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Ideological Twinning

Socialist aesthetics and political meetings in Maputo, Mozambique

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Abstract: Based on ethnographic data from Maputo, Mozambique, this article charts the revolutionary capacities of formalized socialist aesthetics activated only at political meetings in a socio-political environment imprinted by the effects of a national ideological collapse. Through an extended case-study analysis of a political meeting held in a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Maputo in the spring of 2004, the article explores how a nationalist ideology came to act upon itself through the staging of a surprisingly robust socialist aesthetics that has survived the collapse of socialism in the mid-1980s. As will be argued, the carefully orchestrated meeting elicited a pristine political cosmology with a revolutionary force that the governing and former socialist party has never managed to harness. At the heart of contemporary political aesthetics is a paradoxical tension between *sacrifice* and *revolution*. Since the collapse of socialism in the mid-1980s, the aesthetics of political meetings in local communities has been structured around the recollection of a socialist utopia that is widely acknowledged as having fundamentally collapsed. The staging of meetings thus articulates what the Mozambican nation-state had to sacrifice (i.e. socialism) in order to become what it is today. Still, given that the Frelimo government has never deliberately distanced itself from socialism, a revolutionary residue remains, which can be activated at political meetings. Taking inspiration from Roy Wagner's more recent work on holography and invention, I explore the transformation of political meetings as an articulation of a symmetrical 'twinning' of seemingly opposing political principles that are held together by a singular and robust political aesthetics actualized only at political meetings. Hence, an initial and fundamental tension between an 'obscurantist' past and a modernist (socialist) future is gradually 'twinned' outwards into a new tension between sacrifice and revolution.

Introduction¹

Shortly after being sworn in as Mozambique's president on 2 February of 2005, Armando Guebuza embarked on a nation-wide tour to thank his supporters and mobilise the population around the political agenda that would guide his presidency. Having commenced the tour in the far north in early May, he reached Maputo, the country's capital, in the south a month later where he made a victorious return when visiting Mulwene, a peri-urban neighbourhood on the northern outskirts, on the 6th of June. The visit in Mulwene was organised as a political meeting with collective singing in praise of the governing Frelimo party followed by speeches by national and local party cadres on the need for popular mobilisation and unconditional support for the incumbent president. Not surprisingly, the meeting reached its climax with the presidential speech where the new political agenda was introduced and described at length. Until that moment, the presidential visit in Mulwene had followed the formula for political meetings used in Mozambique since the country gained independence from the Portuguese colonial oppressors in 1975. Halfway through Guebuza's speech, however, the meeting took a surprising turn. In front of the huge gathering and standing no more than 10 meters from the raised wooden platform where the president was delivering his speech, a tall and sinewy man suddenly took out a large poster and raised it over his head. In sizable block letters, the banner text expressed an unequivocal critique of the governing regime: 'Mozambique: a backward country' (*Moçambique: um país atrasado*). Having faced the increasingly agitated crowd, the man turned towards the president and held the banner high for a few minutes before folding it together when approached by an official from the president's staff. Surprisingly, the protester was not immediately reproached for having made a public critique of the governing party. In a cordial tone, the official wrote down the man's contact information and promised to return within a week in order to know more about the cause of his dissatisfaction.

What is particularly interesting about the brief disturbance of the political meeting is how the local protester managed to successfully turn the government's rhetoric against itself. On June 25, 1975, Mozambique's new president, Samora Machel, declared the 'total and complete independence of the People's Republic of Mozambique', in which, 'under the leadership of the worker-peasant alliance, all patriotic strata would commit themselves to

¹ This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2004 and 2015 in Mulwene, a peri-urban neighbourhood on the northern outskirts of Maputo, the capital of Mozambique.

the annihilation of the system of exploitation of man by man'.² And, to be sure, the 'annihilation of the system of exploitation' implied that all traces of 'backwardness' and 'obscuratistism' (e.g. ancestor worship, spiritual healing and oppressive feudal structures) should be irrevocably removed from the society (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983). While the Frelimo government's ideological visions of establishing a 'worker-peasant alliance' based on a nationalist version of Marxism-Leninism collapsed during the economic crisis of the 1980s, in many local communities, its legitimacy still derives from activating a revolutionary socialist 'political aesthetics' at present-day local political meetings. Taking my cue from Rancière, I take aesthetics to be 'a system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience' (2004:13). Hence, if aesthetics defines and delimits a field of the perceptible by determining what is visible and invisible within it, *political aesthetics* refer to the conditions of sharing a sensorial experience and to the sources of disrupting that same order. It is, and here I again follow Rancière, a redistribution or interruption of the sensible; 'a reconfiguration of the given perceptual forms' (op.cit.:63). Returning to the incident in Mulwene, then, it was by publicly confronting the government with its political rhetoric (e.g. the need to transcend 'backwardness' and 'obscuratistism') and, implicitly, with its fundamental shortcomings that the protester effectively turned the revolutionary political aesthetics of the former socialist party against itself.

