

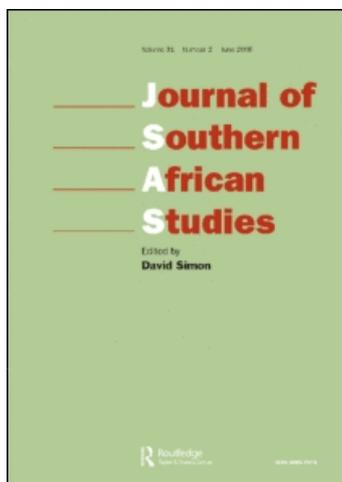
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The War of Lions: Witch-Hunts, Occult Idioms and Post-Socialism in Northern Mozambique*

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*The War of Lions: Witch-Hunts, Occult Idioms and Post-Socialism in Northern Mozambique**

PAOLO ISRAEL

(University of the Western Cape)

The year is 2002, the place Muidumbe, northerly cradle of the Mozambican Liberation Struggle. Lions devouring people, and people lynching sorcerers suspected of magically fabricating lions, unleash a crisis that soon assumes a political dimension. Widespread rumours accuse the local post-socialist elite of manipulating a group of lion-men and engaging in organ trafficking with an international alliance of vampires. Disempowered youth lynchers stage a paradoxical uprising. This article details the unfolding of this crisis over a year, and discusses its broader implications. Are contemporary sorcery crises a deflected effect of 'millennial capitalism'? To what extent can occult rumours be interpreted as idioms that express political agency in metaphors? What is the role of the media and of cultural brokers in propagating rumours and crystallising collective anxieties in recognisable forms? How is one to understand the rationality, if any, of witch-hunts? Focusing on the forms and the effects of violence, a symptomatic reading of witch-hunts reveals their linkages with Frelimo's project of 'total politicisation'. Finally, the article discusses a contradiction inherent in sorcery scholarship, hovering between repeating the Enlightenment's baptismal naming of witchcraft as superstition and producing populist representations of subaltern consciousness dismissive of dramatic experiences of violence.

Between July 2002 and May 2003 in Muidumbe, a rural district of Northern Mozambique, 50 people were estimated to have been slain by lions and half-a-dozen more were thought to have been wounded – unprecedented figures by all reckoning. In Muidumbe, this spate of lion attacks was widely read through the lens of the occult: lions were thought of as being 'fabricated' through sorcery, and rumours ran rampant about a secret society of lion-men involved in transnational trafficking of body parts for 'traditional medicine'.¹ During this period, 24 people were lynched and more threatened or ostracised on suspicion of being connected to the fabrication of lions. The apogee of this crisis – or, as many would call it, the 'War of Lions' (*ing'ondo yavantumi*) – was an uprising against the local government, suspected of fostering the activities of the lion fabricators. In Muidumbe, cradle of the

*Fieldwork for this article was conducted in Muidumbe as a side project of my PhD between January 2002 and September 2004. The argument draws on 61 recorded interviews, personal participation and informal conversations. Part of the fieldwork (September 2002, 26 interviews) was a collaborative project with Estevão Jaime Mpalume of the Provincial Direction of Culture of Pemba, Cabo Delgado. Further research and writing were made possible by a postdoctoral fellowship granted by the Programme for the Study of the Humanities in Africa (PSHA) at the Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape. All quotes and reconstructions of events are based on recorded interviews. The interviewees consented that their stories be made publicly accessible. I have revealed some of their names, while I have concealed others.

¹ I use 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery' as synonymous. The analytical distinction put forth by Evans-Pritchard is not relevant either for local idioms of sorcery (*uwavi*) or for the new globalised occult idioms. Also, rumour and gossip should be considered as inseparable from sorcery beliefs, see P.J. Stewart and A. Strathern, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumour and Gossip* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially pp. x and 27.

Mozambican Struggle of National Liberation and Frelimo stronghold, this act of inchoate political rebellion also appeared to be an unprecedented event.²

The War of Lions can be taken as an exemplary case of the new occult-related crises that punctuate the absorption of postcolonies into neo-liberal global networks, as poignantly described by Jean and John Comaroff.³ Indeed, it contains the two key ingredients that characterise these ‘millennial’ crises: disempowered male youth taking the lead in deadly witch-hunts, and the emergence of new local occult idioms formulated around global imaginaries of bodily predation and consumption. However, as the War of Lions accommodates itself almost too eagerly to the ‘millennial occult’ paradigm, its most peculiar, individuating and disturbing features are left unaccounted for, the spell too quickly dissolved and its magic reabsorbed into the diagnostic of a crisis of global dimensions.

In this article, I interrogate the War of Lions by focusing on the political interpretation of witch-hunting violence.⁴ I will argue that, if a metaphoric analysis of rumours and occult idioms might produce a colourful vernacular critique of Mozambique’s turn to neo-liberalism, a ‘symptomatic reading’ of the witch-hunts connects them more specifically to the unfulfilled promises and the ideological legacies of Frelimo’s project of total politicisation in Muidumbe: to the ‘post-socialist condition’ articulated there in its peculiarly and irreducibly local form.⁵ Unfolding around this pulsating core, the crisis sparked, and was fuelled by, a number of idiosyncratic events and interpersonal conflicts, which resist absorption into any general explanation.

‘He was Roaring like a Person’

Saide – My brother brought the bottles of liquor inside. I was sitting on a stool, and before he came back, the lion took me away. He [ele] took me and then he carried me up to a papaya tree. I started to cry there. I cried in Makua.

Israel – How did you cry?

Saide – [giggles]

Israel – We’ve heard these words a lot around here . . .

Mpalume – Tell us how you were crying, how you were moaning. You were screaming, that’s screaming, not crying.

Saide – ‘*Kihokwa mama! Mi kihokwa! Kihokwa!*’

Israel – ‘I die, mother.’

2 Frelimo (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*) is the front that led the Struggle for National Liberation in Mozambique (1964–1974) and subsequently became the socialist State party under the leadership of Samora Machel. In Muidumbe, over 90 per cent of the votes went to Frelimo in the last three general elections (1994, 1999 and 2004). See P. Israel, “‘Kummwangalela Guebuza’”. The Mozambican General Elections of 2004 in Muidumbe and the Roots of the Loyalty of Makonde People to FRELIMO’, *Lusotopie*, 13, 2, pp. 103–25.

3 ‘A planetary phenomenon [that] takes on strikingly particular local form’ [. . .] ‘at once profoundly parochial and so obviously translocal’, J. & J. Comaroff, ‘Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony’, *American Ethnologist*, 26, 2 (May 1999), pp. 282, 291. See also A. Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa* (Chicago IL, Chicago University Press, 2005), pp. 88–90.

4 I have also written on this crisis, focusing on its connection with genres of masquerading, in ‘Déchirures et Rumeurs. La chasse au sorcier et l’héritage idéologique de la révolution socialiste au Mozambique (Muidumbe, 2002–2003)’, *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines*, Special Issue *Territoires Sorciers*, C. Henry and E.K. Tall (eds), XLVIII, 189–90 (April 2008), pp. 209–36.

5 N. Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the ‘Postsocialist’ Condition* (New York & London, Routledge, 1997), and A.M. Pitcher and K. Askew, ‘African Socialism and Postsocialism’, *Africa*, 76, 1 (2006), pp. 1–14.

Saide – *Mmm* [affirmative mumbling]. Then my *mano* [brother, friend] came, the lion let go of me, and he started screaming. He screamed a bit and then he left.

Israel – He ‘screamed’ like: ‘wahr wahr?’

Mpalume – Was he roaring?

Saide – Yes.

Israel – Was he roaring like a lion, or ... well ...

Saide – Like a man. Like a person. He was roaring like a person.⁶

On the night of 8 July 2002, a lion attacked four people in *Ing’unde*, a lowland area around a seasonal river where the inhabitants of the nearby village of Mwambula – the largest village and the seat of Muidumbe district – reside for a few days or weeks when occupied by agriculture or the fabrication of moonshine alcohol. Three times the lion attacked and mauled, was disturbed, left its victim unconsumed, moved downstream and prepared to attack again. The fourth time, it managed to drag the body of the victim it had chased deep into the bush, and there devoured it. Two of the three people mauled died. One survived to tell a different story.

The lion, recounted Hilário Saide to the local media from his hospital bed, was in fact a person disguised in skins who repeatedly stabbed him with a knife. Saide also identified his assailant as the younger brother of the friend with whom he had been brewing moonshine at the time. The lion-man let go of him as soon as he realised his identity, and thus Saide deduced that his friend, and not himself, was the intended victim of the assault. While Saide passed the night in agony, his friend and a group of people followed the lion’s tracks to discover that further down the path they abruptly turned into sandal-prints.

Saide was an outsider in Muidumbe, a Makua from a faraway district. His friend, a local, took the matter into his own hands. He brought his younger brother, whom the villagers of Mwambula would describe as a no-good youngster, to respond to a family council. The youngster protested his innocence and the council advised him, for the time being, to behave. A few days later he was lynched by a crowd of youths, on the path leading to Namande, a few hundred metres away from the private house of the district’s administrator. Two weeks later, a man called Kumpuni returned from Ing’unde severely wounded. He told a story similar to that of Saide: as he was distilling moonshine, a cousin of his had dressed up as a lion and stabbed him. His assailant wore a lion mask made like the elaborate *mapiko* that the Makonde are masters of. A few days later, Kumpuni’s cousin was lynched on Namande’s path, his body disembowelled and left without burial.

