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3 Spiritual Power & the Dynamics of War in the Provinces of Nampula & Zambezia

Corinna Jentsch

Everyone wanted to be like Manuel [António], but he was the [only] one who knew about the genuine medicine.

Naparama commander, Nicoadala
8 March 2012

The war in Mozambique from the late 1970s until 1992 placed a heavy burden on the Mozambican population, resulting in an estimated one million deaths and almost five million displaced.¹ Though much research on the war has focused on the origins and behaviour of the rebel group Renamo (see the Introduction to this volume), others, including civilians, also played an active role. The suffering caused by the war brought about several popular armed and unarmed self-defence movements to stop the violence. One such armed movement was the Naparama, a peasant militia created by a traditional healer, Manuel António, in 1988, based on the belief in a vaccine to make people invulnerable to bullets.² Within a year, the movement grew from a couple of hundred to several thousand members and spread across the country's central and northern provinces. The people embraced this new force and, after being co-opted by the government, it played a strong part in fighting back the rebel group, Renamo. By 1991, the Naparama was present in two thirds of the northern territory and its success led to an until-then unknown stability during wartime, at least for a certain amount of time.³

¹ Joseph Hanlon, *Peace without profit: How the IMF blocks rebuilding in Mozambique* (Oxford & Portsmouth, NH: James Currey, 1996), p. 16.

² Also see Chichava's and Do Rosário's contributions in this volume. Depending on the local language and pronunciation, the spelling varies: Naprama, Parama, Napharama, Barama. See Kenneth B. Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence in Mozambique', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), p. 561, fn. 148. Naparama means 'irresistible force' in the language of the Macua, the largest linguistic group in northern Mozambique; see William Finnegan, *A complicated war: The harrowing of Mozambique* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p. 254. 'Parama' denotes the drug that is used during the vaccination, and 'Naparama' denotes the people that received the vaccine Parama (informal conversation with the late Naparama leader in Zambezia Manuel Sabonete, 16 September 2011, Nicoadala). An article in the journal of the Museum of Nampula from 1960 refers to 'Emparrámê' as the plant whose roots and leaves are burnt and used for the vaccine that carries the same name. See Júlio dos Santos Peixe, 'Emparrámê', *Separata do Boletim do Museu de Nampula*, 1 (1960), 145–7. A Naparama commander in Lugela district in Zambezia argued that Naparama meant 'stop the weapons', as Naparama stood for 'parar arma' in Portuguese, but this appeared to be his personal interpretation.

³ This chapter is part of a book project on militias and self-defence forces in civil wars and is based

The formation and diffusion of the Naparama goes against the common depiction of the war as a 'dichotomous' conflict between Frelimo, the party in power, and Renamo. It draws attention to a phenomenon common to many civil wars in which the population is actively involved in various local arrangements to curb violence and provide security. These security arrangements include militias, self-defence forces and paramilitaries, who all become significant actors as instruments for counterinsurgent operations and/or protectors of specific communities, thereby challenging neat distinctions between insurgents and the state.⁴ While many of these armed groups emerge as grassroots projects, they are often co-opted by the state as part of its counterinsurgency strategy.⁵ This also occurred in the case of the Naparama, as Frelimo soon realized the potential of the Naparama's power against Renamo and tolerated and at times even actively supported the Naparama's activities.

However, as in other civil wars across Africa and beyond, the state's implicit or explicit support of militias may allow for short-term success against insurgents, but more violence in the long term.⁶ As I will show, though the Naparama's military operations were crucial in re-capturing district towns and liberating people from Renamo-held areas, the group's empowerment was accompanied by internal struggles and an even more powerful response by Renamo, which resulted in the death of Manuel António in late 1991. The military stalemate that was shortly overcome with the rise of the Naparama was followed by an intensification of war due to internal fighting and Renamo's militant response.

The chapter thus focuses on the consequences of the rise of Naparama for the dynamics of the war. The main argument that I pursue is that the short-term success and long-term failure of the Naparama can be explained by

(contd) on 12 months of field research in Mozambique in 2010, 2011 and 2012 in Maputo, the provincial capitals Nampula and Quelimane, Mecubúri and Murrupula districts in Nampula province and Lugela, Namarrói and Nicoadala districts in Zambezia. Field research included oral histories and semi-structured interviews with government officials, demobilized combatants of Frelimo and Renamo, former members of Naparama and popular militias, community leaders and other community members, and archival research in the provincial governments' archives in Nampula and Quelimane. The research project was approved by the Human Subjects Committee of Yale University under the IRB protocol number 110308177. I gratefully acknowledge funding from a MacMillan Center International Dissertation Research Grant and a National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant. I thank Michel Cahen, Eric Morier-Genoud, and Domingos M. Do Rosário for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this chapter, and participants at seminars at the Centro de Estudos Africanos of the Eduardo Mondlane University and the Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Económicos (IESE) in Maputo in August 2016 for their valuable questions and comments.

⁴ Corinna Jentzsch, 'Militias and the Dynamics of Civil War', PhD Thesis (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2014); Corinna Jentzsch, Stathis N. Kalyvas & Livia Isabella Schubiger, 'Militias in Civil Wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59 (2015), 755–69.

⁵ Paul Staniland, 'Militias, Ideology, and the State', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59 (2015), 770–93.

⁶ Alex De Waal, 'Counter-insurgency on the Cheap', *Review of African Political Economy*, 31 (2004), 716–25; Bjørn Møller, 'The Role of Militias and Other Paramilitaries in African (Un)civil Wars', *DIIS Working Paper*, no. 23 (2006); Govinda Clayton and Andrew Thomson, 'The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend... The Dynamics of Self-defence Forces in Irregular War: The Case of the Sons of Iraq', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37 (2014), 920–35.

the importance of spiritual power in the Mozambican war, which contributed to an increase in fragmentation of armed groups and an escalation of violent conflict.⁷ In particular, Renamo's formation of anti-Naparama forces and disputes between two main Naparama leaders in Zambezia and Nampula provinces demonstrate how far the evolution of 'cults of counter-violence'⁸ engendered a dynamic of competition for spiritual power, and by extension also for political and economic power. As the statement by a Naparama commander quoted above demonstrates, every militia leader aspired to be the one with the authentic, most powerful means to succeed on the battlefield. Such competition gave rise to conflicts between armed groups fighting for the same goal, as leaders attempted to outbid each other with regard to their spiritual power. This process of 'spiritual outbidding'⁹ generated military successes that were short-lived and contributed to an ever-increasing fragmentation of the war. Overall, the chapter shows that when local social and political processes are not taken into account, the overall dynamics of war are difficult to understand. Spiritual sources of power were crucial for the Naparama's success and influence on the battlefield.

The spiritual dimension of the war was first analysed in detail by Ken Wilson in a fascinating study from 1992.¹⁰ Wilson argues that 'an intense competition between Renamo, Frelimo and local forces has occurred for spiritually-empowered agency, and ... such agency has been part of 'progressive', 'traditional' and 'reactionary' programmes alike.'¹¹ As I demonstrate in this chapter, this competition for 'spiritually-empowered agency' did not only take place between Frelimo, Renamo, and local forces such as the Naparama, but also between different factions within the Naparama movement, which led to the further fragmentation of armed groups, and violence between them.

In order to analyse the interrelation between spiritual power and the dynamics of war, I build on and add to the provincial analysis of the Naparama included in the chapters of Chichava and do Rosário in this volume by bringing a comparative lens to the analysis of the movement that includes a variety of different sources. Making use of evidence from extensive interviews with former Naparama and Renamo combatants, civilians, and local government officials in five districts across the two provinces and archival documents from the two provincial archives, I complement the view 'from above' based

⁷ For research on the link between the fragmentation of armed groups and increase in violence, see, for example, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, Kristin M. Bakke and Lee J.M. Seymour, 'Shirts Today, Skins Tomorrow. Dual Contests and the Effects of Fragmentation in Self-determination Disputes', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 56 (2012), 67–93; Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, 'Actor Fragmentation and Civil War Bargaining: How Internal Divisions Generate Civil Conflict', *American Journal of Political Science*, 57 (2013), 659–72.

⁸ Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence'.

⁹ I thank Nicolas Blarel for suggesting this term, which builds on the concept of 'ethnic outbidding' that denotes the competitive and 'centrifugal' nature of ethnic politics in political systems with weak institutions. See Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985); Neil DeVotta, 'From Ethnic Outbidding to Ethnic Conflict: The Institutional Bases for Sri Lanka's Separatist War', *Nations and Nationalism*, 11 (2005), 141–59.

¹⁰ Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence'.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 529.

on archival government documents with the view 'from below' of those who participated and experienced the Naparama. I show that the main Naparama groups in Zambezia and Nampula provinces had the same origin, but evolved separately, which partly explains the diverging findings in Chichava's and Do Rosário's chapters with respect to Naparama's use of violence across different districts, both against civilians and the state. I also extend Chichava's analysis of the 'anti-Naparama' forces by analysing the various groups that emerged in different parts of the two provinces and how they further undermined the Naparama's ability to ward off Renamo advances.

