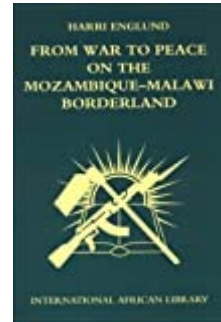**Harri Englund.** *From War to Peace on the Mozambique-Malawi Borderland.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002. xiii + 217 pp. $29.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7486-1577-3.

Reviewed by Eric Allina-Pisano (Department of History, Colgate University)

Coming Home: Displacement and Return in South-East Africa

In "Coming Home," Farida Karodia writes of an adult son's attempt to come to terms with his physically abusive father.[1] Through the narrator's memories of his childhood on a Western Cape vineyard, Karodia sketches an image of an apparently unredeemable wife- and child-beater, a thoroughly unappealing and powerful figure. It is as a father, a husband, and a farm worker in apartheid South Africa that the figure becomes a man, made recognizable and real by his relationships with others. In *From War to Peace on the Mozambique-Malawi Borderland*, Harri Englund has done with ethnography what Karodia does with narrative: he delves into the social origins of conflict and its resolution.

Englund has written an important book that examines the impact of Mozambique's civil war on communities in the Mozambique-Malawi borderlands. Englund spent close to two years in Mozambique and Malawi during two stints of research in the 1990s. His residence in the field during the post-war period allows him to examine rural peoples' experience of "nationalism, war, displacement, repatriation and post-war uncertainty" (p. viii). He is interested in understanding how refugees ne-

gotiated the political, economic, and social dimensions of their displacement during the height of the war and their eventual return after the cease fire. Englund opens with an anecdote of the trademark violence–infanticide, murder, and perhaps cannibalism–that has come to characterize descriptions of the war. He asks, perhaps rhetorically, what analytical ethnography can say about how people lived with "such evil in their midst" (p. vii). Englund succeeds in answering the question, largely because he shows, in human terms, what it means for power to be separated from authority. His success in doing so makes it possible to glimpse humanity–cruel and frightening, but clearly embedded in relations between people–amidst the atrocities of war.

The book's greatest strength lies in its nuanced view of the war and the actors who waged it. Many accounts of the war have tended to be strongly partisan and/or ideological in their analysis, a consequence of the war's tremendous human cost, the cold war context in which it occurred, and the well-publicized acts of brutality visited upon Mozambique's civilian population. An exception is Jeanne Marie Penvenne's contribution, *History of*

Central Africa: The Contemporary Years since 1960.[2] Englund succeeds in matching that balanced account, taking Penvenne's national narrative down to the local level. He frames prevailing analyses of the conflict in terms of internal (Frelimo's political and policy errors created a domestic opposition) and external (Southern Rhodesian and South African commitments to punishing and destabilizing a hostile neighbor) explanations. Englund argues that this bifurcated view makes it impossible to understand the war as Mozambicans experienced it. At the local level the bifurcation would portray village actors as Frelimo stooges or Renamo dupes, figures isolated from the social fabric in which their struggles were embedded. Englund makes it clear that such caricatures fail utterly to explain why people acted the way they did.

Englund demonstrates how the actions of individual historical actors must be understood as having shaped and been shaped by forces from within and without their communities (p. 50). Thus, he shows how a local leader's harassment of Frelimo nationalists was not solely the reactionary impulse of a "traditional" leader who had been allied with the colonial administration, but also part of local power struggles tangential (at most) to national politics. He introduces "the notion of *the patrimonial logic of social capital*" to explain how actors "are constituted and constrained by their relationships" (p. 28). This dialectical approach to individual actions is at the heart of his analysis of refugees and the borderland communities in which they lived.

Englund argues that it is pre-existing social relations, as much war and displacement, that shape the experience of refugees, displaced peoples, and the communities into which they settle (or re-settle). Refugees' (and later, returnees') ability to establish trust, create ties of dependence, and wield power did not emanate from individuals themselves, but emerged from relationships they established. Englund focuses on how refugees drew on those relationships to establish or re-establish social networks even amidst displacement and uncertainty, challenging accepted understandings of the refugee experience as solely one of loss and uprootedness. Englund tries to negotiate between two opposing ideas of the refugee experience: the helpless victim, caught up in structural forces that cast her or him into a maelstrom of loss; and the autonomous agent, able to navigate neatly through the buffeting winds of war and displacement. For the most part Englund succeeds in charting a middle path. Yet in his determination to show how people retain and regenerate social capital, a reader could be forgiven for thinking that Englund tilts in the direction of minimizing the extent of loss.

This tendency reflects a tension within the book overall. Englund conducted traditional ethnographic research and writes in standard academic prose. Yet it appears his audience is as much (or perhaps more) the policy community as it is the academy. This latter audience is unlikely to find much new in claims such as "persons are constituted by multiple relationships" (p. 50). Similarly, few scholars would find it particularly noteworthy that three women, while all related to the same man, "were themselves constituted by different sets of relationships" (p. 101). And finally, not many social scientists would think it necessary to state "by simultaneously maintaining separate households and engaging in exchange between them, women appear as *persons-in-relationships*, not as individuals" (emphasis in the original, p. 113). These may well be important points to make to policy makers, but Englund has chosen to do so in language that may not be accessible to those who most need to hear them. This is unfortunate, and one very insightful conclusion may be lost to the policy makers who can best make use of it. Just as displacement does not necessarily bring total disruption to people's lives, neither does refugee return guarantee the restoration of the status quo ante (p. 138). The policy lesson is that repatriated populations may have as much need for support as do refugees.

There are also some unanswered questions. How applicable are Englund's conclusions for communities displaced over longer distances and into wholly unfamiliar environments? Would his analysis of social capital travel as well with, for example, Somali refugees resettled in central New York, or ethnic Russians "repatriated" to Moscow from central Asian republics? These questions may not be of great importance to Africanist scholarship, but they are central to refugee studies.

Additionally, while Englund generally does a good job grounding his analysis in the history of the region, he does present a fairly static model of kinship, descent, inheritance, and marriage. As Megan Vaughan has shown, these categories changed significantly in the context of trans-border movements during the colonial period.[3] Finally, we may need to problematize the category of refugee in an area with a long history of population movement, much of it coerced. As Englund himself notes, warfare and famine roiled the region in the 1830s and 1840s. The colonial conquest of the 1890s and early 1900s, as well as the forced labor practices that continued throughout most of the twentieth century, led to large-scale population movements, nearly all of which took

place under duress. The Mozambique-Malawi border-lands were a site of war, displacement, and uncertainty long before post-colonial politics drove people from their homes. It seems likely that the strategic responses which people undertook in the 1980s and 1990s are themselves ongoing products of historical change.

Notes

[1]. Farida Karodia, "Coming Home," in *Coming Home and Other Stories*, Farida Karodia (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1988), pp. 1-66.

[2]. Jeanne Marie Penvenne, "Mozambique: A Tapestry of Conflict," in *History of Central Africa: The Contemporary Years since 1960*, ed. David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 231-266.

[3]. Megan Vaughan, "Household Units and Historical Processes in Southern Malawi," *Review of African Political Economy* 34 (1985): pp. 35-45.

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