

Review

Old habits die hard: Resistencia Nacional Mozambicana (RENAMO) propensity for military confrontation against its professed embracement of peaceful conflict resolution, 1976 to 2017

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This article reviews Tavuyanago's publication entitled Resistencia Nacional Mozambicana (RENAMO): from military confrontation to peaceful engagement, 1976 to 2009'. In this article, Tavuyanago gave much credit to Renamo for the creation of democratic space in Mozambique's post-civil war political landscape. RENAMO had waged a brutal guerrilla war against Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) in the period from 1976 to 1992 when a peace accord was signed between the belligerents. Subsequently, RENAMO participated in the 1994 general elections in Mozambique and accepted the outcome of the poll. In this context, Tavuyanago concluded that RENAMO would never go back to the bush to fight against the government; a prediction which was proved wrong by historical events when RENAMO withdrew from the government and declared war on FRELIMO. Indeed, this proved that old habits die hard as RENAMO resorted to war as a tool to gain political concessions from the ruling FRELIMO government. In the final analysis, the paper argues that Tavuyanago was too judgmental to argue that RENAMO would not return to war.

Key words: Conflict, democracy, election, Frelimo, Renamo, Mozambique, war.

INTRODUCTION

Independent Southern African states such as Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe that achieved independence through the armed struggle have had their share of hotly contested elections. The contest has largely been between and amongst political parties that were involved in the armed struggle to liberate their respective countries.¹

The electoral contest had largely involved political parties that played a critical role in the liberation of their

respective countries. The main dichotomies amongst these former liberation movements emanated from divergent ideological orientations, irreconcilable personality differences among the leaders and the general quest for self-aggrandizement. In the case of Mozambique, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) was pitted against the Resistencia Nacional Mozambicana (RENAMO) after the country's attainment of independence in 1975.

The Mozambican scenario is unique in that while FRELIMO waged the liberation struggle against Portuguese colonial rule, RENAMO was a movement that

¹ See the Zimbabwe African National Union and the Zimbabwe African People's Union in the case of Zimbabwe and MPLA and UNITA in the case of Angola.

emerged in the country in the post independence era. RENAMO was a creation of the white minority government in Rhodesia which was indirectly fighting against FRELIMO towards the close of the Mozambican war of independence. It was initially widely cast as a bandit movement that lacked features of other successful insurgency movements such as a well-defined guiding ideology, charismatic leadership and a clear political programme (Hall, 1999).

After about 15 years of a protracted brutal war against the FRELIMO-led government, RENAMO however managed to transform itself into a mass political party that actively and persistently participated in the country's electoral processes from 1994 onwards. RENAMO's dark history (which involved brutalising the masses, forcing youngsters to join its ranks, kidnapping opponents and plundering state resources), its metamorphosis into a supposedly democratic party and its subsequent contribution to Mozambique's nascent democracy was the foci of Tavuyanago (2011) article in the *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations: 'RENAMO: from military confrontation to peaceful democratic engagement, 1976 to 2009'*. This article endeavours to review the above article and, especially in view of the post-2009 developments that have seen RENAMO receding to its old habits of using military confrontation as a weapon of confronting its erstwhile FRELIMO rival.

Summary of the article

Using mainly secondary sources, Tavuyanago (2011) article examines the birth of RENAMO in 1976 as a mercenary movement created and sponsored by the Rhodesian government to destabilise the newly independent state of Mozambique. It also explores the movement's broad aims, its tainted history in the Mozambican civil war of 1976 to 1990 and its mutation from a rebel movement to a fully-fledged political party.

Further, the article analyses the movement's subsequent contribution to Mozambique's budding democracy from 1990 to 2009 (Minter, 1999). The author's central argument was that in spite of its murky history of being a vicious bush guerrilla army, RENAMO was over time able to transform itself into a respectable and credible political party which consistently participated in Mozambique's electoral processes between 1994 and 2009. During this period, the movement acquitted itself well on the country's political landscape when it managed to win in some of the provinces such as Niassa, Nampula, Zambezia, Tete, Manica and Sofala.

