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Civil war and the non-linearity of time: approaching a Mozambican politics of irreconciliation

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At least 1 million people died during the Mozambican civil war (1976/7–92). Unfolding after gaining independence from Portugal (1975) and alongside experiments with Afro-socialism in the 1980s, the war, despite its brutality, has not been subjected to global templates of reconciliation processes. Thus it comprises a unique case to probe what irreconciliation might mean – both as a political horizon and as an analytical concept. This text juxtaposes ethnographic material from rural, central Mozambique from the late 1990s and early 2000s emphasizing reconciliation with material from the same spaces from the 2010s onwards, where I identify what I term a ‘politics of irreconciliation’. I will make three arguments. First, informed by Hannah Arendt, I approach irreconciliation as fundamentally about the rejection of a world of violence in search of a world shared in common. Second, drawing on recent anthropological theorizing about temporal regimes and chronopolitics, I argue for the salience of a non-linear understanding of the politics of irreconciliation to grapple with the fact that civil war violence is understood as dangerously uncontained rather than nominally past. Third, within the context of Mozambique, forgiveness and its other, *irreconciliation*, are not only intimately tied to the temporally past or present; they are also, as I show, produced by a tangible and intense absence of a productive future.

From 1976/7 to 1992, Mozambique was devastated by a civil war that razed the countryside and thoroughly transformed the social and political landscape (Morier-Genoud, Cahen & do Rosário 2018). The war engulfed society, generating an estimated 1 million casualties with a further 5 million of the around 18 million population (in 1975) becoming internal or external refugees (Lubkemann 2008). Heavily simplified, the civil war involved the forces of the liberation movement-turned-political party Frelimo (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique) fighting a guerrilla war of insurrection waged by Renamo (Resistência Nacional de Moçambique).¹ Alongside the civil war, Frelimo spearheaded an Afro-socialist revolution under the charismatic leadership of Mozambican President Samora Machel. Fuelled by the vision of unlocking the potential of a country downtrodden by Portuguese colonial violent rule since the 1500s, Frelimo revolutionized the country’s sociopolitical order (Isaacman 1978). Rolling out a

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political apparatus oriented around a single political party, Frelimo and Machel attacked systems of racial and colonial privilege (including urban segregation) and systems of forced labour. Furthermore, traditional chiefly powers were replaced by a new political structure, including party secretaries and notions of popular justice (Bertelsen 2016).²

The debates addressing the dynamics of the civil war and the reverberations of Mozambique's experimentation with socialism are both extensive and heavily influenced by particular forms of scholarly politics.³ These debates, which I have dealt with elsewhere (see, e.g., Bertelsen 2002; 2016), often revolve around whether the civil war was internally generated (i.e. by a disgruntled populace) or whether it was (solely) the result of destabilizing efforts from Rhodesia, South Africa, and others.⁴ However, in the first decade following the General Peace Agreement (GPA) in 1992, it became commonplace to hail Mozambique as having emerged out of the 'chaos of civil war' more successfully than other conflict-ridden countries: for instance, in works comparing it to the Liberian 'basket case' (e.g. Moran & Pitcher 2004). Reflecting similar celebratory rhetoric, Mozambique was also presented as having completed a bottom-up societal healing type of reconciliation process (Honwana 1996) and achieved some form of stable post-war democratic development – the crux of which was the execution of parliamentary and presidential elections in 1994. Capturing the political optimism of the time, this scholarship also fundamentally rested on a conceptual assumption that the violent past that (once) haunted the body politic of Mozambique had been sequestered or forgotten by political discourses, democratic practices, and popular forms of healing.

Engaging with such a vision of almost organic reconciliation and through engaging with the notion of *irreconciliation* suggested in this special issue, I will broach occurrences in Mozambique that unsettle the understanding of this past as temporally behind us. For the aftermath of the civil war has seen recurrent violent uprisings, skirmishes between various armed groups, and spates of lynchings which have made apparent the spectre of past wars, struggles, and politics (de Brito 2017). Starting with fieldwork in 1998 in and around the city of Chimoio in central Mozambique and later extending to also involve Maputo in the mid-2000s, I have mapped how citizens perceived and related to such violent events. Juxtaposing ethnographic material from two decades, in this text I suggest that the violences of the civil war remain *uncontained* by conventional temporal linear delimitation. I will make three arguments.

