

“They are squeezing us!”

**Gender, Matriliny, Power and Agricultural Policies:
Case Study in Issa Malanga, Niassa Province, Northern Mozambique**

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INTRODUCTION

I decided to analyse the implementation of a development project and State intervention within the context of a matrilineal society. So, I selected as area of study the community of Issa Malanga in Niassa, where there had recently been initiated the implementation of the agricultural development programme - Mosagrius.

The paper argues that women hold a central position and a considerable share of power in this matrilineal society where several post-nuptial residence rules coexist. This fact does not always become clear in the studies conducted on the patriarchal paradigm in force, which cast a patriarchal glance at matrilineity and matrilocality. Current agricultural policies in Mozambique and related interventions by the State institutions or by the so-called development projects, such as Mosagrius, contribute to hinder food security and erode women's power position in this society.

The first part deals with the social and political organisation and the areas of power of women, as regards conjugal residence, divorce, inheritance, relationship with the oldest brother, access to labour, and "traditional" power structures. The second part analyses access to and control over land both under customary and formal law. The third refers to aspects of the interventions of the State and of the Mosagrius Project which I considered relevant for the purposes of this paper.. The fourth discusses possible implications of these interventions in terms of food security and for the status of Ayao women and men, concluding with the need for unbiased and in-depth studies on matrilineal societies and their capacity to adapt to interventions of this nature.

Area of Study and Methodology

In Niassa there is predominance of fertile soils traversed by extensive hydrographic networks. Its inhabitants are mainly Macua, Ayao, and Nyanja, who, despite extensive migratory movements documented in the area since the 19th Century, show certain spatial distribution (Medeiros, 1997:45-46). The province has the least population density in the whole country, just 6 inhabitants per km² (National Institute of Statistics-INE:1997).

Since the 17th Century the Ayao have been engaged in long distance trade with the coast (Medeiros, 1997:37-38; AHM, 1983:Nota 25). Ayao states resisted to colonial occupation and it was only at the beginning of the 20th Century that effective occupation of their territory took place, which caused a disruption in the process of socio-political and economic development of this region (AHM, 1983:w/p). The Islamic influence on Ayao states has been documented since the 19th Century (Newitt, 1997:381).

Already at the onset of the 19th Century, Liesegang quoted by Medeiros (1997:81) refers that the Ayao had acquired considerable agricultural experience and the women had a leading role in agriculture. Currently, women are essentially engaged in nomadic agriculture producing maize, several types of beans, potatoes, rice and tobacco, among other crops

(idem:31-34). As sources of cash income they trade agricultural production surplus, fish, honey and game meat, besides engaging in temporary paid work known as “ganho”.

The province of Niassa has been neglected for a long time, and during the post-independence period came to be known as the “forgotten” or the “unknown” province of Mozambique (Mascaretti and Martins, 1992/1993:74).

The small community of Issa Malanga in Manjune district, comprised of approximately 40 houses/households stretching along a dirt road, is part of what Medeiros considers as currently being the “heart of the Yao country” (idem:81).

In order to carry out this study, I resorted to a desk research, interviews and observation. Due to scarcity of written sources of an anthropologic nature on the Ayao population in Mozambique, I turned to the work of Gama Amaral, whose data were collected in the 1960s. During my stay in the community, I conducted five collective interviews and twenty individual interviews with women and men of different lineage, status and age groups. I took care to record the experiences and perspectives from both spouses. I conducted nine individual interviews with civil servants, Mosagrius Development Society (SDM) and with NGOs.

I. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Since the issue of land and, more specifically, the social relations enacted within the framework of access to and control of land in terms of gender cannot be dissociated from the social organisation system in which it is integrated, it is appropriate to note that the Ayao social organisation is primarily based on the *mbumba*, which, according to Amaral (1990:163-163) is the family group made up of several sisters and their oldest brother as well as by the sisters’ descendants.

According to the anthropologic bibliography consulted, the Ayao relationship system is matrilineal with descent line established through the mother’s side (idem:74; Medeiros, 1997:46; Davison, 1997:18). However, Richards remark, quoted in Davison (idem:17), that both the matriliney and patriliney do not exist in “absolute patterns”, but in “negotiated patterns”, depending on class and family circumstances, among other factors, also apply to the Ayao (Amaral, 1990:72).

