



What is the meaning of the last October Electoral Results for Decentralized Governance?

Abstract

“... now that the process of decentralized governance is setting off amidst the electoral failure of Renamo, does it mean that its continuity will be jeopardized? Not necessarily. The progress of the process of decentralized governance in the country is inevitable, though there will be a change in its significance: from an instance for the consolidation of multiparty democracy through power sharing to a project geared at giving legitimacy to a Frelimo state, tainted by exclusion”

I. Context

This text intends to argue in relation to the above topic, using a historical retrospective of the dynamics of interactions between Frelimo and Renamo well before the Rome Peace negotiations (AGP) up until the last October elections, positioning the narrative on three categories of thought: the fact Frelimo never considered Re-

namo as a legitimate political party in the country; the circumstance that Frelimo always acquiesced to the demands of Renamo when incapable of following its political agenda due to factual violent acts or threats to use force; and, concerning the future of the process of decentralized governance in the country.

II. The negation of Renamo's legitimacy¹

The Frelimo Government against which Renamo fought – guns in hand – from May 1976 to October 1992, had a Marxist-Leninist inspiration and was driven by the logic of state modernization that was in direct conflict with practices that it deemed as reminiscent of feudal and traditional values. In

a certain sense – and though one might concede that there was a “destabilizing” purpose on the part of the external forces that helped Renamo in its origin, first the Ian Smith regime in Southern Rhodesia and, subsequently, the Apartheid regime of South Africa – it is a fact that Renamo struc-

¹ Afonso Dhlakama: “We wage the war with the sole objective of establishing respect for our culture and the traditions of our people, to re-establish the respect for human rights, re-establish the freedom of religion, and to help Mozambique to become a state based on the rule of law, democratic, and where social justice and development are a reality visible to everybody’s eyes” in Brazão Mazula (Coord.) (2002) *Moçambique: 10 Anos de Paz*, vol. 1, Imprensa Universitária – UEM: Maputo (pp. 313-318). Sérgio Vieira: “There is a need to observe that the reasons for the war did not correspond to any internal essential motivation. (...) The Marxist ideological positions were only affirmed afterwards in Frelimo’s 3rd Congress, in 1977. (...) There was not, thus, any degree of contradiction or internal frustration that could constitute the basis for the armed conflict” in Brazão Mazula (Coord.) (2002) *Moçambique: 10 Anos de Paz*, vol. 1, Imprensa Universitária – UEM: Maputo (pp. 381-390)

tured its political and ideological frame in juxtaposition to the contours of the Frelimo Government: presenting itself as the defender of traditions, culture and religious leanings of the majority of the country's population, particularly in the rural areas. In contrast to popular democracy and scientific socialism of the Eastern Bloc, embraced by the then Frelimo Government, Renamo presented itself as an agent of hope for capitalism and liberal democracy as practiced in the West.

Nevertheless, in a very short period of time that went from July 1989 to August 1991 – corresponding to the realization of Frelimo's 5th and 6th Congresses, respectively – the Government of Frelimo changed, dramatically, its political and philosophical bases: it relinquished, ostensibly, its Marxism-Leninism – replacing it with Democratic Socialism – and adopted, for all effects and purposes, the capitalist system as a form of social and economic organization in the country. In this same period, the Frelimo Government went decisively for the adoption of multiparty politics as well as a number of political reforms leading to the establishment of a democratic order based on the Rule of Law in the country, including among these, the freedom of religion. It is important to note that towards the realization of its 5th Congress – in July 1989 – while on the course of the first steps towards the setting of direct negotiations between the Frelimo Government and Renamo, the Frelimo Party pretended to transform itself into a "Party of All People" opening the space for the eventual integration in its milieu of the former guerrilla forces.

In this vein, the Rome Peace negotiations entered its last stage when, objectively, the Frelimo Government had already taken on board all the constitutive elements of the political and ideological discourse of Renamo: the shadow of communism had been substituted by a pluralist political order, the economy centered on market forces had substituted the logic of socialist planning as basis of the country's economic management, hostility to religious practices had been substituted not only by freedom of religion, but significantly by the collaboration between the Government and Church institutions in the search for Peace in the country and, most importantly, at the regional and international levels the Frelimo Government was hand in glove with the countries of the Western Bloc and respective multilateral financial institutions a fact that, mainly, was facilitated by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

In other words: with the setting in motion of the Economic Rehabilitation Program (1987), the adoption of the new Multiparty Political Constitution in the country (1990), the signing of the Rome General Peace Accord (1992) and the realization of the first multiparty general elections in the country (1994) Renamo had achieved all the objectives that it strived for and were the foundations for its struggle. Indeed, the Frelimo Government had abdicated of all its political and ideological compromises as adopted and formalized in its 3rd Congress in 1977, and had embraced the same cause as Renamo's – in the sense of a political and philosophical discourse. Following from here and immediately, in 1995, then President Joaquim Chissano announced the expressed will of the Frelimo Government towards the recognition and integration of traditional authorities in the country's governing structures what amounted to the elimination of the last Renamo's political and philosophical foundation, more specifically in relation to rural areas. These facts meant that at the level of the discourse the basic distinctions between Frelimo and Renamo became blurred giving reasons, as can be argued, to the earlier Frelimo intent of transforming itself into a Party in which Renamo forces could be integrated.

