



Gamba spirits, gender relations, and healing in post-civil war Gorongosa, Mozambique

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This article describes the ways in which in post-civil war Gorongosa (central Mozambique), women (and occasionally men) with personal and/or family experiences of extreme suffering are the focal point of possession by male, war-related spirits named *gamba*. However, *gamba* spirits also create post-war healing in which memory work and gender politics play an essential role. This type of post-war healing is demonstrated through a secret, contractual ceremony in which a male living suitor demands permission from a *gamba* spirit, lodged in the body of a young woman (his deemed wife), to marry that woman. An account of the ceremony is preceded by a description of the conditions that gave rise to the emergence of *gamba* spirits in central Mozambique, and is followed by an analysis of the meaning of the voice of the spirit and its impact on the relation between the living husband and wife and, more generally, on Gorongosa post-war society. We argue that the performance of *gamba* spirits contributes to a certain form of moral renewal. In the process, we locate relationships between spirits and hosts within wider systems of meaning in which they are created and reproduced, and we reinforce approaches to possession that see it as constituted by 'a practice and politics of voice' (Lambek).

Spirit possession is prevalent in many parts of the world. Various ethnographies focusing on different African societies are consistent in finding a greater prevalence of female hosts possessed by spirits in comparison to male hosts. This prevalence has led to the development of a number of aetiological theories providing a rationale for these gender differences in spirit possession. The following article does not advance another aetiological meta-theory for close relationships between spirits and women, but rather gives an in-depth analysis of one particular case of spirit possession, which is representative of certain kinds of possession as they occur in post-war Gorongosa (central Mozambique). The goal is to demonstrate that in Gorongosa: (1) a war-related spirit overwhelmingly possesses women (and occasionally men) with personal and/or family histories of extreme suffering and with patrikin who were allegedly involved in the committing of offences during the civil war; (2) the same afflicting spirit also heals various health problems; and (3) its healing power in particular redresses perceived

gender injustices that were aggravated through war-related gender politics, and more generally helps society deal with the memories of the civil war.¹ This form of post-war healing is interpreted – in line with other anthropological work on the subject – as part of a societal process of moral renewal.

Renewal and revitalization have been approached as ‘a special kind of culture change phenomenon’ in which the members of a society strive to ‘create a more satisfying culture’ (Wallace 1956: 265). Efforts at moral renewal may stem from perceptions that the present moral order of society no longer enables individuals to perceive the truth of things (Burrige 1969: 8; Wallace 1956). The theoretical positions of Wallace and Burrige are pertinent in that forms of ‘renewal’ can be seen as triggered by the ineffectiveness of mechanisms available to deal with disruptions caused by very stressful conditions. Yet we differ from these older, theoretical views. We do not see ‘moral renewal’ as inevitably triggered by stressful conditions and previously planned processes. Rather, we argue that in Gorongosa, a deeply divided and socially fractured society as a result of a protracted civil war, forms of moral renewal are contingent upon intersections of unpredictable factors: willingness of family members to revisit painful war memories; a human host that is receptive to spiritual influences; a spirit that not only displays power but is also capable of disclosing consistent memories of violent pasts; and complementary forms of gender participation. The emergence of these factors cannot be predicted. For this reason, the process of moral renewal as it occurs in post-war Gorongosa does not fit within the old functionalist paradigm of a carefully orchestrated process of equilibrium restoration. It is more in tune with contingency approaches to social change.

In order to conceptualize the multi-faceted participation of men and women, the work of Aidan Southall (1969: 243) on spirit possession in Alurland (Uganda) seems useful. In the performance of spirit possession in this region, the diviner-mediums in charge were always men and the participants were usually women. Yet, despite these different gender positions, the roles that men and women occupied in the sessions seemed to be complementary. This view suggests that the type of gender relations is contingent upon the specific domain of social realities in which these relations are enacted, be that trade, politics, war, justice, or healing (White 1999; Whyte 1978). Such a model of contingency is used in this article to study the multi-faceted nature of relations between men and women, registered in the creation of healing and moral renewal in post-war Gorongosa. Women are the focal point of possession by male spirits, who exhibit Foucauldian forms of power that break with post-war silences. The interruptions of silence are marked by evocations of previously concealed war memories that are crucial for producing healing and addressing prevailing gender inequalities.

Spirits and their anthropological careers

Historically, spirit possession studies have been characterized by an emphasis on spirits as representations of psychological, social, political, aesthetic, or historical processes. Contemporary approaches have argued for the necessity of considering possession as ‘a holistic reality’ (Boddy 1989: 136), which includes consideration of the agency or factuality of spirits as well as the investigation of the cultural logic and practices of spirit possession (Brown 1991; Masquelier 2001). In this article we locate relationships between spirits and hosts ‘within the wider system of meaning’ (Lambek 1981: 60) in which they are created and reproduced. This approach is consistent with ideas

endorsing possession being 'constituted by a practice and politics of voice' (Lambek 1993; see also Stoller 1995). We follow this approach in this article, and analyse spirit possession from the perspective of people who establish relations with spirits, and examine how these relations are shaped by the meaning attached to spirits. One general meaning attached to spirits is power to generate changes independently. However, there are restrictions to this power, which are imposed by practice.

The polysemic nature of spirit possession requires the a priori definition of the kind of situation in which possession is under analysis and also the recognition that relationships between humans and certain spirits are dynamic (Lambek 1981: 79). One situation of spirit manifestation described in the literature concerns marital relations among male spirits, female hosts, and spouses. In some of these descriptions, marital relations involving spirits are not viewed as actual marriage, but are established through analogy (Boddy 1989; Masquelier 2001) and 'the relationship of spirit to spouse is one of siblingship' (Lambek 1981: 327). Based on his study in Mayotte, an island of the Comoros archipelago, Lambek concluded that in that social milieu 'possession does not necessarily turn the marriage in any particular direction' (1980: 329). In contrast, popular beliefs in the Kalabari religion suggest that women married to water-spirits tend to experience difficulties having children and that 'such women are difficult to control, unamenable to household routine, and so make bad wives' (Horton 1969: 38).

