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Epistemologies of the South, Mozambique and a post-colonial feminist quest

Epistemologías del Sur, Mozambique y una búsqueda feminista postcolonial

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ABSTRACT

Far beyond Simone's warnings, the epistemologies of the South are a theoretical body that allows us to think, in a critically different way, about the construction, not only social but also potentially colonial, of the concept of 'woman' and therefore, the emancipation of women. This article has a double goal. Firstly, it is to question feminisms through the concepts of the abyssal line and of 'subaltern, insurgent cosmopolitanism'. The second is to analyse an episode of misogynistic emergency which occurred in Mozambique in 2016 and the resistance and feminist solidarity that followed by exerting a post-colonial feminist imagination. My methodological approach is based on the analysis of women's narratives obtained in interviews, journalism pieces and social networks.

Keywords: Epistemologies of the South; Feminisms; Mozambique; Postcolonialisms.

RESUMEN

Más allá de las advertencias de Simone, las epistemologías del Sur son un problema que nos permite pensar, de manera críticamente diferente, acerca de la construcción, no solo social sino también potencialmente colonial, del concepto de "mujer" y, por lo tanto, de la emancipación de mujer. Este artículo tiene un doble objetivo. En primer lugar, cuestionar el feminismo a través de los conceptos de la línea abismal y del "cosmopolitismo subalterno e insurgente". En segundo lugar, analizar un episodio de emergencia misógina que ocurrió en Mozambique en 2016 y la resistencia y solidaridad feminista que siguió al ejercer una imaginación feminista poscolonial. Mi enfoque metodológico se basa en el análisis de las narrativas de mujeres obtenidas en entrevistas, artículos de periodismo y redes sociales.

Palabras clave: Epistemologías del Sur; Feminismo; Mozambique; Postcolonialismo.

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INTRODUCTION

Far beyond Simone's warnings, the *Epistemologies of the South* are a problem that allows us to think, in a critically different way, about the construction, not only social but also potentially colonial, of the concept of 'woman'³ and therefore, the emancipation of women. Boaventura de Sousa Santos⁴ is clear when he states:

Inspired by denunciations of colonial ontologies from which so many supposedly universal theories of social transformation have derived, the epistemologies of the South are an invitation to a much wider experience of the world than one's own and thus to a much broader company in the task of transforming the world into one more equal and more diverse.

The theoretical interpellation of Santos forces me thus, into an exercise of profound reflexivity that questions my feminist sociological imagination and uncovers the danger of the single story⁵ that my ignorance may prescribe and feed. This means that feminisms need to assume, as well, that there is no social justice without cognitive justice⁶.

By assuming the incompleteness of all knowledge and the arrogance and indolence of modern science,⁷ the *Epistemologies of the South* open ways that allow us to explore in that South, not a geographical location but a metaphor for human suffering, its *formidable energy of survival and transformation*.⁸ In other words, with the *Epistemologies of the South* I contain my memories and narratives of emancipation to open space for others, which are generated in the resistance to systems of oppression⁹, possibly divergent and wrongly understood by me. In this contention, I need to silence myself to be able to hear, with increased focus, other words, silences or the chosen screams with which many women show their understanding of themselves and their worlds. It thus entails questioning the master narrative about the emancipation through the rationalities of those beings that self-represent as feminine, assuming plain epistemological dignity of their subjectivities in action, of their life experiences, of anger, annihilation, resistance and liberation.

The echo of the vitality and intellectual curiosity, essential to the *Epistemologies of the South* informed by a feminist nature, are expressed in the high level of perplexity, surprise and enchantment in face of the infinite

¹ This essay was written in the scope of project 'ALICE – Strange Mirrors, Unexpected Lessons: Leading Europe to a new way of sharing the world experiences', coordinated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos and financed by the European Research Council 7th Framework Programme of the European Union (FP/2007-2013)/ ERC Grant Agreement n. [269807].

² This publication is supported by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (Foundation for Science and Technology), under the UID/SOC/50012/2019 Strategic Project and the Transitory Provision/Individual Employment.

³ I should mention henceforth the problems that the abstract concepts of 'woman' or 'women' pose for me. Besides the limits of all the categorizations, I also assume the potential epistemicide that it may entail by eliminating many other forms of sexual or identity representation. However, I must make rhetorical choices to be able to write. In this sense, I choose to use those words to designate the different subjectivities I come across in this essay and that self-represent as feminine beings. Having clarified this question, I ask the readers of this work to bear in mind these analytic precautions and the fact that we lack many words, in our imperial languages, to decolonize the world and knowledge.

⁴ Santos, 2014: 240.

⁵ Paraphrasing *The danger of the single story* by Chimamanda Adichie.

⁶ Santos, 2014: 133.

⁷ Santos, 2000.

⁸ Khatibi, 2001: 36.

⁹ I follow Santos' position (2014) when he states that there are three big regimes of oppression and exploitation which are coordinated and are operative in contemporaneity: colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy. However, I want to clarify that I find limits for the concept of patriarchy to designate the multiplicity of existing systems of women's oppression. These systems produce relations of subalternity and discrimination of those who represent themselves as feminine by those who represent themselves as males. This debate is very rich and diverse and should be taken into consideration. Among the authors that have drawn attention to the inadequacy or even the colonial character of the concept of patriarchy, I choose to mention Ifi Amadiume, Oyèrónké Oyewùmí, Adéléké Adéèko and María Lugones. In the first section of this essay I briefly deal with this question. For reasons of economy in writing, and because it is not the goal of this work, I invite the readers to bear in mind, once again, these analytical precautions as to the term and concept in hand.

diversity of the knowledge and realities of women. These feminist insights are, therefore, a quest presided over by the idea of rationality capable of astonishment, meaning that it does not regard its own knowledge as settled nor judgement as a principle or as an end. I argue my feminist reading of the *Epistemologies of the South* is also post-colonial or, in other words, it is a theoretical and empirical exercise which has as its main goal to go beyond colonial rationality and the androcentric epistemological imagination.

In the context of Santos' works,¹⁰ I conceptualize post-colonial as the cognitive, social, cultural and economic search for sociability and epistemic relations emptied of colonial hierarchies. Thus, on one hand, there is the epistemological horizon and, on the other hand, the scope of knowledge and social relations that, for different reasons, are seen to be free or in process of liberation from colonial oppression. Post-colonial feminism highlights the profoundly destructive articulation of the troika of colonialism-capitalism-patriarchy dominant in the world. It radicalizes knowledge about the causes and consequences that have been perpetuating the power inequalities among women and men, whether in times of colonial dependence or after political independences. It draws attention to the idea that women-of-ex-colonized-worlds, raised and kept under multiple layers of silencing and invisibility, are authors of narratives and emancipatory sociabilities on their own terms. In this way, the Feminist Epistemologies of the South assume the insights which emerge from the rubble provoked by the disgraces suffered, but it also gives credit to and values the implicit prefigurations of epistemological decolonization and subversion of existing sexist social relations. In this regard, and to counterpoint the coercion of imposed silences, the discourse uttered by women who inhabit and speak from there is heuristically fundamental to this essay.

Political colonialism and the knowledge that sustained it organized insights and ignorance about realities, societies, sociabilities, skills and technologies destroying and disturbing old orders of reason to dictate a brand of irrationality. However, and as I presented in previous works¹¹, *epistemologies of the South* states that many things, many understandings and sociabilities resisted or were kept out of this destructive relation. Along the same lines, the works of Amina Mama, Ifi Amadiume, Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo¹², among many others, show very well the epistemic violence imposed by colonialism but also the never-ending imagination needed to resist it, a formidable energy to fight back, and why not say it, a determination to end it. In other words, if the epistemological search deepens beyond resistances, we may distinguish between active and founder subjectivities that are constituted and live despite the genocide and crushing perpetrated by the consortium of oppression of capitalism-colonialism-patriarchy.