Post-nuptial residence

According to Davison (idem:16-17), matriliney does not necessarily have to be associated to matrilocality, since, a set of social and economic factors may influence the choice of the location of conjugal residence, just as it used to be the case among the Ayao during the 1960s when men of a higher social status had vertical marriages (Amaral, idem:72-73).

If in the 1960s, matriliney was predominant among the Ayao (idem:73-74); nowadays, in Issa Malanga, it is still a common practice among women of different social status, mainly among

older couples. The instances of matrilocality observed among younger couples were generally in relation to second or third wife in polygynous marriages.

Another regime for establishing conjugal residence observed in Issa Malanga is *cicigale*, according to which, after acceptance of marriage proposal by the woman's family, the couple establish residence next to the woman's family, the man cuts down trees and the two spouses build a house.

During this period of time, that varies between 2 and 4 years, the woman's family, particularly, her mother and sometimes her sisters generally have a right to the son-in-law and brother-in-law's labour. Only after this period the man can request authorisation from the woman's family to take his wife, and the couple can then leave and live either with the man's family or at some other place. Besides being a means of access to male labour, *cicigale* also acts as a male behaviour control mechanism:

“Those two years during which the man usually lives with the woman's family are for the family to probe into the man's heart. [...]. If the family conclude that the man is vile, they will not allow him to take the woman to go live there... But if he has a good heart, he can take the woman to go stay with his family...” (Collective Interview with Men)

Therefore, the conjugal residence next to the man's family, is not a guarantee and it is even less a right, it is something that is conditioned and that the man has to endeavour to accomplish, which makes this practice substantially different from virilocality.

Though Amaral in a way compares *cicigale* with virilocality, he states that, though there was a growing acceptance of this practice during the 1960s, *cicigale* was not very common among the majority of the population (Amaral, 1990:73-74). Currently, in Issa Malanga, whilst some men stated that *cicigale* was not a widespread practice, the elderly women interviewed underscored that, since national independence in 1975, its practice had been on the increase. Nevertheless, in a discussion group with 8 men selected at random, only one of them was living in a matrilocal regime and I was also informed that of the existing 40 households, only 8 men lived next to their wives' family, which may give some indication of the prevalence of matrilocality.

Though this society's normative model encourages matrilocality, *cicigale* is a common practice. However, if, according to the environment observed, *cicigale* is a somewhat deviant behaviour as far as this society is concerned, virilocality is even more deviant. The attitude of an Islamic religious leader to conceal the truth stating that he had married within a *cicigale* regime when in actual fact the couple had adopted a virilocal residence may be an indication of that.

According to what has been observed in this case study, male wage labour may influence the establishment of the conjugal residence, which does not mean that matrilocality, as a normative model shall cease to exist. I got to know a couple that had temporarily adopted neolocality, while the man's work so required, who later adopted again matrilocality. I also identified some women who lived with their respective uterine families, whilst the man was away to work.

The war was another important agent of change in the establishment of conjugal residence.

Divorce

The offspring of a marriage in which both parents come from matrilineal groups belong to the mother's lineage and the father has little control over the children (Davison, idem:54). It was equally the case among the Ayao in the 1960s when the offspring were considered "the property of the mother at all circumstances" (Amaral, idem:83), this is still the practice in Issa Malanga. Presently, in the event of a divorce, the children continue with their mother both in the cases of matrilocality as well as in the cases of *cicigale*. (Several collective and individual interviews with women and men); i.e., the descent line remains the same regardless of conjugal residence.

Nevertheless, to confirm Davison's assertion (idem:54) that even in matrilineal groups, educated and urbanised men tend to want to control their progeny, in this case study, the only men that indicated their intention to hold on to their children in the event of a divorce were an Islamic religious leader and an emigrant who had been exposed to other types of behaviour and rules within the urban context. However, I did not come across any instance where the offspring had, in actual fact, remained with the father.

In this case study, I learned that in the event of a divorce within matrilocal marriages, generally, the man returns to his place of origin and the plot continues to be owned by the woman. Though some men had mentioned that, in the event of a divorce, they could "sell" the plot of land they had cleared either to the woman's family or to a third party, I found out that such behaviour had never taken place in the community.

In a *cicigale* regime, in the event of a divorce by the man's initiative, the woman generally returns to the family on her mother's side and loses the plot which, up until then, had been ploughed by the couple, in such an instance various situations may occur:

- ?? Once back to her place of origin, the woman uses the plot that her husband had cleared when they both lived there or she may use another cleared plot and left in those same circumstances;
- ?? Her family (usually, her oldest brother or her own children, if their age allows them to do so) clear a new plot;
- ?? Women may clear the forest themselves or engage male paid labour to carry out this task;
- ?? Men from the community may organise themselves and, together, clear a plot;
- ?? The ex-husband may eventually clear a plot for her and the children.

