

Law, Religion and Reconciliation in Africa



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18 THE INTRICACIES OF PEACEBUILDING AND RECONCILIATION: REASSESSING TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES OF DELIVERANCE AND FORGIVENESS IN MOZAMBIQUE

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INTRODUCTION

From 1964 to present, Mozambique has experienced four major military conflicts namely: the armed struggle of national liberation from the Portuguese colonialism (1964-1975), the civil war (1976-1992), the pre- and post-electoral military conflict (2013-2018) and the ongoing Islamic military insurgency that began in 2017. These intercalated military conflicts consisted of rampant acts of violence against civilians, including kidnapping, beheadings and rape, which disrupted the social fabric that weaved people together in a nation striving for national unity. Unlike other examples of peacebuilding through national Truth and Reconciliation Commissions to deal with traumatic experience, in Mozambique, the wars ended with peace talks that emphasized the need to forgive and forget.²

This chapter shifts the analysis of post-conflict reconciliation from state agents and their partners to ordinary people's traditional ceremonies of deliverance and forgiveness. In it, I argue that Mozambican national reconciliation is an ongoing process, occurring both during and after the conflict. It involves an array of traditional ceremonies of deliverance and forgiveness that blur the distinction between perpetrators and victims of violence. Thus, for a comprehensive understanding of peacebuilding and reconciliation in Mozambique, it is necessary to consider what happens to people during and after conflict.

This approach, achieved here through a methodology of oral interviews, captures how ordinary people responded to acts of cruelty, both as perpetrators and as victims. The interviews were conducted in two phases; they began in 2013 as part of a broad research project on warfare and environment in southern Mozambique and continued in 2023 to capture new insights brought by the resurgence of military conflict in 2013 and 2017. Only men and women who were at least ten years old when the war reached their residential areas and those who participated directly

1 Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Eduardo Mondlane University.

2 On the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa see Gobodo-Madikizela P. 2010. "Remorse, Forgiveness and Rehumanization: Stories from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission", in *Historical Memory in Africa: Dealing with the Past, Reaching for the Future in an Intercultural Context*, Diawara M, Bernard Lategan B, and Rüsen J (eds). New York: Berghahn Books; Bizos G. 1998. *No one to blame?: In pursuit of justice in South Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers; Bellville, Mayibuye Books.

as guerrilla fighters or government armed forces were interviewed.³ The interviews took the form of life stories to capture individual and collective experiences of living in warfare environment. Guiding questions included: How did the person experience war? How did war affect them and their community? What strategies did they adopt to survive? How did they deal with the consequences of war? What was the role of religion and traditional belief in the conduct of war and the response to the effects of warfare in the community? The answers to these questions were subject conversation and narrative analysis, including body language and metaphor. Audio and video records of the interviews are available for consultation on-request at the Mozambique Historical Archives in Maputo. Following this introduction, the chapter presents a brief history of military conflicts in Mozambique. It proceeds with the analysis of the cleansing ceremonies in promoting peacebuilding. Thereafter, it reassesses the role of traditional ceremonies of deliverance and forgiveness to peacebuilding in Mozambique and ends with concluding remarks.

BRIEF HISTORY OF MILITARY CONFLICTS IN MOZAMBIQUE

Since its conception as a single geographic and political unity in the late 1800s,⁴ Mozambique has been experiencing intermittent wars. In the late 1800s, the Portuguese waged a war of effective occupation in various regions of the territory. Following the defeat of the strongholds of African resistance between 1895 and 1920, the Portuguese established a brutal colonial regime that cemented divisions among Africans.⁵ The colonial administration and its collaborators imposed forced labour through violence against colonised subjects. To enforce its policies, the colonial regime relied on the support of African collaborators, who proved to be very brutal to their compatriots, thus laying foundations for dissatisfaction that fueled nationalist sentiment in Mozambique.⁶

On 25 September 1964, FRELIMO guerrillas launched a general military insurgency for the liberation of Mozambique, which lasted for ten years. Far from being a war between white Europeans and black Africans, this war blurred the distinction between colonisers and colonised people, because white people enlisted in the guerrilla movement while black people were also enlisted in the Portuguese army. Africans enlisted in the Portuguese intelligence services spied people in their

3 The inclusion of people over 10 years is justified because of the participation of children as soldiers and carriers of war material.

4 One can trace back to history of wars and violence in Mozambique to the time of European slave trade both in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, but for the purpose of this paper we consider the end of 1800, because it marked the establishment of the borders of Mozambique, as we know them today.

