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The Meaning of Gender Issues as Narrated and Negotiated by Activists in Mozambique

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Abstract

Feminist activism in Mozambique has suffered dramatic changes throughout the many socio-political processes the country has encountered. Consequently, the activists in civil society still struggle to fight against patriarchal oppression, political repression, and socio-cultural norms that hinder women's full realization of their rights. As it follows, this research aims to investigate how activists in Mozambique understand and negotiate gender issues considering socio-political context and cultural norms. The inquiry used ethnography as a tool to conduct a case study with a civil society organization promoting women's human rights from a feminist perspective (Forum Mulher). As well, it includes narratives from other activists working with the thematic in the country. Semi-structured interviews served as a method to delimit what gender issues mean to Mozambican women and how they negotiate such issues with the local governance, transnational feminist discourse, and global norms. Their narratives were analyzed using the post-colonial feminist theory and feminist participatory democracy perspective.

Key words: *Civil society in Mozambique, Civil society in Africa, post-colonial feminism, feminist participatory democracy, gender relations, women's human rights, rights communication.*

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List of Organizations:

| |
|-----------------------------------------------------|
| FRELIMO – Frente de Libertação de Moçambique |
| MDM – Movimento Democrático de Moçambique |
| OMM – Organização das Mulheres Moçambicanas |
| RENAMO – Resistência Nacional Moçambicana |

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1. Introduction:

The democratic discourse on strengthening women's participation in political processes encounters several layers when it comes to empowerment of women in the global south. The theme will negotiate with the transnational feminist agenda on gender equality¹, will contest the modern contractual theories of democracy², and will turn our gaze to the many interpretations of gender equality and women's human rights advocacy.³

Apart from that, the democratization in the non-Western world will intersect with historical and political processes that reinforce patriarchal norms, facilitate class stratification, delimit the boundaries of race and citizenship, and create tension between rights claiming based on culture and tradition, and one's autonomy to contest the norms reinforced by such structures. Thus, the geopolitical localization in which the discourse is applied will draw the possible gaps that hinder the women's participation within the local political structures.

Mozambique is an example of how the articulation on gender issues in civil society is unique and quite complex, considering the colonial and post-colonial development. Thinking of that, this research will attempt to understand how the activists in civil society understand gender issues and negotiate the subject with the local governance structures, the transitional feminist dialog, and the legal framework utilizing the postcolonial feminist theory and participatory democracy theory. It will use as a case study the organization Forum Mulher (women's network in the country that represents women's human rights from a feminist perspective) and the narratives of activists that also work with the thematic.

According to the research findings, the activists fighting for women's human rights in Mozambique are the key intermediaries to translate the thematic to the realities of the women they represent. Here, their work will differ considering their relationship with the local governance and their closeness to the communities (*referred to as base*). That also applies to the right's claiming

¹ Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders - Decolonizing Theory, Practicing, Solidarity - Book*.

² Richardson, J. (2017). *Feminist Engagements with Social Contract Theory*.

³ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). *Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento*.

language within the nuances of the activists' positionality.⁴

The results also show that rights self-recognition is the primary enabling tool to insert women in the local democratic debate. Notwithstanding, societal aspects (such as culture, tradition, economic emancipation, country's political instability) must be carefully addressed to the legal entitlement realized within the local polity. For instance, the women's socioeconomic situation is one of the biggest barriers to overcome the patriarchal impediments to their citizenship agency.

As it follows, the literature shows that civil society dynamics in Africa should be analysed from its pluralist nature. That is because the process of colonialism and modernization layered the work of civil society on the continent, leading to international humanitarian interventions, religious manifestations, patriarchal oppression, class division, ethnicity segregation, and the emerging of associational networks of survival for marginalized groups, including women.⁵

Along with that, the postcolonial feminism sheds light on the women's experiences from the global south as a source of knowledge within transnational feminist discourses to contest the historical and political norms of oppression.⁶ It also signals the subaltern position of women within the modern democratic theories that reduces their political agency to negations with marital norms as a tool of survival.⁷ Additionally, the literature explores vernacular cultures of non-Western activism and how the language of rights will adapt to the cultural aspects in which rights are constantly articulated.⁸ As well, it will delve into how the global norms are translated to the local context to make meaning to rights claiming.⁹

⁴ See chapter 2, p. 34-51.

⁵ Osaghae, E. E. (2006). Colonialism and Civil Society in Africa: The Perspective, p. 233-245; Fatton, R. J. (1995). Africa in the Age of Democratization: The Civic Limitations of Civil Society, p. 67-99; Kleibl, T., & Munck, R. (2017). Civil society in Mozambique: NGOs, religion, politics and witchcraft, p. 203-218.

⁶ Mookherjee, M. (2017). Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminisms. In A. Garry, S. J. Khader, & A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy* (pp. 595-606); Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders - Decolonizing Theory, Practicing, Solidarity, book*; Manning, J. (2021, March 13). Decolonial feminist theory: Embracing the gendered colonial difference in management and organization studies. pp. 1203-1219.

⁷ Richardson, J. (2017). Feminist Engagements with Social Contract Theory. In A. Edited by Garry, S. Khader J., & A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*, pp. 82-93; Dietz, M. G. (2016, December) Carole Pateman, The Sexual Contract. *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Contemporary Political Theory*, pp. 1-14.

⁸ Madhok, S. (2017). On Vernacular Rights Cultures and the Political Imaginaries. *An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism*, 485-509.

⁹ Merry, S. E. (2006). HUMAN RIGHTS AND TRANSNATIONAL CULTURE: REGULATING GENDER

On that note, the Mozambican activists will use the international, regional, and local legal framework to claim the rights of the women they represent. Here, they also understand that such knowledge should be passed on to the women in the communities (the base) considering their level of literacy, their relationship with the law, and the socio-cultural norms that impede their emancipation.

The activists recognize that all women are leaders when acting towards their rights self-recognition, thus their narratives are the main source of production of knowledge based on their agency as leaders. The inquiry also spotted the effects of the interpretation of the term gender in the activists' work and the women's socioeconomic marginalization when fighting against patriarchal oppression.

All in all, the activism on women's human rights in Mozambique is quite unique in view of the many historical and political processes the country has encountered since the colonialism to its present situation. The findings will attempt to draw on the nuances of the activists' work based on their narratives on what gender issues mean in the country. The literature review will bring academic discussion about the positionality of the women in the global south as agents of the production of knowledge, and how they articulate such agencies considering the transnational feminist discourse, the legal framework, and the modern democratic theories. This discussion will be identified in the work of the Forum Mulher and the activists articulating the matter in the country.

1.2. Research purpose

The research aims to identify how activists in civil society in Mozambique understand and negotiate gender issues. Thus, the inquiry attempts to pinpoint the tools the civil society leaders utilize to articulate gender issues within the country's political structures.

That not only could enable one's knowledge on how the vernacularization of gender issues is negotiated within the Mozambican civil society and public sphere, but that also might highlight

their role within the democratic debate at all levels of governance.

1.3. Research questions

Main research question: *How do activists in civil society in Mozambique understand and negotiate gender issues within local governance, global norms, and feminist transnational discourses?*

What tools do they utilize to articulate gender issues within local political structures? How do they facilitate gender-based knowledge between the public sphere and mainstream political structures?

1.4. Concepts

This research will utilize the gender concept framed and articulated at Forum Mulher. The reason for that is because the Organization designed their own gender concept based on the fluidity of culture and traditions in Mozambique. Thus, it contests negative patterns within the social context while recognizing positive societal practices.¹⁰

Furthermore, the framework is carefully applied to the situation of Mozambican women. That enables them to recognize their rights within the societal norms considering their lived experiences, and to address oppressive patterns that hinder their participation in the local polity. Here, the concept clearly justifies the theoretical framework utilized in this research, as further explained.

Together with that, this thesis will use the concept of culture and tradition framed by Forum Mulher as a dynamic and relational aspect. As it follows, the concepts of civil society and social movement will also be considered for this investigation. This combination carefully contemplates the work of Forum Mulher as part of Civil Society and as a social movement actor. Within both spectra, the organization understands that part of the process of negotiating their agendas is to include the

¹⁰ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). *Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento*, p. 27-30.

Mozambican women in the local democratic debate on a participatory basis, considering their lived experiences.

1.4.1 Gender

The concept of gender highlights the fluidity of culture and tradition to enhance the partner organizations' comprehension on the subject and to direct their advocacy more effectively. It appropriates the international framework on women's human rights, meanwhile flexing the notions of culture and tradition to articulate the meaning of gender with the women's realities:

“Gender is what identifies the socially constructed nature that defines and relates men and women within specific contexts.” (...) *“Simultaneously, gender is a category of social analysis that allows the reconstruction of unequal relationships between men and women based on essentialist concepts.”*¹¹

Thus, the gender concept here utilized is relational, as it focuses on the relations between men and women and the socially constructed power dynamics between both groups, understanding that the social and cultural norms between men and women can be modified.¹²

1.4.2. Culture and tradition

The concept of culture utilized by Forum Mulher is based on the World Conference on Cultural Policies held in Mexico in 1982. As it follows, the concept is described as *“Culture is the combination of elements based on spiritual, material, and intellectual beliefs that characterize a society or a social group. It includes not only art and words, but also ways of living, fundamental rights, systems of values, traditions, and beliefs.”*¹³

Moreover, the concept of tradition is described as *“Tradition is a heritage that defines and*

¹¹ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). *Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento*, p.25.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, p.26.

transmits a norm that erases transformative actions with time, retaining only the crucial moments that legitimize and transmit its power and influence.”¹⁴

1.4.3. Civil Society:

The concept of civil society will also be delimited by the local legal framework. That is because such framework guides the civil society activities in Mozambique and helps this research to understand the nuances between the legal disposition and the reality of CSOs in the country.

As it follows, the Mozambican constitution defines Civil Society through the right to associate. The role of associations will also be observed in the exercise of social, economic, and political rights transcribed in the document. This will pinpoint the strategic position of the associations in claiming constitutional guarantees. Thus, at a conceptual level, this research will utilize article number 52, paragraphs 1 and 2 on the right to associate, and article 78, paragraphs 1 and 2 on the importance of associations on the democratic processes.

Additionally, to a more comprehensive conceptual analysis, this research will also use article 1 of the Law number 8/91 that regulates the right to free association, and the article 155 of the Law 39/99 (Código Civil).

On the Constitutional provision¹⁵:

“Article 52 Freedom of Association §1. All citizens shall enjoy freedom of association. §2. Social organizations and associations shall have the right to pursue their aims, to create institutions designed to achieve their specific objectives, and to own assets in order to carry out their activities, in accordance with the law.”

“Article 78 Social Organizations §1. Social organizations, as associations with their own interests and affinities, play an important role in promoting democracy and in the participation of citizens in public affairs. §2. Social organizations contribute to achieving the rights and freedoms of

¹⁴ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). *Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento*, p. 26.

¹⁵ URL: https://cdn.accf-francophonie.org/2019/03/mozambique_const-en.pdf, accessed 19/04/2022, at 13:32.

citizens, as well as raising individual and collective awareness in the fulfilment of civic duties.”

On the Law number 8/91¹⁶ that regulates the right to free association:

“Article 1 (general principle) may constitute associations with non-lucrative nature in light of the constitutional principles that relies on the moral, economic, and social order of the state and that don’t affect the rights of third parties and public property.”

On the Law number 39/99¹⁷ (Codigo Civil):

“Article 155 – (On the right of free association) §1. To all people, the right to free association.”

As it has been pointed out, the concept of civil society in Mozambique is linked with the right to free association and the importance of the associations to claim for the constitutional guarantees legally safeguarded to the Mozambican people.

1.4.4. Social Movement

For this research, social movements are a network of political actors, that could include organizations, sharing the same collective identity¹⁸ that challenges the states structures and non-state systems of political, economic, and social power. It has historically demonstrated a highly influential power to change societal behaviour and influence the state’s political behaviour.¹⁹

As it follows, this concept will be observed in the work of Forum Mulher as a place for collective identity. The organization will negotiate such identity shifting from civil society mode to a network of civil society organizations acting collectively for a common interest by challenging the state’s power of patriarchal oppression.²⁰

¹⁶ URL: (EXTRACTO 1: Lei nº 8/91, 18 de Julho, Regula o direito a livre associação, 1991, accessed 19/04/2022, at 13:45.

¹⁷ [Imprensa Oficial - Código Civil \(io.gov.mo\)](http://io.gov.mo), accessed 19/04/2022, at 14:07.

¹⁸ Diani, M. (1992, February). The Concept of Social Movement. *Sociological Review*, 40(1), p. 17-18.

¹⁹ Bevir, M. (2010). Social Movements. In M. Edit by Bevir, *Eyclopedia of Political Theory*, 2010, p. 1303.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 17-19.

