The killings in Muidumbe district began in the second half of the year 2002. In some cases, attacks were witnessed, while in others, mauled bodies alone told grisly stories. It was by no means unheard of in the area for a lion to kill a person. But this was different. These lions—by collective reckoning, seven—lingered in and around villages on the southeastern edge of the Mueda plateau for months on end, taking victims one after another. Afraid to venture outside of their homes, area residents abandoned their fields at the peak of the agricultural season. As the previous year’s stores ran out, and the current year’s crops rotted in the fields, many went hungry. Women fetched water from sources outside the village only en masse, escorted by men armed with bow and arrow. Bathing became almost impossible. Schools ended classes early so that students could return home while the sun was still high in the sky. Well before dark, makeshift chamber pots were emptied as villagers made ready for another long night behind barricaded doors and boarded-up windows.

1 This essay draws on field research conducted in the Mueda plateau region between 1993 and 2004. Marcos Agostinho Mandumbwe, Eusébio Tissa Kairo, and Felista Elias Mkaima participated in various phases of research. Funding was provided by the Fulbright-Hays Program, the United States Institute of Peace, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom, and the British Academy. Draft versions were presented at the School of American Research Advanced Seminar, “Towards an Anthropology of Democracy,” 5-10 March 2005 in Santa Fe, and at the Anthropology Seminar in the Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, 15 April 2005. Insightful commentary was provided by David Nugent.
Hopes that government would resolve the crisis went unmet. Muidumbe district administrator Pedro Seguro later asserted that provincial authorities failed to respond to his requisition for hunting rifles and ammunition. Villagers wondered if such petitions were even made for, as far as they remembered, no word to that effect was ever issued from the administrator’s office, nor was any other action taken to put an end to the carnage. As the death toll mounted, villagers took matters into their own hands, killing several lions by laying traps in the village or hunting them down with bow and arrow. They also began lynching fellow villagers whom they accused of making or transforming into lions to feed upon neighbors and kin. Those attempting to intervene when mobs pulled the accused from their homes, bound and beat them, doused them with petrol, and set them alight themselves became the objects of potentially lethal popular suspicion.2

For generations, Muedans have suspected certain few among them capable of making or transforming into lions. Sorcerers, by Muedan definition, perform astonishing acts through which they feed themselves on the wellbeing of others. According to most with whom we worked, however, such phenomena have greatly intensified in recent years, taking on alarming new dimensions. The reason, in a word: democracy. One elder put it succinctly when he told me: “In the past, sorcerers were regulated. Today we have democracy. Anything is possible now. Everything is permitted.” In pre-colonial times, individuals accused of sorcery were submitted to ordeals (Dias and Dias 1970: 370)—tests the failing of which not only indicated their guilt but also, often, ended their lives. Colonial and post-colonial regimes prohibited anti-sorcery ordeals in Mueda and elsewhere in Mozambique,

2 This account draws on (Limbombo 2003) as well as a number of interviews conducted by the author in April 2004 in Muidumbe and in Pemba (the provincial capital).
but these restrictions on anti-sorcery activities were interpreted by most as elements of a broader policy also prohibiting the practice of sorcery itself (West 2005). But this, no longer. When I asked the administrator of neighboring Mueda district, Ambrósio Vicente Bulasi, about a recent spate of lion attacks and vigilante justice there, he too linked such occurrences, in the present, to democracy. “Democracy,” he stated, “means that each one has the right to believe what he believes.” Personally, he did not “believe in sorcery.” “Of course people cannot make lions and send them to attack other people,” he told me. “These things arise out of conflicts between families.” Democracy, however, dictated that officials such as he not get involved in these affairs. “It is essential not to get drawn into such matters,” he told me. “If you try to adjudicate, you wind up taking sides. It is better to have [people] reach a resolution on their own,” he concluded. “I tell them that they must sort these things out for themselves.” According to residents of Muidumbe, this is precisely what their administrator did when their villages were besieged by lions in late 2002 and early 2003.

During his 1998 tour of Africa, U.S. President Bill Clinton declared: “From Kampala to Capetown, from Dakar to Dar es Salaam, Africans are being stirred by new hopes for Democracy and peace and prosperity.” In support of this, he pointed to the fact that “half of the 48 nations in sub-Saharan Africa [had] chose[n] their own governments” (Clinton 1998). By many accounts, Mozambique was a—if not the—model for democratization in Africa, having recently emerged from a protracted civil war and successfully staged multi-party national elections (Chan and Venâncio 1998; Manning 2001; Manning 2002). Only a few years later, the Democratization Policy Institute declared: “Despite high hopes following the end of the Cold War, promises of an ‘African Renaissance’ remain largely
unfulfilled. Most of the countries chosen by President Clinton as examples of a new Africa are either outright dictatorships, like Rwanda and Eritrea, or quasi-democratic autocracies, like Uganda and Ethiopia. Most African countries that adhere to democratic governance (loosely defined) have shown some slippage, with democratically elected leaders attempting to remain in power by tweaking constitutions” (Democratization-Policy-Institute 2001). Meanwhile, observers have reported rising levels of corruption in Maputo—punctuated by the failure of the criminal justice system to detain those responsible for the assassination of whistleblowers—while international observers have expressed grave concerns over irregularities in the 2004 Mozambican general elections (Clemens 2002; Hanlon 2004; The-Carter-Center 2005). By Western standards, Africa’s new democracies, including Mozambique, have had limited success in “consolidating regime transition.”

But what of African standards? The Cameroonian historian Achille Mbembe has argued that the project of democratization in contemporary Africa depends not on the application of a Western model of power to African realities but, instead, upon the cultivation within Africa of “other languages of power” that express emergent African political ethics. (The same might of course be said of democratization, political realities, and “other languages of power” in other regions of the world.) These languages, he asserts, “must emerge from the daily life of the people, [and] address everyday fears and nightmares, and the images with which people express or dream them” (in Geschiere 1997: 7). Elsewhere (West 2005), I have examined sorcery discourse as one such “language of power” spoken by Muedans; I have also suggested that in speaking of political realities, Muedans are not limited to this one language. Like most peoples, Muedans draw on multiple “languages of power” which intertwine in complex fashion in the world they inhabit. The way in which they speak of
political realities today has been shaped by historical encounters with various others and the languages of power they have spoken, whether slave traders, Catholic missionaries, Portuguese colonial administrators, Tanganyikan plantation owners, FRELIMO nationalist guerrillas, or agents of post-independence state socialism. At the broadest level, the language of power contemporary Muedans speak thus comprises multiple languages. It is a linguistic mosaic produced and sustained by speakers who have gained varying degrees of fluency in other languages and woven them into their own—a system in constant flux. In accordance with the topic at hand, its speakers draw meaning from different experiential subsystems, geographical reference points, and historical strata. In the current moment, Muedans have even engaged with the language of power spoken by democratic reformers, adopting and adapting some terms and concepts from the democracy lexicon while dismissing or ignoring others.

