

"Cinderellas" of Our Mozambique Wish to Speak: A Feminist Perspective on Extractivism

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All in uniform. Some in army uniforms,
others in administrator uniforms.
(Pepetela, 2018)

Abstract

Mozambique is currently undergoing an intense cycle of extractive activities, with most of the generated benefits being transferred to international corporations and local elites. This has given rise to extreme inequality, the emergence of violent conflicts, the erosion of democracy, forced displacement of many people, and a systematic disrespect for the material and spiritual living conditions of the population who are divested of their territories. Against this background, the living conditions of women and girls have undergone many setbacks. We adopt the phrase "*Cinderellas of our Mozambique*" as a metaphor for those women who continue resisting the economic development model based on the violent and intensive extraction of natural resources. Our text draws on both theory and our experiences in the past two years, namely: 1) our active participation in several events on extractive activities in Mozambique and their impacts on women's lives; 2) 50 interviews, mainly in the northern provinces (Cabo Delgado, Maputo, Nampula and Niassa), where megaprojects and extractive activities are more intense; and 3) our organising and facilitation of three workshops in Pemba, the capital of Cabo Delgado province. Our paper is structured in two principal sections. In the first, we discuss and analyse the contemporary political economy of Mozambique as a southern African country. In the second section, based on our own experience and the narratives and practices of Mozambican women, we identify some of the possible causes of suffering and some of the ideas of resistance and future alternatives led by women and their communities.

Keywords: Mozambique, women, extractivism, African Feminism

Introduction

Since the era of colonial occupation in Mozambique came to an end in 1975, the exploitation of natural resources by the Portuguese Estado Novo dictatorship has given rise to an economic model based on extractivism (Castel-Branco, 2010). The consequences of such a model are blatant inequality, exclusion and injustice experienced by the black population in Mozambique (Francisco, 2003). According to Bidaurratzaga and Colom (2019), the exploitation of natural gas began in the 1960s under colonial occupation of the country. The same is true for coal, which has traditionally been exploited in the north-western province of Tete in the form of small-scale mining, both for domestic consumption and for export. Small-scale mining began to change in 2004, however, when the Brazilian transnational Vale won the exploitation concession of the Moatize mine—one of the largest untapped reserves in the world—and the South African corporation Sasol began extracting natural gas from the Pande and Temane fields.

Although Mozambique is extremely rich in natural resources, with fertile land and valuable timber, minerals and energy resources, the large majority of its inhabitants are poor and too many people live in extreme poverty (Castel-Branco, 2010; Hofmann, 2015; Langa, 2017; Orre and Ronning, 2017). At the same time, increasingly larger and more luxurious private residential or tourist condominiums and sumptuous hotels are being built in the cities, while more people are forced to leave their neighbourhoods and face dire living conditions, mostly in the cities. Waste food pickers, both women and men, walk through the main streets scavenging for food, while the government fails to implement public policies aimed at promoting the well-being of the population or redistributing wealth.

Mozambique boasts a formally democratic regime, yet the political climate is marked by fear, with differences of lifestyle signalling the suffering and discrimination that continue to haunt life and citizenship in the country. In the last four years, several activists, intellectuals and journalists have been harassed, prosecuted by the state, attacked and in some cases, assassinated. They include Carlos Nuno Castel-Branco, prosecuted by the state (2015) and currently living in exile; José Macuane (23 March 2016) and Ericino de Salema (19 July 2018), harassed and seriously injured; Gilles Cistac (3 March 2015) and Anastácio Matavele (6 October 2019), assassinated. All had publicly expressed their dissent regarding the state of the nation and the government's actions. To date, the national police

have not given any explanation or prosecuted any person concerning these crimes. This silence strengthens the view that the Mozambican government does not have the political will to find and prosecute those who are involved or may even be complicit in the violations.

Countering this situation, local as well as national initiatives and many others are taking place around the country. A number of different associations have been engaging in research on these issues over the last ten years. They include Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Education Trust, Moçambique (WLSA Moçambique), *Centro Terra Viva (CTV)*¹, *Centro de Integridade Pública (CIP)*², *Instituto de Estudos Socio-Económicos (IESE)*³, *SEKELEKANI – Comunicação para o Desenvolvimento*⁴, *KUWUKA JDA*⁵, *Justiça Ambiental (JA)*⁶, and *Cruzeiro do Sul – Instituto de Investigação para o Desenvolvimento José Negrão*⁷. Monitoring activities have been conducted by *Iniciativa de Transparência na Indústria Extractiva em Moçambique (ITIEM)*⁸ and *Coligação Cívica sobre Indústria Extractiva*⁹. There is an increased awareness in civil society of how extractive activities are reproducing injustices and reinforcing old and new forms of discrimination against women and girls. The participation of Mozambican civil society organisations in regional networks; the development of joint research on extractive activities and their impact on women's and men's lives; advocacy and campaigning actions for reform conducive to long-term structural changes; together with the different alliance models on the African continent and the world at large, represent different forms of resistance and solidarity aiming at building an alternative post-extractivist African ecological vision.