First, I will outline what a politics of irreconciliation may look like, including its relation to notions of justice, taking the Mozambican case as a starting point. Informed by Hannah Arendt's deliberations on the power of reconciliation and what she calls 'non-reconciliation' – as also detailed by the introduction to this special issue – I will argue that a politics of irreconciliation revolves around an ontological-political rejection of the world in which large-scale genocidal mass violence unfolds (Berkowitz 2011). Put differently, rather than viewing a politics of irreconciliation as a rejection of reconciliation or forgiveness per se, informed by Arendt I approach it as involving a radical non-acceptance of *what is* in search of a common world. This argument is also inspired by Jacques Derrida's (2001) approach to forgiveness. Central to most definitions of reconciliation, Derrida not only points out that forgiveness derives from a specific cosmological system, Judeo-Abrahamic religious thought, but also that it is inherently contradictory. As he writes, 'One cannot, or should not, forgive; there is only forgiveness, if there is any, where there is the unforgivable. That is to say that forgiveness must announce itself as impossibility itself. It can only be possible in doing the impossible' (2001: 32-3). Derrida insists on forgiveness being oriented towards the

past, towards memory, towards bringing history into the present in order to transform the so-called perpetrator (so that s/he becomes an Other, i.e. not the person who perpetrated the act for which forgiveness is sought).

Second, drawing on recent anthropological theorizing about temporal regimes and chronopolitics, I will argue for the salience of a non-linear understanding of irreconciliation to grapple with the fact that civil war violence is widely understood as dangerously uncontained rather than nominally past. Elisabeth Kirtsoglou and Bob Simpson suggest the notion of *chronocracy* to depict the deep and complex relations between time and politics, defining this as ‘the ways in which governance is shot through with the power to shape the temporalities in which people live out their everyday lives’. Further, they note that chronocracy makes visible how ‘inequality and exclusionary practices and the ontological and economic insecurity they engender are not just spatial matters but also have important temporal dimensions’ (2020: 3).

Third, such an attention to what has also been called a non-chrononormative approach to temporality (Jen & McMahan 2017) is crucial if we are to grapple with the non-finite nature of events (Deleuze 2004a [1968]) as well as the ‘futurelessness’ that fuels contemporary politics of irreconciliation. While recognizing the importance of the past in the present and building on the two arguments already mentioned above, in this text I will argue that within the context of Mozambique, forgiveness and its other, *irreconciliation*, is not only intimately tied to the temporally past – which is often assumed in, especially, the reconciliation literature – but it must also be seen as centrally produced by an intense experience of an absence of a (or any) future (see also Goldberg 2021). Understood this way, and as I aim to show, a *politics of irreconciliation* fundamentally revolves around problematic, looped, and twisted forms of temporality that defy the smooth linearity – from violent past to reconciled present – undergirding the ideology of reconciliation.

Civil war and reconciliation (1976/7-2010)

The death in 1986 of Frelimo leader Samora Machel coincided with the country’s abandoning of a socialist politics for a Washington consensus-style economic regime – what Christopher Cramer called ‘the largest privatisation programme in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s’ (2007: 266), including corrupt accumulation and rampant asset stripping. Occurring at the end of the Cold War, the civil war came to an end in 1992 with the GPA signed between the Mozambican government (i.e. Frelimo) and Renamo, after more than a year of negotiation (Hume 1994). Crucially, following the GPA and the subsequent general elections in 1994, Mozambique did not pursue anything like an official ‘reconciliation-through-truth’-style process. Instead, reconciliation was believed to be best served through the Mozambican state abstaining from both attempting to ascertain war crimes or taking action against alleged perpetrators. This mode of thinking was already apparent in 1989 in the statements of then President of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano (quoted in Bueno 2019: 431):

We extended the Amnesty Law and tried to inform followers of the so-called RENAMO that the Amnesty is a necessity. They think that they have not committed any crimes, but we know that rebellion and resorting to violence are crimes that are illegal in the People’s Republic of Mozambique, not to mention the atrocities they commit and have committed against the people that are known throughout the world, and the theft of the people’s goods. They don’t classify this as theft, but the citizens think that it is and only an Amnesty can give them back their dignity without humiliating them and without even placing them in the position of being defeated. A defeated person has to obey

everything, and can't have an opinion about anything. But the Amnesty transforms them into normal people and considers them free from guilt, including in relation to the crime of disobedience and the crime of rebellion.

The GPA in Mozambique thus contrasted sharply with what Richard A. Wilson (2003: 369) aptly calls a 'truth-writing project' – central to the TRC process in South Africa – by being premised upon an all-encompassing amnesty and a refusal to detail the nature of past violent events. Importantly, for the first decade after the 1992 GPA, the scholarly analyses on Mozambique overwhelmingly resembled that of official Mozambican discourse. Patricia Hayner's influential work exemplifies this, arguing that 'reconciliation' in Mozambique means, quoting key politicians, 'we will talk, and we may govern together, but we will not bring up the past' (2001: 191; see also Hayes 1998). Furthermore, Hayner pointed out that there were a number of rituals addressing (or redressing) the past that were undertaken beyond the circles of officialdom, the domains of development agencies, the work of the UN, and the elites of both Renamo and Frelimo.

