

## Communicating Politics and National Identity: The Case of Mozambique

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Consolidation of a legitimate constitutional order is difficult to achieve in any society, but it is especially problematic in recent democracies. This is true for Mozambique, a young nation with more than 24 million residents, of whom more than half live below the national poverty line and most (approximately 70%) live in rural areas. Since its inception, the country has been a ‘deeply divided society’ (Guelke 2012) in socio-economic, cultural and linguistic terms.

The devastation caused by the civil war, after independence from Portugal, had triggered a strong desire for peace, and for overcoming the boundaries caused by tribal and regional divisions. Joaquim Chissano’s presidency (1994–2005) tried to rebuild national unity in the guise of dialogue, encouraging peace and reconciliation among Mozambicans, particularly in the political arena. Under the ideal of national reconciliation, the starting point was promoting an atmosphere of peace and quality of life for all Mozambicans, prioritising rural areas and providing access to education, health, employment and public services (Alden 2001).

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Chissano's successor, Armando Emílio Guebuza, also from the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), ruled the country from 2005 to 2014 and pursued the same objective of national unity. Guebuza's mandates were marked by 'Presidências Abertas e Inclusivas' or PAIs (Open and Inclusive Presidencies). This was a governance strategy whereby the president would temporarily leave the Ponta Vermelha, the official presidential residence in the capital, Maputo, to live in simple, humble places all over Mozambican territory. The government machine (ministers, secretaries, advisers) accompanied the president during these trips and the country was governed from the different districts visited. With the PAIs, Guebuza engaged in direct contact with his people, introducing the head of state figure and calling for people to be united under the same ideals of national identity.

Using the PAIs as an example of government communication in Mozambique, this chapter's aim is to present a picture of Mozambique regarding the following entwined issues: (1) the political system, including the party system and the electoral system; (2) the media system, including the media landscape and media ownership; (3) government communication structure and strategies. Finally, the PAIs, as a political communication strategy aimed at building national identity, will be critically analysed. As in any Western country, media played an important role in Guebuza's communication strategy for both the production and dissemination of information. In fact, Boorstin's (1961) classic idea that media presence is fundamentally supported by 'pseudo-events' is particularly true in the context of PAIs, as will be explained later in this chapter.

## 8.1 OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

A brief look at Mozambique's history shows that the nation was built in three main stages. The first took place in the 1950s and 1960s when, as in most African countries, feelings of national identity emerged from the fight for independence from European colonialism. After four centuries of Portuguese rule, Mozambique only gained independence in 1975. In the second stage, national unity was tested by a 16-year civil war (1975–1992) that exacerbated political and social divides, mostly tied to regionalism and tribalism issues. The third stage corresponds to the foundation of democracy in Mozambique, and continues to the present day.

After several years of peace talks, the first pluralist, liberal constitution of Mozambique was enacted in 1990 and the first democratic multi-party elections took place in October 1994. Since then, Mozambique has remained a relatively stable presidential republic, despite occasional conflicts between the two main parties—FRELIMO and the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO).

Political power is subdivided into two main branches: the executive and the legislative. In the executive branch, the president of the republic performs the functions of head of state and head of government; as head of state, he is also commander in chief of the defence and security forces and presides over the council of state. The legislative branch is represented by the elected members of parliament (MPs), who meet at the Assembly of the Republic. The president of the republic and MPs are elected at the same time (in general elections), by universal, direct and secret suffrage, for five-year mandates.

Because the constitution establishes the existence of a prime minister appointed by the president to perform the functions of government coordinator, Mozambique is categorised as having a president-parliamentary system. In this system, ‘the government relies on the political confidence of the president, and the latter appoints the executive without constraints’ (Macuane 2009: 271).

## 8.2 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In terms of citizens’ political participation, Mozambique has already experienced one huge problem common in Western democracies—high abstention rates. The enthusiastic turnout for the first elections in 1994 (87.87%) has been replaced by indifference and apathy in recent years. Official statistics from the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration (STAE, Secretariado Técnico de Administração Eleitoral) show that abstention increased from 12.6% in the first multi-party elections in Mozambique in 1994 to around 52% in the 2014 general elections.<sup>1</sup>

This phenomenon is happening in a country whose political system involves polarisation around two main parties, RENAMO and FRELIMO; the latter has led the country’s fate since independence in 1975. There

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.cconstitucional.org.mz/content/download/1043/5926/file/Acordao%2021%20CC%202014.pdf>. Accessed 2 October 2016.

has only been a third parliamentary bloc in the first legislative session (União Democrática) and in the last two legislative sessions (Movimento Democrático de Moçambique), but always with few seats. For the political analyst Luís Brito, the trend in abstention in Mozambique poses a clear legitimacy problem for the two main parties, whose combined votes represented 72% of the electorate in 1994, since falling to 50% in 1999 and dropping to only 30% in 2004 (Brito 2008: 10).

