

TANGAZA COLLEGE

Catholic University of Eastern Africa

**THE CONCEPT OF DEATH IN MACUA COMMUNITY:
CHALLENGE OF INCULTURATION**

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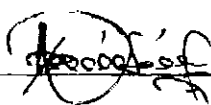
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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

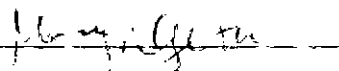
I hereby declare that the material used here in has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution.

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Signed:  _____

André Raúl, mccj

This Long Essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the College supervisor.

Signed:  _____

Dr. Mary N. Getui

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*...What is man that you should be mindful of him,
or the son of man that you should care for him? (Ps 8:5)*

I run short of words to express my sincere gratitude to you Lord God of my ancestors for giving me the most precious gift of life. You protect and guide me day and night. You are the only one who knows what lies ahead of me. In the darkest moments of my life you were always available to hold my hand and carry me in your arms. For this I say thank you very much Lord Jesus, Brother and Friend.

Special thanks go to my departed parents, Raúl Mwaleta and Silvia Wakati who joyfully will receive the reward that God prepared for them. You were and still are a source of encouragement and model of commitment and dedication in everything you did. Thank you for teaching me to love God and my brothers and sisters with an honest heart. May you together with all my ancestors and Christian saints intercede for me before *Muluku* (God).

I convey my gratitude to my brothers: Lázaro, Jaime, Armando, Victor, Cipriano, Tiago and sisters: Isabel and Elisabeth. Courage! In this moment of grief.

My vote of thanks goes to Dr. Mary Getui who has been tirelessly guiding me in this work. In the moments of great distress and frustrations I could hear a voice of a loving mother saying: "...Raúl, stand up and move on because the way forward is ahead, do not lose heart for Christ is with you right now, fix your eyes on him who can never forsake. You can make it, just cast all your worries onto Jesus for he cares for you..." Thanks for your motherly love and care, your patience and dedication. *Nyasae agoseseni*.

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I express my heartfelt thanks to my friends Tinah Kemunto, António Manganhe Natal, Br. Celestino, Peter Waweru, Srs. Silvina, Carmel Powell, Aleti Chris, Ms Rose, Franco M. Collins, and all those friends not mentioned by names here for their availability at the times I needed a caring shoulder to lean on.

I should not forget my family friends in Uganda Mr and Mrs Charles Okula and family who do not know how to repay for accepting me as their own son. I will always remember them wherever I will be.

To all people who directly or indirectly, in one way or another have contributed to the completion of this paper allow me to say: kuxukhuru, muitissimo obrigado, imbuya n'asanteni sana, thank you very much.

May the Lord reward you for your unlimited love and generosity.

André Raúl (Mwanene).

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The Macua look at the reality of death with certain "ambiguity" in the sense that they see it as a necessary step towards ancestorship. It is an essential, indispensable and definitive passage from the visible state of life (earthly) to the invisible. Death is not total destruction or annihilation of a person but through death one goes *owani* (home) or returns to Mount Namuli.¹ According to Macua understanding, death does not break the vital circle because a dead person still belongs to the family or clan. He/she lives a full and real life, for with death the person acquires "supernatural" power and becomes an intermediary between *Muluku* (God) and the living people.

However, death constitutes a moment of great crisis in the family and in the society at large. And whenever death strikes in the family, people grieve, wail and mourn desperately. For this reason death is feared and fought against in order to safeguard life, which is the highest and most precious gift from God. Death creates disharmony and panic in the society. At the same time, the Macua are unanimous about the universality of death, that is to say that death is a universal phenomenon whereby it does not choose some and leave others. Some proverbs will help us to understand the mind and conviction of the Macua concerning the universality of death. *Nakhwa nthavi na Muluku khuvo onihalela* which

¹ See the myth of the origin of Macua people below.

means death is (like) a hunting net of God, there is nobody who can escape it. In spite of this conviction that death is a universal phenomenon, the Macua still see it as something that occurs unexpectedly and without warning, as this proverb shows: *Nakhwa khunleya, onrwa ntoko nawiye* that is to say death is (like) a thief, it comes unexpectedly.

This ambiguity created in me some interest that led me to research on this topic so as to try to grasp this mystery and seemingly contradictory attitudes.

The questions that arise are, how can we as Christians explain the Christian understanding of death as a passage from this world (earth) to the heavenly kingdom of God? How can the paschal mystery be relevant in the daily life of the Macua? How can we make a connection between the Macua understanding of hereafter and the Christian doctrine of resurrection?

1.2 Statement of the Problem

During my Philosophical studies at Seminario Santo Agostinho in Maputo (Mozambique), I was asked to present a paper on Macua culture to the class when we were dealing with African Traditional Religion.² To my surprise when I started looking for the material, I realised that there were very little resources available and accessible in our national libraries. From this I came to realise that although the Macua are the largest ethnic group in Mozambique (about 34.5% of the whole population)³, their culture is still unknown to many due to lack of written sources.

This essay is aimed at providing some major information that will enable us to understand how the Macua view and deal with death. We shall tackle this topic basing ourselves on the issues such as illness and the response of the people to it; death and its

² The theme of the paper was "Birth in Macua Culture: a Celebration of Life".

³ *Jornal Noticias* (Mozambican Daily Newspaper), 1998, February 17, p.7-9.

causes, funeral rites and destiny of the dead people (the hereafter). Finally we shall concentrate on how to give the concept of death a new meaning in the life of the Christians.

The question of death and its consequences still puzzles the Macua today including those who have converted to Christianity. In several instances, the Macua have been accused by the missionaries and other Christian leaders of not having strong faith and trust as far as the destiny of the dead is concerned. Some others even went further to label the Macua as superstitious people because of the strong practice of ancestor veneration and the sacrifices they make to them. The widow/widower inheritance after the death of one of the partners undermines the Gospel values on marriage that teach monogamous marriage, one man to one woman. The disease of the time, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), is a real and serious threat to human life and therefore, needs to be addressed properly lest the entire community runs the risk of being wiped out.

Surely we cannot understand how the Macua people relate to death and understand the hereafter unless we know their social, cultural and religious background. To do so, we shall have the first chapter presenting the Macua community as it is today without forgetting its historical past. Therefore, it is important to mention right now that, like any given culture, the Macua have experienced many internal social, cultural and religious changes throughout history. These changes have been brought in through contacts with other people (neighbouring ethnic groups, Arab traders and Portuguese colonialists) or even due to internal developments within the culture dynamism. Education of the people and new religious belief systems: especially Christianity and Islam have also contributed to the cultural changes.

With a view of promoting and shedding light on the richness of the cultural heritage of the Macua, I developed great interest in writing about them (Macua) as a contribution for those who seek to know them better.

Due to the fact that the Macua are a very large community, and scientifically speaking we cannot cover all of them in this paper which is rather limited so we shall focus our study on the Macua living in Nampula, the northern province of Mozambique.⁴

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The first objective of this work is to highlight the Macua culture so as to help people (especially the missionaries) to know it by portraying its richness as regards the treatment and care they (Macua) give to their dead ones.

Second, to suggest some ways in which the process of inculturation can be carried out in order to affirm the Macua cultural beliefs, which are compatible with Christian teaching. The values to be upheld include solidarity with the bereaved family, appreciation of life as a gift from God, belief that death is not a total destruction or annihilation of life and belief in the life hereafter. Then ways to “purify” those negative elements which go against the gospel values such as fear of the dead and fear of the spirits.

In short I would say that the aim of this work is to look for ways to respond to the challenge put to Macua by Jesus himself when he asks, “Who do you, Macua, say that the Son of Man is?” (Mt 16:13-20). People know and understand somebody according to the way they were brought up and according to their cultural understanding. In my opinion, when Jesus asks the Macua who he is, he implicitly questions how the Macua in their own cultural set up look at and perceive who Jesus is for them. Once they know they will love him in their own way.

⁴ See the subdivision of Macua below.

1.4 Research Methodology

In this work we have used basically three major types of sources: written articles both published and unpublished. Interviews⁵ with some Macua elders and Catholic priests of Macua background (such as Rev. Frs. Mario Maloquiha and Ezequiel Maloa). And some expatriate missionaries both Catholic and Protestant, who have dedicated their time studying Macua culture and have given their contribution to this work either through interviews or non-published papers.

Macua culture cannot be tackled in isolation because it has a lot in common with other African cultures, especially the Bantu speakers. So I have also used a lot of material which deals with other African cultures.

I also took into account my own personal experience and observations as I was born and brought up in the Macua community.

Church Documents, magazines, dictionaries, pamphlets, articles, encyclopaedias and other material relevant to this topic have been consulted.

1.5 Structure of the Chapters

This work is made up of four main chapters. The first chapter presents the Macua community: Who the Macua are, their geographical location within Mozambique, their family life and socio-political organisation. All this is meant to provide some important information about the Macua community: their practices and customs and religious beliefs.

The second chapter deals directly with the Macua understanding of sickness, care for the patients, death and the funeral rites, widow and widower inheritance, ancestor veneration and finally the belief in life after death.

⁵ The interviews were conducted between 1993 to 1998 in view of writing a paper on African Religious Studies. However, due to the fact that the material collected was more than the paper was requiring (I only wrote about Birth as a rite of passage) I decided to make use of the remaining material in this work. While in Tangaza College, some questionnaires were sent to Macualand to collect more information on the matter.

In chapter three, we shall present the theological analysis whereby an attempt will be made to point out what the Scriptures and teaching of the Church say about death, eternal life and communion of the saints vis-à-vis Macua culture.

The fourth and final chapter will be dedicated to practical suggestions for inculturation, that is to present or re-express the gospel in forms and terms proper to a culture.⁶ In other words, to make Christianity more relevant in the Macua life so as to avoid double standard of living. So that a Macua can be a Christian without stopping being Macua. "To be a full Macua and a full Christian".

⁶ A. Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, p. 32.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MACUA PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

To know the culture of a given group of people is to penetrate the deepest secrets of its being, its feelings, its sensitivities and its way of conceiving the world and life. In this chapter we shall briefly present the origin and meaning of the word Macua, Macua Community with its main characteristics, geographical location, sub-divisions of Macua, their origin (myth), socio-political organisation, and the role of the *Atata* (maternal uncle).

1. The Origin and Meaning of the Word Macua

The word Macua stands for the names both of the people and of the language they speak. However, there is not much consensus among historians and anthropologists who have researched on Macua community, as to the meaning and possible root of the word 'Macua'.

Lerma presents two possible hypotheses as to how to understand the meaning of the word Macua. The first hypothesis suggests that the word might have come from a pejorative and negative nickname given to them by the surrounding people due to the Macua's bloody and unending wars with the neighbouring ethnic groups. If this is the case, the word *amakhuwa* means, or is equivalent to savages, barbarians, and rude or uncivilised people.

The second hypothesis that Lerma gives is that the word might have come from the root *Ma-koa*, which means the one who is from Goa. In this case the word would stand for "those who come from Goa". Traditionally it was believed that the Macua came from one of the islands of the Indian Ocean. The island was identified with Goa. The reasons behind this belief are not clear so some further research would need to be done on this link to Goa.⁷

Luis Wegher, in his book *Um Olhar Sobre o Niassa*, maintains that the word Macua comes from the verb *okhuwa*, which means, "to keep secret". He argues that the traditional Macua were specialised in keeping secrets about their life, their ceremonies and especially the initiation rites and the secret societies. He goes on to say that they came to be called *Amakhuwa* (*M'mkhuwa*= singular) which, with the evolution of the language, gave origin to the present 'Macua'. Of course, this evolution of the word was enforced by the Portuguese colonial rule because the Macua themselves still use the original form: *M'makhuwa* or *Amakhuwa*⁸. We need to point out that these are just hypotheses by which anthropologists try to grasp the meaning of the word Macua. Therefore, there is still room for further research in order to unveil the meaning of this word.