A young Mozambican feminist¹⁰ once referred to the grandmothers who participated in the armed struggle against Portuguese colonialism as the "Cinderellas of our Mozambique".¹¹ For her, this signified the simultaneous strength and perseverance of women in overcoming wartime challenges in their lives, and the realisation of the independence dream. We adopt this expression here as a significant indigenous metaphor to name those women¹² who continue resisting one of the faces of contemporary colonial oppression: the economic development model based on the violent and intensive extraction of natural resources. These women are restless fighters who are capable of formidable actions against unrelenting oppression. They are women who dare to tell their stories despite the risks. They treat ashes as if they were fire and hope as though it were

their sister. They weep and do not hide their anger at being abused, but they do not accept their abusers' impunity.

In writing this text, we have drawn both on theory and our empirical experiences over the past two years, especially those concerning our active participation in several events on extractive activities and conflicts in Mozambique and their impact on women's lives. In total, we conducted 50 interviews with women on this theme. Ten of the interviews were in Maputo, the capital of the country, and the other 40 in three northern provinces: Niassa, Nampula and Cabo Delgado, where extractive activities and systematic violence have been ongoing over the last six years. Thirty-eight of the 50 interviews were carried out in groups¹³, in which 98 women participated in total. The women say they feel more confident when they are in groups and preferred to talk with us this way. Our other main sources of information include a series of three workshops held in Pemba (in February 2019) with the collaboration of the Department of Ethics, Citizenship and Development, College of Social and Political Sciences of the Catholic University. We also used the documentary *Terra em Suspense/Tierra en Suspense* produced by our research team (Babagaza Studios and Gogoratz, 2019).¹⁴

The women with whom we worked are mainly impoverished peasants. We also worked with teachers, journalists, students and social workers—active leaders in civic organisations based in Cabo Delgado, Nampula and Niassa Provinces. The large majority (90) are adults, between 30 and 50 years of age. Despite wanting to speak to us, none of the women allowed us to mention their names or refer publicly to most of their comments and reflections. Women fear for their lives and those of their families because of the overall climate of repression and political harassment. In the northern provinces, women are also scared of potential attacks by different groups of insurgents and of how the latter may react to the women's testimonies if they were made public.¹⁵

We address the limitations imposed by this situation by referring instead to material which both resonates with what we heard during the fieldwork and which is available in other reports and the media. We draw particularly on Palmira Velasco's work—she is currently the researcher on the Natural Resources, Environment and Gender programme of SEKELEKANI, an independent centre that focuses on research and action in communication for development. Trained as a journalist, Velasco was previously the coordinator of the *Associação da Mulher*

na Comunicação Social.¹⁶ Palmira Velasco is currently the only woman writing and publishing consistently on issues relating to natural resources. She travels to different parts of the country where violence and harassment related to extractive activities are ongoing and when talking to those affected, she is the only person who pays special attention to women's living conditions and the violence they endure in their territories. We recognise the methodological drawbacks of this approach but note that they arise from the challenges of trying to do research in territories marked by armed conflict.

The rest of the article is structured in two principal sections. Our argument is twofold: on the one hand, that the present economic model based on extractivism is not producing wealth and well-being for the majority of the Mozambican people; and on the other, that these economic options are rooted in an androcentric and patriarchal rationality. In the first section, we conduct a critical feminist analysis of the contemporary political economy of Mozambique. The second section addresses the impact of the extractive economy on women and girls, with regard to access to land, sex and gender inequalities, relations between state and society, and pervasive violence. We also identify some of the possible causes of suffering, and some of the ideas of resistance and future alternatives led by women and their communities.

Extractivism in Mozambique

In 2008, global mining companies made major coal sector investments in mineral-rich Tete province. This was followed in 2010 by an even more significant development: natural gas reserves estimated at 150 trillion cubic feet were found in the Rovuma basin, off Cabo Delgado Province in the northern part of the country. This momentous growth of extractive activities is part of a wider process unfolding across much of sub-Saharan Africa, in Central and East Africa in particular. From the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda to Kenya and Tanzania, several states across the region are experiencing natural resource dynamics similar to those of Mozambique. Yet these activities and indeed the commodity super cycle have not led to a meaningful reduction in poverty and inequality in these countries.

Research shows that poverty remains a transversal and important problem (UNDP Mozambique, 2019); UNDP's (2018) human development analysis ranks

the country as one of the poorest in the world.¹⁷ In spite of the growth rates and investments in the last two decades, “improvements in living standards have not been evenly spread across the country, with improvements heavily concentrated in urban areas and in the southern part of the country” (UNDP, *ibid.*).

Several social scientists in Mozambique have shown that the country is undergoing a period of extractivist neoliberal capitalism with heavy impacts on its economy and its social and political life (Silva *et al.*, 2015; Brito *et al.*, 2017; Osório and Silva, 2017, 2018). The country’s economy is based on the systematic extraction of minerals and hydrocarbons, and on the intensive exploitation of fishing, forest, agricultural, and soil resources; this determines its place within the political economy of the international division of labour and production. According to Nuno Castel-Branco (2010: 29), “The mode of accumulation in Mozambique is predominantly extractive, and this characteristic was historically acquired and developed over time around specific interests of international capitalism, having contributed to create and consolidate an alliance between national capital and international capital”.