This last possibility has been mentioned by several men as necessary to safeguard the well being of the children, who remain with the woman, as suggested by the following account:

"The man, if he is able,... first, he will open a field for cultivation at the woman's household, second, he will build the house [...] then leaves the woman... so as not to be mean... because he has also left the children there. Because, one day, when he passes or goes to town, he may drink water, eat... he has to have a proper farewell." (Collective Interview with Men)

Though the wives of those same men had been somewhat sceptical about the likelihood of their husbands actually accomplishing those intentions; I learned about the case of João Bacar and Fátima Ali: after returning to Issa Malanga when the war ended, the woman decided to divorce the husband and, before leaving the village, the man helped her build a house for herself and their daughters.

Another divorce learned about was that of Lúcia L. and Salamande G. They did not have children together, and the man decided to divorce the wife and leave the village denying the woman the possibility of harvesting the crops he had cultivated. This incident still causes indignation in both women and men from the community, giving the impression that it is unusual for a man to take the initiative in the divorce and take away some of the couple's belongings, even if the woman still keeps the rest.

In this series of accounts a complex dynamics of dispute of spaces of influence and decision is revealed. The intentions of some husbands to take on a position of greater supremacy in the household are frustrated by the resistance from women and their respective families and can even not occur.

Inheritance

Among the Ayao, in the 1960s, the "heir" was usually the oldest son of the oldest sister of the deceased, in other words, the heritage was transferred via the feminine transverse line, though, generally, there were exceptions as far as political leaders were concerned. According to Amaral, the "heir" of an "ordinary man", was responsible for the distribution of the belongings of the deceased among the widow or widows and sisters and brothers of the deceased, he just took what remained (idem:126-129). However, I believe he is not really not an heir, meaning someone who has tenure rights or ownership of the belongings of the deceased, but mainly an "administrator" of those same belongings.

Though the data submitted by the author indicate that the women inherit, the concept of "heir" is used in the masculine. The ensuing invisibility of women and of their right to inherit, which constitute an important element in appreciating women's power position in this society, denotes, among other aspects, the author's "male bias" in the reading of this reality. It is, therefore, relevant to resort to a textual quotation of Diane Elson (1997:156), according to whom the "male bias" operates "both through what is thought, said, written and done; and through what is *not* thought, and said, and written and done."

The information collected in the course of this study indicate that, already during the period prior to independence, in the event of the demise of a married man, both the widow or widows and their respective sons and daughters could inherit his belongings. There was little mention of nephews both as heirs as well as distributors of the inheritance, which denotes changes in the descent line of this society.

It was equally highlighted by women and men that, even in the case of *cicigale*, mainly, in a long lasting marriage, if the husband dies, the widow may stay in the house and the couple's plot; since, according to the customary rules, it would not be appropriate to act otherwise:

"If the woman wants to stay, she may do so. The elder usually say she should be left to cultivate there. She can't be ordered to leave the plot." (Bacassano Salá)

"When the husband dies [...] a woman who stayed a long time was in cicigale does not return to her family... [herself and the offspring usually keep the plot, the house, the husband's clothes; they usually leave everything there with his children." (Aissa Mahomed)

As regards both women married in a regime of matrilocality and women who are "heads of households", the sisters of the deceased, generally, inherit her plot of land. Nevertheless, if the women who are heads of family have grown up children, particularly grown up daughters, they inherit the plot and become responsible for the household.

In societies where women can inherit, their position in the household is stronger (Meinzen-Dick, *et al*, 1997:1306). Among the Ayao, women inherit as sisters, daughters and widows, and regardless of the conjugal residence regime. This fact constitutes one of the elements contributing to the position of power that women have in this society.

The role of the oldest brother

Some studies consulted suggest a reading of the Ayao reality that shows what Amadiume (1997:32) has described as the existence of "patriarchal paradigms that underpin the analysis of power and ideology in African societies".

So, if on the one hand, Amaral interprets the relationship between *mbumba* women and men, with the oldest brother as one of subordination; though in different contexts, both Moore and Vaughan (1994:223) and Davison (*idem*:54) above all refer to the strong "bond between brothers and sisters" and its vital importance in matrilineal societies.

