

19 “HE THEN BECAME A LION”: WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS IN RURAL MOZAMBIQUE

Júlio Machele¹

INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to reconstruct the history of mutual relationship between the villagers of Mwangaza, in Mocimboa da Praia district, Cabo Delgado province, in northern Mozambique, I was pushed into the intricate world of witchcraft. My surprise came when almost all admitted that “some people turn themselves into lions”. They were evoking an ancient institution that characterised Mozambican territory before colonisation. During the colonial era, two worlds confronted each other, the European world with its hegemonic project and the African world, which came to be defined as traditional, static and irrational, according to the European lens. In the context of the European hegemonic project, various traditional practices of the Africans were persecuted and condemned, including witchcraft. In fact, Friar João dos Santos, a Dominican missionary, in his *Ethiopia Oriental*, a book concluded between 1607 and 1609, gave his full support of the “civilizing mission” under the proselytism flag, flogged and banished from the Tete village, in the central region of what would become the modern Mozambique, two women whom he accused of witchcraft practices and of having meetings with the devil.²

Despite Friar João dos Santos’ attitude, evidence shows that many Europeans adopted African traditional practices of witchcraft. In fact, many officials complained in their reports about the shame these Europeans caused to their “civilizing mission”.³ With the strengthening of colonial administration, persecution and condemnation

1 Lecturer, History Department, University Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo, Mozambique.

2 Dos Santos, João. 1999. *Etiópia oriental e vária história de cousas notáveis do Oriente* [Eastern Ethiopia and various history of notable things from the East]. Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para a Comemoração dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 555, 564-566. To understand that witchcraft did not represent something new to Europeans who came to Africa and how the inquisition acted against local European practices, see Ginzburg C. 1988. *Os andarilhos do bem: feitiçaria e cultos agrários nos séculos XVI e XVII* [The wanderers of good: witchcraft and agrarian cults in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries]. Second Edition. São Paulo: Companhia de Letras.

3 Rodrigues E. 2012. “A ciência europeia e a medicina africana de Moçambique: explorações, apropriações e exclusões, entre finais do século XVIII e meados do século XX” [European science and African medicine in Mozambique: explorations, appropriations and exclusions, between the late eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries], in *CIEA 8*. Madrid: UAM; Dias de Andrade I. 2016. “*Tem um espírito que vive dentro dessa pele*”: feitiçaria e desenvolvimento em Tete, Moçambique [“There’s a spirit that lives within this skin”: witchcraft and development in Tete, Mozambique], PhD Diss, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 118-119.

continued against the “hatred practices”. But despite persecution and condemnation, it is a fact that these traditional practices, especially the witchcraft accusations that are the subject of this study, persisted, thus proving witchcraft to be a ubiquitous phenomenon.⁴ Studies carried out in the context of the ethnographic effervescence in the twentieth century point to the persistence of witchcraft accusations and of local mechanisms to deal with the phenomenon.⁵

The independence achieved by Mozambique in 1975, following a ten-year armed struggle for liberation, represented for many the possibility of a kind of rehabilitation and public reassertion of various local practices eclipsed by colonisation. However, to the frustration of many, the Front for National Liberation (FRELIMO) declared itself to be Marxist-Leninist movement from 1977 onwards and condemned magical-religious practices, in a continuum with the modernist colonial project. By labelling the magical-religious practices as superstitious, occult and feudal. FRELIMO reproduced the colonial environment of action where these practices had to be concealed. That is, wherever the state-party tentacles reached, witchcraft accusations and related practices became clandestine and invisible, yet they persisted alongside the law in a form of legal pluralism.⁶ In fact, while Western legal courts were widely adopted after independence, many Mozambicans in rural areas, far away from the eyes of the state, continued to organise their “search for true and justice” on the basis of *muave* or *mondzo* ordeals or related practices.⁷

The aim of this study is to contribute to understanding of witchcraft⁸ accusations in rural Mozambique. Though the focus of the study is contemporary Mozambique,

4 Lane TE. 1999. “Pernicious Practice”: Witchcraft Eradication and History in Northern Province, South Africa, c.1880–1930, PhD Diss, Stanford University, 18-19. Evans-Pritchard had, partially, come to the same conclusion despite more weight he gave to belief and ritual. See Evans-Pritchard EE. 1937. *Witchcraft: Oracle and Magic Among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon.

5 For example, Dias and Dias noticed that around 1957 those accused of transforming themselves into lions between Maconde people in Cabo Delgado province were forced to cut the hair and purification rituals. See Dias J and Dias M. 1970. *Os Macondes de Moçambique: vida social e ritual* [The Macondes of Mozambique: social and ritual life]. Volume III. Lisbon: JIU, 343, 345, 370. For cases in Southern Mozambique, see Junod HA. 1996. *Usos e costumes dos Bantu* [Uses and customs of Bantu]. Volume 2. Maputo: AHM, 432-459.

