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“Healing the past: Zion Churches in Maputo, Mozambique”

1. Introduction

Today I would like to present to you some preliminary reflections about my fieldwork in Maputo within Zion churches, one of the most widespread religious movements in Southern Mozambique.

The aim of my PhD research is to analyze the reasons for the huge spread of Zion churches in the geographical area of the “Big Maputo”, which includes Matola district, with its 600.000 habitants. My research is especially oriented toward the study of the therapeutic practices provided by these churches and the understanding of local concepts of illness and suffering.

In 2010 I worked intensively with four churches, three of which were located in Bairro (neighborhood) T3¹, which belongs to Matola City, and the fourth one in the centre of the capital Maputo, at the heart of which is generally called *Xilungwine* (the place where Whites live, or where Portuguese-speaking people live) or *Cidade de Cimento* (City of Concrete), traditionally seen as the developed area of Maputo where middle-class people live and work.

During the fieldwork I have constantly participated in the nocturne cults during the week, attended Sunday masses, took part in healing session, and collected interviews of several members of the leadership, regular members of the churches, and patients

¹ I decided to work in T3 because it is a semi-rural area, situated at the border line between Matola District and Maputo, close to the Infulene River Valley, where people of the neighborhood have their *machamba* (cultivated fields). Latter, I managed to find a church in a more urban area of Maputo, and through a friend, I found an interesting parish in the centre of Maputo, which I really didn't expect to come across.

who only transitionally requested for treatments and therapeutic support of the prophets and pastors.

Today I would like to present the “path” I went through, starting from the literature I examined, before leaving for Maputo, on the Zionist churches in Southern Africa (and other prophetic churches in Africa in general), and more specifically about Mozambique, up to the discovery of a very heterogeneous reality during fieldwork. Fieldwork opened a new perspective on what it means to be Zion in Maputo. Far from being a homogeneous and standardized phenomenon, Zion churches presented themselves as huge containers of the most different meanings and elaborations of practices.

This underlines the strong agency leadership has in this context, and the constant negotiation of meanings with its members and patients. Each church, as I will show ahead, is a space allowing leaders to create new practices, new forms of power and new moral interpretations of the past and the present. So, fieldwork observation confronted me with a richness of contents, realities and spirits, which, I confess, I did not expect to be so variegated.

2. Brief introduction to southern Mozambican cosmology

In Mozambique, events related to suffering, illness or misfortune of a person or family cannot be reduced merely to a material causality or only to biomedical factors.

Illness is rarely a totally natural fact but rather it reveals dynamics and interconnections within society, visible and invisible realms, dead and living persons. Therefore, misfortune is commonly related to a rupture of the social order, to something lacking or messy in the relationship with ancestors and other spirits not necessary linked to the family.

In order to maintain the well-being, individuals have to respect their relationship with their ancestors, who are strong protective entities, and try to manage all eventual spiritual imbalances they might pass through.

The spirits known as *tinguluve* (in Changane language), or *vakokwane* (grandparents), are the ancestors, the spirit of a dead person considered a former member of the family. There is another important category of spirits, of stranger origin in their majority, who lived in an old past, called *svikwembu* (singular: *xikwembu*). These are spirits inherited by an individual, which have the capacity to possess her/him and then to “work”

through her/him. *Svikwembu* invest the person they possess with powerful skills of divination, of catching evil spirits and of healing. So, whoever is possessed by them usually turns into a traditional healer.

The different combination of these spirits creates different specializations of traditional healing. The most powerful figure is represented by *Nhamussoro*, whose spirits are able to practice the act of *kufemba* (the capacity of catching the evil spirits within a patient and of being temporarily possessed by them, in order to make them speak through the healer's body).

As I will show later, the understanding the local cosmology is necessary in order to analyze the reality of Zion churches in the context of Maputo.

3. The Zion Church in Southern Mozambique

Zion Church is classified as AIC, *African Independent Church* (Oosthuizen 1966; Anderson 2001), and represents today a transnational phenomenon circumscribed to Southern Africa regions.

Its origin goes back to Zion City, in Illinois (U S), where in 1896 the preacher John Alexander Dowie founded the *Christian Apostolic Catholic Church*.

In Southern Africa, the first Zion churches appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century in South Africa, under the influence of some North-American preachers.