In Issa Malanga, though I observed the central role played by the oldest brother in relation to marriages, divorces, marital conflicts or access to land, it is also true that, for instance, sisters are entitled to their oldest brother's labour, as mentioned earlier, in the event of a divorce or widowhood.

Taking on the challenge posed by Gentili (1998:10) to decode the European conceptualisation of Africa, the relationship between sisters and their oldest brother ought to be questioned. It is necessary to investigate that reality, bringing into light the complexity of power relations between sisters and the respective oldest brothers, the nature of the relationship between the latter and other women in the *mbumba*, particularly, their mothers and the *anganga* (see page 9), contributing to a better understanding of this society.

Labour/Deforestation

If, in the sixties, deforestation was a “job only for men” (Amaral, idem:203), nowadays, women who are heads of households have broken with the gendered division of labour and cut down trees as well, as some women pointed out:

“If there is no one to help open the field for cultivation...of course it has to be the woman doing it herself!”

Another strategy used by women is the diversification of their activities. Through *ganho* (temporary wage labour) they obtain cash they then use to engage male labour for activities that are socially allocated to men, such as the cutting down of trees.

In the case of the divorce of the elderly woman that caused great indignation within women and men in the community, that I referred to previously, since this woman was not in a physical condition to cut down trees, the men organised and together did that work.

I had the opportunity to observe the case of an elderly woman, responsible for several orphaned grandchildren, whose husband had recently divorced her when they moved to Issa Malanga after the war, denying her the harvesting of crops he had cultivated. This fact had caused indignation among women and men in the community and, since this woman was not in a physical state to cut down tree groves, the men got organised and together did that job.

Davison (idem:52) postulates that, in matrilineal societies which practise matrilocality, women had and in some instances still have the right to male labour, whereby, before the matrimony, the bridegroom renders various services to the bride’s family, which, generally, consisted of weeding and cutting down tree groves. In Issa Malanga, both in matrilocality and in *cicigale* cases, men had and still have certain work obligations towards the wife and her family, specifically, towards the mother-in-law:

“When a man marries and lives in his wife’s house... works [...] builds the house, opens the field for cultivation, works in the field with his wife and mother-in-law.” (Collective Interview with Women)

“Before independence, we used to work for the woman’s family, we opened the field for cultivation for the wife’s mother [...] others still do it...” (Collective Interview with Men)

I believe that in this society women occupy a central position and hold a considerable share of power in the household and in the community. They are the ones who remain in their family once married; even in *cicigale*, residence in another location is not a male’s right; the behaviour of the husband is subject to scrutiny by the wife’s family, the descent line is traced through the mother’s side, women have right to inheritance and even to male labour.

Instead of making reference to continuity and change in the Ayao social organisation, attention is drawn to the fact that after nearly two centuries of Islamic influence, matriliney and matrilocality still prevail, and I ask myself about the capacity to adapt to change and about the persistence of matrilineal kinship ideology.

Traditional Authority, Participation and Gender

Amaral suggests that, in terms of hierarchy, women and men are subordinate to the oldest brother, to the oldest uncle on the mother's side; to the *asyene mbumba* that the source designates as the head of family and to the *anganga*¹. The Ayao generally use the word *mwenye* to designate chiefs, with the exception of the "head of family", who as it has just been pointed out, is called *asyene mbumba* (Amaral, idem:141).

The first wife of the chief was his "indispensable advisor" (Amaral, 1990:127) in respect of all issues and, in particular, those in relation to women (idem:146). She was called *bibi*, a term that the editor of the Portuguese version of "The Yao" suggests it is used to denote a noble lady or a queen (Abdallah, 1983:100).

In other words, what confers power to this woman is her association by marriage with a male figure of the Ayao social and political system. Though more than a "female authority" as suggested by Amaral (idem:146) she is a representative of the male authority exercised over the whole of the population and mainly over the women, it is also true that she does hold certain power.

Below is an explanation given by an elderly man from Issa Malanga in relation to the role of this female figure in the "traditional" power structures:

"In ancient times, the mwenye married four to eight women and among them there was one who didn't do any work [...] she just ate. It was this woman who sat with the elder and carried out that work. [...] It has to be prudent woman who, when there are secret negotiations, she doesn't then divulge them, because these things are not supposed to be heard outside." (João Ibraimo)

According to information gathered in Issa Malanga, in situations that the *mwenye* considers as problematic, he meets with the "elder" in the community. The two women who eventually take part in that restricted circle of power have close family links with the *mwenye*. However, just as it is important to explain the gender composition of the *mwenye*'s political entourage, it is worth pointing out the atmosphere of secretiveness that surrounds this sphere of power, as well as the privileged and excluding access to information on the part of the community leadership.

