

SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE REACHES ADULthood: GOVERNANCE AND MISTRUST OF THE STREET

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ABSTRACT

São Tomé & Príncipe comes of age against a background of racial antagonisms, flaws in the economic and social fabric, and political instability. Whereas the breezes of globalization upon reaching the country are shaking up its insular society, the management and performance of institutions is sorely in need of improvement. This text briefly reviews the archipelago's post-independence history and attempts to outline various prospects for political development.

1 INTRODUCTION

Shortly, some citizens of São-Tomé born after Independence, in 1975, will become grandparents. Few have any clear memory of colonialism and younger ones lack even an impression passed on by their forbearers. Such memories may be blurred by the accelerated pace of social and cultural change, in the world and in the archipelago. The course of world events tends to be viewed through the prism of racial antagonisms, supposedly coincident with asymmetries of economics and power in the world, and a standpoint of militant post-colonialism now quite out of step with the world. Be that as it may, Portuguese colonialism appears increasingly distant and, consequently, exempt from responsibility for the course of the country's destinies over the 35 years since independence.

From a generic and simplistic standpoint, these three-and-a-half decades appear marred by economic and social failures, exacerbated by political instability in the two latest decades of multi-party government. Paradoxically or not, this instability indicates that institutions (and especially those that ensure alternance of power) are working reasonably well, and that democracy is palpable, in terms of freedom of political expression, both in the streets and in the press.

Having failed to fulfill successive promises of prosperity, as the recurrently trumpeted theme of change (the prototype of which was Independence) the prevailing sentiment seems to be one of perplexity, when not simply of resignation. In this country, where globalization crosses paths with a web of local dynamics that enmesh this tiny island State, the complexity of policy decisions extrapolates

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the smallness of its territory. Moreover, the alarming incapacity of politicians to reach compromise appears both artificial and unreasonable, in face of the huge difficulties facing the archipelago. Indeed, one might think that such difficulties could be overcome, as the archipelago does not face such dire problems as those of governments and peoples in more adverse socio-political contexts.

Perhaps the past can shed some light. This article provides a brief historical overview of the post-Independence¹ period, by examining deeply-entrenched cultural and political traits in the social fabric, in an attempt to outline various scenarios for political development of the archipelago.

2 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Covering approximately one thousand square kilometers, the archipelago had a population of roughly 80,000, in 1975, counting islanders, indentured laborers and their descendents, and Europeans.² Due to strong population growth, the population in 2000 had reached 132,301 (Santo, 2009, p. 189) and, according to projections, currently stands at more than 150,000.

At the time of Independence, Europeans held all prominent positions, most of them being wage earners, either in the colonial administration or on the plantations that owned 90% of the land. For decades, they dominated the economy of the islands, monopolizing the land and disparaging local labor, preferring to hire workers imported from other colonies. There was practically no economic alternative to the export of cocoa; almost no diversification of the economy and, due to the dynamics of local accumulation, no prospects for enrichment of islanders. Up until the 1950s, colonial policy attended solely to the interests of plantation owners. The archipelago was described as a plantation colony; and not a place for settlement. It was a society based upon routines and social immobility, with racially-stratified labor and the ethnocentrism of its colonists (with their feelings of racial supremacy) living among and in command of indentured laborers working in the fields. Such employment was considered poor compensation for the despoilment that some Europeans perceived, and to which they were themselves subject. Over decades, the progressively marginalized islanders accumulated resentments stemming from their subordination under a system which left them feeling cheated.

1. Historical summaries of the period covered by this article are to be found in Hodges and Newitt (1988), Seibert (1999, 2002) and Nascimento (2000a).

2. During the colonial era, such indentured laborers were imported to do field work. For a long period these field workers were subject to tutelage of farmers or farm managers and were kept apart from local society. Indeed, the islanders made efforts to distinguish themselves from the indentured laborers, who were obliged to do demeaning work in conditions of virtual slavery. Whereas some such indentured laborers were later repatriated, others established themselves on farms, and some remained after Independence. To this day, differences between islanders and former indentured laborers have not been totally erased.

These features, typical of colonialism and molded by authoritarian and conservative thinking, only began to be removed in the 1960s, with the launching of economic and social policies targeted at achieving social integration of the local and immigrant populations. Within the limits of political control allowed by a regime unwilling to see its legitimacy questioned, the social environment was opened up. Throughout the 1960s, social coexistence was apparently peaceful. Meanwhile, effective opposition to colonialism was negligible, because sedition was prevented and controlled. Many São-tomenses were oblivious to politics.

It is sometimes said that colonialism left a reasonably well-organized economic legacy and infrastructures of some value.³ Despite references to the deliberate ageing of productive facilities, unsheathed to justify poor economic performance in the post-Independence period, the most troublesome colonial legacy was not related to the economy, but rather, to human and social capital. In view of the dictatorial tone of its final half century, colonial rule did not allow for the emergence of a local elite, and neither did it foster the habit of debate on the future of the archipelago.

Moreover, São-tomense society reached Independence devoid of memory of any form of political or social competitiveness, much less of any social struggles.⁴ It was a society held hostage to a tradition of immobility, at first sight aligned to the limited horizons of the archipelago, in which only in the final years did the paternalistic policies of the colonial regime appear to relax at all. The struggle for political emancipation was thrust upon the archipelago by the coup d'état, in Portugal, on April 25, 1974. In 1975, the view of the São-tomenses as a peaceful people prevailed, as corroborated by various visitors in the years following Independence.

In the final years of the colonial era, the destinies of the archipelago would rest upon decisions made in Lisbon and upon the outcomes of military confrontation in Portuguese colonies on the African continent. In 1974-1975, the archipelago's change in course came from outside. The Movement for Liberation of São Tomé & Príncipe (MLSTP) was comprised of exiles with backgrounds formed in various African countries. In the midst of conflicts, their militancy

3. Evidently, this does not invalidate questions as to whether an economy based upon small farming, and especially cocoa exports, would be capable of facing up to challenges of development, ranging from increasing national income to redistribution of income and personal and collective wellbeing. Today, it is a consensus that the cocoa economy could not support such aspirations – see, for example, Santo (2008). But, after Independence, despite discourse about the decrepitude of installed productive capacity, an option was made not to diversify the economy, but rather, to nationalize the plantations. Thus, the State of São Tomé preserved the economic structure inherited from colonialism, bearing with it the burden of State bureaucracy.

4. From the colonial era to the single-party regime, the police kept strict control over popular movements. Moreover, in the post-Independence period, a self-perception of ill-fated destiny deflated social movements, excepting when in reaction to some apparently more serious occurrence. In view of the constant realignment of factions and blocks, not everybody subscribed unconditionally to such pessimistic views.

had little impact and was hardly noticed on the islands. The leaders of the MLSTP had lost touch with events on the archipelago. After the April 25 coup, the struggle reached the islands through the actions of young students, under the pro-MLSTP *Associação Cívica*. In a political context already favorable to independence, they capitalized upon expressions of the islanders' resentments for decades of subjugation to colonists, and upon trumpeting of a brilliant future once the latter had been removed.

At the same time, doubts persisted among the more conservative São-tomenses (by this time, a minority) who were opposed to independence. Actually, Portugal was by this time no longer counting upon preserving colonial ties, nor even on safeguarding the interests of Portuguese residents. It was hoping, above all, for a smooth uneventful transition. The radicalism of *Associação Cívica* proved to be unsettling, but this was finally reigned in by an agreement between the Portuguese authorities and the MLSTP leadership. Also, political turbulence was avoided by the Portuguese authorities' conviction that independence was inevitable and their consequent acquiescence.⁵

The country thus became sovereign and free; however, such freedom did not extend to its citizens. Under the thrall of the MLSTP, which absorbed all other party organizations that had emerged after the coup d'état in Portugal, Independence came on July 12, 1975. Thus, a new authoritarian political regime, of socialist stamp, was brought into being. The State was subjugated to the party, the MLSTP, led by a small group under the egis of its president, Pinto da Costa.

Quite unforeseen, the changes of 1975 came from outside and rapidly underwent radicalization. The leaders of the independence movement came from exile abroad. Imbued with an idealized vision of the land they had left behind them, often over ten years earlier, they perceived the gap between their own yearnings and the desires of their compatriots, whom they viewed with an ideological bias. They had not accompanied changes that had taken place in the land under the final years of colonial rule. To overcome this gap between their ideological view of their land and the economic and social changes that had taken place, they proposed volunteer action, inspired by socialist ideology. They took it upon themselves to interpret the changes wrought in the archipelago from a standpoint of realizing human historic destiny. In this they were aided by the [cold war] confrontation occurring at that time. They thus resolved to filter foreign influences, as a means of developing the aspirations of their fellow citizens.

