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Mademonio and Angels. The spirit world according to Zion churches in Maputo and Matola, Southern Mozambique

Introduction: Zion churches in Maputo and Matola

In 2010 I worked intensively with four Zion churches, three of which were located in Bairro (neighborhood) T3¹, which belongs to Matola City, and the fourth one in the centre of the capital Maputo, at the heart of which is generally called *Xilungwine* (the place where Portuguese-speaking people live) or *Cidade de Cimento* (City of Concrete), traditionally seen as the developed area of Maputo where middle-class people live and work.

Zion churches are classified as AICs, *African Independent Churches* (Oosthuizen 1966; Anderson 2001), and represent today a transnational phenomenon circumscribed to Southern Africa regions.

Their origin goes back to Zion City, in Illinois (US), where in 1896 the preacher John Alexander Dowie founded the *Christian Apostolic Catholic Church*.

In Southern Africa, the first Zion churches appeared in the beginning of the twentieth century in South Africa, under the influence of some North-American preachers. Although their roots were North-American, in South Africa Zion churches have grown in an autonomous way, developing as a religious movement of the black population specifically linked to the economical and political context of the Apartheid policy, and to the process of industrialization. Zion churches distanced themselves from missionary

¹ I decided to work in T3 because it is a semi-rural area, situated on the borderline between Matola District and Maputo, close to the Infulene River Valley, where people of the neighborhood have their *machamba* (cultivated fields). Latter, I managed to find a church in a more urban area of Maputo, and through a friend, I found an interesting parish in the centre of Maputo, which I really did not expect to come across.

churches and distinctively constructed their identity as belonging to the black population. Jean Comaroff (1985) describes Zion churches in South Africa as a sort of counter-culture movement, a coherent answer for a huge majority of the population to a dominant cultural and economic order, able to synthesize the universe of individuals marginalized by the modern system.

In Mozambique, Zion churches were introduced during the colonial period by the Mozambican miners returning from South African and Rhodesian mines. However, as Cruz e Silva (2001) argues, its proliferation became significant especially since the decade of 1980s, with economic liberalization policies, and after the end of the civil war in 1992. In fact, with the weakening of the socialist policies, it developed a more opened political space and the weakened State started to entrust more responsibility to the civil society as NGOs, churches, and associations.

Today the spread of Zion churches in Mozambique is going through an intense phase. Many churches are not yet officially registered and it is quite difficult to get a trustworthy statistic of the real existing members. However, following data of the last census in 2007, in southern provinces - Maputo, Gaza and Inhambane – as well in the central provinces - Manica e Sofala – Zion churches adherents represent the majority of Christian population, surpassing the Catholics and members of mainline protestant churches.

According to Agadjanian (1999), there is a large variety of Zion churches in Maputo, but all of them generally answer to a fundamental common characteristic: “the Holy Spirit invocation, and the divine healing realized by its miraculous action” (p. 416). In fact the major feature of Zion churches is that they are predominantly healing churches. Much as “traditional” religion does, Zion churches relate misfortune and illness to evil spirits and to witchcraft. Peter Fry (2000) sustains that in Zion vision the Holy Spirit, through the mediation of the Zion prophet, represents a superior force, the most powerful spirit whose actions against witchcraft and sorcery seem to be decisive.

Within churches, there is a well-defined hierarchy, composed by archbishops, bishops (representative of a whole church and often the same founder of the institution), pastors, prophets, catechists, deacons. The role of the pastor(in charge of a local parish), responsible for the sermons and preaching, and the role of the prophet, dedicated to healing aspects, are complementary and interdependent, and it is very common for a pastor to possess prophetic gifts (the gift of prophecy is the concrete source of authority). If it is true that the majority of the leadership is masculine, it is also true that

it is not possible to have a leadership position in the church without being married. In this way, churches are led by couples and it is not rare that women, especially senior and already grandmothers, represent the real pivot of the congregation. In Zion churches I found that authority is cross-gender and based on seniority and healing powers.