Underlining Hayner's emphasis on post-GPA society-level rituals, in incisive publications Mozambican anthropologist Alcinda Honwana (1996; 2003) details how there were a multitude of cleansing ceremonies involving those afflicted by war and violence. For Honwana and other anthropological observers (e.g. Igreja 2019), this meant that what was addressed ritually post-war was not the reintegration of perpetrators of violence – or anything resembling organic processes of transitional justice. Instead, these practices were directed at *re-humanizing* those *de-humanized* by an intensity of violence that was widely seen by Mozambicans as irreducible to individual human actors.

In the years since 1998, I have undertaken many longer- and shorter-term periods of fieldwork in a rural area that I call 'Honde' about two hours' walk from Chimoio, central Mozambique. Especially until 2010, fieldwork was often carried out with people in Honde – a zone in which the exceedingly brutal civil war had been at its most intense. My research delved into how rural dwellers made sense of their lives following civil war violence that was intensely destructive of social relations, economic livelihoods, and ritual practices, in addition to its traumatic impact (see also Broch-Due & Bertelsen 2016). Reflecting also the thrust of Honwana's argument, in my work I was, especially in the 2000s, concerned with analysing what I saw as distinct non-state-initiated efforts at re-humanizing those affected by the war. Arguing for the reconstitution of meaning as being central to these practices, I mapped what I called 'reconstructive practices', thus both avoiding the notion of 'reconciliation' and emphasizing the semiotic dimension to what I observed in the day-to-day lives of Honde's peasants (see, e.g., Bertelsen 2002). At the time, there were a host of reasons for making such an analysis, such as widespread participation in collective and collaborative daily agricultural activities (e.g. the weeding and harvesting of the staple maize from the *machambas*, the plots of land); frequent social calls between households where parting gifts of seeds, seedlings, or food were always provided to bring home (linking households through substance) and which created, literally, well-trodden paths through the (re-socialized) landscape; and key ritual activities such as rainmaking ceremonies linking the fertility and well-being of Honde with the ancestral plane or rituals integrating into society potentially dangerous spirits of foreign dead soldiers who would otherwise roam the landscape creating havoc.

The province of Manica (INE 1999) was materially impoverished from the era of the civil war until well into the 2000s – and Honde was no exception to this, having a high infant mortality rate, widespread malnutrition, and a lower than national-level average life span (see also Kalofonos 2021). However, there was, as I have tried to hint at above, a sense of concerted attempts – some reflecting religious and cosmological dimensions of what I have called ‘the traditional field’ (Bertelsen 2016) – at reconstituting a humane world of life following the deadening of meaning that the war brought. Such a *future-oriented* direction of activities was also expressed by a young neighbour of mine, ‘Helder’, in 2004. During this scorching hot day in November, we had been inspecting banana plants and sugar cane at his *matoro* – the low-lying plots of land close to rivers and rivulets that were key to food provision during the months before the regular rain-fed plots of land yielded maize. Now in the early evening sitting in the dark on low wooden benches in his household and having shared a plate of the staple *sadza* (maize meal porridge) and a relish of sweet potato leaves, Helder explained how he saw the situation in Honde and Mozambique:

You, Bigorn [Bjørn] you are interested in the war, how it was, how it is now. I know this, even though I am just a *mwana modoko* [a small boy – he was around 20 at the time]. Listen, you know that the war was bad around here. Bad, bad, bad! My uncle living over there [nodding his head westward] was beheaded with a machete and his head put on a stake. All the houses here – ALL! – were burnt down [pointing in all directions]. So, who did this, you may ask? Well, we did it all. I know the man who killed my uncle. I greet him. I talk to him. I can drink with him. It was the war that killed. Not people. Because during the war people were animals. Now we are not. And we should forget about when we were animals. It was no good.

Besides being an extremely powerful narrative, Helder’s account resembled many others during this period of fieldwork: they often revolved around the animalization of war, the need to eclipse violent pasts, and the rich prospects for a future now that the war had ended. The analyses that Honwana, I, and others made in what I here will label *the era of reconciliation* (until 2010) were, thus, undoubtedly informed by empirically observable processes and tangible sentiments – many of which were based on similar outlooks that Helder and many others expressed. Thus, despite setting out to critique simplified, politicized notions of reconciliation, typically these analyses, including my own (Bertelsen 2002), were inadvertently affected by what the excellent reconciliation scholar Richard A. Wilson has shown: that there was an industry of reconciliation processes that was globally uniform, also affecting scholarship. As Wilson writes:

Whether in Latin America or South Africa or elsewhere, political and religious elites used a remarkable similar language of reconciliation, and their discourse was characterized by the following features: the construction of a new notion of the national self and psyche, the use of organic models of nation, the use of metaphors of illness and health and the creation of formulations of the common good which exclude retribution and encourage forgiveness (2003: 370).

