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How has traditional healing been used to address conflict in Mozambique?

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Disclaimer:

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List of Acronyms

AMETRAMO: Association of Traditional Doctors in Mozambique.

ARE: Rebuilding Hope Association.

PMT: Traditional Medicine Policy

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

List of Terms for Practitioners of Traditional Healing

Mganga: traditional healer, or *curandeiro*, in northern Mozambique.

Nyanga: traditional healer, or *curandeiro*, in southern Mozambique.

Sangoma: practitioner of *Ngoma*, a philosophy based on a belief in ancestral spirits.

Tinyanga: plural of *nyanga*.

Waganga: plural of *mganga*.

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Abstract

The civil war in Mozambique, between RENAMO and FRELIMO, resulted in millions of Mozambicans being displaced, injured, violated, traumatized, and killed. It destroyed the very fabric of life in Mozambique. It was a collective realization and effort to utilize local resources, such as practitioners of indigenous medicine to perform cleansing rituals with the purpose of reintegrated the traumatized individual into society. By framing traditional healing as an alternative method for reconciliation, this research explores how indigenous knowledge has been used to foster healing that focuses on reconciliation and rebuilding relationships instead of retribution. Through in-depth interviews, discussions, and interpretative analysis, the research explores the meaning behind engaging in indigenous medicine as an unconventional peacebuilding method, and how this method has been utilized and perceived.

Keywords:

Cleansing rituals, civil war, violence, trauma, healers, Mozambique

Chapter I: Introduction

1.1. Background Information in Mozambique

Situated in southeastern Africa, Mozambique is a country with an inter-tropical climate and is situated in Southern East Africa, it happens to share borders with Tanzania in the north, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi in the west, South Africa and eSwatini—formerly known as Swaziland—in the south, and Madagascar after crossing the Indian Ocean in the east—see map 1.

It occupies an area of 799.380 Km², and has a population of 31.7 million as of 2022—38% being urban as of 2021 (US Census Bureau, 2021). Of those, 15.96 million amount to the female population, while approximately 15.74 million amount to the male population (Statista, 2021). Mozambique is quite linguistically and culturally diverse with over 20 indigenous languages—that represent ethnic groups—while Portuguese being the only official, the former has around 76% users while the latter has 24%.

Each of the ethnic groups represented in the map below have their unique practices in indigenous medicine, traditional healing, and herbal remedies that are passed down through generations in the same family. Even though these ethnic groups have practices that may be only unique to them, indigenous and traditional healing throughout the whole country is understood the same. They all share the understanding that indigenous medicine is a system that involves a combination of ancestral knowledge, rituals, herbal medicine, beliefs, and practices.



Image 1: Map of Mozambique

Additionally, each language has its own terms to refer to those who practice indigenous medicine and has different terminology for those who only know herbs to heal the body and those who besides herbology, add the capacity to connect with the spiritual world, being thus

able to not only heal the body, but also provide social, emotional, and spiritual healing. In the south of Mozambique, the former are known as “*Nyngarume and the later nyamussoro being both tinyanga (plural of nyanga)*).

Those who practice indigenous medicine can be known as *tinyanga*, and the closest translation to English would be traditional healer, and *curandeiro* to Portuguese. These groups of people play a crucial role and are oftentimes sought after for spiritual, emotional, physical, and psychological healing; given that *nyanga* have a holistic approach to healing, one can seek healing for one aspect or for multiple. *Tinyanga* are believed and understood to be people that have a deep connection to the spiritual realm, have the ability to communicate with those in the spiritual realm, and possess ancestral knowledge.

Data from Traditional Medicine Policy (PMT)¹ state that more than 60% of people have access only to indigenous medicine, and 40% use both modern and indigenous. This data provides context in public health as it shows that both indigenous medicine and modern medicine are being utilized to deliver health services and that the population can and has established relationships with diverse available healers. It doesn't, however, show those that only seek modern medicine and have denounced this part of Mozambican identity. In addition, the data from PMT is not that surprising given that majority of the population, nearly 61.81%, live in the rural areas and that is where *nyanga* usually reside and operate in.

¹ See Governo de Moçambique, BR nº 15, I Série de 14 de Abril de 2004.

Indigenous medicine, as imagined, is deeply rooted in Mozambique's diverse cultural and ethnic traditions. Indigenous medicine in Mozambique has a long and rich history that dates back centuries and is continuously shaped by the various ethnic groups that inhabit the country. In the pre-colonial era, the main ethnic groups that used their understanding of flora, fauna, and of spiritual realms were the Makua, Yao, Shona, and Tsonga created traditions and a belief system around these practices; this was later influenced by Swahili and Arab traders which contributed to the syncretism of indigenous practices and Islamic healing traditions in some regions (Ngovene, 2021). During the colonial era, the Portuguese colonial administration introduced Western medicine and healthcare systems, which started alongside traditional practices but were later disregarded by colonial authorities. During the post-independence era that was a renewed interest for indigenous practices and efforts were made to standardize by creating a national association for traditional healers; however, during the modern era visiting traditional healers became stigmatize and mainly used in rural areas where there is lack of access to Western medicine.

In the context of Mozambique, indigenous medicine not only has practices that are used to heal, but they were also used by FRELIMO to gain some advantage against the Portuguese that only relied on western methods and western weapons². After fighting for liberation, Mozambique was in desperate need for guidance, peace, and healing; thus, it was no surprise that the country resorted to the help of traditional healers to provide much needed assistance for the traumatized people of Mozambique. Indigenous medicine played a role in this process through

² Interview with nyanga José (19th of August 2023).

utilizing practices to heal the physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds left by the war, as well as using their wisdom and methods to help the community reconcile and rebuild.

1.2 Research Objectives

Even though Mozambicans had lost touch with indigenous traditions and culture due to forced assimilation by Portuguese colonial authorities, an initiative to resort back to rituals for reconciliation emerged. This initiative by the traditional healers aimed to restore the relationship of not only perpetrators and victims, but also of the community that directly or indirectly was involved in the atrocities committed and lived to feel the weight of the burden. The central idea of resorting to these methods is to find a way for members of the community to find harmony after having experienced conflict for sixteen long years.

Therefore, this proposed research explores the role of traditional healers in restoring social order after the civil war. Specifically, the research sought to understand how *nyanga* contributed to the post-war recovery efforts in Mozambique, particularly in their part in conducting ceremonies that cleansed perpetrators and victims after the trauma. The research explores exactly which healing practices were implemented, how they worked on restoring social order, the process through which they assumed the role, and what has been the impact of their contributions.

The research takes measures to seek understanding of the relationship *nyanga* have within with the communities that they operate and reside in, and how given rituals play a role in restorative justice and reconciliation process of the past atrocities committed during the civil war

through conversations and review of existing literature. The question that guides the research in terms of literature and the interviews is: “How does traditional healing make an impact in Mozambique in peacebuilding efforts after conflict?”. Furthermore, the sub-questions that stir the conversation further are: 1) ‘Has the role of traditional healers evolved in the post-civil war period?’ and 2) ‘What social and/or cultural values does traditional healing bring to society?’

The paper is presented in six chapters, namely: 1) Introduction, 2) Contextualizing the research problem, 3) Theoretical framework, 4) Indigenous medicine as healing, 5) Unconventional approach to reconciliation, and 6) Conclusion.

1.3 Justification and Relevance of the Research

The proposed research is fundamental because it sheds light on the role of *nyanga* in post-war Mozambique and the extent to which their contributions have aided in restoration of social order, as well to which extent it has impacted the way of life in rural communities in Mozambique. This could lead to the Mozambican government to revert to including *nyanga* when attempting peace building in the country. By understanding the scope of their impact, it can inform policy and development initiatives in post-conflict contexts, could be relevant for Mozambique itself and neighboring countries. Through the research, one could inspire the Mozambican government to formally incorporate traditional healing into psychological support and/or community-based interventions.

In addition, one could become more inclined to seek after traditional healers to gain wisdom and increase local empowerment. The research is relevant in terms of acknowledging

their practices. Not only does it promote the recognition of traditional healers, but it promotes the sense of agency of traditional healers in post-conflict context; in turn, the recognition can empower traditional healers and local communities to contribute and have agency in rebuilding our society. Thus, researching their role in post-war recovery can further help identify culturally appropriate strategies for healing and rebuilding the community after conflict.

Furthermore, considering that claims of knowledge are merely a product of the socio-cultural assumptions that influence perspectives, ways of seeing, being, saying, and representing the truth (Foucault, 1980); it is not unreasonable for the research to question: How the cultural agency of traditional healing has been used to address conflict in Mozambique? What role did it play in the efficacy of healing?