Millennial Lions

Mashilikali, tuke

Tuke tukavake vantumi

Avana’ vantumi, vitannola

People of the government, let’s go

Let’s hunt down lions

These are not lions, these are vampires⁷

On the Makonde plateau, lions and leopards have preyed on humans since colonial times, when ‘one could not walk alone from the Mission [of Nangololo] to the house of the Vanang’alolo [a distance of 1 km] at dusk, for fear of being attacked’.⁸ After socialist villagisation in 1976, the clearing of large areas of bush and the extension of agricultural plots, most of the wild animals,

6 Interview with Hilário José Saide, Mwambula (Muidumbe), 1 September 2002.

7 Song, Nandindi *mapiko* group, Mwambula (Muidumbe), first heard, 23 July 2003.

8 Interview with Pedro Justino Seguro, 2 September 2002. This piece of information has been confirmed in conversations with hunters and elders alike. See also H.G. West, *Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique* (Chicago & London, Chicago University Press, 2005), pp. xiii–xviii.

both predators and their prey, moved to the wild and sparsely inhabited lowlands around the southerly Messalo River. At the beginning of the second millennium, lions reappeared on the plateau, for reasons that had indeed to do with democratisation and neo-liberal reform. With the peace accord in 1992, the zones of the Messalo lowlands previously threatened by incursions from Renamo were accessible to hunting expeditions. In 1999, a new road was cut into the deep Messalo forest by a timber company. As a consequence, new settlements were built and old ones expanded in ways that altered the ecology of the area and prompted the lions to move. Lions that, as a hunter explained, 'are not afraid anymore of men, because they have not heard the sound of a gun in years'.⁹ Between 1999 and 2002, five people were devoured by lions in Muidumbe. During the first four months of 2002, three lions were killed in the district, with bow and arrow, single-handedly or in organised hunts. By July, it was clear that lions were roaming the district, moving in packs and crossing the plateau from one area of lowland to the other, and that some of them had acquired a taste for human meat.

In the months following Saide's case, as lions continued to attack and suspected 'fabricators' continued to be lynched by groups of youths, rumours coalesced into a widespread version, which went more or less like this:

An organised group – the group of the lions (*shipinga shavantumi*) as it was called – is responsible for all the murders. Its members disguise themselves in lion skins and wear paw-shoes sculpted in *ntene* [the soft wood that *mapiko* masks are made of]. They train and hide all their material in a secret camp located in the vicinity of Mount Ing'ombe, a hill overlooking the valley of Ing'unde. An upside down Frelimo flag can sometimes be seen there. The victims of the lions are missing eyes, genitals and internal organs, sometimes even their shirts! That is because the group sells organs for traditional medicine in Tanzania. The administrator of the district is the mastermind of the lion-men, and he has sold the district to whites for three sacks of money. Every night, the administrator flies to Ing'ombe with his helicopter, one of the invisible kind, powered by human blood,¹⁰ to supervise the activities of his group.¹¹

It is already possible to make some analytical sense of these rumours, if one performs the conceptual operation underwriting most of the scholarship on the African occult that emerged in the last two decades, where the occult is a privileged terrain in which to explore crises of capitalist modernity and their counter-hegemonic discourses and moral economies produced by a vernacular standpoint.¹² (1) Abstract from the inherent truth-value of occult rumours and witchcraft talk, considering them as discursive genres marked by a moral intention and a metaphorical texture.¹³ (2) Connect the rumours to some 'hard' politico-economical reality constructed with objectifying methods of social and historical analysis.¹⁴ (3) Presuppose

9 Interview with Enrique Tomé Mangoni, hunter, Mwambula (Muidumbe), 2 September 2002.

10 About magical helicopters in Mueda, see West, *Kupilikula*, pp. 40–1, 256–7. Military and modernist imagery is common in sorcery idioms in Makonde country.

11 This is a collage of rumours that I frequently heard during my fieldwork in Muidumbe and beyond; and that can sometimes still be heard today (2008 as I write).

12 For its inaugural statement see J. & J. Comaroff, 'Introduction', in J. & J. Comaroff (eds), *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1993), pp. xxv–xxix. H. Moore and T. Sanders, 'Introduction' to *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (London, Routledge, 2001), pp. 1–27, offers a first review of Africanist scholarship inspired by this new approach. For a recent and critical take see T. Ranger, 'Scotland Yard in the Bush: Medicine Murders, Child Witches and the Construction of the Occult: A Literature Review', *Africa*, 77, 2 (2007), pp. 272–83. Witches were cast as 'malcontents of modernity' already in French Marxist anthropology of the 1970s, see J.F. Bayart, *L'Etat en Afrique: La politique du ventre* (Paris, Fayart, [1989] 2006, second edn), p. 43–4, p. 335, n. 43.

13 See L. White, *Speaking with Vampires, Rumour and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2001), pp. 30–40; Moore and Sanders, 'Magical Interpretations', pp. 14–19.

14 As White puts it, 'two kinds of history – one in letters of blood and one in something more stable', *Vampires*, p. 311. This 'stable' component often draws to some dominant concern or fetish-notion of leftist academia: colonialism, neo-liberalism, late capitalism.

an unthematised ‘political unconscious’ as the point of mediation¹⁵ where reality (as understood by the scholar) is articulated into representation (as expressed metaphorically by witchcraft discourse or rumour) – ‘the setting of a line where effects are felt rather than assimilated and understood’.¹⁶ Thus, in the case of the War of Lions one should first assume that man cannot magically turn into lion, that a sect of lion men was not operating in the district (and incidentally, that Saide and Kumpune had lied),¹⁷ and presuppose an unconscious or pre-conscious articulation of the imagery of rumours, in order to interpret them as discourses which ‘allocate responsibility’ and ‘contextualise extraction’.¹⁸

Spelled in an imaginative politics-of-the-belly register, the moral allegations conveyed by the rumours, taken as a whole,¹⁹ were indeed quite explicit. By pointing to Pedro Seguro, administrator of the district, veteran of the Liberation Struggle and local ‘big man’, as the mastermind sorcerer, and by suggesting that he worked in connection with whites interested in ‘buying’ the district as well as body parts of its citizens, the rumours expressed a deep mistrust of the post-socialist Frelimo elites, highlighting their propensity to second the rapacity of international vampires and let the district slip into chaos in order to feed on the blood and meat of its subjects. One can read the story of the ‘three sacks’ as a poignant metaphor for the surrender of sovereignty, the ‘selling back’ of national independence to international patronage (of the Bretton Woods institutions, say) – a reading of Frelimo’s parable to which some political analysts subscribe.²⁰ In Harry West’s interpretation of the crisis, the ‘understanding of and responses to’ the lions’ attacks, articulated in sorcery discourse, criticised the new elites’ (and specifically Seguro’s) proclivity to ‘cannibalise [...] the collapsed collective project of socialist modernisation’, depicting them as malevolent rather than benevolent sorcerers, and offering ‘a nuanced critique’ of the processes of democratisation and neo-liberal reform as experienced by Muedans.²¹ Didn’t the upside-down Frelimo flag make the point clearly enough? Didn’t the rumours somehow mourn socialism?

A New Occult Idiom

This friend of mine, he was walking around Litapata with a basket of dried fish. It was dusk. He saw a group of men, and, frightened, he climbed up a tree. They started their training right under his eyes: a dozen people, with lion skins, lion paws and knives. They were training to kill and roar like lions do. One of them stopped and said: ‘It smells like dried fish here’. They looked up and they saw my friend. They took him and they told him: ‘You have seen what we do and now you must die’. My friend cried and begged for mercy. One from the group said: ‘We’ll let

15 F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Cornell University Press, 1984), especially pp. 39–44. This, of course, is remindful of the question of reflection or mediation between base and superstructure in historicist Marxist theory, see R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 95–100.

16 J. Siegel, *Naming the Witch* (Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 238, n. 25. The phrase refers to the work of the Comaroffs.

17 One could imagine many reasons why the two might have lied. Saide might have been encouraged to do so by his friend, who wanted to get rid of his ‘no-good’ brother. Kumpuni might have wanted to embellish a prosaic fight between drunkards.

18 White, *Speaking with Vampires*, p. 62.

19 On the shortcomings of ‘taking as a whole’ rumours, see White, *Vampires*, pp. 78–86.

20 See for instance, J. Hanlon, *Peace Without Profit: How the IMF Blocks Rebuilding in Mozambique* (Oxford, James Currey, 1996) or J. Saul, *Recolonization and Resistance in Southern Africa in the 1990s* (Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press, 1993). For a critique of the ‘recolonisation’ approach see A.M. Pitcher, *Transforming Mozambique: The Politics of Privatisation 1975–2000* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2002).