5 Hedges D et al. 1993. *História de Moçambique. Moçambique no auge do colonialismo, 1930-1961* [History of Mozambique. Mozambique at the height of colonialism, 1930-1961] vol 3. Maputo: Departamento de História, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane.

6 Isaacman A. 1996. *Cotton is the mother of poverty. Peasants, work, and rural struggle in colonial Mozambique, 1938-1961*. London: Heinemann.

neighborhoods and villages denouncing fellow Africans suspected of collaborating with the liberation war guerrilla fighters. This created resentment among people because they were forced to fight against their friends and relatives.⁷

When Mozambique gained its independence in 1975, many of those who had collaborated with the colonial regime were isolated and sometimes detained without trial. Others were stripped of their privileges and saw their property nationalised.⁸ It was within this environment of revenge that just one year after the proclamation of independence, Mozambique plunged into brutal war that lasted for sixteen years. Sponsored by the white minority regimes in South Africa and South Rhodesia, a rebel movement emerged in central Mozambique and launched attacks on government, military and civilian targets. To spread terror among civilians, the rebels beheaded and maimed people and set on fire schools, houses, hospitals and other property. Children were forcibly conscripted and instructed to murder their relatives as a way of cutting off ties with them.⁹ It is estimated that the war costed over million lives,¹⁰ and it reduced Mozambique to one of the poorest nations on earth.¹¹

As result of negotiations mediated by the Catholic Church, on 4 October 1992, the government of Mozambique and RENAMO signed a general Peace Agreement putting an end to sixteen years of hostilities. Unlike the experience of South Africa and Côte d'Ivoire, to mention but two examples, where the transition from war to peace and democracy led to the establishment of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions,¹² the Mozambican peace process oriented the people of Mozambique

7 See Mattos H. 2008. "Black Toops" and Hierarchies of Color in the Portuguese Atlantic World: The Case of Henrique Dias and His Black Regiment", *Luso-Brazilian Review* 45(1):6-29; Borges-Coelho JP. 2002. "African Troops in the Portuguese Colonial Army, 1961-1974: Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique", *Portuguese African Encounters: An Interdisciplinary Congress*. Brown University, Providence, MA, April 26-29

8 Igreja V. 2010. "Frelimo's Political Ruling through Violence and Memory in Postcolonial Mozambique", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36(10):781-799; Pitrosse F and Viana G de S. 2020. "As estratégias Portuguesas de Guerra colonial: a afirmação das forças armadas portuguesas (FAP) em Moçambique (1964-1974)" [Portuguese colonial war strategies: the assertion of the Portuguese armed forces (FAP) in Mozambique], *Revista da Escola Superior de Guerra* [Magazine of the Higher School of War] 35(75):181-199.

9 Honwana A. 2002. "Negotiating Postwar Identities: Child Soldiers in Mozambique and Angola", in Bond G and Gibson N (eds). *Contested Terrains and Constructed Categories*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

10 Honwana A. 1997. "Healing for Peace: Traditional Healers and Post-War Reconstruction in Southern Mozambique," *Peace and Conflict* 3(3):293-305.

11 Sidaway JD and Simon D. 1993. "Geopolitical transition and state formation: the changing political geographies of Angola, Mozambique and Namibia", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19(1):14.

12 Gobodo-Madikizela, "Remorse, Forgiveness and Rehumanization"; Bizos, *No one to blame?*

to forgive and forget. People had to reunite with those who killed their relatives looted their property and abused them physically, psychologically and sexually.¹³

In fact, Mozambicans lived a peace process delivered from above, but they had to deal with trauma and sentiments of injustice. The willingness to revenge was explicit when, in 2013, following an electoral conflict, Mozambique relapsed into military conflict that continued intermittently until 2018.¹⁴ To make things worse, in September 2017, violent militant extremists who claimed to be inspired by Islamic fundamentalism attacked the Northern Province of Cabo Delgado.¹⁵ As with previous conflicts, this war has been characterised by displacement, kidnapping and killings of civilians along with the looting and destruction of state and private property.

This overview of the history of military conflicts in Mozambique shows that Mozambicans are in permanent state of negotiating peace and reconciliation. In this regard, there are various stakeholders to consider, including the government, insurgents, civil society organisations and the international community, to mention but four. The following section shifts the narrative of post-conflict reconciliation from the state's agents and partners to ordinary people's traditional ceremonies of deliverance and forgiveness. By taking this approach, it looks at reconciliation as an ongoing process, which occurs during and after the conflict from the perspective of both victims and perpetrators. It highlights locally conceived experiences of responding to post-traumatic stress disorder of people exposed to violence in its multiple dimensions.