Wegher goes further to suggest that this interpretation of the word (that is the word Macua comes from *okhuwa*) is the most probably the right one. He defends this position by saying that the Macua are, in fact, very serious people, with few words, prudent and who do not reveal their problems and clanic mysteries to any stranger or foreigner.⁹

1.1 The Macua Community and Its Geographical Location

⁷ For further information on the matter cf. Francisco Lerma Martinez, *O Povo Macua e a Sua Cultura*, Lisboa: Ministério de Educação, p. 39. The fact is that the Macua-Chirima, due to the influence of their language which tends to be open and soft, have problems in pronouncing G. For instance, for them the G and K sound the same. Likewise B and P and D and T are pronounced alike.

⁸ *Amakhuwa* (*Mmakhuwa* = singular) are the people, *Emakhuwa* is the language that the Amakhuwa speak and the *Omakhuwani* is the land inhabited by the Amakhuwa.

⁹ Luis Wegher, *Um Olhar Sobre o Niassa*, Maputo: Edições Paulinas, p. 125.

The Macua community is a Bantu group of people who live in the central and northern part of Mozambique. The Macua are found in four provinces, namely Zambezia (the central part of the country), Nampula, Niassa and Cabo Delgado (in the north). They are bordered in the North by Rovuma River, East by Indian Ocean, South by Licungo River and West, by Lugenda River.

Apart from the Macua found in Mozambique, we can also find Macua, though in small groups, in some other African countries such as Malawi and Tanzania.¹⁰ The Macua are also found in Madagascar, Seychelles and Mauritius islands where they were taken by the slave traders between the 18th and 19th centuries.

Here we need to recall the fact that the Macua were very famous slave traders. They used to practice slave trade with the Arabs along the Mozambican coast long before the arrival of the Portuguese in 15th century. Of course, with the coming of the Portuguese into Macualand the slave trade intensified even more.

They are agriculturists and practice small-scale trade with neighbouring people. Those living along the coast depend basically on fishing, and trade with inland people. As already noted, the Macua are about 34.5% of the whole population, and thus are the largest ethnic group in the country.

1.2 Subdivisions of the Macua

The Macua community is made up of various small groups with small dialectical variations depending either on the internal changes or external influences with neighbouring ethnic groups.

Basically the Macua are divided into three main groups:

¹⁰ Lerma, *O Povo Macua e Sua Cultura*, p.37. Some Scholars suggest that the Macua migrated to Malawi around 19th century either due to harsh conditions of life imposed on them by the Portuguese colonial rule or because of severe famine which was caused by prolonged drought in the areas of Zambezia and Nampula in 19th century. In 1970s and 1980s there was another massive exodus of Macua to Malawi and Tanzania due to liberation struggle of Mozambique against the Portuguese and because of the devastating guerrilla war in the country which ended in 1992.

Macua-Lomwe, found mainly in Zambezia and Niassa provinces; Macua-Meto, located in some parts of Cabo Delgado and Niassa provinces and Macua of the interior, known also as Macua-Chirima in Nampula and Niassa provinces.

Apart from these major groups, we can also find other subdivisions within the Macua community that need to be mentioned briefly here. For instance, we can find the Rovuma group, which lives close to the Tanzanian boarder, in Cabo Delgado Province; the Chaca group found in the southern part of Cabo Delgado and north of Nampula provinces; the Chirima group, in Nampula and Niassa region, and finally the groups of Macua on the coast (the Marrovene, the Nampamela, the Mulai, the Mokingual and the Nahara)¹¹.

Despite the fact that the Macua are made up of different groups, they make up one people. To this point, Lerma points out three major uniting factors: Common place of origin: all the groups and subgroups of Macua trace their origins, or believe that they were created by *Muluku* (God) in Mount Namuli. In spite of these dialectical differences, we can still find that there is indeed that “Macuaness”, the essence or identity, which gives them a strong sense of belonging to the same root and common ancestor.

The second factor is the use of the same language, the *Emakhuwa* though there are few differences and dialectical variations due to the peoples with whom they came into contact over the years. The third factor is the strong cultural homogeneity. In other words, all the groups have basically the same culture, the same tradition, the same customs and values. There is certainly a common characteristic for all the Macua people, the “Macuaness”.¹²

Alberto Viegas agrees with Lerma by saying that

the use of the same proverbs in problem resolution, in initiation rites, the exoclanic marriage, matrilineal regime, belief in one God called *Muluku* and ancestor veneration are but few reasons to accept the fact that all groups make the Macua community.¹³

¹¹ A. P. Prata, *Gramática da Língua Macua e Seus Dialectos*, Portugal: Tipografia dos Missões Cocusjães, 1960, p.6

¹² Lerma, pp38-39

¹³ Alberto Viegas, *Conselho de Um Velho Macua...* unpublished paper, p. 2.

1.3 The Myth of the Origin of Macua People

When we hear the word myth, we immediately think of a narration of miraculous happenings or imaginary events or even baseless legendary accounts. But in fact, myth is first of all, a form of thinking which makes a reality accessible to human grasping. *In myth the person makes an effort to make the reality manageable*, says Cuppen¹⁴. Cuppen goes on to say, *to think mythically is to take a complete position regarding a given reality*. So we can even say that myth is a structure of the first knowledge which a person has of himself/herself and of the world.

On this regard, Elia Ciscato claims *myth tells a 'sacred truth' because it narrates an event that took place at the time of origin; it refers to when the thing began to exist (the real being)*.¹⁵ With these brief considerations about the importance of myths and the role they play in society, let us now see what the Macua say about their origin. The oral tradition of the Macua people asserts that the first Macua couple was created by *Muluku* at Mount Namuli¹⁶. Every Macua values and treasures Mount Namuli as sacred because it is from here that life “originated”. In fact, to speak about Mount Namuli is the same as to talk about the personal and social identity of the Macua community. In other words, all aspects of Macua (social, cultural, moral and religious) are oriented towards this sacred Mountain.

For example, it is very common to hear, in various rites of passage of Macua (birth, naming, initiation, enthronement of a new king, death and burial), people constantly making some reference to Mount Namuli because it is the core of identity that every Macua clings to. For instance, you can hear expressions like this: *miyo kinkhuma oNamuli ni*

¹⁴ G. M. M. Cuppen, *A Religiosidade dos Metos*, Likhulezi, Montfort Press, p. 21

¹⁵ Ciscato, E., *Ao Serviço Deste Homem: Apontamentos de Iniciação Cultural*, Maputo: Edições Paulistas, 1989, p. 11.

¹⁶ Mount Namuli is situated at central province of Zambezia (Mozambique). This is a sacred mount for Macua because they believe that they were created here by God.

kinrowa oNamuli (I come from Namuli and I will return there). This expression means "...we know where we come from, we know our origin and know where we are going, therefore, we have a purpose and destiny in life".¹⁷ And the myth goes as follows:

Long, long time ago, *Muluku* got "tired" of living alone, so he decided to create a human being to give him company. Since *Muluku* was ever busy creating the world and all it contains, the newly created *mulopwana* (man) started feeling lonely and sad because there was nobody to talk to.

One day the man went hunting and during the process of chasing the animals, he stumbled on a stone and fell down, hurting himself. He, then, started bleeding a lot and, due to the pain he was undergoing, fell asleep. But when he awoke he found that the water in the nearby river was full of his blood. He was curious to see where his blood was going and so he started to follow the stream of water downward. Surprisingly he found that his blood was concentrated in one spot; while examining that "miraculous" scene, he realised that there was a human person being formed in the midst of the blood. And behold a beautiful *muthiyana* (woman) was being created. Then, the man was so taken up and excited that he forgot his pain. He took her out of the water and built a small hut for her. Because she was feeling cold; he prepared fire for her to warm herself. Since the woman was very weak and fragile, he forbade her to do hard work such as hunting or collecting wild fruits. Instead, she should always remain in the house making necklaces and bracelets with beads to decorate herself so that she could become even more beautiful. So the conjugal union of this first couple gave birth to some children, who in turn multiplied and filled Macualand up to this day. This is the way the myth presents the creation of the first Macua couple at Mount Namuli.¹⁸

¹⁷ Lerma, op. Cit. p. 41

¹⁸ Interview with Nikupa Sipaneke, a Macua elder (aged around 80 years), interviewed on 15th of June 1994. This version was confirmed by Mario Malokiha, a Macua diocesan priest who has done some valuable research work among the Macua of Nampula in view of inculturation in the diocese. The interview with him was conducted on 23rd of December 1995.

As we can see this myth is very important for the Macua people because it touches the very core of their existence. It also has a vital religious dimension in the sense that it touches *Muluku*, the Creator of everything. He is the Creator of heaven and earth, of people, animal, plants, etc. In other words, Mount Namuli is regarded as the place where *Muluku* lives and who, seated in the high mountain, is able to look after the Macua people and control the whole world.

It too has social and relational dimensions for it points out the sense of belonging to a specific group of people. The myth says that *Muluku* created a group of people who are relational, friendly and united.

Finally, we can say that the myth makes some reference to the finality, or destiny and purpose of the people; that is to say, they are created to live here on earth and then return to Namuli, the place of *Muluku*. That is why for Macua, like many African ethnic groups, death is a serene and joyful return to the place from which they came, as we shall see ahead when we concentrate on the rite itself.

On salvation history and anthropology tell us that the Macua came to Mozambique during the great migration movements of the Bantu people from the Great Lakes region. Many authors say that the Macua might have been the third Proto- Bantu nucleus which migrated from the region of the Great Lakes and moved downwards to Zambezi and Chire valley. Here they stopped and divided themselves into various groups, which later followed different routes. The most recent hypothesis suggests that this Bantu migration took place during the first five centuries AD. According to this hypothesis, the first Macua community had established itself in the northern part of the present Mozambique especially along the big rivers such as Lurio, Lugenda and other large rivers and swamps where agriculture was favourable for their sustenance.¹⁹

¹⁹ C. T. Cruz e Silva, *O Sul de Mocambique e o Povoamento da Africa Sul Oriental na Idade do Ferro Inferior*, Maputo, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, (Non-Published Research Paper), 1978, pp. 9-11.

2. Religious Beliefs

Speaking about the religious beliefs of the Macua, they are very religious people. Cuppen says that the Macua were the first ones in the whole country to receive Islam around the ninth (IX) century through their contact with Arabs from Persia. Today Islam has very many followers²⁰ among the Macua especially along the coast, and now it is spreading into the interior through the Macua businessmen and women from the Coast. In 1947 the Comboni Missionaries were called in by Cardinal C. T. de Gouveia, the Archbishop of Maputo (by then Lourenço Marques), to work among Muslims in the diocese of Nampula, which is ninety eight percent populated by the Macua community. By then, Muslims constituted the second largest religious group after the one of followers of African Traditional Religion.²¹ In short, the highest percentage of Muslims in the whole country is found in Macualand.

The Macua were also the first people to welcome Christianity. The first mass in Mozambique was celebrated in 1498 at Ilha de Moçambique²². This first mass is regarded as the arrival of Christianity in Mozambique. In fact, in 1998 Mozambique celebrated five hundred years of Christianity in the country. Apart from these major religions, a great majority of Macua still practise traditional religion.

3. Family Life

The Macua people are matrilineal, that is to say that descent is through the woman, Shorter says, matriliney is a custom by which inheritance of rank, name and property is not

²⁰ It is estimated that around 85 per cent of the population along the coast of Nampula province are Muslims.

²¹ Agostoni, T., *History of the Institute of the Comboni Missionaries: Outlines*, Rome: Comboni Missionaries General Secretariat for Formation, 1996, p. 125.