1.4 Literature

1.4.1 Literature Review

As a foundation for my research, I have relied on these two works. “Living Spirits, Modern Traditions: Spirit Possession and Post-War Social” by Alcinda Honwana, and “The War Within: new Perspectives on the Civil War in Mozambique, 1976-1992”, by Eric Genoud, Michel Cahen, and Domingos do Rosário. Both of these provide a comprehensive coverage by addressing the historical, political. Social, and cultural dimensions allowing for a holistic understanding of the civil war in Mozambique, and the traumatic aftermath. Both show relevance as it can be used to address contemporary issues.

In her work, Honwana specifically focuses on post-war social reintegration in southern Mozambique, particularly in relation to spirit possession practices. This book offers a unique lens through which to examine the challenges and processes of reintegration, providing insights into the cultural and spiritual dimensions of recovery and healing. Additionally, she incorporates empirical research as she utilizes case studies to provide concrete examples and evidence to support the notions that traditional healers played a significant role in post-war recovery efforts.

The book of “The War Within: New Perspectives on the Civil War in Mozambique”, Eric, Michel, and Domingos provide the historical context of when the war erupted, including the struggle for independence. They also analyze the alliances, ideologies, motivations, and power struggles that characterized the 16 year-long conflict.

1.4.2 Gaps in Literature

There are, however, some areas in which further research could be beneficial. The current research highlights how traditional healing and seeking ancestral wisdom could be beneficial and prove to contribute for peacebuilding positively and significantly after conflict, but it does not provide a map of how traditional healing could be integrated into modern society. In order for to have an effective comprehensive healing services in post-conflict reconstruction, it is important to showcase just how the collaboration with modern healthcare and other state actors occurred so that it could be replicated. In addition, the research does not delve into specific traditional healing practices that contributed the most to restoring peace in Mozambique, the literature offers some case studies, but it does not give the practice/s that were utilitarian.

There is also a gap of literature on what exactly was the impact on the traditional healers working on war affected individuals, and the perspective of ordinary Mozambicans witnessing the work of traditional healers and whether or not their beliefs have played a role in their acceptance, understanding, or impact of restoring social order. Thus, the questions are geared toward understanding what the impact of traditional healers restoring social order in Mozambique was, and how it impacted war-affected individuals after the conflict.

Chapter II: Contextualizing the Research Problem

2.1 Background of Context

After the devastating civil war, between RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance) and FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front), that lasted from 1977 to 1992, the country grappled with the aftermath and struggled to restore social order. The civil war in Mozambique had consequences that went beyond the battlefield and scarred Mozambique and its citizens. During this time, there was a brutal struggle for power that was intensely fueled by differences in ideologies and external interventions.

Throughout the civil war, Mozambique faced immense destruction of infrastructure, loss of life, displacement of communities, severe socio-economic repercussions, and deep trauma on individuals and society as a whole. Mozambique and its people were left traumatized and fractured. The loss of life was staggering, Mozambicans faced death and faced traumas that led them to walk a violent path when many citizens, including children, were forced to become soldiers (Newitt, 2017). Furthermore, this time served as a catalyst for conflicts within Mozambican society by deepening ethnic, regional, and political divisions.

The socio-economic consequences were devastating as it resulted in plunging Mozambique into a state of destitution, a state in which some Mozambicans still face the repercussions of. The agricultural sector, which was and still is the backbone of the country's economy, was greatly affected leading to economic instability, and naturally, food shortage (Morier-Genoud, 2018).

Traditional healers were sought after to address not only the physical, but the psychological and spiritual wounds as well. *Nyanga*, then, stepped up and played an integral role to provide spiritual and physical healing to many Mozambicans, as well as serve guides due to their wisdom and connection to other spiritual realms.

Their rituals, practices, and ceremonies aim to restore harmony, alleviate trauma, and foster reconciliation within communities and between the two major parties. *Nyanga* recognize that peace can only be achieved when addressing past violence as well as seeing as a continuous effort that involves the community, reason why the rituals become a community involvement, it also helps ease the process of reintegration into society.

In order to expand development, it is not sufficient to simply get rid of violence, it is necessary for there to be the absence of conflict as well as finding mediums through which conflicting parts of society can coexist peacefully—and that is why the work of *nyanga* is so important because they cultivate the sense of responsibility within the community to achieve and maintain peace. Highlighting how peace is both an outcome of development, and essential for continuous development, his notion comes from understanding that conflict inhibits development and wrecks lives.

One of the ways to remove the inhibitors of development is by getting rid of conflict, and this means addressing past conflict; it becomes crucial because atrocities of the past can be a barrier to a constructive vision for communities, especially without the existence of harmony and peace within relationships in the community. Moreover, with the dynamics of society and history of Mozambique, no theory can be asserted as the blueprint of maintaining peace, reason why people like Dr. Boía have made effort to utilize their expertise in Western knowledge and their

Mozambican cultural identity to find ways in which they could help people that have been victimized by conflict, as it was seen in the project of “Este Corpo É Meu”³ (Boía, 2014).

The work of Dr. Boía becomes important in the healing process of Mozambique because of how he made efforts to help people through using his knowledge in Peace Psychology and working with practitioners of indigenous medicine to find ways to meaningfully help victimized people, specifically children that were traumatized through sex crimes and having to become soldiers in the civil war. Through this revolutionary idea for Mozambique, Dr. Boía, his colleagues, their organization, and the partnerships they made use of could focus on the root causes of conflict to address and be able to rebuild the community that was shattered, as Peace Psychology suggests; this is related to Restorative Justice because it puts greater emphasis on restoration rather than retribution to the perpetrators, which, in turn, geared them toward using Rituals for Reconciliation, and Restoration. Contextualizing in Mozambique, most of the discussion on peace and development of the country is related to different political ideologies—the sole cause of the civil war that lasted sixteen of inflicted trauma and a lifetime of wounds that were sustained.

2.2 Methodology, Data Collection, and Analysis

The research took a qualitative approach and consisted of semi-structured interviews, a focus group, as well as being supported by secondary qualitative data. The qualitative research method designed to gain an understanding on traditional healers and the role that they have

³ Which translates to ‘This Body Belongs to Me’.

played, and continue to play, in their given communities, specifically after experiencing conflict. To strengthen the objectives of the research, a narrative analysis approach was utilized to make sense the experiences of people as told by them through their own words and worlds. The narrative approach allows for further exploration of rich linguistic data of the interviews and case studies presented by Alcinda Honwana in her works. Given that the research is closely tied to cultural context and indigenous knowledge, the emic perspective became part of the approach. Choosing an emic, instead of an etic approach, there is an ability of understanding and interpreting the data through the perspectives and experiences of the research subject (Headland et al., 1990). This way, the themes, patterns, and concepts emerge and stand on their own.

A key feature of qualitative research is the close relationship that a researcher has with participants; however, due to the inability of traveling to Mozambique, the interviews had to be conducted remotely, through WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams. The interviews that were conducted through WhatsApp were with the aid of research assistants that granted the use of their phones and internet data so that these conversations could take place. In addition to assisting in the medium of communication, the research assistant is fluent in both Portuguese and Changana—the traditional language of the area, which was fundamental when explaining words that the *nyanga* were unable to translate to Portuguese.

2.2.1 Data Collection

This research made use of two main forms of data collection: the first being primary source through in-depth interviews and a focus group. The in-depth interviews can be

interchangeable with semi-structures interviews because, as a researcher some control was retained but participants were welcomed to elaborate on points, and take the conversation to new, but related, direction; and the researcher also has some liberty of asking more and related questions based on the answers being given (Cook, 2008, p.423). An interview digging into the meanings behind the actions of traditional healers and the lived experiences with traditional healing, whether through the perspective of the *tinyanga* or victim, help explore and understand the relationship that indigenous medicine has within communities in Mozambique and how it has contributed to achieve a greater good and relieve people of suffering. In accordance with the objectives of the research, collecting data through interviews allowed this research to explore the meaning and the contributions of traditional healing, indigenous beliefs, and the perceptions behind it.

The focus group discussion was essential to the qualitative approach because it aided in gaining deeper understanding of the social issue at hand. This method aimed at obtaining data from a purposely selected group of individuals so that they could use their own stories for discussion; the discussions, in turn, create a narrative in compliance with their lived experiences. The focus group discussion was made of individuals that have migrated from the current conflict in northern Mozambique, to the south of Mozambique. In this space, the individuals were able to share their experiences from being present in the conflict, being forced to migrate, and seeking help in indigenous medicine to begin healing.