5. This conflict, which led to the exile of São-tomenses on the eve of Independence, is a source of resentment to this day. Some authors perceive this episode, in which the old leadership of the MLSTP expelled the youths of *Associação Cívica*, as being the leitmotif of subsequent conflicts during the period of political liberalization. However, it can be affirmed that, since 1990, a culture of political confrontation has arisen alongside institutional mechanisms, in detriment to the settlement of differences and alignment of interests.

In the field of foreign relations, and without prejudice to incipient diplomatic ties, the new country further deepened the isolation inherited from colonialism. While maintaining almost inescapable relations with the former colonial power, it fostered political animosities in the relationship with Gabon,⁶ a country where MLSTP leaders had found sanctuary during the pre-Independence period, and forged ties of cooperation with socialist countries, notably Cuba, Russia, the German Democratic Republic and China. By this time, while maintaining close links with Angola,⁷ the archipelago had turned its back to the nearest coast. The option to pursue tourism was deliberately discarded, in view of its perceived association with moral degradation, and especially prostitution, as if it were the epitome of capitalism. What the new leaders really wanted was to control foreign influences⁸ by setting limits to the appetites and demands of the population. As difficulties led to disappointments, abroad would assume mythical proportions for the people of São Tomé.

Backed by a police force whose mission, purportedly, was to defend the independence of the islands against the machinations of neo-imperialist agents, political and social control of the population depended upon this filtering of all interaction between the country and the world. Isolation in relation to the outside world was facilitated by difficulties in the field of communications. Curiously, on the one hand, the nature of the tiny islands and the ease of imposing control and, on the other, the tight networks of family ties, served to temper the virulence of the dictatorial regime in the post-Independence period. Fear was cultivated, and some of the less timid or less socially prominent citizens were persecuted; but only one political prisoner died in jail.

In São Tomé, the seat of power and by far the most populous island, opposition assumed a dissimulated approach.

6. For a summary of the relationship with Gabon, see Hodges and Newitt (1988, p.120). At the time, though nothing was explicitly stated, it could be perceived that allusions to threats from abroad were targeted at that country. Formal relations with Gabon existed, but there was no friendship with the president, in part, owing to ideological differences between the governments of the two countries.

7. Relations with Angola have historical roots going back to the colonial period. More recently, Angola had been the source of most laborers for the plantations. The anti-colonial struggle brought the future leaders of the two countries together and, after Independence, closer ties were established between the two States. Angola was stop along the way between the archipelago and the rest of the world, and provided military and economic support for the archipelago. Angola is nowadays the country with the largest São-tomense expatriate community.

For further information on relations between the archipelago and Angola, see Nascimento (2000b).

8. Much the same had been done by the colonial administration. Nonetheless, despite well-founded accusations that this had led to a closing of the archipelago, in the final years of colonial rule proposals were floated to invest in tourism, and controlled visits to the archipelago were allowed. With Independence, these became less common, essentially because the country had turned its back to Gabon and closed itself to the outside world. Santo (2009, p. 98-99) argues that tourism was abandoned as a development strategy for ideological reasons. Without refuting that argument, this author feels that the tendency was to subordinate economic rationale to the political goal of consolidating the MLSTP's hegemony. Pragmatism gave way to the goal of remaining in power.

The archipelago was subjected to the usual mindless actions of regimes of a socialist and authoritarian stamp, and witnessed power struggles among leaders of the MLSTP, from which Pinto da Costa emerged triumphant. In 1979, he arrested his erstwhile prime minister, Miguel Trovoada, on the charge of attempting to lead a coup d'état.⁹ Subsequently, this aggressive underhand approach was to cause gradual desertion of leading cadres, upon whom it dawned just how limited their prospects were, between blind fidelity to their leader and renunciation of all active militancy.

Seeking alternatives, in view of the duplicity of their leaders, mid-ranking cadres and the general population lost interest in institutional and productive pursuits, and learned how to get by, in a context of growing and unequally shared economic privation¹⁰, the climax of which occurred during the 1983-84 droughts. This quite unexpected and unprecedented climatic phenomenon had serious repercussions upon the already precarious survival strategies of the populace, bringing into doubt the ancient aphorism that, poverty notwithstanding, no one died of hunger. Some inhabitants of São Tomé viewed the drought as a transcendental judgment upon the errors of mankind. The political project designed to combat religion that, with a view to eradicating colonial obscurantism sought to replace the customary celebration of St. Thomas the Apostle's Day (on which, according to tradition, it always rains) with a commemoration of People's Power, met with strong rejection. Less than ten years since Independence, the difficulties seemed insurmountable.

Economic performance declined. Aside from the easy pickings gained from appropriating export earnings at the expense of workers, nationalization of the plantations aimed to overcome rural-urban social differences. As a consequence, former-indentured laborers found their subordinate position perpetuated, and further worsened by the economic difficulties that the country faced. While claiming that all land belonged to the State, the MLSTP made symbolic land grants to all inhabitants of São Tomé. What in effect happened was that, as a consequence of nationalization, natives with little or no knowledge of agriculture took the place of colonists in the management of the plantations. The relative status of islanders and former-indentured laborers was maintained, despite the fact that all now enjoyed formal citizenship rights. Appeals for greater efforts to increase production

9. Miguel Trovoada was held in the building of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and was freed and allowed to go into exile in July 1981.

10. By this time essential goods had become scarce. With devaluation of the currency, the supply of locally produced foodstuffs declined. To purchase imported foods, people of São Tomé stood in line for hours in the People's Shops, even to acquire such staples as bread and milk. Finding sufficient food became an arduous everyday task.

for the good of the community fell pray to the rigidity of authority. Predictably, they were ineffective in view of hierarchical relations unsupported by capable performance and increasingly viewed as arbitrary, even by those who had endured the encumbrances of colonialism, but whose fresher memories of the political and social trauma of recent years were even more vivid. Off the plantations, the limitation of horizons, stemming from subjugation of daily life to petty and (worse still) constantly changing regulations, led some to apathy, and others to despair.

The people of São Tomé rose up in 1979; and those of the Island of Príncipe in 1981. The first uprising, though spontaneous and politically uncoordinated, was particularly violent; the second had less impact and was rapidly put down. The first fed fears of the security forces against alleged reactionary agents and, in a frenzy of militancy, probably inspired by the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) and the Popular Movement for Liberation of Angola (MPLA),¹¹ reaffirmed the leadership role of the MLSTP. The outcome of this spontaneous uprising was a hardening of the group in power, with a distancing from the population, although the ritualized performance of nationalist celebrations and mid-level decision-making procedures appeared to confer some support. Be that as it may, the population remained deprived of any means of political expression and, increasingly, lost faith in the leadership.

Alongside declining living standards, there was a gradual crumbling of institutions, assaulted by self-serving attitudes, the economic repercussions of which were to prove devastating. By the mid-1980s, all that remained of socialism was the futile effort to create a New Man [*homen novo*], supposedly a blend of the post political-independence culture of emancipation, on the one hand and, on the other, renunciation of yearnings for the colonial era, subliminally pruned of all causes of popular alienation. This proposed discipline and regeneration could only last so long as the exaltation of Independence remained alive.

The goal of the *New Man* (which, for a certain time, stood for the aspirations of African manhood, freed from oppression and alienation) also underpinned economic options and, alongside contemporary belief in the role of the State in development, also underlay motivations for political and social control, such as retaining power in the hands of a few. Unilaterally dictated, designated by

11. In 1979, the Group of Five, comprised of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé & Príncipe was established. Affinities among the leaders developed during the struggle against Portuguese colonial rule. Their ideological and political convergence was further strengthened by the fact that their independence was taking place amid the heat of the Cold War ideological stand-off. The Group of Five Summit Meetings occurred in various countries, and only ceased after the wave of democratization in the 1990s. Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo), Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

new labels for individuals, now referred to as *nationals*,¹² the apparent social homogeneity (in effect, defined by containment of individual ambitions) ended up serving as a mechanism for social control, to be upheld by those same individuals. Rhetoric of the independence movement notwithstanding, the illusion of exercise of political power by the masses was reduced to a mere ritual, since all real decision-making power was concentrated in the hands of a very restricted group.