1.5. Ethical Considerations

A big part of the information gathered during this field work was collected “in private”, meaning that the sensitivity of such information was carefully anonymized during the process of transcribing the interviews. Thus, what was asked to be “off record” was not put into words. The documentary information was all provided by the leaders of Forum Mulher, and the interviews were made under consent and understanding of what the research was about.²¹

However, considering the political tension in the country and the traumatizing experiences the activists went through, the signed consent was an issue that would cause them lots of distress. Signing a paper was terrifying to them, and that fear was justified once I entered the field and had numerous conversations with the activists about situations in which they felt threatened. Thus, verbal consent on record was the best approach.²² After I left the field, I had already developed a relationship based on a secured level of trust, on which I asked them to fill up a form of consent. Most activists felt comfortable answering the form, especially those who wanted visibility as contributors to the findings. The activists that didn’t answer the forms felt that verbal consent was enough to justify their participation, and for that I didn’t push the boundaries of trust.²³

Most activists outside Forum Mulher were comfortable in making themselves visible for the purposes of this inquiry. Thus, taking into consideration the nature of this research on giving activists agency to produce knowledge, I attempted to provide them a level of privacy in which their personal information would not be directly referred. However, I still entered the name of the organizations to give them the visibility they seek.²⁴ As it follows, they all consented in providing the organization’s name, and that information I used carefully to distinguish their position as *leaders* within civil society.²⁵

²¹ Simons, H. (2020). Case Study Research: In-Depth Understanding in Context. In E. b. Leavy, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2 ed.n)*, p. 16-17.

²² Traianou, A. (2020). The centrality of Ethics in Qualitative Practice. In E. b. Leav, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed)*, p. 5.

²³ Traianou, A. (2020). The centrality of Ethics in Qualitative Practice. In E. b. Leav, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed)*, p. 13–14. And SWEDISH RESEARCH COUNCIL Vetenskapsrådet. (2017). *Good Research Practice*, p. 29.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 14-15.

²⁵ Ibid.

It's important to highlight that the leaders see themselves as women with agency, and not as victims in fragile situations. Hence, their position in this research is not in a place of vulnerability.²⁶

The time frame of five weeks provided this research with a great amount of information. However, to optimize my time, I have decided to conduct semi-structured interviews, giving the activists space to develop the themes they found important as part of their own process of self-reflection. Here, the research could have used more of the insights gathered in informal conversations. Nonetheless, for safety reasons, such information was carefully selected to avoid any type of harm to the interviewees.

2. Methodology

This study will use ethnography as a tool to conduct a case study. The ethnographic method helped this inquiry to grasp the contextual analysis needed to build a nuanced perspective of the activists' experiences in Mozambique.²⁷ That is because the feminist approach guiding the result analysis requires a layered understanding of the women's experiences as subject of knowledge on what is gender issues and women's emancipation in the country.²⁸

Together with that, this research also used semi-structured interviews. The initial goal was to use ethnographic interviews, nonetheless, due to the time frame I spent in the field (five weeks) and the use of case studies to answer the research questions, semi-structured interviews were inductively more efficient as it allowed the interviewees to develop contextual information according to their position as activists in Civil Society while answering the research questions. However, in some cases I found the opportunity to let the interviewees talk about related subjects in a reflexive manner, where both parties would learn and reflect upon such themes.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 18–19.

²⁷ Harrison, A. K. (2020). Ethnography. In E. b. Leavy, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed)*, p. 2-4.

²⁸ White, J., & Drew, S. H. (2009). Ethnography Versus Case Study positioning research and researchers, p. 19-20.

2.1. Case Study

This inquiry understands the case study as an instrumental approach²⁹, yet focusing on the nuances of the lived experiences of Mozambican women as activists (subjects of rights claiming) and production of knowledge on gender equality. Thus, it required a thick description of the organization's work on articulating and negotiating gender issues with the local governance structures and international norms.³⁰

The case is delimited by Country (Mozambique), an organization (Forum Mulher), and key activists working within civil society promoting gender equality in Mozambique at different positions³¹. It attempts to portray an in-depth view of how Forum Mulher articulates gender issues with local governance and international norms on the subject, supplemented by the views of key activists working in the field.³²

The referred design was initially focusing on the broad work of Forum Mulher, however, during the fieldwork the data transpired to a set of angles that could distract this inquiry from the research questions. Thus, I have decided to focus on a specific project that explains the way in which Forum Mulher articulates and understands women's gender equality in the country.

Following that, supplementary interviews with other activists and legal frameworks were used to sustain the analysis of the project, considering the social, cultural, and political aspects of the women's lived experiences, and to demonstrate possible gaps the organization might not cover.³³ Additionally, document analysis was also utilized – such as evaluations, research conducted by Forum Mulher on gender, culture and tradition, capacitation manual, and report on gender-based violence.³⁴

Due to the limited time frame between the fieldwork and the thesis deadline, it was not possible to

²⁹ Simons, H. (2020). Case Study Research: In-Depth Understanding in Context. In E. b. Leavy, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2 ed.n)*, p.8.

³⁰ White, J., & Drew, S. H. (2009). Ethnography Versus Case Study positioning research and researchers, p. 21-22.

³¹ Communities, grassroots movements, civil society organizations, youth, people with disabilities.

³² Simons, H. (2020). Case Study Research: In-Depth Understanding in Context. In E. b. Leavy, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2 ed.n)*, p., p.6-7.

³³ Simons, H. (2020). Case Study Research: In-Depth Understanding in Context. In E. b. Leavy, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2 edn)*, p. 8-9.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 14.

voice every single interviewed activist, yet their insights were used as a source to analyze the results and to guide this research theoretical framework.

Another point to highlight is the carefulness to not only reproduce information that already exists due to the instrumental approach of the case study. Thus, ethnography was also combined to remind me of my position as a researcher, and to critically analyse the context and the collected narratives.³⁵

2.2. Ethnography

The ethnographic approach helped me to reflect on the importance of specific information for this study and on my position as an interviewer and observer. Thus, I attempted to interpret the knowledge throughout the interviewee's narratives and on specific factors that delimit the layers of Civil Society work in Mozambique.³⁶ Here, the nuances within the realities of Mozambican women, as well as the complexities of their activism in civil society, are valued.

The methodology is utilized to justify contextual analysis to better understand the layers in which activism on gender equality is articulated in Mozambique.³⁷ Therefore, this research aims to distancing from generalizing assumptions that would allocate civil society in Mozambique in one specific behavioural mode.³⁸

Considering the timeframe of five weeks, the ethnographic approach acted as a subsidiary to the contextual background here analysed. The methodology will also be observed in transcribed interviews as a source of documentation for primary data.³⁹ As Harrison would argue, ethnography takes time to be well developed, hence I couldn't use the approach as the main resource to conduct this research.⁴⁰ One might question the reason for such limitation. My answer would be based on the economic resources I had access to, though case study was the most suitable primary method.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 10-11.

³⁶ White, J., & Drew, S. H. (2009). Ethnography Versus Case Study positioning research and researchers, p 23-24. And Harrison, p. 14, and 17.

³⁷ Simons, H. (2020). Case Study Research: In-Depth Understanding in Context. In E. b. Leavy, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2 ed.n)*, p. 20-21. And Harrison, p. 10 – 11.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 22-24.

³⁹ Harrison, A. K. (2020). Ethnography. In E. b. Leavy, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed)*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 3 and 20.

2.3. Semi-structured Interviews

To answer the research questions, this inquiry used semi-structured interviews⁴¹ to gather information on how the activists articulate gender equality in Mozambique and what they understand about gender issues. This choice was based on the time frame spent in the field as a way to direct these research resources to answering the main research question.⁴² Nonetheless, considering the ethnographic and feminist approach to conduct the case study, whenever there was time and space for developing the dialog, I would engage in conversations with the interviewees to understand the nuances of their experiences and life stories.⁴³

For instance, some interviewees would develop their answers, leading to different conversations that would also be useful for the validity of the results. Thus, in those cases, I would let them speak through a reflexive dynamic in which I was part of the process of learning. Most of the time, the conversations would last longer after the semi-structured interviews were finalized, and from those conversations I have learnt a lot.⁴⁴ As well, the questions were mostly used as guidance and were framed differently according to the conversation flow.

3. Theoretical Framework

This thesis will aim to understand the work of the activists on communicating and negotiating gender issues using the decolonizing feminist theory, considering their position as agents of production of knowledge within their context⁴⁵. Together with that, this research will also use the feminist participatory democracy approach conceptualized by Carole Pateman as an effective tool for structural change⁴⁶ from a feminist perspective.

⁴¹ See Appendix 1, Semi-structured interview guide.

⁴² Brinkmann, S. (2020). Unstructured and Semi Structure Interviewing. In E. b. Leavy, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed)*, p. 15.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 16-17.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 10 on postmodern and transformative conceptions.

⁴⁵ Manning, J. (2021, March 13) Decolonial feminist theory: Embracing the gendered colonial difference in management and organization studies, p. 203-207.

⁴⁶ O'Flynn, I. (2019). Democratic innovations and theories of democracy. In S. Edited by Elstub, & O. Escobar, *Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance*, p. 39-40.

I believe that both theories will guide this inquiry to understand the activism of the representatives of civil society in Mozambique as a source of production of knowledge, paying attention to the country's historical processes and the women's present positionality within the local democratic debate. Thus, their role in negotiating gender issues within their context is a tool to structural change throughout participatory democracy.

3.1. Postcolonial Feminism

“If you are born in the elite, you won't understand the problems from the base (...) One might say we all have the same 24 hours, hence we all have the same rights, but this is not true. My 24 hours are completely different from others [girls] who live outside the city and must wake up at 4am, meanwhile I wake up at 9am. That person must wake up, do housework, and go for work before attending school. I only have a shower and go. The level of weariness of that person is totally different from mine.”⁴⁷ The Movefemme leader.

The quote was part of the interview held with one of the leaders of Movfemme (Young Mozambican Women's Movement), in which she expresses the nuances of the socio-economic impact on the girls' access to education considering their location within the country. She gives an example of how the 24 hours of a middle-class girl from the city (Maputo, Mozambique) is completely different from the 24 hours of a girl living in remote areas under economic vulnerability, and how such difference affects the girls' performance in school.

The young leader's observations were also present in the discourses of the activists interviewed in the field. With no exceptions, the interviewees (or leaders, as they all recognize themselves as such) have expressed how the cultural, economic, and political dynamics interfere with the political agency of the women they represent. Hence, the sensibility of bringing political awareness considering their level of literacy, social and cultural conditions, and economic power, before articulating gender issues with the local governance.⁴⁸

Mohanty, in her book *Feminism Without Borders*, highlights the importance of understanding the

⁴⁷ Movefemme leader (2022), Appendix 3.

⁴⁸ Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders - Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, p. 17-20, and 71- 74.

nuances in which women from the global south are positioned. The author challenges the Western mainstream discourses of a homogenic patriarchal force that oppresses women in a standardized manner. This reduces the experience of women to a specific group and limits one's understanding of women's experiences marginalized from the transnational feminist discourse.⁴⁹

Furthermore, this reduced interpretation often positions non-Western women in a place of victimization, poverty, ignorance, cultural limitation, and sexual repression. Here, non-Western women are not agents of rights, but rather victims of their own faith and who need to be guided by the transnational feminist discourse on gender equality.⁵⁰

Mohanty then suggests five provisional contexts to analyse the third world women's comprehension of struggle within the feminist movement. The reflexive approach will be used as a guide to the analysis of results in this investigation. Apart from rethinking the position of third world women within the cross-cultural feminist discourse, the author then contextualizes: Decolonization and National Liberation Movements in the third world (1); the consolidation of white, liberal capitalist patriarchies in Euro-America (2); and the operation of multinational capital within a global economy (3), anthropology as an example of a discourse of dominance and self-reflexivity, (4) and storytelling or autobiography as a discourse of oppositional consciousness and agency (5).⁵¹

All in all, the provisional context will give this research the analytical background to understand the nuances in which the activists articulate women's human rights. The interviewees will provide this investigation with knowledge of how they perceive gender issues in their contexts, and the nuances in which they negotiate their agendas with the local governance and transnational discourses on gender equality. They are not only activists, but experts in the field of what gender equality means for Mozambican people, and how they understand the theme considering the Mozambican women's lived experiences and their narratives.

⁴⁹ Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders - Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* p. 17-20.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 21-22.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 83-84.

