

# The social world of dreams and nightmares in a post-conflict setting: the case of Gorongosa in central Mozambique

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*The paper describes socio-cultural theories of interpretations of dreams among the population in central Mozambique. In general, dreams are considered a means of communication, conveying important messages that are applied to organize the social world. The prolonged civil war has impacted upon these dreaming systems by adding another dimension to the interpretation. War-related dreams do not serve as communication channels, but are experienced as striking repetitions of past events. In this way, the dreamer is forced to reconcile with his or her own history without the use of interventions that aim to block the realization of the dream in a waking state.*

**Keywords:** dreams, nightmares, communication channels, war violence, Mozambique

## **Introduction**

Individuals dream, as do communities. It is a basic part of human existence to sleep and to dream. The dreams people have during sleep can be good, bad or inexplicable, at least until a framework is created to offer an explanation. From an anthropological perspective, what makes the study of dreams interesting is not the phenomenon *per se* (people smiling, talking or screaming with *pavor*, or terror, during the actual occurrence of the dream), but the array of meanings

and interpretations that are generated by the dreamer and within his/her society.

Dreams occur 'within a cultural milieu that shapes their content as well as their interpretation' (Young, 2001). In general, two approaches dominate the way dreams are perceived cross-culturally. Dreams can be conceived as coming from either outside or from inside the individual (Shulman & Stroumsa, 1999). This division can also be applicable to differences between some non-Western and Western societies. For example, the approach developed by neuroscientists is that dreams are the result of physiological processes. The content is characterized as meaningless; the result of random nerve cell activity. Dreams also function as a way through which the brain rids itself of unnecessary information (Winson, 1990). This latter aspect emphasizes the role of dreams in restoring equilibrium, and it is at the same time also consistent with the role of dreams in non-Western societies. It should be remembered however, that in some non-Western contexts, equilibrium is both individual and collective, both visible and invisible.

Other Western approaches to dreams have developed a less physiological understanding of the phenomenon. Sigmund Freud, in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, developed a theory that conceives of dreams as a valuable source of disclosure of the deepest

features of the individual's inner life. One of these features, Freud asserted, consisted of repressed childhood sexual memories and fantasies that can cause neurosis when reactivated in adult life (Shorter, 1997). The basic fundamental of Freud's theory is consistent with the Western cultural concept of the self, that is, individualistic and self-centred. With this perspective, instead of going 'out there' to extract an explanation for individual intra-conflicts, the various inner levels of the individual – particularly the unconscious – offer such possibilities. In this way, dreams and their analysis are also considered as a highway to the unconscious.

These perspectives are in direct contrast with how dreams are generally accommodated within non-Western cultures. In many African communities people are deeply concerned with *ku lota* (Shi-Sena language: to dream). Throughout the sub-Saharan continent, as Evans-Pritchard (1976[1937]) found various decades ago among the Azande, dreams foretell events. *Ndota* (dreams) are conceived as channels of communication between the visible and invisible dimensions of the social world (Thorpe, 1991). According to this aetiology, dreams are regarded as external products in relation to the person; dreams 'arrive' in people's heads. Dreams foster continuity with the past, reshape the present and foretell the future by predicting misfortune or success. Dreams form part of the social life of the people; they are used as models for interaction between the living and the dead, and among the living themselves. Dreams communicate a lot about how people are: their fears, expectations, and relations of power and submission. Exceptions to these rules are also found. For instance, among the Gusii in southwestern Kenya, Sarah LeVine (1982) found that her informants, a group of young Gusii women, were not interested in discussing the meaning

of their dreams with her, although they were open to reporting their dreams. In that society dreams are private matters. They are not considered to be caused by spirits, nor created by external forces, and they are not told to healers.