THE ROLE OF CLEANSING CEREMONIES IN PROMOTING PEACEBUILDING

War involves acts of killing; therefore, it leaves lasting effects on both victims and perpetrators. As M.A. Connell and research colleagues have observed, in the case of the South African Border War of 1975-1989, soldiers in the combat, infantry, artillery and armored units were significantly more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to those in non-combatant units.¹⁶ Thus, combat exposure creates a lasting negative psychological impact on veterans.¹⁷ On the other hand, because of the long history of violence in Africa, there are many cases of mass trauma manifested into anxieties, depression, psychosis, traumatic brain injury,

13 Mubai ME. 2015. *Making war on forest and village: southern Mozambique during the sixteen-year conflict, 1976-1992*. PhD Thesis, University of Iowa.

14 Vines A. 2013. "Renamo's Rise and Decline: The Politics of Reintegration in Mozambique, *International Peacekeeping*, 20(3):375-393; Pearce J. 2020. "History, legitimacy, and Renamo's return to arms in central Mozambique", *Africa* 90(4):774-795.

15 Mourier-Genoud E. 2020. "The jihadi insurgency in Mozambique: origins, nature and beginning", *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14(3):392-412.

16 Connell MA, Omole O, Subramaney U and Olorunju S. 2013. "Post-traumatic stress disorder and resilience in veterans who served in the South African border war", *African Journal of Psychiatry* 16(6):3.

17 Connell et al, "Post-traumatic stress disorder and resilience in veterans, 16.

epilepsies and other physical injuries. These cases result on complications including substance abuse, epidemics, dissociative disorders, spirit possessions, somatisation syndromes, rape trauma syndrome, mass hysteria, demon attack disease, cult indoctrination syndromes and nodding syndrome.¹⁸ To respond to these long-lasting effects of warfare, Africans have employed traditional healing and cleansing rituals for reconciliation and conflict resolution.¹⁹

It is not the purpose of this chapter to provide a full description of all healing and cleansing rituals, but it is noteworthy to underline two types: (1) cleaning rituals that incorporate those from the military service back into the community and (2) rituals for those exposed to acts of brutality, such as beheadings and being forced to kill family members. In both cases, the rituals were performed by traditional healers and involved the sacrifice of a chicken or goat and bathing with water treated with medicinal plants. In cases of those who suffered the prosecution by revengeful spirits, the ritual involved also the intervention of a spirit medium who would enter in trance to capture the revengeful spirit. This spirit would use the medium to speak directly to the offender to direct the person about what to do to reconcile. As the war evolved, syncretic African Christian churches know as Ama-Zione also performed these rituals using water and laying hands in prayer upon those who requested assistance.²⁰

It is important to observe that these strategies occurred during and after the conflict, but what happened during the conflict has not received the attention it deserves in scholarly discussions. The argument of this chapter is that traditional healing, cleansing rituals and reconciliation are to be part of a strategy to mitigate the effects of war by creating a conducive environment for peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Bearing in mind that peacebuilding is an ongoing process, this chapter departs from the assumption that for a better understanding of peacebuilding and reconciliation one must look at both conflict and post-conflict periods. Mozambicans perceive reconciliation as a process of reintegrating someone to the accepted behaviour in the community. This occurs in various moments. One of these moments occurs when someone who is discharged from the military service returns to civilian life. The other occurs when someone exposed to acts of brutality returns to his community. In his study of the postwar cleansing rituals in Mozambique, social anthropologist Paulo Granjo concludes that cleansing rituals are based on the local exegesis about

18 Musisi S and Kinyanda E. 2020. "Long-Term Impact of War, Civil War, and Persecution in Civilian Populations – Conflict and Post-Traumatic Stress in African Communities. Front," *Psychiatry*, 11-2020:2.

19 Williamson J. 2006. "The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers: social and psychological transformation in Sierra Leone", *Intervention: International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work & Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict* 4(3):196; Musisi and Kinyanda, "Long-Term Impact of War, Civil War, and Persecution", 10.