In total, six individuals—three *nyanga*, one *sangoma*, one psychotherapist, and one research assistant—were interviewed and one group discussion with four participants from different walks of life, but with similar experience with conflict and healing. The collection of

data occurred from August 2023 to September 2023. Interviews were directly conducted through WhatsApp; since having internet connection is hard in Maciene, the research assistant allowed for their phone to be used and purchased internet data so that I could call and conduct the interviews with the traditional healers. The interview with *sangoma* Priscilla was made without the aid of the research assistant as both had access to stable internet connection. All interviews ranged from an hour to three hours long, mostly in Portuguese, with the exception of some words being said in Changana by the traditional healers and then translated to Portuguese by the research assistant, and in English with *sangoma* Priscilla.

In support of the primary data, secondary qualitative data was utilized in this research. Data through secondary source is then defined as “pre-existing data that have been collected for a different purpose or by someone other than the researcher” (McGinn, 2008, p.804). In spite of a plethora of data not being available, a few published works were vital for the basis and early analysis of the research, the works were also used to generate interview questions and guided conversation. The primary source of secondary data used in this research is the book written by Alcinda Honwana, titled "Living Spirits, Modern Traditions: Spirit Possession and Post-War Social Reintegration in Southern Mozambique" and "The War Within: New Perspectives on the Civil War in Mozambique, 1976-1992" by Eric Morier-Genoud, Michel Cahen, & Domingos do Rosário.

2.2.2 Selection of Participants

The selection of interviewees was through convenience sampling; this is because I made use of existing connections to find subjects to be part of the research. For the traditional healers, the interviews were conducted in the village in which they reside and work in, southern Mozambique, Maciene, Gaza. I already have an existing connection to Maciene as it is the village of my maternal great-grandparents, and I had volunteered through Nguni, a Mozambican NGO, for some work in the village. The remaining interview was with Dr. Priscilla, as well as the focus group discussion were done at the comfort of the subjects as all they had to do was make themselves available online. In this part, the ones that have their name included have consented to it, some only accepting the first name, and others have chosen, as within their right, to remain anonymous.

2.2.2.1 *Tinyanga* in Maciene

All of the *nyanga* in Maciene were interviewed through WhatsApp call that was facilitated by the research assistant. The research assistant traveled to each of their homes and used his data to call me so that I could talk to them.

José

José is a *tinyanga* that operates and resides within the community in Maciene, he became a *tinyanga* in 1984 and has since then evolved and been chosen to be the president of the association of traditional doctors in Maciene. Interviewed August 19th, 2023, via WhatsApp.

Emmanuel

Emmanuel was born in Maciene and had relocated to another province but became a *tinyanga* in 1982 and was guided back to Maciene by the spirits that possess him. He is a respected *tinyanga* of the community. Interviewed August 25th, 2023, via WhatsApp.

Francisco

Francisco is a *tinyanga* that had been helped by José, he became a *tinyanga* in 1991, although his knowledge does not extend to lived experiences when it comes to helping victims heal after conflict, he has insight into what it means to be a *tinyanga* in that community and to be of service to those in conflict. Interviewed September 1st, 2023.

2.2.2.2 Dr. Priscilla (*sangoma*)

Priscilla Dlamini is a *sangoma*, a highly respected healer that operates and resides in eSwatini. Our conversation, in August 2023, occurred through a WhatsApp call and had the objective of providing support to the use of unconventional methods to eliminate conflict and suffering, to promote peace and healing. Although practices vary from culture to culture, the overall theme of what traditional healing can provide for communities is the similar, if not, the same. Interviewed September 17th, 2023.

2.2.2.3 Dr. Boía

Dr. Boia expert in peace psychology, worked as a psychotherapist with Mozambican survivors of child sexual abuse in ‘This Body Belongs to Me’. Dr. Boia recognized the role of culture and restructured how he viewed trauma, how people and communities understand trauma, and how to explore effective treatments in post-war cultural treatments. The interview was through a call on September 23rd, 2023.

2.2.2.4 Migrants from Cabo Delgado

Due to the extreme violence that has erupted nearly six years ago in northern Mozambique, Cabo Delgado, there has been continued displacement of civilian population across the country and neighboring countries. As of late, it is estimated that a little over 1 million people have been forced to relocate. Among many, four were reached through family members and were able to join the focus group discussion. The conversation aimed at understanding how they perceive their own experience with trauma, as well as traditional healing and whether there was a perceived change in their physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Group discussion September 12th, 2023, via WhatsApp.

2.2.2.5 Emanuel Simbine

Research assistant and I had already a previous connection, and they have done and continue to work with Nguni and the community in Maciene. They had already had experience interviewing people for collection of data for other projects in the same community. This experience and knowledge of the community led to them being the best assistant as they were able to be my eyes, and perhaps notice more than I would have, if I had done it all on my own. Their exit interview, in September 2023, consisted of painting the whole picture with their

observation and things they noticed while helping me conduct the interviews. Interviewed September 25th, 2023, via WhatsApp.

2.2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a fundamental part of qualitative research and cannot be separated from both data collection and analysis of the findings. The analysis of qualitative data involves several common elements; these include “simultaneous data collection, writing memos, and development of concepts” (Van Den Hoonaard, 2008, p187). It is important to note that analysis occurs in all stages of the research; the early analysis was done through the initial literature review to generate the guidelines for the interviews and setting the focus of the research.

Exploration of the data through the transcript of interviews with the subjects and the research assistant, as well as fieldwork memos, aid in finding patterns so that the data can be thematically analyzed. Since semi-structured interviews should stray away from having inflexible questions that could lead to specific answers, and possibly taint the data, the data gathering is then parallel to impromptu data analysis. Follow-up questions for clarification are then based on a simultaneous analysis of the topic during the interviews, that way some themes that jump out can be explored more deeply.

During the interview phase, themes that were then put in categories for analysis began to jump out and paint a picture; after transcribing interviews, the research then made use of thematic analysis. There are four themes that were used in the research that coincide with the way that the questions were divided, this would, in turn, simplify the analysis. The themes were:

1) Understanding what it's like to be a healer, 2) Treatments for community issues, 3) Experiences in Mozambican civil war, 4) Historical contributions to conflict resolution in Mozambique. The themes aforementioned correspond with explorative research questions patterns.

The last phase occurs during the writing and analysis of findings. By combining narratives, framed by concepts and literature, but also adapting the research questions throughout the project was an essential part of the data analysis process of the research. The constant exercise of going back and forth with research objectives and empirical findings while exploring the theories and literatures led to conceptual analysis that provide insight to the final research questions. To conclude, the analysis of the data was done in an inseparable manner as it done simultaneously throughout the entire duration of the research.

2.3 Scope and Limitations

Scope and limitations are crucial aspects of any research and should not be neglected as they show what the boundaries and constraints of this research were. In this context, a number of factors shaped the limitations of the study.

One of the primary limitations that were a cause of concern was the language barrier. Even though a number of the subjects spoke Portuguese, the official language of Mozambique, there was a *tinyanga* that barely spoke it and the need for a translation added a layer of complexity to the research. While the other *nyanga* spoke and understood Portuguese, this was not their primary language of communication. In addition, this limitation can affect the accuracy

of the information gathered as there are concepts and words that cannot be directly translated to Portuguese and English; thus, meanings and cultural context are translated to what is closest and risk being lost in translation. Furthermore, language barriers could have hindered the depth of communication and rapport building, which are key aspects in qualitative research. This limitation, however, was minimized as the research assistant is a person that spoke the same dialect and was known in the community for their regular visits and volunteer work for improvements in the community through the non-governmental organization, Nguni. The comfort level, thus, led to more open conversations.

The inability to be physically present during data collection drew another major limitation because this meant that it was harder to pick up on social cues; therefore, non-verbal cues and perceptions of body language could not be used in the form of observation. Non-verbal cues oftentimes provide valuable information, and its absence limits the richness of the data collected. The data could have also been affected because it is a very strong possibility that the subjects could have been more honest in a face-to-face context. In addition, an extra layer of limitation is due to the fact that *nyanga*, and often those that visit, have a secrecy in relation to this matter, requesting to have the conversation recorded, even with explaining that it was for my use only, could have affected how much I was given access to. What was a glimpse into their world perspective could have been an immersive dive had there been more time and less of a long-distanced research.

Another challenge due to the inability to be physically present is limiting the number of subjects for the research, some *nyanga* were only comfortable being part of the research if

AMETRAMO, Associação de Médicos Tradicionais de Moçambique⁴, was made aware, but they require physical presence to request an audience with the heads of the organization. The secretive nature of some *nyanga* and reluctance to speak without the organization knowledge posed a unique challenge for this research and limited the number of subjects that participated, and as aforementioned, the level of openness of the ones that were interviewed.