The objective of this paper is to describe and analyse the role of dreams in some cultures in central Mozambique. Benjamin Kilborne (1981) has suggested that in order to grasp the cross-cultural conceptions of dreaming there is a need to 'take into account the classificatory schemes of the culture one is studying'. This paper, therefore, also deals with the ways in which people in central Mozambique classify their dreams, and how they make use of them in daily life. The population studied have gone through decades of political instability and bloody civil strife. As a result, a particular focus is placed upon war-related dreams, how these have contributed to reshaping the ways dreams are culturally and historically interpreted, and the mechanisms applied for dealing with them. This is demonstrated by using narratives of dreams as recounted by the participants of this study.

### **Socio-cultural context in central Mozambique**

As in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, most of the cultures in central Mozambique are founded on patrilineal kinship, polygyny (a practice in which a male simultaneously has more than one female sexual partner, and the most common form of polygamy) and an agricultural system of production. The family is the basic unit of society. It is a male-dominated society with a strong emphasis on the principle that after marriage (which is arranged by the payment of a bride price), a woman belongs to her husband. They practise the patrilocal form of residence; residing with a husband's kin group or clan.

The man is the head of the household and makes most of the important decisions concerning family and social issues.

In many areas people still live according to the principle of dispersed patterns of residence. Families, most of them enlarged or extended, live far apart in their places of origin (known as *madembe*). This type of social organization allows polygynous men to build houses for their wives and young children in the same yard. It also allows them to freely open up fields for production in front of, and around their houses, rather than having to walk long distances to tend their crops and separating the place of residence from the place of production.

Despite the increasing prevalence of Christian groups and ideology in Mozambique since the early 1940s, the relationship between the living and the dead is still of key importance within original cultural contexts. This relationship is based on the principle of distance. The living respects the dead by keeping a physical distance between them. Cemeteries are no-go areas (very often located in the forest), except when actual burials occur. Actions that involve proximity and close contact, such as cleaning or putting flowers on the graves of the dead, are strictly forbidden. In turn, the dead visit the living through the incursions of spirits and ghosts. The spirits manifest themselves to the living in various ways: diseases, possession, the appearance of very rare animals, and dreams (both good and bad ones).

### **The structure and dynamism of dreams**

The social world of the people of central Mozambique is comprised of two dimensions, one visible, and one invisible. These two dimensions are inextricably linked, and are important in shaping the way in which life unfolds in everyday practices. The invisible

dimension is crowded with a plethora of the spirits of the dead. These spirits can be good or bad. One way in which the spirits communicate with the living is through dreams. In this case, dreams can be conceived as a type of language (Shulman & Stroumsa, 1999) that the spirits employ to communicate different kinds of information that can be used to organize – or disorganize – the individual and collective life.

The information communicated through dreams primarily relates to predictions of events that are going to take place in the near future. However, the premonitory character of the dreams is fluid, and varies according to the type of dream. Dreams are divided into two categories; good and bad. They also have four main fundamental characteristics: calling, prognosis, prophylaxis, and diagnosis.

The most prevalent role of dreams in sub-Saharan Africa is related to the function of calling the dreamer to be initiated as a healer. The ancestor spirits choose certain individuals in the family to become healers, and the first sign of the choice is through dreams. For example, Joop de Jong (1987) describes how among the Jangue Jangues in Guinea-Bissau, god (*nghalla*) appears in a dream or vision to communicate the calling of their host (*txiquiros*). Similar phenomena are found repeatedly throughout the continent (Lambek, 1981; Ellis & Ter Haar, 2001).

The prognostic type of dream gives information about the way in which certain phenomena will unfold in the visible world. Prophylactic dreams offer instruction about the interventions that must be undertaken in order to prevent the occurrence of a certain bad event. Prophylactic dreams correlate with power relations in society. They are common among the elite of traditional or religious healers. In these cases the dream provides information to the dreamer about the name or location of specific roots, or other

parts of trees, that are applied in the healing of certain ailments. They may also provide preventive information about witches who are preparing to make a violent strike, and the measures necessary to stop them. The diagnostic type of dream is also the preserve of traditional and religious healers. Through the contents of these dreams, the healer determines the relationship between the aetiology of a certain health condition and the appropriate intervention. Healers can use both the dreams of clients and their own dreams to elucidate the aetiology of the ailment.