20 As resident of the warzone, I personally witnessed these rituals between 1983-1987 in Zavala district, Inhambane Province, Mozambique. My experience is corroborated by oral interviews with Felismina Malate, Zavala District, February 9, 2023; Filomena Mmadgi, Zavala District, February 9, 2023, to cite but two.

misfortune; thus, they are not exclusive to postwar situation. He underlines that similar rituals were previously used to those returning from prison and the mines.²¹ He goes further to argue that “they allow simultaneously, the confinement of past war actions as an exceptional situation and expurgate the individual veteran from being in danger and being considered a danger to the community... such rituals also played and play an important role in allowing the community to accept previous enemies/veterans as “people like others.”²² In similar approach, anthropologist Alcinda Honwana has explored local strategies and mechanism used to overcome trauma and restore social harmony in postwar Mozambique. She observes that traditional institutions such as “chiefs, diviners, healers, spirit mediums, and the family have long been dealing with social reconstruction and conflict resolution at their own level hence, they can play a crucial role in restoring social stability.”²³ Honwana concludes that these institutions created their own space in the process of healing the social wounds of war by using the means available to them to restore peace and stability through ceremonies such as ritual for soldiers, children, and Mhamba rituals.²⁴ Anthropologist and political geographer Iraê Lundin notes that various actors including “local religious institutions, mostly of syncretic faith, as well as Catholics, Protestants and Muslims”, performed ceremonies and rituals.²⁵ Anthropologist Sara Gibbs underlines that, “churches had an active role alongside the healers in focusing and reaffirming the process of reconstruction and assisting children as well as adults to reconstruct their lives”.²⁶ Gibbs adds, “Churches promoted reconciliation and forgiveness through acknowledging and celebrating people’s return and through a system of confessions that appeared to be enabling people to put the war behind them.”²⁷ Lundin explains that rituals are meant to cleanse both physically and spiritually. Regarding the spiritual cleansing, Lundin observes that it involves reintroduction to the ancestors and reconciliation with the spirit of the dead. Lundin concludes that “rituals reaffirm the principle of togetherness and tolerance, making possible a life of harmony for former enemies who have lived together side by side.”²⁸ Lyn S. Graybill, a scholar of religious and cultural resources in international ethics and human rights practices, notes that the experience of Mozambique stands apart from the ones of South Africa and Rwanda for its total lack of individual acknowledgement of wrongdoing, much less apology. Graybill goes on to question whether those were necessary ingredients for long-term

21 Granjo P. 2007. “The Homecomer: Postwar Cleansing Rituals in Mozambique”, *Armed Forces and Society* 33(3):382-395.

22 Granjo, “The Homecomer”, 382.

23 Honwana A. 1997. “Healing for Peace: Traditional Healers and Post-War Reconstruction in Southern Mozambique”, *Peace and Conflict*, 3(3):294.

24 Honwana, “Healing for Peace”, 300-304.

25 Lundin IB. 1998. “Mechanisms of Community Reception of Demobilized Soldiers in Mozambique”, *African Journal of Political Science* 3(1):104-118.

26 Gibbs S. 1994. “Post-War Reconstruction in Mozambique”, *Disasters* 18 (3):274-275.

27 Gibbs, “Post-War Reconstruction in Mozambique”, 274-5.

28 Lundin, “Mechanisms of Community Reception of Demobilized Soldiers”, 113.

reconciliation.²⁹ More recently, based on the experience of resurgence of military confrontation in 2013, it appears that the formula failed to promote enduring peace. However, if one considers the diversity of traditional cleansing ceremonies, Mozambicans, indeed, found space to acknowledge the wrongdoing by bringing together the dead and the living in peacebuilding and reconciliation process.

In fact, the experience of Mozambique shows that peacebuilding and reconciliation blurs the distinction between the living and the dead. As psychologist and anthropologist Victor Igreja observed in the case of Gamba Spirit in Gorongosa, central Mozambique, the survivors of war, including the military, are often called to negotiate peace with the spirits of the people who they killed during the war or the dead that did not receive a decent burial.³⁰ Transitional justice specialist Erin Baines presents a similar understanding in her study conducted in Uganda. Like Igreja, Baines notes that post-war reconciliation includes negotiating with both the living and the dead. Baines describes a story of war returnee who suffers stigmatisation in the community because it is believed that the spirits of her sister in whose killing she was forced to participate during the war is punishing her.³¹ These cases change the understanding of peacebuilding and reconciliation by including the intimate relationship between the dead and the living in African cosmology. As Igreja put it, “the diagnosis process of *Gamba* allows the free expression and re-enactment of concealed experiences of violence and abuse . . . the overall goal of the session is to achieve justice and in fact the session ends with an acknowledgement of the abuses and traumatic experiences that took place in the past and the family members repair the havoc.”³² Nikkie Wiegink’s study of the former bastion of RENAMO guerrillas shows that many former combatants had indeed participated in “welcoming rituals” to inform the ancestors that an element of the family returned and to chase away spirits of people wrongfully killed in war or simply picked-up during the war. Wiegink expands the analysis of reintegration of ex-combatants beyond violence. She assesses factors that contributed to the decision of ex combatants to settle to in particular places.³³ She concludes that witchcraft was key in these decisions as ex-combatants avoided returning home for the fear of being accused of witchcraft.³⁴ This conclusion is based on oral accounts of ex-combatants, but when RENAMO returned into war in 2013, it mostly relied on the services of its ex-combatants who

29 Graybill LS. 2004. “Pardon, Punishment, and Amnesia: Three African Post-Conflict Methods”, *Third World Quarterly* 25(6):117-1130.