In this essay, however, I argue that the “language of power” Muedans have spoken in the midst of neo-liberal transformation of the Mozambican economy and polity differs substantially from the one spoken by democratic reformers, notwithstanding points of convergence as well as internal variations and dynamic complexities in both these languages. Recognizing that, in the face of reform, Muedans have not spoken with one voice, nor have their ideas and actions derived from some hermetic indigenous logic, I nonetheless suggest that the language of power through which Muedans generally speak reflects and sustains rather different notions of contemporary political realities. In the disjuncture between their language and that of democratic reformers, I argue, Muedans have critically engaged with the ongoing process of democratization. Indeed, I suggest, they have articulated their own vision of and for the working of power in the world they
inhabit. Before examining this in detail, however, I provide an historical overview of
democratic reform in Mozambique.

The “Democratization” of Mozambique

The southern African nation of Mozambique was born of guerrilla war waged against
Portuguese colonizers by the Mozambican Liberation Front (*Frente de Libertação de
Moçambique*, or, FRELIMO) from 1964 to 1974. From rear bases in the newly-independent
and socialist-oriented Tanzania, FRELIMO established its Central Base early in the
campaign on the Mueda plateau amidst generally supportive Makonde populations. With
military support from China, the Soviet Union, and other Eastern bloc countries, the Front
had expelled the Portuguese from substantial portions of the northern Mozambican
provinces of Tete, Niassa, and Cabo Delgado (including most of the Mueda plateau) before
a 1974 military coup in Lisbon toppled António Salazar’s appointed successor, Marcelo
Caetano, and set the stage for FRELIMO to take power, in 1975, over an independent
Mozambique (Henriksen 1983; Munslow 1983). FRELIMO’s commitment to socialism
was consolidated in 1977 with the party’s official adoption of a Marxist-Leninist platform
(Munslow 1983). In coming years, however, the realization of “socialist modernization” in
Mozambique was undermined by brutal civil war. The Mozambican National Resistance
(*Resistência Nacional Moçambicana*, or, RENAMO) was born in the late 1970s of counter-
insurgency operations undertaken by the neighboring Rhodesian regime to harass
Zimbabwean nationalist guerrillas based, with Mozambican consent, across the border in
central Mozambique. After Zimbabwean independence, the South African apartheid regime
extracted, trained, armed, and redeployed RENAMO fighters to “destabilize” a
Mozambican state then harboring African National Congress (ANC) activists. By the late 1980’s, RENAMO had put down roots in Mozambique—drawing malcontents and conscripts into its ranks—and was operating in all ten Mozambican provinces. In some areas, the insurgency in fact enjoyed considerable popular support. Not, however, in Mueda. Deeply invested in the historical construction of FRELIMO nationalism, Muedans fended off sporadic attacks and successfully denied the insurgency any foothold on the plateau. Throughout the country, however, nearly one million Mozambicans died, while up to six million were displaced from their homes, as rival armies waged war over more than a decade and a half (Africa Watch 1992; Egerö 1987; Finnegan 1992; Hall 1990; Hanlon 1990; Minter 1994; Vines 1991). With the end of the Cold War and the end of apartheid in the early 1990s, both sides lost external support, making possible a negotiated settlement in October 1992 stipulating that national elections be held in October 1994 (Alden 1995; Chan and Venâncio 1998; Hume 1994; Mazula 1995; Simpson 1993). FRELIMO prevailed at the ballot box, taking the Presidency and a majority of seats in the national assembly (Hanlon 1994), as it would again in subsequent elections in 1999 and 2004.

The democratization of Mozambique has consisted of far more than the staging of regular national elections, however. In the shadow of Soviet perestroika and glasnost and the global ascendance of neoliberalism, the ruling FRELIMO party initiated comprehensive reforms from the late 1980s onward to liberalize the Mozambican economy and polity. In 1986, fiscal austerity measures were unilaterally adopted by the FRELIMO government, making possible an agreement with the IMF the following year for structural adjustment support (Hanlon 1991). In 1989, the FRELIMO party officially abandoned its commitment to Marxism-Leninism. In the ensuing years, government privatized a great many state
enterprises (Myers 1994; Pitcher 2002; West and Myers 1996). A new Constitution in 1990 established individual rights of person and property, including freedoms of religion and political expression, fostering investment, both foreign and domestic, and leading rapidly to the emergence of not only multiple political parties but also a vibrant independent press (Africa Watch 1992). In 1997, government created a framework for state decentralization, and subsequently staged local elections in a number of cities and towns (Alves and Cossa 1997). Simultaneously, government explored means of incorporating civil leaders—including hereditary authorities—into processes of local governance, eventually issuing a decree on the matter in the year 2000 (Buur and Kyed 2003; Hanlon 2000). All of these measures were underwritten by Western donor nations as well as supported by an array of international organizations.

While the democratization of Mozambique has comprised these multiple, inter-connected political and economic reform processes, three aspects have been central to the Muedan experience of democracy, namely elections, state decentralization, and the establishment of individual rights of person, property, and free expression. In the remainder of this essay, I consider these components in turn, focusing on how Muedans have, through their own language of power, understood and engaged with them rather differently than reformers might have hoped and expected.

**Electoral Democracy, Perpetual War**

The Mueda plateau is not only one of the most geographically remote regions in Mozambique, it is also one of the most politically isolated. The region—often called “the
cradle of the revolution”—has in many ways remained more loyal to FRELIMO socialism than has the party itself. Indeed, most Muedans took notice of democracy only in 1994. During that event-filled year, UN peacekeepers established camp in the town of Mueda to oversee the demobilization of soldiers. RENAMO set up offices in district seats. UN election observers arrived en masse to coordinate electoral registration and voter education. RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama and FRELIMO leader Joaquim Chissano each held campaign rallies on the plateau. And finally, in late October, Muedans voted.