Following Kiernan (1978), who studied the South African case, Zion churches especially heal feminine infertility, mental disorders, possession by evil spirits by purification and protective rituals with salt water (sea water mainly), ashes and salt. The use of the salt water and ashes (with emetic and purification effects), taken as “cold” elements, and totally natural, would make a clear distinction with the traditional healer, who employs “hot” remedies, which he prepares with elements of the earth, as herbs, leaves and roots.

Another important feature that distinguishes Zion churches is the use of drums (with special and recognizable rhythms), protective dances performed during the cults (circular dances, called *dilisa* in Changane language), coloured vestments, yarns, cords, and ropes (mainly red, white, green, blue, yellow and brown) which have a protective function against evil spirits. Vestments and other accessories, with specific colours, are always prophesized during cults or healing sessions by prophets or can also be indicated directly to the patient by his/her ancestors during dreams.

Zion leadership and its members are commonly represented as part of the lower class, scarcely educated and illiterate. As the Mozambican sociologist Cruz e Silva (2001) stresses, although they are a representative number of the population, Zion members remain at the margins of the Mozambican society, and Agadjanian (1999) argues that they are identified and auto identified as belonging to a “church of blacks”, different from the “white” churches such as the Catholic or the historical Protestant ones.

During my fieldwork I realized that this situation is changing and Zion churches are now facing a moment of reformulation due to different factors. I found churches in the periphery of Maputo which expressed the wish to change their practices and to get more “modern”, leaving aside drums, ropes and cords, and becoming less localized and more universal. At the same time I found a Zion church at the heart of Maputo city attended by university students, office employee and middle class people that practiced a very “traditional” way of being Zion, emphasizing very proudly their Zion identity with ropes, cords, staffs, and veils.

So, Zion churches are a very heterogenic phenomenon and what I present in the following paper is an attempt to organize data which is very spurious, implicit in the practices, and with reference to the specific contexts which I worked with.

In order to understand how Zion churches work, I propose an *excursus* among the local spiritual universe trying to synthesize how this same universe is reformulated within Zion context. In this way, it will be clear that the principles which structure relationships between individuals and which define who can be relative or not and how, are the key-points to understand how illness and healing are perceived in this context.

“Spirits of tradition”

In the provinces of Southern Mozambique (Maputo, Gaza and Inhambane) there are different categories of spirits, but all of them belong to people who had a human life. The categorization of the spirits is not linked to their intrinsic nature, but depends on the perspective by which they are considered. For example, all the spirits are ancestors of someone, but if a spirit possesses, or better, manifests himself through an individual who is not his relative, then, he can be potentially dangerous, because he is not in his proper place.

The most neutral connotation of spirit is *moya*, breath or wind. When they are considered by the interior of their kinship (patrilateral and matrilineal) spirits are called *tiNguluve* or *vaKokwane* (grandfathers) or in Portuguese, *vovôs*. Then, there is a special category of healing spirits, of foreign origin, called *svikwembu*, of Nguni e Ndaue origin, and finally different categories of avenging spirits.

Especially in Christian contexts, people call these spirits “spirits of tradition”, especially in the case of *svikwembu*, that are quite ancient (some lived during the Nineteenth Century, during the Nguni domination in southern and central Mozambique) and of other spirits that “were not used to pray” (*não rezavam*), were not Christian. Is not by chance that being Christian is designed by the expression *mukhongeli*, “one who pray”. This categorization creates a neat distinction between “tradition” and Christianity, and between “spirits of tradition” or “before Christ” and spirits that embraced Christianity and other spirits introduced by evangelization, as angels and the Holy Spirit. However, as I will show ahead, angels are most often ancestors and the Holy Spirit is not the central source of healing for several Zion prophets.

At the same time, if it is true that Christianity represents a clear cut in the perception of the spiritual world for most people in Maputo today, not only among Zion churches, it is also true that, at the practical level, there is a continuity in the manner spirits are managed and how evil is understood. Before I introduce the spiritual reformulations of the Zion churches I worked with, I will try to present some fundamental key-point about the “traditional” spiritual world in Southern Mozambique, in which the neutralization of alien spirits by mechanisms of familiarization and consanguinization are very old and widespread strategies in a region marked by continuous invasions and wars.

