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## Gamba Spirits and the Homines Aperti: Socio-Cultural Approaches to Deal with Legacies of the Civil War in Gorongosa, Mozambique

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**BUILDING A FUTURE ON PEACE AND JUSTICE  
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**WORKSHOP 10  
REPORT**

**GAMBA SPIRITS AND THE *HOMINES APERTI*: SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACHES TO  
DEAL WITH LEGACIES OF THE CIVIL WAR IN GORONGOSA, MOZAMBIQUE**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper,<sup>1</sup> which results from nearly a decade (1997-2006) of continuous field research in the centre of Mozambique, analyses the ways in which Mozambican war survivors managed to develop socio-cultural approaches to deal peacefully with the legacies of an extremely violent past. More specifically, it focuses on the contributions of a civil-war-related spirit named *gamba* in the former war zones of the Gorongosa district, and central Mozambique more generally. This paper is organised in three sections. Following a brief introduction in which the goals of the paper are stated, Section Two outlines some aspects of the Mozambican civil war and its consequences at community level. Section Three describes the emergence of the *magamba* spirits in the Gorongosa district and demonstrates how these war-related spirits break the prevailing conspiracies of silence over a past of civil war violence. This section also presents how *magamba* deal with issues of truth, justice and reconciliation. In Gorongosa, reconciliation is a multidimensional phenomenon and *magamba* spirits demonstrate the multiplicity of reconciliation processes and achievements. The last section gives the main conclusions and suggests the necessity of taking the various socio-cultural processes that are developed in various post-civil war countries seriously, in order to deal with the extreme legacies of violent conflicts.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is partly based on a more comprehensive chapter (“The legacies of the civil war, *gamba* spirits, healing and restorative justice in Gorongosa, Mozambique central” written by V. Igreja & B. Dias-Lambranca) in a forthcoming report on traditional justice and reconciliation mechanisms in six African countries (IDEA, Stockholm, 2007).

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the Mozambican civil war (1976-1992), the political authorities opted for politico-legal measures to secure impunity for gross human rights violations and war crimes. Neither the cadres from the Frelimo-led government, the Renamo leadership, nor the representatives of the international community, who played a key role in brokering the Mozambican peace agreement, offered a public explanation as to why no politico-legal initiatives were to be forthcoming in the post-civil war period. War survivors were simply advised to forget what had happened and to forgive one another, and the only reference to justice was the emphasis placed on “you shall not take revenge upon your fellow man.”

*Gamba* (*magamba* in plural) spirits break the post-war conspiracies of silence regarding a violent past, joust for truth and justice, and foster peace and reconciliation. In their struggle for truth and justice in post-war Mozambique, *magamba* spirits powerfully bespeak the necessity of actively dealing with the horrors of civil war. Furthermore, they suggest the need to recognize the availability worldwide of diverse strategies to peacefully deal with the legacies of civil war. *Magamba* spirits are a contemporary example of what Douglas Fry (2006) calls the “the human potential for peace.” From this perspective, one issue to consider is that there are multiple ways of thinking about truth, justice, peace and reconciliation in post-conflict countries. The acceptance of this reality should lead us to think that perhaps in certain societies ravaged by civil wars, transitional justice by way of formal retribution (national and international) or truth commissions are alternatives to the potential embodied and enacted by socio-cultural processes such as that of the *magamba* spirits. If we are prepared to endorse this proposition and to take it seriously, then it is appropriate to develop mechanisms of achieving dialogue and cooperation between various forms of post-war truth finding, justice and reconciliation, instead of simply imposing rules of reasoning and conduct on how to deal with extreme legacies of civil strife.

## 2. ASPECTS OF THE MOZAMBIKAN CIVIL WAR

### 2.1. The Mozambican civil war and its consequences

The Mozambican protracted civil war (1976-1992) was ruthless. Although the war was spread all over the country, rural areas were the most affected in terms of war destruction and human suffering. The war was fought between the Frelimo-led governmental troops and the former rebel movement Renamo. Around the mid 1980s, the Zimbabwean army joined the war by supporting the Frelimo-led government. The civil strife was a low-intensity war, i.e., the parties in conflict largely struggled for control over populations. This fight for control over civilians gave rise to divisions between areas militarily controlled by governmental troops and other areas controlled by Renamo. The people continuously shifted between one area and another, or even moved around “no man’s land” in search of better security conditions.