21 H. West, ‘Govern Yourselves! Democracy and Carnage in Northern Mozambique’, in J. Paley (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Democracy* (Santa Fe, USA, School for Advanced Research Press, forthcoming). See also West’s *Kupilikula*, pp. 250–1.

you go, but you mustn't tell anybody. Or we will find you where you live, we'll kill you and kill all your family'.²²

The idea of a group of people (something like a secret society) dressing up as lions with the help of specific implements (skins, paws, knives) and killing for ritual purposes suggests fact rather than rumour to the historian. I found myself drawn to the numerous occurrences of 'big-cat killings' that took place across the African continent in the last two centuries, where secret societies of leopard-men, lion-men and panther-men disguised murders as the actions of beasts. While these big-cat killings were widely interpreted as ritual murders, their motives were often linked to power struggles and moral crises at the height of colonial domination.²³ For instance, in central Tanganyika, 103 lion-killings were reported in a crisis from 1946 to 1947. Forensic evidence described the peculiar mode of these murders. Children were abducted and then trained to kill as lions and to maul the bodies of their victims. The motives of the murders were various and often petty, but overall the crisis was 'explicitly linked to the shifting features of the colonial political landscape'.²⁴ Often it was difficult to ascertain if the killings were murders or the working of real lions. In these areas of Tanganyika, the local notion of 'transformation' was highly ambiguous, as it wavered between disguising, shape-changing and magically controlling a lion.

In Muidumbe the concept of transformation is rooted in local conceptions of sorcery. Powerful sorcerers – healers explained to me²⁵ – have the ability to 'fabricate' animals (lions, elephants, hyenas, monkeys) through the use of particular bits of wood, called *dimika*. The notion of 'fabrication' (*kupika*) covers both the physical transformation of the sorcerer (*mwavi*, pl. *vavi*) into animal and the evocation of a beast that obeys the sorcerer's command (a familiar) to steal the neighbour's goods (*mang'opo*) or to kill them to feed his/her appetite for human meat. When someone is killed by a lion, often a healer is asked to determine whether the lion was 'from the bush' (*ntumi wakumwitu*), or 'fabricated' (*wakumpika*) and, in the latter case, which of the members of the matrilineal clan could be motivated to 'grab in lion form' (*kunkamula shintumi*) the victim. The idea of 'lion-men' killing with knives, on the contrary, was one that local healers were not familiar with, a novelty in Muidumbe.²⁶

For now, let us discard the possibility that Muidumbe's maulings were murders and not the deeds of lions. Let us assume that lion-men stories from colonial times, fictionalised as they were in popular press and orally transmitted, reached Muidumbe to signify anew. Makonde masquerading traditions might have constituted a fertile breeding ground for this kind of *reprise*, as they implied the association between the ability to 'fabricate' nocturnal masks for funerary ceremonies and the realm of sorcery. The term used for 'masquerading' itself has a semantic connection with the verb indicating magical 'fabrication' (*mapiko*, the masks; *kupika*, fabricate, transform).²⁷ Let us assume that we are indeed dealing with rumour. The lion-men trope allowed the blending of different genres of occult talk – sorcery discourses, vampire stories, big-cat killings and medicine murder allegations – into a new composite idiom. It allowed the articulation of local idioms of sorcery with global rumours

22 Rumour collected in Wimbe (Pemba) from a Makonde shopkeeper, 25 May 2003.

23 There is a growing literature on colonial big-cat killings. See especially D. Pratten, *The Men-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press for the International Africa Institute, 2007), pp. 8–20 and J. Rich "Leopard Men", Slaves, and Social Conflict in Libreville (Gabon), c. 1860–1879', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 34, 3 (2001).

24 Pratten, *Men-Leopard Murders*, p. 16.

25 Also see West, *Kupilikula*, pp. xiii–xviii, pp. 45–6, 61–3.

26 This was the opinion of seven elder healers whom I interviewed in Muidumbe, and of all the people that I happened to talk with about this particular issue. West's detailed historical analysis of sorcery discourse in Mueda (*Kupilikula*) does not mention lion-men disguising themselves with implements.

27 See my Ph.D. dissertation, *Masques en Transformation. Performances Mapiko des Makonde (Mozambique): Historicité, Créativité et Revolution* (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, January 2008).

concerning the predation of body parts.²⁸ It also accommodated witchcraft accusation based on interpersonal networks with suspicions directed to figures of power and strangers – although this ‘dialectics of suspicion [of the powerful] and accusation [of the wretched]’ is inscribed within sorcery practice itself.²⁹

These rumours crystallised into a shared version when specific utterances meant to make sense of – or to strategically operate in – deathly situations were reformulated and broadcast in formulaic idioms by cultural brokers and the local media. The first case was Saide’s. His interview on a local radio constituted a watershed in shaping a new idiom of the occult. In the aftermath of a night of terror, here was the first person who had survived to give an eyewitness account of the deeds of a sorcerer disguised as a lion. Saide described the event in a way that differed from ‘traditional’ accounts, which insisted on the invisibility and indecipherability of the process. Kumpune told a similar story. Then, other eyewitness accounts followed, although they were more confused. A man was ‘hit by a lion on the head with a hammer’ while another lion devoured his wife and children.³⁰ Another person was attacked by a lion and, while trying to defend himself, was ‘stabbed in the back by another lion’.³¹ Another ‘kicked a lion in the belly, and it felt like he was a thin man’.³² Each of these fuzzy eyewitness accounts was recast in formulaic terms, drawing on Saide’s groundbreaking testimony, on the ‘lion-killings’ genre, and on local idioms of sorcery. In performing this operation, cultural brokers such as travellers, nuns from the mission, journalists and visitors from nearby urban centres played a crucial role in the emergence of a body of rumours whose consistency and contours, like an impressionist picture, appeared visible only from a certain distance.³³

But in the midst of fear and indecision – of the ‘fear of something whose source we cannot account for’³⁴ – nothing looked clear to anyone. Healers, who should have known better, were confused. If the practice of disguising oneself as a lion with implements was conceptualised as a modality of ‘fabricating’ lions (*kuvapika vantumi*) and hence as a form of sorcery (*uwavi*), most healers declared they were not proficient to tackle it. The existence of men disguised with skins was not incompatible with the idea that lions ‘looking like lions’ could be the products of sorcery. Increasingly, many of the latter were seen roaming around in the district. Some healers asserted that the attacks were indeed partly due to lions fabricated with *dimika*, and partly due to ‘knife-carrying lions’. Some deployed old techniques for new situations, but they were mostly dubbed as impostors by more senior healers. The foremost counter-sorcery expert in ‘fabricated lions’ of the district could not put it more clearly: ‘These knife-carrying lions, I don’t know anything about them’.³⁵

28 On these global rumours, see Comaroff, ‘Occult Economies’; Ranger, ‘Scotland Yard in the Bush’; N. Scheper-Hughes, ‘Theft of Life: The Globalization of Organ Stealing Rumours’, *Anthropology Today*, 12, 3 (June 1996), pp. 3–11; L. White, ‘The Traffic in Heads: Bodies, Borders and the Articulation of Regional Histories’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23, 2 (June 1997), pp. 325–38.

29 ‘There is the suspected sorcerer (which is the one on the side of power) and the accused (which is marginal, declassified, tempted maybe to make others believe in powers that he does not have)’, M. Augé, ‘Les Croyances à la Sorcellerie’, in M. Augé (ed.), *Construction du Monde: Religion, Représentations, Idéologie* (Paris, Maspero, 1974), pp. 69–70, my translation. See also the dialectics of redistribution and accumulation in suspicions of sorcery as described by P. Geschiere in *Sorcellerie et Politique en Afrique: La viande des Autres* (Paris, Karthala, 1995).

30 In the ‘encampment’ of Nawadimu, September 2002. Interview, Remigio Makomang’ana, Nawadimu (Muidumbe), 6 September 2002. This and the two following quotes come from interviews with victims of lion attacks.

31 In Mapate (Muidumbe), late 2002. Interview, Pedro Mateus, 5 June 2003.

32 In Shitashi (Muidumbe), March 2003. Guilherme Madeira, 22 December 2003.

33 A provincial radio programme was also produced by the radio journalist Oscar Limbombo, ‘Os Leões de Muidumbe’, *Questão de Fundo* (Pemba, Radio Moçambique, 2003).

34 Siegel, *Naming the Witch*, p. 24.

35 Interview, Kalamatatu, 18 December 2003, and also: Interviews, Magnus Myagwa Navelido ‘Bomba’, 5 September 2002 and 15 June 2003.

Another healer made a clear if unintentional statement when, after being summoned by the villagers of Mwambula to protect their village (*kukuva ludeya*) against lions and having received substantial payment for the work, was devoured by a lion on his way back to the lowland village of Litandakua. The hunters, accustomed to working in conjunction with healers, were scared of beasts they believed they could not kill, and often used their ammunition to hunt game.

The lynchings of the War of Lions also marked an important break in the history of sorcery practice in Makonde plateau. Colonial era accusations of witches were conducted inside the matrilineage, by elders and diviners, more often than not resulted in a ban from the village and entailed no lynching.³⁶ Postcolonial witchcraft accusations and suspicions were infrequent and private, due to Frelimo's modernist ideologies.³⁷ These post-socialist witch-hunts were sustained by conceptions of sorcery that counter-sorcery specialists themselves could not recognise, and were mostly sparked by youth rage.