6 On the nature of legal pluralism in Mozambique, see De Sousa Santos B. 2006. “The Heterogeneous State and Legal Pluralism in Mozambique”, *Law & Society Review* 40(1):39-76.

7 Ordeal in the north and south of Zambezi river is called *mauve*, while in some regions of southern Mozambique it is called *mondzo*. The use of *mauve* ordeal in Tete and Manica provinces, during the time it was labelled obscurantist, or occult, was classified as a crime and the party urged the need to implement justice criteria free from obscurantism. See “O obscurantismo no crime”, *Tempo*, 24 September 1978.

8 The notion of witchcraft, despite its suggestion of multiple abilities, can perhaps be defined, in a large majority of African countries, as the ability to harm someone through the use of mystical power. See Cimpric A. 2010. *Children Accused of Witchcraft: An anthropological study of contemporary practices in Africa*. Dakar: UNICEF WCARO, 1.

19. "He then became a lion": Witchcraft accusations in rural Mozambique

it deals with an ancient institution from precolonial times that evolved by adapting and readapting to the ever-changing political, cultural, social and economic environment. In this study, I examine the profiles of the victims of the witchcraft accusations, the accusations per se, and finally the strategies adopted by the victims and the state. I argue against approaches that see witchcraft as simply ubiquitous in Mozambican society and argue instead that witchcraft accusations, as visible signs of the belief in witchcraft, tend to be more marked in periods of tension.

The study employs social science methods, but with an inclination toward historical methods. It is quite clear that the study of witchcraft demands an interdisciplinary approach, given the need to consider all of its societal aspects. Evidence relating to witchcraft is here mobilised and analysed, relying on sources that include journalistic accounts and my own observations and conversations during field work, which focused particularly on gender and ethical dimensions of the witchcraft phenomenon.

The study deals with rural Mozambique, while acknowledging regional differences in terms of local conceptions of supernatural powers. In northern Mozambique, people are haunted by the "invisible world", while in central and southern Mozambique the active spiritual forces are the deceased spirits that one can dominate or use them for one's own benefit.⁹ What makes it possible to analyse the country as a whole, is that, despite some variations, many believe in witches and witchcraft accusations are ever present.

The analysis starts from independence in 1975 and extends through the democratisation of the country. Independence brought new power relations and political tensions into rural communities, which are expressed by witchcraft accusations. The national independence was also accompanied by a war that erupted and devastated the country from 1976 to 1992. The demobilisation and reintegration programmes brought new scenarios of witchcraft accusations with which ex-combatant and rural families had to deal.¹⁰ By the mid-1980s, while the conflict escalated, the Program of Economic Adjustment brought another hardship to Mozambicans besieged by droughts and floods. The new democratic Constitution of 1990, which ended the one-party system, also brought new fears, which were reflected in witchcraft accusations. This trajectory went in parallel with the poverty cycle, droughts and floods, interpretations of which were also made within the "invisible world" or the "occult reign".¹¹

9 Granjo P. 2012. *Julgamentos de feitiçaria, relativismo cultural e hegemonias locais* [Judgments of witchcraft, cultural relativism and local hegemonies]. Bragança: CESAB. Centro de Estudos Sociais Aquino de Bragança, 139.

10 For a detailed study on witchcraft and postwar Mozambique, see Wiegink N. 2013. "'Why Did the Soldiers Not Go Home?': Demobilized Combatants, Family Life and Witchcraft in Post War Mozambique", *Anthropological Quarterly* 86(1):107-132.

11 In 2013, in Pemba, the northern capital of Cabo Delgado province, a new phenomenon of witchcraft deactivators created agitation. Traditional healers (witch doctors) decided to

WITCHCRAFT STUDIES IN MOZAMBIQUE

Witchcraft studies in Mozambique have tended to be the monopoly of ethnographers and anthropologists. In fact, the twentieth century was, *par excellence*, the golden era of ethnographers and anthropologists, who ventured in the complicated world of witchcraft.¹² These studies produced valuable insights for the understanding of witchcraft dynamics. Jorge Dias and Margot Dias, both anthropologists in the mid-1950s, showed not only the fears and power surrounding the figure of the witch, but also the mechanisms adopted by the victims to deal with these accusations. In their valuable study, they treated witchcraft and the figure of the witch as a metaphor. For them, the witch was an imaginary figure, an invisible figure that people suspected, but no one knew.¹³ In adopting this stance, these ethnographers failed to understand that witchcraft is real for the people they analysed.

