INTRODUCTION

THINKING ABOUT NATIONALISMS & NATIONS
IN ANGOLA, GUINEA-BISSAU AND MOZAMBIQUE

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Our sure road is pain and blood
Straight road to the sun
The sun of our freedom.¹

Nationalism is back in force in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. While the years 1990s saw a rise in public debates about the liberation struggle and national heroes, the years 2000s saw a flurry of official commemorations and the building of many monuments to celebrate nationalist achievements. In Angola, three new memorials to national heroes and martyrs have been built by the Ministry of Public Works since 2003 as well as a Cultural Centre to the memory of Angola’s first president Agostinho Neto. In Mozambique, all former liberation war’s military bases have been turned into monuments, and a National Liberation Museum has been created in the northern village of Chai in 2005. Smaller memorials to specific nationalist figures have been inaugurated all over the country as well as many monuments to the first postcolonial president, Samora Machel. In Guinea-Bissau, the on-and-off civil war since 1998 has absorbed most of the government’s energies. But an interesting initiative has still emerged in 2004 joining former African nationalist guerrillas and former Portuguese soldiers to hold a conference, restore a military base and establish a museum at Guiledje – the conference was held in 2008 with the support of the Mario Soares Foundation.² In Cape Verde, the government and the Amilcar Cabral Foundation were active the same year in celebrating the memory of the national hero of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde who should have turned 80 that year. In all these

² See the website: http://www.guiledje.org/ (accessed 3 August 2010).
countries, the inauguration of monuments, museums and centres, and
the celebrations of anniversaries, have been accompanied by a bout of
nationalist discourse geared towards today’s youth who is asked to cher-
ish the past and faithfully continue the work that heroes are said to have
begun.

Needless to say, these nationalistic activities have led to much contro-
versy. In Mozambique, the hottest discussion has been about who is, and
who should be, in the crypt at Heroes Square. Individuals buried there
before 2003 were all Frelimo liberation fighters and this came to be seen
as problematic, even within the party in power, for two main reasons.
First, because the heroes were all armed fighters. There was no civilian,
and particularly none of the artists who had done so much to create a
national culture and consciousness. Second, the individuals in the crypt
were all members of Frelimo, the party in power since independence.
There were no nationalists not affiliated with the party in power, no
armed fighters from other Mozambican liberation movements, and
none of the Frelimo dissidents who played a fundamental role in the
foundation of the front. In 2003 and 2004, President Joaquim Chissano
addressed the first line of critique by including two more personalities
in the crypt: the poet José João Craveirinha and the composer of the first
national hymn, Justino Chemane. But Chissano did not tackle the
partisan accusation, nor has his successor since 2005. This has led some
opposition parties, such as Renamo, to boycott official ceremonies at
Heroes Square which they argue is a partisan locale. Is this the case?
Is Heroes Square merely a Frelimo place? Are Mozambique’s official
heroes only from one political party? By extension, is today’s official his-
tory and commemoration selective and biased? If so: how, why, and since
when? What is being left out, what kind of nationalism is being promoted
(and obscured), and what impact does this all have on the national imag-
ined community? To put it in broader terms, what is the history of the
formation and politics of nationalisms and nations in Mozambique and,
by extension, Angola and Guinea-Bissau?

There is today a strong interest in nationalisms and nations in
Portuguese-speaking Africa, both in society and in academia. This
renewed interest can be traced back to the 1990s, and its cause to three
main factors. First, the authoritarian decompression which took place in
the late 1980s-early 1990s led to more open and pluralist political systems,
something which permitted the emergence in the public realm of new
voices and new testimonies about the war of liberation and the history of
nationalisms. Voices dissonant from the official scripts begun to be heard