Creative Destruction and Sorcery of Construction. Power, Hope and Suspicion in Post-War Mozambique
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Abstract
This article addresses the historic transformations occurring in Mozambique over the past decade, including political and economic liberalization, the cessation of armed conflict, and the staging of national elections. Drawing on fieldwork conducted among the predominantly Makonde-speaking communities of the Mueda plateau in the country's northern province of Cabo Delgado, the author argues that recent historical events have been met with ambivalence and suspicion. The article focuses on the use made by Muedans of the interpretive schema of sorcery to navigate what they experience locally as a disorderly new order. The author suggests that the discourses produced and sustained by Muedans in the context of historical change offer a salient critique of modernization and the individuals and institutions which capture its agenda.

Résumé
La destruction créatrice et la sorcellerie de la construction : pouvoir, espoir et méfiance dans le Mozambique de l'après-guerre. — Cet article traite des transformations historiques qui sont survenues au Mozambique durant les dix dernières années et qui se sont traduites par la libéralisation politique et économique, la cessation du conflit armé et la programmation d'élections nationales. S'appuyant sur un travail de terrain mené dans des communautés majoritairement makonde-phones de la province septentrionale du Cabo Delgado, l'auteur tente de démontrer que les événements récents ont été vécus sur le mode de l'ambivalence et de la méfiance. L'article est centré sur l'usage que font les gens de Mueda du schéma interprétatif de la sorcellerie pour s'orienter dans ce qu'ils perçoivent localement comme une situation de désordre. L'auteur fait l'hypothèse que les discours produits et revendiqués par les gens de Mueda, dans le contexte de changements historiques, fournissent une critique pertinente de la modernisation ainsi que des individus et des institutions qui se situent dans ce cadre.
Harry G. West

Creative Destruction and Sorcery of Construction

Power, Hope and Suspicion in Post-War Mozambique*

'The peasant suspicion of "progress" [...] is not altogether misplaced or groundless' (Berger 1979: XXVI)

'The work of modernization is the burden of this age. It is our rock. [...] No matter how difficult the labor, or even, at times, how fruitless, the rock is shouldered once again, eagerly and with hope. Perhaps it is the element of hope that allows Camus to conclude his essay on the Greek myth with the words, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy".'

As Samora Machel departed the Nachingwea rear base in southern Tanzania (from which his Frente de Libertação de Moçambique [Frelimo] organization had waged war on Portuguese colonialism since 1964), crossed the Rovuma river into Mozambique, and began his victory march to take power on 25 June 1975 in the nation's southern capital, Mozambique had come to represent, for many in Africa and beyond, a powerful symbol of hope. Machel promised that freedom, purchased with the lives of so many Mozambicans in the luta armada ('armed struggle'), would not be compromised by neo-imperialist relations between his government and the banished colonizer. At the same time, he promised that inde-

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1. D. APTER (1987: 54). Despite the title of the 1987 volume, ‘Rethinking’ Development (emphasis added), these words were first published by Apter in 1965 in a work entitled The Politics of Modernization.

pendence would bear fruit for the people of Mozambique. With the slogan *A Luta Continua!* (‘The Struggle Continues!’), Frelimo transformed its struggle into one whose objective was ‘socialist modernization’—a war on poverty, famine and nakedness.

Over the following years, hope would be transformed into despair as Frelimo’s commitment to a socialist form of ‘national reconstruction’ made the party, and the Mozambican people, the objects of viscous attack by hostile neighbors (the minority regimes in southern Rhodesia and South Africa) and a rebel movement—the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Renamo)—which was built, trained, equipped and financed by these hostile neighbors to ‘destabilize’ their enemies. After the systematic destruction of the young nation’s rural schools, health posts and roadways, the terrorization of its population, and the demolition of its national morale, Mozambique came to symbolize, for a world frustrated with the failures of ‘development’, the horrors of a primitive and chaotic Third World.²

With Frelimo’s acceptance of International Monetary Fund supervised structural adjustment beginning in 1987 (Hanlon 1991: 113-122), its official abandonment of Marxist-Leninist ideology during its 1990 fifth party congress, and its negotiation of a peace treaty with Renamo in October 1992, the post-Cold War ‘international community’ saw reason to reinvest in Mozambique—their vision of hope having, of course, notably different contours than that of their more left-leaning predecessors. By the time elections were successfully staged in October 1994, the United Nations had taken to representing Mozambique as a model for the successful PKO (Peace Keeping Operation), and the World Bank had come to consider it an exemplary client. Perhaps nowhere else has the New World Order been so quickly, and so ‘successfully’, writ small than in Mozambique.

I do not wish to diminish the importance of peace to the people of Mozambique. Despite the temptation, however, to finally find Sisyphus happy, I remain reluctant. The latest models for conflict resolution, democratization and economic liberalization now being deployed in Mozambique have more in common with the socialist models whose errors they purport to address than the actors and institutions which espouse them would admit. Like their precursors, these stewards of modernization make universalizing claims regarding the inevitability and desirability of the globalized futurescapes they would bring into being, demonstrating ignorance of their own legacies of failure and betraying indifference to the perspectives of those whose lives they would ‘improve’.

I base my ‘suspicions’ of their claims of ‘progress’—if I may adopt John Berger’s wording—in the perspectives shared with me by the residents of the Mueda plateau in the northern Mozambican province of Cabo

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² Mozambique was often described by foreign observers as having returned to the Stone Age (see, for example, Ayisi 1991). The World Bank would grant it, in 1990, the distinction of being ‘the poorest nation on earth’ (Plank 1993: 407).
Delgado during eleven months of ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in 1994. For these people, there has been continuity over the past two decades in the unfulfilled promises of modernizing institutions. Modernity—whether underwritten by ‘socialist modernizers’ or western liberal ‘developers’—has always seemed, to them, to arrive in bits and pieces that don’t work, and that rarely make sense: tractors without spare parts, hospitals without doctors, schools without books, pipes without water, banks without credit, consumer goods without the money to buy them, free markets without job opportunities, elections without safe choices. The experience differs across social categories of age, gender and class, but for most people in Mueda, modernity’s partial and fragmented delivery has fomented division, envy and confusion, despite claims to establish a more beneficial social order.

