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Published by AFRICAN SUN MeDIA

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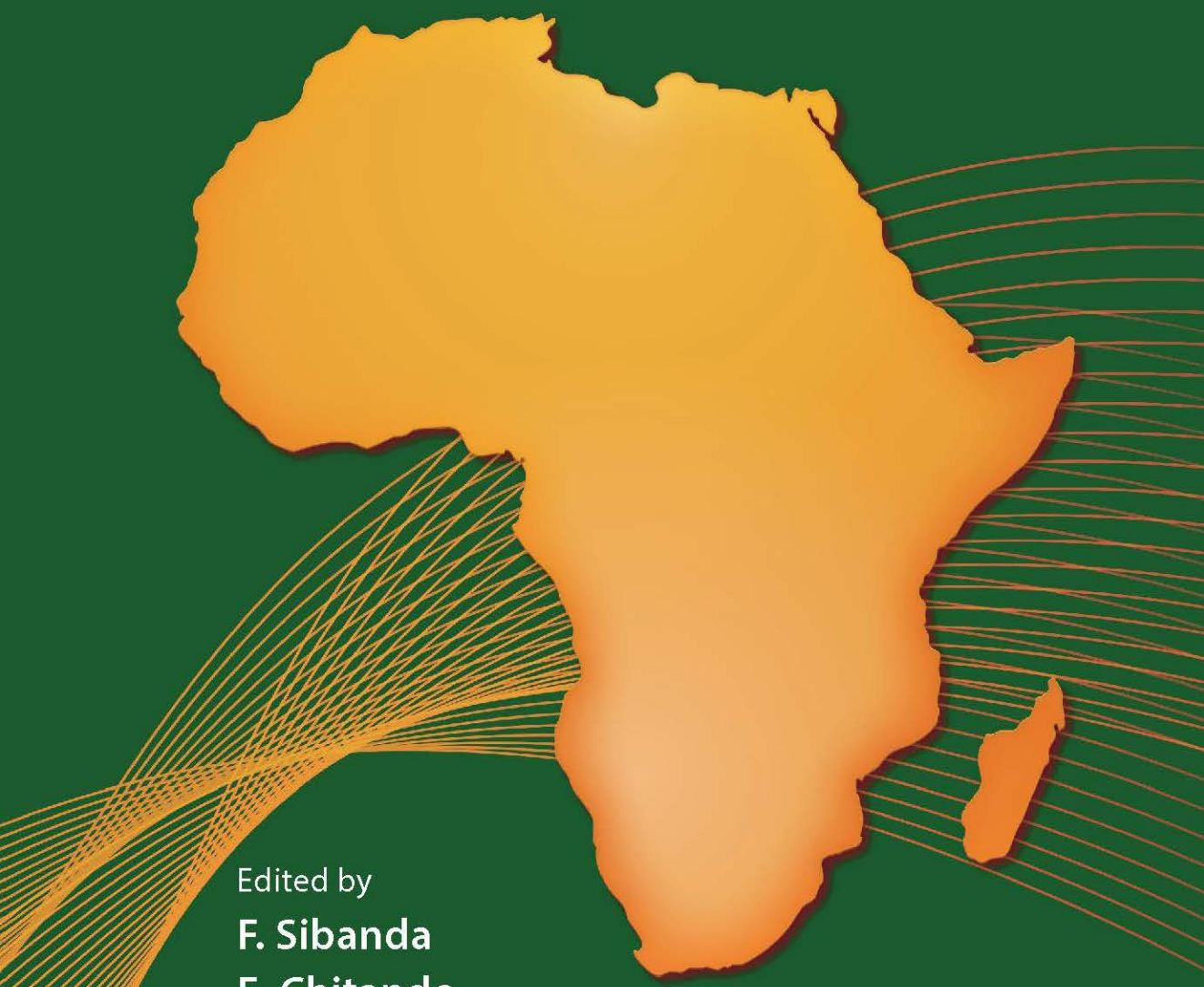

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https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

ACLARS

AFRICAN CONSORTIUM FOR LAW AND RELIGION STUDIES

2 Religion as a moral authority: the case of electoral processes in Mozambique, 1992-2023

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INTRODUCTION

Since the launching of the general armed insurrection for the liberation of Mozambique on 25 September 1964, Mozambique has suffered from cyclical military conflicts. In their pursuit for peace and national reconciliation, Mozambicans have turned to the moral authority of religious leaders. One of the areas of religious leaders' intervention for pacification and national reconciliation has been presiding over the organisation of electoral processes. In fact, since the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990, five out of six presidents of the National Electoral Commission (CNE) have been from the clergy.

This chapter builds from literature review, archival research, and oral interviews to analyse the role of religious leaders in the organisation of electoral processes in Mozambique. It provides the historical background of the involvement of religious leaders in electoral processes. It also discusses the rationale behind the selection of religious leaders to organise electoral processes and evaluates the image of religious leaders amid frequent accusations of fraud in favour of the party that has been ruling the country since independence in 1975.

The argument of this chapter that recurrent civil wars affecting Mozambique have created an environment of distrust among political contenders which requires the mediation of someone with uncontested moral and legal authority. In the process, religious leaders have been entrusted to lead the organisation of free and fair elections to reconcile a society divided by decades of war. The chapter moral authority of these clerics has contributed significantly to mitigating violence amid frequent accusations of electoral misconduct committed by the contesting parties. However, the inability of religious leaders to address complaints about successive allegations of electoral fraud has tarnished their moral authority. With these concerns in mind, the section that follows provides a brief theoretical framework of religion as moral and legal authority. It is followed by a historical analysis of

1 Assistant Professor, Department of History, Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique; Research Associate, DHHS, University of Pretoria, South Africa. The author acknowledges the contribution of Reginaldo Massango (MA Student) and the undergraduate students of History Course, Class of 2021 for their support in data collection. He also acknowledges the contribution of Professor Elmer Matos on statistical data analysis.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

the approach of the role of religious leaders in democratisation and peacebuilding in Mozambique. Thereafter, the chapter's analysis relies on a questionnaire and written narrative responses from Mozambicans surveyed for their views of the post-electoral conflicts and its implications on the image of religious leaders as guardians of morals and integrity.[2] The chapter ends with some conclusions on the historical background behind the involvement of religious leaders in electoral processes and the effects of their image as wielders of moral authority.