TiNguluve and Svikwembu

Honwana (2002) sustains that *tiNguluve* have to be understood as the direct ancestors of the populations of Southern Mozambique, the only ones known until the Nguni invasion and the subjugation of the people of Ndaue origin during the Nineteenth Century², after which the incorporation of foreign spirits, known as *svikwembu*, followed. According to Honwana, *tiNguluve* did not possess or manifest themselves by a medium or a descendent and the possession of the local healers, especially those named *nyamusoro*, as is widely known today, is a phenomenon due to this invasion and the reconfiguration of local allegiances.

As Honwana points out, there are two main kinds of *svikwembu*: *svikwembu swa mulhiwa*, or *xipoco* and *svikwembu swa matlhari* (spirits of war). These are avenging spirits which could have been betrayed or killed by witchcraft or which could have been killed during a battle and were not buried and that came back through the body of an individual (almost always a young woman) that they possess in order to get revenge or compensation. This power to come back (called *mpfhukwa*, from the verb *kupfhukwa*,

² In the 19th Century there was a reorganization of powers, probably associated with the rise of the leader Chaka Zulu, which forced some people to relocate outside their homelands among populations of the current South Africa, in the region of Natal. Thus, some Nguni groups spread towards North, founding military type kingdoms and subjugating indigenous peoples in many areas of southern Africa, as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique (Marlin 2001). In the latter, the most famous and enduring kingdom was the one of Gaza established by Shoshangane which extended from Inkomati River to the Zambezi River (now Zambezia Province), defeated only by the Portuguese in the late Nineteenth Century. During their rule, the Nguni also subjugated the peoples of the center of the country speaking Shona-Karanga, that became known by the designation of vaNdaue. Numerous young Ndaue were forced to spread as soldiers throughout the empire, earning the reputation of brave warriors (associated with a spiritual power still recognized today), while women were forced to marry Nguni leaders to strengthen the rule in the region. However, it had the opposite effect, because the Ndaue strengthened their identity, unlike the other populations of southern Mozambique (as Changane, Ronga and Tswa) that absorbed the Nguni culture and profoundly reordered the local culture (Marlin 2001).

meaning “to resuscitate”) is particularly associated to the Ndaue people, seen as endowed with a special mystical power.

The term *mulhiwa* often indicates the spirit of a person killed by witchcraft, that “was eaten” (from the verb *kudhla*, to eat) and whose spirit is now at the service of a sorcerer. The *svikwembu sva mathlari* are often spirits of dead warriors (not properly buried and / or died without offspring) during the Nguni domination that had the ability to *kupfhukwa*, to come back. Thus, the unsatisfied spirits returned to local families demanding compensation. The solution was to offer him a hut (*ndhomba* or *thepele*) in the yard and a woman who cared for him and became his wife (*nsati wa svikwembu*). Thus the *svikwembu*, from dangerous spirits became family (in-laws and husbands) and conferred powers of healing to their wives. In fact: "A *xikwembu* enjoys this privilege of "son in law" to the point that it is also designated by the term *nyamukwaxani* (= small son in law)" (Langa 1992:118).

To sum up, I can say that the spirits are called *svikwembu* when they have the ability to possess an individual or, following the local expression, "going out", "show themselves" through the body of a living person.

However, nowadays *svikwembu* - of Nguni and Ndaue ancient origin - can be defined as healing spirits because when they possess an individual, usually they claim the right to "work" and lead to the profession of traditional healer. The possession by these spirits, therefore, confers powers of mediumship that are almost always inherited. According to Granjo such spirits can be inherited "through direct patrilineal or matrilineal line or collateral one and different combinations of these four principles" (2009: 130).

Although they are healing spirits who "want to work", the connotation of *svikwembu* is always quite contradictory, since their power, if not properly channelled (and spirits cannot work), can become a negative force within a family. In fact, *svikwembu* are hostile elements until their guest will accept their call as a healer, because originally they are always foreigners, and their presence requires a ritual always renewed.

