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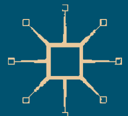
Ethnographic Peace Research

Approaches and Tensions

Edited by
Gearoid Millar



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CHAPTER 7

Violent Spirits and a Messy Peace: Against Romanticizing Local Understandings and Practices of Peace in Mozambique

Nikkie Wiegink

Introduction

In August 2007, I visited JustaPaz, one of the few NGOs working on conflict transformation in Mozambique. In their office in Matola, a satellite city of Maputo, I had a conversation with Francisco Assix, one of the project managers, about the ways Mozambicans had dealt with the atrocities after the civil war (1976–1992). According to Francisco:

> Truth and justice come through traditional leaders and healers. It is believed that in a normal situation a human being cannot kill another human being. There have to be bad spirits present causing these events. Therefore the killer has to be cleansed. And after that, someone cannot be called a killer anymore.[1]

With these words Francisco explained what many postwar studies of Mozambique also observed, namely the ubiquity of ritual cleansing practices of former combatants and other people affected by war in order to (re)incorporate them into community or family life (e.g. Granjo 2007a, 2007b; Honwana 2003; Lundin 1998; Nordstrom 1997). After sixteen

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years of war between the armed resistance movement Renamo (*Resistência Nacional de Moçambique*) and the government, led by Frelimo (the Mozambican Liberation Front, *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*), the political elites opted for silence regarding the war and amnesty for all involved. Consequently, there were no formal initiatives for truth-finding and transitional justice. At the same time, the Mozambican peace process has—until the recent return to war—been portrayed as a success story, which has been largely attributed to the successful community-initiated reintegration rituals for former combatants (e.g. Boothby 2006; Cobban 2007; Graybill 2004).

The reintegration of former combatants is generally seen as a crucial part of peace processes after (civil) war (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007), particularly in postwar situations on the African continent (McMullin 2013). Recently, there has been much attention to community-based reintegration (Stovel 2008; Theidon 2007; UN 2006), which proclaims a more context-specific and participatory approach to the involvement of combatants and the "community." The attention to purification rituals in Mozambique marked, as Stovel (2008: 306) noted, the start of a wider trend in academia and peacebuilding practice, to focus on "traditional" or "local" conciliatory rituals and expressions that facilitate the reincorporation of former fighters (see also Baines 2007, 2010; Veale and Starvou 2003; Theidon 2007). Moreover, the importance of the spiritual world in post-violence social reconstruction has been observed in post-war contexts in Sri Lanka (Perera 2001), Vietnam (Kwon 2006), Uganda (Baines 2010) and several other African countries (Meier et al. 2013). While contextually different, these studies reveal the prominence of the spiritual world in shaping how suffering is experienced, interpreted and dealt with (see for Mozambique: Honwana 1996; Igreja 2007: 90; Pfeiffer 2006: 82). It follows that the spiritual or supernatural world might, in a variety of contexts, be a central topic for ethnographic peace research to explore.

Local rituals of (re)acceptance and purification may provide hopeful, bottom-up (and cheap) practices for international NGOs and agencies interested in supporting peace processes. However, there are several challenges in the study and representation of such practices; analyses of the socio-spiritual world and related rituals may risk romanticizing the "traditional repository" for peace (Richmond 2009: 153) and end up defining the peace process merely by these ritual moments. Such analyses risk providing a rather apolitical and simplistic picture of the actors involved

and the issues at stake (see also Schafer 2007; Stovel 2008), and may disregard the role of the (often considered failed) state. Mozambique is a case in point. Notwithstanding the importance of the purification rituals in enhancing the healing of trauma and restoring a balance between humans and spirits, the strong focus on these rituals in postwar Mozambique has resulted in rather ahistoric and apolitical depictions of former combatants and the communities they are supposedly reintegrating into (Scanlon and Nhalevilo 2011; Schafer 2007: 167–168; De Vries and Wiegink 2011). Such a focus was also limited in its time frame, as it only captured the moment of return, thereby ignoring post facto changes in what, for example, successful "reintegration" means and how former combatants were regarded when the joys of reunion ceased and (new) inequalities surfaced (see also Bertelsen 2002, pp. 116–128; Schafer 2007; Wiegink 2013). Additionally, and more importantly for this chapter, it is important to note that upon closer examination these "local" understandings and practices may not be as harmonious and inclusive as they seem. In Mozambique, the importance of the role of spiritual beings in ex-combatants' postwar lives goes far beyond the "washing away of the spirit of war," as spirits play ambivalent, even violent roles that may facilitate acceptance, but in some cases also involve a continuation of suffering and a variety of understandings of justice and retribution.

