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Les motifs d'un meurtre. Conceptualisations culturelles locales du martyre de Gonçalo da Silveira en 1561.

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The Reasons for a Murder

Local Cultural Conceptualizations of the Martyrdom of Gonçalo da Silveira in 1561*

During the night of the 15th of March, 1561, occurred one of the most renowned martyrdoms in sub-Saharan Africa. The Portuguese Jesuit missionary, Dom Gonçalo da Silveira, was executed on the direct orders of the Monomotapa, the head of the dominant political entity on the southern bank of the Zambesi at the time, in today's Zimbabwe. According to two local servants of the father's translator, Antonio Caiado, Silveira was strangled to death inside the hut in which he dwelt by high-ranking officers of the Monomotapa, and his body was thrown into the Monsengece River. Efforts by the Portuguese administration and the Jesuits to reconstruct the events of the murder, to understand its motives, and to try and locate Silveira's body started almost immediately after the murder and continued for a few generations, more or less until the final expulsion of the Jesuit order from all the Portuguese territories, in 1759 (Godinho 1614; de Sousa 1710: 865; Cordara 1750: 629; Caiado 1898; Monclaro 1899; de Couto 1900: 321; Caetano Xavier 1955: 169; Gomes 1959; Frois 1975; da Conceição 2007: 54).

Thanks to these inquiries we now have a solid idea not of what occurred on the night of the murder but of what was thought to have happened that night. This, as explained below, is far more important for the purpose of understanding the reasons of the murder than what actually happened. The reasons for the murder were initially provided by the father's translator, Antonio Caiado (1898), in 1561¹. Caiado claimed that Silveira was wrongfully accused by the spiritual consultants of the Monomotapa, the *Ngangas*, of being a sorcerer (*moroo*)². It was also claimed that he had been originally

* The author would like to thank Ruth Ginio, Amos Megged and the anonymous readers of *Cahiers d'Études africaines* for their valuable comments.

1. These explanations do not vary much in subsequent Portuguese inquiries.
2. In the Portuguese documentation of the relevant period, the translation of the terms *enganga* (*n'anga*) and *moroo* (*muroyi*) are very problematic. Both terms were translated as *feiticeiro* (*sorcerer*). In local perception, however, the term *muroyi* had negative connotations and was applied to a person perceived as using his supernatural power to generate evil. The term *n'anga*, on the other hand, had positive connotations and was applied to people who perform a wide range of spiritual acts. In the case of the murder of Silveira, the specific task performed by the *engangas* was the detection of a *moroo*, Gonçalo da Silveira. On the problematic translation of both of these terms in the context of the British colonial legal system in South Rhodesia in the early 20th century, see JEATER (1996).

sent by the Portuguese to spy and prepare the conquest of the Monomotapa, and that he was an envoy of a local lord named Chapute. The explanations for the murder that appear in modern scholarship derive by and large from those provided originally by Caiado. The broadest consensus in modern scholarship accepts Caiado's claim that Silveira was regarded as a sorcerer, which was the main reason for his murder (Rea 1960: 32-33; Axelson 1973: 149; Randles 1975: 44; Newitt 2004: 149; Rodrigues 2004: 762). Scholars also noted the belief that Silveira was a Portuguese agent who was sent to pave the way for Portuguese economic and colonial interests in the region (Chirenje 1973: 39, 42; Beach 1980: 123; Nicolaidis 2011). Thus, the murder was interpreted by Africanist scholars as an early form of resistance against the Portuguese presence and against the missionary efforts initiated by the Silveira. Another common explanation tried to situate the murder within the context of local contemporary political intrigues. Mudenge (1988: 62-69) explained that the murder was the result of internal political intrigues having to do with local struggles over succession between the Kiteve and the Monomotapa.

In this article I show that given the fact that this murder occurred in a precise cultural context, and that it was ordered, reasoned, and performed by people possessing an extraordinarily complex cultural worldview, of which we have substantive documentation since the beginning of the 16th century, the claims that Silveira was executed because he was regarded as a "sorcerer" or an envoy of the Portuguese are not only extremely simplistic but also exceedingly culturally biased. To decipher and contextualize the motives for the murder of Gonalo da Silveira, I begin by re-examining the documentation on which the evidence for this murder case is based. I show that modern research has tended to over-emphasize the acts of Silveira before the murder in order to explain it, and that it has dismissed or disregarded the vernacular explanations and evidence contained in the documents. Based on comparison with other contemporary sources, I show that some of the facts presented in these documents are simply wrong. In the second part of the article I examine the Portuguese historical and ethnographic documentation available, and some of the oral traditions of the populations of the region in order to prove that Silveira was perceived as a traitor possessed or empowered by a foreign-spirit, or being one himself. In the conclusions I discuss what the process of recovering local perceptions and the understanding of specific historical events may contribute to the historical study of pre-colonial African societies.

