CHAPTER FOUR

WRITING A NATION OR WRITING A CULTURE?
FRELIMO AND NATIONALISM DURING THE MOZAMBICAN
LIBERATION WAR

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There now exists a very extensive bibliography on the subject of nations and nationalism, with prominent names including Anderson, Gellner, Hobsbawm, Nairn, Smith, Ranger, as well as Chatterjee, Bhabha and Lloyd in the field of postcolonial theory. Yet none of these studies seems to offer a sustained reflection on the complex internationalism of the 1960s and 1970s which sustained the liberation movements of the former Portuguese colonies in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea and (de)formed the traditional European models which were supposed to be transmitted by the colonial system. A reason for this absence might lie in the fact that Anglophone research was not confronted with similar late-revolutionary liberation movements in colonies like India or Indonesia, while in the 1950s ideologies created by the nationalist struggles in colonies like Ghana, Kenya or Tanzania used references to a particular Pan-Africanist, “socialist” strand of internationalism. Another explanation may be related to the auxiliary or transitory status of nations and nationalism within the Soviet, Marxist-Leninist internationalist movement of the 1920s and 1930s, which may deter researchers from focusing on this issue. Placed within a historical dynamic of class-struggle, at least in theory, nations would eventually be dissolved in a centrifugal movement towards the final victory of the proletariat, while the centripetal forces of socialist homogenization lead to the exclusion of the bourgeois enemies of the revolution. With its Universalist outlook Soviet internationalism therefore can be conceived as a form of “civic nationalism”, rooted in the French Revolution, which finds its bourgeois counterpart in the organic, ethno-linguistic model of the nation exemplified by German Romanticism.1

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The internationalism of the 1960s and 1970s, however, presents a more complex picture than the classical Soviet model. Related to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements, such as the Afro-Asiatic movement, the Chinese cultural revolution, the group of non-aligned countries, the events of May 1968 and Havana and the Latin-American Tricontinental movement, this internationalism is associated with the introduction of the idea of “revolutionary national culture” as discussed by authors such as Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral, and finding a parallel in Latin American literature in the reflections of writers like Roberto Fernandez Retamar on the revolutionary potential of aesthetics.\(^2\) On the one hand, FRELIMO would inherit the difficulties which the Soviet system had with the national question. On the other hand, it would borrow from the internationalism of the ‘60s and ‘70s that makes popular culture the central motor of the revolution. Could FRELIMO not exploit precisely this ambivalence in order to cope with the nationalism question?\(^3\) What are the consequences of the use of the internationalist idea of (revolutionary/ popular) culture for the way in which nationhood is constructed by FRELIMO? How do answers to this question translate in terms of theories of civic and ethno-linguistic nationalisms?

In this article I propose to provide some preliminary responses to these questions by examining the case of the construction of the Mozambican nation by FRELIMO, the Mozambican Liberation Front. In this respect, FRELIMO had to solve two problems. Firstly, the movement was confronted with the practical necessity of legitimizing the unity and identity of a territory against the hegemonic claims of the colonial empire. Secondly, FRELIMO needed to distinguish itself from other political factions, which had already elaborated their own visions of Mozambican nationalism. Against these movements, which it considered to be colonial and bourgeois,\(^4\) FRELIMO’s revolutionary project sought to abolish class inequalities and racism within a broad internationalist movement.

In the present chapter, I argue that the solution to the problem of both sustaining a discrete political entity and being internationalist

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\(^{2}\) Of course the problem of culture is also present within the Pan-africanist current which advocated an internationalist project preceding all those cited above.

\(^{3}\) In the second chapter of the second part of my Ph.D. thesis I deal with the way in which the FRELIMO and CONCP elites, and the liberation press, related to these different kinds of internationalisms.

\(^{4}\) As Anthony Smith observes, from the revolutionary perspective nationalism always remains suspect as it may be used by the bourgeoisie to cover up class contradictions (Nationalism in the Twentieth Century, New York: NY University press, 1979, p. 142).