Evil spirits and the notion of evil in Southern Mozambique

In addition to *tiNguluve* and *svikwembu* there are several categories of spirits which can be considered evil, or at least potentially dangerous to the living. In this perspective, the concept of evil is not absolute and is not dichotomously opposed to the notion of good, as in the Judeo Christian vision. Rather, evil has a relational character and for this

reason the definition of "evil spirit" depends primarily on the position that this assumes in a particular time and in relation to a particular person, in this case a victim. Not surprisingly, the term "evil spirit" does not have an exact match in local languages, and people use the Portuguese term demon, especially in Christian contexts, to subsume the various categories of dangerous spirits. As I will show later on, this linguistic simplification does not always correspond to a reduction of the specific classification of spirits.

Thus, the spirits are evil when they attack or possess a person who does not belong to their family group. In this way, evil is first of all a disrespect of categories and the spirits who are in the proper place (along with their descendants) have no negative connotations, although they can show their disapproval withdrawing their protection to their descendants (Ngubane 1977).

Unlike the case of possession by *svikwembu* of Nguni and Ndaue origin, possession by certain alien spirits has not the connotation of a "cult of affliction" (Turner 1968), because these spirits do not usually confer powers of divination and healing to their victims and in some cases it is possible their complete expulsion. However, the expulsion of such spirits can be very time consuming and not always possible. Some cases lead to a long negotiation that ultimately creates a kind of coexistence between spirit and his guest, and the latter can acquire some powers of divination and healing.

The most dangerous spirits are the ones which are in a liminal status because they did not receive a proper burial, or the necessary sacrifice in order to be integrated within their family (as in the case of spirits of warriors, soldiers, murdered people, immigrants, emigrants, etc.) and often have died without descendants.

There are also spirits (not necessarily foreign) that are manipulated and used by sorcerers (*muloyi* / pl. *valoyi*) as his servants who are generically called *xigono* or *xipoco*. In order to get free of the affliction they cause, sometimes it is enough to satisfy their request. However, each case is different and, as I said, not all treatments are successful and it is more common to learn how to deal with such spirits. For this reason, the therapeutic itineraries are the most varied and people experience different options in order to find a definitive solution to their problems.

The more severe problems of spiritual suffering which I observed were linked to situations in which a person inherited evil spirit/s, often without his/her knowledge and frequently, but not exclusively, through his/her patrilineal ascendance³.

In most cases observed, the presence of such spirits is not result of a recent act of witchcraft perpetrated while the victim had already been born, but it was originated before his/her birth by the generation of their grandparents.

The principle at the core of the presence of such spirits is more or less the same phenomenon that gives rise to *mpfuhkwa*, in which a spirit possesses a victim indefinitely from generation to generation within the family that caused his death or that is indebted to him, demanding revenge and compensation. This vision responds to a local logic that "the person, whatever his generation, age and condition, is likely to account for errors and crimes of their ancestors, relatives or clan" (Polanah 1987: 30). However there are significant differences between these cases and the cases involving the notion of *mpfuhkwa*. The origin of recent evil spirits is not a war, nor the actions of a *muloyi* (sorcerer), but is caused by an act of witchcraft committed by close relatives of the victim, as grandparents and parents. These are rather problematic cases to be solved, because the stronger the proximity, the more increase the risk and vulnerability.

In this sense the cases of "spiritual husband" is very emblematic⁴. Nowadays affliction by spiritual husband (*marido espiritual*, in Portuguese) is one of the most widespread phenomenon among families in Maputo and one of the most representative cases in Zion healing processes I observed.

Some people defined the spiritual husband with the name *mulhiwa*. As I mentioned, Honwana (2002) describes *mulhiwa* as a spirit manipulated by witches. In fact, according to some of my interlocutors, the spiritual husband may have been a spirit of a person killed or abused by a family group or by an individual, through the intervention and mediation of a witch doctor (whose role is ambiguous and always close to the sorcerer). However, more recently, the presence of a spiritual husband is most frequently related to spirits bought in the "house of a healer" (*casa de um curandeiro*) in

³ Spirits can be inherited by paternal uncles or aunts or grandparents, but nowadays it is no longer rare that the principle of inheritance of spirits is also matrilineal.

