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CHAPTER 5 – CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE STATE, POLITICAL PARTIES AND CHIEFS

Apart from some concepts already discussed, the theoretical repertoire needed in this thesis includes *state*, *political party* and *chief*. In this chapter these concepts are discussed from an anthropological viewpoint.

State

Northeast Africa is generally recognized as one of the areas of the world where the state as a human form of socio-political organization first came into being, alongside Mesopotamia, the Indus River Valley and China in the “Old World” and Mesoamerica and Peru in the “New World” (Service 1975). In more recent times, areas of state formation are discernable in other parts of the African continent, amidst other forms of socio-political organization; a complex situation that makes it more difficult to pinpoint central dominant powers in precolonial Africa than in the other areas just mentioned. The top leaders in African states were usually produced within families who formed royal dynasties – large indigenous precolonial republics do not seem to have emerged in Africa. These royal dynasties could accumulate and maintain wealth through controlling trade, although conquest states and feudalism are also known (e.g. Great Lakes region, Rwanda, Ethiopia). In most of (sub-Saharan) Africa land was not too scarce; slash-and-burn cultivation was productive and adaptive and it was often rather easy for people to split off from earlier communities, move home into another area and start a community for themselves (Curtin, Feierman, Tompson and Vansina 1995: 70-76, 132-134; Geschiere 1982: 13-14, 18, 21-25; Newitt 1981: 12).

It is prudent to study definitions of “state”. In their famous distinction between Group A and Group B societies, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1967: 5) associate the first group with states as having “centralized authority, administrative machinery, and judicial institutions – in short, a government”, and the second as not having these items. This distinction may have been useful for the cases in their edited book but it cannot exhaustively describe all possible intuitions about what is a state and what not. For example, many national and international football associations have the three mentioned items but they are not states. Weber’s definition of “state” is less easily pushed aside when he adds the aspect of the successful exercise by an administrative staff of a monopoly of legitimate physical coercion concerning the realization of rules to the idea of “political institutional enterprise” (Weber 1956: 29). The

aspect of territory Weber couples to the concept of “political association”, although later he also sees it as a characteristic of the “modern state”. Essential for both *state* and *political association* is the aspect of “enforceability”; to indicate a goal for the state is not necessary or even feasible (Weber 1956: 29-30). Simplifying, one could say that Weber sees *state* as having *bureaucracy* (cf. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard) plus (a monopoly of legitimate) *physical coercion* (not cf. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, who only mention “authority”).

Another way to define states is to look at morphological aspects. The advantage of such an approach is that chiefdoms, a type of political unit dealt with to a considerable extent later in this thesis, may also easily be subsumed under it. Indeed, Robert Carneiro (1981) sees the chiefdom as the “precursor” of the state. Historically, according to Carneiro, the chiefdom “transcend[ed] local sovereignty and [...] aggregate[d] previously autonomous villages”, while the state emerged later as a historical phenomenon (Carneiro 1981: 38; cf. p. 45). *Chiefdom* conceived as a political system with two levels of socio-political accretion may then be contrasted with *state* which has three such levels, where chiefdoms are capable of coalescing into states. Carneiro adds Weber’s criterion of the monopoly of physical coercion as an extra condition for a state to be properly defined as state (1981: 46-46, 65, 68-69). Although we can accept the idea of a hierarchy of levels between state and chiefdom, the information we have about the Barue kingdom does not fit easily with Carneiro’s model. Possibly this is because Carneiro’s interest seems to be in explaining the emergence of pristine states, while Barue came into being as a part and later split-off from the earlier Monomotapa state (as described below). Barue as an independent kingdom never existed as the result of accretion or coalescence in Carneiro’s sense.

Elsewhere Carneiro (1978) argued that military competition between states would probably lead within a few centuries from now to a single worldwide political unit; thus to a situation in which the exercise of legitimate physical coercion would be truly monopolistic globally. Abbink, Van Dijk and Van Dokkum (2008: 9) point out that the trend which Carneiro argued existed, even if it could be identified up to about the 1930s, was already reversing at the time Carneiro published his (1978) chapter. The number of countries has grown worldwide since the 1930s, to a large extent due to decolonization. An important feature of present-day states (but not necessarily *only* those of today) is that they can distinguish themselves from yet other states, and deal with matters of collective identities (Abbink, Van Dijk and Van Dokkum *ibid.*; cf. Migdal 2001: 50). As Ruigrok (2011: 42-45) also argues, it is not enough to look at the aspects of bureaucracy and force alone to study present-day states, specifically in Africa where states are indicated as “collapsing” or

“institutionally weak”. To be sure, in the Weberian sense Mozambique was not a state in the 1977-1992 period, because there was no monopoly of the exercise of physical coercion (legitimate or not). But to explain the Frelimo-Renamo war one necessarily has to invoke the *idea* of Mozambique as a state. The too limited character of Weber’s definition of *state* is thus demonstrated. On the other hand Weber has provided useful insights that seem to have become underappreciated of late. This will become clear when discussing a few more recent writings about the state.