RELIGION AS A MORAL AUTHORITY

In times of turmoil and uncertainties, people in Mozambique find refuge in religion. In fact, in the history of humankind, religions have played key role in regulating social and political affairs. In the Bible, the Quran, the Torah, the Vedas, to mention but four sacred books of world religions, moral and legal matters overlap. For example, the Ten Commandments in the Bible and the *sharia* in Quran are sources of inspiration for modern judicial systems worldwide. As legal scholar Peter Edge, law is a mechanism to maintain social order, resolve disputes, regulate relationships between individuals, respond to social problems, secure individual rights and freedoms against state power and, ultimately, to empower organisations and individuals.[3] These attributes of law, overlap with key attributes of religion. According to and ethicist Heather Widdows, Christian premises and values continue to inform societal structures and laws, thus providing a shared background.[4] For professor of psychology Azim Shariff, religious commitment determines moral commitments, and people determine what is right depending on their religious belief.[5]

Religion brings together people from diverse backgrounds. It plays major role in developing goodwill and tolerance, which are key for democracy. As the theologian John de Gruchy observes, democracy implies the acceptance of religious pluralism and tolerance at the very least, but it also requires that people of different faiths

2 Data collection consisted of administrating a printed version of a questionnaire to 51 people [27 (52.9%) male and 24 (47.1%) female]. The interviewees' age ranged from 21 to 80 years old. Out of this age range, 61.2 % were below 35 years old. In terms of occupation, 25.5 per cent worked in the public sector, 12.8 per cent in private sector, 17 per cent in informal sector, 29.8 per cent were students from university and high school, 14.9 per cent had other occupations. The fieldwork took place in the cities of Maputo and Matola in September 2023. The questionnaire included open-ended questions that allowed people to express their opinions lengthily. All interviewees received a written and oral explanation of the aims of the research and were asked to read or listen to an introductory note. The information collected during the interviews was processed using SPSS 20 and was subject to content and quantitative analysis.

3 Edge P. 2006. *Religion and law: an introduction.* Aldershot: Ashgate, p.5-11.

4 Widdows H. 2004. "Religion as a moral source: Can religion function as a shared source of moral authority and values in a liberal democracy?" *The Heythop Journal* 45(2):197-208.

5 Shariff A. 2015. "Does religion increase moral behavior?", *Current Opinion in Psychology (COPYSCH)* 6:4.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

learn to co-operate in bringing about the just democratic transformation of society.[6] Religion is also known for cultivating a type of peace based on deep spirituality, from which emanates virtues such as a calm mind, tolerance and patience, the ability to forgive, nonattachment to material things and the perception of oneself as a being that is individual and social, material, worldly, spiritual and, ultimately, transcendental. These qualities are linked to the value of the leadership of religious leaders, particularly their capacity to inspire and guide communities in the same direction, instilling in them these virtues considered indispensable for post-war reconciliation and pacification.[7]

In Mozambique, the relationship between politics and religion goes back to pre-colonial times. In African kingdoms that existed before colonialism, political power was intimately connected to religious authority. For example, in the Mutapa State in modern-day central and southern Mozambique, kings controlled their subjects through the power of religion. On the other hand, religious authorities played major roles in succession processes.[8] With the advent of the Portuguese colonial administration, the role of religious leaders in politics continued with Catholic priests substituting for African spirit mediums.[9] Throughout the colonial history of Mozambique, the Portuguese government trusted the Catholic Church in key aspects of public administration.[10]

Only after independence in 1975 did Mozambique try to separate religion from politics by adopting a Marxist-Leninist orientation. Constitutionally, Mozambique is secular state, but between 1977 and 1990, the ruling party was intolerant to religious organisations deemed counterrevolutionaries. This, intolerance, however, did not prevent the ruling party since independence Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), from having clerics in its ranks.[11] This state of affairs was slightly reversed when religious leaders drew attention to the need for dialogue between the belligerents to end the civil war. However, the first profound change took place in 1990 with the approval of the first liberal constitution, which opened space for freedom of religion and worship.[12]

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6 Gruchy JW de. 1995. *Christianity and democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 185.

7 Weimer B. 2002. "Moçambique, Dez Anos de Paz: Democracia, Governação e Reforma" [Mozambique, Ten Years of Peace: Democracy, Governance and Reform], in Mazula B. (ed). *Moçambique: 10 Anos de Paz* [Mozambique: 10 Years of Peace]. Maputo: Centro de Estudos de Democracia e Desenvolvimento/Centre for the Studies of Democracy and Development (CEDE), 50-62.

8 Departamento de História [Department of History], Univerisdade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM). 2002. *História de Moçambique* [History of Mozambique] vol. 1. Maputo: TEMPO/UEM.

9 Departamento de História, UEM. *História de Moçambique.*

10 Dores HG. 2024. "Beyond Nation and Empire? Questioning the Role of Religious Missions under Portuguese Colonial Rule at the Turn of the Twentieth Century", *Religions* 15(3):269.

11 Mubai M. 2019. "Politics, Religion and Human Flourishing in Mozambique", in Green MC (ed). *Law, Religion and Human Flourishing in Africa.* Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 316.

12 Cabrita JM. 2000. *Mozambique: the tortuous road to democracy*. New York: Palgrave.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

Under the new political dispensation, the government introduced the Department of Religious Affairs within the Ministry of Justice. It is interesting to note the move from hostility to religion to establishing a department of religious affairs within the ministry. In fact, the government went as far as creating the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs, showing its assumption that justice, faith and morals overlap. Thus, it did not come as a surprise to see the government, civil society organisations and the then-rebel movement trusting the mediation of contentious issues to religious authorities.

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN PEACE-BUILDING AND DEMOCRATISATION

Religious leadership and peace mediation

Mozambique is a country at war. The various conflicts that affected the country from colonial times are well documented, but the civil war that affected the country from 1976 to 1992 was the most devastating because it decimated more than a million people and destroyed the country's economic and social structure. This conflict involved the government of Mozambique under the leadership of (FRELIMO), the ruling party since independence in 1975, and Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), a rebel movement first supported by Southern Rhodesia (1976-1979) and later by South Africa (1980-1984).[13] The interpretation of causes and characteristics of this war divides the opinions of researchers. It is not the purpose of this chapter to resurrect this debate, but it must be stressed that its origins are associated with various factors, including, the Cold War, apartheid, governance errors and disagreements within the liberation movement.[14]

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13 To these are added, even if not officially, Malawi, Kenya and some conservative countries in North America, Western Europe and the Arab world.