### **Bad dreams and nightmares**

*'Ku lota ndota zwa kunyangara,'* means 'dreaming bad dreams', and is a very common phenomenon. People in central Mozambique, however, do not regard bad dreams or nightmares as symptoms of physiological or psychiatric dysfunction. These dreams are regarded as social phenomenon. They can be the result of the disruption of the relationship between the living and the dead, conflicts between the visible and invisible world and/or serious family and social difficulties between living people. In order to restore the equilibrium in these relations, dream activity is one channel through which solutions are conveyed.

Historically and culturally there was only one type of bad dream, that is, bad dreams with cultural or symbolic content. As a result of the civil strife, however, war survivors began to suffer from war-related bad dreams. The content of these dreams primarily replicate the original traumatic experience (Rothbaum & Mellman, 2001). In some cases 'the reality content of dream is so high that one can indeed speak of a re-enactment' (Schreuder, 1996).

Bad dreams can also be distinguished according to their fear-provoking intensity. The most frightening type of dream, regardless

of its symbolic or war-related content, is designated as *mawewe* or *mahomohomo*.

In the vernacular classification of nightmares, *mawewe* are defined as a very terrifying dream in which the dreamer fails to wake up of his/her own accord. Consequently, the dreamer moves his body and legs, and screams for help. When people nearby hear the screams, they quickly wake the person up because they know that the dreamer is in deep distress. The definition of *mawewe* is consistent with the Western description of *pavor nocturnes* or night terrors (American Psychiatric Association DSM-IV, 1996). In some cases, the dreamer is still unable to communicate with the external world for some minutes after being awoken and with their eyes open.

### **Culture-related bad dreams**

Culture-related dreams are also known as 'home-related' dreams, and in general they foretell events that are going to happen in the future. One informant told me how pre-occupied he was because the previous night he had dreamed that his mother was dead, and how he had cried during the dream. On the following day when I spoke to him, he still did not have any information about the real situation concerning his mother, who worked in a distant village.

*Now I am suffering because my mother came into my dreams last night. I cried for my mother because she died in the dream. This is very bad, and I don't know how my mother is doing now in her work in the district.*

This was a very frightening dream for him and the content was very concrete in that he dreamed that his mother was dead and he was crying. Since dreams foretell the future, his hyper-aroused state would only subside when he received confirmation that his

mother was still alive, and he had consulted a traditional healer for an intervention to prevent the realization of the dream in the waking state.

Other people disclosed bad dreams whose meaning and interpretation requires a more contextual knowledge of the culture as they are shrouded in symbolism; *'I dream of pigs. . . I dream of hyenas. . . I dream that fire is burning. . . other days I dream that I am cultivating the land with a hoe.'* Dreams of pigs and hyenas are considered very bad dreams because of the feeding habits of these animals in real life. According to the culture, in the areas where there are dead bodies, the pigs get in, destroy the area and eat the corpses. By analogy, these are practices enacted by witches. In this case, to dream of pigs means that witches visited the dreamer while s/he was sleeping. A similar rationale lies behind the interpretation of dreaming of hyenas. The hyena is an animal that roams, and if they find dead bodies as they roam, they eat them. The name of the hyena in the local language is *thika*, which means 'to carry.' This animal carries corpses and human bones to its hiding place to eat. An informant recalled that the corpse of his relative had been found in pieces in a hidden place; *'my mother's brother, who was killed, was carried off by a hyena. We had a hard time finding the remnants of his body.'*

To dream of fire is also a bad dream. Although in this case, one might be inclined to think of it as a dream that replicates the beginning of every agricultural cycle when the people make a fire to clear the land. This is not the case. Fire is one of the numerous manifestations used by ghosts, and when it comes in the form of a dream it is very dangerous for the dreamer himself. It means that the dreamer may soon become sick unless an intervention is carried out.