Therefore, though women hold power within the household, hold prominent positions in the community and enjoy social recognition in it, there is a sphere of the so-called "traditional authority" that, among other aspects, deals with issues related to land management, conflict resolution and to contacts with government and entities with others, in which women have weak participation.

¹ The local translation of *anganga* is grandmother. However, written sources introduce more detailed information on the role of the *anganga* in matrilineages, regarding them as their symbol. (Amaral, 1990:158-163)

ACCESS TO LAND

By access to land it meant the possibility to use that land and as John Bruce cautions (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 1997:1318) this fact does not necessarily imply ownership or property of that plot of land.

In Mozambique, access to land can be accomplished either within the framework of Formal Law or, similarly to the case under study, through Customary Law. In Issa Malanga, the process of land allocation in the community is generally effected via marriage and by request to a family member of one of the spouses, who in turn submits the request to the *mwenye*. When the conjugal residence is matrilineal, generally, the land is firstly requested from the wife's oldest brother. Generally, it is the men who, accompanied by the *mwenye* and a member of his family or the wife's (depending on the conjugal residence regime adopted), indicate the plots of land intended, which the *mwenye* usually agrees to without any form of payment taking place.

In Issa Malanga, women and men work side by side on the same plots of land. According to the explanation given by both the women and men interviewed, an exception is recently introduced horticulture where only men are involved, due to the long distant location of vegetable plots from the community.

In the 1960s, the settlement of newcomers was keenly welcomed by the chiefs. Newcomers were allocated plots and community members expressed solidarity towards them by helping them with their immediate needs of housing and food (Amaral, idem:118). Nowadays, in Issa Malanga, if, on the one hand, they can even be granted cleared land on loan terms; on the other hand, assistance is more restricted and they have to find food for themselves and work for other community members in exchange for seeds. No single instance of access to land through loan terms learned about was in respect of community members, but newcomers.

Social representation of what is a purchase of a plot for cultivation may not be associated to what conventionally we call purchase. Some men considered purchase, the fact that they did not use their own labour but paid several individuals to clear the forest in order to open up a new field for cultivation:

“Here, we buy the plot for cultivation [...] There're people with money that want a plot. There're other people who want to engage in ganho. So, people will clear a plot for me and I'll pay money... we'll negotiate.” (Collective Interview with Men)

In order to have access to an additional plot of land it is also necessary to submit a request to the *mwenye*, but, again, no payment is made, according to one peasant farmer “we just ask”.

Another way of having access to land is through purchase. I learned about instances where the individuals who had cleared the forest, later on emigrated and sold their plots, at amounts varying between 60 and 150 thousand meticals, to other individuals from the community and without the intervention of the *mwenye*.

These cases may eventually translate the fact of the forest being perceived as belonging to the community, with all members having rights over it, and the *mwenye* acting as guardian of this common asset. Individuals who have added value to that land by cutting down tree groves would then have “rights” over that plot, and may even lend it or sell it without the interference of the “guardian”.

Another form of access to land is by inheritance. As mentioned earlier, women and men may inherit land. In the specific instance of women, they inherit as daughters, sisters and widows, depending on the circumstances and on the regime of post-nuptial residence.

A group of men pointed out that in the cases of *cicigale*, when the husband dies, the following could inherit the plot: a brother of the deceased, only in the absence of this brother could the heir be the nephew or the father of the deceased. Nevertheless, this whole group of heirs would fade into the background, if the widow and/or the couple’s children opted for staying in the location, then they would inherit the land of the deceased.

The flexibility of the “traditional” system of land allocation, which makes it possible to address problems faced in day-to-day, is clear in the following case:

Maria Ali settled again in Issa Malanga after the war. She is divorced with two children, she has no brother who is alive and her mother is the cousin of the *mwenye* and one of the influential women in the community. Maria asked her mother for a plot for clearing, the mother gave her one and she then cleared it all by herself. Maria Ali’s mother and her oldest sister had also cleared their own plots themselves; one because the husband was away on work and the other because she was a widow.

As an alternative for women heads of family in difficult situation to be able to have access to land, other cases were also observed, where either grown up children cut down the tree groves for their mothers, widows or divorced; or like in the case referred to in Page 7, men from the community got organised and cut down the tree groves.