Abrams’s (2006) article has been identified as an important analysis of the concept “state” (cf. Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 2). Let us review some of Abrams’s arguments. He maintains that the state is an “ideological project” (p. 122) and that

[t]he state [...] conceals the real history and relations of subjection behind an a-historical mask of legitimating illusion (p. 123).

According to Abrams this illusionary character of the state would be reason to discard of the notion of “state” altogether. He criticizes Perry Anderson for “not [being] able to shake off the notion of the state” (p. 124) in the following way:

Every time he [P. Anderson] uses that word [« state »], others – regime, government, monarchy, absolutism – could be substituted for it and the *only* difference would be to replace an ambiguously concrete term with ones of which the implications are unambiguously either concrete or abstract (ibid.; emphasis added).

When we substitute a term for another in an assertion, we are confronted with the dilemma that either (a) the two terms should be equally ambiguous or unambiguous; or (b) if they are not, we would not be justified in doing the substitution in the first place when we intend the assertions to have an identical meaning (a *locus classicus* for these substitution problems is Frege 1997). Abrams already admits that (a) may not be the case when substituting another word for « state », which leaves us with the conclusion formulated in (b) that we may not be justified in making the substitution.

Abrams’s procedure turns out to be an uneasy form of censorship that prohibits insight. Consider the assertion: “The state is a monarchy.” Now substituting « monarchy » for « state » delivers a tautological sentence and we are justified in saying that some *information* extant in the original assertion has now been lost. We might, after all, want to stress the insight that the state can be a monarchy or a republic. The example « government » is also not convincing. I can say that “I belong to the state of the Netherlands, which is a monarchy”,

but replacing « state » by « government » produces an assertion that at the moment of writing has no meaningful interpretation. (Consideration of the words « administrative apparatus » and « country » can be shown to lead to problems as well.) Abrams gives no convincing reason why the word « state » should be censored in these cases. Abrams misses the point, already indicated by Nettle (1968), that the state might be some sort of *variable*, an anthropological object that is flexible and does not require of itself to be interpreted uniformly, even if we can discern continuities and overlaps in varying manifestations and perceptions of the state. Das and Poole (2004) make similar points. Macamo and Neubert (2003/2004) make a concrete proposal for varying types of political systems with which they are able to argue that the Mozambican state transformed from “authoritarian state” (bureaucratic) to “command state” (arbitrary) under Frelimo during the 1970s-1980s. (For earlier general criticism of equating “state” with “government”, see Nettle 1968: 563, 570-571.) Based on ideas of others discussed so far in this thesis, a proposal for a delineation of “state” may be that it can be conceived of as a complex variable involving flexible aspects of people, territory, functional institutionalization, power distribution (including the threat or application of violence, itself institutionalized but not necessarily monopolistic), behavioural rules (conceived of as emanating from the complex entity under study), hierarchical morphology with some sort of enduring political centre, and coordinated involvement concerning economic resources, with coupled to it aspects of cross-generational replication and self-referentiality.

Abrams makes a further point related to the aspect of flexibility and perception. Considering the state as ideological, and as an idea, he suggests that *therefore* the state does not exist:

[W]e should recognize the cogency of the *idea* of the state as an ideological power and treat that as a compelling object of analysis. But the very reasons that require us to do that also require us not to *believe* in the idea of the state, not to concede, even as an abstract formal-object, the existence of the state (p. 124; emphasis original).

The “reasons” Abrams maintains would require us to deny the existence of the state are that the idea, or ideology, of the state has specific functions, such as to conceal “actual disunity of political power” and to maintain “an essentially capitalist economy” (p. 124). To “dismantle” that ideology is the very task we would have to do in our analyses, in order to “make a ruthless assault on the whole set of claims in terms of which the being of the state is proposed” (p. 122). However, the present author sees no reason why disunity of political

power or the functionality that the state idea has concerning the perpetuation of capitalism would force him to deny the *existence* of the state. I rather respond, in line with the arguments given above, that if the state is a collective anthropological object capable of self-reference, then disunity, vagueness, ambiguity, flexibility and phenomena of concealment can be considered possible *by virtue of the state's existence*.