14 There are many defenders of the external causes of war. Of these, we can highlight those that are considered as precursors. See: Minter W. 1994. *Apartheid's Contras: An inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique*. Johannesburg: Zed Books & Witwatersrand University Press. Hanlon J. 1984. *The Revolution under Fire*. London: Zed; Vines A. 1991. *RENAMO: Terrorism in Mozambique.* London: James Curry; Love J. 2005. *Southern Africa in the World Politics: Local Aspirations and Global Entanglements*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Onslow S (ed) 2009. *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation.* London and New York: Routledge, 2009. As for the defenders of the internal causes of the war, see Tavuyanago B. 2011. "RENAMO: From military confrontation to peaceful democratic engagement", *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 5(1): 42-51; Darch C. 1989. "Are There Warlords in Provincial Mozambique? Questions of the Social Base of MNR Banditry", *Review of African Political Economy* (45/46):34-49; Cabrita JM. 2000. *Mozambique: The Tortuous Road to Democracy*. New York: Palgrave; Weinstein J. 2007. *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence.* New York: Cambridge University Press; Lubkemann SC. 2008. *Culture in Chaos: An Anthropology of the Social Condition in War.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Emerson SA. 2013. *The Battle for Mozambique: The FRELIMO-RENAMO Struggle, 1977-1992.* Pinetown: South Africa.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

The war lasted sixteen years because the belligerents, particularly the government, did not recognise the rebel movement as a genuine national organisation. However, following a combination of factors including economic collapse, prolonged drought, the end of Cold War and the fall of the apartheid regime, the government began direct peace talks in 1990.[15] The negotiations were held in Rome under the mediation of the Community of Saint Egidio of the Roman Catholic Church. It is important to highlight that the intervention of the Roman Catholic Church built from prior contacts established by the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM).[16]

Among the religious leaders who played a major role towards the pacification of Mozambique, were the Bishop Dinis Sengulane, a long-serving president of the CCM and Lucas Amosse, a prominent leader of the same organisation.[17] As far back as 1984, CCM created the Commission for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation (CJPR). The aim of this commission was to alleviate the suffering of people affected by war, especially in the countryside. Among the initiatives implemented by CCM was humanitarian aid for the victims of war in the battlefields and refugee camps located internally and in the neighbouring countries. These initiatives were accompanied by the preaching of the gospel of peace and national reconciliation to prepare the hearts and minds of both war victims and perpetrators for peace and reconciliation. In summary, humanitarian aid paved the way for peace talks that would lead to the end of war and establishment of liberal democracy in Mozambique.[18]

In their pursuit to general peace in Mozambique, in 1985, Mozambican religious leaders met with President Samora Machel and officially presented a suggestion to start talks with RENAMO, but the proposal was not agreed to. It was only in 1987, with the ascension of Joaquim Chissano to the presidency, following the death of Samora Machel on 19 October 1986, that steps towards the start of talks resumed. At this stage, Dom Jaime Gonçalves, a prominent Catholic Bishop of Beira, the second largest city in Mozambique, entered the scene. Gonçalves did not enjoy any sympathy from the FRELIMO government due to his perceived sympathy with RENAMO, or at least his anti-communist rhetoric.[19]

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15 Mubai ME. 2004. "Os militares e a população em contexto de guerra e fome, 1982-1992" [Soldiers and population in the context of war and famine] in Ngunga A and Perreira I (eds.) *Progressos na Investigação em Ciências Sociais e Humanas: Actas do I Seminário de Investigação em Ciências Sociais* [Progress in Research in Social and Human Sciences: Proceedings of the 1st Research Seminar in Social Sciences]. Maputo: Faculdade de Letras, UEM.

16 Resende MM and De Almeida CG. 2018. "O papel da Igreja Católica na democratização pós-guerra em Angola e Moçambique", *Relações Internacionais* (59):43-63.

17 Chipatime MJS. 2024. "The Contribution of the Mozambique Christian Council to Peace and Reconciliation in Mozambique", in Green MC, Sourou J-B and Gnonzion C (eds). *Law, Religion and Reconciliation in Africa.* Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 83-98.

18 Ribeiro GM. 2011 "Lucia van den Bergh: Porque prevaleceu a paz? Moçambicanos respondem" [Why did peace prevail? Mozambicans respond], *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos* [African Studies Notebooks] (22):182-186.

19 Ribeiro, "Lucia van den Bergh: Porque prevaleceu a paz?"

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

It is noteworthy to observe that, while Protestants had more ability to influence the government, Catholics had more access to RENAMO. In this context, several meetings were held with President Chissano and representatives of the United States Senate in order to speed up the negotiation process. Through a complex network of contacts, for the first time, in February 1989, there was a meeting between government officials and the representatives of RENAMO.[20]

At the same meeting, the representatives of the CCM made it known that they did not intend to be mediators, but only to bring together the parties in conflict. It was in this context that the Sant'Egidio Community took the responsibility of mediating the negotiation process.[21] After several rounds of negotiations, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was finally signed on 4 October 1992.[22]

It is important to highlight that religious leaders were one among various actors that contributed for the peace process in Mozambique. In fact, the peace is product of various actors both nationally and internationally. As I have indicated in previous writing, in the 1990s, the belligerents suffered fatigued due to prolonged war and, in some localities, they had established a gentlemen agreement truce that prevented them from fighting.[23] Finally, it is also important to underline that the peace talks involved the compromise of organising the first multi-party elections in Mozambique. The major challenge was how to convert former foes into political contenders? How would one reconcile civilians with former guerrilla fighters? In summary, there was a climate of distrust. It was, therefore, necessary to create institutions that would ensure conditions that would guarantee free and fair elections to be held.

Religious leadership and mediation of distrust among electoral contenders

The General Peace Agreement between the Government of Mozambique and RENAMO set conditions for the realisation of the first multiparty democratic election. These elections had as major contenders the former belligerents, who were not fully reconciled after sixteen-year of military hostilities. This reality contributed to the formation of a National Electoral Commission (CNE) dominated by political

20 Fernando CT. 2021. "O outro lado da história de Moçambique: Surgimento da RENAMO entre (1977 e 1992) como alternativa para a construção da democracia multipartidária e identidade moçambicana" [The other side of the history of Mozambique: emergence of RENAMO between 1977 and 1992 as alternative for the construction of multiparty democracy and Mozambican identity], *Revista Electrónica História em Reflexão* [Electronic Magazine History in Reflection] 15(29):206.