Each attack, each appearance of the lions gave rise to idiosyncratic suspicions. The witch was named in this gap of uncertainty.³⁸ Sometimes a person would be accused through some kind of personal network (a relative, a neighbour, a friend, a political enemy, an acquaintance). Suspicion would rise and a crowd of youth (not necessarily linked to the victim by ties of kinship) would form to hunt and kill. This lapse of time offered the suspect a chance to flee. But more and more people were accused because of circumstantial evidence: if they were found in possession of skins, or the tracks of the lions led to the vicinity of their houses, or because they were seen creeping around at night in unusual places. Sometimes, the rage of a crowd already formed after the attack of a lion just fell on the most likely suspect at hand – in one case, a mentally disordered wanderer. The parents of the lynched and the devoured were bereaved and suspicious – *they* could be accused too, after all. The witch-hunters' rage itself was almost wordless. Killing? 'Why not, after all. These people are lions.' Sometimes on the point of death the sorcerer confessed, 'It was me, I did it with so and so'.³⁹ The 'accomplices' thus indicated would be sought out, if they were not quick enough to abandon the scene.

A metaphoric interpretation of rumour as 'moral economies' bypasses this complex web of negotiation, incertitude, manipulation, fear and displacement.⁴⁰ Rumour and sorcery talk can be constituted as an interpretative object only at a certain minimal distance – spatial, temporal or conceptual – from the impending moment of violent death.⁴¹ These rumours retold at safe distance can then be treated, by the scholar as well as by social actors, as discourses conveying statements of social agency in metaphorical form, as 'magical interpretations' of 'material realities'. In the case of the War of Lions, such interpretations most often represented the views of neighbours or bystanders. From a place like Mueda, where the roar of the lions and the hymns of the witch-hunters would not be heard, Matias Ntundu, a renowned Makonde carver and engraver, could indeed articulate: 'Those lions come from democracy. In the times of the old Frelimo we were supposed to obey rules.

36 Here I am pointing to functional and procedural differences, with no wish to romanticise the 'good old times' of witchcraft accusations. For a discussion of colonial versus postcolonial witchcraft accusations in South Africa, see Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence & Democracy*, pp. 256–61, and Stewart and Strathern, *Witchcraft, Sorcery*, pp. 63–65.

37 West, *Kupilikula*, pp. 161–3.

38 Siegel, *Naming The Witch*, pp. 26, 210–31.

39 Here, I keep the anonymity of my first-hand sources. I was acquainted especially with three male youths involved in lynchings in Mwambula.

40 On the paradoxes of metaphoric analysis of sorcery discourse, see H.G. West, *Ethnographic Sorcery* (University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 35–38.

41 Is this not the same distance from which the 'scholastic reason' operates? P. Bourdieu, *Méditations Pascaliennes* (Paris, Le Seuil, 2003, 2nd and revised edition). White acknowledges a qualitative difference between analysis of rumours and of the causes of rumour-related riots, *Vampires*, p. 245.

Now, everybody does what he wants: that's the meaning of democracy'.⁴² Also, lingering on a metaphoric interpretation of shared rumours is the equivalent of a 'fetishistic fascination' with the content of a dream. The proper analytical stance might be 'to answer to the question: why have the latent dream-thoughts assumed such a form, why were they transposed into the form of a dream?'⁴³ Why and how could rumours 'take hold of people's imaginations and displace reality becoming a reality of their own making'?⁴⁴ The 'symptomal truth' of rumour is to be located precisely in this displacement.

In Muidumbe, interpretive certitude was to be found nowhere – except in Pedro Seguro's hammering denial: 'These are lions from the bush. People from Muidumbe are violent, illiterate and superstitious'.⁴⁵

'Who You Think You Are?'

We were in the lowlands. The lions had started to capture people in the lowlands of our neighbours, in Ing'unde. Truly, the lion took many people there. In our lowlands, the lion had not yet taken anybody. Time passed. Then, this is how lions started to take away people in our lowland: it took a boy called Padangeka. It was on a Monday. A Sunday night, as it was turning to Monday. [...] In the morning, we went out. We carried bows, machetes and I carried my spear. We were directed to the place where the lion had taken the boy. When we arrived there (this is our way of dealing with lion matters) we played *likuti lishonjo* [the name of a peculiar rhythm that announces the presence of a lion], so that everybody might know what happened. [...] What else could we do? We took some hoes, and we buried it, I mean what was left of the workings of the lion. [...] At that time, people came from Mandava: the village leader and his militias. [...] He came and said: 'You, Kalatashi, who you think you are? And you, Mustafa, who you think you are? And you, Erik, who you think you are? Who you think you are, you? None of you people can build any village. A village, a village... What village? I am the Chief here. Me, my land is Mandava. I am the War Veteran. Who you think you are?' Then he ordered his militias to beat and kill people.⁴⁶

Lipelwa is a fertile lowland situated between the plateau villages of Mwambula and Mandava. Unlike Ing'unde, a group of people settled there to live during the whole agricultural season (October to May). In 2002, they asked the local government for permission to build a new recognised village in the area, and permission was granted. One night in February 2003 a lion killed a boy in Lipelwa. A group of people set out to follow the beast. They found the remains of the boy and buried him.

The village president (*presidente da aldeia*, village leader) from Mandava, a war veteran called Timbanga, arrived with his popular militia, whom he commanded to arrest and beat up these people. Three of the victims were at the frontline of the project of the construction of the new village in Lipelwa. Three died from the blows. As the village president was quietly contemplating, the rest were forced to dig a grave for their dead friends, were beaten up again, and left there for dead or dying. Amongst those men who survived was Mustafa, a 60 year-old from Mwambula, leader of an ingenious and beloved *mapiko* group, who had developed an impressive system of irrigation in Lipelwa that made him one of the foremost producers of rice in the district. As soon as he was able to make his way to Mwambula he denounced Timbanga to the police. Timbanga was arrested and taken to prison in Mueda, until the villagers made contributions, paid the bail to free him and organised a conspicuous party when their leader came home.

42 Interview, Matias Ntundu, Nandimba (Mueda), 18 June 2003.

43 S. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, Verso, 1989), pp. 11 and following.

44 Stewart and Strathern, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors and Gossip*, p. 52.

45 This was Seguro's signature phrase during the whole crisis. I heard it pronounced several times both publicly and in the privacy of his house.

46 Interview, Mustafa Mwana' Bondi, 20 June 2003, Mwambula and Lipelwa (Muidumbe).

Of Communal Villages and their Fissures

Ngupita nguwenawena ndyaludeya I go around from village to village
Kuvalambela vanambili To search for partridges [Renamo supporters]
Kwavapulike navona avó I can't see a place where they are thriving⁴⁷

Besides highlighting the high rate of illiteracy among the inhabitants of Muidumbe and their cultural proclivity to violence, Pedro Seguro used to warn against 'opportunists who take advantage of lions to settle personal scores' – referring to both occasional murders disguised as the deeds of lions and the manipulation of crowds to hunt down personal enemies. Timbanga killing off potential political rivals on the occasion of a lion's attack epitomises the latter form of opportunism. But, I argue, there is more in this story of conflict around the construction of a new communal village in the lowlands of Lipelwa.

Introduced in 1976 as a national policy inspired by Tanzanian *ujamaa* villages, Frelimo's communal villages were intended to be 'cities born in the forest'.⁴⁸ In the former 'liberated zones', more than elsewhere in the country (even more so in Muidumbe, where the central base of Frelimo was operative throughout the war), the setting up of communal villages drew on the experiences of the camps that had sustained the struggle for liberation (military training camps, military bases and people's encampments) and in which the construction of the socialist 'New Man' (*O Homem Novo*) was piloted. In this sense, communal villages can be read as the extension of the camp to the totality of social life, the totalisation of the camp as the basis of social life.⁴⁹ More than any other institution, the communal villages epitomised and sustained Frelimo's project of total politicisation⁵⁰ of life: the organisation of the villages was meant to bring not only cities into the bushes, but to violently inscribe the political structures of the totalising state into its citizens to be.⁵¹

In Makonde country, the massive militarisation of the population during the liberation struggle and their extended experience of camp life made the communal village project a viable if not an unconflictual one. The communal villages can be considered as the spatial expression of modernist revolutionary commitment. In Muidumbe, communal villages would survive the downfall of socialism: even after informal markets erupted into the heart of the villages – a metonymy of macro-political events – social life there was still defined by their rectangular boundaries. Settlement outside villages, in dispersed and precarious huts or in so-called 'encampments' (i.e. unauthorised small settlements where houses are not built in lines and following a strict rectangular grid), is stigmatised by the government and associated with political rebellion.

As a dramatic accident, the attacks of the lions concentrated on people living outside of villages, in production areas,⁵² in encampments (*campamentos*)⁵³ or at the margins of small

47 Widespread electoral song.

48 Frelimo, *Resolução Sobre Aldeias Comunas* (1976). See H. West "'This Neighbour is not my Uncle!': Changing Relations of Power and Authority on the Mueda Plateau', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 1 (1998), pp. 141–60 and *Kupilikula*, pp. 164–79.