Re-examination of the Documentation Concerning the Murder of Gonalo da Silveira

Interpretations of the actions and motives of the murderers of Gonalo da Silveira are generally based on two substantial documents produced in the year 1561. The first is a letter written by Antonio Caiado, the translator

who accompanied Gonalo da Silveira to the Zimbabwe of Monomotapa in January 1561 (Caiado 1898). Antonio Caiado's letter provides the motives for the murder, as he understood them based on his own experience and on inquiries he conducted among officials at the court of the Monomotapa. The second is a letter written by Luiz Frois (1975: 34-58), head of the Jesuit college of So Paulo in Goa, on December 15th, 1561. This document provides the description of the acts performed by the murderers. Frois also provides the reasons for the murder, although these were copied almost exactly from Caiado's letter. The only biographical information we have about Caiado is contained in Frois's letter. Frois (*ibid.*: 42) mentions that Caiado was "Portuguese, a good friend and familiar with the king in Manamotapa". Note, however, that Caiado spoke the local language and was not regarded as a foreigner at the court of the Monomotapa. He had access to the Monomotapa, his mother, and the officials at the court. These were the ones who provided the core of the information on which his letter is based.

Frois' letter retells the testimony, translated into Portuguese, of two local eyewitnesses. Those were the servants of Antonio Caiado who were present in Silveria's hut on the night of the murder. The description contains a very detailed account of the murderers' actions. As noted, whether or not the acts described by the two witnesses are right or not is less important than the fact that they were described in this exact way and order. According to the witnesses, the murder occurred inside a hut at night. It was performed by seven or eight men. One of them was the *Mucurume*, a very high-ranking official at the court of the Monomotapa³. The *Mucurume* laid the father on his chest. Four men seized him by his arms and legs, while two other men tied a ribbon around his neck, each one pulling to the opposite side. After Silveira died from suffocation, a rope was tied around his neck and his body was dragged on its back and thrown into the Monsengece River (*ibid.*: 54). This highly detailed description of precise actions leaves little room for any biases on the part of the author of the text.

As opposed to the description of the execution in Frois's letter, Caiado's explanation of the motives for the murder contains a clear cultural bias, quite evident from the beginning. The cultural bias in the accusations presented by Caiado derives both from his need to explain the accusations in a form and through concepts understandable to the Portuguese reader of the period and from the inherent conceptual gaps between local and Portuguese or European contemporary worldviews and beliefs⁴. Caiado claims that

3. The office of the *Mucurume* or *Bucurume* is described in Bocarro's *Decada* as the right hand of the king (BOCARRO 1899 : 268).

4. As explained in the present article, these gaps can be partially bridged by cross-referencing objective actions described in the texts, statements by locals reported in the texts, and the extensive contemporary and modern ethnographic and anthropological literature. Wyatt MACGAFFEY (1994) used a similar method to explain local perceptions of early encounters between Europeans and local populations of the Kongo kingdom.

those responsible for the murder were Muslim *Ngangas* who served as spiritual advisors to the Monomotapa. This accusation clearly speaks to the anti-Muslims sentiments of the Portuguese readership of the period. According to Caiado, the Muslim *Ngangas* manipulated the young Monomotapa and persuaded him to order the execution of Silveira using false accusations. They did so in order to maintain their political and religious influence on the ruler (Caiado 1898: 99). Whether the accusations of the Muslim *Ngangas* in Caiado's letter were part of a manipulation or whether the *Ngangas* actually believed in what they said about Silveira is irrelevant to the understanding of the way in which the figure of Gonçalo da Silveira was perceived. The fact that the execution occurred proves that at least the Monomotapa believed the accusations.

According to Caiado (*ibid.*: 100), the *Ngangas* stipulated that Silveira was a sorcerer (*moroo*). They claimed that he was sent by the Portuguese authorities who were seeking to take control of the Monomotapa's kingdom, and that he was sent to provoke a local revolt by his rival Chapute (*ibid.*: 99-100), who is mistakenly identified by Frois and by modern researchers as the Kiteve (Frois 1975: 48; Mudenge 1988: 62-69). The accusations that Silveira was a sorcerer, as described in Caiado's letter, are explained in a rather simplistic way by using a concept that would be comprehensible to an European audience.

To comprehend the motives for the murder, it is essential to understand what the local people believed or claimed that has happened, however irrational and contradictory these explanations may appear. Evidence of Silveira's guilt which Caiado and Frois claim to be given by the *Ngangas*—and which has been ignored or uncritically reported in part by modern research—can help transcend these simplistic categories. To prove their accusations, the *Ngangas* claimed as follows:

- a. Silveira was determined to kill the Monomotapa and the entire population of the land by persuading them to become Christians and by "splashing water on their heads", which according to them was a potion used to conquer the land, while saying the words of the *Langarios* (Portuguese). All these actions would have been intended to bring the Monomotapa's subjects under Silveria's control and break their resistance.
- b. Silveira carried with him a bone that he had stolen from a grave and many other potions that he intended to use to do away with the king.
- c. He will cause drought and famine.
- d. If he is not killed he will suddenly disappear, and as a consequence the people of the land will begin killing each other without any apparent reason.
- e. He should be thrown into the river and his body not left exposed to the sun otherwise it will poison the people.
- f. He was seen walking naked from the waist up near the precinct of the king's palace; he had taken away from the precinct barks of wood and tied them to his shirt. Because of these acts, lightning descended from the sky

and broke a pole from the king's doorway (Caiado 1898: 99-101; Frois 1975: 45-48).

Incoherent and irrelevant as they may seem, these claims are crucial to understand how Silveira was perceived locally. Moreover, the actions described as being performed during the murder, which are endowed with specific religious and cultural meaning, are unmistakably related to these local explanations aimed at proving Silveira's guilt.