Another alternative for these women is illustrated in the following account given by an elderly peasant farmer, married in a *cicigale* regime, who lived for approximately six years next to his wife’s family before the authorisation was granted for the wife to accompany him:

“I left the plot with my wife’s sister [...] she was married but her husband had gone on a long trip... it was a way of helping that woman.” (João Ibrahim)

Land Act 19/97 and its Regulations

Though in a study carried out in a matrilineal area it had been observed that the majority of women and men interviewed “had no knowledge of this law” (DMEG/CEA/UEM, 1994:49), the majority of the population being guided mainly by the Customary Law as occurs in this case study, the importance and developments enshrined in the new Land Act 19/97 cannot be underestimated.

This law recognises occupation rights and introduces important developments envisaging equal access to land by women and men, mainly by putting in place legal mechanisms aiming at preventing discrimination against women, by stating, for instance, that women can hold land titles and can inherit land.

However, in Mozambique, a country which is frequently symbolised in the political discourse by the metaphor of “cultural mosaic”, diversity and heterogeneity seem not to have room and, therefore, no need for them to be reflected in the legislation in force.

Though I do not intend to generalise the situations found in Issa Malanga to all matrilineal societies in Mozambique, the law not only has not taken into account the various contexts in which it is to be applied, but also it advances models that do not necessarily bear relationship with the different realities found in Mozambique. .

In particular, the new Land Law does not reflect the reality of matrilineal societies where different post-marital residence arrangements coexist, where women are key figures in access to land and where men are generally not the heads of the households, such as was the case in Issa Malanga. It is worthwhile to point out Ekejiuba (1995:50) statement that the conception of a household made up of a father, mother and offspring, in which the man is the head household and sole provider has been made universal and has been the basis for government policies aimed at rural areas

When the Act 19/97 makes reference in Article 12 to the right to land use through occupation “according to customary rules and practices that do not go against the Constitution” it is mainly trying to prevent situations where, for instance, women are not regarded as inheritance subjects, which is generally the case in the existing patrilineal societies in Mozambique. But why not also think of putting in place mechanisms that safeguard the rights of access to land that women, in matrilineal societies, have up to now enjoyed like in the case under study?

How is what is enshrined in the Law going to be implemented regarding community participation in the management of natural resources, in conflict resolution; in the process of issuing the title and in the identification of boundaries of land occupied by the communities? Taking as an example the Issa Malanga case, where the differentiation is clear in terms of age group, gender and lineage among other aspects; as well as the discriminating and excluding nature of the “traditional authority”, it is appropriate to ask whether the interests of the different groups can be expressed and be taken into account.

Though the Formal Law itself can not ensure true equality of rights and opportunities between women and men, it can, as Sousa Santos (1994:142) points out, act as a development catalyst and as an agent for social change in material and cultural realms and mentality.

At the mentality level, the challenge would exactly be to respect and undertake the country’s social and cultural diversity. In this specific case, this would imply not addressing matrilineal societies from an evolutionist perspective, which places these societies at an underdeveloped

stage, that would necessarily have to give way to patriliney as a prerequisite for development; and not use patriliney and virilocality as reference models in the country's legislation.

Control of Resources

Taking as the basis the concept of control over land as being the power one has over a given plot of land, as well as over benefits eventually accrue thereof, which implies a certain recognition of ownership over that piece of land, be it either according to formal or customary law and be it either temporary or permanent (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 1997:1318), the power that women and men have to make decisions on loan and sale of land, as well as on benefits accruing from the sale of agricultural produce were examined.

The accounts collected in Issa Malanga highlight references to the exchange of information, opinions, and consultations between spouses on decisions to be made in relation to land. Though we are before complex mechanisms of power that defines hierarchies and which implies that in some cases men hold final decision power regardless of the fact that they do or not actually resort to that prerogative; it can not be denied that women hold a considerable share of decision power in this respect, as illustrated in the following accounts:

"The women has to wait for the husband, she has no authority to lend a plot to anyone. The husband cannot lend it either, [...] the man cannot do that, as if he were out of his mind, the man and the woman have to agree to it." (Collective Interview with Women, Issa Malanga, 1999)

"... I can say that I don't want to sell [the plot]... Gilberto'll accept that and he'll not sell it..." (Interview with Fátima Omar, Issa Malanga, 1999)