The political scenario is dominated by FRELIMO, the leadership of which was built during the fight for freedom and the civil war (Pereira and Nhanale 2014: 7). The dominance of the FRELIMO party is also explained by its governments' use of communication campaigns, above all with the election of Guebuza in 2004, using a notably nationalistic political discourse (Brito 2008: 8). The aim of these campaigns is to deepen the bonds of unity among Mozambicans, who have been threatened by serious political divides between the two main political forces. The divides are felt above all in the areas of the country where each party has the most influence (FRELIMO: south and northern tip of the country; RENAMO: centre and part of the north of the country).

Today, central political power is still characterised by a two-party system formed of RENAMO and FRELIMO, whose existence systematically involves a certain apprehension and animosity (Azevedo-Harman 2012). The election processes themselves have 'been marked by accusations of fraud, high levels of mistrust among political parties and some serious incidents, which demonstrates the weakness of the country's democratic institutions' (AfriMap 2009: 8).

### 8.3 MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Following the proclamation of national independence in 1975, the Mozambican state nationalised the media organisations of the colonial period (Rádio Clube de Moçambique became Rádio Moçambique) and also created new ones (the Mozambican Information Agency, Agência de Informação de Moçambique, and the Media Bureau, Gabinete de Comunicação Social, now called the Media Institute, Instituto de Comunicação Social). At the time, restrictions on freedom of expression and press freedom were implemented through severe censorship enforced by the Ministry of Information (Magaia 1994).

With the enactment of the Press Law in 1991, new media organisations began to emerge; generally speaking, they were independent.

Although they were concentrated in Maputo, they became established as true focal points of a more open, alternative public debate, unlike what had happened during the single-party system after independence. The passing of the Right to Information Law in 2014 was another milestone in the country's development. Mozambique joined a small selection of African countries that already had a right to information laws,<sup>2</sup> which are important instruments for encouraging transparent governance and citizens' effective participation in managing public funds. Perhaps for that very reason, in the context of countries in Southern Africa, Human Rights Watch placed Mozambique at the same level as Botswana, Mauritius and Namibia, which have seen significant press freedom improvements.<sup>3</sup> The country's rating in the 2015 Press Freedom Index also rose,<sup>4</sup> from 2 to 2.23:<sup>5</sup> Mozambique was given 44 points (with 0 being good and 100 being bad). However, despite the advances, journalists continue to complain about government interference in the media (Chichava and Pohlmann 2010: 132–133).

Three newspapers of reference stand out in the Mozambican media landscape: *Notícias*, *Diário de Moçambique* and *O País*. The weekly publications *Zambeze*, *Magazine Independente*, *Canal de Moçambique*, *Savana*, *Dossiers e Factos*, *Público* and *A Verdade* generally take an editorial position that challenges the government's actions. Public newspapers (the *Notícias* daily newspaper and the weekly *Domingo*), on the other hand, focus their stories on government accomplishments.

A peculiar feature of the Mozambican media system, according to Salgado (2012), is the proliferation of 'fax newspapers', such as *MediaFax*, *Expresso* and *Imparcial*, which have considerable circulations. These newspapers are printed in A4 format and faxed to subscribers, in a

<sup>2</sup>Until 2014, only fourteen African countries had adopted freedom of information (FOI) laws: Sierra Leone, Niger, Tunisia, Angola, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Available at <http://www.redeangola.info/especiais/o-progresso-da-liberdade-de-informacao-em-africa/>. Accessed 20 October 2015.

<sup>3</sup>Human Rights Watch. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/pt/news/2015/01/29/266559>. Accessed 20 October 2015.

<sup>4</sup>More information on the Freedom House indexes are available at <https://freedom-house.org/report/freedom-world/2015/mozambique>. Accessed 20 October 2015.