30 Igreja V. 2003. ‘Why are there so many drums playing until dawn?’ Exploring the Role of *Gamba* Spirits and Healers in the Post-War Recovery Period in Gorongosa, Central Mozambique” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 40(4):459-487.

31 Baines EK. 2007. “The Haunting of Alice: Local Approaches to Justice and Reconciliation in Northern Uganda”, *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1(1):91-114.

32 Igreja, “Why are there so many drums playing until dawn?”, 479.

33 For example, it is thought that a person can pick up a spirit by stepping on a person’s remains.

34 Wiegink N. 2018. “Violent Spirits and a Messy Peace: Against Romanticizing Local Understandings and Practices of Peace in Mozambique”, Millar G (ed). *Ethnographic Peace Research: Approaches and Tensions*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, ch 7.

did not return home after the war. This might be an indication that her informants may have concealed the main reason that kept them in areas where they served during the war. Despite this observation, Wiegink shows that reconciliation was much more complex than it appeared because it involved complexities within family relationships. She argues for an analysis that includes the period during and the aftermath of the war. This approach is closer to what this chapter pursues.

The literature on traditional ceremonies of deliverance and forgiveness in war-torn countries is vast but it appears to overlook how these traditional ceremonies and creeds are entangled in the conduct of both warfare and everyday life. Thus, to capture a broader picture of the significance of these traditional strategies, one has to look at the way African wars are fought and to internal dynamics of warfare in the countryside. Taking the example of Mozambique and other African countries like Uganda and Sierra Leone, it is evident that traditional ceremonies, particularly the use of spiritual elements on the conduct of war, cleansing rituals and social reintegration can be traced as warfare strategic assets and as peacebuilding components. In African warfare, spirits are part of the conduct of war. Continent-wide, there are examples of stories of people being administrated traditional medicine or vaccine allegedly to become immune to bullets.³⁵ In the case of the Mozambican civil war of 1976-1992, some authors considered it a war of spirits.³⁶ Oral accounts of war veterans reveal stories of military commanders who were feared because of their use of spirit mediums and traditional medicine to succeed in combats. As one war veteran recalled in an oral interview conducted in Mabote District, Inhambane Province, "my commander used a very strong medicine; we enjoyed fighting with him because his units suffered minor casualties." The war veteran went on to tell the story of a commander who, using magic, penetrated the territory of the enemy and obtained valuable intelligence information that facilitated the capture of RENAMO provincial stronghold in Tome, Inhambane province. In Zambézia Province, the Naparama gained international fame for their rituals, which made them fearless of guns.³⁷

Moreover, their demise was also perceived as result of counter-spiritual attack from the government troops. In Gaza Province, southern Mozambique, the Mungói spirit created an oasis of peace in a province heavily dilacerated by war. According to

35 Asekhauno AA and Inagbor VA. 2012. "Magic, Witchcraft, and Sorcery in Warfare The Experience of the Etsako of Nigeria", *Matatu* 40(1):245-256; Włodarczyk N. 2009. *Magic and Warfare: Appearance and Reality in Contemporary African Conflict and Beyond*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan; Geschiere P. 2008. "Review of Studies in Witchcraft, Magic, War and Peace in Africa: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 3(2):223-225.

36 Wilson KB. 1992. "Cults of violence and counter-violence in Mozambique", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18(3):527-582.

37 Jentzsch C. 2018. "Spiritual Power and the Dynamics of War in the Provinces of Nampula and Zambézia", in Morier-Genoud E, Cahen M and do Rosário DM (eds). *The War Within: New Perspectives on the Civil War in Mozambique, 1976-1992*. Martlesham, Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer.