21 Fernando, "O outro lado da história de Moçambique".

22 Bussoti L. 2021. "Peace and Democracy in Mozambique: An Endless Transition", *Africa Development* XLVI(2):3.

23 Mubai ME. 2020. "People's War: Military Supplies during the Mozambican Civil War, 1976-1992", *Southern Journal for Contemporary History* 45(2):125-151.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

parties, a paradoxical requirement for a process that was intended to be impartial.[24] However, politicians needed a moral authority to lead the process. In this regard, the former belligerents, together with civil society organisations and international mediators, agreed that the moral authority could come from religious leaders.

Following this logic, the first CNE was formed.[25] Composed of 21 members, ten were proposed by the FRELIMO ruling party, seven by RENAMO and three by the "unarmed" political parties. The President of the CNE was set to be nominated by the President of the Republic. After two days of discussions, the choice of a religious leader to lead the CNE to organise the process gained consensus among stakeholders. Brazão Mazula, an academic and non-practising Catholic priest, was appointed to the position. Mazula was regarded as independent, with no ties to FRELIMO or RENAMO. Moreover, the choice of Mazula received the support of the so-called unarmed political parties, without which there would be no democracy, since the political environment of the time was characterised by bipolarisation.[26]

The CNE had as its mandate working with political parties to produce the regulations for a disciplined electoral campaign, on the distribution of broadcasting time and on the use of public and private sites and facilities during the election campaign. It would also be responsible for supervising the preparation of electoral lists, the legal submission of candidacies, their publication and the verification and registration of election results.[27] It also fell under the responsibility of the National Electoral Commission to monitor the electoral process to ensure compliance with legality and equal treatment of citizens in all electoral acts and to receive, examine and deliberate on complaints regarding the validity of elections. Finally, the National Electoral Commission was responsible for the assessment of the electoral accounts, for the preparation and publication in the *Bulletin of the Republic* of the maps of the results of the general tabulation of the elections.[28] It is noteworthy to obsere that the CNE aimed to respond to an immediate and pertinent situation: the running of multi-party democratic election in a war-torn country. It was dominated

24 Carilho N. 1995. "A Legislação Eleitoral em Moçambique e a Realização Política e Social" [Electoral Legislation in Mozambique and Political and Social Achievement], in Mazula B (ed). *Eleições Democracia e Desenvolvimento*. [Elections, Democracy and Development]. Maputo: Embassy of Netherlands in Maputo, Mozambique.

25 Assembleia da República. Lei Eleitoral No. 4/93, de 28 de Dezembro. Publicada no Boletim da República.

26 Mazula B. "Eleições Moçambicanas: Uma trajectória da Paz e da Democracia" [Mozambican Elections: A Path to Peace and Democracy], Mazula B. (ed). *Moçambique: 10 Anos de Paz* [Mozambique: 10 Years of Peace], Maputo: Centro de Estudos de Democracia e Desenvolvimento/Centre for Studies of Democracy and Development/ (CEDE), 50-62.

27 Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA). 1992. *Acordo Geral de Paz de Moçambique. Protocolo III, número 3.* [General Peace Agreement: Protocol Number 3]. Maputo.

28 AWEPA, *Acordo Geral de Paz de Moçambique.*

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by political parties, which transferred the centre of discussions of the electoral process from the CNE to their headquarters.[29]

It was within this political environment that the first multi-party elections took place in October 1994. Like the negotiations for the General Peace Agreement, these elections took place in a climate of mistrust that led to the first post-electoral crisis in the country with RENAMO withdrawing from the electoral process on the first day of the ballot for alleged fraud. RENAMO was only returned to the ballot due to enormous diplomatic pressure. As result, the voting time was extended from one to two days but, in the end, FRELIMO and its presidential candidate emerged victorious.[30] FRELIMO's candidate, Joaquim Chissano, officially won 53.6 per cent of the vote against RENAMO's Afonso Dhlakama's 33.7 per cent[31]. RENAMO refused to officially recognise the result of these elections. The outcome of this election and the response of RENAMO would repeat itself in the following elections, demostrating the difficulty of democratic coexistence between the two former belligerents.[32]

The first general elections of 1994 paved the way to regular presidential and parliamentary elections every five years. In 1998, Mozambique inaugurated municipal elections in selected cities and towns. RENAMO and other small parties boycotted these elections due to concerns over the administration of the processes. Amid this boycott, FRELIMO contested alone, taking all municipalities with a voter turnout bellow 15 per cent.[33] Thereafter, following pressure from civil society organisations and opposition parties, the Assembly of the Republic, reformed the electoral law to accommodate RENAMO's complains over FRELIMO's dominance of the Commission.[34]

In this context, the parliament approved Law 4/99, creating the CNE by consensus of all parties represented. Among other things, this law determined that the CNE comprises seventeen members, eight appointed by FRELIMO, six by RENAMO, one by Democratic Union, two appointed by the government and a president

29 Guiliche JC. 2011. "Governação Eleitoral e Democratização em Moçambique: Análise do Desempenho da Comissão Nacional de Eleições na Supervisão das Eleições (1994-2009)" [Electoral Governance and Democratisation in Mozambique: Analysis of National Electoral Commission Performance in Electoral Supervision, 1994-2009]. BA Honours Mini-Dissertation, Department of Political Science Facuty of Arts and Sciences, Eduardo Mondlane University, 21.

30 De Brito L. 2014. *Uma reflexão sobre o desafio da paz em Moçambique* [A reflexiono on the challenges of Peace in Mozambique]. Maputo: Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Económicos/ Institute of Social and Ecnonmic Studies (IESE).

31 Nuvunga A. 2005. *Multiparty Democracy in Mozambique: Strengths, Weaknesses and Challenges*. Maputo: Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), 1; Haines R and Wood G. 1995. "The 1994 election and Mozambique's democratic transition", *Democratization* 2(3):363-4.