3.2. Feminist Participatory Democracy by Carole Pateman

Pateman's theory on participatory democracy comes as a form of contestation of the social contract theories constructed by political scientists such as John Locke, Kant, and Rousseau. She contests the political theorists idea of the natural state of human beings, in which women are systematically excluded from the political debate.⁵² The author questions who are the ones inserted in the social contract agreement, thus the ones participating substantially within the democratic dynamics of liberal representative democracy?⁵³ Pateman's then explain how the contract of marriage, for instance, is a political contract in which determines the role of women in the social dynamics, hence excluding them from the formal democratic structures of power.⁵⁴

Thus, she explores the idea of participatory democracy as a tool to constantly reflect upon the political power exerted over one's body through neoliberal representative democracy models, and from that to create change within one's private exercise of democratic participation.⁵⁵ As it follows, the author also reaffirms that democratic participation must be enabled, and for that to happen, economic emancipation is an important aspect to enable a realistic model of participatory democracy, especially when talking about inclusion of minority groups. This last idea is further explored with her theories on basic income, and it is also constantly observed in the activists work on women's political emancipation in Mozambique. Here, social, and economic structural conditions matter if they ought to participate within the local democratic debate.⁵⁶

Apart from that, the contradictions of the country's constitutional order on women's equality and their actual participation within the local polity is a subject constantly inquired among the interviewees. Comments such as *"we have beautiful laws in Mozambique, but they are not well implemented"*, *"we have a constitution that declares equality between men and women, yet we are not free"*, or *"we teach the women that their kids with disabilities have rights under the Mozambican constitution, otherwise they won't have access to basic education"*, are repeatedly

⁵² On, S. (2012). A Conversation with Carole Pateman: Reflections on Democratic Participation, The Sexual Contract, and Power Structures. In G. Browning, R. Prokhorovnik, & M. Dimova-Cookson, *Dialog with Contemporary Political Theorists*, p. 146-147.

⁵³ Goatcher, J. (2005, December). Carole Pateman and the nature of a participatory society, p. 217-219.

⁵⁴ Dietz, M. G. (2016, December). Carole Pateman, The Sexual Contract. *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Contemporary Political Theory*, p. 1-6.

⁵⁵ Goatcher, J. (2005, December). Carole Pateman and the nature of a participatory society, p. 219-220.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 223-225 and 227-228.

mentioned by activists. These claims are contesting the idea of freedom and liberty under the democratic ideals prevented in the country's constitution and highlight the structural problems that hinder the women's full realization of their rights. Thus, Pateman questions one's agency to participate in the democratic debate and their free will to elect their representatives.⁵⁷

Pateman's theoretical framework goes beyond an ideological and universal idea of liberty under modern Democratic theories. Her feminist approach opens the discussion of women's participation under a democratic state that complies with the universal ideas of liberty and free political participation of all citizens under its jurisdiction, but that still excludes.⁵⁸

In that line of thought, the work of the activists interviewed in this research is centered on the idea of enabling the women in civil society organizations, the community representatives (the *base* as they call), and all the women engaging with the partner organizations⁵⁹, to recognize themselves as subjects of rights. With that, they learn how to articulate their agendas within the country's political structures. Their work is about psychological change, economic sustainability, and to provide them the right tools to articulate the nuances of gender issues in Mozambique in a participatory democratic mode.

4. Literature review

To understand the context of civil society in Mozambique is imperial to understand the historical socio-political processes that influenced the Civil Society approach to articulate rights within the local government structures. For instance, the forces of colonialism, liberation process, the period of democratization, the civil war, the country's abrupt transition from socialism to capitalism all influenced the civil society positionality in the country. Those forces framed the socio-political ideas of class division, ethnicity hierarchies, patriarchal dominations, and religious identities.⁶⁰ Here, the civil society structures are not always cohesive and consensual, as understood by the

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 228-230.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 228-231.

⁵⁹ Organizations that collaborate with Forum Mulher.

⁶⁰ Kleibl, T., & Munck, R. (2017). Civil society in Mozambique: NGOs, religion, politics, and witchcraft, 2017, p. 204-206.

Western civil society theory. Conversely, it can often be a structure of contestation to dysfunctional socio-political practices.⁶¹

In Mozambique, the fragile process of democratization and the rapid change between different economic models created a deep economic inequality, followed by diverse responses from international NGOs, religious organizations, and associations.⁶² For instance, the study conducted by Tanja Kleibl and Ronaldo Munck in the district of Inhassunge showed that spiritual beliefs and witchcraft were appropriated as an expression of political struggle against poverty and exclusion.⁶³ Here, the churches also acted as representatives of civil society, especially for women who would be the target group among witchcraft practices.⁶⁴

Following that, the factors that influenced spiritual and religious political manifestations in the country were the government's politics of exclusion, the lack of NGOs responsibility to address the structural problems of inequality, and the war between the two main political parties Frelimo (Front of liberation in Mozambique) and RENAMO during the civil war that lasted 14 years (but is referred to as the 16 years' war).⁶⁵

This demonstrates how the different socio-political processes lived in Mozambique affect the way civil society mobilizes, and the understanding of *who* is civil society and *who* is part of civil society. For instance, in the same research, the interviewed people didn't perceive NGOs as part of civil society. In most cases, they would refer to civil society as to public sphere.⁶⁶

As it follows, Ekeh also affirms that the process of colonialism affected the civil society functions and structures in Africa. The author attempts to theorize civil society during the African colonization period to better understand their structures in the post-colonial period. He argues that the civil society in Africa must be historicized in colonial times from an African perspective for a realistic theorization of their structures in post-colonial Africa.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Osaghae, E. E. (2006). Colonialism and Civil Society in Africa: The Perspective, p. 243.

⁶² Kleibl, T., & Munck, R. (2017). Civil society in Mozambique: NGOs, religion, politics, and witchcraft, 2017, p.206

⁶³ Ibid, p. 209-211.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 2012.

⁶⁵ Kleibl, T., & Munck, R. (2017). Civil society in Mozambique: NGOs, religion, politics, and witchcraft, 2017, p. 209-211.

⁶⁶ Kleibl, T., & Munck, R. (2017). Civil society in Mozambique: NGOs, religion, politics and witchcraft, p. 208.

⁶⁷ Osaghae, E. E. (2006). Colonialism and Civil Society in Africa: The Perspective, p. 237.

The author then explains that the colonization process in the continent was a place for negotiation of dominance between the colonizers and the African bourgeoisie class. Thus, the bourgeoisie class reproduced the colonization structures to legitimize its power, but at the same time rejected the foreigner hegemony.

Moreover, Ekeh develops the *two public theories*. The theory consists of the idea of a primordial public, that would be groups, ties, sentiments, and activities that influence individual behaviour. The primordial public would be ethnic associations that persevered in the margins of colonial rule; thus, they would fill up the gap of lack of social support to the ordinary people ignored during that period. Furthermore, the primordial groups' relations would be based on the moral premise of rights and duties and on the individual ownership of the group.

As opposed to the primordial groups, the civic public would coexist within the civic services, such as military, police, and associations close to the state. Nonetheless, the civic public would encounter lack of people's ownership due to dysfunctional practices reproduced within the public sector, hence the citizenry would not feel moral obligation to give back to the state. The civic public would also lack the moral imperatives that constitute the primordial public, such as ownership based on rights and duties.⁶⁸

Ekeh's theory encountered some criticism, such as overstressing the African bourgeoisie class explanation of tribalism, and his emphasis on the constitutive in the anti-colonial ideology ignores the complexity of corruption systems. Osaghae also explains that primordial attachments are not sufficient to determine people's membership. That means that an individual would engage with a hometown association if that would be relevant to their private interests.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, Ekeh's theory is still valid as to the understanding of civil society in the African context. He brings the attention to the dialectics between civic public and civil society (primordial public) and the position of civil society to represent the marginalized ethnic groups excluded from the state's welfare during the colonial period. Hence, the structures of the African civil society are not always harmonic associational groups within the country's political pluralism.⁷⁰

Along the same lines, Robert Fatton Jr. interprets civil society in Africa as a plural social dynamic

⁶⁸ Osaghae, E. E. (2006). *Colonialism and Civil Society in Africa: The Perspective*, p. 238-239.

⁶⁹ Osaghae, E. E. (2006). *Colonialism and Civil Society in Africa: The Perspective*, p. 240.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 243-244.

organism that does not always articulate the nuances of local inequalities, thus offering a fragile arena for contestation against states' oppressive norms. It has indeed been a great force to fight against totalitarian governments, but it can encounter civic limitations in the post-colonial context, where people are extremely marginalized by the government's failed economic projects.⁷¹

Fatton emphasizes that civil society differs from civic community. For the author, civic community is a place for egalitarian membership based on trust and cooperation, yet composed of individual interests.⁷² Thus, civil society in Africa might in many situations encounter civic communitarian limitations, considering the social and political nuances of failed liberal modernity projects and exclusionary governmental politics.⁷³

As it follows, for Fatton, civil society in Africa is not unitary, it is composed of nuances that negotiate with historical choices "*of competing social actors, institutions and beliefs*" that are not always working within the democratic framework. He then concludes that understanding the multidimensional aspects of African civil society is to understand the different political, economic, and historical events that manifested a plurality of citizenry manifestations to contest the critical social inequalities in the post-colonial time.⁷⁴

Moreover, the author draws three ideal models of civil society on the continent to facilitate the understanding of its complex dynamics. The first model is called predatory civil society, it represents predatory liberal interests and works within the class stratification framework to control its power.⁷⁵ The second model is referred to as middle-sectors or quasi-bourgeoise civil societies, they represent the interests of the middle-sectors and work within the local political elites.⁷⁶ Finally, the third model would be represented by the popular civil society that represents the interests of the subaltern groups excluded from the local political debates, and that find in such networks a tool of survival (individual interest) and contestation.⁷⁷ Hence, the popular civil society must be empowered if democratization would be realized.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Fatton, R. J. (1995). Africa in the Age of Democratization: The Civic Limitations of Civil Society, p. 67-72.

⁷² Ibid, p. 72.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 75-77.

⁷⁴ Fatton, R. J. (1995). Africa in the Age of Democratization: The Civic Limitations of Civil Society, p. 77.

⁷⁵ Fatton, R. J. (1995). Africa in the Age of Democratization: The Civic Limitations of Civil Society, p. 79-82.

⁷⁶ Ibid, P. 82-85

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 85-93e

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 92-93

All in all, the complexities of the civil society participation throughout the different political, social, and economic processes in Mozambique created different perspectives. Its plurality manifested religious practices as a tool of contestation, rehabilitated and negotiated with traditional norms from the colonially intensifying class stratification and political dominance, created elites within the political governance and emerged the force of the subordinate class to struggle against dysfunctional state norms.

4.1. Participatory democracy and women's political emancipation

Joseph Hanlon argues that there was a period of participatory democracy in Mozambique during the country's transitional period in the mid-70s to adapt to the socioeconomic setback in the decolonization process.⁷⁹ The communities organized themselves into dynamizing groups (grupos dinamizadores) as an administrative task force to resolve the economic problems within the local public sphere throughout participatory democracy mode.

The participatory democracy highlighted by Joseph Hanlon also included the participation of women. Additionally, right before that same period, the Mozambican Women's Organization was created as a social movement to represent the interests of the women joining the armed forces against colonialism.⁸⁰ Now, this model is observed in the work and articulation of the civil society organizations acting as proxy to the communities' political needs together with the local governance. They represent the interests of women in the plural Mozambican context by allocating them within the political debate as subjects of rights and agency to speak about their causes.

As it follows, Carole Pateman argues that the contractual theories developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries marginalized women from the political debates,⁸¹ and she sees participatory democracy as a solution to insert minority groups back into the political discourses. The author makes a parallel between the social contract theories and the marriage contract. She questions the women's agency under contractual legislation that subordinates them to their male

⁷⁹ Hanlon, J. (1991). Carole Pateman and the nature of a participatory society, p. 10-12.

⁸⁰ See, Appendix 8 on Mozambican Women's organization.

⁸¹ Richardson, J. (2017). Feminist Engagements with Social Contract Theory. In A. Edited by Garry, S. Khader J., & A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*, p. 83.

partners by inquiring about the natural subordination state of women based on the notions of freedom and political participation.⁸²

Furthermore, Pateman draws the similarities of the working contract with the marriage contract in terms of power relationship and subordination. Here, liberal contract theories would entail a weaker part of the contract that accepts contractual obligations. She draws the notion of the contract in the person, in which in the case of a working contract, the employees adhere to the contract norms in exchange for a wage, and in the case of a marriage contract, women would be expected to offer sex and domestic labor in exchange for surviving. Hence, women would not expect to have a voice within the democratic debate, failing the implementation of participatory democracy.⁸³

Pateman challenges the historical socioeconomic aspects that force women into subordination. The author claims that participatory democracy is only possible if citizens are aware of their political agency and capable of fully realizing their political autonomy, to then be entered into the democratic discourses.⁸⁴ Thus, political self-awareness seeks a safe space to articulate rights and to be effectively accepted by the key actors in the process of democratic change. However, for that to happen, the social, political, cultural, and economic context in which women are placed must be addressed, so the ownership of women's emancipation is not only targeted at women as an individual responsibility.