The Rise of the Naparama

The Naparama formed in the late 1980s after a large counter-offensive by Frelimo and allied forces failed to stop Renamo's expansion across the country. Renamo forces reached Zambezia in August 1982 and entered Nampula in April or May 1983 as an extension of a second offensive across Zambezia (see Map 3.1).¹² Both provinces experienced an escalation of violence in late 1986.

To counter the rise of Renamo, the Mozambican military, together with allied forces from Zimbabwe and Tanzania, began a counter-offensive in late 1986 and early 1987. This operation returned all district towns to Frelimo control by July 1988, but did not succeed in creating enduring stability. As a response to the continued instability, the Naparama emerged in late 1988 in the border region between Nampula and Zambezia provinces, soon spreading to their various districts over the course of 1989 and 1990.

The war in Zambezia and Nampula provinces took on a character different than in the south of the country, partly due to historical legacies. First, both provinces have a long history of opposition to Frelimo due to their historical marginalization and Frelimo's failure to mobilize the population for the party's cause.¹³ Thus, Renamo could exploit local grievances and benefit from more support by peasants and Frelimo representatives than in Mozambique's south.¹⁴ Second, Renamo was able to benefit from thick forestation and the

¹² Jean-Claude Legrand, 'Logique de guerre et dynamique de la violence en Zambézie, 1976–1991', *Politique africaine* 50 (June 1993), pp. 91–2; Alice Dinerman, 'From 'Abaixo' to 'Chiefs of Production': Agrarian Change in Nampula Province, Mozambique, 1975–87', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 28 (2001), p. 51; Domingos Do Rosário, 'Les Mairies des "autres": une analyse politique, socio-historique et culturelle des trajectoires locales – le cas d'Angoche, de l'Île de Moçambique et de Nacala Porto' (PhD., Bordeaux, 2009), p. 305. See also Chichava's Chapter 1 and Do Rosário's Chapter 2 in this volume.

¹³ Legrand, 'Logique de guerre', p. 88; Sérgio Inácio Chichava, 'Le "vieux Mozambique": Étude sur l'identité politique de la Zambézie', (PhD., Bordeaux, 2007); Do Rosário, 'Les Mairies des "autres".'

¹⁴ For a critical view of this argument, see Morier-Genoud's Chapter 5 in this volume. Some analysts argue that the lack of popular support led to more massacres and atrocities against the population in the south. See Margaret Hall, 'The Mozambican National Resistance Movement (RENAMO): A Study in the Destruction of an African Country', *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, 60 (1990), 53; Finnegan, *A Complicated War*, p. 72. However, the level of Renamo's perpetration of violence against civilians in the centre and north increased over the course of the war, amplifying people's discontent with the rebels and their support of the new Naparama force.

porous border with Malawi to achieve a high level of military organization and stage large-scale attacks on economic infrastructure and district towns.¹⁵

Civilian responses to wartime violence

The population in Nampula and Zambezia provinces suffered severely from the consequences of war. In addition to the violence perpetrated by both Renamo and Frelimo forces, the coastal areas of Nampula and the central areas of Zambezia were affected by famines in the late 1980s. Drought, poor harvest, and theft of relief goods by local officials, soldiers and civilians led to hunger and mass starvation.¹⁶ In early 1987, the situation in Zambezia was the worst in the country, with 105,000 people affected by hunger.¹⁷

People did not remain passive victims of war, however. They developed various strategies to respond to the violence, but only few of them succeeded in successfully protecting the population. Most people migrated. At the time of Naparama's emergence, 500,000 people in Zambezia province were displaced or affected by the war and 100,000 refugees had fled to neighbouring Malawi.¹⁸ The displaced no longer had access to their fields and they were dependent on limited supplies of aid relief.

In addition to migrating, people developed unarmed strategies of defence, such as peace zones – areas in which people were able to convince Renamo and Frelimo not to attack. Such peace zones emerged in the north with support from the Catholic Church and Jehovah's Witnesses.¹⁹ The most well-known case of an unarmed defence strategy was a peace zone in southern Mozambique. It was created by a spirit medium in the village of Mungoi in Manjacaze, in the province of Gaza.²⁰ When violence in Gaza escalated in 1987, people believed that the spirit of a former headman, Augusto Sidawanhane Mungoi (also Mongoi), awakened and spoke through his granddaughter Cristina Chemane, a traditional leader who became his principal medium.²¹ After a severe attack

¹⁵ Finnegan, *A Complicated War*, p. 71.

¹⁶ Mamba Death Toll Still Rising', *Mozambiquefile* 153 (April 1989), pp. 8–9; 'Mass Starvation in Mamba', *Mozambiquefile*, 152 (March 1989), pp. 4–5.

¹⁷ 'Milhares de vítimas da fome e da guerra', *Tempo* 847 (Maputo, 4 January 1987), p. 23.

¹⁸ Fernando Manuel, 'Para compreender o presente', *Tempo* (Maputo 1989), p. 7. In all of Mozambique in late 1989, one third of the country's 15 million people were threatened by famine, 100,000 had been killed, more than 1 million people had fled the country, and 2 million were displaced within Mozambique; see Karl Maier, 'A Program for Peace', *Africa Report* (1989), p. 58.

¹⁹ Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence'.

²⁰ Gil Lauriciano, 'Spiritual Revolution: Another Revolution in the Countryside', *Domingo* (Maputo) (1990). In the context of Mozambican society and culture, the spirit mediums relevant here are ancestral spirits. The spirits of the dead that cannot get to rest are believed to influence the world of the living. The descendants acquire the support of the spirits through spirit possession, a process by which spirits speak and act through a living person. Spirit possession provides the living with knowledge and power. See David Lan, *Guns & Rain: Guerrillas & Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (London, UK and Berkeley, CA: James Currey, 1985); Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence', p. 542; Francisco Lerma Martínez, *O povo macua e a sua cultura. Análise dos valores culturais do povo macua no ciclo vital, Maíua, Moçambique 1971–1985* (Maputo: Paulinas, 2008).

²¹ Karl Maier, *Into the House of the Ancestors: Inside the New Africa* (New York, NY: John Wiley, 1998), p. 51–63. People in the village stated that Mungoi had received his powers from his mother who had been a powerful traditional healer. See Mary B. Anderson and Marshall Wallace, *Opting Out of War: Strategies to Prevent Violent Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013), p. 146.

in December 1987 during which 92 people died, the spirit asked – through his medium – for a meeting with Renamo, during which it demanded the group to never attack the village again.²² At first the rebels did not listen, but after the spirit of Mungoi sent his message directly to spirit mediums in Renamo camps, the area was protected. Schools remained open and villagers could work their fields.²³ Thus, the village of Mungoi became an ‘oasis’,²⁴ allowing people to work and travel safely in the area.

The spirit of Mungoi is just one famous example of many, in which people mobilized cultural resources to bring an end to the war. Other important examples include the peace zones of Chief Capiteni and Chief Gadina in Morrumbala district in Zambezia province and of Samatenje, close to Renamo’s Gorongosa headquarters in Sofala province.²⁵ Samatenje remained truly neutral by playing Renamo and Frelimo off against each other, selling war medicines to both sides, and supposedly being protected by dangerous animals that would attack anyone who entered his area with a weapon.²⁶

However, peace zones such as Mungoi’s provided limited relief from the hardship of being removed from one’s areas of origin. Peace zones were static and did not extend from one area to another. Thus, people were not protected in their area, but had to move into such peace zones to be spared rebel violence. Moreover, the activities of traditional authorities and the creation of peace zones did not only have a military dimension, but also an economic one. Peace zones provided ‘major opportunities for trade and production in an environment of scarcity’.²⁷ Opportunities emerged not just for the community that would be able to engage in trading and farming, but also for the traditional authorities. For example, Mungoi asked for presents or work in exchange for liberating family members from Renamo-held areas.²⁸ Traditional war medicines were not provided for free, but sold to communities and individuals. This mixture of military, economic, and social effects of the ‘counter-cults of violence’ had significant implications for the evolution of these movements until the end of the war, which I will discuss below.²⁹

As an alternative, some community residents in the centre and north developed more offensive strategies of armed protection that spread across district borders. The formation of self-defence forces and community-initiated militias – of which Naparama was one – appeared more viable over time, as residents were able to ensure that they could remain in their home towns. Cultural resources of spiritual protection were also vital in the case of

²² Maier, *Into the House of the Ancestors*, p. 52.

²³ Anderson & Wallace, *Opting Out of War*, Chapter 11.

²⁴ Carolyn Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. 148.

²⁵ Wilson, ‘Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence’, 554–5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 557; Alex Vines, *Renamo: Terrorism in Mozambique* (London: James Currey, 1991), p. 118; Maier, *Into the House of the Ancestors*, p. 66.