49 This takes a radical twist if, with Giorgio Agamben, one assumes the camp to be 'the *nomos* of the modern', cf. *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Palo Alto, CA, Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 166 – an idea also formulated by Žižek in *The Sublime Object*, p. 50.

50 The expression 'total politicisation' is Karl Löwith's, quoted in Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 144.

51 C. Geffray, *La cause des Armes: Anthropologie de la guerre civile au Mozambique* (Paris, Karthala, 1990). This inscription was particularly successful in the former liberated zones. For critiques of Geffray's thesis and traditionalism, see A. Dinerman, *Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Revisionism in Postcolonial Africa: The Case of Mozambique, 1975–1994* (London, Routledge, 2006) and C. Serra, *Novos Combates Pela Mentalidade Sociologica* (Maputo, Livraria Universitaria, UEM, 1997), pp. 109–11.

52 In the zone of Ing'unde and around the Messalo river.

53 Especially the encampments of Malangonya, Lipelwa, Nawadimu, '2000' (south of Shitashi), Nguri.

and remote lowland villages.⁵⁴ In addition, the activities of the lion-men were said to take place outside villages, and specifically in the Messalo lowlands, a space of ‘danger’ throughout the history of Makonde ethnicity, where the slave raiders had thrived, where the colonial occupation of the plateau was negotiated, where Frelimo guerrillas hid and where Renamo had its bases during the civil war. The War of Lions put into question the possibility of ethical and meaningful social life outside the ideological grid of communal villages, as the people at its margins were being devoured and suspected of ‘fabricating’ lions.

While people were being eaten in the lowlands, the lynchings of those accused took place inside the villages. From 2002, in the context of a nationwide rehabilitation of traditional authority, democratically elected village presidents in Muidumbe had been endowed with new insignias that signified indefinite new prerogatives of power.⁵⁵ Popular militias instituted after Independence were reorganised and instructed to follow the orders of village presidents and report to the police. Faced as they were with crowds that demanded the lynching of fabricators of lions, village presidents commanding popular militias were put under increasing pressure and exposed to unprecedented temptation. Especially so in a place like Muidumbe, where the law of the *shamboko* (flogging) is unofficially practised (that is, where the authority administrates flogging as punishment for crime); where a dozen police members serve an estimated 70,000 citizens; where there is no prison and no formal tribunal; where the concentration of war veterans is the highest in the country; where it is usual for people to be armed with machetes, bows and knives; where alcoholism is widespread, especially amongst the police, state workers and war veterans; where political violence is common and tolerated; where brawls and homicides are frequent and go mostly unpunished.

This turned the crisis into a sort of civil war. Some leaders decided to use militias as private troops to bolster the crowds, against the directives of the local government prohibiting any kind of mob justice. Mandava ranked as the first rebellious village. The village *24 de Março* followed. Instigated by the village president, a crowd ransacked the house of a war veteran accused of ‘grabbing’ his nephew. The veteran took refuge in Mwambula and denounced the village president at the court of Mueda. A warrant for his arrest came. Militias sent a message to Muidumbe: ‘Come and take him. We are sharpening our arrows.’ The police never dared. The leader of the lowland village of Litapata ordered the killing of a man and his son accused of ‘grabbing’ a relative. The two took refuge in the nearby village of Litandakua (in the district of Macomia) only to be sent back by its leader, escorted by militias who bore a note identifying them as lion-makers. The village president of Litapata sentenced them to public stoning. There were few village presidents that stood up against the lynchings⁵⁶ and whose popular militias protected the killings of suspected fabricators, rather than contributing to their execution. In March 2003, the leader of Namakande witnessed the lynching of a woman who was buried alive.

The spatial organisation of the War of Lion’s dialectics of law and disorder⁵⁷ – the maulings taking place in the dangerous lowlands, the executions in the orderly centres of the communal villages – suggested that, if life outside the margins of villages implied a return

54 Especially the villages of Litapata and Mapate.

55 The law on traditional authority (Decreto no. 15/2000 de 25 de Agosto de 2000, Boletim da República, I Série, no 34) was approved in 2000 and implemented in Muidumbe starting from 2002. In Muidumbe, traditional authorities did not officially exist after the War of Liberation, thus democratically elected authorities were recognised by the State. See L. Buur and H.M. Kyed, ‘Contested Sources of Authority: Re-claiming State Sovereignty by Formalising Traditional Authority in Mozambique’, *Development and Change*, 37, 4 (2006), pp. 847–69 and West, ‘Govern Yourselves!’.

56 Especially those of Shitashi and Nshinga, a young leader and an elder respectively.

57 J. & J. Comaroff (eds), *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2006), pp. 1–56.

to pre-revolutionary moral chaos, a certain fissure was inscribed in the revolutionary project itself (or what was left of it), one that would be closed only through some kind of sacral violence.

Youngsters, Puppets

N° 90/F/4/2 of 22/4/2003. I inform Your Excellency that on the day of 21/4/2003 a group of citizens of the village Mwambula, armed with arrows, machetes and knives went to the village of Namakande, seized a citizen accused of transforming into a lion and killed him, burning his body. As I have been reporting on the lion situation, the situation is dire with unforeseeable consequences. It is necessary that the provincial government help us to restore order and tranquillity in the district. The Administrator, Pedro Justino Seguro. [Radio message to the Governor of Cabo Delgado]

On Easter eve, April 2003, a lion attacked a young man on the outskirts of the village of Mwambula. The boy somehow managed to kick the lion away and escape. The administrator took the wounded youth by car to the hospital of Mwatide; he then fetched one of the three foremost healers of the district who specialised in fabricated lions, and carried him to Mwambula. The healer, together with the village deputy president and his militias, took the lead of a crowd of people to hunt down the lion. They followed the footprints of the lion down to the lowlands for more than 20 kilometres, up the side of the mountain Ing'unde and down again, crossing bushes and rivers, until they reached a hut in the lowlands of Namakande, locked from the inside, and circled by lion paw-prints. The door was broken down and more paw-prints were found inside. On a bed were two pieces of cloth and besides it half a bottle of moonshine. No human footprints could be seen inside, nor any lion footprints leaving the house. The crowd burnt the hut down in a frenzy.

The owner of the hut was identified as a middle-aged man from Namakande. On Easter Day, a group of people left Mwambula, armed with machetes, pikes, bows and knives and headed to Namakande. On their way, they gathered people in the rebellious village of *24 de Março*; when they arrived in Namakande, other people joined in. The owner of the hut in the lowlands was abducted from his house, beaten up and brought to Mwambula. For the first time the police in Mwambula faced the crowd and asked them to surrender the man, who was then jailed at the police station. The crowd waited outside, loudly protesting. While the police were occupied in keeping the crowd at bay, the man fled from the window and snuck back to Namakande. The following day, the same group left Mwambula and headed to Namakande. Again, they passed through Nshongwe, gathering people. Again – surprisingly – they found the man in his house. He was again carried to Mwambula. There, the leader of the crowd, a youth called Mwela, stepped on the podium usually reserved for political authorities. He harangued the crowds. ‘Viva Frelimo! This Frelimo is not anymore Frelimo. It doesn’t want us to be free from the threat of the lions. So, starting from today, we are the new Frelimo! We will kill all fabricators, like we kill today this one.’ The president of Mwambula, who had recently come back from Maputo, threw away his insignias of power in anger. A wooden cross was put on the victim’s head. He was pushed on to the road of Namande, while the crowd sang:

Vashikaji noma
Wenda kwashi baba?
Namanya shinu!
Wenda ku-Kalavali nelo

Youngsters, puppets
 Where are you going, daddy?
 I don’t know!
 You’re going to the Calvary today

Easter Symptoms

<i>Manemba mwangu mala' kulyunga</i>	My boys, be still and organised
<i>Tummalangile maimyo tushitenda muing'ondo</i>	So that we can tell you the deeds of the Struggle
<i>Bila shididi</i>	With no pity
<i>Tukankamula aju munu wamalambi</i>	If we caught one of these scoundrels
<i>Tushinammunga dimbuu</i>	We'd tie him to a pole
<i>Kushamanila nkutano</i>	We'd call a meeting
<i>Munu kuntannola</i>	We'd execute [suck the life of] the man ⁵⁸

Crowd violence and lynchings are so tragically common in the history of humanity that it seems somewhat futile to try to point out the specific causes of one or another of their manifestations. If anything, Muidumbe's case signalled a national and regional tendency: mob justice and vigilante violence would be dramatically on the rise all over Mozambique in the new millennium.⁵⁹ But Muidumbe's Easter lynching had an overt political character and symbolism. The lynchers who had gathered from three villages were no longer only 'baiting crowds' aiming to kill, but rather 'reversal crowds'⁶⁰ aiming to overturn (at least symbolically) the political order. This specific lynching triggered for the first time a response from the government, as it no longer configured an act of 'popular irrationality', but one of political rebellion. It should be taken as the accomplished expression of the previous lynchings, as the one that did and said what the others wished but had not dared to.