Despite the extreme animosity between Frelimo and Renamo – even taking into consideration their logic of hegemony and mutual exclusion – the fact is that most of the demands posed by Renamo during the leadership of Afonso Dlhakama were indicative of an expressed will towards power sharing with Frelimo, within or even without considering the parameters of the electoral processes. The proceeded bi-partisan nature of the country's National Defense Forces, the demand for the nomination of provincial governors as well as members of the Board of Administration of the country's public enterprises, all of these are indicative of the manifested predisposition of Renamo for political cohabitation with Frelimo. This, while Frelimo always strived for the definitive demise of Renamo from the country's national political scenario. In sum, Frelimo never considered Renamo as a legitimate political party in the country, beyond a mere agent geared towards "destabilizing" the country – an entity created and nurtured by external forces – with which Frelimo was obliged to negotiate and sign the Peace Accord only in order to avoid the escalation of destruction and misery in the country during the war years.

III. Renamo and the “declaration” of the end of the Rome Peace Accord (AGP) between October 2013 and August 2014²

In a certain sense, the bi-partisan political scenario established in the country, following the expressive results obtained by Renamo in the legislative elections of 1994 and 1999 – with 112 and 117 elected Parliamentarians, respectively, in a National Assembly comprised of 250 Parliamentarians – meant a tremendous political performance by Renamo that Frelimo could not have imagined during the Rome Peace negotiations: Renamo proved to be a formidable political opponent and, within the internal milieu of Frelimo, strong contestation began to raise against President Chissano presumably being accused of allowing too much political space for the eternal rival of the party in power. Armando Guebuza, assumed power with the lesson learned and ready to fight a ceaseless combat designed to diminish the political and electoral fortunes of Renamo. Thus, the reality of this fierce combat manifested itself in the aftermath of the 2009 general elections, the ones in which Renamo registered its worst electoral performance in the history of the country’s multiparty general elections. In those elections, Frelimo won with an unqualified majority opening the way for the realization of its long-standing will of seeing Renamo out of the country’s political chess-table. To a great extent, the veiled but robust support accorded to the self-named “Constructive Opposition Bloc” of Yaqub Sibindy and João Massango was a symbol of that aspiration. The concept,

itself, of “constructive opposition” suggested, by its very nature, the denial of the constructive character of the genre of political opposition that Renamo represented. Conscious of this political environment, Renamo through its leader Afonso Dlhakama, refueled the specter of war in 2012 precisely with a view of regaining its centrality in the national political arena, including the reiteration of its key demands: the realization of the bi-partisan character of the country’s Defense and Security Forces and the nomination of provincial governors.

Again, in the name of political stability and social peace, the Frelimo Government – now under the leadership of President Filipe Nyusi – was obliged to negotiate and sign the accord with the leadership of Renamo in order to accommodate its demands, more specifically those related to the process of demilitarization, demobilization and reintegration of the military men (DDR) and the adoption of a new package for decentralized governance in the country. It is true that, through a profuse and rambling legislative engineering, Frelimo was able to propose and get the approval, even from the opposition parties, of a political and legal apparatus that, to a great extent, pours away the substantive political content of the idea of electing the provincial governors as originally intended by Renamo.

² Afonso Dlhakama is cited by the journal “A Verdade” of 13th July, 2013, as stating the following: “... in case of any attack to Sathunjira, that would mean the spread of the third war in Mozambique. (...) It is different in the case of any attack here, and there. I do not want that to happen, since I have already sworn never to lead a combat again”. Therefore, after the attack by the Mozambican Defense Forces (FADM) to the base of Satunjira, that took place on the 21st of October, 2013, Fernando Mazanga, then spokesperson of Renamo, announced the end of the Rome Peace Accord (AGP) adding that: “The attack made against the base of president Afonso Dlhakama is no other than a declaration of war” in DW – Notícias Moçambique: *Doze momentos-chave do conflito entre a RENAMO e o Governo de Moçambique*, 05/08/2014. In the same journal “A Verdade” of 13th July, 2013, Afonso Dlhakama is cited stating the following: “We knew two Presidents, I do not want to speak much about Samora Machel, because his time was that of revolution, of hatred, of persecution against the colonizers. Many say that Machel was a communist but, in a true sense, he did not know what communism was, he only read what others wrote and used to repeat it, as in ‘A luta continua’ (The struggle continues, in English). The other president (Joaquim Chissano) tried to do his best, though I cannot say that he improved things much, because he also stole votes. But this president (Guebuza) not at all. If he could, probably by now he could have changed the Constitution of the Republic to allow him to stand for office more than 40 times, that is his intention”. According to Bernhar Weimer, Jaime Macuane and Lars Buur: “Frelimo’s strategy of ‘receptivity and repression’ (Birkelund, 2005) *vis-à-vis* Renamo and its systematic exclusion from access to benefits and clientelistic rents constitute structural impediments for the consolidation of Renamo” in *A Economia do Political Settlement em Moçambique: Contexto e implicações da Descentralização*, capítulo da obra organizada por Bernhard Weimer (2012) *Moçambique: Descentralizar o Centralismo? Economia Política, Recursos e Resultados*, IESE: Maputo (pp. 31-75).