32 De Brito, *Uma reflexão sobre o desafio,* 23.

33 De Brito, *Uma reflexão sobre o desafio,* 33.

34 De Brito, *Uma reflexão sobre o desafio,* 33.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

nominated by the President of the Republic from among the designated members of the CNE. Following the consensus that religious leaders are guardians of morals, the President nominated Reverend Jamisse Taímo, from the United Methodist Church proposed by the Christian Council of Mozambique to preside over the CNE.[35]

It is important to underline that given the legacy of Marxism-Leninism and subsequent state centrism in Mozambique, the barrier between state and the ruling party is liminal. This has been haunting the opposition in their search for impartial civil society members. Because of this reality, the election of Reverend Jamisse Taímo occurred only with the majority of votes from FRELIMO. Among the opposition, Taímo was seen as FRELIMO's Commissar. Alternatively, the opposition supported the election of three names proposed by civil society organisations, but its proposal was rejected by FRELIMO.[36]

With a new electoral commission, Mozambique went to its second general election in 1999. Once again, FRELIMO and its candidate won but with a smaller margin of 52.3 against 47.7 for the coalition formed by RENAMO and other small parties.[37] Despite registering some improvement compared to the first election, RENAMO contested the results. It presented its own tally claiming to have won with 52% and 60% of the votes for the presidency and parliament respectively.[38]

Based on this conviction, RENAMO's president, Afonso Dhlakama, made a series of demands to the government. In three meetings with President Joaquim Chissano, RENAMO demanded a recount of the votes, the sharing of power, with emphasis on the right to appoint governors in the provinces where it had obtained the majority of votes.[39] It also demanded the reform of the judicial system (perceived as flawed and partisan), equity in the defence and security forces (army, police and intelligence services) and finally, the dismantling of party structures in public institutions.[40] These claims were unsuccessful, as RENAMO rejected a compromise proposal and abandoned the negotiations, losing the possibility that was under negotiation to propose names to be part of the boards of directors of public companies.[41] Having failed to secure a peaceful solution, RENAMO threatened to paralyze the country through public protests. One of the major demonstrations happened in Montepuez, resulting in clashes between demonstrators and security forces. In these protests, 40 people died and dozens were detained in deplorable conditions, which led to the death of 43 people.[42] Meanwhile, in the parliament, RENAMO members

35 Guiliche, "Governação Eleitoral e Democratização em Moçambique", 23.

36 Guiliche, "Governação Eleitoral e Democratização em Moçambique", 8.

37 De Brito, *Uma reflexão sobre o desafio,* 31.

38 Nuvunga, *Multiparty Democracy in Mozambique*, 6.

39 De Brito, *Uma reflexão sobre o desafio,* 33

40 Nuvunga, *Multiparty Democracy in Mozambique,* 6.

41 De Brito, *Uma reflexão sobre o desafio,* 33.

42 Cahen M. "Mozambique: L'instabilité comme gouvernance"? [Mozambique: Instability as governance?] *Politique Africaine* [African Politics] 4(80):113; De Brito, *Uma reflexão sobre o desafio,* 28.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

protested continuously, disturbing the normal functioning of the legislature. It took the intervention of the international community, particularly the United States, for RENAMO leader to order the end of protests.[43]

To accommodate opposition complaints against the administration of electoral processes, the third general elections of 2004 were held under a new electoral law, Law No. 7/2004.[44] However, despite the revision of law, RENAMO suffered one of the heaviest electoral defeats in its history.[45] In fact, signs of decline emerged in municipal election of 2003 in which RENAMO won only four-out of 33 municipalities.[46] Once again, RENAMO cried victim of fraud and threatened to return to war. Its president moved from Maputo the northern province of Nampula in 2009 and from there to Satungira, Sofala Province in 2012.[47]

These moves by Dhlakama, accompanied by threats of resuming the war, served as a pretext for FRELIMO government to intervene militarily in 2013, resuming military hostilities in central Mozambique. These low-intensity military confrontations dragged on until 2017, the year in which another wave of armed violence by religious fundamentalist broke out in October in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. The war between RENAMO guerrillas and government forces ended in 2019 with the signing of the General Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities, once again mediated by religious leaders.[48] The signing of this agreement aimed at bringing RENAMO to general elections held in October of the same year. The President of the CNE was then Sheikh Abdul Carimo, a prominent Muslim leader who had presided over the conflictual municipal elections of 2018. In these elections, FRELIMO was declared winner in 44 municipalities (51.95% of votes), RENAMO, 8 (38.71 % of votes) and MDM, one (8.5% of votes) and other small parties only obtained 0.84 per cent of votes. Despite this significant improvement, RENAMO contested the results alleging fraud in five municipalities.[49] It presented the case to the Constitutional Council, which recognised the occurrence of minor irregularities but dismissed the case.[50]

Following the pattern of previous electoral processes, in 2019, Mozambique went to general elections. With voter turnout around 51.74 per cent, FRELIMO once again won both parliamentary and presidential elections. FRELIMO's candidate Filipe Jacinto Nyusi won with 73.46 per cent and his party obtained 71.28 per cent, corresponding to 184 parliamentary seats out of 250. It also won the majority in

43 Cahen M. "Mozambique: L'instabilité comme gouvernance".128.

44 Assembleia da República, Lei No. 7/2004 de 17 Junho. Publicada no Boletim da República.

45 Nuvunga, *Multiparty Democracy in Mozambique*, 14-5.

46 De Brito, *Uma reflexão sobre o desafio,* 34.

47 De Brito, *Uma reflexão sobre o desafio,* 34.

48 Presidência da República de Moçambique. 2019. Acordo de Paz e Reconciliação de Maputo [Maputo Peace and Reconciliation Agreement] Maputo , 6 August.

49 Government of Mozambique. 2018. "Moçambique Autárquicas 2018 CNE confirma vitoria da FRELIMO", 25 October.

50 Conselho Constitucional. Acórdão no. 26/CC/2018 de 9 de Novembro.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

all provincial assemblies. However, eight major groups of observers including the European Union, the African Union and the U.S. Embassy echoed RENAMO's claims that the elections were not free, fair and transparent. They cited various irregularities, including unequal opportunities among candidates, lack of trust in electoral institutions, the police force and the quality of electoral census, to mention but a few.[51] Despite these documented irregularities, the Constitutional Council validated the results causing indignation and protests of opposition and civil society organisations.[52]

In October 2023, Mozambique held the sixth municipal elections, following the replacement of Sheikh Abdul Carimo by another religious leader, Bishop Don Carlos Matsinhe. This demonstrated the persistence of the assumption that religious leaders are trustworthy to run electoral processes in volatile political environment. However, according to many observers, these elections marked the institutionalisation of electoral fraud in Mozambique. Despite documented evidence of opposition victory in key municipalities, including the capital city, the CNE attributed the victory to the ruling party. Overall, there were elections in 65 municipalities. The CNE declared FRELIMO the winner in 64 and Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM) in one. The Constitutional Council changed four results, giving RENAMO victory in Vilankulo, Quelimane, Alto Molocue and Chiure. The Constitutional Council also ordered a completely new election in Marromeu and new elections in some polling stations in Gurué, Milange and Nacala Porto; these elections were held on December 10, and the Constitutional Council ruled that FRELIMO won in all four.[53] These results caused indignation, particularly among the youth. All major cities registered massive protests, with sporadic scenes of violence against civilians, which resulted on the death of some protestors. Despite being the Constitutional Council, which gives the final verdict on the electoral results disputes, people directed their indignation to the CNE with particular focus on its president, Bishop Don Carlos Matsinhe. The following section looks at the image of religious leaders amid these cyclical accusations of fraud in favour of the party that has been ruling Mozambique since independence in 1975.