The war not only destroyed the country’s socio-economic infrastructure but also created deep divisions and relations of hatred between family and community members. People living within the war zones were compelled to spy on one another, with hints of murder contributing to the erosion and depletion of the trust and relationships of reciprocity that had bonded communities together

historically. Young virgin daughters were abducted to military bases for sexual violation and forced marriage. Young boys were forcibly recruited and compelled to murder their own relatives and burn their own villages. Mutilation of male and female body organs was carried out on some occasions. Forced labour and forced displacement were also common practices. Thousands of innocent civilians were killed, although the numbers of the dead are not known for certain. Some observers of the Mozambican civil war estimate a figure of 100,000 civilian deaths; others place the figure at one million (Hanlon 1991); still others suggest that “A more realistic guess would be that some 50,000 victims lost their lives directly as a result of rebel military action throughout the entire war” (Thomashaussen 2001: 98). Regarding the forced population displacement, it is estimated that at least four million people fled into the urban centres, becoming internally displaced; others sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The extreme events of the civil war brought profound divisions and mistrust among many community members in Mozambique. These divisions and enmities still prevail in this post-war era.

## **2.2. The transition from civil war to peace and reconciliation**

The civil war did not terminate due to a military victory of one side over the other. In order to attempt to end the civil war, the Frelimo party promulgated two amnesty laws: The Laws no. 14/87<sup>2</sup> and 15/87<sup>3</sup> of December 19 (Trindade 2003: 114). However, these legal initiatives failed to achieve their aim. At the end of the 1980s it became clear that the Frelimo slogan of “when we are at war, the first priority is war”, meaning that “it is necessary to make war in order to end the war,” was disastrous propaganda. It was not possible for either side to reach a military solution for the conflict. Initiatives to end the conflict through peace talks came from Christian religious groups. Eventually in 1990 peace negotiations began between the Frelimo-led government and the Renamo rebels. After two years of mediated and direct negotiations in Rome, Italy, the Mozambican government and Renamo reached a peace agreement on October 4 1992 and publicly swore never to return to war violence as a mechanism for resolving disputes. This sworn peace, which was witnessed nationally and internationally, marked the cessation of the prolonged cycle of extreme violent hostilities.

The signature of the Mozambican General Peace Agreement (AGP) was an important reconciliation event. According to William Long and Peter Brecke (2003: 6), a reconciliation event includes the following elements “direct physical contact or proximity between opponents, usually senior representatives of respective factions; a public ceremony accompanied by substantial publicity or media attention that relays the event to the wider national society; and ritualistic or symbolic behaviour that indicates the parties consider the dispute resolved and that more amicable relations are expected to follow.” An incremental step was given after the reconciliation event when the Mozambican General Peace Agreement was attributed a legal status through the law no. 13/92 promulgated

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<sup>2</sup> Article 1<sup>st</sup>, no. 1, states that, “amnesties for the crimes against the Security of the People and of the Popular State, foreseen in the Law no. 2/79 of March 1, committed by Mozambican citizens that, by any way, have combated or promoted violence against the People or the Mozambican state, within or outside of the national territory, as long as they voluntary give up themselves.”

<sup>3</sup> Preamble. It concedes pardon for the punishment to the actors of crimes against the security of the State that by their behaviour, “have revealed the purpose to reintegrate in peace in the society and to redeem through socially useful work”.

by the then Frelimo-led Popular Assembly. This political accord completely neglected the fact that the civil war hostilities had extensively breached conventional rules dealing with victims of war (Geneva law), and the rules governing the conduct of hostilities (The Hague law) (Tomuschat 2003: 14). That is, no measures in the post-war period were developed to hold accountable those individuals who had been responsible for the most egregious acts of violence. The peace agreement was founded upon what Stanley Cohen (2001) has termed *cultures of denial*, in which political authorities “encourage turning a collective blind eye, leaving horrors unexamined or normalized as being part of the rhythms of everyday life” (p. 101). Such neglect of the Mozambican political authorities in assuming their responsibilities over past abuse and war crimes was believed by many political authorities, non-governmental officials and intellectual elites to be the most effective mechanism of achieving a resolution for the Mozambican civil war (Hayner 2001).