In the context of the modern nation state, multiparty elections are often the most celebrated component to democracy. Accordingly, great emphasis has been placed on the successful staging of elections in Mozambique. In the aftermath of the first national multi-party elections in 1994, one observer declared: “Peace in Mozambique first and foremost means that the political conflict fought out between FRELIMO and RENAMO in a bloody war has been civilized in the sense that both its theatre and instruments have changed: from the bush to parliament and from weapons to words, respectively” (Weimer 1996: 43-44). Above all else, elections were conceived of by democratic reformers in Mozambique as a means of ending violent conflict and of rationalizing political contestation by rendering contestants and their respective politics directly accountable to the Mozambican people.

From the outset, however, Muedans looked upon elections, and democracy more generally, rather differently than this. Many Muedans first heard the word, democracy, spoken on Radio Moçambique and associated with RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama, who proclaimed that he had fought for, and won, democracy for the Mozambican people (Manning 2002: 144-145). Muedans subsequently saw the word in print on RENAMO flags
and tee-shirts that appeared in the region during the electoral campaign. To be sure, UN representatives in Mozambique—from Maputo to Mueda—also frequently deployed the term, democracy, in public discourse and in printed matter distributed before elections. Tellingly, most Muedans conceived of the United Nations Operation in Mozambique (UNOMOZ) as a “political party” which, like RENAMO, contested FRELIMO’s historical right to govern the nation it had liberated from colonial rule. The fact that many ranking UN military officers were Portuguese—owing to competence in the Mozambican national language—exacerbated suspicions that UNOMOZ constituted a stealth invasion force under the control of the former colonizer.

In the months prior to elections, UNOMOZ worked to demobilize both combatant armies. As there were no RENAMO bases on the plateau, however, Muedans bore witness only to the disarmament of FRELIMO troops, whose occasional return to Muedan villages signaled to them FRELIMO vulnerability or defeat. Meanwhile, UNOMOZ visibly safeguarded the establishment of RENAMO headquarters in Mueda town, where “foreign delegations” frequently appeared to celebrate democracy’s arrival in Mozambique by bestowing largess on those whom Muedans considered “bandits” and “murderers.” In these early days, Muedans thus conceived of democracy as the ideology of “opposition,” the slogan of ignoble enemies, past and present. Democracy’s arrival in Mueda signaled the potential undoing of all that FRELIMO—and with it, Muedans—had accomplished since taking up arms in 1964, including the achievement of national sovereignty.

When voter registration began, many Muedans declined participation. When asked why, many told me that they had no use for the identification cards issued by elections officials,
for they “already belonged to a political party” (West 2003). When local FRELIMO leaders themselves spoke out in support of democracy and urged Muedans to register for the vote, many worried that FRELIMO was “growing tired.”

With the start of the electoral campaign, rival political parties focused attention on potential voters. This was the moment in which, according to democratic reformers, parties would be required to attune themselves to the desires of constituents. What actually happened was rather different than this. Mozambicans everywhere uttered the proverb, “When buffaloes fight, the grass gets trampled.” Indeed, the campaign was defined less by “debate” than by contestants activating networks of patronage and coercion. Voters ultimately “recognized” candidates who most convincingly exercised power in their midst—RENAMO generally winning in regions it had come to control during the war, and FRELIMO in regions that it had held. The campaign nonetheless introduced new tensions—sometimes violent—into communities through the country, including Muedan villages. At the start of the campaign, FRELIMO leaders circulated in the Mueda region calling upon villagers to remain “vigilant” against the appearance of RENAMO in their midst. The term—which invoked memories of revolutionary wartime campaigns to detect and eliminate “enemies within” the ranks of the FRELIMO insurgency (i.e., spies, saboteurs) accentuated Muedan resentment against and fear of RENAMO in the very moment of the democratic consolidation of peace. Suspected RENAMO sympathizers were identified and beaten. Several times, Muedans attacked RENAMO headquarters in Mueda town, tearing down the RENAMO flag and chasing RENAMO delegates out of town. When RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama came to the plateau to stage a rally, Muedans “stoned” him and, then, the helicopter in which he fled with green (hard, unripened) mangoes. By contrast, FRELIMO leader Joaquim
Chissano was met on the Mueda airstrip by throngs of supporters who carried him on a makeshift throne to his rally in the center of town. Weeks later, Muedans cast their ballots, voting overwhelmingly in favor of Chissano and FRELIMO.

Once ballots had been cast, and results tabulated, most Muedans with whom we spoke expected talk of democracy to end, for they, and the nation, had recognized “Papa Chissano” as their legitimate leader. To their surprise and indignation, the RENAMO flag continued to fly at party headquarters in district seats on the plateau. RENAMO delegates continued to lay claim to power as they prepared for future elections. To most Muedans, such “provocation” was unprecedented. Under socialism, the one-party state knew no contestants; within the ranks of the highly centralized party, power struggles were quickly—if sometimes violently—resolved. The colonial state, too, had admitted no rivals, within or without. FRELIMO’s challenge to Portuguese rule produced protracted, violent conflict, after which only one of the two claimants to power remained in Mozambique, namely FRELIMO. The model of singular uncontested power resonated even more deeply than this among Muedans. In pre-colonial times, young men often challenged the authority of their elders—whether on the basis of descent from a founding elder, aptitude for leadership, or courage—giving rise to struggles over settlement headmanships. Such contests sometimes turned violent. In any case, such affairs were considered finished only when all parties recognized a victor, or when parties refusing to do so abandoned the settlement (often in the company of their supporters). Until the uncontested authority of one

3 Muedans also dressed Chissano as a *humu* (a ritual elder). Elsewhere (West 1997), I argue that this constituted an ambivalent gesture whereby they “recognized” his power but also demanded that he enact it responsibly, to the benefit of his subjects.

4 FRELIMO won 25207/30023 valid ballots in Mueda district, 18084/21065 in Muidumbe district, and 13164/17540 in Nangade district (Mazula 1995: 496).
man was recognized, the security of settlement residents vis-à-vis one another and neighboring settlements remained unsure. By contrast with these familiar models for dispute resolution, multiparty democracy, from the Muedan perspective, promised to sustain, and even proliferate, rival claims to power at the highest levels in the land, with dramatic implications for those living in every province, every district, and every village in the country. Under democracy, it seemed, no defeat was recognized, and thus, no war finished—a political reality to which Muedans have only slowly, and partially, acclimated themselves.5

Democratic Decentralization, State Abandonment

Simultaneous with the staging of national-level multi-party elections, democratic reformers in Mozambique have pursued a policy of democratic decentralization. Just weeks before the 1994 elections, government in fact passed a law (no. 3/94) providing for the devolution of responsibility over a variety of governmental functions to “municipalities” to be formed of urban and/or rural districts and administered by elected officials. In 1995, before the law took force, it was declared unconstitutional. A new law (no. 2/97), passed in 1997, established the framework for devolution to democratically-elected local governments call “autarchies” to be established only in the thirty-three largest cites and towns in the country (Alves and Cossa 1997; Weimer and Fandrych 1999); elsewhere, the government would