By the mid-1980s, few still subscribed to socialist dogma. Gradually, opposition festered. Though the population did not organize to contest political office, yet it distanced itself from the political aims of the MLSTP which, in effect, offered to offset growing privations with promises of a brighter future. Lacking in moral substance, the exercise of authority was increasingly ineffective. Against this background, the State of São Tomé began to dissolve,¹³ its institutions decayed, and social life fragmented.¹⁴

Nonetheless, political change would not result from popular pressure,¹⁵ unless one counts festering resentment spurred by hours wasted standing in line to purchase essential goods and all the rigmaroles of *schemes* which, even in comparison to the much-maligned colonial period, served to aggravate the lives of the São-tomenses. Following the crisis of governance (the initial signs

12. Some authors imply that Independence conferred upon the people of São Tomé and other Africans the status of citizens, as apposed to colonized peoples. In fact, in the 1980s, the most commonly used designation was '*nacionais*'. However, under this status, people were liable to more obligations than rights, generally obligations stemming from engagement in tasks prescribed by the political leadership. It was as if, more than mere citizens, the people of São Tomé had in some way become property of the State. This was, evidently, a goal in line with the socialist aims of the MLSTP. Aside from questioning whether acceptance of this idea had been duly assessed at the time of transition and exaltation of Independence, one might well also ask: did not such acceptance stem from the legacy of a colonial culture of subservience and obedience to authority? Or, did it originate from an almost invisible, yet powerful, cultural trait of African societies, based on rights over people, rather than rights over goods? If the latter hypothesis is correct, it becomes necessary to reassess not only the cultural depth of Portuguese colonization on the archipelago – which, though it lasted several centuries, when compared with other colonial ventures can be regarded as a mere varnish, breached in the wake of independence – but also to consider the influence of this cultural ballast on the political configurations and local practices, also as compared to other African contexts.

13. By using this term "*deliquescente*" [dissolve], I [the author] aim to indicate the loss of authority and of efficacy of the State since Independence which has not, however, totally annulled its political, social and (circumstantially) unequal preponderance. The population of São Tomé remains aware of the need for a State. It is relying upon this perception that the party in power recurrently proposes to reaffirm the authority of the State, as a precondition for reconstruction and development of the country.

14. According to Branco and Varela (1998, p. 42-43) notwithstanding its aim of social transformation, the São-tomense State was a "soft state" whose institutions were incapable of implementing its political objective of consolidating a national political administrative system, and it proved incapable of imposing a productive economic system.

15. This view is defended by Branco and Varela (1998, p. 11-13/36) both of whom were associated with the MLSTP and assumed government responsibilities. In the 1980s, as the winds of change swept the archipelago, under the rule of Pinto da Costa, the reformers had the opportunity to debate their reasoning with more orthodox cadres. Espousal of the idea of a change in course within the core leadership of the MLSTP stems from the memory of this (contained) confrontation between advocates of reform and of orthodox positions, which also coincided, to some extent, with a generational struggle and responses to world events. Foreign authors tend to stress the role of exogenous forces for change and for democratization. Ferreira (1990, p. 164) holds that the desire to install democracy arose from dissatisfaction with economic disorder, and from pressures from foreign governments and international institutions. Seibert (1999, p. 152-153/409) considers that the principal motive behind the changes that took place as of 1984 were economic weakness, rather than popular pressure. From the standpoint of the MLSTP leadership, what mattered was preservation of their power, regardless of political or economic changes. Eventually, they were overtaken by events.

of which had been a reformulation of the economic model in the second half of the 1980s) Pinto da Costa decided to seek rapprochement with the West, through adjustments in the economy and, lastly, through political changes. In accordance with the recipe for conversion of authoritarian regimes into open political systems (gradual social and political changes, appeals to dissidents to return, convocation of a National Conference¹⁶ and the emergence of groups that, over time, could become opposition parties) the preannounced path leading toward liberalization was followed. Curiously, resurgent resentment emerged throughout the land, bent upon discrediting the intentions of Pinto da Costa in promoting political liberalization.¹⁷

3 THE RECURRENT PROMISES OF CHANGE

The changes of the early 1990s led to a remodeling of political and institutional structures, in line with the Western model; as was purported to be the objective of some of the *independentistas*. Following the referendum of 1990, a new constitution¹⁸ came into force in 1991, under which the country was described as a representative democracy. Under the slogan of Change, former-exile Miguel Trovoada mobilized vast popular support for his election as president. Though the MLSTP had made the transition to social-democracy in the late 1980s and added Social Democrat Party (PSD) to its title, it was an alliance of dissidents under the banner of the Party of Democratic Convergence – Reflection Group (PCD-GR) that won the election.

Monolithic thinking had been breached, but parties tended to be groupings devoid of ideological content, whose efforts focused merely on disputing power.¹⁹ From the onset, such efforts focused upon subordinating democratic institutions to special interests. Quite apart from the almost vertiginous accumulation of economic difficulties, exacerbated by the Structural Adjustment Program, a great majority of people still prized the multiparty regime. Disregarding aspersions as

16. The National Conference, of December 16 to 19, 1989, sought to overcome resistance to change within the MLSTP. See Branco and Varela (1989, p. 65).

17. This refers to some observers who, though not natives of São Tomé but having some knowledge of post-independence history, ceased to doubt that the pressures for political liberalization had become irreversible. However, certain of the more strident proponents of democratization – some of whom had abandoned the MLSTP – repeatedly expressed their doubts as to the principles underlying Pinto da Costa's position, even after they had witnessed the first concrete achievements. They sought to disqualify them and to block them politically, rather than to express well-founded doubts with respect to the irreversibility of the new political path. If such arguments were voiced, it was because it was felt that they would find resonance with a population whose resentments, at having been subject to so many privations, grew in proportion to their perception of the duplicity of their rulers and the belief that they were simply protecting their own privileges.

18. Drafted by a Portuguese constitutionalist invited by Pinto da Costa, the text underwent reformulation with a view to strengthening presidential powers relating to defense and foreign policy.

19. For Seibert (1999, p. 412) the parties represent not just ideological dissentions, but also rival groups in the dispute for power. This description still applies today.

to the authenticity of their democracy²⁰ and criticisms of the fairness of the electoral process, change remained a noble aim to the eyes of the population of São Tomé. Influences from the outside world (of which people were now more aware, through the emergence of greater interaction among myriad players, and not just States) and greater access to information and consequent cultural opening, led to a crescendo of demands for definition of minimum human-rights standards, applicable also on the archipelago, as life began to take on features quite unlike those of the period of single-party rule.

The truth is that the entrenched incumbent party was overwhelmingly defeated by change, personified by former-exile Miguel Trovoada,²¹ upon whom the population pinned hopes for a new era of post-Independence redemption. In such a political and social context, any attempt by the MLSTP to control the process of democratization or secure victory at the polls was doomed. Whatever the intentions may have been at the onset of the democratization process, omens of implacable defeat led Pinto da Costa to withdraw from the first election. In this way he avoided the political punishment of founders and rulers, uncommon in Africa, that the São-tomenses inflicted upon the MLSTP, the party of Independence.²² Thus, the path to socialism imposed since independence, had been soundly rejected.

With the weakening of social subordination and obedience inherited from the colonial era, community life on the archipelago was molded by the corrosion of social regulations of the previous period. Increasingly, political disputes were held hostage to a web of minced words and social conveniences, on the one hand, and the personalization and consequent aggravation of conflicts, on the other. Instead of presenting competing political and social programs, the inflammation of political discourse reflected unhealed traumas²³ in the political struggle. Political party structures began to be perceived as vehicles for promoting personal ambitions.²⁴ While president, Miguel Trovoada created his own party, the Independent Democratic Alliance (ADI).

20. In 1999, Seibert (1999, p. 244) considered that the democratic institutions had become compromised by appropriation of resources by special interests (a phenomenon which had also been common under the single-party system) and propounded that the democratization process ran the risk of being limited to creation of institutions that were only formally democratic. Without prejudice to the accuracy of his considerations, one can hardly overlook the vivid political competition. In view of the interests at stake, contenders become committed to the "*banho*" [bath - bribery], a form of redistribution of favor at election time, an issue that will be taken up later in the text.

21. Differently to other MLSTP former-militants, Miguel Trovoada has remained totally averse to any conciliation with Pinto da Costa that was, allegedly, to be mediated by President Bongo in the second half of the 1980s.

22. It should be noted that, owing to disillusionment with management outcomes brought on by *change*, which led to conflict between Trovoada and the PCD-GR government, this latter party was also subsequently punished in the 1992 *autarquia* [local] elections established under the new Constitution.

23. According to Seibert (1999, p. 99) the conflicts of the 1990s were a resumption of unresolved issues dating back to the time of the Committee for the Liberation of São Tomé & Príncipe, the organization that preceded the MLSTP.