The ideals about the emancipation of Mozambican women as one condition for the full emancipation of the Mozambican people have been resonating within the society since the liberation struggle against Portuguese colonialism and for political independence in 1975. In spite of evidence of persistent inequalities between men and women, one can say that there was a kind of a transversal common sense about the importance of such an ideal. The high number of females in political institutions and the judiciary, the participation of women in security forces and armed forces and women's associative fabric and agendas are some elements that show how much women feel they have a say and a critical contribution to share with their communities and country.¹³ So it was with a certain perplexity that in recent times it was revealed how much misogyny is arising in society, surfacing clearly and loudly in political proposals and public discourse from state and civil entities. Liberation's energies of the ideals of independence seem to be challenged and put into question and the patriarchal abyssal line emerges in its own glory framed by the neo-liberal globalization political economy that requires more and more battalions of disciplined and controlled female bodies and minds¹⁴.

¹⁰ 2010; 2014.

¹¹ Cunha, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017.

¹² Mama, 1995; Amadiume, 1998; Dussel, 2000; Mignolo, 2002.

¹³ Cunha, 2014.

¹⁴ Carty; Mohanty, 2015; Osório; Cruz e Silva, 2016; Osório, 2014.

In this context, I choose to bring to the discussion a critical moment that occurred between March and April 2016, where this abyssal line became vividly apparent: the rally that took place in Maputo (18/03/16), the capital of Mozambique, organized to protest against the governmental suggestion to oblige all girls in elementary and secondary school to wear maxi-skirts. Two main arguments were used to legitimize such a measure. The first was about the power of maxi-skirts to control and avoid male¹⁵ harassment and early pregnancies. The second concerned the idea that mini-skirts do not conform to African traditions, so girls must learn how to behave as authentic African women. Rapidly, coercive laws popped up in almost every public school obliging all girls to wear maxi-skirts to attend classes. Women and girls were not listened to and were even advised to humbly accept the procedures for their own sake. During the rally, several women and girls were arrested and one foreign activist was expelled from the country after a controversial criminal process.

The patriarchal abyssal line that seemed, at least, to have been blurred for some decades, both in governmental and social media discourse, resurfaced here with special vigour. Despite the problematic situation, women – and some men, is important to mention – refused to be constricted to silence or be reduced to passive victims. They were reacting and performing what can be assumed as their version of a subaltern and insurgent cosmopolitanism, creating alternative explanations and narratives about sexual harassment, gender-based violence and women's emancipation.

This work is based on access to information grounded on the following methodological devices: the first one was a systematic collection of newspaper articles and social network posts that circulated during the months of March, 2016 and April 2017; the second, listening to testimonies provided by children and families, as well as feminist activists, affected by these events.¹⁶

With this in mind, this essay has a double aim. On one hand, to question feminisms through the concepts of abyssal line and of subaltern, insurgent cosmopolitanism (Santos, 2014): the first section of the essay. On the other hand, I intend to contribute to an analysis of an episode of misogynistic emergence that occurred in Mozambique in 2016 and of the feminist resistances and solidarities that followed, by exerting a postcolonial feminist sociological imagination in the second section.

PART I – EPISTEMOLOGIES OF THE SOUTH: FROM THE ABYSSAL LINE TO A COSMOPOLITAN SUBALTERN AND INSURGENT FEMINISM

1.1. Feminisms and the abyssal line

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, by portraying modern thought as an abyssal thought, affirms that it actively builds invisible but powerful lines, that make it impossible for *the co-presence of the two sides of the line*. *To the extent that prevails, this side of the line only prevails by exhausting the field of relevant reality. Beyond it, there is only nonexistence, invisibility, nondialectical absence*¹⁷. This abyssal thought is not the result of any abstract idea but structures and is structured by a capitalist, colonial and sexist economy¹⁸ which articulates different ways of exploitation and discrimination throughout different social realities. In other words, abyssal

¹⁵ Teachers, colleagues or other males involved in school activities or those whom girls may encounter or have contact with on their way to schools.

¹⁶ It is imperative to mention that the work of gathering articles and testimonies that serve here as the empirical basis and document of analysis was only possible because of the vital collaboration of two Mozambican colleagues and activists from WLSA – MZ (Women and Law in Southern Africa – Mozambique) whom I deeply thank. They are Terezinha da Silva and Maria José Arthur. In a way, the authorship of this essay should be understood as a result of a collective and collaborative reflection, a realization of a subaltern insurgent and supportive rationality.

¹⁷ Santos, 2014: 118.

¹⁸ This sexism I mention here is a system of sexual differentiation based on biological evidence that encompasses attributes and social roles and presents two characteristics that should be mentioned here: it is hetero-patriarchal and andocentric. This means that the abyssal line created has male sexualities and heterosexual placing as its normative reference, with all others dependent on it or in an abnormal zone that should be controlled and dominated or even be inexistent.

thought is grounded in hierarchies established in dichotomies as productive–reproductive; metropolis–colony; and male–female and that evoke their power to define, name, affirm or deny the existence of a certain entity or reality. Bearing in mind the limits of this essay I will draw special attention to the colonial and hetero-patriarchy bias inscribed in it. I am aware that this choice withdraws a significant part of the analytical elements, but it allows us to focus on some aspects which in my opinion are relevant for the reading of the case presented in the second part.

The geography of contemporary wars, the European political speeches on forced migrations of people which, euphemistically, are termed ‘refugee crises’ and nationalist imaginaries are constantly infiltrated with a colonial rationality which transforms something that has always been a conquest into something good.¹⁹ And this conquest has always implied and perpetuated suffering, loss, destruction, appropriation, denial of autonomy, fracture, withdrawal, and subaltern differentiation. In my view this is not an operation of colonial melancholia. On the contrary, it is the strength of the colonialism, that produces and carries on steadfastly not recognising alterity. It becomes obscured, once again the full acknowledgement of ourselves, our mistakes, our finitude and our incompetence to admit the infinite cognoscence of the world. Western ultra-modernity, redefined by the socio-political dynamics of the 21st century, thus continues to view itself as the centre and the end of the story. It is the simplistic and Manichaeist vision of a world which recreates the categorical imperative of civilizing, liberating and redeeming the other from its irreparable and fundamental ontological failure.

Colonialism as a mental system, a representation of the world and abyssal epistemology remains active and consequent despite the struggles of liberation and political independences of the countries, ongoing for decades. I highlight the colonial character of our time since the reconfiguration of the relations of dependence and exploitation, occupation and dominance are strongly apparent in the geo-politics of the accumulation of wealth²⁰ or in the recreation of urban centres and colonial peripheries which abysmally divide our contemporary world²¹. Now, this reality is not sexually neutral; it involves, co-opts, victimizes, instrumentalizes or silences, in different ways, women and men²². I am thus interested in bringing to this debate some of the problems that continuously emerge from this colonial geo-politics of the 21st century: the various ways in which violence particularly afflicts women; the growing misogyny of speech and political practices and the structural impoverishment that affects the majority of women on the planet. These questions, which subsist as a continuum along historical times and geographies, reveal, in my opinion, the enormous sexist interstitial resistances of our societies that are actively constructed in this still (so) colonial space-time.

For these reasons, I launch a challenge to those feminist thoughts that, despite their laborious criticisms of modernity and the mechanisms that maintained many women overshadowed. Better, those beings that self-represent as women, their options, their perspectives and their knowledge, have not been carrying out criticism of the colonial inside themselves with equal vigour. In other words, they have not yet overcome their pretension, while western, of being the measure and the reference for all women and all the epistemologies that claim to be feminists. What I aim to reach with my argument is that a post-colonial feminist critic is not happy with identifying the exclusions that many women were subjected to, but rather the abyssal exclusions that this colonial modern long cycle inflicts on the majority of them. Thus I am set to launch the basis on which, later on, I can recognize in the resistance and struggles of Mozambican women the inequalities and misogyny of their country, agencies and narratives in the first person of emancipations which are subaltern but insurgent rationalities.