The presence of major corporations that lead mining projects in Mozambique shows how attractive the country’s resources are to transnational capital. Many extractive activities take the form of megaprojects—large-scale economic projects that are highly concentrated in a few sectors and which attract foreign investment mainly for export (Castel-Branco, 2010). Eduardo Bidaurratzaga and Artur Colom (2019) highlight the close connection between megaprojects and the extractive economy. This is evident in coal exploitation in Tete province, natural gas exploitation in Inhambane and Cabo Delgado, hydrocarbons in the Rovuma basin in Cabo Delgado, and the production of aluminium in the Mozal smelter in Maputo. The authors argue that an economy based on extractive, intensive exploitation and megaprojects severely restricts the creation and development of other production chains based on small and medium proximity economies which generate jobs and income. Consequently, economic diversity and endogenous production networks suffer drastic impacts or are destroyed.

Although financial-extractivist capital carries out capital-intensive operations, it does not have the capacity to create jobs for most people in the places where such projects are implemented. A major reason is that these businesses require skilled labour, which in most cases cannot be found locally and in the short term. Women tend to be more penalised because they hold lower or no qualifications

at all for the jobs available. It is estimated that the megaprojects developed in Mozambique between 1992 and 2010 represent only five per cent of the total available jobs while accumulating 70% of the capital generated (Bidaurratzaga and Colom, 2019, based on data published by UNCTAD, 2012).

Over the past decade, the economic vulnerability of the country has been confirmed by reports showing how the fall of commodity prices in the international market has affected foreign investment:

FDI¹⁸ flows to Africa slumped to \$42 billion in 2017, a 21 per cent decline from 2016. Weak oil prices and harmful lingering effects from the commodity bust saw flows contract, especially in the larger commodity-exporting economies. FDI inflows to diversified exporters, including Ethiopia and Morocco, were relatively more resilient.

(UNCTAD, 2018: 11)

This has resulted in weakened Mozambican capacity to implement redistributive policies, create jobs and properly address calamities such as the 2019 Idai and Kenneth cyclones and the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The country's over-indebtedness is yet another consequence mentioned by Bidaurratzaga and Colom (2019), since an extractive development model requires permanent development of infrastructure (roads, railways, ports and airports) serving these companies and their operations. However, the development of infrastructure does not really benefit territories and populations or the State's participation in the companies. Mozambican debt service increased from 0,34 % of the GDP in 2007 to 4,54% in 2016 while the country's gross debt increased from 37,5% of the GDP in 2011 to 120% five years later (World Bank, 2017). This situation has deteriorated even further due to a lack of transparency in the presentation of accounts concerning these government expenditures (Mosca and Selemene, 2012).

Another risk caused by the massive injection of foreign currency into the economy is what economists like to call the "Dutch disease", meaning an excessive or deregulated appreciation of national currency, which is detrimental to the competitiveness of national export-oriented companies (Bidaurratzaga and Colom, 2019). There has, in fact, been a massive transfer of the benefits generated by Mozambique's intense cycle of extractive activities to international corporations and local elites. Despite tax incentives granted to transnational corporations

operating in the country, the expected benefits, i.e. direct investment in the Mozambican economy and society, are not to be found. There has, instead, been a clear disconnection between the massive presence of foreign capital and the State's financial resources for enacting public policies that make a positive impact on the lives of people and their territories (Silva *et al.*, 2015: 195).

Whilst the mining sector of the Mozambican economy is responsible for no more than four per cent of the country's GDP, the latter grew by 11% in 2016 and is now considered the major driving force for economic growth in the country (AfDB/OCDE/PNUD, 2017; Bidaurratzaga and Colom, 2019). Between 2003 and 2008, GDP grew by about 55%, although "the percentage of the population living below the poverty line decreased only by 7% or even less, having increased in urban areas and in some rural areas" (Castel-Branco, 2010: 21). By 2014, economic growth had reached 7,2% in the first half of the year; yet 46% of the Mozambican population—at least 12 million people—were poor (World Bank, 2014). Mozambique is, therefore, experiencing a very complex socio-economic reality.

Wealth generated in the country, which should be used as a basis for fair redistribution among all Mozambicans, vanishes into thin air. The country and its people are left at the mercy of both gradual impoverishment, accompanied by feelings of injustice and abandonment, and the conflict generated and fed by scarcity of all sorts. This dissonance between economic growth and the improvement of the population's living conditions is one of the factors to be borne in mind regarding the social turbulence or even the violence that the country experiences, particularly in the northern provinces where poverty indices are even higher (Brito *et al.*, 2017; Weimer and Carrilho, 2017).

The contemporary situation may be described as a new kind of colonialism which, although not based on political occupation, operates via the imposition of economic and cultural as well as political relations of subjugation and exploitation carried out by the elites through their enterprises and through transnational corporations. This then is the context in which the living conditions of women and girls have undergone many setbacks.

Cinderellas of our Mozambique Speak and Sew Life Alternatives

Since 2000, many Mozambican non-governmental organisations, in particular those affiliated with *Fórum Mulher* (Women's Forum), have been participating

in national, regional, and international meetings on the mining industry and its impact on countries, with particular emphasis on its impact on women and girls. These regional meetings have provided important opportunities for exchanging information, learning, and disseminating alerts about what is happening in different countries. The meetings also provide opportunities for strengthening the resistance of women's groups so that they can organise themselves and put pressure on their respective governments. Women's demands are that their governments enforce the law and also mainstream gender and women's human rights from an African perspective into extractive activities.