24. Despite recent pronouncements of ideological affiliation and identity, the parties remain institutions related to personalities who, not rarely, underwrite them. Such is currently the case of the *Movimento Democrático Força da Mudança-Partido Liberal* (MDFM-PL) the life cycle of which is closely linked to the political prospects of its founder.

Nonetheless, transition to democracy brought the guarantee of civil and individual rights, and freedom of the press. Significantly, the power of rumor did not decline, as a form of counter-fire with which the population wrought symbolic vengeance upon politicians. The most common manifestation of this phenomenon is the caricature on the front page of *O Parvo*, a newspaper which, with rudimentary means, has been published without interruption over the past fifteen years.

Political liberalization brought an end to the support of Angola, whose army had remained in the archipelago for more than a decade, supposedly to defend it against foreign aggressors but, in practice, to lend support to the MLSTP. The People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola returned home soon after inauguration of the first constitutional government, thus severing the hitherto umbilical link with Angola. The "whiff" of oil²⁵ hastened termination of this relationship, as it led to rapprochement with countries of the nearest African coast. In 1998, negotiations were launched to discuss maritime borders with Equatorial Guinea and with Gabon, and a final settlement was reached in 2001. Also under the administration of Miguel Trovoada, the maritime border with Nigeria was settled. In 2001, a solution was negotiated for the most promising oil field, with the establishment of a common oil exploration zone, covering 28,000 square kilometers. In the wake of this solution, these countries signed cooperation agreements (Santo, 2009, p. 178) or special partnerships²⁶ which relegated relations with Angola to a secondary level.²⁷

For many years, oil appeared to presage a new cycle and the hope for that bright new future to which politicians were no longer alluding. It has been amply demonstrated that, aside from longed-for positive economic effects, oil is also apt to bring with it rent seeking and so-called "Dutch disease", an inflationary spiral triggered by the incapacity of other sectors to survive in an economy flooded by oil revenues. Fears of rent seeking are manifested in the agreement signed in 1997 with the Environmental Holding Remediation Corporation. Alongside

25. In the midst of an especially difficult decade (the 1990s) overshadowed by low prices for cocoa exports, caused by progressive degradation of the plantations, added to the socially disruptive effects of structural-adjustment policies, the glorious prospect of oil arose, bringing with it, once again, promises of redemption.

26. Under the agreement, 60% of the revenues of the joint oil field would belong to Nigeria, and 40% to São Tomé & Príncipe. Preparations were made to put blocks in this area up for tender. Many years ago, it was calculated that, between 2005 and 2025, this exclusive zone could provide 800 million barrels of oil (Menezes, 2002, p. 104). By 2010, no oil exploration had taken place.

27. Regardless of the political volatility of the archipelago, at one point it seemed that Nigeria had replaced Angola in the position of special partner which the latter had enjoyed since the Independence era. This alignment with Nigeria, forged in the aftermath of the attempted coup of 2003, appeared to be reaffirmed by the government formed after the elections of August 2010, in counterpoint to the affirmation of the outgoing administration that Angola was a strategic partner.

It was after the "discovery" of oil that São Tomé & Príncipe turned toward the northern coastline, with which it had maintained close ties one and a half centuries previously, during the era of the transatlantic slave trade.

others (also deemed unfavorable to São Tomé & Príncipe) the terms of that contract were subsequently renegotiated.²⁸ In view of the feared economic distortions that oil exploration might cause, safeguard measures were introduced to ensure prudent management of oil revenues, among them, the Petroleum Revenues Management Law, approved in 2004. Among economic and social pressures, the efficacy of this instrument for management of oil revenues would be tested.²⁹ Aside from fears that rent seeking brought on by abundant oil revenues might undermine the dynamics of the local economy, there were also accusations of undue transfers of oil. Indeed, for many years, issues relating to oil were shrouded in silence and contradictory information.

In compliance with legislation, the investment of oil revenues is confined to education, health, and social welfare. It was believed that the availability of funding would contribute toward overcoming of certain social problems, and to the outlining of a strategy for sustainable development, based upon enhancement of human resources, increased employment, and wellbeing of the population.³⁰ Once having achieved the prosperity promised by black gold, some expatriate São-tomenses could be induced to return to the country.

While the São-tomense diaspora has spread to many parts of the world, recent years have also witnessed the arrival of immigrants from the nearby coasts, attracted by prospects of making money in various fields of economic activity in a country that enjoys relative social peace.

Comparatively speaking, this perception is undoubtedly accurate, despite the attempted coups d'état of the last decade of the past century. The presidents are not, strictly speaking, responsible for day-to-day government, but it is they that are targeted by popular demands that, to some extent, are manifested by such attempted coups.

Both coup attempts, in 1995 and in 2003, were put down by the international community.³¹ But the accompanying demonstrations had popular support and restoration of the constitutional order took several days. Due in part to the nature of the small-island country and its dependence upon others, on both occasions contributing factors

28. Trade agreements were signed with companies in the oil sector, whereby São Tomé & Príncipe gave up a substantial portion of prospective oil revenues. Under renegotiation, these agreements have become less onerous for the archipelago. For a historical account of the oil exploration agreements, terminated and subsequently renegotiated by São Tomé & Príncipe, see Menezes (2002, p. 100ss).

29. On August 30, 2010, the Association of Economists requested that the new government institute an oil inspection agency. Though created in December 2004, this agency has not yet gone into effect. See *Repórter África* (2010).

30. Significantly, successive government authorities have sought to draft development projects that do not rely on oil revenues, as these increasingly are perceived as a mirage. On the streets, there is much mistrust with regard to misappropriation of such revenues by members of government.

31. On the coups d'état of 1995 and 2003, see Seibert (1996, 2003). On March 8, 1988, there was a coup called the '*golpe das canoas*'. The authorities had been forewarned and the coup was pitifully organized. Following the transition to democracy, the plotters were pardoned. At no time did they constitute a real threat.

to the negotiated solution came from abroad. Notwithstanding divergent interests, the international community restrained the coup makers. However, despite containment of the more disruptive forms of violence, there has been a gradual increase in low-intensity violence, which remains both contained and unpunished, not in the name of causes (as in the past) but, presumably, as a form of retaliation.³²

Open political competition brought on by the return to multi-party democracy did not appear to usher in a new crop of leaders or political parties, nor even a new political elite. This void made way for hope of a solution from outside the realm of politics. Pinto da Costa announced his candidacy for the presidential elections of 2001. The country was facing particularly difficult circumstances and, by the end of the decade, disappointment with the failure of much-heralded *Change* appeared to open up the field for one who, despite rumors as to his instigation of the 1995 coup attempt, had remained aloof from the political fray since the period of democratic transition, of which he too had been a protagonist. Nonetheless, in 2001, the cause of *Change* gained a new face, Fradique de Menezes.

Fradique de Menezes appeared to embody the virtues of one who had come in from outside, and had a background of economic success. He appeared to be the ideal candidate to dispute the election against Pinto da Costa. Crudely speaking, the ideas he embodied were of swift and efficient corporate-style government. Not lacking in personal offenses, the election campaign featured posters reminding voters of the 1979 census, of the instability of the early years of Independence, and warned of the danger of return to single-party rule. More to the point, the efficient and attractive choreography of Menezes' political rallies promised the hope of a future under better economic management. Though Pinto da Costa vainly tried to emulate this style at his own rally in *Praça da Independência*, in a glaring marketing flaw he struck a regal pose, thus demonstrating his incapacity to make populist gestures of empathy and complicity needed to convince swing voters.

Much more at home under the spotlight, Fradique de Menezes won the presidential election. Setting out to maximize his own power, he appointed and dismissed prime ministers, and forced renegotiation of oil contracts on more favorable terms for the country. Like his predecessor, he created a political party, the Democratic Movement Force for Change (MDFM) with an acronym incorporating the initials of his name, (thereby subliminally associating *Força da Mudança* with Fradique de Menezes) to which he later added the name Liberal Party (PL). To expand his powers, Fradique de Menezes revived the idea of a constitutional review. In this, however, even his own congressmen rejected his draft, which, he

32. Some of the new owners hired guards, who were sometimes ordered to defend the property using firearms. Resort to such methods would have been unimaginable in the past and just after Independence, and they are considered a symptom of economic segmentation and manifest incapacity of the State to apply the law.

claimed, would bring the constitution into line with the prevailing mentality on the archipelago which, as in Africa, requires a strong hand at the top, the division by branches of government being poorly understood. He impressed George Bush, at a breakfast with African leaders in September 2002 in New York, when the United States was seeking sources of oil other than the Middle East. Nonetheless, American support in the field of security has been restricted to minor actions, since the Americans do not appear disposed to assume active commitments to the security of the islands, in a complex regional scenario. Little by little, enthusiasm for Fradique de Menezes waned, and his party (which, amidst much political controversy, he had formally presided while still president) lost support until, in the elections of August 1, 2010, it elected only one congressman.