A significant indication that helps us place Silveira's murder in context is the mention by Caiado that the *Ngangas* claimed that Silveira was sent by a person named *Chapute*, who Frois (1975: 48) mistakenly identified as the Kiteve. This confusion has since been accepted as historical evidence by a portion of modern research (Mudenge 1988: 62-69). The error is part of an addition that Frois made in his letter based upon information provided by Caiado. According to Caiado (1898: 102):

"[...] that the Father also came by command of *Chepute*, to ask the *Morefos* why they would not acknowledge him as their lord, and took one for their king who had no right to the title"⁵.

Frois copied out this excerpt and added his own explanations to the local terms of *Chepute* and *Morefos*. The additions by Frois (1975: 48) are marked in bold:

"[...] that the Father also came by command of *Chapute*—meaning—the Kiteve, who is another king of Sofala who had been his servant and had revolted, to ask the *Morefos*, who are the nobles of the kingdom, why they would not acknowledge him as their lord and took one for their king who had no right to the title"⁶.

The identification of *CheputelChapute* as the Kiteve by Frois is clearly wrong. Comparing Caiado's excerpt with a section in a document produced a decade later brings this mistake to light. This document is the *Relaço da viagem que fizera os padres da companhia de Jesus com Francisco Barreto na conquista de Monomotapa no anno de 1569*, written by the Jesuit Francisco de Monclaro (1899). Monclaro accompanied the campaign of Governor Francisco Barreto to conquer the mines of the Monomotapa. This campaign was described in contemporary sources as an act of retaliation for the murder of Gonalo da Silveira (*ibid.*: 157). During Barreto's campaign, the Portuguese engaged in battle with a group that the Portuguese referred to as *Mongazes*. One of these group's lords (*fumos*) is described

5. "E que o padre vinha por mandado do Chepute para que dissesse aos Morefos como o no vinham a tomar por senhor e tinham por rei a quem no era por direito" (Caiado 1898: 99).
6. "E que o padre vinha por mandado de Chapute—a saber—o Chiteve que he outro rey de offalla que foy seu cryado alevantado pera que dissesse nos morefos que so os nobres do reino que como o no vinho tomar por senhor e tinho por rey a quem no hera de direito" (my translation and bold).

by de Monclaro (*ibid.*: 191) as follows: “Near the field of battle was a place of a chief, a great warrior, named *Capote*, who defended the entrance to the lands of the *Mongaz* and made great efforts to defend this place.”

No Portuguese documentation of the 1560s and 1570s recalls any feud or violent actions between the Kiteve and the Monomotapa; there is much, however, evidence of ongoing conflicts between the Monomotapa and the *fumos* of the *Mongazes*. The Portuguese chronicler Diogo de Couto writes that the ambassador of the Governor Francisco Barreto asked permission from the Monomotapa to attack the king of the *Mongazes* who was said to “have revolted against him, the Monomotapa, because he wished to punish him on his behalf, and he was the most powerful beside him” (de Couto 1900: 321). The Monomotapa answered Barreto that he appreciated the offer and very much liked to punish that rebel (*ibid.*).

The group which Monclaro, Couto, and the Dominican João dos Santos identified as the *Mongazes* cannot easily be found by this name in Portuguese documents produced after the second half of the 17th century (Newitt 1982: 152-153). The *Mongazes* are mentioned recurrently in Bocarro’s thirteenth *Decada da Asia*, which, although it was written in the 1630s and 1640s, is entirely based on documents relevant to the first and second decade of the 17th century (Bocarro 1899: 266). They also appear in the writings of the Jesuit Antonio Gomes (1959: 181) in 1648 with reference to events that occurred in earlier periods. The geographic location of the *Mongazes* in all these sources is quite consistent. They are said to live in the region between the Portuguese forts of Sena and Tete, in the *Lupata* Mountains on the southern bank of Zambesi. In the 19th century, Sebastião Xavier Botelho (1835: 389) identifies in the same location a group that speaks a dialect called *Monga*, which is close to the one spoken by the people of the Monomotapa.

From their geographic location we can deduce that this group is the same as the one identified in the Portuguese documents since the middle of the 17th century as the *Botongas* or *Tonga* of this same region. The populations of the *Tonga* in this region, as well as those of the *Tavara* in the region between Tete and the mines of Chicova, are regarded in the oral traditions of the modern Shona groups as the owners of the land, meaning the populations which their ancestors encountered during their migration to the region (Mudenge 1988: 133). The main spirit cult of these populations is the one of the *Dzivaguru-Karuva*. This cult was adopted by the migrant populations, and at least in the period in which the Monomotapa prevailed, the mediums of this foreign spirit belonged to the *Tonga* and *Tavara* (*ibid.*: 132).

Conceptual Links between the Mongas, the Dzivaguru-Karuva Cult and the Local Perception of Gonçalo da Silveira

In Shona cosmology different categories of persons are perceived as possessing supernatural powers. According to Bucher (1980: 105) and Gelfand

(1959: 122, 129, 150), the most feared witches among the Shona are those possessed by foreign-spirits (*Shavi*), which endow them with magical powers. To understand the nature of a certain “witch” or “sorcerer”, we must understand the type of the spirit to which it is related. Ethnographic Portuguese documents from the 16th century onward have attested to this perception (dos Santos 1609: Parte I, Livro I, Cap. 14). In the case of Gonçalo da Silveira, the foreign spirit which he was associated with was the *Dzivaguru-Karuva* and *Chicara*. The *Dzivaguru*, which can be literally translated as the “Great Pool”, is one of the most common spirit cults among the population of the southern bank of the Zambesi basin (Bourdillon 1972, 1979b). *Chicara* is sometimes identified in modern oral traditions as *Dzivaguru*’s great-granddaughter, but according to other traditions, *Chicara* is identified as a male medium or a priest of *Dzivaguru* (*ibid.*: 112-114)⁷. That the persona of Gonçalo da Silveira was associated with the *Dzivaguru-Karuva* and *Chicara* is obvious when one compares the accusations levelled by the *Ngangas* and the actions that were said to occur during the murder with ethno-historical descriptions to be found in Portuguese documents from the 16th to the late 19th century.