Henri Junod, a Swiss missionary and ethnographer, also dedicated some of his lines to witchcraft in southern Mozambique. Like Dias and Dias, Henri Junod can be located in the group of scholars more concerned in dichotomising witchcraft by focusing on beliefs and rituals.¹⁴ For Junod, modernisation had the potential to reduce practices related to witchcraft, such as fines of which traditional leaders, acting as witchcraft judges, used to get a good share.¹⁵ This was, in fact, the shared position of a body of scholarship, which saw in modernisation the end of these practices. To Junod's disappointment, witchcraft did not disappear with modernisation. Instead, witchcraft became a prolific conceptual terrain to understand social, economic and political crisis and to counter hegemonic discourses.

Recent scholars who deal with witchcraft also have an anthropological background. Paolo Israel is anthropologist who is concerned with witchcraft in northern Mozambique. He has devoted his attention to northern Cabo Delgado. In a paper titled "The War of Lions", he associates the "occult idioms" with wide political and economic transformations.¹⁶ Israel relates the 2003 violence and the inherent discourses in Miudume, Cabo Delgado province to "a deep mistrust of the post-socialist FRELIMO elites, highlighting their propensity to second the rapacity of international vampires and let the district slip into chaos in order to feed on the blood and meat of its subject".¹⁷

enter any house, sometimes without permission, to perform the deactivation ritual. After the unauthorised ritual they demanded money. See "Curandeiros 'porta a porta' agitam Pemba" [Door-to-door healers shake Pemba], *O País*, 3 July 2014.

12 See, for example, Dias and Dias, *Os Macondes de Moçambique*, 343, 345, 370; Junod, *Usos e costumes dos Bantu*, 432-459.

13 Dias and Dias, *Os Macondes de Moçambique*, 343, 345, 351, 368, 370.

14 Junod, *Usos e costumes dos Bantu*, 432-492.

15 Junod, *Usos e costumes dos Bantu*, 458.

16 Israel P. 2009. "The War of Lions: Witch-Hunts, Occult Idioms and Post-Socialism in Northern Mozambique", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35(1):155-174.

17 Israel, "The War of Lions", 159.

19. "He then became a lion": Witchcraft accusations in rural Mozambique

Harry West, another anthropologist, has related power and witchcraft in Mueda plateau, Cabo Delgado province. In his doctoral dissertation, he seeks to challenge the dichotomising approaches that characterised initial ethnography in Mozambique on witchcraft. He argues that sorcery "is both a structured cultural expression of social experience and a structuring framework for participation in social process."¹⁸ He argues that the emergence of new forms of power and the postcolonial elite introduced new political tensions in rural communities that were expressed by witchcraft accusations.¹⁹ Despite his declared intention to avoid dichotomies through detailed historical examinations of experiences of Maconde people in relation to forces and institutions advancing the modernising agendas, West is, as he admits, an anthropologist acting as a delegated historian.²⁰

Dias de Andrade, another anthropologist, analysed in his doctoral dissertation, the relationship between development and witchcraft in Tete province, central Mozambique. In his work, he tries to link the actual interpretation of events related to development intervention to an historical past. For Dias de Andrade, "the new international modernising projects are embedded in secular race relations whose longevity lies on the ability to incorporate exogenous projects in local dynamics and expressed it in the witchcraft discourse". In fact, for Dias de Andrade, the gains and losses surrounding the development interventions were interpreted according to witchcraft, and that is why, quoting West and Achille Mbembe, he postulates the need to consider the incorporation of witchcraft discourse in development efforts.²¹

A study by Nikkie Wiegink, another anthropologist, deals with witchcraft in postwar Mozambique, but he is more concerned with fears of becoming the victim of witches than the accusations *per se*. He argues "that witchcraft played a role in framing and shaping social tensions within the (extended) family, influencing the decision-making processes" of many demobilised combatants in central Mozambique, especially in relation to their place of settlement. According to Wiegink's study, some demobilised soldiers, understanding the ubiquitous nature of witchcraft, sometimes refused to return to their pre-conflict homes.²² The "fears approach" is also evident in a pre-conflict study by geographer Inês Raimundo, associating poverty, migration and witchcraft. According to Raimundo, many people in Niassa province, northern Mozambique, are afraid to increase agricultural

18 West H. 1997. *Sorcery of Construction and Sorcery of Ruin: Power and Ambivalence on the Mueda Plateau, Mozambique (1982–1994)*, PhD Diss, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 13.

