

The Implications of Accumulated Grievances and Memories of Political Violence to the Administrative Decentralization in Mozambique

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Abstract

Political grievances accumulated in the course of protracted civil wars constitute major challenges for democratic decentralization in various postconflict countries in Africa. However these types of problems have not been thoroughly accounted for in the political sciences literature. In Mozambique, the persistent attempts by the Mozambican main opposition party, Renamo, to officially inscribe in the country's landscape their own version of the post-independence civil war (1976-1992) offers an interesting context 'to espy alternatives' in relation to the effects of civil wars in the constitution of new democratic practices and institutions. The overall analyses demonstrate how grievances over memories of violence can paradoxically hamper and reinforce political pluralism and democratic decentralization in Mozambique.¹

Keywords

War memories, democratization, administrative decentralization, Mozambique

Introduction

Since the end of the civil war in Mozambique, which opposed the Frelimo government and the rebel movement Renamo (1976-1992), both parties have been engaged in serious political confrontations for the definition of the most adequate memories to give meaning to the national unity, identity and decentralization in a context of political pluralism. However, the Frelimo party never recognized the Renamo war (1976-1992) as legitimate; the party considers that the only valid official memories that can nourish the sense of national unity and identity are a set of selective memories of the armed liberation struggle (1964-1974) led by Frelimo against the Portuguese colonial regime. In their turn, the Renamo party considers that the memories of their postcolonial war against the Frelimo government should be recognized by the official structures of the Mozambican state.

Following attempts to find official recognition and taking advantage of the decentralization process initiated with the national Parliament's approval in December 1996 of the law 2/97, known as the Juridical Framework for the Implantation of Local Autarchies, the Renamo party constructed a square with a sculpture to honour André Matsangaíssa, Renamo's first commander killed in combat during the civil war. This article analyses the impact of the Renamo's legal decision to build the Matsangaíssa' monument in Beira, the second most important city in the country and how this construction reverberated in the process of democratic decentralization in the country. The Frelimo party reacted unfavourably and they presented a legal appeal to the Administrative Court and climbed hastily to the rostrum of the national Parliament to legally reverse some aspects of the law 2/97 into recentralization. Through the analysis of the reactions of the political elites and the diversified responses of journalists in the country, the results reveal both the limits and possibilities created by postwar democratic processes which are festered with grievances accumulated in contexts of civil wars.

The main argument made here is that although the Frelimo party legally succeeded in reversing the decentralization (into recentralization), they were only partially successful as Frelimo's legal initiatives also exposed the fractures among the Frelimo elites. These

fractures are reminiscent of Achille Mbembe's idea of the 'chaotic plurality', which leaves 'enormous spaces open to improvisation' (Mbembe, 2006: 385). In this regard, during instances of political improvisation, some of the Frelimo echelons have indirectly recognized the limits of the selective memories of the armed liberation struggle in the current context of pluralistic democracy, and the fact that in practice other political groups have contributed to national unity and identity.²

From civil wars to political pluralism

One of the most complex challenges in the aftermath of civil war is the constitution of viable and durable political communities. Various studies demonstrate that political transitions at state level are marred by partisan and uncompromising attitudes, because political elites are aware of the significance of memory for acquiring and maintaining political power and legitimacy (Alonso, 1988: 33-57). In this regard, politics of memory involves contested decisions about what and who is to be publicly remembered or forgotten (Werbner, 1998: 1-17) and the form that social and political institutions should take in the future (Edkins, 2003). In the aftermath of colonial and authoritarian regimes in Africa (and beyond) there have been proliferations of projects to remove the vestiges of previous regimes from meaningful public places. These vestiges are either destroyed or kept in museums, and the public spaces are filled in with new monuments that embody the political representations of the new regime (Levinson, 1998).

In post-independence Africa, these types of projects have been controversial as the memories of the national liberation struggles were often essentialized and what was regarded as politically problematic was excluded from official regimes of memory and commemoration (Adebanwi, 2008: 419-444). This exclusion gave rise to serious contestations from groups that felt excluded from official recognition and commemoration (Alexander, McGregor, Ranger, 2000; Kossler, 2007: 361-382; Kriger, 1995: 139-162). Even in political transitions that were featured by 'abstention from a radical iconoclasm', such as post-apartheid South Africa, in order to 'contribute to nation building in the spirit of inclusiveness' were embroiled in conflicts about official and legitimate representations and commemorations of the past (Marschall, 2006: 177; Hansen, 2003: 43-60).

In contexts of major political change, 'social memory is a central site of political contest' (Alonso, 1998: 51) to the extent that politicians use 'memories as weapons' for partisan gains (Igreja, 2008: 539-556). Yet there is still a need to investigate the relations between political contests over memory, democratization and decentralization through devolution. In addition, how these relations enlarge and restrict the sense of national unity and identity among political elites and ordinary citizens.