It shall be my aim, in this article, not only to examine the shortfalls of Mozambique’s latest set of reforms—to question the claims to success of the New World Order—but also to describe the attempts of Muedans to treat the wounds they suffer on modernity’s dysfunctional and perilous ‘periphery’. In doing so, I wish to follow the lead of anthropologist Arturo Escobar. Where the exhausted rationality of a globalizing modernity has created impasse, Escobar urges political activists and analysts of the Third World to approach the question of social transformation through perspectives generated precisely in the locales of the resultant crises: ‘[T]he nature of alternatives as a research question and a social practice can be most fruitfully gleaned from the specific manifestations of […] alternatives in concrete local settings. The alternative is, in a sense, always there’ (Escobar 1995: 223).

For the Muedans among whom I have worked, local discourse not only brings the wisdom of experience and familiarity to bear in the context of social change, but also provides a way in which people can engage the forces of transformation and attempt to steer change in desirable directions.

3. The research was funded by grants from the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship program, the United States Institute of Peace, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. I also wish to acknowledge institutional support provided in the field by the Arquivos do Patrimônio Cultural, and the director of their offices in Pemba, Estêvão Mpalume, as well as the Associação dos Combatentes da Luta de Libertação Nacional (ACLLN), and the director of their department of historical research in Pemba, Lazaro Mmala. Fieldwork was facilitated by the invaluable assistance of Felista Elias Mkaima, and the generous and insightful collaboration of Marcos Agostinho Mandumbwe, a historian at the ACLLN in Pemba. Eusebio Tissa Kairo and Rafael Pedro Mwakala also participated in various components of the research. While each of these individuals were essential to the success of my research, they are not accountable for the opinions expressed in this publication. I also gratefully acknowledge the people of Mueda, who shared their views and sentiments with me in the midst of political tension and confusion. Due to the sensitive nature of many of their contributions, I have chosen, in most cases, not to identify them by name.
directions. I begin this article by recounting how local discourse was deployed to frame one of the most dramatic events in recent Mozambican history—the 1994 electoral campaign. I then seek the historical roots of the symbols and social relations upon which that discourse, and related ones, depend for their salience in the present day. In the final sections, I conclude that Muedans use local discourses to navigate a perpetual state of emergency described by Michael Taussig (1992: 17) as simultaneously ‘disordered order’ and ‘ordered disorder’. Through them, they sustain nuanced understandings of the ambivalence of power and the complexity of social relations—understandings necessary to the survival of unending crisis.

Making Papa Chissano More Responsible

‘As a young man, I had a reputation for provoking fights. When we went to dance mapiko in neighboring settlements, I was always insulting people. Eventually, those in my likola became tired of it—tired of participating in the fights I had started—and so they decided to make me humu. That way, they reasoned, I would have to behave more responsibly, and be finished with this thing of going around provoking fights all the time.’

On the first day of the 1994 Mozambican presidential campaign, the northern end of the Mueda aerodrome—near the town, where it is not mined—was lined with people twenty deep. There must have been more than thirty women’s choral groups, some composed of elders, some of young women, some of girls, but each ensemble uniformed in new and brightly colored outfits sewn from capulanas. Each group was singing in trilling voices, dancing, awaiting the arrival of the planes which carried ‘Papa Chissano’ and his entourage. President Chissano had chosen to inaugurate his campaign in Mueda because of its historical importance as the ‘cradle’ of his party. When Frelimo began its armed campaign for independence from Portuguese colonial rule in 1964, it did so in a town called Chai, just off the Mueda plateau, which Chissano was to have visited earlier in the day. Frelimo’s central base throughout the war—which culminated with Mozambican independence in 1975—was maintained on the Mueda plateau. Chissano wished to remind the nation of Frelimo’s heroic origins. He also wished to remind the predominantly Makonde population on the plateau of its long-standing identity with Frelimo, not to mention his own identity as chief of Frelimo internal

4. *Mapiko* refers to a dance performed at ritual functions, particularly initiation rites.
5. A *humu* (pl. *vahumu*) is a counselor, and symbol of unity, of a Makonde *likola* (pl. *valikola*), a matrilineal kinship unit.
7. A *capulana* is a printed cloth normally worn by women as a wrap.
security during the war. During his campaign rally in Mueda, he would speak in Swahili, the *lingua franca* not of Mozambique but of the northern bush-paths during the *luta armada.*

The thousands gathered around the airstrip also had a mnemonic agenda. They wished to remind the President of the promises made to them by the Frelimo leadership during the war for independence as they suffered attack from helicopter gunships and paratroopers, napalm bombers, and agents of Portuguese counter-insurgency that fostered distrust and divisiveness in the midst of their communities. Since independence, Mueda has proven a tough audience for Frelimo leaders, including the dynamic Samora Machel, despite, or perhaps because of, the sense among its residents that they are more genuinely ‘Frelimo’ than whatever may call itself so far away in the south, in the capital, Maputo, ‘where the *luta* was never fought.’ The shiny cars, the tractors, the zinc-roofed concrete-block houses they imagined they would own upon evicting the Portuguese have, twenty years later, only materialized for a few party bosses. The recently-ended civil war, which devastated most of the rest of the country, did not hit Mueda hard, but was experienced there primarily as government justification for the failure of post-independence ‘socialist modernization’, and the collapse of the rural economy.

The President descended the plane, accompanied by high ranking members of the Mozambican military—several of them natives of the plateau. This day, however, local veterans of the war for independence who never ‘made it to Maputo’ would give commands. They had ‘mobilized’ the local population over the preceding weeks, prepared the town, built the platform, rehearsed the choral groups, and drilled the ceremonial rifle corps. They had ‘delivered’ Mueda to ‘Papa Chissano’, and now they would have a word with him. The President was brought before their clustered group, unprepared for what would happen. There he was treated, ritually, as a *humu* would have been. Told to remove his shirt, he was clothed in a white robe and head band and given a spear. Finally, he was placed in a chair mounted upon a litter and carried to the far side of Mueda town for the campaign rally.