5 Elsewhere, I have argued that Muedans conceive of politics as “an unending contest with ever-changing rules—one in which no victory [is] final, and no defeat complete (West 2005: 265). What I argue here is that, instead of placing hopes in a system of rules and regulations that might eliminate perpetual competition (as democratic reformers urged them to), they expect powerful actors to assert victory and attempt to impose order while also supposing that any regime thus established must constantly protect itself against new challenges.
continue to appoint officials, from the district administrator down to the village president and neighborhood secretary. In parallel, however, reformers pressed FRELIMO to reverse post-independence policy that had abolished the chieftaincy. FRELIMO justification for banning hereditary authorities from any role in government lay in arguments that such figures had actively collaborated with Portuguese colonial rule (Monteiro 1989). Indeed, colonial administrators had used chiefs at the highest levels as tax collectors, labor recruiters, and agents of law enforcement—tasks for which these individuals received substantial rewards. FRELIMO thus proclaimed the need to liberate rural Mozambicans not only from the Portuguese, but also from the feudal hierarchies through which colonial rule was consolidated. The party did so by establishing party-based structures of authority that reached deep into every village, displacing hereditary authorities at levels where they had collaborated with the colonial regime (Hanlon 1990). Some Mozambicans celebrated the abolition of the chieftaincy. Others resented it as an attack on local autonomy and custom. Still others manifest ambivalence. Over the course of the Mozambican civil war, RENAMO insurgents played on mixed sentiments, resuscitating and/or (re)inventing institutions of hereditary authority among populations in the areas that it came to control and using them to extract information, food supplies, labor, and guerrilla conscripts (Alexander 1997). Notwithstanding compulsion in most instances, many communities (particularly in the central part of the country from which key RENAMO leaders hailed) supported the insurgency, in part because of resentment of various FRELIMO policies, including, but not limited to, the abolition of the chieftaincy (Englund 2002; Geffray 1990). By war’s end, democratic reformers had taken notice of this, and had begun to advocate renewed recognition of “traditional authorities” by the Mozambican government itself. Reformers sometimes suggested that the institutions of “traditional authority” might serve rural
Mozambican communities as forms of “civil society” where successive authoritarian regimes—slave trading kingdoms (in some places), Portuguese colonialism, the FRELIMO guerrilla (in its “liberated zones”), a centralized socialist state, and the RENAMO insurgency (in some places)—had rendered impossible the emergence and/or maintenance of other collective social forms (Lubkemann 2001; see also Orvis 2001). Some in fact suggested that, through “traditional authorities,” the will of the people might be powerfully expressed in the new democratic era (Lundin 1995).

In 1991, the Ford Foundation provided funding for the establishment of a research project on the issue of “traditional authority” to be housed within the walls of the Mozambican Ministry of State Administration. In 1995, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) financed the continuance of the project under the rubric of its broader “Democracy in Mozambique” project (Fry 1997). As project researchers toured the country, holding workshops with ex-chiefs (African American Institute 1997), FRELIMO officials in some places sought to improve relations with these figures, whose potential influence over the rural electorate they deemed significant. Preceding elections, FRELIMO officials in many parts of the country made substantial overtures to ex-chiefs, particularly where they believed doing so might swing the balance of support away from RENAMO.

Elsewhere, FRELIMO cadres expressed grave concerns that hereditary authorities were not necessarily qualified to discharge the duties of modern state administration. Perhaps more importantly, state officials wondered what would become of them if the chiefs who had been displaced by the creation of their positions were once more recognized. Some FRELIMO leaders in Maputo wondered how FRELIMO would hold power if it abandoned
loyal cadres in rural areas in favor of “traditional authorities” most of whom had been marginalized by FRELIMO rule (West and Kloeck-Jenson 1999). Others—still committed to the socialist project—saw recognition of hereditary authorities as the reestablishment of feudal hierarchies.

Despite promises in the mid 1990s from the Minister of State Administration that a law officially reinstating hereditary authorities was imminent, no such law was ever passed. Government policy on the matter eventually took the form of a decree (no. 15/2000) issued by the Council of Ministers in the year 2000.6 The decree mandated local government consultation and cooperation with “community authorities” in relation to various governmental functions ranging from tax collection, voter registration, policing, judicial proceedings, land distribution, oversight of public education and public health, environmental protection, road construction, and other developmental issues (Buur and Kyed 2003; Hanlon 2000). While the decree granted “community authorities” the right to wear uniforms and to use “symbols of the Republic,” however, it neither stipulated that government was required to heed their counsel nor strictly delineated who they were. Included in the category of potential “community authorities” were not only “traditional authorities,” but also “village or neighborhood secretaries” (historically FRELIMO appointees), and “other legitimate leaders” (Buur and Kyed 2003; de Sousa Santos 2003: 83; Hanlon 2000; Meneses, Fumo, Mbilana, and Gomes 2003: 358). According to the decree, such leaders had to be duly “recognized as such by their respective communities”

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6 Such a decree requires no legislative discussion or approval, has no real legal force, and can easily be rescinded at any time.
(Hanlon 2000), but the decree specified neither what constituted a “community” nor the mechanism for “recognition” (Buur and Kyed 2003).

The Autarchies Law, as well as the Community Authorities Decree, ultimately left it to the discretion of local state officials to craft relationships with the “traditional authorities” in their jurisdictions in accordance with their governing strategies and agendas. In some areas of the country—especially where RENAMO relations with “traditional authorities” undermined FRELIMO hegemony—local government officials organized ceremonies in which “traditional authorities” were formally recognized as “community authorities” (Buur and Kyed 2003; Institutions-for-Natural-Resource-Management n.d.)—seemingly in attempts to deny RENAMO a point of political contention while rendering these figures more beholden to the ruling party. Some administrators in fact began using such duly recognized “community authorities” as tax collectors, granting them subsidies for their services in accordance with the provisions of the Decree (Buur and Kyed 2003).