Although their roots were North-American, in South Africa Zion churches have grown in an autonomous way, developing as a religious movement of the black population, specifically linked to the economical and political context of the Apartheid policy, and to the process of industrialization. Zion churches distanced themselves from missionary churches and distinctively constructed their identity as belonging to the black population. Jean Comaroff (1985) describes Zion churches in South Africa as a sort of counter-culture movement, a coherent answer for a huge majority of the population to a dominant cultural and economic order, able to synthesize the universe of individuals marginalized by the modern system.

In Mozambique, Zion churches were introduced during the colonial period by the Mozambican miners returning from South African and Rhodesian mines. However, as Cruz e Silva (2001) argues, its proliferation became significant especially since the decade of 1980s, with economical liberalization policies, and after the end of the civil

war in 1992. In fact, with the weakening of the socialist policies, it developed a more opened political space and the weakened State started to entrust more responsibility to the civil society as NGOs, churches, and associations.

Today the spread of Zion churches in Mozambique is going through an intense phase. Many churches are not yet officially registered and it is quite difficult to get a trustworthy statistic of the real existing members.

However, following data of the last census in 2007, in southern provinces - Maputo, Gaza and Inhambane – as well in the central provinces - Manica e Sofala – Zion churches adherents represent the majority of Christian population, surpassing the Catholics and members of mainline protestant churches.

According to Agadjanian (the author of one of the rare papers about Zion churches in Mozambique), there is a large variety of Zion churches in Maputo, but all of them generally answer to a fundamental common characteristic: “the Holy Spirit invocation, and the divine healing realized by its miraculous action” (1999: 416).

The major feature of Zion church is being predominantly a healing church. So, for Agadjanian (1999) and Seibert (2005), health problems, frequently linked to children and fertility, associated with the possession of evil spirits, represent the fundamental motivation for people searching for church services.

Much as “traditional” religion does, Zion churches relate misfortune and illness to evil spirits and to witchcraft. Within this perspective, as Peter Fry (2001) sustains, the Holy Spirit, through the mediation of the Zion prophet, represents a superior force, the most powerful spirit whose actions against witchcraft and sorcery seem to be decisive.

Within churches, there is a well defined hierarchy, composed by archbishops, bishops (representative of a whole church and often the same founder of the institution), pastors, prophets, catechists, deacons, mostly men (Cruz e Silva 2001; Seibert 2005). The pastor’s role (in charge of a local parish), responsible for the sermons and preaching, and the prophet’s one, dedicated to healing aspects, are complementary and interdependent, and it is very common for a pastor to possess prophetic gifts (the gift of prophecy is the concrete source of authority).

Following Kiernan (1978), who studies the South African case, Zion churches especially heal feminine infertility, mental disorders, possession by evil spirits by purification and protective rituals with salt water (sea water mainly), ashes and salt. The use of the salt water and ashes (with emetic and purification effects), taken as “cold” elements, and totally natural, would make a clear distinction with the traditional healer,

who employs “hot” remedies, which he prepares with elements of the earth, as herbs, leaves and roots.

Another important feature that distinguishes Zion churches is the use of drums (with special and recognizable rhythms), protective dances performed during the cults (circular dances, called *dilisa* in Changane language), colored vestments and ropes (mainly red, white, green, blue, yellow and brown) which have a protective function against evil spirits.

Zion leadership and its members are commonly represented as part of the lower class, scarcely educated and illiterate. As the Mozambican sociologist Cruz e Silva (2001) stresses, although they a representative number of the population, Zion members remain at the margins of the Mozambican society, and Agadjianan (1999) argues that they are identified and auto identified as belonging to a “church of blacks”, different from the “white” churches such as the Catholic or the historical Protestant ones.

4. The meanings and “reasons” of Zion churches in the existing literature about Mozambican case

Seibert (2000) has argued that the strong adherence to Zion churches is represented not only by the importance of healing, but also by the offering of a new community for the individual. In the new social urban context, religious communities substitute old extended families, creating new social identities in which kin connections are weakened. Cruz e Silva (2001) stresses that it is not rare that contacts entrenched inside the religious community can help people to find a job and open little business. Therefore, the rapid process of urbanization, caused in part by the strong rural migration to the capital city, represents an important factor related to the growth of Zion phenomenon in the urban context. And furthermore, the growing social and economical inequality contributes to the increase of fear about witchcraft and evil spirits. In such a context, divine healing is an important mechanism of recruiting new church members.