In other descriptions, relationships between spirits and female hosts are characterized as actual marriage. Honwana succinctly states that in southern Mozambique, girls, usually young virgins, are offered as wives to an avenging spirit (*mipfhukwa*) as a way 'to pay redress for a debt or moral fault committed against them' (1996: 69). These girls may also get married to a man if their families grant support and the spirit authorizes it. When these conditions are met, a ritual is performed where the fiancé has to ask the permission of the spirit, and the woman's family has to provide another girl to replace the first (Honwana 1996). These anthropological accounts offer insights upon which to build and enable us to expand our understanding both of marriage between female healers and their fiancés and the marital relations among spirits, female hosts, and spouses over time in a context affected by protracted civil war violence.

In both Gorongosa and southern Mozambique, marriage between male spirits and female hosts is regarded not as an analogy, but as actual fact, and the spirit treats his female host as his wife. Also, in both locations the effects of war violence are expressed through spiritual agency. However, the key difference between these two contexts is that in Gorongosa, the wife of the spirit can also get married to a living fiancé. The woman married to the spirit often works as a healer. Additionally, in the context of post-war Gorongosa, the afflictions and healing of the *gamba* spirits intersect with gender and marital politics and the work of civil war memories.

These intersections are illustrated through the presentation of a secret contractual ceremony in which a *gamba* spirit lodged in the body of a young woman (his deemed wife) dictates the rules that must regulate the relationship between his wife and her living suitor. The acceptance of the rules by the fiancé implies that the fiancé and fiancée are united by marriage. Through follow-ups, we engage in conversations with the spirit and the kin group to assess the practical impact of the marital relations between the spirit's wife and his *muroze* (rival) over time. Although this article is based on a single case, this case is representative of other cases of contractual ceremonies between female healers married to spirits and male living suitors.

Family organization and the beliefs and practices of spirit possession in Gorongosa

Gorongosa is a district of Sofala province in the centre of Mozambique. Gorongosa society is founded on patrilineal kinship, polygyny, and an agricultural system of production. Although colonial Portuguese officials attempted for more than a century to classify the ethnicity of the Gorongosas, the local people identify themselves with a place rather than an ethnicity. They call themselves Ma-Gorongosianos, referring to the constellation of the Gorongosa Mountains, which are said to possess mystical powers. The family is the basic unit of society. Marriage is based on the practice of *ku fewa* (work that the fiancé must do for his future parents-in-law), *mambira* (work that the fiancée must do for her future parents-in-law), and payment of *mabatiro* (bridewealth). After the marriage, the wife lives in her husband's house and under his authority. The man is the head of the household and makes the most important decisions about family and social issues. In the case of a divorce, his ex-wife and her parents have to pay back the *ku fewa* whereas the man has to pay nothing.

The social world of the Gorongosas is permeated by a plethora of spirits, the great majority of whom are male. In general, belief in and interaction with spirits is encouraged by all sectors of the society, except by the Christian religious groups. Yet, on some occasions, even when the veracity of spirits is disputed, particular individuals tend to change their discursive positions as a result of failing to find effective responses to serious afflictions that cannot be tolerated. They eventually consult spiritual experts. The spirits disclose the aetiology of misfortunes and provide healing interventions through the work of healers. Spirits can possess both men and women, and both genders can also be initiated to work as healers, an exception being the *mapaza* healers (specialized in conflict resolution), who are only men. However, more women than men tend to be afflicted by spirits or to work as healers.

The practice of possession is enacted through a separation between the personalities of the spirits and of their hosts. This distinctive feature is expressed through the concept of *txiquiro* (host). Whereas in some cultures the same spirit can possess a number of persons simultaneously (Boddy 1989: 152), in Gorongosa this is not possible. Moreover, although spirits, as in other cultural contexts, may exhibit similar features (Brown 1991), each spirit is unique. He uses his own name and freely enacts aspects of his own personality without causing ambiguity in the eyes of the beholder over who is really who. When the spirit leaves, the host experiences *post facto* amnesia; this disjunctive mechanism turns spirit possession into a social activity.

Generally, the aetiology of spirit affliction is attributed to problems that occur among members of the *dzindza* (family of origin). For instance, if a wife becomes seriously ill, the procedure is for her husband to take her to her *madembe* (place of origin) where her elder patrikin live, because they are the only ones who can do *ku himirira* (assume responsibility for the patient). This contrasts with other socio-cultural contexts in which the husband is expected to do *ku himirira* and pay all the required expenses for the wife to get better (Lewis 2003 [1971]).

In Gorongosa, the subject of the spirit's penetration is not the individual body as such; it is the cognate 'family-self' (Nathan 2001 [1986]). The same spirit can penetrate any other kin member at a different time. For instance, if during a healing session the patient fails to enter into a trance, another member of the *dzindza* can replace the patient. Only a healer, a designated ritual object (a toy made of clay), or an animal can act instead of the *dzindza*. In the case of healers, they perform *ku fema* (sniffing), where

the healer temporarily embodies the spirit afflicting the client. Through *ku fema* the healer transfers the troubling spirit from the body of the patient to his or her own body, thus providing resolution. However, the use of this procedure has drastically reduced as a result of the emergence of *gamba* spirits, since these latter spirits prefer to talk themselves using the body of the victim, rather than via the medium healer.

In Gorongosa, worshipping spirits does not take the form of a cult of devotees. Family members worship their ancestral spirits in the privacy of their homesteads,² and people convene informally during healing sessions of patients, often in the houses of healers. The lack of cults mirrors the absence in Gorongosa of polarizations between central and peripheral spirits and cults. The interaction between living people and spirits is a dynamic process of continuous integration of new spirits.

Dynamics of spirit possession over time

The socio-cultural world of the Gorongosas has always been inhabited by a plethora of spirits and healers. They occupy different positions and perform a variety of complex roles: from safeguarding the moral values, social stability, and identity of the community to watching over the land (*muzimo wa patchisso*: territorial spirits), and to healing in the strict sense of the word. Moreover, there are spirits and healers who perform various roles simultaneously. These positions and roles change over time according to the general metamorphosis that the society undergoes.

Historically, the general name for healing spirits and their practitioners is *dzoca* (*madzoca* in plural). Traditional healing practices were the responsibility of the *madzoca*, a set of ancestral spirits that for generations were embodied in living people through agnate inheritance to exercise their healing powers. According to the local theory, *madzoca* spirits could possess only individuals who belonged to families with a healing genealogy so that they could work as *madzoca* healers. Outside the boundaries of the *madzoca* healing families, it was rare for a person to become possessed.