Alliances such as those with Women in Mining Industries (WoMin¹⁹) have helped women to articulate efforts countering the concept of extractivist development. In Mozambique, WoMin works with the associations *Fórum Mulher*, *UNAC*,²⁰ *Justiça Ambiental (JA)*²¹ and Hikone Mozambique.²² Women's engagement in research, training and the exchange of information among organisations in various countries within the WoMin network has been crucial for strengthening their ability to challenge extractivist activities in the context of a neo-liberal, capitalist, racist and heteropatriarchal model of development.

The Cinderellas of our Mozambique Wish to Speak

Colonialism of all sorts, including the contemporary, is based on extreme exploitation and the suppression of any counter narrative about its destructive essence. Chinua Achebe (1994) once quoted a proverb that says, "Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter", which alerts us to the critical need to listen to the lion to know what really happens during the chase. But, in this proverb, a layer of silence remains, because it is actually the lioness who goes to hunt and bring back food for the family, including the lion. The story told by the lioness cannot be forgotten or silenced if we want to understand the hunt.

Many feminists (Mohanty, 1991; Mama, 1995, 2001; Amadiume, 1997, 1998; Oyewùmí, 2005; Pereira, 2008; McFadden, 2011; Casimiro; 2014b, 2015; Cunha, 2014, 2017, 2019) have shown how women, particularly African women, have been subjected to various forms of epistemic violence and how this compounds our marginality. Whether political, epistemological, economic or social, the contestation of any kind of single story is one of the most vivid rebellions against patriarchal

and colonial powers. This is why it is our epistemological choice to bring to light some of the words and initiatives pronounced and led by Mozambican women in areas of extractive activities. Together we raise powerful questions regarding the present master narrative on their own country.

The set of impacts and challenges generated by extractivist capital is rather complex, causing a wide range of personal and collective tragedies. Our research shows the impact of the extractive economy on the lives of women and girls in terms of land access, militarisation and violent conflicts, state-society relations, and sex/gender inequalities.

The Montepuez district, Cabo Delgado province, is one of the most fertile regions in Mozambique. Boasting a mild temperature, the main activity in the region is agriculture, producing corn, beans, sesame, tubers, sorghum, and rice. For this, Montepuez is called the province's granary. Market production results in income from the sale of cotton and cashew nuts. The subsistence model, where women are the core element and thus granted some power and authority in the household, has been exposed to continuous risk. Research conducted by SEKELEKANI's team at the ruby mines in the district indicates that:

A poor northern Mozambican town [was] transformed in a period of five years into a sought-after destination for hordes of citizens of varied nationalities who, given the circulation of relatively large amounts of cash, cause social destabilisation in the local community, destroying families, causing divorces, early marriages, and prostitution, and generating a further spread of sexually transmitted infections. (Velasco, 2017: 11)

Palmira Velasco's words above convey the incredible violence which the women experience daily. The "hordes" refer to the influx of men of all nationalities into the communities, whose behaviour is extremely aggressive against women: harassing, abusing, and raping them at every opportunity. The resulting atmosphere of permanent violence is described by Mariam²³ below:

Nós não somos pessoas, nós somos como cabritos. Eles vêm e queimam as casas, levam as mulheres e fazem-nas suas esposas. Para dormir temos que ir para o mato e dormir como os leões. Nós não queremos viver assim.

We are not persons, we are like goats. They come, they burn the houses, they take the women and make them their spouses. To sleep we have to go to the bushes and sleep like the lions. We do not want to live like this.²⁴

Women and men were deprived of their land and displaced to regions where the soil was infertile, lacking water, transportation, and markets. One of the consequences has been a splitting of families, which increases female loneliness and means additional family duties to take on, whilst violence against women goes increasingly unpunished (Osório and Silva, 2017: 153-160). Having lost access to their lands, which puts their food security and sovereignty at risk, some Namanhumbir women in Cabo Delgado province are forced to participate in activities that are complementary to prospection, such as selling water and preparing food.

The current situation created by extractivist capital and its activities in Mozambique has a specific characteristic that deserves special attention: the growing militarisation and aggressive policing of the territories. In addition to the presence of military people, this translates into a violence-based culture of addressing conflict—one of continual threat, dread and the inability to speak out or denounce for fear of being considered to be against development, or to be a government enemy, or even a terrorist. Women and men suffer together from this violence. Yet in these districts and provinces, since women are mainly responsible for subsistence agriculture (work in the *machambas*²⁵), they experience particular dramas:

Women from Olinda, a small island in the Mucupia Administrative Post, Inhassunge district, in the Province of Zambezia, are terrified due to the climate of intimidation and persecution that prevails in the island since a deployment of the *Unidade de Intervenção Rápida* (rapid intervention unit) (UIR) moved here on a permanent basis. Last July the police opened fire on helpless members of the population, causing one death and several wounded people, besides arresting others, including the village leader. The peasants were holding a peaceful demonstration, protesting against the government plan to remove them from their lands which, in the meantime, had been granted to a Chinese company that wants to exploit heavy sands there. [...] They tell us to go to Cherrimane, but the land there is not enough even for the natives, who cultivate *machambas* here in our island. (Velasco, 2018: 3)