19 West H. 2008. "'Governem-se vocês mesmos!' Democracia e carnificina no Norte de Moçambique" ["Govern yourself!" Democracy and carnage in northern Mozambique], *Análise Social* 43(2):347–368. Peter Geschiere, in his study of Cameroon, reached the same conclusion, but also argued that witchcraft accusations tend to reproduce the social order. Geschiere P. 1997. *The Modernity of Witchcraft*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 7, 219.

20 West, *Sorcery of Construction and Sorcery of Ruin*, 15.

21 Dias de Andrade, "Tem um espírito que vive dentro dessa pele", 9, 168–169, 334–336.

22 Wiegink, "Why Did the Soldiers Not Go Home", 108–110.

production and productivity or to improve their living conditions, such as to build homes with more durable material, because they can become victim of witches.²³

Anthropologist Esmeralda Mariamo, less concerned with witchcraft accusations per se, has studied the linkage between reproduction and witchcraft in Maputo and Gaza provinces and concluded that reproductive potential, such as conception, pregnancy and birth, is not always guaranteed and maintained, owing to a powerful malignant and invisible force implanted in the body.²⁴ As noted above, these and other witchcraft studies in Mozambique have, however, been almost the monopoly of anthropologists and ethnographers, leaving historians lagging behind in this intricate and fertile terrain. In choosing to study witchcraft accusations in rural Mozambique, I intend to include historical insights into this debate.

VICTIMS' PROFILE OF THE WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS

Unlike Angola, Benin, Nigeria and other African nations, where children have also been accused of witchcraft, in Mozambique the victims "who undergo the ordeal of designation", to borrow the expression of Aleksandra Cimpric,²⁵ are old people. "It is forbidden to get old in Mozambique"²⁶ is the interesting title of an article in the *O País* newspaper, showing the ordeals that these people, accused in most cases of practising witchcraft, undergo. The concept of "granny witches" is another example that shows the face and ages of that the victims.²⁷ In Mozambique, it is also evident that these accusations do not cross a river because "every misfortune is provoked by a relative that is jealous".²⁸

Statistical data from newspapers corroborates this tendency, which has been unchanged since independence. Old people continue to be the majority of those who fall in the "ordeal of designation". Both men and women in the period analysed here have continued to be the main victims of witchcraft accusations. Women appear to be the most frequent victims,²⁹ but one needs to be cautious in this designation, considering the existing proportion of old men and women.

23 Raimundo I. 2009. "Mobilidade da população, pobreza e feitiçaria no meio rural de Moçambique" [Mobility of the population, poverty and sorcery in rural Mozambique], *Economia, Política e Desenvolvimento* 1(1):13-39.

24 Mariamo E. 2016. "The 'Unsayings' of Reproductive Affliction in Mozambique Witchcraft and Local Reproductive Knowledge", *The Oriental Anthropologist* 16(2):310-312.

25 Cimpric, *Children Accused of Witchcraft*, 14.

26 País O. 2013. "É proibido envelhecer em Moçambique", *O País*, 2 October. *Deutsche Welle*, a German newspaper reproduced the same title in 2016 with slight variation: "To get old in Mozambique is a nightmare". See "Ser idoso em Moçambique é um peadelo", *Deutsche Welle*, 4 May 2017.

27 Sayagues M, Mulhanga S and Da Silva T. 2011. "Vovós feiticeiras: algumas reflexões sobre tristes relatos de idosas moçambicanas" [Witches' Grannies: Some Reflections on Sad Reports of Older Mozambican Women], *Revista Kairós Gerontologia* 14(4):181-195.

28 "O obscurantismo no crime", 416.

29 For some accounts by women accused of practising witchcraft in southern Mozambique, see Sayagues, Mulhanga and Da Silva, "Vovós feiticeiras", 181-196.

19. "He then became a lion": Witchcraft accusations in rural Mozambique

In northern Mozambique, where some residents are accused of becoming lions tend to be men.³⁰ Local stories and evidence from primary and secondary sources highlights the figure of a man who has the power to turn himself into a lion or to use these animals to harm people for his own benefit. The victims of Njawa Njawa, who appeared in Mueda plateau from Tanzania around 1984 to administer his toxic mixture to suspected people of practising witchcraft, were also men.³¹ Historical accounts from the twentieth century also associate this domain with the figure of a man.