²⁷ Wilson, ‘Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence’, p. 556.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 555; Jane Perlez, ‘Spared by Rebels? The Spirit Says That’ll Be \$2’, *The New York Times*, 24 August 1990, p. A4

²⁹ *Ibid.*; Wilson, ‘Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence’, p. 555.

community-initiated militias. The organization of self-defence forces was partly possible due to the different characteristics of spirit mediums in the Bantu culture of the centre and north compared to those in the southern part of Mozambique. For example, while the Shona *mhondoro* of Zimbabwe and southern Mozambique primarily provides group protection, the Macua-Lómuè *munepa* of northern Mozambique provides an individual with certain abilities and protection.³⁰ This difference has consequences for the kinds of movements that emerged in various regions in Mozambique. While Mungoi in southern Mozambique provided group protection, Naparama (and other spirit mediums) in northern Mozambique provided special powers to individuals.³¹

The formation of Naparama built on community defence forces organized by the party-state and local administration, the 'popular militias' (*milícias populares*) and community initiatives of self-defence. Beginning in the early 1980s, Frelimo relied on the popular militias – initially created as political forces in communal villages and state companies – as the first line of defence against the growing threat of Renamo. The military took over the command of these forces and provided training. In addition, Frelimo formed *forças de defesa territorial* ('territorial defence forces') in 1985, which received rudimentary military training to defend the rural areas in the districts.³² These forces, however, lacked morale, materiel and efficient leadership. In Namarrói district in Zambezia, for example, the local administration explained the high desertion rate for the militias by pointing to weak and inefficient leadership and a lack of weapons.³³

Community initiatives for local defence spread in the mid-1980s. The journalist Gil Lauriciano reported in 1986 of ten thousand civilians being armed with spears and knives to defend their communities in various districts in Zambezia.³⁴ In Marea, a village in Namarrói district in Zambezia province, people used spears and machetes to defend themselves after they had fled into the mountains and developed elaborate techniques to control the movement of people.³⁵ In the village of Nahipa in Mecubúri district, the *grupo decidido* ('the

³⁰ Lan, *Guns & Rain*; Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence', p. 542; Lerma Martínez, *O povo macua*.

³¹ See, on the spirits among the southern Mozambican Tsonga, the *sikwembu*, Alcinda Manuel Honwana, *Espíritos vivos, tradições modernas: possessão de espíritos e reintegração social pós-guerra no sul de Moçambique* (Maputo: Promedia, 2002).

³² It is unclear what the exact difference is between the *milícias populares* and the *forças de defesa territorial*; in many districts, the 'popular militia' appeared to be part of the 'territorial defence forces'.

³³ República Popular de Moçambique, Província da Zambezia, Administração do Distrito de Namarrói, *Informação do Governo Distrital sobre as actividades realizados referentes aos meses de Janeiro a Setembro 1989*, 2 October, 1989 (AGZ, Quelimane).

³⁴ Gil Lauriciano, 'Resistência popular cresce na Zambezia: Dez mil pessoas armadas com zagaias', *Notícias* (1986).

³⁵ Interview with religious leader, 1 May 2012, Pm9, Namarrói, Zambezia. In order to protect the identities of the respondents, the interview citations indicate date, location, the interviewee's role during the war, and gender of the interviewees: N (Naparama); F (Frelimo combatant); R (Renamo combatant); M (militiaman); P (religious leader); L (local leader including traditional and other community leaders); H (traditional healer); G (government representative); m (male); f (female).

decided group') emerged before the arrival of Naparama – a group of civilians armed with spears and machetes to patrol at night.³⁶ In Namacurra, the 'Anakabudula', peasants armed with spears and machetes, emerged in 1986 to protect the district from Renamo forces.³⁷

As a consequence of their limited means and capabilities, many militiamen and community defence forces joined the emerging Naparama. The Naparama provided the villagers with the necessary courage, offensive tactics, and effective leadership to confront and successfully pursue Renamo combatants.

The formation of Naparama

Zambezia and Nampula provinces witnessed the emergence of the Naparama, the most important community-initiated militias in the late 1980s. The Naparama leader Manuel António was from the district of Namuno of Mozambique's northern-most province, Cabo Delgado.³⁸ He was responsible for the formation of Naparama in a few districts in Nampula and many districts across Zambezia, and became the group's main leader in Zambezia.³⁹ António maintained that he had died of measles as a child, had been buried, and then was resurrected after seven days.⁴⁰ He told the story that he had spent six months in the mountains, where he had received a divine mission from Jesus Christ to liberate the Mozambican people from the suffering of the war, and learned of a medicine to turn bullets into water.⁴¹ António's story varies in different accounts, however. In Nordstrom's account, António received his mission on Mount Namuli in Gurué district in the border area between Nampula and Zambezia provinces.⁴² Other accounts state that he learned about traditional medicine in the mountains in his province of origin, Cabo Delgado.⁴³ Since Mount Namuli is the legendary origin of the Macua and Lómuè people, the narrative of receiving the mission in a place as culturally significant for

³⁶ The initiative for the group came from the local administration; nevertheless, the group attracted many youths and took on the character of a community-based group. See interviews with former Naparama combatants, 26 October 2011, Nm29, Nahipa, Mecubúri, Nampula; 22 October 2011, Nm27, Mecubúri, Nampula.

³⁷ Rosário Jaime Lemia, 'Pós-Independência, guerra e reassentamento da população no distrito de Namacurra (1975–1998/9)', BA Thesis (Maputo: Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, 2001).

³⁸ The story I tell here differs in many details from those told by Chichava and Do Rosário in their contributions to this volume, which is based mainly on documents from government archives. This is due to my use of a variety of different sources, including newspaper and interview material. It shows that the Frelimo administration had limited knowledge about Naparama's origins and what happened in other districts, and thus the information included in the government documents is often incomplete.

³⁹ See the Naparama's presence across Zambezia and Nampula provinces in Map 3.1. Interviews with former Naparama combatants, 19 September 2011, Nm11, Nicoadala, Zambezia; 20 September 2011, Fm2-N, Nicoadala, Zambezia.

⁴⁰ Rachel Waterhouse, 'Antonio's Triumph of the Spirits', *Africa South* (Harare, May 1991), p. 14; Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story*, p. 58.

⁴¹ In the Macua-Lómuè culture, ancestral spirits live in cemeteries, the wilderness, rivers, and mountains. See Lerma Martínez, *Opovo macua*, p. 207. António's stay in the cemetery and mountains is therefore significant for receiving magical powers from ancestral spirits.

⁴² Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story*, p. 58.

⁴³ Interview with former Naparama combatant, 30 September 2011, Nm20, Nicoadala, Zambezia.

the potential recipients of his services as the Namuli mountain served as a powerful legitimization for Manuel António's work.

Manuel António mobilized followers by 'vaccinating' them with a medicine. In order to become Naparama combatants, youths had to go through an initiation ritual that took place as follows:

Thirty youths were taken to be treated. [Manuel António] vaccinated us with razor blades. [He] cut our bodies with razor blades and put the medicine [into the wound]. Others he rubbed the whole body [with the medicine]. After all this, we were put to a test, [he] took sharpened machetes and attempted to cut [us], but because of the medicine, the machetes did not hurt us. He took a rifle and shot in our direction and nothing happened with us. And then we were told the rules that we had to respect. We paid five meticaís for a small ceremony.⁴⁴

The rules that new recruits learned about concerned their (and their families') behaviour in the household and on the battlefield. They were akin to common rules that users of traditional medicine had to respect, such as not taking a bath for a couple of days or not to eat certain foods. Naparama's code of conduct for the battlefield ensured their surprising success. Naparama combatants were

not allowed to look back, only look ahead; no one was allowed to be in front of the other; no fighting in the shade, always in the sun; if the enemy was in the shade, we were not allowed to be in the shade as well ... we could not retreat when we heard shots, we had to go there where they [Renamo] were.⁴⁵

By continuously advancing, often while singing, and not turning back, Naparama created such fear among Renamo combatants that it often did not come to a direct confrontation between the two forces. Renamo combatants left their bases as soon as they heard Naparama approaching. Those Naparama combatants who violated any of these rules, in contrast, 'stayed in the bush; when someone shot, the bullet chased you until it hit you'.⁴⁶ All deaths among the Naparama combatants were explained by reference to violations of these rules.

Manuel António introduced himself as the only Naparama initiator and claimed that his medicine was the authentic one, but other accounts of Naparama's formation contradict António's version of the story. There is ample evidence that the various Naparama forces across Zambezia and Nampula, including those of Manuel António, had the same origin. The initial vaccine appears to have come from Lalaua district in Nampula province. After

⁴⁴ Interview with former Naparama combatant, 9 September 2011, Nm2, Nicoadala, Zambezia.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Interview with former Naparama combatant, 9 September 2011, Nm1, Nicoadala, Zambezia. The same former Naparama combatant reported that there was a medicine that commanders had that could provide relief when someone violated a rule, so that those combatants would not die in battle. When combatants were surprised by an attack but had sexual relations shortly before that moment, they had to rub their body with salt or ash to purify it.