Problems with this global template of reconciliation extend also to the politics of forgiveness and consent (Simpson 2017). As Jacques Derrida notes, ‘The “globalization” of forgiveness resembles an immense scene of confession in progress, thus a virtually Christian convulsion-conversion-confession, a process of Christianisation which has no more need for the Christian church’ (2001: 31). Derrida’s notion of the Christian cosmology underlying the industry of reconciliation in the 1980s and 1990s resonates with academic and political discourses in Mozambique at the time. However, more recently, quite a few studies have challenged these notions of Mozambique achieving post-war reconciliation and being a country governed by sociopolitical forms of stability

(Khan, Meneses & Bertelsen 2019; Monjane & Conrado 2021; Muchemwa & Harris 2019). In the following, I draw on these critiques as well as return to Helder and Honde to describe a situation in which vernacular forms of reconciliation have been replaced by a politics of irreconciliation. Crucially, such revisiting is also informed by the emergence of tangible yet opaque forms of warfare, political violence, and unrest.

Irreconciliation and the problem of time (2010-21)

On 31 October 2019, long-standing rumours of international war in Mozambique were in a sense confirmed in, of all places, *The Moscow Times* (Sauer 2019):

Seven Russian Wagner Group mercenaries have been killed in two separate shooting incidents involving Islamic State-linked insurgents in Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province this month, two Mozambique army sources told *The Moscow Times*. In a previously unreported attack that took place on Oct. 10 in Cabo Delgado's Macomia district, two Russian Wagner soldiers were shot dead after their group was ambushed by Islamist militant insurgents, a soldier with the Mozambique Defense Armed Forces (FADM) who witnessed the incident told *The Moscow Times* (Sauer 2019).

A report about this attack was a rare insight into the slow, opaque, and globally linked form of warfare that unfolds in Mozambique and which has been reported since the early 2010s. For, after a period of simmering tension, on 5 October 2017, an armed group of young men occupied the town of Mocímboa da Praia in Cabo Delgado, ransacking buildings, looting shops, and stealing weapons from police posts, before retreating into the bush (Morier-Genoud 2020). This was the first major attack attributed to a group that locally is dubbed al-Shabaab. The group has no identifiable link to either the Somali Jihadists or IS/Daesh, as has been alleged in some mainstream media, and despite IS/Daesh claiming responsibility in its social media outlets (Hanlon 2021). Instead, the group seems to have been formed around a local breakaway Islamic sect comprising young Mozambican men (Morier-Genoud 2020).

Arguably, the opaque violence in northern Mozambique comprises a very modern form of warfare. First, a key dimension fuelling the support for the war, also by local inhabitants, is the construction of a major gas plant in the province – a process that has been ongoing for many years, but which has, similar to such capitalist enclaves of extraction elsewhere (e.g. Appel 2019), not created any significant local development. Second, it is a war in which the Wagner Group is not the only private military group involved: eclipsing the Mozambican armed forces in tactical prowess, for instance, the South African Dyck Advisory Group has been operative for years – again, obfuscating simple visions of a war comprising merely civilians, state forces, and insurgents. Third, and crucially, the war is integral to a political economy of images of enemies – here entailing that the Mozambican government actively labels insurgents as Islamic terrorists, serving to deflect attention from local grievances and illicit accumulation.

The war in the north relates directly to a politics of irreconciliation in the sense that, in all its violence and opacity, it appears to be without end. For, in relation to Cabo Delgado, there is no sign of talks, and the whole prospect of peace, as in the ceasing of violence as the willed outcome of a settlement, seems to belong to an abandoned era of politics. War is, therefore, constituted as unending and its intensity also challenges the gospel of prosperous gas futures that the Total gas developments in Cabo Delgado were meant to realize (see also Lesutis 2022). This temporality of perpetual war is compounded in the everyday for Mozambicans as reports are very scattered and – as with the civil war of the past – conventional notions of veracity, in the sense of basic facts about events, are virtually non-existent. Thus, even more significant than what has

been called ‘the fluidification of warfare’ – a term coined by Alessandro Zagato (2018) for Mexico – is the fact that the consecutive waves of rumours, reports, and hearsay reverberate significantly with previous periods of war and unrest. Let me provide an empirical example.