In some circumstances, old women appear allegedly to have the power to turn themselves into animals or to use animals for their own benefit. In 2009, a local newspaper related witchcraft accusations to agricultural production. According to the account, women had the ability to become crocodiles or to control these animals. Eight people were killed, supposedly because certain women commanded these reptiles to attack people while they were going to plough their fields. Eight women were accused because their production and productivity were relatively higher than the majority. Surprisingly, the number of killings coincides with the number of women who confessed. According to the local administrator: "We have already finished with these acts, following the meetings we had with the communities, where eight women who confessed to have magical crocodiles killed people to work in the fields, and who exceeded the production compared to other people without this supernatural power."³²

In southern and central Mozambique, women are the most frequent victims, because there is a belief that the chain of transmission of witchcraft is from mother to child. Everyone who becomes a witch, is so because they inherited it from their mothers. They are also victims due to their vulnerability. In most cases, they are in a dependent position. Widows are also often in a precarious position in their family. They fall victim to these accusation when they show a behaviour inconsistent with the models imposed by locally effective power relations.³³ Men are accused if they show

30 Harry West, while working on his PhD, reported that villages in Macomia district, Cabo Delgado province, attributed an attack by a lion to a woman. See West, "Sorcery of Construction and Sorcery of Ruin", 8.

31 Adam Y. 1996. *Trick or Treat: The Relationship between Destabilization, Aid and Government Development Policies in Mozambique, 1975–1990*. Roskilde: University of Roskilde, 236. In the administrative post of Ntamba, Nangade district, Cabo Delgado province, eight people were arrested because they vandalised the administrator's house as he did not allow a famous tradition healer (witch doctors) from Tanzania to come and treat their shops (barracas) against witchcraft that did not allow the business to prosper. See Campos Z. 2013. "Cabo Delgado em Ntamba jovens vandalizam casa do administrador" [Cabo Delgado in Ntamba young vandalise house of the administrator], *Notícias*, 7 September).

32 Maringuè, A. 2009. "Após oito mulheres confessarem ser 'donas' dos répteis" [After eight women confessed to being "owners" of reptiles], *Verdade*, 16 February.

33 Granjo. "Julgamentos de feitiçaria", 138; Silva, Teresinha da, 1999. "Conflict, disaster, migration and older persons in Mozambique", *Southern African Journal of Gerontology* 8(2): 28-32, 30.

political ambitions that are considered to be exaggerated or if they have considerable assets and wealth in advanced age that have not been distributed to the heirs or other immediate relatives.³⁴

WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATION IN RURAL MOZAMBIQUE

In historical perspective, following ten years of armed struggle against colonial Portugal, Mozambique achieved its independence in 1975. Euphoria characterised this turning of events, because some Mozambicans believed that traditional practices eclipsed by colonial authorities would be reaffirmed and protected by the new Mozambican regime. The practices that were prosecuted and condemned by colonial authorities had included local mechanisms to “search true and justice”, but also to interpret and negotiate and renegotiate practices surrounding witchcraft. To the disappointment of many Mozambicans, the new regime adopted a similar position to colonial authorities. Many traditional practices continued to be prosecuted and condemned. 1977 was the watershed year in which the party became Marxist-Leninist and embraced comprehensively the project to build the “new man” free from obscurantism and “feudal” practices.

Traditional healers, traditional authorities, witch doctors, witches and others were all put under the same umbrella. One illustration of this situation was a 1980 article in the widely circulated *Tempo* magazine with the title “Mestra de feitiçaria expulsa espíritos, ensina alunas e ganha dinheiro”.³⁵ A thorough analysis by the paper shows that the master alluded to did not see herself as a witch, nor did her community members, who tolerated and encouraged what she was doing. The figure of traditional healer was widely criminalised and sometimes, as pointed out by Fernando Florêncio, became victim of witchcraft accusation.³⁶

In the eyes of the new state-party, traditional authorities and traditional healers were seen as negative agents, because they promoted obscurantism by performing justice by ordeal. That was why the state-party needed to insist in political education, in order to implement justice criterion free from obscurantism. In their quest for rationalism, they did not make distinction between different practitioners. The emergence of new organisational structures, emanated to dismantle the feudal society, was also made at the expenses of traditional authorities. They were publicly humiliated and often accused of witchcraft. They also became the ones who “tied the rain”,³⁷ especially

34 Granjo. “Julgamentos de feitiçaria”, 138-139.

35 “Female master in witchcraft chases out spirits teaches female students and wins money”. Literal translation by the author.

36 Florêncio F. 1994. *Processos de transformação social no universo rural moçambique pós socialista: o caso do distrito de Búzi* [Social transformation processes in post-socialist rural Mozambique: the case of Búzi District], MA Thesis, ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, 158.

37 “Amarrar a chuva”. Literal translation by the author.

