

**Narratives of Illness and Witchcraft :**  
**Healing processes of Traditional spiritual healer and Discourses on**  
**Witchcraft**  
**in Northern part of Malawi**

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Place of fieldwork: Republic of Malawi

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**Research Background**

A dispute has recently erupted in Malawi among a human rights organization called Secular Humanism, Traditional spiritual healers, and villagers concerning witchcraft discourses. Secular Humanism claims that witchcraft does not exist, and are opposed to the activities of Traditional spiritual healers. By contrast, Traditional spiritual healers claim that witchcraft exists, and are requesting the re-instatement of their legitimacy as traditional spiritual healers.

**Research purpose and aim**

This study aims to understand the diagnostic procedures used by Traditional spiritual healers, the related discourses in the community, and how they influence each other. Traditional spiritual healerTherefore, this study focused on people's illness narratives and the diagnostic procedures of "Nchimi," local diviners possessed by ancestral spirits ("Mizimu").

**Results and achievements of fieldwork**

My fieldwork can be divided into two parts. I first conducted general research on Nchimi and their patients. During this phase, I collected data on the process involved in becoming a Nchimi, and the types of activities involved in their diagnostic procedures. The most prominent finding of this study was that several patients who visit Nchimis have chronic illnesses, and the diagnoses are often that the illnesses were caused by witchcraft.

Second, I conducted extensive research in the Karonga district in the northern part of Malawi. I stayed at a Nchimi, Biriya Lowani's homestead, in Bunganiro village for one month. During the stay, I observed Lowani's diagnostic procedures and treatment regimes. In addition, I interviewed people who were staying at Lowani's place to collect data on their illness narratives. The main finding of this phase of the study was that people based their illness narratives on the Nchimi's divination or diagnostic procedures, and this contributed to discourses on witchcraft proliferating in the

community. However, it seemed that these illness narratives were not static, but rather flexible and open to changes.

### **Implications and influences on future research**

The findings of this study will be analyzed and discussed in my Master's thesis due this year. In my thesis, I plan to discuss the relationship between Nchimis' divination practices and discourses on witchcraft by focusing on people's illness narratives and Nchimis' divination processes. With this thesis, I aim to contribute to both the anthropological study of witchcraft, as well as studies on illness in Medical anthropology, using the analytical concept of "Narrative."