

Multiculturalism in Mozambique?

Reflections from the field¹

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How do we get to solve the big problems of identity and nationalism and gender in the field, if we cannot speak with people? And if we do speak with them, what should we say? These are not fake issues for people doing fieldwork

Sidney W. Mintz, *The Localization of Anthropological Practice*, 1998.

The Mozambican people have come to consider themselves a nation in the same way that the peoples of India, China, the Soviet Union and other multi-linguistic and multi-religious societies now consider themselves one nation.

Eduardo Mondlane, *The Development of Nationalism in Mozambique*, 1964.

This article addresses some dilemmas that the contemporary uses of “tradition” have provoked in Mozambique. During the colonial period until the end of the *Indigenato* system, in 1961, “tradition” was identified with the so-called “uses and customs” of those groups which, legally, were qualified as *indigenas* (natives). Thus, in the name of a gradual evolutionism, the laws should be applied according to the cultural values – and the “degree of civilization” – of the groups in question. The figure of the *indigena* is opposed to that of the *assimilado*. The *assimilado*, according to the above-mentioned legal system, was considered an African who was emancipated from his *uses and customs* and had acquired European cultural values. In the name of “tutelage”, the *indigenas* would be governed by customary law, while the *assimilado* would be governed by the civil public and private law of Portugal. This system of colonial administration – which established a distinction between subjects and

¹ I would like to thank Peter Fry for engaging me in the research of this fascinating and complex Mozambique. I am grateful also to the anonymous reviewers of this article and to Kelly Cristiane da Silva for her patience, professionalism and precision.

citizens – was based, according to the ideas of Mahmood Mamdani (1996), on a “bifurcated State”. This, like the so-called Indirect Rule, is characterized by a *Decentralized Despotism*. Following independence (1975), “tradition” was identified, above all, with “tribalism”. The so-called New Socialist Man, according to the discourses of some spokespersons of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) must be a citizen who is emancipated from the “tribalist”, “obscurantist”, “feudal”, “colonialist” values, and, hence, carries values such as solidarity, sacrifice and patriotism. From this notion of the *assimilado*, during the colonial period, there was a shift towards the notion of the New Socialist Man in the period of independence. The *Decentralized Despotism* was succeeded, in the view of Mamdani, by a *Centralized Despotism*².

Examining the consequences of this legacy - that of a bifurcated State during the colonial period and that of a centralized state during the period of independence – these pages address some debates on “cultural policies” that occurred in Mozambique throughout the second half of the 1990s. This was a period in which, despite the definitive pacification of the country, a new horizon of democratization was glimpsed. Perhaps one of the remarkable features of this process was the fact that the protagonist of these policies was not, simply, the “Mozambican State” but rather – together with it – multiple local and translocal actors: Churches, Non Government Organizations, international cooperation agencies. This article briefly addresses the marked dilemmas that occurred during this period: 1) the discussions surrounding the so-called “traditional power” and 2) the debates concerning some incipient attempts to formulate bilingual policies in elementary schools.

The approach to these issues in the context of the “multicultural” debate is due, here, to the urgent need to deal with a kind of anthropological challenge that has become very common: “culture” is no longer a subject over which anthropology, as a discipline, exerts an exclusive monopoly. Nowadays, many States that were previously “assimilators” – and their respective spokespersons – have become somewhat (multi)culturalist.

2 These these were presented by Mahmood Mamdani in his well-known book *Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*, Princeton University Press, 1996. For a more recent debate, see the critical work by Bridget O’Laughlin “Class and the customary: the ambiguous legacy of the *Indigenato* in Mozambique”, *African Affairs*, No. 99, 2000, pp. 5-42. This article, in turn, received a response from Mamdani in the same volume: “Indirect Rule and the struggle for democracy: a response to Bridget O’Laughlin”, op. Cit.

Although Terence Turner has announced, with emphasis, "...that multiculturalists use the term *culture* in different ways and for different purposes than anthropologists" (Turner, 1994: 407), the simple warning does not resolve the issue. Perhaps, the Mozambican "experience" can offer us support for reflecting on the problem with greater comparative sensitivity. In this case, far from remaining indifferent – with the legitimate excuse of our lack of trust in relation to the "multicultural mode" – we prefer to face the subject head on: taking it as a privileged and new instance capable of renewing our respective disciplinary convictions, under new empirical horizons.

Legal and colonial background to the multicultural "problem"

In 1966, Manuel Belchior, a colonial administrator of educational affairs in Mozambique (and a member of the *Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Política Ultramarina*), published, in Lisbon, the book *Fundamentos para uma política multicultural na África*. Certainly, the multicultural trend had not yet made its triumphant entry into the field of political diversity, far less into the debates on social theory in general. In fact, what Belchior considered a multicultural policy for Africa consisted of a curious mixture of British anthropological functionalism and more or less systematic concerns relating to the "traditional" African culture, along with a good dose of lusotropicalism. In this regard, his program was no different – in terms of the paternalist rhetoric – from those early formulations of Portuguese assimilationism, whose frustrating destiny was the impossibility of assimilating a large mass of African population, providing a small, more or less manageable number of assimilated Mozambicans.

In September 1996, I arrived in Mozambique for the first time to carry out fieldwork in the south of the country. One of the initial goals of this work was to get in touch with a generation that had experienced a shift from the condition of *indigena* (native) to that of *assimilado*: which, as I mentioned earlier, two categories that the colonial legal system had helped to create. Thus, the goal was to observe, *in loco*, the consequences of the influence of the Portuguese "culture" and to investigate, by means of oral and written records, the way in which this supposed heritage shaped the identity dilemmas of contemporary Mozambique, and the way in which the assimilation policies have influenced the destiny and the lives of a wide group of people.