19. "He then became a lion": Witchcraft accusations in rural Mozambique

during the 1981–1983 drought.³⁸ Notably, the new government cadres used witchcraft as both a powerful tool of social control and as an economic and political strategy.³⁹

Collective production and socialisation of the countryside found its reflection in witchcraft accusations. In fact, a conflict over land broke out in northern Mozambique, in Namaua village, Cabo Delgado province. The issue had been presented during colonial period, and with the onset of liberation war FRELIMO decided to distribute lands for collective production. When a man reaffirmed his position in relation to his land after independence he received the accusation of turning himself into a lion and taken to the administration to be flogged.⁴⁰

The experience of the communal villages during the liberation war, introduced with more consistency after independence, was also marked by witchcraft accusations, due to the restructuring nature of power relations. In these new villages, people were detached from their homeland. New power relations emerged, whereby FRELIMO cadres occupied important positions. Conflicts over land near communal villages, social inequalities, conflicts over the access of privileges in the administration were common. People began to use witchcraft accusations to challenge the nature and objectives of communal villages.

Production Operation (Operação Produção – OP) introduced between 1983 and 1988 forced people from urban areas to remote rural areas. People were stripped from urban areas to remote rural areas of the country, and the list included traditional authorities, witches, whores and individuals who supposedly had former ties with colonial authorities. Though the political discourse of the time referenced the need to make productive the “non-productive”, the evidence points out that many who were included were productive. In the remote areas to which these people were relocated, accusations and fears of witchcraft became more present in their life.⁴¹ According to a traditional healer (*curandeiro*) interviewed by Maria Paula Meneses, when militias on road control duty found traditional healers, they forced them to eat everything they brought with them. They also used to burn traditional healers’ working instruments, and some were sent to Lichinha, Niassa province.⁴²

38 Florêncio F. 2005. *Ao encontro dos Mambos: autoridades tradicionais vaNdau e estado em Moçambique* [Meeting the Mambos: traditional VaNdau authorities and state in Mozambique]. Lisbon: ICS, 172-173.

39 Granjo, “Julgamentos de feitiçaria” 136.

40 Centro de Estudos Africanos (CEA). 1983. *A situação nas antigas zonas libertadas de Cabo Delgado*. Maputo: CEA. 4:19-20.

41 Raimundo, “Mobilidade da população”, 29; Quembo C. 2017. Poder do poder: operação produção e a invenção dos improdutivos urbanos no Moçambique socialista, 1983–1988 [Power of power: production operation and the invention of the urban unproductive in socialist Mozambique, 1983–1988]. Maputo: Alcance Editores.

42 Meneses MP. 2004. “Maciane F. Zimba e Carolina J. Tamele: os percursos e as experiências de vida de dois médicos tradicionais moçambicanos” [Maciane F. Zimba and Carolina J. Tamele: the trajectories and life experiences of two traditional Mozambican doctors], in De Sousa Santos B and Cruz e Silva T (eds). *Moçambique e a reinvenção da emancipação social* [Mozambique and the reinvention of social emancipation]. Maputo: CFJJ, 114.

The war that started in 1976 and ended in 1992 also brought shifts in family relations that triggered some witchcraft accusations. In the beginning of the conflict, the rebel movement claimed that it was waging a war for the spirits. The lack of the distribution of wealth gained during the conflict, along with the demobilisation programme, contributed to new power relations, in which young people who had joined the war and had acquired some sense of independence “clashed” with old values in ways that triggered witchcraft accusations. Postwar dynamics also conveyed the spectrum of witchcraft in some cases. Disputes over land for charcoal production in southern Mozambique sometimes were expressed through allegations of witchcraft. Because life became so difficult, people from urban areas, especially women, embraced charcoal production in rural areas of Gaza province. Disputes over land became frequent and were reflected in witchcraft accusations.⁴³

The democratisation from 1994 onward also represented a new way in which to interpret this world of uncertainties. It became a period where “lions came with democracy”. People assume that democracy subverted traditional rules and those introduced by the one-party regime.⁴⁴ An old man interviewed by Harry West summarised the relationship between democracy and witchcraft: “In the past, witches were regulated. Today we have democracy. Everything is possible today. Everything is allowed.”⁴⁵ Despite of representing the “power of the people” democracy failed to solve many problems that affected ordinary people. Inequalities escalated. Corruption and the use of influences for economic and political benefits became common. Some people in rural Mozambique people reacted to these disadvantageous scenarios by using witchcraft accusations.