It is useful to investigate what it could mean to assert that the state does not exist. Mozambique became independent on 25 June 1975, so we might say the Mozambican state did not exist on 24 June 1975. However, denying its existence on 25 June 1975 is problematic because, in contrast with 24 June, most people who consider themselves Mozambicans would affirm the state's existence on that date. So the unambiguous non-existence of the state on 24 June is of a different character than a supposed non-existence on 25 June, for the word « state » on the latter date refers to existing people as comprised by it (ambiguously or not) where it could not refer so on 24 June. More precisely, the two situations also differ concerning the self-referential *perception of it* by people who themselves fall within a (possibly contested) scope of *belonging to it*. The transformation occurring in the world from 24 to 25 June would not be described exhaustively by a mere change of government, due to the change in people's self-perception (or complex of self-perceptions) as Mozambicans, related to but not coinciding with a change of government. This change in self-perception by itself also constitutes a transformation of the world, and thus « state » designates more than just « government » (etc.). This refutes Abrams's (2006) theory for Mozambique. The difference between the existence and the non-existence of the Mozambique state is not dependent on political disunity or concealment of capitalist economic relations. The existence of the state has to do with people who find themselves and certain others as connected (amicably or not) within a political entity and act in certain ways on such a realization.²² In terms of critical realism, I say that the Mozambican state on 25 June 1975 is transcendent and of a different ontological character than the individuals who may belong to it, but no less real. Where I say “amicably or not” I mean that the state can encompass violent relations between the people designated. Indeed, in cases where people disagree about whether they belong to the state or not, government representatives, being more powerful, may declare individuals as foreigners and force them to leave the state's physical territory, as we shall see.

Of the Barue state we can meaningfully assert that it no longer exists, even if certain

²² This expression is not meant as a *definition* of “state” but would be an aspect relevant for any such definition, for example in combination with (perhaps contingent) stipulations about morphology or bureaucracy.

chiefdoms deriving from it still exist, because colonialism was capable not only of destroying the physical and governmental aspects of the Barue state, but also of destroying any general idea of the Barue state that people could entertain self-referentially in order to resurrect the state (as has happened in earlier times, as we shall see). Today there is no self-referential conception of a Barue state that could be made actual. When my assistant and I asked one of the chiefs in Barue District, a descendant of the famous Makombe Kabudu Kagoro, what he found of the idea to reinstall the kingdom of Barue, he literally did not comprehend what we were talking about. What *does* exist is the collective *memory* about the state in the past. The surviving present-day historical memory in Barue is an appreciation of those times when the Portuguese were still safely outside the state's territory and life was good under the protection under Makombe.

By contrast, the self-referential character of the Mozambican state is constitutive to it, also historically. Mozambicans who had *ideas* (plural) of the Mozambican state in the 1960s had so in a prospective way, but on 25 June 1975 one particular idea about the Mozambican state became actual, namely that the state should be controlled solely by Frelimo. In Mozambique on 25 June 1975, the state as a variable was realized in one real manifestation. It is not difficult to see at least one contradiction emerging here: some people did not agree with the particular idea that Frelimo alone controlled the state, a situation to be discussed in this thesis.

Initially Frelimo could subdue opposition that represented this alternative idea about the state, but the drastic military operations of Renamo were to a large extent intractable for the Frelimo-government. In large parts of the country Renamo was capable of exercising control over territory and the population. But even amidst the catastrophic situation of the war, where Frelimo had no significant influence or even presence in certain areas, Frelimo was *still* master of the Mozambican state. The very continuation of the war implies this: even if it may have been the rhetoric at times, it would make no sense for Renamo merely to “fight Frelimo” as an organization, or the state as an administrative apparatus (and also not as a country). Renamo fought Frelimo *as entangled with the state*, and the state *as entangled with Frelimo*, in order to change the character of the relationship between Frelimo and the state. The existence of the Mozambican state was not undermined by the war.

Hansen and Stepputat (2001) do not dismiss the existence of the state. Their focus is mainly on Europe. They mention that “languages of stateness” are “not necessarily all purely Western in origin” (pp. 2, 5, 10, 15), but that insight is not integrated in the theory. Thus they maintain:

As we try to understand how states in contemporary Africa and Asia are imagined and designed we are inadvertently thrown back on the historical development of modern forms of government and sovereignty in Western Europe (p. 6).