<sup>5</sup>UN Radio. Available at [http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/2015/05/relatorio-mostra-avancos-na-liberdade-de-imprensa-em-mocambique/#.V31TX\\_I97IU](http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/2015/05/relatorio-mostra-avancos-na-liberdade-de-imprensa-em-mocambique/#.V31TX_I97IU). Accessed 20 October 2015.

clear attempt to reduce the high costs of printing and distribution. They are, most of the time, linked to journalists who originally worked for other newspapers but decided to develop their own media projects.

There are some digital daily newspapers (e.g., *Expresso da Tarde*, *Correio da Manhã*, *Diário do País*) but in practice they are only accessible to workers and/or civil servants at public and private institutions. Despite its growth, the percentage of Internet users is very low when compared with other parts of the world. According to the Internet World Stats website, in March 2017, 1,834,337 users had Internet access in Mozambique, representing 6.2% of the population. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that the percentage of users is growing fast, mostly in urban centres, owing to the availability of cheaper access services.

A significant section of the written press is restricted to urban areas, especially Maputo. This coverage is heavily conditioned by low literacy rates (around half the population is illiterate) and high levels of poverty in the country. Most of Mozambique's population lives in rural areas and has never bought (and never reads) newspapers. Radio is the only way of reaching a substantial part of the population. As well as the only public radio station, Rádio Moçambique Antena Nacional, which has national coverage, there are several private radio stations, also mostly based in Maputo and with relatively small coverage areas. Rádio Moçambique broadcasts in nineteen national languages, as well as Portuguese, and also has an English language service. In recent years, several community radio stations have also emerged, focussing on rural areas, and they provide information in local languages. Many of the community radio stations resulted from projects supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Media Project.

As for television, Mozambican television is clearly the largest source of information in the country, compared with radio and newspapers (EU-EOM 2014: 34). There are seven television stations in the country broadcasting in open signal, including two public stations (Televisão de Moçambique, TVM, with two channels, 1 and 2; and Rádio e Televisão de Portugal para África, RTP-África). The others are private (STV, which belongs to Sociedade Independente de Comunicação, SOICO; Televisão Independente de Moçambique, TIM; and TV Miramar). There are also encrypted television channels that are gradually gaining ground in the country's media agenda, but they do not have a major impact on audiences.

It is important to remember that, unlike the situation in most liberal countries, where ownership of the media is concentrated in the hands of

large business groups, in Mozambique ‘all press enterprises are economically weak and only SOICO (Sociedade Independente de Comunicação) has a number of different media outlets (STV television, SFM radio and the daily newspaper *O País*)’ (Mário 2012: 35–36).

In regard to media independence, some authors stress that the overall media landscape sees some partiality and even partisan sympathies, mostly during election periods (Chichava and Pohlmann 2010: 133). Not infrequently, the public press is accused of favouring the party in power, FRELIMO. Reports by European Union mission observers state that, for example, in 2009 the public media was favourable to the FRELIMO party, with ‘clear quantitative imbalances in favour of Armando Guebuza (FRELIMO)’ (EU EOM 2009: 24).<sup>6</sup> In the last elections, in 2014, although Rádio Moçambique ‘offered a generally balanced coverage of the electoral campaign’, coverage by the public television station (TVM) showed ‘an obvious inclination towards FRELIMO that received 56 percent of the total airtime, followed by RENAMO with 22 percent and MDM with 17 percent’ (EU-EOM 2014: 36–37).<sup>7</sup>

#### 8.4 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRUCTURE

The president of the republic is the epicentre of all of Mozambique’s government communication. In general, this area is the responsibility of the Government Information Bureau (GABINFO, Gabinete de Informação de Moçambique). GABINFO replaced the Ministry of Information, which was dissolved because of its history of censorship when the multi-party system was adopted. The director of GABINFO is appointed by the prime minister. It supervises all the state communication organisations and public media bodies, advises the executive on specific issues in the media field and encourages the dissemination of and access to information about government actions, among other activities. It is also responsible for registration and licensing for the media.

In recent times, the work of advising the government has become more significant, thanks to the institutionalisation of government

<sup>6</sup>European Union Election Observation Mission, EU EOM (2009, 28 October). *Mozambique Final Report: General Elections*. Available at [http://www.eods.eu/library/FR%20MOZAMBIQUE%202009\\_en.pdf](http://www.eods.eu/library/FR%20MOZAMBIQUE%202009_en.pdf). Accessed 20 October 2016.