The *madzoca* spirits ensured that only certain families could keep control over, and a monopoly on, possession and healing practice. There is an array of healing spirits following the *madzoca* orientation, such as *nkumbayssa*, the spirit that resolves the most complicated health and social problems, and *nhacazuro*, a healing spirit that uses two small birds and does not involve trance possession. One exception to the *madzoca* orientation are the *ndzundzo*, which are non-human or naturalistic healing spirits. They live deep under water, mainly in rivers. *Ndzundzo* used randomly to choose a certain poor, disabled, and mistreated person in the community to use his/her body to work as a healer.

Another set of spirits with healing features are known as *mucipaio*, *madwite*, and *n'fukua* (a vengeful spirit). The *mucipaio* are spirits of former local police officers working for the colonial administration; they had a reputation for being harsh in their mission to arrest wanted persons. The spirits of some very violent *mucipaio* are included in the array of healing spirits used by the *madzoca* healers, and their function is to attract patients and to indicate, through sniffing, the location of a specific problem in the patient's body. *Madzoca* healers usually have more than one spirit, and *mucipaio* is one of them. *Madwite* and *n'fukua* spirits emerged in the late nineteenth century as a result of massive migration movements of southern populations aimed at dominating and subjugating the central region populations. The *madwite* did not gain a wide healing reputation (indeed they hardly worked as healers), but they had a powerful

reputation for dancing and re-enacting the behaviours of the soldiers who came from the south and invaded the central areas.

N'fukua spirits never attained the category of healing spirits, and they did not leave any institutional and material legacy. Historically, *n'fukua* spirits were kept very secret; people did not talk about them and they were used covertly to deal with very complicated family issues. As in the context described by Honwana (1996), local interlocutors in Gorongosa mentioned *n'fukua* and their violent characteristics, particularly the fact that they used to demand a young girl as part of the process of seeking justice in a family dispute. A girl given to a *n'fukua* spirit was called *mukadzi wa pagua* (woman of the verandah).³ Older interlocutors recollected from what they had heard from their grandparents that *n'fukua* never generated mass appearances in the Gorongosa region, as the irruption of *gamba* spirits did in the context of the civil war.

The civil war and the emergence of *gamba* spirits, healers, and healing

The protracted civil war (1976-92) brought all kinds of horror perpetrated by both the Frelimo-led government army and Renamo troops: forced conscription of young men to fight in the war; the killing of men, women, and children; betrayal among family members; the destruction of villages; and *gandira*, a Renamo military-logistic strategy involving forced labour, the rape of girls, and sexual slavery of women. These wartime experiences, particularly *gandira*, left profound consequences in families and communities. Following *gandira*, husbands felt humiliated by their failure to protect their wives and by their loss of control over their wives' bodies in the face of the soldiers' power, and wives felt shamed and stigmatized as it was known that the soldiers invariably raped them. Although rape became a public secret about which everyone was prepared to talk, this was only when it concerned other couples' or parents' disgrace, and not their own.

Immediately after the civil war these cults of silence and mistrust remained and many men found it difficult to digest their wartime experiences. They were quick to accuse their wives of adultery and could become very aggressive. This attitude brought serious instability to marital life, which often ended in divorce. Owing to the crisis in gender relations, divorce could be a relief for the women, but also another form of burden as a result of the *ku fewa* rule, which seemed to have survived the civil war intact. However, by around 1999, the unbearable experiences of the war could apparently no longer be relived and processed in silence. The accumulative effects of these traumatic experiences gave rise to the emergence of *gamba* (*magamba* in plural), which is the name of a spirit, an affliction, and also the healer who specializes in *gamba* afflictions (Igreja 2003; Marlin 2001).⁴

In general, *gamba* are spirits of male soldiers who died during the civil war. Their bodies were not properly buried, and people living in extreme conditions within the war zones were said to have used pieces of the corpses of fallen soldiers (known or unknown, but not related) to make medicines to protect themselves against war violence. This was part of a belief that if you 'eat' the dead you become immune to death or extreme suffering, as some of our interlocutors told us. In this context *gamba* spirits return to the world of the living to fight for justice. The focal point of their avenging purpose is the bodies of women with personal and/or family experiences of extreme suffering and whose relatives were allegedly involved in the use of such protective medicines, or were involved in the murder of the soldiers themselves. However, unlike other vengeful spirits, which emerged during violent periods in the nineteenth century,

gamba spirits have institutionalized healing activity. In cases of symbiotic relations, *gamba* spirits redress gender and marital injustices, and help process memories of the civil war.

The emergence of *gamba* broke through the prevailing silence, which had been detrimental for women and society in general. Consequently, there was a rapid spread of possession of young women in particular (married and unmarried) by *gamba* spirits all over Gorongosa and other regions of central-northern Mozambique. *Gamba* spirits inaugurated a new era in Gorongosa, characterized by an intense gesture to a civil war past in order to address unresolved war-related conflicts as well as post-war ordeals, including gender quandaries. Formally, this new era is characterized by reformed rules and procedures in healing activity. *Gamba* spirits ended the previous monopoly on possession states reserved for families with a *madzoca* healing history. *Gamba* spirits can possess anybody, as long as the host has personal and/or family experiences of abuse and extreme suffering and his/her patrikin family were involved in the commission of criminal offences during the civil war. The manifestation of *gamba* spirits is very noisy, bodily enacted, and involves much talking. Unlike *n'fukua*, which were kept private, everybody in a village knows who is a host and whom a *gamba* spirit has afflicted. Furthermore, unlike a union of a *n'fukua* spirit with a girl that introduced the matrilineal rule of residence, in cases where a *gamba* spirit demands a woman as payment, the union results in the woman being both the wife of the spirit and a healer. In this regard, in contrast to the *n'fukua* spirits, which left a weak legacy, *gamba* spirits institutionalized a new form of community healing.

The historical career of the *gamba* in the post-war period indicates that during the first five years of peace (1992–7), *gamba* were generally a silent phenomenon. When the first author initiated studies in 1997 in the Gorongosa region, there were only a few young men who were considered to be working as healers using the spirits of dead male soldiers. With the passage of time, the phenomenon proliferated in the sense that any male spirit whose life was taken away prior to or during the civil war could be said to be *gamba*, and the relatives of the *gamba* spirit could take part in the healing ceremony. Additionally an increasing number of women became *gamba* healers, overshadowing the few male healers. Interestingly, some *madzoca* healers have integrated some aspects of the *gamba* spirits into their practices. What remains similar to the initial configuration (spirits of male soldiers) is the link between the civil war and experiences of neglect, abuse, and murder from which these spirits return to take revenge. Also similar is the fact that *gamba* spirits mainly strike within the family of the alleged perpetrator.