In 2017, a man I have known since my first fieldwork in 1998 – when he was still a child in rural Honde – went to work at an illegal logging operation run by Chinese operators in Sofala province, central Mozambique. While the pay was dismal and the workers camped in the bush, the money was very welcome. One afternoon, several cars with tinted windows pulled up to the roadside where the workers were loading tree trunks onto trucks and started shooting indiscriminately at them, killing several. My friend, let us call him ‘Ernesto’, ended up being shot in the shoulder and the leg but survived by crawling into hiding. For Ernesto, this event confirmed the perpetual nature of war, and how, as he told me, ‘the big ones are still fighting over money, territory, us [meaning the people]’:

My friend, the war is never over. The time of Samora [Machel] is never over. It does not matter who does it. The Chinese are the same as the Party [Frelimo]. We are never now [*nunca estamos agora*]. Suffering always just accumulates without exit [*sem saida*].

Ernesto’s conflation of the protracted experience of violence emanating from Frelimo with the Chinese reveals an understanding of a form of accumulation that is temporally unbound by pastness or presentness. His notion of a twisted and contorted timeline was in no way unique: during the many conversations I had with long-standing interlocutors, past, present, and future seemed intermeshed – a phenomenon *not* common in what I above called the era of reconciliation. Arguably, in contexts such as Mozambique, this kind of reverberation is not fully explained by analysing it as people remembering *past* violence when confronted with *present* forms of violence: that is, understanding violence to be inscribed by a form of temporal boundedness or pastness.⁵ Instead, violent attacks while working, or reports about dead Russians, bring into being sociopolitical worlds of warfare and upheaval that are not yet finished, not yet contained, and point to a particular form of politics of irreconciliation.

This shift became abundantly clear in 2019 when I again visited my (now middle-aged) interlocutor and friend Helder. In contrast to 2004, Helder had moved to live most of the time in one of the populous *bairros* (poor, urban areas) in Chimoio, having abandoned full-time farming for small-time trading in the informal economy. He still had his plots of land (*machamba* and *matoro*) in Honde, however, and regularly tended to these. When we met, he had just returned from the Malawi border north of Chimoio, a journey which took him through Sofala, a province in which Renamo has remained strong (Wiegink 2020). As in 2004, Helder and I shared a meal together, but this one was outside a stall in a local market in his Chimoio *bairro*. Digging into the plates of *sadza* and goat meat relish while sharing a bottle of Manica beer, we talked about the state of the country’s economy and politics. Since I met him the first time, he had gradually grown much more critical not only of politicians – whom he, like many, regarded as thoroughly corrupt – but also of the prospects for peace and the future. He was particularly concerned with the operation of groups of armed men (allegedly belonging to a faction of Renamo) that were commonly believed to have been orchestrating waves of attacks since the early 2010s in central Mozambique (see Pearce 2020). Taking the last sip of his beer and looking across the makeshift stalls, he told me:

Helder: Bigorn, look at this. Look! Do you remember how things were when you were here twenty years ago? It is the same now. The same kind of shit! The stalls [at the market] ... there is no change. They have the same bad products, now from China. When the war with Renamo [the civil war] ended, we thought it would all be good – that violence was over, that the future would come, that the past was past. Do you remember I also told you? Well, we see now that the war ... it never went away.

Bjørn: But the war is over, yes? Renamo is now in parliament, there are elections ...

Helder: [Interrupts] Ah, the parliament! Who are they? They [the Renamo deputies] in Maputo are just eating from the same plate as Frelimo. Like me and you now! [Laughing] ... But what is important is this: the war will always be there, like the real Renamo in the bush in Sofala. We may try to forget, try to forgive, but we do not move forward. It is like a bus that is stuck in the mud with wheels spinning. There is no future, no development. What is here, is violence from the [civil] war that continues, that comes back again and again. Like a bad spirit you cannot shake for generations. We are spinning, spinning. But it this spinning we need to kill [matar]! It is what they [the state] want! To attack spinning is why some people do war, others participate in strikes [riots], others loot.

Resonating with Ghassan Hage's (2015) notion of 'stuckness' to describe a precarious, profound, and existential sense of immobility, as well as some recent work in anthropology on the 'ebbing away of futures' in contexts which are suffused with conflict and grief (Jefferson & Segal 2019), both Helder and Ernesto underline not only the 'un-pastness' of war and violence but also its continuity as futures are politically eclipsed. Such horizons of continuous, muddled war and violence were indicated also by other long-term interlocutors – including those who seasonally join the sporadic fighting and looting undertaken by armed Renamo men in Sofala province. Crucially, this shift from an era of reconciliation to one of irreconciliation is characterized by an unstable, non-linear form of the temporal. How can we, as anthropologists, approach reoccurrences of violence – a world spinning, to use Helder's term – that one would, conventionally, have thought past?