In the local oral tradition there are various versions of the story of the creation of the *Dzivaguru* (the Great Pool). Even if the names of the main protagonists may vary, these various versions share a common pattern (Posselt 1929; Gelfand 1962: 25-27; Bourdillon 1972: 112-121). The earliest complete recorded version of the creation of the *Dzivaguru* is found in Albino Manoel Pacheco’s diary from the 1860s (Pacheco 1883: 147-148). It begins with the migration to the region of a small group of elephant hunters led by a man called *Mutota*, originally from a place called *Changoé*. This group decided to migrate because of cattle and salt brought to their land by a Tonga person from *Chedima*, named *Netondo*. In the process of the conquest of the land, *Mutota* died on the top of a mountain called *Chitácaxangônha*. He was succeeded by his son, *Matópe*, who continued his father’s conquest until he reached the *Ruenha* River. At this point the process of conquest was halted because of resistance offered by a local princess named *Chicara*, who was much more powerful than *Matópe*. Pacheco (*ibid.*: 148) relates that in order to defeat *Chicara*, “A black man called *Chicuma* informed him with much ingenuity that the only way to imprison her was to adorn the heads of his *vanhae* with ribbons made of shells and *cauris*”⁸. Following these instructions, *Matópe* and his warriors proceeded to engage in battle

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7. The claim here that *Chicara* is a medium is problematic because it implies that there is a distinction between the possessed person being a medium or a spirit, whereas in the local perception the medium is the spirit.
 8. The word *Vanhae* is the plural form of the word *Munhai*. It has various meanings in different Shona dialects. In the chiNyongue dialect, spoken in the region, it denoted a person who belonged to the people of the Monomotapa (COURTOIS 1900 : 40). In the chiKaranga dialect it denoted a slave (SPRINGER 1905 : 67).

with *Chicara*, who upon seeing them decided to flee. During her persecution by the forces of Matópe, she disappeared in a place named *Nacacote*, creating a lake called *Choma*, which the locals claim exists to this day, where she and her followers were said to have drowned themselves (*ibid.*).

A 20th century version of this story was recorded by M. F. C. Bourdillon. This version belongs to the *Nyombwe* dynasty of the Korekore Shona. According to it, the senior ancestor of the dynasty, named *Nyabapa*, who was a direct descendent of *Mutota*, defeated the people of a place named *Choma*. He was able to achieve this by extorting from a prisoner the method by which he could overcome *Karuva's* magical powers. *Karuva's* powers included the ability to hide himself with his people inside a thick mist. After *Karuva* realized that he had been betrayed, he descended with his kin into a magical pool that never dries out, which borders his sacred wood, and he was never seen again (Bourdillon 1972: 112-114).

We illustrate the connection between the 16th century *Mongazes*, the traditions regarding the creation of the *Dzivaguru*, and the murder of Gonçalo da Silveira using an excerpt from a document mentioned above, João dos Santos' *Ethiopia Oriental*. The excerpt follows Santos' description of the battle that eventually took place between the *Mongazes* and the Portuguese in 1571, in which, according to Monclaro, *fumo Capote* was said to be killed:

"Beneath these mountains of *Lupata*, near the river on the eastern bank, in front of the lands of the Mongas, there is a beautiful lake three leagues in circumference and very deep, and in its center there is a very high island, about five hundred *braças* in circumference. At the highest point of the Island there is a beautiful tamarind tree [...] it has great medicinal properties [...]. This lake is called by the Kaffirs *Rufumba*. It has fresh water; many good fish, hippopotami, and very big crocodiles. On its edge there is a grove, which the Kaffirs call *Chipanga*, very fresh and full of wild trees. The Kaffirs living in proximity to this grove bury their dead in it, and it is perceived by all of them as a very sacred place, the principal reason for this being that the crocodiles of the *Rufumba* lie under the sun on the borders of this grove and, according to their custom, the Kaffirs believe that these are the souls of their deceased which are inside these crocodiles and live in this lake" (dos Santos 1609: Parte I, Livro II, Cap. 6).

The diverse elements, including the Sacred Pool and the grove, which are part of the *Dzivaguru* traditions, are present in this excerpt from Santos, which is associated with the *Mongazes*. Also present is the perception that the souls of the ancestors of these people live in this pool (inside the crocodiles). This latter point can be clearly juxtaposed with Silveira's case.