Insisting upon the necessity of addressing the violence and crimes of the past does not imply ignoring the fact that there are serious difficulties in achieving justice and peace in transitional periods. The issue is that “consolidating democracies have a wide range of options with regard to justice and accountability: they can pursue selective prosecutions, purges and even commissions of enquiry that lay bare the legacy of the past” (Sriram 2004: 2).

Instead, the culture of denial was nationally formalised in Mozambique when the Frelimo-led single party parliament enacted the law no. 15/92 that granted generalised and unconditional amnesties for crimes committed between 1979 and 1992 in Mozambique. The law no. 15/92 states that it, “Amnesties the crimes committed against the security of the people and of the popular State, foreseen in the law no. 2/79, of March 1 and in the law no. 1/83, of March 13, the crimes against the security of the state, foreseen in the law no. 19/91, of August 16, and the military crimes foreseen in the law no. 17/87, of December 21, and still those whose criminal procedures were not yet established by July 1 of 1988”.<sup>4</sup>

From the top to the bottom of the political hierarchy there was no explanation as to why no politico-legal initiatives were to be provided. War survivors, having been given no advice or support other than to forget past events and to avoid the extraction of revenge, went back to their villages of origin in order to start new lives by building houses in which to live and cultivating the land for subsistence farming.

One compelling reality of the post-war settlement, however, was that these former war-zone villages were not to be inhabited solely by individuals and families who shared a collective memory as victims of war violence. The ex-soldiers from the two former belligerent armies (the Frelimo-led government army and Renamo) and their associates, who had committed the most pervasive abuses and war crimes, did not forfeit the right to live in these villages. On the contrary, they went back, quite unconcernedly, to live in these same villages.<sup>5</sup> In general, there were few reports of former soldiers swaggering and strutting in the

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<sup>4</sup> Boletim da República, I SÉRIE – Número 42. Quarta Feira, 14 de Outubro de 1992. Suplemento.

<sup>5</sup> From the government side they were mostly *secretarios*, *chefes do quarteirão* (chiefs of neighbourhoods), and militia. From the Renamo side they were *mujibas* (vigilantes and collectors of food for the troops), *blocos* (vigilantes), and some local traditional chiefs that remained under their control.

villages, but their very presence was a continuous reminder of wartime crimes and abuse. Under these conditions of military crimes and abuse and post-war political abandonment, the following questions are raised that require careful examination: how can war survivors live in peace when their perpetrators roam freely in the same villages? What kind of truth, justice and reconciliation is it possible to attain amid cultures of denial and impunity? To what extent has the emergence of the *magamba* spirits contributed to the healing of divisions caused by the civil war, by responding to the needs of truth, justice and reconciliation in Gorongosa?

### **3. MAGAMBA SPIRITS: BREAKING THE CONSPIRACIES OF SILENCE**

*Magamba* spirits emerged in a social world that already had a long history and tradition of conceptualising human beings as *homines aperti*, i.e., “the image of a multitude of people, each of them relatively open, interdependent processes” (Elias 1970: 121). The idea of *homines aperti* in Gorongosa bespeaks such an openness of human beings that they establish relations of interdependence not only with other human beings but also with supernatural forces that inhabit the same social world. *Homines aperti* establish continuous interactions with spirits to the extent that spirits not only inhabit the landscape of the region, but they also have the capacity to dwell within the *homines aperti*.

Spirits and healers occupy different positions and perform a variety of complex roles. These positions and roles change over time according to the general metamorphosis through which the society goes. The spirits perform various roles: there are spirits and healers who historically safeguarded the moral and ethical values, social stability and identity of the community; there are spirits and healers who perform healing, in the strict sense of the word; and there are yet other spirits and healers who perform both functions simultaneously.