Consequently, Tavuyanago (2011) argues that the

RENAMO movement contributed to Mozambique's peaceful transition from war to peace and in the establishment, together with FRELIMO of a democratic culture of electoral contest in the country. This was in spite of the contestations which characterised each election since 1994. It was the author's contention therefore that overall, RENAMO's contribution to conflict management in the country and to the deepening and consolidation of democracy in Mozambique was great (Tavuyanago, 2011). It was in that vein that Giovanni (2005) affirmed that the movement became a major instrument in channelling peaceful management of conflicts in Mozambique. The paper however notes RENAMO's limitations which, among others, included deliberate frustrations by the FRELIMO government to its contribution to national development for fear it would steal the show, its inexperience in governance and Afonso Dhlakama's "personalistic and extra-parliamentary leadership style (Tavuyanago, 2011) worked down on the efforts his party representatives were putting into their parliamentary duties.

Tavuyanago (2011) conclusion was that notwithstanding its spiteful past and heavily dented history, RENAMO managed to re-brand itself into a new political outfit which moved away from the use of military force in resolving domestic conflicts. As a result, the movement was able to attract a large following which subsequently legitimised it. It is again the author's view that RENAMO thus managed to deliver peace and safeguard multi-party democracy in the country for the period up to 2009 (Tavuyanago, 2011). Its participation in Mozambique's burgeoning democracy, without doubt, led to the establishment of relative peace and stability in the country and the promotion of a competitive political climate, itself a sign of democracy. The period between 1990 and 2009 was therefore characterised by the general absence of open military confrontation and a desire to cooperate with its erstwhile FRELIMO opponent.

RENAMO's 2012 disengagement from government and its subsequent retreat to its Gorogossa hideout was certainly a sign that 'old habits die hard'. This review will deliberate on the implications of the movement's new tactics of using military force as a bargaining tool to, once again, 'democratise' Mozambique's political space. The review will however caution that while indeed Dhlakama (the leader of RENAMO) has gone back to the bush, this is only but some bellicose grandiloquence directed at forcing the government to return to the democratic path of full-scale engagement and accommodation. This review will thus aver that currently RENAMO has no capacity to fight a sustained war with the FRELIMO government because of the changed geopolitics of the region which does not condone banditry. Given that scenario, the

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review argues that the movement will find it difficult to solicit for regional military backing. Resultantly its threats will remain mere combative rhetoric.

A critique of the article

While the article brings about some new insights in the understanding of the contradictions shrouding the RENAMO movement during its lifespan, it is totally silent on the methodology employed in synthesising the collected information. Indeed, while it is evident that the article is grounded on secondary sources, this review goes further to interrogate the data collected through oral interviews conducted along and across the south-eastern border area of the country by one of the reviewers between 2015 and 2017.

Overall, the study employs qualitative research techniques to collect, collate and synthesise data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with displaced Mozambicans currently living in Zimbabwe and across the border. Document analysis involved the study of secondary sources of information such as published books, journal articles and electronic media sources. The information from the interviews certainly added a new dimension to the RENAMO story and without doubt injected fresh insights in understanding the movement, especially since the 'rebel' group's return to its Gorongossa wartime base in 2012 invariably to start another war.

Again, Tavuyanago loosely uses the term 'democracy' throughout his treatise without giving due consideration to its deep meaning. Democracy comes from the Greek word *demo*-people and *cratos*-power (Bhebe and Ranger, 2001). Abraham Lincoln succinctly defined it as a government of the people by the people for the people (Hlongwana and Makanyisa, 2011). It therefore means people's power where government derives its sovereignty from the people. Its main tenets include free and regular elections, transparency, rule of law, political tolerance and political pluralism. While after 1992 RENAMO embraced democratic practices of contesting in elections, the assertion that RENAMO contributed to peace and democracy in Mozambique cannot be taken at face value. It was in effect RENAMO which destroyed peace in Mozambique during the 15 years from 1976 while fighting in the corner of regional and global agents of imperialism. While it is a progressive gesture to acknowledge RENAMO's participation in democratic processes in Mozambique it is equally disingenuous to associate the movement with total engagement with democracy. Democrats do not unleash wars but get into office through democratic means, a credo that RENAMO failed to live by at all times.

Moreover, the author overlooked the contribution of transnational processes and events to the rise of Mozambican democracy. What needs to be emphasised is that the end of bi-polar politics in the 1990s following the

collapse of the Cold War and the subsequent rise of the United States' unilateralism whipped African Marxist states such as Mozambique into adopting the Western liberal democratic culture (Manning, 1998). Thus, RENAMO participated in democratic processes in Mozambique not as a willing contributor but an opportunist who had no option but to embrace the dictates of a new global ideology, and certainly sing for its supper.