Recognition of “community authorities” played out rather differently in Mueda, however. There, in pre-colonial times, dispersed settlements had sustained a high degree of autonomy one from another. Settlement heads had generally exercised authority over very small numbers of people. In order to administer local populations through the intermediary of hereditary authorities, the Portuguese administration had been obliged to construct hierarchies between settlement heads were none had previously existed. Colonial administrators interacted only with the highest-ranking figures in this hierarchy—figures

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7 Meneses et al (Meneses et al. 2003: 370, 380) report several cases in which FRELIMO recognition of “traditional authorities” led to RENAMO condemning such figures as “sell-outs.”
whose authority the vast majority of Muedans considered illegitimate. At independence, FRELIMO orchestrated the construction of communal villages on the plateau, where the former populations of several dozen settlements would live together. Despite the fact that ex-settlement heads were no longer officially recognized by FRELIMO-appointed village presidents and neighborhood secretaries, Muedan matrilineages continued to recognize them in clandestine. In the post-socialist era, Muedans openly recognized these lineage heads. They demonstrated no interest in the post-socialist era, however, in resuscitating the hierarchy of chiefs through which the Portuguese had governed in colonial times.

Surprisingly, FRELIMO officials themselves pressed for the recognition of “community authorities” in Muedan villages. Community authority in Mueda, however, would not look like it did elsewhere in Mozambique. District officials in the plateau region in fact orchestrated processes whereby Village Presidents—who held FRELIMO-created offices, by FRELIMO appointment—would simply be renamed “Community Leaders.” Like reinstated chiefs elsewhere in the country, these Village-Presidents-turned-Community-Leaders were given uniforms to wear and Mozambican flags to plant in their yards, just as colonial era chiefs had once been given. Elsewhere in the country, debates raged over whether or not it was appropriate to stage elections to identify legitimate claimants to the title of “community authority;” hereditary authorities themselves often resisted the idea that

8 Local FRELIMO officials loosely based their initiative on Diploma Ministerial no. 107-A/2000 (the Community Authorities Decree Regulations), which stated that, where the legitimacy of a “traditional chief” and “neighborhood secretary” were simultaneously recognized, the community was obliged to identify which of the two entities enjoyed precedence as “community authority” in the representation of the community vis-à-vis local government. In the process of recognizing village presidents as “community leaders,” local FRELIMO officials did not explicitly present Muedans with the option of choosing a “traditional chief” to fill the post. The looseness of local application of the degree is further reflected in the use of the term “community leaders” instead of “community authorities.”
their status could be determined by popular ballot. In Mueda, FRELIMO officials in fact
decided to stage elections to legitimate office-holders in the moment of renaming village
presidents as “community authorities.” Some polls took the form of referenda, and others
multi-candidate contests. In some villages, the incumbent prevailed (whether because
villagers had, or felt they had, no choice, or because he was truly respected by his charges),
while in others, challengers unseated them.

Notwithstanding FRELIMO high jinx, the process of recognition of Community Leaders
thus provided Muedans the opportunity to choose those who would govern them at the
most proximate level. Ironically, to the extent that the election of “community leaders”
constituted a meaningful form of democratic decentralization, Muedans saw in it peril
rather than promise. To be sure, many were displeased with the FRELIMO appointees who
had long governed them. As we shall see in the next section, in the years following
independence, FRELIMO rule had brought fewer and fewer benefits to the ruled, and more
and more to the rulers. Prior to village elections, however, most responded to the idea of
electing local authorities with a simple question: “Who would rule us then?” Reading such
statements as capitulation to FRELIMO authoritarianism would be a mistake. Muedans
with whom we worked appreciated the dynamics of governance as complex, echoing
popular understandings elsewhere on the continent. Such understandings warrant close
scrutiny.

More than one scholars of African history has suggested that, by varied logics, power in
Africa has long depended more on “wealth in people” than “wealth in things” (Bledsoe
1980; Cooper 1979; Guyer 1995; Miers and Kopytoff 1977; Miller 1988; Vansina 1988),
more on cultivating social relations than on cultivating lands (Berry 2002). African rulers, they suggest, have long sought to transform material wealth into loyal subjects, for such subjects have been considered both means to the (re)production of power, and power’s ultimate ends. Power in Mueda has indeed long been measured in terms of one’s ability to attract and sustain subordinates. In pre-colonial Mueda, warlords depended upon loyal and productive subjects to harvest goods—such as India rubber, gum copal, bee’s wax, and sesame seed—which could be traded at the coast for arms; with such arms, they not only defended themselves and their people but also mounted raids to capture slaves, many of whom were ultimately absorbed into the group as members with full rights who contributed to its strength like any others. Rulers who abused subordinates, or who failed to defend them or to create a mutually beneficial environment in which they might live, faced the prospect that their subjects would abandon them. The Portuguese colonial regime mostly relied (with limited success) on coercive means to capture Mozambican subjects and their productive potential, issuing passbooks in which the required fulfillment of periodic labor contracts was to be recorded; displeased subjects of colonial rule fled in vast numbers across borders where they found more favorable labor regimes. In the post-independence period, FRELIMO implored rural Mozambicans to produce in their fields in order to produce the nation itself (Machel 1978); the party also rounded up “unproductive” city-dwellers and set them to work in re-education camps (Africa Watch 1992). One after another, these successive regimes struggled through various means to secure “wealth in people.”

Muedans with whom we worked were accustomed to the idea that the legitimacy of authority depended in such varied ways upon “cultivating people.” They also recognized
that the establishment of a prosperous domain was inextricably bound up with the exercise of superior force. To this end, they considered a ruler’s power commensurate with his ability to tap resources beyond the reach of others—resources to be deployed in the construction of a mutually beneficial order and in the maintenance of that order, whether by force or by the cultivation of consent. The authority of local officials, as they had experienced it in both socialist and colonial eras, derived from the state, in whose voice, and with whose backing, local officials spoke. Local power depended upon the resources of the state—indeed, depended upon the state as resource.

Such conceptions gave foundation to Muedan anxieties about democratic decentralization and elections at the local level. For as long as anyone with whom we worked could remember, the state had appointed local officials who acted in its name. Muedans feared that an official of their own nomination would not speak for the state and, thus, would not bring the force of the state to bear in the maintenance of local order and in the resolution of local problems. An official of their own choosing would speak only with their voice—a voice they had no reason to believe the state would hear. Many in fact saw local elections to the post of “Community Leader” as an ominous sign, for a state that no longer cared who occupied such positions, they reasoned, was a state no longer interested in the domains over which these office holders exercised authority. A state that allowed them to appoint their own officials, they feared, was a state no longer prepared to bestow its largess in the interest of cultivating consent, a state preparing to abdicate authority over people it no longer considered a source of wealth.
The dynamics of post-socialist reform dramatically confirmed Muedan suspicions. In order to secure support from the IMF and Western donor nations, the Mozambican government slashed state budgets from 1986 onward. State enterprises—which had provided a large proportion of employment opportunities nationwide, but many of which were not economically viable—began to shut down. The Nguri agricultural scheme in the lowlands immediately southeast of the plateau, where large numbers of Muedans worked, was among them. Shrinking budgets also translated into declining social services. In the Mueda region, teachers abandoned schools, and nurses left health clinics, as real salaries declined precipitously; only those schools or clinics enjoying the patronage of a non-governmental organization continued to provide quality services. For all intents and purposes, the state ceased to provide an environment in which Muedans might “produce the wealth of the nation.”