The country went on changing while maintaining continuity, spellbound by a hope of redemption from abroad that might bring an end to its apparently insolvable impasses. Unquestionably, there are now more opportunities for making a living than in past decades and, despite growing economic asymmetries, essential goods are no longer in short supply. Nonetheless, economic changes notwithstanding, huge problems persist in the fields of education and healthcare, while job prospects remain scarce. Over the years of democratic regime, political and social disparities between rulers and the ruled have deepened,³³ as demonstrated by the outcomes of the August 2010 elections, in which members of the opposition party did well.

4 POLITICAL AND SOCIAL FISSURE

The common-sense perceptions of the street are now worth examining. Based upon their experience of abysmal economic disparities, São-tomenses unfailingly subscribe to the view that misgovernment is the major factor underlying their impoverishment.³⁴ But, in the light of the huge disparities between the rulers and the ruled and, like heads and tails of the same coin, while a significant portion of the population claims to despise politicians, this does not mean that such people are unwilling to take as much advantage as they can of patronage, in the form of the *banho*.³⁵

For the common people of São Tomé, the government's continuous failure to fulfill promises and satisfy basic needs is undeniable, and the rapid enrichment of those in power is resented as unfair and unjustifiable, especially since every-

33. Predictably, this chasm is greater among the newly-formed diasporas, looked down upon, on the one hand, by the rulers and those who stayed put or who hold mid-level positions, and who resent the ties established freely and with impunity abroad. This reflects the difficult relations that the country maintains with its diaspora, whose leaders, removed from the opportunities of the homeland, make themselves heard by raising the banner of civic demands for better governance.

34. Citing, Santo (2009, p. 147), among others. This author reproduces data examined by international institutions on the rise of poverty up until 2001. See Santo (2009, p. 148-149).

35. From a foreigner's standpoint, the "*banho*" or buying of favor by distribution of gifts may appear irrational. Observers do not perceive links between illegal vote buying and beneficiaries of the *banho*. According to Seibert (1999, p. 412) gifts distributed during campaigns do not ensure votes but, nonetheless, have an effect, in view of a cultural tradition for reciprocity.

one knows where their wealth comes from. These are conclusions drawn when, without recourse to complex sociological theories, the people of São Tomé seek to explain the blighted destinies of their country, for which they blame their rulers, when not blaming themselves.³⁶ The idea of an inexorable destiny, inferred from individual experiences of loss is extended to the entire course of history of São Tomé & Príncipe. Underlying the good-natured atmosphere lies a sentiment of irremediable despair at missed opportunities of a better life.

Against a background of poverty and marginalization suffered by a portion of the population, slogans of *Change* intone themes of salvation and miracle working. Such themes proved politically effective in 2010, and were especially well received by younger voters. On the one hand, they lack memories of the *changes* launched in the early 1990s and of the disappointments they subsequently engendered; on the other, they deem the country capable of a rebirth, by removal of corrupt and thieving *politicians*.

Anyone walking through the heart of the City of São Tomé during the campaigns for local and legislative elections (on July 25 and August 1, respectively) could perceive how the young tended to vote for the ADI (as the outgoing prime-minister Rafael Branco, acknowledged when conceding defeat). In political terms, this party proved much more aggressive and better organized than is usually the case in the country.

The *street*³⁷ disdained the MLSTP's contract with "civil society",³⁸ interpreting it as a cooptation sustained by nebulous and shady deals. Whether or not this view was justified, it seemed a plausible reading in a country in which, to the present day,

36. By running counter to the promises of the period of Independence and the agenda of all politicians, rising poverty engenders loss of self-esteem, with effects that are as socially corrosive as the old racial stigmas stemming from a sense of innate racism and the paternalism that underpinned the colonial system. Among such effects is the low trust of islanders in politicians, and even of themselves.

37. The *street*, a social actor that is difficult to describe or characterize, is the main target of political action in the archipelago. In view of the way in which information and controversies circulate, and their susceptibility to vagaries of individual perception and ear-to-mouth communication rather than conventional media content, scrutiny of politicians is literally conducted in the street, where all social problems are voiced. A major portion of economic activity and of circulation of information takes place in the *street*. It is in the *street* that opinions are molded. Such opinions affect everyone, except those who are not obliged to seek livelihoods in the *street*, and who are thus able to cultivate a certain detachment.

As in other contexts, the response to difficulties may assume greater or lesser degrees of violence. But more serious than the episodic violence in itself is its corrosive effects in terms of a breakdown of social cohesion, which raises the costs of the islands' economic and social performance. Increasingly, informal and precarious forms of organization have become ingrained in the social fabric of São Tomé. At the same time, people are reduced to seeking means of ensuring survival, while the costs of building a fair society steadily increase.

38. There is no confusion between civil society and non governmental organizations (NGOs) but, alongside the *street* and the newspapers, NGOs are probably the most organized players, apart from the State. Though there are over one hundred such organizations, their social activities and political representativeness are undeniably weak. Some make valuable social contributions, but they have failed to produce a diagnostic study of society that is distinct or independent of the public authorities. In the absence of any local tradition of initiatives and independent protagonism (unquestionably a vestige of colonial hegemony, later exacerbated by the hegemonic instincts of the MLSTP) many NGOs keep close ties with, or are accredited by the State. This is partly due to foreign influence, as they lack deep roots in the country. Few of them can show constant, independent and visible performance; which, curiously, are attributes associated with foreign financing, revealing another source of dependence.

civil society is practically unheard of,³⁹ and where everything is dependent upon the State, or upon opportunities and means that only the State can provide.⁴⁰

Unquestionably, electoral proposals were of only minor significance and, in comparison with other countries, placed less binding obligations upon the newly-installed government. One of the ideas of the MLSTP was to rebuild the social fabric on a rural base, by creating opportunities in agriculture. According to the party's platform, rebuilding of the social fabric in the countryside [*mato*] would result in improved living conditions in so-called *communities* which, in turn, would result in improvements in macro-economic indicators. This strategy, however, proved electorally worthless,⁴¹ in part, owing to the party's failure to keep up with the fast rate of social change taking place in the towns. The crowd [*mole*]⁴² concentrated in the towns, has little interest in the countryside [*mato*]. Ostentation of the *politicians* is the tuning fork by which the young assess their own privation. The young want immediate *change*, and disdain the nebulous offer of economic opportunities in the unprotected countryside.⁴³

Curiously, in an expression of tainted moral judgment, part of the São-tomenses subscribe to the view that theft has become "a cultural fashion or lining, a veritable plague for the small economy of São Tomé & Príncipe, a plague that is very hard to combat" (Santo, 2009, p. 184).

Belief in the virtues of work seems like infantile naivety in a land where all wealth is associated with the exercise of political power. Any attempt on the part of the outgoing administration to impose demands must have seemed an affront, when no one believes that politicians do, or have ever done, any work. When compared with efforts under colonial rule to inculcate body and soul into correct political and social paths, the similarity of discourse (taking, for example that of the outgoing prime minister, who said "*tlabá só ka da tẽ*"; i.e., "only through

39. The author does not examine the intentions and content of this contract, the details of which he is unfamiliar with. As most São-tomenses have no knowledge of the contract, they are instinctively against it, in gut reaction to the theatrical way the signing was staged just days prior to the elections.

40. At one stage, NGOs appeared to be a sort of breeding ground for budding government leaders, who would, unlike the incumbent politicians, lead the country on a better path. This stemmed from an inference by analogy of the idea that, sometimes, in the informal economy, entrepreneurial capacities are revealed in even the worst social settings. Even without delving into the social implications of the informal economy, such an inference is an illusion, since the role of civil society as a training ground for politics, in itself, reflects a biased outlook. From the standpoint of the *street*, the signing of a pact during election week in 2010 between the MLSTP and civil society, personified by one of its foremost protagonists, signaled a surrender to the incumbents, and thus failed to achieve the effect the party had desired.

41. Though such moves should not be attributed solely to electoral motives, outcomes of voting in less populated districts could result in a MLSTP victory, in view of the structure of the electoral system and expected polarization. Nonetheless, the results in rural districts proved insufficient to compensate for losses in the more populous urban areas.

42. *Mole* = Dense and numerous crowd (Editor's Note).