In this chapter, I will explore how ethnographic peace research could approach "local" or "traditional" practices in peace processes in a way that does not essentialize or simplify them. I will provide a different reading of cleansing rituals in postwar Mozambique by delving into the ambivalent roles of spiritual beings in former combatants' personal histories of healing and violence. In doing so I aim to propose three possible characteristics of an ethnographic peace research agenda, namely: (1) attention to a polyphony of power relations and interpretations; (2) a caution not to assume that local peace initiatives are inherently inclusive and harmonious; and (3) a long-term or multi-temporal focus that is able to capture the transformative character of postwar processes. This is certainly not meant as a conclusive list of characteristics, but these are three issues that I believe reveal how ethnographic peace research enables us to break down simplistic, binary and apolitical depictions of local mechanisms for peace and is able to present an in-depth and complex understanding of local life worlds and experiences of transition.

The data I present in this chapter is based on fourteen months of fieldwork conducted over different periods of time between 2008 and 2010 in

Maringue, a rural district in central Mozambique that was a Renamo stronghold during the war and was, at the time of fieldwork, the home of allegedly 3000 former Renamo combatants.[2] I made use of conversational methods, including open interviews, and the drawing up of life histories, which were supplemented by countless informal conversations. Often the conversational methods that I employed were adapted to the situation at hand. A scheduled open-interview with a traditional leader could, for example, turn into a group discussion with his family and other people who happened to pass by. I conducted over 200 interviews with former combatants, traditional healer-diviners, community leaders and many others. Conversations with non-combatants were invaluable for understanding the social, cultural, historical and political context of Maringue and, therefore, for arriving at a more heterogeneous notion of "the recipient community." Some of the people I interviewed I met only once, yet the majority I visited at least twice and a small group of people I tried to meet on a weekly basis. By "being there" I was able to grasp what social and family life, people's daily struggles and social interactions meant in Maringue. Furthermore, I could follow how political contingencies, violent incidents, illness and misfortune took place and were interpreted on a day-to-day basis. In this way I made use of participant observation, which was also undertaken during political rallies, church services and healing sessions involving spirits, but was thus predominantly characterized by "hanging around" at people's homes and accompanying people on walks to their fields or elsewhere.

Most interviews started by tracing how people came to live in Maringue, as most research participants, especially the former combatants, were not originally from the district. They had ended up settling there because of their wartime deployment, marriage or troubles with their (deceased) relatives, to name a few reasons (see also Wiegink 2013). People's mobility thus often formed an insightful entry point for learning about the experience of war and how it had shaped people's lives. It was not my aim to analyze the psychological consequences of violence, nor did I have the therapeutic skills to delve into these subjects. Therefore, I did not probe people's accounts about the perpetration and witnessing of (sexual) violence. Rather I let my interlocutors define the limits. Some people talked very candidly about atrocities they had experienced or even perpetrated, while others reduced their experience to general sentences on "suffering" and "hunger." In other instances, as we will see in this chapter, stories of

atrocities were related to experiences of spirits, which came generally to the fore when I inquired about people's health.

At the time of fieldwork, the political situation in Maringue was tense. Renamo, which after the war became a political party, continued to maintain an operational military base in the district. For this reason there was also a special police force stationed in the district. While there were no violent clashes during my stays there, the presence of these militarized actors put political actors on edge. For my research this meant that I could not simply go around asking people questions about the past war and combatants. Instead I had to be introduced in a way that would not raise suspicion or fear. I therefore recruited a team of research assistants, being well aware of the fact that an ethnographer is judged not only on his or her own characteristics but also on those of his or her associates (Berreman 1963). These research assistants aided in navigating Maringue's political landscape and, when needed, assisted with translation. Most conversations were conducted in Portuguese, which I speak nearly fluently, but in some cases I needed a translator for Chisena, the local language spoken in most parts of northern Sofala province, where I conducted my research.

I begin the chapter by explaining my views on ethnography and the analysis of narratives, and how these are reflected in my presentation of the data. Subsequently, I will delve into an ethnographic account of the socio-spiritual world of Mozambique by fleshing out multiple interpretations of how violence, spirits and healing intersect in the lives of former combatants. In the conclusion I will return to the three characteristics of ethnographic peace research.

