

Mozambican democracy: Research Notes

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The main goal of this paper is to try and draw some notes for future research in observing the political arena in Mozambique, which is turning from a bipartisan arrangement into a situation in which one of the two parties, Frelimo, is increasingly hegemonic.

After fifteen years of one-party rule by Frelimo, (1975-1990), which were marked by frequent economic crises and a destructive civil war (1977-1992), the Mozambican ruling elite was forced to adopt liberal and democratic policies in 1990. Throughout the entire period of one-party rule, Frelimo always considered itself a democratic party. During this period, Frelimo's rule was labeled as "popular democracy"; today, the current model of governance is said to be a "multiparty democracy". (Note: it is any illusion or hypocrisy to argue that democracy is possible without political parties. Kelsen cited by Przeworski, 2006:17).

In 1994, Mozambique held its first pluralist elections, which consolidated the formation of a two party political system, with Renamo and Frelimo as the major political players in Mozambique. Since then, the country has held more two general elections, which confirmed this situation.

However, since Armando Guebuza came to power in 2004, as the third president of Mozambique since independence, there has been an increased effort to marginalize or even eliminate the opposition. Repeatedly, we have heard historical leaders of Frelimo close to the current president saying that the opposition must be "reduced to insignificance or that, the "single party is the best system to develop a country" and also that "the single party is the best one for national unity". Also, many Renamo members (of the former rebel movement who strongly contested military Frelimo during the civil war, and now form the main political opposition party), have been recruited to join the ruling party Frelimo in exchange of certain benefits.

Similarly, Frelimo has promoted the establishment of a so-called "constructive opposition" (*Oposição constructiva*), which consists of a coalition of eight small political parties with the clear intention of having a façade of political debate behind which it can rule undaunted. . Media attention is now divided between the ruling party, on one side, and a fragmented opposition, in the other side, which has reduced Renamo's media coverage. Recently, the leader of this coalition, Yacub Sibindy, -- a former member of Frelimo during the single-party state era-- has gone as far as saying that political pluralism was not good for the development of Mozambique, and calling on other opposition parties to cease and integrate themselves into Frelimo and help this party to fight poverty (which is defined by Frelimo as its main political goal).

From a global point of view, we can say that this strategy is a part of the ideology of the one-party system, which is now making a comeback in the form of advocating open ultra-hegemony. Moreover, this ideology has never disappeared within Frelimo; many members of the party have always believed it to be Frelimo's objective to eliminate all political opposition that can pose a real threat to Frelimo's dominance. How can we explain this authoritarian mindset? Can the origins of Frelimo as a military movement explain the persistence of such approach?

In order to account for this, I advance three hypotheses: Frelimo's conception of nationalism; the colonial heritage and the civil war.

1. Frelimo's conception of nationalism and the fact that Frelimo achieved Mozambique's independence through an armed struggle

It seems to me that, to understand Frelimo's stance against political pluralism, we have to look at its conception of the notion of nationalism. We know that Frelimo was created as the result of the union of three movements: Democratic National Union of Mozambique (UDENAMO), Mozambique African National Union (Manu) and National Union of Independent African Mozambique (UNAMI). According to Frelimo, it was this union that not only allowed victory over colonialism, but also has forged unity among Mozambicans, eliminating tribalism, regionalism and other forms of exclusion. According to Frelimo, the

existence of many anti-colonial movements was a great obstacle in the fight against colonialism. The capacity of Frelimo leaders to unite those movements, to carry out the war and to achieve Mozambique's Independence, is seen as evidence that only this party (Frelimo) has the ability to govern Mozambique; no-one else could do it properly:

"You don't believe that it was only when the Mozambicans united in one front as one people and consequently as one power, commanded by Frelimo, that they accomplished the objective that they had been fighting for during centuries? (Marcelino dos Santos, Notícias Online, 9th March, 2007)".