The origins of the RENAMO movement are well articulated in the article through a thorough dissection of two contrasting schools (Tungamirai, 1987; Hanlon, 1984; Ellert, 1993; Flower, 1987). While the first school argues that RENAMO was an imperialist stooge created and sustained by external support (Rhodesian, South African and Western), the 'revisionist' paradigm countered that the group was a "genuine popular movement" fighting a "bona fide civil war" (Tavuyanago, 2011). What was undeniable was that it indeed started as a counter-insurgency movement that grew into a formidable political party because of its ability to study, understand and take full advantage of the grievances of the rural electorate of the country.

Concomitant with the aforementioned argument, this article discusses both the declared and perceived aims of the movement in fairly great detail. However missing from this part of the discussion is how the Ndaou-Tshonga ethnic rivalry became embroiled in the RENAMO-FRELIMO conflict matrix. The Tshonga southerners who happened to dominate FRELIMO politics blamed the Ndaou for practising witchcraft and for being mentally incorrigible while on the other hand the Ndaou accused the southerners of displaying disdainful attitude towards them (Chingono, 1996). The Ndaou, appeared to have had a case as provinces north of the Save River had not been part of the top FRELIMO leadership. To this extent the first three leaders of FRELIMO, two of whom became state Presidents of the Republic of Mozambique, all came from the south: Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane (Inhambane), Samora Moises Machel (Gaza) and Joaquim Alberto Chissano (Gaza) (Chisiwa, 2017). Undeniably, southerners tend to have an upper hand over other ethnic formations because they benefited more from the Portuguese colonial system (Sumich, 2005).

In addition, the Ndaou blamed Samora Machel and his compatriots from the south for hijacking the revolution from a deserving Ndaou, Urias Simango, who according to the FRELIMO's hierarchical structure should have ascended to the presidency of the party following Mondlane's assassination in 1969 (Chikava, 2010). However, the Ndaou allege that Simango was falsely accused of complicity in the murder of his leader and subsequently expelled from FRELIMO (Chitiki, 2016). As if the expulsion was not enough Simango was arrested in 1974 and secretly executed together with his wife on the orders of the Mozambican government in 1977. It is, thus, undeniable that the expulsion and the subsequent elimination of Simango drove a wedge between the Ndaou and the Tshonga and by extension, between RENAMO

Table 1. RENAMO election results between 1994 and 2014.

Election	Votes	Percentage (%)	Seats
2014	1 495 137	32.46	89
2009	688 782	17.69	51
2004	905 289	29.73	90
1999	1 603 811	38.81	117
1994	1 803 506	37.78	112

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RENAMO>.

and FRELIMO during the period of confrontation (Cahen, 1999).

Again, this review emphasises that in order to gain domestic and international sympathy, Dhlakama and RENAMO portrayed themselves as nationalists who were fighting to liberate Mozambicans from communist domination and oppression. RENAMO also blamed the Mozambican Government for excluding other groups in governance and for pursuing policies that were ethnically biased. It, therefore, argued for proportional representation in government, the holding of regular, free and fair elections and the abandonment of a command economy (Young, 1989) On the prosecution of the war, RENAMO furthermore exploited the people's underlying grievances. They certainly had grievances against the FRELIMO government, considered generally insensitive to the needs especially of the rural population. Chingono (1996) argued that FRELIMO's miscalculations contributed to the outbreak and progression of the civil war.

In support of the RENAMO party were some traditional chiefs who had been aggrieved by the FRELIMO-led government after being forced to relinquish their authority to government-appointed officials who in many cases were not familiar with local customs (Morgan, 1990). Furthermore, the creation of *aldeia comunais* state initiated villages alienated FRELIMO from the ordinary man in Mozambique. Broadly, many people were less willing to leave their traditional homes for the *aldeia comunais* (Dinerman, 1994). Perreira (1999) argues that FRELIMO adopted the villagisation programme as a ploy to exercise political control over the people rather than a means of initiating an agricultural revolution through collective agricultural production (Perreira, 1999).