The dominant ideas about women of the global south have been throwing them into abysses of incommensurability with a status of quasi person-object. The obsession for control over them led the

¹⁹ Dussel, 2000: 68.

²⁰ OXFAM, 2017.

²¹ Santos, 2017; 2018.

²² I apply the same analytical and epistemological precautions to the concept and to the term ‘men’ as explained above.

continuation of women-from-the-other-side-of-the-line being described as a amalgamated whole to which a set of unifying and explicative characteristics is attributed. Many feminists from this south have been showing us how much this master narrative is colonial. As Maréma Touré or Lugones²³ state in this regard, concepts like gender, patriarchy or woman, created and exported from the north to the impoverished south, are defined from the exterior. Without considering historicity, cultures, languages and different experiences, these concepts and categories have often been functioning as discourse that only underlines the victimization of the majority of women in the world and denies them the ability to think and act against their misfortunes on their own terms. They argue that people are encrypted in systems where they are barely heard and much less understood. In this regard, the debate among feminists is intense and regional universalisms, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos²⁴ calls them, are continuously discussed and reinterpreted. Among many others, the works of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Amina Mama, Wazir Karim, Kalwant Bhopal, Titi Ufomata, John N. Orij, Vandana Shiva, Mojúbàolú Olúfúnké Okome, Ifi Amadiume, Esther Chow, Deanna Lyter and Kum-Kum Bahavnani²⁵, denounce them like the universalistic bias of a certain feminism codifies and reduces women's heterogeneity to general and closed categories.

I distinguish four main categories that form this amalgam of subalternity. The first, and maybe the most dominant, is the 'victims'. Victimization is maybe the category on which its ontological and existential lightness most profoundly based. There are many negative images, powerful, painful and prolific about the deprivation of any identity, subjectivity, capacity or agency of the beings thus placed before us²⁶. They exist in a timeless world in which timeless itself is mistaken for tradition and tradition for habit, atavistic, that is, repetitive irrationality. The colonial prerogative, of any type and time, continues to represent then ineluctably poor, ignorant, illiterate, bent over work and hoes, indistinguishable among each other, confined to kitchens and despair; they wait for their rape as their fate and consider prostitution a natural activity of survival; they are patient, quiet, mute and are silent when ordered and remain invisible both outside and inside their houses. This *other* of the *other* is the possible rhetorical representation of those who exist without resources, without names, identity and without exegesis. Secondly, I argue that logocentric feminisms²⁷ of the western north have at their core the idea that male privileges and their domain are like a experience shared by all women worldwide, at every time and in every place. Therefore, when confronted with uncontroversial evidence of women who are in positions of power and authority, are figures of strength and are subjects who refuse to be objects, a second possible category of women emerges: 'the exceptionals'. However, by affirming the exceptionality of some, we are highlighting the subalternity of them all. The chosen ones confirm the rule in their inherent minority. I thus underline that that exceptionality is not unconditional since, despite everything, they are thought of as temporary and authorized representatives of men and their interests and are called upon to play their role of reproducers of oppression. The third category is that that Yuval-Davis designates as 'frontier guards'²⁸. Quite often in the nationalist rhetoric, women are imposed as the ones responsible for the role of preserving, with their works and their bodies, all the material and symbolic fabric on which rest some of the most powerful symbols of the invented permanence of the nations: languages, traditions, ceremonies

²³ Touré, [s.d.]: 2; Lugones, 2010.

²⁴ Santos, 2010.

²⁵ Mohanty, 1991; Mama, 1995; Karim, 1995; Bhopal, 1997; Ufomata, 2002; Orij, 2000; Shiva; Mies, 1993; Shiva, 2000; Okome, 2001; Amadiume, 1998; Chow, Lyter, 2002; Bahavnani, 2001.

²⁶ Oyewùmi, 2005: 188.

²⁷ There is no room in this text to develop the question of western rationalism as logocentric and of which the dominant feminisms are taxable, excluding or undervaluing all the knowledge that is not generated and stated through reason. However, it seems to me very important to signal this characteristic for it is responsible for a master narrative that denies, for itself and for rival knowledge, a multitude of epistemologies present in the world that have no explanation nor which argue from rational experience. In this sense, this should be considered one more of the abyssal lines with which the world is divided between ignorance and knowledge and it needs to be pointed out here.

²⁸ Yuval-Davis, 1997: 23.

and lineages. This category of women is used by hyperbolizing the honour of a destiny which after all is imposed on them and over which they seem to have little or no control. Their meaning is thus reduced to mere and exotic guard-servant instruments of their lords, supplying the needs of the reproduction of their power. The fourth way of subalternizing them is by making them 'the untouchables'. This means separating them from the world due to their intangibility or incommensurability. They are imagined as and transformed into queens, Amazons, sophisticated and wise courtesans, sorcerers and unreachable goddesses, untouchable creatures and, therefore, alone and ethereal and whose power is more fictional than real and concrete.

The potential of the ethno- and logocentric character of the dominant feminist categorization hides the complexity and the diversity of the social, material, symbolic, political and power nature of women's experiences. This shows how inadequate and unsuitable concepts like patriarchy and gender or even woman may be. Regarding Africa, Okome, Ufomata and Amadiume's studies offer remarkable analysis on the different family systems, kinships, lineages, family relationships and proximity.²⁹ In these there are women who can be husbands and where the daughters may be male children, with these social identities double and transitive (dual identity) being non-based on biological sex or social class and much more grounded on inter-generational relationships, status and relationship with the land³⁰. On the other hand, the perplexity and suspicions that are raised when these women refuse to be freed and saved from their cultures and choices, as Srila Roy's work³¹ expresses so well, show how a feminist critic which is not profoundly post-abysal may be colonial.

Not only do these feminisms, seen as power systems of some women over others, not understand the diversity and the particular processes in which the oppressions take place, they also become blind and insensitive to the processes of appropriation, co-option, resistance and creation of alternatives which are operative in the most varied places of the world. They are forms of abyssal thought that reduce the existential and biographical multiplicity of women to the categories of informed women by a cultural essentialism which places, names and classifies them according to their origin, place and culture making them hierarchal different from one another. These differences, created and maintained in abstract, allow the segregation and domination by some over the others, even if the evocation of a feminine sisterhood is used as a rhetorical strategy of unity. Patricia McFadden mentions a sort of femocracy in the western north that has been inventing concepts and categories that have been made use of by a certain way of looking at, conceptualizing and keeping this South dependent and in epistemological, social and political minority.³² It thus becomes clear that it is necessary to exercise hermeneutics of suspicion regarding feminism and its generalizations and, at the same time, motivate pluritopic hermeneutics, in which all the women that wish to may have a place. As Gayatri Spivak proposes, it is up to feminists to know how to develop an 'ethic of singularity' which is a quest for commensurability among culturally situated people, it is the search, face to face with alterity not the abstract, theoretical and categorical form but listening and giving room to plurivocality³³.

On the other hand, all abyssal thoughts not only divide reality, they darken the transits, ambiguities and uncertain spaces which inhabit the lines and ruin the regulating power of dichotomies. Critical sociology of science³⁴ and *Subaltern Studies*³⁵ have shown for a long time that it is in the margins of systems that one can better perceive differences and transgressions. I argue here that the abyssal lines created and fed by modern,

²⁹ I use this set of expressions since only one concept does not allow the complexity of these social relations to be captured.

³⁰ Amadiume, 1998:32

³¹ 2017.

³² Bohler-Muller, 2002: 87; McFadden, 2011.

³³ See Spivak, 1996.

³⁴ See among other works by Sandra Harding, 1998; Isabelle Stengers, 1997 and João Arriscado Nunes, 2009.