Ethnography and "Worlds Made"

I understand ethnography as a practice of description that explores social life through a focus on people's daily interactions and behavior in a certain context, aiming to uncover meaning and significance from "within" (Ragin 1994: 91). This is a practice, Geertz (1973) famously wrote of as "thick description," which involves "an interpretation of the intertwined cultural constructions and social discourses of actors" and results in a "richly, textured, multilayered and multi voiced ethnography" (Robben 2012: 513–514). Such a practice of description directs the attention toward the polyphony of power relations, identities and connections in postwar settings, and enables one to see beyond stereotypes of, for

example, the undifferentiated community, the one-dimensional perpetrator and the helpless victim (Robben and Nordstrom 1995: 8).

Consequently ethnographic fieldwork is characterized by methods that "emphasize the immersion of the researcher in a research setting and the effort to uncover meaning and significance of a social phenomenon for people in those settings" (Ragin 1994: 91). This involves long-term attachment, participant observation, a triangulation of methods and a certain degree of reflexivity. As the ethnographer's self (and that of his or her associates), with his or her personality traits, appearance and emotions, background and perceptions, is implicated in the research process (Crapanzano 2010; Diphoorn 2013; Madden 2010), the data produced is a product of dialogue and intersubjective encounters between the researcher and the research participants (Finnstrom 2008; Rabinow 1977). Ethnographic research, therefore, often demonstrates an awareness and explicitness of the research as a social process and the interpretative prepositions of the researcher (Higate and Cameron 2006; Robben 2012: 513).

The data I present in this chapter is based on observations and people's interpretations of events and practices as they unfolded during fieldwork. However, as fieldwork was conducted almost fifteen years after the war, I also drew heavily on people's narratives of past events. I understand narratives as a meaningful as well as contingent way to deal with experiences, as the narrative's significance may change over time, circumstance and speaker, and are politically colored, historically situated and culturally constructed (Igreja 2007; Nordstrom 1997: 21; Malkki 1995: 104). Narratives, and especially narratives about violence, may be subject to alteration with some aspects forgotten or omitted intentionally or unintentionally. As Nordstrom (1997: 22) argues, narrative organizes experience after the fact; it "domesticates experience." If violence "unforms" the world, then narrative is among the multitude of options people have to create a survivable world (Nordstrom 1997: 22). They are what Malkki (1995: 104) calls "worlds made," and "it is these that people act upon and riddle with meaning."

In this chapter I aim to uncover a variety of these "worlds made," which are multiple, contradicting and intertwined. Stories, as Paul Ricoeur (1991: 142) stressed, "are seldom self-explanatory," as they are negotiated through dialogue and contextualization. The ethnographer is implicated in this negotiation (Finnstrom 2008: 21), as it is his or her task

to interpret and contextualize people's narratives (as well as silences, see also Bjorkdahl and Selimovic in this volume), but also to explicitly indicate the limits of understanding. The ethnographer's interpretation of the narratives is, thus, the outcome of such negotiations; an informed reading at best.

The task of ethnographic peace research then is to uncover a variety of these "worlds made" in relation to peace, in order to account for people's navigations of uncertain transitional periods, in which "intimate enemies" (Theidon 2013) have to find a mode of peaceful coexistence. More specifically, in this chapter I aim to present a multi-voiced thick description of the "world" of purification rituals and related practices and understandings of violence and healing. In what follows, I will explore such a description by presenting three cases of the role of spirits in ex-combatants' postwar lives, thereby presenting a layered understanding of the ways in which former combatants sought healing and redemption and the extent to which this was reflected in acceptance by their fellow community members.

Washing Away "The Idea of the Bush"

Ronaldo could not remember the year in which he was recruited. It must have been sometime in the late 1980s, when he and five others were taken by Renamo combatants to the nearest rebel military base in Cheringoma. "It was forced," Ronaldo recalled, but then he said: "it was a time of war, it was military life, it was always forced." Similar to many other former Renamo combatants I interviewed, he recalled the war in terms of "suffering." He lost his eldest son in a Renamo attack and was himself shot twice in the legs during an ambush by Frelimo soldiers, after which his fellow Renamo fighters left him for dead. "I thought I was going to die," Ronaldo said, "but thanks to the spirit [that was with me] I survived." As was true for other Renamo combatants, he had approached a *nyanga* (a traditional healer-diviner in Chisena) during the war, who provided him with a protective spirit. It was this spirit that needed to be "taken out" when the war was over.