*Gamba* is the name of a spirit, an affliction, and also a healer that specialises in *gamba* afflictions (Igreja 2003b; Marlin 2001). In general, *magamba* are spirits of male soldiers who died during the civil war. Their bodies were not properly buried, and people living within the war zones and in extreme conditions are referred to as having defiled the corpses of these fallen soldiers to make medicines to protect themselves against the violence of war. Within this context *magamba* spirits return to the world of the living to fight for justice and the focal point of their avenging force is women. *Magamba* spirits also attack men, but less frequently than women.

Women and men who fall prey to *magamba* strikes are those whose relatives were allegedly involved in the use of protective medicines illicitly made from the corpses of the fallen soldiers (known or unknown, but not soldiers related to them), or were allegedly involved in the murder of the soldiers themselves. With the passage of time, the initial configuration associating *magamba* spirits with dead soldiers has evolved to the extent that currently any male that was killed during the civil war is able to return to the world of the living to claim justice.

In order to understand the impact of violence and the local setting of social experience there is a need to analyse “how that local world mediates between broader political forces and the responses of individuals” (Kleinman 1997: 183). In this regard, there is clear evidence that the cultures of silence over a grisly past promoted by the Mozambican political elites in the post-war period were also initially incorporated into the everyday life of war survivors in the centre of

Mozambique. That is, when the war was over, many war survivors in Gorongosa wished to forget the horrors that they had lived through and to simply move on. For instance, in the first five years of peace (1992-1997), *magamba* spirits were generally a silent phenomenon. During my initial observations in April 1997, I came across only very few young men who were considered to be working as healers using the *magamba* spirits. These observations were confined to remote villages located in the central Gorongosa Mountains. The few *gamba* healers roaming around in 1997 would carry their working instrument (a bayonet) with them at all times, in a scabbard tied to their waist. These bayonets are said to come from the *Kalashnikovs* that stabbed and killed many people during the civil war. The *gamba* healers travelled around with these bayonets as an indication of the presence of a *gamba* healer and of the spirit's puissance.

By around 1999, the unbearable experiences of the war could apparently no longer be relived and processed in silence. *Gamba* spirits broke through the prevailing conspiracies of silence and there was a sharp increase in the number of people possessed by this spirit, particularly young women. A striking aspect of *gamba* is that it manifests itself mainly through spirit possession of the body of its victim. *Magamba* spirits can randomly possess anybody that has a personal or family history of extreme suffering, abuse, abandonment, and death related to the civil war. The manifestation of a *gamba* spirit is always very noisy, bodily enacted and very talkative. Everybody in a village knows who is a host and whom a *gamba* spirit has affected. When someone becomes possessed by *magamba* spirits, this is a denunciation of the prevailing divisions caused by the civil war within the families and indicates the necessity to openly deal with the turbulent past.

### **3.1. Cultures of engagement: *Magamba* spirits and practices of truth and justice**

The emergence of the *magamba* spirits forced war survivors to change their initial strategy of oblivion regarding their violent past. This capacity to change is referred to here as *cultures of engagement*, which generally means sustainable social practices that are crucial in keeping peace, social stability and generate prosperity at local level. Specifically, *cultures of engagement* consist in the willingness of war survivors to actively create new resources and accessing and utilizing available endogenous resources to repair their devastated social world by way of reconciling formerly estranged people and healing the extreme wounds of war. Cultures of engagement for reconciliation and healing are enacted in a way that cannot shun the past of violence. In this regard, after a relatively short period of silence and attempts at oblivion, many people started becoming seriously afflicted and the origins of these afflictions were rooted in the past of violence, i.e., *magamba* spirits.

Possession by *magamba* spirits causes severe afflictions to their hosts and agnates. One particular affliction is the blockage of the reproductive functions (Igreja *et al* 2006). Afflictions by these spirits are an indication of violent experiences, involving war-related shameful or amoral acts, which are being concealed. This experience must be publicly disclosed, acknowledged and repaired. In this way, *magamba* spirits also present a potential source for a peaceful resolution of the histories of abuse, denial and concealment that prevail in Gorongosa (Igreja 2003b).