Climate events were also interpreted using witchcraft discourse. In Zambeze province, in central Mozambique, the victims of these accusations were people with some relative economic stability who supposedly had the ability to “tie the rain” and jeopardise the life of the poor for their own benefit. In 2009, in a series of incidents in Nicoadala, Namacurra and Quelimane, four people were killed and an unknown number of people injured, 25 houses were burnt and 12 individuals were arrested. The main target of community superstition was people who enjoyed some economic stability and were accused of serving as witches to “tie the rain” and harm the poor.⁴⁶ The accusations of tying the rain in regions like Quelimane, Maquival, Inge, Namacata in the district of Nicoadala and Macuse, Mixixine, Forquia in Namacurra, were not new, but in 2009 the situation took on a criminal

43 McGregor J. 1997. *Staking Their Claims: Land Disputes in Southern Mozambique*. University of Wisconsin-Madison: Land Tenure Center, 10.

44 West H. 2008. “Democracia e carnificina”, 348-349; Israel, “The War on Lions”, 62-63.

45 West, “Democracia e carnificina”, 349.

46 “Chuva amarrada no céu gera violência na Zambézia” [Rain tied in the sky generates violence in Zambézia], *Diário de Notícias*, 15 February 2009.

19. "He then became a lion": Witchcraft accusations in rural Mozambique

dimension, never seen in the history of the province of Zambezia.⁴⁷ Years later, accusations re-emerged including other provinces, such as Tete.⁴⁸

STRATEGIES AND AGENCY AGAINST WITCHCRAFT

People facing witchcraft accusations are not passive victims. They develop mechanisms to deal with this traumatic experience. The "exit strategy", using Lubkemann's expression,⁴⁹ is widespread in the country. It is a practice than can be remoted to colonial times and that adapted and readapted to new changing environments. "In central Mozambique, it is not uncommon to hear that someone has decided to move to the city or to another district, leaving networks of family, friends, land, and possibly job behind."⁵⁰ In northern Mozambique, a family that had a member devoured by a lion in 2003 in Mwangaza village, Mocimboa da Praia district, Cabo Delgado province, decided to leave the village forever. During this year, the village became a desert and people sold their assets in a hurry at a low price.

Of course, in this case, the "exit strategy" is related to being an actual victim of witchcraft, but those who were accused of practised witchcraft by using the lion also took the opportunity to leave the village. In southern Mozambique, this strategy was also applied, and victims of these accusations living in the proximity of urban areas or with means to move to urban areas took the opportunity to find comfort in the shelters for old and abandoned people. But, in many cases, the "exit strategy" contributes to making people more vulnerable to poverty. The continuing fear of being accused in the new settlements makes these people invest little in agriculture and in their living conditions, a conclusion reached by Inês Raimundo in her study of Mandimba district in Niassa province.⁵¹

Suicide is another sinister strategy adopted by some people accused of witchcraft. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Mozambique had by 2016 an average of 17.3 suicides per 100,000 inhabitants, the highest rate in the continent.⁵² A considerable number of these suicides, including suicide attempts, are due to witchcraft accusations. In the last two decades, the country has witnessed suicide and suicide attempts reported in radio, television and newspapers. An officer from Ministry of Women and Social Action in Gaza province, southern Mozambique,

47 Maximum Consult. 2009. "Falta de chuva provoca violência" [Lack of rain causes violence], 17 February.

48 "Homem acusado de amarrar a chuva foi linchado em Tete" [Man accused of tying rain has been lynched in Tete]. *Moz Massoko Notícias*, 29 January 2016.

49 Lubkemann SC. 2005. "Migratory Coping in Wartime Mozambique: An Anthropology of the Violence and Displacement in 'Fragmented Wars'", *Journal of Peace Research* 42(4): 493-508.

50 Wiegink, "Why Did the Soldiers Not Go Home", 124.

51 Raimundo, "Mobilidade da população", 36.

52 Frey A. 2016. "Mozambique has highest suicide rate in Africa – WHO", *Club of Mozambique*, 20 May.

highlighted this tendency when he asserted that “we have often seen cases of elderly people, among others vulnerable, who resort to suicide, all in an attempt to get rid of the suffering they are subjected to in their own families and the communities in which they live”.⁵³ Karl Weule, a German ethnographer, studied similar phenomena among people of southern Tanzania. The groups he studied are also located in Mozambique territory. Considering the porous nature of the borders, Weule also dealt with the same groups due to many affinities. Less concerned directly with witchcraft, he shows that suicides were practised in family disputes or in misunderstandings that were considered to be an insult.⁵⁴ Accusing or suspecting a family member of being a witch is one of the intolerable insults one can receive that can lead to suicide.