³⁵ Bhabha, Homi K. "The Postcolonial and Postmodern: The Question of Agency." In *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. pp.171-197. Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts," *Economic and Political Weekly* v.33: no.9 (28 February 1998), pp. 473-479. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and The Interpretation of Culture*. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. London: Macmillan, 1988. pp. 271-313.

indolent and arrogant rationality³⁶ are not empty nor are they totally impermeable. Abyssal lines are populated and disobeyed intensely by women; those subjectivities and social subjects are so diverse, with their actions of resignation and revolt with which they affront the categories and the unhappiness imposed on them. The lines shift and at the same time are inhabited by ambiguities and incongruences which are exploited to oppress and silence or to support irreverent and unsubdued narratives. A post-abysal feminist thought begins when, beyond the gap that it divides one can see the insurgency constituted in the refusal of coercion both of silencing and of redemption from it. The very terms of diversity of emancipation, even if we do not understand them in the master narrative that moulds us, are those steps taken by women on top of the abyssal lines and that represent the conditions of their own resilience. Santos evokes *intercultural translation* as the possibility of finding reciprocal commensurabilities, mutual conditions to engage in dialogue and establish conditions to initiate something that we still don't have any name for. Therefore, it qualifies as post abyssal because it is *learning from the South, through an epistemology of the South. On this basis it is possible to struggle for a 'subaltern insurgent cosmopolitanism' based on a subaltern cosmopolitan reason*³⁷.

1.2. Subaltern, insurgent, cosmopolitanism feminism

Post-abysal thought is therefore an epistemological ambition which finds critical expression in subaltern insurgent cosmopolitanism. As Santos states, subaltern insurgent cosmopolitanism is an *[A]spirational of oppressed groups to organize their resistance and consolidate political coalitions on the same scale as the one used by the oppressors to victimize them [...] uniting social groups on both class and nonclass basis. [...] For this reason insurgent cosmopolitanism does not imply uniformity, a general theory of social emancipation and the collapse of differences, autonomies, and local identities*³⁸.

One of the main conditions for preserving this instituting diversity of subaltern, insurgent cosmopolitanism is there being knowledge which is not derivative but rather forged on the other side of the line and in the disobedience to it. This knowledge, that modern western thought has not considered or considered to be irrelevant and incapable, is a concrete emergence of other terms and epistemologies. These not only exist but are operative beyond the line and above the line and inform many forms of knowledge, thought and transformation of the world. I propose bringing some reflections which impel me in this direction and that will allow me, afterwards, to understand differently the activities of resistance and the manifestations of solidarity addressed in the second part of this work.

By stating this, I want to affirm that many actions performed by women and which perform multiple ways of transforming the world and thinking about the world, do not constitute an abstraction or a mere theoretical desire. If the abyssal line has sent the majority to epistemological indigence, the concept of subaltern, insurgent cosmopolitanism recovers the potential for ambivalence of what they know and represents, in itself, dissension and disobedience because it escapes the canon and the mould.

This provide me a basis to think of how some African societies³⁹ are entities composed of subjectivities full of vitality that, despite all the attempts to destroy them epistemologically and socially, emerge and contradict the classical key ideas of dystopic enclosure of reality. I therefore carry on with some considerations that reveal the social and cognitive density inscribed in African societies, to which Mozambique belongs.

³⁶ Santos, 2000.

³⁷ Santos, 2014: 134.

³⁸ *Ibid.*: 135.

³⁹ It is important to mention that I do not intend to perform any generalization for the African continent. Apart from being extremely inaccurate it would be impossible given the internal diversity and post-colonial ambition. In this work, I address some African societies studied by myself and by the authors I mobilize. I can not make statements with any universalistic or normative character but I do not renounce thinking sociologically of what realities and experiences convey and instigate.

My previous works⁴⁰ show, in line with other authors like Charmaine Pereira, Ifi Amadiume, Patricia McFadden, Conceição Osório and Isabel Casimiro, Cunha⁴¹, among others, that a sophisticated analysis allows us to see among women and men multiple relations of negotiation, dependence and specific resistances to coercion mechanisms or particular discrimination existing in different African societies. Women and men do not live, necessarily, in a system based on hierarchy and opposition between sexes. Equality among women and men does not have to be conceived, exclusively, as an assurance of a universal set of political, civil, economic and cultural rights, legitimised by the power of a State or a community of States. Equality and dignity may be thought of by many women with an identity and social distinction which is evident and desired among women and men and the source of power does not arise from sexual determination, biologically or socially constructed. Women are not like men nor do they want to resemble men. Indeed, resembling a man or acting like a man may be a source of personal and community indignity. Women want to belong to every social sphere but without losing their own prerogatives of power and prestige which are reached through their spiritual capacities, of transfer, visibility and invisibility control, of resistance and strength. To affirm that the sphere of decision of women is informality and obscurity is to be unaware that what prevails and is over-determinant is prestige or the moral degradation of each person and group and not people's genders and their confinement to spheres considered formal or informal. For many of those women the conception of power in the west reveals lack of spiritual strength, lacks effective energy and that is what diminishes and degrades the prestige of those who exert it.⁴² Women's work is not considered invisible or underrated and women are educated to be particularly sensitive to the many ways of exploitation of their work outside the house and family. Preparing food is often an expression of power and ability to control resources and the possibilities to obtain income⁴³.

In African societies, as among the Namibians, being a mother is not a passive and domestic role. Mothers are not quiet beings crushed by their maternal burden. On the contrary, it is a revered and valued position from which they can fight against injustices, challenge situations, make demands about their place and status and obtain tangible powers from them and their daughters and sons.⁴⁴ Bonds are based much more between generations than between partners⁴⁵ and thus there are differences in perception, social strategy and knowledge. Adéléké Adéèkó⁴⁶ shows that some women in some African societies are born 'husband' and that that includes, cumulatively, husband and sister-in-law status.⁴⁷ However, it is a way to highlight the differences, our ignorance and the difficulties we have in enunciating them. In reality, identity is processed and built in a system of belonging to a lineage and not to a determined biologic genre or to a constructed and global gender. Being a husband, being born a husband indicates a *locus* in a logic of relations and not an attribute of gender or an anatomically determined gender. Women and men as part of determined convivial and domination rules were invented as categories of analysis in universes in which these did not make sense or there was no specific gender or a sexual specification to access power through norms, laws, language or cultural *ethos*.

Bearing in mind that all generalizations are reductionist and trying to avoid them as much as possible, one may nevertheless affirm that in different African societies there is much evidence that women exert control over their lives. That power is based on their functions of producing, exchange, commercializing and distributing products, whether in nearby circuits in local markets and bazaars, or creating and maintaining

⁴⁰ Cunha, 2014.

⁴¹ Pereira, 2005; Amadiume, 1998; McFadden, 2011; Osório, 2008; Casimiro, 2008.

⁴² Cunha, 2006; 2014.

⁴³ Esterik, 1995: 248-253.

⁴⁴ Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005: 267.

⁴⁵ Casimiro, 2008.

⁴⁶ Adéèkó, 2005: 125.

⁴⁷ I stress here that I am trying to translate to a European language those identities and social positions with all the problems it entails.

medium- and long-distance commercial routes⁴⁸. On the other hand, many maintain rights of use and exploitation of land considered property of their communities⁴⁹ and, consequently, the budgetary freedom that feeds production and commerce networks which they implement and develop.⁵⁰

Despite societies being, in general, patrilineal, the offspring and ascendancy is determined by belonging to the father or paternal uncle's family, women control power structures in the communities. The effective control that those women manage to get over production and distribution of essential goods for the life of the family or community is often expressed in the effectiveness and legitimacy of their political power, here thought of as the relations and decision circuits. As Okome⁵¹ states, some women may become very powerful despite not being designated queens or an equivalent. They mastermind their groups that work as governing councils with whom they decide about the punishments and penalties and other means of conflict regulation and attending to individual and collective complaints. They organize public demonstrations and other pressure actions and public denunciation against attitudes of men considered less proper or unfair. They function, in many circumstances, as counselling and regulation entities of collective life and all the actions are considered legitimate and are publicly recognized.