In the neo-liberal era, the state looked elsewhere for wealth. Government carved up state sector enterprises, auctioning off some of the nation’s most valuable assets, or rights thereto, to foreign investors (Alden 2001; Pitcher 2002). High rates of economic growth yielded disappointing employment prospects for Mozambicans as new enterprises tended to hire expert foreign workers and/or use capital-intensive means of production. Muedans watched from the side of the road as foreign lumber companies trucked massive loads of hardwood from the plateau interior to the coast. As a result of such arrangements, state power was to an unprecedented extent delinked from the productivity of the Mozambican people. Needing nothing from the people, the state offered them nothing. Apart from periodic election campaigns, the state in fact betrayed near total lack of interest in
“cultivating people” and their productive power.\textsuperscript{9} To Muedans, the state’s devaluation of its citizenry—of people as wealth—was nowhere more clearly communicated than in the mandate given them under the rubric of democratic decentralization to “govern themselves.”

\textbf{Individual Freedom, Collective Danger}

Also among the essential elements of democratic reform in Mozambique was the ratification of a new constitution giving foundation to a wide range of civil liberties (1990). Article 74 of the new constitution established rights to freedom of political expression. The freedom to “pursue religious aims freely” was laid down in article 78. In article 86, the right to ownership of property was delineated. Whereas the rights of the Mozambican people as a whole had been elevated over those of the individual in the socialist era, democratic reformers argued that, in order to secure prosperity in post-war Mozambique, it was essential to lift socialist era-constraints on individual creativity and entrepreneurship. The early 1990s witnessed not only the formation of more than a dozen political parties, but also the growth and proliferation of religious communities and the emergence of a robust independent media. Businesses, large and small, emerged on the economic landscape. Investors, including nationals and foreigners, canvassed cities, towns, and rural districts throughout the country for investment opportunities. By the end of the decade, Mozambique was able to claim some of the highest annual economic growth rates on the African continent (Fauvet 2000).

\textsuperscript{9} During elections campaigns, both parties momentarily cultivated people, often through doling out jobs in the temporary, but lucrative, elections industry (undermining concerted donor attempts to professionalize the electoral bureaucracy).
Notwithstanding dramatic political and economic transformations, however, marked continuities were also observable. The faces of power remained familiar. Such continuities were in part the product of the very processes defining transition. For example, state officials controlled and often personally benefited from state enterprise divestiture. Calls for bids—many of which were issued prior to the passage of legislation officially mandating and giving structure to divestiture—were often posted in inconspicuous places such as bulletin boards on state officials’ office walls. Through what the Mozambican Attorney General later sarcastically referred to as “silent privatizations” (in Harrison 1999), officials at various levels privatized assets unto themselves, their cronies, or clients from whom they might extract rents (Myers 1994; West and Myers 1996). Through such means, national-level military leaders from the plateau region took possession of military warehouses, garages, and machine shops in Mueda. Agricultural officials staked claims to large plots of land in the Nguri State Farm irrigated scheme.

Advocates of privatization generally suggested that, through market mechanisms, these valuable assets would eventually pass into the hands of those most capable of exploiting them, contributing to sustained economic growth and greater national prosperity. Indeed, those who first took possession of state assets often sold them, at considerable profit, to more capable investors. In other cases, they kept controlling interest over such assets, seeking manager/investors who might provide essential expertise for a share of the wealth to be generated by their exploitation.

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10 Some—including once-staunch socialists—declared the need to insure the emergence of a strong national bourgeoisie as opposed to allowing the wealth of the nation to fall into the hands of foreign investors.
Included among advocates of democratic reform were those who criticized such forms of opportunism. Participants in donor-sponsored workshops on the topic of corruption railed against the use of public office for the pursuit of private gain. People spoke openly in the independent media about the criminalization the Mozambican state (Hanlon 2004). Mozambican officials themselves were among the most vociferous critics of corruption, some speaking out in earnest, and some to cover their own behavior. Ironically, public furor over rising rates of corruption provided grist for the mill of neo-liberal condemnation of the Mozambican state, and reinforced donor and NGO tendencies to bypass the state in order to “work directly” with intended beneficiaries, further weakening the project of state governance.

Muedans too looked critically upon the behavior of the national elite. They, however, expressed criticism in a different language. The standards by which they condemned the powerful among them derived from various historical moments and models of power. Indeed, Muedan experiences with and expectations of power in some ways licensed privilege. In pre-colonial days, Muedans told us, settlement heads never went hungry. These figures of authority enjoyed the best, and the most, of everything available. According to Muedan parlance, they not only “ate well,” they also “ate” their subordinates. Youngsters, when successful in the hunt, offered these elders the choicest cuts of meat. Men returning from coastal trade expeditions were obliged to give these elders the goods they had procured. The most powerful of these elders even “ate” their rivals, forcing their neighbors to join their own settlements, thereby augmenting the number of people paying them tribute and defending them against potential attackers. Through feeding their own
appetites, these elders expanded the social bodies of which they were heads. At the same
time, however, they fed these social bodies, and the individuals of which they were
composed. Successful settlement heads spurred their subjects to produce the wealth of the
group, which they used to insure the wellbeing of those upon whom they depended. They
not only demanded that their subjects fill their plates, but also used their plates to feed their
subjects. The satisfaction of their expansive appetites thus gave foundation to their
subordinates’ sustenance.