In this article, I trace the revolutionary capacities of formalized political aesthetics activated at political meetings in a socio-political environment imprinted by the effects of a national ideological collapse. Through an extended case-study analysis of a political meeting held in a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Maputo in the spring of 2005, I discuss how a nationalist ideology came to act upon itself through the staging of a surprisingly robust socialist aesthetics that has survived the collapse of socialism in the mid-1980s. As I will describe, the carefully orchestrated meeting elicited a pristine political cosmology with a revolutionary force that the governing and former socialist party has never managed to harness.

One may rightfully ponder why the revolutionary socialist aesthetics of the early post-independence era continue to be activated at political meetings in local communities. It could be imagined, for example, that the potency of socialist aesthetics and therefore also

² <http://vozdarevolucao.blogspot.co.uk/2009/06/mensagem-da-proclamacao-da.html>.

of the formula for political meetings having been used since independence would gradually wane following the collapse of socialism as a guiding ideology. As I will argue, however, political meetings in local communities endure as potent vehicles for activating socialist aesthetics that stretches what might be contained by an all-encompassing political system. Crucially, it was at political meetings and rallies that Frelimo's ideological vision of a modernist socialist society was most forcefully promoted and contrasted with the 'obscurantist beliefs and practices' of traditional communities (Honwana 2003:62; see also Cahen 1993:54). With the collapse of socialism as national ideology in the mid-1980s, however, the socialist aesthetics activated at political meetings in local communities seem to articulate a different tension. While the formula for political meetings has remained intact since the initial post-Independence years, it no longer elicits a collective vision of a pure socialist society. Rather, at the heart of contemporary political aesthetics is a paradoxical tension between *sacrifice* and *revolution*. Since the late 1980s, the aesthetics of political meetings in many local communities has been structured around the recollection of a socialist utopia that is widely acknowledged as having fundamentally collapsed. In a sense, the staging of meetings, such as the presidential visit in Mulwene, thus articulates what the Mozambican nation-state had to sacrifice (i.e. socialism) in order to become what it is today. Still, given that the Frelimo government has never deliberately distanced itself from socialism, a revolutionary residue remains, which can be activated at political meetings.³ Taking my cue from Roy Wagner's more recent work (2001; 2010; 2011b; 2012), I explore the transformation of political meetings as an articulation of a symmetrical 'twinning' of seemingly opposing political principles that are held together by a singular and robust political aesthetics actualized only at political meetings. Hence, the initial and fundamental tension between an 'obscurantist' past and a modernist future is gradually 'twinned' outwards into a new tension between sacrifice and revolution. In a sense, the latter opposition (sacrifice::revolution) is the *expersonation* (Wagner 2001:51) of the original tension (obscurantism::modernity) returning with a vengeance.

If, as I argue, political meetings in contemporary Mozambique are apt media for stretching the limits of all-encompassing political ideologies, this might have significant implications for our anthropological understanding of meetings writ large. In closing the

³ It could even be argued that the tension between sacrifice and revolution reinvigorates an ideological force that has been at the heart of socialist movements throughout the last century namely the need to sacrifice existing value regimes in order for a revolution to occur. In this particular instance, however, the relationship between sacrifice and revolution constitutes an oppositional (synchronic) tension on the 'inside' of an all-encompassing ideological system and not a progressive (diachronic) movement in time.

article, I will therefore suggest that certain forms of political meetings balance out society's key political paradoxes; not because they adhere to a static ritualized formula (cf. Moore and Myerhoff 1977) but because they change as rapidly as the world of which they are part. To be sure, the similarity in velocity is what gives political meetings their seemingly unchanging qualities. It could therefore be argued that the meeting is to politics as myth is to cosmology (Lévi-Strauss 1970; cf. Gow 2001).

The election of a new quarter chief in Mulwene

Since the birth of the neighbourhood in 2000, Mulwene had been governed by one neighbourhood chief (*secretário do bairro*) and 52 quarter chiefs (*chefes de quarteirões*), who administer individual quarters, each comprising approximately 150 household. In Quarter 20, the residents had become increasingly dissatisfied with the erratic and allegedly corrupt behaviour of their local quarter chief and wanted to nominate a new one. A small group of residents from the quarter therefore decided to organize a formal election process in order to find a new and hopefully better quarter chief. While knowing that the neighbourhood chief in Mulwene would probably disapprove of their initiative, they summoned all residents for an initial meeting where candidates would be given the opportunity to present their political agendas to the public.