António's death, rumours spread that António had learned the medicine and skills from a 'powerful and venerated spirit leader and healer who lived in the remote bush of Nampula province'.⁴⁷ This spirit leader presumably was the elder Zinco from the village of Méti in Lalaua district, as several interviewees mentioned that António had reached other districts in Nampula coming from Méti.⁴⁸

The various accounts of António's story and the origin of the Naparama vaccine and 'movement' may be explained by its rapid diffusion across Zambezia and Nampula and the decentralized character of its organization. Once Naparama formed in Nampula province, the militia spread across district and provincial boundaries. According to the accounts of journalists, of former Naparama combatants, and of a resident from Ribáuè, Manuel António mobilized the first peasants in Ribáuè district in Nampula province in late 1988 and then entered Zambezia in early 1989.⁴⁹ In Ribáuè district, António initiated several men who then accompanied him on his travels as his personal guard. Among them was Manuel Sabonete, who took over the leadership after Manuel António's death and is still considered the Naparama leader in Nicoadala district in Zambezia today.⁵⁰ The group entered Zambezia in the area of Alto Ligonha in Gilé district and first worked in Alto Molócuè.⁵¹ They then moved into the districts of Ile and Mocuba.⁵² Later, António also formed Naparama groups in Pebane, Maganja da Costa, Namacurra, Nicoadala, Lugela, Namarrói, Milange, Gurué and Inhassunge (see Map 3.1).

The Naparama groups increased their offensive capabilities over time. In Alto Molócuè, Manuel António first worked on improving road security by vaccinating bus passengers, and then, once he received the (indirect) support of the local administration, formed small groups to attack Renamo strongholds in the northern part of the district. The Naparama militia soon created a base in Nampevo, a locality at the border between the districts of Mocuba and Ile, and from there launched offensives into Mocuba, Ile, and Gilé.⁵³ The

⁴⁷ Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story*, pp. 69–70.

⁴⁸ Interview with civilian, 29 November 2011, m23, Chinga, Murrupula, Nampula; interview with former Naparama combatant, 20 September 2011, Fm2-N, Nicoadala, Zambezia. Dinerman assumes that Zinco produced his own Parama vaccine independently of António and then created a group of Naparama combatants in Namapa district in 1990 with the help of the district administrator who was previously the head of the local administration in Lalaua. See Alice Dinerman, *Revolution, Counter-revolution and Revisionism in Post-colonial Africa: The Case of Mozambique, 1975–1994* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 7.

⁴⁹ Waterhouse, 'Antonio's Triumph of the Spirits', p. 14. See also interview with former Naparama combatant, 20 September 2011, Fm2-N, Nicoadala, Zambezia; interview with civilian, 29 November 2011, m23, Chinga, Murrupula, Nampula; interview with former Renamo combatant, 15 October 2011, Rm2, Mecubúri, Nampula.

⁵⁰ Interview with Naparama combatant, 30 September 2011, Nm20, Nicoadala, Zambezia. Manuel Sabonete, the current Naparama leader, claims that Manuel António and his first group of Naparamas from Ribáuè also vaccinated people in Muecate and Lalaua districts, but I was not able to confirm this information. Interview 30 September 2011, Nm20, Nicoadala, Zambezia.

⁵¹ Fabião Manuel Pereira, 'Particularidades da dinâmica do conflito armado no distrito do Alto Molócuè, 1982–1992: Violência armada e guerra mágica', BA Thesis (Maputo: Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, 1999), p. 82.

⁵² Interview with Naparama commanders, 30 September 2011, Nm20, Nicoadala, Zambezia; 23 August 2011, Gr-Nm1, Quelimane.

⁵³ Pereira, 'Particularidades da dinâmica do conflito armado', p. 86.

base at Nampevo served as a launching point for Naparama's epic attack on Renamo's regional base at Muaquiua in early-mid 1991.⁵⁴ In Naula, a former Renamo stronghold, Naparama began to punish the population for supporting Renamo and pillaged their property. Consequently, Naparama lost the support of the people and Manuel António was forced to move to Mocuba, the district to the south, to be able to recruit more youths.⁵⁵ In Mocuba, Manuel António established new headquarters, until he moved the latter to Nicoadala, presumably in 1990.

Although they may have had the same origin, the Naparama in Nampula evolved independently of Naparama in Zambezia province. The formation of Naparama in Nampula province is not very well known. This is partly due to the fact that António monopolized the media attention, thereby obscuring the story of Naparama manifestations in other regions. In contrast to the Naparama leaders in Nampula province, Manuel António spoke Portuguese well, came to bars in Mocuba and Quelimane, and frequently invited journalists (and also researchers such as Carolyn Nordstrom) to come and observe his initiation ceremonies. Therefore, he was well known in Mocuba and Quelimane, received frequent national and international press coverage, and was presented as the Naparama's main leader.⁵⁶

In Nampula province, militia units were formed when an acquaintance of Manuel António from Ribáuè district, Ambrósio Albino, started his own group in Murrupula district. Ambrósio Albino was a former commander of the late president Samora Machel's special forces *Boina Vermelha* (Red Berets). He had left the military after being wounded in battle. He had learned how to prepare the medicine from Manuel António in Ribáuè and became one – or maybe the main – leader of the Naparama in Nampula.⁵⁷ In 1990, Albino travelled from Nampula city to Móthi, a small village close to the district town of Murrupula, to treat a traditional healer. When Renamo units attacked the village during his visit, Albino offered to vaccinate youths with the Parama vaccine to help the people of Móthi avoid further attacks.⁵⁸ Nampila Mupa,⁵⁹ the traditional

⁵⁴ See Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence', p. 565.

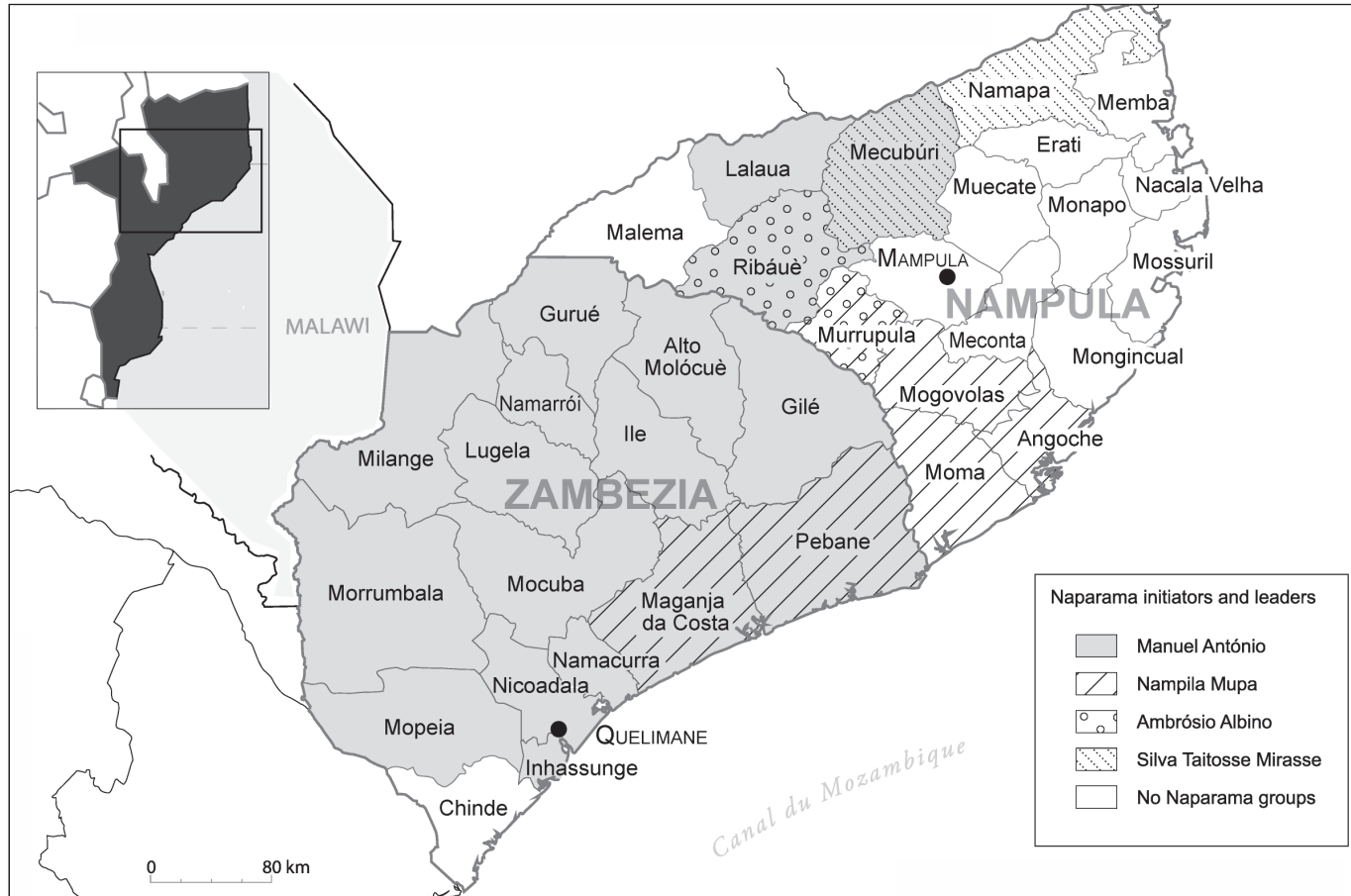
⁵⁵ Pereira, 'Particularidades da dinâmica do conflito armado', p. 84.