The sociopolitical context of the country at the time of my arrival could not have been better: Mozambique was finally managing to put an end to one of the longest civil wars in modern-day Africa, and the society was in a process of democratization and pacification. The wounds were still open, but there was an underlying expectation as to the possibility of a new Mozambique, and above all, a deep-felt need to talk about the past and the future. Thus, the possibility of investigating a polyphonic space was opened up to the researcher, in which different voices, many of them dissonant, clamored to be heard. In fact, one of the most unsettling, yet stimulating observations provided to me in this field was the fact that these *assimilados*, represented in the legal categories of the laws and in the colonial discourses as a homogenous block, in fact comprised a heterogeneous group, whose path was not governed by linear or uniform routes. In short, on one hand there were the *assimilados* as a legal formulation, and on the other, actual *assimilados*, carriers of hybrid and “multiple identities”.

My intention here is not to focus on the process of legal construction of the *assimilados*, which I have already discussed elsewhere³. Suffice to mention, simply, that since the first legislations on this subject, at the start of the 20th century, in successive regulations and decrees, the *assimilado* was characterized, in general, as an individual who, by emancipating him/herself from the *uses and customs*, had managed to acquire Portuguese cultural values (of which the language was one of the most important). The aim was to demonstrate through proofs – not always meticulous – how far the individual in question was emancipated from his/her system of local values, and able to convert him/herself into a second or third category Portuguese citizen. Thus, the two separate categories *indígena* (native) and *assimilado* were constructed, not only in the dualistic minds of the administrators, but in the colonial laws themselves.

Going beyond the ambiguities of the assimilationist plans of Portugal, and the unsteady tone that marked it (under the argument of a supposed tolerance for the “uses and customs”), I was able to identify, in the field, the way in which the classifications imposed by colonialism could be assumed by the assimilated individuals themselves, since some members of this group often incorporated colonial categories when talking about themselves, their past and their present.

3 Macagno, Lorenzo. “O discurso colonial e a fabricação dos *usos e costumes*”. In: Fry, Peter (org.). *Moçambique: ensaios*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 2001.

This heterogeneous group included individuals with secondary level and/or higher education, but the majority had reached the status of *assimilados* after completing only elementary education. This was the case with Fanuel, a former employee of the *Imprensa Nacional*, who received his primary education in the Anglican mission. In 1948, he completed fourth grade, the highest level to which those with the *caderneta de indígena*⁴ – a personal document that was carried by the *indígenas* (natives) – could hope to aspire. If he wanted to continue his studies, the only option open to him was the school of native teachers. Nevertheless, Fanuel decided to stay among his Anglican teachers and take a course in book binding, in which he learned to produce small textbooks in Portuguese and Changana, his mother tongue (spoken mainly in the South of the country).

Fanuel stated that his father had been a Bantu hunter who practiced the *uses and customs* – a category that the ethnographic insensitivity of the colonial administrators and jurists helped to perpetuate. Perhaps the use of this language constituted, on his part, a strategy that gave me access to his world. Or else it was simply another example of how the classificatory language of colonialism had come full circle: where the objects of this classification assumed, as their own, the categories into which they fit, making them valid forms of self-presentation. There is no doubt that speaking of the *uses and customs* of his father was, for Fanuel, an indirect way of speaking about himself, and his own “cultural past”:

— Did your father also study with the Anglicans?

— *He didn't study at all. He worked in the mines of South Africa. He was a Transvalian*⁵.

— Didn't he teach you about religion?

— *Only the uses and customs. The Bantu knew about the cuxa-cuxi, but didn't teach it. A person who wants to know about that has to learn from a cuxacuxeiro*⁶. *So I went there to learn. My father loved these things. That's what he was most afraid of.*

— You father wasn't a cuxacuxeiro?

4 Every *indigena* (native) was obliged to carry his *caderneta de indigena*. Therefore, despite the assimilationist pretensions, the colonial education system aimed at a segregated education.

5 In reference to the geographical region of Transval, to where many Mozambicans migrate even today, to work in the mines.

6 A witchdoctor or witchcraft worker.

— No. He was an ordinary hunter.

— And you had no knowledge of these uses and customs?

— No... but we watched. Father sometimes called a witchdoctor (“*nhangá*”) to practice faith healings here. In the old days, the Africans believed in surrounding your house, so that evil spirit workers couldn’t enter, and to protect you from their spells, you had to get a witchdoctor to plant your roots and then inoculate you.

Fanuel then went on to describe in detail what he called *uses and customs*. He spoke with familiarity of the *nhamusoro*, “that spirit which makes divinations, calls up the spirits of the ancestors, of those who died long ago, then say: ‘I am your father, I want this, I want that...’”. In a colonial context, this type of revelation would certainly have placed in doubt his status as an *assimilado*.

Having reached this point, some questions should be asked: was Fanuel an alien of his own culture, who displayed in public what he had learned from the Portuguese, but in private, assumed his familiarity with the cultural values of his ancestors? Besides his simultaneous participation in these two worlds, did Fanuel enjoy a favorable context for the heterodoxical nature of two identity “options”?

When Mozambique gained independence from Portugal, in 1975, the challenge of turning these *assimilados* into Mozambicans citizens arose. The assimilated individuals were an important subject for the construction of the independent nation State. In fact, many of them joined the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), while others preferred to remain under the protective wings of Portugal. Those more politically committed to the colonial regime were later forced to abandon the country. Although more than thirty years have elapsed since independence, the debates on the cultural content of the Mozambican nationality (the substance of which has been referred to by its spokespersons as “Mozambiqueness”) have not completely ceased. After the war between the FRELIMO and the National Mozambican Resistance (RENAMO), it was demonstrated once and for all that these Mozambican citizens also carry diverse sociocultural values.

7 The purpose of the inverted commas here is to relativize a supposed rational or instrumental personal choice in relation to a set of determined cultural values. It is a question, in any case, of evaluating how far people in general are able to assume, or reject, the identity classifications imposed on them from outside.

