Notes on Challenges to Peace Consolidation: the Case of Mozambique[29]

João Bernardo Honwana [30]

Sumário

Moçambique pode constituir uma ilustração dos desafios que se colocam à consoli-dação da paz em muitos países que se encontram numa situação de pós-conflito. Apesar de ser um exemplo sui generis *de reconciliação nacional «quase espontânea», algumas das causas estruturais da crise não foram devidamente equacionadas no caso moçambicano, nomeadamente no plano político – a permanência de um Estado fraco, com uma cultura democrática ainda frágil e níveis consideráveis de corrupção –; no plano económico – continua a figurar ente os países mais pobres do mundo, com grandes disparidades regionais na distribuição da riqueza –; e ao nível social – por ex-emplo, o aumento exponencial do crime, ou ainda os conflitos em torno da identidade e da percepção de exclusão por parte de sectores significativos da população.*

Neste contexto, o processo de liberalização económica tende a agravar a crise política e social, nomeadamente pelo aumento do desemprego e do custo de vida, pelas consequên-cias altamente penalizadoras do sector agrícola, etc. O autor argumenta que o apoio da comunidade internacional é condição necessária mas não suficiente, sendo complementar aos esforços internos que têm de ser desenvolvidos para a consolidação da paz.

In contributing to the topic of this session, I intend to briefly examine Mozambique as an illustration of the challenges to the consolidation of peace in post war situations in Africa. 11 years after the signing of the Rome Peace Accord between the government and Renamo, and nearly 9 years after its first multiparty elections in December 1994, Mozambique has successfully broken the cycle of violence that wracked the country since the early 1960s. Peace seems to be there to stay, as Mozambicans now grapple with the challenges of democratization and social and economic development, under the unforgiving conditions of accelerated globalization.

With the end of the superpower confrontation that characterized the Cold War, and the demise of apartheid rule in South Africa, the global and regional conditions for war have disappeared in Mozambique. What happened, though, to the main internal factors of conflict? How have they evolved since the end of the war? What new challenges, if any, have emerged with the advent of peace? How effective has the Mozambican state been in managing internal conflict? What role can international and regional organizations play in assisting Mozambique in its efforts to consolidate peace?

This text is more concerned with elaborating the questions, rather than with offering answers which, may I suggest, could be one of the items on the agenda of our African-European dialogue. But first, and for the sake of clarity, let us look at the distinction that Laurie Nathan (1998) draws between conflict and crisis.

Conflict, as a social phenomenon, reflects the variety of interests, needs and values of different groups in any given society; it is often generated by the unequal access of such groups to the exercise of power and the attendant differences in their ability to influence the distribution of resources; it is intrinsic to any process of change; in short, it is a normal fact of life.

Crisis, in turn, is normally characterized by the presence of a number of structural conditions, paramount among which are socio-economic deprivation and inequity; authoritarian regimes; the exclusion of certain groups from the political process on the basis of identity, be it ethnicity, race, gender, or religion or any combination thereof; and the institutional failure to manage conflict in a constructive and effective manner. A crisis may result in more or less protracted violence if, for example, a given group

decides to resort to force as a means to address its grievances; and violence may be triggered by a number of the so-called "accelerators" or "dynamic factors" such as natural disasters or the severe repression of majority or minority groups, which exacerbate the structural conditions of crisis described above.

The point of this distinction is to avoid the tendency to equate conflict with war, and crisis with violence.

The problem with seeing conflict as synonymous of war is that it leads to the concept that conflict is inherently negative and therefore should be prevented. But how can we prevent the *unpreventable*, if we accept the argument that conflict is an inevitable fact of life? Shouldn't we rather try and manage conflict in constructive and effective ways?

There is equally a problem with seeing crisis as synonymous with violence, for that often leads to a lack of appreciation of the complex nature of the crisis and an almost exclusive focus on violence and its triggers or proximate causes. It is indeed important to heed to the well-meaning impulse to stop the violence in a crisis situation. But is it not even more important to effectively address the structural, underlying conditions of the crisis itself? And is this not a much more demanding, though fundamental, and much less attended to, undertaking?