Early in the morning on 12 March 2005, the promoters went through Quarter 20 with whistles in order to summon all residents for the meeting that was planned to begin at 9 o'clock in one of the quarter's public squares. The neighbourhood chief had been informed of the meeting and, while sceptical of the initiative, agreed to participate as the municipality's official representative. Together with his notary and a local delegate from the governing Frelimo party, he arrived 15 minutes late and the meeting began when the promoters asked all participants to sing two communal songs in praise of Frelimo's socialist victories. Encouraged to do so by one of the promoters standing to his right, the portly neighbourhood chief then stood up in front of the 40-odd participants attending the meeting and raised his right hand towards the sky. 'Mulwene *hoje!*' he shouted three times; each exclamation immediately followed by a repeated response shout from the participants. 'You all know what Frelimo is?' he rhetorically asked and proceeded to respond: 'Frelimo is progress. Only Frelimo will be able to remove the evils that prevent us from reaching a collective future and destroy the individualistic and greedy behaviour that corrupts the Mozambican nation'. During the neighbourhood chief's 10 minute long monologue, he

repeatedly emphasized that the election was not a collective process and that he was only there as a state representative to witness the procedure. “This is your process; not ours!” he thundered out each word separately and made a theatrical pause before returning to his seat next to the Frelimo representative. ‘And this is not how it should be done’, he concluded. The promoters then asked the six candidates to present their political programs and sketch out how to tackle the pressing problems that residents in Quarter 20 were facing. All but one of the candidates structured their contributions as a crescendo towards a high-pitched critique of the weak collective morale. ‘The quarter chief was the embodiment of the spirit of apathy’, one of the candidates argued. ‘But that spirit has to be eliminated. We need to be strong and brave enough to denounce those who promote chaos and confusion. In this quarter, we will never be able to live in peace if we are afraid of reporting on our neighbours. Denouncing a neighbour is not equivalent to killing a brother; it rectifies a bad morale’. When all candidates had presented their political programs, the promoters announced the date for the election and thanked the neighbourhood chief and the local Frelimo member for attending the meeting. The gathering slowly dissolved and people returned to their homes to resume their weekend activities.

Political meetings as ideological delivery rooms

After the celebration of Independence in 1975, it took Frelimo two more years to build the ideological skeleton of an alternative state (Coelho 2004:4). At the Second Congress in 1977, a development strategy intended to guide Mozambique through the next decade was formulated. Most importantly, Frelimo was constituted as a vanguard Marxist Leninist party, which was to act as primary force pushing the nation towards a socialist reconstruction (Dinerman 2006:50). This ambitious objective would be achieved by adopting a planned economic strategy and, even more profoundly, through a ‘decolonisation of individual minds’ leading to the complete eradication of all ethno-cultural differences (Meneses 2006:65). Traditional practices, such as spiritual healing and ancestor worship, were consequently condemned as obscurant remnants of the kind of backwardness that the new socialist nation would leave behind. From the late 1970s, the political rhetoric of the new government was further sharpened and it was increasingly emphasized how internal enemies hindered the socialist process through rumours, conspiracies and economic sabotage (Hall and Young 1997:48). In his detailed analysis of the so-called ‘Meeting of the Compromised’ in 1982 where accused opponents of the

socialist revolution were questioned and scorned in public, Igreja (2010) exposes the violence and ruthlessness with which the Frelimo government wanted to transform the Mozambican society. Focusing on one particularly brutal encounter, Igreja describes how ‘the way in which Machel (the Mozambican president) created the context for this interrogation demonstrated that he desired to humiliate (the accused person)’ (op.cit.:793).

During the initial post-Independence period, Frelimo’s legitimacy was relatively uncontested with ties to the population based on a strongly felt ‘wartime affection’ (Ottaway 1988:217). ‘To die a tribe and be born a nation’ (Henriksen 1978:455), Frelimo’s slogan during the struggle against the Portuguese colonisers, was carried into the post-Independence era as a guiding vision for a unified nation that was determined to eliminate ethnic differences and heal the wounds afflicted by colonial suppression through ‘scientific socialism’ (Saul 1985). In the late 1970s, Kathleen Sheldon was doing ethnographic research on gender relations in Beira in the central Mozambican province of Sofala. Her unpublished memoirs from that period beautifully captures the intense atmosphere at local political meetings among activists who were determined to build a unified nation liberated of the vices of the past (2014). Sheldon eloquently describes a series of meetings with the ‘Organization of Mozambican Women’ (OMM)⁴ beginning with communal singing of socialist songs in praise of Frelimo (‘Frelimo sings with us, you can’t sing alone’), followed by endless sessions of analytical self-criticism where traditional practices were rejected as being morally abhorrent before reaching a crescendo at the final gathering. At this closing stage of the meeting, the need for continuous revolutionary progress towards the realization of pure socialism was collectively formulated and written down in memoranda for the organisation’s growing archive.

