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## Conceptions of Gender in Colonial and Post-colonial Discourses: The Case of Mozambique

Signe Arnfred

### Introduction

Seen in terms of conventional political science, and also as experienced by Mozambican men and women, the recent history of Mozambique has been very dramatic. There have been several changes of political regimes, and almost three decades of war, from the onset of the armed struggle in 1964 to the Rome peace agreement in 1992. There have been two remarkable political shifts during this period. First there was the transition in 1975 from Portuguese colonialism to political independence and Frelimo socialism after a successful war of liberation. Second, in the late 1980s the government moved from Frelimo socialism to neo-liberal economic policies and a structural adjustment programme (PRE – *Programa da Re-estruturação Económica*) under World Bank leadership. This time the name of the government did not change. Frelimo remained in power, but with a somewhat different political and economic agenda after its fifth Party Congress in 1989.

The point I want to make in this paper has to do with the contradiction between on the one hand the ways in which each of these different politics of government have seen themselves as radical breaks with the immediate past, and on the other hand the ways in which these different political regimes (in theory as well as in practice) have approached issues of gender. Examined through a gendered lens these apparently radically different political lines have much in common. Considered from this angle the political continuities seem much more dominant than the radical breaks.

From one point of view these decades of history include dramatic changes in government. The process has moved all the way from colonial dominance

and economic exploitation, to socialist politics and (attempts at) a planned economy in a one-party state, to multi-party democracy and neo-liberal economic structures. From another point of view the dramatic changes are overshadowed by persistent continuities. With regard to the field of politics and policies on gender, the lines of thinking of each new period can be shown to build heavily on the previous one. This is the case in spite of the fact that for each of the decisive breaks, first Independence, and later the neo-liberal turn, part of the very profile of the change has been its gender policies. Frelimo Socialism boasted a high profile regarding women's emancipation, as in the famous words of Samora Machel: 'The liberation of women is a necessity for the revolution, a guarantee of its continuity and a condition for its success' (Machel 1973). Similarly the present period of donor-dominated development stresses the importance of gender mainstreaming in all political spheres.

This paper examines political documents – political speeches, official reports and so on – from these three major periods: First there was the transition in 1975 from Portuguese colonialism to political independence and Frelimo socialism after a successful war of liberation; second, Frelimo socialism; and third, the SAP/PRE period of donor-dominated development. I shall focus on lines of thinking and implicit assumptions, but also on actual policies on gender issues in the respective periods.<sup>1</sup>

### Portuguese colonialism

Portuguese colonial documents and political speeches make for interesting reading for their ideological bluntness: 'To us Portuguese, colonization is essentially to lift the indigenous populations to our own level of civilization, by teaching them our religion, our language, our customs. (...) It is our mentality that we want to transmit to the people of the colonies, we are not intending to take away their riches' (Ministro das Colónias, in *Boletim Geral das Colónias*, 1940). Colonisation for the Portuguese, according to the Archbishop of Lourenço Marques, is about civilisation, Christianisation and *aportuguesamento* – Portugalisation – of the indigenous population (Cardeal-Arcebispo, Lourenço Marques 1960: 2).<sup>2</sup>

Gender issues are rarely mentioned in these political statements. In the colonial context, gender relations matching a Christian ideal are taken for granted as an aspect of the civilising, Christianising and Portugalising mission. The conception of gender embedded in the civilising mission only becomes explicit when it is challenged. One example is the difficulties Portuguese observers encountered in coming to terms with the matrilineal societies of northern Mozambique.

It is pathetic to see how the writers of colonial reports<sup>3</sup> struggle to make the position of women in the matrilineal North<sup>4</sup> fit the pre-conceived image of oppressed subordinated African women in need of liberation. According to da Silva Rego (1960) in the North it is the woman who dominates the family. The

husband must leave his own village in order to marry. If the marriage does not work out he must leave, and the woman can re-marry (da Silva Rego 1960: 85). This of course is unacceptable by Christian standards, but women take pride in the system, and they fight against changes. This *matriarchy* (ie matriliney) might even look like women's emancipation, da Silva Rego says, hastening to explain that in actual fact this is far from the case. First because the *individual* dignity of the woman is not respected – women are subordinated to the clan. Second, true emancipation of the woman is for her to be part of a Christian family, with the man as the natural head of the family (*chefe natural da familia*) and the woman at his side (da Silva Rego 1960: 86, 25).

Measured against Christian marriage – monogamy, indissolubility and the man as head of the family – everything is wrong with family relations under conditions of matriliney. Marriages are not particularly stable, and worst of all, the husband/father has no entrenched position. Men's positions are derived through women (not the other way round) and men are important as uncles (mothers' brothers), not as fathers/progenitors. To the colonial administration, matriliney – or matriarchy (*matriarchado*) as it is called in contemporary texts – is unacceptable, presenting 'indisputable inconveniences' (Rita Ferreira et al 1964: 78) for a series of reasons. Apart from family life being less stable, and the father not head of the family, 'it is an acknowledged fact that patrilineal societies are better suited than the matrilineal ones for adaptation to rapid social and economic change' (Rita Ferreira et al 1964: 78). Matriliney conforms neither to the demands of Christianity, nor to the demands of development; and furthermore these societies are irritatingly resistant to change.

The difficult matrilineal societies in the north are described as primitive and backward. Women are embedded in demeaning traditional customs. They enjoy less access to schools and they are burdened by heavy workloads. Thus defined, women are now positioned in the usual subordinate situation, and Christianity and civilisation can come to their rescue with offers of dignity in Christian marriages, courses in sowing and hygiene (sowing was considered important as the semi-nudity of women was perceived as offensive), and men taking over agricultural work (Rita Ferreira et al 1964: 79).