⁴ The phenomenon is very relevant and Linda Van de Kamp (2011) evidenced it as one of the most spiritual afflictions present in the treatments offered by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD) in Maputo. I believe that the IURD, through its constant media presence, emphasize the problem of spiritual husband among women and somehow this "policy" encompasses other realities as Zioni churches, for example. I had no way to investigate in depth the interactions between IURD and Zion churches, but surely the former has an undeniable influence today, because its presence in urban space, physically and through media, is becoming predominant.

order to create protection and luck to the petitioner and his family, through the act of *kukhendhla*, which can be translated as a "request for luck". What seems to originate this ceremony, always ambiguous, is the ambition to enrich easily, an ambition that the descendants eventually pay as a kind of atonement.

According to the explanation of most of the people whom I spoke with, in exchange of his services this kind of spirit must receive the continuous care by the same family that acquired him by offering a traditional hut (*ndhomba*) in the backyard, along with a young woman who becomes his wife (*nsati wa mulhiwa*).

When the family respects this pact and dedicates to the spirit a woman chosen among its members, an alliance is sealed and the spirit can become a *mukonwana*, a brother or son in law, and thus becomes a protective entity of the house. This is the same principle that integrated the Ndaue and Nguni spirits to local families of Southern Mozambique. Obviously, changing the historical context also changes the type of spirits.

In some cases the wife of the spirit can marry, but it is appropriate for the family of the groom to offer *lobolo* (dowry) to the spirit, instead of offering it to the family of the bride, and they have to accept that the offspring produced by the couple belongs to the spirit too. In return, the *mukonwana* will ensure his protection for the entire family.

According to the majority of cases I collected today is much more likely that the presence of a spiritual husband is discovered only after a marriage, and throughout the marriage, because an unhappy spirit undermines the stability and fertility of the couple. If families begin to neglect such a spirit and do not follow his orders, *mukonwana* becomes a *xindotana* (like a despot, with pejorative connotation), and he ceases to be a protective element and begins to rebel against family members, in particular against the woman who was dedicated to him. So he tries to ruin the existence of his wife, making her sterile, attacking her economic and emotional stability. He can attack physically at night, attacking the intimacy of his victim⁵.

Alien spirits and the transformation of enemies into kin

For the Chope population (southern Mozambique, Inhambane Province), Webster says: "one of the most obvious ways to incorporate a stranger in a given social

⁵ For this reason, many men suspect the presence of a spiritual husband when their wives begin to refuse to have sexual intercourse with them.

environment is to allow him to marry a daughter [...] The position of son in law perhaps the lowest of all within the kinship" (2009 [1976]: 300).

The work of Passador (2011) in the district of Homoine (Inhambane Province, Southern Mozambique) relates this strategy of familiarization of enemies to the long history of foreign invasion and domination that characterizes southern Mozambique.

In order to present his argument, the author takes the study of Alcinda Honwana (2002) as a starting point. According to Mozambican anthropologist, pre-colonial wars of the 19th Century (the Nguni invasion and the consequent dispersion of soldiers Ndaus) are a key factor in the structuring of beliefs and "traditional" medicines in southern Mozambique. In fact, the responses of the indigenous population that the conflict generated developed in particular through the pacification of enemies and, in parallel, of alien spirits that started to possess the living. Using data collected in Homoine, Passador re-proposes Honwana's thesis, highlighting with more emphasis the central role of conflict in structuring the relationship between the living and between the living and the dead.

According to the approach suggested by the author, the logical principle of war, the conflict with a foreign enemy and the need to pacify him, are at the core of the local cosmology. The pacification becomes possible only through the submission of the enemy / foreign to hierarchical structures that have some familiarity and can therefore be handled. This is how matrimonial alliances become key strategies in order to remove the predatory potential of the Other and integrated him as an ally and kinsman. Thus: "it is not kinship by descent that organizes the primordial forms of sociality, but predation and war that open space to operate around kinship and form alliances, producing socialites" (Passador 2011: 119).

It is within this logic that illness is perceived. In fact this is always understood as an attack committed by a foreign entity: "traditional medicine is primarily a medical system, a "traditional" legal system [...] Therefore, an analogy between the so-called traditional medicine and biomedicine is an impoverishment and a poor understanding of the dimensions that make up this system and define" (Passador 2011: 54).