⁵⁶ See for example, Lauriciano, 'Spiritual Revolution'; Karl Maier, 'Renamo Flee at Sight of Rag-tag Army', *The Independent* (London, 27 July 1990); David Borges, 'O Último dos Paramas', *Grande Reportagem*, 111 (1992), pp. 48–53. Analysts and political commentators assumed that the Naparama in Nampula belonged to Manuel António's group, but António distanced himself from the Naparama in Moma when they perpetrated violence against civilians, and claimed that these were not 'authentic' Naparama; see Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence', p. 573.

⁵⁷ Interview with civilian, 28 November 2011, m22, Chinga, Murrupula, Nampula. Albino's nephew confirmed that Albino was from Lalaua, but lived in Ribáuè and then moved to Nampula city. See interview with former Naparama commander, 30 November 2011, Gr-Nm2, Nampula. A Naparama commander in Nicoadala confirmed that one of the members of Manuel António's personal guard was called Ambrósio, and he was responsible for vaccinating new members, but it remained unclear whether this person and Ambrósio Albino were the same person. See interview with Naparama commander, 8 March 2011, Nm18, Nicoadala, Zambezia.

⁵⁸ Interview with Naparama commander, 3 November, 2011, Nm32, Móthi, Murrupula, Nampula; interview with Naparama combatants, 30 November 2011, Gr-Nm2, Nampula.

⁵⁹ In interviews and documents, Nampila is also referred to as 'Mpila', 'Mbila' or 'Nhambila.' 'Mupa' is also spelled 'Mópo' in government documents.



Map 3.1 Overview of Naparama initiators and leaders in Zambezia and Nampula provinces (Source: Interview and archival sources, Corinna Jentzsch; Design and creation: Valérie Alfaut, LAM/CNRS 2016.)

Table 3.1 Overviews of Naparama initiators and leaders in Zambezia and Nampula provinces according to interview and archival sources

| <i>Initiator</i> | <i>Zambezia Province</i> | <i>Nampula Province</i> |
|------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Manuel António | Gilé, Alto Molócuè, Mocuba, Gurué, Ile, Nicoadala, Namacurra, Pebane, Maganja da Costa, Lugela, Namarrói, Inhassunge, Milange, Morrumbala, Mopeia | Ribáuè, Lalaua, Mecubúri |
| Ambrósio Albino | | Ribáuè, Murrupula |
| Silva Taitosse Mirasse | | Mecubúri, Namapa |
| Nampila Mupa | Pebane, Maganja da Costa | Murrupula, Moma, Mogovolas, Angoche |

healer and local leader (*'rei'*) of Móthi accepted, and together they formed a Naparama unit.⁶⁰

From Murrupula, Naparama spread across several districts in Nampula. Nampila became an important Naparama leader in Murrupula and neighbouring districts, and brought the vaccine to Moma, and presumably also to Mogovolas and Angoche districts (see Map 3.1). In 1990, local administrators in Pebane district in Zambezia close to the border to Nampula province asked Nampila to work in their district, where he (presumably) died in 1991. Albino taught the preparation of the medicine to his nephew Silva Taitosse Mirasse, who had accompanied him to Murrupula, and Silva mobilized peasants in Mecubúri and Namapa districts (see the overview of Naparama initiators in Table 3.1).

Frelimo's response to Naparama

Although the Frelimo government was at first sceptical of the emerging Naparama movement, it soon tolerated and even supported the militia. Observing events in war-torn Angola, where two insurgent movements were fighting against the government, government and party officials feared at first that the Naparama would evolve into a second insurgent force against the government. The local administration was also concerned that the group might make financial and material demands or seek compensation during or after the war. Tellingly, before Manuel António could work in Mocuba district, the local administration demanded he confirm that his goal was not money or political power, but only the protection of the population.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Some residents of Nampila's village claimed that Nampila already had a medicine that he mixed with Albino's to create an even stronger vaccine. He had already treated the area around the village to prevent Renamo from attacking. See interview with former Naparama combatant, 4 November 2011, Nm36, Móthi, Murrupula, Nampula.

⁶¹ Interview with former Naparama leader, 6 June 2012, Nm46, Lugela, Zambezia.

When local Frelimo officials realized that Naparama forces were loyal to the government and could support its war effort and maybe even alter the military stalemate, most of them supported Naparama's recruitment efforts and some even agreed to joint military operations. Chichava (in Chapter 1), for example, reports about Frelimo's co-optation of Naparama in Alto Molócuè in Zambezia province. In Mecubúri in Nampula province, the representatives of the local administration actively recruited youths for the Naparama and its forces ended up replacing Frelimo armed forces.⁶²

The decision to tolerate the Naparama and even cooperate with them in certain districts was based on pragmatic calculations to further local power interests, not a change in the official party ideology of scientific socialism that despised anything 'traditional'. Frelimo officials at the provincial and national level never officially acknowledged their cooperation with Naparama in certain districts, even if the party had abandoned all references to Marxism-Leninism at its party congress in 1989 and was changing its attitudes towards traditional authorities in the early 1990s. As the national government denied any (formal) collaboration with Naparama, Naparama was not considered a party to the conflict during the peace negotiations between Frelimo and Renamo and was therefore not included in post-war demobilization programmes.⁶³

The Competition for Spiritual Power

The evolution of the Naparama in the two provinces demonstrates how fragile spiritual power was, how little institutionalized it stayed, and how easily it could be challenged. The early success of Naparama can be explained by the spiritual dimension of the armed conflict. According to Wilson, Renamo and Naparama (and Frelimo) are examples of 'cults of violence', as their violent activity possessed 'ritualistic elements which the perpetrators – who in such circumstances see themselves as some kind of brotherhood socially discrete from the victims – believe provides or imputes value or power into the activity'.⁶⁴ Renamo leaders made use of spirit mediums in their bases and referred to the war as a 'war of the spirits' as they aimed to protect the ancestral spirits that Frelimo sought to abandon.⁶⁵ Naparama severely challenged Renamo's superiority in the spiritual domain as it emerged as a 'cult of counter-violence' to

⁶² Interview with former Naparama combatants, 26 October 2011, Nm29, Nahipa, Mecubúri, Nampula; 16 October 2011, Nm-24, Mecubúri, Nampula; 22 October 2011, Nm27, Mecubúri, Nampula; interview with local government official, 17 October 2011, Gf1, Mecubúri, Nampula.

⁶³ João Paulo Borges Coelho & Alex Vines, 'Pilot Study on Demobilization and Re-integration of Ex-combatants in Mozambique, USAID's Mozambique Demobilization and Re-integration Support Project (656-0235)', University of Oxford, Refugee Studies Programme, Queen Elizabeth House (1992).

⁶⁴ Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence', p. 531.

⁶⁵ Christian Geffray, *La cause des armes au Mozambique: Anthropologie d'une guerre civile* (Paris, 1990); Otto Roesch, 'RENAMO and the Peasantry in Southern Mozambique: A View from Gaza Province', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 26 (1992), p. 472.

challenge Renamo's 'spiritual power'.⁶⁶ The main proof of Naparama's prowess and spiritual superiority was the death of Renamo's northern commander Calisto Meque – a powerful and feared personality believed to have spiritual powers – that Naparama combatants claim Manuel António caused during a battle at Renamo's base of Muaquiua in early-mid 1991.⁶⁷ However, Naparama's cult of counter-violence was itself challenged, and provoked counter-movements, such as those of special forces formed by traditional healers in Renamo camps, and of rival Naparama forces.

Anti-Naparama forces

Due to the competitive logic of spiritual power, the Naparama forces were soon challenged by their own means. Renamo leaders in the areas in which Naparama was active soon realized that they had to respond to Naparama with a similar force in order to regain supremacy. Renamo forces in the border area between Nampula and Zambezia provinces therefore created their own versions of Naparama. Leaders identified traditional healers capable of initiating members of Renamo's existing auxiliary forces – the *mujeeba* (also called *mujuba*, *mudjiba*, *mujiba*, *majiba*, *madjuba* or *madjuhba*) – to empower them to successfully respond to Naparama's threat.