Another limitation that might have affected the course of the research and its richness is the lack of available data on *nyanga*. Secondary data can have valuable insight that provide support for new research. The gaps in literature and proper documentation of the work *nyanga* have done, and continue to do, makes for a shaky foundation, and perhaps puts some constraints on the verifiability of some data. I was able to, however, base the research on the book of Alcinda Honwana titled *"Living Spirits, Modern Traditions: Spirit Possession and Post-War Social Reintegration in Southern Mozambique"*, and *"The War Within: New Perspectives on the Civil War in Mozambique, 1976-1992"* by Eric Genoud, et. al. Not being able to find other perspectives on the matter, our finds would be rather and in agreement that *nyanga* made significant efforts in peacebuilding efforts.

I left Mozambique and began an international academic career when I was seventeen, thus there may be some limitation in the compatibility as I had a western higher education in the United States, and now Netherlands. Similar to how my own beliefs may have influenced the guidelines of the research, my western education may have affected shaped my interpretation and perspectives of the data analysis. Western methodologies and perspectives may not always align

⁴ Translates to Association of Traditional Doctors in Mozambique.

with indigenous worldviews, thus potentially affecting the validity and applicability of the findings.

Nevertheless, conducting the interviews with the help of the research assistant also provided an edge in a sense that interviewees feel a sense of comfort within the conversation through knowing him, and having the safety net of the research assistant understanding the local language. The group interviews conducted help in painting a sort of mural, as the subjects would each fill in with the colors of their own narratives. In the group discussion, the narratives expressed clarified existing stories, but the story of one subject added a new discourse to the discussion—one that was not extensively discussed in the literature.

In all, acknowledging these limitations are an essential part of the research as it helps maintain and promote credibility, integrity, and transparency with and for myself, the subjects, and the readers. In addition, being aware of these limitations can help guide future studies toward more comprehensive and nuanced research.

2.4 Ethics, Beliefs, and Positionality

I was not born into this tumultuous era, therefore too young to fully grasp the despair that many Mozambicans experienced. I did, however, experienced it through the tales of family members and having learnt about this part of Mozambican history during the early stages of my academic life in Mozambique. The teachers would also bring their own experiences as they lived through it, and many of them were consequences of the civil war, not only because of the trauma, but because they were forced to take the career path of teachers due to the scarcity that

Mozambique experienced after gaining independence and then fighting a lengthy civil war. So, the teachers were forced into careers based on where their strengths were; for example, my Portuguese teacher, similar to my mother, were forced to be Portuguese teachers because they performed extremely well in the language when they were still at school.

This to say that I could have gained some bias on the account of the teachers around me being forced to abandon their hopes and dreams. I hold the belief that the atrocities committed during this time was caused by elites as they were fighting for power in a newly independent Mozambique. Naturally, this dispersed to the rest of the population and the country became polarized. Moreover, the civil war was due to the fact that FRELIMO wanted to implement a one-party system so that they could hold all the power, there was never the intention of having a truly free Mozambique, only for there to be a change on who was in charge—from the colonial rule to FRELIMO. Nonetheless, the research does not aim at pointing the finger, it is purely motivated at researching the way in which indigenous medicine and traditions were used for healing after conflict, and how the relationship between victims and perpetrators was rebuilt.

My own beliefs also introduced some cause of concern as I am a firm believer in the work that *nyanga* do; this is partly because of the belief system that I was born into, but also because I am a person that *nyanga* have helped—meaning that I see it, and I have felt it, I have experienced it, I believe in it, and I trust it. It is important to acknowledge that personal biases and preconceptions may have influenced the research and affected the findings because my own experience plays a big role in how the paper is researched and presented.

Another interesting aspect of my positionality is the way in which I am both an insider and an outsider. An insider because Mozambique is my home country and I was raised into the

ancestral belief system, but I am also an outsider because I am privileged and lived in the capital of the country, Maputo, and not in the rural areas in which these practices are part of their way of life, like Maciene—where the subjects were found. Even though I have experienced it, the practices and ceremonies were not part of my day-to-day and could go years without witnessing anything related to indigenous medicine. Moreover, I have visited the village numerous times, but I do not share their struggles, norms, or language—making me an outsider.

The participants were selected based on their lived experience and how they could contribute to the research. Their experiences vary from being a healer, to working with healers to seek effective treatment, and the very people that have been on the receiving end of a traditional treatment to alleviate their suffering. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research, that it would be record for transcript purposes only, and that they were free to withdraw consent at any given time. Another ethical consideration was in regard to the protection of the identity of the subjects, some of the subjects wished that their names and any identifiable information remained confidential, while others were comfortable with only their first names, thus, that had to be respected. All the data collected has been given consent by the subject to be added, as well as the personal information that was included.

In regard to the analysis of the data, I acknowledge the position that I hold as an outsider and insider attempting to explore traditional beliefs that have been embedded in Mozambique since the ages. Thus, my view and interpretation would be affected as I come from an urban area, with less attachment to the norms and values held in rural areas, but that was born into the belief system as my family believes and has participates in it.

Chapter III: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Peace Psychology

Peace psychology is a multidisciplinary and dynamic field of study that focuses on the psychological processes that underline peace, violence, conflict, and social justice. The field emerged as a response to the need for a deeper understanding of the root causes of conflict and the need to develop strategies to foster peace at both individual and societal levels. Peace psychology, thus, seeks to promote peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution (MacNair, 2003).

An important part of peace psychology is the exploration of the causes for conflict, this involves taking a closer look at factors that exacerbate conflict and violence, as well as the instruments that consequently perpetuate conflict. Researchers in this field examine the cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural processes that underlie conflict; these can include issues that are related to identity, prejudice, stereotypes, and intergroup relations. By examining the emotional, cognitive, and social factors that underline conflict, researchers in this field, such as Dr. Boía, strive to identify transformative strategies that can change destructive patterns into both harmonious and constructive interactions within affected communities.

An area where peace psychology plays a pivotal role when applied is the community empowerment. Communities unfortunately bear the brunt of conflicts, therefore, understanding the psychological, cultural, and spiritual dynamics within these communities is fundamental to rebuild the community, and by consequence promote resilience and foster agency.

Cultural sensitivity is an essential aspect of peace psychology, as it recognizes that conflict and cultural factors are deeply intertwined and must be addressed as such. This can, in turn, be used to explore how cultural norms, values, and beliefs can either further fuel tensions or be used to come to a resolution. This aspect is profoundly connected to indigenous medicine as both recognize the importance of culture and tradition in promoting harmony within communities. Peace psychology highlights the importance of acknowledging and respecting diverse cultures; similarly, indigenous medicine is deeply rooted in cultural traditions. This has been the approach of Dr. Boía in addressing the trauma left in the children in Mozambique, so much so that he has often referred to *nyanga* as traditional therapists.

By taking into consideration the psychological, cultural, and societal factors that can deepen conflict, the theory also contemplates the way in which the same factors that can drive conflict can also become insightful tools for a peaceful engagement between perpetrators and victims. Peace psychology also becomes an entry point for the research not only for the way it has been combined to address conflict after the civil war in Mozambique, but because it shares features with restorative justice through its transformative nature. Restorative justice is aimed at escaping conflict to enter a stage of reconciliation instead of retribution; and this was done through combining peace psychology, as mentioned before, with rituals of indigenous medicine in Mozambique.

3.2 Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice from the standpoint of those that were victimized by violence, conflict, and human rights violations may be seen as a remedy for the atrocities committed

against them. It can, however, be seen as a way of ‘making peace’ with the past and work towards building a peaceful future (Lamourne 2014: 19). This is because restorative justice supports the field of peacebuilding through an interactive understanding of past wrongdoings; but instead of solely focusing on ‘resolution’, it borrows elements from the concept of ‘transformation’ to relay the idea that conflict is a normal occurrence in the human experience, and that it can be seen as an opportunity for learning and growth (Zehr, 2009). Rather than restorative justice putting emphasis on truth and justice, it aims at rebuilding and restoring the relationship in societies.

The foundation of contemporary restorative justice has their “roots in ancient societies, numerous world religions, and the traditional practices of native or indigenous cultures across the world” (Maruna, 2014). Thus, similar to peace psychology, restorative justice makes use of conflict transformation as it attempts to utilize available tools, such as traditional methods, to shift communities from a having destructive pattern to a constructive one.