The power of the settlement head was diminished under a colonial administration that
required subjects instead to fill the state plate. Only those used by the Portuguese as
administrative intermediaries “ate well.” When FRELIMO initiated its guerrilla campaign
in the plateau region, party “Chairmen” displaced hereditary authorities altogether but, like
their predecessors, these figures of authority mobilized subordinates to fill the plate from
which all were fed (Negrão 1984). Following independence, the FRELIMO-orchestrated
project of collective production was reproduced on a national scale. Faced with the prospect
of total economic collapse in the wake of mass exodus of Portuguese colonials following
independence, FRELIMO “intervened” in the management of abandoned plantations,
farms, factories, and machine shops and, eventually, nationalized many of these properties
(Hanlon 1990). The party not only coordinated production but, also, through the
management of trade and the setting of prices, appropriated and redistributed the nation’s
produce. Like settlement heads before them, FRELIMO leaders fed their subjects from the
plate it required them to fill. Of course, state officials never went hungry. Although the
wealth of the nation purportedly belonged to the people, they enjoyed it most directly.
Goods were sometimes scarce, but ranking officials had first dibs. Vehicles belonged to the
state, but party bosses generally rode in them. To most Muedans, this was not particularly surprising.

The behavior of the post-socialist elite was another matter altogether. They ate well, according to Muedans, but failed to feed others. With profits generated in the exploitation of former state enterprises, or with rents garnered from foreign investors to whom they served as godfathers, elites tightened their hold on power even as the state weakened. On the plateau, and elsewhere, they built new homes surrounded by walls. They sent their children abroad to be educated. They manipulated and controlled banks and donor-funded credit schemes to acquire for themselves fleets of cars, trucks, and tractors with which they often provided “services” at a charge, consolidating control over local economic hierarchies. As we have seen, the enterprises and transactions over which they presided generated few jobs. All but the closest of family members were denied access to the plates they filled high to satisfy seemingly insatiable appetites.

From pre-colonial days, Muedans have associated insatiable appetites with sorcery. Whereas the ordinary appetite can be satisfied by the fruits of one’s own labor, the sorcerer is sated only by feeding on the wellbeing—indeed, the very life substance, the flesh—of others. This, it is said, sorcerers undertake in clandestine, through the use of a medicinal substance called *shikupi* that renders them invisible to ordinary people. Such illicit consumption, and the social carnage (literally, meat derived from slaughter) to which it gives rise, challenges the prerogatives of legitimate authority to measure appetites against one another and to nourish the social body as a whole. According to Muedans, since pre-colonial times legitimate authorities have met this challenge by following sorcerers into the
invisible realm of sorcery, wherein they monitor sorcerers’ activities and quash their appetites. The exercise of legitimate authority in fact constitutes a form of sorcery, according to Muedan conceptions. Whereas Muedans have long distinguished between the “sorcery of self-advancement” or “sorcery of self-enrichment” (uwavi wa kushunga) practiced by common sorcerers, and the “sorcery of self-defense” (uwavi wa kulishungila) practiced by responsible authority figures on behalf of the larger group, they have also recognized that the line between these two forms of sorcery is fine. They were generally convinced, in the socialist era, that FRELIMO leaders practiced uwavi kulishungila. In the era of democracy, by contrast, most suspected that authorities practiced uwavi wa kushunga. Post-socialist elites were suspected of transforming kin into mandandosha (zombie slave laborers) to tend their fields, work in their factories, or guard their houses, cars, and other possessions. “How else could they get so rich?!,” Muedans often asked, rhetorically. “How else could they protect themselves?!; How else could they protect their wealth?! “

The idea that present-day elites acted as maleficent rather than beneficent sorcerers arose from and reinforced Muedan understandings of the new regime of tolerance for political and religious expression as well. In the socialist era, FRELIMO authorities in Mueda had prohibited sorcery accusations, proclaiming belief in sorcery to be a reactionary form of “obscurantism” that jeopardized the emergence and consolidation of class-consciousness and solidarity. Muedans, however, interpreted socialist-era condemnations of sorcery

11 As David Nugent pointed out in commentary on this essay at the School of American Research Advanced Seminar to which it was presented, whereas the idea of the self-governing individual is essential to most variants of Western democracy, it is an idea that Muedans find threatening, for most are unable to achieve it and are in fact left vulnerable to those who do.
beliefs and practices as the enforcement of a ban on self-serving forms of sorcery—in other words, as the FRELIMO enactment a beneficent form of (counter-)sorcery. In the new democratic era, as we have seen, FRELIMO officials demonstrated “respect” for individual “beliefs” through tolerance of sorcery discourse. Muedans interpreted such tolerance as official acceptance of—even collusion with—maleficent forms of sorcery. Indeed, state tolerance of sorcery discourse confirmed popular suspicions regarding the practice of sorcery of self-enrichment on the part of the elite. Tellingly, Muedans sometimes referred to the new, more liberal regime as one of uwavi wa shilikali (government sorcery). New constitutional freedoms of expression contributed to an environment in which Muedans heard daily evidence of sorcery’s rise. Incidents of sorcery were reported on Radio Moçambique. New independent churches—along with traditional healers, plying their trade openly after years in clandestine—called attention to sorcery in the act of treating its ills. But to Muedans, freedom of expression not only meant that one could speak of sorcery, it also meant that sorcerers could speak. Muedans referred euphemistically to sorcery when they lamented that “with democracy, anything can be said, and anything can be done.” Where state officials refused to intervene as responsible figures of authority in sorcery-related disputes, sorcery ran wild at all levels of society, Muedans told me. Under cover of democracy, it was said, sorcerers formed political parties of their own. Their motto, “Each one for himself!,” echoed new constitutional rights in a sinister register. In the shadow of suspicion and resentment of the new elite, accusations flew between villagers themselves. As the wealthy and powerful ate their fill, ordinary Muedans went hungry, or worse still many feared, satisfied their hunger by feeding on their neighbors and kin.

Democracy, Carnage
The same language of power through which Muedans have engaged with democratic reform over the past decade and a half gave shape to their understandings of and responses to the grizzly attacks taking place in Muidumbe in late 2002 and early 2003. The fact that arms and ammunition with which to kill the lions that menaced them were not provided by provincial authorities until nearly a year after the maulings began only confirmed suspicions that the FRELIMO state was weak and/or that local officials didn’t have its ear. Muedans were, however, more disturbed by the fact that district administrator Pedro Seguro never publicly condemned the sorcerers they knew to be responsible for the attacks. They assumed Seguro—a man of great authority—capable of seeing into the invisible realm of sorcery and practicing (counter-)sorcery therein. But as the death toll mounted, Seguro remained silent.