The same climate of intimidation is depicted in testimonies of how community consultations processes have been conducted, or not. Although required by law,

community consultations are often not carried out, which leaves communities feeling abandoned or harassed by the State. Instead, the State comes to the defence of investing companies while failing to safeguard the rights and the lives of its citizens. In the few meetings organised by the district or the local authorities with communities affected by some project, the populace is typically told: “*Vão ter escola, posto de saúde, trabalho*” (“You are going to have a school, a health clinic, work”). Or “*Vão ser mais ricos, vão criar barrigas grandes*” (“You are going to be wealthy, to grow a big belly”) (*ibid.*). Raising expectations of well-being further increases their subsequent feeling of powerlessness in the face of unfulfilled promises and the violence of such processes, especially when accompanied by impunity. “*O reassentamento é desterro*” (“Resettlement is exile”), they say. “*Este capitalismo é como uma calamidade: mata*” (“This capitalism is like a calamity: it kills”).²⁶

This sense of injustice and helplessness was expressed consistently by women in the interviews we carried out. The same unfortunate experiences were repeatedly shared in assemblies, meetings and seminars such as those held in Maputo²⁷. During an interview in Maputo, the situation endured by people and communities in Mocimboa da Praia and Palma (in Cabo Delgado province) was described by a woman who wants to remain anonymous, as the epitome of “*Fáida!*” (“Profit and greed!”).

A second aspect of the extractivist economy concerns the androcentric nature of this capitalist rationality which creates many new problems for women of all ages whilst reinforcing underlying problems which might otherwise have been resolved. Large-scale mining operations are places dominated by a male workforce, where informal and smaller-scale practices carried out by women and children tend to be disregarded. Women and girls are experiencing these problems acutely due to the sharpening of the dominant sexual division of labour. Since women are supposed to provide food and drinking water daily for their families, despite the living conditions, they are under increased pressure and feel overwhelmed by their “duties”. There is less fertile land and it is further away from home. Water supplies are poisoned or access to them is more difficult because of the violent episodes related to mining. Women’s workload increases as does their vulnerability to sexual abuse. We notice, too, that in the context of scarcity of food and clean water, domestic violence against women and girls increases. At the same time, cultural

norms which prevent females from carrying out certain activities as remunerated jobs or from participating in economic life are being reinforced:

Trade is male-dominated. Men are the ones who travel to the cities of Montepuez or Pemba to buy products to be resold in the local markets. The few women who are involved in business mostly sell water to artisan miners, usually known as *garimpeiros*. (Velasco, 2017: 11)

The situation in Cabo Delgado is mostly as described below:

Women in Namanhumbir say that they lack access to paid work at Montepuez Ruby Mining, the mining company. They had hoped that they would be able to improve their life with this job opportunity, as was much trumpeted during community consultations. Most women who have been hired by MRM come from Nampula and Montepuez and they are mostly in charge of kitchen duties, first-aid, and security services (Velasco, 2017: 13).

Practices that are harmful to women's bodies and subjectivities are reinforced and their subaltern position deepened, while the violence perpetrated against them goes unpunished. Their work and responsibilities are relegated to a subsidiary, undignified place, and transformed into intensively exploitative relations in the family, the community and in the workplace. The androcentric nature of this extractivist model activates a disconnection which further emphasises the segmentation between economy and life, reducing women's place and functions in their societies to endless duties with no right to the enjoyment of benefits or well-being. These are concrete manifestations of the destructive power of the hetero-patriarchy that lies at the core of extractivist capitalism.

An additional feature of the extractivist economy is the extreme violence involved in all these processes: military and police violence in conflict resolution; violence against women in the increasing commodification of their bodies in order to survive; the violence of abandonment; the institutional violence of the failure to comply with norms and legislation, and the associated unaccountability and impunity; the violence against subjectivities, depriving people of their memories and self-esteem through the destruction of their territories and their ability to represent the world as theirs. Violence and aggression are other names for this capitalist rationality which informs the current global political economy whose presence can be felt in Mozambique. It is crucial that we understand how this

reality reveals the contradiction between capital and life, or, to use specific feminist terminology, it shows the androcentric nature of contemporary extractivist political-economic rationality which favours and fuels violent, autocratic masculinities among both perpetrators and victims.

It is important that we introduce an element of analytic precaution here. Many of the forms of violence against women and girls identified in Mozambique, such as sexual abuse, forced marriages, early pregnancies and all kinds of domestic violence, are seen by several feminists (Osório and Silva, 2017, 2018) as being rooted in local customs. However, we should not forget that culture and customs are vibrant, dynamic, and constantly reinvented. What we call tradition or culture is, to a great extent, the result of permanent exposure to all sorts of influences and contexts. Thus, it is important to remember that centuries of colonialism and sexual, social, and epistemic violence brought and imposed by this system have played, and continue to play, an active role in the reconfiguration of what is presented as genuine and traditional. By this we mean that there are strong reasons to believe that these forms of violence against women and girls, as well as the problematic relationship with the land, still retain much of their colonial heritage and have not been freed from the contradictions inherent in the western rationality that shapes them (Pereira, 2008).

In our view, Mozambican women, as well as many men, have been subjected to a process of objectification as if they, both women and men, were also natural resources to be endlessly exploited through their work, the abuse they face, and old and new forms of dispossession of their humanity and wealth. In spite of this extremely hostile environment and all the hardships they endure, Mozambican women and girls have been engaged in reflection and action, building alternatives that promote their human dignity as well as the possibility of a future for themselves and their children (Cunha, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019; Casimiro, 2014a and b, 2015; Casimiro and Trindade, 2019).