Dreams of people cultivating the land, or digging, may also appear to be replicating work-

ing the land, which these rural people do their entire lives. It is not a bad practice, of course, since preparing the land guarantees a successful harvest and consequently, their own self-sustainability. The extrapolation made from dreaming of this activity, however, is that it relates to the future. When people dream of cultivating the land, the dream foretells something that will happen in the future, but it has not yet been established what kind of bad thing will happen. The problematic aspect of this kind of dream concerns the analogy relating to burial. To bury the dead, there is a need to dig holes in the ground. Therefore, dreaming of cultivation, or digging holes in the earth, symbolizes the activity of burying the dead. This can be interpreted to mean that sometime in the near future, someone in the dreamer's family will die.

One informant told me; 'a long time ago I heard from the older people that when someone dreams about farming it is a bad dream. Actually I dreamed that I was cultivating the land, and after my dream, my brother Paulino's son died.'

Another informant said he was certain that his grandchild had died because of the dream that had preceded the event: 'I dreamed that I was cultivating the land. After this dream my grandchild died and we went to the cemetery to bury him. The death of my grandchild came with this dream.'

According to the local cultural theory, the realization of the dream in the waking state could have been avoided if the dreamers had taken the necessary measures by consulting traditional healers in order to perform an intervention.

### **Culture-related dreams and gender**

Gender also plays a role in how dreams are experienced and interpreted. Some dreams

of men can be interpreted differently than those of women, and some dreams are more typical for one gender than for the other.

A woman told me; 'I dream I am going to the river. . . . I dream that a person is giving me a baby. I dream I am breastfeeding a child. On the next day my menstrual cycle starts.'

To go the river is not considered bad behaviour. The women fetch water from the river for domestic use and use the water for hygiene during their menstrual cycle. This is the reason 'going to the river' is a bad dream: because women who have this type of dream suffer from highly irregular menstrual periods. It is said that a spirit controls their cycle, and if the spirit does not announce in a dream that their menstruation will begin, these women can go for months without one. This is a very bad situation for them. A dream of having a child also foretells the beginning of menstruation. On other occasions, the same dream can be very bad, as to dream of a child does not mean that woman will have a child in the future but exactly the opposite. In this case, the dreamer will not have a child in the future as the spirit who is lodged on the dreamer's body controls this possibility. The baby that the dreamer holds during the dream is dead. Men rarely dream of holding babies, but when they do, it means that the ancestors are asking for a commemoration ceremony.

Another gender-specific dream concerns carrying wood on the head. According to the gender division of labour in these communities, this is a task performed mainly by women. They go to the bush to fetch wood in order to make a fire to cook. This is considered a bad dream not because the women perform these tasks, or because of the cooking-related functions of the wood, but because when someone dies there is also a need to fetch a lot of wood to warm the guests who come to participate in the funeral rituals.

Therefore, dreaming of carrying wood on the head is a very bad dream because it announces an imminent death. This dream is more typical for women than for men.

On the other hand, men have many more fighting dreams than women. Men acquire enemies more easily than women, as a result of envy of another man's property, strength working the fields, or a well organized and ordered family. The envious do not fight their allegedly enemies directly, they do it indirectly through witchcraft. In a dream, the victim of witchcraft must fight against a witch – or in the worst cases against a legion of witches – who want to invade the dreamer's homestead. He has to defend his homestead. The witches are very powerful, and they scream; '*why are you eating alone, what about us? . . . Who do you trust to be better than us? . . . Why do you like to show off?*' The result of this sort of dream is that often the dreamer falls ill immediately before reaching a healer. According to the capacity of the dreamer and his family capacity to resist against the terrorizing strikes of the witches, they can decide to proceed with the accumulation of capital by reinforcing their defensive capacities, through traditional medicines, through conversion to Christian religious groups, or they can simply give up.