I met Ronaldo at a drinking gathering of former Renamo combatants in a rural area just outside the town of Maringue. He was with a group of five men and a woman who was making *nipa*, a traditional alcoholic drink. The *nipa* was kindly shared with my research assistant Adão, who was also a former Renamo combatant, and me. Adão explained in Portuguese and

Chisena the nature of my research to the other war veterans, and asked if we could interview them. Ronaldo was the first to step forward and we talked separately from the others for a while about his war experiences. At a certain point during the conversation, I asked him if there were ceremonies organized when he was returned with his family. He told us that he spent the first portion of his demobilization allowance, provided by the UN Mission in Mozambique (ONUMOZ), to pay for a *nyanga*, who organized a cleansing ceremony. In the presence of his wife and son, Ronaldo was cleansed by sitting over a steaming hot pot of water and roots, covered up by a cloth. He said that he decided to conduct this ceremony "because the spirit that was working with me [during the war] was aggressive. After the war I decided to take this spirit out [*tirar esse espiritu*] because I needed a civil spirit." Ronaldo was referring to the spirit that was "given" to him by the *nyanga* in order to protect him during the war, and noted that while the spirit saved his life during the war, giving him strength, in peacetime he needed a different kind of spirit and a less aggressive attitude.

Many of the ex-combatants I met in Maringue underwent cleansing rituals after the war ended. When asked to explain the reasons behind these rituals, they spoke of "washing away the idea of the bush [*o mato*]" or "the blood of war." Similar to Ronaldo, several mentioned the use of steam from a pan containing certain roots and plants and some said the *nyanga* would walk around them waving an animal's tail. Others said that these rituals also included "vaccinations," which involved making small incisions in the skin with a razor. In the southern region of Mozambique, cleansing practices involved the burning of war clothes in a small hut from out of which the former combatant had to jump (Honwana 2006), or the simulation of a fight and internal and external "washing" by, for example, goat blood and traditional medicine (Granjo 2007b). This indicates that the ways these ceremonies were performed varied across the country and depended probably to a great extent on the specialty of individual *nyangas*.

Certainly not all former Renamo combatants experienced such ceremonies. Some Christian veterans said the church forbade such practices (others performed "traditional" ceremonies anyway, cf. Pfeiffer 2006). Other former combatants, such as my research assistant Adão, expressed a suspicion toward "tradition" and labeled these ceremonies as "backward."[3] Still others experienced spirit exorcisms during praying sessions in Zionist or Pentecostal churches (see also Honwana 2006: 110). But as Ronaldo said, "many did take out that heat you pick up in the bush." "And what happens if this heat (*calor*) is not taken out?" I asked him. "A person can

become crazy," Ronaldo answered.[4] Others similarly said that without cleansing ex-combatants may become "confused," "start drinking and killing people as they used to," or "have bad dreams." Importantly, the spirits "picked up" during the war would not only bother the ex-combatants, but might also come after his or her relatives. This resonates with what Honwana (2005: 92) calls "social pollution," meaning that the combatants' contact with death and bloodshed affects not only the individual, but also the social body. Cleansing is thereby a fundamental aspect of protecting the collective against pollution and thus, as Honwana (2005: 92) continues, "of the social reintegration of war-affected people into society." Therefore, these purification rituals were ideally done in the presence of the combatants' family, if possible family from afar, and even neighbors (see also Granjo 2007a).

These cleansing rituals have been described as "sparks of creativity for peace," showing people's resilience and capability for peace when facing a culture of violence (Nordstrom 1997: 198). Yet more contextualized studies reveal that these purification rituals should be understood in longer histories of suffering and pre-colonial warfare, and that they resemble the purification ceremonies performed when people returned from prison or the mines in South Africa which are, similar to war, also seen as "bad" and "polluted" places (Granjo 2007a: 125, 141–142; Honwana 2006; see also Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002). Seen this way these rituals are best understood as existing rites performed in a new context, although one can question the extent to which war constituted a *new* context for people in central Mozambique, considering that the liberation war and the civil war together span over three decades.