Possession by *gamba* spirits causes severe afflictions to their hosts and agnates, but there is also potential for resolution (Igreja 2003). During a diagnosis and healing session, the *gamba* healer and the participants re-enact the war events through songs, discourses, and body movements. The *gamba* healer holds the bayonet and the *gamba* spirit tips back his host's head, rolling up his/her eyes. In that moment the *gamba* healer gives a scream, which is an indicator that the *gamba* healing spirit is from then on in control of the healer's body. The *gamba* healer in a possessed state re-enacts the war experiences of the soldier, including his death: crawling, shooting, fighting, running, smoking cannabis, drinking alcohol, and fainting. The goal of these performances is to call on the afflicting spirit to become manifest in the patient's body. As a result, the patient starts getting hyper-aroused and making uncontrolled body movements, and the participants start screaming loudly to call the spirit to manifest itself. At this point, the *gamba* healer usually discharges his/her *gamba* healing spirit because the focus is

turned to the patient, who must become permeable so that the afflicting spirit can manifest itself to the public. Just before the spirit appears, the patient also gives a loud scream as if s/he was being hurt. The violence of the *gamba* spirit during the state of possession is caused by him having returned to take revenge for past misdeeds.

The *gamba* healer manages to appease the patient's afflicting *gamba* spirit through empathic identification of the self with the spirit. When the *gamba* spirit subsides, the *gamba* healer then returns to his/her normal state and the focus is directed solely onto the possessed patient. He who was hurt by the offence, the spirit, starts disclosing what happened so that every participant can hear. Here again there is a discontinuity between the spirit and the host. Everything that the *gamba* spirit discloses concerns his personal suffering and death, and not that of the host. The reason why the host is suffering is because the *gamba* spirit chose that host through which to enact his revenge. Unless justice is done, the host is doomed to suffer.

The host's relatives listen and argue, but must acknowledge past wrongdoing. Through a verbal narrative, the *gamba* spirit establishes the modalities of resolution. When a consensus is reached over this phase, the final resolution can follow two paths. In one of these, the *gamba* spirit decides that his host/patient becomes his wife and he uses her body to work as a *gamba* healer; in the other, the spirit demands reparation and the relatives of the host have to pay what is required in a specific closure ceremony.

Gamba spirits have broken with the tradition of inheriting ancestral healing spirits characteristic of *madzoca* healing practice. Someone is possessed by a *gamba* spirit or becomes a *gamba* healer by dint of a personal or family history of neglect, abuse, extreme violence, or murder. The procedure still follows that of the wounded healer, but the principal key to becoming a *gamba* healer is to have a past of suffering due to war. Following this logic we analyse the case of Aletea and her family, on the one side, and her fiancé, on the other.

The case of Aletea

Aletea was born in 1979. In that same year the Frelimo-led government army swept through entire villages in Gorongosa looking for rebel forces (Renamo). Aletea's father and one of her brothers were brutally tortured and murdered by Frelimo soldiers amid accusations of supporting the rebel movement. At the time of these tragic killings, Aletea's patrikin, particularly the brothers of her murdered father and the brothers of her paternal grandfather, were separated and living in different war-zone areas; they were not able to get together to mourn the deaths of Aletea's father and uncle. Aletea grew up together with her mother and her brothers in the middle of a war zone. She survived the civil war, but her patrikin remained in their quarantines of silence, acting as if nothing had happened, and never showed an interest in reuniting to acknowledge their losses and re-establish relationships with Aletea, her brothers, and mother. Their post-war behaviour can be seen as inimical for survival in this society because the origins of misfortunes are often imputed to moral faults occurring among patrikin. The lack of family support in periods of severe crisis impairs the sufferer from obtaining effective healing interventions.

Nevertheless, Aletea grew up and in her second year of menstruation she married a young man from a nearby village. One year after the marriage Aletea became pregnant and delivered a son, but he died some months later. As a result, the relationship with her husband started to deteriorate. He became very aggressive towards her and she had extreme difficulty getting pregnant again. After two years she finally managed to get

pregnant and a second son survived. However, Aletea's husband was no longer supporting her financially. Every time she complained, one of her husband's relatives would accuse Aletea of being possessed by a spirit and her husband would beat her, although the spirit had never manifested himself to the public. On one occasion her husband beat her very severely and Aletea ran away to her brothers' house, but they would not accept her back because her husband had already complained that she did not respect him and that they would sometimes fight as a result. It is worth noting that if Aletea and her brothers had had positive relations with her elder patrikin, she could have reported the case to them instead of her brothers. Aletea's mother could hardly do anything to help Aletea, since according to the patrilineal rules she had no rights over her. Aletea returned to her husband's house, but the violence did not stop. It was at this moment that Aletea started showing clear signs of spirit possession, such as replacement of her agency with that of the spirit.

In the meantime, Aletea's eldest brother and his two sons fell very ill, suffering headaches, body pain, and terrifying nightmares. Such symptoms usually signal the strike of spirits. Consequently, they rushed to a healer. Through the body of Aletea, the presence of a *gamba* spirit was formally diagnosed and recognized for the first time. The *gamba* spirit disclosed his identity. He was a neighbouring young man named Antonio and he had been severely abused and killed by Aletea's paternal grandfather during the civil war. The spirit wanted justice; otherwise he threatened to kill everyone in Aletea's family. The *gamba* healer solicited the presence of Aletea's paternal uncles and grandfather's brothers. As in many similar cases, the representatives of the indicted persons (in this case the paternal uncles) initially adamantly refused to co-operate. They stated that Aletea, her brothers, and their mother should bear responsibility for what they might have done during the civil war. However, as a result of the *gamba* spirit's increasing threats of revenge and family destruction, Aletea's paternal uncles and other relatives eventually agreed to co-operate by taking part in the diagnosis and healing session in the house of a *gamba* healer.

Aletea's paternal relatives confirmed that her grandfather had indeed murdered someone during the civil war. They acknowledged the abuse and extreme suffering that Antonio had gone through and declared that they were prepared to follow his demands. The spirit demanded Aletea as compensation for his death, to use her body to work as a *gamba* healer. As a result Aletea would no longer have difficulties in becoming pregnant. Aletea's paternal relatives, her brothers, and mother accepted the request and bought the required healing instruments. Aletea went through a process of initiation (*ku panirwa*), as followed by people who have suffered from *gamba* spirits and then start working with them. She was eventually transformed into a healthy *gamba* healer.

