore a uniform or medal of office, it mattered little to the victims. Such deaths as these are the uncharted casualties of war.

At the time Gella was threatened I thought the island was largely deserted; it had always been presented to me that way. I couldn't figure out how the knife-wielding killer came to be on the island at all. That night, when I took a walk along a "deserted" island path and inadvertently ran into a refugee camp arms bazaar, I discovered yet another example of the "strategically unmentioned" in war: the island was home to thousands of refugees, soldiers — or what seemed more like quasi-soldiers — bootleggers, smugglers, various quasi-military factions linked with quasi-business racketeers, and a host of other survivors washed up on the shores of war. Gunfire erupted throughout the night on the island, and we heard about the casualties the next day. No one in the group found this unusual. They had long since figured out the answer to the question as to where the front lines are — the next day, the man who had explained Gella's story continued:

They extend out, from Gella and her brother, from the pain in her family, out to the military, and all the troops, militias, renegade bands of troops and armed troop bandits, out across the political fighting, and all the foreigners

who come in supplying and fighting the war, out across the "business" of war with its thugs and big leaders, out across the deals cut with different countries, out across the killing and chaos and right back inescapably into our homes and lives.

ZENO'S PARADOX: HOME FRONT AND BACK

I wish I could write something about the way the full moon rises, yellow, over the high buildings; how it glides up silently from behind the forlorn office blocks, but I can't.

Instead I feel the hot breath of war puff into my face and make my eyes sting with the ash of burning villages; ash from the burning of thatched roofs; ash from the torched corn stores. War has crept in on its belly through the long grasses of the dry season and crossed the dry riverbeds to come close, close to me here in the city where bush war should not reach. War wants me to see that it is more powerful than anything good, that it cannot be held at bay by non-war. Non-war is just a butterfly or soft petals. Strong wind or beating sun shrivels it.

But war, war howls with the taka-taka-taka of machine-gun fire tearing up the edges where sunset meets night; tearing up the curtain behind which life is supposed to be safe. It is the numberless refugees marching down like a column of ants to reach Skyline and safety. It is Bernard's untold nightmare. It is the terrible stories unfolding next to a steaming enamel teapot and baked maize bread in Princess's flat.⁵

When researchers conduct studies of war in its midst, where, exactly, is that? Is war situated with the power brokers and the state; or alternatively, with multinational hegemonies and global politico-economics? With the front-line actors of all kinds, from troops to transnational actors? The maimed bodies of the persecuted, whether in torture chambers or barren backstreets? The militarization of the mind and the suffering of the spirit? The profound creativity average people employ in surviving war and forging peace? Do we consider the actions of the arms shippers who craft transit paths designed to avoid sanctions; the beliefs of skinhead mercenaries from Germany and Serbia found on the battlefields of Sudan and Rwanda? Do we follow the plight of war orphans forced into illegal underage labor by international war profiteers? Do we investigate generals' private lives to see if they maintain profitable connections to arms manufacturers, secretly authorize torture, or engage in racist or misogynist

violence? Do we study the efforts to stop bloodshed that civilians with no political voice have instituted on the front lines? And, if so, how do we find these people and gain access to their stories? How do we give them human depth and empirical relevance at one and the same time? How do we ourselves stay safe in the process of doing front-line research?

Even if we begin situating the "Where is war?" question with the stereotypical (male) soldier, the realities of such a person's life carry the definition of war to greater complexities. This is guaranteed to play havoc with traditional military science and conflict resolution. For example, if a soldier fights in a battle, that is definitely war. But if a soldier goes home and interacts with family and friends, business partners and enemies, this must also be recognized as constituting part of war's reality. If he loots civilian goods because he has a gun, or donates books and help to war orphans, it is part of the war. If he sells pilfered weapons for money, if his brother-in-law sells drugs for arms, or if his wife is kidnapped and tortured by another army, this is part of the war. If his sister's ex-husband's cousin, a seamstress, lives in a town a thousand kilometers away that is bombed, that is part of the war story, as are all the stories of the civilians maimed and killed in the attack, the pilots who flew the bombing run, the industries that supplied the planes and the fuel and the maps, the commanders who chose this town to bomb, the propagandists who hid the number of civilian casualties, the refugees who escape, and even the anthropologists who document these realities. If that town is bombed because it holds profitable resources worth millions, perhaps billions, of dollars of profits, that too is part of the war story.

Looking for a line that distinguishes war from not-war is like seeking the line that divides zero from one in Zeno's paradox.⁶ As John Keane notes:

For citizens living in the so-called democratic zone of peace, alas, the world is not so neatly subdivided into peaceful and violent zones. Nor can it become so, thanks in part to the links between the two worlds forged by global arms production and the violence-ridden drug trades. Mass migrations, pauperization and prejudice also ensure that rootlessness, ethnic tensions, and violent lawlessness are features of nearly every city of the developed democratic world.⁷

Looking for such lines of war and peace, of barbarity and civilization, is as much a battle over ethical claims as it is a pretext to theory, a fact Valentine Daniel grapples with in his writings on the violence in Sri Lanka:

I have called this an anthropography of violence rather than an ethnography of violence because to have called it the latter would have been to parochialize vio-

lence, to attribute and limit violence to a particular people and place. Granted, the events described and discussed in the body of this work pertain to a particular people: Sri Lankans, Sinhals, and Tamils. But to see the ultimate significant effects of this work as ethnographic would exculpate other peoples in other places whose participation in collective violence is of the same sort; even more dangerously, it could tranquilize those of us who live self-congratulatory lives in times and countries apparently free of the kind of violence than has seized Sri Lanka recently, could lull us into believing that we or our country or our people were above such brutalities.⁸

Daniel's words call to mind a conversation I had with a Mozambican at the end of the war in his country. He was explaining why many Mozambicans thought state-led truth and reconciliation commissions (which they subsequently declined to hold) raised thorny issues:

So who all do we try? How far along the chain of associations that made war possible and atrocities a reality do we go? To the military soldiers? Of course. But also to the leading commanders? To the politicians who forged war policy? To Chissano, our president? To the military and political leaders in other countries who lent aid, advice, weapons, and manpower to the war? All the way to George Bush and Bill Clinton, your presidents? Where does the chain of responsibility end?

Where then, do we locate the study of war? The military, yes — but which aspect of it? Civilians, yes — but who? The businesspeople who burn out a competitor and blame it on the rebels, and the criminals who ply their trade across peace and war, are as likely to assist the military or their fellow citizens as to exploit them, depending on the "fortunes" of war. The traders who black-market in arms, food, medicines? And how far do we follow these traders? Do we follow the chain of procurements all the way to the cosmopolitan centers, continents away, that host munitions plants? Do we ultimately interview the CEOs of these industries? The transporters who bridge the borders between legal, gray, and black-market transfers? The professional consultants who actually make a business of telling people how to smuggle illicit goods? The weapons scientists who fashion these instruments, and the public/governmental debates about the legality and morality of using these weapons? Or, as Cynthia Enloe asks, in the can of Campbell's "Star Wars" soup, with its little patriotic missile defense weapons made of noodles?⁹

The answer to all this should be yes, and more.

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IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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who told me when I was five
that I could go anywhere I wanted.
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