²² Ilha de Moçambique is a small but very historical island located in Indian Ocean in the northern part of Mozambique. It geographically belongs to Nampula province. It was in this island that for the first time the Arabs came into contact with Mozambican coast (by then not yet a nation). Through this island the Portuguese entered and conquered Mozambique for almost five hundred years, from 1489 to 1975. Another aspect that makes Ilha de Moçambique a very historical place is that it was once the capital city of Mozambique before it (Capital City) was transferred to Maputo.

from father to son but from mother's brother to her son.²³ The identity and inheritance are passed on to the children through a brother-sister relationship rather than through husband-wife. Kirwen asserts that a father, in the matrilineal society, is not the source of either lineage identity or inheritance for his own progeny, but he fulfils this function for the children of his sister.²⁴ Among the Macua there is no dowry or bride-wealth but there are certain conditions that one needs to fulfil if he wants to marry somebody's daughter. First he has to fix his residence on his wife's clan land (especially near the maternal uncle of the girl), and then he must be willing to render some services to his in-laws (farming, house repair and financial assistance). The most important condition of all is that the man should have the capacity to bear children once he is married. It is important to underline that the Macua prefer having girls to boys for they (girls) are the ones who guarantee the growth and continuity of the family and clan.

Although, they are matrilineal and the women have a special place in the society such as apwiyamwene (the mother of the king) and nampewe (the eldest sister of the king), it is interesting to point out that the social, political, economic and religious functions are exercised by men especially the maternal uncles- Atata²⁵

Nowadays polygamy is rarely practised among the Macua, not long ago it was something allowed and sometimes even encouraged, especially in cases of barrenness or sterility and impotence of one of the partners. My informants told me that once a man was officially married, he would be given some years to show to his in-laws his real "manhood", that is the capacity of bearing children. For example, the man could be given four to five years to do so. However, if the time expired and there was no hopeful sign that a child was going to be born, they would lay the blame on their daughter about the misfortune of not

²³ Shorter, A. (Editor), *Church and Marriage in Eastern Africa, Eldoret*: The AMECEA Research Department, 1975. p. 180.

²⁴ Kirwen, M.C., *African Widows*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979, p. 84.

²⁵ Cuppen, G. M. M., *A Religiosidade dos Metos*, Likulezi: Montfort Press, 1974, p.5.

being able to bear children. So in order to overcome this shame they provide another young sister²⁶ (if there is no other young sister in the family, a cousin-sister or any close young girl relative can play the role) to the man so that he could have another chance to try his sexual potentiality. The young girl provided was meant to bear children on behalf of the elder sister. However, if the man failed to have children with this young one, the in-laws would immediately conclude that the fault is on the side of the man. Since for Macua children are very important, this man would be chased away because he was “making the eggs get rotten”, to use a Macua expression²⁷. Then the two sisters will get married to another person who can eventually give them some children.

In this way, polygamy²⁸ was perfectly legal and greatly encouraged since it was regarded as being at the service of life – children begetting. In fact, one of the purposes of polygamy as spelled out in the book, *African Christian Marriage*, is childbearing. Other purposes of polygamy are: catering for sexual needs of men during the period of the last months of their wives pregnancy, and the time after birth which normally varies between two and three years, to minimise the chances of promiscuity and prostitution, to have a large family, to cater for childless unions rather than opting for divorce, to stabilise the institution of marriage, to tighten the bonds of the society and to broaden the circle of relatives and associates.²⁹ We can say that polygamy was also practised as a way of showing power, wealth. Today the few people who still practice polygamy do it due to the old age of their wives while men are still strong sexually. In some cases the women themselves advise their husbands to out and get another younger wife so as to satisfy his needs.

²⁶ If there is no other young sister in the family or any close young girl relative can play the role of substituting the elder girl.

²⁷ In case a man knows that he is the one who is impotent and therefore, he cannot impregnate his wife, he secretly invites his brother, or even a close friend to go to bed with his wife so that he can have children and so save his marriage. The children born through his brother/friend's assistance are considered to be his own.

²⁸ In this paper we shall use the term polygamy to refer to the practice in which a man can have more than one wife.

The Macua have something peculiar, which is wrongly called “ practice of guest prostitution”.³⁰ This practice is as follows. When somebody receives a very important guest or close friend who intends to stay for long time, the host is supposed to “lend” or allow his own wife to go to bed with the guest. This is or was a sign of warm hospitality and honour that one Macua could award to his guest. Of course, this gesture was not shown to any guest but to close friends and very important personalities who happened to come for a visit and did not come with their own wives. Apart from this practice, there is also another one known as *watana* that means alliance, pact or covenant between two friends. Once two friends make *watana*, they are supposed to exchange their wives in order to have sex with them as a sign of strengthening their relationship. In some instances, this practice brings about a lot of problems because one of the women may not like to go to bed with another man and sometimes one woman may like the other man (her husband’s friend) more than her own husband.

These two practices (*wakhelela aletto* and *watana*) have been abandoned some years back. Actually, they were some of the first things that the European Missionaries fought against when they came to Macualand, as they were considered evil and incompatible with Christian teaching.

3.1 The Role of Atata (Maternal Uncle)

We cannot talk about the Macua people, especially concerning their socio-political life, without making reference to *Atata*, because they play a very important and unique role in the society. Men are forbidden to marry within their own *nihimu* (clan) so they have to go

²⁹ Kisenbo, B., Magesa L., Shorter, A., *African Christian Marriage*, London: Cassell & Collier M. Publisher, 1977, p. 64.

³⁰ In Macua language, this practice is called *wakhelela aletto* which literally means to welcome the visitors.

outside it and get married. Although a man goes out looking for wife, he is still attached to his mother's clans and will always come back whenever there is a need. For instance, they will always come back to their family (mother's side) when he gets seriously ill, or has some socio-economic difficulties in the society, and when there are big events of the clan such as funerals, initiation rites and other important ceremonies. The paternal authority in the family is exercised by the maternal uncles, that is the eldest brother of the woman (wife). So, what is the role of the man (husband) in the family?

Traditionally, a man is simply an agent of procreation of new offspring for his wife's clan or generation. In other words we can say that the man has no juridical power over his own children but in relation to his nieces and nephews. He has only affective power over them (his children). Sometime back, it was a serious problem if a man beat or "disciplined" his own children, because the right to discipline children was reserved to the *Atata*.

In fact, the *Atata* is entitled to supervise and foster good moral behaviour of his sisters' children. He is the one to determine when and to whom his nephews and nieces should get married. The power of the *Atata* over his nephews and nieces is so strong that sometimes it reaches the point whereby he interferes in the internal affairs of the conjugal life of his sister. For instance, he can rebuke the behaviour and conduct of his brother-in-law and his sister; he can demand explanation about certain attitudes and if necessary he can chase away his brother-in-law. This interference in the life of the couples contributes to the high rate of divorce in the Macua society.

However, today this power of the *Atata* over their nephews and nieces has been reduced to almost zero because due to education, urbanisation or Christian teaching, the parents take the lead in bringing up and educating their own children.

4. Socio-Political Organization of the Macua

We have briefly mentioned above that the Macua society is matrilineal whereby the children "belong" to the woman's clan. In fact, among the Macua of Nampula, giving

birth to baby girls is more important and more appreciated than to boys. This is due to the fact that the girls are the ones to maintain the prosperity and the growth of the family, and the clan as a whole. A clan or household without girls is doomed to disappear because the boys, once grown up, will have to move away from their own *nihimu* to marry and therefore, they will only increase other people's clan. The fact that the woman has the duty and responsibility to transmit life through procreation and therefore, to increase her *nihimu*, she is bound to remain in the place of her parents and be faithful to the land in which the spirits of the ancestors are resting. For this reason the Macua marriage is called matrilocal, that is, the husband goes to live with his wife's relatives. In short, once a man wants to get married: he has to fix his residence in the land of his in-laws. It is important to point out that despite the fact that the society is matrilineal, still the head of the family or even of the clan is always the *Atata* (the maternal uncle, the eldest brother of one's mother).

Let us now try to see how the Macua are socially and politically organised.

The Macua, like many other African ethnic groups, are organised and live in an extended family set up called *nloko* (*maloko*= plural) under the leadership of the *mwene* or *mpewe* (the traditional ruler or king). *Nloko* is a set or group of uterine units. Each uterine unit is known as *Erukulu* (*lrukulu* in plural) which means womb, in this sense it refers to the persons from or born by the same mother. The *Nloko* is founded upon a common male ancestor or the clan founder who is called *anakhulu* (or *anakhulu*: plural) who is always remembered during rituals and other important events of the clan.³¹ Each *nloko* has its own territory given by the founder ancestor. The territory is known as *muttethe* (*mittethe*= plural).

The second kind of socio-political organisation of Macua is the *Nihimu*, which can be described as the set of *maloko*. The members of the same *nihimu* use the same family

³¹ Lerma, *O Povo Macua e a Sua Cultura*, P. 62.

name, which originates from the common founder ancestor and is transmitted from one generation to another through the mother's side.

As far as leadership in Macua society is concerned, we can say that the first group of leaders is the group of *Atata*. This group is made up of the elders (maternal uncles) who are under the supreme elder, the *humu* (*mahumu*: plural). After the *humu*, comes the *mwene* who is the head of various *makolo* which stay in a specific territory. Alongside *mwene*, there is a very important female figure called *apwiyamwene*. She is the right hand and the counsellor of the *mwene*. He, *mwene*, cannot take any decision without the consent or advice from the *apwiyamwene*. *Apwiyamwene* acts like the Queen Mother for the ruling *mwene* and she is also known as the mother of all mothers. The *mwene* is also aided by two other powerful female personalities: the *Nampewe* (the niece of the ruling *mwene*) and the *ahano*, (the aunt of the king, on mother's side). These three women, together with other counsellors known as *atokwene* (elders) and the *mwene*, make up the jury for problem resolution, decision making and many other important events of the society. For example, when natural calamities such as floods, drought, severe famine, ethnic wars and other misfortunes befall the people, the community rushes to these three female figures. They, *apwiyamwene*, *nampewe* and *ahano*, try to offer prayers and supplications to *Muluku* and offer sacrifices to the ancestors so as to intercede for the rest of the community.

During my interview, I asked why the prayers of intercession are not carried out by the *mwene* since he is the one who represents the whole people.

The reasons given were as follows: women are a symbol of fertility and therefore they are the ones who are in position of standing before God to plead for assistance in times of trouble and misfortunes.³² The second reason is that women are a symbol of reconciliation and peace due to their meekness and compassion.

³² The conditions for the people to play the role of *apwiyamwene*, *ahano* and *nampewe*, is that they have to be fertile and therefore capable to bear children.

One of the elders I interviewed told me that whenever the Macua were involved in wars with surrounding people, women were exchanged in order to bring about peace and reconciliation between the two fighting factions. The exchanged women were married and through marriage, new and deeper relationships between the two warring factions would spring up and therefore, peace and harmony were restored. The traditional authority also has the duty to maintain unity among members of the society, to safeguard the customs, traditional heritage and the identity of the people. The *mwene* and his council were supposed to organise and co-ordinate the defence of the people from any eventual external attacks.³³

CONCLUSION

Although, the Macua are considered to be one of the most traditional people, at least within Mozambique, they have lost many cultural and religious aspects and acquired new ones. For instance, the social and political organisation or set up, has greatly changed. Today the rural "exodus" to the main towns, has undermined the customs of the people. New generations of Macua people do not even know their own mother tongue and much less about their ancestral tradition. It is important to point out that most people, once they migrate to town, they tend to live anonymous lives, and therefore they are subjected to cultural shock and eventually end up in deep crises of cultural identity.

The figures of *mwene*, *mpewe*, *apwiyamwene* cannot be found today, and if they are there, they do not play the same role as they used to. Some cultural changes were necessary and essential but others have proved to be more harmful and destructive than beneficial to the people. However, our aim here is not to pass judgement on what is good or

³³ Viegas, A., pp. 6-7.

bad in Macua culture. At the same time we cannot overlook the fact that the Macua culture, like any other culture, is a dynamic reality, which is subjected to changes as time goes on. These changes have also affected greatly how people look at death, (which is the main theme of our study in the paper), as we shall see in the second chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: ILLNESS AND HEALING RITES

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we shall be dealing with the reality of illness and the process used by the Macua to prevent, cure or heal their sicknesses. First of all we shall see the concept of *iretta* (illness), then we will try to understand how sick people are looked after, the process of healing, death and burial, ancestor veneration and the hereafter. In the conclusion we shall stress the values emphasised in the whole process.