Irreconciliation, time, and justice: repurposing uncontained violence

What is living, present, conscious, here, is only so because there's an infinity of little deaths, little accidents, little breaks, little cuts in the sound track, as William Burroughs would say, in the sound track and the visual track of what's lived. And I think that's very interesting for the analysis of the social, the city, politics. Our vision is that of a montage, a montage of temporalities which are the product not only of the powers that be, but of the technologies that organize time.

Paul Virilio in Virilio & Lotringer, *Pure war: twenty-five years later* (2008 [1983]: 48)

As Diane M. Nelson (2009) has eloquently shown for the case of Guatemala, accessing the central dynamics animating the so-called 'post-war' terrain situation is exceedingly complex. This is even more so in a context like Guatemala, where, she holds, most people were, to some extent, complicit in or contributed to violence. A similar argument has been made by Carolyn Nordstrom (1997) in her evocative analysis of the Mozambican civil war. There she suggests, like Nelson later did for Guatemala, that the maelstrom of war obfuscates researchers' search for singular truths as to who were perpetrators, victims, and onlookers. Such war-induced opacity, Nordstrom argues, is integral to a Mozambican notion of violence – one that bypasses universally assumed victim/perpetrator distinctions, as well as complexifying understandings of the temporality of violence and war. Similar to Nordstrom and Nelson, in recent decades, scholars have also demonstrated the importance of popular forms of historicity and documented how globally varied formations of memory or unruly forms of pastness impinge on the present.⁶ Even though many works commonly challenge

state-centric or other hegemonic forms of discourse – for instance, in critiques of post-conflict narratives being integral to politicized national-level reconciliation processes – they often neither fundamentally undo a tripartite division of past, present, and future, nor upset the temporal linearity inherent in such a division (but see Santos 2021).

Arguably, the transition from an era of reconciliation to that of a politics of irreconciliation in Mozambique, as I have demonstrated above, necessitates a revisiting of some critical approaches to time: for instance, Deleuze's post-structuralist analysis of the event (Deleuze 2004b [1969]). For Deleuze (2004a [1968]), the event harbours anti-hierarchical or egalitarian potential, at least if this is taken to mean something which shifts circumstances, ruptures orders, and, as an effect, collapses chronological time – what he called *kairos*. Later, these approaches to *kairos* and events were developed into the pair of *actual* events (tangible, recorded in a linear perspective) and *virtual* events (potential, not yet realized), both constituting the real. Thus, the event has a double temporal location: first, in historical time (*chronos*) and, second, in another temporal dimension of perpetuity (*aion*) – a doubleness underscoring the event's openness and potential to evade the powers of scripting and territorialization. Seen in this way, the event evades accounts along the veins of space (local, national, and global – macropolitical, micropolitical) or historical time (*longue durée* or short-term). However, as we saw above in the transition from the era of reconciliation to the muddled contemporary politics of irreconciliation, the temporality of the civil war itself seems to have been unmoored from *chronos*, for, as much as the *chronos/aion* division offers more sophisticated analytical tools to grapple with past-present relations, the conceptual pair is still future-oriented and, perhaps, inherent in a wider modernist vision of futurity as a taken-for-granted part of the horizon of political time. This is, at least, the case with the notion of reconciliation, which allocates to the present the task of dealing with the past in order to secure a future body politic.

Such critical discussions about futurelessness as a figuration of (political) time are not, of course, solely the domain of irreconciliation or event studies. Building on Frantz Fanon, Achille Mbembe's (2017) critique of both capitalism and racism in an age of the Anthropocene (see also Bertelsen 2021) analyses a thoroughly fragmented subject which Mbembe recognizes as becoming globally common. Centrally, his notion of the 'becoming black of the world' seems to indicate the cancelling of the future in a world that is blackened, as it were, by the violence of Anthropocenic politics. Similarly, David Scott (2014) has explored the domain of Grenada to rethink the temporal scope of postcolonial politics. Concretely looking at the trajectory of the short-lived Grenada revolution (1979–83), he critically interrogates a familiar script in representing many so-called postcolonial contexts: first, a colonial era of repression; then, a time of liberation; then, the institution of a dream of a unified postcolonial society with national sovereignty and a 'cultural-political consensus'; and, finally, collapse – a template trajectory quite similar to conventional portrayals of Mozambican history (Newitt 1995). However, rather than seeing this script as the only possible way in which to conceive of politics, Scott invites us to think about the '*propensities and limits of political action itself, political action in time: in failure and ruin as much as success*' (2014: 36, original emphasis). Furthermore, he draws on Hannah Arendt to suggest that '[t]ragedy is the price of freedom [and that] the threat of tragedy casts a permanent shadow over political action' (Scott 2014: 62–3). In sum, Scott invites us to leave the essentially modernist vision of time and ask: how can we understand politics without a future?