Therefore, according to a local logic, when there is an attack by an alien spirit, the best way to neutralize him is not so much his expulsion from the body of the victim, as its integration as a kinsman in order to become an ally. However, as highlighted by Passador, this alliance is somewhat tenuous, because it is based on a compromise which

can be broken anytime. This creates a climate of vulnerability against which people invest constant efforts.

It is in this context that the Zionist churches act. How it will be clearer forward, their vision is not very far from the logic of familiarization of enemies, although they add to this strategy the integration of the "spirits of tradition" to the Christian world, and this seems to allow a further and more powerful neutralization of the spirits that "cleanse" them of a burden which is always potentially dangerous. However, this does not mean that the Zion churches represent a definitive solution to the aggression of alien spirits. Rather some Zion leaders contribute to foster a sense of spiritual disorder in which the phenomenon of "spiritual husband" seems to represent a real social epidemic.

The Zion reformulation: the conversion of the "spirits of tradition"

Within the small Zion churches I observed in Maputo I found reformulations of the local spiritual universe that somehow seemed to be fairly shared by the population at large, as Zion churches are a form of popular religion where Christianity and "tradition" interplay daily in a common space.

In other words, my argument is that the Zionist leaders do not arise in society only as agents, creators of new meanings, but also as vehicles of common understandings and local knowledge that have developed over years, decades, within the interaction of multiple practices and experiences. Today, those that can be defined as Zion cosmological reformulations are representative of a broader common sense that goes beyond the Zion borders. Within this common sense, the ancestors have an increasingly ambiguous connotation because they are related to the "African tradition", while Christianity is placed in a position of undisputed superiority. In this context Christianity assumes a function of a symbolic and cultural mediator which is essential. It provides the terms for a universal and shared language in a reality which is strongly plural.

In this view, all "spirits of tradition" continue to interact with the living world, threatening it, protecting it, and conferring powers to it, but now in a position of subordination to the unique God and to the authority of the Christian Bible. So, evil is not just related to Otherness and its possible attacks, but also when there is not submission to the God of the Bible.

The term most named during Zion healing sessions and church services was *mademonio*, an appropriation in the local language of the term demon, generally used to

indicate the concept of "evil spirits". Throughout the fieldwork, the term *mademonio* represented one of the most challenging aspects to my research, because behind this apparent simplistic expression actually underlays a much more complex perception of the universe of spirits and their relationship with the living.

Angels or *tiNtsumi*

Ancestors or *tiNguluve* do not have full status of *mademonio*. Kin related spirits are part of a living individual as something ontologically connected. An ancestor cannot be divided completely from his/her own family, especially when he/she has a *xará*, a namesake. Sharing the same name with a relative or a person close to the family is something of great importance, because the name has a concrete effect on the person's existence and can define his/her personality and identity.

In Zion churches, ancestors may be denominated *tiNtsumi* (sing. *Ntsumi*) or *anjos*, angels. The name *tiNtsumi* literally means "messengers" (such as the original meaning of the term *angelos* - ἄγγελος - the Greek translation of the biblical text), for the reason that in Zion context angels always channel messages through dreams, visions or simple voice-guide. Thus, angel can be an ancestor who gives the gift of prophecy or some other kind of gift within the church and therefore shapes the person who accompanies and protects, as an indivisible entity that can be "accumulated".

Among Zion, people often speak about angels as being a constant presence in their lives that helps and guides. "My angel likes Zion church", was for example the explanation that some people gave me when asked about the causes that led them to choose a Zionist church.

In fact, in order for the treatments provided by a particular church to have some effect, the angels of a person should be the first to feel comfortable because without their acceptance any kind of healing will result.

Obviously, ancestors are "full" angels only when they protect and guide their descendants under the blessing of the Christian God. Thus, if there are still heathen, if they did not accept Christianity when they were alive (and in this way their protection results too much ambiguous and tenuous, because still connected to "tradition") it is necessary their conversion to Christianity. According to this logic, the conversion of the ancestors to Christianity is a solution that is safe enough to reset the balance and transform ancestors in definitive positive entities.