Legacies of political conflict, decentralization and recentralization

Decentralization through devolution is a complex process because of the diversity of interests of the political actors that struggle to retain or access the control of state in different levels (Cheema; Rondinelli, 2007). Decentralization consists in 'measures that initiate a transfer of responsibility (authority), resources (human and financial), accountability, and rules (institutions) from central government to local entities' (Oluwu; Wunsch, 2004: 4-5); and devolution is the process in which 'there is transfer by the law and other formal actions, of responsibility, resources, and accountability' (ibid.: 5). The transnational nature of circulating discourses and experiments on democracy creates a familiar set of political, institutional and economic factors that emerge from newly

democratic countries that adopted decentralization policies (Paley, 2002: 469-496). In general, the necessity to decentralize is justified based on standardised arguments, which is that the transference of state authority from central organs to local constituencies increases efficiency and popular participation and sense of ownership on matters of local governance (Barkan; Chege, 1989: 431-453; Grindle, 2007; Samoff, 1990: 513-530). In contrast, the political justification for adopting recentralization, which is the process of removing previously handed out state authority to local organs and bring it back to state central organs, is based on less standardised arguments (Eaton, 2001: 101-127; Manyak; Katono, 2010: 1-24). Thus a context-specific approach is necessary to grasp the dynamics of decentralization and recentralization in post-conflict countries engaged in democratic state-building and facing fierce debates over the place for a wide range of memories of political violence.

In post-conflict contexts and emergent pluralistic democracies very serious conflicts arise from political attempts to blend diverse streams of memories of violence with modernization projects through the creation of new decentralized institutions (Fanthorpe, 2005: 27-49). These conflicts can turn decentralization and recentralization into either a potentially conflict-solving mechanism or a source that deepens and perpetuates conflicts to the extent of precluding real debates about possible alternatives among political elites (Mouffe, 2005). The few available studies that have focused on decentralization and recentralization in post-conflict countries have not comprehensively explored these issues and links (Santos, 2006: 39-76; West, Kloeck-Jenson, 1999: 455-484; Alexander, 1997: 1-26; Fanthorpe, 2008; Kyed, Buur, 2006: 563-581; Monteiro, 2000: 29-45; Machohe, 2001; Chiziane, 2011). Thus in this article I examine how political elites have dealt with the tensions emerging from political grievances and the need to implement democratic reforms conducive to decentralization in Mozambique.

Postcolonial state building and political violence in Mozambique

Frelimo's armed struggle for independence ended with the signature in Zambia of the Lusaka Accords on the 7th of September, 1974 between the Frelimo representatives and the leaders of the Movement of the Armed Forces. These forces defeated the dictatorship regime in Portugal in April 1974. The peace negotiations in Lusaka secured the transfer of power to Frelimo, which led to the independence on June 25, 1975.

According to the Frelimo political program, the postcolonial project called for the decolonization of the state and its institutions as well as the build-up of adequate structures to the democratic popular power (Machel, 1974: 11). During the Frelimo 3rd Congress in February 1977, the postcolonial statebuilding project was boosted when the liberation movement was officially transformed into a socialist party with Marxist-Leninist orientation. The guiding principle of socialism was democratic centralism, which meant that the executive, legislative and judiciary powers were vested in Frelimo (Cabrita, 2000: 85). As in various postcolonial states (Hyden, 1983; Young, 2004: 23-49), Frelimo adopted a modernist agenda and state nationalism, 'nationalism erected in opposition to existing ethnicities' (Cahen, 2000: 165). This political project was problematic and ended up undermining the state's effort to attain the 'material and moral transformation of its entire national population' (Asad, 2003: 191). While the political elites insisted with speeches about people's participation, the actual practice was different. The state authority was centralized as 'the superior levels', which were dominated by particular ethno-regional elites, 'transmitted the necessary orientations and showed the essential tasks and controlled their execution.' In turn, 'the inferior levels informed about the process of implementation, transmitted the problems on time and proposed solutions'.³

The principle of democratic centralism also shaped the politics of memory, commemoration and national identity which centred on Frelimo as the unifier and sole guide of the Mozambican people since the national liberation struggle. Early in postcolonial Mozambique, as in postcolonial Zimbabwe, Kenya and, more recently, post-apartheid South Africa the process of dealing with the legacies of the past was seriously contested⁴. Frelimo suppressed the multiplicity of memories of the national liberation struggle. One of the most notorious cases of suppression of memories involved the case of Uria Simango, who was one of Frelimo's founders, and his wife Celina Simango. The Mozambican government killed both sometime after independence thereby contributing to the accumulation of grievances in the postcolonial period in the country (Ncomo, 2003).