4.2. Feminist perspectives in the post-colonial and developing world

Studying gender issues and women's human rights in developing contexts requires an understanding of how the global dynamics between gender norms, gender mainstreaming within the transnational discourses, and women's lived experiences coexist in the local gender dialogue. That is because many civil society organizations acting on gender equality in developing countries, at some stages, will negotiate their agendas with developmental founders.

⁸² Richardson, J. (2017). Feminist Engagements with Social Contract Theory. In A. Edited by Garry, S. Khader J., & A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*, p. 86.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 86-87.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 90-91.

On that note, Sandra Harding and Ana Malavisi address the issues of developmental projects tackling poverty for not contesting the structural social, economic, and political problems in which the poorest women are inserted in. The authors highlight the contribution of the feminist critics to the development theory considering the experiences of the poor women's domestic work as a profitable system to maintain the economic power of local and global elites. Here, more efficient projects would address the relational power of men and women, that also includes the *“transformations of social and political theory and of the policies and practices of dominant economic, political, and social institutions.”*⁸⁵

As it follows, the feminist critic, it is an instrument to learn from the lived experiences of the women directly suffering the oppression and marginalization within the developmental theories, policies, and practices. In this case, researchers and founder organizations working with the gender equality themes would be learning from the women's epistemological and methodological arguments to tackle the social, political, and economic issues that put them in place of extreme vulnerability. With that, the contestation of patriarchal norms within local institutions and private settings will inevitably be interlinked with the lives of the women taking part in the process of change.⁸⁶

As an example of that, the term *gender mainstreaming* within the developmental agenda does not always translate to the developing context. The term is usually used as a guideline to sustain the Western programmatic objectives as opposed to question the formal Western discourse on the matter. Although gender mainstreaming has placed women's experiences among the transnational gender dialogue, its application within the beneficiaries' organizations can often find obstacles - such as not placing women in the democratic discourse effectively by focusing only on the individual as opposed to the relational power reproduced from the colonial rules. Thus, the structural problems women encounter in their daily lives are still not fully considered, and those nuances will only be tackled with long-term solutions.⁸⁷

In that line of thought, substantial change would happen if gender issues would pinpoint the

⁸⁵ Richardson, J. (2017). Feminist Engagements with Social Contract Theory. In A. Edited by Garry, S. Khader J., & A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*, p. 421-422.

⁸⁶ Richardson, J. (2017). Feminist Engagements with Social Contract Theory. In A. Edited by Garry, S. Khader J., & A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*, p. 423-424.

⁸⁷ Harding, S., & Malavisi, A. (2017). Women, Gender, and Philosophies of Global Development. In A. Garry, S. J. Khader, & A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*, p. 427-429.

practical barriers that impeded the women social and political emancipation considering the diversity of their daily lives.⁸⁸ Consequently, those women would then gain agency and be included in the local gender mainstreaming debate in a participatory dynamic process that is already facilitated by the organizations and movements capable of articulating practical societal issues.⁸⁹

The post-colonial feminist theory also encounters some important discussions in academia. The topic can be contested by the feminist multiculturalist (humanist) arguments in which the cultural aspects of the women's experiences should be contemplated within the transnational feminist movement. Philips, contest such an argument based on the idea of autonomy. Here, the author argues that the multiculturalist discourse excludes the women's choices to contest the cultural arguments that justify their oppression. She bases her argument on change within cultural dynamism and sees participatory democracy as a tool to include minority groups in the local discourse of cultural contestation.⁹⁰

In that line of thought, the intersection of culture, traditions, political hierarchies, and economical power dynamics with the aspects of gender, race, class, and ethnicity are constantly questioned in the postcolonial feminist theory.⁹¹

Following that, the postcolonial feminists question the systems of power that constructed the *gender* and *cultural* norms as a mechanism of oppression. Thus, they are attentive on what is excluded from the dominant notions of individual interests.⁹² With that, the subject also reflects upon the subjectiveness of women in the post-colonial context, meaning that the binary idea of oppressor and subaltern can misinterpret the nuances of the women in the colonized setting. Therefore, this approach will open a third via in which women from the third world will be agents of change and producers of knowledge based upon their experiences.⁹³

⁸⁸ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). *Tradição, Cultura e Gênero nos Programas de desenvolvimento*, p. 36-37.

⁸⁹ Harding, S., & Malavisi, A. (2017). *Women, Gender, and Philosophies of Global Development*. In A. Garry, S. J. Khader, & A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*, p. 428-429.

⁹⁰ Mookherjee, M. (2017). *Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminisms*. In A. Garry, S. J. Khader, & A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*, p. 496-495.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 498-499.

⁹² Mookherjee, M. (2017). *Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminisms*. In A. Garry, S. J. Khader, & A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*, p. 499.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 600.

Both multiculturalists and post colonialists' feminists contributed to the critical debate of the universality of gender. The discussion opens precedents for new normative ways to interpret the experiences of the women in the post-colonized world. However, in this research the focus will be based on the postcolonial perspective as a theoretical framework of analysis of results.

4.2.1. Critical feminism and the production of knowledge

Educational institutions are another place in which negotiations on gender issues and methodologies of change are constantly created. For instance, a study conducted by women and academic field in Mozambique used a historical analysis of several research conducted at the CEA Centro de Estudos Africanos (Center for African Studies) utilizing a critical feminist approach. The study not only explains the concept of gender within the Mozambican context among 14 years of research studies but also highlights the diverse situation of Mozambican women throughout the country's history.⁹⁴ It considers the process of construction of masculinity and femininity, the spatial localization (cities and rural areas), the women's economic statuses, the hierarchization of social systems, the words, body language, and behaviors that replicate the patriarchal norms of oppression.⁹⁵

That shows us that a great amount of information is theorized in the global south, thus it is not only a place to be saved, but rather an important source of production of knowledge that also contributes to the academic democratic debate. Mohanty explores the notions of citizenship and legitimacy within the Western academic setting. She questions who is legitimized to produce knowledge and what knowledge is welcome to be produced within the women's studies in the U.S. and Europe.⁹⁶

The author questions the European Union Women's studies network on *who* are the ones inserted in the feminist academic discourses? What is the notion of gender, race and citizenship framed in the curricula? Borders such as race, sex, and class division fade away with the discourse of

⁹⁴ Casimiro, I. M., & Andrade, X. (2009). Critical Feminism in Mozambique Situated in the Context of our Experience as Women, Academics and Activists. In A. A. Edited by Ampofo, & S. Arnfred, African Feminist Politics of Knowledge Tensions, Challenges, Possibilities, p. 137-150.

⁹⁵ Casimiro, I. M., & Andrade, X. (2009). Critical Feminism in Mozambique Situated in the Context of our Experience as Women, Academics and Activists. In A. A. Edited by Ampofo, & S. Arnfred, African Feminist Politics of Knowledge Tensions, Challenges, Possibilities, p. 151-153.

⁹⁶ Mohanty, C. T. (2003). Feminism without borders - Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity, p. 169-189.

multiculturalism that appropriate dysfunctional practices that exclude non-Western knowledge within academic gender studies or place the thematic in the academic *exotic* framework.⁹⁷

Thus, the concept of gender in the global south is constantly theorized considering the aspects of race, historical processes, citizenship, socioeconomic status, culture, and traditions. The subject is also articulated within the network of organizations that utilize the knowledge to contest negative structures of power that systematically marginalize non-western women from the gender transnational debate. Recognizing such knowledge is accepting that policies on gender equality in the global south should be carefully revised and reinterpreted for its successful implementation. Yet that would entail accepting that powerful relationships within gender studies also exist.

4.3. Communicating rights, cultures, and traditions.

Sally Engle Merry explains that aspects of culture and tradition in local settings are not always contemplated when local governments translate the global norms to state's legal framework. The transnational human rights movement most times ignores the contextual nuances of the relationship with culture and the mainstream human rights agenda. Consequently, the binary view on cultural relativism versus human rights is easily set as a conflict of interests.⁹⁸

As it follows, the author highlights the role of civil society (social movements) and NGOs to translate the global norms to local understanding, meanwhile at the same time contextualizing the local agendas with the transnational human rights movement.⁹⁹ Here, she argues that vernacular rights between the global and local does not necessarily entail the defense of cultural and traditional norms *at all costs*, but it does consider the cultural nuances for a better moral judgement of what are the dysfunctional norms that affects one's full realization of rights without unitarizing culture.¹⁰⁰

The unitarization of culture as an essentialized argument justifies its fixation and influences the

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 169-189.

⁹⁸ Merry, S. E. (2006). HUMAN RIGHTS AND TRANSNATIONAL CULTURE: REGULATING GENDER VIOLENCE THROUGH GLOBAL LAW. OSGOODE HALL LAW JOURNAL VOL. 44, NO. 1, p. 53-60.

⁹⁹ Merry, S. E. (2006). HUMAN RIGHTS AND TRANSNATIONAL CULTURE: REGULATING GENDER VIOLENCE THROUGH GLOBAL LAW. OSGOODE HALL LAW JOURNAL VOL. 44, NO. 1, p. 58.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 61-62,

way human rights are communicated and implemented in the local scenario. Culture as a dynamic and non-fixed term turns the legislator gaze to the institutional hindering aspects and structural societal relationships that inflict oppression towards minority groups.¹⁰¹ Moreover, the author understands that Human Rights is first and foremost a cultural system that is normally persuaded rather than enforced, and civil society actors are commonly negotiating the tension between the global human rights norms and the local cultural constructions. Contesting cultural and traditional norms does not mean enforcement of global norms but negotiating the global ideals with key aspects that hinders the women's full realization of their rights.¹⁰²

Sami Madhok also explores the communication between the legal framework and its diverse interpretations when applied to reality. The author's concept of vernacular rights cultures means "*generate both a distinct set of rights and distinct practices through which rights are delivered, but also transforms the rights that are inscribed in constitutions and political imaginaries*". In her study, she investigated how vernacular rights cultures disrupt universal human rights discourses when interpreted in different contexts.¹⁰³

Following that, the author explains that vernacular cultural rights are not a tool to fundamentally contest the mainstream human rights discourses, but instead it is a place to understand how the universal norms are interpreted and negotiated with the local vocabulary, religion, legal systems, culture, and traditions. Moreover, the concept not only translates the meaning of the global norms to the local settings but also brings the universal ideal to the people's reality and lived experiences in an intelligible manner.

For instance, Sumi uses the word *Haq* as an instrument of analysis on how the word binds legal systems to the understanding of the local realities.¹⁰⁴ She then explains that the term possesses its own meaning independent of the global norms and legalist claims. It determines moral obligation and normative ideas that shapes one's citizenship, but it would depend on the state's willingness to legitimate its concept within the local legal system. The author also highlights the gendered aspect of the word as an issue that is commonly perceived as an extra subject within the human

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 64–65.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 74–75.

¹⁰³ Madhok, S. (2017). On Vernacular Rights Cultures and the Political Imaginaries. *An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*. 2017. 8.3 Winter, p. 490-492.

¹⁰⁴ But the term is also used in other dialects and countries.

rights discourses. Thus, the vernacular cultures not only signal how rights are negotiated locally but also pinpoint the systematic gaps marginalized from the rights claiming mobilization.

As it follows, the process of translation allows the creation of new meanings to what is rights and how rights claiming is articulated in the vernaculars.¹⁰⁵ Both authors highlight the importance of understanding the local nuances in which universal rights are negotiated, translated, and recreated. Civil society, social movements, grassroots movements are constantly used as examples of intermediaries on rights from the global to the local and vice-versa. They challenge the tension between human rights and cultural relativism when understanding that culture is dynamic and adaptable to rights claiming in the process of rights emancipation.

4.4. Conclusions

The literature review underlines an important aspect that will be constantly addressed by the activists interviewed in this research – the tension between women’s human rights transnational discourses and the local nuances when negotiating the thematic. As it follows, aspects of constructed cultures and tradition are normally perceived by the transnational women’s movement as fixed norms that must be defeated by education. This not only guides developmental programs on the subject but also influences policies that ignore the lived experiences of the women in the local context.

Culture and tradition when perceived as a dynamic organism that can be changed and recreated will target practical obstacles faced by local women in their daily lives, not only in the private setting but also, and very often, in the governmental structures. Moreover, the potential to change socio-cultural aspects can be observed in the different political and economic processes most developing countries have encountered before, during and after the period of colonization. For instance, the participation of women in the democratic debate to seek their emancipation has been quite dynamic in Mozambique. The colonial rules, liberation movements, democratization period (post-colonial period), civil wars, developmental programs, all have influenced in the way

¹⁰⁵ Madhok, S. (2017). On Vernacular Rights Cultures and the Political Imaginaries. *An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*. 2017. 8.3 Winter, p. 501.