In essay of 2000 about Zion churches in Chimoio, central Mozambique, Peter Fry shows the limits of the functionalist theory that relates the strength of Zion churches mainly to population’s need of living in community and reconstructing new social links after the long civil war. As Ana Bérnard da Costa (2004) sustains too, familiar networks have not been completely destroyed, and still represent a strong economical and social

reference. And more, the urban social networks constructed around a religious identity constitute a source of survival for the families themselves.

Following Fry (2000), the attractive force of Zion church should not only be related to the population's marginalization and privation, but it will be more useful to bring into focus its theology, its "cosmological efficacy"². As Fry argues, in Zion perspective, the Holy Spirit is superior and the most powerful spirit among all the others which belong to local cosmology. Actually, for Zion members, while only the Holy Spirit possesses the capacity to efficaciously alleviate the human suffering, misfortune interpretation remains assigned to social relationships, of both living and dead, as in a traditional vision. Local cosmology, in this way, is not denied, but positively reoriented in a new meaning, through the Holy Spirit.

I believe this perspective does not completely exhaust the complexity of Zion churches. In my experience, Zion churches present very different theologies depending on leadership background, manipulation of local cosmologies and Biblical training.

Fry stresses that in Zion vision illness and suffering are attributed not only to exterior evil (as the spirits), but are related to a possible sin committed by individuals. Whoever follows church rules, can protect her or himself from actions of demons, from ambition and envy of others. Therefore, misfortune can also be a form of God's punishment, related to individual incapacity to observe the rules of the congregation. For Fry, Zion churches celebrate the idea of an autonomous individual, complete and responsible, very different from the "person of tradition": this individual suffers or has a good life, depending on her/his capacity to follow the church's doctrine. For Fry, this represents a process of individualization, based on the relationship between individual, divinity and the church.

The ancestors' reality, however, is never questioned. Thus, while churches fight against the "evil of tradition", they testify its vitality, still representing a more efficient and definitive way to manage ancestors' or spirits' requests and protecting individuals and families from different kinds of enemies. So, conversion does not seem to represent a real break with the past (as happens in Pentecostal churches), because tradition continues to surround individuals, who are still burdened with all the "spiritual" charges of their own kinship.

² The concept of cosmological efficacy refers to the Lévi-Strauss (1978) theory about "Symbolic Efficacy".

Daneel (1992), in his work about AICs in Zimbabwe, offers a similar perspective: churches seem to offer a more original and effective contribution for misfortunes caused by witchcraft, transforming the perception that spiritual problems are incorrigible, and allowing a more stable social rehabilitation for church's members.

Mahumane's work (2008) about Zion church in Southern Mozambique comes close to Fry's thesis, but emphasizes much more on the theory of continuity within traditional cosmology and Zion vision. Mahumane highlights the fact that Zion reveals its meaning mainly within a cosmologic *continuum*, a wider knowledge with deep roots, in which relationships between the living and the dead play a vital role.

5. The “path” which I went through: initial considerations about my fieldwork in Maputo

As I have told before, I have concentrated my observation mostly in Bairro T3. However, during my work I had the opportunity to visit several churches in other neighborhoods, and I discovered that in each *bairro* of Maputo and Matola there is a conspicuous number of different little churches, called *zonas* or “parishes”³, which have as reference the principal church (called *sede* - headquarters - or “Cathedral”, when the establishment of the church is reasonably big) where is located the Archbishop or Bishop, usually the same founder of the church as an institution. Usually different denominations should be registered with their specific names at the Gabinete dos Assuntos Religiosos (Office of Religious Affairs), a specific department of the Ministry of Justice dedicated to the monitoring and the register of religious institutions.

These little “zonas” and parishes (each of them usually named with a Biblical name, such as Bethlehem, Samaria, Jerusalem, etc.), counting with 20 or 30 permanent members, structure themselves, in the majority of the cases, from a nucleus of a family. Churches are commonly localized in the backyard of the pastor's house, being a sort of personal property. Besides that, it is recommendable that the leaders be officially married couples. The pastor's wife turns automatically into a pastor too, as well as the wife of the catechist or the deacon turns into a catechist or a deaconess, even though they do not have any Biblical training or charisma (and vice-versa). And often there are

³ A “zona” is a “working in progress” church community, on formation, not yet official, which turns into a parish (official branch of the main church) when it reaches roughly 50 elements.

kin connections among the different levels of leadership itself. Each parish is a small nucleus where leadership exercises a micro power, in connection with others parishes (which rarely range beyond the Province territory) and other religious denominations in the neighborhood.