To the high-priced Brazilian campaign consultants accompanying the President, this may have appeared an unambiguously positive reception. Only three years earlier, however, such a scene would have been unimaginable. Since coming to power at independence, Frelimo had regarded traditional practices and social structures as obscurantist and anti-progressive—positions forged during the war for independence as the party wrestled with local elders for ultimate control over the populations of the plateau and other areas occupied by their guerrilla forces. In other regions of the country, local chiefs had, in many cases, later thrown their lot in

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8. For a general history of the war for Mozambican independence, see Mondlane (1969), Henriksen (1983), and Munslow (1983).
with the South African-backed Renamo guerrillas which terrorized the countryside beginning shortly after independence⁹ and now, as the Renamo party, constituted Chissano’s main rivals in the upcoming elections. On the plateau, pro-Frelimo “vigilance” prevented the formation of alliances between Renamo and the chieftaincy. Renamo never occupied the plateau. By 1994, all but three of the thirty-six va Humph on the plateau prior to its libertação by Frelimo had died, and none of them had passed their mantles to successors.¹⁰ By local perceptions, Frelimo had replaced the va Humph, but had failed to honor subsequent commitments. Decked out in the regalia of a hump on the Mueda runway, made to embody the symbols of what Frelimo would call “tradition”, the President was reminded of his humble responsibilities to the national likola.

Sorcery of Construction

Newspaper coverage of President Chissano’s visit to Mueda declared that he had been made “emperor” by Mueda residents.¹¹ But to be hump is a rather more complicated matter. In conversation with elders on the plateau, I was told that in the first half of the twentieth century, the hump constituted the most powerful figure within Makonde political cosmology.¹² Before colonial conquest, the Makonde-speaking populations of the plateau and surrounding areas lived in dispersed settlements, each one with a nang’olo mwene kaya (elder head-of-settlement) who oversaw the well-being of his resident matrilateral male kin—normally younger brothers, and sisters’ adult sons—as well as their dependents. The settlement was vulnerable to attack from other valikula,¹³ but it could also be thrown into chaos by rivalry and jealousy from within, prompting outbreaks of sorcery. As in the present day, sorcerers were believed capable of feeding off the health and well-being of their neighbors and family members. Congregating in the settlement center at night, they would dance together

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9. Geffray (1990) provides the most detailed rendering of this scenario. See also Vines (1991), and Wilson (1992).
10. According to the three remaining va Humph, youth no longer aspire to become va Humph. This lack of interest is, in large measure, attributable to changing socio-economic conditions which have made pursuit of jobs in the cash economy more attractive than a vocation tied to the village. Nonetheless, government hostility toward the institution in the post-independence period has clearly intensified its decline.
12. My own research indicates that the institution of the hump is a rather recent one among plateau Makonde, and that it was only just being imported, in modified form, from the Makua-speaking areas of the lowlands south of the plateau when the Portuguese conquered the plateau between 1912 and 1922.
13. The various valikula on the plateau raided one another’s settlements to capture women to enhance their own populations, or to take slaves which might be ransomed or sold at the coast.
naked before making forays to attack their victims. The most powerful of sorcerers could transform themselves into dangerous predators—most frequently lions—and consume their victims all at once. Through use of a powerful medicinal substance, they rendered themselves and their acts invisible to the ordinary person, remaining visible only to one another. To escape the perceived threat of sorcery, factions sometimes abandoned the settlement, founding their own at a safe distance. Excessive splintering, however, could weaken the capacity of the likola to defend itself. The role of the humu was to coordinate likola solidarity within and among constituent settlements in a given region.

The humu was often chosen for his diplomatic manner, but also for his knowledge of the workings of sorcery. Many of those nominated to become humu had prior experience practicing the art of healing on victims of sorcery. In any case, a nominee would be ‘installed’ by a group of other vahumu from other valikola, at which time he would be submitted to various ritual ceremonies, made privy to cult secrets, and given medicinal substances to insure that he live long and command respect. While ordinarily young men who demonstrated their courage with acts of ‘provocation’ (ushaka)—e.g. stealing brides from a neighboring settlement, opening fields on lands unclaimed by another man—gained respect within Makonde society, the reprimand or counsel of the humu was rarely contested, whether he spoke in arbitration of disputes within, or between, valikola.

Most assumed the humu capable of ‘seeing’ sorcerers; how else could he monitor their activities and quash their appetites in the interest of likola well-being? To wield such power, most reasoned, the humu had to be a sorcerer himself.14 Like healers and other authority figures (including vanang’olo vene kaya), however, the humu was presumed to be a ‘cured’ or ‘reformed’ sorcerer who used his wisdom and powers to combat the destructive use of sorcery by others. The sorcery of the humu or the nang’olo mwene kaya was therefore referred to as a ‘sorcery of construction’ (uwavi wa kudenga).

The ambiguous figure of the humu is revealing of Makonde notions of power in the first half of the century. Implicit in the ritual complex that gave meaning to the power of the humu was the notion that power is at once essential to social well-being and a threat to it, both constructive and dangerous. During passage through the requisite rites of investiture—described to me by Humu Windu as ‘dirty, ugly and dangerous’—a humu would be made to ingest a medicinal mixture containing lukulungu (the...
flesh of a slain lion’s throat), allowing him to then speak with the lion’s voice. So close was his association with the lion that, in the words of Humu Mandia, lions would ‘recognize’ him in the bush, and even yield the path to him. As stated above, the most lethal of sorcerers were also closely associated with lions, being thought capable of turning into them. The humu, of course, was barred from aggressive actions, and this prohibition certainly included social predation; he was not permitted to accumulate wealth for his own benefit, nor to cultivate his own fields. After his investiture, however, the humu was considered in many ways to have become more animal than human. By ingesting the lion’s throat meat, the humu—whose body symbolized the likola itself—was said to have swallowed its power and digested it for the good of the entire likola, but his hold over the violent power of the beast within him was tenuous: upon death. Humu Mandia worriedly informed me, his body would require treatment by other vahumu, who would cut his hair and nails and carry them far into the bush lest the dangerous predators they spawned turn upon his own likola.