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While engaged in suppressing the memories of dissidents, the government gave the country the political memories and symbols of their convenience. Thus the date of Frelimo's creation as a liberation movement (25 June 1962) coincided with the date of independence (25 June 1975); although there has been recent blogs and accompanied by historical documents that have claimed that Frelimo was actually founded on 2 February⁵. Frelimo's leaders made sure that the Frelimo's foundation as a political party (3 February 1977) coincided with the National Heroes' Day (3 February) that was established to commemorate Eduardo Mondlane. He was Frelimo's first president during the anti-colonial war and was assassinated on 3 February 1969. In addition, Ngungunhane was declared a national hero in 1985 (Ribeiro, 2005: 257-275). He was a southern pre-colonial king who subjugated the populations in central Mozambique but also resisted the Portuguese occupation; yet he was defeated and deported to Portugal (Liesegang, 1996). The elevation of Ngungunhane, in disregard of historical figures from the centre and north of Mozambique, further reinforced people's perceptions that Frelimo only recognized historical figures from southern Mozambique, in particular from the Gaza region. This is so because Frelimo's first president Mondlane, as well as the country's first and second president, Machel and Chissano, respectively, were from Gaza province.

These initial political machinations were significant as the interlocking of historical figures and dates centralized Frelimo in ways that equated 'centralization' with 'ownership' by a group of southern politicians and equated decentralization with its loss. The Frelimo's post-independence project of state building, which was inspired by the experiences of the liberation zones during the armed struggle for independence and the authoritarian socialist model of development, achieved little and intensified the sense of alienation among various segments of the Mozambican society (Adam, 2006). In 1986 sometime before his death, the late President Machel attempted to address the sense of alienation that the people from the centre and north of the country felt in the postcolony. He nominated Francisco Masquil, a native of Sofala province and of Ndau ethnicity as the governor of Sofala. This nomination was regarded as 'a confirmation of Machel's strategic intelligence in order to justify the dream of national unity'⁶. However, this strategy was inconsequential as it was not followed by a serious political debate and strategies to address the regional disparities existing in the country.

As a corollary to the colonial and postcolonial political struggles, the Frelimo government and rebel movement, Renamo, engaged in a protracted war that lasted sixteen years (1976-1992) (Coelho, 2003: 175-193). The origins of the postcolonial war remain a matter of fierce dispute and disagreements between Frelimo and Renamo cadres, as well as in academic circles. Frelimo's official view, which is also consistent with numerous academic publications (Hanlon, 1990; Vines, 1991), is that the postcolonial violence

derived from the former white minority regimes of Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa to impede the post-independence socialist development of Mozambique. Thus Frelimo labelled the war a 'war of destabilization' whereby some Mozambicans grouped in Renamo were used as puppets of foreign interests. The Renamo movement was not regarded as a legitimate armed national group; they were treated as an externally created and driven group of 'armed bandits.'

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In turn, Renamo cadres affirm that they dissented because Frelimo's Marxism was 'a political and ideological brutality'⁷. Soon after independence, the government publicly committed itself to wage a political struggle against religious influence and local traditions as these were regarded as obscurantist practices⁸. Traditional leaders (named Regulos by the Portuguese colonial state) and traditional healers were treated as 'enemies of the people' and obstacles to the modernist agenda. Large numbers of Mozambicans that had worked for the colonial institutions were named 'the compromised' and were violently persecuted (Cabrita, 2000; Cahen, 2005: 213-233; Igreja, 2010: 781-799; Geffray, 1990; Hoile, 1994). Although there has been a growing literature suggesting the need to consider a multiplicity of factors behind the Mozambican postcolonial violence⁹, the familiar official disagreements between Frelimo and Renamo continue in times of peace and democratization.

Improvisations: political transition, democratization and decentralization

The transformation processes that led to the peace negotiations and subsequent political democratization in Mozambique already began during the civil war through the adoption of a new Constitution in 1990. The new constitution officially recognized various individual and collective freedoms and political, legal, cultural and religious pluralism. These reforms constituted attempts to resolve the problem of people's alienation and accumulated grievances and expand the state authority to the entire territory. Following two years (1990-92) of mediated political negotiations between the Frelimo government and the Renamo leadership, the Mozambican General Peace Agreement (AGP) was signed on 4 October 1992 in Rome, Italy. Renamo was officially recognized as a political party and since 1994, it has participated in various electoral processes. Yet while the multiparty democracy and the rule of law were introduced, Frelimo maintained control of the state institutions and Renamo kept a parallel army in Maringué district, the ex-military headquarters of the wartime rebel movement. These facts, combined with the absence of a truth commission (as in post-apartheid South Africa), have created an openly contentious transition as Renamo outside and within the national Parliament and numerous intellectuals outside through the media presented competing versions about the memories of the national liberation struggle and the civil war¹⁰. Frelimo conceded Renamo's right to participate politically, but rejected Renamo's attempt to change the current version of the country's official history. This position created fierce political conflicts which has influenced the democratization and decentralization processes in the country¹¹.