Leadership is mostly masculine, but, in my opinion, it would be more correct to say that the few men present in a church (attended mostly by women) are, almost invariably, the leaders. However, during fieldwork I had the opportunity to work intensively with three churches led by female pastors (and prophetesses) whose leadership and authority were strongly recognized by the whole community and even by their husbands, who benefited from their wives' leadership. And based on my close observation, it seemed to me pretty clear that, without them, their respective parishes and communities would be very weak, because they represented the real pivot of the church structure.

I have to say that during the beginning of my work, I was quite frustrated because it seemed very difficult for me to recognize the churches of T3 I was working with as "Zion". In the two parishes where I started to work there were no use of any special colored vestments that distinguish so well Zion members from other denominations (the pastors just appeared dressing a doctor's coat or a more elegant suit and tie). There were seldom colored ropes, called *svifungo*⁴, headscarf, *pula pula* (colored capes with crosses, stars, doves which are prophesized for eventual protections). Furthermore, people did not follow any food restrictions, they entered the church wearing shoes,⁵ they did not practice *ganzelo*,⁶ as the Book of Leviticus prescribes, and they rarely went to the beach of Maputo for purification ceremonies and prayers. All that I have listed here are common features of the Zion churches as described in most of the literature, and that I did find while living in Maputo. However,

⁴ *Svifungo*, (sing. *Xifungo*), literally means "swearing". They are threads of different colors (whose meanings can change in each singular church, from person to person, depending on different "schools of thought" of the leadership). It can be used as a singular thread, for smaller problems or permanent protection on the body (under the clothes), or different threads can be spliced to get bigger ropes (it is possible to mix the colors, following specific patterns) that patients or members have to dress during the cults or personal prayer in their houses. They have to be blessed by a pastor or a prophet and only through this blessing they can become efficacious.

⁵ Originally, as some pastors explained to me, Zion churches followed the Biblical mandate in which God orders Moses to enter barefoot in the sacred space.

⁶ *Ganzelo* (plural *Maganzelo*) was traditionally the sacred tree dedicated to the family ancestors in which offers and prayers were dedicated. It is a kind of "altar". The term was used to translate "holocaust", the sacrifice of animals, in the Changane version of the Bible.

these churches presented themselves as Zion, but a kind of more advanced Zion, “modernized”, as the leaders usually said, and in a process of transformation.

After three months of work, I found other interesting churches where I could get tired of colored tunics, rope, prophecies, animal sacrifices, dances and all that constitutes the common (Mozambican and mine) imaginary about Zion churches in Africa.

I worked intensively with a female pastor (and prophetess), 65 years old, whose healing practices were really liminal. In T3, she leads a parish and a real team of prophets that she forms and orients, since she is almost completely dedicated to healing practices. Pastor L. has a consultation room in the backyard of her house, where her church is situated too, and to where people from different places of Maputo and Matola go to be treated throughout the day.

She heals especially through visions, dreaming roots, herbs, ceremonies, vestments, ropes, candles, fruits, etc. And she does not talk about Holy Spirit, but about her *Svikwembu*, that, converted to the Christian God, give her the power to heal and see what is causing problems to a patient.

Then, as I have already said, I found a church (founded by a very charismatic old lady with a strong Catholic upbringing) in the centre of Maputo, constituted by middle class members and many young girls who have academic degrees.

While in many churches I observed in T3, attended mostly by people of the lower class, there is already a kind of “complex of being Zion”, in this church at the heart of the capital, leaders and members showed a strong and emphasized proud of being Zion, that is seen as a church with a huge power to heal and to restore order in people’s lives. And more, they almost flaunt and make explicit an alleged Zion identity that in other churches appears to be more implicit and unconscious.

They enter the church barefoot, use a good variety of vestments, colored tunics, ropes, headscarf (for women it is obligatory to enter the church head covered), prophetic sticks, they practice *ganzelo*, make purification ceremonies at the beach and dance around afflicted people, dedicating a major part of their cult to bless and treat people.

So, I can say that Zion is much more complex, varied and less standardized than I was expecting after having read monographs about it. To me, Zion seems to be a huge container, which different leaders and common persons fill, following their personal understandings, needs, and strategies, sometime giving a huge space to improvisation.