*Magamba* spirits do not disclose “the truth” since in the context of protracted civil war “the truth” does not exist. *Magamba* spirits are concerned with the multiplicities of truths about the past. That is to say, *magamba* spirits create a safe public space in which an afflicted person, her family and the community at large can deal with their past without fear of igniting new cycles of violence and bloodshed. In this respect, *magamba* spirits resemble a kind of collective remembering in which “our bodies, which in commemorations stylistically re-enact an image of the past, keep the past also in an entirely effective form in their continuing ability to perform certain skilled actions” (Connerton 1989: 72).

In post-war Gorongosa, the process of creating collective memories and their usage takes place largely during the public sessions aimed at dealing with *magamba* spirit possession. When someone is afflicted this means that a family member of the afflicted person has done something terrible against someone during the civil war. It is the person who was wronged that returns in the form of a *gamba* spirit to disclose the narrative of the violent events; and these events are extremely serious.

In order to discover the accusation and establish the facts, the *gamba* healer places the afflicted person at the centre of the ceremony. The *gamba* healer re-creates the scenario of war by acting out the actions of the soldiers during the civil war. People participating in the ceremony follow the *gamba* healer by singing songs whose messages evoke war events: abuse, suffering and death. The songs also evoke ideas about the necessity of voicing what happened so that the alleged wrongdoer and the participants in general can acknowledge the truths about the past, and in a later stage, specifically the wrongdoer can repair the havoc.

The scenario of war created by the *gamba* healer and the community in general gives confidence to the afflicting *gamba* spirit to manifest itself to the public via the body of the host. When the spirit assumes full control of the host’s body, this implies that the conscience of the host is fully replaced by the personality of the *gamba* spirit. This means that the host cannot be held accountable for anything that happens during this ceremony. When the *gamba* spirit is ready to make the indictments against the alleged perpetrator, these usually refer to the following acts: “killing of one or more people”, “eating human body parts”, or “stealing the goods of dead people.”

The indictments are not free of dispute. The deliberations, which are mediated by a *gamba* healer, are very agitated and can take hours, since initially the indicted person refuses to comply with the accusation. Since the *gamba* healer is also a survivor of extreme experiences and knows very well the politics of denial, he or she mediates the deliberations between the *gamba* spirit and the indicted person, using as a starting point the principle that “*não há fumo sem fogo*” (there is no smoke without fire). In order to lead the people to see the fire that produced the smoke, the *gamba* spirit has to work very hard. Besides making the indictment, the role of the *gamba* spirit is to provide more unknown clues that may increase the indisputability of the accusation. When this level of evidence production is reached the inductee must assume his or her responsibilities in the case.

The formal acceptance of the accusation by the inductee is a very reconciliatory act. It is his or her acceptance that will allow the justice, i.e., the transformation processes to be initiated. Justice consists in the transformation of the *gamba*

spirit from the status of an alien and wounded spirit to that of an acknowledged spirit. It also consists of the transformation of the accused from the status of afflicted patient to the status of being free from the *gamba* spirit. This transformation allows the patient to start the recovery process, as their status changes from that of a perpetrator to that of someone who assumes his or her responsibilities by publicly acknowledging his or her weaknesses at the time of the civil war. The person ceases to live under the shadow of being a perpetrator, whose behaviour always raises motives for suspicion. He or she gains the status of a 'cleansed' person.

### **3.2. Reconciliation after everyday and mass violent conflict**

In Mozambique, the ordinary meaning of reconciliation encompasses both a process and state. The Mozambican word for reconciliation derives from the word *ku batizana* (or *patizana*), which means reconnection. Specifically it is a ceremony that married people go through after one spouse breaks the sex taboo by being involved in extra-marital sexual intercourse. The consequence of breaking this taboo is that the married couple cannot have sex, as otherwise one of them, or even their children, can become seriously ill. In order to be able to restart their sexual life as a married couple there is a need for *ku batizana*, i.e. for them both to be reconciled. The healer prepares the roots and leaves of different trees to use in the preparation of a bath for the taboo breaker. While taking a bath in private, he or she must narrate the events and make a promise to never repeat the act. The healer also prepares a meal using, among other ingredients, an egg, which culminates in the estranged couple eating together. The state of reconciliation means that the couple is cleansed or free to re-establish their sexual relations without the risk of contamination by disease.