We see in the quote that two items are coupled: “modern” and “Western Europe”. This is problematic. I do not deny that ideas and practices from Western Europe about the state have influenced areas in other parts of the world, but an exclusive focus on this discourages us (a) to look at factors that were developed within other (non-European) areas themselves; and (b) to investigate instances where processes of influence may have been the other way around, with Europe (or North America) being influenced by ideas and practices from other areas. China provides a good possibility for some reflections. This country has known an idea of the state concerning itself for more than two millennia (counting from the Qin Dynasty), longer than any state in Europe, across all the changes of dynasties. “Modern” China did not depend on Western ideas alone: home-grown Legalist thought continued to exert its influence in China over the centuries well into the Communist period (Ch’ü 1961: 280; Fu 1996; Li 1977).

Now according to Hansen and Stepputat (2001: 8) the “modern” state is characterized as follows:

The decisive step in the invention of the modern nation-state was exactly when the sovereign state became entrusted with expanding tasks of managing the social and economic well-being of its people, to protect, reproduce, and educate its citizens, to represent the nation, its history, and its culture(s), and to reproduce boundaries and institutions enabling the political community to be recognized by other states as a proper state.

Later they also mention “bureaucratic rationality” (p. 24). However, the authors do not explain why the enumerated aspects would have been specifically European. Graeber (2004: 70) suggests

that one reason the territorial nation-state ended up winning out [against e.g. city-states] was because, in this early stage of globalization [16th-17th centuries], Western elites were trying to model themselves on China, the only state in existence at the time which actually seemed to conform to their ideal of a uniform population, who in Confucian terms were the source of sovereignty, creators of a vernacular literature, subject to a uniform code of laws, administered by bureaucrats chosen by merit, trained in that vernacular literature.

(On “well-being”, cf. *Mengzi* (1970: 70-71; 1B12.) Graeber is not alone in suggesting that Europeans did model things on Chinese statecraft. Rui Lourido (2013; 2014) points out that

Montesquieu based his approach towards bureaucracy at least partly on Chinese material (cf. Anderson 2006: 69-70). Especially the circumstance that commoners were deemed fit to function within the Chinese state made an impression. So if it should be assumed that anyone invented the “modern” state, the Chinese (if not also others) make for far better candidates than the Europeans. Hansen and Stepputat mention China (p. 34-35), but not in relation to the historical development of “modern” statecraft in earlier centuries. Weber (2006) at least shows more historical sensitivity in this respect; in fact he points to Africa and identifies ancient Egypt as “[t]he historical model of all later bureaucracies” (2006: 54, cf. 56). Even considering this, our view of history would still be imprecise because a state like Barue may not have depended on the ancients when it comes to certain organizational aspects. As we shall see, to safe-guard “well-being” the Barue state knew some system of centrally coordinated food redistribution to deal with situations of nutritional crisis. The word « modern » tells us little about the differences between Barue and European states in this respect. An effective solution to this problem would be to discard any concept of “modern” altogether in historical analyses of the state (unlike the concept of “state” itself). It would better be replaced by such concepts like “simultaneity” with current events and “contemporaneity” (Meneses pers. comm.).

Hansen and Stepputat’s approach is also difficult to square with the situation in postcolonial Mozambique. They rightly ask “to what extent [postcolonial] experiences [e.g. of government] can be understood [...] through theoretical lenses that rely heavily on the historical trajectory of state formation in Western Europe”, but on the same page they suggest the precipitate answer that “the Western imagination of the state [...] remains the globally most powerful idea of political order [...] after 1945” and that “[this] understanding of the state was eagerly embraced by the nationalist political elites in the postcolonial world” (p. 10). For Mozambique this is plainly false. Even the most cursory observation of European and postcolonial Mozambican history will show that there has never existed any Western-European equivalent of the *Party-State Frelimo* (De Brito 1988). Even comparison with Soviet-Russia is imperfect (Cahen 1993; cf. De Brito 1988). Also the demand for a multiparty system which some Mozambicans made in 1974 is better explained by their relationship vis-à-vis Frelimo than by a desire to mimic Western Europe.