The process of addressing Aletea's problems demonstrates how the emergence of the *gamba* spirit, which bears witness to the violent events of the civil war and creates a safe and legitimate social space for war survivors to engage with the memories of that time, was pivotal to achieving a positive resolution. The *gamba* spirit broke with the cults of silence prevailing in Aletea's family, reunited her patrikin for the first time after the end of the civil war, and forced them to engage in conversations about some of the conflict's tragic events. Furthermore, it forced Aletea's eldest brother to accept her divorce and attribute a prominent position to Aletea in her family, and it reinforced her ties with her brothers.

Aletea started healing patients, and soon a young man from the same village approached her and proposed marriage. Aletea accepted. She informed her relatives

and they also felt positive about the match. However, Aletea had become the sanctuary of a *gamba* healing spirit, and marriage was therefore not dependent solely on her own volition and the consent of her relatives. The *gamba* spirit had to grant permission and establish the rules that were going to regulate the three-way relationship between him, his 'wife', and her living husband. It was in this context that the contractual ceremony was arranged, so that the *gamba* spirit could encounter Aletea's fiancé and they could come to know each another.

Aletea, her family, her fiancé, and the spirit

In the ceremony, two sets of triangular relationships can be distinguished. The first is composed of the spirit, Aletea's family, and the fiancé. Emotionally and cognitively, Aletea is absent from this trio. She only participates as the physical vehicle (host) through which the spirit marks his presence. Aletea's relatives represent the embodiment of her cognitive faculties and emotional states; they speak and feel for her. This first set performed during the actual contractual ceremony. The second triangle consists of Aletea, her fiancé, and the image of the spirit, which is imprinted both in Aletea's and in her fiancé's mind. This is the set that is to function in everyday life.

On the day of the ceremony, Aletea and her sisters-in-law went into Aletea's hut to help her get properly dressed. They started singing the spirit's calling song. Together with Aletea's eldest brother and mother, the two researchers were invited to come in too, and to sit down in a corner of the very small hut. Aletea went into a possession trance, and since the spirit had already been positively accommodated, there was none of the physical violence of other *gamba* healing sessions. At this stage the fiancé was also called to come into the hut, and the dialogue began. The spirit treated Aletea's fiancé as a *muroze* (rival) because the spirit and the fiancé were disputing over the same woman.

The voice and the orders of the spirit

Each participant who intervened was properly identified: the spirit, Aletea's brother (B), Aletea's mother (M), and Aletea's fiancé (F). Aletea's sisters-in-law were present but they did not say anything individually. The researchers (R) were also allowed to speak or ask questions. Yet most of the time the entire collective (C) intervened in unison by saying *iomba* (a word indicating endorsement of what the spirit has said; it also indicates that intersubjectivity is being established). After the initial greetings and introductions, the exchange started:

Spirit: My name is Antonio ...

B: *Bambu* (father) Antonio, we don't have many things to say. You asked for the fiancé of your *txiquiro* to come here, and he is here. You said that you wanted to talk to him and he also wants to tell you what he has in his heart ... There is nothing wrong here.

Spirit: I am very grateful, my fathers-in-law. Are you fine at home?

C: *iomba*

Spirit: ... Now I am about to talk ... When my wife wants to get married, first she has to come to where I am.

iomba

Spirit: When you let me know, then I will take care of her and she will also take care of me.

iomba

Spirit: Are you looking at me well?

F: I am looking at you, and I am appreciating you.

Spirit: I am the one who sent for you.

iomba

- Spirit:* I am the one who asked to meet with my *muroze* ... So that I can say what I want and you can say what you want ... So that we can live well ... I don't want my wife to marry a crazy person.
iomba
- F:* I don't have any problem; I don't beat women. The only difficult thing that was happening was arranging this meeting. I don't have many things to say ...
- Spirit:* ... In the past, they ordered my wife to get married without consulting me.
iomba
- Spirit:* I was already in her body, but it was before they knew that I, Antonio, was lodged in her body.
iomba
- Spirit:* I do not accept that suddenly I see my wife already married, I am the one who chooses.
iomba
- Spirit:* When I suddenly realized that we were two persons, I got very annoyed.
iomba
- Spirit:* The first *muroze* did not take good care of my wife. She wasn't even taking baths; she was dirty ... I don't like to see my wife dirty.⁵
- M:* Yes, she was indeed suffering. Our first son-in-law did not take good care of our daughter ...
- Spirit:* When my wife passed by, you could smell my wife's bad smell. I, Antonio, I do not like that ... You don't know me; I can disturb your head if I want to; you will go crazy, and then you'll start walking in the bush not knowing what you are doing. I will mistreat you.
iomba
- Spirit:* If you insult, threaten or beat my wife I will kick you ...
iomba
- M:* Are you listening, my son-in-law? ... The spirit is refusing such kinds of behaviour ...
- F:* In my house, since we love each other, I wouldn't beat a wife ... She has to listen to what I say, and I must listen to what she says ...
- R:* ... Did you like what the spirit said?
- F:* I am very happy. Before this meeting I had many doubts and sometimes I even lost my appetite. Now that I have heard the words of the spirit, I have become very strong and motivated ...
- Spirit:* ... I do not want to work [to heal] in the house of my *muroze*. My wife can go to your house ... but when I want to work I will do it in this house.
iomba
- Spirit:* My wife must be married here on the verandah ... I want to do my job while my parents-in-law are watching me.
iomba
- Spirit:* ... I don't want to be controlled ... I don't want you to start getting jealous of me otherwise tomorrow I will make you go crazy ... I am the one who controls my wife because this is my work ... I do not want you to take my wife and then start saying tomorrow that you weren't warned about these rules ... I, Antonio, I speak for myself.
iomba
- Spirit:* I don't want my wife to live with many husbands; I refuse this.
iomba
- Spirit:* Even when my wife is in the middle of the path I am holding her with both hands ... I am watching her day and night ... I want my wife to marry just one man ... so that we can live well.
iomba
- Spirit:* My parents-in-law, that's the only thing that I wanted to impart to you.
iomba
- F:* ... My secret is that I don't beat women ...
- Spirit:* Parents-in-law, I am going away; everyone, I am saying goodbye to you. I am going away ...