As seen in Fiji through a study of restorative justice as a practitioner for healing, by Jarem Sawatsky, it can be noted that by becoming healing-centered can prove to be beneficial for addressing conflict in communities. Sawatsky’s work examines the role of peacebuilding and restorative justice practitioners as healers, drawing lessons and guidance from ancestral wisdom and healing traditions in Fiji. The research explores the transformative potential of utilizing traditional healing practices to address the consequences of conflict, whilst also promoting healing at the individual and community levels (Sawatsky, 2005).

The research aforementioned shows how holistic approaches that are tied to ancestral wisdom for addressing conflict is not unique to Mozambique; and provides support to push as lessons for global applications, especially for countries that strayed away from their indigenous practices due to colonialism and forced assimilation. The principles learned from the lenses through which restorative justice is seen in countries like Mozambique and Fiji can contribute to more inclusive and culturally informed approaches to conflict resolution.

The term restorative justice has been traced to a German text that says “heilende Gerechtigkeit”, which has been argued to be more closely translated to ‘healing justice’ (ibid). Similar to using indigenous medicine for healing, restorative justice represents a theoretically different approach to conflict and its given aftermath in comparison to any other justice practice methods that are considered to be mainstream. Once more showing its similarity to resorting to indigenous medicine and approaches, it is groundbreaking in the core values for reconstructing healthy relationships with practices that are not confined to the formal trials and methods, this could be applied to the choice of making use of traditional ceremonies. Restorative justice is explicitly grounded in the idea of building healthy relationships within the community, similar to the core value of using rituals for reconciliations by traditional healers.

In order for the concept of restorative justice to be sustainable, the transformative process must acknowledge the cultural context of the conflict, as well as including an effective and active participation of the society. This is where the connection to rituals, reconciliation, and restoration lies; this is because in the context of Mozambique, indigenous medicine with the purpose of

healing and restoring post-conflict, there must be an agreement from all parts of the conflict, victims and perpetrators, the community has to agree to take the steps to come to terms with the past and begin reconciliation, it is not something that is effective when done on an individual level.

3.3 Rituals, Reconciliation, and Restoration

The use of rituals and reconciliation in this context works hand-in-hand with the idea of restoration of justice and peace psychology. Many cultures have made use of structured ceremonies, such as rituals, to address conflict, reduce tension, reduce and/or heal physical, emotional, spiritual, or psychological burden. These rituals exist in various forms across different cultures, and thus interpreted in different forms. Rituals can then be seen as a form through which victims and perpetrators re-negotiate their identity and the terms of their relationship. Instead of opting to formal process of prosecution which might exacerbate conflict and disharmony within the communities, the cultural approach seeks after ancestral wisdom to externalize the pain of the past and draw on the vision to build a healthier form of connecting to one another.

The conventional approach to justice after conflict oftentimes involves formal legal processes, which are arguably punitive in their nature. In contrast, rituals and ceremonies offer non-adversarial ways of addressing past wrongdoings that emphasize restoration over retribution, aiming to foster accountability and encouraging community effort to rebuild the social fabric instead of tearing it further apart.

Rituals have the power to transform the way people see, experience, and understand the world. It is through its symbolism method, and shared experiences that the people that partake in such ceremonies can alter their perspectives and attitudes (Hobson, et.al, 2018). When engaged and done correctly, those that participate can emerge from the rituals with a greater sense of interconnectedness and deeper understanding for the need of reconciliation. Essentially, the unconventional method of resorting to indigenous methods such as rituals for healing can serve as a catalyst for the transformation of perception.

The idea of rituals is pivotal in providing healing after the civil war in Mozambique as these ceremonies transcend the individual sphere and have a communal dimension. The unconventional method to address conflict tap into the collective consciousness of a community, helping them rebuild trust and unity. Moreover, the ceremonies draw upon ancestral wisdom and cultural heritage for guidance and for healing, as it has been done after the civil war in Mozambique, and as it has been documented in Fiji.

3.4 Analytical Framework

For the purpose of putting together the theoretical framework into one analytical approach, the content analysis approach was used. The development of content analysis as a research method cannot be accredited to a single person; Dr. Harold D. Lasswell, however is credited as one of the early proponents. Content analysis is then a research method that is used to analyze and interpret the content of information in systematic manner (CITE). For a qualitative research, such as this, content analysis is used with more of a thematic analysis lens for a more in-depth examination of context, meaning, and interpretation of the content at hand.

Through the use of content analysis, it becomes easier to identify recurring themes, assess occurrence of specific content, and relationships between different elements in the data collected. This is facilitated through creating a coding scheme, as researchers do, to classify content that is then applied consistently across the data set to ensure its validity and reliability. Once the coding is complete, the data is prepared to be analyzed to draw meaningful conclusions based on interpretations of summarized themes, identified trends, and inferences based on the coded content.

The framework required a capacity to understand and be able to categorize the patterns of the past and the narratives of each individual spoken to. It is important to understand how the identity of all involved in the civil war in Mozambique has been shaped, and it continues to be shaped until the present time through their continuous experience with trauma and healing.

Chapter IV: Indigenous Medicine as Healing

Addressing the violent past is a necessary part of the process of fostering restorative justice, yet it is not the highlight of the process. Therefore, the root cause of the conflict that resulted in the civil war is not the main objective of the research at hand, though, to some extent, it is critical to address the issues surrounding the conflict. For the purpose of analyzing traditional healing for addressing the aftermath of conflict, what is fundamental is to explore what traditional healing means itself, through understanding what it means to be a healer, and the rituals used to alleviate traumatic experiences of the civil war in Mozambicans. Especially, how the participants involved give meaning to using traditional healing as peacebuilding efforts after conflict.

4.1 Unpacking the Civil War

This particular section provides a more detail on what relationships the communities across Mozambique were attempting to heal, and how the atrocities committed affected the lives of all.

Shortly after gaining independence, Mozambicans found themselves at the height of the conflict between FRELIMO and RENAMO and was then left to grapple with the aftermath of the civil war. It is important, however, to note that the dynamics in this civil war were particularly brutal and destructive due to the global political forces at play, and because this war did not unite Mozambicans to fight a common foreign aggressor, as it was done against colonial Portugal, but against one another (Igreja & Skaar, 2013).

The internal conflict arose against FRELIMO's socialist policies, which led them to align themselves with the Eastern socialist bloc, that resulted in felt political and economic repercussions from their East-West alliance; RENAMO, on the other hand, was initially supported by (white) Southern Rhodesia, until 1980, and later by apartheid South Africa (Efraime Jr. & Errante, 2010). The support that RENAMO received stemmed from the fear of a strong national black government sympathetic to anti-apartheid forces.

The conflict forced the displacement of 1.5 million Mozambicans to neighboring countries, namely Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, and Tanzania; while another 3 million Mozambicans became internally displaced, as those in rural areas moved to urban areas and/or places that were deemed to be militarily safer. The civil war claimed the lives of millions, with 45% of the casualties being children under the age of 15, in accordance with UNDP (Efraime Jr. & Errante, 2010). In addition, 600,000 children were deprived of access to education as there was a destruction of 2655 primary schools, 22 secondary schools, and 36 boarding schools in rural areas (Richman et al., 1990).

Children bore a disproportionate burden of the conflict, in 1988, UNICEF (1989) estimated that almost 250,000 Mozambican children suffered physical and psychological trauma. These children were forced to witness the death of their family members, and were subjected to multiple forms of abuse, including kidnapping and sexual violence. Innumerable families were separated and decimated. In addition to the vast number of human rights violations committed against Mozambican children, as they were used as soldiers in combat. Many children were also used by the government, FRELIMO. According to the data collected in efforts of demobilization

at the end of the conflict, it revealed that 27%, nearly 25,498, of soldiers had less than 18 years of age at the time they were recruited. Of these, 16,553 belonged to governmental forces of FRELIMO, and the remaining 8,945 to RENAMO (UNICEF, 1989).

What officially marked the end of the conflict was the peace agreement that was signed in 1992, but the consequences had already suppressed beyond material losses. At the end of the conflict, it was reported that 2 million mines were left scattered across the country, which posed serious threats to the lives of civilians. The physical, psychic, and spiritual toll on Mozambicans, especially children, their families, and communities, was severe. The objective of the regional destabilization was not solely military, it sought to shatter community stability and destroy the very fabric of social life.

4.2 Healing from the Traumatic War

In the African context, for example, Honwana and Dawes (1998) suggest that the context in which the traumatized individual is found in should be seen in a more holistic manner, because only that way can therapists, traditional or modern, comprehend the meaning that the individual give and bring to traumatic experiences. In addition, it is through this perspective that it can be seen and understood that there are other resources available to help address traumatic events, such as the civil war. Through taking in consideration the cultural context of Mozambique, it becomes clear, as Honwana shows, that there are healing resources not only made available to the traumatized individual, but to modern therapists to utilize for healing.