Post-electoral conflicts and the image of religious leaders

As indicated in the previous sections of this chapter, following eighteen years of one-party political dominance, Mozambique inaugurated multiparty democratic elections in 1994. Since then, Mozambique organised twelve electoral processes, six

51 Centro de Integridade Pública/Centre for Public Integrity (CIP). 2020. "Relatório Final das Eleições de 15 de Outubro: Duvidosa vitória esmagadora" [Final Report of the October 15 Elections: Doubtful landslide victory], *Boletim Sobre o Processo Político em Moçambique*, [Bulletin on the Political Process in Mozambique] 58(98):1-28.

52 Conselho Constitucional, Acórdão no. 25/CC/2019 de 22 de Dezembro.

53 Centro de Integridade Pública/Centre for Public Integrity (CIP). 2014. "Resultados das eleições autárquicas de 2023: A RENAMO ganhou 0, 4, ou 7 municípios?" [Results of Municipal Elections of 2023: RENAMO won 0, 4 or 7 municipalities?] *Boletim sobre o Processo Político em Moçambique* [Bulletin on the Political Process in Mozambique] (221):1.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

of which were presidential and parliamentary (1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019) and six for local municipalities (1998, 2003, 2008, 2013, 2018 and 2023). A common feature of these electoral processes except two is that the CNE was presided by a religious leader. Despite having the leadership of individuals considered as guardian of morality, all elections so far, have been marred with accusations of fraud and subsequent post-electoral violence.[54]

It is notable that a close observation of the composition of the CNE and the attributes of its member shows that the President has limited powers. In fact, the strongest organ of the CNE is the plenary, which is dominated by political parties, with the ruling party enjoying the majority, including the power to influence members coming from civil society organisations. In fact, a recent book on civil society organisations by the professor of social work Tanja Kleibl has shown that FRELIMO has control over them.[55] Nevertheless, from communication point of view, the president of CNE is the one who announces the results of regularly contested electoral results, making him a kingmaker. Consequently, people focus their anger on him, accusing him of being agent of the ruling party. A look at the major independent newspapers in post-electoral editions reveal this tendency. [56] In social media, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, people have published stories condemning the performance of the CNE, with particular attacks on the figure of its president, who happens to be a religious leader. In fact, people go as far as to question the moral authority of a religious leader presiding over the electoral commission. In this regard, scholars such as the philosopher and ethicist Heather Widdows and the political scientist and sociologist Raul Chambote have argued that inability of religious leaders to run a free and fair election puts into question their moral authority.[57] In Chambote's view, an analysis of the performance of last four CNE presidents with religious background shows that they do not represent any moral or legal authority, because they condoned electoral fraud. Chambote further calls for limitations on the influence of religious leaders in political affairs.[58]

To contribute to this discussion with empirical data, this study captured perceptions of Mozambicans who witnessed the performance of various religious leaders in running elections in which results led to conflict. The interviewees were asked

54 Cahen, "Mozambique: L'instabilité comme gouvernance",124.

55 Kleibl T. 2021. *Decolonizing Civil Society in Mozambique: Governance, Politics and Spiritual Systems.* London: Zed Books Bloomsbury Publishing, 193.

56 "Bispos anglicanos exigem resignação imediata de Dom Carlos Matsinhe" [Anglican Bishops demand resignation of Bishop Carlos Matsinhe] *O Pais.* 11 November 2023; "Eleições Autárquicas 2023: Ao abster-se, o Bispo Carlos Matsinhe tomou partido da corrupção eleitoral, denuncia Adriano Nuvunga" [Municipal Elections of 2023: By abstaining, Bishop Matsinhe chose the side of electoral corruption, denounces Adriano Nuvunga], *Carta De Moçambique.* 29 October 2023.

57 Widdows, "Religion as a moral source".

58 Chambote R. 2020. *Líderes Religiosos na Presidência da Comissão Nacional de Eleições: Infalíveis ou Inflamáveis?* [Religious Leaders and the Presidency of National Electoral Commission: Infallible or Flamable?], Academia.edu [Accessed 12 February 2025].

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

their opinion about the reasons behind the nomination of religious leaders to lead electoral processes in the thirty years of democracy in Mozambique. Among the interviewees, 68 per cent pointed to morals, ethics, justice, integrity and peace, to mention but top five key justifications behind this tendency. If we break it down by gender, 64.7 per cent of male respondents and 35.3 per cent of female respondents hold this opinion. A look at the occupation of the people who hold this perception, shows the predominance of state or public employees (23.9%) followed by students (21.7%). A look at the various explanations presented, reveal a common understanding that religious leaders are the guardians of morals thus, they are more likely to run a transparent electoral process. It is also evident that for the majority of interviewees, religious leaders are perceived to strive for justice and integrity. They have also contributed significantly to the mediation of disputes in Mozambique. As one interviewee put it, "It is believed that religious leaders have principles, they are spiritual fathers who everyone believes; religious leaders always strive for truth."[59] For a police officer interviewed for this study, "Religious leaders are regarded as providers of ethics, legality and impartiality."[60] These statements show that people see religious leaders as moral authorities. In fact, a look at the fifty-one interviews conducted reveals the following key words, integrity, just, impartial, ethical, moral, transparency, correctness, credibility, trust, mediation, peace and good faith, to mention but a few.