The ceremony and its impact

By listening to the voice and observing the reactions of the *gamba* spirit and of the participants, it is possible to interpret the contractual ceremony as containing various remarkable features. First, the spirit has his own agency and the participants do not perceive any kind of androgynous appearance. The spirit is male and he is dead, and Aletea is a woman and she is alive. The manifestation of the spirit is realized through

the removal of Aletea's agency and there is no single moment during the ceremony in which the beholder can experience confusion about whether the spirit or Aletea is talking. Second, the link between the spirit and Aletea is that both have suffered in the past. The spirit was a victim of Aletea's cognate relatives in the past, whereas Aletea suffered as a result of the premature death of her father during the war, the extreme abuse from her first husband, the death of her child, and the neglect of her brothers. Third, Aletea was married to the male *gamba* spirit to reconcile and repair the havoc that her cognates had caused in the past. As a result of the marriage, Aletea's relatives take on the role of guaranteeing respect for the spirit and enforcing his decisions both in the homestead and in the community in general.

The ceremony and its aftermath illustrate the transformation of traditional gender relations in this society. In the everyday life of Gorongosa society, contractual ceremonies do not entail the submission of the fiancé to the family of the fiancée. On a general level, courting follows the pattern of the local proverb, 'It is the pig that rolls in the direction of the pumpkin': the fiancé looks for the fiancée in her house. In this case, however, the fiancé has to engage not only with the 'pumpkin' and her family but also with spiritual forces that own Aletea's life. Without the presence of the *gamba* spirit, the bride would have submitted herself to her fiancé, but in this ceremony it was different. The fiancé submitted himself to the power of the spirit lodged in his fiancée's body, to the extent that he hardly demanded anything in particular from the spirit.

The presence of the *gamba* spirit also reversed another socio-cultural norm of marriage and relationships between men, women, and society. Marriage is always a ceremony culminating in the union of two families. Here there was the union of representatives of three families: the spirit, Aletea, and her suitor. Furthermore, Aletea is officially married to two men: the male spirit and the living husband. Contrary to everyday conjugal unions, in which the wife is expected to subordinate herself to the husband, in this case the husband must subordinate himself, via the spirit, to his wife. This type of husband is generally classified in this socio-cultural group as not being a man: '*mwamuna inei ha hana ndzero*' (this man does not have ideas).

For this reason, such ceremonies are carried out secretly. The public is not allowed to witness the humiliation that the fiancé goes through for his fiancée, so that his integrity in the community is upheld, and he is not seen 'to have no ideas'. However, judging from what he said during the ceremony, he certainly does not seem to lack ideas. People joke because they know that Aletea's husband cannot easily subjugate her and use violence in their marital relations; he treats her with a respect that other women in this post-war society do not easily get from their husbands or from men in general. Unlike other types of contractual ceremonies, in cases similar to this the living fiancé is not culturally obliged to pay the bridewealth. Hence, the spiritual husband and the family of the fiancée have more power over the development of the marital relationship. The social impact of cases similar to Aletea's signals the possibility of attaining equal gender relations based on endogenous available resources.

The state of affairs at one- and four-year follow-up interviews

At one-year follow-up interviews, Aletea had become a rather well-known healer in her village and the spirit had fulfilled another of his promises: Aletea had become pregnant by her second husband and delivered a baby girl, and the relationship with her husband was thriving. The spirit interfered in the politics of naming in the following way. He ordered that the baby was given the name of Aletea's mother-in-law. If the second child

was a boy, he would receive the name of Aletea's father-in-law. The spirit decided that only the third child would receive his name. This was a strategy of the spirit to increase the involvement of Aletea's in-laws in his network of social relations of support. The custody of the children remains with Aletea and her family because in such cases the living husband does not pay the bridewealth. However, in general, the spiritual and human fathers control the children born out of marital relations. In order to guarantee his descent, the *gamba* spirit does not rely solely on Aletea's children; he is free to possess any girl that belongs to Aletea's patrikin.

Four years later, Aletea's baby is healthy. Aletea is still married and living with her husband in their own house. Her husband very often takes the role of healer's assistant. Aletea's spirit made very positive comments about her husband: not a single incident of domestic violence had occurred in the four years, and the spirit proudly remarked that the living husband even avoids heated arguments with Aletea that could result in violence. The *muroze* works very hard in the fields and he does most of the things that Aletea asks of him. Aletea's family seconded the spirit's general assessment, saying that he was indeed a very respectful young man.

The spirit only had one complaint, which was also corroborated by Aletea's mother: the living husband does not pay the bills for his wife and child. The spirit was very annoyed because he is the only one who pays the expenses incurred by Aletea.⁶ When we asked the spirit whether he had already approached the living husband about this, the spirit answered: 'I have spoken to him about this problem many times. He always listens very carefully to what I say and he promises to participate in paying my wife's expenses. Yet until now he has only bought one piece of cloth for my wife'. We suggested that the living husband could be failing to pay the bills because of a lack of financial means. The spirit rejected this suggestion by saying that when his *muroze* gets money he spends it all on drinking alcohol with his friends.

As the interview progressed, the spirit also explained that one of the reasons for his anger was related to the fact that he wanted to save as much money as possible to pay for his wife's identity card. Since her living husband was not paying any bills, Aletea was using up most of the spirit's money and it was becoming difficult to save anything. When we asked the spirit what his plan was to resolve this conflict with his *muroze*, he said, 'I am gradually transforming my *muroze*'s thoughts. Step by step I am changing him'. Aletea's mother also thought that her son-in-law would gradually change since he is a good young man.

The overall result over a period of four years is positive. The *gamba* spirit has changed Aletea's life in a very constructive manner. Unlike many other women in the community who are victimized by their spouses, Aletea and women in similar positions are well treated by their living husbands and there is mutual respect and trust. In this society, people who accommodate spirits are entitled to respect and power. However, this power is not unlimited. The host of the spirit has to use power with restraint; otherwise the spirit can abandon her body and look for another, more disciplined body. This is one demonstration of the real agency of the spirits: their capacity to choose their own bodies to live in and to extend their existence.