The Cinderellas of our Mozambique Want to Break Out of their Glass Slippers

This section highlights resistance by the Cinderellas of Mozambique and also the emergence of alternatives. We draw on different sources of information circulating among the scientific communities, social movements, the media and social media,

and our own empirical research. Sewing these different forms of resistance together requires a rationality that does not waste experiences, a rationality that promotes dialogues which can help restore hope as an epistemological category.

Our research team held three workshops in close collaboration with the Catholic University of Mozambique in Pemba. The knowledge and information generated in these workshops was grounded in lived experiences which included acts of resistance and perspectives on alternatives. Thirty-eight persons participated – intellectuals, local authorities, leaders of civic organisations, and religious authorities. They came from Montepuez, Pemba, Namanhumbir and Palma districts. Only nine women attended the workshops, largely due to lack of security. The women avoided using their names, preferring instead to appear as members of organisations or groups of citizens. The collective voice is much safer for all.

In Table 1, we systematise two elements. Firstly, we analyse the problems and challenges experienced, interpreted and voiced by the workshop participants, living as they do in one of the most critical areas of extractive activities within Cabo Delgado province. The second element lists the alternatives imagined by the women and men involved and the kind of initiatives they have been constructing to counter their own misery and exploitation.

Table 1. From challenges to the imagination of justice

| Problems and challenges | Initiatives and outcomes |
|---|---|
| <p>Access to the land Lack of access to fertile land.</p> <p>Degradation of urban infrastructure and public spaces.</p> | <p>For communities hosting displaced populations, public claiming of rights concerning land redistribution and access to other resources.</p> <p><i>Fórum Urbano Permanente</i> (Permanent Urban Forum) (PLATIP).</p> |
| <p>Exclusion and social inequalities Lack of jobs and housing opportunities.</p> <p>Ethnic and tribal conflicts concerning immigrants.</p> <p>Women's subjugation to their husbands in the household.</p> <p>Increase in the number of forced and adolescent marriages.</p> <p>Sexual harassment in schools and within the family.</p> | |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Governance and participation Corruption.</p> <p>Lack of transparency; not enough governance monitoring initiatives.</p> <p>Inaccessible accountability mechanisms.</p> <p>Absence of law enforcement.</p> <p>Communities and local leaders not included in community consultations.</p> | <p>Training of paralegals to work in all districts.</p> <p>Use of local community radio stations.</p> <p>Dissemination and training population on <i>Lei de Terras</i> (land law) and <i>Lei do Reassentamento</i> (resettlement law), <i>Lei do Ambiente</i> (environmental law), <i>Lei sobre Minas</i> (mining law), <i>Lei da Floresta e Fauna</i> <i>Bravia</i> (forest and wild fauna law), rights and duties of displaced people and right to information.</p> <p>Short courses on human rights and professional ethics.</p> <p>Establishment of a Leaders' Council annual assembly for accountability to members and planning. Municipal Observatory Programmes and Participatory Budgeting Programmes. Public debates - <i>Fórum Terraço Aberto</i>. Peaceful demonstrations demanding that communities be shown the respect that they deserve.</p> |
| <p>Violence Rape and sexual violence against women.</p> <p>Violence against prostitutes and sexual exploitation in mining areas.</p> | <p>Communities report cases of rape. Silence is gradually being broken by reports, claims, and participation in democracy.</p> <p>A green line is available for reporting and displayed in most sectors. Peaceful demonstrations demanding that communities be shown the respect that they deserve.</p> |

As we can see, women and men resist, in the most diverse ways, the threats impinging on their lands, their ways of life, their bodies and their community life, weaving together different life prospects. Within the dominant hetero-patriarchal and colonialist capitalist model, the struggles of these populations, especially of women, are often ignored and left undocumented by both researchers and journalists. The challenges are many and varied, from the domination of women's organisations affiliated with specific political parties to the increasing criminalisation of feminist organisations that raise their voices against crimes and violations, demanding global systemic changes. Many things are yet to be done but the rise in awareness and analytical thinking is already apparent from the contents of this table.

The climate of resistance and opposition to lived and imposed situations has its own voices and specific strategies to which we must pay attention so as to deepen understanding of how things are developing on the ground. At the village of Quitupo, during a meeting with the Administrator and the female Permanent Secretary of the provincial government of Cabo Delgado on 10 August 2013, the populace made it impossible for the meeting to continue, booing the government representatives and leaving the room, as described below:

During this meeting, a team from Anadarko, the oil multinational, accompanied by two government officials, imparted this news to the local communities 'in a single strike': (1) a DUAT (certificate of the right to use the land) had been issued on their lands benefiting Anadarko AMI1 and ENH Logistics; and, as a consequence (2) people would be removed and resettled in a different region. Quite simply! Since they were getting this news with virtually no previous preparation or information, the populations asked for explanations and, on receiving none, they abandoned the place and the authorities' representatives (Mário and Bila, 2015: 5).

During the First Congress of Displaced and Affected Communities by extractivist projects in Mozambique, organised by the Civic Coalition Against Extractivism (*Coligação Cívica sobre Indústria Extractiva*, 2019), there was a session called "Narration of suffering". Men and women from different provinces of Mozambique narrated their suffering since the first experiences of extractivism in Inhambane, about the ways they were challenged and mistreated by the multinationals and by

government officials, showing how the places where these industries are located have been affected. Maria Sincreia, from Bagamoyo village, Tete province, stated during the meeting:

Dantes tínhamos as torneiras a jorrar água, tínhamos os riachos. Agora estamos entre a linha férrea, quando o comboio passa apanhamos a poluição. “Vão ter escola, posto de saúde, trabalho”, disseram-nos em 2002. Até agora só temos um posto de saúde.