In a later essay, Hansen and Stepputat (2005) do not pick up Graeber’s (2004: 70) suggestion to study possible foreign influences on European statecraft. Europe remains the focus of their analysis of the development of the “modern” state, for which they now give the year 1648 as pivotal (the Westphalian peace; 2005: 4). Two great empires, the Chinese and

the Ottoman, are briefly mentioned (2005: 4n4, 19), but their theoretical and practical contributions to statecraft are not alluded to, and neither is the question whether or not they could be called “modern” like European states. The authors attribute the emergence of the “modern notion of sovereignty as the ultimate and transcendent mark of indivisible state power” in Europe to “power struggles between the Vatican and the kings of Northern and Western Europe” (p. 5). The fact that during centuries large chunks of Europe were under the rule of Muslims rather than the Vatican is not taken into account (for the relevance of this, I need only mention the process of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans with all the subsequent effects, including the dismal failure of the continental European state system to solve political problems – *Britannica* 2014: 14-17; Nettle 1968: 574-575). Also, even if for example China would not in any way have influenced European ideas about statecraft, it would at least have been appropriate to allude to what has made this vast country and powerful state so resilient over the millennia. Couching their theoretical analysis in European references, Hansen and Stepputat’s (2005) text is representative of the tendency identified by Graeber (2004: 97) to describe the world’s history from perspectives drawn from Western canonical reference points.

Hansen and Stepputat’s furthermore argue that “[d]omination of the non-European world, the race for commerce and territory, was *intrinsic* to this formation of [post-1648 European state] sovereignty” (2005: 9; emphasis added). This is assuming a necessary connection that is unproven and not very likely. The deficiency of not comparing Europe with other areas concerning statecraft makes itself manifest here because the said connection is not investigated against the background of a comparison between states in Europe and other areas. Concerning Europeans’ behaviour in the 16th and 17th century (we can add the 18th, 19th and 20th too), Graeber (2004: 49) points out that

there appear to have been plenty of examples of people in a position to wreak similar havoc [genocide, mass slavery] on a world scale – say, the Ming dynasty in the fifteenth century – but who didn’t, not so much because they scrupled to, so much as because it would never have occurred to them to act this way to begin with.

At most we could conclude that the European processes of state formation which Hansen and Stepputat (2005) identify were (for some period) *simultaneous* with colonialism. If the Chinese state was just as “modern” as the European states, then there is nothing *intrinsic* about colonialism in relation to the form of the state. In this way Hansen and Stepputat obscure the world-wide colonialism of the past half a millennium (so far a unique

phenomenon in the history of humanity) as a self-standing invention by Europeans *separate* from the development of the “modern” state. They miss the point that colonialism started before the presumed “modernity” and could continue without it:

By the early fifteenth century when overseas expansion began, Portuguese institutions had not undergone any of the changes associated with the emergence of the early modern state [...] [I]t is a key to understanding the story of Portuguese imperialism that [the] transition to a modern, professional bureaucratic state failed (Newitt 2005: 1).

In other words: Portugal did not need “modernity” to initiate colonialism, nor did colonialism induce Portugal to become “modern”. In Portugal at least, colonialism was *independent* from “modernity”. Around 1900, more sophisticated methods of governing than had existed before were introduced in Mozambique, but even then Portugal came to rely heavily on a corrupted system of hereditary leaders and local policemen (*cipaios*) in order to control the African population, as we will see below (at best one might perhaps say that the 20th-century Portuguese state had a “modern” way of governing Portuguese settlers in Mozambique). Weber’s (2006: 63, cf. 70) following insightful comments may conclude these considerations:

If “indispensability” [of officialdom] were decisive [for power relations], the equally “indispensable” slaves ought to have held this position of power in any economy where slave labor prevailed [...]. Whether the power of bureaucracy as such increases cannot be decided *a priori* from such reasons.

Anderson (2006), already mentioned, deals with the concept “nation”. He explains “the origin and spread of nationalism” mainly with the printing (in Europe) of books in languages other than Latin since the 15th century and with independence movements in Latin America in the early 19th century. “National consciousnesses” emerged from the fact that people happened to read printed material in the same language (2006: 44-45; cf. Flannery 2011). For precolonial Barue this is problematic. Anderson (2006: 6-7) defines “nation” as “imagined political community” which is “limited and sovereign”, where “imagined” means that not all members of the community know each other but are subsumed under an “image of their communion” in the minds of people; “limited” that “nation” does not equate all of humanity; and “sovereign” that “the concept [‘nation’] was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm” (Enlightenment as occurring in the 18th century – p. 11). He then states that “nations dream to be free” and that “[t]he gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state”. Now we will see below that Barue fought a war for independence from the Mutapa state in