In the ethnographically identifiable shifts above, both Helder and Ernesto express significant visions about the perennial nature of war, the domination of a single political regime (Frelimo), and the unboundedness of violent temporalities – expressed in the recent war in the north. In order to make sense of this particular chronocratic (Kirtsoglou & Simpson 2020) configuration in Mozambique, the relations between *chronos* and *aion* (despite its future orientation) and the calls to fundamentally rethink the nature of the political subject, by Deleuze, Mbembe, and Scott, respectively, are all helpful. At one level, the current violence in Mozambique, naturally, reflects the failure of reconciliation in a technical sense, including failed integration of Renamo fighters into the military and the configuration of the one-party state (Bueno 2019; Jentzsch 2022; Wiegink 2019). At a more fundamental level, however, while identifying such dimensions is key, I believe the ethnographic material indicates the impossibility of even *thinking* forms of reconciliation without a future. This means that the violence that sometimes emerges and sometimes is painfully present is, essentially, *uncontained* given the collapse of any tangible project of socioeconomic development or permanent peace. Thus, as identifiable in the expressions of Helder and Ernesto, the politics of irreconciliation become integral to the horizon of sociopolitical worlds, constituting, again drawing on Kirtsoglou and Simpson (2020: 6), a chronocracy encompassing ‘our “everyday” and [which] structures our ordinary experiences to the point that our common time thickens and becomes saturated with its effects and our labour to mitigate them’.

Given such an understanding of a futureless chronocracy operating in the (nominally) post-civil war, the politics of irreconciliation may here be understood as the temporal figuration where the duration of an event – its intensity – can be expected to be resolved neither by futurity in the form of revolution, peace, and reconciliation, nor by economic development. I therefore ask: can we think of irreconciliation as the temporal figure of the cancelling of the future – the end not of history (in fact, rather the *un-ending* of history) but of linearity in the modernist sense of projecting an improved form of what comes after; what we sometimes call the future?

Conclusion

First, as the cases from Honde and Chimoio show, while the future is not on the horizon, the sense of an intensification of times (in the plural) impinges on Helder’s and Ernesto’s present. To me, this suggests the emergence of a body politic in which the very possibility of the future as either emancipation or the cordoning off and neutering of the violences originating in events of the past – or both – is rendered meaningless. Such a state form will obviate any notion of reconciliation as a national project and instead generate alternative actions and orientations – also temporal – that may undermine the stability of the sociopolitical order. This reading would also be in line with recent analyses of Mozambican politics where, for instance, Jason Sumich argues that the ‘gradual decoupling of any sort of political project of transformation from this sense of revolutionary temporality, a soon-to-be-realized future totally different from the present, has seriously undermined the moral basis of Frelimo’s rule’ (2021: 595). Thus, building on the analysis of a politics of irreconciliation undertaken here, one may argue for Mozambique that the chronocratic regime is dependent on a semiotically fixed and futureless political ontology (Sumich & Bertelsen 2021).

Second, if we use the notion of irreconciliation to think through notions of justice, development, and war in Mozambique, we end up with a paradoxical figure. At the

macro level of the state and inherent in the world of what we used to call development, we see an active cultivation of an end to the future – not least in notions such as resilience or climate change – for the vast majority of the population. At the level of people like Ernesto and Helder, we see an increasing creative engagement with *aion* in situated contexts, such as uprisings or other forms of mobilization. What this volatile context means for notions or instantiations of justice that are not derived from the hands of the people or the death-bringing practices of state forces – or Russian mercenaries in the service of local or transnational elites – is difficult to disentangle. However, I think we have a lot to gain from approaches that move beyond notions of chronological time. For, as we have seen, as the very stuff of time integral to notions of reconciliation, *linearity* is problematic to relate in a context where uncontained and violent temporalities eclipse its very principle. Put differently, it seems like the current chronocracy is one that we need to challenge given a context in which violence continues to emanate from events we normally allocate to the past that threatens to destabilize the sociopolitical order, and where people like Ernesto and Helder experience temporality itself as inherently violent and non-linear. Thus, while violent events of the past remain uncontained, undercutting the notion of pastness that is inherent in reconciliation, the current politics of irreconciliation does not *necessarily* mean stasis or political stagnancy; it is, as Mookherjee outlines in the introduction to this special issue, a form of rejection of a world that holds such acts, calling for a new order by dismissing the current state of affairs.