Before we used to have taps spouting water, we had streams. Now we are between the railway; when the train passes we catch the pollution. “You will have schools, health centres and jobs,” they said in 2002. So far, we just have one health centre.²⁸

On 13 February 2019, a team from the *Territórios em Conflito* project²⁹ met women and men from Afungi Peninsula, displaced from their communities in Pemba. The Liquefied Natural Gas factory is being built in their villages. They recounted the suffering they had endured since they were first approached by Anadarko and government officials. They were so badly treated that they decided to work together with members of the *Centro Terra Viva*. A local leader, a woman who identifies herself as Aicha, contrasted their situation with that of another village:

Em 2014 a empresa pediu às pessoas da vila de Mondlane para aceitar as pessoas de Quitupo. Quitupo e Mondlane são família. Mas não nos perguntaram e não são as pessoas de Quitupo que querem sair. Eles vão ter casas e nós? A resposta foi que seríamos tratados por igual e que receberíamos os mesmo benefícios que os de Quitupo.

In 2014 the enterprise asked the people from Mondlane village to accept the people from Quitupo village. Mondlane and Quitupo are family. But they didn’t ask us and it is not the people from Quitupo who want to leave. They will have houses and what about us? The answer was that we would be treated equally and that we would receive the same benefits as Quitupo.³⁰

However, nothing was done to support the displaced people and the host communities.

Overall, our research emphasises the remarkable level of perception and detail of people’s analyses of the different types of violence that women and girls are subjected to: forced sex work, marriage, imposed illiteracy, harassment, no

power to participate and make decisions, and inequality in access to land. A nearly complete catalogue of physical, structural, and cultural violence is introduced into the discussion. This shows that there is a collective awareness of the extent and intensity of the problem as well as genuine concern regarding the situation and its impact on both women and the community. Among the initiatives identified, however, none is directly related to these issues and nothing is explicitly mentioned concerning concrete forms of protection or cultural change. In our view, this shows how extremely sensitive and deeply societal the issues are, which makes them almost untouchable. The problem is acknowledged but, besides posing difficulties, responses would require exposing the many premises that naturalise women's supposedly ontological inferiority. Apparently, the society is not ready for that.

People's expectations of change lie mostly with the effectiveness of good governance as well as with education as a possible means to change the current state of affairs. In these dialogues, it is interesting to note how there is a strong belief among community members that the Law, the State, the School are key to peacefully and positively solving their problems. This suggests that both the State's social and regulatory functions should be among our concerns when imagining life and emancipation alternatives. Despite the evidence of legal pluralism in Mozambique as well as government regimes which are closely interwoven with customs and other culturally contextualised practices, this appears not to preclude the will of community members for co-existence and the mutual enhancement of the institutions that can guarantee peace, security, social and sexual justice.

In view of the challenges identified, women and girls stressed that one of the key elements of their resistance lies in organisation "*so that they won't be alone and divided.*"³¹ This is the women's way of counteracting the government and the companies' divisive strategies, by reinventing forms of association and union among men and women to defend their land, their livelihoods, and their ways of life.

The Cinderellas of our Mozambique want to be seen as women who resist misfortune and play an active role in ending their captivity. They do not wait for salvation by the prince—any kind of prince; they wish to speak out to say what they believe must be said. They speak and yell, if need be, not only to denounce but also to build different, positive subjectivities, personal and collective skills, spaces of liberation and happiness that do not hide or mask the perils in their lives where everything seems to be lacking.

The alternatives identified by the Cinderellas of our Mozambique may not be fully-fledged alternatives. They are signs, incomplete solutions; they are acts of care, for themselves, their land, and the people that form part of their mode of producing dignity, respect, and happiness. Despite the fact that their resistance to the violence of extractivism is unfinished and fragile, the Cinderellas of our Mozambique want to express their ideas, analyses and proposals for change.

The absence of solutions and actions concerning the increasing inequalities between men and women, and the increase in violence against women driven by the extractive activities within the country, shows the genuine importance of these issues for planning and developing collective, feminist life alternatives. Let us summarise two ideas that are at the core of our feminist approach to extractivism in Mozambique. The first has to do with the androcentric nature of western modern rationality that disparages and subjects women, their bodies and labours to the idea of a certain masculinity taken as the measure of all things. The second idea is that, although they are actively present in their societies, acting, thinking, and breaking their glass slippers, the Cinderellas of our Mozambique continue to have to do more than all men and boys to make themselves heard and understood, and to include the terms on which they want to see their lives freed from duress and violence in the agendas of struggle and collective process.

Final remarks

Enormous challenges are being experienced in Mozambique, especially in the northern provinces of the country where extractivist activities are particularly concentrated. In roughly a decade and a half, life there has undergone major changes for most people. The presence of foreign corporations and their extractive activities, the arrival of many people from other places, and, more recently, the extreme violence perpetrated against the populace have caused stupor, a condition of vulnerability that is worsening by the day, generating a feeling of insecurity, besides some perplexity, among the population. The number of areas where these problems emerge is so vast that we believe we are in the midst of a situation that is highly complex and dangerous, with an impact on nearly all spheres of personal and community life.