To return to Mozambique, I will touch upon four issues: political instability; poverty and socio-economic issues; regional imbalances; and crime and corruption. For the sake of brevity, I have decided against addressing the critical issue of civil-military relations and the role of the armed services. As a former soldier, I am simply unable to be brief when it comes to discussing military and security matters, so I will not even try!

Political Instability

National independence and the revolutionary experiment of Frelimo initiated a process of dramatic transformations in Mozambique. This process was compounded by the wars with Rhodesia, apartheid South Africa and the civil war that ensued, and led to acute political instability and social dislocation in a massive scale. The reconfiguration of the political landscape and the advent of multiparty politics that followed the end of the war further aggravated the situation.

I have argued elsewhere that peace in Mozambique was based on very shaky foundations. This was so, I thought, because in wars that end with the unconditional defeat of one party, the victors invariably exert the right to judge and punish the vanquished for the human and material cost of the war. History is written or re-written by the victors whose abuses are conveniently underrated, explained or simply ignored as the defeated carry all the blame. Peace comes with a measure of justice, however partial and biased.

In Mozambique though, the war ended without a clear winner and the only losers were the "anonymous" people of the land. Their quest for justice and reparation has failed to stimulate the "CNN effect'. Under these circumstances, the allegations that either party to the conflict committed war crimes and human rights abuses during the war have been ignored, allegedly for the sake of national reconciliation.

'National reconciliation" in this case simply translates the compromise between the new partners in the peace process, i.e., Frelimo and Renamo, rather than the establishment of harmony and justice among all Mozambicans. In time, I suggested, the frustrations resulting from this failure to address the issue of justice might lead to a new cycle of violent conflict.

So far, I am very happy to concede, I have been proven wrong. In the immediate aftermath of the war, a more genuine and almost spontaneous process of reconciliation seemed to have developed. How is that? Let me offer one possible explanation, of course, with the clarity of hindsight.

The civil war in Mozambique had the very distinctive feature of going beyond ethnic, regional or religious lines of fracture, to affect the nuclear family, the community, the village. We all recall the numerous accounts of children who have been forced to kill their parents, relatives, or neighbours, as one of Renamo's rites of passage; we equally recall the stories of brothers who, by choice or force, have joined the opposing fighting forces. Such was the war in Mozambique at its cruellest. Paradoxically, though, this is precisely what made grassroots reconciliation a much less daunting proposition.

When the weapons finally went silent and the carnage stopped, the persons and communities most affected by the war realized that there was no "other" to blame for the suffering, and reconciliation had to occur within the family, the immediate community, the village. And, resorting to ancestral rites and practices, in the absence of the services of sophisticated psychotherapists, they engaged in the business of reconciliation with the same surprising energy that they put into the physical reconstruction of their houses and villages, the rebuilding of their lives.

In other words, just as the war was fought inside of "us", rather than between "us" and "others", so too reconciliation is happening within the same collective "self".

Even though Mozambique is obviously far from being a stable democracy, it is enjoying a general atmosphere of peace. With more or less strident cries of "foul play" following the elections in 1994 and in 1999, the former rebels seem to have accepted two successive electoral defeats with relative grace and are now trying to recreate their image as a sharp opposition party, the "fathers of Mozambican democracy" as they call themselves.

Beyond their proclaimed commitment to democratic transformation, the leaders of Renamo and the so-called "unarmed opposition" certainly benefit materially from the new situation. Besides the generous salaries, social status and other privileges they derive from being members of parliament, these leaders also had access to land ownership and set up or are partners in a number private companies. To put it crudely: Frelimo retains political power, while sharing the meagre "spoils of the war" with Renamo et al.