There is an interesting relation between work and gender in this colonial discourse. As for men, inducing (or forcing) them to work is part of the civilising mission. The image of the lazy African is the point of departure; work as such has a civilising effect, and the repression of idleness is a goal in itself 'dignifying and uplifting the native through the work' (Governador Geral de Mozambique, in *Boletim Geral das Colónias*, 1948). This line of argument seems only valid for men, however. As for women, the opposite seems to be the case. For women a heavy workload is an indication of subordination, the civilising mission being to lift it off her shoulders, in order to enable her to devote herself to housework.

'Development goes in the direction of leaving the bulk of agricultural work to the man. Also in Africa the woman shall become the queen of the home: a *Rainha do lar*' (da Silva Rego 1960: 26). Civilisation thus also includes the well known division between public and private spheres, with the husband 'the natural head of the family' as worker and breadwinner, and the wife and mother as 'queen of the home'.

This is how things worked – or were supposed to work – at the level of ideology. In practical terms Portuguese colonialism was indeed based on women's productive work in family agriculture, feeding the family while the men were away on forced or contract labour. Colonial exploitation of Mozambican wage labour was conditioned by salaries being kept very low, as male workers' families were supported through women's work on the land. Also the forced cotton cultivation in the North depended heavily on women's labour. According to Allen Isaacman (1996) the physical burdens of the cotton regime – forced cultivation on family plots, usually one hectare for husband-and-wife, and half a hectare for single women – fell disproportionately on women's shoulders. 'Women were forced to help their husbands clear new fields and, in men's absence, to cut trees and remove heavy stumps and even plow – strenuous tasks that in the past had been performed almost exclusively by men' (Isaacman 1996: 53). At the same time, of course, women retained the principal responsibility for food production and household work. The colonial regime, thus, depended on women's double workload: In the official ideology they were (or ought to be) housewives; in actual fact they were major producers.

An additional problem with the '*Rainha do lar*' ideology is that it naturalised women's procreative capacity, and restricted their role as mothers to the private sphere. In this way, the ground was pulled from under the feet of women in northern Mozambique taking pride in their role as mothers, *not* in the private context of nuclear male-headed families, but in powerful positions as lineage elders. Power based on maternity and fertility is not recognised in the civilised Christian context, however, where fertility is trivialised as a function of nature, and maternity is reduced to the education of children in the seclusion of the patriarchal family.

Yet another aspect of women's lives, also not accepted in its own right in Christian/colonial thinking, is sexuality. The general attitude of the Portuguese colonial power was a strong condemnation of female initiation rites, because of their focus on development and education of female sexuality.<sup>5</sup> Female initiation rites were considered by the colonial administration as well as by the Catholic church as 'immoral and offensive to the human nature' (Medeiros 1995: 5). The attitude of the Protestant missions was no more permissive. In the writings of Henri-Alexandre Junod, a clergyman of the Swiss Mission,<sup>6</sup> customs relating to female sexuality were so 'vile and immoral' (Junod 1912/1974: 176) that he could

only speak of them in an appendix for ‘doctors and ethnographers’ written in Latin. It was bad enough to think of explicit education of male sexuality; but to confront education of female sexuality would be beyond the pale.

Similarly, Terence Ranger reports from Masasi district in Southern Tanzania, populated by matrilineal Makhuwa, Maconde and Yao peoples immediately north of Mozambique, how ‘the missionaries did not approve of the concept of womanhood in Masasi society’ (Ranger 1972: 237). Ranger’s discussion relates to Protestant missionary attitudes to female initiation rites, which were considered as ‘much more obscene than the male ceremony’. ‘It was difficult’, writes Ranger, ‘for the missionaries, perhaps especially for the white laywomen who had most to do with female initiation, to see the rites as Africans saw them. (...) There was a constant tension between the mission view of the role of women in Masasi, and the women’s view of their own role’ (Ranger 1972: 237, 247). On the ‘civilised’ background of the Victorian ideal of female passionlessness<sup>7</sup> and ‘the Angel of the House’ (*a Rainha do lar*) – as opposed to the demonised and demeaning image of the sexualised woman as prostitute and whore – it is not surprising that explicit celebration of female sexuality should be considered obscene and repugnant. According to this logic explicit female sexuality is indistinguishable from prostitution.

In the analysis of colonial attitudes to gender I have focused on the matrilineal societies in Northern Mozambique, because here the clashes between Christian ‘civilisation’ and African realities were most explicit. In actual fact, however, the situation was very similar in other parts of Mozambique. To the missionaries and colonisers’ relief, thanks to patrilineal kinship systems, the man and father was the ‘natural head of the family’, and thanks to the bride-price (*lobolo*) marriages would tend to be more stable. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that Rita Ferreira in 1964, pointing to the preponderant and prestigious position of women in ‘traditional’ society, also remarks that women’s powerful positions in the south of Mozambique, instead of disappearing in fact had been *increasing* in recent years, due to the absence of many men for prolonged periods (six to eighteen months) on work contracts away from home (Rita Ferreira et al 1964: 76). But this is a limited power, Rita Ferreira adds, as the women continue to be more traditional and backward, less educated than the men. Thus the analysis ends up with the expected conclusion of subjugated women in need of civilisation and education.

Summing up the colonial attitude in terms of work, family, maternity and sexuality, the situation looks as follows:

*Work:* According to colonial ideology the men were lazy and the women overworked.<sup>8</sup> Men were urged, if not forced, to work more, with the legitimisation that work in itself is a civilising activity. In the case of women, however, non-domestic work was an indication of oppression and subordination. At the level

of ideology women should remain in the private sphere and devote themselves to housework as *Rainbas do lar*. At the level of practical policies, however, the colonial economy was based on women's productive work in agriculture, partly to feed their families, but also to secure agricultural output for export, as in the case of cotton.