1608, becoming a state of its own. In so doing it fulfilled the criteria of incomplete mutual acquaintedness of the members within a political community, being limited and having a state. However, Anderson's definition would forbid us to call Barue a "nation", because the aspect of "sovereign" has attached to it a reference to the 18th-century Enlightenment as constitutive component, which evidently does not apply to 1608. I affirm that societies in different parts of the world and in different epochs can produce certain concepts or adopt them from others. But what Anderson does here is to *incorporate* reference to a very specific epoch *within* the definition of "nation", while the theory of the book is about explaining "the origin and spread of nationalism" around that time. The problem here is not the circularity of the definition but that it is the wrong sort of circularity, a historically and geographically circumscribed one instead of allowing for people's possible (not: necessary) self-definition as nation anywhere, anytime. Anderson's move blocks in an *a priori* way the possibility to investigate the diverse manifestations of "nation" across world history. If we would agree with Isaacman (1976: 68n1) that "[b]y the middle of the nineteenth century, if not earlier, the Barue had all the characteristics of a 'modern nation-state'", then one origin for this situation must have been some orally coordinated expression of an orally communicated desire (in 1608) not to be ruled by a Mutapa leader. It had absolutely nothing to do with printing books in certain European languages (cf. Wogan 2001).

In his definition and argument, Anderson theoretically imprisons the concept of "nation" within the confinements of European languages and Enlightenment, hereby prohibiting insight into other factors that may have contributed to conceptions of nationhood. This becomes clear in Anderson's treatment of postcolonial Mozambique. He maintains that "[i]f radical Mozambique speaks Portuguese, the significance of this is that Portuguese is the medium through which Mozambique is imagined" (2006: 134). Note that the language is here only a vehicle for the "imagination", not an intrinsic cause of it as it was, according to Anderson, in Europe. In any case, the Portuguese language cannot be an exhaustive explanation for Mozambique's being "imagined", because the language is not universally understood in Mozambique. For an inclusive "imagination" of Mozambique, something else is needed than a specific language. Machel had a clear answer for this problem. On the day of Mozambique's independence, he said in a "message to the nation": "In Mozambican history, the fight for a revolutionary political line has been intrinsically bound up with the fight for unity" (Machel [H] 1975: 19). The "political line" referred to is that of Frelimo which evolved during the anticolonial struggle not only as against an external enemy but also as against "national opportunist and reactionary forces" (ibid.). Certainly, this "political line"

was communicated through Portuguese, but it is hard to believe that the Portuguese language was the only component of the “political line”. The “political line” was assumed to be followed by anyone, Portuguese-speaking or not. The choice for Portuguese was itself not a self-evident one, as we shall see later in this thesis. Moreover, Anderson’s analysis gets contradictory when he maintains that generally Mozambicans form “a variety of monolingual populations”, implying that, except for the “bilingual political class” (p. 138), they would not speak Portuguese or a second African language at all. We will also see that Frelimo was able to ward off the establishment of a multiparty system in Mozambique at the time of independence. If only language would have been the issue, Frelimo could just as well have agreed with a multiparty system on the condition that the Portuguese language would become the national language. Evidently Frelimo saw its own rôle as far more fundamental than only as promoter of a language. Machel continued in the referred speech:

Through practice and its action, FRELIMO has asserted itself as the leading force in our society. For this very reason, the broad masses, from the Rovuma to the Maputo, have quite spontaneously fully identified with FRELIMO’s principles and fight (1975: 21).

One might say Machel “imagined” his national community, but in terms of the historical significance of his movement as anchor point for Mozambicans’ identification. The Portuguese language was at most a tool for the realization of such “imagination”, not its motivation. Even more importantly, Machel’s imagination of the nation was not shared by everybody, as his comment on the “opportunist and reactionary forces” indicates. Just as we saw above with ideas about the state, “imaginings” about nations may not be uniform. What matters most is not that people may have “imaginings” about some undifferentiated nation, automatically generated by either printed language or Frelimo’s principles, but questions concerning *who* “imagines” *what* about the nation, and *how* differences between communicated “imaginings” are resolved, amicably or not. Anderson’s description of Mozambique does not help us to understand the asserted “radical” aspect of that nation because his explanation concerning Mozambique as a nation comes straight from his problematic assumptions about form aspects of communication, not from a study of Mozambican history. Under way already in 1983, a devastating war had been going on in Mozambique for more than a decade when Anderson published the revised edition of his book (1991), but he writes about “Mozambiquian [sic] national solidarity” as to emerge through “advances in communications technology” (2006: 134-135). (Concerning peace time, Pereira and Shenga and Mattes mention some effects of radio and television on partisanship