Apart from this, women in African societies master complex combat tactics which are, in many cases, assumed transgressions and signals of power strategy in other terms. Oriji's⁵² suggestive analysis about the revolt of Igbo women shows very well that the power structures, influence and women's participation are based in age-old experiences which remained more or less operational throughout the entire colonial period and beyond. He shows how, in moments considered decisive of collective life, women were capable of calling upon those ancestral cultural apprenticeships and bringing about the desired effect in new contexts. Both literature and empirical experiences show the momentum of this heritage that may assume many diverse shapes, like: strategically using silence in the various spheres of life; keeping an apparent but hostile harmony; using moral and spiritual prestige against degradation and injustice; serving food without eating; asking and not waiting for the reply; going out without saying where, with whom and for how long; cross dressing as a man and choreographing manlike fights; shouting stridently; causing social embarrassment of men with words, murmurs and stares; screaming insults and curses; singing insults; showing genitals and breasts; being totally naked in front of everybody; urinating, defecating; singing in group; hiding savings, precious things or money; protecting their interests or their families' excluding their husband or husbands; taking part in silence marches, tying themselves up, sitting down and remaining in one place; dressing for mourning; protesting against presence and implication; postponing; being patient and knowing how to transfer space-time of confrontation.⁵³ Women's agency may mean reproducing inequalities but also may defy them in ways as unexpected as they are effective. The terms of the challenges do not always make sense in the ideology of the dominant western feminist gender and do not have to, but that doesn't mean that they don't exist, are not operative and reinventing themselves throughout the entire time and oppressive regimes.

It is in this sense that I distinguish between a subaltern and insurgent cosmopolitanism that has been functional throughout time and in relevant geographical scales. It is in this that we should found the social and epistemological energies that go beyond abyssal thinking and allow us to reencounter humble and learning feminisms. With them we discover that contradicting the intensity and persistence of the naming of African women as victims – orphans, widowers, prisoners, trophies, cattle – and resorting to hyperbole for their sufferings is, mostly, a way of mummifying and paralyzing them. It is as is they could not think and theorize

⁴⁸ Amadiume, 1997 e 2005; Karim, 1995.

⁴⁹ On this issue in Mozambique, see among other, the work of José Guilherme Negrão "Sistemas Costumeiros da Terra", 2003 [Land Customary Systems].

⁵⁰ Karim, 1995; Esterik, 1995; Waylen, 1996: 50-51; Oriji, 2000; Ufomata, 2002; Okome, 2001: 4; Jacobson, 2006: 503.

⁵¹ 2001.

⁵² Oriji, 2000.

⁵³ Among others, see the works of Agarwal, 2003; Casimiro, 2004; Tripp, 2009; Zeleza, 2005; Bonate, 2006; Bhavnani, 2001; Karim, 1995; Oyewùmi, 2005; Amadiume, 1997; Oriji, 2000.

about themselves and their lives; it is as if no resistance is possible for them, and through them, the actual change of their conditions of their subalternity.

Abysal thought, which informs some feminist epistemologies, denies a part of feminine humanity so that the other part of feminine humanity can affirm itself. However, a simple phenomenological look at reality shows that such precipices and emptiness are attitudes of blindness and deafness that hypertrophied thought doesn't see, does not want to see and is no longer surprised by the infinitude of creations propelled by alterity and by feminine polyrationality. In this sense, Yuval-Davis' work and her concept of 'interior frontier'⁵⁴ may be understood as an ethos of opposition and confrontation. The *interior frontier* is a brand of difference, of conscience of that difference, regardless of the degree of submission to which they are forced. The *interior frontier* is the way where alterity does not bend, despite violence and domination. In this way, I reinforce my attention on other reasoning, where the eccentric is not marginal and where time is complex, dynamic and long. I can thus, from my perspective, identify reasoning of emancipation which may be in contradiction with or go beyond those with which I am trained to think.

The criticism I sought to outline here leads me to three theoretical premises. The first is that all subjectivities and women-subjects, those self-represented feminine-bodies leave traces and indelible marks in their social realities; they are not only spray and wind. The second is that their practices, subjectivities and knowledge are far beyond mirror images of the will and interests of male-virile-men. The third is that these women-subjects and feminine-bodies create their own spaces of alterity, resistance and evaluation of their self-interest and act accordingly. Women face internal and external frontiers, walk on lines and abysses, suffer violence, recurrent impoverishments and misogyny, refuse and accept help but they do not renounce their existence.

PART II – CONFRONTING MISOGYNY AND IMAGINING SOCIETY BEYOND THE LINE: MOZAMBICAN WOMEN'S RESISTANCES AND COSMOPOLITAN SOLIDARITIES

2.1. Context and the rise of misogyny in public discourse in Mozambique

With this in mind and before going on with further analysis on the case of the maxi-skirts, I find it important to pursue, albeit very briefly, a broader contextualization of the current situation in Mozambique. To do so, I outline some elements of the present political economy that, in my view, help to understand the re-emergence of these misogynistic discourse and actions.

Mozambique is currently experiencing an economic reality contradictory to its national image. On one hand, Mozambique continues to rank as the world's third poorest country; based on the HDI developed by UNDP, Mozambique is in 180th position out of a total of 188 analysed countries.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the World Bank underlies that its economic growth has been remarkable in recent years with an average of 7.2% in the first half of 2014.⁵⁶ In fact, today Mozambicans commonly perceive that they live in a very rich country in spite of their own misery. There is no evidence that the informal sector has decreased or that the state budget has committed these new resources towards social policies such as employment, education, health and social security.⁵⁷ On top of this, the recent scandals about huge hidden debts that the previous government contracted in devious business and the accusations of high levels of corruption reveals the complexity of the situation.⁵⁸ I argue that present-day Mozambique may be presented as a critical example of what the financial and extractivist economic globalization can produce on a national scale: deep democratic erosion, corruption, extreme inequalities, and a remarkable difficulty in enunciating progressive alternatives.

⁵⁴ 1997: 199.

⁵⁵ PNUD, 2015.

⁵⁶ WB, 2014: 1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: 2 – 4.

⁵⁸ Brito *et al*, 2016.

In this sense, and as Teresa Cruz e Silva,⁵⁹ points out, the figures presented by the official data from the Third National Poverty Assessment in its various rounds⁶⁰ are indicative of the enormous contradictions that exist in the country and their troubling consequences. In fact, the comparative results of three rounds of evaluation of poverty in Mozambique can lead us to conclude that in this country poverty is *still very high, chronically resistant and showing signs of having increased rather than decreased*.⁶¹ This disarticulation between economic growth and the absence of improvement in living conditions and redistribution of wealth within the country are some of the reasons for the continuous social turbulence that occurs all over the country.

In spite of vast natural resources such as coal, precious wood and stones, gas, oil, agriculture and fishing, Mozambique, as a nation, has been failing the profound vulnerability of the majority of its population. It is common sense that Mozambique is going through a period of accelerated extractivism and financial capitalism. Many social scientists in Mozambique have been discussing these matters and the literature demonstrates critical thought related to economy,⁶² social justice, equality and human rights protection and guaranties⁶³.

According to Silva; Araújo; Souto⁶⁴ analysis,

The Government sought not only a framework in global contexts, but sought, above all, international and national legitimacy for the mobilization of aid resources, which does not necessarily mean the development of any challenge and / or change to the dominant pattern of capital accumulation.