***Gamba* spirits, marriage, and family relations**

The empowerment of Aletea means that her relationship with the opposite sex will never be the same again. The *gamba* spirit turned the logic of marriage in a specific direction, and over time we found out that Aletea enjoyed more leeway in the usual

constraint faced by other women who are not married to spirits. However, our data are not comparable with the magnitude of changes observed regarding the impact of *bori* (spirit possession cults) among the Mwari in Niger. *Bori* 'threatens the very foundation of Mwari marriage', while a woman 'who does *bori* is more likely than other women to neglect her wifely duties' (Masquelier 2001: 238). *Gamba* spirits do not threaten the foundations of the Gorongosa marriage as such. The issue is that the spirit changes the gender status quo during the contractual ceremony and subsequent marital relations by shifting the balance of power to the side of the fiancée and her relatives. If she divorced, Aletea and her patrikin would not give back any *ku fewa* and her husband would not gain custody of the children. Of equal importance to consider, however, is the fact that women such as Aletea are not exempted from their wifely responsibilities.

For instance, our ethnographic observations show how at specific hours of the day Aletea went down to the community well carrying a can to fill with water, as any other woman does; on one occasion, she was refused access to water and had a fierce argument with the person who controls the well because her family had not yet paid the monthly levy; and on two other occasions we wanted to interview Aletea's *gamba* spirit, but she was away by the river helping her mother to wash pounded maize. However, what must be underlined is that women married to spirits do indeed become sanctuaries, which require rules and practices of respect, particularly protection from domestic abuse and violence. This point is generally consistent with assertions that spirit possession to a considerable extent protects women from the exactions of men (Lewis 2003 [1971]; Masquelier 2001).

In analysis of similar themes it is suggested that female spirit possession is a 'paradical means to domesticate male and alien powers' (Boddy 1994: 417). In Aletea's case there is indeed a process of transformation of status. The *gamba* spirit moves away from the status of a male wounded spirit jousting for acknowledgement and justice to that of an accepted and victorious spirit with powerful healing capabilities. The power enacted by the *gamba* spirit during the contractual ceremony stating his catalogue of zero-tolerance attitudes toward Aletea's fiancé could rather be seen as a generalized 'moral critique' (Masquelier 2001: 244), whose intent was to foster a moral renewal in post-war Gorongosa. This is illustrated in the ceremony through the orders uttered by the spirit: 'I don't want my wife to live with many husbands'. These remarks were being imparted not only to the men, but also to society as a whole. In fact, many men in Gorongosa feel that as a result of the war numerous women have become very unfaithful to their husbands, and attribute to them the reputation of engaging in sexual intercourse with any man that they meet; these women are called *hure* or *uputa* (prostitute). In the case under study here, the spirit was setting the moral boundaries for society as a whole, not just domesticating the men. Both women and men are subordinate to the spirits and both sexes need the redress or domestication that can be made by the spirits.

***Gamba* spirits, memory work, and the transformation of power relations**

Gamba spirits bear witness to the horrors of the civil war by afflicting people. These spirits seek acknowledgement for past wrongdoing, create post-war healing for an array of health problems, attempt to repair family divisions caused by the civil war, and try to prevent the repetition of cycles of injustice, particularly gender inequalities and gender violence. In order to heal and to restore family relations, *gamba* spirits evoke powerful memories that break the prevailing cultures of silence and denial. It is a kind

of re-enactment of collective memories (Connerton 1989) that forces war survivors in Gorongosa to deal with memories of the wartime.

The power vested in *gamba* spirits in contexts of symbiotic relations is consistent with the idea that power has a 'double valence of subordinating and producing' (Butler 1997: 2). In its repressive form, the power of *gamba* clearly carries the force of prohibition and the resulting changes are not expected to be ephemeral; they are set in motion to generate long-term practical consequences. For instance, in the private domain of the nuptial ceremony the spirit vehemently gave orders that indicated a change in the exercise of power relations between genders. Because of her spiritual husband, Aletea is exempted from certain forms of subjugation typical in this male-dominated society. Since spirit possession is a process rather than a moment, even when Aletea is not in a possession state, those who know (or come to know) her regard her as the site of supernatural forces, deserving of certain forms of respect denied to those who are not spiritual mediums.

In the public domain, one way in which the power of *gamba* spirits is demonstrated is through ritual songs used during the diagnostic processes, in which female healers are the only women in society to sing: '*Djongwe lika penga gwanda mussoro?*'. This means: 'When the cock goes crazy, cut off his head'. The cock represents men in society, to whom women are in principle subordinated. In the case of Aletea's first marriage, her husband could be classified as 'crazy', but she could do very little to change her husband's violent behaviour and her own predicament. When Aletea became the sanctuary of the *gamba* spirit, this reality changed to the extent that her spirit could even threaten her suitor, 'If I want to, I can disturb your head; you will go crazy ... I will mistreat you'. As the song says, if the husband of a female *gamba* healer goes crazy, she is not expected to accommodate his violence; the obvious solution is to cut off his head. The agency of the spirit gives power to the female host to the extent of stopping unbridled abuse of women married to spirits.

Alongside the idea of power as a mechanism rooted in prohibitions, *gamba* spirits are also characterized by a productive dimension. Foucault affirms that power 'traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse' (Rabinow 1984: 61). *Gamba* spirits have the power to break away from cults of denial that proliferate in post-war Gorongosa and in Mozambique more generally. Silence and denial are counteracted with narratives that carry specific forms of discursive knowledge about extreme abuse and offences perpetrated during the civil war. Based on these violent narratives, *gamba* spirits produce healing and head towards transforming gendered family and social relations in the post-war era (Igreja & Dias-Lambranca 2008).

The capability of the spirit to overcome the barriers of individual affliction and to descend into the collective and be heard requires an elaboration of power that complements the conception of power as a form of repression and transformation. That is, 'power that at first appears as external ... pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity' (Butler 1997: 3). Viewing subjection as part of one's identity formation offers some insights into the reasons that led: (a) Aletea and her family to repair the havoc wreaked by her kin during the civil war by offering Aletea to the *gamba* spirit; (b) Aletea's fiancé to submit himself to the *gamba* spirit's orders during the secret ceremony; and (c) everyone involved not to express scepticism about the actions of the *gamba* spirit over time. In the face of spirits, not only women (Bourguignon 2004) but also men reproduce and reinforce certain aspects of their culture.