Mozambican women claim their rights and negotiate such rights with their lived experiences involving the concepts of culture and tradition.

Therefore, from the literature review we can conclude that the knowledge gap between the local cultural fluidity and the universal human rights framework shows to be counterproductive when perceived as oppositional subjects that can't co-exist. Hence, it ignores the work of vernaculars that constantly struggle to fill up such gaps. Here, I would question how much contextual analysis is needed to understand the layers of rights negotiation and communication in a productive and non-conflicting manner? And who are the key agents to provide such knowledge? I am not arguing that the transnational women's rights movement ignores such aspects, but with the literature I highlight that more efforts in contextual analysis based on the experiences and agency of the right claimers should be contemplated for more effective change.

Chapter one

Contextual analysis

This chapter will present the contextual background in which activists on women's human rights in Mozambique struggle to create agency within the country's political structures. Therefore, this research will focus on the political context and sociocultural background that delimits the women's participation in the country's polity.

5. Socio-political context

The Mozambican women encounter several social and cultural problems that affect their participation within the country's political setting. Forced child marriage, reliance on the informal labor sector, lack of access to education, and reduced participation in the decision-making processes within the formal political structures are some of the aspects that marginalize their self-awareness as subjects of rights and entitlements.¹⁰⁶

The diverse political processes the country has lived through influenced the emancipation of Mozambican women. For instance, failed economic developmental projects, urbanization process (affecting mostly the women in the rural areas), and economic inequalities created a set of layers that determined gender relations in the country.¹⁰⁷

Mozambique is marked by strong patriarchal norms rooted in the private settings (families) and socio-political structures (such as public institutions and political structures). Moreover, there are some regional differences between the north and south part of the country, meaning that up north the cultural norms are based on matrilineal roles, and after the country's independency in 1975, there has been a great influence of Islamism in that region. Meanwhile, in the southern part of the

¹⁰⁶ Karberg, S. (2015). Participação Política das Mulheres e a sua influência, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

country, it is traditionally composed of patrilineal roles.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, in both scenarios the patriarchal rules are still determining the women's societal and political choices.¹⁰⁹

As it follows, during the liberation process and early independency, the government in power (Frelimo – Mozambican Liberation Front) based its ideology on the orthodox Marxist approach that promoted gender capacitation as an inclusive tool for the country's further development. Thus, the constitution of 1975 contemplated gender equality as a core value for women emancipation.¹¹⁰

Notwithstanding, strong patriarchal norms intensified during the civil war that lasted 14 years (also commonly known as the 16-year war). Here, the participation of women was still prominent within the armed conflict. Yet, the emancipation process became quite stagnant considering the reinforcement of the patriarchal roles within the country's political structures.¹¹¹

With the end of the civil war in 1992, the women's participation became part of the multiparty model of political representation in the process of democratization. The country has ratified international conventions that promote gender equality and has observed a high number of elected women within its political structures. It has also created several policies that guarantee the legal participation of women in the political sphere, however, the weak implementation of the legal framework and lack of monitoring mechanisms has diffculted the women's socio-political emancipation.¹¹²

Presently, Mozambique is constituted by a democratic multiparty system composed of 3 main political parties: Frelimo (the liberation party), Renamo (the resistance party) and MDM (the democratic party). The women's representation within the parties' structures is also mirrored in the number of votes the respective party has acquired within the parliaments, which means the biggest party Frelimo is still leading the number of women within the government structures, followed by Renamo, its biggest opposition, and MDM.

¹⁰⁸ To better explain, in the patrilineal society the family follows the father's lineage, while in the matrilineal societies the family follows to the mother's lineage. That means that in the first case, the man owns the property acquired by the family and is the only one taking decisions about those resources, meantime in the second case, the woman owns the property acquired within the family and have the right to maintain the resources in case of divorce or death.

¹⁰⁹ Karberg, S. (2015). *Participação Política das Mulheres e a sua influência*, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 5–6.

¹¹² Karberg, S. (2015). *Participação Política das Mulheres e a sua influência*, p. 6.

Nonetheless, the participation of women in the decision-making processes is still quite low, and the patriarchal norms within the parties' systems is an issue that difficult the women's agency within the important political decisions that affect their roles in the country.¹¹³

5.1. Socio - economic aspects

Most Mozambican women are still occupying job positions that are classified as “feminine” such as domestic work and primary teachers. However, only a small percentage of women can reach a professional education, thus domestic work is still the prominent role for women in the country's socioeconomic dynamics followed by rural labor and informal jobs.¹¹⁴

The country has ratified eight international treaties from the International Labor Organization, including the Convention against discrimination in the workplace. It has also created a local legal framework (Lei do trabalho) to promote gender parity within the job market, nonetheless, those policies still encounter structural factors that hinder the women's access to legal knowledge and economic independence.¹¹⁵

5.2. Cultural aspects

In Mozambique, the gender roles attributed to men and women generates a subordination power in which the women are the ones to serve their husbands and male relatives. Naturally, the women perceive their roles as being responsible for the domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of the house and the husband, and to reproduce. Meanwhile, men are economically emancipated and responsible for political affairs.¹¹⁶ Those dynamics place women in a position of economic dependency and social subordination on their male partners setting them on the margins of political marginalization and reduced recognition of their rights.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ *ibid*, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ Karberg, S. (2015). *Participação Política das Mulheres e a sua influência*, p. 11.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁶ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). *Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento*, p. 74.

¹¹⁷ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). *Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento*, p.75.

As it follows, the researcher Maira Hari Domingos affirms that such relational dynamic is sustained by culturalist and essentialist arguments. The author explains that the gender roles attributed to women are perceived as an obligation, thus it is the women's responsibility to serve their man and their family.¹¹⁸ She then continues explaining that such arguments are essentialists in the sense that women are capacitated to reproductive social roles, while men are essentially built for productive work, and the culturalist argument reinforces the idea of gender roles being determined by cultural and traditional community practices.¹¹⁹

Practices such a lobolo (marriage ceremony in which the wife's family receive presents from the husband family in an exchanging dynamics), initiation rituals in the north of the country and *culaia* practices in the South (rituals preparing women for marriage), polygamy, Pitka Kufa (ritual to purify widows after the husband death), beliefs in sorceries as causes of diseases, dearth and even disabilities, are aspects that still justify the oppression against the women's body and their social marginalization when contesting such practices. Thus, the cultural aspects also influence the processes of change regarding gender equality in the country, hence the activists work.¹²⁰

5.3. Civil society context

As I mentioned in the literature review, the civil society in Mozambique has encountered several transformations considering the different socio-political processes the country has lived through.¹²¹ On that note, in one of my interviews, the activist from the women's observatory explained how the armed conflict in Mozambique influenced and still affects the way in which civil society articulates their agendas. She then explains:

"We have a transition from the colonial system to an independent state that is marked by armed conflicts. (...) And in the today's history, we celebrate the heroes that hold guns to fight for independence. But soon after we entered the independent system, some circumstances began to be questioned for the reproduction of oppressive and excluding practices. (...). This generated a big

¹¹⁸ 7 Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento, p. 74-77.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 78.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 66-70.

¹²¹ Osaghae, E. E. (2006). Colonialism and Civil Society in Africa: The Perspective, p. 237.

wound in the Mozambican people (...) When people understood there was this logic of violence, the civil society started to mobilize pacifically, but the citizens understood that [pacifism] was not good, and that only with violence they [government] will listen to us.”

As it follows, the same activist also voiced that civil society pacific mobilization is perceived by the local formal political structures as an intellectual movement that denies the victories of the armed conflict in the liberation process. Thus, the civil society positionality in the Mozambican political and societal scenario will vary considering their relationship with the government in power¹²², the population’s socio-economic situation, and the socio-cultural norms of power legitimation in the local polity.¹²³

The political environment in which the activists mobilize also suppresses their right to demonstrate and to express their agendas publicly. Another leader and activist on freedom of speech and gender-based violence in the country mentions that “*The governance in Mozambique is not very participatory, it needs opening. The politicians make decisions, implement policies, they do everything, and no one knows about it. So, it is not participative, as there is no dialogue between the government and the citizens.*” Here, we can clearly see that the country’s political compliance with freedom of speech will affect the activists’ work. The same leader mentions that mobilization on agendas accepted by the government is usually welcomed, yet when it comes to issues that directly relate to the government’s “reputation” the mobilization won’t be authorized.

Concerning the organizations that represent women’s human rights in the country, the Civil Society plays a major role when it comes to defending gender equality and promoting substantial participation of women within the country’s political discourses.¹²⁴ However, even in this case, organizations working in the field also have different characteristics considering their political ties with the government in power, which is the case of the Mozambican Women’s Organization – OWM.¹²⁵

¹²² Osaghae, E. E. (2006). Colonialism and Civil Society in Africa: The Perspective, p. 238.

¹²³ Kleibl, T., & Munck, R. (2017). Civil society in Mozambique: NGOs, religion, politics and witchcraft., p. 206-208

¹²⁴ Karberg, S. (2015). Participação Política das Mulheres e a sua influência, p. 10.

¹²⁵ See appendix 8 on Mozambican women’s organization (OWM) and women emancipation in the postcolonial period.

Regardless of the nuances between the organizations acting in favor of gender equality in Mozambique, they are still key agents to promote the theme in the country. That happens because they have the power to pressure the local government to implement and monitor policies on gender issues as well as to advance women's capacitation programs.¹²⁶ Yet, the nuances of class, localization, religion, political instability, and cultural norms are aspects that determine the organizations' territorial extension.

5.4. Conclusions

As we can see, Mozambican women still encounter challenges within the country's social and political structures. Strong patriarchal norms are the main barriers that impede the full realization of their socioeconomic and political rights. As it follows, the cultural aspects surrounding the country's societal and traditional practices plays a major role in the work of the organizations struggling for women's human rights in the country. The contextual element also helps this research to understand the layered aspect of the organizations working with gender equality in the country.

¹²⁶ Karberg, S. (2015). Participação Política das Mulheres e a sua influência, p. 10.

Chapter 2

Fieldwork Findings and analysis

The fieldwork findings will cover an analysis of the gender approach utilized by Forum Mulher as a tool to understand the relational differences between men and women in Mozambique and how such dynamics should be questioned within the country's cultural practices and traditions. Here, the organization understands the importance of identifying negative cultural and traditional practices that oppresses women's socio-political agency, meanwhile enhancing positive cultural practices that could be contemplated within the movement of societal change.

As it follows, the capacitation program is the first step for the women to recognize themselves as subjects of rights and to identify key aspects within their lived experiences that hinders the full realization of those rights. Following that, the organization also acts as a link between the community leaders, civil society organizations and the local mainstream political structures regarding gender issues. Thus, this research will utilize their project to strengthen the participation of women in politics as a case study to understand one of the tools the Forum Mulher utilizes to enhance the women's participation within the local political debate.

Finally, the findings will also explore the perspectives of activists from different organizations that also work with the promotion of gender equality in Mozambique. This will supplement arguments on how the activists articulate gender issues within local governance and global norms.

6. Forum Mulher

“The Forum Mulher is a social movement that articulates the interests of the base together with the local governances. This is a space for all women, regardless of their educational background. Here they learn how to see themselves as subjects of right and agency, thus they learn how to claim those rights back to themselves” (Director of Forum Mulher)

The quote was part of the introductory conversation I had with the director of the Forum Mulher in my second day in Mozambique, and that perfectly describes the work the organization has been constructing over the 29 years of its existence.¹²⁷

Forum Mulher is formally recognized as a civil society institution representing women's human rights interests of equality, solidarity, economic empowerment and, socio-cultural transformation from a feminist perspective. Nonetheless, the organization's work goes beyond the civil society representation mode, it branches out across the country's provinces acting through their provincial centers and key partner organizations to provide support to the local communities on gender related issues.¹²⁸

Although Forum Mulher is part of the civil society sector, the organization is perceived by its members as a social movement that articulates the interests of local civil society with the local governance structures. Thus, its organizational capacity is highly developed.

As it follows, in this thesis I will explore the work of the activists acting towards the improvement of local democracy based on their project on women in politics, and how they articulate gender equality among the country's socio-political structures.

Thus, Forum Mulher understands that women should have their political self-recognition to claim for their rights before acting collectively. Here, many of the women represented by the project to improve the participation of women in politics, reached out to places within the representative political scenario - such as accomplishing executive and parliamentary positions within the local governance. This demonstrates the broadness and yet organized work the referred social movement advocates for.

6.1. Gender approach as a tool to change dysfunctional cultural and traditional norms.

¹²⁷ Amad, A. A., Banze, E. G., & Nicha, A. d. (2019). Avaliação Final do Projecto de Participação Política da Mulher - Relatório Draft, p.10

¹²⁸ Amad, A. A., Banze, E. G., & Nicha, A. d. (2019). Avaliação Final do Projecto de Participação Política da Mulher - Relatório Draft.