*Family*: At the level of ideology the family in colonial politics should follow the Christian model, a goal for which the missionaries (Catholics and Protestants alike) were perpetually struggling. This ideal family did not correspond very neatly to family structures anywhere in Mozambique. The ideal family was monogamous, stable (divorces not tolerated) and with the man and father as family head. The missionaries speak of course of *equality* between man and wife, but it was a kind of equality for which the *natural* superiority of the man was a precondition: with woman as man's companion (and subordinate) but 'with equal dignity in front of God', as put by a Swiss Presbyterian historian in 1987 (Biber 1987: 64). At the level of families, however, colonial realities were different from colonial ideology: Families were broken up and dispersed by migratory work and by forced labour. Struggling to keep family networks intact was one of many forms of resistance to colonial oppression.

*Maternity*: Women's roles as mothers were located in the private sphere, as one aspect of their positions as *Rainbas do lar*. Since the Christian family structure is unwaveringly patriarchal, and since motherhood in addition to being privatised is also naturalised and trivialised, no (or very little) potential female power is embedded in the role of mother.

*Sexuality*: Female sexuality was considered a tool for procreation and nothing more. The civilised norm for women is passionlessness – 'Close your eyes and think of England' – allegedly the Victorian advice given to young women facing their sexual debut. To acknowledge the existence of female sexuality, to focus young women on their sexual potential, educating them in the area of sexual pleasure was considered vile, immoral and offensive to human nature.

### **Frelimo socialism**

Unlike in colonial times, when gender was not a policy issue in itself, for Frelimo gender, or rather *women's emancipation*, becomes an goal in its own right. During the armed struggle against Portuguese colonial power, issues of gender equality had been put on the agenda by women themselves, demanding the creation a women's wing of the Frelimo guerilla army. In addition to the important female support to the guerilla struggle in terms of transport of weapons and other material, production and preparation of food etc., women claimed the right to become soldiers and to fight along with men (Casimiro 2001). The *Destacamento Feminino* was created in 1966, and a few years later (1973) was supplemented by the creation of a non-military women's organization, the *Organização da Mulher*

*Moçambicana* (OMM) in order to facilitate the mobilisation of peasant populations in support of the guerilla war. In one sense the OMM was a political organisation, created to support Frelimo; in another sense it was a politicisation of female gender networks which had always been there, creating a link from these networks to political power, i.e. Frelimo. As I was told by women in Cabo Delgado in 1983: 'During the war we held meetings, we mobilised women to transport war material, to grow food and to cook for the soldiers. Women volunteered, but sometimes husbands tried to prevent them from participating in the tasks of war. When that happened, we called in Frelimo. I remember a case of one man who was beating his wife. We tied his arms behind his back and took him to Frelimo. Frelimo told him that he should not fight his wife; it was better to fight the Portuguese together. The man became a soldier and the women continued her war work. During the war women were respected because we were organised' (Arnfred 1988: 6). Interviewing in the north of Mozambique in 1983–84, I realized that in daily talk 'OMM' was often synonymous with 'women'.

During the war it seems that women were still in command in the OMM, and even supported by Frelimo. After Independence in 1975 however, Frelimo took over. Matters as important as development of a policy for women's liberation could not be left to women – and certainly not to the largely uneducated peasant women who had struggled with Frelimo in the north of Mozambique. Centrally positioned in the Frelimo political line was the fight against 'traditional society' and the whole array of 'habits and customs', *usos e costumes*, around which the daily lives of most Mozambicans were constructed. The performance of customary ceremonies was not directly criminalised, but strong political campaigns were waged against them. These were the years of what has later been termed '*the abaixo politics*'. '*Abaixo*' means 'down with', and slogans of 'down with *lobolo*, 'down with polygamy', 'down with initiation rites' were shouted at every political meeting. Frelimo's socio-historical analysis was put forward in the documents for the 2nd OMM conference in November 1976. This conference preceded the 3rd Frelimo congress in March 1977 by only a few months, and these two events together mark the transformation of the previous political front Frelimo into a socialist party. The fingerprints of a communist party's socio-historical analysis are very visible in the OMM 2nd conference documents. 'Traditional society' was seen as 'feudal' and it was analysed in terms of exploitation and oppression, not just by colonialism, but in equal measure by indigenous power structures. Any customary beliefs and practices were considered obscurantist, oppressive and an obstacle to progress and modernity. Central in all of this was the alleged oppression and humiliation of women.

Regarding the understanding of women's position in 'traditional society', Frelimo's analysis was not very different from the colonial one. Women were constructed as humiliated and oppressed. The analysis goes as follows: All

Mozambicans, men and women alike were exploited and oppressed by the colonial system, but in addition to this 'the Mozambican peasant woman is the victim of another form of oppression which is linked to the traditional-feudal ideology. This ideology sees the women as having only the role of serving the man – as object of pleasure, producer of children and worker without a salary. (...) This position of women is reinforced through institutions and ceremonies such as 'initiation rites', as well as the whole system of marriage, including *lobolo*, premature and forced marriages, and polygamy' (OMM 1976: 89).

Just as it was the case in colonial writings, however, a certain ambiguity may be discerned. In some writings produced by the colonial power, even if the image of the oppressed and overworked woman was maintained, it had been conceded that 'women in traditional settings enjoy a considerable preponderance and prestige' (Rita Ferreira et al 1964: 75). Similarly, in some OMM/Frelimo documents, even if also here the dominant line was the one about the oppression of women in 'feudal-traditional' society (this being one major legitimization for Frelimo's push for modernization), here and there a different understanding can be felt, indicating that women's positions *might* also be threatened, and *not* improved, by modernisation. This understanding, which from my point of view, is much more precise, remained however an undercurrent, only popping up here and there in OMM/Frelimo writings, as in the following passage from the OMM 2nd conference documents: 'In the countryside, where in reality it is the woman who make plans, who organize and who has since immemorial times been the main producer, we nevertheless see her relegated to the role of simple workforce in our cooperatives and communal villages' (OMM 1976: 58).