43. Effectively, land tenure depends upon the capacity to defend the property, rather than upon law or institutions. Today, protecting property may imply building of walls or hiring of guards, options that were unimaginable only a few years ago. The capacity to defend land holdings is limited, for example, for the elderly or the poor, who are often deprived of the benefits of their property owing to constant thefts.

work can we achieve anything”) one begins to perceive the difficulties faced by governments, especially when (as appeared to be the case) they are under pressure both from the *street* and from the State. The scale of difficulties in redirecting such social behaviors makes it impossible to overlook the fact that, all too often, they are spurred by erroneous political proposals, and are unlikely to be resolved by applying a firm hand.

In the absence of clear ideological or programmatic content, outflanked by demands of the *street* and pent-up promises, the winning electoral program prescribed only that the way accounts are settled with the corrupt be changed. In the *streets*, symbolized by voter registration attached with a safety pin to t-shirts, the young described the contest as “a weapon for blocking thieves on election day”.⁴⁴

With its aggressive rhetoric, the ADI won the elections. Its campaign entailed a considerable degree of media mobilization. For example, the polo shirts worn by its activists were of better quality than the t-shirts of those of other parties, a factor implicitly reinforcing promises for a better future. From the start of the campaign, the ADI sought to attract the uprooted and urban youth. On the morning of July 10, during preparation of the rally in front of the *Mercado Novo*, the following slogans were among those heard: “*Mercado Novo, ADI! motoqueiros, ADI! candongueiros, ADI! corruptos...* (pausa) *rua!*” [*Mercado Novo, ADI! bikers, ADI! van-drivers, ADI! corrupt officials ... (pause) out!*”] The tone implied alignment of the will of the *streets*, oblivious to the party’s statements that, once in office, it would respect international commitments. In line with the desire for change, its performance at the rallies proved effective.

In this regard, it is interesting to note how different parties chose venues for their rallies that reflected memories and political associations of the social groups they sought to attract. As usual, the MLSTP chose *Praça da Independência*; whereas the ADI chose the *Mercado Novo*. This juxtaposed promises and the historical record with realities of the informal economy and lack of prospects. Youth, it seems, were less attracted by the theme of independence than by the promise of material goods, based upon the irrefutable logic that the latter were not in short supply for politicians. Beyond evocation of memories and past attachments, this reading of the election campaign is indicative of a breach that would have been unthinkable on the eve of April 25, 1974⁴⁵, and which in no way is conducive to the (purportedly desirable) aims of political concertation and social cohesion.

44. The author quotes [in Portuguese] from memory, but is sure that the meaning has been faithfully conveyed.

45. From time to time, this climate of emotive disruption is deplored, especially by the São-tomenses themselves. In effect, it feeds the fissures which, significantly, coexist with successive instrumental realignments of the various groups and individuals in the struggle for power.

The desire for change, so evident in the streets and nurtured by resentments accumulated over the years, periodically erupts as uprisings against those in power. To the more exalted expressions of the *street* (like those cited in relation to MLSTP and PCD-GR politicians) must be added those that, tomorrow, may be raised against others, just as bold as the alarming statement of economist Teotónio Torres. He, having described the Prime Minister as low-class,⁴⁶ then accused him of making a deal with Angola and Portugal under which these countries were stealing São Tomé's oil.⁴⁷ From the standpoint of São-tomenses, the recent message that oil revenues are not just around the corner⁴⁸ and the condescending (some might say overbearing) response of the outgoing Prime Minister, who had chosen Angola and Portugal as strategic partners, may have lent credence to Teotónio Torres' words. Moreover, in the prevailing political environment, predisposition to such beliefs was already rampant, especially in the *streets*.

In effect, the virulence of that attack was nothing new. Earlier election campaigns had also featured libel of the same type, mostly in the form of anonymous pamphlets targeted at eliciting emotional responses against opponents. On this occasion, however, the assault upon the character of the sitting Prime Minister was broadcast live on television. Circumstantially, the virulence of the attack may have helped bring to the surface, if not a conviction with respect to the oil then, at least, with respect to performance of the prime minister, who had come to office through a negative coalition with the PCD-GR, a party that had abandoned a governmental alliance with the ADI, to form another with the MLSTP. Thus, another step was taken in the disruption of political and social relations on the archipelago. Nonetheless, following announcement of the election results and formation of the new government, former members of the government stated their intention of serving as responsible parliamentary opposition.⁴⁹

46. On July 15, 2010, just a few days prior to the Summit Meeting of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) and the elections, on *Fórum-África* (a program of the Portuguese Radio and Television broadcaster - RTP) former-Minister of Economy, Teotónio Torres accused the Prime-Minister, Rafael Branco, of having arranged for the sale of São Tomé's oil with Angolan and Portuguese oil companies. "Prime-Minister Rafael Branco is selling the country. I do not accept that you should collaborate with this sale. Talk him out of it, president of Angola. Talk him out of it, president of Brazil. Do not let him steal the only thing we have: our oil. This Prime Minister is a low individual. I do not know how to describe him. He was my colleague, but I have no respect for this man". According to Teotónio Torres, "Rafael Branco is selling this country. He has connived with Galp and with Sonangol to form a group to exploit the oil of São Tomé & Príncipe on behalf of Portugal and Angola". Teotónio Torres also stated that part of the money for Rafael Branco's election campaign had been donated by oil companies (Teotónio, 2010).

47. The apparently heart-felt indignation of veteran politician Teotónio Torres validated accusations against Portugal and Angola, whose instrument had been Prime Minister Rafael Branco. In the tone of a broadsheet, and a discourse presented as irrefutable, with accusations of vague (or perhaps no) substance, corroborated only by his indignation and which, without knowing the facts, might be considered mistaken, though not necessarily duplicitous or malicious. Curiously, his remarks on the ruinous deal which would deliver São Tomé's oil to Portugal and Angola form part of a collection of allusions to usurpation of the rights to this resource. On some points, almost everyone appears to agree, one of these being that the country is being robbed; though rarely are any concrete facts presented to corroborate this.

48. Moreover, the assertion was repeated by the Prime Minister elect, Patrice Trovoada, at his inauguration.

49. It is doubtful how long their commitment to consensual government will last, in the event of a breach between the MLSTP and the PCD, as proclaimed by the recently-inaugurated Prime Minister, or when the vicissitudes of day-to-day politics will jeopardize party loyalties in parliament.

Some older people, and those who grew up in a more peaceful and rule-based society, look back longingly to the values of a past era. They long for consensus among politicians, whose performance has proven how difficult it is to restore behaviors once the limits of a rule-based society have been breached. Clearly, the commitment to rules and transparency is not quite so consensual⁵⁰ as it is volatile, since no one would be prepared to risk their popularity or reputation for preeminence and political and social ascendancy, by exposing it to the disregard (or disdain) of the *street*.

For the present, (until the 2010 elections) social and political pressures directed toward unseating the MLSTP and PCD government have been contained. The recently-installed government thus enjoys understanding and support. For now, because rules and predictability are still prized (and because they are aligned with the desire for a strong hand) initial measures for bringing order to the streets of the City of São Tomé appear to have been well received. These will gain binding force once the government is able to forge an environment of social discipline and applies it not solely to the *street*. Otherwise, once again, the government will have to resort to an array of encumbrances and restrictions upon people's lives, blame for which will be laid at the door of the politicians.

Having regarded the elections as an opportunity to punish thieves, the door remains half open for demands of the *street*. These may be of greater or lesser vehemence, or even accompanied by violence, in the event that privations and social rifts persist. Such scenarios are, indeed, possible. In the near future, the *street* will want to see the politicians punished and, when appropriate, will remember the promises of oil. Possibly, those in power will have to accept a repositioning of State authority, the weight of which has fallen disproportionately upon society's weakest members.

Only very recently were the first steps taken to strengthen the authority of the State vis-à-vis the powerful, with whom it is highly unlikely that accounts will ever be settled. This perception notwithstanding, certain judicial bodies have taken up the cause. Backed by pious oaths (to some degree attributable to the proximity of local and legislative elections) and promises to combat corruption, this impetus came to a head with the launching of the government program on September 17, 2010. However, in an interview published on Independence Day (July 12) of the same year, President Fradique de Menezes stated that he did not consider that the offer of payment to expedite the passage of paperwork through

50. A commitment expressed upon the death of Francisco da Silva, leader of the PCD-GR and president of the National Assembly, who enjoyed a reputation of being beyond reproach. At one particularly tense moment, Francisco Silva serenely urged the President of the Republic to stop referring to his fellow citizens as *escumalha* [scum]. It should be noted that political commitments announced at such times tend to be summarily forgotten.

a government office constituted a case of corruption.⁵¹ It would be different, presumably, were it a case of millions paid to favor high-level business. In this case the President made light of (allegedly common) cases where at issue is the payment of sums or stipends. In effect, he cast aspersions upon an entire array of social and institutional relations and offers a loophole for, and tolerance of, corrupt practices.

