

Forgotten Allies? Mozambican Revolutionary Songs and Popular Memory of Comradeship

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Contemporary Mozambique has been marked by a dual relation to memory. On the one side, the process of reconciliation after the civil war and nation-building has engaged a definitive rupture with the past; on the other side, a sturdy silence expresses a more ambivalent acknowledgement that the past is still deeply present, where contestation around citizenship reflect the inequalities and prejudices present.

Using the analysis of the lyrics of the songs that went together with the development of the nationalist struggle in Mozambique, and that were latter transformed into popular songs, I will seek to map out the construction of the image of struggle allies, and the ideological references of ‘correct struggles’, as a basis to discuss the multiples meanings of transnational solidarity that was at the base of the popular project of the ‘new’ independent Mozambique. These song embodied the political anticolonial manifesto of FRELIMO (the nationalist movement in Mozambique). This insurgent nationalism was conceived as a means of soliciting the participation of heterogeneous communities in defeating and displacing the colonial state. Challenging the dominant forms of Western thinking in terms of political project, this project appealed to Pan-Africanism and transcontinental solidarities, transcending the pragmatic boundaries drawn by the colonial powers.

Today, these songs, still remembered by several groups, but long forgotten by the official history, allow to uncover how the past representations of friendship, alliances and ‘just struggle’ remain inscribed in bodies and lives. Songs are a crucial site for understanding issues of memory and cultural transmission; the revolutionary lyrics will be discussed with reference to ideas about belonging and broader political participation, *in particular how these ideas have impacted on the popular and political discourse, and are at the same time different from local reality.*

Recurring to different languages, these ‘old’ songs are growingly being (re)activated as part of a struggle for a broader citizenship, where multiple /transnational ties remain strong references of a broader reivindicative project, whose major players are traditional, informal, and ethnic associations, which generally are not included in the conventional concept of civil society. In short, the voices playing these songs continue to hold out the possibility of liberation as an on-going, contested and valued process.