1. The Concept of Illness in Macua Society

Macua look at sickness as something bad/evil, disgrace and sometimes as punishment (*ehukhumu*) for one's wrong doings. The Macua believe that sickness comes from the forest or from big rivers or lakes. In fact, the Macua always try to avoid going to thick forests or crossing big rivers or lakes alone, for fear that the lord of darkness and evil may send them some sickness.

So when a person gets sick the people around normally say that the sickness has left the forest and now dwells with us (people). The treatment given to a sick person is normally meant to return the sickness to where it belongs, the forest or big rivers.

Whoever falls sick is expected to bear the sickness boldly and bravely. One should never despair before sickness. A Macua proverb goes as follows: *erettha ennupuweliha*

Muluku, which means that sickness, reminds us about God³⁴. Through sickness one comes to realise the fragility and vulnerability of life and the need of God in one's life.

The Macua are also aware of the fact that sickness is a universal reality. Everybody gets sick in one way or another as this proverb illustrates *erettha kinimuthanla mutthu* that is to say the sickness does not spare (choose or select) anybody, meaning that everybody can get sick, from the weakest to the strongest.

Sickness weakens and undermines the health of the person, interrupting the normal rhythm of one's activity. Sickness brings about disharmony in the society and that is why people make an effort to restore the state of good health broken by sickness.

Lerma rightly says the Macua do not see sickness as a mere physical problem but as something much deeper which touches the very essence of the person as an individual and as a relational being with his/her surrounding environment (cosmos). He concludes by saying that in Macua community sickness touches all the aspects of life: social, political, economic, cultural and religious. For this reason, whenever people look for healing, they actually address all the components of life: God, ancestors, and the world of the spirits, the family and the society at large.³⁵

1.1 Looking After the Sick

As in any other culture, sickness is a cause of great concern in the Macua community. Once a person falls sick, all family members feel the need to look after him/her. The family members and relatives of the patient try their best to use all the means available such as herbs, leaves, roots of certain trees or any other known traditional medicines in order to cure the sick.

In case the sickness persists or worsens, the patient person is transferred to his/her own mother's house even if he/she is already married. This transfer is meant to provide the

³⁴ Lerma, *O Povo Macua e a Sua Cultura*, ibid. p. 184.

³⁵ Lerma, *O Povo Macua e a Sua Cultura*, ibid. p. 180.

maternal care and love to the patient in this time of pain and suffering, which could not be rendered if the person remained far away from his/her mother.

Family members and neighbours in turn, come to pay visits to the sick. They try to assist him/her in whatever way necessary, ranging from supplying foodstuff, fetching water for bathing or drinking, fetching firewood.

Even today when there are clinics, dispensaries and hospitals in almost every village, people, before taking their sick to these modern hospitals for treatment, first have to consult the *nahako* (the diviner) in order to diagnose and determine the cause of the sickness. The *anahako* (plural of *nahako*) have several ways of conducting their findings or diagnosis. For instance they can do it through *otthukiya ni minepa* (spirit possession), *washerya ehako* (divination), consultation of the ancestors or other spirits.

Once the cause of the sickness has been discovered, the *nahako* either prescribes the medicine or refers to another person known as *mukulukhana* (the medicine man/woman) who will treat the sick. However, if everything has been exhausted and yet the diviner cannot detect the root cause of the sickness, or if the local/traditional healer has failed to cure the sick, then the family resorts to a modern hospital or health centres. Unfortunately in some cases the sick are taken to the hospital when it is too late.

Catarino Mwikuha³⁶ pointed out that even when the sick person have already been taken to hospital, relatives still sneak in secretly with traditional medicine and therefore, the patient combines both traditional and modern medicine. Another informant went further to say that the family can even “steal”, that is, take away their patient secretly for traditional treatment at home. The reason for this practice is that the Macua believe in holistic healing (body and spirit) of the person which is not given in the modern hospital.

³⁶ Catarino Mwikuha, a Macua elder interviewed on 17 June 1998, Mayer Village, Nampula.

As long as the sick are still alive, people show him/her love, care, kindness, solidarity and concern. For instance, the daily visit to the sick by all-family members and neighbours is compulsory and a duty of everybody.

Mwatuka commented that all the wishes of the sick are to be granted when possible so that the sick may feel really taken care of and so that if the person dies, he/she will do so with a happy and peaceful mind.³⁷ The witchdoctors or wizards, people of evil eyes and problematic people in the society are not allowed to visit the sick as they are regarded as bringing a bad omen.

The good hearted, caring, responsible, respectful, humble and loving people are the suitable ones to look after the sick. Juma Assumani³⁸ says that the care rendered to the sick includes giving them company, turning them from time to time (in case they cannot do it by themselves), bathing them, feeding them if necessary and silence within the house or neighbouring compound is strictly observed.

During the last days of confinement the close relatives and friends spend the nights around him/her keeping vigil. To fail to do so can be a serious issue within the family and accusations of witchcraft or negligence can be levelled against those who do not come to spend the night in the house where the sick is. This gesture is a sign of solidarity and respect for both the patient and the family.

2. Death Among Macua

In Macua community there are several names given to the act of dying: this includes to go back home, to return to Mount Namuli (see The Myth of Namuli), *ohiya murima* (to leave heart), to sleep, to be called by Muluku, to join the ancestors.

³⁷ Mwatuka, interviewed on the 20th /December 1996, Netia Location.

³⁸ Juma Assumani interviewed on 15th Nov. 1995, at Mayer village, Nampula.

On the other hand, the Macua consider death as the greatest enemy because they (Macua) give a lot of importance to life and do everything to defend, conserve and transmit it.

Although the Macua are aware of the fact that death is not a total destruction of the person, that there is a continuation of life in the other world, and the concept of returning home as reference to death, they still find death to be something to be fought against. The reason behind this negative view about death is that it creates disharmony or a gap in the society.

Buti Tlhagale, in his article, *Death, African Rites and the Gospel* asserts:

The relatives of the deceased experience a terrible sense of loss and feel angry at such deprivation. They feel powerless because they cannot undo or reverse the chain of events caused by death. And further, mourning and funeral rites are intended to enable the bereaved to cope with such traumatic events.³⁹

Due to this ambiguity about the reality of death, Lutahoire points out that *Christian preaching about resurrection of the body and life everlasting is a difficult hypothesis for their perception.*⁴⁰ But does it mean that the Macua see death as a total and complete destruction of the person?

Certainly not for *life goes on beyond the grave*⁴¹

Death is a change of status of being, which implies rupture and continuity. Rupture because the dead person goes to join the ancestors, so he/she is not physically visible to the living members of the family. On other hand, there is continuity because the dead person still has family links with the living; in other words, he/she still belongs to his/her family/clan.

³⁹ Buti Tlhagale, "Death, African Funeral Rites and the Gospel", ACS 15 (1999) no 2, p.1.

⁴⁰ Sebastian K. Lutahoire, *The Human Life Cycle among the Bantu*, p. 84.

⁴¹ Mbiti, J. S., *Introduction to African Religion*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1975 (Reprinted in 1978), p. 113.

The Macua believe that the life which one lives here on earth, is the one that he/she will live in the hereafter. For instance, they say if a person lives a morally good life, he/she will lead a good life after death. If a person dies before marrying he will consequently remain single forever. Or if a person is a thief throughout his/her life, then he/she will also be a thief in the other world.

Dead people are both respected and feared. For this reason whatever they (departed) ask from the living family members, it must be granted to them, lest a misfortune befalls them.

2.1 Causes of Death

In Macua community the causes of death can be natural or physical and spiritual.

2.1.1 Natural or Physical Causes

There are several physical causes of death according to Macua understanding. Here we shall briefly mention some of the commonest ones so as to have an idea about them without going into details. These include road accidents, murder, lightning, fire accident, war, famine, attack by wild animals, drowning, falling down from a high place, floods, fatal sickness and snake bite.

It is important to know that it is not easy for Macua to accept an explanation that death can occur due to purely physical causes.⁴²

The Macua believe that there is nothing that can happen by accident, as the following proverb illustrates *ekoma khiniruma ehivariye*- that is, the drum cannot make noise (sound) by itself. Somebody must beat it so that it can produce a sound. There must always be a person (evil person, witchdoctor) who causes the death of another.

⁴² For instance if somebody dies in road accident, the Macua will never be contented to accept the fact that this death has been purely physically caused. Instead they will ask questions like; who caused the accident to happen? Why had he/she to die that way and at that time?

2.1.2 Spiritual Causes of Death

These are the causes that cannot be explained physically as they are regarded mysterious because they are prompted by evil spirits and magic power such as: *mirretti* (Sorcery, witchcraft), *havara* (magic powers), *minepa sonanara* (evil spirits of the dead people), *mwikho* (broken taboos), *natiri* (failure to fulfil an oath or a promise), *oriheliv* (poisoning), *ottikiha ephatxe* (literally it means to pay back, but in this sense it means revenge), *inrima* (jealousy), *oraviya*⁴³ (death caused by bewitching due to theft), disrespect towards a deity.

2.1.3 Natural Death

Although the Macua rarely talk of natural death or death caused by *Muluku* himself, still some of the elders interviewed maintain that there is in fact a natural death. This occurs when *Muluku* calls old people to join the ancestors who by their very nature are close to Him (*Muluku*).

2.2 Types of Death

Among the Macua there are two types of death: 'good' and 'bad' death depending on the circumstances surrounding it.

2.2.1 Good Death

Occurs when a person dies in his/her old age, having many descendants (e.g. surrounded by his numerous children, grandchildren and even great grand children). Another characteristic which qualifies death to be good, is to die at home or in his/her own village whereby the family and friends are around, ready to take care of him/her. To die a good death implies to die without leaving unsolved problems, debts, quarrels, accusations

⁴³ It is believed that if a person has been robbed, he/she can hire an expert to use magic power to bewitch the thief using his/her footprint. Then the robber will fall sick he/she may be and can end up dying if he/she does not return the stolen property. Some people say that if the thief stole a cock, on the last days before his/her death, the cock will start to crow in the stomach of the patient.

of being a witch and so forth. In short, those who have lived honest moral and sound lives are seen as dying a good death.

2.2.2 *Bad Death*

It is normally an abrupt death that occurs at early an age of a person who did not leave descendants. In this category is also included those who die a violent death such as suicide, homicide, assassination, car accident, drowning in a river or lake, in war, or hunting or killed by a wild animal. The persons who die far away from their home area are also counted among those who have a bad death. Those who die barren/sterile or having major social and economic problems in the society are regarded as having a bad death.

2.3 *Care for the Dying*

As already noted, *Okhwa nthavi na Muluku khaninxerekeliwa* death is (like) God's net, it cannot be avoided. This popular wisdom of the Macua people tells us that death is a universal reality that everybody has to go through. At the moment of death, the agonising person is placed at the breast of the most intimate person present.

As Odoki asserts, the aim of putting the agonising person on the breast is to ensure his/her spirit that proper care is being taken to ensure a peaceful death⁴⁴. He goes on to state that the gesture is meant to lessen pain in the dying person and to limit the painful sight of one wrestling with death.

At this point the sick person can never be left alone because this is the most crucial moment of his/her life.

2.4 *Omulaleya Nakhwa (Announcing Death)*

Once the person has left his/her heart (euphemism of death), an elderly person is called in to confirm that the person is really dead. After this confirmation, the women present go out and start to wail. The wailing has two purposes: a sign of great sorrow caused

⁴⁴ Odoki, S., *Death Rituals Among the Luos of Uganda*, (Unpublished Research Paper) p. 84.

by the loss of the beloved one, and also to announce to the public that death has occurred to the family. However, before the wailing starts, the children and uninitiated people are taken away from the house. Assumani says that the removing of children and non-initiated people is done because they are regarded as being immature people, incapable of bearing and understanding the pain of the loss of the relative⁴⁵.

The first sign that alerts the people that death has occurred is the shouting and wailing of women. And prompted by this sign the neighbours start coming to the scene to express sympathy and solidarity to the bereaved family. Then messengers are sent out to different villages where other relatives and close friends live so as to announce the death. The messengers are normally young and vigorous men (never a woman)⁴⁶ who are capable of walking long distances.