The 1990 Constitution mentioned decentralization as a principle to structure the public administration sector and on 13 September 1994, before the first democratic elections in the country, the Frelimo party alone approved the law 3/94 to initiate the decentralization process. However both the Constitution and the law 3/94 were not assertive about how the devolution of state powers would be institutionally configured; both legal instruments were unclear about the definition of local agents of the state and local authorities, and how the citizens were going to officially participate in the political processes of their cities and villages. Some of these limitations determined the revocation of the law 3/94 and the initiation of a revision of the constitutional text¹².

In October 1996, the national parliament made an *ad hoc* revision of the Constitution to address these limitations at the constitutional level and replace the law 3/94. The Constitution explicitly introduced the principle of local power as encompassing the existence of local municipalities. These local powers are created by universal suffrage and the system of proportional representation in order to elect an assembly and an executive agency with deliberative powers. Administrative, financial and patrimonial autonomy are also granted to the autarchies.

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Although the Frelimo party unrelentingly defends the position of being the sole nation-builders and history-makers, the current context of democratic pluralism makes it more difficult to sustain this position politically without permanently reverting into incoherence. This was visible when the *ad hoc* revision of the 1990 Constitution was finalized and approved with acclaim by the three political parties with seats in the parliament (Frelimo, Renamo and Democratic Union). The ex-president of the *ad hoc* commission, who is also a high echelon figure of the Frelimo party, enthusiastically proclaimed 'we have just finished writing history'¹³. The 'we' indirectly meant that in the everyday practice of political pluralism, Frelimo's essentialist approach to national unity and identity was, through 'improvisations', actually being reconfigured even if the party echelons paradoxically refused such a possibility¹⁴.

Law nº 2/97, Politics of memory and national identity

The approval of the Constitutional revision laid out the foundations for the specific laws to regulate the decentralization process through the Law nº 2/97, known as the Juridical Framework for the Implantation of Local Autarchies. The whole debate around the creation of Law nº 2/97 revealed some of the hesitations about the efficacy of devolving power to local autarchies¹⁵. The majority of Frelimo's MPs insisted that 'the municipalisation cannot and must not represent a negation of the state'¹⁶ which indicates that decentralization represented a loss of ownership. The objectives of the draft proposal were to 'reinforce the national unity and the unitary power of the state; deepen and consolidate democracy; reconstruct and foster the economic, social and cultural development; and improve the life conditions of the citizens'¹⁷.

While the issue of national unity and identity was central to the Frelimo party, they presented a loose understanding of its meaning. They stated that the national unity was built based on two presuppositions, 'the community is based on common objectives and each member of the community feels and assumes that s/he has a share of responsibility and identical power to the other members of the same community. The common objectives are defined in each historical moment by the people through their political representatives (...)'¹⁸ For the Renamo MPs, the problem was that hitherto, the definition of common objectives had been a prerogative of the Frelimo party alone, and none of the Frelimo cadres indicated which people would define the common objectives in the new context of pluralistic democracy and how. One Renamo MP reacting to the Minister's speech first criticized Frelimo's approach to national identity and in a lengthy speech concluded that 'it is good to remember that Mozambique does not belong only to the founders from the south of the Save River [in the centre of the country]; Mozambique extends to the Rovuma River [in the north]. It is necessary to remember the figures of the traditional power of the rest of the country (...)'. He added that various figures in the centre and north of Mozambique resisted against the Portuguese occupation and colonization 'in the same way as Ngungunhane, Maguiguane and others here in the south

(...) In the north and centre of the country there are also heroes of the resistance (...)’ (Zacarias, 1997). This deputy was making a plea for the Frelimo leadership to recognize some of the country’s heroes originating from the north and center of the country. 188

The former President of the Assembly, another Frelimo’s high-echelon, was enthusiastic at the end of this speech, and gave the impression that he was listening for the first time to a different but meaningful version of Mozambican history, culture and sense of national identity. In an *improviso* he said to the Renamo MP, ‘thank you Deputy A. Zacarias for this lesson in anthropology’ (Mulembwe, 1997). Another MP requested that the Assembly’s President make copies of the speech of ‘our brother [Renamo MP]’ in order to distribute it to interested deputies because ‘the issue that he presented was of huge diversity and maybe of huge importance’¹⁹. These enthusiastic reactions suggested that some of the Frelimo MPs recognised the need to diversify memories in order to craft the official history; and that the issues of national unity and identity require adjustments to the new context of pluralism and decentralization.