Although Frois claimed in his letter that Silveira's body was thrown into the *Monsengece* River, this fact was disputed by contemporary sources. In *Oriente Conquistado a Jesu Christo Pelos Padres Da Companhia De Jesus Da Provincia De Goa*, written by Francisco de Sousa (1710), the author claims that there was another letter written by Caiado and sent eight

days after the murder of Silveira to a friend of his, named Gaspar Gonalves⁹. Moreover, according to de Sousa (*ibid.*: 865), Caiado claimed in that non-existent letter that Silveira's body was thrown into a lake, and not into a river:

"[...] the Kaffirs destroyed the image of the holy crucifixion and they wanted to take the clothes off the Holy Father's body because of their rapacity, but seeing that it was held by a cilice of metal they assumed that he was a great sorcerer and they did not dare to take his clothes so they would not become contaminated by some spell. They tied him to a wooden pole and threw him into a lake which is located at the top of a mountain which is the source of the *Mocengueze* and the *Motete* Rivers. From here originated the varied information, some of it saying that he was thrown into *Mocengueze* and some, into the *Motete*."

De Sousa continues this argument by providing further evidence based on letters from later periods containing local testimonies contemporary to Silveira's murder:

"The fact that a lake and not a river was the first sepulture of father Gonalo da Silveira is related in a letter of father Gaspar Soares written in Tete at the seven-teenth of July 1611. ** I found a very old man, he says that he was baptized by father Gonalo da Silveira on the Mocaranga road, and that he was hundred and twenty years old and that he had four sons already old and that he was the great-grandfather of the wife of a Portuguese residing in Sena. This man told me that father Gonalo da Silveira, when martyred; his body was not thrown into a river but into a great lake [...]" (*ibid.*)¹⁰.

There are some less obvious elements in the excerpt from Santos regarding the *Rufumba* Lake that are related to the *Dzivaguru* and to the murder of Silveira. The first one is the Sacred Tree, which stood on the island, at the center of the lake, which can be attributed to the oral traditions about *Karuva* and the religious rituals concerning *Chicara*. The second element is the crocodiles seen as carriers of the souls of the local ancestors. According to modern Shona oral traditions, all the aquatic totems such as the *Mvuu* (hippo), *Hove* (fish), *Mheta* (water python), and *Garwe* (crocodile) originate from *Dzivaguru* (Taringa 2006). This is the place to mention that following the murder of Silveira, crown officials, local Portuguese residents, and Jesuit missionaries have gone to great lengths in order to locate the whereabouts of Silveira's body by collecting information from the indigenous population

9. The fact that there was another letter written by Caiado is mentioned by Caiado himself, but this letter was probably lost (CAIADO 1898 : 99).

10. Eric AXELSON (1973 : 149), one of the leading historians of Southern Africa, claimed that he visited this region and that the sources of the two rivers are widely separated from each other, so that there is no lake at their juncture. But as noted above, this is irrelevant for assessing the importance of de Sousa's description, which lies in the fact that not only at the time of the murder, but 60 years later the locals believed that Silveira body was thrown into a lake.

and from Portuguese residents of the region, as we have already seen in de Sousa's text. Diogo de Couto explains that during the campaign of Francisco Barreto, in 1571, the Jesuit father Francisco de Monclaro insisted on taking the same route that Silveira took to the Monomotapa to see whether his holy remains could be found. Couto claimed that this was impossible because "all the men who at that time traded in the lands of the Monomotapa affirmed that as soon as the body of this saint father was thrown into the river it was eaten and swallowed by the reptiles and crocodiles, so it could not reappear but at the last universal judgment" (de Couto 1900: 324). The claim that Silveira was eaten by crocodiles became, at least since the 1570s, an integral part of the story of the Martyrdom (Godinho 1614: 70a).

In the ethnographic documentation of the region from the 16th century onward, the indigenous population of the southern bank of the Zambesi believe that the liver of a crocodile is a highly dangerous and harmful poison (dos Santos 1609: Parte I, Livro I, Cap. 25; Fernandes 1975: 126)¹¹. Monclaro (1899: 174) claims that "About the liver of the reptiles and crocodiles, of which there are many in a river, the Kaffirs say that it is the greatest poison and the quickest to kill or one of the quickest to kill [...]". This belief is persistent to this day. Moreover, African crocodile hunters today, particularly on the shores of Lake Victoria, make sure that they are seen cutting out the organs of the crocodile and burning them or throwing them back into the water so as to not being accused of manufacturing poison for sale (Miller 2012: 48). Luiz Frois (1975: 54) explained that the murderers of Gonçalo da Silveira were ordered by the king to throw the body into the river: "His body should not be left under the sun, because the poison of that man was sufficient to contaminate them all."

The final clue to Silveira's story examined here lies in the etymology of the name *Rufumba*, mentioned by Santos. The verb *kuFumba* means to *strangle*, *suffocate*, or *drown*, which is obviously related both to the myth of the *Dzivaguru* and to Silveira's execution (Elliott 1897: 285). In Monclaro's, Santos', and Couto's accounts of the battle that took place in 1571 between the *Mongazes* of *fumo Capote* and the Portuguese army, there is a description of a sorcerer. According to Couto's description, the sorcerer is a female, in Santos' description she is an old woman, and in Monclaro's description he is a male (dos Santos 1609: Parte I, Livro II, Cap. 6; de Couto 1900: 324; Monclaro 1899: 193). This sorcerer is described as performing similar actions to those of which Silveira was accused by the *Ngangas*. Monclaro describes that the sorcerer held potions inside a gourd,

11. In 1766, Antonio Pinto MIRANDA (1955a: 238) claimed that "Inside the stomach of the crocodile or Jacaré there are infinite stones of many colours, although there value is ignored. They also say that it has for its defence one venomous tooth, but from my experience, it's a fable".