IV. What future for decentralized governance³?

As a matter of fact, the last October elections witnessed the reedition of the 2009 scenario: an unrecognizable performance by Renamo and an unqualified victory for Frelimo. This time around Renamo – along with the Military Junta of Major General Mariano Nyongo – has the possibility of regrouping fast in view of improving its electoral fortunes in the coming elections, with especial attention to the elections for the district decentralized governance organs in 2024. To a certain extent, it is fair to assert that Renamo under the leadership of General Ossufo Momade – despite the blunders experienced by this party during the electoral process this year – obtained a better result in 2019 compared with Renamo under Afonso Dlhakama in the 2009 elections: with 60 elected Parliamentarians and about 22% of the presidential vote, against only 51 elected Parliamentarians and 16% of the presidential vote. However, if the party fails to capitalize on this meagre success and not take it as a backbone for projecting audacious political interventions and more focused on the key concerns of the population at large, Renamo might, indeed, lose the pace and open the grave allowing itself to be buried by Frelimo. Frelimo, certainly, would shed no tears if, by Renamo's own fault or as a result of a vigorous push by Frelimo itself, Renamo were to disappear from the national political scene. All those who witnessed the parade of massive irregularities that went with the

last October electoral process might form an idea of what Frelimo is capable of when the goal is to ensure, for itself and none other, the outright exercise of political power in the country.

Nevertheless, the advancement of the process of decentralized governance – both at provincial and district levels – even though it was advocated by Renamo, it mainly represents a functional demand within the Frelimo party itself: it is a discharge valve that can allow the accommodation of local elites and, to a certain extent, reduce the pressure for the attainment of positions at the level of central government or the National Assembly. That is, even if Renamo fails to regain a reasonable degree of political sparkle – as well as certain harmony in its political interventions – that were visible under the leadership of Afonso Dlhakama, with the serious risk of leading to its marginalization from the national political scene in case of unfavorable results in the coming elections, mainly in 2024, there is no risk of reverting the process of decentralized governance, and it might deepen still further. In a hypothetical scenario of the demise of Renamo from the national political chess-table, probably the conditions would be set for the disaggregation of the different, sometimes contradictory, factions within Frelimo that are only kept together given the fact that they are all facing a single common adversary: Renamo.

V. As a way of conclusion

Strictly speaking, for Frelimo, Renamo does not live up to the notion of “Her Majesty’s Most Loyal Opposition” (as celebrated in the British Parliament) as the so-called “Constructive Opposition Bloc” pretended to be, despite Renamo’s history of satisfactory electoral results and, it is reasonable to assert

that, in case of its possible demise from the country’s national political scene, that would be lavishly celebrated by the party in power. However, given its political and military might it is tolerated and, on several occasions, was called in to the negotiating table in order for both to decide together the fortunes of the

³ “...the movement towards decentralization in the ambit of the Chissano coalition has been influenced by concerns about the distribution of a minimum set of benefits to local actors as geographically spread as possible, without renouncing central control, altogether. This logic is reflected in the tendency towards de-concentration with significant progress made by President Guebuza, with the enactment of the Law about de-concentration (8/2003) and Budget for Investments and Local Initiatives (OILL) of 2006, now designated FDD. All these led to the enactment of a series of administrative regulations and to the de-concentration of management of a number of sectoral funds, such as those on education, health and water, with a mixed success in the last two cases”. Weimer, Macuane and Buur in *A Economia do Political Settlement em Moçambique: Contexto e implicações da Descentralização*, capítulo da obra organizada por Bernhard Weimer (2012) *Moçambique: Descentralizar o Centralismo? Economia Política, Recursos e Resultados*, IESE: Maputo (p. 70).

country. This, as the facts illustrate, only happened whenever Renamo succeeded in showing capacity and determination to threaten the use of force to uphold its intents against the will of Frelimo. So, now that the process of decentralized governance is setting off amidst the electoral failure of Renamo – the force that was noted for advocating for the process – does it implies that its continuity will be jeopardized?

Not necessarily: the advancement of the process of decentralized governance in the country can be said to be inevitable, though there would be a change in its original meaning, as an instance for the consolidation of democratic pluralism through power sharing. It would, thus, amount to a legal appropriation, without legitimacy, of the decentralization process by Frelimo.



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