In spite of the acclaimed anthropological lesson given by the ‘Renamo brother’, the Frelimo MPs showed no additional interest to openly examine more about Mozambique’s pluralistic history and cultural diversity and how this pluralism and diversity must be taken into account in the democratic decentralization process. Instead, the Frelimo ruling elite invested considerable political and financial capital to enact laws that affirm and confirm ‘the authority and status of particular elites’ (Adebanwi, 2008: 430). The results culminated in the installation of Machel’s statuettes in the capital cities of all Mozambican provinces. Some of the other laws refer to law 3/2008 that created the research centre for the history of the national liberation struggle; and law 13/2009 to protect, preserve and valorise the patrimony of the national liberation struggle. In spite of Frelimo’s financial investments and numerous legal initiatives, they have not always attained an absolute control of the legislative process to make laws that coherently match with their own political positions. The crafting of the Article 45 of the law 2/97 is a case in point.

The problematic article of the law 2/97

The appreciation of the Law n° 2/97 was a long and complex process as the Assembly’s President guided the reading, analysis and revision of each of the almost 120 articles in the plenary session. From the whole debate on the draft proposal, I will focus on the debates surrounding the elaboration of Article 45 regarding the ‘Competencies of the Autarchies’, because this article crystallized the tension between memory and decentralization which erupted ten years later in 2007²⁰.

In the draft proposal, Article 45, line 2 stated that: ‘It is the competence of the Municipal Assembly, namely: (...) s) to establish the name of roads, squares, localities and places in the territory of the local autarchy; t) to propose to the competent entity the alteration of names of roads, squares, localities and places of the territory of the local autarchy’.

The Assembly’s President asked the deputies whether there were remarks about the content of Article 45. One Renamo deputy proposed an alteration of the line ‘t’. He suggested that ‘instead of ‘to propose’, perhaps it could be adequate ‘to communicate’ to the competent authority the alteration of the name of the roads (...)’²¹ According to the national assembly, for an alteration of a draft proposal to be considered, the alteration must be seconded by another deputy; afterwards if there is no agreement among the deputies about the proposed alterations, the president submits the altered proposal for

a vote. In this regard, another deputy immediately corroborated the suggested shift from 'propose' to 'communicate' by arguing that it was the proper competence of the autarchy to give names to the local infrastructures and then 'communicate' to the competent authority²². A third and final deputy that intervened also agreed with the proposed change by arguing that if line 's' defined that the municipality 'establishes', it was logical that afterwards the municipality should 'communicate' instead of 'propose'²³.

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The President acknowledged these requests for amendments. However, he never submitted this proposal to a vote. It is not clear why the President did not revisit these proposals as he had done with all the other amendment proposals, which were subsequently submitted to a vote. Perhaps this was because, as a former Renamo war General told me, 'the deputies were sleeping'²⁴ as the three deputies that presented the proposed amendment could have reminded the President and the plenary session about it, which did not happen. It might also be that because the differences between the lines 's' and 't' were subtle, the importance of this subtlety to promote meaningful local political actions remained under Frelimo's radar. This suggests the impossibility of any political party to politically control everything, even when the party has 'political experience' (Pitcher, 2002: 126). Therefore, the initial formulation of this article in the draft proposal passed when the law was approved. Frelimo voted in favour, whilst Renamo voted against as they wanted, in the last minute, to change Article 112, which was related to the principle of gradual elections and they did not agree with it. Yet the real test of this law and the decentralization process was still to come as the law had to pass muster in the real world through elections.

In the initial municipal elections in 1998, Renamo boycotted and the Frelimo Party won all the selected municipalities. In the second municipal elections held in 2003, Renamo won in five municipalities that included the Beira municipality, which triggered a new spin in the intersections of politics of memory, national unity and decentralization.

The line 's' versus the line 't': official recognition for a rebel leader

Beira is the second most important city in Mozambique and is located in the central province of Sofala. Over the years, it garnered the reputation of 'the most complicated province of the country'²⁵ due to its insubordinate tendencies towards the Frelimo central government. In June 2007, the Renamo Party in control of the Beira Municipality and making legal use of the line 's' of the Law n° 2/97, presented a proposal to the Municipal Assembly. The proposal attributed the name of André Matsangaíssa to a square located in a neighbourhood named Munhava. Renamo considers Matsangaíssa as the founder of their movement and hail him for his courage and for initiating the postcolonial armed rebellion against the postcolonial Marxist-Leninist dictatorship. This culminated with the introduction of multiparty democracy in the 1990s. The proposal to attribute a name to a square was in accordance with Law n° 2/97, and therefore the initiative was legal. The problem was not the initiative itself, but the figure that Renamo chose to honour by attributing his name to a square. As a journalist wrote sometime later, 'it is known that André Matsangaíssa is a hero to many and an eternal 'armed bandit' to others'²⁶.