One of the most vital local resources is the *nyanga*, considered to be traditional therapists by Dr. Boía. In the cultural context of Mozambique, the *tinyanga* are agents of healing for physical, psychic, and spiritual troubles; they receive their knowledge from their unique access to the spiritual realm, and through indigenous medicine and practices. During the interview with *tinyanga* José, it was conveyed that even before combining efforts towards peacebuilding and cleansing for social reintegration, meaning during the war, *tinyanga* and local religious leaders performed ceremonies to protect their existing patients.

Nonetheless, in order to paint the picture of the role of the *nyanga* in communities and, specifically, their role in healing after the conflict, it is imperative to first understand what it means to be a healer, from the perspective of the *nyanga*, as well as those that have visited them.

4.3 Becoming a Healer

The main function of a *nyanga* is to provide healing services and rituals, be the intermediary for spiritual entities, and be a ‘constant’ amongst uncertainty and doubt. This means that, in addition to curing physical illnesses, the *nyanga* can perform tasks diverse as providing emotional support in amidst of uncertainty and spiritual guidance in a sea of doubt and negative spirits. The capacity to perform these tasks is accredited to being possessed by spirits, *chikuembo*, or, as referred by interviewed *nyanga*, spiritual entities, who unlike common ancestors, have acquired these special abilities by virtue of exceptional spiritual strength, actions, or even negative circumstances surrounding their deaths.

In actuality, one is not granted the possibility to choose to become a *nyanga*, but rather to be chosen for this role by spiritual entities who maintain some type of connection with the person and want to work through them, with them, and in them after the act of possession. The act may occur through dreams, divination, or by trance; in addition, the revelation of the choice can occur at any point in their lives—at birth or at later stages. It is revealed that this act is rather hard to ignore, the possession assumes the form of *doença de chamamento*⁵ (Honwana, 2005).

Doença de chamamento manifests itself in individualized physical symptoms—meaning that each *nyanga* has a different experience—through unusual accidents, general weakness, and severe pain, particularly in the joints. The *nyanga*, at this stage, becomes a patient and will resort to the healthcare they can access, until a *nyanga* diagnoses them and legitimizes their chamamento, or their calling, by revealing the identity of the spirits and providing an explanation to what could ‘visibly’ be understood as unexplainable events. In fact, they suffer if they attempt to defy the wishes of these spiritual entities. It is said that if those that are called refuse or attempt to delay without valid reasons, it is expected that illnesses, misfortunes, and deaths will affect them and their families. For example, *nyanga* Emmanuel lived in South Africa the time that he was possessed by spiritual entities, he attempted to stay a while longer, he describes that the consequences for the defiance was extreme illness caused by the entities but that had no physical evidence that could attest to what he was experiencing.

It is equally important to understand that this rather aggressive behavior from the spiritual entities is not due to being malicious, but rather due to the limitation they experience given their

⁵ Which can be translated to calling of illness, but some meaning is lost in translation as the words in English do not capture the full significance.

current form of existence. Even though they are powerful beings, they are only “what is left”⁶ of the person they once were; therefore, they are incapable of communicating with ordinary living beings, they are limited to indirectly calling for attention through “paranormal activity” until they are properly heard through a *nyanga*.

Nonetheless, having access to all the abilities being a *nyanga* has to offer means that they have to be possessed by, at least, three different spirits, namely: *tinguluve*, *vaNguni*, and *vaNdau*. The *tinguluve* is composed by deceased members of their families, and they have the main function of healing illnesses; this could vary from guiding them toward the most appropriate treatment for their patient or by sharing knowledge of which herbs to use. The *vaNguni* are men that are connected to an ancestor that have helped the family in the past and no longer have living descendants. The *vaNdau* can be women brought from the war as a concubine⁷ and slave, or it can be of a warrior that died before getting married and demanded a living wife⁸ from his opponent’s family and settled to ‘work’ after their anger calmed.

Regardless of the origin of the spirit, the ontological consequences will be the same in essence, meaning that both the possessed individual and the spiritual entities will cease to be separate and independent as they once were, and become one symbiotic being. This means that they have a new and common identity, the living and spirit being influence each other’s behavior and overall identity—this can lead to changes in eating habits, general preferences, or even religion if the one of the possessed individual does not align to that of the most important spirit

⁶ Interview with *nyanga* Emmanuel (25th of August 2023)

⁷ A woman living with a man but having a lower status than his wives.

⁸ *Marido da noite*, translate to husband of the night, is when a living woman is given to marry to a male spirit, and therefore is unable to maintain lasting relationships with other living men.

when they had life. They coexist and continue to adapt to the coexistence during the process of becoming a *nyanga*.

The *tinyanga* interviewed revealed that they gained the ability through family connection, *nyanga* José, for example, was granted the ability through his grandfather, who was also a *nyanga*. The manner through which they become a *nyanga* is not so different from their similar counterparts, the *sangomas*. *Tinyanga* and *sangomas* are both chosen and possessed by spiritual entities, and ultimately have personalized and diverse experiences when chosen. Moreover, they both have personalized and unique experiences with their speculations, innovations, and their overall patrimony with the vocation.

The responsibilities of *tinyanga* does not vary much from those of the *sangomas*, they have the main task of having to care for and cure their patients of illnesses by tapping into their knowledge of indigenous medicine. They provide spiritual guidance, they are confidants, they are traditional therapists, and they provide treatment for any emotional, psychological, spiritual, or physical disturbances those that seek them may have. Due to their abilities, they hold a certain status and level of respect from the rest of the community and although secretive, they do not need to hide who they are and their profession—the secrecy manifests as a form of protection as they are the keepers of their knowledge and a confidant for their patients.

4.4 Healing Mozambique

Traditional practices were developed not only to cure illnesses, but to also heal from trauma. For example, in the island Josina Machel in Mozambique, there are various practices

developed that aim at helping the individual heal from traumatic experiences, such as putting their memories of the war and problems caused by the same in a bottle and throwing the bottle in the river⁹. The river, in turn, would take the problems away, it is important, however, that they do not look back as they are walking away after throwing the bottle away.

The findings in both the primary and the secondary data revealed that the specificities in the rituals utilized for healing differed depending on the area that it was performed at, this is because different areas belong to different ethnic groups, and thus, have variations in the practices of traditional healing through indigenous medicine. The consultations do, however, take a general structure that can be seen in the image below:

⁹ Interview with nyanga José (19th of August 2023).

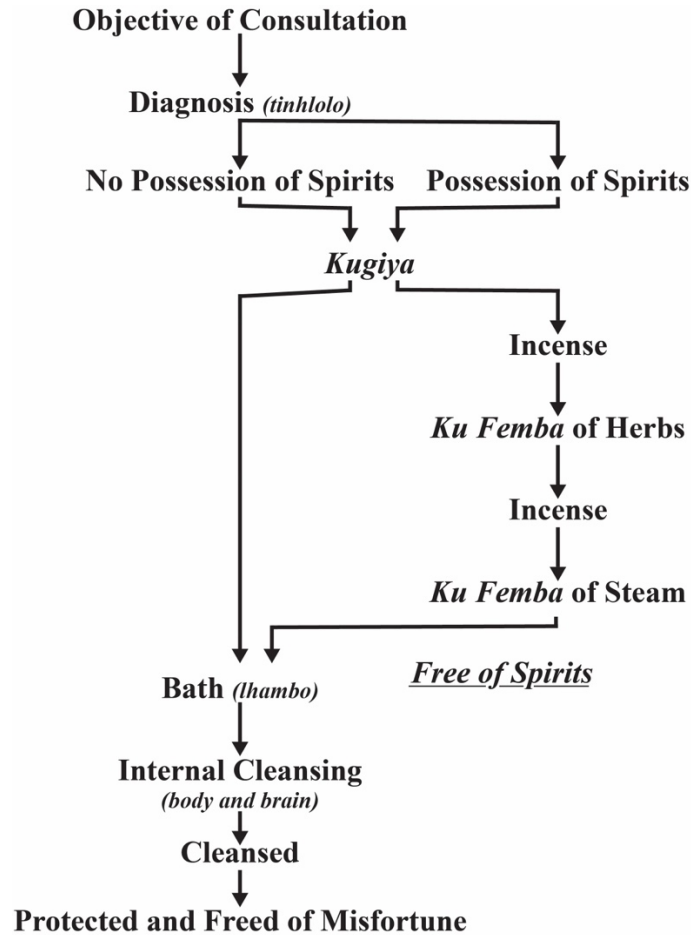


Image 2: General structure of a consultation with a *nyanga*.