Even when corruption is purportedly founded upon African “traditions”, complicity with it must entail endurance of its political, social and economic costs. The alternative is to enforce laws, casting aside dubious and idiosyncratic interpretations which, based upon condescending relativism, conveniently provide justification for depredations of common property. Compliance with the law ought not to hinge upon considerations as to its western (or other) roots but rather, and above all, upon the fact that the law stems from political choices assumed by the people of São Tomé.

Inevitably, civil society will continue to be invoked by government leaders, but current political and social architectures grant it little space and, as things stand, it appears unlikely to attain relevant status⁵² or accredit itself as a politically significant voice, capable of matching the clamor of the *streets* in the upcoming elections.

Civil society is not the only element lacking. A number of potential protagonists abstain from public duties, broadly regarded (from their perspective) as irrelevant to political and social performance. After Independence, the single-party regime induced many to flee abroad⁵³ and, practically to the end, annulled the diaspora’s potentially positive and innovative contributions, thereby reinforcing negative features of the colonial legacy. Renewal and continuity of the political class is effected, preferentially, by exclusion of opponents and cooptation through patronage. Alternatively, some renovation occurs when the political system is breached from outside, generally, through aggregation of new sources of patronage.

Such factors blemish the exercise of politics, incite permanent indignation in the *streets*, and denigrate the reputation of politicians.

51. The common view among São-tomenses differs from the lenient attitude of Fradique de Menezes. In São Tomé, tales of innumerable episodes similar to those related by Santo (2009, p.181) are told.

As in other countries, perception of the social importance of the applicant is a crucial factor in the standard of service provided. This gives rise to a culture of social relations that tends to be overbearing with subordinates and obsequious with superiors. At different levels, opportunism has replaced responsibility and civic commitment.

52. A somewhat similar phenomenon occurs among the diaspora. The inhabitants of the land are notably disdainful of ideas expressed by the emigrants.

53. On the political exile of elites, see Cahen (1991, p. 134).

5 MARKS OF THE POLITICAL CULTURE

A visitor to São Tomé during an election period, upon seeing masses of bills posted in the market place in the City center, has the impression of healthy political and civic participation. Such political contests are not to be disparaged, even though the spirit of free competition is rarely a feature of the discourse of politicians.

Rather than aspiring to defend the interests of fellow citizens with whom they share a common heritage, those citizens of São Tomé that enjoy even a modicum of choice appear, above all, to compete for untold privileges.⁵⁴ The concept of a common destiny is frequently invoked (alongside the assertion that poverty is unacceptable) but the content of political discourse – like the social policies for promoting gender equality, combating domestic violence, achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and reducing poverty – is heavily influenced by the agendas of foreign agencies.

Though any observer will perceive that political discourse bears little resemblance to reality, freedom of the press is truly remarkable. Indeed, *O Parvo*, a newspaper that championed change⁵⁵ has not suffering harassment. Such press freedom provides an outlet for criticism, but is really quite tame when compared to the acerbic mouth-to-mouth *radio* which, indubitably, plays a much more incisive role in forming political views.

This apparent political freedom stands in contrast to other trends, such as the deep silence that envelopes proposals of an economic and social nature; and overlooking of ideological outlooks in favor of emotional appeal when judging politicians. Sparse ideological differentiation⁵⁶ combines with a lack of discussion on economic and social issues.⁵⁷ Add to this attacks upon, and/or unfulfilled expectations in relation to, leading political figures, and you have an explanation for the vertiginous fall of the MDFM-PL, caused by the alleged political demise of President Fradique de Menezes after less than one year in office.

54. Among holders of political office, the veiled self-justification is that they would be regarded as inept by society should they prove not to have taken advantage of the opportunity. An inversion of values, at odds with local political discourse and not merely a relative external subjectivity, becomes the implicit justification for depredation of common property.

55. For a summary of the journalistic career of the director of *O Parvo* see: <<http://www.cstome.net/oparvo/1º%20Pessoa.htm>>. Accessed on: September 4, 2010.

56. In the latest campaign, the MLSTP-PSD exchanged support of the PSD for that of the Socialist Party (PS) of Portugal, without anyone on the islands paying much attention.

Relations with the two major parties in Portugal (PSD and PS) as parties of Portuguese former colonies, are not governed by ideological affinity; but rather, by ties and personal relationships among their leaders and the pragmatism of inter-state relations.

The PSD, allied to the European Liberal Party, lent its support to the MLSTP in the late 1980s. For this reason, on the eve of the first elections, the MLSTP became the MLSTP-PSD. The PS, affiliated to Socialist International, found friends among parties governing the former colonies after Independence.

57. One exception was the systematic presentation during the Football World Cup final, organized by the MLSTP in the square of São Tomé, at a time when the local broadcaster (*Televisão São-tomense* TVS) was on strike.

The most important factor is the way in which sentiments are handled, the manipulation of which brings into play expectations, symbolic vengeance, and the *banho*, *i.e.*, the graft whereby consciences are bought. In view of the scope of this phenomenon, its spread and (today) its almost institutional nature, though all parties deny that they attempt to buy votes, all plead that it is normal to provide motorcycles to be used for campaigning, and that television sets are not given to individuals, but rather, donated for the benefit of poor communities. Candidates unable to win by handing out gifts urge the electorate to “take the *banho*, but do not sell your souls”. The truth is that no political group seriously considers the imposition of measures to do away with the *banho*, or wishes to discuss how election outcomes are warped owing to graft.⁵⁸ Nobody is interested in doing away with the *banho* because no other mechanism for attaining power has yet been conceived.

These are marks of the country’s political culture and outcomes of its recent history. More than any abstractly and fondly-invoked cultural values – with little significant impact upon political and social change – these are marks that comprise the local political identity, leaving aside strained and increasingly unattainable ties of brotherhood and shared destiny among the people of São Tomé.

With rare exceptions, money and power are the criteria for assessing the status of an individual on the archipelago, and such characteristics in the day-to-day lives of the people appear intimately related to patronage.

Africanization, taken as meaning a drift toward social disorder – regarded, not as an intrusive value from abroad, but rather, as a facet of the São-tomenses themselves –contributes toward the yearning for rule by a strong hand⁵⁹ which some regard as the only way of ensuring any degree of stability and predictability in everyday life. The recently-inaugurated administration of Patrice Trovoada is responding to this sentiment, when it says it will not tolerate anarchy in the *streets*.⁶⁰ Whether or not fully aware of the parallel, it is following the authoritar-

58. On the contrary, reciprocal accusations focus upon who first launched the *banho*.

Seibert (1999, p. 300/307) has described election campaigns as occasions when the population gains access to certain material goods, such as televisions. As has occurred in recent campaigns, when such goods were offered to a community, party leaders did not regard this as *banho*.

59. Years of privation, social upheaval and lack of decent alternatives led some são-tomenses to hanker for a strong hand, and for a restoration of values, meaning that they longed for a firmer and more direct link with authority.

Some claim that a subliminal cultural trait favors a strongman and the need for a strong hand at the top. The author of this article suspects such theories, but the prevalence of these ideas in society and the memory of forbearers always paid deference to such authority as the most decisive factor in social regulation.

60. Such intransigence carries a heavy political liability, as it may become unfair and arbitrary by falling most heavily upon the weakest. Unquestionably, such intransigence helps to form opinions and consolidate support for the government of Patrice Trovoada. However, such conditions face a deadline, depending upon a series of factors, including the consequences of government action and perceptions as to the progress of the economy, especially as it affects the poor and the young.

ian path taken by the MLSTP during the period of transition to Independence⁶¹ and which, to some degree, prolonged the effects of colonialism. Often, the outcomes of this strategy were quite different to those intended.

6 THE HORIZONS OF CHANGE

Notwithstanding recent improvements in macroeconomic indicators, most notably lower inflation, achieved by application of austerity measures which resulted in dull economic prospects for urban youth, the overwhelming sentiment was a desire to punish the thieves (i.e., politicians). In such a setting, Patrice Trovoada's wealth, remote posture and reputation as a zealous protector all favored the ADI (a party founded, it should be remembered, by his father Miguel Trovoada in 1992) which won the August 1 elections with a plurality of votes.

Though hardly symptomatic of political volatility, it should not be forgotten that Patrice Trovoada's background included loss of an election in 2006,⁶² and that he did not inherit power directly from his father, as so often happens in African countries, a practice viewed with disdain on the archipelago. This time, however, Patrice Trovoada's appeal was successful.