Sheldon’s memoirs give a passionate glimpse into a decisive period of Mozambique’s recent history when political meetings served as delivery rooms for a socialist ideology that were to catapult the country into a modernized and independent future. If we then compare with the meeting held in Mulwene in March 2005, it does seem as if the ideological drive has maintained its pace throughout the intervening 30-odd years. In both instances, political meetings reflect strikingly similar aesthetics framed by communal singing in praise of Frelimo’s socialist victories followed by sessions of analytical self-criticism and mutual allegations of moral deviancy before concluding with a ritualized recital of the need for collective progress towards a modernized future liberated

⁴ *Organização da Mulher Moçambicana*

from the vices of the past. Returning to Rancière, we might argue that despite the apparent differences in objectives at the two meetings (short-term objective of electing a new quarter chief versus the long-term objective of transforming the Mozambican state into a socialist democracy based on a ‘worker-peasant alliance’), they both seem to articulate similar forms of political aesthetics aiming to reconfigure ‘what is given to sense perception’ which, in both instances, is a particular configuration of ‘domination and subjection’ (2009:13). The problem is, however, that Mozambique is no longer ‘a bellwether for the future of socialism in Africa’ (Young 1982:89). Despite the ambitious goal of rapid development, independence did not mark the beginning of a period of reconstruction for Mozambique. Only two years after Independence, the already sorely tried country was cast into a regional conflict between the ruling Frelimo party and Renamo,⁵ a guerrilla-movement supported first by Rhodesia and later by South Africa.⁶ As the war activities escalated, the limits of Frelimo’s program of modernization and secularization as well as the incapacity of its ideology to respond to people’s actual problems became obvious. With an increasingly paralyzed state organization without the necessary resources to carry out even minor administrative tasks, in 1987 the government made a definitive ‘turn toward the West’ and decided to undertake far-reaching economic reforms orchestrated by the IMF and the World Bank (Hanlon 1996). The ideological shift was apparent at Frelimo’s 5th Congress held in 1989. All references to Marxism-Leninism were carefully removed from official documents along with any associated phrase, such as ‘scientific socialism’. The party’s new political key terms were significantly less clear and some almost vacuous, such as the ideal of creating a ‘democratic society of general well-being’ (Hall and Young 1997:202; Nielsen 2014a). In 1990 Mozambique took a final step away from its socialist past by adopting a new Constitution that enshrined the principles of multiparty democracy. From the first democratic elections in 1994 and until today, Frelimo has nevertheless been elected as the

⁵ Renamo (The Mozambican National Resistance (*Resistência Nacional Moçambicana*)) was initially a rebel movement but after the peace treaty in 1992, it was transformed into a political party (Vines 1996). While Renamo ‘desperately searched for a political ideology’ (Honwana 2003:62) to constitute a nationalist vision in opposition to Frelimo, it is doubtful whether they succeeded. In the attempt to muster popular support, Renamo has consistently emphasized their respect for those traditions and religious beliefs, which were rejected by Frelimo as manifestations of ‘obscurantism’. As a political party, however, Renamo has been less successful in formulating an ideological programme.

⁶ Before the war reached its conclusion in 1992, a million Mozambicans had lost their lives, one third of the population (i.e. five million people) had been forced to leave their homes, and 60% of all schools had been destroyed (International Poverty Centre 2007). According to recent estimates, the total cost of the conflict was 20 billion USD, which roughly equals five years GDP for the country (Christie and Hanlon 2001:6).

majority party in the national parliament. At the general elections in 2014 it thus won 144 (56%) of all 250 constituencies.

Considering the radical political and ideological transformations that Mozambique has undergone during the last 30 years, it does seem strange that participants at political meetings today, such as the election meeting in Mulwene, continue to actualize a socialist aesthetics that is uncannily similar to that of the initial post-Independence era. Could it not be imagined, for instance, that contemporary Mozambique would follow other postsocialist nation states in sub-Saharan Africa and eastern Europe in rejecting socialist values and rhetorics through an unambiguous adoption of economic liberalism (cf. Pitcher and Askew 2006)? Hence, while the social-economic transformations can be read in terms of the recent 'turn towards the West', it is the unchanging and robust aesthetics of political meetings that warrant further analytical investigation.

Political meetings: An ideological terminus?

A few days after the presentation of the candidates in Quarter 20, I visited the neighbourhood chief to discuss the procedure. I had barely sat down before my portly interlocutor voiced his dissatisfaction. 'It's all wrong, Morten'. The neighbourhood chief leaned back and sighed. 'This is not at all how it is supposed to be done. Why didn't they just approach me?' He made a small theatrical pause before continuing to respond to his own question. 'It could have been so easy. If they want a new leader, let me nominate a new one. But they wanted to prolong the process; they wanted to complicate things...'