Where provincial- and district-level authorities failed to resolve the crisis, village authorities did what they could. Hunting parties were organized and, in time, six lions were caught in traps or killed with bow and arrow. Meanwhile, Community Leaders in some villages summoned councils of elders in attempts to discern who was responsible for the killings. “When the situation got bad,” Namakandi Community Leader Pedro Agostinho told Radio Moçambique reporter Óscar Limbombo, “we put out word that if anyone knew who was making these lions, they had better say so” (Limbombo 2003). Some Community Leaders made public pronouncements that the attacks must cease. Through such acts, these village authorities attempted to play the part of beneficent sorcerers. In the wake of democratic decentralization—meaning, in this case, elections whereby the “legitimacy” of Community Leaders was “confirmed” at the ballot box—villagers, however, perceived
these figures as representatives not of some greater power who governed them all but, rather, only of those who had voted for them (generally, their matrilineage). As such, Community Leaders were deemed able to quash sorcery attacks within their own matrilineages but not on the grander scale on which these attacks were apparently taking place. Tellingly, the proclamations and accusations of some Community Leaders only fanned the flames of inter-matrilineage suspicion and hostility. In the villages of Litapata and Mandava, Community Leaders themselves incited villagers to lynch their neighbors (Limbombo 2003).

District administrator Seguro expressed frustration that he was able to respond to vigilante killings only after crimes were committed and frenzied mobs dispersed (Limbombo 2003). Villagers, however, blamed him more for failing to prevent the precipitating incidents—the attacks of sorcerers qua lions. Rumors circulated that Seguro himself was behind the attacks. Others suggested that Seguro had “sold the district” for “three sacs of money” to “three whites” (reportedly including a European dental technician working at the Nang’ololo Catholic mission health clinic), meaning that he had granted permission to these foreigners (and, by most accounts, their local sorcerer colleagues) to attack people within a domain nominally under his protection. As evidence that Seguro practiced sorcery of self-advancement rather than sorcery of self-defense on behalf of district residents, villagers pointed to the considerable personal wealth amassed by Seguro in recent years. With the NGO-sponsored construction of a new school block in the district, the old school building in the center of the district seat had been auctioned off—to none other than the district administrator. The owner of the district’s only existing restaurant and guest house, Seguro was renovating the building to expand his operation to accommodate a greater
number of customers. While works were being carried out, Seguro stored inside the 
building dozens of sacs of maize and peanuts harvested from his many fields. He was, by 
all accounts, the richest man in the district. Where reformers saw in Seguro an energetic 
entrepreneur bringing development to the district, however, villagers generally saw in him a 
man of expansive appetite who fed only himself. His personal “development” projects 
cannibalized the infrastructure of the collapsed collective project of socialist modernization, 
creating jobs for only a few close family members. While Seguro “ate well” in late 2002 
and early 2003, those under his charge went hungry (for fear of harvesting their meager 
crops) and in some cases were devoured by fellow villagers or literally eaten alive by lions. 
By the middle of 2003, lions had claimed the lives of 46 men, women, and children, and 
gravely injured another six. Eighteen villagers had been lynched.

In mid 2003, provincial authorities finally convened and provisioned a hunting party, 
headed by a man named Fernando Alves, and dispatched it to Muidumbe. Alves killed the 
fifth lion, after which villagers killed two more, bringing to an end the carnage that had 
beset the district for more than a year. Alves was a man of local legend long before he 
killed what Muidumbe residents identified as the most vicious of the pride that had stalked 
them. The son of mulatto parents, Alves lived in Pemba in the “concrete neighborhood” 
(composed mostly of houses built by Portuguese occupants in the colonial period), and 
earned a living as a self-employed mechanic. Like his father, however, he was an avid big 
game hunter. According to Makonde trackers employed by Alves, he was adept at 
recovering lyungo, the life substance Makonde say a predatory animal, such as a lion, 
vomits in the moments immediately before dying. Alves himself attributed his success as a 
hunter to his ability to find and ingest lyungo. Thus, the man who put an end to the carnage
in Muidumbe came from outside the district as the bearer of superior force, but acted in defense of the wellbeing of ordinary Muedans in a language they recognized.

That Muedans conceived of and engaged with events defining their world in the post-socialist era in a language of their own did not mean that they failed to recognize or to understand democracy’s emergence in their midst. Indeed, I would argue, the language of power Muedans spoke in the course of these events and processes afforded them profound insights and allowed them to formulate a nuanced critique of democracy as they experienced it. Whereas neoliberal reformers suggested that democracy would rationalize political competition, render power more accountable to the people, and open greater spaces for individual contributions to a prosperous post-war environment, Muedans experienced democracy as a regime that not only promoted irresolvable conflict in their midst, but also provided cover for dominant political actors to forego the responsibilities of authority and to feed themselves at the expense of others. Not only have Muedan perspectives on democracy resonated with the critical assessments of deepening corruption and electoral fraud in Mozambique offered in recent years by various commentators, their skepticism regarding the true objectives of democratization has been validated by continuing donor support, notwithstanding these disconcerting phenomena, provided Mozambique continues to adhere to IMF provisions and sustain a friendly climate for foreign investment and trade.

Just as Muedan conceptions of and reactions to democracy do not constitute a failure of understanding, neither do they support the idea that Africa and Africans are ill suited for democracy. I would argue that, by critically engaging with democratization in a language
that differs profoundly from the one spoken by democratic reformers, Muedans have, ironically, enacted democracy. After all, if democracy is conceived of as government of the people, by the people, and for the people, following Lincoln’s famous formulation, then democracy necessarily resides within the languages and terminologies used by “the people” to assess power’s workings in their midst. Accordingly, regardless of constitutional reform, the staging of elections, and the devolution of power to the local level, any regime failing to create a beneficial order, by the people’s definition, can scarcely call itself democracy. If democracy resides in the understandings, experiences, and expressions of the people, however, Muedans have enacted it—to the best of their abilities, albeit with limited success even by their own evaluations—through critical assessment of what reformers have called democracy, through expression of “the will of the people” in an altogether different language.12

Alas, such possibilities are rarely entertained by democratic reformers. In the run up to the 1994 elections, the international community invested considerable resources in civic education programs designed to teach Mozambicans about democracy. If the meanings and methods of democracy depend, by definition, upon the political subjects in question, such initiatives not only betray unfounded conceit but also render democracy’s actualization more difficult. One can only imagine what might have come of investing such considerable resources in attempts to discern what the Mozambican people had to teach policymakers about viable and/or desirable forms of governance. The notion reinforces the idea underlying this volume, namely that anthropologists—through the dialogical methods of extended fieldwork and ethnographic writing—potentially have much to contribute to

12 David Nugent and Kay Warren provided stimulating commentary on this point.
facilitating and strengthening democracy as variably defined by people in diverse locales around the globe.
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