As regards the proceeds from sales of agricultural produce, according to information collected in different locations in Niassa, men tend not to inform women about the income earned, and sometimes the use of income obtained from the sale of an income generating crop such as tobacco, becomes the cause of serious misunderstandings and physical aggression of wives by some husbands. (Hirvonen and Braga, 1999:32-33) The facts outlined above are to a large extent in contrast to the situation in Issa Malanga. Though it had been observed that control over these resources is effectively a male's prerogative, even in instances of matrilocality, it was found that both spouses knew about the amounts earned from the sale and about the whereabouts of the funds:

"I say to my wife: look, the rice I took [to sell] we got so much... then I took so much and bought cloths or shoes or something else... Then, the other money is this you see here..." (Bacassamo Salá, Issa Malanga, 1999)

"When the husband comes back, he calls me in... [...], he says: I'm back and I got this... [cash]. then it's me who counts that money..." (Manuela Sucá, Issa Malanga, 1999)

It is important to note that the wives who said that the decision power over land rests with the men were those married in the *cicigale* regime and consequently with less assurance on land ownership.

Let us now see how the intervention of the State and that of the so-called Development Programme was effected within the context of what has been outlined above.

III. MOSAGRIUS PROGRAMME

On 6 May 1996, the presidents of the Republic of Mozambique and the Republic of South Africa, Joaquim Chissano and Nelson Mandela, respectively, signed the “Agreement for Agrarian Development in Mozambique” and the “Agreement on Basic Principles of Understanding on Mosagrius Development Programme (APBEPM)” for whose implementation Mosagrius Development Society (SDM) was established a year later. The South African Chamber for Agricultural Development in Africa (SACADA) holds 50% of SDM capital and the Mozambican State the other 50%.

Within the context of the Mosagrius Programme, South African and Mozambican farmers went to settle in Niassa, but not on Lugenda River valley as stipulated in Addendum 2 of APBEPM. In Majune district, farmers ended up settling on the banks of Luambala and Luangua rivers. (Interviews with government and SDM officials in Niassa and Maputo).

In this district, which has an area of about 9,095 sq. km (UNHCR/UNDP:1997), a total of approximately 64,000 hectares was allocated to the Mosagrius Programme, of which 25,000 hectares were allocated to a group of communities. (Interviews with SPGC officials in Niassa, Lichinga, 1999). The Programme faced various kinds of difficulties in its implementation and, in 1999, only eight farmers- three Mozambicans and the rest being South Africans, integrated the Programme in Majune, having been stipulated modules of 1,500 hectares for each family. (Interview with SDM’s Eng. Tamele, Lichinga, 1999). However, it is worth pointing out that, if, on the one hand, there is lack of knowledge as regards the actual extension of the area currently occupied by each farmer, on the other hand, who actually holds the legal right to use that land is Mosagrius Development Society and not the individual farmers. (Interview with SDM’s Eng. Tamele, Lichinga, 1999).

Conflict/Demarcation

In the case under study, when a South African farmer taking part in the Mosagrius Programme settled in Majune, he annexed and occupied land belonging to peasant farmers from Issa Malanga community, including some cultivated plots. (Interviews with government and SDM officials in Niassa and Maputo; National Directorate for Geography and Cadastral (DINAGECA) Report, Interviews with Peasant Farmers in Issa Malanga).

As a way of resolving this situation and preventing future conflicts, government authorities decided to demarcate community lands, maintaining that it was a way of safeguarding those communities’ rights to land.

At a meeting that took place in Issa Malanga with government and SDM entities, some members of the community expressed their concern in relation to land requirements both for resettlement of the displaced from the war who were at the time still in Tanzania and Malawi as well as for the expansion of the community:

*“We’re sad here. The children who were born here will have nowhere to stay and cultivate.”
(Collective Interview with Men, Issa Malanga, 1999)*

I was impressed by the consonance between the opinions of both men and women interviewed and the different age groups regarding the geographical features that constitute the boundaries of their community: Canjeze river to the north, Luambala river to the south, Belanzuza village to the west and Namatuno creek to the east, though, I did not checked this information with the neighbouring communities.