However, Lorgen (1999) contends that the government set up communal villages in order to manage the redistribution of scarce resources and services to the peasants. However, Samora Machel who wanted to please his communist handlers such as China and Russia adopted socialism as a guiding ideology. However, the result was chaos in the country's economy (Daniel, 2016). The new currency (*meticais*) which replaced the Portuguese Escudos) in 1975 was rendered valueless by hyper-inflation while commodities disappeared from government-owned shops commonly known as *loja do*

povo. Mozambican Ndau resorted to crossing the border to Rhodesia to get basic commodities as the country's populist policies had destroyed the economy.

Also, RENAMO capitalised on FRELIMO's attitude on religion and tradition (Morgan, 1990). FRELIMO's determination to oppose all types of religion, age old practices such as polygamy was motivated by the desire to modernise "backward looking" Mozambicans and to get rid of practices and institutions that were closely associated with the Portuguese colonial Government (Morgan, 1990). It is important however to note that some other post-independence policies were meant to effect positive transformation. Among others, were the government's efforts to force people to use toilets, to stop wearing a traditional mini skirt popularly known among the Ndau as *Chichakati/girigidera* for moral reasons and its opposition to alcoholism, which, however, found little purchase among the Ndau (Mafika, 2017).

President Machel became unpopular among Ndau men who could not stomach attempts to ban the consumption of home-brewed beers notably *kachasu/nipa*, *chikeke* and others (Mutukweni, 2017). In spite of the allegation that such beers were a danger to health and sexual fertility the local population had no substitutes as the commercially brewed beers such as *vinho* and *cerveja* were expensive to buy. Women on the other hand argued that *girigidera* unlike other dress apparels enhanced their beauty in the eyes of men. While the above policies were intended to transform the Mozambican society, some commentators suggest that such policies should have been gradually introduced to prevent a backlash from tradition (Muzondi, 2016).

The discussion on RENAMO's participation in the presidential, parliamentary and local government elections between 1994 and 2009 was fairly elaborate. Conclusions so arrived at were RENAMO's performance remained constant except in the 2009 general election where there was a noticeable decline in its support base. There was again a noticeable increase in the number of its voters in the 2014 poll as reflected in Table 1. What was however evident in all the elections was the existence of relative peace and tranquillity, a plus to the country's emerging democracy.

Postscript: The resurgence of conflict since 2012

Up until 2012, it appeared that the domestic framework then established had been a rare case of post-war success: violence receded and general elections as demanded by the country's constitution were held regularly. Mozambique also seemed to have a promising economic future lying ahead. However, this air of optimism dissipated when RENAMO returned to the bush and declared war on the Mozambican government in 2012. Ironically, the resurgence of conflict between FRELIMO and RENAMO was contrary to Tavuyanago (2011) earlier

conclusion that RENAMO would not return to war. Accordingly explanations have been forwarded to justify the escalation of conflict between FRELIMO and RENAMO. The latter continued to accuse the former of running a warped political and economic system which disadvantaged people outside FRELIMO structures. Dhlakama, argues that FRELIMO's political and economic governance strategy since the 1992 Peace Accord systematically isolates RENAMO and the generality of the Mozambican population (Shikani, 2012).

In this new conflict, RENAMO demands three major reforms. Firstly, it wants its members to have greater representation and participation in government institutions which are currently dominated by FRELIMO. In particular it wants greater inclusion of its former combatants in the country's army. However, an observer commented that FRELIMO is unlikely to allow RENAMO access to institutions of power and authority because of the latter's unpredictability (Mutendeni, 2016).

Secondly, RENAMO alleges that the electoral system is not transparent enough to guarantee flawless democratic processes in the country. Here, it demands greater representation in government in order to veto election outcome when FRELIMO tempers with electoral processes. Thirdly, RENAMO asks for equitable share of the country's natural resources (Shikani, 2012). RENAMO complains that FRELIMO is keeping spoils of the country's wealth to itself. It was in this context RENAMO leader Dhlakama once described the former Mozambican President, Armando Guebuza as a "robber-in-chief of public funds" (Mambondiani, 2012). Closely related to the above is RENAMO's seemingly reasonable demand for autonomy in regions where it won majority votes (Bueno, et al., 2015) in the 2011 General Elections. The proposal carefully follows the current Mozambican practice of dual administration for the elected municipal governments, where there is an elected assembly and president (mayor) and district administrators.