which Monclaro claimed to have seen, and with which the sorcerer persuaded the *Mongazes* that he would deliver all the Portuguese into their hands (Monclaro 1899: 193). Diogo de Couto (1900: 324) claims about this sorcerer: "When they were near us, she took out from a gourd a small amount of powder, and tossed it into the air, with these she made the *Mongas* believe that she will blind all of our men and we will all fall into their hands [...]." Gonçalo da Silveira was accused that the water he splashed on the heads of the people during baptism was the potion he used to gain control over them. Note that the word *fumbi* in the local dialect of this region means both dust and splashed water (Courtois 1900: 17). As mentioned above, the verb *kuFumba*, which comes from the same root, means to drown, to suffocate, or to strangle someone and also to concoct a potion in order to make someone's hunt unsuccessful (Courtois 1900: 17; Bucher 1980: 89)¹². Monclaro (1899: 193) continues the description of the sorcerer by saying that: "He put into their heads that he would deliver us all into their hands [...]. As they were sure of victory, he made them bring many ropes made of the barks of trees [...]. These were brought in order to bind us." As mentioned above, Silveira was accused of having been seen for several days collecting the bark of the trees from the palisade of the house of the king, which he had tied to his shirt.

There are other themes that are not emphasized in Santos's excerpt about the *Rufumba*. Both *Chicara* and *Karuva* were said to have disappeared spontaneously, never to be seen again. According to Caiado, the *Ngangas* warned the Monomotapa that if Silveira was not killed he would disappear without them knowing. Gonçalo da Silveira was also accused by the *Ngangas* of commanding the sun, and causing drought and famine. Both Portuguese documents and oral traditions ascribe to *Chicara* or *Karuva* the ability to cause drought and famine. The anonymous author of the *Descrição do Imperio de Manamotapa daquem do rio Zambeze*, sent in March 1794 by the governor of the rivers of Sena Cristovão de Azevedo de Vasconcellos to the governor of Mozambique, Diogo de Sousa, attributed the ability to cause draught and famine to the *Chicara*:

"They have three priests; a great one named *Chicara*, this one never comes in the presence of the emperor, nor is he called to come to him, only in the times of their sowing the emperor sends an envoy to ask for rain. This one is a fine thief that whenever he can take anything from the emperor, as well as from his vassals, he steals it in order to make himself more powerful"¹³.

This same element appears in documents from the second half of the 20th century. M. F. C. Bourdillon recounts that during his field work among the Korekore Shona a medium arrived from a nearby chiefdom. The

12. According to Bucher, the element of the hunt and the *Shavi* spirits are connected.

13. AHU-CU-Moç-Caixa no. 66 — Doc. no. 55.

medium predicted a good rainy season, followed by a drought. Bourdillon wrote that the medium achieved a considerable reputation in the area, and that he instilled fear in many. The fear gave rise to a rumor that he was possessed by the *Dzivaguru*. Bourdillon stated that according to the locals, the spirit had not appeared in a medium for more than fifty years. Bourdillon (1979a: 85-86) explained that eventually the local chief persuaded the district commissioner to expel the medium from the area following the medium's suggestion that the wrong man had been appointed chief. The element of treason and the attempt to depose a reigning sovereign by suggesting the legitimacy of another person is also related to the *Dzivaguru* and its mediums. Silveira was accused of doing the same thing for *Chapute*.

Another important element is the use of the bark of trees and of the wooden pole. Silveira was accused by the *Ngangas* that he was seen for several days walking naked from the waist up near the palisade of the house of the king from where he took the bark of trees and tied it to his shirt. This act was said to be followed by a lightning that broke a pole in the door of the king. According to the oral traditions presented by Bourdillon (1972: 115), Karuva was accused of the same thing:

"*Chigango* [the first person to come to this country] visited *Nhenhene*. There he found Karuva cutting poles. Karuva sat down on the poles he had cut and asked Chigango why he had come to the place where he, Karuva, was cutting trees. Chigango said that he was wondering why Karuva was cutting trees in a land that was not his own."

The description of a half-naked Silveira is also related to the *Dzivaguru* and its mediums. Harold von Sicard (1946: 259) reported in his research on the tree cult in the Zimbabwe culture that in the Tavara area the "priest (*nanga*) naked approaches a *makombeva* tree. He hits its trunk on the eastern and western side with a *sukusa* (an axe handle) [...] and then takes the bark required for the trial". The *Dzivaguru* entry in the *Dictionary of African Mythology* describes him as follows: "Dzivaguru god of water was a simple man who wore his hair long and nothing but a skin about his loins" (Scheub 2000: 41). The resemblance between the local explanations for the murder of Silveira provided by Caiado, the main elements of the story of the *Dzivaguru-Karuva*, and the ethnographic and historical documents about the 16th and 17th century *Mongazes* is unequivocal.

The Links between the Execution of Chicara and the Murder of Gonalo da Silveira

In Portuguese documents from the 16th century onward, *Chicara* is regarded as a prototypical traitor, rebel, and usurper¹⁴. A precise ritual related to *Chicara*, performed during the coronation of a new Monomotapa, is described in one such document of the 18th century. The connection between the rituals performed during the coronation of the Mocaranga kings and *Chicara* derives from the fact that these rituals reenacted the tradition of the migration of Mutota and the conquest of the land by his son, Matpe. We presented above a version of this tradition, recorded by Albino Manoel Pacheco in the 1860s, in which *Chicara* is one of the main protagonists. In 1766, Antonio Pinto Miranda (1955b: 309) provided a straightforward account of the connection between the rituals performed during the coronation of the Monomotapa and *Chicara*:

“This same sacrifice [the execution of the Nevinga during the coronation of the Monomotapa] they do also to a Vazimo, Chicara, who was a chief and pretended through an uprising to be Emperor, and after he failed he drowned himself in a lake with all his generation, in order to release himself for the punishment for his rebellion and from the attack by the emperor at that period, and in memory of this exasperated resolution they make the mentioned sacrifice.”