My aim is to show here, in a transversal way, how far these issues are still present in modern-day Mozambique, and form part of the day-to-day intellectual concerns. I will take as my starting point a fragmentary example (a kind of tip of the iceberg) relating to the anxieties that a *retraditionalization* of society produces, particularly among some sectors of the urban elite. These anxieties evoke both the dilemmas of the colonial past, and the ways in which the socialism of the State sought to answer those questions.

Uses of tradition

The example that I shall give next refers to a type of anticolonial criticism against anthropology that was very frequent in the discourses of the African nationalist elite of forty or fifty years ago. In the case in question, the cloak of suspicion is cast by a member of the intellectual circles of the socialist phase. I hope the example will serve to outline the way in which a colonial past, that is still very present, operates in the consciences of the local intellectuality, and to stimulate the debates on identity and culture in Mozambique.

I encountered this anticolonialist suspicion against the anthropologists in October 1996, a few days after my arrival in Maputo, in a journal article entitled “Sobre autoridade tradicional” (*On traditional Authority*) The author of the article, Sérgio Vieira, had joined the FRELIMO while still a university student in Europe; he was later to become Minister of Security and Director of the Central Bank of the Samora Machel Government, the first after independence in 1975; In the 1990s, he was Director of the Center for African Studies of the Eduardo Mondlane University and Deputy for the FRELIMO party. Furthermore, Colonel Sérgio Vieira was one of the most enthusiastic formulators of the idea of the *New man* in Mozambique, the basis of which, as we shall discuss later, was founded on a heterodoxical application of Marxism. For all these reasons, I read the article with great interest. It began thus: “In recent times, perhaps because it has become fashionable among foreign anthropologists in search of exoticism, a lot has been spoken about *traditional authority*”⁸.

8 Vieira, Sérgio. “Sobre autoridade tradicional”. *Domingo*, 27/10/1996. It is emphasized that this suspicion is not recent. As Teresa Cruz e Silva advised me in a personal communication, between 1976 and 1978, a series of discussions on the future of the social sciences in the independent Mozambique took place at the Centre for African Studies of the Eduardo Mondlane University. In these discussions, new

As a newcomer I noticed that these words introduced me to a set of discussions and dilemmas that could form an important basis for reflection on the Mozambique of today. The first mobilizing aspect of the debate was perhaps “anthropological knowledge”, which once more became the villain of the story. “Once more” because from the 1950s on, when the process of decolonization began to expand throughout Africa, the obscure side of anthropology was revealed (especially in the territories under British rule), and the accusation of *collaborationism* was made by the new nationalist African elites themselves⁹. The supposed complicity between anthropology and colonialism was thus heralded, particularly due to the sympathy that many anthropologists harbored for the so-called *Indirect Rule* in the British colonies¹⁰. In this system of colonial administration, the natives institutions and the traditional chiefs played an important role as mediators between the rural African populations and the metropolitan power. Over time, the nationalist African leaders came to understand that criticism of the *Indirect Rule* and criticism of anthropology were just two sides of the same coin.

In contemporary Mozambique, the accusation of anthropology was associated with a similar phenomenon: the intended resurrection of the so-called *traditional power* at the local levels of State Administration, which created mistrust, evoking an administrative system that Portugal had tried to implement in the colonial era. In fact, the mistrust of Sérgio Vieira over the plan to integrate the *traditional chiefs* in a local administrative structure was based on the supposed complicity of those same chiefs with Portuguese colonialism. From the 1990s on, with the process of pacification and the subsequent process of multipartitary democratization, the role of the traditional power was reexamined, in order to establish its degree of legitimacy between the populations in the interior of the country, seeking, above all, its reinsertion into the municipal districts. This was an initiative of the Ministry of State Administration, and was financed by international bodies¹¹.

generations of intellectuals denounced the colonial roots perpetrated by a certain type of anthropology.

9 Cf. L'Estoile, Benôit. “Au nom des ‘vrais africains’: les élites scolarisées de l’Afrique coloniale face à l’anthropologie (1930-50)”. *Terrain*, n° 28, 1997, pp. 87-102.

10 This is unequivocally manifested in a text in which Malinowski explicitly defends the Indirect government: Malinowski, Bronislaw. “Indirect Rule and its scientific planning”. In: *The dynamics of culture change*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1968.

11 The US Agency for International Development (USAID) financed the initial stages of this program in 1991, and in the following year, implementation of the pilot project began, with financing from the Ford

But the criticism of Sérgio Vieira also led, in addition to a conspiracy against the colonial past, to a new stance towards a more recent subject: the war of destabilization against the socialist FRELIMO regime, initiated by the RENAMO around 1976. In a way, it is possible to read, in the accusation of “exoticism” against the anthropologists, a wider rejection of the ethnicist (or as some would prefer, “tribalist”) position of the RENAMO. This would come out of a counter-revolutionary movement in neighboring Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe), at that time governed by a white minority. When Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, the RENAMO won support from the South African apartheid regime. What began as a war of destabilization became one of the bloodiest civil wars Africa has ever seen¹². Once again, the FRELIMO had to strengthen its discourse of national unity, particularly when the RENAMO sought to clean up its international image (that of “armed bandits”, as it was known), assuming a more “politically correct” stance based on ethnicist arguments (Fry, 1995; 2005).

In fact, this ethnicist claim was a key aspect of the conflict between the FRELIMO and the RENAMO. It is often stated that the RENAMO followers came mostly from the ethnic group called the Ndaou, which is concentrated in the center of the country, and that one of the key elements of the RENAMO’s ethnic-political discourse was the accusation that the FRELIMO (traditionally supported by the ethnic groups in the South and North) was promoting a policy of persecution of the ethnic groups in the center of the country, while for the FRELIMO, the RENAMO position was stirring up “tribalist” claims. In fact, some analysts have pointed out the Jacobinism of the FRELIMO, which in the name of national unity would have underestimated and even combated these ethnicist claims¹³.