Nonetheless, for the most part, rituals are developed and practiced to foster and promote social reintegration. An example brought to light the ceremony known as *ku Phaha*, in which a family member that has inherited the ability to communicate with spiritual entity conducts the ceremony and explains to their ancestors the reason for the ceremony. It could be that, for example, this family member wants to inform their spiritual ancestors of the return of a loved one and want to then ask for forgiveness for any act that they may have committed during the war, and for their ancestors to relay the message to any spirits they may be angered.

Other people sought after a *nyanga* for a ritual called *Ku femba*, in which the *nyanga* establishes contact with the angered spirits responsible for the disturbances in the family. In the *Ku femba*, the *nyanga* then seeks to liberate the family by breaking the link between the spirit and the family; similar to the ritual in the island of Josina Machel, it is very important that the patient(s) do not look back and say goodbye¹⁰ to the *nyanga* (Honwana, 2005). This ceremony, looking through a western lens, can be understood to be an act of exorcism.

Moreover, the region of the interviewed *tinyanga* mostly made use of the ritual of *kugiya*, which translating means to simulate a fight, but combat is a more fitting word for its original meaning. The patient that is put through this cleansing ritual is told to recreate the combat and deaths experienced during the war, using a pestle instead of a weapon. This act in the *kugiya* is not limited to those that were directly responsible for atrocities when they were soldiers, people that witnessed the tragedies and were left traumatized are also submitted to cleansing rituals. Through the imitation, the veteran is taking accountability for their violent past actions and initiate a process of liberation; this, however, is done in a ritualized manner that has more to do with the representation of the act than with reliving the trauma.

Unlike the *ku Phaha*, where the type of bottle does not matter, in the *kugiya* cleansing ritual, the usage of the pestle has an important meaning in the context of Mozambique. The pestle¹¹ is an item that symbolizes family and home; this is because in rural areas, the pestle is one of the most important items a family can possess. Using the pestle, instead of other objects

¹⁰ It is said that when one says goodbye, the spirits know they are leaving and go with them instead of staying with the *nyanga*. Interview with *nyanga* José (19th of August 2023).

¹¹ See image 3 in Appendix.

that resemble a weapon more, emphasize the rupture between the actual context of the representation and the represented act. In addition, the implicit objective of the ritual is not to put focus on the guilt they may feel, it is not about retribution, but to overcome it through the naturalization of the acts in the context of what the imitation represents. For this reason, rituals can be understood as restorative justice as it combines efforts to help traumatized individuals overcome pain and guilt, not by making them pay for their violent acts, but by purifying them and finding ways to reconcile their past with their present.

Independent of the cruelty that the imitation in the *kugiya* represents, the *nyanga* are able to open themselves to help people reintegrate back into the community because of how they view justice and their patient. In the translated words of a *nyanga*, “In war, people kill, hurt, and do horrible, horrible things. But it is war, after all. That is how war is, everything is upside down, they are upside down. It is expected that they kill and hurt, it is not really their fault, they are different people there [at war]”¹².

In short, acts of war, traumas, and atrocities committed are categorized in contexts in which they can be washed away in the river, asked for forgiveness, or transformed by reaffirm new meanings to actions. These rituals allow for the individual to be cleansed and, thus, freed from the traumas acquired during the war, and mark “the beginning of a long period of adjustment, treatment and reconstitution of identities” (Honwana, 2005, p. 253). Moreover, spiritual possession as a ritual phenomenon gives room for redefinition and allows for resocialization of identities. Through “...understanding the ritual, one can comprehend that they

¹² Interview with *nyanga* José (19th of August 2023)

serve the purpose of balancing the past and the present” through addressing past violence and seeking balance and harmony between victims and perpetrators (Honwana, 2005, p. 233).

Emphasizing that the most important part of the rituals and the work *tinyanga* did post-war was aiming at reconciliation, not retribution.

When dealing with the reinsertion of individuals that were excluded to the acts they committed during the war, it is not enough to simply put them through a cleansing ritual for them to be reintegrated back into the community. It is important that the community also participated and is welcoming of the cleansed identity of the returned individual; therefore, it is important the victim and perpetrator are walking toward the path of harmony and are open for there to be a dialogue between them in the living world, and that their ancestors are in accordance.

The post-war reintegration process consists in the reinsertion of individuals that were excluded from their communities for having committed atrocities in the war, and for committing acts against their ancestors. The focus on social reintegration in the community was essential for reconstructing social relationships and reducing the tendency of members of the community to stigmatize and ostracize people that were products of war (Maslen, 1997). Additionally, it is realized that social reintegration would not otherwise be possible without the cleansing rituals performed by *tinyanga*, but it begs to question the effectiveness of them. The traumatized individuals could be cleansed of their sins and of what they have witnessed, but does that mean that they are healed?

The use of the social collective of *tinyanga* actors in the process of social reintegration of soldiers and rehabilitation of the country was not only a product of the lack of resources of the state of Mozambique, but also the perception that it was this social collective that was in the best position to transform the destabilizing pain, anger, and shame into a positive potential for reconciliation for the various entities that were directly or indirectly involved in the conflict. The *tinyanga* in Mozambique were not only used as an integral part of the healing process, but it was also used as a local resource in a later stage of interventions to alleviate trauma.

4.4.1 Who was Healed?

It is imperative to take into consideration those that were helped, their story is a big part of the overall narrative. Unable to find subjects that were submitted to cleansing rituals right after the civil war in Mozambique, the recently traumatized individuals fleeing the conflict in Cabo Delgado¹³ were interviewed. They all had some variation of the same ritual to cleanse them of the tragedy they were living through. The conversation revolved around four main parts: 1) What had happened to them; 2) How they comprehended and experienced the trauma; 3) What healing resources they had utilized; and 4) Whether the rituals had made a difference in their lives.

Each story was important in painting the full picture; the overall consensus was that they had all resorted to *waganga*¹⁴ after migrating to Mozambique and felt meaningful change in the way they behaved and lived with their experiences. They, although, felt significant differences in

¹³ Insurgency in Cabo Delgado is an ongoing Islamist insurgency that has displaced, injured, violated, and killed many Mozambicans since October 2017.

¹⁴ Curandeiros are called *waganga* in the north.

the way indigenous medicine is practiced in the south, compared to where we were from, northern Mozambique. Therefore, it was difficult for them to ‘assimilate’ to the practices of a different ethnic group, this, could then, affect the healing process of these particular individuals.

The subjects had gone through the consultation with a *mganga* and received treatment accordingly. Moreover, as aforementioned, the subjects felt a significant shift in their perspective of the atrocities they had been submitted to. They generally agreed feeling as though they were they were being punished, and after the rituals they reported feeling in a harmonious synchronicity with their ancestors. In sharing their story, they describe going to a *mganga* as though “a cloud was lifted from right above my head, but the days are still very dark and uncertain”¹⁵.

The conversation delved into feeling as though they wished they had a more present help after the ritual was completed; this, in part, is due to the fact that rituals are seen as the cure, and not part of a continuous healing process as therapy is done. I deduce that it was this understanding that motivated peace psychology to be combined with indigenous medicine, in order to begin the cleansing process and allow them to rebuild their identity, not only focusing on reconstructing the community.

As a researcher, the perspective that *tinyanga* hold of rituals being thought of as the cure was a discovery to me as an insider and a believer. This is because through experiencing life and studying psychology, I understood healing to be a continuous process of learning how to

¹⁵ From a subject in group discussion (12th September 2023).

alleviate trauma in order to learn how to live with it. Therefore, through understanding this point of view it became easier to comprehend the findings in the group discussion with the Mozambicans that have recently been traumatized in the conflict in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique.

4.5 Using *Tinyanga* as Local Resource for Healing

The *tinyanga* and therapists in Mozambique were doing independent work in their capacity to try to heal communities for the traumas they had experienced in the war. At some point, however, there was a realization that more work could be done by combining forces and addressing the areas in the healing process that were not being met. Namely, the therapists, on one hand, were not taking into consideration the cultural context in which the traumatized people were in, thus, they were not taking into account how the relationship Mozambicans have with spirits may be affecting the healing process. On the other hand, the *tinyanga* perceive rituals as an “act of cure” and not as a continuous healing process. After going through the ritual, the patient is expected to be cured, if not, they will look for other causes for the disturbances.