### **War-replica dreams: individual and collective locus**

War violence has affected central Mozambique for almost three decades. The legacy of this war is overwhelming (Igreja, 2003a; Igreja, Kleijn, Schreuder, van Dijk & Verschuur, 2004; Igreja & Dias-Lambranca, 2005; Igreja, Kleijn, & Richters, 2006 [in press]). In a previous quantitative study, research was conducted to determine the prevalence of war-related dreams among the population that survived the war in Gorongosa. The results demonstrated that

from the study group ( $n = 406$ ), 63% ( $n = 257$ ) suffered from bad dreams. Of these 257 people, almost everyone (97%) was able to recall the content of the dreams. Almost half of this group (47%) experienced their nightmares as a replication of experiences they went through during the war (Schreuder, Igreja, van Dijk, & Kleijn, 2001).

War survivors have dreams whose content can be traced back clearly to their extremely distressing experiences. One striking particularity of these war-replica dreams is that they can have individual as well as collective loci. A description of the former follows. One informant said;

*'I dream we are running away with luggage on our heads. I dream that the soldiers who used to be here are coming, and they say, "Hey, grandfather – let's do gandira". I answer, "I can't manage it", and they order me; "No way; let's do gandira." Other times I dream the soldiers are chasing me and they threaten to beat me.'*

*Gandira* does not concern symbols of a culture, it is about war suffering. Only by knowing what *gandira* is, and how people suffered under it, can this dream be understood. *Gandira* was the Renamo rebels' war-logistic strategy, as well as a mechanism to control the civilian populations. People were compelled to produce food for the soldiers and to carry it to the Renamo military bases. People also had to carry various kinds of war ammunition over long distances, with very little time to rest and little food to eat, or water to drink. For women, *gandira* also involved a great deal of sexual violence, although this aspect of their wartime experiences remains concealed. More precisely, women do not disclose if rape during *gandira* is replicated in their nightmares. Now that the war is over, dreams about *gandira* are a constant affliction for survivors of the war.

Another war survivor narrated her bad dreams in the following way:

*'The other day I dreamed about soldiers firing their weapons. I dreamed of soldiers in an ambush, and then I woke up, and wondered. "Do these dreams mean that the war is going to begin again?" I pray, because we spent many years with war and now it's coming in our dreams, and this is bad. I kneel down on my knees and I pray to put everything in God's hands, so that if a war begins again he can save us.'*

Initially, war-related dreams were very tricky for this population since it forced them to remember their extreme, traumatic war-time experiences. As dreams are considered characteristically premonitory, they would become distressed because they tended to think that the war would come back again to afflict and disorganize their lives. While in the case of culture-related dreams people know that they can count upon the intervention of traditional or religious healers to think of, and implement a strategy. In the case of war-related dreams people were confused. First of all, they were not used to dreaming about events that had occurred in the past. As seen above, even when they dream of cultivating or of fire, this is not a replicating dream; it is an announcement of a death. Secondly, it was not clear to what extent healers possessed the appropriate medicines to prevent the eruption of a violent war. The available solutions to distract from daily ruminations about the suffering of the past and over an unpredictable future were to: (1) work hard in the fields, (2) eat well, (3) drink alcohol, or (4) pray.

War-related dreams forced the population of central Mozambique to re-think the way in which certain dreams were interpreted in their culture. It introduced another dimension to dream interpretation, namely

're-experiencing' triggered by spirits. A former combatant provided a rather long narrative describing how afflicted he was by the cyclical repetition of his past military life in nightmares loaded with *mawewe*, which in turn led him to daily brooding about the war.