These anti-Naparama forces were modelled on the Naparama; youths were initiated into the groups by use of a medicine that was tied to a certain code of conduct on the battlefield. In Nampula province, traditional healers in the Renamo base of Namilasse in Murrupula treated youths with a vaccine that was supposed to empower them to confront the Naparama and the Frelimo army in the town of Murrupula:

The *régulo* was Mário. The Naparamas came from the town and killed many people here. So the *régulo* arranged a traditional healer to form a group here, the Muta-passa. This drug was the same as the Parama [medicine] because sometimes those from Frelimo fled.⁶⁸

The vaccine for the auxiliary Renamo forces supposedly had the same effect as the Parama medicine. The group used spears, but also had a few firearms. Mutapassa combatants followed similar rules as the Naparama regarding prohibited food, but their main rule was that they were not allowed to shoot unless others did first.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence', p. 529.

⁶⁷ Whether Naparama killed Meque is contested, however, as Frelimo claimed to have done so much earlier during a battle in the town of Gilé in July 1988. See 'Mozambique: Setback to Peace', *Africa Confidential*, 32, 4 (1991), p. 4; Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence'.

⁶⁸ Interview with civilian, 24 November 2011, m18, Namilasse, Murrupula, Nampula. Other interviewees identified the traditional healer as Sabala from Taveia in Ribáuè district in Nampula who had treated youths in Ribáuè-Sede. See interview with civilian, 28 November 2011, m22, Chinga, Murrupula, Nampula; interview with former Frelimo combatant, 28 November 2011, Fm13, Nampua, Murrupula, Nampula.

⁶⁹ Interviews with civilians, 24 November 2011, m18; 24 November 2011, m19, Namilasse, Murrupula, Nampula.

The conflict also escalated in Zambezia province, where Renamo sought to create a force as similar to the Naparama as possible. Zambezia's anti-Naparama force emerged in the early months of 1991, led by the traditional healer Mulelepea (or Mulelepeya/Malelepea; Mulelepeia in Chichava's contribution to this volume), which may even have led to the defection of some Naparama combatants.⁷⁰ Renamo leaders chose between several traditional healers when struggling to respond to Frelimo's counter-offensive, and finally settled on a healer whose powers resembled those of the Naparama initiators:

Frelimo had intensified their attacks here in Nauela. This was when Renamo hired Mulelepea of Namixaxen. However, there was another man called Namukhotxen of the area of Nanthupa. Renamo asked the latter how they could solve the critical situation provoked by the enemy, and Namukhotxen answered that he was capable [to help] because he could transform himself into a lion and decimate the enemies. Renamo didn't accept his proposal. By contrast, Mulelepea said that he would use magic, vaccinating the warriors so that Frelimo's bullets didn't penetrate their bodies. He was authorized to recruit men, usually youths called *anamavaka* [spear users], to be vaccinated. They began their military operations. Renamo's guerrilla fighters advanced in the second line and the *anamavaka* in the first line of offence.⁷¹

Mulelepea (Mulelepeia in Chichava's Chapter 1) was an elder of about 70 years and claimed that he had learned how to transform himself into a child to escape detention by the sepoy (*cipaios*, i.e. 'native police') during the colonial period. He may have been linked to the other Naparama initiators through his connection to the traditional healer Zinco in Méti, Lalaua, as Pereira speaks of 'Metó' as the place where Mulelepea learned about the vaccine.⁷² When Mulelepea heard that there were Naparama in Nauela, he claimed that António's vaccine was weak and went to Nauela to put his abilities into practice.⁷³ He travelled to other bases in other districts and also reached Renamo's regional base Maquiringa in Namarrói district.⁷⁴

Although Renamo strove for similarities between the Naparama and the anti-Naparama forces to ensure that the latter could cope with the strength of the former, there was one major difference. In contrast to Naparama's largely voluntary, bottom-up mobilization, the formation of the anti-Naparama forces was a top-down decision from the Renamo leadership. In other regards, however, Mulelepea's forces resembled those of Naparama. Mulelepea's combatants had to follow similar rules of conduct as the Naparama.⁷⁵ Moreover, in the same way as Naparama conducted joint operations with Frelimo,

⁷⁰ Legrand, 'Logique de guerre', p. 103. See also Chichava's Chapter 1 in this volume.

⁷¹ Interviewee cited in Pereira, 'Particularidades da dinâmica do conflito armado', p. 94. Translation from Portuguese by the author.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁷⁴ Interview with former Renamo combatants, 22 June 2012, Gr-Rm3, Rumala, Namarrói, Zambezia.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

the Mulelepea combatants advanced in front of the regular Renamo units to make use of their special forces to clear the area.

Renamo's strategy to challenge the power of Naparama in the spiritual domain played out successfully. Mulelepea's warriors succeeded in posing a significant threat to Naparama and Frelimo units. Mulelepea's force had their first confrontation with Naparama in April 1991 in Nauela, during which 25 Naparama combatants died.⁷⁶ Mulelepea's combatants were called 'Khonkos', which means the strong and powerful.⁷⁷ A former Frelimo soldier in Murrupula claimed that 'Khonkos' denotes people who are 'crazy' and 'don't like to joke around'.⁷⁸ This demonstrates that Frelimo soldiers considered these forces as unpredictable, which increased their threat on the battlefield. Naparama combatants were more afraid of the Khonkos than of Renamo combatants, as Mulelepea's forces were, according to some former Naparama combatants, supposedly difficult to catch with bare hands and – in contrast to regular Renamo fighters – were able to kill Naparama with their spears.⁷⁹

The fragmentation of Naparama

The Naparama's spiritual power was not only easily challenged by its enemies, but it also suffered contestation internally. In addition to Renamo's spiritual counter-offensive, the fragmentation within the Naparama movement severely limited Naparama's further expansion and escalated the armed conflict, as it contributed to the death of the two main Naparama leaders in Nampula and Zambezia provinces. While Manuel António may have been responsible for the death of Nampula's Naparama leader Nampila (discussed below), his own death in a battle between Naparama and Renamo forces in December 1991 in Macuse in Namacurra district is rumoured to have been caused by traitors stemming from his own group.⁸⁰ Above all, stories of betrayal attempt to explain the waning power of the Naparama forces, but they also point to crucial conflicts within Naparama over power and resources.

Cultivating reputations as the most powerful Naparama leader

The power of armed forces that rely heavily on traditional resources depends largely on the charisma and reputation of their leaders as powerful traditional healers and fearless warriors. Such reputation is important to gain the trust and support from the local population to provide resources and recruits to the emerging group. But such reputation can be easily contested, in particular

⁷⁶ Pereira, 'Particularidades da dinâmica do conflito armado', p. 98. Also see Chichava's Chapter 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Interview with former Frelimo combatant, 28 November 2011, Fm13, Nampua, Murrupula, Nampula.

⁷⁹ Pereira, 'Particularidades da dinâmica do conflito armado', p. 100.

⁸⁰ There are many versions of this story, but all are about António's lack of protective powers due to a betrayal by his mistress, his assistant, or a former Naparama member who had joined Renamo. See interviews with religious leader, 8 September 2011, Pm2; civilian, 14 September 2011, f1; and community leader, 23 September 2011, Lm3a, Nicoadala. See also Pereira, 'Particularidades da dinâmica do conflito armado', p. 91; Lemia, 'Pós-Independência, guerra e reassentamento', pp. 57–8.

when leaders are confronted with deaths among their own troops on the battlefield and when the leadership of a large militia is tied to certain benefits and resources. This also occurred in the case of the Naparama. The mobilization success of Naparama forces depended on their reputation as courageous warriors who would survive even the heaviest episodes of fighting. As soon as a force was accused of dying in battle, the power of the traditional healer in charge was in demise, since his medicine appeared to have no effect. Each of the Naparama leaders declared to be better than the other – to have the ‘authentic’ and most powerful medicine – as claiming the monopoly on the vaccination of youths was a gateway to money, power and fame.

