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**Mozambique:
Religious Peacebuilders
Broker End to
Civil War**

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Abstract

This case study investigates an intriguing instance of religion being used to settle a nonreligious conflict, in which the Catholic lay Community of Sant'Egidio brokered an end to the civil war in Mozambique (1975-1990). In examining the conflict and its resolution, this study addresses five questions: What were the historical origins of the Mozambican Civil War? How were religious actors involved in the conflict and its negotiated resolution? How important were international religious and political forces? What role did socioeconomic factors play? How did religion intersect with these other factors in driving outcomes? The case study features a core text, a timeline of key events, a guide to relevant political parties, nongovernmental organizations, and religious groups, and a list of scholarly sources for more detailed information.

About this Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

The civil war in Mozambique (1975-1990) had a variety of political, ethnic, ideological, and geopolitical causes. Religion was not among them. However, religious actors played an important role in the resolution of the conflict. The Community of Sant'Egidio, a Catholic lay organization headquartered in Rome, brought the different sides together and successfully brokered the peace accords that ended 15 years of devastating conflict. This successful case of religious peacebuilding had many causes, including favorable domestic conditions in Mozambique and trends in international diplomacy. It also demonstrates the independent impact of a religious community with experience in international mediation inspired by biblical imperatives of service, compassion, and peace.



Residents pump water from the village well.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Modern Mozambique is the product of a long history of intercultural encounters. The majority of Mozambique's population traces its ancestry to Bantu-speaking migrants who arrived in the first half of the first millennium CE. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the coastal regions of the country were settled by Arabs and came to form part of a Muslim trade network that stretched across much of the Indian Ocean. Portuguese explorers arrived in the late fifteenth century, and by the sixteenth century they had incorporated much of Mozambique into Portugal's sprawling overseas empire. Portugal brought the influence of the Catholic Church with it, which gradually established itself as a major power in Mozambican society. However, this colonial project did not prosper and, in 1891, the Portuguese government handed over the administration of much of the country to a private company, the Companhia de Moçambique, under a 50-year charter. This shift did not improve the lot of the majority of the country's inhabitants, many of whom were still forced to work on plantations. Following World War Two, as colonial empires began to break up and most African nations gained independence, the authoritarian Portuguese regime led by Antonio Salazar stubbornly retained possession of its colonies, renaming them overseas provinces and encouraging emigration to the region. In September 1964, a nationalist group named the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO, later Frelimo as it transitioned to a ruling political party)¹ began a guerrilla-style military campaign to obtain the country's independence. In 1974, a leftist military coup in Portugal overturned the authoritarian and colonialist Estado Novo regime, and the new government immediately began the process of extricating itself from Mozambique. The Lusaka Accords set out the terms of Portuguese withdrawal, and on June 25, 1975 Mozambique finally gained its independence.

Almost immediately, inspired by the settler resistance to independence in Rhodesia, Portuguese settlers attempted a coup. However, the national army, known as the Forças Armadas de Moçambique (FAM) and controlled by Frelimo, along with forces supplied by the new Portuguese government, promptly quelled these attempts. When it became clear that indepen-

dence was irreversible, many of the 300,000 Portuguese nationals who lived in Mozambique left the country for Portugal. The departing settlers sold their assets, emptied their bank accounts and removed consumer goods. Even Portuguese companies repatriated their assets, decimating the national economy.

In this context, the Frelimo Party turned to Soviet-style state socialism and established a system of one-party rule in 1977. Its efforts to control the economy and society included repression of the Catholic Church and certain indigenous traditions.

The Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) formed in 1975 in opposition to Frelimo, and intensified its activity in the years that followed independence. Its forces destroyed state infrastructure and attacked the policies of Frelimo, particularly state farms and communal villages. Its armed resistance, supported by the white regimes in both Rhodesia and South Africa, had widened into a full-scale civil war by the early 1980s.

The Mozambican Civil War continued throughout the 1980s despite Frelimo's shift to a market economy late in the decade.² In 1990, Mozambique adopted a new constitution that included multiparty elections, the first step toward a peace accord signed in Rome in 1992 and the subsequent deployment of UN peacekeepers in the country.