During the debates in the municipal assembly, the Frelimo members just stated that the intention of the Municipal Council was legitimate, but that the act was illegitimate because 'the roundabout has a name, which is historical, Munhava Roundabout' (Saize, 2007). To defend their argument of 'illegality', the Frelimo party made recourse to Law n° 2/97, line 't'. In reality, the roundabout officially did have a number, which was 2314; the name 'Munhava' was part of popular usage, but according to the state lexicon and its bureaucratic procedures,

a popular nomenclature is not administratively valid. As some of the journalists that also followed this case wrote, 'Daviz Simango [President of the Beira Municipality] acted within the law' and the failure of Frelimo's argumentation was that 'a number is not a name'²⁶.

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In response to Frelimo's positions in the Municipal Assembly, the chief of the Renamo-Electoral Union in the same Assembly said that 'Frelimo will never accept the name of André Matsangaíssa for a public square, because in their understanding, the national heroes are emphatically only from Frelimo. For this reason, they are making use of all stratagems for impeding the locals to nominate their own heroes'²⁷. At the end of the debates, the resolution, named Deliberation 51/2007, was passed favourably and the roundabout received the name of *Praça André Matsangaíssa*. The Frelimo party appealed to the Administrative Court demanding that the decision of the Renamo-Electoral Union be considered unconstitutional. This appeal to the court is partially consistent with Chantal Mouffe's assertion that in various contemporary societies there is 'a marked tendency to privilege the juridical field and to expect the law to provide the solutions to all types of conflict' (Mouffe, 200: 115). Yet to this date, the Administrative Court has not issued a formal judgment, and as a journalist wrote at the time, 'if justice is not blind in this case, there is little that the Administrative Tribunal can do to change the scenario' (Langa, 2007).

When the roundabout was thoroughly transformed to receive Matsangaíssa's statuette, its proponents argued that 'we feared vandalism from the side of the others [Frelimo]'; for this reason 'in the first phase we placed a small sculpture which symbolizes a family that gets united to go to war'²⁸. The sculpture, which was described as 'a dignifying art work made of soap-stone' (Timóteo, 2009), is composed of a five-member family (father, mother and three children). It is complemented with a white marble plaque which has the following inscription:

Praça André Matade Matsangaíssa. Pela Determinação Com Que Conduziste A Luta Em Prol Do Entendimento E Da Harmonia Nesta Terra Legada Pelos Nossos Antepassados. Aqui Fica Registada A Homenagem, Ó Fundador Do Movimento De Luta Pela Democracia Que Conquistámos E Continuamente Aperfeiçoamos. Inaugurada Aos 17 De Outubro De 2008 Pelo Presidente Do Conselho Municipal Da Beira Eng. Daviz Mbepo Simango.

In spite of the absence of the image of Matsangaíssa, the sculpture was not generally rejected by the city dwellers. Unlike the examples of contested monuments in post-apartheid South Africa that had to be iron-fenced but nevertheless were vandalized (Hansen, 2003), Matsangaíssa Square was neither fenced in nor vandalized. Yet when the Renamo-Electoral Union experienced a serious internal crisis, which culminated with an internal split and expulsion of Daviz Simango from Renamo in 2008, the political elites of Renamo contradicted themselves by voicing their rejection, not of Matsangaíssa Square but of the Matsangaíssa statuette. Renamo high officials, from the party President to the local Beira cadres, boycotted the inauguration of the monument and they argued that the 'sculpture had nothing to do with Renamo' (ibid.). Some people in Beira believed that Frelimo and Renamo, for different reasons, spread rumours to instigate popular sentiments against Matsangaíssa Square. They gossiped that the statuette had been part of Daviz Simango's secret project to honour his father (Urias Simango) and mother (Celina Simango) and that the three children were Daviz Simango himself and his two other brothers. In spite of these rumours, the Beira dwellers did not vandalize or get involved in fracas over the sculpture; instead they found ways of peacefully dealing with Matsangaíssa Square and interpreting the serious conflicts between Frelimo and Renamo political elites both at local and national level.

Recentralization as modernization or as subversion

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The recentralization process was motivated by serious disagreements over issues of official memory and national unity and identity. Frelimo initially believed that decentralization in the context of political pluralism was a threat to their understating of official memory, national unity and identity and commemorations. Renamo's insistence on the legal process and approval of renaming Matsangaissa Square confirmed Frelimo's belief. Frelimo's response in Beira to appeal to the Administrative Tribunal sparked debates in civil society about the issue of national unity, identity and reconciliation that had been dormant. Some local intellectuals unanimously affirmed that 'Daviz Simango is right' and that 'the government woke up late'²⁹. Others said that 'we speak every day about democracy, but we still have profound difficulties in accepting the rules of democracy when they shock our principles and convictions'; and that in spite of all the efforts to control the political life 'it was expected that the Frelimo Party strategists, at some point, would open gaps and commit mistakes'³⁰. Frelimo cadres hardly participated in these public debates; they focused instead on preparing a draft proposal to amend Law n° 2/97.