While the majority of people consider morals ethics and justice, integrity and peace, 32 per cent of the interviewees present other reasons including, political motivations and political manipulation. If cross-tabulated in gender, 31.2 per cent of male respondents and 68.8 per cent of female respondents point to other reasons. In terms of occupation, people working in the informal sector and students, both represented by 8.7 per cent of respondents each point to other reasons behind the nomination of religious leaders to run elections. According to these interviewees, politicians bring religious leaders to deceive the people with the idea that they are impartial while, in fact, they are not. The argument further states that some of religious leaders nominated to run certain elections are sympathetic to certain political parties; therefore, are not impartial in their decisions. In the words of one female student interviewee, "In principle they choose a religious leader to deceive citizens, because we have church as the centre of salvation. Therefore, when religious leaders preside over the CNE, there is no big noise. It is as if they do not lie, it appears that elections are fair because of the presence of religious leaders. A Christian, even if he lives double life, transmits credibility, if he shows the image of Christ."[61] Also behind the justification of opting for religious leaders, a woman working in public administration stated, "I think it is strategy. Since people have trust in religious leaders, they take advantage of that to commit fraud. They do

59 Interview with REP#1 (Domestic worker) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 20 September 2024.

60 Interview with REP#1 (Police officer) by M Mubai, Matola, Mozambique, 17 September 2024.

61 Interview with REP#5 (Student) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 11 September 2024.

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this because people expect honesty, integrity, transparency, respect and truth from religious leaders."[62] It is noteworthy that the perception against electing religious leaders to run electoral process on ethical and moral grounds finds more supporters among men.

Regarding people's perceptions on the performance of religious leaders in conducting electoral processes, 16 per cent of people interviewed consider it good, 70 per cent consider it bad and 14 per cent consider it acceptable. Breaking it down by gender, 11.1 per cent of males consider the performance of religious leaders good, 74.1 per cent bad and 14.8 per cent acceptable. On the other hand, 21.7 per cent of females rank the performance of religious leaders good, 65.2 per cent as bad and 13 per cent as acceptable. When disaggregated by occupation of the interviewees, the performance of religious leaders in electoral processes was characterised as follows, state and public employees considered it as good (8.3%), bad (75%) and acceptable (16.7%). People working in the private sector ranked it as follows: bad (66.7%) and acceptable (33.3%). People working in informal sector, consider the performance of religious leaders good (25%) and bad (75%). Students ranked it as good (23.1%), bad (69.2%) and acceptable (7.7%). People with other occupations classified it as good (28.6%), bad (42.9%) and acceptable (28.6%).

People interviewed for this study used the following words to evaluate the performance of religious leaders in running elections: "It is certainly bad"[63]; "They run away from their religious principles; Ambition speaks louder; They are Judas Iscariots"[64]; "They are failures because they cannot play their role as religious leaders"[65]; "It is not fair, particularly in the last elections (2023), there was fraud, there was no justice, the evaluation is negative"[66]. "Their performance is negative, whenever we have elections in Mozambique the results do not satisfy all parts involved and we end up in conflicts"[67]; "Their performance is not good because despite being men of God who swore to make justice, religious leaders have violated basic principles of justice"[68]; "They have not performed well. They seem to lack authority within electoral institutions or can bribed by political parties"[69]; "The

62 Interview with REP#8 (Public employee) by E Jalane, Maputo, Mozambique, 15 September 2024.

63 Interview with REP#2 (Banker) by M. Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 11 September 2024.

64 Interview with REP#3 (Public employee) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 11 September 2024.

65 Interview with REP#4 (Female Student) by R Nhabanga, Maputo, Mozambique, 11 September 2024.

66 Interview with REP#5 (Female Student by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 11 September 2024.

67 Interview with REP#7 (Female Domestic Worker) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 20 September 2024.

68 Interview with REP#8 (Female Public employee) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 11 September 2024.

69 Interview with REP#13 (Male Public employee) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 20 September 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

elections organised in this period produced results in which all contenders accused each other of fraud. At the end of day, the blame fell on the President of the CNE."[70]

In sum, those who consider the performance good argue that religious leaders have no power to determine the election outcome. Moreover, they contend that given the legacy of war, only religious leaders are well placed to run electoral process, and they have contributed to peace and stability in Mozambique. Those who consider the performance acceptable argue that religious leaders operate in a very contentious environment, and they have been doing all in their capacity to run fair and free elections, but they have no power to control the whole system. The majority who consider the work of religious leaders in electoral processes to be bad justify their assumption on examples of frequent allegations of fraud. They claim that religious leaders have failed to act impartially and respond to complaints presented by opposition parties. In their view, religious leaders serve the interest of the ruling party.

The research for this chapter also explored to what extent the frequent allegations of fraud affect the credibility of religious leaders as guardians of morals and ethics. Overwhelmingly, 94.1 per cent of the interviewees considered that the management of post-electoral conflicts affects the credibility of religious leaders negatively, while the remaining 5.9 per cent maintained that the credibility of religious leaders is not affected negatively. Looking at these responses according to occupation of the interviewees reveals that 100 per cent of employees in both the state and public sectors and the private and informal sectors consider that the credibility of religious leaders is negatively affected. Additionally, 92.9 per cent of students and 71 per cent of interviewees with other occupations also maintained that the management of electoral processes affects the credibility of religious leaders negatively. In the words of one interviewee, "the credibility of religious leaders is negatively affected because the suspicion of fraud puts into question these leaders among the members of religious denominations".[71] A female student summed it up stating, "The suspicions of fraud affect the credibility of religious leaders because a leader must be unquestionable in terms of ethics and morals. He must be someone who preserve his values and not someone who gets involved in organisations which can hurt his integrity and the one of the community in which he perform his duties."[72]

It is important to highlight that those who consider that the allegations of fraud affect the credibility of religious leaders make a distinction between religious leaders as individuals and religious denominations as organisations. Therefore, when a religious leader gets involved in dubious actions, only his image and reputation are affected. Some interviewees used the example of Reverend Matsinhe, the president

70 Interview with REP#29 (Military Officer) by R Chinhama, Maputo, Mozambique, 15 September 2024.

71 Interview with REP#31 (Male student) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 24 September 2024.

72 Interview with REP#12(Female Student) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 16 September 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

of the CNE who, after much contested electoral results, was forced to retire from church duties due to pressure from his congregation members. The minor group of interviewees who argue that the credibility of religious leaders is not affected justify their position based on the idea that the president of the CNE has no power to influence the outcome of electoral results. In sum, religious leaders who venture into leading electoral processes are expected to use their moral authority to run a free and fair election. So far, in the history of Mozambican electoral processes, perceptions are that religious leaders are failing to use their moral authority to run elections. This puts into question the moral authority of these leaders in the society.

