

Healing the Past: The Case of the Zion Church in Maputo, Mozambique

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In this paper I will analyze the healing practices of the different churches I observed during my fieldwork in 2010, that took place in the Zion Church in Maputo and Matola. Zion Church, classified as AIC, *African Independent Church*, is a transnational phenomenon that spread in South Africa at the beginning of 20th century by the action of North-American missionaries.

The Zion church was introduced in Mozambique by the local workers returned from the South African mines during the colonial period, but its diffusion in the country became considerable after the economic liberalization of the 80's and, especially, after the end of the civil war in 1992.

Nowadays, the Zion church, whose principal characteristic is that of healing and exorcising evil spirits through the Holy Ghost's force, is one of the most popular religious movements in southern Mozambique, although it is often depicted as the religion of the marginalized people.

In Maputo, Zion church is a heterogenic reality; each church has, in fact, its peculiar way of healing and bargaining with spirits. Being a 'Zion' implies different ways of experiencing the world, coping with spirits, reworking the past, and interpreting local cosmologies. In fact, the Holy Ghost is just one of the many healing spirits helping people to restore their life.

I will discuss how church members, leaders, prophets and patients come to terms with affliction, interpreting it and manipulating the world of the ancestors and spirits.

Thereafter, I will show how the healing process among Zion Church is a long negotiation of meanings between prophets and patients, through which they attempt to manage and, at the same time, exploit a "heathen" past. This memory of the past, embodied in evil spirits, is experienced as a dangerous legacy which may threaten people life, provoking poverty and family problems.

Finally, by presenting the life story of two woman prophetess - pastors, I will discuss how women play a relevant role in the churches and how they usually lead not only the healing processes, but the whole community church, subverting the general idea of a hierarchy based on the power of men.