In April 2007, the government climbed to the rostrums of the national Parliament to affirm that the necessity to alter some of the articles of law 2/97 emerged 'as a result of the experiences of the application of this legislation during approximately ten years (...)'³¹. From the various articles to be changed, it was Article 45, line 's' that captured most attention and triggered fierce debates particularly among the Renamo MPs. The minister of Estatal Administration said that the line 's' of Article 45 was going to be changed to include the verb 'to propose' to the competent authority the attribution, alteration of the names of roads, squares, localities and places in the territory of the local autarchy. This change was necessary 'in order to allow the government to follow this process'³². This meant that the lines 's' and 't' were merged; from then on the municipalities were forbidden to attribute or change a name without a prior consultation and approval by the central state.

Renamo MPs argued against these changes; one deputy stated that the Frelimo government was 'subverting the process of decentralization'; and he further said that 'the municipalities have their own references... and these references should continue to receive attention by eternalizing them with names of roads, squares, localities, and diverse localities as the current law stipulates'³³.

Frelimo MPs responded in support of the government alteration project; one deputy affirmed that it was unacceptable 'that individuals just because they own a municipality can alter everything in their own favour'³⁴. The use of the word 'to own' in these debates was also revealing of Frelimo's understanding of political power. That is, power is not acquired to serve the public interest; instead its acquisition reverts into a sense of privatization of the public good. Both parties did not reach a consensus on this issue; therefore the proposals were put to the vote. Taking advantage of their majority of seats, Frelimo passed the changes and reiterated that they had voted in favour 'because we are for the modernization and permanent actualization of our legislation'³⁵. For the Frelimo Party this meant that modernization was a return to the *status quo ante* by recentralizing some of the competences that had initially been devolved to the municipalities. The Renamo MPs highlighted the contradiction of recentralization as modernization by asserting that 'these alterations substantially reduced the autonomy and independence of local municipalities, reversing the direction and the spirit of the decentralization which is part of the deepening of democracy'³⁶.

In the midst of these contradictions of words and deeds, the Frelimo MPs' posture of unity is also noteworthy even though some of them disagree with the political orientation of the party and government on certain issues. One prominent Frelimo MP had voted in favour of recentralization. He told me off the record that the alterations in the Law n° 2/97 'in my opinion represented a regression; it was a regression because in fact, the Frelimo Party and the government decided in the quinquennium (1994-1999) program to move forward with a deep reform of the public administration sector'.

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Final improvisos

The process of decentralization in Mozambique cannot be separated from the independence struggles, politics of transition at the time of independence in 1975, politics of memory and the post-civil war pluralism and democratization. As in various African countries that underwent major political changes in the postcolonial era (Berman; Eyoh; Kymlick, 2004), in Mozambique, the Frelimo party managed to maintain the formal control of the principal state institutions. This predicament is similar to the post-liberation politics in various African countries as it has been observed that 'the ownership of the state—and of the nation—is thus firmly held by the power-holders of the former liberation movement' (Dorman, 2006: 1097). In Mozambique, the former liberation movement developed a strong sense of ownership on issues of national unity and identity and how decentralization should evolve. In spite of the recognition of political pluralism, the Frelimo party have continuously postponed the renegotiation of the post-independence project of public memory that shaped the sense of national unity and identity. This renegotiation is necessary in order to deal with the new pluralistic features of the country's political landscape and the proliferation of conflicting memories of the country's recent history. In this regard, since the Decentralization Law n° 2/97 inadvertently opened political spaces in the country's landscape in order to cement other versions of the collective memory and public commemorations, the Law n° (2/97) was amended. Yet it was amended late because the opposition party Renamo, had already made use of the initial law to officially recognize their founding leader, André Matsangaissa. In the meantime, other ways of commemorating opposition figures have unofficially flourished in the centre of Mozambique through the emergence of *gamba* spirits, which partially bears witness to the sacrifices incurred by Renamo ex-soldiers in the civil war³⁷. The informal recognition suggests that national unity and identity "will be the product of multiple, and sometimes conflicting, 'imaginings'" (West; Kloeck-Jenson, 1999: 484).