As I showed before, today there is a very strong effort, among some leaders, to “modernize” and “civilize” their Zion churches, perceived more and more as churches whose way of praying is not yet legitimate, because it is too close to the Old Testament and represents a too local way of understanding Christianity. Leaders, now literally bombed by the media messages of the Brazilian Pentecostal churches (heavily present in Maputo) and by a sort of educational campaign led by the Assembly of God (a nationalized evangelical church with North American origins), feel that “old” Zion Church is too closely and ambiguously linked to “tradition” and, for this reason, they perceive it as illegitimate.

I found several churches that do not want to be Zion anymore, but a kind of generic evangelical copy of it, having the Assembly of God as a model, where people can enter with their suit and tie, dress elegant clothes, and, in this way, where they can be more “modern” and more urban. Many leaders want uniforms, they want more formality, structure, organization and the respect that is given to Catholic Church or to other missionary churches. This desire becomes evident in the strong mimesis of the missionary churches, where the majority of the leaders and members grew up.

In my opinion, what must be stressed, in order to better understand this context, is that it cannot be said correctly that there is a main “Zion Church” with capital letter in Mozambique, as can be said about the Catholic, Anglican, or Methodist churches, for example. There does not exist in Mozambique a unique and homogeneous doctrinaire reference. So, in the specific historical and social context of this country, Zion churches, more than a concrete institutional reality, rather characterize themselves as a way of praying and operating which reformulate the local cosmology in different manners. And my work is to understand better the reasons for this kind of informal development.

I heard many times talks about the “Zion work” (*trabalho de zione*), which means the specific healing therapy through prophecy that Zion churches practice. And, most important, the Holy Spirit (*Moya wa Kwetsima*) is not always a meaningful spirit through which prophets heal and have visions. Usually *Svikwembu* remain more relevant entities able to allow prophets to “work”. In this way, prophecy career is not always accessible to everyone (but this depends on each church’s ideology) because it is very similar to traditional healer career, in which the “gift” has to be inherited. So, in order to prophesy in a way that is in conformity with the church, *Svikwembu* have to accept the Word of God and “convert” their power to the service of the Lord leaving traditional realm.

Today there are hundreds of little parishes in each locality of Maputo (it is difficult to give a statistic because many churches are not yet officially registered), and they separate one from another constantly, founding new headquarters, where a pastor of a old church soon becomes a bishop of his new own congregation.

At present, in order to be officially registered at the Office of Religious Affairs, leadership of each parish (especially pastors) must present an official Biblical training. However, there is no biblical training or school offered by any Zion church. Zion churches are all very little (with some exceptions) and they do not have organizational support and structure able to offer any kind of Biblical school. So, leaders usually attend courses offered by other evangelical denominations such as the Assembly of God (the Biblical training they offer is free and much appreciated by Zion leaders), Watch Tower, and other evangelical denominations. In this way, those who attend these classes get a new vision about what they have to propose to their church.

There are leaders who decide that is necessary to take off tunics, dressing only suit and tie or a uniform,⁷ those who do not accept anymore the use of ropes for blessing and protecting people and, more important, there are those who reject thinking that *mademonio*, the evil spirits, are traditional spirits (*espíritos da tradição*) or ancestors, and completely reformulate their vision and healing practices. And finally, there are leaders who decide to get out their church, leaving Zion denomination and found a new church closer to their vision (often they found a church of generic evangelical denomination, closer to the theology of the Assembly of God).

Inside the same church, each leader carries her/his specific view about evil spirits (*mademonio*) and healing practices, and church remains united as far as the leaders tolerate and accept reciprocally these differences (and as far as they do not question the highest leadership itself).

One of the key questions, to understand this diversity, was asking to pastors and members what the meaning of the word *mademonio* was.

There are those who say, after many years of Biblical school of the Assembly of God, that (*ma*)*demonio* is a kind of a fallen angel (as in the Bible) able to disguised himself as an ancestor, but the majority recognizes that *mademonio* are spirits of dead people (not

⁷ It is important to stress the emphasis leadership put on aesthetic. Many pastors see in suit and tie a way to be recognized as members of a “real” church, legitimate and modern in front of the whole community.

necessarily ancestors), that had a real life and can trouble one's life. These spirits can possess a person for different reasons, for example for old acts of witchcraft that are inherited through the lineage (that pass from generation to generation), or witchcraft acts caused by envy or hate at present time. Mostly, the heaviest spiritual problems have roots within families and the attacks of strangers are more manageable and resolvable.