The Creative Destruction of Modernity

Whether Papa Chissano realized it or not, the reception given him by his former comrades-in-arms was anything but unequivocal. The antigos combatentes (veterans of the war for independence) gathered on the Mueda runway responded to the rationalized and benign image of political power the campaign was designed to affirm with a form of shock treatment—what Taussig (1992: 7) might call a ‘dialectical image’—invoking the complex figure of the humu and his regalia. To give Chissano his due, much had changed in Mozambique after his succeeding Samora Machel as President. Since around the time of the new Mozambican constitution in 1990, the once taboo ‘issue’ of ‘traditional authorities’ began to appear in the media, non governmental organizations’ seminars, donor reports, and government policy discussions on an increasingly regular basis. Soon, most in Maputo agreed that democratization would imply some recognition of the continuing importance of kin-based political institutions in the future. A consultant to the Ministry of State Administration and one of the leading voices on the subject in Mozambique, Iraê Baptista Lundin (1994: 85), argued openly that ‘Tradition can play a role in helping to

15. Out of ‘respect’ for him, his community cultivated his fields and provided for his fundamental needs.
16. Mandia is the healthiest of the three remaining vahumu, and fears that neither of his colleagues will survive him. Thus, there will be no humu to treat his body for burial.
17. Machel died in a plane crash in October 1986.
maintain social order and avoid conflict, as it has done in other parts of the world’, if only its dynamism could be recognized.

Assertions that tradition is dynamic, however, do little to reveal the way in which tradition and modernity interpenetrate one another, little to expose the manner in which modernizing institutions attempt to frame and define tradition according to their own dynamic (and often contradictory) agendas while the subject of these attempts shifts and squirms beneath the weight of analysis. What is most revealing about the change of tact from the post-independence assault on tradition to the present-day attempt at accommodation is that both fit into what critics of modernity have called the maelstrom of ‘creative destruction’. David Harvey writes (1990: 16): ‘The image of “creative destruction” is very important to understanding modernity precisely because it derived from the practical dilemmas that faced the implementation of the modernist project. How could a new world be created, after all, without destroying much that had gone before?’ If Frelimo’s post-independence frontal attack on tradition was an act of ‘creative destruction’, so too is the present-day attempt—necessitated by the apparent failures of the first campaign—to appropriate it in the name of nation-building. In Harvey’s words (ibid.: 11-12), ‘modernity can have no respect even for its own past, let alone that of any pre-modern social order. The transitoriness of things makes it difficult to preserve any sense of historical continuity. If there is any meaning to history, then that meaning has to be discovered and defined from within the maelstrom of change, a maelstrom that effects the terms of discussion as well as whatever it is that is being discussed’.

Just as sorcery of construction represents an attempt to continually reconstitute social relations through gaining interpretive ascendancy over them, creative destruction belies the need of political power perpetually to have the last word on the meaning of history. The willingness of modernizing institutions, including the Frelimo state, to forget their differences with those they previously considered obstructive was predicated on the hope that forgetfulness would become generalized, and that in the mix, ‘tradition’ would wither and the antagonisms that circulated around it would dissipate. As Chissano arrived on the runway in Mueda, the existence of history itself had been thrown into question (Benjamin 1968: 253-264). But the deeply historical figure of the humu, which the antigos combatentes chose to invoke in that moment, resonated with the clamor of past crises, and challenged the claim of modernizing institutions to be able to remake the world from scratch. Indeed, the image’s power derived from its position within a history shared by the residents of the Mueda plateau and the Frelimo leadership. It reminded those assembled of the complexity of that shared history, of the many contradictory voices and perspectives that constituted it, and of the ambivalent images of power which it contained.
Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency, Sorcery and Counter-Sorcery

By the time the war for independence began in Mueda in 1964, Makonde society, and the role of the humu within it, had come under increasing stress from the forces set in motion by colonialism. The Portuguese—who had ‘pacified’ the plateau during the First World War as they secured the northern Mozambican border against the threat of German invasion—had not attempted directly to undermine the functioning of local kinship institutions on the plateau, but rather had used selected vanang’olo vene kaya, and occasionally a humu, as local intermediaries to their administrative structures. These intermediaries—benefiting financially from their roles as tax collectors for the colonial administration and labor recruiters for colonial plantations in the vicinity—attracted varying degrees of resentment from their valikola and those over whom they exercise authority. As a result, respect for these figures waned even as their power over subordinates increased. Other factors contributed to a growing crisis of legitimacy. Portuguese overrule eliminated most of the threat of attack by one likola of another. Rivals were freer to break off from the settlement upon provocation, and were thus less dependent upon the mediation of elders such as the nang’olo or the humu. The Portuguese policy of chibalo (corvée labor) also had profound consequences. Young Makonde increasingly fled to Tanganyika to work on sisal plantations for wages, and returned home with wealth in cash and manufactured goods which was resistant to redistributive practices previously controlled by the nang’olo mwene kaya. Sorcery circulated wildly around objects of individual wealth. In the 1940s and 1950s, social conflict increased dramatically as elders proved incapable of ‘monitoring’ and ‘controlling’ jealousy, predation and sorcery.

In the early 1960s, the Frelimo guerrilla army stepped into this social milieu with unprecedented force. With an international network of support, and weapon sometimes more sophisticated than that used by the Portuguese, they wielded obvious power. What is more, many among them were of local origin, and their stated objective of ousting the colonizer garnered sympathy. Fear of reprisal from the Pide (Policia internacional e de defesa do estado, the Portuguese secret police) prompted many elders (including both vanang’olo vene kaya who were colonial intermediaries, and others who were not) to hesitate, but when Frelimo showed itself equally—if not more—willing and able to summarily assassinate those who collaborated with its enemy, local elders and their populations rallied to Frelimo’s support. ‘At first I was afraid of Frelimo’, the nang’olo mwene kaya Mauru Mwalisha (now deceased) told me. ‘But I hated the Portuguese.’ When Frelimo asked me to help them, I agreed immediately.

18 These intermediaries were ranked, from highest to lowest, as régulos, capitães mor and waziri.
If I had said no, they would have killed me. I gave them two of my sons to fight for the guerrillas.'

During the war, Frelimo maintained tense relations with vahumu and vanang'olo vene kaya, sometimes using them as liaisons with their populations, but always subordinating them, at the lowest level, to the military hierarchy of the organization. The population largely came to think of Frelimo authorities in much the same way it had thought of the vanang'olo vene kaya and vahumu which these powerful young men and women had subordinated to themselves. This analogous treatment extended into the realm of sorcery as well. In my conversations with them, many survivors of the war gave evidence that this attitude was grounded in day-to-day attempts to explain experience: As the war progressed, the Portuguese adopted a counterinsurgency strategy which depended heavily upon the training of African operatives and their insertion into Frelimo liberated zones, where they would gather information, sabotage operations, and sow distrust within the ranks of the guerrilla forces; in combating this, Frelimo set up an extensive internal security apparatus, with counterespionage operations, prison camps, and occasional open executions: to be successful in this effort—as most agreed they were—Frelimo had to be ‘able to see acts of sorcery which called in enemy attacks and made hidden settlements visible to enemy aircraft’, and to be able to identify and silence the perpetrators.