<sup>7</sup>European Union Election Observation Mission, EU-EOM (2014, 15 October). *Mozambique Final Report: General Elections*. Available at [https://ceas.europa.eu/sites/ceas/files/eueom\\_mozambique\\_2014\\_finalreport\\_en.pdf](https://ceas.europa.eu/sites/ceas/files/eueom_mozambique_2014_finalreport_en.pdf). Accessed 20 October 2016.

communication in the organisation charts of state bodies, both centrally (ministries) and at province level (provincial governments). Although the functions have not yet been harmonised, press officers and press secretaries, which GABINFO calls ‘government communicators’, look after the government’s image by sector, while retaining a constant and direct tie to the Information Bureau.

More recently, and with the aim of harmonising government communication processes, the Government Communication and Marketing Strategy (2015–2019) was launched to, among other things, introduce a new dynamic to a context that had seen little intervention from the communication sector in ministries, no specific budget for communication actions and a lack of unified discourse in the government.

Alongside GABINFO, there is the Press Office of the Presidency of the Republic, which is exclusively supervised by the head of state. This is run by a press officer, who is responsible for all communication issued by the Ponta Vermelha. Since 2005 the work of the presidency’s press officer has gained greater visibility because of Guebuza’s PAIs, which involved the president visiting all 128 districts of the country (a number that rose to 152 in 2013).<sup>8</sup> In his first term (2005–2009), Armando Guebuza went to the district capitals and in his second term (2009–2014) he expanded his government action to other locations spread across a territory measuring almost 800,000 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>9</sup>

During the PAIs, the press officer and his/her team’s mission was to find the best setting for a meeting between the president and the people; a public meeting. Setting up the sound, positioning the podium, placing microphones, organising the press room and press conference room and organising the journalists were some of the team’s tasks.

Interaction between the president and the citizens also took place on social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter). In fact, in the final years of Guebuza’s second term PAI events were broadcast on those platforms in real time, which meant that there was audiovisual communication and instant interaction. Guebuza also had a blog ([armandoguebuza.blogspot.com](http://armandoguebuza.blogspot.com)), entitled ‘Mozambique: exploring other means to consolidate citizenship’, where he publishes his speeches and opinions.

<sup>8</sup>Law no. 26/2013 of 18 December 2013.

<sup>9</sup>On 15 January 2015 Armando Guebuza was succeeded by Filipe Jacinto Nyussi and FRELIMO kept the majority of parliamentary seats. The terms of the constitution prevented Guebuza from running for a third term in the last elections.



As Salgado (2012) argues, it is common to associate this type of alternative media with opposition parties or new political movements, which have more difficulty in gaining coverage in the mainstream media. Thus, Guebuza's blog provides evidence that even politicians in power have acknowledged the weight of the Internet, 'and are using the new media communication tools to advance their own ideas and make contact with voters' (Salgado 2012: 1384).

## 8.5 THE PAI'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

According to Boorstin (1961), the massive presence of politics in the media is fundamentally provided by 'pseudo-events': self-promotion events that are planned in order to obtain media coverage, which is the measure of their own success. Armando Guebuza's PAIs clearly fit into this philosophy. Management of this strategy includes producing messages that focus on the government's political objectives, a political emphasis on the figure of the president, a dramatisation of events and control over media coverage, particularly through the group of official journalists who travel within the president's entourage.

Data from the Presidency of the Republic shows that the PAIs were prepared a year in advance, in a project coordinated by the Presidency of the Republic, the Ministry of State Administration and provincial governments (Matola 2009). Preparing these visits was a complex matter. A team visited locations in advance and shared recommendations in order to choose places with the highest service standards in the country because, during the PAIs, the district visited would become the *Ponta Vermelha*. Recommendations would range from how to build the platform for the public meeting to how to furnish and decorate the bedroom and bathroom.

As a rule, the PAIs took place in the first six months of each year, when the president visited an equal number of districts per province over four days. The exceptions to this rule were Nampula and Zambézia—the largest provinces in the country—where he spent longer, visiting five districts in each one. As a communication strategy, the most important moment in the PAIs was a rally at which the head of state could meet his people. They were the perfect opportunity for the president to interact with people directly and, at the same time, locally gauge harmonisation with the government's five-year programme. Guebuza's speeches almost always followed the same structure: they began with the issue of national unity,

followed by the struggle against poverty and then, at the end, a moment of interaction with local people. These interactions were not spontaneous or open to everyone, however. In order to avoid criticism of the administration, district administrators carefully chose those who would participate in the debate with the president (Leininger et al. 2012).