By amending some of the articles of the Law n° 2/97, the Frelimo government took back to the state central organs some aspects of state authority that had been previously devolved to local municipalities were taken away from them and brought back to state central organs. The case analysed here differs in terms of the content and its implications from other analyses of recentralization acts conducted in Mozambique and in other African countries (and beyond). Previous studies on recentralization in Mozambique focused on juridical alterations that reduced the autonomy of local communities in the management of land resources, the institutionalization of a state representative in the local municipalities, and administrative procedures that increase the financial dependency of the local municipalities vis-à-vis the central state (Chiziane, 2011).. In other countries, the central state officials recentralized issues of control of land and forestry and administrative finance (Manyak; Katono, 2010; Wunsch, 2001: 277-288), or by issues of control of provincial budgets (Eaton, 2001).

The significance of the recentralizing act in Mozambique does not conform so much to the assumption of 'opposition weakness in Africa.' (Rakner; Van de Walle, 2009: 108-121).

The analysis that I developed in this article is instructive from the perspective of political grievances as the promoter of political transformations. The decentralization in post-civil war Mozambique does not have the immediate effect of attaining its normative goals: to increase the state efficiency in delivering services at local level (Wunsch, 2001). Instead, the decentralization process is instructive by revealing the tensions, fears, fractures and limits of the power and authority of the Frelimo ruling elite. These tensions have renewed critical arguments about the selective and ethnic basis of the Frelimo's practice of national identity and commemorations.

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It can be argued that serious disagreements over issues of national identity and commemorations are a common phenomenon around the world (Gillis, 1994: 8). Yet in Mozambique the serious disagreements over time has also contributed to political transformations in that in the everyday of political practice, the Frelimo's essentialist approach to national unity and identity has been paradoxically reconfigured through multiple acts of 'improvisation' (Mbembe, 2006). The results of this improvisation have unexpectedly rendered more visible how decentralization has eroded the discursive capacity of the Frelimo party in their claims of possessing the monopoly of the national agenda. By contradicting themselves, Frelimo cadres inadvertently highlight the role that the emergent pluralistic democracy and decentralization and some of its key players have had in disrupting Frelimo sense of state ownership. Over time these transformations may boost the democratization process in Mozambique. It has been argued that one way of decreasing the current predicament of tension and sense of permanent political transition, could be by accepting the country's history 'in its fullness and complexity' (Hayner, 2001: 195), and by institutionalizing 'the cultural diversity and other social complexities' (Mazula, 2004: 197). However this article shows that in fact, over time, the Frelimo's ruling elites have paradoxically both rejected and embraced the recognition of the country's complex history and cultural diversity (Igreja, 2013).

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Notes

1. An extended version of some of the ideas presented in this paper can be found in V. Igreja, 'Politics of Memory: Decentralization and Recentralization in Mozambique'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2013, vol. 39.

2. The data used in this article was collected through various methods: In-depth interviews in Beira and Maputo (capital) with the political leaders of Frelimo, Renamo and Beira Democracy Group; in-depth interviews with key officials and informal talks in the corridors of the national Parliament in Maputo. Other sources consisted of official documents, newspapers and blogs regarding the recent political history of Mozambique and political speeches located in archives in Beira and Maputo. 194
3. Chissano, 3 February 1987.
4. ALEXANDER, J. et al. *Violence and memory*; KRIGER, *The politics of creating national heroes*; MARSCHALL, *Commemorating*; HANSEN, *Public spaces*.
5. F. Gil, in the blog: <http://macua.blogs.com>
6. 'As confissões de Francisco Masquil', in 'Diário de Moçambique', 17 October 1995.
7. Intervention by I. Saica, president of Renamo's Women League, during the public commemorations in Gorongosa district of the eighteenth anniversary of the death of André Matsangaíssa. In 'Diário de Moçambique', 20 October 1997.
8. In 'Notícias da Beira', 27 November 1979; IGREJA, V.; DIAS-LAMBRANCA, B. *Christian religious transformation and gender relations in postwar Mozambique*. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 2009, vol.39, no.3, pp. 262-94; GEFFRAY, C. *La cause des armes au Mozambique*. Paris: Editions Karthala, 1990; HOILE, D. *Mozambique, resistance, and freedom: A case for reassessment*. London: Mozambique Institute, 1994.
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 13. GAMITO, H. Archives of the Assembly of the Republic (AAR). Maputo, 29 October 1996.
 14. MBEMBE, *The banality of power and the aesthetics of vulgarity in the postcolony.*
 15. WEST AND KLOECK-JENSON. *Betwixt and between.*
 16. SITHOLE, A. R. Frelimo MP. Debates on the Law nº 2/97. AAR, Maputo, December 1997
 17. GAMITO, A. ex-Minister of Estatal Administration.
 18. Ibid.
 19. Deputy Inusso. AAR, December 1997.
 20. This was a slight modification of Article 23 of the initial Decentralization Law nº 3/94 referred to above.
 21. Deputy Adalberto. AAR, December 1997.
 22. Deputy Ricardo. AAR, December 1997.
 23. Deputy Manteigas. AAR, December 1997.
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