The patriarchal drive of capitalism, as so many feminists point out,⁶⁵ is revealing itself in the rise, for women and girls, of augmented risks in enduring a violent and deeply insecure life and being confronted recurrently with misogyny within public discourse that campaign for strict control of women and their actions. This larger context shows that women and girls in Mozambique have been targeted by policies of weakening of the state protection that also gives room to an increase of their objectification as they are a kind another 'natural resource' of underpaid labour and extreme abuse. It is how and why a so-called indiscernible mass may be launched into informality, vulnerability and poverty, risking solutions that attract danger and discrimination.⁶⁶ It is in this extremely hostile political economic context that women, and especially girls in Mozambique, have been forced to become work-self-agents in order to try to survive and create their alternatives and guarantee, somehow, their own human dignity.⁶⁷

National statistics also clearly demonstrate that, globally speaking, girls are the majority of students within the national education system. However, it is plain to see that the net enrolment rate of girls decreases from 92% to 34.5%⁶⁸ when considering the transition from primary to secondary school level. Although there is no updating of these national data, the perception based on partial surveys indicates that this trend has been worsening, which means that a remarkable amount of girls leave the educational system before reaching 18 years of age and engage in informal jobs and activities in villages and cities. They thus waste their lives and abilities in reinforcing, without choice and informed awareness, their own vulnerability in unwished-for marriages, early pregnancies, poverty and, furthermore, a silent obedience that is imposed on them. Inside

⁵⁹ Silva; Araújo; Souto, 2015.

⁶⁰ Francisco, Ali e Ibrahim, 2011

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 14.

⁶² Brito *et al*, 2010; 2016; Mosca, 2013; Francisco, 2003, 2013.

⁶³ Casimiro; Souto, 2010. Just to indicate some of them.

⁶⁴ 2015: 74.

⁶⁵ Among others see: Federici, 2004; Orozco, 2014; Carty; Mohandy, 2015.

⁶⁶ One of the reported dangers bringing high levels of discrimination that women are undergoing is the rise of prostitution both by their own choice to survive and by being trafficked inside and outside the country. See, among others, Kabeer, 2008, Osório, 2014 and Cunha, 2015.

⁶⁷ Cunha, 2014, 2015.

⁶⁸ Osório; Silva, 2008: 364.

the country many forces are squeezing many people into dramatic impoverishment and an absence of expectations of liberation, particularly exposed girls and women.

The present national meta-narrative about the contemporary modernity of the Mozambican state avoids dealing with these questions altogether. Actually, 'women's issues', as they are called, have become more and more confined to some sectorial and under budgeted policies. At the same time, an exacerbated and aggressive masculinity as the authentic African identity is, on the contrary, occupying public and private spheres more and more.

It is thus relevant to mention the increasingly recurrent public campaigns that take place with the purpose of creating an atmosphere of legitimization of the Mozambican ideal of women as one that resists every setback without ever losing their sense of moderation nor revolting against men. Without any contextualization and transforming a single incident into a national trend, Carlos Tembe published an article in the 'Notícias' newspaper on 7th April, 2017 stating that the nation has to commit itself to *put a stop to domestic violence within families, characterized by the new practice of ending the husband's lives by women, through the launch of food and fuels*.

The series of articles published around Mozambican Women's Day, on 7th April 2017, affirmed that violence exerted by women over men in Mozambique is increasing at an alarming rate, thus raising questions on society and its values⁶⁹. The authors, all men, talk about hypocrisy and impunity in regards to women's organizations, claiming that women are the main victims of violence and argue for public policies of prevention, education and punishment. While this is not the aim of this work, this example enables me to reinforce the argument that Mozambique is not exempt from this conservative and misogynist political economy that the financial and extractive globalization so clearly feeds.⁷⁰ The ideals inscribed in the struggle for liberation when the independence of the homeland was bound to full dignity and equality between every woman and man of the country, are dismissed by the same elite that has been in power since then.

The abyssal line created by this concrete context is easy to discern, as is the view of a profoundly unequal country populated by miserable rich people. The evocation of the strings of tradition, not only by the elite but also by common people, is a way that some, especially men, resort to in order to deal with the empty space of their power to change anything. Tradition becomes like the ultimate salvation from deprivation. In the process, misogyny grows as the possibility to control those who are even more dispossessed: women. The colonial, neo-liberal and patriarchal ghosts have returned with renewed energy and conviction. Is in this context that I aim to analyse the compulsory use of maxi skirts for girls in Mozambican public schools and the return of the idea of a disciplined and obedient housewife as African authenticity as tools to overcome its contemporary colonial experience and exploitation.

2.2. Seeking a post-abyssal ethnography: women refusing the burden

As in almost every society, being a girl or woman in Mozambique brings many dangers. Besides the lack of primary health care, nutritious food, quality education or secure employment with effective rights, their bodies are seen as a playground for men. This is manifest in many ways, from initiation rituals on how to submit to the pleasures of men, rape, harassment, pregnancies, forced marriages, behaviour or dress interdictions. Although it is the dark side of Mozambican women's lives that concerns us in this work, it is important to clarify that, as stated above, the reality is always much more dynamic and, therefore, I argue that every form of oppression is matched with resistances: the obligation of maxi-skirts in schools was followed by many manifestations of counter-position and defiance to the *status quo*, despite the risks.

⁷⁵ It is important to mention in regards to this episode of public misogyny, that a group of women's organizations issued a public statement available at <http://www.wlsa.org.mz/7-de-abril-2017/>.

I begin with the analysis of the Minister of Education and Human Development, at the time, Jorge Ferrão, on the situation of girls in the country's schools, quoted one year ago by the widely read online newspaper, @Verdade:⁷¹

According to the minister, over 2,500 girls, from primary to secondary school, have left school in 2015 as a result of being impregnated. These figures, that for some, may not reflect anything or almost nothing at all, "mean that we [Ministry of Education and Human Development], the adults, have not been able to find mechanisms to prevent unwanted and premature pregnancies".

In fact, that diagnosis has long been carried out. Several Mozambican organizations have been systematically warning of problems of harassment, rape and early pregnancies in public schools in the country, such as the WLSA Mozambique – Women and Law in Southern Africa; the Women's Forum; Save the Children; the HOPEM network; Blue Horizon; Youth Parliament, among others. In addition to the recognition of the problem, these organizations engaged in the positive transformation of the conditions of the schools and the country through different means like training, setting legislative proposals, carrying out public campaigns and being present on a regular basis in the social media for public awareness. Some of the concrete measures they have been pushing through are: increasing the number of places in day courses to avoid overnight transit for girls; allocating greater and better police surveillance of home-school-home routes; exemplary punishment of teachers who harass, rape and impregnate students and providing responsible sex education in schools in deep dialogue with families and communities.

In February, 2016 and in the face of this dire situation, one idea began to take force in public discourse, from authorities, teachers and religious leaders, and rapidly became street common sense: girls are to blame for these problems by dressing provocatively and not respecting African decorum that women must maintain. In a country that is facing so many social and political problems and with the extreme insecurity provoked by conflicts and a lack of almost everything to give dignity and the will to live, such an analysis is rapidly absorbed as an explaining panacea for these problems. The solution was promptly found: men who should have the power to control girls' bodies and lives. In this domineering drive, we can see the three-headed monster turning against these girls. Patriarchy because women's bodies make sense only when they are part of the patrimony of men; capitalism because the lesser the state, the lesser training of teachers the better for the interests of a few; colonialism in the demeanor of *the other*, here the *other-of-the-other* as an uncontrollable savage that has to be saved from its own degeneracy, not to mention the Euro-Christian idea of feminine decorum inscribed in the design of school uniforms.