Furthermore, the cleansing practices for war veterans and others should be situated in the wider "sociospiritual world" (Lubkemann 2008). In Maringue, as elsewhere in Mozambique, people live in social interaction with a supernatural world that is home to spiritual beings with effective powers over the material world (see, e.g. West 2005; Bertelsen 2009; Nielsen 2010). This is not only revealed in spirit possessions or cleansing ceremonies but also in dreams and in interpretations of illness, bad luck and death. For most people in Maringue, the "idiom of spirits" is always present in ontological and epistemological stances toward everyday life (Ellis and Ter Haar 2007: 387–388). The "spirit idiom" has a strong moral dimension, as it is permeated with understandings about what it means to lead "a good life" or to be a "good person," and it forms a central interpretative framework through which one's death can be classified

as good, "suspicious" (often related to witchcraft) or "bad." The spirit idiom is, however, more than an explanatory model for misfortune, illness and death; it is fundamentally related to providing a sense of social order though practices of purification, cleansing, protection and healing (see also Honwana 1996: 1; Meier et al. 2013). Ronaldo's spirit, being a protective force during the war but an aggressive force in the postwar period, shows the "double semantic" of the spiritual idiom and practices, as "the medical treatment and different kinds of ritual activity may both cause and remedy all sorts of personal or social misfortune" (Meier et al. 2013: 27). This double semantic is further explored in the next section where I present the story of Rebecca and her avenging spirit who caused her serious health issues, but also became a healing companion.

"You Took My Head to Make a Cooking Fire"

Rebecca was a small, frail woman in her forties. She was HIV-positive and lived alone in a small hut near the Catholic mission, from which she received food and social assistance. She considered herself a former combatant and she was also a *nyanga*, a healer-diviner, and this was why my research assistant, Adão and I had set out to talk to her. When I asked her how she became a *nyanga,* she told us a tale of various layers of suffering. Adão translated our conversation. As her story unfolded, she seemed to forget her frailty and she enacted the story as much as telling it, making bold gestures when she imitated the Renamo commander who forced her to commit a "crime, too big [and] too serious."

> Rebecca: It began with blood that came from my sex. It was a lot. When it was too much my husband took me to a *nyanga*. He said that the blood was coming out because I was also a soldier and that one day I had encountered a dead person. […] I had taken someone's head, the skull, to use it to make a cooking fire [using the skull to secure the pot above the fire]. Those people's spirits were saying, "*porra voce*! [damn you] You took [my head] to make a cooking fire!"
>
> Nikkie: They were spirits of soldiers?
>
> Rebecca: Yes, spirits of the war between Frelimo and the *Matsangaissas* [Renamo combatants]. It is this spirit that heals with me now. He is called João.
>
> Nikkie: How did he die?
>
> Rebecca: He died because of the war. I was almost a *guerrilheira* in those days; I did not have fear. That day that I took the head, there was no other way to make a fire. And I did not expect to live longer.

> Nikkie: Why did you not expect to live more? […]
>
> Rebecca: I was taken in Nhamundu to Gorongosa for the *liga* [forced porter marches]. There was commander Anaona, who led the group on this day. We stopped in a place where there were dead bodies. "Take those heads and make a fire!" [she was commanded]. After cooking porridge [*xima*] on top of the heads, I did not feel well. I went to sleep but I could not. I felt weak. I could not make a child and my other children all died. I tried to take out the spirit but the spirit would not let himself be taken out. The crime I committed was too big, too serious. It continues in my body until now.[5]

João, the spirit that caused Rebecca's health problems, had been a soldier who had died "of war," which was considered a "normal death." However, what happened to his body was not normal, as his skull had been used by Rebecca to make a cooking fire, probably during a forced porter march. The spirit hung onto Rebecca and caused her weakness and infertility. This became clear when Rebecca's husband took her to a *nyanga*, who made the spirit speak. The spirit was appeased, as he was willing to "heal" with her so she could become a *nyanga* herself. Rebecca said she never completely recovered, as she was not able to have children and she still felt weak, because, as she explained, "the crime was too big." Nevertheless, there was some sort of appeasement as being a *nyanga* provided her with some income as well as a certain degree of respect (and perhaps fear) from other community members (cf. Igreja et al. 2008; Marlin 2001).[6]