In the *Descrio do Imperio de Manamotapa daquem do rio Zambeze*, from 1794, the funerary practices of the Monomotapa, which are held before the coronation rituals, include: “Playing the drums, being constantly in a state of war that is called *Pemberaoem* [...] both the men and the women [...] adorn their head with a strip of white cloth, and when this cloth is absent they paint their heads with white clay”¹⁵. The enactment of war or a state of war, called *Pemberaoem* or *Pembere*, has been mentioned as part of the funerary practices of all the heads of the political systems of the Mocaranga, ever since the 16th century (dos Santos 1609: Parte I,

14. The earliest mention of *Chicara* in Portuguese documents is probably in Bocarro’s *Decada XIII*. *Chicara* appears as the first one to rebel against Monomotapa Gatsi Lucere, preceding the revolt of Matuzianhe, one of the Monomotapa’s servants. *Chicara* is mentioned in Bocarro as Chiraramuro (muro is probably an adjective, the misspelling of the word Guru, which means the great). He is also mentioned as the ruler of the *Anatavara* (the wet lands or lake, in literal meaning) (BOCARRO 1899 : 274). Moreover, according to Antonio DA CONCEIO (2007 : 65), the most notorious rebel and usurper in the 17th century, *Changamira*, “dug up the bones of our companions to burn them. This he did, reducing them to ashes in order to use them in his ceremonies, in this way putting it into the heads of his men that he was invincible in relation to the Portuguese, We had news of all this from some Cafres”. Silveira was accused of the same act by the Ngangas : stealing bones from graves in order to use them for the purposes of magic.

15. AHU-CU-Mo-Caixa no. 66 — Doc. no. 55, f.a(v).

Livro I, Cap. 8; Bocarro 1899: 270). In the 19th century Sebastião Xavier Botelho (1835: 166; Silva 1998: 80) wrote that at the funeral of the Kiteve, “They all march in closed ranks as in the action of combat with much clamor”. The enactment of a state of war during the mourning period for the heads of the political entities of the Mocaranga is a representation of the war between Chicara and Matópe, mentioned by Albino Pacheco¹⁶. According to the author of the *Descrição*, the ornaments that people wear during this period of mourning parallel those that appear in the story of the war with Chicara (Santos 1609: Livro I, Cap. 8, Livro II, Cap. 16; Silva 1998: 79).

The rituals related to Chicara’s story, performed during the coronations of the Mocaranga kings, are the exact same actions that were carried out during Silveira’s murder. These rituals are documented in Dionízio de Mello e Castro’s *Notícia do Imperio Marave e dos Rios de Sena*, from 1763 (de Mello e Castro 1954), in Antonio Pinto Miranda’s *Monarchia Africana*, from 1766 (Miranda 1955b: 309), and in the *Descrição do Imperio de Manamotapa daquem do rio Zambeze*, from 1794¹⁷. De Mello e Castro (1954: 135) describes the sacrifice of the *Nevinga* as follows:

“Following the death of a reigning emperor, before another has been crowned, one of the lords of prime nobility, called *Nevinga*, governs for three days. At the end of these three days, the one who is to be the successor to the throne sends to instruct [the *Nevinga*] to die in order that he may ascend the throne, which is carried irrefragably, coercing the *Nevinga* to die by being strangled with a *Mucheca*, or ribbon.”

Three years later, Pinto Miranda (1955b: 309) writes about the same ritual that:

“In ancient times it was a custom that following the death of a reigning emperor, one of the lords, called *Nevinga*, reigned for three days. At the end of these days the elected emperor would send to inform him that he has to die because he wants to begin to govern. Following this message, death was offered to the said *Nevinga*, who was strangled with a ribbon. However, Emperor *Nhanpando* cancelled this abuse, both because he was a tyrant and because all the lords, knowing about this harsh condition, exempted themselves from assuming the office of the *Nevinga* [...]”

The *Descrição do Imperio de Manamotapa daquem do rio Zambeze*, from 1794, as well as Castro’s description, explains that a peaceful successions to the Monomotapa throne is a rare occurrence and that the throne

16. Regarding the ceremonies performed at the death of the Monomotapa, many Portuguese sources record the custom of suspension of the law and widespread violence, robbery, and killing before a new Monomotapa is chosen. As noted above, the acts carried out during the death and coronation of a new Monomotapa reenact the story of the migration of Mutota and the battle between Matópe and Chicara. This correlates with the accusation of the *Ngangas* that if Silveira is not killed he will suddenly disappear and the people of the land will begin killing each other without any apparent reason.