Foundation. Cf. Lundin, Iraê B. and Machava, Francisco Jamisse (orgs.). *Autoridade e poder tradicional* (vol. 1). Maputo: Ministério da Administração Estatal, Núcleo de Desenvolvimento Administrativo, 1995.

12 One of the most provocative works relating to this war is that of the anthropologist Christian Geffray: *A cause des armes au Moçambique: anthropologie d’une guerre civile*. Paris: Khartala, 1990. In this work, the author attempts to show that beyond the external supports of the Renamo, there was, in the north of Mozambique, a real discontent among the rural populations in relation to the Frelimo, which was capitalized on by the destabilizing strategy of the Renamo. For a criticism of the book by Geffray, cf. O’Laughlin, Bridget. “A base social da guerra em Moçambique”. *Estudos Moçambicanos* (Maputo), nº 10, 1992.

13 Cahen, Michel. “Mozambique, histoire géopolitique d’un pays sans nation”. *Lusotopie*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994. The article provoked the reaction of Elísio Macamo, to whom Cahen “sought to explain the weakness of the Frelimo based on the negation of its nationalism” (“A nação moçambicana como comunidade de destino”. *Lusotopie*, 1995, p. 361). The debate continued with the rebuttal

In its struggle for national unity, the FRELIMO replaced the combat against *tribalism* with the repudiation of *regionalism*. However, it almost goes without saying that these categories are always related: the regionalist trends cannot be understood without considering the homogenizing trends of “national unity”. Put in schematic form: the “tribalism” of the RENAMO cannot be understood without the homogenizing Jacobinism of the FRELIMO.

From the 1990s, Mozambique underwent some fundamental transformations: the end of the civil war, the introduction of a multipartidary democracy¹⁴, changes in the socioeconomic field, rearticulation of its external policy, and the crisis of socialism of the State (unleashed by the break up of the Soviet bloc, among other factors). The anticolonial criticism of Sérgio Vieira against the anthropologists, suspected of reviving traditionalism, tribalism and ethnicism, was a decisive symptom of this new context. In a way, the stalemate that gave a new direction to the sociocultural diversity of Mozambique created, according to the vision of some historical intellectuals of the FRELIMO, a cultural mix that produced a kind of *neocolonialism*.

From *assimilado* to New Man

According to Roger Scruton (1982: 322)), the expression “new man” (or “new communist man”, or “new socialist man”) has been used since the 1920s, by both followers and critics of Soviet communism, to describe a certain transformation not only in the economic order, but also in relation to the individual personality. This transformation occurs, or should occur, both under socialism and the “plenitude of communism”, to which socialism supposedly leads. Following the ideology of the new man, since man has a

of Cahen and the rejoinder of Macamo (entitled “Identités populaires et nationalisme élitare” and “Objectividade e normatividade”, respectively. *Lusotopie*, 1996). A much more overt attack on the theses of Cahen can be found in Serra, Carlos. *Combates pela mentalidade sociológica*. Maputo: Eduardo Mondlane University, 1997, esp. pp. 93-94.

14 The negotiations for peace between the Frelimo and the Renamo began in 1990, with the Conversations of Rome, and continued up until 1992, when a General Peace Agreement was signed by Joaquim Chissano, President of the Frelimo and of the country, and Afonso Dhlakama, President of the Renamo. The first stage was mediated by the Vatican (through the Community of Santo Egídio) and the Italian Government, and in the second, the process was mediated by the United Nations. Under the development of the process of pacification and the subsequent implementation of a multipartidary democratic system, cf. Mazula, Brazão (org.). *Moçambique: eleições, democracia e desenvolvimento*. Maputo: Embaixada do Reino dos Países Baixos, 1995.

historical essence, under a new economic order, he becomes, in a sense, a different creature, with entirely new values and aspirations.

In December 1977, Sérgio Vieira, at that time a member of the Central Committee of the FRELIMO, gave an important speech at the II Conference of the Ministry of Education and Culture, which began with the following sentence: “The revolution succeeds or fails inasmuch as the New Man emerges or fails to emerge”¹⁵. The construction of the *New Man* becomes a tool for mobilization, a driving-idea, a fundamental objective to be reached. According to Vieira, the first time Samora Machel addressed, in a central and systematic way, the idea of the *New Man* associated with the emergence of a new society was in 1970, in a speech given at the II Conference of the Department of Education and Culture, in which he affirmed the need to “educate man to win the war, create a new society and develop the nation”¹⁶.

While at a theoretical level the *New Man* should represent a qualitative break away from the values of the “bourgeoisie culture”, the “colonial culture”, and the “traditional culture”, at the level of facts, this process operates in actual individuals in hybrid, complex ways. The *New Man*, in the final instance, is a product whose purity is never fully achieved.

Almost forty years since the idea of the *New Man* began to feature in the speeches of Samora Machel and other notable members of the FRELIMO, it is possible to see that period of revolutionary unrest from a certain perspective. At that time, the words of order appeared to immediately create a reality in which there was no room for doubt: the anticolonial voluntarism and enthusiasm over the creation of the new society neutralized any possibility of questioning on the feasibility of this goal.

Over time, that revolutionary spirit was attenuated. If we consult, for example, a document of the Ministry of Education on the National Education System, produced in 1991, we see that this had the result not of forming the *New Man*, but more simply, “contributing to the formation of the Mozambican Man, with a sense of patriotism, scientifically qualified, professionally and technically trained, and culturally liberated”¹⁷.