Third, while retaining support from certain segments of academic work in Mozambique, including my own, the notion of ‘reconciliation’ seems to be heavily out of fashion in anthropology and, increasingly, in grey literature also. While we know that, for better or worse, the waxing and waning of terms is a natural feature of academic conceptual ecosystems, I think the waning of the reconciliation concept, also beyond the context of Mozambique, reflects an additional feature: the increasing lack of references to reconciliation mirrors a world order where war has become *omni-present* in the sense of cancelling both the past and the prospects of (a post-war) future. This means, as Allen Feldman notes, that ‘[w]e are living the time of wartime as a largely unwitnessable time out of time, as a fall out of conventional time that fractures any polemological idea of progress and political achievement’ (2019: 175). War, then, in its current configuration of spatiotemporal perpetuity, omnipresence, and unwitnessability, seems to co-produce the rise of a politics of irreconciliation not only as a chronocratic regime but also as a modality to engage with, to resist, and to strive for, in Arendt’s sense: ‘Non-reconciliation, the act of judging the wrongs of the past to be incompatible with a common world and thereby calling forth a new common world, is one of the very highest political examples of politics action’ (Berkowitz 2011: 13; see also Marongwe, Duris & Mawere 2019). As I have tried to illustrate with the case of Mozambique, the shift from an era of civil war and reconciliation to one dominated by a politics of irreconciliation within an increasingly violent context is instructive as it outlines how futurelessness is both key to a temporal regime and identified as that which must be engaged with.

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NOTES

¹ The author acknowledges that the existence of several other armed forces fundamentally problematizes the Renamo-Frelimo/Mozambican government distinction, including the rebellion in Zambézia Province pre-dating the establishment of Renamo (Morier-Genoud *et al.* 2018) and the so-called traditional army of Naparama (Jentzsch 2017, 2022). While recognizing these complications, I will nonetheless here deal with the Renamo-Frelimo/Mozambican government distinction as these remained the sole parties integral to the peace process and are also those that continue to inform the political and historical horizons of my interlocutors (but see Sumich & Bertelsen 2021).

² For some treatments, see Nielsen (2017); Obarrio (2014); Sumich (2018).

³ See, for example, the fierce debate following Christian Geffray’s (1990) controversial analysis of the civil war with incisive interventions from Chichava (2013); Florêncio (2002); O’Laughlin (1992).

⁴ Differing positions in this long-standing debate include Alexander (1997); Cahen (2002); Coelho (1998); Dinerman (2006); Hultman (2009); Morier-Genoud *et al.* (2018); Roesch (1992); Vines (1991); Wiegink (2020).

⁵ For analyses of trauma in relation to these events, see Broch-Due & Bertelsen (2016); Igreja & Baines (2019).

⁶ Antze & Lambek (1996); Feldman (2015); Gilroy (2004); Kwon (2008); Malkki (1995); Mookherjee (2015); Werbner (1998) – all exemplify seminal interventions into this field.

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Guerre civile et non-linéarité du temps : une approche d'une politique de l'irréconciliation au Mozambique

Résumé

La guerre civile au Mozambique (1976/77-1992) a fait au moins un million de morts. Consécutif à l'indépendance du Portugal (1975) et parallèle aux expériences d'afro-socialisme des années 1980, ce conflit brutal n'a pas pourtant été suivi de processus généraux de réconciliation. Il constitue donc un cas unique d'étude de l'irréconciliation, comme horizon politique autant que comme concept analytique. Le présent article juxtapose des matériaux ethnographiques recueillis dans les régions rurales du centre du Mozambique entre la fin des années 1990 et le début des années 2000, qui met l'accent sur la réconciliation, et postérieurs à 2010 provenant de la même région, à partir desquels l'auteur identifie ce qu'il appelle une « politique de l'irréconciliation ». Il avance trois arguments: premièrement, suivant Hannah Arendt, il voit dans l'irréconciliation le rejet d'un monde de violence et la recherche d'un monde partagé ensemble. Deuxièmement, sur la base de récentes théories anthropologiques sur les régimes temporels et la chronopolitique, il défend une compréhension non linéaire de la politique de l'irréconciliation, admettant que les gens perçoivent la violence de la guerre civile comme quelque chose de dangereusement débridé ne relevant pas nécessairement du passé. Troisièmement, dans le contexte du Mozambique, l'oubli et son revers, *l'irréconciliation*, ne sont pas seulement intimement liés au passé et au présent mais sont aussi produits, comme le montre l'article, par l'absence tangible et pesante d'un futur constructif.