Under this context, it is relevant to ask whether Mozambique should continue trusting religious leadership to run elections. Interestingly, despite having over 90 per cent of people rating the performance of religious leaders negatively, 39.2 per cent of people still consider that religious leaders are better suited to run elections in Mozambique. On the other hand, 60.8 per cent of the interviewees contend that religious leaders should stay away from electoral processes because they damage their reputation. Looking at this data from an employment and occupation perspective, it reveals that 16.7 per cent of public and state employees defend the continuation of religious leaders in running elections and 83.3 per cent reject this idea. Among private sector employees, 33.3 per cent are in favour and 66.7 per cent are against this idea. In the informal sector, 62.5 per cent are in favour while 37.5 per cent are against this idea. Among students, 42.9 per cent accept and 57.1 per cent rejected the idea of continuing with religious leadership in electoral processes. Finally, among people from other occupations, 42.9 per cent are in favour while 57.1 per cent are against this idea. Some arguments by interviewees against the continuation of nominating religious leaders to run elections include "the separation of state and religion and the danger of religious conflict".[73] Other interviewees claim that the presence of religious leaders does not add value because there is always conflict. They contend that religious leaders should focus on religious organisations.[74] For some, "religious leaders are puppets of the ruling party thus; they should not preside over elections."[75]

These numbers show that despite negative evaluation of the performance of religious leaders in presiding over electoral processes, after all, a significant number of people (39.2%) still trust religious leaders. As one female student observed, "The problem is not on religion as a whole, but on individuals chosen to perform the duty who appear not to be impartial. In this regard, the country can continue relying on religious leaders, as long as they are people with moral and intellectual capacity to

73 Interview with REP#24 (Female Student) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 24 September 2024.

74 Interview with REP#26 (Male Public Employee) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 11 September 2024.

75 Interview with REP#27 (Female Public employee) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 24 September 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

hold the position."[76] A woman trader observed, "We cannot live without religion, it is the way, the truth and life. It is responsible for transparency, to have free, fair and transparent elections you need religious leaders. Where Jesus is, there is also transparency. Behind this trust is the idea that Mozambican society is extremely divided. It is argued that the experience of war and violence requires someone with moral credentials to bring people together. They go on to argue that politicians have no intention to run free and fair elections and that they are using religious leaders to camouflage their mischievous attitudes. Overall, it appears that people are no longer enthusiastic about the idea of bringing religious leaders into electoral process because of their inability to run free and fair elections process or to address the complaints of opposition parties.

As has been argued earlier in this chapter, since the inception of multiparty democracy in 1994, there have been complaints over the lack of transparency. Nevertheless, for a country, which had come out from a sixteen-year brutal civil war, the electoral grievances did not escalate into full-scale conflict. In fact, in 2013 Mozambique witnessed a return to military confrontations confined in the central region. In this context, the interviewees were asked whether this relative stability was due to the influence of religious leaders. The majority of respondents (64.7 per cent) do not see any connection. Instead, they present various explanations, including war fatigue, the power of police and security forces repression. The remaining portion (35.5 per cent) still consider that religious leaders contribute to peace and stability in the country. A cross-tabulation according to occupation shows that 33.3 per cent of state and public employees defend that religious leaders' conduct of electoral processes contributes to peace and stability while 66.7 per cent hold a different opinion. Among private sector employees, 16.7 per cent agree with this opinion while 83.3 per cent disagree. In the informal sector, 35.7 per cent agree and 64.3 per cent disagree. Finally, 42.9 per cent of people from other occupations agree and 57.1 per cent disagree.

Overall, the record of religious leaders' performance in running elections appears to have eroded the prestige and respect this group enjoyed from people of diverse occupations, but a considerable number of people continue looking at religious leaders as peacemakers. The statements below gives a glimpse of the divided opinions about the role of religious leaders in building peace amid volatile post-electoral environments. According to a mason man, "religious leaders have no role in maintaining peace, people are afraid of military repression".[77] A locksmith contended that religious leaders played no role for relative stability because they are no longer seen with credibility, they are seen as taking sides".[78] There are also

76 Interview with REP#35 (Male Student) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 20 September 2024.

77 Interview with REP#33 (Mason) by M. Mubai, Maputo 11 September 2024; Interview with REP#13 (Male Public employee) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 20 September 2024.

78 Interview with REP#9 (Male Locksmith) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 15 September 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

those who give credit to opposition parties, claiming that they prefer peace.[79] A male student holds a different opinion arguing, "They play an important role for peace because being honest or not, religious leaders are pillars of peace in certain way. Their mediation calms the mood of disgruntled people".[80]

CONCLUSION

Throughout the history of Mozambique, religious leaders have played an important role in mediating conflicts. The General Peace Agreement that put an end to sixteen-year war was mediated by religious leaders, paving the way to involvement of religious authorities the reconstruction and reconciliation of post-war Mozambique. One of the cornerstones of peace and reconciliation was the organisation of the first multiparty democratic elections with the participation of RENAMO, the former rebel movement turned into political party. Given the divisions created by war, the candidates did not trust each other thus, requiring the mediation of someone credible. It was within this context that from the general election in 1994, five out of six presidents of the CNE had a clerical background. This chapter showed that Mozambicans believe that religious leaders have legitimacy to run elections because they are guardians of ethics, morality, integrity, impartiality, fairness, love and justice, to mention but few attributes. However, people at large negatively evaluate the performance of religious leaders as presidents of the CNE. Statistical data shows that out of fifty-one people interviewed (27 male and 24 female) 70 per cent consider the performance of religious leaders bad, 14 per cent consider it acceptable and only 16 per cent consider it good.

The negative evaluation of the performance of religious leaders in running elections affects the credibility of religious leaders as individuals, but it does not affect religious organisation from which the leaders come. This study observed that 94.1 per cent of the interviewees think that the performance of religious leaders in running elections affects their credibility in society negatively. Because of this erosion of credibility, 60.8 per cent of the interviewees are against the continuation of nominating religious leaders to run elections in Mozambique. In fact, the nomination of religious leaders to preside over elections, which are frequently marred with irregularities, affects negatively a long history of religious leader affirmation as guardians of justice, morals, integrity and impartiality. This is corroborated by 64.7 per cent of interviewees claimed that religious leaders do not contribute to the relative peace and stability lived in the country despite episodes of allegations of massive electoral fraud.

79 Interview with REP#7 (Female Domestic Worker) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 11 September 2024.

80 Interview with REP#35 (Male Student) by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, 20 September 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888