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**Rethinking local agency and  
state-building in post-conflict  
Mozambique: The ambiguous  
relationship between the state  
and traditional healers via  
AMETRAMO**

**Samara Dantas P. Guimaraes**

*samara@samaraguimaraes.com*

PhD Candidate in International Development  
University of Birmingham

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# Introduction



## Post-conflict state-building in Mozambique

- Portuguese Colonisation (1498-1974), Independence War (1964-1974), Civil war (1977-1992)
- General **amnesty** for all veterans after the civil war, rejecting ICC
- FRELIMO's *Homem Novo*: Persecution of traditional authorities
- 90s: Wave of 're-traditionalisation'

*“To unite all Mozambicans, transcending traditions and different languages, requires that the tribe must die in our consciousness so that the nation may be born.”* Samora Machel, 1974, 1<sup>st</sup> President of Mozambique



## ARGUMENT

Traditional healers have multiple roles in the Mozambican **state-building** processes, comprising justice, politics and health. **Spirituality** permeates these three areas.

There is an ambiguous relationship between traditional healers and the state in post-conflict Mozambique, in which healers are co-opted by the state structures by their inclusion into AMETRAMO/AERMO.

How does the relationship between  
healers and the state takes place?

Post-Liberal  
State-building

- Healers as state actors via AMETRAMO
- Healers as providers of justice, health, politics

## Theoretical Framework

### Hybridity and post-liberal state-building in Mozambique

- Hybridity and post-liberal peace in IR: the move beyond state-centric approaches
- The legitimation of traditional healers via AMETRAMO - Hybrid political orders - (Boege et al., 2008)

*The fact that healers are informal actors in the Mozambican justice system has implications for understanding hybridity and post-liberal state-building in Mozambique, considering the healers' roles in Mozambican justice systems.*



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- Present literature has not fully accounted for the dynamics of traditional justice in Mozambique neither the interactions with the state
- Traditional healers' role in the Mozambican state-building processes has remained neglected in the literature
- Controversial angles: witchcraft and spirit possession
- Strengthening the literature, bridging gaps between transitional justice, state-building, peace-building





## Qualitative methods

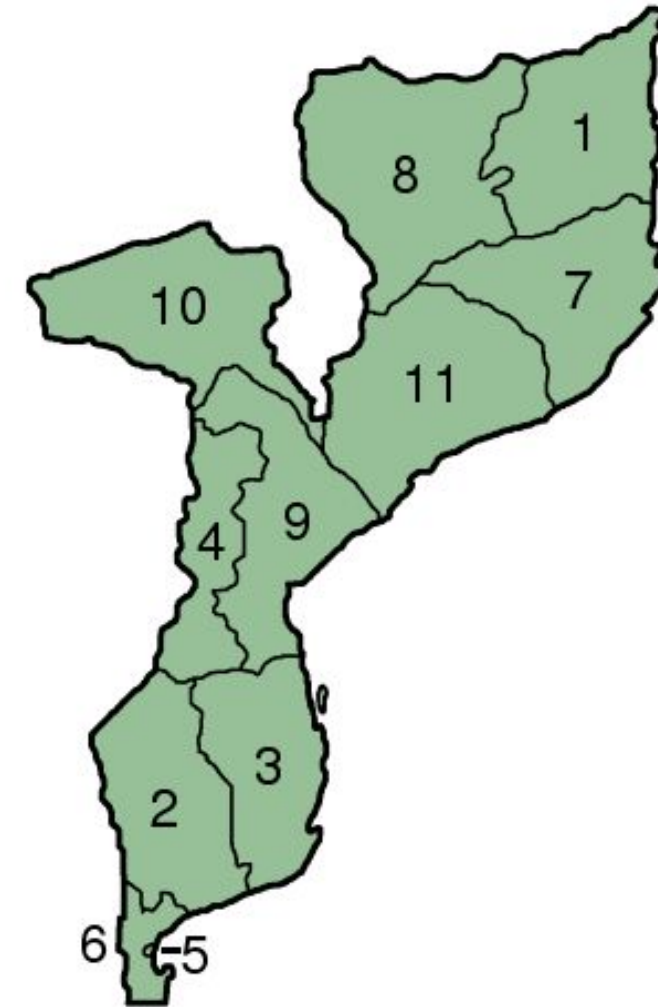
Data collection: three months of fieldwork

Location: **Maputo** (6), **Inhambane** (3 - Inhambane Maxixe, Massinga) and **Sofala** (9 - Beira).

Qualitative **research techniques**: participant observation; semi-structured and unstructured interviews; revision of documentary evidence.  
Primary source for data collection: **interviews**.

**Participants**: Traditional healers,  
Religious leaders, Local Leaders (*regulos*, judges)  
Traditional Justice Beneficiaries, NGOs  
and civil servants.

- 1 Cabo Delgado
- 2 Gaza
- 3 Inhambane
- 4 Manica
- 5 Maputo (city)
- 6 Maputo
- 7 Nampula
- 8 Niassa
- 9 Sofala
- 10 Tete
- 11 Zambezia





## Interplay between Healers and the State via AMETRAMO

- Established in 1992, following an official ban against traditional authorities
- AMETRAMO registers healers throughout the country
- Bridge between Modern and Traditional (HPO – Boege et al., 2008)
- AMETRAMO simultaneously an attempt at control by the state and political parties and a plural space of assertion for the healers (Meneses, 2008)
- Beyond the strong focus on traditional medicine, AMETRAMO is also part of the regulation of traditional justice system in Mozambique
- Healers interacting with varying degrees of cooperation and resistance

*“There is not a clear policy that tackles the obscurantism and stigma associated with traditional healers.”*

Member of the Mozambican Institute for Socio-Cultural Research

*“The use of the term traditional medicine practitioner by AMETRAMO and the focus on medicine restricts our work. There are things that nyanga does that the state does not know (...) Nyanga is a state by itself, a natural state that has its own structure.”* Traditional healer in Maxixe, Inhambane

*“There is no mapping, there is no say within the organization itself, the association of even between us outside the association, there is not a very clear structure.”*

Traditional healer in Maxixe, Inhambane



# A METRAMO

SEDE DA CIDADE DE INHAMBANE





## Healers' as key actors in Mozambican Traditional Justice: Community Courts

- Community courts created in 1992
- HPO combining a mixture of legal orders developed by local actors
- Healers invited by **AMETRAMO** to identify culprits/judge contemporary conflicts
- Healers as key actors: “Proof of the guilty” + Resolving everyday conflict
- Restorative justice through reparations
  
- Lack of legislation/structure
- Language barriers
- Only male healers elected as judges

*“Community courts are legitimate in rural areas because traditional actors know how to use local customs and even before AMETRAMO traditional healers were always heard in those instances.”* Head of the Secretariat of the Palace of Justice in Maputo

## Findings



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- AMETRAMO as part of a 're-traditionalisation' agenda
- Partial recognition of traditional justice systems
- Lack of support from AMETRAMO/focus health
- Lack of a clear policy that tackles stigma
- State recognition intertwined with agency and power dynamics in the country
- Healers revealing mixed perceptions: Political consciousness with historical **resistance** (*Nyangas*)
- Healers providing holistic justice: **Post-liberal state building**
- Healers are part of chiefdom systems, patriarchal politics and witchcraft: **romanticised hybridity**













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Thank you!

[samara@samaraguimaraes.com](mailto:samara@samaraguimaraes.com)

*twitter: @sam\_guimaraes*