peace educators Mary Anderson and Marshall Wallace, the spirit Mungói protected the community against military attacks by both government and rebel military.³⁸ As some people who lived in the region under the influence of the Mungói spirit recall, the rebels did not dare to kidnap someone who identified himself with the spirit. Consequently, people from distant communities found refuge in the land of Mungói. Those who had their relatives abducted by militaries asked assistance from the spirit to have their relatives released from captivity.³⁹ The case of Mungói spirit shows that parallel to government and international community efforts towards the end war and consequent reconciliation, ordinary Mozambicans developed their own mechanisms of peace based on the fear of magical powers. It shows that some regions of the country became oases of peace during the most critical moment of the civil war in Mozambique.⁴⁰ Interestingly, it is believed that both government and rebel forces requested the assistance of Mungói spirit to succeed in the battlefield.⁴¹ Like in Mozambique, the civil wars in Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Sierra Leone and Liberia,⁴² to mention but a few examples, have stories of the deployment of magical powers to fight the war. Taking an example from Angola, historian Inge Brinkman states that it “was thought that the rebel movement UNITA possessed “powers with which they could influence nature, technology and the senses. UNITA’s long-time leader Jonas Savimbi and the commanders in his army were said to use magic to protect themselves during combat. They could disappear, turn into animals, change bullets into water, make the enemy lose all sense of direction etc.”⁴³

From the dynamics of warfare, it appears that African warfare is also spiritual; thus, any attempt to resolve a military conflict must take into account this dimension. It seems that for African societies, spiritual problems require spiritual solutions. This justifies the presence of religious men and women, including African religious practices, in the battlefield. In the case of Mozambican civil war, the RENAMO guerrillas were famous for their reliance on traditional healers. According to testimonies of people who lived in areas under RENAMO control, traditional

38 Anderson MB and Wallace M. 2013. *Opting out of War: Strategies to Prevent Violent Conflict*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 143-156.

39 Interviews with Horácio Massangaie, Paulino Chifuco, Matinguriane Guire by M Mubai. Zavala, Mozambique, March 2023.

40 Nordstrom C. 1997. *A Different Kind of War Story* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 148.

41 Maier K. 1991. “A Traditional Revival”, *Africa Report* 36(4):64; Roesch, O. 1992. “Renamo and Peasantry in Southern Mozambique: A View from Gaza Province”. *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 26(3):462-484.

42 Stephen E. 2007. *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. Second Edition. New York: New York University Press.

43 Brinkman I. 2012. “Town, village and bush: war and cultural landscapes in southeastern Angola (1966-2002)”, *Afrika Focus* 25(2):36.

healers played a crucial role in the planning of military operations.⁴⁴ In fact, some commanders were feared because of the belief that they had a strong command of magical powers. It is believed that commander Macuvelane prepared magic portions to protect the soldiers in the battle. The ceremonies consisted on informing the ancestors that they were going to war and they wanted protection. On the other hand, the killing of General Gomes, RENAMO's most feared commander in southern Mozambique, is remembered as result of the use of magical powers.⁴⁵

Within the context of warfare, an active Christian religious activity played a crucial role in healing the wounds of war. As one interviewee put it in Funhalouro District, Inhambane Province, many people converted to Christianity during the war. Churches, he explained, helped people to understand their fate by bringing scriptures that explained the biblical explanation of the conflict.⁴⁶ Moreover, churches are credited with helping people to cope with the effects of war during the most critical time of the conflict. As a villager resident in the sixteen-year war torn zone of Funhalouro observed, The Church was very important in the consolation of those who had lost their relatives because of war. It administered funeral ceremonies and prayers to the victims of war and engaged in activities that helped accommodate people who were abducted and internally displaced.⁴⁷

From the experience of Mozambique, it is clear that as far as the spiritual and community-based experiences of coping with warfare are concerned, the distinction between the wartime and post-war periods is not clear. In fact, some of the experiences of peacebuilding and national reconciliation heralded in the post-war period were in place during the conflict. Therefore, the seeds of peacebuilding and national reconciliation are present during the conflict and serve as the basis for post-war experiences. Mozambicans did not wait for the end of war to administer cleansing rituals for war veterans and to people who were subject to brutal scenes of violence or lived in captivity in the course of war. As Filomena Mmagi has observed, upon their return, people who were abducted by RENAMO guerrillas went through a cleansing ritual before being reintegrated into the family. This was done to prevent the suffering from bad memories, which would destabilise the lives of the victims and of those who lived with them.⁴⁸ Sometimes it happened that the very same person was abducted several times. In this case, the person went

44 Interview with Dinis Simione Chibique by M Mubai. Mabote-Sede, Mozambique, 20 August 2013.

45 Interview with Celestina João Mapossa by M Mubai. Nhanala, Chigubo District, Mozambique, 29 August 2013.

46 Interview with Alfiado Milisse Mutuque by M Mubai. Funhalouro District, Mozambique, 1 September 2013.

47 Interview with Arnaldo Salomão Mazive by M Mubai. Funhalouro District, Mozambique, 3 September 2013.

48 Interview with Filomena Mmagi by M Mubai. Zavala District, Mozambique, 9 February 2023.

through as many rituals as necessary.⁴⁹ The fact that both those who committed atrocities and those who were victims or simply witnessed them required some sort of spiritual cleansing blurs the distinction between perpetrators and victims. These experiences show that long before the peace process that culminated with the General Peace Agreement between the government and RENAMO, people who lived in the battlegrounds were engaged in peacebuilding and reconciliation. These experiences continued after the end of war, sometimes with the “blessing” of government authorities. Because these reconciliation rituals took place in the family units, they decentred the peacebuilding and reconciliation process from state entities to households.