In Inhambane province, southern Mozambique, Juma Dauto from the Ministry of Internal affairs argued that they have, on a weekly basis, “registered a case of an old person accused of witchcraft, others are killed and still others, when they understand that their respective sons accuse them of witchcraft, they end up with suicide”.⁵⁵ But those who do not migrate or do not commit suicide are sometimes caught in the middle of the yelling crowd. Those who are lucky are subject to purifying and integrative rituals while the unfortunate face violence that can lead to dead or mutilation.

The government faces increasing pressures with regard to these accusations in term of legality. People who accuse other people of witchcraft and perform justice with their own hands are committing crimes. Many cases appear in police stations, the Public Ministry and courts. In most cases, the government deals with these accusations in legal terms. The plight for legal recognition of the Association of Traditional Healers (Associação dos Médicos Tradicionais – AMETRAMO) started immediately after the independence. Traditional healers pressed Samora Machel, the first president of Mozambique, who died in a plane crash in 1986, arguing that even in the colonial period white people tried to stop them, but had failed.⁵⁶ The association came to recognition in 1991 as a valid interlocutor for traditional healers. At the same time, it became clear that the institution was and is a way of controlling its activities by the state. AMETRAMO appears to denounce charlatans and still defends its importance in detecting witches, but the government argues that its members should not perform witch-hunting rituals. In 2015, however, new amendments to the criminal code in Mozambique criminalised witchcraft accusations.

53 “Sessenta idosos rejeitados acusados de de feitiçaria por familiares, em Gaza” [Sixty rejected elderly accused of family sorcery in Gaza], *Verdade*, 21 March 2012.

54 Weule K. 2000. *Resultad científicos da minha viagem de pesquisas etnográficas no sudeste da África Oriental* [Scientific results from my ethnographic research trip in Southeast East Africa]. Maputo: Imprensa Universitária, 145.

55 “Moçambique: Acusados de feitiçaria, idosos vivem abandonados em Inhambane” [Mozambique: Charged with witchcraft, old people live abandoned in Inhambane], *Deutsche Welle*, 6 October 2016.

56 Meneses, “Maciane F. Zimba e Carolina J. Tamele”.

19. "He then became a lion": Witchcraft accusations in rural Mozambique

Article 180 on the ill-treatment of the elderly posits that "psychologically offending the elderly person by accusing them of witchcraft or other traditional practices that violate human rights" is punished by law.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have sought to make a contribution to the understanding of witchcraft accusations in rural Mozambique. Witchcraft accusations, the visible signal of belief in witchcraft, have been treated here as a ubiquitous phenomenon. The understanding of these accusations demands a clear consideration of the wider political, economic and social environment, because they do not operate in a vacuum.

An ancient institution, witchcraft accusation survived colonial policies that sought to prosecute and condemn them. Witchcraft and witchcraft accusations showed vitality during the colonial era, because people believed in them and they were used as a framework to interpret and understand the African milieu. The postcolonial regime, which adopted the modernist project inherited from colonialism, did not succeed in its effort to end the odious, obscurantist, backward practices.

In trying to make radical changes in the society in order to create the "new man", the new government failed to understand the logics of these rural communities. The war waged by a rebel movement against the government marked a resurgence of new forms of witchcraft accusation where figures of soldiers, ex-combatants became present. New fears of witchcraft, as the result of radical transformations brought by the war, emerged. Together with the war, came the communal villages that were places where new forms of power collided with traditional form. The cadres from the new government were in constant tension with traditional authorities. Witchcraft accusations flourished in this period, showing how these rural communities understood, interpreted and appropriated their world.

Democracy brought the "witchcraft of democracy". Government officials also became victims of witchcraft accusation. But, in general, those who undergo the ordeal of accusation are most frequently women, along with other vulnerable social groups. These groups, including a small number of old men, suffer from physical, mental and moral violence as result of being defined as witches. Defining who is witch is also a form of social control and of reaffirming and strengthening local principles and relations of domination and inequality.

People accused of witchcraft practices are not passive victims. If they are not trapped with witch-hunters, they run away from their residence, sometimes without returning. In other cases, they commit suicide or make suicide attempts. The solution they adopt in many situations is to confess the unthinkable. In most cases, the government deals with witchcraft accusations and the violence around it in legal terms. Against this government stance, the Association of Traditional

⁵⁷ República de Moçambique. Boletim da República – Lei n.º 35/2014: Lei da revisão do Código Penal. Quarta-feira, 31 de Dezembro de 2014, I SÉRIE – Número 105.

Healers (AMETRAMO), as indicated above, has developed a different discourse. It argues that it has the means to tackle witchcraft accusations by performing specific rituals, while the government discourages them. This contest between the official and traditional healer views is the current landscape of witchcraft accusations in Mozambique in the historical context set forth in this chapter.