Although it was not a ministerial enforcing law, it was taken immediately as something with force of law, adequate and desirable. The Minister of Education and his deputy minister, on made clear several occasions that it was a guideline and that it would be up to schools to decide jointly with the Parents' Committee whether or not to adopt it. However, the arguments used make clear the political force attached to this initiative:

*The rules on school uniform are clear, and school is not the place for a fashion parade. Each educational level is governed by specific rules. There is a clear description, and precise measurements that should be used when making primary and secondary school uniforms. All these measures about clothing are designed to protect the girls, safeguarding their integrity and ensuring that they look decent when at school. The Government is favourably disposed towards the prohibition of short skirts, and it is a measure that will be upheld. The internal rules in secondary schools consider that skirts above the knee facilitate sexual harassment.*⁷²

The reactions from various sectors of Mozambican society were quick to come. A variety of ways were chosen by girls, families and society to protest, demonstrate displeasure, resist and question the order to be able to reverse it and circulated on social networks and through all means that people had at their disposal. From word of mouth, in posts, in news and reflections, in street rallies and articles, supportive women and

⁷¹ Editorial of @Verdade, April 11th, 2016.

⁷² Vice-Minister of Education and Human Development in Nampula, June 2016, Jornal Notícias.

men saw in the guidelines on the use of maxi-skirts another opportunity to demonstrate their ability to create imaginaries of emancipation in their own terms.

The testimony of a young girl from the city of Chibuto circulated on social media⁷³ and was taken as a good example of how girls were dealing with the problem in their own ways, as subjects of their lives and aspirations:

[During the meeting with Rosa, 30 school girls staged a protest against long skirts, which had already been recommended to all, and demanded that the director pay for the skirts out of his salary. And it worked out, at least insofar as no one has been forced to wear long skirts.

What I try to show next is, on one hand, the creativity and dynamism of resistance, which can never be discarded or forgotten; and on the other hand the voices and actions of subaltern, insurgent subjectivities that took their lives in their hands and chose the words in which they wanted to express themselves. For my purpose, I will pay attention to a particular event: the rally against maxi-skirts and its subsequent events.

2.2.1. The attempted street protest

On March 17 (2016), a group of civil society organisations issued a press release on the rights of women and girls in education and asked for attention to a possible violation of the constitutional guarantees of equality between men and women. It mentioned in particular Ministerial Dispatch N°. 39, which defines the compulsory transfer of pregnant students to evening classes, the insulting and degrading corporal punishment of girls applied by some teachers, the increase in sexual harassment, the large scale enrolment of adolescents of both sexes in evening classes alleging lack of vacancies in daytime classes, which results in increased numbers of female drop outs and sexual assaults on girls going to and from school at night, and the control of girls' clothing.

Within this context, a group of young girls programmed a street rally in front of the Francisco Manyanga Secondary School in Maputo City, because this school had approved a regulation on the use of maxi-skirts 3 years earlier. The rally was planned for March 18 (2016), and would include a press release and a play staged by a group of girls, activists, actresses and secondary school students. The theme of the play was violence against girls in schools. A Brazilian "Theatre of the Oppressed" group was coincidentally in Mozambique and was invited to take part in the street activity. The following image is the poster that was produced to mobilize people to attend the rally:



Given that the play was to take place on the pavement just outside the door of the school, the municipal authorities were not informed, as there would be no threat to public order, nor would it interrupt the traffic. However, what happened that day turned out to be very different from the initial expectations of those who

⁷³ Published by Danilo Silva in his Facebook page on April, 3, 2016.

went to express disagreement within the public space. The abyssal line became as real and hard as concrete over those subaltern reasons.

When the group of young people arrived at 10.30 a.m., both uniformed and plain clothes police, some with dogs, were already there and were later joined by a military tank. They began to collect the posters that had not yet even been displayed, alleging lack of authorisation and saying that they could be retrieved from the 7th district police station. The activists questioned this position, but continued with their demonstration, singing protest songs. ⁷⁴*The police asked who the organisers were. As they were told that the organisers were a group of organisations and individuals, the police decided to grab the white activists and drag them off, and tried to disperse the group by pointing their weapons. Once again, a group of activists confronted the police and questioned their behaviour, whereupon the police took five of them to the police station, one of whom was Eva Moreno, a Spanish woman working in the international secretariat of the 'World March of Women' with its headquarters in Mozambique.*

In an attempt to denounce the police actions and raise social awareness about the facts, several photos were taken by the activists and immediately posted on social media such the one below:



2.2.2. The arrest

The five activists remained in the police station from 11.20 to 17.30. They were put in a cell, and deprived of their belongings, including mobile phones, watches, earrings and bracelets. They were forbidden to contact their families. Meanwhile, other activists gathered outside the police station, and started informing friends and organisations of what was going on. A woman lawyer arrived and served as intermediary for discussions with the police, during which she was told that the group would be freed immediately. But this did not happen.

The public prosecutor for Maputo City also came to the police station, and spoke to the detainees to get more details. As the police had no legal document to justify the detentions, she ordered them to be freed and took them to a room in the police station. The police alleged crimes such as attacks on decency through the content of the posters, and did not want to release them, notwithstanding the prosecutor's orders. Their release was due to the intervention of a human rights lawyer and activist, and the presence of diplomats from Brazil, Spain and France and a representative from UN Women.

These events show the weight of the abyssal line upon those women and girls in at least three forms. The first one is the disproportionate apparatus that was used to stop the rally. In fact, less than 20 girls and women participated in this rally, singing, displaying some posters and trying to perform a short play about the issue.

⁷⁴ The following descriptions are based on the transcriptions of testimonies gathered by Terezinha da Silva, one of the most highly reputed social activists in Mozambique. She is the national coordinator of the civil organization WLSA – MZ (Women and Law in Southern Africa – Mozambique). I must acknowledge and thank her deeply for her courtesy and collaboration in making this paper happen and for her collaboration for a common presentation about this matter at an international colloquium that took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, *Decolonizing Feminism*, at the University of Witwatersrand, 24, 25, 26 August 2016.

Nonetheless one tank, dogs and weapons were taken to the scene, as if they were very dangerous criminals that represented a critical threat to security and society. This disproportion reveals clearly that this is not only about a democratic deficit, which uses the criminalization of protests as a form of undermining the dynamism of dissension in society. In my view, this also reveals to what extent violence may be used to disaggregate any type of contestation. The amount of aggressiveness is a powerful tool to destroy and annihilate those who do not matter.⁷⁵ The abyssal line is, by its nature, severely violent and destructive.

The second form I discern is how the police intervened in the public space. It seems that it was imperative to the police security forces to perform their task of repression in a way that everybody could see. It was a strong disciplinary action toward the women and girls carried out by men in the sight of all. The public humiliation of being arrested and threaten by weapons, dogs and a tank was part of a material and strongly symbolic manifestation of men's power over potentially disobedient women. This abyssal line is patriarchal and wants to be feared by women. The fear paralyses and, therefore it kills.

The third concerns the allegations used by the police to arrest the activists. As the public prosecutor argued that were no reasons to take such measures such as the arrest and apprehension of personal belongings, which in fact, configures illegality, the claims about the actions against decency came into the discussion. What seems to be outrageous is not breaking the law or creating a situation of insecurity and danger for other citizens. What became intolerable is the possibility of a bunch of women and girls saying what they wanted to say in public. Their own terms were, from their point of view, enough to justify their actions and their resistance to complying with the law. The abyssal line is radically intolerant to any attempt at transgression. Even though these women did not cross the line but only stepped on it for some minutes, their intention to rebel needed to be exemplarily terminated: by violence, public humiliation and being put in their place as mere subalterns.

This episode didn't end here. In following paragraphs, I shall describe it as it was perceived and interpreted by the women that I heard, pointing out how a cosmopolitan, subaltern, insurgent rationality came into place and started to shape solidarity beyond feminist prescriptions.