As a sign of sorrow and mourning they are not supposed to comb their hair or wear a shirt. They must not shake hands with people on the way. The *Atata* (maternal uncle) and other clan elders organise and co-ordinate everything. Meanwhile the women are entrusted with the task of washing and dressing the corpse. The washing ritual has a double value: hygienic cleansing and purification from earthly dirt as a preparation for the person's encounter with his/her ancestors. They (women) also carefully treat the corpse with traditional aromatic herbs in order to avoid its decomposition.⁴⁷ Even though some people take their dead ones to the mortuaries while they arrange for the burial.

⁴⁵ In Macua community a person who has not gone through the initiation rite cannot attend any burial. It is *malavi* = taboo.

⁴⁶ Women normally remain in the house where death occurred in order to take care of the corpse and even to prepare some food for the gravediggers and other people who come to attend the burial.

⁴⁷ Up today, in rural areas when death occurs people stop doing the farming, fishing or hunting, going for long trips or any heavy work until the burial takes place. My informants told me that before the burial takes place, people must not do any work because one hand there is a belief that if one works he/she can have a terrible accident such as cutting oneself with a hoe or cutlass. On the other hand, by refraining from work people are paying some respect to both the deceased and the bereaved family.

The majority prefer to keep the *muruthu* (dead body) of their beloved ones in the house so that they can view it until it is buried. The *muruthu* can be kept in the house for three to four days without getting decomposed due to the herbs applied to it. The burial will only take place when all the relatives (especially the elders) have arrived.

2.5 Burial

The type of burial given to a person depends on the age, status and his/her responsibilities in the society.

2.5.1 Burial of a New-Born Child

When a new-born child dies, there is no much wailing and announcing of the event. The close relatives secretly bury the baby within the compound (in the ashes dumpsite) on the very same day. Assumani says that this is done because the child is not a full member of the clan and therefore, it does not need a complete burial ceremony. Another reason is that the death of a child is a curse, a great misfortune, a disgrace and bad omen to the family. Other relatives who stay far away will be told after the burial. Only the parents of the dead child will shave their hair as a sign of grief, then a small rite of purification will take place and routine life will resume.

2.5.2 Burial of an Elderly Person

When the death of an adult or elderly person has occurred and the announcement has been done, arrangements for burial are made.

On the day of burial the grave is dug in the family cemetery, which is normally located some few kilometres away from the village. The gravediggers are usually the family friends and the in-laws known as *anaperwa*. In the house women wash the corpse with water and dress it with the best attire available. Then the body is brought outside near the main entrance for the last viewing. After uncovering the face of the deceased, one of the elders addresses the people around asking them to come forward in case the deceased has an unpaid debt to them or if somebody owes him/her something. In short, this is the time

family reconciliation before the departed starts his/her journey to the world of the ancestors. In case there is a debt it must be paid right away so that the dead may return to Nam (the world of the ancestors of the Macua) reconciled and peaceful.

The elders carefully and ceremoniously utter words of praise for the deceased turns. Finally the eldest member of the clan says a rather long prayer for a “safe journey” for the deceased. The elder also begs the ancestors to welcome the new member. After the prayer the dead body is taken in procession to the grave where it will be laid to rest.

Reaching the grave one of the elders says the last prayer and the body is laid in the grave. The grave is made as a niche where the body is placed so that the soil can touch it. Then all the members throw a bit of soil into the grave as a sign of farewell. People return home without looking behind, as it is believed that if one looks behind he/she may “carry” death to his/her home. In the house of the funeral people undergo some purification before they go back to their homes.⁴⁸

2.6 Funeral Rite (Mathanka)

Like initiation rites, *Mathanka* has three phases: separation from the previous world (the world of the living), period of seclusion, and finally re-integration into the new state of life (the world of the ancestors)⁴⁹.

There are two types of mourning, *mathanka malupale* (literally it means mourning period), which lasts between 30 to 40 days, then the *mathanka makhani* (spiritual period of mourning), which ends with the celebration of the first anniversary of the death. During the *mathanka malupale*, the relatives spend nights in the house of the deceased.

⁴⁸ However, the burial of a person who has committed suicide is very simple, whereby mourning is forbidden, the burial is done in a hurry because it is a shame and bad omen to the family. For instance, if a person has hanged himself, he/she is buried under the tree on which he/she hanged himself/herself. People even fear to touch the body of such a person. Nikhupa commented saying that this is done because people value life so much that one should never take it away by him/herself, which is a sign of selfishness and cowardice.

⁴⁹ Lerma, *O Povo Macua e a Sua Cultura*, p. 209.

keeping vigil, praying and offering sacrifices to the ancestors so that they may welcome the spirit of the dead into their “kingdom”.

At the end of the *mathanka malupale* another purification rite is carried out which includes the shaving of the hair of all the family members.

2.6.1 Funeral Meal and Drink⁵⁰

For Macua, like many African cultures, the funeral is both a social event and a spiritual experience. Families and friends gather to celebrate as a sign of restoring the harmony of life broken by death. The sharing of meal and drinking of *otheka*⁵¹ is a sign of solidarity with the bereaved family and symbol that life has to go on in spite of what has happened. At mealtimes people make jokes about death saying death is not all that powerful because it has only managed to take away one person. Before people start eating and drinking, some food and a full calabash of *otheka* is given to the *ankhulu* (the ancestors). This is a symbolic act in which the people express the bond of unity between the living and the ancestors and the Supreme Being (*Muluku*). It is also a sign of appreciation and thanksgiving to the entire group of the ancestors and a request for them to welcome the newly departed brother/sister.

While drinking *otheka* people dance and sing with joy as they believe that the departed has finally joined the world of the ancestors. On this occasion nobody is expected to show any sign of grief or sorrow because it is a day of joy and feasting as the departed victoriously go to the other world.

As we have seen that death brings about impurity, after the meal and drinking, people who participated in the burial (especially the grave diggers, the mourners, the women who washed the corpse, the corpse carriers and all the family members) go for a purification rite so as to rid themselves of pollution. The purification ritual consists in

⁵⁰ Funeral meal and drink are taken on the last day of the *mathanka malupale* (big mourning period).

⁵¹ Local brew made out of cassava and fermented sorghum flour called *miropo*.

thorough cleaning of the house in which the deceased spent his/her last days and eventually died in. The dirt is taken to a nearby crossroad where another ritual is performed by having symbolic washing with some herbs of all the family members. Few belongings of the deceased such as the stool, a gun or a spear (if a man) or tobacco, are placed at the crossroads known as *mafulo* where the ritual cleansing takes place. The utensils, which are put in the *mafulo*, are meant to calm down the spirit of the departed and prevent it from disturbing the family in the pretension that he/she is looking for his/her belongings. The Macua also believe that the departed needs some tools to use them in the other world.

At the end of all this, all the members go back to their homes and normal life resumes.

2.7 Widow, Widower Inheritance

On the last day of *mathanka malupale*, the elders choose a suitable person (trustworthy, good hearted, responsible and caring) who will become the “substitute” of the deceased man or woman. As we can see both man and woman are given a substitute of their partner to take care of the widower or widow, of the children, and to continue the procreation activity left by the deceased. Both the bereaved man and woman need a partner to console and take care of his/her needs. Then the two are officially declared to be “husband” and “wife” and from then on they can live together, enjoying all the rights of a couple. The children born out of this leviratic union are regarded as belonging to the deceased person. The “inheritor” somehow perpetuates the life of the deceased since he even bears the name of the deceased and plays the role of the dead relative.

Looking critically at this practice we can see that it has both positive and negative aspects. The positive ones are: to console the bereaved man/woman, to cater for the children of the deceased, as they need the love from both father and mother, continuation of childbearing, the possibility of the children to belong to the same clan, and maintaining the bonds between the two clans of the spouses created through the marriage. Nikhupa a

that the widows are inherited to prevent them from becoming prostitutes since they never remarry. They cannot remarry because everybody knows that she is still married to the deceased husband. A man gets a surrogate wife after the death of his wife in order to take care of the children. In case the man goes outside the lineage of his departed wife to remarry, his children might be mistreated by their stepmother since she is not related to them. Last but not least, there is another fact to take into account, the economic factor. Once the man who has lost his wife receives a surrogate wife from within the clan, then he will not have to share his wealth with his children while he goes out to remarry. Here we need to recall the fact that among the Macua children belong to the mother's (wife's) side.

On the other hand, it is also true that there are some negative aspects that need to be addressed. For instance, the lack of freedom of the widow or widower to remarry a person of his/her choice after the death of his/her partner.

The issue of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD), Human Immune-deficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), which are rampant among the Macua, is another factor that should be borne in mind. In this case once one of the partners had been infected, consequently the "inheritor" will get infected as well. With all these factors I would like to say that this practice should be abandoned because of the above mentioned factors. As mentioned above to continue practising widow/widower inheritance poses a great danger to the Macua society in the sense that many people will be effected with HIV virus.

2.8 Ancestor Veneration

Today we cannot accept the expression "ancestor worship", used by some authors to describe the respect that the African give to their dead ones. People now rightly talk about ancestor veneration referring to the due respect accorded to ancestors. Parrinder in his book

African Traditional Religion quoting Smith E. W. says that the best word, which describes the attitude of the African to their dead ancestors, is *pietas*.⁵²

To the dead is given special and profound veneration. The graveyards are carefully treated and there is a period in the year when the whole society goes around cleaning the cemeteries so that fire should not destroy them. In most cases, it is on these occasions that people deposit some foodstuff, maize or sorghum flour, local brew, clothes and even other decoration objects such as golden or bronze bracelets, beads, necklaces or chains on the tombs. One of my informants mentioned that traditionally Macua do not offer flowers to the deceased because flowers have no meaning in the life of the people. People do not use flowers during wedding or initiation rites so why should they use them for their dead ones. The Macua offer to their dead foodstuff and clothes because these are the things that they knew and utilised while they were still alive.

Richard Gehman points out that the ancestors are benefactors because they provide blessings, protection, and defend their living members from enemies. They are also mediators between the living and *Muluku*. On the other hand, Gehman also notes that there are certain duties of the living towards the ancestors such as care for their tombs, obedience to maintain communion with them through offering some food or drinks, visiting of the tombs regularly and offering prayers.⁵³

Although the Macua feel some familiarity with their ancestors to the extent of expressing openly their disappointment and frustration when they (ancestors) do not meet the expectations of their living family members, we also realise a certain fear towards them. This attitude can be clearly seen by the way the Macua try their best not to annoy the deceased and so whatever the ancestors demand must be granted so as to avoid their wrath.

⁵² Parrinder, E.G. *African Traditional Religion*, London: S.P.C.P. 1968, p.64

⁵³ Gehman, R. J. *Who Are the Living Dead? A Theology of Death, Life After Death and Living Dead*. Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1999, pp. 38-40.

Is every dead person an ancestor in Macua culture?

As Enefie Ikenga Metuh, his book *God and Man in African Religion*⁵⁴ observes there are some qualities that people look at so as to determine whether somebody is an ancestor or not. Likewise the Macua identify their ancestors by their moral uprightness, age, and the kind of death the person died and the observance of full funeral rites. In fact I have already stated above that in Macua community there are good and bad deaths. So those who died a good death, are considered ancestors while those who had a bad death (suicide, dying while young without descendent, or those who died far away and unknown places therefore had no proper burial) will never be considered as members of the *anakhulu* ancestors.

2.9 The Hereafter

Death is seen as a change of status, an entrance into a new and deeper relationship with clan, tribe and family, it (death) is sometimes desired or accepted with surprise and equanimity- particularly by the elders.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Metuh, E.I., *God and Men in African Religion*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981, p. 151

⁵⁵ L. Magesa, "Death as Moral Maturity: a Synthesis of Three Theories", in *African Christian Studies* Vol. 4, no2, (1988) p.41.