Anyhow, in the dominant OMM/Frelimo view the way to women's emancipation goes through her participation in the principal task – *tarefa principal* – of the revolution. As put by Samora Machel in his speech to the 2nd OMM conference in November 1976: 'The decisive factor for the emancipation of woman is her engagement in the principal task, the task which transforms society. At that time [i.e. during the liberation war] it was the struggle for liberation. What then constitutes the principal task in the present phase of the revolution? The principal task of the present phase of our process is the following: The construction of the material and ideological base for building a socialist society. Thus for the implementation of this strategy, which has as its objective the construction of socialism, the principal task is production and the principal form of action is class struggle' (Machel 1976: 23).

Whereas participation in the war of liberation in many cases *did* bring about changes in male/female gender relations, strengthening the position of women *vis-à-vis* men at a local levels, participation in production or, as it was later re-phrased, participation in 'the increase of production and productivity so as to fulfill the economic plan' (Rebello 1981) did not hold similar promise, from women's

point of view. In post-independence Frelimo politics women were instrumentalised as a workforce for the state and nation building. In Rebelo's 1981 speech<sup>9</sup> to the OMM national council, the focus was on the state and the economic plan, not on women. Women were requested to work hard in production, which in fact they had always been doing, and doing increasingly during the colonial period, and in addition to this were not to forget their tasks as wives and mothers. Nevertheless, this kind of politics was launched as 'women's emancipation'.

In actual fact what happened was just that the double workload for women – production as well as domestic work – was maintained, only with a different emphasis compared to the colonial ideology. Where during colonialism the lead image had been the *Rainha do lar*, with women's productive role maintained and increased, the lead image now was the woman soldier and the woman producer – the image of the state farm tractor driver being very popular in Party contexts – however with the domestic roles as wife and mother maintained. In the socialist theory of women's emancipation, from which the Frelimo women's politics drew inspiration, the emancipatory effect of 'women as wage workers' was conditioned by state organised alleviation of domestic tasks in terms of creches, kindergartens etc. Such conditions were not in place in Mozambique.

The Frelimo ideology regarding gender equality was also characterised by a certain ambiguity, however of a different kind, more like double standards, similar (again) to the colonial double standards of the 'social priority of the man over his wife, but equal dignity in front of God' (Biber 1987: 64). In OMM/Frelimo contexts the position of the man as family head was taken for granted, and the gender equality aspect amounted to woman being seen as man's companion, not his subordinate. Unlike the colonial writers, however, the Frelimo leadership was not troubled by matriliney, presumably because they knew nothing about it. Most of the programme-writing party cadres (the educated intellectuals) came from the patrilineal South. Matriliney was only 'discovered' in Frelimo contexts in the course of the preparations for the extraordinary OMM conference in 1984.<sup>10</sup>

The man as family head/the woman as man's companion were standard ingredients in the so-called 'socialist family' strongly supported by Frelimo as well as by OMM. Just like the Christian family model, the so-called 'socialist family' should be monogamous, stable and indissoluble. Women's easy access to divorce in the (matrilineal) North was frowned upon by the Party (Arnfred 1988). In the concluding document from the OMM extraordinary conference in 1984, the OMM (as always) toed the Party line: 'The OMM Extraordinary Conference emphasised specifically the vital importance of the coherence, stability and harmony of the family, because this is the basic cell of our society, the foundation of the Mozambican Nation, and the basis for the consolidation of our State' (OMM 1984).

In a speech during his travels in Gaza province in 1982 Samora Machel acknowledged the similarity between Frelimo and Christian morals: 'We have the

same ideas regarding the combat of alcoholism and prostitution, but we differ regarding the ways of interpreting phenomena in the world' (Machel 1981: 42). In this speech Samora Machel specifically paid homage to the Protestant missions in southern Mozambique. The Protestants, like the Frelimo militants, had their reasons to be opposed to the Catholic colonial regime, enforcing *aportuguesamento* and greatly impeding Protestant missionary work. Thus an alliance developed between the Protestant church and the Frelimo militants,<sup>11</sup> as expressed by Samora Machel in the Gaza speech: 'Here, in the province of Gaza, the Protestant church, which was a centre for the struggle against colonialism, cultivated some of these values' (Machel 1982: 40). The values to which Machel refers are those regarding the importance of monogamous and stable marriages based on love, and the rejection of 'idleness (*vagabundice*) alcoholism, prostitution and marginality' (Machel 1982: 40). 'The Protestants helped us a lot', Machel continued, 'they educated us in order to for us to know the value of a human being. Ever since the Portuguese effected the total domination of our country, the Protestants constructed churches, and there they taught us about our history, our value as human beings, our identity. They taught us that we were Mozambicans, Africans and not Portuguese. (...) For this, *obrigado protestantes* (thank you, Protestants)' (Machel 1982: 40). In this speech Machel also spoke of the values of individual and collective hygiene and cleanliness, of clean nails and well-combed hair, and of the dignity of the family. Here as elsewhere he came down hard on women having children with different men, i.e. children without fathers, 'children of the bush': 'Such children are born like goats, coming from the bush, without knowledge of their father' (Machel 1982: 39). To be human in Samora's eyes was to live in a patriarchal, monogamous family: 'We are human beings, we have family, we have parents, we have sons and daughters, we have husbands and wives, we form a cell of society. For this reason we condemn adultery, for this reason we condemn "children of the bush"' (Machel 1982: 40).