As powerful figures of authority, it was reasoned, Frelimo commanders, security operatives, and even ordinary guerrillas, had to be adept sorcerers themselves. It was now they who claimed responsibility for guarding the well-being of the community from both internal and external maleficence. One man remembered how inside the liberated zones, Frelimo used sorcery: ‘They formed open alliances with known sorcerers, and killed others to show their power. Some elders could predict when the Portuguese would attack. Usually, when they were right, Frelimo used them. But sometimes Frelimo would say ‘we know this man is working with the enemy, that is why he knows these things’, and they would kill him.’ The chief of Frelimo security operations on the plateau was widely considered to be the most powerful of all sorcerers. Another man told me, ‘He would pass a Frelimo column in the bush and look each man in the eyes. He would select one from among them and say ‘come with me!’ He would take the traitor to D. He had seen something! He saw everything! How else could he be chief?’

19. In most cases, elders became members of the Circle Branch Committees set up by Frelimo amongst residential communities hidden in the bush. These committees supervised activities involving production of food, organization of trade caravans, and support for the guerrilla army whether in the form of food contributions, portage or the supply of young recruits.

20. For interesting comparative analyses drawn from the Zimbabwean nationalist war, see LAN (1985) and KRIGER (1992).

21. D means Moçambique D, the Frelimo security operations base. The base was composed of two areas: one for minor offenders who worked on Frelimo col-
Government Sorcery

Mozambique achieved independence in 1975 after ten years of war which had taken a considerable toll on the residents of a select few regions of the country. The Makonde people contributed substantial numbers to Frelimo’s ranks, and counted among their casualties large numbers of guerrillas and civilians. Not surprisingly, expectations were high among those who felt that they had given the nation its freedom and now deserved rewards. The initial successes of Frelimo’s post-independence policy of socialist modernization—the construction of rural schools and health posts and, on the Mueda plateau, the building of a costly water supply system—were soon undermined by generalized economic crisis throughout the country. Whether the crisis was attributable to Frelimo incompetence or to Renamo’s banditry was much debated in Mueda. So long as Frelimo’s socialist ideology prevailed, however, leaders were unable to distance themselves greatly from the rest of the populace. Even if they had privileged access to limited goods and services, they could not use these to reproduce individual power at the expense of the rest of society.

Only with the adoption in 1986 of a structural adjustment program referred to as the Programa de Reabilitação Económica (PRE) would such behavior become possible. Rather than a coherent strategy to address the problems of the Mozambican economy, the PRE constituted, in large measure, a concession to the western donors which could save Mozambique from impending famine and ever-deepening crisis. It created the conditions under which inefficient units within the state sector of the economy would collapse, and officials at all levels of government would—lective farms, the other for more serious offenders. Most of the latter were eventually executed. Witnesses of procedures at D were few, but sufficient to spread detailed accounts of torture among the civilians of the liberated zones. It should be noted that most of the techniques of torture employed were modeled on those used by the Pide against captured Frelimo operatives and civilians suspected of sympathizing with Frelimo. Though it is beyond the scope of this article, it warrants mentioning that nearly all residents of the plateau remembered the colonial regime as incomparably more violent than Frelimo both in scope and in tactics.

22. Some expectations were fantastic. For example, many residents of the Mueda plateau state with indignation that Frelimo promised a new national capital would be constructed upon independence in Negomano (a wilderness region off the western edge of the plateau some 200 km from the coast).

23. These debates paralleled academic discussions, with many scholars initially asserting that South African destabilization was the root cause of the failure of the Mozambican economy, and others later suggesting that internal dynamics such as excessive centralization and low skill levels within state institutions were sufficient conditions for failure.

24. The PRE actually constituted an attempt on the part of the Mozambican government to unilaterally implement structural adjustment. One year later, the government came to terms with the IMF and received its support in continuing reforms.
with or without legal sanction—dismantle and distribute state assets. In most cases, high ranking members of the party/state were best positioned to assert control over the disposition of these assets. Officials divested them to private capital (usually foreign interests who paid tribute to them), or simply auctioned them off to themselves.

In the Mueda region, military officials individualized titles to military warehouses, garages and machine shops. Agriculture officials took over large plots of land in the N’guri irrigated scheme in the lowlands southeast of the plateau. These same officials were involved in transactions throughout the northern region, and in some cases, all over the country. ‘The big chiefs found money in the PRE’, I was often told. High ranking officials of local origin were seen using military transport planes to shuttle materials to the plateau to build elaborate stone houses with tiled roofs amongst their neighbors’ mud and bamboo dwellings. Muedans referred to any Antonov plane seen flying overhead as ‘Air Imbuho’—Imbuho evoking the catholic mission where most ranking Frelimo bosses of local origin had been educated.

Economic liberalization was framed by officials in the north of Mozambique as an opportunity for development which the Frelimo party had ‘arranged’ for those who had fought for independence years earlier. Fearful that regions such as Mueda—home to large concentrations of generally frustrated antigos combatentes—might provide an advancing Renamo army with fertile ground for recruitment, Frelimo had begun paying retirement benefits to selected veterans beginning in 1986 and had, in 1988, formed a veterans’ association which had as its stated objective, among others, the solicitation and administration of development initiatives to benefit antigos combatentes and their families. In his role as President of the Associação dos Combatentes da Luta de Libertação Nacional, Chissano himself visited provincial offices in the north and ‘delivered’ a credit scheme which would allow veterans to purchase tractors, trucks and grain mills for small-scale agricultural projects. The goods were imported by private sector dealers under a USAID–Private Sector Support Program which furnished hard currency at the official exchange rate (i.e. 20% of the black market rate), and thus allowed the goods to be sold at prices substantially lower than the open market would ever have permitted.


27. This scheme was called the Caixa de Credito Agrícola para Desenvolvimento Rural (CCADR). Though antigos combatentes were target recipients of the scheme, it was not established exclusively for them.