Zambezia’s main Naparama leader (and the most famous one), Manuel António, sought to establish a monopoly on youth initiation into militias by cultivating his reputation as a powerful leader with a medicine able to defeat Renamo and protect thousands of peasants from the violence. His strategy proved successful; for a long time, he worked as the main Naparama initiator in the province. When he reached a new district, he first introduced himself to the local administration and asked for a meeting with the population. During the meeting, he re-enacted his own resurrection in order to establish people’s trust in his powers. A resident of Namarrói recalls António’s public ceremony like this:

The first day I saw Naparama was on a Sunday. The Administrator Mucutueliua had invited many people in order to see how [the Naparama] did things, there by the church. We didn’t wait long and went to watch. They dug a grave as if it was a cemetery and they started singing and carried [Manuel António] over to [the area] where the student housing is today and buried him there. They put a mat [in the grave] and a big rectangular mirror and he started talking [predicting the number of] troops and weapons in the base of Sahia and in the base of Mussisse. Everything that was at the base. Then they covered the grave. When he left [the grave], they started to sing and started a fire with big pieces of firewood. He went [to the fire], sat down and started to take piece after piece [out of the fire] and put them on his chest. They brought some leaves and a mortar ... The youth who wanted to join the group came and took a leaf from the mortar and when they took a machete and struck [his] body, they put the leaf [on the wound] and the wound healed right away. The next day, they left and went to test whether the medicine worked. They advised the new Naparama combatants that whoever ducked down or retreated [would die]. Even though the enemy had a weapon, you should not withdraw – they even captured [the enemy] and brought the captured men here with their weapons.⁸¹

The main strategy by which Manuel António sought to gain trust in his abilities and support from the population was to retrieve people abducted by Renamo. In fact, many people remember strongly that with the advent of Naparama, they could finally return home.⁸² Naparama’s major task came to

⁸¹ Interview with civilian, 26 May 2012, m28, Namarrói, Zambezia. See similar descriptions of the ceremony by Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story*, pp. 58f.

⁸² Karl Maier, ‘Triumph of Spears over Guns Brings Refugees Home’, *The Independent* (London, 1990).

be the capture – not the killing – of Renamo combatants and collaborators, and the ‘recuperation’ of the population from Renamo-held areas:

We didn’t go [on missions] to kill. If a [Renamo combatant] was shooting over there and no more bullets were left in the magazine, we said ‘drop your weapon’. Really – you are here and he is where that mango tree is [demonstrating the proximity between himself and the Renamo combatant], [we said] ‘drop your weapon’. So he approached to fight with his bare hands – ‘let’s go, brother’. We, this movement, from the beginning to the end, it was all about recuperating [population]. It was not about killing. We recuperated people, even [when they were] armed. We captured weapons. Then we took the people [and the weapons] and presented them to the government.⁸³

The Naparama turned out to be very successful in this strategy, which bolstered popular support and the fame of the Naparama leader. The British journalist Karl Maier estimated in February 1990 that Naparama had succeeded in returning over 100,000 displaced to their homes.⁸⁴

To further strengthen the support among the people, Naparama forces also focused on securing areas freed from Renamo, so that the displaced could return to their districts. By creating the opportunity to return, Manuel António created the expectation among the peasants to be able to work their fields and provide for themselves, ending the dependence on the government and relief supplies. This meant that Naparama enjoyed much support from among the displaced and was able to recruit among them volunteers for their forces, as in Nicoadala district in Zambezia:

Where did Manuel António mobilize the people to initiate them into Naparama combatants?

That was in the village [for the displaced]. Because many refugees lived in the village – people tired of the war. Thus when [Manuel António] Parama arrived and said he was bringing [this medication], all of those who were in the village and suffered agreed [to participate], and the headquarters was there in the village.⁸⁵

In fact, Manuel António deliberately targeted the displaced young men living in impoverished refugee camps around government-controlled hamlets for recruitment ‘with a promise of a means to restore their dignity’.⁸⁶ In addition to providing a safe return for the displaced, Naparama took on the task to defend the people in their villages. Naparama’s main task was to ‘defend the population’,⁸⁷ and ‘save our sons, belongings, and family members’.⁸⁸ In both

⁸³ Interview with former Naparama combatant, 30 September 2011, Nm18, Nicoadala, Zambezia.

⁸⁴ Maier, ‘Triumph of Spears over Guns’.

⁸⁵ Interview with former Naparama combatant, 9 September 2011, Nm1, Nicoadala, Zambezia.

⁸⁶ Maier, *Into the House of the Ancestors*, p. 67.

⁸⁷ Interview with former Frelimo combatant, 13 September 2011, Fm1, Nicoadala, Zambezia.

⁸⁸ Interview with former Naparama combatants, 30 September 2011, Gr-Nm2, Nampula.

provinces, former Naparama combatants claimed to be the main – or even only – armed group that protected the population.

As a consequence of the widespread success of Manuel António's forces, his predominance was uncontested. When his troops managed to assault Renamo's main base at Muaquiua in Mocuba district, António became famous in both rural and urban areas. National and international press coverage increased his fame even more.⁸⁹

However, Manuel António had to build up his reputation slowly, as an example from Mecubúri demonstrates. One of the first districts in which Manuel António vaccinated peasants was Mecubúri in Nampula province, where he went shortly before or after his visit to Ribáuè. When the combatants he had vaccinated died in battle, Mecubúri's residents were unconvinced of the power of his vaccine and refused to join. António left the district without leaving a group of Naparama behind. One Mecubúri resident claimed António was working on both sides of the conflict and joined Renamo after leaving the district – an expression of general mistrust towards António.⁹⁰ This was not the end of Naparama in the district, however. When Mecubúri residents later learned about the elder Nampila and his apparently more powerful medicine, a group of youths went to Murrupula to receive the vaccine.

The challenge to Manuel António's predominance

Manuel António's predominance in Zambezia, based on his fame and reputation, did not remain unchallenged. When the Naparama leader in Nampula province, Nampila, arrived in Pebane district, he reportedly encountered Manuel António upon arrival.⁹¹ In the early fall of 1990, they got into a struggle for power. Both leaders accused each other of not using the authentic medicine, which supposedly explained why their forces were dying in battle. A Naparama commander of Manuel António's forces went as far as accusing Nampila of collaborating with Renamo:

When the elder [Manuel António] arrived, the other [Nampila] was [vaccinating] the other side [Renamo] without the proper medication. Because when he prepared a group to go to the bush, they died. This means that the medicine that he used did not have any effect.⁹²

The local administration in Pebane was concerned about the conflict between the two leaders, as it diminished the Naparama's credibility among

⁸⁹ See, for example, Lauriciano, 'Spiritual Revolution'; Maier, 'Renamo Flee at Sight of Rag-tag Army'; Maier, 'Triumph of spears over guns'; Borges, 'O Último dos Paramas'.

⁹⁰ Interview with former Frelimo and Naparama combatant, 26 October 2011, Fm6/N, Nahipa, Mecubúri, Nampula; interview with former Naparama combatant, 26 October 2011, Nm29, Nahipa, Mecubúri, Nampula; interview with former Naparama combatant, 22 October 2011, Nm27, Mecubúri, Nampula.

⁹¹ A local leader claimed that Nampila left Murrupula because Ambrósio Albino and Nampila had a disagreement, as Albino was more powerful, and Nampila left in anger. I could not confirm this information. See interview with local leader, 27 June 2012, Lm21, Murrupula, Nampula.

⁹² Interview with Naparama commander, 8 March 2012, Nm18, Nicoadala, Zambezia.

the population. A local government report from November 1990 identified the source of the conflict as being related to the question of which leader had the superior knowledge – ‘who knows more’.⁹³ In an interview, the former district administrator of Pebane confirmed that the conflict was a classic struggle for power and each leader accused the other of ignorance and incapability.⁹⁴ In fact, Manuel António’s subordinate maintained that Nampila and his troops did not know about the correct secrets – the taboos that combatants had to obey in order for the vaccine to have the desired effect:

[Nampila] was not a confirmed traditional healer of Naparama because we have this secret that we weren’t allowed to eat certain foods. Had we started doing it and gotten into an ambush, we would have died right away. And we could not sit and eat however we liked – that was dangerous.

Nampila’s son defended the authenticity of Nampila’s medicine by arguing that the fact that their troops were not hit by mines and bazookas proved that they did respect Naparama’s rules:

[Manuel] said, ‘these [Naparama] don’t know the Parama medicine. I prefer my drug, [as] my soldiers do not die’. I said that, ‘[With] my drug, if you violate [the rules], you die. If you don’t violate [the rules] – [if you hit] a mine, you will escape; [if a] bazooka [hits you], only the clothes the person is wearing will be burnt’.⁹⁵

Linked to the struggle for spiritual power was also a generational conflict. The local government report cited above also points to the fact that Manuel António’s disrespect for Nampila was grounded in Nampila’s age and reputation rather than his alleged lack of botanical knowledge. Manuel António was a young and dynamic man who was independent of traditional hierarchies, had no prior experience as a healer, and acquired his leadership skills as a Naparama initiator. By contrast, Nampila was an elder, a respected local leader and healer, and had been known for his use of powerful traditional medicine since the colonial period.⁹⁶ Nampila’s Naparama force was a ‘family enterprise’: Nampila, the eldest, prepared the medication, his son and his brother conducted the vaccination, and his other brother was the local Frelimo secretary who checked that all the people who came to be vaccinated had permission to do so from their respective local administration. António’s forces were independent of the hierarchy of traditional authorities and clans, and thus he had no inclination to respect Nampila for his age, rank and reputation.