Mozambique's Constitution – one of the most liberal on the continent – entrenches fundamental individual rights and freedoms, a clear separation between the Executive, Judiciary and Legislative powers of the state, as well as the broadest freedom of the press. In other words, the new political dispensation is, on paper at least, based on sound democratic values and principles. These noble values and principles, however, have little positive impact on governance and stability. Political stability and the consolidation of peace fundamentally require effective governance, i.e., the capacity of the state to deliver basic services to the citizens, adopt and enforce laws, and manage society and its conflicts in a fair and harmonious fashion. That capacity in Mozambique is, at best, very, very weak.

Furthermore, Mozambique's yet fragile sense of nationhood and internal cohesion are seriously undermined by frequent calls to more primary loyalties based on the manipulation of the multiple identities that compose the Mozambican mosaic. Indeed, the politicization of ethnicity, the mobilization of a false sense of regional solidarity, and the radicalization of the politics of religion are raising their dangerous heads and, what is more worrisome, are met with a deafening silence on the part of the state.

To summarize, Mozambique features a weak state, a multiplicity of ethnic, religious and regional groups in search of a common nation, a very fragile and totally donor-dependant civil society and an incipient democratic political culture. Such structural weaknesses of the Mozambican society and its body polity may seriously hinder the consolidation of peace and stability and dramatically increase the country's propensity to be yet again drawn into violent conflict.

Poverty and Socio-Economic Issues

During the African Union summit held in Maputo last July, prominent personalities in the field of international development assistance have praised Mozambique's economic performance.

As a result of a strict adherence to the IMF-WB economic policies, and the influx of foreign capital into the mega-projects of aluminum, gas and titanium, Mozambique's GDP is raising at an official rate of 8% per year. This is commendable and may be excellent for the long-term health of the country's economy, but it exacts a heavy social cost to the common citizen in the short-term.

First, unemployment has risen as a result of privatisations, rationalisations and bankruptcies, with about 40% of small and medium industrial firms having closed down over the last 4-5 years. Second, salary adjustments in both the public and private sectors have lagged far behind the ever-increasing cost of living. Third, the violent containment of credit and monetary circulation resulted in a sharp reduction in internal investment that, in turn, affects negatively economic growth. The very few Mozambicans who have accumulated enough to invest without the need to resort to bank credit are, paradoxically, the main beneficiaries of bank credit since they are the only internal economic operators able to offer sufficient guarantees of creditworthiness. Moreover, neither foreign nor domestic investments thus far have created enough jobs to impact on unemployment in any significant way.

Current economic policies have a particularly severe impact on the family sector of agriculture that employs nearly 80% of the total national labour force. What happened with the agricultural production in 1997 illustrates this point. Neither the state nor the private sector had the financial resources to buy the peasants' surplus production in that year. As a result, many family producers scaled down their efforts in subsequent years, to save on crops and avoid the drama of seeing their produce lost for lack of buyers. Another consequence was the weakening of the critical rural commercial network, dominated by small shopkeepers, many of whom faced bankruptcy for lack of business.

For a short period, it seemed that the lack of commercialisation was a blessing in disguise. Given the insistent warnings about the devastating drought that El Nino would cause in Southern Africa, the sight of full granaries was a good protection against famine. But peace and the logic of market economics generated other solutions. Since the (Mozambican) state and the private sector did not have the capacity to absorb the surplus production, others, in neighbouring countries had the resources to do so. Thus, along the boarders with foreign countries, the surplus production found its way to markets across the boarder and was sold at give away prices by desperate farmers.

Clearly, the overdose of remedial action by the government in terms of violent

constraint of consumption and small investment can only be sustained at the risk of deepening the crisis and provoking social explosions which would undermine the desired outcome of the whole exercise of economic structural adjustment.