So, treatments with sea water do not always have the purpose of expelling the spirits from the patient, but to purify and activate the conversion process. This conversion process is not always peaceful and obvious. In some cases, the ancestors can be very recalcitrant to the idea of accepting Christianity, and when this happens, other operations involving other types of spirits (not kin related) that afflict their descendants are clearly more difficult to solve.

As within "tradition", also among Zion churches ancestors are key mediators during healing processes and when they are already christianized are precious allies in treating afflictions related to possession by spirits. For this reason, some healing sessions, which represent only a tiny part of a long process of negotiation with and purification from spirits, seek to unite and reconcile all the ancestors of the patient in order to make their protection more effective.

In contemporary Maputo, the ancestors seem to be quite ambivalent entities. If on the one hand the *tiNguluve* are the entities that define their descendants, at the same time they may represent the origin of its worst afflictions (as in cases of *kukhendhla*), causing a "poverty" which seems hard to escape. This situation generates continuous ambiguity in a context where a climate of distrust and suspicion seems to prevail.

Svikwembu: angels, or mademonio?

For some pastors I worked with *svikwembu* (in the sense of healing spirits), as the ancestors, have double connotations. In this sense, when *svikwembu* are working for a traditional healer, are classified as *mademonio*. But these same *svikwembu* can be converted and can "work" in collaboration with ancestors (angels) within Zion. It is no coincidence that Zionist churches convert potential healers to prophets.

For other pastors, however, negotiating with these spirits is not possible and these have to be replaced by some angels or (more rarely) by the presence of the Holy Spirit. In the vernacular translation of the Bible, and only in the Old Testament, the term *svikwembu* (always in the plural form) is used to translate the word demons (e.g. Psalm 106: 37; Deuteronomy 32:17) and therefore this explains in part why *svikwembu* are so ambiguous for some Zion leaders. It is curious because in the Changane New

Testament⁶ demons are translated by the word *madamona* (e.g. Matthew 7:22, Matthew 8: 31), while the term *svikwembu* disappears. Partly due to this reason, in my view, the *svikwembu* are eventually perceived as the true "spirits of tradition", because related to the Old Testament only.

Despite this apparent demonization, many Zionist prophets have a connection with the powers of *svikwembu*, although this is not always perceived discursively. I say this because when a person is called to work for *svikwembu* (when he/she is chosen by them for inheritance), they become part of this person, especially when they are allowed to perform their healing powers. Thus, *svikwembu*, as well as grandparents, are entities from which it is hard to get free, because they are part of a living person, and constitute his/her essence. Thus, *svikwembu* may be considered angels when they accept to work under the authority of God. For *svikwembu* to convert the spirits, it is necessary to take all the objects and clothing featuring the work of professional healers (where part of the power of the spirits is located), and burn them or hide them in a hole in the beach.

Often traditional objects that are destroyed and burned are successively "converted" into objects and clothing accepted by Zion. Thus, the spirits at the service of God continue to work with a series of symbols and resources very close to "tradition", but are neutralized and "absorbed" into the Zion "tradition".

Contrary to a literature on the AICs (Anderson 2001; Devisch 1996, Kiernan 1992; Oosthuizen 1988 and in particular for the Mozambican case Agadjanian 1999 and Fry 2000) that emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit, among Zion churches in Maputo and Matola I seldom heard references to the power of *Moya wa Kwetsima* (literally "pure spirit") amongst the pastors and prophets I met.

The pastors always remained vague when I asked them to define the spirits which gave them powers. The spirits were called "angels" or more often "my spirit" without any detail adjunct.

Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are quite absent entities in the Zion discourse and practices and the concept of sin in terms of personal guilt is something that does not make much sense in a context where, on the contrary, prevails a strong persecutory logic. In most cases that I have gathered, evil always has an external origin, is always an assault by someone or something that violates basic rules of coexistence and respect. In this sense, the Zion churches offer a manipulation of the spiritual world under the

⁶ Reference: *Bibele, Mahungu Lamanene*, 1989 published in South Africa by the Bible Society of South Africa

authority of God and the Bible, perceived as superior. However, the logics that structure traditional healing remain.