Disdainful of shallow rhetoric of commitment to authenticity and to realities of the *land*, the *street* preferred to bet upon a less verbose political platform. In this manner, Patrice Trovoada, a politician whose focus was not on the *land*, and perceived as having been born abroad and thus outside the context of the Independence struggle, now has his chance.

Mostly young and unfettered by ties or loyalties of their forbearers (forged in colonial times or pledged to founders of the republic), the *street* desires the long-promised fruits which globalization offers to all peoples. Such promises appear especially attractive to the young of São Tomé, whose

61. Though not wishing to speculate as to what would have been the result of a popular referendum on the archipelago in that scenario, the São-tomenses were left without choice. The MLSTP wished to be the only political force in São Tomé. Firstly, with complicity of the outgoing colonial power, it scared and co-opted skeptics and more conservative elements in relation to Independence. Later, still with support of the Portuguese authorities, it rallied the population against the *Associação Cívica*, considered more radical and, thus, upsetting to those who, thought they accepted Independence, wished to continue living as they always had, if possible, in better economic conditions.

62. Against Fradique de Menezes, referred to in its rhetoric as the sworn enemy, the MLSTP lent its support to Patrice Trovoada, thus enabling him to achieve broader political base.

Later, some months into the Patrice Trovoada administration, the MLSTP presented a motion of censure with the support of the PCD. By this time, the latter party was part of the government, and for this reason the vote of censure was viewed as traitorous.

Patrice Trovoada came to power, not by direct vote, but by his party's participation in a coalition. Rafael Branco also came to power, not by direct vote, but through a coalition with the PCD, which switched from one coalition to the other. The unexplained fortunes of STP-Trading (an ad hoc company formed to import consumer goods, thanks to a US\$ 5 million grant from Brazil, a sum that did not appear compatible with the value of the goods imported) and the unshakable conviction that the persistent difficulties were due to corruption and diversion of funds, led to a wave of demand for *change*.

opportunities, due to political and social factors, have always been sparsely and unevenly shared, and whose resentment of the politicians stems from feelings of being deprived.

For the present, from the government's pronouncements and from the lineup of personalities chosen to take part in the administration, there appears to be some consensus as to development options. These include diversification of agriculture with technological enhancements; tourism;⁶³ and, above all, provision of services for other countries of the region⁶⁴ based upon establishment of a modern and secure logistics platform. Essentially, this proposal is in line with textbook prescriptions for development of small island states, which are considered appropriate as tourist destinations or logistical platforms associated with free-trade zones (Santo, 2009, p. 152). In São Tomé and Príncipe, mirage scenarios have been built up around these projects which, it is hoped, will enthrall public opinion, until such time as the (illusory) oil revenues begin to flow in.

From the government are heard exhortations to effort, rigor and, above all, crack-downs on corruption and restrictions on the privileges of holders of high office. The parliamentary opposition, for its part, reiterates promises to act responsibly in the National Assembly. The figurehead of the MLSTP, the first president of the archipelago, Manuel Pinto da Costa urges national unity.⁶⁵ Though it holds only a minority in parliament, the government enjoys a state of grace, and positive expectations abound with regard to the country's assuming a path toward development.

The greatest problems stem from weakness of institutions and of the State. Its ineffectiveness notwithstanding, in the light of historical factors, it is generally acknowledged that, as the only beneficiary and channel for foreign aid, it is the State alone that can impose the necessary social regulations. In face of prospects

63. Prospects for rural and ecological tourism have been mooted as alternatives to mass tourism, considered a threat to the environment. This stems from two false premises: firstly, that the beaches are not large enough to accommodate any significant tourist volumes; and secondly, that removal of sand has damaged their capacity.

Besides, failure to observe land-use standards on the seashore has spoiled access to some of the more attractive beaches. Such failures of territorial planning are illustrative of the fragile balance between compliance with the law and the public good, on the one hand, and misappropriation of assets by individuals, on the other.

64. Relations between the archipelago and the Gulf of Guinea had practically ceased by the mid 1800s, the time of re-colonization (Nascimento, 2000a). See also prospects for relations with neighboring countries by Hodges and Newitt (1988, p. 120-122).

Currently, rather than seeking markets for its exports, the archipelago wants to serve as a logistics base, an aspiration that would appear coherent with the prospects for maritime security in the region.

65. Pinto da Costa showed signs of attempting to overcome a conflict of decades with the Trovoada family. Seibert (1999, p. 125) for example, considers the main differences between Pinto da Costa and Miguel Trovoada to be personal, rather than political. However that announcement was regarded as an attempt to clear the field for a political candidature in 2011.

of violence and social upheaval⁶⁶ the need for a strong, effective, and fair State authority has become imperative. However, though sustained by recurring hopes of *change*, increasingly, there is a sensation that behaviors can not be altered. The persistence of bureaucratic hurdles and red tape that govern social conduct according to institutionally autonomous and binding mores, attest to the herculean scale of the tasks at hand, most notably in the justice system.⁶⁷

Action programs targeted at ensuring fulfillment of basic needs are managed and driven by foreigners. When left in the hands of São-tomenses, some institutions and projects perish, reinforcing an impression that the archipelago is constantly starting out, and incessantly distant from a safe haven. This reflects less upon the capabilities of São-tomenses as individuals than upon their position as hostages to a web of dependence, loyalties and conveniences. Built up over the years, this political and social edifice hampers assimilation of new ideas, conditions processes of social reproduction, and frustrates economic growth.

In speaking out against anarchy in the streets⁶⁸ the new government showed signs that, finally, political action is to be freed from the fetters of society and from pernicious practices and the shameful effects of micro-insularity that hamper the exercise of fair and effective governance. However, the balance of relations among the political and social spheres is highly complex and must take into account efforts to impose regulations on urban areas which, though potentially useful from a symbolic standpoint, would imply raising the political and social bar, and thereby running the risk of setting the government on a collision course with the *street* that voted it into office. The street, in turn, would then demand immediate fulfillment of the promises of opportunities and of well being that it chose to believe, and which form the informal basis of its contract with the newly-elected government.

66. Just as, upon witnessing the luxuriance of nature, no visitor for one second doubts the fertility of the land, people also tend to be captivated by the simplicity and friendliness of the natives.

Though not completely illusory, such views are relative, and may obscure factors that are not immediately apparent. It is not so much the fertility of the land as the climatic conditions that account for the exuberant vegetation. These may be placed in check by deforestation that has mostly affected the northeast of São Tomé. With respect to the character of the São-tomenses, the idea of a colonial varnish may well apply. Some would claim that peaceful society is a positive feature of the colonial legacy, overlooking the violence, the illegalities and racism under colonization, factors that exceed the scope of this article. It should be noted that social control exerted under the final decades of colonial rule produced an idea of social peace and simplicity that was often considered intrinsic to the people of São Tomé when, in fact, it was a historic consequence.

A few decades of political competition are sufficient to explain the abysmal difference between the behaviors of today and those of past decades, none of which bodes well for the political management of the archipelago.

67. For example, Seibert (1999, p. 240) expresses the view that there is no independent judicial branch. There are various reasons for this, ranging from the web of relations of family, patronage and proximity, or the course that institutions have followed since Independence.

68. See the news item at *Téla Nón* (Governo..., 2010).

This social theme, built up over the decades since Independence, requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses renovation and the adequate management and performance of institutions. Pragmatically, the veiled promise of changing everything must be avoided because, if later abandoned or overruled, it would breed disillusion and alienation. For this same reason, individual and collective acquiescence, albeit gradual and silent, to the status quo should be avoided. Nonetheless, there is no assurance that such aims will be achieved.

7 FINAL NOTES

Leaving aside that fraction of the population of São Tomé whose own demise is deemed closer than that of their country, an overwhelmingly young majority has no alternative other than to hope and have good will.

Over the decades, successive vague hopes and pledges to change from abroad have molded a fatalistic attitude to politics. Political programs are minimalistic and recurrently amount to little more than pinning hopes upon someone from outside. On this tiny island, with its legacy of different cultural traditions, where society is fragmented and the State weak, what can be expected as a follow-up to the attempt of August 1, 2010 to, once again, invert the untoward course of events of recent decades?

Will the response be incessant local unrest, or is it finally possible that a realignment of political interests can be achieved, uniting all in favor of the common good of the people of São Tomé?

Without casting aspersions upon the applicability of simplistic messages to the complex regeneration or recreation of institutions, it would be well to apply the aphorism of a foreign observer: do what is good, and have neither fear nor shame of being honest.

Pacification of social life has little relation to the alleged character of the São-tomenses, but rather, depends upon the political wisdom and performance of institutions, these being the crucial factor for determining behaviors and the course of history.

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