Imbalances in Regional Development

Since the end of the war, most major investments have been concentrated in the southern provinces of Mozambique. Such is the case of initiatives like the Maputo Corridor, Mozal, and the exploitation of the Panda natural gas reserves. It is true that the government is promoting a few agricultural and mining projects elsewhere. Investors, however, seem to prefer to invest in the south where the infrastructure is better and there are better prospects for return on investment. This reinforces the longstanding and widely held perception that the Frelimo government dominated by Southerners gives preferential treatment to the south. The following comment I heard from a former (Northerner) senior officer in the government army captures the point: *Everything, all the money goes to the south. The only thing Frelimo has sent to Niassa since the end of the war were groups of Boer farmers, with their culture of apartheid, to take our best land. Is this all we deserve?*

A related issue is the question of regionalism. In its most benign form, regionalism is manifest in the debates in Parliament. Often, parliamentarians from Northern provinces representing different parties, will have a common position on a given agenda item, independently of the instruction form their respective party leaders. This suggests a deep sense of primary loyalty to the region of origin, rather than to the party. The ability of regional MPs to transcend party political lines may facilitate investment outside the south. Equally, investment that is directed to those regions outside the south may help to redress the imbalance that currently exists.

A less positive manifestation of regionalism is the proliferation of regional civic groups. Invariably, their aim is to affirm aggressively a distinct identity, on the basis of the language and place of origin of its members. In a stable nation, this is a normal phenomenon that does not threaten the sense of national identity. In the case of Mozambique, I would argue, the concept of nation has little substance. This, coupled with perceptions of unfair treatment from the central government and unequal access to resources, can easily be manipulated to undo the fragile political balance.

Crime and Corruption

The spiral of crime in South Africa has infected other countries in the region including Mozambique, a country that is both a “client” and a “supplier” of criminal activities. Thus, for example, cars stolen in South Africa are sold in the Mozambican black market; and Mozambique’s uncontrolled surplus small weapons find their way to fuel criminal activities in South Africa. The dramatic upsurge in crime in Mozambique can be partly explained by poverty and unequal distribution of resources, both between urban and rural areas, and between the south and the rest of the country

Police reports indicate that there is a connection between car theft, and weapons and drugs smuggling into and from Mozambique. And some observers, particularly those associated with the emerging independent media, have long argued that organized crime in Mozambique reaches high into the political and social elite.

The quick spread of corruption at all levels of the state bureaucracy is yet another symptom

of the crisis. But here, an important distinction needs to be drawn between, on the one hand, the allegations of acts of corruption protagonised by some politicians and senior civil servants who misuse their positions of power and influence for self-enrichment. If the allegations are true, such acts can only be explained by the connivance and/or lack of capacity to establish the necessary checks and balances at the highest levels of the state apparatus. On the other hand, there are the cases of traffic officers, customs officials and other junior bureaucrats who take (normally) small bribes "to make ends meet at home'" to compensate for their meagre salaries. Their need to survive explains to a large extent, although by no means justifies it, this dramatic fall in ethic standards.

Some of the internal factors of conflict directly associated with Mozambique's structural conditions of crisis have not yet been properly addressed; furthermore, peace has come with a new set of challenges. Mozambique remains one of the poorest countries in the world; it features a weakened state; an alarming growth of the crime rate; corruption; conflicts around identity and equitable access to resources; and real or perceived political exclusion of significant sectors of the population. In this context, economic liberalisation tends to aggravate, rather than alleviate the country's social and political crisis.

It seems reasonable to suggest and expect that the international community will understand that Mozambicans alone cannot succeed in consolidating peace. Of course no amount of foreign assistance, no matter how well intentioned, organised and generous, will excuse the Mozambicans from their responsibilities. No amount of foreign assistance will ever be sufficient or even worthwhile without the commitment of the Mozambicans to build their own future. The international community can, at best, be supportive and avoid taking action that may undermine the domestic effort. In particular, it is the duty of the Mozambican political elites to grow above sectarian interests and show the courage, the vision and the qualities of leadership required to build the nation; to raise to the challenge and sow, today, the seeds of peace, democracy and development.