However, the analysis of agency as containing elements of submission cannot be confined to the living. The spirits also have to submit since spirits are persons (Boddy 1989), and behaviour in possession is bound by particular cultural rules of embodiment (Lambek 1980). In Gorongosa the belief is that between the spirits and their human hosts, the agency lies entirely with the former, who are regarded as being fearless and powerful. Whomsoever the spirit possesses (man, woman, animal, or landscape), the status of these hosts or places will change. Spirits in Gorongosa are not only regarded as a 'cultural resource appropriated by individuals under certain conditions' (Boddy 1989: 137); the spirits are also regarded as having the capacity to appropriate their human hosts. Possession by *gamba* spirits demonstrates the impotence of the living to control and to define the violent past and consign it to history. However, there are also limits to the power of the spirits because of the required embodiment, that is, 'spirits are socially accessible only through the particular experiences and actions of their human hosts' (Lambek 1993: 306).

In Gorongosa the submission that human hosts and society in general undergo in the face of spirits is not reciprocally recognized as an attribute of the spirits. Society remains silent regarding the fact that subjection partially sustains the spirits' agency. These cultural beings are powerless in their ability to satisfy one of the most fundamental needs of society, namely procreation.⁷ This dimension of weakness, and the submission that the spirits have to incur to be able to make women reproduce, remains unspoken. From this perspective, the agency of the spirits cannot be considered independent from that of the living, since the spirits have to establish alliances with the living in order to maintain and reinforce their agency and fulfil their marital obligations.

The analysis of spiritual agency can also be located within the idea of 'dissociation in the service of the self' (Bourguignon 2004). That is, the personalities that appear in spirit possession maintain the person's basic motivations. Descriptively there is a consistent narrative that involves the extreme suffering that Aletea went through during her first marriage, the fact that her *gamba* spirit gave clear indications that he would not permit a repetition of this, and the fact that neither Aletea nor her relatives wanted a repetition of it either. Such a striking coincidence of wishes could lead us to think that Aletea and her relatives were using the *gamba* spirit in a very conscious way. However, as indicated above, what took place in the ceremony forms part of the enactment of the agency of the spirit. It is the spirit that voices his own desires and rides through Aletea's body and her family to attain these wishes. In order to avoid the impression of some kind of master-slave relation or the impression that living people respect the spirits much more than themselves, the spirit in return fulfils some of the needs of the human host and relatives.

Through examining some of the features associated with the personalities and selves of possessed women, we consider that it is the self that is under the service of dissociation, and not the opposite, as Bourguignon (2004) has argued. In Gorongosa, the spirits penetrate bodies and selves that are solid to the extent of being able to mutate, fragment,⁸ and reconstitute them again with consistency. That is, although Aletea was traumatized in various ways, her suffering was transformed into a source of healing and she became the sanctuary of the spirit because she did not have identity confusion. Should that confusion prevail, Aletea would be regarded as unfit to repair the havoc wreaked against the murdered person during the civil war and produce healing more generally in the post-war period. The spirit uses Aletea's body and mind to carry on his

own projects, and when Aletea regains her own agency, ambivalence is only in the eyes of the external beholder. The Aletea that enters and leaves the possession state is consistent with herself. The transformation of Aletea's predicament allows the spirit to use her as the focal point of denunciation of the fragmentary state of society as a result of the civil war.

The overall argument of this article is that *gamba* spirit possession, involved in symbiotic relations with hosts, contributes to a plethora of metamorphoses: it changes the lives of the spirits, their hosts, and those around them over time. In order to capture the dynamics of the fragmentations and changes at stake there is a need to locate spirit possession within societal contingencies and to follow the lives of the spirits, their wives, and their spouses and kin members longitudinally. Within this context we note that living people cannot easily thrive and renew society without their spirits, and the spirits cannot evolve over time without the imprint of the living.

NOTES

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¹ The data in this article form part of a community-based research project that the first author started in April 1997 on recovery strategies after the civil war in Mozambique. The specific data described and discussed here were obtained through unstructured interviews, informal talks, gathering of proverbs, and participant observation. In total there were four encounters between the first two authors and the family and spirit involved in this case study over a period of four years (2003-7). The key event is presented here through a detailed (though edited) transcription.

² Historically, public ceremonies for spirits occurred when traditional chiefs performed community ceremonies to worship ancestors at different stages of the agricultural cycle.

³ The *n'fukua* spirit introduced the rule of matrilineal residence, and her fiancé had to live in her parents' *madembe*.

⁴ In the Shona praise poems from Zimbabwe, *gamba* is referred to as a 'warrior-hero' (Fortune & Hodza 1974).

⁵ This stance of the spirit is only aimed at showing that he had already chosen Aletea a long time before he had manifested himself to the public.

⁶ Expenses resulting from Aletea's work as a healer. This is the spirit's money and he indicates how to spend it.

⁷ *Gamba* spirits have the power to penetrate women's bodies and block their reproductive activities as well as creating the correct conditions for them, but they themselves cannot cause women to reproduce.

⁸ For instance, in a given moment of the contractual ceremony the spirit started to disclose aspects of his personal childhood.

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Esprits *gamba*, relations genrées et guérison au Gorongosa (Mozambique) après la guerre civile

Résumé

L'article décrit comment, au Mozambique d'après la guerre civile, dans la région du Gorongosa au centre du pays, les femmes (et parfois les hommes) ayant fait une expérience personnelle et/ou familiale de souffrance extrême sont possédées par des esprits mâles liés à la guerre appelés *gamba*. Les esprits *gamba* sont cependant aussi facteurs d'une guérison dans laquelle le travail de mémoire et la politique des genres jouent un rôle essentiel. Ce type de guérison d'après-guerre est démontré par une cérémonie contractuelle secrète, au laquelle un prétendant vivant demande à un esprit *gamba* logé dans le corps d'une jeune femme (considérée comme son épouse) la permission d'épouser cette femme. Le récit de la cérémonie est précédé d'une description des conditions suscitant l'émergence des esprits *gamba* dans le centre du Mozambique, et suivi par l'analyse de la signification de la voix des esprits et de son impact dans la relation entre le mari vivant et sa femme, et plus généralement dans la société d'après-guerre du Gorongosa. Les auteurs de l'article affirment que les performances des esprits *gamba* contribuent à une certaine forme de renouvellement moral. Ce faisant, ils resituent les relations entre les esprits et leurs hôtes dans des systèmes plus larges de significations dans lesquels elles sont créées et reproduites, et confortent les approches qui considèrent la possession comme constituée par « une pratique et une politique de la voix » (Lambek).

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