17. AHU-CU-Moç-Caixa no. 66 — Doc. no. 55.

is usually won by usurpation or war. This is confirmed by Mudenge's documentation of succession to the Monomotapa's throne from the 17th to the beginning of the 20th century (Mudenge 1988: 79). In 1763, de Mello e Castro (1954: 138) explains the fate of the beaten Monomotapa if the throne is won by war or usurpation:

"The Emperor who dies on the occasion of battle / it is prohibited to any *Munhai* to kill him or injure him / being defeated by his adversary he is obliged to lean his back against a tree, and by picking up a branch of that tree he signals his surrender."

This excerpt is clearly related to the traditions regarding *Karuva* and the element of the tree. The continuation of this excerpt from Castro shows that the succession to the throne, whether peaceful or not, reenacts the tradition of the battle between Matópe and Chicara:

"Being subjected to the will of the victor, who puts him under custody; in that same place he is given for three days all the splendor and honors and at the end of these days he is notified that he must kill himself with a *Mucheca*, or ribbon, strangled. This execution is assisted by the *Matumbzes*, who are the dukes, marquises, and counts, and by their priests who serve as his executors in order to finally finish him" (*ibid.*).

Moreover, the vanquished Monomotapa, the *Nevinga*, or the traitor is executed by strangulation with a ribbon, referred to as a *Mucheca*, by the *Matumbzes* of the Monomotapa. Earlier in the text, Castro identifies these *Matumbzes* by their titles, one of them being the *Bucurume* (*ibid.*: 135), the only person involved in the execution of Gonçalo da Silveira identified by the two servants of Caiado who witnessed the act (Frois 1975: 54). This ritual is described in the *Descrição do Imperio de Manamotapa daquem do rio Zambeze*, written 30 years after Castro's description. The anonymous author of this document claims that:

"When the emperor is defeated in war, he cannot flee, and the victor cannot kill him in another manner than strangulation [...] the victor sends to build a big house made out of wood, and after this house is built the lords and priests grasp the defeated emperor from one side and from another, they take him into that house and strangle him [...]"¹⁸.

The descriptions of the execution of a traitor or rebel in the 18th century, which as we saw are related to the myth of *Chicara* and reenact it, correlate with the acts reported by Caiado's servants to have been performed during the murder of Gonçalo da Silveira. Silveira was strangled to death with a ribbon inside a hut after his arms and legs were held by his executors, one of whom was the *Mucurume*.

18. AHU-CU-Moç-Caixa no. 66 — Doc. no. 55.

Recent scholarship on pre-colonial African history emphasized the need to apply and develop new methodological tools in order to reconstruct local voices and ideologies from early European documents (Chouin 2001). Thornton's work on the African perception of the slave trade and on Christianity in the kingdom of Kongo, and Macgaffey's work on early encounters between Africans and Europeans demonstrated our ability to gain deep and broad understanding of important historical process by taking account of the ways in which these processes were understood and interpreted from a local point of view, according to local worldviews and conceptualizations (MacGaffey 1994, 2005; Thornton 2003, 2013). The present article continues this effort by showing the ways in which a broad historical knowledge about the religion and culture of pre-colonial African societies can be gained by reconstructing local understandings and perceptions of specific events.

Both in early documents and in modern scholarship the murder of Gonçalo da Silveira is regarded as a key moment in the history of the Portuguese presence in Africa and of the political and social systems along the Southern bank of the Zambesi. I have shown that this event cannot be assessed without exploring its local meanings. I reconstructed the local interpretations of this event first by detecting and singling out the information embedded in the contemporary documents concerning the murder that was provided by local interlocutors. Next, following an explanation of the biases that may be present in the accounts of the murder, I contextualized this information by cross-checking it with extant ethnographic and historical documents from the same period and from later ones. The article shows that Silveira was killed because he was regarded as a traitor and believed to be possessed by the spirit of the *Dzivaguru-Karuva* and *Chicara*, who was sent by a *fumo* named Capote, of the Mongazes group. Following the murder, there were no repercussions for the Portuguese in the Zimbabwe of the Monomotapa and in the region, suggesting that in the local perception the act was not associated with the Portuguese as a group.

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ABSTRACT

The martyrdom of the Jesuit father Gonçalo da Silveira is considered both in early Portuguese documentation and in modern scholarship as a very significant event which had substantial implications on the course of the history of the Portuguese presence in southeastern Africa. The present article provides a new interpretation of this event by reconstructing and unfolding its local meanings using contemporary and subsequent Portuguese historical and ethnographic written documentation and oral traditions of the population of the region. By doing this, this article challenges orthodox historical narratives of a region relatively rich in written historical documents by demonstrating our ability to understand the manner in which historical events were interpreted from an indigenous point of view.

RÉSUMÉ

Les motifs d'un meurtre. Conceptualisations culturelles locales du martyr de Gonçalo da Silveira en 1561. — Le martyr du père jésuite Gonçalo da Silveira est considéré aussi bien dans la documentation portugaise que dans l'académie moderne comme étant un événement significatif qui a eu des répercussions sur l'histoire du Portugal en Afrique du Sud-Est. Le présent article fournit une nouvelle interprétation de cet événement en reconstruisant et en déployant ses significations locales, utilisant la documentation historique et ethnographique portugaise écrite ainsi que les traditions orales de la population de la région. En examinant et interrogeant les récits historiques d'une région largement documentée historiquement, cet article met en lumière notre capacité à comprendre la manière dont les événements historiques ont été interprétés d'un point de vue local.

Keywords/Mots-clés: Gonçalo da Silveira, Monomotapa, Mwene Mutapa/*Gonçalo da Silveira, Monomotapa, Mwene Mutapa.*