The postwar spirit possessions and the related healing processes can be regarded as (embodied) storytelling, which offered possibilities for breaking the silence about the war and taboo issues such as sexual violence (see also Honwana 2003; Igreja et al. 2008: 366; Marlin 2001). However, it is not the story of the host that is central in the healing session, but rather the story of the spirit (see also Igreja et al. 2008). Such spirits have a personal identity and name (e.g. João, former combatant), gender (in the case of "avenging" spirits, almost always male), ethnicity (e.g. spirits from Zimbabwe, speaking Shona) and a specific story of their death (e.g. murder, theft, abandonment). It was the soldier who had been suffering and had to be appeased and it was Rebecca who had committed the "crime." Nevertheless, in this process Rebecca's story was told as well to her husband and probably other relatives during the *nyanga* consultations, as well as to Adão and me. She does not tell it explicitly, but the forced marches of Renamo women were remembered in Maringue, as well as elsewhere in Mozambique, as one of Renamo's most violent practices, as women were often raped and babies, the elderly and others who slowed down the

marching were killed (Igreja 2007). Narratives of spirits such as Rebecca's may thus be perceived neither as true accounts of factual misdeeds nor as mythical stories, but rather as multi-layered and gendered narratives and a "multidimensional and collective truth" (Igreja 2007: 337).

Rebecca's narrative also involves several moral understandings about death and violence. João, the soldier, died a "normal" death, but what happened to his body afterwards (being used to make a cooking fire) was not normal. Rebecca's talk of "crime" suggests that there are certain interpretations of justice and retribution involved in her spiritual affliction. This topic I will explore further in the next section, where I describe a pattern of spirit afflictions targeting male combatants who were regarded as having done "bad things" during the war and whose affliction was regarded as incurable. People's narratives about such afflictions seemed to deviate from "normal" spirit afflictions in their emphasis on retribution and punishment.

The Haunting of Fazbem

Fazbem was a former Renamo commander, recruited at the age of eighteen at school. He was the son of the *régulo* (chief) of Palame, a rural area in the north of Maringue district. Fazbem was a man of thirty-something years of age, but he was only the size of a child. He was just over 1 m in height and his arms and legs were a quarter of the size they once were, he claimed. When I met him, he was unable to walk or even sit up straight. He spent his days in a hut at his father's homestead, in a bed made of wooden planks softened by several blankets. He liked visitors, and the two times I met with him he welcomed me enthusiastically with his characteristic high-pitched and quavering voice.[7]

Fazbem was great conversation on almost any topic, but he was especially thrilled to talk about his time as a Renamo soldier. He recalled great victories, shrewd schemes and the women he "took." This was a time when he was a "big man," in stark contrast to the man he had become now. He told me his illness had started in the wake of war, but before demobilization: "In 1992 when the war ended I was in Manica close to Zimbabwe. We walked from there to Gorongosa and then the sickness began, I noticed it in my knees." "What kind of sickness do you have exactly?" I asked. "My bones are disappearing," he replied. "I have been in hospitals in Maputo and in Beira but they cannot find an explanation for why my bones are like this. They examined my blood but it was normal.

They took a piece of my bone and put it back then it stayed firm. […] But there is no cure."

The disappearance of Fazbem's bones had not gone unnoticed by people in Palame and in Maringue more generally. In fact, his ordeal was one of the first things that came to people's minds when I expressed interest in war stories and the trajectories of ex-Renamo combatants. Yet there were several theories about the origin of Fazbem's illness.

Most interpretations of Fazbem's illness were based on the idea that during his time as a Renamo combatant he had done something "bad"—specifically that he had killed a civilian. I spoke with two community leaders of the Catholic Church from the northern *zonas* of Maringue. The two men, named Januario and Pedro, started to talk animatedly about Fazbem. Januario seemed very impressed by what happened to the former Renamo commander. "Ah, Fazbem, the son of the *regulo*. *Xii* [exclamation of surprise]. He was a man like us. You could sit with him around a table. But he was a soldier," he said. Pedro continued: "He was a soldier, yes, but he killed a person of the house [*pessoa da casa*]. Not just a military person [*pessoa militar*] that you can do, but a person of the house, you can't." Januario explained: "He wanted a girl that was already married. He demanded her and killed the husband and took the girl. Now all his bones are getting smaller. He is like a child." Pedro indicated Fazbem's reach on his own arms.[8]

These commentaries entail a variety of moral understandings of violence. As Pedro said, a "person of the military" you can kill. Especially if the other one is also a soldier, this would be seen as legitimate violence. However, as he elaborated, "you cannot kill a person of the house," a civilian. So Pedro did not refer to *any* civilian, but rather someone who belongs to a "house," a family. Januario contributed a further layer to this morally complex conception of violence by saying that the woman (or girl) in this case "was already married," which added gravity to Fazbem's crime. Taking a married woman was regarded as a serious offense both within Renamo and among the population. Murdering the husband, moreover, was regarded as extraordinary and illegitimate violence. Though Januario and Pedro did not say it in so many words, they clearly believed that the spirit of the murdered husband was causing Fazbem's condition and that he was being punished for a crime.