And, indeed, the election process in Quarter 20 was more complex and time-consuming than previous elections in the neighbourhood. Two weeks after the initial meeting, the formal election was held in a vacant plot in Quarter 20. An election committee was appointed and during the course of two consecutive days, they organized an election process that involved the large majority of residents in the area. The neighbourhood chief attended the final session accompanied by his notary and the local Frelimo delegate and when all votes had been counted, he officially announced the name of the winner. Defeating the only female candidate with only a handful votes, Faruque Abdalá, a newcomer who had lived in Mulwene for four years, won the election. While looking a bit taken aback by the situation, he thanked the neighbourhood chief for the honour of

representing his community.⁷ The following weekend, the inaugural ceremony was held where Abdalá took over the office from his unpopular predecessor. After the initial songs in praise of Frelimo, the neighbourhood chief announced that all responsibilities had been transferred to Abdalá and he was now the official representative of Quarter 20. Turning towards the promoters of the election process, the neighbourhood chief expressed his continued dissatisfaction with the process. ‘I am only here as formal representative of the state’, he stated with a loud and clear voice. ‘And what you have done is not right. It should have been done differently. It is not in the revolutionary spirit of the party to commence a political process without involving your leader (litt. ‘your father’ (*o seu pãe*)). Still, as he continued to explain, the process was well organized and supported by the majority of residents in the quarter and therefore it had to be accepted as formally legitimate. The promoters thanked the neighbourhood chief and after a few statements in praise of the party, the meeting was over.

The basis for the popular participation that was so crucial to Frelimo’s nationalist project during the late 1970s has gradually been eroded and today political meetings are considered as anachronistic remnants from an era that has little or no relevance to the present. While Frelimo’s initial program clearly defined the procedures for securing independence, it was considerably more vague about how to draw benefits from popular involvement in the process of creating a progressive socialist nation-state. All too quickly, mass organizations (such as OMM) that were established as mechanisms of popular empowerment ‘became more like transmission belts for delivery of the party line’ (Saul 2005:313) with the consequence that those critical debates that should have been the lifeblood of a revolutionary process gradually dried up.

This historical account does nevertheless seem to be at odds with the situation in Mulwene, where the possibility of an important political transformation arose from the activation of a political aesthetics that originated in the initial post-Independence era (Nielsen 2011; 2014b). In order for participants to engage in debates during the meeting, a complete assimilation was required so that bodily postures (e.g. sitting up straight when listening to the neighbourhood chief’s initial discourse and standing up while singing the communal songs in praise of Frelimo), verbal phrasings (e.g. the very formalized structures of sentences and individual statements) and argumentative structures (e.g. the recurrent

⁷ As I was later told, Faruque had recently bought a truckload of grit to stabilize the dirt road outside his house and, on that account, had apparently gained a certain degree of popularity.

self-criticism) that seemed to arise from a socialist ideology that everyone present also acknowledged as having fundamentally failed. Somehow, a radical alteration occurred when participants allowed themselves to become assimilated by this political aesthetics. During the meeting, the difference between then and now - between a proto-socialist past and a capitalist present - ceased to exist and all that remained was an endless repetition of a single eternal moment.

A few weeks after Abdalá had been elected as quarter chief, I sat down with old Boavida Wate, a former Frelimo activist and community chief in Mulwene during the 1980s, to discuss the process. Having been quite vocal in his criticism of the neighbourhood administration in Mulwene, Wate was clearly satisfied with the way things had turned out. I asked him how the promoters had managed to successfully organise the elections despite the overt hostility of the neighbourhood administration. ‘Well, Morten, you have to know how to do things properly. I knew how to organise the meeting so I helped them. You need to do the ‘Mulwene hoye’...’. Wate raised his right arm as if in praise of Frelimo and smiled. ‘If you let people sing their songs, they feel as if they are at home (*eles chegaram em casa*)’. In ‘*Power, Poets and the People*’ (Penvenne and Siteo 2000), Penvenne and Siteo analyse Frelimo’s salutations and praise etiquette. Since the armed struggle against the Portuguese colonisers, Penvenne and Siteo tell us, Frelimo has used political meetings to ‘consolidate and expand its base’. Typically commencing with a ‘rousing sequence of exhortations in support of Frelimo’s goals (*Viva!* – Long live!) and against Frelimo-defined “enemies” (*Abaixo!* – Down with!)’ (op.cit.:72),⁸ a shout-and-response session ensued where the leadership called out phrases for the audience to respond to: ‘Long live Frelimo’ and ‘long live the struggle against imperialism’. As Wate emphasized, the promoters of the elections were not only conscious of the party’s salutation and praise etiquette; they knew that in order for them to successfully organize an election process that was from the outset explicitly opposed by the neighbourhood administration, they would have to work through the political aesthetics of their immediate opponents. As it turned out, the activation of the socialist aesthetics made the ideology act upon itself and thereby stretch what could be contained by an all-encompassing political system. Significantly, it was at the meeting that the revolutionary force associated with the staging of Frelimo-like aesthetics both (re)actualized the failures of the governing party and

⁸ According to Jason Sumich, Frelimo was even known by the nickname ‘*abaixo com*’ (pers. comm.).

precisely of that same reason giving the local residents a unique opportunity for reclaiming political legitimacy: They were essentially being more Frelimo-like, as it were, than the party itself had ever managed to be. In the final section of this article, I will discuss how the stretching of the political ideology produced what Rancière has defined as a “double effect”: the readability of a political signification and a sensible perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification’ (2004:63). As I shall argue, this double effect emerged when the tension between obscurantism and modernity was ‘twinned’ outwards as a relationship between sacrifice and revolution.