The lynchings of the War of Lions were denoted with a peculiar Shimakonde verb, *kutannola*. This verb refers originally to the life-drawing and blood-sucking performed by 'vampires' (*vitannola*).⁶¹ During the Struggle for Liberation *kutannola* came to indicate the public execution of counter-revolutionaries, in Portuguese referred to as *fuzilamento* (executing with a shotgun).⁶² The semantic slippage through which blood sucking came to denote the ritual execution of the Enemies of the People points to an obscure, inert core in the latter's meaning, and suggests a paradoxical common ground (life-sucking) between the executioners and the executed, if not their substantial identity.⁶³

58 Song, *Musica Tradicional de Moçambique: Mapiko* (Pemba, Radio Moçambique, Recorded Reel, 1986). I reckon that this is 'Nandindi' a *mapiko* group of Mwambula.

59 See C. Serra *Linchamentos em Moçambique I (uma desordem que apela à ordem)*, (Maputo, Livraria Universitária, 2008). 1249 cases of lynching ('mob justice') were reported in Dar es Salaam between January 2000 and December 2004, see P.M. Ng'walali and J.N. Kitinya, 'Mob Justice in Tanzania: A Medico-Social Problem', *African Health Sciences*, 6, 1 (March 2006), pp. 36–8. See also D. Pratten (ed.), *Global Vigilantes* (Irrington, NY, Columbia University Press, 2008).

60 For 'baiting' and 'reversal' crowds, see E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (New York, Farrar, 1972), respectively pp. 49–53 and 58–61.

61 In Portuguese, *chupa-sangue* (blood-sucker). See C. Serra, *Combates Pela Mentalidade Sociológica* (Maputo, Imprensa Universitaria, 2007), pp. 46–54 and White, *Vampires*, p. 12.

62 Similarly, 'necklacing', yesterday ANC's moral debate, is today's witches' exorcism in South Africa and beyond. See Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence*, pp. 93, 102, 256, Comaroff, 'Occult Economies', pp. 280, 295, I. Niehaus *et al.*, *Witchcraft, Power and Politics: Exploring the Occult in the South-African Lowveld* (Cape Town, David Philip, 2001), pp. 1, 210.

63 *Kutannola* is a paradoxical trope not dissimilar from the once-obscure figure of Roman law *homo sacer*. *Kutannola* is a collective killing that only apparently implies a sacrifice. The ritualism of the execution disguises the fact that the crowds are performing the same operation for which the victim is being killed: the drawing of 'bare life'. And is not 'necklacing' the crudest form of producing 'bare life', of annihilating without sacrificing?

The ‘quilting point’ of Frelimo’s ideology – the element that glued together the ideological field while masking the impossibility of its complete closure⁶⁴ – was indeed the socialist ‘New Man’ and its obscene reversal, the counter-revolutionary. The failing epiphany of the ‘New Man’ was thus (quite unoriginally) attributed to the subterfuges of traitors, counter-revolutionaries, enemies of the People and ‘scoundrels’ (*malambi* in Shimakonde). The character from the popular press *Xiconhoca* (The Snake Guy), a layabout ready to sell the Nation to pursue his own petty-bourgeois pleasures and vices, personified this ‘subject supposed to enjoy’ working against the advent of the new social order.⁶⁵ As soon as Renamo came into existence, it naturally filled the position of the ‘quilting point’ in Frelimo’s ideological field. Hence the impossibility of naming it other than a group of armed bandits.⁶⁶

This ‘quilting point’ was inscribed in the spatial structure of social life since the Liberation Struggle. And it was inscribed in blood. Traitors were executed at the centre of the bases and the camps during the Struggle, their ‘life sucked’ with ‘no pity’.⁶⁷ At the centre of the communal villages ‘scoundrels’ were flogged to the rhythm of a hymn that said ‘Frelimo has no end’ (*Frelimo aina mwisho*). And, until yesterday, at the centre of communal villages an enclosure hides from view the many consumers of moonshine alcohol who temporarily turn into *xiconhocas*: this space of moral aberration and violence was revealingly named after Renamo’s former operative base, Maringue. Thus, the Enemy – the one to be punished and re-educated and the one to be tolerated and concealed – is visually inscribed at the core of the project of the Revolution, almost to show that the latter cannot subsist without the former.⁶⁸

I argue that Muidumbe’s lynchings must be understood as an ‘impotent *passage à l’acte*, an outburst which displayed the inability to break with the weight of the past symbolic tradition’ and that ‘bears witness not only to the impotence of the perpetrators, but, even more, to the lack of what Fredric Jameson called “cognitive mapping”, to their inability to locate the experience of their situation into a meaningful Whole’.⁶⁹ This *passage à l’acte* was sustained by the recognition, voiced out loud by Mwela in his harangue, that ‘this Frelimo is not anymore Frelimo’. This should be read on two levels. On a first level, ‘this Frelimo is not Frelimo’ means that the Party was failing to keep its basic political promises, as it didn’t protect the biopolitical bodies of Muidumbe’s citizens from the voracious appetites of lions *qua* sorcerers. On another level, ‘Frelimo is not Frelimo’ implied the recognition that the ‘real’ Frelimo, as a set of concrete political structures, was not the ideal projection upon which Makonde society and identity was founded since the massive, collective engagement in the Liberation Struggle and the subsequent radical transformation of the social

64 I am drawing here on Slavoj Žižek’s reformulation of Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of ‘nodal points’ of ideology fields. See *The Sublime Object*, pp. 87–9, 98–9, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London, Verso, 1991, 2008, Second edn), pp. 16–20 and ‘The Spectre of Ideology’, in S. Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London, Verso, 1994), pp. 1–33.

65 On the Enemy in the Mozambican Revolution, see C. Serra, *Novos Combates*, pp. 97–106. On *Xiconhoca*, see L. Buur ‘*Xiconhoca*: Mozambique’s Ubiquitous Post-Independence Traitor’, in S. Thiranagama and T. Kelly (eds), *Traitors: Suspicion, Intimacy and the Ethics of State-Building* (Philadelphia, PA, University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

66 This is reflected in academic writing, see J. Depelchin and A. De Bragança, ‘From the Idealization of Frelimo to the Understanding of the Recent History of Frelimo’, *Review*, 11, 1 (1988), pp. 177–8. These considerations in no way minimise the atrocities committed by Renamo.

67 The 1968–69 internal crisis of Frelimo that led to the Marxist-Leninist radicalisation of the winning faction was sparked by a conflict on the lynchings of ‘traitors’ in the liberated zones. See U. Simango’s manifesto, ‘Gloomy Situation in Frelimo’ (Dar es Salaam, 3 November 1969).

68 One of the effects of the neo-liberal turn in Muidumbe was indeed the multiplication and disclosure of drinking places, a trend that began with the new millennium.

69 S. Žižek ‘Some Politically Incorrect Reflections on Violence in France & Related Matters’, retrieved online from <http://www.lacan.com/zizfrance.htm>, consulted on 21 April 2008. See also S. Žižek, *On Violence* (London, Profile Books, 2008), pp. 79–88.

organisation. It expressed the recognition that ‘the Emperor has no clothes’.⁷⁰ The *passage à l’acte* of lynching sought to give back the clothes to the Emperor by reactivating the ‘quilting point’ that kept together Frelimo’s ideological field: the execution of ‘scoundrels’.

This demand for a totalising closure of the social order was clearly paradoxical, and decidedly post-political.⁷¹ The new Frelimo that the youth imagined, a teenage nation ‘quilted’ by the execution of sorcerers, was an impossible one. The Sorcerer does not lend itself easily to be inscribed in the ideological space of the political Enemy. ‘Killing the witch is not exactly killing the enemy. [...] “witch” could be the basis against which a polity is formed only if the witch could be identified and thus built into an ideology. The word “witch” [...] galvanises the attention only when is charged with the uncanny, and that is not always the case. When it is, it remains outside the possibility of recognition, which would be the basis for making “witch” the equivalent of “enemy” and thus the basis for a political system’.⁷² Moreover, it was clear to everyone that no political conditions for a real transformation of the social order were present. Harry West’s *Kupilikula* provides abundant evidence of how sorcery functioned as a ‘discourse of power’ throughout Mueda’s history, articulating political consciousness and agency. However, unless one takes seriously the allegations conveyed by the rumours, and considering their outcome – the lynching of innocents – one can hardly defend that these constituted a useful cognitive mapping for Muidumbe’s youth, one that allowed them to make sense of their predicaments and to exert effective and sensitive political agency.

The lynchers were unashamed of exhibiting the paradoxicality of their *passage à l’acte* and almost too keen to ‘produce their own symptoms’.⁷³ Inspired by the Easter service, they described themselves as ‘the Jews who killed Jesus Christ’. They kept asserting their identity with the scoundrels, and not only through the idiom of *kutannola*. Their killing hymn was a refrain used as a provocation song in football games: ‘*vashikaji noma*’. The first word means ‘youngsters’ in Kiswahili. The second term is commonly associated with a Portuguese slang expression, ‘*matreco*’, which literally indicates a table football puppet, and metaphorically refers to a person without personal agency, whose actions and thoughts are manipulated by some external force. A *matreco* is ‘like a zombie, a living-dead’ (*lindandosha*). It was unclear throughout the crisis if the refrain referred to the people lynched, who more than often were not youngsters at all, to the lynchers themselves, or to both. And then, of whom were they the puppets?