But the long awaited rewards for the *luta* were not so easily attained by most who aspired to them. Ranking government and party officials pressured the Mozambican bank managers who administered the credit schemes to give them and their affiliates preferential treatment. Most of the vehicles which appeared in Mueda were owned by national political figures who used them to set up a family member back home with a steady income. Other Mueda residents who did obtain vehicles had their difficulties. A young man recounted for me a scenario others agreed was typical:

‘If you got a loan for a tractor or a truck, your family thought you had wealth to share. Every time you saw a cousin, he expected you to buy him a beer. Your aunt wanted you to give her, or her children, rides from one of the villages into Mueda town to sell produce in the market. Your wife’s father had a grandchild who needed to be taken to the hospital. Your brother wanted to visit a girlfriend. So instead of saving the money you were loaned for maintaining the vehicle, you spent it on beer, or on petrol. You didn’t use the vehicle to do what you had planned. You didn’t make any money, and then your vehicle needed a part, or your first payment at the bank was due, and you had no money. So you borrowed from a friend, or a relative, or maybe even the bank. But you went deeper and deeper. Your vehicle then had a real breakdown. I mean serious. So you had to wonder, “Who has done this to me? Who is ensorceling me?” You went to a *curandeiro*, and he told you that a jealous family member had stuffed an arm or a skull in your vehicle. (Sorcerers will do that. The bones they leave behind are evidence of their cravings for human flesh. They are jealous because you have a plan to improve yourself.) The *curandeiro* removed the skull, but then one of your children became ill. More sorcery. The *curandeiro* tried, but he told you you had to take the child to the doctor. So you took a part off your tractor and sold it to someone who needed it so that you would have enough money to pay for the medicine at the hospital. Now you were in trouble. You had no money, the bank was after you, your friend needed his money, and your vehicle was dead. What could you do? So you either waited for the bank to come and take the tractor away, or you sold it.

This is how the big chiefs wind up with everything. This is how they eat everything. They have the money to buy your tractor. They hire someone from [the southern province of] Gaza to run their business here, so not even their families can eat them. They know how to protect themselves from sorcery. They have a way of mining their vehicle, or their house. When the sorcerer comes, when the sorcerer gets close, the tractor will disappear, the house will disappear. The sorcerer steps back, and it reappears, but he cannot get close enough to ensorcel it!’

As with previous generations, objects of individual wealth gave rise to sorcery and pressures to share benefits with the community. The magnitude of wealth, and the ability of the wealthiest to resist redistributive pressures was, however, unprecedented. If Frelimo authorities practiced

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29. For interesting discussions of the imagery of ‘eating’ in discourses dealing with political and economic power elsewhere in Africa, see Bayart (1991), and Schatzberg (1994). See also Gschwend (1988), and Comaroff & Comaroff (1993), on relationships between sorcery, wealth, elites and the state in Africa.
sorcery. just what type of sorcery was it? Was it a ‘sorcery of construction’? Many were left to wonder. Respect for state authority deteriorated further on the plateau in this period. Where participation in party-organized village-level projects had once been total, residents began to excuse themselves, or to demand wages from cooperating NGOs to serve on local committees. An expression gaining currency in the villages was ‘Socialism was doing as you were told, and receiving what you were given; now we have democracy, everything is paid’. Democracy came to be understood as the inverse of everything that Frelimo-style socialism had stood for. Its dawn was conflated not only with the free market economy, but also with the depreciation of ‘protocol’—the word used to denote respect for hierarchical structures of authority. ‘Now we have government sorcery (uwavi wa shilikali)’, an elder well known across the plateau as a powerful healer explained to me. He called it such not because it is the government, or its local representatives, who perpetrate the acts (although this is a plausible corollary in many instances), but because it is sorcery which takes place in a social environment which government (unconvincingly) claims to structure, claims to control.

Buffaloes in the Village

The linkages made by villagers on the Mueda plateau between implementation of the PRE and the onset of democracy are not surprising in light of the tight association posited by western donors and international institutions between these same processes. Indeed, for most who played a role in mediation of the Mozambican civil war, peace also depended upon rationalization of the nation’s economic and political regimes. With the deployment of a United Nations PKO in Mozambique, the international community invested faith, and substantial funding, in the idea that peace and prosperity could be built on the foundation of recent constitutional and institutional reforms. Power, they postulated, could be made to serve the commonweal—rather than destroying it—as former rivals and enemies found mutual interests in the promotion of bustling commerce and in the lively exchange of ideas and opinions. As a consequence, nationwide elections were to be the keystone to resolution of the sixteen year-long conflict.

Mozambicans frequently cited a proverb as they reflected back on a decade and a half of civil war: ‘When two buffaloes fight, the grass that gets trampled’. Ironically, one of the consequences of the multiparty electoral campaign (leading up to elections on 27-29 October 1994) was that Mozambicans now found buffaloes in the midst of the village where they had to be dealt with in ways previously unimaginable. In Mueda, Frelimo flouted the rules and norms of democratic contestation
established by the Comissão Nacional de Eleições and underwritten by international observers and the United Nations. During a period of ‘civic education’, in which the campaigning of political parties was prohibited, the Frelimo party sent delegations to the villages to conduct their own civic education—to ‘teach people how to vote for Chissano’ as one party functionary phrased it in conversation with me. Frelimo leaders instructed plateau residents to remain ‘vigilant’. When I asked one ranking party official if Frelimo need bother campaigning in the land of its birth Mueda, his telling response was, ‘Oh yes, there is opposition here; they are just afraid to show themselves’.

The ruling party took every opportunity to demonstrate dramatically uncontested power in its heartland. Each time the flag was raised outside of Renamo headquarters in Mueda, it was torn down within minutes by individuals of known identity who were detained, but quickly released so as to avoid giving the wrong impression. The lives of Renamo delegates and known, or suspected, sympathizers—mostly ethnic ‘outsiders’ on the Makonde plateau who worked there as functionaries or technicians—were threatened, and they were assured that their votes would be ‘seen’ and that their houses would be burned if they voted against Frelimo. It was even rumored that when the district director of the government department of roads and bridge construction refused to allow his fleet of vehicles to be used for shuttling Frelimo supporters from outlying villages to the Chissano rally because he was under commitment to finish a French-funded road project before the approaching rainy season, the district administrator (himself a government employee and not a party functionary) evicted the department and its uncooperative fleet from its buildings, stating that it was Frelimo, and ‘not the government’, that had ‘liberated the buildings from Portuguese control’. In the weeks after the rally, the fleet and its maintenance crew could be found strewn across the town of Mueda, serving as clear messages to the town’s inhabitants.