*'Every week I dream that I am firing weapons. I am running away. I am getting out of cars and unloading things, and weapons are being fired. I dream that I am ordering the soldiers to stand in a row and I tell them "Fire your weapons! Fire your weapons and kill those bastards" . . . Other times I dream of seeing soldiers being hit, and I am lifting them like I used to do during the war.'*

When the dreamer manages to wake up, he is very anxious:

*'I think; "How is this possible? Why am I always dreaming about the war? Does this mean that I will go into the army again? Am I going to be a son of the war? Every year I am always living with weapons, firing weapons all the time. Why am I dreaming like this? . . . Am I going back into the army, or is the war over forever? Why do I always dream about war? Is it because I grew up in a war situation that I am having these dreams? It looks like I was the son of the weapons . . ." I am always suffering with these thoughts. I think my life is not going very well because of the war. It seems to want to stay in my body. Where does the spirit that does this kind of work come from? Why am I always dreaming I am going into combat?'*

This informant is not unique in having a disturbed dream life related to wartime experiences. For the culture as a whole, it is considered very strange for someone to continuously dream about his, or her, past experiences. As stated above, dreams are an instrument of communication, which prevent or solve problems by providing useful clues about the present, and events in the

future. Yet in this case, the dreamer was reliving his wartime experiences over and over. As a result, he consulted various traditional healers to provide an explanation as well as treatment. Many interventions were performed to stop the dreams. Soon after the ceremonies, he was able to sleep well and was free of bad dreams for several weeks.

However, eventually, the war-related dreams returned to afflict his nights again. It was only when a healer managed to clarify the whole problem relating to these dreams that he was able to stop his continuous consultations. The healer told him that he had become a 'son of the war', not because he was going to be abducted again to fight in another war, but because he had lived so many years in the service of the war. He was also told that he had become a 'son of the war' because the 'father of the war', a spirit, was still lodged in his body. During this intervention the healer also said that this was not a harmful spirit, it was living inside the informant's body to remind him that he had been raised amidst war. Since that time, my informant stopped consulting healers and decided to acquiesce to living with the dreams. He realized he had experienced the war over many years and it would take a long time before these past experiences would stop haunting him.

Gradually war survivors began to accept that their past experiences could continue haunting them in the present without necessarily announcing that the war would restart, or that the dreamer would be kidnapped to fight in another war, or to do *gandira* again.

The above descriptions of war-related nightmares have an individual locus. But there are also nightmares with collective loci, when an entire community suddenly starts dreaming of the same events and reacts in the same way. On two occasions, entire communities woke up in the pre-dawn, frightened and shaking with fear because they were

dreaming that angry spirits were firing weapons. The shots were so loud and vivid in the people's dreams that everyone simultaneously woke up and tried to escape with their bags on their heads, as if they were experiencing a military raid comparable to the innumerable raids that took place during the prolonged war. This was a very unusual phenomenon of a collective re-enactment. Initially, the community members, along with the traditional chiefs and healers, tried to find out where the noise of the weapons was coming from but could not find a clue. Some weeks later, when the second round of this collective *pavor nocturne* occurred, it generated less fear than on the first occasion. Since no clue had been found, the chiefs of the villages decided to ask the traditional healers to perform a ceremony in a place where two soldiers had apparently been killed during the war. The village contributed different goods and the ceremony was enacted to appease the spirits of the two fallen soldiers. Although no one was sure that the spirits of the dead soldiers had triggered the nightmares, after the ceremony these dreams did not recur again.

### War-related rape dreams

As stated above, people experienced multiple forms of violence during the war. Of particular impact for women, their families and communities, was the experience of sexual violence and rape. Both during and after the war, rape experiences were not spoken of, with very few exceptions. Yet remarkably, when sexual intercourse occurs in the nightmares, the women, their husbands and the communities in general are prepared to share it, even in detail. It does not matter if the gender of the researcher corresponds to the one of the informant or not, the reality is that talking about coitus during dream activity is not considered a taboo. Apparently bad

dreams and nightmares give freedom to the members of these communities to talk without taboos about violent sexual intercourse. As part of the traumatic consequences of war violence it could be suggested that the rape women experience in nightmares is a form of intrusive re-experiencing labelled post-traumatic stress disorder (Herman 2001 [1992]). However, this is not the case. These nightmares that include sexual violence are not experienced as a replica of the anxiety, extreme fear, and powerlessness felt during the war. The culture has its own ways of explaining this type of nightmare when they occur in either men or women. Moreover, unlike other types of dreams, these nightmares, particularly in relation to women, do not fit the logic of the foretelling of an event either (that someone is trying to rape the dreamer in the waking state).