There were alternative explanations for Fazbem's illness however. One of the *nyanga* I met in Maringue assessed that Fazbem was being punished for disobeying another *nyanga*: "He [Fazbem] just did not do what the

curandeiro [*nyanga* in Portuguese] told him to do when he wanted to be a *chefe* [leader, big man]."[9] In Maringue it is commonly known that people who want to be rich or "*chefes*" ask a healer to use his or her powers to help them. However, becoming rich is not without sacrifice, as it is said that *nyanga* make outrageous demands of their "clients," such as killing one's child or having sex with one's mother. If a client fails to follow the order of the *nyanga*, he or she may go mad or something terrible will happen. Fazbem's strange illness, the *nyanga* thought, was the consequence of such disobedience.

Fazbem himself had yet another interpretation of these alternative understandings of his illness. During my second visit to his hut, I dared to confront him with the stories that others had told me about the origin of his illness. "If I may ask, […] I heard people here say your illness is a punishment." He nodded. "It is a punishment to lie here, that's for sure," he said. I continued: "That is not exactly what I mean. People here in Maringue say you did bad [*fez mal*] during the war." He nodded again. "Some people say that I took the wife of somebody else and that I killed this man. It's propaganda." "Propaganda?" I repeated, because I did not know quite what he meant. "Yes, propaganda. They, from Frelimo, wanted to take me with them. The governor was here, with whiskey. They wanted me to come with them." Earlier in the interview he had explained to me that he was part of the Renamo intelligence service and that Frelimo was interested in collaborating with him. He suggested that the stories about his illness were a kind of slander campaign against him designed to prevent him from being considered by Frelimo as a worthy collaborator. It is possible that Fazbem tried to impress me with this "propaganda theory" which emphasized his political importance and relevance.

The multiple interpretations of Fazbem's affliction demonstrate that narratives of war and health, though often deeply intertwined, are manifold and polysemic. These interpretations range from avenging spirits to the wrath of a *nyanga* and are influenced by the narrators' own war experience and his or her social and political position. While Fazbem recalled a glorious war in which he rose through the ranks to become a senior Renamo combatant, others—mainly civilians, but also other combatants—recalled a war in which combatants used their rank and power-through-the-gun to harass and harm (married) woman and (family) men. It is within such narratives that health, spirit possession, morality and retribution (and gender) intersect. These are not only the interpretations of *nyangas*, pastors or other mediums, but mostly the narratives of "lay adherents" (Spierenburg

2000: 77), for whom possession by avenging spirits forms an interpretative frame for understanding war violence and its consequences.

The interpretations of Fazbem's illness, and those of several other former combatants who were said to have been paralyzed or rendered permanently impotent, reveal that the spirit idiom and related practices are not only geared toward restorative justice (Igreja and Dias-Lambranca 2008) or reacceptance of former combatants (Granjo 2007b) but that there may also be a certain degree of punishment and retribution involved. Some spiritual afflictions were thus considered as irreversible and may be considered as forms of transitional justice. Moreover, the multiple interpretations about Fazbem's illness exemplify the open-ended and dynamic character of these "local" expressions and healing practices (Igreja 2012, p. 421) and the space for conflicting interpretations and uncertainty (Meier et al. 2013: 27). It follows that practices of purification, cleansing and healing are ways to provide a sense of social order, but that this order is contested and unstable.

Concluding Remarks

In the wake of massive atrocities, religious or cosmological expressions and practices may provide a tremendous resource for healing or transitional justice for both the individual and the collective. Yet all too often, such practices and ideas end up being portrayed in reified, romanticized and one-dimensional ways (Richmond 2009). In this chapter I presented the much-celebrated "traditional" purification rituals of former combatants in postwar Mozambique as a phenomenon that has been subject to such "romanticizing" and I explored an alternative, more ethnographic approach to researching and representing the role of spirits in ex-combatants' lives. More specifically, I aimed to provide a thicker description of the various intersections of violence and healing and the spiritual world in central Mozambique and thereby to flesh-out the three elements that I deem essential for ethnographic peace research: (1) a multiplicity of interpretations; (2) a caution not to assume that "traditional" or "local" peace initiatives are inherently inclusive and harmonious and that they work naturally toward healing and reconciliation; and (3) a long-term or multi-temporal focus.