Ideological twinning

In ‘*An Anthropology of the Subject*’ (2001), Wagner examines the ‘twinning’ of bilateral symmetry and sexual dimorphism as a fundamental form of ‘appositional self-knowledge’. The human body is connected to the external world through a double process of twinning. All that might serve to model extension or relations in the world is twinned *inward* in the body’s laterality (walking by putting one foot in front of the other, coordination of hands and feet, etc.), which is again twinned *outward* as two distinct gender types defined as male and female (op.cit.:42). Hence, as emphasized by Weiner (1998:26), gender and laterality are used to ‘code’ each other in a symmetrical relationship between two genders, external to each other, and two sides of the body, internal to each other. Twinning is not equivalent to mirroring, however. What is twinned is also transformed in the act of its own replication: male is not female’s identical twin just as the two genders do not reproduce the two sides of the human body. Wagner defines this appositional pairing of gender and bilaterality as ‘antitwins’ of each other. They are, Wagner tells us, ‘distinctive in relation to the generic animal form by underdetermining the physical body and overdetermining its attributes. As disembodied concomitants or gender symmetries, they are one-sided beings’ (2001:49). Hence, gender always involves a certain kind of underdetermination of its inherent laterality (male as internal to female and vice-versa). What is revealed to others is one’s ‘own gender’ in contrast to some ‘other gender’. Still, as a genderless ‘sexual desire’ (Dalton 2002:58), one’s ‘own gender’ (also defined by Wagner as ‘supergender’) is not an impersonation or replication of an inner counterpart but, rather, an *expersonation* of the hidden laterality (Wagner 2001:51; 2012:162-163). While *impersonation* involves a ‘mere copying of its subject, an act of *mimesis* in Aristotle’s terms, and thus necessarily an exaggeration of some features and consequent omission or downgrading of others’,

expersonation ‘reverses this process, and registers more concrete particularity than is found in the original...so that the original becomes a *de facto* impersonation of it’ (Wagner 2012:162; see also Wagner 2001:48-66). As a ‘form of abstraction’ (Holbraad 2013), impersonation subtracts the unique particularities of things in order to establish stable and conventionalized social forms.⁹ Expersonation, by contrast, adds to the things upon which it operates, ‘rendering them more particular than it found them’ (Wagner 2012:162). In a sense, anti-twinning (or expersonated twinning) characterizes the appositional knowledge of twinning itself. Almost like the Mobius Strip, the anti-twins are ‘subject-object shift agencies, that either turn us inside out or show us to be one-sided’ (Wagner 2010:51). With explicit reference to Bateson’s perplexing analysis of lateral asymmetry when looking in a mirror (1979), Wagner thus concludes that the effect of anti-twinning is an acute insight as if the mirror had borrowed one’s eyes in order to view itself. ‘It is the “sense” of a picture that contains its own depictive (and hence pragmatic “understanding”) capabilities that is at issue’ (Wagner 2001:54). We achieve this acute and inverse insight, Wagner might say, when briefly sensing that our own gender (our ‘supergender’!) is structured by the laterality of the physical body that is otherwise underdetermined.

What I find particularly illuminating in Wagner’s exposition of twinning as appositional self-knowledge is the paradoxical insight that knowledge might act upon itself through recursive (holographic) self-replication. Wagner thus invites us to consider the purchase of keeping an analytical ‘double-focus’ on twinning and unity *at once* (2012), which folds within the object the knowledge about its internal composition (e.g. the twinning to every ‘one’ and the unity to every twinning).¹⁰ This is a particularly rewarding approach, I propose, when studying contemporary reverberations of an ideological collapse within a political system that claims to be all-encompassing. For could it not be that political disruptions in such environments arise precisely by ‘expersonating’ the ideological premise, which, although having collapsed long ago, still orient its internal organisation? If so, the twinning of an ideological collapse is not merely an imitation of a fractured utopian imagery; it might equally articulate the emergence of a pristine revolutionary sensibility.

⁹ In *Coyote Anthropology* (2010), Wagner thus argues that ‘(t)he secret of everyday values and normal life is just simply that of impersonation... We copy, mimic, and imitate one another every day, in fun *or* in abject seriousness, including our ideas, body movements, and especially our feelings, and have learned to do so since the day we were born, or before’.

¹⁰ Here, we might recall Turner’s aphoristic comment that ‘twinship presents the paradoxes that what is physically double is structurally single and what is mystically one is empirically two’ (1991:45).