In 1994, the first free elections were held and, although Frelimo won the majority, a significant portion of the population (38 percent) voted for RENAMO. In the most recent parliamentary elections (2009) Frelimo received 75.4 percent of the vote, leading many to conclude that RENAMO is no longer a viable political opposition to Frelimo.

The Community of Sant'Egidio, a Rome-based Catholic lay organization, played an important role in ending the civil war in Mozambique. The group developed personal relationships with key leaders on both sides of the conflict, arranged meetings, provided a channel for communications, and ultimately brought in international actors to assist in bringing about peace.

DOMESTIC FACTORS

Religious factors did not cause or drive the conflict, but religious leaders were essential to brokering the peace in 1992. Historically, religion played a notable role in the development of Mozambique. Until the tenth century, the country's inhabitants adhered to traditional African religions, but the arrival of Arab traders and Portuguese colonizers transformed the religious landscape of the country. The Arab traders introduced Islamic culture early on to Mozambique, and this spread through the coastal regions before Portuguese colonization. In turn, European colonization brought Catholic ideas to many in the coastal and southern regions. However, although religion was a marker of difference between the Portuguese and Arab communities, this did not, after the initial Portuguese displacement of the Arabs, cause significant conflict.

Religion was also not a significant factor in the civil war era (1975-1990). The two sides divided along ideological lines—socialist versus capitalist—and were fighting over power rather than because of religious differences.³ However, Frelimo's suppression of religious activity after independence, especially local traditional practices and institutionalized religion including the Catholic Church (which Frelimo saw as too attached to Portuguese colonization) allowed RENAMO to paint itself as a defender of religion and use this as a tool to motivate people to support its cause. The anticommunist rhetoric employed by RENAMO was also instrumental in attracting the support of religious groups in the United States and other parts of the West, who provided resources and support for the rebel movement. Despite this, religion was not a major factor in the civil war, particularly as Frelimo relaxed its suppression of religious activity during the 1980s and slowly began to repair its relations with religious organizations.

Religion did not cause the war, but a religious actor was critical to the peace. The involvement of the Community of Sant'Egidio began in 1976 when Dom Jaime Gonçalves, a religious figure in Mozambique, decided to study in Rome. While there, he befriended members of the community. Upon his return to Mozambique, he was made Bishop of Beira, a large town in the

center of the country. Shortly after this, he returned to Rome in his official capacity in order to attend a synod. While there, he talked to the Community of Sant'Egidio about the suppression of the Catholic Church in Mozambique. The community decided that it would work with the bishop to help ease this suppression, and it even arranged a meeting between Gonçalves and the Italian Communist Party leader Enrico Berlinguer.

In order to encourage human development in Mozambique and encourage the Frelimo government to relax its suppression of the Catholic Church, the community worked to build good relations with the ruling government. As part of its efforts, it sent three airplanes and two ships full of essential supplies to Mozambique as gifts. The government, surprised by such generosity, eventually began to meet with representatives of the community, despite continuing suspicion and resistance in some quarters.

The organization eventually offered itself as a mediator in the conflict. Due to their positive relations with the Frelimo government, they were allowed to make contact with RENAMO. An early example of their quiet mediation took place in 1982, when the community facilitated talks that led to the release of several priests and nuns being held hostage by RENAMO forces.

The Community of Sant'Egidio was one of the few actors in the world simultaneously in contact with both Frelimo and RENAMO. The group used its unique position to encourage an informal dialogue between the two sides, eventually persuading them to meet. The first of these unofficial meetings occurred in June 1990 at a World Cup soccer game. The informal meetings paved the way for a secret, formal meeting in Rome later that year. Bishop Jaime Gonçalves, a representative of the Italian government, and Sant'Egidio's Andrea Riccardi and Matteo Zuppi opened the negotiations at the Rome headquarters of the group. Thus, Sant'Egidio took on the role of co-mediator in the negotiation process. This role was, in effect, granted to them long before any other state parties were involved. Indeed, Riccardi made a speech before the launching of the talks to set the moral tone of the whole process. He said:

“Many serious problems exist in the past and in the future. We are aware that every problem can give rise to misunderstanding and that the interpretations which are made are very different. Will we be able to resolve them...? An expression of the great Pope John XXIII...comes to mind: “let us strive to find that which unites rather than that which divides.” The desire for that which unites can also suggest to us a working method, the spirit of this meeting. That which unites is not little, rather there is a great deal. There is the great Mozambican family, with its very ancient history of suffering... The unity of the Mozambican family has survived this history of suffering. We find ourselves today, if you will allow me to say, before two brothers, truly part of the same family, who have had different experiences in these last years, who have fought each other... Conflicts with outsiders pass; between brothers it always seems more difficult. Nevertheless brothers will always be brothers, notwithstanding all

the painful experiences. This is that which unites, to be Mozambican brothers, part of the same great family.”⁴ The final peace agreement explicitly echoed these sentiments by making reference to “Mozambican brothers.”

The 1990 meeting in the Sant’Egidio’s offices in Rome was a crucial step in the process that ended in the signing of a peace agreement. This process, from the first unofficial meeting until the signing of the peace accords, lasted a total of 27 months. Eleven meetings were held under the group’s mediation before the ultimate signing of the peace accords on October 4, 1992. Moreover, it was the community that was ultimately responsible for bringing in other state parties and the UN to oversee the process. While Sant’Egidio had no direct influence on the compromises both sides made on the substantial issues, its role in bringing the sides together and facilitating dialogue was vital to the resolution of the conflict.

INTERNATIONAL FACTORS

Mozambique’s civil war, like that of Angola, combined local dynamics with wider Cold War geopolitics. Frelimo drew support from the Soviet Union and its proxies, notably the Cuban military, while RENAMO was supported by South Africa and, in the early years of the civil war, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The United States was divided over providing support for RENAMO, but ultimately opted not to become directly involved in the conflict. Frelimo in turn offered some limited support to liberation movements outside of Mozambique, notably in South Africa and Rhodesia.

In contrast to these secular forces, religious international influences played a less divisive role in the history of Mozambique. During the early colonial period, tension between Catholic Portuguese colonizers and Muslim Arab traders did occasionally produce deadly conflict, particularly because religion was used to justify the “civilizing” colonial mission. However, after the initial period of colonization, religious actors did not cause

significant violence. Under the Portuguese, settlers sought to strengthen their control of the countryside, by means including the conversion of the native population to Catholicism. There were also parallel efforts by some Protestant missionary groups, and both Catholic and Protestant NGOs have long traditions of working to promote development and provide humanitarian assistance in Mozambique.

During the early stages of the civil war, relations between the Vatican and Frelimo were strained, particularly as a result of the nationalization of Church property and the expulsion of missionaries. However, in the 1980s, conciliatory talks took place between Pope John Paul II and Mozambican President Samora Machel. By 1988, most Church property had been reinstated and the pope made a highly successful visit to Mozambique. International religious influences were vital to resolving the civil war due to the peacebuilding efforts of the Community of Sant’Egidio discussed in the previous section. The community,

buttressed by its faith calling, relying on quiet track-two diplomacy (diplomatic efforts performed through nongovernmental channels), dispensing freely-given humanitarian assistance, willing to eschew the limelight and work in privacy, was uniquely suited to be a trusted outsider who became the indispensable insider. The long peace process initiated by the Community of Sant'Egidio eventually resulted in the signing of a treaty that brought the conflict to an end. Following the signing of the peace agreement, Pope John Paul II hosted a symbolic reconciliation event for all the prominent figures involved in the Rome talks.

In conclusion, Mozambique's devastating civil war was one of dozens of domestic conflicts that took place in the context of the Cold War. What makes this conflict stand out is that the peace deal that brought it to an end has proved lasting and resilient. Furthermore, the case is unique due to the unusual way in which it was resolved—from outside, through the intervention of religious peace-builders unaffiliated with any government. Indeed, the success of the Community of Sant'Egidio's work in this case opened doors for their work in other conflicts over the subsequent decade.

KEY EVENTS

1500s Vasco Da Gama, commanding a Portuguese fleet, establishes control over trade posts in what is now northern Mozambique. Towns that resisted his advances are attacked and often destroyed. The Portuguese justify this violence by describing it as a Christian crusade against Islamic influence. Indeed, Vasco Da Gama himself orders the destruction of a ship carrying 380 Muslim pilgrims.