Forum Mulher's understanding of the term *gender* explores the nuances of the local context addressing the characteristics of culture, tradition and gender and their intersectionality with the Mozambican women's experiences.¹²⁹

The concept of gender equality negotiated by the organization highlights the importance of adequate actions that enforce safe spaces for women within their private sphere (families), country's institutions (schools, work, associations, etc.), and cultural norms (religion, costumes, and other practices). Thus, once women can safely occupy such spaces on an equal basis,¹³⁰ their political participation ought to be facilitated.¹³¹

The organization's capacitation Manual describes gender equality as it follows: *“It is about acknowledging that gender equality means not denying or hindering one's opportunity or rights just based on their sexes (women and men). Thus, it is about the equality on opportunities and rights that implicates systemic changes of cultural processes and not a ‘sex rivalry’. It is about an equality that starts within the family circle and that substantially extends itself to the public sphere within the workplace, public associations/organizations, religious institutions, within the social norms and other practices. It means giving a different treatment to promote the balance on the relationship between men and women. Therefore, that treatment should be done based on the criterion of sufficiency, to improve the quality of the action that does not aim favoritism but rather ones' merits.”*¹³²

In that line of thought, the organization's capacity training is carefully designed to understand the nuances of gender equality by dissecting the term *gender* and its placement within the women's human rights discourses. The organization will contemplate the social, economic, and political situation the trainees are inserted in, while negotiating with the legal framework.

Moreover, the manual's glossary¹³³ is divided between the following subjects as demonstrated in the diagram below

¹²⁹ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento, p. 26-27.

¹³⁰ The structural equality in this case means promoting effective equality within the private settings (family), public spheres (social institutions), and political structures.

¹³¹ Forum Mulher, Coordenação para a mulher no desenvolvimento. (2011). Mudando os tempos, Mudando as culturas, Manual de Capacitação, p. 6.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento, p. 51-70.

Figure 1. Gender equality concept – Forum Mulher (Capacitation Manual):

| |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Affirmative actions. |
| Empowerment – power attributions or capacitation, |
| Equal opportunities for men and women. |
| Equal pay for the same type of job. |
| Gender (the meaning of the word and what it entails) |
| Gender analysis |
| Gender disparity |
| Gender necessities |
| Gender stereotypes |
| Gender relations |
| Patriarchy |
| Practice of gender necessities |
| Reproductive rights |
| Statistics desegregated (data) divided per sex and gender |
| Sexual division in the workplace/gender norms |
| Sexual harassment |
| Strategic necessities of gender |
| Women’s human rights |

As we can see, figure 1 draws the different facets of term *gender* to understand its conceptual versatility. With that, the target groups create awareness on the many meanings the word entails and how to articulate such meanings towards substantial change. For instance, it includes the aspects of positive discrimination, sexual division in the workplace, equal pay and, sexual harassment to tackle practical issues within the women’s lived experiences together with multiple analysis of the term, and concepts of rights and patriarchy.

As it follows, Maira Hari Domingos¹³⁴ draws a model of two types of organizations that based on their interpretation on the gender aspects will determine their strategic approach on the subject.

¹³⁴ Researcher and activist at Forum Mulher.

Furthermore, the organization type one is more likely to address the necessities (consequences) of its public by attenuating the situation of the women they represent, meanwhile the organizations type two would focus on the socio-cultural barriers that generate gender inequality based on the gender relations. The organizations type two challenge the dysfunctional cultural and traditional norms that reinforce power relationships, as opposed to organizations type one that sometimes would reproduce the cultural aspects when working within the socio-cultural norms.¹³⁵

On that note, the organization type one usually lacks sensibility towards the socio-cultural aspects linked to the nuances of the gender relations applied to the context here analyzed.¹³⁶ That will also reflect on the way they perceive their target groups. On the other hand, the organizations type two, pay attention to relational negative mechanisms of culture and tradition between men and women and strategically place those groups in the process of change.¹³⁷

Therefore, the interpretation of *gender* is one of the aspects that direct the organizations' activities when working with women's human rights and gender equality. On that note, Professor Isabel Casimiro explains that the concept of gender has been emptied from its revolutionary meaning. It denotes that many times the word is neutralized by statistical desegregation analysis, thus its meaning can be perceived differently when applied to specific contexts.

As an example of that, the professor explains that many times the word gender is confused by the word women in Mozambique.¹³⁸ Hence the importance of understanding the term from a relational perspective. That will deconstruct the idea that the responsibility for change is exclusively of the women receiving the training without considering the hindering societal aspects they are surrounded by and the role of men in the process of change. Notwithstanding, the professor affirms that the neutrality of the gender concept enabled the recognition of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination within the formal institutional structures such as in the law.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). *Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento*, p. 37-40.

¹³⁶ See, Appendix 8 on the Mozambican Women's Organization and its relationship with the government in power.

¹³⁷ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). *Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento*, p. 41-46.

¹³⁸ Casimiro, I. M., & Andrade, X. (2009). *Critical Feminism in Mozambique Situated in the Context of our Experience as Women, Academics and Activists*. In A. A. Edited by Ampofo, & S. Arnfred, *African Feminist Politics of Knowledge Tensions, Challenges, Possibilities*, p. 137.

¹³⁹ Casimiro, I. M., & Andrade, X. (2009). *Critical Feminism in Mozambique Situated in the Context of our Experience as Women, Academics and Activists*. In A. A. Edited by Ampofo, & S. Arnfred, *African Feminist Politics of Knowledge Tensions, Challenges, Possibilities*, p. 137-140

In comparison analysis, Sumi Madhok's explanation of the meaning of the word *haq* as a moral claim to rights denotes the flexibility of the word among global claims and legalist interpretations. The term possesses its own normative meaning outside the legal discourses, and it is used to negotiate one's citizenship within the process of mobilization, yet it also negotiates with the law.¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the word is still gendered considering that the moral claim is most recognized by men, so here I would question how the term *haq* would be internalized in the states' legal framework? That could also be the case with the flexibility of the term gender. But in this case, the word flexes its term to different rights claiming discourses that could lead to counterproductive policies on the matter - such as the understanding that the word gender equals women and the assumption that women are the only ones responsible for their emancipation.¹⁴¹ Here, I believe that a critical analysis of the concept applied to different contexts might signal the systemic gaps kept in the margins of the rights claiming discourses.

The organization's typology is an example of how different interpretations of the term *gender* generate different outcomes. Those interpretations will be shaped by the organization's cultural inclinations, its perspectives on gender equality, and the organization's political positionality.

6.1.2. Legal Framework

The legal framework adhered by Forum Mulher is also a tool for negotiation on gender issues with local governance. Therefore, when it comes to gender equality, the organization will appropriate the Human Rights Declaration (UDHR)¹⁴², articles 1, 3 7, 25:1 and 26, and the state's legal obligation with the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW¹⁴³ as a tool to contest discriminatory practices legitimized by the country's patriarchal systems within the lived experiences of Mozambican women:¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Madhok, S. (2017). On Vernacular Rights Cultures and the Political Imaginaries. *An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*. 2017. 8.3 Winter, p 119-122.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 121-123, and 128-131.

¹⁴² URL: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>, access 15/04/2022, at 13:25.

¹⁴³ URL: Definition of Discrimination - Article 1, CEDAW | Women's Resource Centre (wrc.org.uk), access 15/04/2022, at 13:37.

¹⁴⁴ Forum Mulher, *Coordenação para a mulher no desenvolvimento*. (2011). *Mudando os tempos, Mudando as culturas, Manual de Capacitação* p. 7.

On the UDHR:

Article 1. *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*

Article 3. *Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of a person.*

Article 7. *All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.*

Article 25. §1. *Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

Article 26. §1. *Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all based on merit.*

§2. *Education shall be directed towards the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*

§3. *Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.*

At the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW:

Article 1. *For the purposes of the present Convention, the term "discrimination against women" shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made based on sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.*

Together with the international framework, the organization also adheres to the Regional and local legal framework utilizing the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, article 18¹⁴⁵, the Mozambican Constitution, article 35¹⁴⁶, the Political agenda of women in Mozambique, point number 15¹⁴⁷, and the Declaration of Rural Women¹⁴⁸ as described below:

On the African Charter on Human and People's Rights:

Article 18. *(...) The State shall ensure the elimination of all discrimination against women and ensure the protection of the rights of women and children as stipulated in international declarations and conventions (...).*

On the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique:

Article 35. Principle of Universality - *All citizens are equal before the law, and they shall enjoy the same rights and be subject to the same duties, regardless of color, race, sex, ethnic origin, place of birth, religion, level of education, social position, the marital status of their parents, their profession, or their political preference.*

On the political agenda of the Mozambican Women, point 15:

"(...) It refers to the necessity to identify and include positive cultural aspects in the curricula [school curriculum] and banish discourses based on cultural practices to justify and decriminalize

¹⁴⁵ URL: <https://www.achpr.org/legalinstruments/detail?id=49>, access 15/04/2022 at 15:24.

¹⁴⁶ URL: Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique 2004, as amended to 2018 (unwomen.org), access 15/04/2022 at 16:06.

¹⁴⁷ Forum Mulher, Coordenação para a mulher no desenvolvimento. (2011). Mudando os tempos, Mudando as culturas, Manual de Capacitação, p.7.

¹⁴⁸ 8 Ibid, p.7.

acts that violates the Girls and women human rights.”

On the Declaration of Rural Women:

“(…) improve the rural women access to justice services, privileging the rights secured by Law and to reduce the effects of the negative cultural practices integrated in the Customary Laws.”

The legal framework utilized by Forum Mulher is a mechanism to address the country’s institutional compromise with regional and international human rights provisions. Mozambique has ratified the international and regional conventions that import the notions of equality, liberty, freedom, access to education, and non-discrimination. It also replicates such rights in the Mozambican constitution as core values to the democratic state.

However, when looking to the local legal framework we will find those rights translated in laws and policies that tackles the most prominent issues among Mozambican women, those being gender-based violence, their rights to land as a source of economic empowerment and within the educational systems curriculum to address relational aspects of the term *gender* as a tool to contest oppressive cultural practices.

For instance, during my time working with Forum Mulher, the organization released the latest diagnosis of gender-based violence. There were several open discussions about the problems with implementations of the laws and policies on the subject, such as lack of human resources in the institutions that receive the victims of GBV, together with low investment for GBV within those institutions, lack of working tools to report and monitor the GBV cases and reduced economic assistance to victims of VGB. The main institutions here analyzed were the healthcare systems, the social welfare, and the judiciary.¹⁴⁹

Notwithstanding, the document still recognizes the key role of the international and regional laws on gender equality and non-discrimination as an opening door to negotiating such policies with the local governments.¹⁵⁰ Here, it is possible to see that the legal framework has its limitations when it comes to the applicability and implementation of the law and policies on the thematic,

¹⁴⁹ Forum Mulher, Governo da Catalunia, MedicusMundi, ACCD. (2022). Diagnostico de Necessidades dos Serviços de Violência Baseada no Género (VGB) na Cidade de Maputo, p. 15-35.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 2-4.

hence the importance of the practical analysis on the women's daily situation to address the systemic dynamics of oppression that acts as barriers to the implementation of the legal provision.

As an example of that, in my conversation with the leader from COLUAS¹⁵¹ (organization that represents mother of kids with disabilities from a feminist approach), the activist mentioned that she appropriates of the country's constitutional framework, the international convention for people with disabilities, local laws on accessibility as a tool for rights claiming. Nonetheless, she highlights that such laws have their limitations, and considering the realities of the women she represents, it would be necessary a law for the *base* (lei de base). Here, the law would address discrimination against people with disabilities in their daily basis such as within the schools, public transportation, type of actions classified as discrimination, etc.¹⁵² The activist understands that the legal framework still doesn't address the gaps that oppress mothers of kids with disabilities in Mozambique.

Following that, in the political agenda of Mozambican women, the idea of reinforcing good cultural practices and recognizing the need to address the negative cultural patterns that hinder the Mozambican women's full realization of their rights, is communicated with the universal principles of non-discrimination and non-violence against women.¹⁵³ Thus it would require the educational institutions recognition of oppressive cultural practices that are still legitimized by the country's patriarchal system and costumery laws.

Sally Mary explains that the relationship between the meaning of rights from the global to the local can also create new meanings in the local to be translated to the global. Here, equality according to the political agenda of the Mozambican women, is recognizing that what is contemplated within the country's educational curricula matters – such as acknowledging positive cultural aspects that promotes the girl's emancipation and addressing negative aspects that discriminate against Mozambican girls.¹⁵⁴

Along with that, the legislation on access to justice for rural women is also shading light on their

¹⁵¹ Cooperative Luana Semeia Sorrisos.