In areas of the country where Renamo was strong, i.e. in many of the districts in Manica, Sofala, Zambezia and Nampula, it reportedly behaved in similar ways (see, for example, Awepa 1995: 42). In Mueda, however, it had been incapable of making its power felt on the plateau for anything more than isolated days of plunder during the civil war. Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama was met in Muidumbe—the seat of the small district on the south-eastern corner of the plateau—by an angry mob throwing stones and unripened mangoes at his helicopter and his supporters (bused in from coastal districts). The three Renamo rallies organized on the plateau earlier in the campaign all ended in bloody brawls.

30. The term itself conjured up strong associations with the security apparatus of the *luta armada* and the ‘re-education camp’ at Ruarua which took the place of Moçambique D in the years after independence.
Mueda was described as ‘impenetrable’ to the opposition by a Maputo paper. This disposition affected the reception given third parties as well. When Mueda native Padimbe Nkamati, founder of the Partido do Progresso do Povo de Moçambique (PPPM), sent money to a relative to organize his presidential campaign in his home district, this relative immediately took the money to the Frelimo party offices and contributed it to their campaign. ‘I want nothing to do with his confusion’, the relative explained to me; ‘I am with Frelimo, and they know me.’ Antigos combatentes often told me they would consider voting for fellow war veteran Wehia Ripua—who founded Pademo (Partido Democrático de Moçambique)—for president if only he would renounce his own party and its opposition to Frelimo, ‘the party which gave him everything he had, and made him everything he was’.

Election results indicated that the greatest determinant in voting patterns in a given region was a party’s strength as demonstrated in the course of the civil war. While international monitors sought to insure that such factors would have minimal impact, voters sought to know who they were ‘supposed to vote for’: their choices at the polls reflected ‘respect’—as they often described it—for power more than an exercise over it. The official Mozambican assessment of the elections (offered by


32. Nkamati was a curious figure in the campaign. Viewed by most as a source of comedy, many suggested O Vovó (‘the grandpa’, as he called himself) was insane. Family members state that Nkamati fled the Mueda plateau prior to the outbreak of the war for independence, and after a short guerrilla training stint with Frelimo, abandoned out of a desire to study. After a brief affiliation with Coremo (a rival nationalist organization) training in Cairo, he again fled, this time to Kenya. There he was arrested and transferred to a prison in Tanzania. Despite expressing the wish to return to the Mozambican ‘interior’ and start his own nationalist party there, he was released on agreement that he go to Ethiopia. His family then lost contact with him until, in the early 1990s, he sent word from Portugal claiming that he had obtained a Ph. D. in America and become a millionaire entrepreneur. During the campaign, he pledged to build universities and olympic stadiums in each of Mozambique’s ten provinces, and to distribute 5 million meticais to every Mozambican farmer (see ‘Sonho de uma universidade em cada província mantém-se”, Noticias, 7 janeiro 1995; ‘Para a paz, democracia, unidade e progresso: PPPM apresenta um programa modesto”, Savana, 7 outubro 1994; ‘Kamati promete 5 mil contos a cada camponês”, Mediafax, 23 outubro 1994). His campaign headquarters reportedly organized computer training courses for party recruits in the downstairs, and ran a brothel out of the upper floor. He finished last among registered candidates for the presidency, and was subsequently unable to account for the trust fund money made available to him as a candidate by the donor community. His campaign never arrived in Mueda.

33. Many antigos combatentes assert that as a detachment commander in Cabo Delgado during the luta armada, Ripua was among the most clever of sorcerers in the region.

34. The most detailed electoral results published appear in MAZULA et al. (1995).
the Comissão Nacional de Eleições), as well as the commentaries of international observers, highlighted the lack of civic education in explaining why Mozambicans had not quite ‘understood’ what was happening to them (see also Awepa 1995: 5, 21, 52). Apart from the obvious questions raised by this assessment—What is democracy if it does not arise from the political understandings of the people, if it must be applied as a foreign model, if it must be ‘taught’?—there is ample reason to suggest that local perspectives on the political processes which ultimately defined the elections were more probing and insightful than those founded in the western liberal paradigm. Most Muedans remained wary of existing forms of power, and suspended judgment on the claims of modernizing institutions—whether the new state or international organizations—to be able to police these.

All around them, the residents of Mueda (and the rest of the country) witnessed a cynical manipulation of the peace process. At the provincial and district levels, not to mention the national level, an astounding percentage of UN expenditures were captured by state and party bosses—renting out their newly acquired properties to the UN and its officials after telling them that the installations promised for UN use at the time of the peace accord were unavailable. *i.e.* recently privatized by themselves as *state officials* to themselves as *private entrepreneurs*. Renamo leaders’ primary concerns focused on their own exclusion from such activities. In the rural areas, the UN and the Mozambican institutions set up under its tutelage to monitor the peace process appeared wholly incapable of recognizing—let alone controlling—forms of power with deeper historical roots. When it wasn’t being duped by state and party officials, the UN was made to look foolish by the rank and file. Demobilized troops camped in Mueda town—like their compatriots elsewhere—learned that they could easily extract material concessions from their panicky hosts with mild camp uprisings which they then orchestrated on a regular basis. Genuine conflicts between political parties, by contrast, were rarely taken by either party to the UN Civpol (civilian police), who were meant to arbitrate such cases, because both parties saw them as inept.

Despite the dawn of the post-war era, Muedans placed greater confidence in the power of local interpretive schemas to explain what was happening around them than in the simple slogans—*e.g.* *No Teu Voto, O Futuro de Moçambique* (*In Your Vote, Mozambique’s Future*)—offered them by the electoral campaign. At night time on the plateau, sorcerers

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35. Most UN Civpol did not speak Portuguese, many did not speak English (the UN’s language of operations), and some were not even able to drive. Their Mozambican drivers and interpreters often did their work for them and then reported the outcome to them in the ride back to headquarters. During the UN operation, more Mozambican civilians were killed by reckless UN vehicles than by the incidents that Civpol was deployed to investigate.

36. This was the slogan adopted by the National Elections Commission.
were now said to fly about—visiting illness, ruin, chaos and death upon victims with ever increasing range—in helicopters modeled on those used by Unomoz (the United Nations Operation in Mozambique).

