

Resources of Violence and War for Political Negotiations and Legitimacy in Mozambique

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Abstract

Following twenty years (1992-2012) of celebrated peace and reconciliation, Mozambique descended again into a new civil war pitting again the Frelimo government and the armed-wing of the Renamo party. Mainstream and often ahistorical explanations in Mozambique for the escalation of violence into a new civil war focus on political elite's struggles for the control of mineral and economic resources in Mozambique. These types of explanations are insufficient to account for the new civil war in the country. Instead, following an historical analysis, I argue that the lack of accountability and truth for the serious crimes committed during the first post-independence civil war (1976-1992) has contributed to maintain a political climate of an "open-ended" transition. For two decades, Frelimo and Renamo lawmakers could not let go of their deeply divisive past; both parties used "memories as weapons" whereby the new democratic institutions, particularly the national parliament, constituted platforms to mutually accuse one another of perpetration of serious human rights violations and war crimes during the first civil war. These memory wars reinforced the mutual denial of each other's legitimacy as valid political interlocutors. While Frelimo and Renamo lawmakers were successful in adopting significant formal legislation, typical of pluralistic democracies, they failed to transform the legal formalisms into new democratic practices centred on dialogue and negotiations. Within this context, the commitment to reconciliation remained elusive and the Frelimo government and Renamo consistently reverted to violence as resources to foster political negotiations and establish political legitimacy in the new context of pluralistic democracy.

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