15 Vieira, Sérgio. “O Homem Novo é um processo”. *Tempo* (Maputo), nº 398, 1978, p. 27.

16 Machel, Samora. *Educar o homem para vencer a guerra, criar uma sociedade nova e desenvolver a pátria* [1970]. Maputo: Departamento do Trabalho Ideológico, Frelimo, 1978 (col. Estudos e Orientações).

17 Moçambique, Ministério de Educação, Direção de Planificação. *Balanço da introdução do Sistema Nacional de Educação*. Maputo, 1991, p. 3.

The construction of the Mozambican nation as a homogenous entity can only be understood by contrasting it with the other entity which sought to be equally solid: the Portuguese empire-nation with its Overseas Provinces, whose rhetoric was founded on the construction of a transcontinental and pluriethnic “great Portugal”. In fact, the Mozambican nation was built on the political and territorial boundaries delineated in the colonial stage, but in the period of independence it sought to fill this space by appealing to an entity grandiloquently announced in the speeches of Samora Machel: the People. The so-desired “death of the tribe” was, then, a desire for union, a form of plotting against the colonial heritage. The depositary and beneficiary of this process was the People, whose common experience of “exploration” was born during colonialism. The “unity of the people”, it was hoped, would eclipse and neutralize every particularist, localist and tribalist attempt, as Samora Machel stated in his speech in the city of Beira in January 1980: “We killed the tribe to give birth to the nation”¹⁸.

In a way, Samora Machel speaks in the name of the “People” yet at the same time, creates it. In his powerful and histrionic speech, a kind of alchemy operates, by which heterogeneity is transformed into homogeneity. A single people, a single nation, a single culture, “from Rovuma to Maputo”, as was announced by the geographical metaphor of national unity, repeated a thousand and one times by Samora.

This vanguardism will be combined with some institutions which are politically active at the local level, as is the case with the *Dynamizing groups*, which began to be formed from 1974 during the transition government. They operated in practically all the establishments of formal employment (factories, schools, hospitals) and in the district associations of urban and rural areas. The members of the *Dynamizing groups*, elected by assemblies of workers or residents, were conceived as an extension of the FRELIMO organization, as formal channels through which it could mobilize the population and extend the “popular power” of the liberated zones.

A “neo-tribalist” multiculturalism?

From the 1990s, however, the widespread loss of hegemony of socialism

18 apud, Munslow, Barry (org.). *Samora Machel: an African revolutionary*. London: Zed Book, 1985, p. 77.

as an ideology of the State had considerable consequences in Mozambique. First, particularly after the peace agreement between the FRELIMO and the RENAMO, discussions on national unity were added to the debates on the multiethnic character of the country and its implications for the future of the national State, in which both foreign researchers and Mozambican intellectuals took part¹⁹. And in these debates often the specter of tribalism (so conjured up in the times of Samora Machel) interfered, as an ever present threat, or as a “traditionalist *residuum*” of which the fragments had to be totally eradicated. Thus, the ethnicist claims emerge as a new “danger” and at the same time as a symptom of the post-socialist situation.

For Jean-François Bayart (1996), however, the political importance of ethnicity is rooted in the fact that it is in reality an eminently modern phenomenon, and not a vestige or resurgence of the “traditional culture”²⁰. This process is linked to a phenomenon that he calls *Imported State*, which is the construction of a legal-administrative device (first colonial then post-colonial) on a social base which, at a certain moment, reacts politically by means of “ethnicity”. The ethnic, in this case, is not so much a more or less homogeneous given substance, but a result, or response constructed by the participants of a specific modernity.

In Mozambique, a focus of dispute that often assumes the problem of ethnicity is the so-called “linguistic policies”. Since before the creation of the national State, the linguistic question has been present in the agenda of the nationalist leaders. In 1974, Luanda joined the Conference of Nationalist Organizations of Portuguese Colonies (CONCP), on which occasion the members deliberated on a common denomination for the countries on the eve of their independence: Angola, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, Guinea and Cape Verde. The nationalist leaders of the Conference needed to establish a new identifying acronym that could be used in international diplomatic circles, and that would bring together the common expectations of these countries. After a series of discussions, they opted for the denomination Países

19 An example of these heated debates is the strong criticism made by the Mozambican sociologist Carlos Serra (op. cit.), of a book organized by José Magode entitled *Moçambique: etnicidades, nacionalismo e o Estado — transição inacabada*. Maputo: Fundação Friedrich Ebert/Centro de Estudos Estratégicos e Internacionais, 1996. Based on a theoretical perspective that incorporates the contributions of the historical sociology of Norbert Elias, Serra attacks the “ethnicist” approaches that see Mozambique as a crystallized mosaic of multiple ethnicities, which are seen as a-historical and essentialized substances.

20 Bayart, Jean-François. *L'illusion identitaire*. Paris: Fayard, 1996.

Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (PALOPs).

As the Mozambican writer and politician Bernardo Honwana – who was minister of Culture in the Samora Machel government – stated in 1993, it was proposed in the Conference to describe the African countries gathered in Luanda as lusophones – drawing a certain parallelism with the former French and British “francophone” and “anglophone” colonies —, but the Mozambique delegation radically rejected the initiative. Therefore, the final decision was to use the Portuguese language only as the official language, and not as an excluding attribute justifying a supposed lusophony. As for the rest, the Portuguese language has been used by the liberation movements in the armed struggle itself: it was in Portuguese that the documents of the FRELIMO were written, and in which its different groups communicated with each other since, coming from different regions of the country, it was only in Portuguese that they could understand one another. Therefore, the Portuguese language was imposed by virtue of the sociocultural formation of the FRELIMO leaders itself, who were *assimilados* and sons of *assimilados* and who had, in fact, learned to speak and write Portuguese during the colonial regime.