Reconciliation after the civil war does not follow the procedure of *ku batizana*. It is *magamba* spirits that create the possibility of post-war reconciliation taking place. However, post-war reconciliation through *magamba* spirits and *ku batizana* pursue the same goals, in that the state of reconciliation consists in the reconnection of formerly estranged people. *Magamba* spirits not only address issues of truth and justice, they also deal with the reconciliation of people divided by violent conflict.

The magnitude of violence during civil war has no precedent in the history of the Gorongosa people and of the Mozambicans more generally. The violence disrupted all spheres of human existence and the official post-war settlement challenged war survivors to experience reconciliation in the most basic and fundamental way. That is, perpetrators, victims, bystanders, cowards, traitors, potential perpetrators, potential victims, victims that went on to become perpetrators, perpetrators that went on to become victims, etc., all went on to live exactly at the scene of their violent experiences. The processes of reconciliation, therefore, that can effectively address these intriguing complexities must be comprehensive. *Magamba* seems to be the answer since there are no socio-cultural processes in Gorongosa that more closely deal with a past of violence than that which is initiated by the *magamba* spirits.

The actions ignited by *magamba* spirits deals with three levels of reconciliation that form part of the *homines aperti*: Reconciliation between people; reconciliation between people and the spirits of the dead; and reconciliation between the spirits of the dead themselves.

### 3.2.1. *Reconciliation between people in the aftermath of the civil war*

*Magamba* spirits pave the way for reconciliation to take place among war survivors. The presence of these war-related spirits force war survivors to move out of their scattered quarantines of silence. They have to come together to address the divisions caused by protracted civil war. When someone is afflicted by *magamba* spirits, this is not an individual problem: the family members of the patient must also take part in the healing ceremonies. However, most of the time family members are still bitterly divided because of the events that took place during the civil war and have not yet been reunited after the end of the civil strife. These divisions impair, in the first instance, the possibility of the afflicted person receiving an intervention since no comprehensive intervention can be developed without the presence of family members. Since *magamba* spirits return to disclose war-related shameful events that took place within families, their presence is one of the key factors without which reconciliation cannot start.

In this regard, the eruption of the *magamba* spirit compels divided families to join together in order to help a relative in great affliction. Community members, particularly neighbours of the *magamba* healer in charge of the case, also participate of their own free will to help in the peaceful resolution of war-related ill-health. Bystanders also take part in the rituals by witnessing 'other' people's problems. I place 'other' in inverted commas because according to the model of *homines aperti* and the fact that almost everyone in Gorongosa has an experience of the civil war, the appearance of *magamba* spirits must indeed be everyone's concern. Perhaps it is for this reason that neighbours choose to go to the *magamba* healer's house as soon as they know that there is a patient (even one unknown to them) suffering under a *gamba* spirit. This manifested willingness to cooperate in the solution of problems affecting unknown persons afflicted by *magamba* spirits indicates the collective dimension of the *magamba* phenomenon.

### 3.2.2. *Reconciliation between people and spirits*

The world of the living cannot be separated from that of the spirits. Both form part of the same social world. As a result of the extreme abuse and mass killings of the civil war, relations between the living and the spirits of the dead were severely disrupted. The landscape and the social environment were also affected: *phfumbe rawa nhakufa*, i.e., the *dust of the dead* polluted society as a whole. This expression suggests the existence of many corpses of the war that were not properly buried; sacred zones such as cemeteries that were violated during the war with no attempts made in the post-war era to re-establish them; men and women continuing to disrespect the dead by fornicating under banana trees, either in the forests or in ad-hoc cemeteries; in general, people hardly worshipping their ancestral spirits in the privacy of their homesteads. Above all, the *dust of the dead* is an indicator of the existence of large amounts of individuals in communities with prowess in conflict and killing. For all these reasons, *magamba* spirits seriously afflict the living, forcing them to know and be continuously and publicly confronted with the images of what war does.