While FRELIMO argues that devolution of power would undermine national unity, RENAMO maintains that decentralisation would ensure justice as parties would exercise power where they command popularity (Hanlon, 2015). Moreover, RENAMO asserts that devolution of power would eliminate ills that are caused by the 'the winner takes all' political model which divides the nation into winners and losers thereby sowing the seeds of conflict. RENAMO further attacks the 'winner takes all' political paradigm because not only does it result in wasted votes but empowers the 'winner' to introduce policies aimed at the pursuance of selfish political agendas at the expense of building national unity (Dingane, 2017). However, while devolution of powers could act as a panacea to the country's political ills, FRELIMO argues that the demand is a ruse by RENAMO to dominate provincial governments north of the Save River where it has been winning majority votes (Dzinesa and Motsani, 2013).

Further, Regalia cautions against underestimating the

purpose of RENAMO's insurrection (Regalia, 2017). Concomitantly, Hultman (2009) argues that by targeting specific sectors strategic to the country's economy RENAMO is resorting to its old guerrilla and destabilisation tactics ostensibly to extract concessions from the government which it has not been able to ascend to through the ballot box. Central to this, stratagem has been the disruption of transport routes which undermines commercial operations in the country. Similarly, Dzinesa and Motsani (2013) postulate that the flare-up of tensions between RENAMO and FRELIMO is a sequential outcome of RENAMO's crushing defeat in the 2009 General elections which demonstrated that RENAMO was unlikely to secure political power through democratic processes and was therefore facing political extinction (Dzinesa and Motsani, 2013). Consequently military confrontation is a device through which it seeks to revive its waning political fortunes.

Yesteryear RENAMO was synonymous with brutality characterised by murder, rape, slavery, kidnapping of youngsters and looting of assets. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that in the current conflict which resumed in 2011 RENAMO has largely abandoned terrorism. Generally, it targets government forces and installations and FRELIMO party members (Gumangeyi, 2017). By maintaining some presence in rural areas RENAMO has successfully sold a dummy, prompting FRELIMO to unleash violence upon the civilian population.

Respondents from the Mossurize District of Manica province claim that FRELIMO is implementing terror warfare in the current civil war (Albert, 2017). This accounts for the thousands of Mozambicans who have sought refuge in neighbouring Zimbabwe (Kuda, 2017). While the ill-treatment of the Ndau could be linked to their ethnic connection with RENAMO leadership several respondents were of the view that government forces were implementing terror tactics to strike fear into the rural population so that they force the populace to relocate to government controlled areas (Tsikwi, 2017). The tactics range from indiscriminate killing, confiscation of property and animals, burning alive suspected RENAMO collaborators and the destruction of homes and crops. In this regard, government forces' ill conduct resonates with the views of the former President of Mozambique Samora Machel who at some point remarked that "those who deal with bandits will die with the bandits" (Thailer, 2012). In the final analysis, RENAMO has gained political mileage over FRELIMO as its counter-insurgency strategy has boomeranged, costing the ruling party of rural support as reflected in Table 1.

Conclusion

The paper critiqued Tavuyanago's publication on RENAMO. In particular, it drew attention to the article's glaring shortcomings such as the dearth of ground based methodologies, silence on RENAMO's brutality and to

credit RENAMO for ushering in an area of democracy in Mozambique when in actual fact it was created as an agent of destabilisation that only attempted to engage with democratic processes at the tail end of its history. While the author reasonably drew his conclusion from the prevailing geopolitical situation then, he tended to speak too soon; his position that RENAMO would not return to war has been proved wrong by RENAMO's declaration of war on the Mozambican government in 2012. What emerges therefore from the discussion is that the article was overtly written from a RENAMO perspective. This paper has drawn attention to RENAMO's old omitted and new grievances which include FRELIMO's monopolistic tendencies in governance, indulgence in corruption and the desire to by RENAMO to control government structures in areas where it commands popularity. While the paper acknowledges RENAMO's argument for returning to the trenches, it has shown however that the return to war is a gimmick by the movement directed at regaining visibility on the country's political landscape. This became a matter of necessity following its declining popularity in the country's latter elections. However, the paper has shown that the gamble has paid dividends: the war has given RENAMO a chance to mobilise support in areas it controls and also the unmeasured response by FRELIMO to unleash violence on civilian population has arguably contributed to RENAMO's improved approval rating in rural communities north of the Save River. In summation, the paper argues that the return to war by RENAMO is a spontaneous expression of anger over FRELIMO's determination to pursue exclusive politics in Mozambique and a statement that 'old traditions die hard'.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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