¹⁵² Leader COLUAS (2022), Appendix 2.

¹⁵³ Forum Mulher, Coordenação para a mulher no desenvolvimento. (2011). Mudando os tempos, Mudando as culturas, Manual de Capacitação, p. 21-33.

¹⁵⁴ Merry, S. E. (2006). HUMAN RIGHTS AND TRANSNATIONAL CULTURE: REGULATING GENDER VIOLENCE THROUGH GLOBAL LAW. OSGOOD HALL LAW JOURNAL VOL. 44, NO. 1, p. 53-56 and 61-62.

poor access to the judiciary, considering negative practices that impede such prerogatives. Two points we can extract from this claim: The first one is the recognition that the access to justice is not equal considering practical aspects in the judicial systems that constrains the women's access to justice, the second point is the emphasis on rural women. That happens because most of the Mozambican women work in the agriculture sector, hence that is the place in which they are most marginalized.¹⁵⁵

Thus, to communicate the gender issues with the local governance mechanisms, the activists learn how to recognize their rights within the international, regional, and local frameworks before negotiating their agendas. Here, understanding the concept of gender equality, is enabling women to articulate their interests with the country's political structures paying attention to their lived experiences. However, the translation of the universal human rights to the women's lives is still a gap that encounters strong societal barriers to be effectively implemented.

6.2. Project to Reinforce the women's awareness in the political participation.

Thinking about the barriers to electing women in the autarchy's elections, in 2009, Forum Mulher decided to run a project to strengthen the participation of women in the country's polity in a well-coordinated work between key political agents, public institutions, and the *base*. The project not only focused on capacity building for the women that were already inserted in the country's formal political structures, but it also paid close attention to how the organizations in the civil society articulate their agendas with the local governance.

That also included the mobilization of the *base* (community's leaders and/or women in the communities) to understand their rights as women within the Mozambican society and how to negotiate those rights. The project considered the cultural, economic, and social barriers that hinder the Mozambican women's understanding of their political agency. Thus, the leader responsible for the referred project explains:

“So, the project was born to strengthen the [qualitative] capacity of women that was already

¹⁵⁵ See chapter on contextual analysis.

within the [country's formal] political structures and those outside politics [within the communities]. We provided them with trainings and capacitation, we capacitate the women within the autarchies [municipalities] and occupying political positions as well as the women from civil society and community leaders. So, there was a period in which they would meet up to discuss issues in their communities (f.eg. water, infrastructure, etc.) (...) These leaders [from the base - CSOs and community leaders] influenced local agendas. And that was the goal of this project."¹⁵⁶

The project had at scope the strengthening of women's participation in the country's politics by enhancing their influence and political awareness's on citizenship, governance, and political participation in an active participatory manner. As it follows, it was divided into three phases, those being innovation throughout training and capacity building, influence within the political parties allowing the participants to present their manifesto and to study the electoral processes from a gendered perspective, and women's participation in the elections creating discussions about the thematic within the *local radio stations*.¹⁵⁷

According to the final project evaluation conducted in 2019, the project encountered several barriers to progress with its agenda due to the political instability at the time it was implemented, and the strong patriarchal norms entrenched in the country's political structures. Yet it still made its initial mark in the process of change.¹⁵⁸

6.2.1. Social and economic aspects

Social and economic factors negatively affected the activists' work, such as lack of basic infrastructure to enable their full participation in the program, and the strong sexist stigmas surrounding their political participation towards gender equality.¹⁵⁹

When questioned about the challenges of women participating in politics in Mozambique, the leader responsible for the project promptly answered that patriarchal norms are the main problem

¹⁵⁶ Leader, Forum Mulher (2022), Appendix 6.

¹⁵⁷ Amad, A. A., Banze, E. G., & Nicha, A. d. (2019). Avaliação Final do Projecto de Participação Política da Mulher - Relatório Draft, p. 14.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 20-21.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 25-26.

that impede the women's full realization in the local politics. The leader also adds that political parties are not fully complying with the women's quota and the women that manage their "way in" are usually not aware of their political rights and power of change. In that sense she says:

"The patriarchy is still a challenge. There is still the view that power is only for men, and that there are places and spaces that only men can occupy (...) "There are those [men in political parties] that say: . . look, we have the 30% quotas, so we already accept that women are important for the party, but when we have a look at the list of female candidates, the number 1 to 10 are not there! [she refers to the parties under the notification of the women members]"¹⁶⁰

As we can see, the leader explains that patriarchal norms influence the way women perceive political agency in Mozambique. Thus, they are conditioned to think about men as exclusively entitled to talk about politics, but not only that, they learn how to conform with the country's patriarchal mechanisms of oppression.

The same argument was spotted in an interview with the leader from COLUAS. The activist mentions that the feminist approach to her agenda empowers women to understand that they are entitled to participate in society as much as their kids. She explained that feminism to her is the opportunity to do whatever she wants (to have a choice), however, such opportunity is hindered by the county's patriarchal norms. She then continues by saying that *"The feminism here (Mozambique) is very elitist. We must bring feminism to the communities, to our neighborhoods, to that mother (mama) that sell peanuts on the street and who suffered domestic violence and tried to bring the issue to the police, but who still lives with her aggressor as he is her provider."*¹⁶¹

The leader also adds the importance of bringing education to the base, and here she means within the households: *"For our women we need education from the base inside their homes. Because here, the person who has the opportunity to go to school is the man. That is why the education in the base is important so the girls can attend to school."*¹⁶² As we can see, the activist pinpoints the impediments girls will encounter to have access to education.

Therefore, it does not necessarily mean that Mozambican women don't recognize the systemic oppression they are conditioned to, but they feel the need to negotiate with the patriarchal norms

¹⁶⁰ Leader, Forum Mulher (2022), Appendix 6.

¹⁶¹ Leader COLUAS, (2022) Appendix 2.

¹⁶² Ibid.

as a mechanism of survival. Thus, once they recognize their rights and learn how to articulate those rights within a safe space, they are more likely to develop agency to contest the oppressive norms that place them in a vulnerable situation.¹⁶³ Yet here one might question if only recognizing one's right ownership is sufficient to enable their full political participation.

As an example of that, when I interviewed the member of the Movfemme, I asked her about her feminist perspective, and how she saw the way men are perceived by the girls at her age. The leader then replies: *"Women here in Mozambique see men like mini gods."*¹⁶⁴ That affirmation was also mentioned in the many conversations I had with other activists and Mozambican friends. Basically, all women I had contact with would mention how men is perceived as a choice for negotiating their space in the Mozambican society, and that situation are mostly intensified in the poor areas and remote communities where men are their only choice to persevere, and where the discourses on tradition legitimize such actions.

That perspective was also addressed by the leader responsible for the project implementation. She mentions that women still perceive men as politically active and don't see themselves inserted in the local political places, but only resumed to marriage and domestic work. She then explains:

*"Another issue is the cultural component, the culture formed the women's education in the past, like they are conditioned to take care of the stove [a common local slang to signal cooking], taking care of their husbands, to stay at home, etc. (...) Some women also don't see themselves in politics because of this [social norms]. They think 'this is not for me', or 'I didn't study, so I can't be there' [in the political arena], those factors limit and diminishes the women's participation in the governance processes, elections, and exercising their citizenship."*¹⁶⁵

The leader's statement clearly shows how the women's position within the country's patriarchal system put them in a situation of reduced political agency. Carole Pateman sees such issues as an impediment to participatory democracy. The author understands that if women can't see themselves as active political agents they will continue to be marginalized from the political debate.¹⁶⁶ However, empowerment in this case would not only rely on the capacity to understand

¹⁶³ Harding, S., & Malavisi, A. (2017). Women, Gender, and Philosophies of Global Development. In A. Garry, S. J. Khader, & A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*, p. 426-427.

¹⁶⁴ Leader Movfemme (2022) Appendix 5.

¹⁶⁵ Leader Forum Mulher (2022), Appendix 6.

¹⁶⁶ Richardson, J. (2017). Feminist Engagements with Social Contract Theory. In A. Edited by Garry, S. Khader J.,

themselves as subjects of rights but also to recognize the socioeconomic situation in which the women are trapped in.

The absence of basic infrastructure services poses a burden on women to claim their rights. Lack of access to public transportation, economic dependency on their male partners, and lack of childcare facilities are some of the aspects that impeded the women to leave their houses to make their way to training. During the time I spent in Maputo, I noticed the struggle of depending on the country's 'public' transportation. The local buses are scarce and badly maintained, which forces people to create their own transportation mechanism.

That is the reality of majority of Mozambican people, including the activists from the *base* that for lack of transportation in their municipalities would encounter barriers to mobilize for the issues they represent or to attend to a training.¹⁶⁷

Practical aspects of the women's daily lives matter when contesting systemic patriarchal rules. Knowledge of their experiences is an important piece of the puzzle to effectively include women in the local democratic process and to include their contribution in the country's decision-making processes concerning issues that affect their lives.

6.2.2. Bringing women to articulate societal issues

When talking to the leader responsible for the project, she mentioned that some participants occupied spaces in the local parliaments, and they still advocate for their agendas by spreading the knowledge gathered during the training to their new peers. She then explains:

“For example, in the video I gave to you, one of the cases was in Pemba municipality, the women were the one going more often to the water well, but when they arrived there, the taps would be shut down and there was no water. Another example was for them to get to the local medical clinic,

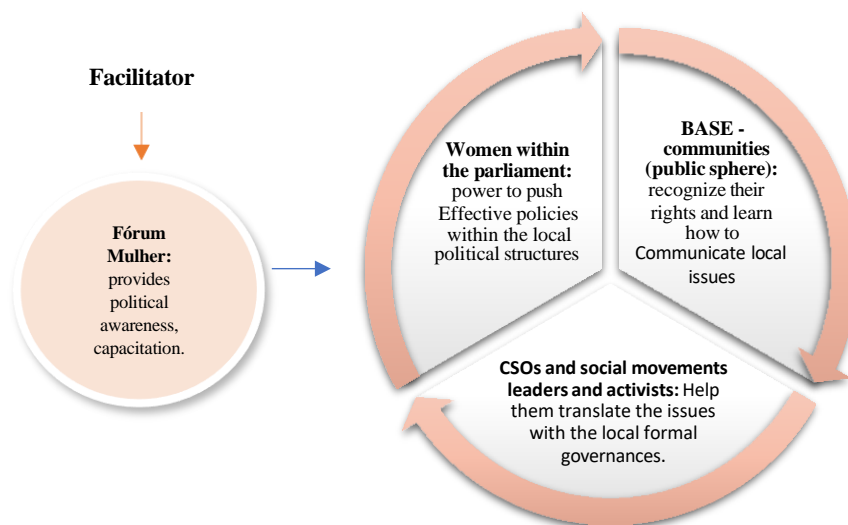
& A. Stone, *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*, p. 91.

¹⁶⁷ Amad, A. A., Banze, E. G., & Nicha, A. d. (2019). *Avaliação Final do Projecto de Participação Política da Mulher - Relatório Draft*, p. 25-26.

they would have to cross a bridge, but there was no bridge, instead there was some sort of ladder made of wood where lot of them would accident themselves by falling from it. So, there were discussions about those issues. The women representing the Pemba [municipality] assembly demanded the construction of a bridge, and they made it happen. They mentioned that it only happened because they pressured the municipality authorities. (...) Some women even ended up having other [political] aspirations.”

As we can see, the project to strengthen the participation of women in politics (also called women in democracy) facilitated by the Forum Mulher, not only provided the capacitation for women at all levels of political activism (political parties, civil society, and base) but it also trained the women representing their communities to articulate the issues in the local governances’ structures. Here, they were first educated for then bridging the relationship with all sectors. The figure below explains the program dynamics:

Figure 2 – Project to strengthen women in politics' overall dynamics.



On that token, when I asked about the role of the Forum Mulher in facilitating the training, the leader mentioned how it is important to bring the political education to the understanding of the women’s reality in the base. That means the organization recognizes the participants' level of literacy and political awareness to make sure the education enters their private lives. She then

explains:

“(…) Because our biggest dilemma, is the lack of information, and the weak level of education. If you look at the statistics, you will see that there are still a lot of people that can’t read, can’t write, so if you don’t have these two tools you will end up losing it [political engagement], you know (…).”¹⁶⁸

As it follows, Forum Mulher understands the necessity to conceptualize the feminist ideology considering the nuances the Mozambican women’s lives when providing capacity building to the partner organizations.¹⁶⁹ And that is solidarity as explained by Mohanty.

On that note, Mohanty explains the importance of the transnational feminist movement to understand the experiences of the women from the third world considering their geopolitical location. The author then brings the concept of solidarity to understand the nuances of women’s experiences within the transnational feminist discourses to fill up the gap on the interpretation of the non-western women’s experiences.