Many women reported having many nightmares of sexual intercourse with men.

*'Sometimes I dream that a man comes to have sexual relations with me, I begin to scream. I try to fight but I fail. . . I dream about a man wearing a military uniform who wants to rape me. I scream and run away. . .'*

Seldom do the women manage to see the face of the rapist. The cultural interpretation is that a male spirit is lodged in the dreamer's body. The intention of the spirit can be either to marry his *txiquiro* (host), or to demand justice for a past wrongdoing not done by the dreamer herself, but by her already deceased relatives. If the dreamer gets married to the spirit, then it is said that she has two husbands: one living, and the other the spirit of someone dead. When the spiritual polyandry is realized, the dreamer is no longer assaulted by violent sexual nightmares. The prognostic characteristic of this type of dream is that it can represent the calling of the dreamer to

work as a healer. To realize this, there is a need to consult a healer in order to determine the veracity of the spirit's intention.

### **Interventions by religious and traditional healers**

Religious and traditional healers differ in the way they look at the invisible world. For religious healers, the invisible world is inhabited by the Holy Spirit of God and by harmful spirits commanded by the devil. It is a very simplified system in that every misfortune is attributed to the malevolent actions of the devil. In some cases, religious healers also use the dreams as a way to prevent bad events from happening in the future, but the aetiology of these problems is most often attributed to incursions by the devil (Charsley, 1987). The solutions they propose range from sacrificing the individual body through fasting and praying, to being an active participant in the church through song, dance, testimonies, and devotion of time.

The traditional healers present a more complex and dynamic system of addressing the invisible world. Multiple types of bad and good spirits, including God, compose the invisible world. These spirits relate to different historical periods of the life of the social group, and they perform different tasks. The existence of spirits is dynamic, in the sense that there is a process of renovation according to the changes and challenges taking place in the visible world. According to the intensity of the challenges, new spirits emerge and useless ones disappear.

The interventions provided by religious and traditional healers fall within the boundaries of this logic. Religious healers continue to insist that the only thing to do with people being haunted by nightmares related to wartime experiences, or any other type of bad dream, is to fast and to pray, to participate in church services regularly, and not forget to pay tithes.

Traditional healers, on the other hand, have had to innovate in order to provide sensitive responses to the complaints of their clients. Soon after the end of the war, traditional healers made an old and well-known intervention to cleanse the bodies of the former soldiers who had fought and killed in the war. During the war, cleansing rituals had already been performed for raped women and for people who had been kidnapped. In the case of the demobilized soldiers in the post-war period, the intended goal of these rituals was to prevent the misdeeds that they had perpetrated and seen during the war from haunting them, and interfering in their civilian lives. The rituals also served to reconnect the former soldiers back into their social world composed of the living and ancestral spirits. However, these rituals did not prevent the nightmares from coming and disturbing the *oniric* (dream) life of the war survivors in general. In order to help their clients, the healers used another old technique named *ku zungulira* or *ku teterera*. There is no literal translation for these two concepts; only by describing them can the meaning be grasped. The dreamer has to get a black-and-white cloth and sometimes a coin, and the dreamer and the healer go close to a tree in the forest to perform a ceremony. The healer takes an instrument called a *mutchira* (made from an animal's tail), the dreamer kneels down while holding the cloth and the coin, and the healer starts moving around the dreamer and softly beating him or her with his *mutchira*, while ordering the spirit that is causing the bad dreams to fly away. At the same time, the dreamer develops a narrative of the contents of his/her dream:

*'You spirit that comes with bad dreams, you come into my body, you bring fire into my dreams, you make me dream of a cemetery, you make me dream of cultivating the land. I dream of dogs. I dream of*

*hyenas. But now fly away back to where you come from, because this body refuses you. This body does not want you to make these dreams.*