Even worse than 'children of the bush' were prostitutes, 'women who transform their bodies into shops. (...) A prostitute is a rotten person with a foul stench' (Machel 1982: 33). A particular kind of prostitute, according to Machel, consisted of 'girls of twelve to sixteen years' who hunted down adult men in political power. Interestingly, the President's blame was laid exclusively on the girls, and not on his fellow Party members, the powerful politicians letting themselves be seduced. In a later speech, at the Extraordinary OMM conference in 1984, Samora Machel continued this line of blaming the women: 'It is a shame to be a single mother. The phenomenon, the very concept, should be extinct' (Machel 1984. Quoted in Arnfred 1985: 18).

I am quoting the Frelimo (and Mozambique) President at length, because I find the similarities between Frelimo and Christian/Protestant morals sadly striking. In spite of all talk of 'women's emancipation' Frelimo's moral worldview

was strictly androcentric and even patriarchal. In the speeches of Samora Machel this whole moral package was termed ‘socialist ethics’ (Machel 1982: 40). In actual fact, however, it was very similar to the ‘Protestant ethic’ outlined by Max Weber in his famous work (Weber 1920/1984).<sup>12</sup> Even Machel’s critique of *vagabundice* belongs here. According to Weber, for Protestants, the ‘waste of time is the first and in principle the deadliest of sins’ (Weber 1920/1984: 167). Weber also notes how Protestantism even more fiercely than Catholicism bans sexuality: Catholicism decrees celibacy for priests, monks and nuns, but it does not interfere with sexual life in general, as long as it is practiced in matrimony. Under Protestant puritanism, however, ‘sexual intercourse is permitted, even within marriage, only as the means chosen by God for the increase of His glory, according to the commandment: ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ (Weber 1920/1984: 168). The Frelimo approach has many similarities with the Protestant line. Female initiation rites were considered, if not explicitly as vile and immoral, then certainly as oppressive and humiliating, and they were centrally positioned among the *usos e costumes* considered social problems for women, and which should become extinct. The 1976 OMM 2nd conference documents, just as later the 1984 extraordinary OMM conference documents, refer to initiation rites, *lobolo*, polygamy etc as ‘women’s social problems’. Seen from my vantage point, however, these *usos e costumes* were not *women’s* as much as they were *Frelimo’s* problems. These so-called ‘women’s social problems’ pointed to aspects of Mozambican social life that did *not* conform to Frelimo’s strongly Christian /Protestant-inspired version of modernity and development – aspects which Frelimo struggled to change and to control.

Also in denouncing ‘traditional-feudal society’, *lobolo*, polygamy and the rest of it, there is an interesting ambiguity in Frelimo’s line. Samora Machel in the 1982 Gaza speech was, as usual, strongly against ‘traditional-feudal society’, but he was *also* against young people who want to marry without a specific ceremony and without consulting the parents: ‘They think that this is Independence’, the President snorted, ‘they behave like animals, and they say that this is Independence!’ (Machel 1982: 34). Furthermore these youngsters, when reproached by their parents, call them old-fashioned and outdated, *ultrapassados*. In this dispute the President was on the side of the parents, who were instructed to maintain their authority *vis-à-vis* the misbehaving offspring. Thus traditional marriage was bad, but no marriage at all was even worse, and the parents, much more rooted in ‘tradition’ than the younger generation, were given support. This ambiguity later developed into the idea of ‘positive and negative aspects of tradition’ The decision regarding *what* is positive and *what* is negative remained, however, with Frelimo. As it was put in the General Resolution resulting from the OMM extraordinary conference regarding initiation rites: ‘The Extraordinary Conference recommends that the local bodies of OMM, in coordination with the institutions of Education and Health, should go deeper into the study of context and practice of initiation

rites, in order carefully to concretize which are their negative and which their positive aspects. These bodies should submit their considerations to the Party leadership in order for it to have appropriate foundation for issuing directions as to what should be combated and what should be maintained' (OMM 1984).

One aspect of women's lives, which was not considered a social problem and thus did not figure in the OMM/Frelimo list of 'women's social problems' was motherhood. Frelimo had policies on work, family and (female) sexuality, but regarding maternity OMM merely advised a 2-year period between births (which conformed more or less to prescriptions of 'tradition'),<sup>13</sup> and projects for *saude materno-infantil* – mother-child health /reproductive health were established. Like 'gender' in colonial days, to Frelimo 'motherhood' was uncontroversial. As long as women produced the necessary amount of children for the Nation, all was well. Mozambique is fairly sparsely populated, so the Frelimo government welcomed a population increase. Talk of family planning was in terms of *spacing* births, less of limiting families. Also in this aspect, thus, women were instrumentalised and subordinated in relation the Nation's needs.

Summing up, I have characterised Frelimo ideology as follows:

*Work:* The model is the Soviet-socialist inspired 'women in men's jobs': The woman soldier, the woman tractor driver. Tacitly however, it is presumed that women also take care of domestic tasks. In actual reality women work a lot, particularly in agricultural production, as they have always been doing.

*Family:* The 'socialist family' is put forward as the ideal. This family model however is indistinguishable from a Christian, particularly a Protestant, ideal.

*Sexuality:* Female sexuality is dealt with only in negative terms (as prostitution, blaming the woman). Campaigns are waged against female initiation rites.

*Maternity* is taken for granted.