The process of nation building in Mozambique – and in Africa in general – although it had acquired rather more complex aspects, was no different from that seen in many other countries of America and Europe, i.e. it was a process in which the nation was built vertically, based on a State which broadcasted a nationalism which, in the words of Ernst Gellner, “sometimes assimilates existing cultures and transforms them into nations, sometimes invents, and often destroys them” (apud. Hobsbawm, 1995: 18). Thus, new States were created on the bases of the territorial boundaries already created by colonialism which, in turn, were established arbitrarily and by force, on the ruins of the pluriethnic African States.

In recent years, the foundations on which the nation State was built have been questioned, and in view of the totalizing narratives of the nation, the micronarratives of ethnicity, gender, language and “race” were built. A *post-modern neotribalism*?. It is not difficult to evoke here the famous crisis of the “legitimizing meta-narratives” (particularly that of Marxism)²¹, but a certain

21 The debate refers to much the discussed formulations of Jean-François Lyotard in *La condition post-moderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979). However, more thought-provoking for us is the fact that, in its recent form, the discussion recycles the very concepts of “tribe” and “tribalism” (cf. Walzer, Michael. “Le nouveau tribalisme”. *Esprit*, n° 186, 1992; Antonio, Robert J. “After Postmodernism: reactionary tribalism”.

care is needed in order to avoid automatically “importing” these notions to the local context. In any event, if they have some legitimacy it is because they are placed within an agenda of problems by the Mozambican intellectuals themselves. According to Honwana, it is a question of assuming the challenges of a historically “badly accepted” multiculturalism:

... the central question in the discussion of the problem of language – or other languages — in Mozambique is the multicultural nature of our society. The relations of conflict that throughout history have marked the relationship between Portuguese and other Mozambican languages are, after all, the disfigured face of our badly accepted multiculturalism... A multiculturalism that is the result of the historical fact which shows that the space defined by the frontiers of colonialism — a space in which the Mozambican State is built – is inhabited by various peoples, each, naturally, with his unique culture (Honwana, 1993: 48-49).

However, this local concern with multiculturalism has a global counterpart that cannot be neglected. One of the aspects of this relationship is the exchange between Mozambican researchers and foreigners “cooperantes”, which caused the discussion on multiculturalism to become somewhat deterritorialized. Our interest, in this discussion, is to focus on the education policies, and more specifically, on some projects of bilingualism that have been formulated during those exchanges.

Linguistic policies and national unity

It appears that the arguments on which the policies of bilingualism in Mozambique are based fluctuate between extremes of a kind of anticolonial criticism (not exempt from a certain conservatism and essentialism) and a questioning of the homogenizing policies of the socialist period (in which the different Mozambican languages were marginalized by the State). There is also a justification of a more pedagogical nature, whereby in contexts with a variety of languages, bilingual education favours the process of transmission of contents.

The efforts of the *Núcleo de Estudos de Línguas Moçambicanas (NELIMO)* — formed in 1978 by a group of researchers of the Department of Languages

American Journal of Sociology (Chicago), vol. 106, nº 1, 2000).

and Literatures of the Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo — to classify the Mozambican languages throughout the national territory, is certainly a symptom of the context of discussions on multiculturalism that we are attempting to describe. This classification effort, carried out at the end of the 1980s, led to the elaboration of a linguistic map of the territory which, in the words of Graça Machel (1989: 4), enabled the authorities to “elaborate a linguistic policy for Mozambique”. The educators and linguistics will know how to evaluate the results of this work. For the objectives outlined in this article, it is not the work itself that interests us but rather, the type of policy that these classification efforts authorize, and the types of concrete behaviours they provoke, through different uses of the diversity: producing phenomena of ethnic self-adscription, demands for the recognition of difference, or strategies for recomposing, in the sense of Erving Goffman (1968), “deteriorated” identities. I shall give a brief example to illustrate this process.

In September 1996, during my stay in Mozambique, a large group belonging to the Catholic community in the city of Beira, in the center of the country, came into conflict with the priest of a local parish. The members of this group had a specific “cultural” trait: they were speakers of Sena. They demanded that the priest hold mass simultaneously in the Portuguese and Sena languages every Sunday – the Sunday masses were being celebrated alternately in Portuguese/Ndau, and in Portuguese/Sena. The protest then moved on to demand that the mass be held in three languages simultaneously. This claim could not help but raise the spectre of “tribalism”. As one of the spokespersons of the protest hastily warned:

There are no ethnic conflicts between the Sena and the Ndau, as certain social spheres would lead one to believe. If there is an ethnic conflict, then we are not the ones who are causing it. It is simply a liturgical problem, and if the politicians want to take advantage of it, then the archbishop is to be blamed and he should withdraw²².

This incident reminds us that the language is not merely a communication tool, but also a cultural trait that legitimizes symbolic disputes and identity claims. Retrospectively, however, it would be a long time until the multicultural reality entered the agendas of discussions on the issue of languages in Mozambique, and in this sense, the end of the civil war and the

22 “Crentes senas boicotam missa na S. Benedito”. *Noticias* (Beira), 17/09/1996.

introduction of multipartidary democracy represent a key moment, when there was a gradual growth of awareness on the part of the FRELIMO, concerning the sociocultural complexity of the country.

One of the first symptoms of the concern with multilingualism can be identified in some points of the 1st Seminar on the Teaching of the Portuguese Language, organized by the Ministry of Education and Culture itself, and held in Maputo in 1979. At this event, the “widening of the use of Portuguese” was recommended, “...although it had also been proposed that studies be carried out aimed at enabling the Mozambican languages to be part of the scientific and cultural development of the country” (Firmino & Machungo, 1994: 16). At that time, the NELIMO researchers defended the idea that, after all, the linguistic diversity of Mozambique was not as complex as was thought, as there were four main languages that could serve as vehicular languages for the entire Mozambican territory, namely, Makua, Nyanja-Sena, Shona, and Tsonga²³.

