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Protesting unemployment and precarity?: mapping community perspectives on the anti-bloodsucker protests in Mulanje District, Malawi.

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ABSTRACT

Malawi grappled with occurrences of bloodsucking rumours that erupted in Mulanje, one of the rural and tea growing districts but also spread to three other districts within the Southern region of this Southern African Country. More than four occurrences have happened, in 2000, 2002, 2009 including the most recent ones of 2016 – 2018.Unlike the other three occurrences, the 2016-2018 occurrences were entrenched in violent protests that claimed many lives and disrupted the country.

This research report has used primary qualitative data based on an extensive field work in Mulanje district to explore community perceptions on both the rumour and violent protests defining them. The research argues that the events in Mulanje surrounding bloodsucker protests were not irrational, ludicrous sparks and random rural superstitions. Rather, these occurrences and the violence emerging from them represented deep seated issues ingrained in fractured relations between different groups of people. Fractured relations between groups such as the state and citizens, local community leaders and community members, journalists and villagers, women and men, and white tea estate managers and black workers all filtered to define the texture of these protests within the narrative of bloodsuckers. These were social processes ingrained in a tissue of suspicion, precarious livelihoods, perceived injustices, violence, displacement, and perceived unfulfilled promises by people in authority. To this end, the research report is mostly interested in both vampire/bloodsucking stories and the subsequent violent protests in the predominantly tea growing plantation of Mulanje district.