While Mozambique is not a socialist nation-state and probably never has been (cf. Cahen 1993), its nationalist ideology is today structured around the painful recollection of having sacrificed socialism in order for the nation-state to survive. Today, there is no distinction between the Mozambican state and the Frelimo party whose interest groups and affiliated associations dominate civic life in both urban and rural areas throughout large parts of the country (Nielsen 2007; Sumich 2015). Indeed, as argued by Michel Cahen, *'the site of production of national sentiment is the party'*. The party is the nation in this country without a nation' (1993:56; italics in original). At the heart of this nation, however, is no longer a shared ideology that outlines the guiding principles and moral values of the collective. Rather, what unites and binds people together as a collective is the congenital collapse of the ideological project by which the nation was born (Nielsen 2014a; cf. Pitcher 2006). In other words, this nationalist imagery in 'a country without a nation' is, paradoxically, configured in terms of an imagined future that collapsed long before it could be implemented.

The activation of a political aesthetics that everyone acknowledged as having already collapsed should therefore not be considered merely as a caricature of socialism, or, to use Alexei Yurchak's apt term, a parodic 'overidentification' with an ideological idea (2006; see also Boyer and Yurchak 2010) structured around a leap from 'obscurantism' to modernity. Rather, what I wish to suggest is that political meetings in local Mozambican communities articulate a symmetrical twinning of the latter into the seemingly contradictory ideological principles of *sacrifice* and *revolution*. Official state-authored rhetoric is structured around the recollection of a socialist utopia that is widely acknowledged as having fundamentally collapsed. Even public gatherings in local communities, such as the meeting in Mulwene, are permeated by a nostalgic sadness that takes effect through the staging of an alleged defunct socialist aesthetics. Sustaining a political aesthetics that is acknowledged as having collapsed long ago is, however, an operative lever for reproducing the party's political legitimacy and continued relevance. Through the repetitive staging of the 'socialist drama' at political meetings, Frelimo reminds the Mozambican population of what it was prepared to sacrifice in order to salvage a decaying nation-state. From this perspective, the government's 'turn toward the West' (Devereux and Palmero 1999) in the mid-1980s was not caused by an ideological rejection of socialism but, rather, by an all-consuming love for the nation, which, at the crucial moment of dire national crisis, infused the political elite with the strength to sacrifice its socialist soul.

At local meetings, such as the one that occurred in Mulwene in March 2005, state-authored rhetoric structured around the painful recollection of an ideological sacrifice are confronted by seemingly contradictory political principles that operate through the resuscitation of a revolutionary potential that the governing Frelimo party never managed to harness - let alone realize. No wonder, then, that the neighbourhood chief was reluctant to acknowledge the legitimacy of the election process: By allowing the enterprising promoters to organize the election procedures in conformity with political meetings organized during the initial post-independence era, he invariably confronted the incapacitated Mozambican state by its own weaknesses. With brutal clarity, the election process revealed not what the former socialist government had been willing to sacrifice in order to salvage the weakened nation but, rather, what it had been incapable of delivering. Returning to Wagner, we might argue that the promoters of the election ‘expersonated’ themselves by imitating a version of the socialist ideology that had never existed before. By so doing, the perspective was essentially taken out of the perceiver (promoters, residents and neighbourhood cadres) (Holbraad 2013) and the ideology came to operate on itself to such an extent that the state-authored mourning of the mid-1980s sacrifice of the socialist ideology paradoxically appeared as an impersonation of its symmetrical anti-twin (the resuscitated revolutionary potentials actualized by the promoters).¹¹ Held together by a singular and surprisingly robust socialist aesthetics, the two pairs of ideological principles can thus be seen as a symmetrical twinning of what the potentials and implications of political meetings might be. They disrupt the internal organisation of a political system not by positing an opposition or radical outside but, rather, by operating as what Wagner calls a ‘subject/object shift agency’ (2010) that allows a momentary and, indeed, unsettling gaze at the holographic self-scaling capacities by which the political imagery is stretched.

In sum, a reading of the political meeting in Mulwene by way of Wagner’s analysis of twinning suggests that the socialist aesthetics was activated not merely as a (re)enactment of a collapsed utopian ideology in order to destabilize the Frelimo government. The ambition was not at all to overthrow an all-encompassing political system but, rather, to allow the socialist aesthetics to recursively operate on itself and thereby generate a ‘double effect’ (Rancière 2004:63): The political aesthetics was immediately readable while at the same time acting upon itself in an uncanny twinned-out version. With

¹¹ As such, expersonation reverses conventional forms of imitation and mirroring so that ‘the one you see in the mirror steals your act of looking but only to see itself’ (Wagner 2011a:173).

Wagner, I will consequently argue that the appositional self-knowledge that was thereby produced (i.e. the expersonated version being ideologically stronger than the ‘original’) is what allowed a stretching of an all-encompassing political system. While all participants undoubtedly knew that socialism will never again come to as serve as ideological basis for a national project, its momentary force arose from the successful activation of the tension between two latent oppositions, namely obscurantism::modernity and sacrifice::revolution.