For this reason, the findings show that there was a second stage in the intervention, from 1994 to 2001, to maximize the little resources that were available for Mozambicans (Boía, 2014). It was after seeing the efforts of *tinyanga* that psychotherapists in Mozambique decided to essentially team up and create Associação Reconstruindo a Esperança, ARE¹⁶. Therapists sought out after *tinyanga* to best utilize the local resources that have been culturally made available; thus, the intervention had a psychodynamic tone to it by combining psychotherapy techniques

¹⁶ Translates to The Rebuilding Hope Association.

and traditional healing resources and methods to achieve greater and more effective results in the context of Mozambique (West, 2004).

As said by Dr. Boía as an interviewee:

“...but if we go out some a few kilometers from the provincial capitals, from the city of Maputo we find very different realities in which who heals people is no longer the doctor but a practitioner of traditional medicine, people are governed by values related to your culture, your family... so we had to learn to value our beliefs, our own ways of healing and understand why traditional medicine cannot solve issues by itself, soon there is an opening to try new ways and healing attempts.”¹⁷.

The quote encapsulates his approach, which was to create a bridge between healing practices in indigenous medicine and the expertise in understanding conflict and the aftermath of the same (Boía, 2023).

The general objective of the second intervention was to facilitate traumatized individuals and their communities to overcome their traumatic state after undergoing the cleansing rituals (Boía, 2014). This second stage meant subjectively understanding the traumatic experiences of the individual, taking into consideration the cultural and geographical context of each patient. Similar to how experiences before trauma was inflicted are taken into consideration in normal therapy sessions, cultural norms and values, through which individuals comprehend and assign meaning to their own experiences were taken into account.

¹⁷ Interview with Dr. Boía (23rd September 2023)

In using tinyanga as a local resources, there were parallel interventions that were carried through by the Ministry of Education¹⁸, UNICEF¹⁹, Red Cross of Mozambique²⁰, Save the Children US, Ministry of Social Action²¹, to name a few examples. These organizations, similar to therapists and the tinyanga, however, mainly worked with civilian populations and did not involve political and military leaders of both FRELIMO and RENAMO—the root of the conflict—thus, having very little contributions to reconciliation at the leadership level.

¹⁸ Developed an intervention with Brazilian Institute Heloísa Marinho for children affected by the war).

¹⁹ Created the project “Circo da Paz”, translated to “Peace Circle”.

²⁰ Created the project “Brincar Curando”, translated to “Curing while Playing” (translation does not accurately describe the meaning).

²¹ With a program of family reintegration.

Chapter V: Unconventional Approach to Reconciliation

Traditional healing in Mozambique offers an unconventional yet effective approach to reconciliation by making use of cultural practices, community involvement, and holistic healing methods. By tapping into these traditional resources, Mozambique can foster resilience, restore relationships, and focus on rituals that promote reconciliation of the past with the present, instead of methods of achieving justice through retribution. Traditional healing in Mozambique is often grounded in restorative justice, instead of punitive measures that could create further divide in the community.

By taking the approach that of tapping into indigenous knowledge, local communities are given agency in their healings, whilst also taking into consideration the cultural context in which healing is needed. The concept of peacebuilding from a constructivist perspective, for example, highlights the role of human security in promoting peace. It is argued that peacebuilding is not solely the responsibility of government, but that it warrants agency of local communities and civil society (Conteh-Morgan, 2005).

Conteh-Morgan argues that resorting to a more comprehensive approach to peacebuilding, it can aid in the fulfillment of basic needs, access to resources, and most importantly, protection of human rights (Conteh-Morgan, 2005). The traditional healing approach would then recognize the interconnectedness between human and the social, cultural, political, and spiritual dimensions of peace. He discusses the importance of undressing the underlying causes of conflict, and ways to empower individuals and communities in addressing the same conflicts.

Empowering local communities through relying on indigenous knowledge is crucial; it grants agency to communities in their healing processes, acknowledges the importance of cultural context in the pursuit of reconciliation, and ensures the preservation of cultural identity. By embracing traditional healing practices, Mozambique not only honors its rich cultural heritage but also fosters a path towards reconciliation that transcends conventional methods. Through this approach, communities can rebuild the social fabric that binds its communities together, fostering a resilient and harmonious future, free of guilt and retribution.

5.1 Identity in Rituals

Mozambique lost a big part of its identity when it was forced to assimilate to the culture and beliefs of the colonial rule. After Mozambique gained its independence in 1975, the country continued to assimilate with the rest of the world and forced the traditions, that have been part of the culture for ages, to take the backseat. As the years went by, visiting a *tinyanga* became a stigmatized act; thus, people became less and less open about being part of indigenous practices. Many people, perhaps, began to feel as though they had to choose between believing in God and believing and having a relationship with their ancestors. When in reality, one does not have to choose between the Western God and the traditional belief system, they can coexist.

Sangoma Priscilla talks about how traditional healing is a big part of both the personal and collective identity of people in eSwatini. Many traditional rituals in eSwatini involve honoring their ancestors and seeking their guidance, these rituals reinforce a strong sense of identity by connecting individuals to their lineage and heritage. Ancestral spirits are considered

an integral part of the community, reason why there is not any shame or stigma in maintaining these relationships with ancestors and publicly partaking in rituals. As described by sangoma Priscilla, “rituals serve as a way to maintain a link between the past, present, and future”²².

Traditional rituals often have a spiritual dimension, similar to rituals performed in Mozambique, reinforcing the people's connection to the divine and the natural world. Whether through offerings, prayers, or symbolic actions, these rituals help individuals situate themselves within a broader spiritual context, contributing to a holistic sense of identity.

A more holistic approach to fully grasp the meaning an individual brings and gives to life and experiences, consists of resorting to cultural identity and making use of practices in indigenous medicine. Moreover, the rituals are not focused on what the truth is and pointing fingers, it is concerned on how to repair the relationship with the self, with others (the community), and with ancestors. The rituals seek to redefine identities in order for there to be room for healing in the community. For this reason, and perhaps many more, is why I wish for Mozambique to reclaim our identity in the cultural heritage and foster both a collective and personal relationship with our ancestors and traditions.

²² Interview with sangoma Priscilla (17th September 2023)

Chapter VI: Conclusion

Indigenous practices offer a set of understandings and teachings that are particular to the community they are from, but it provides with an alternative method of healing deep wounds. With traditional healing emphasizing cleansing and re-defining a story, as it was done with the pestle in *kugiya*, it creates room for destructive patterns to be transformed into constructive ones. The rituals and practices in indigenous medicine seek to have traumatized reconcile with the past in order to overcome, it does not intend to punish, retribute, or shame those that have suffered by traumatic experiences.

It can be seen that as it is with the older relatives in any given society, ancestors in Mozambique have the duty to protect, guide, and correct their living descendants. Since they are a mere “leftover” and incomplete parts of the human being they once were, they lack the ability to directly communicate with the living world. Therefore, the only recourse they have left for communication is through their chosen *nyanga* to relay messages and ensure that the living descendants stay aligned to their ancestors in the spiritual realm.

The journey of becoming a healer is one that is particular as it is not a vocation that one can choose, rather you are chosen for the vocation. Being given the ability to be a medium between the living world and the spiritual realm is one that comes with immense responsibility as their knowledge holds great power.

Even though there are variations in rituals due to differences in the practices of ethnic groups, there are interconnected themes that are affirmed and reaffirmed. These are: the impurity

that the traumatized individual carries with hem; the need to be cleansed from it; and the reintegration back into the community. The social reintegration as a form of reconciliation, instead of retribution, occurs when they ultimately separate themselves from the trauma, freeing themselves from the dangers, impurities, and burden of past actions.

Rituals are perceived to be the cure itself, this, as results have shown, can alleviate the burden that traumatized people feel but it is not the solution to completely healing from traumatic experiences. It does, nonetheless, foster reconciliation with thyself and with others in the community. Perhaps relying solely on traditional healing is not the key, as healing is a continuous process, but it is definitely a tool and resource that should be used when addressing conflicts in the context of Mozambique.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

The pestle aids in the cooking, in grinding food similar to a mortar, and it requires people to be in sync with each other when using at the same time. The image below shows the pestle being used by women to grinding food to make flour.



Image 3: Women using Pilão in Mozambique.

Appendix 2

Interviewees

The interviewees were all made online with, 6 individuals interviewed and 4 subjects for a group discussion. The interviews were conducted while I was in the Netherlands and the rest of the subjects were in Mozambique, with the exception of sangoma Priscilla which resides in eSwatini.

The names that are included in the paper have been granted consent, except for the subjects in the group discussion, therefore, not included.