Since the living initially resist the necessity of assuming their individual and collective responsibilities, *magamba* spirits block the most important physiological and social process, i.e., reproduction. *Magamba* impair society from regenerating. It is in this moment that the living realise that they must

reconcile peacefully with the spirits of the dead. Therefore, war survivors get together in the house of a *gamba* healer, perform for the *gamba* spirit and the *gamba* spirit manifests itself to the public, which is ready to listen. After deliberation, the family concerned asks the *gamba* spirit for forgiveness (*ku lekerera*). They then look for the goods that the *gamba* spirit considers necessary to be given to him to repair the havoc. When this reparation has been completed, the living request the *gamba* spirit to go home in peace and to leave the afflicted person in peace. The departure of the *magamba* spirit allows in principle procreation to take its normal course.

### 3.2.3. *Reconciliation between spirits themselves*

In general *magamba* are alien spirits. The initial configuration connected *magamba* spirits to the male soldiers that died in combat in Gorongosa. With the passage of time, *magamba* spirits came to be associated with the unjustified death of any men during the civil war. Although war survivors can recognise some of the soldiers or civilians that return as *magamba* spirits, these spirits are alien because historically Gorongosa was dominated by the existence of ancestral spirits known as *madzoca* spirits. *Madzoca* spirits only possess people that have a history of healing within their lineage.

*Magamba* spirits changed the prevailing logic of the *madzoca* spirits, as *magamba* randomly possess anybody, as long as the person (or his/her family) have a history of extreme suffering, abuse and death as a result of the war. However, more than possessing people *magamba* spirits needed to be accepted: to create an institution in society. That is, the transformation of *magamba* spirits into *magamba* healers was only possible because *magamba* spirits made a reconciliatory pact with the ancestral spirits. Under these conditions, the *magamba* spirits established themselves as a valid healing institution in Gorongosa and elsewhere in central Mozambique. A pertinent example of this reconciliation can be illustrated through the fact that the *madzoca* healers initially showed some resistance regarding the emergence of the *magamba* spirits and healers. Over time, this has changed and various *madzoca* healers have incorporated into their healing practice certain aspects of the *magamba* healing institution. *Magamba* healers have done the same. With regard to the *madzoca* healers, it is interesting to observe how they have adopted some of the *magamba* healing techniques, particularly by eliciting their patients' past of war violence, instead of their common ancestral past.

## 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The practices offered by *magamba* spirits to unveil past truths and attain justice and reconciliation cannot be analysed in a similar manner to that which, for instance, Sasanka Perera (2001) uses regarding the proliferation of avenging ghosts in the wake of the terror in Sri Lanka. Perera affirms that, "The emergence of ghost stories and experiences of spirit possession have to be placed in the context of a society where both normal means of mourning and coping and the mechanisms of law and order have been radically subverted" (2001: 190). This analysis is problematic since it suggests a hierarchy of orders for resolution of extreme conflicts. That is, the proliferation of avenging ghosts in that country is the result of the failure of the secular justice system. However, it is known that the Sri Lankan people inhabit a social world that already has a long history of trafficking with spirits (Obeyesekere 1993). Within this context, it could be argued that it is not the failure of the justice system that gives rises to the

mushrooms of vengeful ghosts in Sri Lanka. Instead, these vengeful ghosts emerge as part of the extreme failure of man to recognize the humanity of other men and they also proliferate as a result of the cultural traditions already available featuring metaphysical responses in the wake of extreme violence. Under these circumstances there are no hierarchies of orders, but parallel systems of dealing with the legacies of political violence.