Twentieth Century The Portuguese gain greater control over Mozambique during the early twentieth century and expand their efforts to promote Catholicism, sending missionaries across the country.

1976 Dom Jaime Gonçalves decides to study in Rome. Upon completing his studies he is appointed Bishop of Beira.

1981 Bishop Gonçalves works with the Community of Sant'Egidio to strengthen religious freedom in Mozam-

bique, participating in meetings under Community auspices in Italy, including with then-Italian Communist Party leader Enrico Berlinguer.

1982 RENAMO takes nuns and priests as captives, but the Community of Sant'Egidio helps to negotiate their release.

July 8, 1990 Representatives from the Mozambican government and members of RENAMO meet officially for the first time at the Community of Sant'Egidio's headquarters in Rome. Some officials from both parties had met unofficially at a World Cup football game earlier that year.

October 4, 1992 After eleven meetings under the Community of Sant'Egidio's auspices, a final peace agreement is signed in Rome.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Liberation Front of Mozambique

The Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO), was founded in the early 1960s as an alliance of three regionally based anti-colonial movements fighting for Mozambican independence. When this was achieved, Frelimo (the political party successor to the liberation movement) took control of the country in 1975 and has remained in power ever since. In its early years, the movement suffered infighting over a variety of ethnic, ideological, and political issues. Ultimately, however, it came to be “dominated by a southern, urban-based elite with a strong, non-racial, nationalist ideology.”⁵ Under Frelimo, Mozambique became a single-party state, and its armed forces fought a deadly civil war against RENAMO. Samora Machel led Frelimo from 1969 until 1986, when he was killed in a plane crash and replaced by Joaquim Chissano. The party dropped its Marxist-Leninist designation in 1989 and, in 1990, established a liberal constitution that allowed for a multiparty political system. Later that year, negotiations were launched with RENAMO and, in 1992, the General Peace Agreement was signed. In the ensuing elections, Frelimo secured 52 percent of the seats in the national assembly.⁶ The party has maintained power over the

last 20 years and has seen its percentage of seats increase. Its best showing to date was in the 2009 elections, in which it received over 70 percent of the vote.

RENAMO

The Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) was formed in 1975 in order to challenge Frelimo’s control over Mozambique. Supported by the Rhodesian and South African governments, it engaged in a 17-year struggle against the governing party. Following the signing of the peace treaty in 1992, it entered electoral competition as part of a coalition including the Independent Alliance of Mozambique, the Mozambican Nationalist Movement, the National Convention Party, the National Unity Party, the People’s Political Party, the Front of Patriotic Actions, and the United Front of Mozambique. In the 2004 election, this coalition (RENAMO-UE) received 30 percent of the national vote and its presidential candidate Afonso Dhlakama got almost 32 percent of the presidential vote. However, its support base, traditionally based in the northern and more rural parts of Mozambique, is beginning to dissipate and it performed poorly in the 2009 elections.



Members of the Mozambican army.

RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Catholicism

The Catholic Church is the largest supra-ethnic organization in Mozambique. There are over four million Catholics in Mozambique, accounting for just over 23 percent of the population. The country is divided into twelve dioceses (established in 1940)—including three archdioceses—and has its main offices in the capital, Maputo. During the early stages of the civil war, the Catholic Church had poor relations with the government, largely due to its links with Portuguese colonialism. But as the war neared its end, these relations warmed and the Church, in particular Archbishop Gonçalves of Beira, was vital in facilitating the end of the war.

Evangelical Christianity

Evangelical Christians are the fastest-growing religious denomination in Mozambique. The majority of evangelicals in Mozambique self-identify as Zionist Christian. In total, the evangelical churches in Mozambique account for about 17 percent of the population.

Islam

Eighteen percent of Mozambicans identify themselves as Mus-

lim. The majority of these Muslims live in the North, while the majority of Catholics and Christians are concentrated in the South.

Community of Sant'Egidio

<http://santegidio.org>

The Community of Sant'Egidio is a Rome-based Catholic lay organization. It has made significant contributions to peace processes around the world, most notably in Mozambique. In 1990, the ruling Frelimo Party and rebel RENAMO accepted the organization as a mediator in their dispute, and it played a key role in the signing of the Rome General Peace Accords in 1992. It adopts a peacemaking approach that is deeply rooted in Catholic tradition and theology.