and approach to “democracy”, but the results are equivocal and seem not decisive in larger contexts – Pereira 2008: 234-235, 241; Shenga and Mattes 2009: 151-152, 154). An approach more sensitive to history is necessary for the understanding of the contemporary situation in Mozambique. In particular, the rôle of Frelimo, as a movement and later as a political party, is crucial for understanding the political fate of Mozambique. In the next section, I shall briefly discuss political parties as an anthropological phenomenon. As for a delineation of the concept “nation”, I would suggest that one could accept certain components mentioned by Anderson, such as “political community”, “limitedness” and the aspect that people do not all have face-to-face relationships within that community. I suggest removing the aspect of the Enlightenment, and replacing the “imagined” with the aspects of referentiality and self-referentiality irrespective of epoch, including the possibility that “nation” may be a contested reference. Also, the community may or may not have attached to it a state for itself (for the “not” one may think of the Haudenosaunee “League of Nations”).

Political parties

Above I have affirmed the possible existence of the state but also indicated that it is best conceived of as a sort of variable. Migdal’s (2001) “state-in-society” approach is a useful contribution to the study of the state, emphasizing that state apparatuses do not operate in isolation from non-state actors within society. I shall specifically focus on the interaction between state and *political parties*. The status of the latter can be ambiguous: some political parties may be connected with the state but others not. In any case, one of the most striking features of present-day states in postcolonial Africa is that they have been associated with political parties, whether in one-party or multiparty political systems, while in precolonial times these were virtually ubiquitously if not totally absent (cf. Gyekye quoted above). This cannot be emphasized enough. In fact, in the entire history of humanity political parties have been a rather rare phenomenon. The current debates on “transitions to democracy” conceived as “transitions from one-party systems to multiparty systems” do not always recognize this fact. To appreciate the framing of “democratization” as “transition to a multiparty system”, it will be necessary to study what sort of anthropological objects “political parties” are, or could be.

Keane (2009: 37) describes how in ancient Athens in the early 440s BC “one Thucydides” attempted “to seat his supporters together in one block so that they could speak and vote in unison” but this attempt seems to have failed. For the ancient Athenians, “[a]

no-party democracy was not seen as a contradiction in terms, or in fact” (2009: 38). It is not that block-wise political debate did not exist in olden times. In ancient China the Legalist and Confucianist politico-philosophical schools held an apparently hot debate on economic policy during the reign of Emperor Chao in 81 BC (Hsiao 1979: 457-468). However, the philosophical schools do not seem to have constituted *organized structures specifically* devoted to political action, which is what we might include in our anthropological intuitions about what political parties are, or could be. On the other hand not every organized political action may be seen as indicating the existence of political parties. Lobato (1989: 107) mentions that church groups in the Mozambique area of the mid-18th century had legal powers over civilians. This led not only to conflicts between church organizations and the (Portuguese) government, but also between church organizations themselves, specifically the Jesuits and Dominicans in Sena where the population acted like “partisans” (*partidários*) of the two church groups. Still we would not call these church organizations political parties.

Unfortunately, it is not very common to include explanations in text books about the general history of political parties. Wilton (2009) does provide some information, indicating how *unusual* political parties are in human history. Wilton defines “political parties” as “organizations, usually consisting of volunteers and paid staff that nominate candidates and compete in elections” (2009: 145). The latter clause seems to exclude political parties in one-party systems, as these do not compete in elections, at least not against other parties. Indeed, Wilton does not list “one-party systems” at all in her general overview (2009: 149). Lawson (1976: 2-3) does make comments on one-party systems, but he considers it important that political parties (electoral or not) seek “authorization from the public” (1976: 3). For future analyses, this is still unsatisfactory because it fits uneasily with the historical behaviour of Frelimo, which did not always seek authorization from the public (it often rather required the public to seek authorization from Frelimo). Salih (2003: 3-5) does pay attention to this problem, distinguishing between formalist and substantive definitions of the functioning of parties. The first concern generalizable organizational aspects of parties, Western or African. The second highlight specific aspects of content of African parties, where the background of decolonization is often still relevant. With an eye on analysing Frelimo’s history in the sequel, it is prudent to anticipate the analysis of that party’s history by giving a definition of “political party” already. Thus I propose:

A (political) party is an association of individuals that knows a durable internal organization, aims at promoting identifiable policy goals in government in a way that

(actually or potentially) involves the association itself within executive and/or legislative political processes, where those policy goals do not exhaust the socially conceivable options, and where the association specifically exists for such promotion.