However, this recommendation would only begin to have concrete expression, albeit rather tentative, from the end of the 1980s, when the NELIMO initiatives began to be accompanied by pilot projects in bilingual education elaborated within the National Institute for the Development of Education (INDE), which in turn, began working in close contact with a group of researchers and linguists of the University of Stockholm. A key moment for the discussion of the role of Mozambican languages in the field of education was the organization of the I Seminar on the Standardization of the Orthography of Mozambican Languages, held in August 1988. Besides the NELIMO, the Ministry of Education and the INDE, the seminar was also attended by various national and foreign institutions, and even churches such as the United Congregational Church of Mozambique, the Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church, among others.

The justifications for investment in bilingual education programs in the country do not differ from those brandished in other contexts, in terms of the benefits for the cognitive development of children. The root problem in the false appearance of a proficient use of the second language, by the child, is that oral skill in the use of this language does not necessarily signify corresponding cognitive and conceptual skill. At the start of the 1990s, Swedish researchers Kenneth Hyltenstam and Christopher Stroud (1993) pointed out that

23 Ibidem, p. 16.

in Mozambique, the majority of the children have great difficulty acquiring a second language through formal, decontextualized teaching, and learn to pronounce certain example phrases, without understanding the functions or even the meanings they might have in their effective uses.

For the researchers Gregório Firmino and Inês Machungo, who came to similar conclusions, Portuguese should continue to be the official language of national unity, while the Bantu languages would be preserved as symbols of the cultural heterogeneity of the country, through the introduction of bilingual programs in basic education²⁴. The arguments in favor of a bilingual education are often based on conclusions of linguistic studies produced in other sociocultural contexts: Zaida Gulli (1991), a researcher from the INDE, affirms that various psycho- and sociolinguistic studies carried out since the 1960s in different parts of the world (Canada, the United States, the Nordic countries, etc) point to bilingualism as capable of giving the child greater cognitive flexibility, greater diversification in mental skills, and better formulation of concepts.

Besides the tenuous divergences that can be manifested among those in favour of the introduction of the Bantu languages to primary education, there is a prevailing concern over the possible negative consequences of marginalizing these languages. This concern is based, on one hand, on a *principle of efficiency*, whereby the use of Mozambican languages in the initial stages of teaching would help prevent school failure, and on the other, a *conservationist principle*, given the gradual disappearance of the Bantu languages throughout the Mozambican territory. This latter principle appears to show an aspect of “cultural resistance” in relation to the assimilationist (or “monoculturalist”) policies in force, both during colonialism and in the period of independence. Thus, by placing in check both the assimilationist postulates of the Portuguese colonial policy, and those of the education of the New Man during the socialist era, the demand for the use of the Bantu languages in primary education instills, among the ancient intellectuals of the FRELIMO, an irrepressible fear of a possible regression to “tribalism”.

However, none of the above arguments was as opposed to the Portuguese language as the language of national unity. It was, once more, a question of defending the condition of multiculturalism that would characterize the Mozambican nation. The rejection of the idea of *lusophony* does not mean,

24 Firmino e Machungo, op. cit.

among these researchers, a rejection of Portuguese as the official national language, but simply a refusal to accept the exclusivity of Portuguese in the construction of “Mozambiqueness”. It should perhaps be asked whether these demands for the use of Bantu languages in primary education constitute manifestations of the primordialist or nativist type. But if this were so, what type of linguistic nativism, traditionalism or “tribalism” is it that to promote and stimulate its proposals, appeals to such “modern” institutions such as the UN, the World Bank, Swedish educational institutions, and other cooperation agencies?

Proposed in terms of an “autocentric” Mozambique, the dilemma of “assimilation *versus* multiculturalism” is somewhat fictitious. The tension between one extreme and another can only be understood in the context of the complex relations between the local, the regional and the global. To understand the challenges and dilemmas of this tension, I mentioned here two areas of dispute: the degree of legitimacy of the so-called “traditional power” and the linguistic policies.

The assimilationist colonial discourse and the post-independence anticolonial enthusiasm provided the backdrop to an evolutionist argument on the sociocultural universe of Mozambique. According to this argument, the overcoming of various stages would lead to “civilization”, in one case, or the “New man” in the other. To make itself heard, this logic needed a State (first “decentralized”, then “centralized”) which assumed the right to the monopoly of physical and symbolic violence. The question I would like to throw out seeks to change the center of gravitation of this unilinear and functionalist concern with “modernity”: can we not admit that these “traditionalisms” constitute, in themselves, one of the forms to which a specific modernity appeals when speaking of itself? In this case, could “tradition” be seen as a language elaborated by modernity itself²⁵, rather than as a previous stage or a simple residual survival²⁶ - and on this point, it is worth mentioning Marshall Sahlins

25 It is worth mentioning here the importance of a pioneering text by Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, “Etnicidade: da cultura residual mas irreduzível” (in: *Antropologia do Brasil*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1987), in which *ethnicity* is seen not as a simple pre-political product or an archaic survival, but as a language with specific effectiveness, which is being constantly reinvented and resignified.

26 I would like to suggest, at this point, the possibility of going a little beyond the parsonian notion of modernity. See Parsons, Talcott “Beyond coercion and crisis: the coming of an era of voluntary community”. In: Alexander, J. and Steidman, S. (orgs.) *Culture and society: contemporary debates*. Nova York: Cambridge University Press, 1993. This certainly opens a window for the discussion of “multiple

(1997: 57) when he says that *modernization* and *indigenization* are not necessarily opposites. Therefore, it would perhaps be valid to think of a simultaneous development of “global integration” and “local differentiation”, in which the cultural similarities of globalization are dialectically related to the opposing demands of indigenization.