This is the meaning of *ku zungulira* or *ku teterera*. This intervention might also be accompanied by the administration of herbal medicines to drink, aimed at boosting sleep efficacy, and by burning certain tree roots in the dreamer's hut so that the smoke can wipe away any hidden remnants of a spirit. Healers and clients claim that this type of intervention was effective in the past for dealing with different kinds of bad dreams and nightmares. When this technique was applied to deal with war-related nightmares, however, it proved less effective. The dreamer would get better for some days and weeks, but then the dreams would reoccur. The healers had to adjust the prevalent socio-cultural feature of a human being, which is characterized by what Norbert Elias called *Homines aperti*, or 'the image of a multitude of people, each of them relatively open, interdependent processes' (Elias, 1970). The idea of the *Homines aperti* is one of the most important sources of resilience in this society since human beings are considered as an extension of nature, and the body is the gravity centre of visible and invisible forces. However, in relation to the persistent appearance of war-related nightmares, the idea of *Homines aperti* was failing to thrive. There was nothing 'out there' in the extension of the body and in the web of interdependencies that could offer an explanation to war-related nightmares. The exception of a positive application of the idea and practice of *Homines aperti* vis-à-vis war-related dreams was enacted in the context of the collective nightmares described above. In this case, an intervention on the site of the fallen soldiers generated a collective impact into the dreaming life of the community.

In relation to the individual nightmares, the healers had to apply what Elias (1970) called in opposition to *Homines aperti*, the idea of the *Homo clausus*, i.e., the individual as a 'closed box'. This is in order to reduce the number of explanatory clues to an individual level. In this way, there was nothing to be found 'out there' that could be in the form of a neighbour doing witchcraft, or a family member launching the spirit that triggers the war-related nightmares.

The healers continued to apply the usual interventions, *ku zungulira* or *ku teterera* accompanied with herbal medicines to ameliorate the sleep performance, but also taught their clients; '*because you lived in the war, you became a son of the war. The spirit that haunts you and manifests itself in dreams is your war father. He is not a bad spirit, just a reminder of your individual wartime experiences.*'

Until recently dreams were not interpreted or handled in this way. Even when the individual dreamt of his or her dead relatives, the interpretation was always consequential; these dreams served to communicate either that the dreamer was not observing the right cultural norms (and there was a need to offer tobacco and alcohol to worship the dead) or that an event was going to happen in the near future unless something was done to stop it.

War-related dreams contributed to reshaping the way dreams are interpreted in these former-war zone communities. The events that one has lived in the past, come back to the present, without necessarily communicating a message about something that is going to happen in the future to the dreamer, or to his/her group. The healers found a strategy in which the dreamer must reconcile with his/her own past experiences (i.e., *Homo clausus*), without involving the group (i.e., *Homines aperti*), and without interventions aimed at blocking the realization of the

dreams in the waking state. Teaching the dreamer about the reasons behind their persistent war-related dreams, as the healers do, helps the dreamer to better master their fears and agonies. It also reduces the possibility of family and social conflicts, since the explanatory locus is the individual themselves, instead of explanations that relate to strikes of spirits launched by family or community members because of any sort of envy.

However, a different logic is applied when the dreamer is a young girl or boy. In this case, the war-related dream may communicate the call of a spirit, known as *gamba* spirit (Igreja, 2003b), who wishes to use the body of the dreamer to be initiated into the healing profession. If this is indeed the case, the dreamer will gradually move from the level of just dreaming, to the level of becoming possessed by the spirit that bothers him or her through nightmares.

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<sup>1</sup> Men's sexual dreams are mostly peaceful, but despite the peacefulness these dreams are considered as bad. The explanation is that there is a woman in the neighbourhood who lusts after the dreamer, or that a witch is haunting the dreamer. This type of dream falls outside the boundaries of the prognosis and prophylactic rationales except when the dream is accompanied by violence. In such cases, the man looks for a healer to get help.

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