Our collaborative feminist methodology, centring local women's conditions and perspectives, afforded us an insight into the causes of the daily suffering

experienced by women and girls in contemporary Mozambique. From our academic and activist experiences, we learn that women's knowledges, born of their experiences of suffering, are not only modes of *existence* but also modes of *resistance* that seek alternatives to violence, dispossession, and mourning. With the women, we learn that all oppression must be met with resistance. We argue that there are no victims, only people who are victimised; no silences, only forms of silencing.

Despite all the kinds of victimisation that Mozambican women in northern provinces are subjected to, they do not tend to remain in absolute silence and allow themselves to be paralysed by suffering. We were able to identify varied forms of resistance in the different spaces of extractivist exploitation as well as the emancipatory, liberating emergences that they bring to light. Although the outcomes may seem rather modest in the face of the magnitude and complexity of the problems, increased feminist attention will allow us to understand that hope and perseverance should also be considered epistemological categories that enable us all to imagine the feminist transformation that we pursue. They demonstrate the importance of bonds, of rationalities involved in mutual obligations and the acknowledgement that individual humanity is only possible by recognising the humanity of all women and men, and that there is no individual emancipation without collective emancipation.

Endnotes

1. Centre for Living Earth
2. Centre for Public Integrity
3. Institute of Socio-Economic Studies
4. *SEKELEKANI* – Communication for Development. In the Rhonga language, “Sekelekani” means “Rise Up”.
5. *Kuwuka JDA (Juventude, Desenvolvimento e Advocacia Ambiental)* – Kuwuka Youth, Development and Environmental Advocacy. In the Chope language, “Kuwuka” means “Wake up”.
6. Environmental Justice
7. Southern Cross – Research Institute for Development José Negrão
8. Mozambique Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
9. Civic Coalition Against Extractivism
10. She did not wish to be named.

11. An expression used by Luisa (pseudonym) when interviewed by Isabel Casimiro and Withney Sabino in 2018 during field work for the project “Confronting dialogues: Women’s emancipatory trajectories, constructions and pathways in the PALOP’s: Guiné-Bissau, Cabo Verde and Mozambique”, financed by CODESRIA.
12. Our aim here is not to discuss the colonial, heteronormative potential of the concept of “woman” as a universal category. This has been discussed by Ifi Amadiume, Patricia McFadden, Teresa Cunha, Chandra Mohanty, María Lugones, Sílvia Cusicanqui, Oyewùmi Oyèrónké, among many others. However, we wish to acknowledge this debate and state that we share the criticism produced by these and other feminist authors.
13. These were not organised focus groups, but they functioned as such.
14. All these activities were developed in the framework of an international research project, “*Territórios em Conflito: investigação, formação e acção para o fortalecimento de capacidades e a construção de alternativas de vida*” (“Territories in Conflict: research, training and action to strengthen capacity and construct life alternatives”) led by the University of the Basque Country, University Eduardo Mondlane, Mozambique, University of Tolima, Colombia and the University of Coimbra, Portugal.
15. Whilst the insurgency in Cabo Delgado appears to have begun with local youths’ involvement in Islamist radicalisation (it is referred to locally as al Shabaab) (Chichava, 2020; Forquilha and Pereira, 2020), the situation today is much more complex than two years ago when we carried out our research for this article. Many other actors have since carried out acts of violence, like the Mozambican Defence and Security Forces (FDS) and mercenaries (Russian and South African) engaged by the government. In 2019, the first claims from the Islamic State began to appear regarding responsibility for attacks, although there is no solid evidence for such claims (Forquilha and Pereira, 2020). Additional actors include the security forces of transnational corporations currently exploiting the hydrocarbon reserves as well as the Asian (Pakistani, Afghan) organised crime networks trading with heroin that cross Africa through this continental corridor on their way to Europe and the US.
16. Association of Women in Social Communication (i.e. Communication for Social Change)
17. Mozambique is ranked 180 out of 189 countries analysed.
18. Foreign Direct Investment.
19. <http://womin.org.za/who-we-are/what-is-womin.html>
20. *União Nacional de Camponeses* – National Peasants Union.

21. Environmental Justice.
22. Hikone Mozambique – Women’s Empowerment Association, protecting women’s rights in extractive areas.
23. Mariam is the pseudonym of a lady from the village of Macomia, Cabo Delgado province. She agreed to be interviewed by the authors during the International Conference “Islamist Insurgencies in Africa: History, dynamics and comparison”, 5 December 2019 and allowed us to use her words.
24. Translation by the authors.
25. Plot of land.
26. Symposium on “Extractivism and Socioeconomic Development – Challenges and Opportunities”, Maputo, 12 June 2019. Translation from Portuguese to English by the authors.
27. “Narration of suffering. First Congress of displaced and affected communities by extractivist projects in Mozambique”, Maputo, 13-14 January 2019. Transcribed and translated by the authors, who participated in this meeting.
28. Maria Sincraia validated her statement and gave us permission to use it.
29. Project Territories in Conflict. Isabel Casimiro, Alda Salomão, Boaventura Monjane and members of the CTV, *Centro Terra Viva* – Centre for Living Earth.
30. Transcribed and translated by the authors, who participated in this meeting. Its use was allowed without referring to the name.
31. Excerpt of a woman’s intervention during the workshop on Exclusion and Social Inequalities, Pemba, 6 February 2019.

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