The unity argument explains also why Frelimo was very hostile to other forms of social power such as religious groups, associations, social clubs, traditional chiefs and other social formations which were seen as a cause of conflict. Like the consensual Ideology which was in vogue in the western countries particularly in eighteenth century about representative government (Przeworski, 2006), Frelimo conceived politics only as a space of consensus, where the interests and values of people are the same and where any kind of opposition to the government is undesirable. It explains why Frelimo has great difficulties in accepting plurality. In itself, pluralist democracy is seen as an obstacle to development, as a source of division. Frelimo is strongly convinced that many of problems that we have in Mozambique stem from the new multiparty democracy. We can mention as an example one of the historical and prominent figure of this Party, Mariano Matsinhe, who said that the problems which the police are confronted with in Mozambique are because of democracy:

"Today, *as a consequence of democracy*, these *fora* are being occupied by unemployed people and people that have no time to dedicate to this activity. While these places are not filled by employed people willing to cooperate actively with the police, it would be hard to achieve a situation of stability.(...) What we need to do is to have a full grasp of community policing and discuss our actions" (Matsinhe, Notícias Online, 28th April2007).

Also we have to note that because of its past, Frelimo is strongly convinced that it has a historical mission to develop Mozambique and to govern the country. In that sense, to leave power before attaining its main goal - to develop Mozambique - is not seen as desirable; it could even be perceived as a betrayal by the people of Mozambique. That is why Frelimo has great difficulties to accept the notion of change of parties in government, and is doing

everything possible to stay indefinitely in power. It is normal to hear things like "we are what we are thanks to Frelimo", or it was because Frelimo drove out colonialism that we are independent. For example, in 2004, at the time of general elections, the slogan was "the victory of Frelimo is a national, historical and patriotic imperative". So, the following statement was not a surprise:

"We will do everything that is necessary to keep Frelimo always in power and to continue to serve better. They can create thousands of parties and they can compete in all elections; but Frelimo will always command in this country. Moreover, shortly we want to drive them out to the Parliament, in the future all seats in the parliament must be occupied by our members. I am not in favor of eradication of the opposition, but it must be insignificant (Matsinhe, Notícias Online, 28th April 2007)".

The idea of change in power is not conceivable to Frelimo. That's why Frelimo has systematically resorted to electoral fraud, even if it is not necessary.

2. The colonial heritage

The colonial system, which provided the only political reference to Frelimo's elite, was embodied in the National Union (União Nacional), the party of Salazar, which governed Portugal between 1926 and 1974. The União Nacional presided over a single party-state; it was a repressive, authoritarian and exclusionist regime: it didn't tolerate political parties of the opposition nor did it tolerate even civil society associations.

3. A civil war

It is common to say that the civil war was one of the main factors that pressured Frelimo into accepting the process of democratization. In fact, the democratization process in Mozambique was conducted in the middle of a great crisis, caused mostly by the civil war. It wasn't an internal process, initiated and interiorized by Frelimo elites as the model which can lead the country to development and unity.

This can also explain the perceptions or the concept of democracy by Frelimo. Again, we will mention one of Mariano Matsinhe's statements, where he advances that the change of the name of the Mozambican police from "Mozambique's Popular police" to "Police of the Republic of Mozambique", was imposed by the internal and international context; it wasn't the desire of Frelimo (Matsinhe, Notícias Online, 28th April 2007).

Also, we must note that the peace agreement between Frelimo and Renamo, which was signed in Rome in 1992, was essentially concentrated on the pacification of the country (end of combats, demobilization and reintegration of two forces in conflict), not on democratization of the country (Messiant, 1997; Cahen, 1995). Moreover, this agreement only legitimized Frelimo and Renamo and relegated the other parties (born with the new pluralist constitution of 1990) to a secondary role. For example, they were excluded in the discussion of the new electoral law for the 1994 elections.

Another point to consider is that, similar to Frelimo, Renamo's idea of democracy is an exclusionary one. For example, one of the Renamo's demand during the Rome talks was that any party to be represented in parliament should get between 5% and 20% of votes throughout the national territory. This demand, which was set to 5%, can be seen as a desire to prevent other parties from being represented in parliament (Brito, 1995: 484-485). Recently, in the debates that preceded the approval of new electoral laws and in which it was decided to abolish the 5% clause, Renamo opposed the change. Obviously, the 5% clause not only encouraged the continuation of the ancient anti-democratic practices, but also the bipolarization of Mozambique's political system. So, contrary to Renamo's declaration that: "it is because of the Renamo war that we have democracy in Mozambique", the civil war did not bring a real democratization of the country.

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