First of all, I hope to have shown that ritual practices are surrounded by a multiplicity of interpretations, which may vary individually but also between social markers, such as religion, politics and gender. Rebecca and

Ronaldo did not have similar healing possibilities, for instance. This was due to their different personal histories, but also because of their different roles during the war of being a forced porter and a soldier, and the different ways in which spirits may afflict women and men. It might thus be erroneous to assume that local notions and practices of peace are inherently inclusive and equally accessible even within the same community (cf. Lubkemann 2008). Moreover, the various narratives about Fazbem's mysterious disease demonstrated that within basically the same locality there may be different interpretations of healing and suffering in relation to the spiritual world. Interesting questions for further research would be to understand how interpretations may change over the course of time (cf. Igreja 2012) and how some become dominant over others.

Secondly, by presenting the multiple interpretations of Fazbem's illness, as well as the continuous suffering of Rebecca, I hope to have challenged the somewhat romanticized ideas that "local" peace practices work "naturally" toward healing and reconciliation, and that such practices are restorative rather than retributive in nature. Both cases were characterized by continuous suffering interpreted (at least by some) in terms of morality, justice and punishment. In concurrence with Kwon (2006: 5), I hold that such understandings of justice and punishment are to be understood as culturally grounded concepts and are therefore not easily framed in terms of transitional justice, human rights or peacebuilding.

Third, the chapter testifies to the value of long-term or multi-temporal research of "peace processes" (see also Brauchler 2015: xxi). Long periods of fieldwork allow for the establishment of rapport between researcher and interlocutors, and provide the possibility of speaking with a wide array of people and to follow events (such as healing processes) over time. The factor of time and the timing of research are of particular consideration in ethnographic peace research, since this type of research generally speaks to a (historical) moment of atrocity. The fact that I conducted fieldwork more than fifteen years after the war was to a great extent essential in understanding former combatants' processes of postwar accommodation on different terms than studies conducted in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. The stories of former combatants' show that their search for a civilian life is an ongoing process, rather than a momentary *rite-de-passage* in the wake of war, and that this process is poorly captured in terms such as "community-based reintegration." The open-endedness of "local" healing practices and of former combatants' adjustment processes stand in contrast to linear conceptions of "before and after" that dominate peace

studies (Igreja 2012: 421), and it is only by following people's lives over time that this can be made palpable. Similar to Finnstrom (2005: 494), I believe that ethnographic peace research is in an ideal position to understand war and peace as processes, also—or especially—when the UN peace missions and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs are over and the international peacekeeping community has focused its gaze elsewhere.

All in all, I have tried to provide a more cautious perspective to contrast the celebratory tone in which local, traditional or community-based mechanisms for peace (linked to the spiritual realm or not) are often presented, both in peacekeeping programming and reporting and academia. I would, therefore, make a case for ethnographic peace research as able to show how "peace and war are not so much two opposed states of being as they are multifaceted, ambiguous, mutually imbricated arenas of struggle" (Aretxaga 1997: 4–5). By presenting an in-depth and complex understanding of local life worlds and experiences of transition, ethnographic peace research would ideally be able to uncover the workings of healing and transitional justice initiatives that promote the restoration of relationships, without losing sight of the multiplicity and complexity of ritual practices and their interpretations.

Notes

1. Interview with Francisco Assix, staff member Justapaz, 20/08/07, Matola.
2. It is worth noting that this data was gathered before 2012, when Renamo's leader and an unknown number of combatants "returned to the bush" and central Mozambique became again the stage attacks on highways and violent clashes between Renamo and the special forces of the police.
3. Adão often expressed a deep suspicion of "tradition" and especially "*curandeirismo*" (visiting healer-diviners), yet at the same time he would take his sister to a *nyanga* to resolve her infertility problems. Such seemingly contradictory actions and statements are well documented in relation to religion and health in Mozambique (e.g. Pfeiffer 2002) (Interview with Adão, 17/06/09, Maringue).
4. Interview with Ronaldo, 04/08/09, Maringue.
5. Interview with Rebecca, 03/08/09, Maringue.
6. Rebecca's trajectory of becoming ill, consulting a *nyanga*, and finally placating the spirit closely resembles Igreja's (2007; see also Igreja et al. 2008) descriptions of *magamba* in neighboring Gorongosa district.

7. Conversations with Fazbem, Maringue, 23/05/08; 11/11/08.
8. Conversation with Januario and Pedro, Maringue, 02/05/08.
9. Conversation with *nyanga* Fernando, Maringue, 15/06/09.

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