I have focused critically on Frelimo ideology, because of its deplorable lack of understanding of the actual conditions of male/female relations in Mozambican daily life, and because of its unsavory (to my taste) mix of socialist/communist ideology with Protestant puritanism, both of these lines of thought being strongly androcentric and patriarchal, if not outright misogynist. Nevertheless, in actual political practice in the post-Independence years, much did happen that was also beneficial to for women. There were wide-ranging programmes of education and mobilisation and political participation at local levels, to name just some of many important changes in the early years of Independence. Before long, however, the Frelimo-Renamo war paralysed political and economic change, and the Mozambique that emerged from the war in many respects was very different from the Mozambique of the immediate post-Independence period.

### Donor-dominated development

The Mozambique of Frelimo socialism was a very particular country with a very particular colonial past and an equally important history of struggle. The Mozambique of SAP and PRE is just another poor African country. From the late 1980s onwards Mozambique became integrated in the 'normal' development setup under the neo-liberal auspices of the IMF and the World Bank, with donor agencies pouring in and with masses of international NGOs. Maputo's bumpy streets were flooded with donor agencies' expensive cars, and the previously empty shops were filled with goods for those who could afford them.

These transformations also brought changes in the field of gender. With the first UN Women's conference in 1975 in Mexico City and a further series of UN conferences on women, population and human rights, a globalised approach to 'women' and 'gender' in development contexts was created. In a strange kind of dialogue between struggling women and accommodating/coopting state and donor bureaucracies, a standardised language and approach to gender issues were developed. Gender policies in this era greatly depend on gender struggles from below. The ideas of 'women in development' and later 'gender and development', were invented by women's groups and introduced into development language through lobbying and advocacy. Most frequently the government and donor agencies - in a general climate of neo-liberal politics - do their best to coopt and integrate, if possible by undermining in practice the political implications of the gender language that they have felt obliged to apply.

The very language of *gender* is a case in point<sup>14</sup>. When the vocabulary of gender-and-development was introduced into the development debate in the 1980s, it was advocated by feminists, who wanted to criticise the dominant women-in-development (WID) approach for dealing only with *integration* of women into existing development policies, with no critical analysis of development as such, and with no criticism of the unequal power relationships between men and women. Nevertheless, in spite of the good intentions, which were to politicise the WID debate through gender-and-development (GAD) thinking, the opposite seems to have happened. Instead of speaking about *women*, which implied an awareness of women's specific and often marginalised positions, the term *gender* came into use as a neutral term, referring to both women and men.

Because of the overall standardisation of development approaches in neo-liberal economic contexts, the situation in Mozambique is not very different from development approaches to gender elsewhere. The specificity is provided, not by the donor-and-government approaches themselves, but by challenges to government and development machineries from lobby groups of women activists, women's NGOs and intellectual women. During the Frelimo era Mozambican civil society organisations were almost non-existent, and OMM had been the one and only women's organisation. With the political changes in the late 1980s – the

introduction of PRE (*Programa de Re-estruturação Económica*), later re-named PRES (*Programa de Re-estruturação Económica e Social*) – NGOs emerged all over the place, including a series of local women's NGOs. An umbrella organization, *Forum Mulher*, was created, embracing national and international NGOs, government institutions working with women's issues, as well as women/gender-aware individuals from trade unions and political parties.<sup>15</sup> Over the years *Forum Mulher* has become a focus for debate on women's issues and quite an important lobby group, pushing women's issues where and when it is felt needed. After the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, *Forum Mulher* was active in the setting up of a so-called operative group (*Grupo Operativo*) led by the Minister for Co-ordination of Social Welfare, and incorporating representatives for fifteen different ministries, as well as in the drafting of a Post-Beijing National Plan of Action (da Silva and Andrade 2000: 81). The planning in this case took place at a very general level, but nevertheless it could be used as a tool for putting further pressure on the government.

### ***The PROAGRI Programme***

That pressure is needed is obvious. The development of a unified, donor financed and supervised plan for the ministry of Agriculture, the so-called PROAGRI: National Programme for Agrarian Development, may in this context serve as an example. The PROAGRI process started in the mid-1990s and since then a series of plans have been elaborated and a series of joint donor evaluations have taken place. From the side of the donors there has been a more or less steady insistence regarding consideration of gender factors in the PROAGRI planning process, and various gender focal points internally in the Ministry of Agriculture as well as in the Directorates for Agriculture in the provincial governments have been established. Nevertheless the push for gender awareness in PROAGRI contexts continues to be an uphill struggle.

As expressed by Wenke Adam, who was involved at an early point in the PROAGRI process, all the talk about 'gender awareness' is in actual fact very simple:

Actually it is nothing revolutionary, it is just simply to acknowledge the fact that in agriculture men and women generally perform different tasks, complementary and socially defined, and that when somebody plans to make an intervention in this sector, it will be a good idea to make an analysis regarding who does what and why, in order to be able to direct the support to the proper persons, in the most adequate form, for the best effect. (...) An important aspect, in this context not to be forgotten, is that in Mozambique, for historical reasons, the major part of the actual work with the crops in the field is done by women, as their regular and permanent work. The men will clear the bush, and they may participate in

the sowing and the harvesting, but for the rest of the time they will often be on the lookout for waged employment in order to be able to buy such non-agricultural products as the family needs. The men also deal with the cattle. If we consider the fact that the family sector produces around 95 percent of the country's basic agricultural products, it becomes abundantly clear that it is the Mozambican women who feed Mozambique with grain, potatoes, groundnuts and vegetables. Any support to the family sector should thus be directed to this group... (Adam 1997: 9).

This indeed seems very simple and straightforward. That the main producers in family agriculture are women is a well known fact, and since in Mozambique the family sector in agriculture is by far the largest one<sup>16</sup> in terms of persons engaged in production, as well as in terms of produced goods, women obviously are centrally positioned. How then is this reflected in the plan?