In fact, many scholars recognise the role of cleansing ceremonies and other traditional forms of peacebuilding, but they express concerns about their capacity to create justice. In her study of Sierra Leone, psychiatrist Laura Stovel observes, “cleansing ceremonies were meant to appease ancestors after an offense but are now commonly used to create a symbolic closure on the past.”⁵⁰ In this assertion, the idea of a symbolic closure of the past hinders reconciliation because people live with sentiment of injustice and vengeance. Seen this way, cleansing ceremonies are reduced to reconciliation and peaceful coexistence of people who did not forgive each other. It lacks the elements of justice required for deep reconciliation to occur. As Stovel observed in the case of Sierra Leone, people were submitted to cleansing ceremonies, but they were not fully reconciled with their communities. Stovel calls attention to power dynamics that underpin the whole process of reconciliation in the community. She warns against the danger of confusing real forgiveness with helplessness.⁵¹ In fact, another study conducted in Sierra Leone, showed that girls who served the guerrillas suffered more discrimination in the process of social reintegration and compensation.⁵² In Uganda, psychologist Angela Veale and development studies specialist Aki Stavrou concluded that social integration appeared to be harder for young women than men.⁵³

REASSESSING THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES OF DELIVERANCE AND FORGIVENESS TO PEACEBUILDING IN MOZAMBIQUE

The literature review underlying this chapter shows that the 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the celebration of traditional ceremonies of peacebuilding and

49 Interview with Felismina Malate by M Mubai. Zavala District, Mozambique, 9 February 2023.

50 Stovel L. 2008. “‘There’s No Bad Bush to Throw Away a Bad Child’: ‘Traditional’-Inspired reintegration in Post-War Sierra Leone”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46(2):306.

51 Stovel, “There’s No Bad Bush to Throw Away a Bad Child”, 314.

52 Williamson J. 2006. “The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers: social and psychological transformation in Sierra Leone”, *Intervention* 4(3):185-205.

53 Veale A and Stavrou A. 2007. “Former Lord’s Resistance Army Child Soldier Abductees: Explorations of Identity in Reintegration and Reconciliation”, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 13(3):273-292.

social integration in countries that went through brutal civil wars. Examples from Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Liberia provide evidence of how people who were torn away by war came together to build a new environment of peace, reconciliation, social integration and national reconciliation. Two decades after the establishment of these practices, it is timely to reassess their efficacy and their meaning to the lives of ordinary people, as well as to the peace processes in post-war African countries. In fact, there is a trending approach challenging the success of post-war reconciliation in African countries. In the case of Mozambique, international relations scholar Natália Bueno's examination of the entrenchment of reconciliation challenges the idea that Mozambique was once reconciled.⁵⁴ Individually, some people are being haunted with wartime dreams and being prosecuted by spirits of the dead.⁵⁵ Other scholars warn against the romanticizing local understandings and practices of peace and assuming that local peace initiatives are inherently inclusive and harmonious.⁵⁶ Reading between the lines, it appears that the waning of celebratory narratives of traditional strategies of peacebuilding and national reconciliation departs from the assumption that peace is the lack of military violence. Seen this way, it appears that the meaning of peace and reconciliation to government authorities and international community differed from individual and community conception of term. For people in grassroots peace activism, the end or absence of military confrontation does not mean the existence of peace. Even those who were killed during the war must go through a pacification process. Their souls will not rest in peace until some rituals are conducted.⁵⁷ On the other hand, those who killed them are also in permanent instability because the spirits of the dead haunt them.⁵⁸ To make things much more complicated, the simple act of stepping on the remains or graveyard of someone who was killed can lead to disturbances in someone's life.⁵⁹ These experiences make the peacebuilding much more complicated than it is portrayed in the literature. Thus, the meaning of peacebuilding for people on the grassroots is much more complex than is assumed by government officials and international community.

As Mozambique suffers another cycle of violence with the Islamic military insurgency in Northern Cabo Delgado and is set to conclude the demobilisation, disarming and reintegration of war veterans of the 2013-2018 conflict, it is timely to observe what was learnt from previous experiences of peacebuilding and

54 Bueno N. 2019. "Reconciliation in Mozambique: was it ever achieved?" *Conflict, Security and Development* 19(5):427-452.