I highlight that the exclusive control of government by one specific party may itself be an “identifiable policy goal”, even if no further policy substance is defined. The clause “involves the association itself” serves to distinguish parties from lobby organizations or think tanks. The “specifically exists” clause is intended to exclude associations that may formulate policy goals but would exist also if they would not do so, such as families, or religious groups. The idea that any party promotes only part of socially conceivable policy options indicates that parties will be sectional across society if people in society disagree on issues (cf. Day, Degenhardt and Maoláin [eds.] 1988: 570 on the UK; Warner 1983: 28 on the USA). This sectional character makes that we should expect more than one party in situations where parties historically emerge within a polity for the first time. Once this has occurred we may, possibly, encounter a transition to a one-party system.

For Mozambique we shall have to study how the Frelimo one-party situation came into being during the 1974-1975 transitional period leading to independence, out of a situation in which several parties existed. The personnel of these parties had for a significant part a background in the several liberation movements, which were not themselves founded specifically as political parties (Meneses, pers. comm.). Whatever their origin, characteristic for these parties in 1974-1975 was that they were Mozambican initiatives. They were not offshoots of European political parties; they could hardly be since the fascist regime in Portugal had curtailed any significant political activity (in contrast with France; see discussion by Ronguane 2010: 184-189 on the French and UK African colonial situations). Only by 1974 a very small opening had been made (cf. below). Using Nettle’s (1968) idea of the state as a variable, it can be commented that during the anti-colonial struggle Mondlane and Machel had divergent views on the role of Frelimo within the prospective Mozambican state. Mondlane focused on educating people for a future government of what he vaguely described in (1969: 221) as a “national political body” and a Central Committee of which the personnel could be popularly elected, while Machel stressed the primacy of Frelimo as a politico-military organization over both state and society, where Frelimo was viewed as sectional, i.e. as deliberately not intending to encompass different political outlooks. How Machel’s vision came to gain the upper hand is a matter for the historical part below.

Chiefs

I have briefly mentioned *chiefdom* already in relation to *state*. In Mozambique some chiefdoms existing in precolonial times were better able to survive colonialism than the precolonial states, which all but disappeared as a direct result of colonial aggression. The degree to which precolonial political institutions in Africa in general have survived the colonial era varies. Such institutions as existed in Africa as age grades, secret societies and spirit societies which could be politically relevant could survive colonialism and independence (see Forrest 2002: 245-249 for a description concerning Guinea-Bissau). The phenomenon of chiefly rule was widespread in colonial Southern Africa but was perceived to be a corrupted (Mamdani 1996) or eroding phenomenon, either in colonial times due to administrative changes or “modernizing processes” (as in Rhodesia – Holleman 1969: 152, 351) or, more commonly, under postcolonial governments (cf. Meneses 2007: 20-23). Recently, however, this perception has changed. Not only is it recognized that chiefly rule never totally eclipsed but it has been hailed as something to be officially promoted. In Mozambique the *Decree 15/2000* of 2000 is an example of such official promotion of chiefly rule. This changed attitude, together with its practical consequences, is captioned as the “revival of traditional leadership” (Oomen 2005: 11) or a similar phrase. Oomen (ibid.) views this as a “surprise re-entry” and problematizes “the essential novelty of the present situation, with democracies legally recognising cultural pluralism within a global world order” (2005: 25) within a wider framework of “customary law” (ibid.). Dinerman’s (2006) study debunks the thesis of “revolutionary rupture” and argues that, at least in Mozambique, the talk about a “break followed by total reversal” (2006: 23) concerning chiefs mostly serves just to avoid talking about other, undesirable, policies of Frelimo (2006: 283-288). To a certain extent this is true; to what extent, will have to be investigated below. I respond to Oomen that the “novelty of the present situation” lies in the introduction of political parties rather than in the existence of chiefdoms, since viewed from world history the latter are obviously older than the former.

Summary

The concepts of “state”, “party” and “chief” were discussed. It was remarked that a “state” may not only be characterized by concrete aspects but can also comprise an *idea* that people have in their thoughts. Not recognizing this would make it difficult to comprehend how

Mozambique could continue as a “state” while Renamo was fighting against the Frelimo-government of that state. The importance of “political party” as anthropological phenomenon was pointed out, even if it is a rather recent phenomenon. The resilience of chiefdoms as historical phenomenon was highlighted.