Market-Youngsters and Nostalgia of Agency

<i>Ukapata madengo</i>	If you find a job
<i>Bai tatako namanyoko lipambedye bwana</i>	Take care of your mother and father, mister
<i>Upate pakuwikila</i>	So you’ll have a place to land
<i>Ntondo madengo kukumya</i>	Tomorrow they fire you from the job
<i>Undashang’apa kuwikila</i>	You have no place to land
<i>Ishilikali lamina uji kuvili</i>	The State is a two-edged blade ⁷⁴

70 ‘After the deed [of proclaiming that ‘the Emperor has no clothes’], when it is already too late, we suddenly notice that we got more than we bargained for – that the very community of which we were a member has disintegrated’. Žižek, *For They Know Not*, pp. 11–12.

71 ‘These violent *passages à l’acte* bear witness to some underlying antagonism that can no longer be formulated-symbolized in properly political terms’. S. Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London, Verso, 1999), p. 204.

72 Siegel, *Naming the Witch*, p. 216. It must be noted though, that the Catholic Church managed to cast the witch in the role of the Enemy in the epoch of the great European witch-hunts.

73 Žižek, *For They Know Not*, p. 252.

74 Song, bwarabwà, mang’anyamu group, Matambalale (Muidumbe), recorded the 28 December 2004.

As far as I can tell, Muidumbe's witch-hunters were mostly youths and mostly male. This is far from obvious: in Muidumbe, middle-aged women, mostly but not exclusively war veterans, are frequently involved in political violence against Renamo; and it is women's dance groups who are allowed to speak out against Frelimo.⁷⁵ The lynchers were mostly male youths of the kind that in Shimakonde one would call *vanemba* (sing. *nnemba*). This denomination is systemically opposed to *nang'olo*, which conveys notions of age and power, was previously used to refer to unmarried men and it now loosely indicates young-looking men from teenager to those about 40 who live within a certain unsettledness or precariousness: 'social cadets', that is.⁷⁶ Many of the lynchers could more specifically be described as *vanemba vakubazari*, 'market-youngsters' – a nickname that indicates youth hanging around at the corners of village markets waiting for whatever opportunity might arise.

The expression 'market-youngster' has evident echoes in the present neo-liberal contingency. The preponderant role of marginalised youth in contemporary witch-hunts has indeed been related with poverty and social disruption, accelerated by 'millennial capitalism'.⁷⁷ It is pertinent to read Muidumbe youth's *passage à l'acte* as linked to economic despair and to the syndrome of emasculation induced in Africa's youth by the harshness of neo-liberal policies.⁷⁸ The imaginaries of consumption that flutter alongside markets – on the TV screens of 'bush cinema' for instance – send back Muidumbe's 'market-youngsters' to their marginality. Opportunities are few and are seized by those already well placed, alcoholism is widespread, petty crime is common and despair is the dominant feeling. Many of these youths cannot afford an education and have no proficiency in the national language. Escaping from the villages to the larger cities is the alluring path taken by those who have a chance, a personal connection or the spirit of adventure. Others choose to stay and linger in the market's shadows. Some take up occasional jobs as assistants of stonemasons, carpenters or in local civil construction. Some end up working in the excavation of semi-precious stones in illegal mines – weeks of drug-sustained work in exchange for a made-in-china sweater. Some experiment with trade, and a few succeed in becoming successful entrepreneurs, self-made men who start selling cigarettes and end up owning a shop in the village market. Most meet with failure.

Muidumbe youth's marginality is reinforced by the ideological legacy of Frelimo's revolution. Nostalgia of the Liberation Struggle's agency is inscribed in Muidumbe's public sphere as well as in the subjectivities of the generation of women and men who took up arms to liberate the country.⁷⁹ In the name of the Struggle, these young people were authorised to break the symbolic injunction of respecting their elders. Significantly enough, the (mythical) biography of one of the Makonde leaders of Frelimo guerrillas starts with the killing of the father, a Portuguese 'native authority'. This generation of 'war-makers' (*vanantenda ing'ondo*) acquired a new, empowered, sense of their agency: to the eyes of the Nation they were heroic liberators and the pioneers of the New Man; the government reinforced the ideological devotion through an intensive programme of war pensions; and new local

75 See Israel, *Masques en Transformation*, Chapter 5, and Israel, 'Kummwangalela Guebuza', pp. 119–21.

76 Both Meillassoux and Bayart employ the expression *cadets sociaux*, See N. Argenti, *The Intestines of the State: Youth, Violence and Belated Histories in the Cameroon Grassfields* (Chicago, IL, Chicago University Press, 2007), pp. 7–11, 258 n. 4, 5, 6. The analysis of African societies in terms of elders and juniors (*ainés* and *cadets*) was a recurring feature of Marxist French anthropology, see B. Jewsiewicki, 'African Historical Studies: Academic Knowledge as "Usable Past" and Radical Scholarship', *African Studies Review*, 32, 3 (1989), pp. 23, 33.

77 See Comaroff, 'Occult Economies', pp. 287–90, Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence*, pp. 256–7.

78 Mbembe, *On The Postcolony*, pp. 67–77.

79 For 'nostalgia of agency', see P. Lulu, *The Deaths of Hintsa. Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Past* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2008), pp. 16–18, 219–22.

structures of power and prestige built on the symbolic capital of participation in the Liberation Struggle. Most of the subsequent generations, while brought up to venerate their elders' agency, nostalgically embedded in the public sphere, had little part in the benefits brought by liberation. Hatred of Renamo as the ideological Enemy brought little possibility of *défoulement*, especially after democratic reform and the injunction of ideological tolerance that came with it.

Pedro Seguro embodied these ideological legacies and their contradictions. Decorated Frelimo guerrilla and son of one of the first political prisoners of Portuguese secret police (Pide), he based his governance in Muidumbe on the mobilisation of the social and symbolic capital of his participation in the Struggle. Extremely proficient in kin-based codes of power and allegiances, he was eager to deploy the language of the bureaucratic state to reinforce his authority whenever needed. An investor in Muidumbe well before neo-liberal reform, he played on the double register of persistent ideological commitment to socialism and personal entrepreneurship. Seguro had 'eaten the nation', benefiting from both the Revolution and its neoliberal aftermath, while never giving up the nostalgic worship of the Struggle's symbols. His large house at the centre of Muidumbe embodied this duplicity, with its white façade open only to official visits and its backyard a bustling of local conversations and economic activity. This house, the first made of concrete, bricks and corrugated iron built in the district, was also the object of occult rumours. Blood was seen dripping from its walls at night – the blood of the people 'vampirised' for its construction, and of the many sorcerers who tried to penetrate Seguro's premises and crashed to their death on its magic defences.

Seguro's response to the lion crisis was marked by an ambivalent mix of circumspection and stubbornness. Fearful of meeting a violent death like that of his predecessor in Muidumbe,⁸⁰ he never confronted the crowds of lynchers. He lamented the impossibility of acting in the midst of events, which he attributed to the violent ethnic character of Makonde people.⁸¹ He also lamented that the guns that he gave to hunters were never used for the right purposes. At every public meeting,⁸² however, Seguro harshly dismissed the belief in fabricated lions as superstition and obscurantism, deploying old-time Frelimo's ideological formulae.⁸³ In so doing, Seguro was publicly inflicting a series of epistemological double binds on those who believed differently.⁸⁴ His explicit denial of the existence of sorcery contrasted with an implicit and menacing presupposition, 'that the vernacular language fully recognizes, but that the Marxist lexicon nevertheless prevents': that history 'participates in a great economy of sorcery'.⁸⁵ That is, while Seguro openly denied the existence of sorcery, his personal economic success and symbolic capital was witnessed as proof of his strong investment in the occult. The more Seguro denied the existence of a sect of lion men, the more he revealed his involvement in their activities. Was not his indecipherable and indefectible denial the clearest sign that he was the 'master of puppets' of the occult predators?

80 The former administrator had been killed in retaliation by the parents of a boy who had been beaten to death by the police.

81 A defensive stereotype fuelled by the Makonde themselves since the times of the slave trade.

82 Seguro's private self was more cautious. See Israel, 'Déchirures et Rumeurs', p. 218, n. 18.

83 Carlos Serra calls this the 'miserist-obscurantist' explanation of occult belief, *Côlera e Catarse* (Maputo, Imprensa Universitária, 2003), pp. 16–17.

84 I make more forcefully the point for this 'imposition of double-bind' as one of the causes of the lynchers' rage in 'Déchirures et Rumeurs', pp. 217–22.