It is not. The PROAGRI Master Document, containing the 1998–2003 plan, is a masterpiece in deliberate gender blindness. The family sector figures fairly prominently. It is acknowledged that this sector comprises some 3,000,000 families occupying a total farming area of 3,500,000 ha of land. It is also acknowledged that about 55 percent of the total farmed area is concentrated in the three northern provinces of Nampula, Cabo Delgado and Niassa. But gender aspects are not mentioned at all. In the text of the document neither men nor women are agents; the way it is put is as follows: 'the family sector grows commercial crops such as ...', 'the family sector engages in the cutting and sale of firewood...' (Ministry of Agriculture 1998: 29). To be noted here is first that the 'sector' as such is the subject, neither men nor women, and secondly that what is mentioned are *commercial* crops and firewood *for sale*. That women in the family sector produce food to feed the vast majority of the Mozambican population *outside* the market economy is apparently of no concern. Also not mentioned is the fact that the three northern provinces are populated by Makhuwa, Maconde and Yao peoples, all matrilineal.

That this fact is not mentioned comes, however, as no surprise. Especially as the general strategy of the whole PROAGRI endeavour is defined as 'the transformation of the subsistence agriculture into one that is more integrated in the functions of production, distribution and processing, in order to achieve the development of a subsistence agrarian sector which contributes with surpluses for the market and the development of an efficient and participatory entrepreneurial sector' (Ministry of Agriculture 1998: 37). The gender effects of this strategy are not investigated, and maybe for good reasons. Transformation of subsistence agriculture into more market-oriented production will, especially in the matrilineal areas where generally women control not only food production but also the distribution of food, imply the transfer of social power from women to men.<sup>17</sup> And as for the development of 'an efficient and participatory

entrepreneur sector' – one may wonder if these 'entrepreneurs' in their majority will be women – or men?

Oddly reminiscent of the colonial as well as the Frelimo ambiguities, acknowledging women's 'preponderance and prestige' in traditional settings (Rita Ferreira et al 1964: 75), or admitting that in the countryside it is 'the woman who organize and who has since immemorial times been the main producer' (OMM 1976: 58), the PROAGRI plan contains such ambiguities, in however weak an undercurrent. No talk of women, no! But it is acknowledged that in the family sector 'producers are highly efficient in the utilization of the existing means and that they possess an enormous potential to increase the current levels of production' (Ministry of Agriculture 1998: 53). The way, however, in which this potential will be developed is through marketisation, which by all indications is most likely to favour men.

Thus the PROAGRI plan is full of gender, but it is all implicit, and the strategies advocated will be to the advantage of men. Perhaps this is the reason for the consistent gender blindness. The issue of gender (men/women) is mentioned only *once* in the 94-page document, in the following words: 'An evaluation of the PROAGRI in the light of the gender issue will be conducted in 1988' (Ministry of Agriculture 1998: 92). In my reading, this looks like a war against women. No wonder that the present coordinator of the Gender Unit in the Ministry of Agriculture is frustrated: 'We have difficulties in getting the leaders within the Ministry to take gender seriously. Some within the Ministry say that we are doing this work related to gender because it is the wish of the donors, and that we are doing it in order to ensure that we get the funds' (personal communication from a November 2002 review team).

In the Post-Beijing period Gender Units were created in several ministries, without however a clear mandate and outside the hierarchies of power. The 1998 review requested in the PROAGRI Master Document has this to say about the Ministry of Agriculture Gender Unit: 'It is placed in a situation where it has neither sufficient authority nor autonomy for doing what it ought to do. (...) At the moment the coordinator of the Gender Unit in the Ministry of Agriculture does not participate in the management group meetings, nor does she participate in the counseling group. In this way there are few possibilities of letting the women's views be heard in these fora, or for introducing and promoting gender perspectives in the Ministry's policies and plans' (quoted in Arthur 2000: 14).

The situation in the Ministry of Agriculture may be extreme, but it is not unique. In a critical evaluation of the Mozambican governments gender politics and programmes post-Beijing, from 1995-1999, commissioned by Forum Mulher, Maria José Arthur gives several similar examples. Summing up regarding the ministerial Gender Units she says: 'If these units are not given capacity to make interventions, power to take decisions and means to carry them out, they will

remain no more than symbols of an intention which will never get beyond dead words on paper' (Arthur 2000: 14).

### ***The new Family Law***

At a very formal level all looks well. Male/female equality is guaranteed in the constitution, and the government, as in most African countries, has ratified the CEDAW convention. At the level of political practice, however, things work very differently. An example here is the long struggle for a new family law. Very early in the immediate post-independence period, a Family Law project was developed, in order to replace the Portuguese *Código Civil* of 1967, containing several clauses which contradicted the constitution. The Family Law project contained clauses regarding acceptance of 'de facto' unions in order legally to protect the majority of women who were married 'traditionally' and not according to any written law; the concept of a 'male family head' was eliminated, divorce was facilitated and polygamy was made illegal. Perhaps for these reasons the Family Law project did not result in a new law. In 1982 a directive was issued, by virtue of which parts of the Family Law project could be used as guiding principles for juridical decisions. But in 1992 this directive was annulled, with the implication that it was now again the patriarchal values of the Portuguese *Código Civil* which ruled family relations. As an aspect of the post-Beijing mobilisation women's groups have since 1997 been pushing for parliamentary action regarding the Family Law. The law has been on the parliament's agenda several times, but was been repeatedly and systematically postponed. At long last in April 2003, the new Family Law was finally discussed and passed in the Assembly of the Republic (AIM April 29, 2003). That this new law has not constituted a regression with regard to any of the radical suggestions brought forward in the first draft of 1980 is remarkable, the general political situation taken into consideration. As far as I can see the explanation for this is to be found in one particular fact: the perpetually active Maputo lobby groups of researchers and activists regarding women's issues, who have been feeding the Frelimo minister of Justice with facts and arguments, and also, of course, the minister's willingness to listen. As noted in local media: 'The parliamentary debate showed that this is one of the few issues where the government is to the left of the Frelimo parliamentary group. While every speech broadly welcomed the bill, they usually contained reservations' (AIM April 29, 2003). According to the new bill the husband will no longer automatically represent the family; either partner may do so; 'de facto' marriages will be recognised, which means that children of this type of union will have the same protection and recognition as children of any other form of marriage, and that the father, if the marriage breaks down, will be obliged to pay maintenance. Polygamous unions are not outlawed, but they are also not recognised, except at the time of the man's death, in order to safeguard the inheritance rights of his wives and children.