This is also the case with the socio-cultural milieu in which the *magamba* spirits emerged. Although the goals of *magamba* spirits intersect at certain points with the goals of secular institutions of justice, they differ greatly in scope. Secular institutions of justice are primarily concerned with establishing individual culpability and the modalities of punishment. *Magamba* spirits also identify individual culprits, but it is as much about the collective as it is about the individual. For this reason, an intervention by *magamba* spirits cannot take place if the relatives of the host are not present. They must be there in order to participate in the deliberations, and as the person singled out by wrongdoing assumes his or her responsibilities. It is the justice achieved by the spirit that allows the living to move on in their lives. In this context, the secular institutions of justice are clearly limited in the goals that they pursue. As demonstrated above, *magamba* spirits deal with all the various issues of truth, justice and reconciliation at once. Furthermore, reconciliation is comprehensive since the spirits create conditions for reconciliation between the living people, between the living and the spirits and among the spirits themselves. No state, no formal law, no court of justice (national or international), and no political process can totally achieve the goals accomplished by *magamba* spirits and healers. As Douglas Fry suggests “an anthropological perspective demonstrates that humans are capable of devising and employing a great diversity of conflict prevention and management techniques” (2006: 260). That is, retributive justice or truth commissions in periods of transition should be seen as one of many mechanisms available to deal with crimes of the past, since there are indeed other ways of thinking about truth and justice. Socio-cultural processes such as those presented by *magamba* spirits and healers and war survivors in general in Gorongosa unequivocally demonstrate the potential of human beings to utilise available mechanisms for a peaceful resolution of war-related conflicts.

Despite the accomplishments of the *magamba* spirits, one lesson that it is important to spell out is that the justice enacted by *magamba* spirits does not replace national and international formal processes of justice. The reconciliation between ancestral and *magamba* spirits reiterates the political dimension of the *magamba* spirits. These spirits were born out of an extreme armed conflict among factions that were fighting for keeping political control and legitimacy (Frelimo), accessing political recognition (Renamo), and paying a political debt and accessing trans-frontier resources (Zimbabwean army). The male soldiers from these three armies are capable of returning as a *magamba* spirits and bear witness to the mass-scale war violence that ravaged Mozambique over two decades. However, the emergence of *magamba* spirits should not be used as an excuse by political authorities to avoid assuming one of their post-war responsibilities, which is to engage in national processes of truth-seeking, justice and reconciliation.

Although the goals of *magamba* spirits are comprehensive, they deal principally with transitional processes within families and communities. Those directly responsible for war destruction and crimes are not called upon during the *magamba* sessions to be held accountable for their past actions. Moreover, the

interventions of *magamba* spirits are limited in their geographical coverage. Under these circumstances it is appropriate to consider complementing socio-cultural processes performed by *magamba* spirits (and similar processes around the globe) with national and international formal processes of transitional justice. The tendency to endorse the idea of complementarity between various types of transitional justice approaches applicable in contexts of mass-scale violence has been gaining momentum since the creation of the *gacaca* justice system in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the recent demonstration of *mato oput* (bitter root or juice) ceremonies among the Acholi people in northern Uganda. In post-genocide Rwanda the political authorities re-created *gacaca*, which is a community mechanism of conflict resolution, in order to “make it applicable to the prosecution of those accused of having committed crimes during the genocide” (Molennar 2005: 3). Although the *gacaca* system has been widely criticized for its weaknesses in conforming to due legal procedures, it demonstrates the prospect of various types of legal orders, including grassroots justice approaches, in addressing mass-scale and collective crimes in an African country. In relation to attempts to resolve the conflict in northern Uganda, the elders are said to mediate the *mato oput* ceremony in which the wrongdoer must admit responsibility, ask for forgiveness and agree to pay compensation. Both parties drink the blood of a sacrificed sheep mixed with *mato oput*, and the ceremony ends with *gomo tong* (bending spears) to represent reconciliation (Allen 2006: 132-3). *Mato oput* is another example of how local people living through extreme violent conflicts can develop their own ways of achieving resolution, peace and reconciliation. Although during *mato oput* ceremonies nobody is prosecuted, as in the case of *gacaca*, the fact that the wrongdoer is called upon to admit his or her responsibility signals the presence of ideas and practices of accountability in these systems.

### **About the Contributor**

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