55 Igreja V and Dias-Lembrança B. 2006. "The social world of dreams and nightmares in a post-conflict setting: the case of Gorongosa in Central Mozambique", *Intervention* 6(2):147-159.

56 Wiegink, "Violent Spirits and a Messy Peace".

57 Granjo P. 2007. "The Homecomer: Postwar Cleansing Rituals in Mozambique", *Armed Forces and Society* 33(3):382-395.

58 See Honwana, "Negotiating Postwar Identities"; Baines, "The Haunting of Alice".

59 Igreja V et al. 2010. "The epidemiology of spirit possession in the aftermath of mass political violence in Mozambique", *Social Science and Medicine* 71(3):592-599.

national reconciliation in Mozambique. It is assumed that learning from the loopholes of previous experience enables the creation of an enabling environment for peacebuilding and national reconciliation in the country. Considering that that peacebuilding and reconciliation also occurs during the conflict, it is necessary to understand the contribution of traditional cleansing ceremonies during and after the conflict. This is relevant because the ongoing conflict in northern Mozambique is sustained by Islamic beliefs. An overview of the major news media outlets on the peace process in Mozambique shows that government, international donors and RENAMO did not learn from previous experience. Their major preoccupation was disarming the rebels and providing them with some material benefits to return to civilian life. Little is heard about clinical treatment of those who are now vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder. There is no reference to cleansing ceremonies or to other rituals aimed at appeasing the spirits of those who lost their lives during the conflict. Meanwhile, the accounts of those who participated in the hostilities continue to narrate cases of administration of magical powers in the battleground.⁶⁰ At family level, those who were exposed to gruesome atrocities are receiving cleansing treatment to help their social reinsertion and to prevent them from attacks by the spirits of the dead.⁶¹ On the other hand, within the government and non-governmental organisations involved in the programme of demobilisation and reintegration of war veterans there is no reference to psychological support to the victims of war. This means that thousands of people are vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder. This reluctance to learn from the experience of reliance on traditional ceremonies of cleansing and deliverance threatens the establishment of effective peace and national reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the role of traditional ceremonies of deliverance and forgiveness in the promotion of peace and national reconciliation in Mozambique. Building from a literature review with particular emphasis on war-torn African countries, along with oral interviews of Mozambicans, the chapter showed that the waging of war is more than the exchange of gunfire. Magical powers are all present in the battleground and in the households. Because of this reality, for a better understanding of peacebuilding and national reconciliation it is necessary to take into account what happens during and after the conflict. Because the war is also a spiritual battle, the peace and reconciliation must address the spiritual dimension. Contrary to the bulk of literature on African warfare, the origins of peacebuilding and national reconciliation should be traced in the experiences of reintegrating both the victims and perpetrators of gruesome violence while the conflict is occurring.

By looking at peacebuilding as an ongoing process, there is a possibility for a better understanding of how people come into terms with their traumatic experiences. The

⁶⁰ Interview with Casimiro Noa by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, September 2023.

⁶¹ Interview with Rachid Momade by M Mubai, Maputo, Mozambique, September 2023.

experience of traditional ceremonies of deliverance and forgiveness in Mozambique reveals that peacebuilding and national reconciliation are much more than absence of military confrontation and vengeance. They involve the establishment of an inclusive negotiation involving the victims, the perpetrators and, above all, the dead. In Mozambique and elsewhere in African societies, a dead person continues to wield supernatural powers that can destabilise the lives of the living. On the other hand, the soul of the dead can also suffer if the living do not perform certain rituals.

In sum, while Africa appears to fail the African Union plan of silencing the guns by 2030, there is a need to learn from past experiences of building peace and reconciliation during and after conflict. This will prevent the danger of having peace processes planned from above, without a clear understanding of social and cultural dynamics of African warfare. In respect of traditional ceremonies of deliverance and forgiveness, government and nongovernmental organisations involved in peace negotiations and transitions from war to peace should learn from localised experiences of pacification. An effective peace and reconciliation process must begin in grassroots efforts to bring together the victims and perpetrators of violence at the negotiation table. The negotiations must address the needs of the living and the dead. They must conceive peace beyond the absence of physical violence by acknowledging that in some societies, the distinction between the living and the dead is liminal. This approach has the potential to reduce collateral effects of exposure to situations of extreme violence that occurred during military conflict. It also has the potential to reconcile the dead and the living, thus creating an enabling environment for effective peace beginning at personal, community and national levels.