Notwithstanding, the role of intermediaries such as Forum Mulher can also encounter limitations when it comes to recognizing different agendas within mainstream feminist discourses. Thus, the intermediary work conducted by the activists in Mozambique is composed of layers in which other organizations will emerge to fill up the gap.

As an example of that, the leader from COLUAS explains that her organization’s agenda intersects with the rights for people with disabilities, and that creates an obstacle when she tries to bring the issue to the feminist agenda. She then explains:

“I will give you an example on how civil society organizations function here (in Mozambique). They (women) reunite to resolve the problem they detected and that will benefit all women. So, the COLUAS detected many problems in the reproductive health of our mothers, but we are facing some difficulties to bring our agenda together with the feminist movements that can’t see the problems we advocate for as a problem related to women.”

Moreover, the leader from COLUAS signals how the discourse on feminism articulated within the

¹⁶⁸ Leader Forum Mulher (2022), Appendix 6.

¹⁶⁹ Forum Mulher, Coordenação para a mulher no desenvolvimento. (2011). Mudando os tempos, Mudando as culturas, Manual de Capacitação, p 4-7.

organizations in civil society that advocate for women's rights can sometimes not fully understand the experiences of Mozambican women at its fullest. Mothers of kids with disabilities are full-time, not remunerated caregivers in a context that excludes their access to socioeconomic and civil rights, and yet they struggle to place themselves within the feminist discourse on reproductive health.

Furthermore, the strategic communication used by Forum Mulher will allow the organizations joining the network to fight for common interests that affect all women in that specific context. They learn how to articulate their subjectiveness with a clear and objective agenda, and with that they negotiate their space within the local democratic process.¹⁷⁰

To begin to claim for their rights imperial to understand their realities to enable them to become agents of transformation and change. The Forum dialogs with the international framework for gender equality, solidarity, and international human rights, such as the Development goal number 5, Universal declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW.¹⁷¹

Meanwhile, the project attempts to observe the diverse experiences of the women it supports. The organization transmits feminist knowledge, from the transnational feminist agenda to the understanding of their women's experiences and stories. Women learn about their citizenship and rights, and the importance of owning the power to vote and be part of the political debate. However, as we could see, the network still can't cover the diversity of women's experiences in Mozambique, thus the pluralistic characteristic of the civil society in the country exists as a form to fill up the hermeneutical gap of the women experiences that are not inserted in the local civil society network that advocates for women's rights.

6.3. Making meaning of gender issues in Mozambique – other perspectives.

Communication on gender issues will differ depending on the roles the activists occupy within the

¹⁷⁰ Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders - Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, p.161–163.

¹⁷¹ Forum Mulher, *Coordenação para a mulher no desenvolvimento*. (2011). *Mudando os tempos, Mudando as culturas, Manual de Capacitação*, p 6-7

organization and the communities. Nonetheless, mobilization throughout public demonstrations, meetings with local governments to talk about their agendas, workshops together with community representatives, are some of the examples I observed on how they communicate gender issues with the local governance structures.

In the interview conducted with Movfemme, the leader explained that societal norms shape the way these women will communicate their needs. For instance, she argues how the vocabulary in which Movfemme communicates rights changes depending on which geopolitical location they are inserted in:

“I remember that I was doing an interview in a community, and the language I was bringing there did not correspond with the community’s knowledge, they didn’t understand the technical language. So, the interviewee said that someone arrived in the community saying they needed clothing and alimentation, then a lady answered that they didn’t need that, that they needed food and clothes. She didn’t understand that both things meant the same, because the language that was brought to them was completely different.”

As we can see, the lady from the community questioned what her community needed according to the tools (words) she appropriates to make meaning for her rights claiming. She recognized her community necessities and her agency to speak for them. Claiming food and clothes is a claiming for her socioeconomic rights.

Following that, the activist mentions that the organizational agenda will change depending on the target group. Additionally, she underlines that each group will demand a different rights’ language and have their contexts analyzed closely to understand what are the practical aspects that will affect the articulation of their agendas.

Often the activists will need each other to push their agenda forward, and in the case of Movfemme, as a youth movement, they rely on the sisters’ organizations within the Forum Mulher network to communicate their claims with local governance. The movement is quite aware of the societal context in which Mozambican young women are inserted in, they understand that in provinces in which the Islamism is quite strong young women’s agenda will be completely different from the women living in Maputo city, and the young women living in the rural areas.

All the activists I interviewed articulate the human rights discourse on gender equality, freedom

of speech, and freedom to mobilize. They are all aware of the laws that allow pacific mobilization and that promote women's human rights, however, they also understand that such knowledge should be passed along to the women they represent so the communication on gender equality is clear and concise. On that note, another leader advocating for women's human rights and freedom of speech mentions the importance for the women to know how to "talk" to be able to claim their rights:

*"Processes of change are for the middle and long term, and it is important that they [women] recognize their rights and learn how to claim for them (...) they need to know how to effectively participate, know how to speak, to understand and communicate such issues."*¹⁷²

When the activist mentions that "they need to learn how to speak", she is referring to the legal language. The leader sees how it is important for the women to understand the language of rights to then claim for them. However, she also recognizes the nuances of the lived experiences of Mozambican women and how such nuances interfere in the way they perceive themselves as subjects of rights.

This is an example of how activists make meaning of gender issues in Mozambique and communicate such issues with the local governance. The mediators in Mozambican civil society will be in diverse locations between the communities and the governmental institutions, and such location will determine their level of sensibility on gender issues and their power to communicate closely to places in which change is much more substantial.

In that line of thought, the legal discourses on gender equality will be often perceived far from the realities of the women in the base (communities and rural areas). They won't utilize the rights' discourse to articulate their agendas because they understand that the law is alien to their lived experiences. Thus, in this case, it is more productive to negotiate the discourses on opportunities within the socio-political context (cultural context) that would enable the women social, political, and economical emancipation.¹⁷³ That work will only be made when culture is perceived as fluid and dynamic to the change.

As it follows, Maira Hari Domingos explains that organizations acting on gender equality in

¹⁷² Leader from Civil Society, (2022), Appendix 7.

¹⁷³ Blanco, E. R., & Domingos, M. H. (2011). Tradição, Cultura e Género nos Programas de desenvolvimento, p. 103-104.

Mozambique will intermediate their agendas throughout technical staff and activists. In some organizations, the level of sensibilization on gender equality is still quite limited, and they tend to be quite distant to the communities' realities, especially the technical staff, hence such limitations will affect the articulation of women's human rights at an organizational level.¹⁷⁴

As opposed to that, the community, and traditional leaders (régulos, elderly, curandeiros, and religious leaders) are much closer to the communities' affairs, and they are often recognized by the local governance structures. Here, their level of sensibilization is also quite low compared to the organizations' activists and the technical staff creating barriers on the local gender equality agenda. Notwithstanding, they usually play a key role on articulating the community issues with the local governance systems to enable cultural changes, especially the community leaders that usually act as intermediates between the institutional leaders and the traditional leaders. Their position is quite political and strategic for creating opportunities for women's emancipation within the *base*.¹⁷⁵

Another aspect mentioned by the activists is the impact of developmental programs on gender equality on the way they articulate their agendas. When I asked the leader of COLUAS how she saw the participation of the women in her organization in the local democracy, she mentioned that these women have a lot to contribute, nonetheless, to enable their full participation it is necessary to empower them economically. She sees this aspect as a first step to include women within the local democratic debate, so she also adds:

*“But this group of mothers needs more information. When I talk about information, I mean teach them the tools to articulate their agendas, what are the tools to help them organize, and how they should communicate their causes efficiently. Because it is not only making noise, as we already make noise, but we are not heard.”*¹⁷⁶

The statement shows the frustration of the activist with the breached communication between the local governance and her mobilization. In the interview she recognized that articulating with the country's political structures is important to push her organization's agenda, nonetheless, she

¹⁷⁴ Forum Mulher, Coordenação para a mulher no desenvolvimento. (2011). Mudando os tempos, Mudando as culturas, Manual de Capacitação, p. 91-92

¹⁷⁵ *ibid*, p. 92-93.

¹⁷⁶ Leader COLUAS (2022), Appendix 2.

understands that the women she represents need to learn how to “develop” skills to communicate their necessities. Here, I would question why their “noise” is not the right tool to articulate rights? And what does it entail to learn the “right” tools to communicate their needs? As we saw in this research, Forum Mulher attempts to fill up the hermeneutical gap between the “noises” within the base and the local governance, but these kinds of projects will depend on international funds that normally carries a Western preconceived idea on gender mainstreaming and women’s human rights. Thus, the relationship with donors, the legal framework and the transnational feminist discourses will all reflect in the way activists in civil society communicate their issues in Mozambique.

7. Final conclusions

The research aimed to understand how activists in Mozambique articulate and negotiate gender issues in the country and the intersectionality of their rights’ claiming discourses with the transitional feminist dialogue and global norms on the subject. Thanks to the post-feminist feminist character of this inquiry the women’s narratives served as a basis for understanding the layers in which their activism navigates to make meaning of what gender issues in Mozambique mean and how such issues are negotiated.

Furthermore, this inquiry utilized a case study as the primary method to understand how activism on women’s human rights in Mozambique is articulated. Notwithstanding, the ethnographic approach allowed this research to build a ticker contextual analysis to spot possible gaps and limitations on their work in civil society, but mostly to learn from their narratives the key aspects to enable the women’s substantial participation in the local political debate.

The analyzes on how the Forum Mulher understands gender issues and how they articulate the themes demonstrated the marginalization of Mozambican women within the country’s democratic discourses. It distressed that rights entitlement and self-recognition is a key aspect of including women in the local democratic debate, nonetheless, if societal and cultural behaviors are not systematically addressed by the facilitators (or intermediaries) of the rights claim, only rights self-recognition won’t suffice the women’s legal ownership.

Considering that fact, the contextual analysis revealed the nuances of civil society's work towards gender equality in view of the political processes that influenced the lives of Mozambican women and their present position within society. Thus, the activists' work is not always linear, it encounters a plurality of groups and approaches that emerges in the country's polity to fill up the hermeneutical gap of the experiences in the margins of the rights claiming mobilization. Their work will differ depending on the country's political situation and the cultural aspects that place women in a socioeconomically vulnerable position.

As it follows, the organizations' approach will also vary considering their interpretation of *gender* and its relationship with the legal framework on the subject. Thus, Forum Mulher understands that perceiving gender as a relational concept allows the organizations to reflect upon the power relationships that oppresses women's emancipation in the country. It also highlights that culture and tradition are dynamic, thus they can be modified, and good practices can be preserved. Here, the organization's feminist approach contests oppressive cultural behavior, but it doesn't deny the women's struggle in the past.

The language of rights is also another aspect the activists utilize for rights claiming, however, they also signalized the limitations of the law when applied to the Mozambican reality and how such gap affects the women's understanding of the legal provision for their own benefit. Thus, the leaders in civil society (usually directors of the organizations, project coordinators, technical activists) will appropriate the rights language to articulate their agendas with the local governance and international developmental programs. Meanwhile, the activists from the *base* will perceive the legal language as distant from their realities, hence they will articulate their rights based upon their necessities and the opportunities that ought to enable the rights' ownership. Here, the vernaculars will shift from *rights* claiming to *necessities* claiming depending on the context in which they are localized.

As we can see, the negotiation of gender issues in Mozambique encounters a set of layers in which the language utilized by the key actors in the process of change will adapt to their closest realities. Moreover, the closest the intermediaries are to the communities the biggest the power to challenge dysfunctional cultural practices that oppress women, however, the lower is the level of sensibilization on the concept and the bigger is the resistance to the process of change. Thus, imperial to understand the cultural aspects of power relationships between men and women in

Mozambique to create opportunities for women's emancipation.

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9. List of Appendix

Squiassi, Karina. (2022). Appendix 1: *Guideline for semi-structured interviews*.

Leader, COLUAS. (2022). Appendix 2: *Interview with leader from Cooperative Luana Semenias Sorrisos (COLUAS)*.

Leader, Movfemme. (2022). Appendix 3: *Interview with leader from Movfemme*.

Leader, Observatório das Mulheres. (2022). Appendix 4: *Interview with leader from Observatório das Mulheres*.

Leader, Movfemme. (2022). Appendix 5: *Interview with leader from Movfemme*.

Leader, Forum Mulher. (2022). Appendix 6: *Interview with leader from Forum Mulher*.

Independent Activist. (2022). Appendix 7: *Interview with Independent activist*.

Squiassi, Karina. (2022). Appendix 8: *Mozambican women's organization (OWM) and women emancipation in the postcolonial period*.

Figure 1. Gender equality concept – Forum Mulher (Capacitation Manual)

Figure 2. Project to strengthen women in politics' overall dynamics.