The use of Portuguese, a colonial legacy and the country's official language, forced the PAIs to provide simultaneous translation of the president's speech into different national languages. There are an estimated 43 national languages in the country, most of which are Bantu in origin although some are entirely different. It could be argued that emphasising Portuguese meant that the government did not show a bias towards any particular national language, and this decision probably also contributed to the message of unity.

A press conference always took place at the end of the public meeting, and the president's speech was spread, via the press, to other Mozambicans in the region and the country. The national press was highly favourable to Guebuza as the PAIs took place, framing the initiative in a very positive light, even within media that were usually more critical of the Guebuza administration (Neta 2017).

## 8.6 DISCUSSION

The act of governing in a democracy relies on constant exchanges of information and communication about public policies, ideas and decisions, not only between members of the government and political parties, but also, and in particular, between those who govern and those who are governed.

Providing information and being accountable are goals that Mordecai Lee has called 'the democratic purposes of government public relations: media relations, public reporting and responsiveness to the public (as citizens)' (2012: 12). These goals can be implemented directly or indirectly; directly when governments inform citizens using public reports about public policies and the use of public funds, and they have the chance to respond to their questions and criticisms.

The 'democratic purposes' of government public relations may also be achieved indirectly through news coverage. This can either be the result of the government's initiative, normally through media relations strategies (e.g., press releases, press conferences, interviews), or when news stories arise from journalists' investigations in conjunction with

government information sources (e.g., PR professionals) or non-official sources (e.g., politicians or civil servants).

Looking at Guebuza's PAIs, it could be argued that they contributed to the 'democratic purposes' of government public relations. In his inaugural speech on 2 February 2005, Guebuza named rural development as one of his government's main actions and placed similar emphasis on the fight against poverty. In 2006, to boost this measure, his government passed the Local Initiative Investment Budget (OIIL, Orçamento de Investimento de Iniciativa Local), popularly known as '7 Million'. This is a funding mechanism for individual or collective projects to produce food or create jobs and income. During the PAIs, the government had the chance to explain '7 Million' and to present ongoing initiatives face to face with the local populations, all over the country. As a result, it was able to focus on the way the fight against poverty could drive national unity and progress. In other words, Armando Guebuza's PAIs were an opportunity to increase proximity between the political elite and the people, within a 'pedagogy of democratic governance' (Sitoe 2014).

On the other hand, however, it could also be said that the PAIs were nothing more than political propaganda, based on a very specific soundtrack: 'national unity will fight poverty'. As can be seen all over the world, the act of governing has ended up becoming a 'permanent campaign', which combines 'image making with strategic calculation', refashioning 'government into an instrument designed to sustain an elected official's public popularity' (Blumenthal 1980: 7). In fact, in terms of the media, and taking into consideration the media culture in Mozambique, it can be said that more than scrutinising government messages, the media had the role of amplifying messages in presidential speeches, and in a very positive way (Neta 2017).

There are certainly many variables that influence votes, but the truth is that Armando Guebuza, who was elected by 63.74% in 2004, won his second term with 65% of valid votes in 2009. FRELIMO and its candidate received a mass of votes in rural areas in 2009, including regions that were traditionally understood to support the opposition. In a sense, these electoral data demonstrate how the PAIs helped achieve one of the main objectives of any political public relations strategy: 'to ensure that a party receives maximum favorable publicity and minimum of negative' (McNair 2000: 7).

Norris and Mattes (2003: 1) argue that societies with low literacy rates are marked by an 'unaware' democracy, in that potential voters do

not have the insight needed to assess the parties and their candidates based on their election manifestos and government programmes. In these societies, identity creates a greater bond between individuals and parties than the governance plans and objectives that are presented to them. Mozambican philosopher Severino Ngoenha (1998: 31) claims that the existence of a Mozambican state will depend on the ability of the political project to resolve rivalries and conflicts among social, religious, regional and ethnic groups, according to rules and mechanisms acknowledged as being legitimate. In this context, it can therefore be concluded that Guebuza has been able to use the PAIs to appeal to feelings of national identity, thereby developing an effective governmental and political public relations strategy; that is, providing accountability for his governance but also garnering always-desired popular support.

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