85 A. Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', *Public Culture*, 14, 1 (2002), p. 252.

Fernando's Doubt

<i>Tulila kwatulila</i>	We cry and cry
<i>Tuvamwidumbe wetu</i>	We Muidumbeans
<i>Ntumi mpalakele kwamunjadike</i>	Bring back the lion to where you fetched it ⁸⁶
<i>Vajungu 'ndivashema</i>	[They] called some whites
<i>Vandyaloka Ku-Maputo</i>	They came from Maputo
<i>Ntumi vandimyyaa</i>	They killed the lion
<i>Tuvamwidumbi kupuwa</i>	We Muidumbeans rejoice
<i>Ntumi mpalakele kwamunjadike</i>	Bring back the lion to where you fetched it ⁸⁷

'This is not over. As soon as things will be quiet, these people will start again doing their dirty work. You will see.'⁸⁸ Fernando Alves, a renowned hunter living in Pemba, had been sent from the provincial government with a brigade of policemen to put an end to the lion crisis in Muidumbe. With a single shot he killed a huge lion in the Messalo lowlands, one that locals had baptised *Kumpyaya*, 'the sweeper'. The lion was shown around in Muidumbe, and eventually brought to Pemba, where it was again displayed and finally handed over to Makonde people there. Elders ate it. In Muidumbe, Fernando's intervention had a shock effect. People started to hunt down lions. The local government offered a bicycle as a prize to all those who killed one. In two weeks, three lions were killed in the lowlands around Shitashi through a joint effort of healers and hunters. By the end of May, the War of Lions was over. In June, the Easter rioters' leader Mwela was arrested, together with the village president of Litapata. All others crimes were forgotten, if not forgiven.

But Fernando Alves was left with doubts. He had seen 'strange things' in Malangonya. People had shown him the tracks left by a person supposedly snatched by a lion. 'That was no lion, I tell you. That person was killed and carried away by men.' The village president had gone to Tanzania with a basket of dried snails. 'You know what does this mean? Dried snails smell like dried human organs.' Fernando was convinced that a group of organ-trafficking murderers *was* responsible for many of the killings, merely taking advantage of the actual presence of lions. He also suspected Seguro of being involved. The Malangonya's village president, he observed, was always accompanied by a mystic girl, 'some sort of healer that told him how to do everything'. She should be taken, Fernando suggested, and interrogated, harshly if necessary, and all the dark murderous plots of the village president of Malangonya, and possibly of Seguro, would be uncovered.⁸⁹ 'You will see,' he kept repeating to me 'this will start again as soon as things will calm down.' Fernando's conviction was sustained by personal experience. 'People come to me and ask for all sorts of things. Everybody wants a piece of this lion that I have killed.' At that very moment, someone stepped into his yard asking for a piece of the beast. 'What do you want to do with that? Eh? What do you want to concoct? Come back later!' Then to me: 'You see?'⁹⁰

86 This must be read as a euphemism for 'fabricated'. For a close reading of the paradoxical nature of this song, see Israel, 'Déchirures et Rumeurs', p. 223.

87 Song, 'Nandindi' *mapiko* group, Mwambula, recorded the 14 April 2005. I heard this song frequently between 2003 and 2004. In 2008, it is still sung.

88 Interviews, Fernando Alves, Pemba, 2 and 3 June 2003. All following quotes come from these interviews.

89 Unaware of Fernando's suspicions, the Malangonya president wrote a letter to the hunter asking for a bicycle on account of the help that he provided in hunting down *Kumpyaya* (he entrusted the letter to me in July 2004).

90 Fernando himself used 'medicines' prepared with lion parts while hunting. See West, 'Govern Yourselves!' and *Ethnographic Sorcery*, pp. 21–3.

Conclusion: Explanation and Violence

There is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown⁹¹

By and large, this article has not evaded the constraints, the legacies and the conundrums of the 'usual' theorisations of witchcraft crafted by anthropologists and historians – where sorcery is an explanation of misfortune (here, lions devouring people, youths' despair and poverty); witchcraft crises point to social tensions and historic upheavals (here, neo-liberal reform, the institution of communal villages, post-socialism); occult discourse is characterised by an ambiguous rationality (here, an unconscious articulation of social realities, a vernacular language of power, a symptomatic expression of ideological deadlocks); and witch-hunts are forms of sacral, communitarian violence (here, *kutannola* and 'quilting points') which inhere in the social as a limit point, one called upon to restore its illusory seamlessness. But now, what to do of Fernando's doubt? What to do about this ghost that reappears where it should not – in the mind of the person whose shot put an end to the War of Lions?

Fernando's suspicions certainly testify to the global extent of anxieties concerning bodily predation, pointing to conspiracy theory as a major form of cognitive mapping in the wake of the collapse of overarching explanatory narratives and their attendant projects of collective mobilisation.⁹² However, one should also take these suspicions literally. When Fernando held that 'medicine murders' were going on in Muidumbe, he meant no metaphor, nor did many Muidumbeans – and they had more than one reason to believe so. Organ trafficking and 'medicine murders' *do* happen worldwide⁹³ and lion-men societies *did* kill in other times and spaces. There was no police enquiry in Muidumbe to ascertain that this had not been the case there. The only evidence – the mauled bodies and the scars on the survivors – was inconclusive. Mwatide's hospital diagnosed Saide's wounds as produced by a perforating weapon such as a knife. Can one trust this diagnosis?⁹⁴ Even though Fernando's prevision was wrong – the killings did not recommence – up to this day we don't know if some of what was alleged and suspected during the War of Lions did really happen or not. A scholarly dismissal of these claims to *factual* truth as 'playful', 'ephemeral' and genre-based rumour⁹⁵ underplays the contestations and violence surrounding occult discourses, and does not account for the experiences of those who lost or risked their lives in the midst of events.

Fernando's doubt poignantly expresses the ambivalent relationship that sorcery discourse entertains with its practice. The Real of sorcery – the fact that some people might practise something like witchcraft, and that it might work out effects unforeseen by modern science – is precisely the 'quilting point' of sorcery discourse: while it provides the imaginary ground to articulate metaphors and moral economies, it invalidates at once their metaphoric and discursive nature. In other terms, if one wouldn't believe *a little bit* in the Real of sorcery, it

91 Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, incipit.

92 'Conspiracy, one is tempted to say, is the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age', F. Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois Press), p. 356 – and not only the poor person's, see. J. Dean, 'Theorizing Conspiracy Theory', *Theory and Event*, 4, 3 (Fall 2000) and H.G. West and T. Sanders, *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2003).

93 See N. Scheper-Hughes, 'Theft of Life' and 'The Global Traffic in Human Organs', *Current Anthropology*, 41, 2 (April 2000), pp. 191–211. For a grim account of 'medicine murder' in South Africa, see H.J. Scholtz, V.M. Phillips, G.J. Knobel, 'Muti or Ritual Murder?', *Forensic Science International*, 87 (1997), pp. 117–23. For a detailed account of a colonial era case, see C. Murray and P. Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho: The Anatomy of a Moral Crisis* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

94 In Annang 'the line in distinguishing between murder and mauling, between yam spike and leopard claw, was a fine one and required precision in its detection'. Pratten, *Men-Leopard Murders*, pp. 6–7.

95 White, 'The Traffic in Heads', p. 338.

couldn't function as a moral idiom;⁹⁶ but isn't the moral idiom unsettled and displaced by the very belief that articulates its existence? This serves to remind the scholar of the failure of all attempts to theoretically dispel the non-discursive hard kernel of occult practices and beliefs in order to construct their rationality. The question here is not only to 'repeat the classic metaphysical paradox of the conjunction of impossibility and prohibition'⁹⁷ – of arguing that one should not try to explain away witchcraft because it is in fact unexplainable. The question is rather to point out the ethical and epistemological double bind that defines the horizon of modern sorcery scholarship. On the one hand, one is led to reiterate the Enlightenment's baptismal naming of sorcery as superstition.⁹⁸ On the other, one is easily drawn to downplay the grievousness of occult-related violence (medicine murders, witch-hunts, social death) while indulging in the populist gesture of representing a subaltern (un)consciousness that articulates agency mostly through occult idioms.

Coda: An Avowal

In the Northern Province of Northern Rhodesia, the provincial commissioner was said to have given the Bemba paramount chief a 'large bag of money' to allow *banyama* [vampires] into his country.⁹⁹

I was the white with three sacks of money of the War of Lions' rumours. When I first arrived in Muidumbe in January 2002, I took residence in a house that Seguro offered to me as the administrator to a researcher endorsed by the Ministry of Culture, one that had all the stamps in order, so to say. I settled there for a couple of months, with three backpacks of field gear and clothes. Researching the crisis only made matters worse. 'Whites are orienting the lions with their video-cameras down in Ing'unde.' In the aftermath of the crisis, travelling around plateau and lowlands, I sometimes encountered my ghost. 'You know, in Muidumbe there is a white guy who paid three sacks of money to Seguro.'¹⁰⁰ Collapsing myself with my ghost provoked disbelief in the people who knew me. 'So it was *you*? Man, people can lie.' Others mistrusted me. The Frelimo secretary of Namakande saluted my return to the plateau in May 2003: 'We are fine . . . up to now . . . but we don't know what will happen now that you've arrived, Mr Paolo.'

In guise of a conclusion, let me wonder why, in this late age of free-flowing capital, I could not buy Muidumbe with an international bank transfer.

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96 That is, occult talk would be just a rhetoric device, or a question of style.

97 Žižek, 'Spectre of Ideology', p. 32 n. 34 and *Sublime Object*, p. 164.

98 'Anthropological analysis of the local categories of witchcraft [. . .] still leaves those who claim the validity of witchcraft on the other side of a divide'. Siegel, *Naming the Witch*, p. 17.

99 White, *Speaking with Vampires*, p. 62.

100 The renowned potter Reinata Sadimba, amongst others, reported this rumour to me in Maputo, in March 2005.