In other words, death is a “necessary” passage leading to the life beyond. It is common among the Macua to hear some statements like, *afulano anorupa* - so-and-so is asleep, *afulano ahathimakela makhulupale* - so-and-so has gone after the ancestors, *afulano ahola* - so-and-so has gone ahead of us. These expressions reflect the deep conviction that life does not end with death, but continues somewhere else in a way the person has been living here on earth. This helps to understand why the living members are faithful to offerings, sacrifices, prayers and libation to the deceased ones. Magesa, quoting some outstanding writers (P. Fannon, R. Gleason and others) says, *death is seen as an active transformation of the person into a new form of existence vis-à-vis God and the universe.*⁵⁶

In fact, the ancestors are the closest link that people have with the spiritual world, spirits and God. So the ancestors are not actually far away from the living members, but rather they participate actively in the daily events of life in the community. As mentioned earlier, the living get into contact with their ancestors through prayer, sacrifice and libation, divination and spirit possessions.

Although the Macua believe that there is life beyond the grave, it is also true that they have no clear idea about what exactly happens in the life after death. My informant (João Muhammad and Catarino Mwikuha) commenting on this issue said that life beyond the grave is similar to the earthly one. The view given by the above mentioned elders is in line with what Magesa using the words of Mbiti states:

“For the majority of the African people, the hereafter is only a continuation of life more or less as it is in its human form. This means that the personalities are retained, social and political statuses are maintained, sex distinction is continued, human activities are produced in the hereafter, the wealth or property of the individual remains unchanged, and in many ways the hereafter is a carbon copy of the present life.”⁵⁷

Further on, however, the Macua elders, seemingly contradicting themselves, say that life after death is better than what we are living here on earth. To use their own words

⁵⁶ L. Magesa, “*Death as Moral Maturity*”, *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Magesa, “*Death as Moral Maturity*” quoting Mbiti, p.38.

*in the other world there is joy, peace, harmony and freedom since the spirits of the dead can move wherever they want. They (spirits) can be in two or more places at once.*⁵⁸

Of course, here the elders are not referring to the Christian notion of Heaven; they are talking about a certain nice place where the ancestors live. In fact, some writers such as Mbiti and Obayashi, came to the conclusion that *on the whole African Religion is neither heaven nor hell, and neither rewards nor punishment for people in the hereafter*. The fact remains that the Macua, like many African societies, believe that life does not end with physical death. The practice of ancestor veneration is a clear proof of this belief, as ancestor veneration presupposes the existence of life beyond the grave. Otherwise, it would be meaningless to offer sacrifices and prayers to people who do not actually exist.

The Macua hold the belief that people will always meet in the other world. I think that this is similar to the Christian doctrine of the communion of the saints and triumph of the Church through the risen Lord. The Macua do also invoke their ancestors before starting an important event such as war, hunting, sowing, harvesting or even in the various rites of passage. There is a convergence between this Macua practise with what the Christians do during their major events. The invocation of Christian ancestors (saints) during for example religious profession and priestly ordination.

⁵⁸ João Muhammad and Catarino Mwikuha, Macua elders living in Mayer village, Namibia, interviewed on 10th June 1998.

⁵⁹ J. S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, p. 117. See also H. Obayashi, *Death and Afterlife*, University of Michigan Press.

CONCLUSION

As a word of conclusion to this chapter we are going to single out a few values contained in the whole chapter. From the time the person falls sick there is the sense of great solidarity among Macua to the extent that no sick person can suffer without the assistance of his/her family members and even of the society at large. Visiting, assisting and caring for the sick are the duties of each and every relative. Life makes sense as long as it is lived in community.

Solidarity goes hand in hand with togetherness. In Macua community, to live is to be with others, to eat with others, to share with others, to cry with others, to rejoice with others. People are together both in happy and sad moments, during birth and during death. The sense of belonging and community and the concern for each other are the pillars on which each Macua is supposed to cling to.

In this chapter we have also realised that reconciliation among people, be it at the moment of sickness or at the deathbed, is deeply valued. They pray for reconciliation with one another, with the cosmos and ancestors, and with *Muluku*.

Any broken relationship between one of these entities means death and chaos for the society. A master of the initiation ceremony once uttered a very important statement which illustrates what we have just said. He said *the worst thing that one can do is to live with friends, surrounded by enemies yet have no courage to seek for reconciliation.*⁶⁰

The notion that death is obligatory passage for all which leads into the world of the ancestors and the belief that life does not end with death (the existence of the hereafter) are important values that Macua wisdom treasures.

⁶⁰ Khwepeya, Master of initiation rite in the region of Mutxikha (Nampula), during an initiation ceremony on 13th November 1988.

CHAPTER III: THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

As the kernel and the centre of his Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man/woman but which is above liberation from sin and the evil one, in the joy of knowing God, and being known by him, seeing him and of being over to him.⁶¹

These words of exhortation of Pope Paul VI keep ringing in our ears and reminding us of the urgency and necessity of proclaiming the Good News of God's liberation so that every tongue, nation and people may know God and worship him. This proclamation of the kingdom of God is addressed to human beings who are profoundly linked to a culture and therefore the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures.⁶² Any evangelization must take a person in his/her cultural context. However, the cultures must be challenged, regenerated and purified by the Gospel.

In this chapter we are going to make a theological analysis on the concept of deification presented in the second chapter so as to see the points of convergence and areas of conflict between the Macua culture and Christian teaching. To do so we shall try to look at what the Scripture and Catholic Church say about these points.

⁶¹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi, Apostolic Exhortation*: London: Catholic Truth society, p. 15

⁶² Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, p. 29.

1. Illness in the Scripture

As already mentioned illness in Macua community is understood as disgrace or an *ehukumu* (punishment) because it brings confusion and suffering not only to the affected person but also the whole family. One gets sick either if either he/she has broken an oath or a taboo, or has disobeyed the orders of the ancestors. In other words, sickness is associated with punishment. For instance, a person who complies with the tradition and customs, respects the elders and ancestors, he/she is thought to enjoy good health since he/she receives blessings and protection from the ancestors.

Likewise the Old Testament (OT) presents sickness as a punishment for one's misconduct, disobedience to God or consequence of sin (Gn 3:16-19). This is the image of a God who punishes the God of revenge of the OT. The "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" concept".⁶³ For instance, in Ps 32 the psalmist says that the hand of God was heavy upon him and his strength was dried up because of his iniquity (vv. 3-5). In Ps 41 we find another connection between sickness and sin when the psalmist cries out to God to heal him for he has sinned against him, God (v. 4). The suffering he was going through was due to his sinfulness. Illness can strike somebody due to his unfaithfulness to Yahweh. In fact, God promises not to bring diseases upon the Israelites as long as they listen to him and keep his statutes (Ex 15:26). The OT also testifies that God is the healer "I am the Lord who heals you" (Ex 15:26) and the same time the human healers are also acknowledged and honored for their healing skills (Sir 38:1-7ff). But on the other hand, sickness is a deprivation of goodness and wholeness because when God created the world everything was very good (Gn 1:12; 18; 21). The friends of Job have this attitude towards sickness. For them sickness and suffering are a sign of one's sins (Job 4:7ff). Suffering is a trial to which human beings are subjected. For instance, before the suffering of Job began, Satan went to God and said

⁶³ K. Rahner & K. H. Weger, *Our Christian Faith*, London: Burns & Oates, 1980.

him to put Job into the test so as to prove the genuineness of his faithfulness to God (Job 1:11; 2:5).

In spite of this suffering God did not abandon humanity to its fate but rather prepared some ways to redeem the world from the power of sin, sickness and death. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). God sent his only Son into the world in order to restore the broken wholeness and perfect goodness with which God had created the world, so the “world may be saved through him”(Jn 3:17).

When Jesus came into the world, his public ministry can be summarised as healing (Jn 5:6-9), restoring people’s lives (Jn 11:43-44, Lk 17:14ff; 18:35-42), freeing people from the evil spirits (Lk 9:37-42; Mt 17:14-24; Mk 9:14-29). In short Jesus really came into the world to restore the human brokenness caused by sin. Jesus is the incarnate love of God the Father.

Jesus did not keep his healing power to himself alone but he gave it to the apostles and commissioned them to go out and heal the sick and cast out devils on his name (Mt 10:7-8; Lk 10:9; Acts 3:6-10) and bringing salvation and eternal life to the world (Jn 6:68).

Illness is something much deeper than a mere physical malfunctioning because it affects the person as a whole (body and spirit). For example, whenever Jesus performed a healing, he forgives the sins of the person before the physical healing takes place (Mt 9:2-7, Mk 2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26). Because for him physical sickness reveals an internal disorder, that is why physical healing can only take place if the person is internally disposed. Another requirement for the healing Jesus asks before any healing is faith because without faith there is no real healing of the person as a whole (Mt 9:28-30; Mk 10:46-52). Faith is an internal disposition, which enables one to be open to God’s grace.

As already noted the Macua understanding of healing goes beyond the physical wellbeing of the person. For this reason the Macua are not contented with the scientific explanation about the causes of illness. They need to know the ultimate cause of the illness. A spiritual and deeper root cause of the illness. It is understandable that the world of spirits, the ancestors and the Supreme Being are consulted whenever illness strikes.

1.1 Looking After the Sick

Jesus summarises all the commandments into one word, love. The love Jesus is speaking about has two dimensions: love for God and love for one's neighbour (Mt 22:37-40). Jesus does not talk of love that is just in the air but a concrete and practical gesture shown to others through concrete actions and deeds. Jesus says that everybody will be judged by their concrete act of love (Mt 25:31-46).

St. James goes in the same line when he says that faith without works is dead (Jas 2:17). Our faith is meaningful as long as it is accompanied with deeds. One of the practical and concrete gestures of love is looking after the sick, "I was sick and you took care of me..." (Mt 25:36b). "Whoever loves a brother or a sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling" (1Jn 2:10). Taking care of our sick brothers and sisters is to fulfil Jesus' commandment given to his disciples, "...just as I have loved you, you also should love one another so that the world may know that you are my disciples" (Jn 13:34-35).⁶⁴

While dealing with sickness we have seen that visiting and taking care of the sick has a top priority in Macua culture. There is a general concern of everybody to care for the sick and console them.

⁶⁴ It is very important to realise that Jesus uttered these words on the eve of his suffering and death. In Macua, like any other African culture, the last words of one's family or friend are regarded as sacred and therefore they should be treasured and obeyed. I think that we too are asked to take these words of Jesus to our heart and live on them.

1.2 Causes of Illness

We have come across in Macua community that the causes of illness are rather “mysterious” and to the idea that to diagnose them people need to go to the diviner. And in most cases the diviner lays blame on some people as witch doctors or wizards. This brings about confusion and suspicion in the family and society.

Earlier on we have seen that in the Scripture illness is caused by sin because illness is Satan’s burden that needs to be unloaded (Lk 13:10-17). Once again the NT renews the idea that God (now in the person of Jesus, his only Son), is the healer. Since Jesus is the healer par excellence, there is no need for people to consult the diviner who after all causes more harm (suspicion) in the family than good. The issue at stake here is not whether to use tradition healing methods or modern medicine but the problem is to look for the causes of one’s illness from a diviner rather than trusting in Jesus.

However, Jesus breaks through ‘the mechanical dogma of retribution’, which was wide spread in the OT later Judaism.⁶⁵ When confronted by his disciples Jesus clearly rejected the connection between sickness and one’s sinfulness when he states, “Neither he nor his parents have sinned” (Jn 9:3).

Paul goes so far as to claim that suffering (sickness) can also be permitted by God as a means of healing chastisement (1Cor 11:32; 2Cor 4:17; 12:7ff).⁶⁶

Scientifically speaking illness can be caused by lack of hygiene, unbalanced diet or poisoning. There are also ways to diagnose people to detect the cause of illnesses and provide a proper cure. It is proved scientifically that some herbs or roots are medicinal and can cure some diseases if used properly, which means that people can also use these natural resources that are provided by God for healing purposes. However, this should be done without the process of divination which entails use of magic power, instead of trusting Jesus

⁶⁵ Bauer, J.B. (Editor), *Encyclopedin of Biblical Theology*, London: Sheed and Ward, p. 847.