Conclusion

In *Forgetting from Above and Memory from Below* (Pitcher 2006), M. Anne Pitcher contrasts ‘forgetting’ among state officials and businesses with ‘remembering’ among urban workers in Maputo. In the attempt to build a national identity that rests on ‘entrepreneurialism, social harmony through market participation, and the shared goals of business and the state’ (op.cit.:106), state officials and financial entrepreneurs are strategically attempting to eradicate the traces of the country’s socialist past. By contrast, urban workers are reviving the political sensibility of the early post-independence era in order to articulate their dissatisfaction with the effects of neo-liberalism:

“In the urban areas, some workers are expressing their discontent in a language that draws on the promises made in the past, the right accorded to them under socialism, and the principles articulated by the previously Marxist-Leninist party. By employing these symbolic frameworks, workers are not attempting to return to that historical moment just after independence... But their discourse does serve as a powerful reminder to the ruling party that it stills depends on workers for political support... This may constitute a *‘political awakening’* in Mozambique, where collective desires instilled in workers during the socialist period are rescued from certain oblivion in the new era” (op.cit.:99, 105; italics added).¹²

What Pitcher considers as a ‘political awakening’ among urban workers, I take to constitute an ‘interruption of the sensible’ (*pace* Rancière 2004) at political meetings in local

¹² It might be argued that the recent series of popular uprisings and lynchings that have unsettled several Mozambican cities articulate a similar albeit more violent form of ‘political awakening’ (Bertelsen 2014). Hence, in February of 2008, groups of angry citizens took to the streets of Maputo to manifest their anger about the government’s plan to increase transportation costs with 50-100%. During the riots, there were at least 68 cases of popular lynchings, where individuals accused of misconduct of office and other forms of crime were informally sentenced during processes of popular justice (Lubkemann, Kyed et al. 2011). Significantly, these processes clearly resembled the practice of public flogging and beating of thieves that was implemented during the initial post-Independence era (Bertelsen 2009; see also Sachs and Welch 1990).

communities. While it may rightfully be argued that socialism in Mozambique never was properly implemented, the activation of its political aesthetics by a collective acting in opposition to the local administration did, for a brief moment in time, elicit the revolutionary capacities contained in that ideology. To be sure, none of the participants at the meeting had ever experienced the realization of the socialist ideal and, still, the staging of its political aesthetics clearly manifested what implications it could have. It might therefore be argued that the political meeting in Mulwene was a potent way of making ideology act upon itself. Through a singular and surprisingly robust political aesthetics, the socialist ideal turned upon itself and ‘twinned’ out into a symmetrical relation between its sacrifice and revolutionary potentials. A revolutionary potential was ‘expersonated’, in other words, by imitating a version of the socialist ideology that has never existed before. Paradoxically, then, what political meetings in contemporary Mozambique seem to generate is a mode of appositional self-knowledge where a revolutionary potentials contains and is contained by its own collapse; not a ‘perspective seen twice’ (Strathern 1991:113) but, rather, a twinned-out perspective seen as one.

In Moore’s classic analysis of a citizens’ political meeting in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania (1977), the author shows how unanimity is achieved through ‘style and form, rather than substance’ (op.cit.:152). By carefully examining the repetitive formalities of the meeting, Moore traces the contours of a ‘doctrinal efficacy’ that works by recursively legitimizing the ‘unquestionable’ and timeless qualities of its socialist ideology. In order to ‘carry the new political faith far into the countryside’, political meetings are used ‘to define and teach an official version of social reality while acting it out’ (op.cit.:170). Returning to the political meeting in Mulwene in May 2005, it was the seemingly timeless character of the socialist aesthetics that allowed for a transformation to occur on the ‘inside’ of an all-encompassing political ideology. In both instances, then, political meetings serve as vehicles for coming to terms with considerable socio-political transformations through the making of a seemingly timeless aesthetics. Let me then finally propose that political meetings, in this regard, seem to exhibit certain fundamental qualities that are not unlike those of certain Amerindian myths (Lévi-Strauss 1970; 2001; see also Gow 2001). According to Lévi-Strauss, myths are ‘instruments for the obliteration of time’ (1970:16), which exist to lessen the effects of radical societal transformations. Hence, in ‘The Naked Man’, Lévi-Strauss argues that the Amerindians ‘have conceived their myths for one purpose only: to come to terms with history, and...to re-establish a state of equilibrium capable of acting as a shock absorber

for the disturbances caused by real life events' (1981:607). Myths appear timeless precisely because they change at the same pace as the world of which they are part. They 'readjust' themselves, Lévi-Strauss explains, in order to produce the 'least resistance to the flow of events' (op.cit.:610). In a certain sense, political meetings in Mozambique and Tanzania seem to operate as 'instruments for the obliteration of time' which undergo transformations as rapidly as the societies of which they are part and therefore, paradoxically, appear to be timeless. Considered as such, meetings are to politics what myths are to cosmology.

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