2.2.3. The expulsion

In a dispatch dated 28th March 2016, the Minister of the Interior ordered the expulsion of Eva Moreno for having been "involved actively, openly and publicly in an illegal demonstration", and she was summoned to the Directorate of Migration to be informed of the decision. Submitting a legal request for its suspension, lawyers unsuccessfully tried to prevent the implementation of the decision. Eva Moreno was forbidden to enter Mozambique for ten years. She would have had the right to appeal against the decision to the Administrative Tribunal, but was unable to exercise it, as she had not been notified in writing.

On March 29, Eva Moreno received an order to present herself at the Public Attorney's Office in Maputo City, accompanied by two lawyers. Activists and civil society organisations waited anxiously outside. Eva Moreno was taken to Maputo International Airport in the custody of a group of officials from the Migratory Department of the National Migration Services.

In spite of the various irregularities found in the process and pointed out by lawyers and activists, the ministerial order was implemented showing that the rally was not a common protest led by citizens in a democratic country whose national constitution guarantees freedom of expression and the rule of law. My argument is that it was transformed into a matter of national security in the eyes of the public with the government turning these activists into a kind of potential terrorists. If we just stop one minute to think about

⁷⁵ Cunha, 2006; Reardon, 1993.

this issue, it becomes quite easy to understand the qualitative transformation that all this implies: women protesting against men's orders and opinions represents insecurity, even danger to the nation. There is no subtlety in the way that the abyssal line operates.

At around 10.00 a.m. on March 30, when all the attempts to reverse Eva's expulsion had failed, some friends and colleagues (including from the World March of Women office and the Women's Forum) went to the airport and waited with tears in their eyes to see her embark. They were initially told that she would leave at 13.00, but she only embarked at 14.15.

During the wait, the general feeling was of sadness and revulsion, aggravated by the realization that the Mozambican government had managed to buy her what was probably an expensive ticket in record time. There was also a great deal of indignation that someone was being expelled because of a skirt, even after the intervention of the Spanish Embassy.

Posters were produced at the airport with the slogan WE ARE ALL EVA. We took photos and drew the attention of the public to what was happening. Finally, just before she embarked, we were allowed a rapid and emotional goodbye. As an additional way of expressing our thanks to her we sang the following song:

Help me companions

I can't walk alone,

I can walk alone

But I walk better with you.

One of the most striking photos that circulated is this one where Graça Samo, Mozambican and international leader of the World March of Women and in tears, hugged Eva Moreno at the airport in Maputo just before she was expelled. This photo may also be interpreted as a strong statement on what I previously theorised on the cosmopolitan solidarity based on the differentiation between women and men as a source of self-dignity.



2.2.4. The aftermath

On 1st of April 2016, the Attorney-General's office set up an enquiry committee, which reported that a 'crime of illegal imprisonment was committed' and concluded that Eva was 'illegally detained on March 29 for having demanded an end to violence against girls in school'. The report recommended an inspection to verify the legality of how the Ministerial dispatch was implemented. The magistrates' association instituted criminal proceedings against members of the police force for having violated the law, but with no results so far.

This incident demonstrates how, in the present day, women and girls are treated as a category to be controlled, and their bodies as territories to be guarded. It is interesting to note here that the two activists who were white were handcuffed and presented as the instigators of the demonstration. Mozambique's leadership commonly imputes demands for women's human rights to foreign influence. It may be true to some extent, but they do not take into consideration that Mozambican women are able to appropriate and give meaning to what, in their own view, may be mobilized for their sake, freedom and happiness, whatever comes. In fact, it is important to mention that the media pressure surrounding this case was carried out mainly by the militancy

of women and their organizations against maxi-skirts. Naming the episode of the deportation of Eva Moreno as an act of 'suspension of democracy' resulted in public declarations delivered by the Minister of Education, which conveyed another position on the matter of sexual harassment and how to deal with it. Writing a newspaper article titled *Ending child pregnancies is the duty of everyone*, the Minister of Education⁷⁶ said:

Traditions are important marks of our identity. However, just as we have the right and duty to maintain traditions so that what it is to be Mozambican and national unity are not lost, we are also responsible for transforming cultural practices within a human rights perspective, watching over the rights of our children and adolescents.

FINAL REMARKS

It is well accepted as potentially true that, at any given point of their life, the abyssal lines produced by the intersection of colonialism-capitalism-patriarchy can victimize every woman in the world. However, despite the apparent similarities in being oppressed and the hypertrophy of the violence that can be inflicted upon them, the differences between them – of experiences, of resistances and of building of alternatives – cannot be subsumed in generalisations, much less in a discourse of abstract sisterhood.

Post-abyssal feminisms imply therefore, three epistemological exercises. On one hand, to consider the sociological and experiential diversity of women deeply rooted in their territories and historical experience. In other words, there are no women in the abstract, but beings who identify as women that, from their place of enunciation, see and think the world in their own terms. Post-colonial feminisms calls, therefore, for the recognition of the diversity and complexity of the contexts in which these women's identities and subjectivities are produced.

Secondly, it must be said that, despite of their produced subalternities and the silences that they are subject to, these concrete beings speak, express their views, enunciate, through the words they choose, their decisions or the lack of power to make them. From Spivak we know that the subaltern speaks. Decolonising feminisms means recognizing in this discourse, often divergent, sometimes unintelligible to some of us, epistemological energy that cannot be wasted.⁷⁷ Postcolonial feminisms – which recognise that colonialism does not end with the end of political colonisation and that, therefore, it is necessary to conduct both a cognitive decolonisation and a decolonisation of contemporary power – not only recognise diversity but engage in an exercise of intercultural translation that has at its base a permanent epistemological humility.

Thirdly, post-abyssal feminism implies pursuing another political economy. The neo-liberal globalisation that prevails today in the world builds its hegemony of domination by articulating three forms of oppression: capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. This entails, at the same time, depatriarchalising and bringing forth non-capitalist modes of production, exchange and consumption able to dismantle capital-labour, capital-nature contradictions and the sexual hierarchies they involve.

Albeit aware that we still lack the words to say that world, we know that the Epistemologies of the South forces feminism to consider the three dimensions of oppression, how they articulate and how to dismantle them: the 'three-headed monster', in the words of the Angolan poet Raquel Lima. An epistemology of this type requires us to develop not only sociological but also ontological critique; it send us out to unlearn what we have taken for granted so we can think the unthinkable and allow the new to arise.

In our view, that the modern social contract is not only based on a patriarchal logic⁷⁸ but can only exist based on colonial exploitation and expropriation to feed the current capitalist accumulation. The current inequalities in the world, between and within countries; the impoverishment of more and more people,

⁷⁶ Published in the newspaper Notícias, July 5, 2016

⁷⁷ Santos, 2002; Cunha, 2014.

⁷⁸ Among others see: Butler 2007; Pateman, 1988; Saffioti, 1978.

especially women, in direct opposition to the extreme enrichment of merely a few, particularly white, men;⁷⁹ plunder and violence as forms of conflict resolution; the reduction of State, of the economy and civil society to the sphere of private interests; the criminalization of social and political activism; the systematic transfer of social responsibility to individuals through the ideas of entrepreneurship and merit; overexploitation and destruction of natural resources of all in favour of fantasies and luxury projects of some; the narrative of crisis as the fault of their own tragedy, are some of the sinister mirror claims through which we can see the three-headed monster every day.

This is the political economy into which fall the continuities of old and new violences against women I examined in this paper. It is no wonder that the workforce of women, their bodies, their minds, their actions and thoughts are entering a new cycle of exploitation and domination. There is no such thing, in our view, as a more humane and equitable capitalism, colonialism or patriarchy. What does exist is, in different stages of history, different levels of concession of space and rights created through the pressure of resistances and alternatives to these regimes of power and private interests that want to strategically safeguard it.⁸⁰ Therefore, my feminist quest anchored in the epistemologies of the South is not only critical but, as Santos states, the attempt to formulate, albeit very imperfectly, alternative thinking for alternatives.

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⁷⁹ Oxfam, 2017.

⁸⁰ Svampa, 2013.

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