Religions for Peace

<http://religionsforpeace.org>

Religions for Peace, founded in 1970, joined a coalition of other organizations in a program called the Hope for African Children Initiative (started in 2002), which aims to provide assistance to children orphaned by HIV across Africa. The Hope for African Children Initiative attempts to reduce the stigma attached to the



A mother prepares a meal with her child.

disease and focuses its work on educating and housing orphaned children. In Mozambique, it has formed a partnership with the Council of Religions of Mozambique (COREM) to conduct its work.

The Christian Council of Mozambique

<http://ecumenical-services-ccm.webs.com>

The Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM) is an ecumenical organization founded in 1948. It was designed to promote unity and cooperation among the churches of Mozambique. Its members include the Anglican, Baptist, Reformed, Methodist and Independent church traditions. During the civil war, the CCM called for dialogue between the two sides and, in 1984, it established a Peace and Reconciliation Commission. The CCM had good links with the government during the Civil War period and used these to get permission to approach and discuss peace options with RENAMO. It played a role in facilitating the Nairobi talks, which were the first meeting between the two warring sides. Between 1990 and 1992, the CCM pushed for accelerating the peace talks and helped facilitate a faster nego-

tiation of a ceasefire. Additionally, CCM-affiliated churches often helped facilitate local ceasefire agreements and diminish tensions within local communities, and they have been advocates of grassroots development work since the civil war ended. Currently, the organization is a national ecumenical faith-based organization of 24 Protestant denominations working on human rights issues and sustainable development.

All Africa Council of Churches (World Council of Churches)

<http://aacc-ceta.org>

The All Africa Council of Churches (AACC)—affiliated with the global World Council of Churches (WCC)—is an ecumenical group of churches in Africa. The AACC supported the early attempts of religious actors to establish links with RENAMO representatives. They collaborated with the CCM in the Nairobi Peace Initiative. In the post-civil war period, the AACC has analyzed its experiences working for peace in Mozambique in order to better counsel member churches across Africa on how to effectively approach the task of peacebuilding.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

World Relief Care Group

<http://worldrelief.org>

World Relief Care Group, an evangelical Christian organization, was founded in 1944 to ease the suffering caused by World War Two. It is a faith-based organization that aims to empower local churches by assisting in serving those who are most vulnerable. It has conducted work in Mozambique since 1994, particularly focusing on AIDS prevention and care, child development, and economic empowerment. According to its website, “twice a month, more than thirty Pastor’s Networks come together to sing, pray and challenge each other to answer the biblical call to serve the poor and suffering. Each congregation has devoted volunteers who meet regularly to share experiences and lessons learned. They are active in health

promotion, economic empowerment and in caring for the sick and dying.”

DREAM: An Integrated Faith-Based Initiative to Treat HIV/AIDS in Mozambique

<http://santegidio.org/en/amicimondolaids/programma.htm>

This program, named the Drug Resources Enhancement against AIDS and Malnutrition (DREAM), was created by the Community of Sant’Egidio to fight AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. The project combines highly active anti-retroviral therapy (HAART) with the treatment of tuberculosis, malnutrition, malaria, and sexually transmitted diseases, while emphasizing the importance of health education. DREAM was launched in Mozambique in March 2002, following two years of groundwork.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were the historical origins of Mozambique's civil war?
2. How were religious actors involved in the conflict and its negotiated resolution?
3. How important were international religious and political forces?
4. What role did socioeconomic factors play?
5. How did religion intersect with these other factors in driving outcomes?

¹ The insurgent movement was known as FRELIMO. However, when they took control of the country and became a political party they became Frelimo.

² Frelimo applied to join the IMF in 1982 and was accepted in 1984. A structural adjustment package was agreed in 1987 and the country officially became capitalist.

³ It remains unclear the extent to which the divide between the two sides was ideological as opposed to just oppositional. RENAMO primarily framed itself by its opposition to Frelimo more than any concrete policies.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ http://c-r.org/sites/c-r.org/files/accord%20Mozambique_Key%20actors.pdf

⁶ http://c-r.org/sites/c-r.org/files/accord%20Mozambique_Key%20actors.pdf