Another central element of this process is the legacy of a classificatory system whose historical solidity is not always sufficiently underscored. In fact, who coined the category *uses and customs* that Fanuel used to refer to the complexity of his own sociocultural world? What agents (administrators, missionaries, ethnographers) intervened in the historical process of Mozambique, so that the categories such as *Macua*, *Changana*, *Tsonga* etc. reached us today, already crystallized and consummated? What historical and cognitive plot ended up granting a “real” existence to notions like *indigena* (native), *assimilado* and *New man*?

It is worth remembering, at this point, the heritage of the ethnographer and missionary Henri-Alexandre Junod, who produced what is perhaps the most complete ethnographic research on the ethnic groups in the south of the country (Macagno, 2009). But these groups which between the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century were denominated by Junod as *Ronga*, *Thonga*, etc were, for the Portuguese administrators, simple *indigenas* (natives) practitioners of the “uses and customs”. Later, with the advent of independence, these groups were simply inserted into the category of “peasants” or “proletariat”, according to their status as laborers in the production system. Hence, the debates on identity(ies) and multiculturalism operate in Mozambique under the unmistakable heritage of the categories elaborated during the colonial and postcolonial periods, so that when analyzing these discussions, one cannot make spontaneous and innocent use of the classificatory plot that accompanies these categories, rather, one must identify the intellectual context in which they were created and developed.

It is clear that to function, the so-called multicultural policies need groups (and therefore, categories) with clearly defined symbolic and cultural borders. However, this delimitation obscures an aspect which I seek to call attention to here: “multiple identities” are the result of the sociocultural

modernities” or “alternative modernities” (cf. Robotham, Don. “Postcolonialités: le défi des nouvelles modernités”. *Revue Internationale des Sciences Sociales* (Unesco), n° 153, 1997; Eisenstadt, Samuel “Multiple modernities”. *Daedalus* (Cambridge, MA), vol. 129, n° 1, 2000.

dynamics that do not admit a solution of continuity, thus, Fanuel's "changaness" is not the same as that defined by Junod a hundred years ago. The process of raising awareness of certain aspects of the Mozambican cultural diversity indicates, in general, a notable questioning of the cultural policies of the recent past. However, debates on the identity and "culture" of the country require an explanation of the concrete agents that participate in it, as well as the targets (never passive) of those cultural policies.

"South-south" conclusions (Brazil/Mozambique)

As is known, the multicultural debate made its triumphal entry to Brazil, particularly following the famous seminar called by the President of the Republic – Fernando Henrique Cardoso – in Brasília, in 1996, under the title of *Seminário sobre multiculturalismo e Políticas de Ação Afirmativa*, (Seminar on multiculturalism and Policies of Affirmative Action) which was attended by numerous intellectuals²⁷. Since that time, the discussion, far from ceasing, has been growing in relation to the quantity and quality of interventions. There is no doubt that at times, the tone of the debate has taken on rather exalted forms, which certainly do not detract merit from the sophistication of the respective arguments being defended, on the contrary, far from impoverishing them, it has enriched them with the necessary spice – unfortunately increasingly rare – for a heated and thought-provoking intellectual dispute. With the meeting in Brasília it was observed that one of the most marked – and exciting – characteristics of the multicultural dilemma is the very fact that the spokespersons who called it come from a wide variety of sectors of the public sphere: intellectuals, social movements, spokespersons of the nation and the general public. Multiculturalism – and the social scientists wisely capitulate before this evidence – is not simply a matter of "academic" debate; this necessarily polemic aspect makes it, without doubt, doubly challenging.

The curse of the human sciences lies in the fact that they reflect on an "object" that speaks. For the subject at hand, this sentence from Pierre Bourdieu carries singular weight. Thus, the curse of the multicultural dilemma also consists of the fact that it deals with an "object" which reflects on its

27 The best analysis of that Meeting published to date was that of Mônica Grin in an article entitled "Esse ainda obscuro objeto de desejo. Políticas de ação afirmativa e ajustes normativos: o seminário de Brasília", *Novos Estudos*, CEBRAP, Nº 59, São Paulo, 2001.

own (multi) cultural condition. This observation, which the hermeneutics call reflexivity, brings us a second evidence: the multicultural dilemma is also a dilemma that addresses the very disciplinary foundations of anthropology. Why? Simply because in the last twenty years, anthropologists have had to appeal to a new theoretical imagination in order to dialog with interlocutors whose conviction becomes, for many of these anthropologists, somewhat antipathic and threatening: the “culture” is no longer the exclusive monopoly of anthropological reflection. And, as if that were not enough, while the common place of the anthropological criticism has long based itself on a criticism of culturalism and its possible variants, the anthropologists are now seeing – with amazement – the ironic circumstance that “their” natives have become more culturalist than ever before. As is known, one of the disciplinary dictates of anthropology – elevated particularly to the category of dogma – is the effort that the observer must make to achieve the “native point of view”. Thus, how can this dictate be followed, faced with this new (multi) culturalist circumstance, and at the same time, meet the critical demands that oblige the “observer” to announce (denounce?) the constructed nature of all “identity”?

These reflections on the “case” of Mozambique are not intended to domesticate the perplexity that the political circumstances, and the hermeneutic turn has produced in the multicultural debate, but to construct, as far as possible, a distancing look, an angle of attack, a perspective. This construction is not governed by the demands or urgencies of a rushed intervention, but rather, by a commitment to bringing to the debate socio-cultural universes that seek to go a little further than our own nation-centric concerns. Mozambique – and its multiple spokespersons – are, in this case, an excellent pretext for illuminating and, in turn, adding complexity to a debate which, it seems, will continue knocking on our door.

We believe that far from “forcing” a supposedly external debate, we are in fact going straight to the heart of the dilemmas that have existed since the very beginnings of the formation of the nation. After all, to return to the epigraph at the start of this essay, Eduardo Mondlane himself, the “father” of Mozambican nationalism, also envisaged – back in 1964 – a “multi-linguistic” and “multi-religious” vocation for Mozambique.

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