I shall leave the current situation here, with these examples, one rather negative (the PROAGRI case) and one surprisingly positive (the new Family Law) from the point of view of women's activist groups. Now for a brief summing up regarding the four aspects of work, family, maternity and sexuality.

As for *work*, women's work in the market sector is considered an indication of gender equality. This is not much different from the socialist vision of the woman wage worker and tractor driver: that is to say, women in men's work. What women have to do with apart from this kind of work, in terms of housework and care-taking, seems more invisible than ever.

*Family*: The family position is ambiguous, due to the recent passing of the new Family Law. In a Government programme proposal for 2000-2004, Frelimo flags its old preference for Christian family values, stating that 'the Frelimo government will (...) guarantee the continuation of the Fatherland and stability of the family, the basic cell of our society' (Frelimo Comité Central 1999, quoted in Arthur 2000: 11). Women's groups have been struggling for different visions of family life, more on women's terms. Now the women's groups' visions have been turned into law. Of course realities still do not change overnight, but obviously this is an important step in the right direction.

*Sexuality*: Female initiation rites, which were a burning issue in colonial times as well as during Frelimo socialism, are a non-issue nowadays. People are free to perform any ritual they wish, and initiation rites are now again openly taking place, particularly in the northern part of the country. Because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is widespread also in Mozambique (the prevalence rate of HIV infected on a national level is currently 12 percent [Danida 2002]) sexuality is often being associated with risk and danger. The strong moral tone of previous politics has eased, but has been replaced by a discourse of risk and danger.

*Motherhood* is only an issue in practical terms, as for example in the contexts of health (where women's reproductive health is integrated in the Family Health Section), and of maintenance payments. *A Rainha do lar* has disappeared, but motherhood as a basis for female power receives no political recognition.

## Conclusion

In spite of the overall conclusion that examined through a gendered lens the political continuities during the latest fifty years of turbulent Mozambican history have been more apparent than the radical changes, some changes *have* taken place. One of the more important ones is the appearance of civil society lobby groups for women's rights, gender equality and the promotion of women's perspectives. But these groups fight an uphill battle. First they must fight just to keep women's issues on the agenda, and secondly they must fight on the issue of *how* women's issues are integrated into the political process. But by their actions, they might, with time, be able to integrate some of the forms of female power which are still

embedded in the social systems of the vast and populous matrilineal societies in the north of Mozambique into the mainstream of the nation's life.

### Notes

1. The discussion is based on my knowledge of Mozambique from four years of life in Maputo and work as a sociologist in the OMM 1980–84, including several travels to the provinces; frequent visits to the country during 1985–97, and six months of fieldwork in Nampula province 1998–99.
2. Portugalisation in practice was among other things forced use of Portuguese as language of instruction in mission schools, to the great annoyance of the Protestant missionaries, who were not of Portuguese origin, and who preferred to teach in local languages. (On these and related issues, cf. the excellent paper by David Hedges, 1985).
3. The two reports under consideration here are A da Silva Rego 1960: *Alguns problemas socio-missionários da África Negra*, and Antonio Rita Ferreira et al 1964: *Promoção Social em Moçambique*. Both reports are published by *Junta de Investigações do Ultramar* in Lisbon.
4. Major ethnic groups, all matrilineal, in northern Mozambique are Makhuwa, Makonde and Yao. According to the data collected in *II Recenseamento Geral da População e Habitação* in 1997, almost 40 percent of the Mozambican population speak Emakhuwa or Elomwe (closely connected languages spoken by Makhuwa people), Shimakonde or Ciyao.
5. Female genital cutting or mutilation is not a part of initiation rituals in Mozambique. As opposed to cutting, the rituals, particularly in Northern Mozambique, focus on female sexual capacity building.
6. Only in the 1960s did the Swiss Mission (*Missão Suíça*) change its name to *Igreja Presbiteriana de Mocambique*. (Cruz e Silva e Loforte 1998: 43).
7. Cf Nancy Cott 1978: *Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790–1850*.
8. Cf. Ann Whitehead 2000 for contemporary versions of similar ideological presumptions.
9. Jorge Rebelo at that point was Secretary for ideology of the Frelimo Central Committee.
10. Cf Arnfred 1988, 1990.
11. Cruz e Silva (2001) highlights the importance of the Swiss-Presbyterian mission in southern Mozambique for the formation, particularly from 1930 onwards, of an educated, politically conscious (i.e. nationalist and anti-colonial) elite.
12. Cf. Arnfred 1990.
13. 'Traditionally' in most of Mozambique, mothers are/were supposed to breastfeed children at least until they walk; in this period chastity is/was prescribed.
14. Cf. Arnfred 2001a.

15. Cf. Arthur 2002, in itself an important, critical contribution, commissioned by *Forum Mulher*.
16. According to the 1997 census (*II Recenseamento Geral da População e Habitação 1997*) 79 percent of the Mozambican population are 'peasants', i.e. family farmers. Among these two-thirds are women.
17. Cf. Arnfred 2001b.

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