Contrary to what is usually thought, most of the time, during Zion prophecies, the culprits are indicated (causing turmoil in already highly dysfunctional families), and the patients are always designated as a victim.

Therefore, following the speeches and some biographies, the career of the prophet seems to be open to a wide range of possibilities. There are actually a multitude of ways and means by which an individual can have access to the gift of prophecy. In the same congregation, the stories of the prophets are the most diverse: some work with "spirit of tradition" converted to the service of God, there are those who have already their angels that convey powerful messages and visions, some had received training in a missionary church or Zion church and is in contact (but like I said this is a rare case) with the Holy Spirit. No itinerary is forbidden, since the healing is done in the name of God and by the material presence of the Bible.

The heterogeneity of small Zion churches and the absence of an official dogma provide a large elasticity of visions and careers. I think this is a prerogative of the general Mozambican context not limited to the Zion universe. During my fieldwork, I rarely encountered situations of intransigence in front of multiples stories and backgrounds of the people who asked for help within Zion churches or requested to be integrated into the community.

Conclusions

For many Zion leaders the real *mademonio*, truly dangerous for the living, and that can be exorcised, are spirits that possess an individual (in most cases female) that is not part of their own kin. Thus, Zion leaders often follow the local logic on equivalence between evil and Otherness. Spirits that can be exorcised are, in fact, *xipoco/xigono* and *mulhiwa/xindotana*. These often belong to the category of *mademonio* because they are spirits outside their own families, own names, and they have to return to their origin.

However, if it is true that ancestors can be angels, it is also true that often for not being "believers" and have practiced "things of tradition", they accumulated a spiritual burden that nowadays affects their descendants. Thus, for many people, Christianity is a force by which it is possible to purify themselves from a past perceived as mystically polluted. In almost all the narratives of my interlocutors were no longer only the Other,

the unfamiliar attacking and assaulting the bodies and the existence of the living, but also their own direct ancestors, who, to enrich quickly and easily, compromised the success and well-being of their children and grandchildren.

Paradoxically, this vision of the "traditional" world filtered by Christianity has not always a comforting and peaceful effect, does not necessarily represent a way to "feel at home" (with reference to the text of 1966 Welbourn and Ogot) and it seems to trigger many situations of tension and suffering. There is always a racial connotation in relation to this perception. "Being African", in the words of many of my interlocutors, seemed almost to be a curse from which to redeem oneself. It seems that an African carries a number of spirits and a load of pollution that prevents him/her from succeeding in life. In fact, one of the most frequent speeches was that "evil spirits create poverty" and their capillary presence explains the state in which many African countries are.

In short, the discourses and practices of Zion churches are strongly illustrative of an African identity culturally and historically divided. So, what Zion churches offer their patients and members is not a peaceful and creative "bricolage", in the words of Comaroff (1985), able to comfort and save them from the traps of modernity, but it is more a set of practices that contribute to foster ambiguity and get the spirits (and especially, the living) tormented.

There is something important to stress. Even in the Zion context, it is possible a negotiation with some types of *mademonio*, especially when their presence and their requests seem to have some legitimacy, and it is contemplated that these spirits can be "modified" and "transformed" into ally entities which confer healing power. For example, some young women affected by spiritual husband could begin to reveal a particular predisposition to prophecy. Thus, when properly treated and converted to Christianity, the spiritual husband can be converted into a spirit of prophecy. This is not by chance, because most of the time the spiritual husband is a spirit "bought in the house of a healer", and may have healing powers. In this way, his anger can be neutralized allowing him to "work". This shows that women, through their bodies and their histories, are the means by which a negative action, antisocial (usually male) as the *kukhendlhla* for example, can be positively redirected, generating new forms of healing and survival for those who originally were the victims.

Of course it is not always possible a peaceful coexistence with alien spirits and they cannot always offer healing powers. However, the expulsion of a spirit, even in Zion context, is a process that can take years and there is not always a possibility of success.

However, attending the services of a church and following continuous therapies can help to weaken and calm the spirit. In fact most of the possessed people end up creating a sort of tacit coexistence with their spirits, trying to minimize his manifestations and his arms.

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