⁶⁶ Bauer, J B., *ibid.*

whole heatedly. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in me and believe also in me” (Jn 14:1).

1.3 Dying With A Peaceful Mind

In the Scripture there are passages that present death as universal reality in the sense that all people must die (Sir 14:17) because we all made out of dust (Gn 3:19). In the OT and Macua culture see the death of people of old and full of years as a blessing and honour from the Lord (Gn 15:15; 25:8; Job 5:26).

Jacob died in peace after his son Joseph had promised that when he (Jacob) died he will not be buried in Egypt but the land in which his ancestors are resting (Gn 47:27-30). Joseph complied with his father’s request because he realised that by doing so it would mean for him (his father) die with a peaceful mind. Likewise in the Macua community, as noted in the second chapter, people try their best to give special attention to the patients, by granting them their wishes and respecting their last will, so that they may die happily and peacefully.

In the NT happiness and peace for the dying is Jesus Christ because ‘whoever believes in me and has faith in him (Christ) will never die for He is the resurrection and life’ (Jn 11:25-26; Rom 6:8). Jesus has overcome sin and death through his glorious resurrection. He conquered sin by his obedience unto death, and overcomes death by his resurrection. The Bible continues saying that as a result of Christ’s salvific work, a human person exists on earth with hope of eternal life and holiness.⁶⁷ If we die with Christ we shall rise with Him (see Eph 2:2-10). In other words, the death of Jesus has a redemptive value in the life of Christians. The death of Christ is the model for our dying (Phil 1:20, 3:10).

1.4 Death as the Greatest Enemy

The ambivalence experienced by Macua before death is amazing. Death is a necessary path to the world of the ancestors yet it is feared.

⁶⁷ John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris: The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*, Kampala: St. Paul Publications, 1984, p. 24.

St. Paul says that death for those who live or die in Christ is no longer frightening and scaring because if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord (Rom 14:8). Paul goes further to assert that death has been swallowed up in victory and has lost its sting (1Cor 15:54-55). Christian hope in eternal life is the core of this belief, and people will go to the home of God where death will be no more, mourning and crying will be no more (Rev 21:4). Death is a call to communion with God.

Through Baptism, which is a copy of the death of Christ (Rom 6:5), the Christian unites him/herself with the death of Christ with whom he/she is buried but only to rise again (Rom 6:3-11).⁶⁸ Having all this in mind there is no need to consider death as the greatest enemy after all it has already been defeated, and as a result we have become the sons and daughters of God hence we share Christ's sonship.

1.5 Mourning and Funeral Rites as Coping Mechanisms

Mourning is one of the ways a bereaved person tries to cope with situation of grief and loss. Abraham mourns for his wife Sarah (Gn 23:1ff), the Egyptians wept and mourned for Jacob (Joseph's father) for seventy days (Gn 50:3) and the Israelites mourned for Moses for thirty days (Deut 34:8). Mourning is an expression of sorrow, grief and helplessness before death. Funeral rites are meant to counteract and 'neutralise' this pain of loss of a beloved one. It is intended to restore the broken harmony caused by death.

1.6 Macua Concept of Hereafter vis-à-vis Eternal Life

In the second chapter we found that the kind of life in the hereafter for Macua is similar to the present one. The life one leads here on earth is repeated almost literally in the other world. Of course, in Christian understanding it is that at the moment of death a transformation takes place in the deceased. He/she cannot still have the same type of life

⁶⁸ Bauer, J.B., *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, p. 185

First of all with death the soul survives and subsists separated from the body, while the body is subjected to gradual decomposition.⁶⁹ At the moment of death the body which is made of dust returns to dust.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that after death, the separated soul goes to meet God while waiting for the reunion with its glorified body. On the last day (the Parousia) God will grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them to our souls through the power of Christ's resurrection.⁷⁰

1.7 The Dead Still Make Requests of Food and Other Material Things for their Survival

The Macua believe that the dead still need to be supplied with food for their survival in the other world and if one fails to grant it to them (dead), misfortune will befall him/her. This belief creates a lot of fear for the dead, if this is not done accordingly.

Of course this belief cannot be substantiated in the Scripture for on one side the dead are like angel in heaven who neither marry nor are given in marriage (Mt 22:29-30). Jesus himself pointed out the fact that the dead either go to heaven or hell (eternal perdition) depending on one's deeds here on earth (Mt 25:31-46). Those who die in Christ go to heaven to live with God. For these reasons there is no need to be afraid of the dead.

1.8 No Natural Death?

The Macua as seen in the previous chapter, deny any possibility that death can be purely natural, that is to say that at a certain moment the person has to die as it is the fate of every living being. We also said that this attitude creates tensions and raises suspicion in the family. It also spoils the relations since some people are accused of being the cause of death. This belief denies the fact that God himself can also call somebody when the time comes. God has the right to take away life for he is the creator.

⁶⁹ John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris...*, p. 25.

⁷⁰ CCC, no 997

1.9 Bad Death

Some of the types of death regarded as “bad” are not really bad. For instance, Macua claim that the barren/sterile people have a bad death, just because they have chance to get children. This view is not right because it is not the fault of the person not have children.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we looked at the points of convergence and conflicts between Macua culture and Christian in view of inculturation. Using the Scriptures we have detected some similarities as well as areas of disagreement that need to be looked into.

Through his resurrection Jesus overcame sin and death, and as a result, he is only hope for the dead. He invites people to go to him whenever they are in trouble for yoke is easy and his burden is light (Mt 11:29).

CHAPTER IV: PASTORAL SUGGESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

We shall now focus our attention on the pastoral implications of death understood in Macua. Thereafter we shall make some suggestions so as to enable pastoral agents to work out some ways of contextualizing or inculturating the gospel.⁷¹

But what is *inculturation*?

Fr Pedro Arrupe defines inculturation as:

The incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a 'new creation'.⁷²

Today more than ever before inculturation is the keystone for any fruitful evangelization. For this reason the missionaries and indeed all the pastoral agents need to know the culture and try to understand its positive as well as weak points so that they can adapt the gospel message to the culture they are evangelising. This was also the conclusion that the African Bishops reached during the Special Synod for Africa when they stated:

⁷¹ Although the term contextualization is more favoured and more extended, as Shorter suggests, I shall be using the term inculturation in this essay because I believe that this is the term most used today in view of its shortcomings.

⁷² Fr Pedro Arrupe quoted by Aylward Shorter, in his book *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (New York: Maryknoll, 1988, p. 11).

*The Synod considers inculturation an urgent priority in the life of the particular Church for a firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa.*⁷³

Although inculturation is a complex and difficult task, as observed by the Synod Fathers, the process of inculturation must be done *in an ongoing manner, respecting the following criteria: compatibility with Christian message and communion with the universal Church...in all cases, care must be taken to avoid syncretism.*⁷⁴

This difficult and complex task is what we are going to try to assess in this chapter.

1. From the Negative View of Illness (as a Curse) to a More Positive One (Sharing the Suffering of Christ)

As we have seen there is a need to make a shift from the negative view towards death in Macua community that is to look at death as something which is very bad and meaningless to the understanding that suffering has a redemptive value. Jesus embraced suffering and death in order to re-unite or re-establish the broken relationship between God and humanity caused by sin (1Cor 15:22). Jesus accepted to suffer and die on the cross for us while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8) so as to bring us to God (1Pet 3:18) and those who might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for us (2Cor 5:14).

The main task of a pastoral agent is to bring this awareness of the redemptive value of suffering and death of Christ. Jesus' death was divinely willed by God (Mt 16:21-23) because it was through this gesture that Jesus gathered people from all nations before God.

Concerning the witchcraft accusation I think that some scientific explanation could be given to the people especially the illiterate in upcountry. Hygienic methods and preventive measures could be of help for the people to reduce the rate of sickness.

⁷³ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1995, no 59.

⁷⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no 62.

Macualand.⁷⁵ Giving right information about the causes of sickness could eventually reduce the accusations of witchcraft, evil eyes and magic power believed to cause illness. Instead of going for the diviners, hospitals would be of help to counteract the abuses that are typical of the diviners.

In fact, health services in the Nampula area are very few and most people do not have access to them and no wonder that people resort to consulting the diviners, magic power and witchcraft. For instance, in Netia County, which is my home area, there are only two health centres, one run by the government and the other by the Church. These two health entities (actually poorly equipped) cannot cover the whole population which is estimated at about seven hundred thousand people. I think that the Church could give a hand in this aspect since it is an essential and primary need of the people. Here an integral pastoral work which includes preaching the gospel and building up of infrastructures would be appropriate in the diocese. Of course, the Church is already doing something in these lines but at the same time more effort could be accorded.

On the other hand, the stress could also be given to the importance of prayer for the sick in the life of the Christians (Jas 5:13-18). Prayer can be a call for help or an act of gratitude. Although the Christians are called for prayers at any time and circumstances, at a time of sickness and crisis a person needs more prayers for comfort and consolation so as to be able to bear the pain with hope and trust in God.

Another important suggestion in regard to this double standard of living, that of being Christian and at the same time relying on others forces other than God, could be that the Church would try to emphasize on the healing ministry in the diocese. As we have seen, people go out to consult the *anahako* (diviners) because they are looking for holistic healing (body and spirit). And I am convinced that if the Church makes this step of providing

⁷⁵ The diseases most common in Macualand are Colera, typhoid, malnutrition, tuberculosis, malaria and skin diseases. Most of these diseases are caused by lack of hygienic observances and preventive measures.

strong healing ministry team in the area, the cases of diviner consultations will naturally reduce. It is also true that to eradicate this deeply rooted practice from among the Macua will take sometime but it will certainly occur.

I believe that this change of attitude could be more fruitful if the Basic Christian Communities or the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) could be of great help to Christians. As we know in the Small Christian Communities there is more openness, sharing and interaction which easily enables people to help one another in times of crisis. In the SCCs the people are concerned (or at least are supposed to) with one another. If a person has a problem, an illness of one is (or should be) an illness of all the group members.

2. Ancestor Veneration

In regard to the ancestor veneration (The Macua venerate their ancestors because they believe that they have supernatural power in them, ancestors). I think that this is a good ground on which to build the veneration of the Christian saints who are universal ancestors regardless of one's ethnic group or clan. More light could be shed on the matter so as to clarify the fact that it is not each and every dead person who qualifies to become a saint. *Saints qualify to be saints.*⁷⁶ It is not enough to have been loyal to one's traditions and customs in order to become a saint, as it happens for the Macua ancestors. The saints are models of inspiration for Christian commitment and holiness.

In spite of this shortcoming of the whole practice (ancestor veneration) the Church in Nampula Diocese has started exploring ways to integrate it into liturgy as an attempt to make it relevant and meaningful to the people. For instance, before the Eucharistic celebration starts there is the invocation of the ancestors. Since the Macua are

⁷⁶ VVAA, *Inculturation in the South African Context*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2000, p., 2. The author continues to assert that saints were those who performed miracles during their lives on earth and after their death. Whereas the ancestors are mystical agents by virtue of death and not on account of suffering or miracles performed.

accustomed to the practice of ancestor veneration, they will find the invocation of Christian saints meaningful and relevant to their faith.

Then the feast of All Saints could be explained in such a way that the Macua would appreciate it whereby some names of Macua outstanding ancestors could be mentioned during the celebration so that people may feel touched and moved by knowing that their own dead family members are also in heaven with Jesus and God the Father.

This, of course, does not mean that the ancestors should be elevated to the level of the Saints but just as a recognition of the figure of those who faithfully lived according to their own tradition and culture. Proper measures could be taken to avoid misunderstanding among the Christians, that is to look at their ancestors on equal basis with the Christian Saints. On the other hand it is also true that people are more familiar with their ancestors who are blood of their blood, and bones of their bones, this experimentation would be useful as a starting point to the teaching about the Christian concept of sainthood.