⁹³ República Popular de Moçambique, Província da Zambézia, Administração do Distrito de Pebane, *Boletim Informativo No. 8 do mês de Outubro 1990*, 2 November 1990 (AGZ, Quelimane).

⁹⁴ Interview with former district administrator, 24 May 2012, Gm25, Gurué, Zambézia.

⁹⁵ Interview with Naparama commander, 3 November 2011, Nm32, Móthi, Murrupula, Nampula.

⁹⁶ Interview with former Naparama commander, 4 November 2011, Nm34, Móthi, Murrupula, Nampula.

Frelimo recognized the significance of such leadership conflicts for the Naparama's effectiveness in the war against Renamo and the more general risk of an escalation of the conflict. Pebane's local administration decided therefore to geographically separate the two leaders and it sent Manuel António to Maganja da Costa, a neighbouring district (see Map 3.1). Nampila's son interprets António's relocation to Maganja as an expression of the local government's distrust for the rival Naparama leader. According to Nampila's son's testimony, Manuel António was discontent with his dislocation to Maganja, as he had difficulties finding enough people to be initiated into his Naparama forces:

Since Manuel said that his troops didn't die in battle [and some did die], he was sent to Maganja da Costa, and he went, as he couldn't object. After [the relocation], he said, 'I don't have any money because you treated all the people here. I will thus treat people in Mulapane [in Pebane].' Even in Pebane, he treated 500 people.⁹⁷

Overall, this internal struggle demonstrates that the two leaders did not only compete for spiritual power, but also for economic power – for more recruits and more resources. Both leaders charged youths for the initiation ceremony, and people brought them money, chickens or maize. Nampila's son complained that António was greedy for money and fame; although Nampila had given him the prerogative to mobilize youths in Maganja – and thus a unique opportunity to make money – , António was unhappy with his relocation and violated the deal by returning to Pebane.⁹⁸ According to this narrative, Manuel António claimed that Nampila had already vaccinated all the youths in Maganja, so that none were left for his own troops, and this gave him a reason to pursue Nampila in order to kill him.

The conflict between the two leaders soon escalated and ended with Nampila's disappearance close to Mocuba. When Nampila and his son decided to return to Murrupula, they were called to Mulevala in Ile district to help Naparama combatants to assault a Renamo base. According to Nampila's son, Manuel António met Nampila in Mulevala at a time when the two were supposedly not protected by their medicine, abducted Nampila, and killed him.⁹⁹ What exactly happened with Nampila remains unclear, however, and his disappearance has created many rumours.¹⁰⁰ For example, one resident of Móthi recounted that a visitor told Nampila's family that Nampila was still alive. According to his story, Nampila had escaped from Manuel António with Zimbabwean soldiers stationed in Zambezia and today lives in Zimbabwe.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Interview with Naparama commander, 3 November 2011, Nm32, Móthi, Murrupula, Nampula.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ In a different version of the story, Manuel António kidnapped Nampila in Inhassunge and held him in a pig shed. See interview with former Naparama commander, 8 March 2012, Nm18, Nicoadala, Zambezia. See also interview with local government representative, 4 November 2011, Gm10, Móthi, Murrupula, Nampula.

¹⁰¹ Field Notes, 7 November 2011, Murrupula.

Conflicts about claims of authenticity and power last up to the present. The Naparama leader in Nampula who brought the vaccine to Murrupula in 1990, Ambrósio Albino, today claims to have been the leader of all the Naparama forces in Nampula and Zambezia provinces. He maintained in repeated interviews that the story usually attributed to Manuel António – that he died, was resurrected and then received a message from God to liberate the Mozambican people – is *his own* story. Ambrósio recounted that *he* taught all the other Naparama leaders – including Zinco in Lalaua and Nampila in Murrupula – about the vaccine.¹⁰² After teaching António, the two healers supposedly agreed for Albino to remain in Nampula province, and António to travel to Zambezia to mobilize people for the Naparama.

As ‘proof’ of his claim to have founded the Naparama, Albino keeps a laminated document in his briefcase – a report of a provincial government delegation that investigated the Naparama forces in Murrupula district.¹⁰³ When the district administrator was concerned about the emergence of Naparama forces, he asked the provincial government to send a delegation to find out more about the until-then unknown group. In October 1990, the delegation met with Ambrósio Albino and was told that he was the main Naparama leader who had learned about the Parama vaccine from his uncle in Tanzania. Albino’s nephew claims that Albino’s forces in Nampula were the ‘real’ Naparama and much more powerful, as they survived in battle – in contrast to António’s forces: ‘The most acclaimed work was that of the Naparamas, while [Manuel António’s force] was called anti-bullet [*anti-bala*] and many of them died. And [Manuel António] himself died in Zambezia’.¹⁰⁴

The claim that Albino founded Naparama and was the leader of all Naparama forces appears implausible because there is ample evidence that – as elaborated above – Albino and António met in 1988 in the district of Ribáuè in Nampula province, where António had arrived from Lalaua. It is more likely that António trained Albino, and after treating people and demonstrating the force of the vaccine, they left Ribáuè together.¹⁰⁵ This version of the story is confirmed by reports stating that the vaccine originated in Ribáuè, since this could be attributed to the original treatment of youths and the formation of the first Naparama unit.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

Naparama’s emergence was an expression of people’s longing for peace and an end to the constant struggle for survival, among the displaced in particular,

¹⁰² Interview with Naparama commander, 7 October 2011, Nm21, Nampula.

¹⁰³ Partido Frelimo, Comité Provincial, Departamento de Trabalho Ideológico, Nampula, *Relatório do levantamento e estudo efectuado sobre o fenómeno ‘Napharama’ no distrito de Murrupula, 15 November 1990* (personal archive of Ambrósio Albino).

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Naparama commander, 30 November 2011, Gr-Nm2, Nampula.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with civilian, 29 November 2011, m23, Chinga, Murrupula, Nampula.

¹⁰⁶ Dinerman, *Revolution, counter-revolution and revisionism*, p. 7.

but the group's success was temporary. During a time of intense violence and famine in the late 1980s and early 1990s, communities in Zambezia and Nampula embraced the new force, as it promised a more durable solution to the war than displacement and neutrality. Frelimo tolerated and in some cases even aligned with the community-initiated militia, as state security forces were overwhelmed by Renamo's security threat. Naparama also provided a means for local leaders to settle local conflict. The secret of the group's success lay in its appropriation of cultural resources for self-defence, which resonated with local communities as well as Renamo combatants and shaped their reputation of military prowess. Naparama's success on the battlefield forced Renamo leaders to find ways to regain the upper hand in the spiritual and military realm and led to the formation of anti-Naparama forces. These forces copied the militia's secret of success – the means to instil courage in combatants for the use of offensive tactics, with the only difference that they claimed to possess a more potent medicine. These new forces, in conjunction with a new military offensive in which the Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama trained and led special forces from Gorongosa into Zambezia, contributed to Renamo's regaining of power.

While Naparama, once tolerated or co-opted by the government, promised a powerful response to Renamo, its spiritual superiority was soon challenged by anti-Naparama forces fighting for Renamo and rival Naparama factions. The dynamics between the two rivals, and also within the new militia group, demonstrate the potential for innovation inherent in the use of cultural resources by armed groups, as traditional religion was adapted to respond to the wartime threat. However, they also show the fragility of spiritual power, as any advance in the spiritual realm could be challenged by a claim of even greater authenticity and power. This spiral of 'spiritual outbidding' shaped the dynamics of the war in its final years, increasing the fragmentation and polarization of the Mozambican social, political and military landscape.¹⁰⁷

The demise of the Naparama, and the continuation of war, can only be understood in conjunction with the fragmentation that occurred within the movement. When Renamo overcame its initial surprise of the militia's power, developed a strategic response, and succeeded in killing Naparama combatants, the necessity to explain such deaths provoked rivalries between Naparama leaders who all claimed to have access to the 'authentic' vaccine. In addition, the militia's success among the population gave rise to economic opportunities, as new recruits paid for their initiation and military operations provided opportunity for looting. Thus, for Naparama leaders, mobilizing more recruits promised access to economic – and also political – resources. This implies that different leaders competed for the support of the same clientele and attempted to 'outbid' each other with regard to their spiritual power, as the community was the one that fostered their credibility and provided access to such resources. In their search for the best strategies of survival,

¹⁰⁷ Stephen C. Lubkemann, 'Migratory Coping in Wartime Mozambique: An Anthropology of Violence and Displacement in "Fragmented Wars"', *Journal of Peace Research*, 42 (2005), 493–508.

community residents remained flexible in their support, which underlines the fragility of spiritual power and the fluidity of wartime loyalties during Mozambique's war, and explains the eventual disintegration of the Naparama and contributes to our understanding of the dynamics of the war in Zambezia and Nampula provinces.