Tripping up Disorder

‘In this world of epistemic murk whose effect in the body is so brutally felt, the cure also comes forth as something murky and fragmented, splintering, unbalanced, and left-handed. The hands of the curer are powerful and gentle, they ring evil from the body, while the song in its riot of stopping and starting and changes of pace is without destiny or origin, circulating that body, rustling and darting, tripping up disorder in its own disorderliness’ (Taussig 1987: 412).

I have argued above that concurrent with the rising and falling of hopes for Mozambique among those who would bring it into modernity’s fold, residents of the Mueda plateau have experienced continuities in the failures of modernizing institutions to deliver on their promises. To cope with these failures and explain their meaning, I suggested, they have relied upon discourses grounded in local historical contexts. Returning to Arturo Escobar’s notion of alternatives—and of seeking them out in the locales of global modernization’s crises—the question remains as to why people in Mueda might find talk of vakumu, and of lions, and of sorcery of construction, and of buffaloes an effective means of ‘treatment’. The answer, I believe, lies in the richly textured ambivalence of the symbols upon which such discourses depend for their meaning.

The discourse of sorcery, for example, has allowed those who participate in its reproduction to see the goods and technologies of modernity as both desirable and disruptive. In contrast to the western democratic model, the language of sorcery has framed power as simultaneously essential and dangerous. Through the interpretive schema of sorcery, various groups of Muedans have been able to recognize the indissoluble contradictions of ‘creative destruction’ without accepting the messianic myths of development advanced by the likes of David Apter. Many have experienced the disorder wrought by the campaigns of modernizing institutions, but observed how that disorder is ‘ordered’ for others who profit by it. In this perpetual state of emergency, tripping up (dis)order in the (dis)orderliness of local discourse has allowed various groups and individuals to avoid unmitigated commitment to the existing state of affairs, sustaining hope for the future. At the same time, it has enabled them to make the best of what they can muster from within the prevailing situation, to embrace that which they find accessible to them and to try to protect themselves from predation. For in the end, most people remain tirelessly interested in exploring modernity—or in ‘attaining development’ as most in Mueda would phrase it—even if their experience of it, to date, has been problematic.
Raymond Williams (1973: 302) has written that:

"[R]esistance to capitalism is the decisive form of the necessary human defense. Many particular defenses stop short of seeing this decisive process, and need to be challenged to take the ideas and the feelings right through. Many others, however, get through as defenses, as forms of opposition to what is called the modern world, in which capitalism or technology may well be included, but with no specificity: the reflex indeed being fundamentally defensive, with no available confidence in any different way of life, or with such confidence replaced by utopian or apocalyptic visions, none of which can connect with any immediate social practice or movement."

The responses of Muedans to the experiences brought on by economic and political reform, however, demonstrate that the New World Order is as susceptible to local interpretation as is tradition. Rather than a monolith to be adopted or rejected, it is a terrain upon which negotiations over the meaning of future, and the values which will guide it, are constantly waged. For this reason, I hedge on the term ‘resistance’ put forth by Williams, even if I am persuaded by his argument that it is really capitalistic social relations, and not modernity, which is the source of threat. I prefer Berger’s word, suspicion, because it conveys the ambivalent nature of local responses to modernity—responses which allow for the avoidance of dichotomies, including, ultimately, one between resistance and false consciousness.

I do not wish to overly romanticize these discourses nor those who reproduce them. Through the rumor network that talk of sorcery sustains, Muedans of all social categories do as much to terrorize one another as they do to defend themselves from larger predatory forces. They inflict as many wounds as they treat. What is more, the emphasis of the discourse upon the beneficial aspects of consolidated, centralized power and upon the threat posed to society by challenges to—or dispersion of—that power provides the strong with justifications to consolidate privilege. Nonetheless, even these complicated truths find expression within a discourse which defers final judgment on any social actor, and refuses to identify any social power as inherently and indefinitely good, or evil.

By contrast, the discourses of economic liberalization, democratic decentralization and conflict resolution applied from Maputo, Rome or New York have demonstrated little aptitude for taking into account the subtleties and contradictions of power. *Humu* Mandia told me that ‘sorcery is like development; its practitioners are always studying to improve their methods’. His statement led me to wonder whether he was not being overly generous to the development industry in his comparison. As most Muedans recognize, however, these global discourses also wield tremendous power over their futures. Any future will have to take such ‘reformers’, and their schemes, into account. Muedans can only hope these actors and their institutions capable of realizing that modernity is
not theirs to define—capable of ‘healing themselves’ and becoming ‘cured’ reformers. It is a hope that remains tempered with ambivalence and suspicion.

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**Abstract**

This article addresses the historic transformations occurring in Mozambique over the past decade, including political and economic liberalization, the cessation of armed conflict, and the staging of national elections. Drawing on fieldwork conducted among the predominantly Makonde-speaking communities of the Mueda plateau in the country’s northern province of Cabo Delgado, the author argues that recent historical events have been met with ambivalence and suspicion. The article focuses on the use made by Muedans of the interpretive schema of sorcery to navigate what they experience locally as a disorderly new order. The author suggests that the discourses produced and sustained by Muedans in the context of historical change offer a salient critique of modernization and the individuals and institutions which capture its agenda.

**Résumé**

*La destruction créatrice et la sorcellerie de la construction : pouvoir, espoir et méfiance dans le Mozambique de l’après-guerre.* — Cet article traite des transformations historiques qui sont survenues au Mozambique durant les dix dernières
années et qui se sont traduites par la libéralisation politique et économique, la cessation du conflit armé et la programmation d'élections nationales. S'appuyant sur un travail de terrain mené dans des communautés majoritairement makonde-phones de la province septentrionale du Cabo Delgado, l'auteur tente de démontrer que les événements récents ont été vécus sur le mode de l'ambivalence et de la méfiance. L'article est centré sur l'usage que font les gens de Mueda du schéma interprétatif de la sorcellerie pour s'orienter dans ce qu'ils perçoivent localement comme une situation de désordre. L'auteur fait l'hypothèse que les discours produits et revendiqués par les gens de Mueda, dans le contexte de changements historiques, fournissent une critique pertinente de la modernisation ainsi que des individus et des institutions qui se situent dans ce cadre.

Keywords/Mots-clés: Mozambique/Mozambique, Makonde/Makonde, peace process/processus de paix, structural adjustment/ajustement structurel, sorcery/sorcellerie.