I have to say that, initially, none seemed interested in explaining to me why and how spirits of dead people come back to trouble and sometimes destroy people's life. It was very difficult for me to understand what was happening during the healing sessions, when a woman or a young girl, possessed by a *demonio*, was energetically treated by a prophet. I spend several months (I have to confess) wondering what *mademonio* were and becoming more and more curious about it.

Keeping on collecting interviews, observing rituals and ceremonies, after three or four months I understood that the majority of people maintain a very strong connection to local cosmology. There are different categories of spirits and it is important to stress that some spirits cannot be exorcised. The ancestors, *Tinguluve* or *Vakowkane* (or in Portuguese *vovós*, grandparents) are ontologically part of an individual, they cannot be separated from him, especially if they have the same name (*xarás*).

"Grandparents are not really *mademonio*", a bishop I interviewed explained to me. Ancestors, even if they are causing some problems at the present, cannot be exorcised, but it is necessary to satisfy their claims, and, if necessary, to convert them to Christianity. This is a very safe and useful way to calm them and make them definitive protectors of the family and the individual.

Categories of evil spirits, potentially dangerous for living people, are many and of different qualities, but in Zion churches they tend to be commonly classified with the term of *mademonio*, which is very generic and does not express the complexity of spirits related to it. It seems that *mademonio* (the spirits that can be exorcised) are traditional spirits outside of their family name (*apelido*) and their kinship, which possess or find themselves in an individual who does not belong to their own consanguinity. And possession by *mademonio* is mostly caused by witchcraft actions - people talk about *curandeirismo* or *xinyanganyanga* - which people inherited from their parents. These actions are not necessarily recent acts, as I have told before, but they find their roots (in the majority of the cases I have followed) in a "heathen" past (as people say) in which "our grandparents did a lot of rubbish (*porcaria*) with that witchcraft stuff!", as I have often heard.

So, it could be argued that an evil spirit is “matter out of place”,⁸ it is not the spirit of a dead person who was mean during his life - as I was naively thinking - because the human soul is intrinsically good. Mostly, an evil spirit is a dead person who comes back for a special revenge in a lineage (patrilineal or matrilineal) other than his own (maybe because he was killed during a war or a dispute) or is a spirit delocalized from his family name and used for acts of witchcraft.

The cases are many and very stratified, and it seems to me very important to understand these dynamics, because spirits speak about the past and the present, are very strong memories and may provide a crucial key to perceive how people interpret their society, their present, their life and the anxieties they are going through.

At the same time, spirits are manipulated ambiguously by Zion leaders, who insert them in a more dichotomist view of the reality, within which the present difficulties of Maputo society are projected toward a strong sense of a “guilt of the fathers” (the fact that they were not Christians but heathen, and that by using “witchcraft”, they compromised the living ones of today), a guilt that can be redeemed only by passing through the Christian faith. So, Christianity is perceived as a much more updated reality, strong enough to purify and clean a “wrong past”, and thus making the present safer.

In my opinion Zion leaders strategically exacerbate some aspect of local cosmology, exploring a diffused feeling of spiritual disorder, creating an increasing sense of instability and suspicions among families (those are accuses Zion traditionally directs to traditional healers) and fostering the feeling that an “African” individual will never be free from spirits and witchcraft attacks. People live in a constant fear of envy, and Zion churches position themselves not only as “problem solving” realities, but at the same time as places where people find confirmation about their fears.

More than offering a way to “domesticate modernity”, Zion is a place where people try to domesticate their history and their past, where leadership strategically manipulate elements of local cosmology in order to reinvent a history inserted in a vision where dichotomies such as tradition/modernity, civilized/not-civilized, Christian/heathen become very meaningful emic concepts, which mold many discourses and the way people construct their identities.

⁸ Mary Douglas, 1966. *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*.

Within Zion, a powerful kind of popular religious movement, people look for a meaningful purification of the past in order to restore their present life. And this situation speaks loudly about the dominant concepts that were integrated during the colonial times and the first missionary work. These dominant concepts and visions are not only reworked by social actors in order to make a new present order, but, in my opinion, they are still cause of suffering and torn identities. In the Zion vision, the past seems something similar to a curse, where all the present social problems are projected, pushing away individual responsibilities of what is perceived as personal failure, incapacity and family weakening.

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