3. The Concept of the Hereafter

As far as Macua concept of hereafter is concerned, (Macua believe that life does not end with death but it continues beyond the grave), it could be good if the Church could start from where the Macua are so that from there it could construct the doctrine of eternal life. Although the Macua concept of hereafter is rather materialistic (the dead maintain the status of life, need food or drink), the work of the missionary or any other pastoral worker would be to help people to transcend and go beyond the physical and material idea. Since the belief is already there, I believe that the shift would not be all that difficult. The pastoral work here is to facilitate a gradual change in the mind of people from within through an organised Catechesis. In Macualand, like in other areas, people are baptised while they are still very young and when they grow up they know very little about their Christian faith. I think that the way forward would be to promote ongoing Catechesis or ongoing formation on Christian doctrine in order to make the Christian know deeply the basis of their

For instance, the doctrine of eternal life (life of communion with God) would be appropriate to stress here. It (doctrine) could be explained in very simple words that people could grasp of course bearing in mind their level of literacy and their capacity for assimilation.

Through the concept of hereafter we could also help the Macua to appreciate the treasure and re-live to the full the feast of Easter. In fact, the feast most attended to is Easter. Even those Christians who rarely go to Church throughout the whole year find themselves feel very eager to go for Easter vigil. The reason behind this flocking to Church on Easter is that it is a celebration of life. Jesus is being 'resurrected' or brought back to life. Once again the resurrection is looked at, as something rather physical like the one of Lazarus (see Jn 11:1-44).

An evangeliser could facilitate the move from this Macua understanding of hereafter to the Christ's resurrection. During Lenten season more emphasis could be put on the mystery of resurrection so that people would get a deeper meaning of it. I am saying this because I believe that resurrection of Christ (our future resurrection too), is the core and centre of our Christian faith. At the same time it is one of the most complex realities that cannot be explained. It is indeed a mystery.

Since the Diocese of Nampula (indeed the whole country)⁷⁷ has a shortage of ordained ministers who could help people to at least grasp the real meaning of Easter, lay people would be given sound preparation on Christian doctrine so as to be able to meet the demand of the people.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Up to today the number of local priests in the diocese of Nampula is very low. They are about 11 of them. Even the expatriate missionaries are very few in the diocese which makes it more difficult to reach more people. For example, the parishes of Netia (my own parish) and Mwekate remained for five years without a residing parish priest until 1997 when the Spiritan missionaries came in. However, Mwekate is being assisted by priests from another mission. They go there twice a month because the distance is rather long and the road network is very poor.

⁷⁸ Without falling into clericalism, we can say that there is a need for ordained ministers in the diocese and in the country in general.

The Synod Fathers aware of the role of lay people in the Church came up with a strong recommendation to *train them (laity) for the mission in suitable centres and schools of biblical and pastoral formation*. Further more, speaking about catechists the Bishop stated that:

The role of the catechist has been and remains a determinative force in the implantation and expansion of the Church in Africa, therefore they should continue to receive doctrinal formation as well as moral and spiritual support.⁷⁹

The lay people could be really empowered with Christian doctrinal knowledge to face the challenges laid to them by their fellow Christians especially nowadays that more and more of the Macua people, like many other African communities, are experiencing secularisation and loss of traditional values.

4. Widow and Widower Inheritance

Despite the fact that the Macua do not consider widow or widower inheritance or 'leviratic unions' as marriage as such, it (marriage) indeed compromises the Christian teaching of monogamous marriages. Although this practice is dying out naturally there are instances whereby people are forced to accept to be inherited or to inherit after the death of one of the relatives. As we have already seen there is no much freedom to refuse this practice, as it is a tradition left by the ancestors to be passed from generation to generation.

In my opinion, pastoral agents are required to assist the Macua Christians to understand that marriage is between two people and goes on as long as both partners are alive. According to Catholic teaching marriage terminates with the death of one of the partners.

Jesus referring to the original plan of God in creation says that marriage is indissoluble because once marriage takes place, man and woman become one (Gn 2:24). Even though it is not explicit about when the marriage terminates, the fact that

⁷⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no 90-91.

is a covenant between two people implies though implicitly that it ends with the departure of one of the spouses because after all what makes marriage is the coming together of two people who then become one flesh.

Thinking about the eminent Parousia of the Lord, Paul puts it clearly that a widow is only bound to her husband as long as he lives (1Cor 7:39). But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes. Then Paul continues to say that the second marriage should also be in the Lord, meaning that it should be conducted in Christian way ('not just come and stay'), following the directives of the Christian teaching.

As we have said Paul was influenced by the idea of the eminent return of Jesus. Paul inserts a final clause urging the widows to remain as they are, that is without remarrying (1Cor 7:40).

The fact is that the widows and the widowers should be free to remarry the person they love without being forced to inherit or to be inherited.

On the other hand, we have seen that this is not the case in Macua community. In fact, marriage is 'forever' and therefore when one of the spouses dies, another person has to come in to substitute the deceased so that the marriage continues. In other words, the issue of widow/widower inheritance needs to be revisited following the directives of Catholic teaching on the matter.

Apart from this Church principle on marriage (that is a stress on monogamy) it would be good for the pastoral agents to explain the dangers of this practice (widow/widower inheritance). We have already mentioned some of these dangers in the second chapter 2.7 Widow and Widower Inheritance.

St. Paul urges the Christian communities to honour widows (1Tim 5: 3). And further he seems to suggest that there was a special group made up of widows committed

prayers, supplications night and day (1 Tim 5:5).⁸⁰ I think that this could be one of the ways to solve especially the problem of widows in Macua community. I mean the Church could try to alleviate the suffering of widows⁸¹ who are forced to be inherited by brother-in-laws, by creating clubs or associations which will be concerned with widows' welfare. Meetings could be held to sensitise the widows of their rights to remarry a person of their choice outside their deceased husband (if they wish).

For those who, for one reason or another, find themselves already inherited the Church could seek ways to accommodate them rather than throwing them away. Special concessions, such as being allowed to receive the sacraments, could be granted to them. Then sessions for Counselling could be organised to help the widows to cope with their situation of widowhood.

5. The Funeral Meal and the Sacrament of the Eucharist

The Macua funeral meal has various religious meanings. On one side it is a gathering together of all the family members to celebrate not death but life therefore a total 'defeat' of death. Death is no longer powerful, as we have stressed earlier, because it has only managed to take away one of the many family members. People now perform a mockery on death. The act of drinking *otheka* (local brew) which is a source of happiness is also very significant in this process because it implies that grief and sadness are over and happiness has to come back, therefore life has to go on.

I think that this is basically what Christians celebrate in the Eucharist. It (Eucharist) brings together people in the new family, no longer confined to the blood relations but a family based on the life of Christ. The Risen Lord brings joy and hope to the bereaved. The apostles locked in the house, not only were they frustrated and disappointed but they

⁸⁰ Bagot, J.P., *How to Understand Marriage*, London: SCM Press Ltd, p. 93.

⁸¹ Here we concentrate on the widows because the widowers have more saying in the sense that they can refuse this practice if they want to, though they can also be pressurised to comply with this practice lest they be ostracised.

also fearful and uncertain. All their dreams were shattered and it seemed to be the end of everything. Death was too strong and had apparently won the battle. But Jesus' resurrection draws away all anxieties and fears. New life has come back. Death is completely overcome and Paul proudly shouts: "Where, o death, is your victory? Where, o death, is your sting?" (1Cor 15:55).

In my opinion this ritual (funeral meal) could be integrated into the celebration of the Eucharist and given a new meaning. In this way the Macua could retain their funeral ritual which is so essential to their culture at the same time it could have a Christian meaning. Once again this involves dialogue and careful study of the matter in order to avoid superficial adaptation and syncretism.

CONCLUSION

Having dealt with the practical pastoral suggestions for new ways of inculturation, we have seen that the Macua already have some solid traditional foundations rich in religious meaning. To use the words of St. Justin, there are already seeds of the Gospel in the Macua culture. Only that some work must be done in order to cherish these seeds. Care, patience, endurance, openness and frank and transparent dialogue are greatly needed here.

Finally proper pastoral methodology, preparation and empowerment of laity and ongoing formation for the pastoral agents are the key to possible success in the process of contextualizing the gospel into the Macua culture especially on the area of death and funeral rituals.

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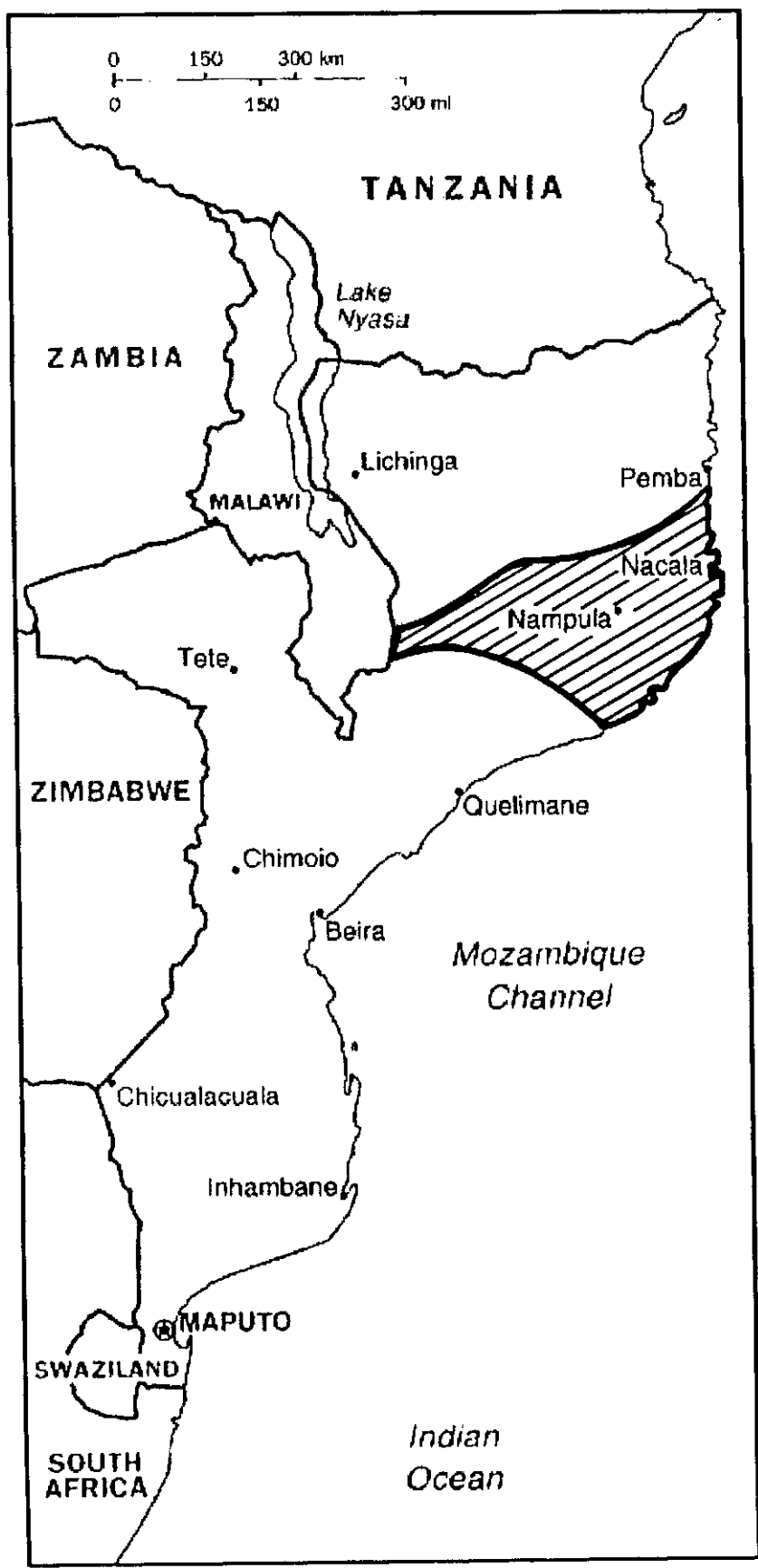
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