In the demarcation process carried out by DINAGECA (National Directorate of Geography and Cadastral) and by SPGCN (Provincial Service of Geography and Cadastral of Niassa) the criterion followed was that of setting the boundaries of the communities at 3 to 5 km from the road along which they are established. (Interviews with DINAGECA, SPGCN and SDM officials). In other words, the boundaries mentioned by the community have not been taken into account, as illustrated in the following account:

“Many people said that the boundary was Luambala River, but it was very far [7 to 8 km] and we didn’t take that into consideration...” [Interview with an official from SPGC Niassa]

As it can be seen from the map in annex, the land demarcated for communities comprises a narrow strip along the road, therefore, with neither access to alluvium land nor to Luambala and Canjeze rivers. However, presently, the peasant farmers are only barred from access to resources located in the south, specifically to Luambala River and surrounding forests, since land concession within the ambit of the Mosagrius Programme has not yet covered the other areas, nor has it taken the extension initially provided for.

Generally, the Ayao use three types of plots which they use in accordance with the different seasons of the year. Thus, in the rainy season they, use the uplands, which offer good drainage; at the end of that season, they move on to plots that are adjacent to the land flooded by watercourses; and afterwards they use the land that was previously flooded (Amaral:203). Apart from having their territory significantly reduced, community members are now unable to carry out the combined use of the three types of plots referred to above, which represented an important strategy within that context of unirrigated agriculture. This fact is an extremely serious one if we take into account that periodic cycles of severe droughts, usually followed by floods, have been recorded in the country since the 18th Century (Newitt, 1997:234-237, 255; Medeiros, 1997:86).

The women and men interviewed in Issa Malanga are not aware that their land has been demarcated, and a large majority thinks that the demarcation was only established in the south between the community lands and the land allocated to the South African farmer. I can even attest that not even the structures of “traditional authority”, which in a way monopolised the information pertaining to this process, are aware of the actual extension of land which they are entitled to use.

Community members repeatedly stated that they were not against the settlement of the farmers on their land, but they did not agree with the procedures followed. They were

particularly unhappy about the fact that neither the customary law in relation to the settlement of newcomers nor their proposal in regard to the location of the new community boundary in the south have been taken into account:

“We didn’t want the whole of this jungle for ourselves... We wanted that the [new] boundary be that mountain.” (Collective Interview with Men, Issa Malanga, 1999)

Whilst as far as some government authorities are concerned, the problem has been resolved, community members think that it is latent and are not happy with the decisions that have been taken. They recurrently use the word “squeeze” to refer to the demarcation of their land and have the perception that it is a manoeuvre specifically directed against the community:

“We think that someone is directing them to squeeze us here, for us not to grow up in this village.” (Collective Interview with Men, Issa Malanga, 1999)

According to interviewed sources on location, on a visit to the community, high ranking government officials had reminded the South African farmer that he just had the right to use the land, and that it was not his because it belonged to the Mozambicans. They also assured the community members that they could continue fishing, hunting or recollection on land beyond the current boundaries, given the fact that those activities did not conflict with the interests of the farmer who would mainly be dedicated to agricultural production. (Interview with the *Mwenye* Issa Malanga and the peasant farmer Carlos D).

However, in practice, the situation is different, land has in actual fact been taken away from the communities, with the argument that the farmers had already undertaken investments on the annexed land (Interviews with officials from DINAGECA, SPGCN and an NGO called OPORTUN). This is a paradoxical situation, in which the State pronounces in its Constitution the right of Mozambicans to land, and in turn, it holds half the shares in the undertaking, which led to the plundering of several community lands, under conditions which put to risk their food security.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the current Land Act Regulation (Decree 66/98) establishes in Article 17 the right of passage of communities in relation to access routes, women and men in Issa Malanga see their access to basic resources such as the Luambala river and part of the forest surrounding it as well as the path leading to the river barred. In other words, there is some kind of disparity between what is stipulated in the law, the content of the political discourse and the day-to-day practices.

III. IMPLICATIONS OF INTERVENTIONS

Participation in Mosagrius conflict resolution

Let us take the above mentioned conflict resolution process as an example. Within the community, the *mwenye* did not convene any meeting open to the whole population to discuss this problem (Collective Interview with Women, Issa Malanga, 1999).

As previously mentioned, this conflict prompted at various occasions the presence, in the location, of several personalities from SDM management board, high ranking government officials from both the central and provincial levels and, in one occasion, even of the President of the Republic. In this process, the meeting, which led to the definition of the new southern boundary between the community land and South African farmer's land, was particularly relevant (Interviews with high officials at SDM and with several peasant farmers from Issa Malanga).

Though it was an issue that had impact on the lives of all the members of the community, a large part of the population did not take part and some women and men were not even aware that such a meeting had taken place. Also neither were present the young Muslim leader and a female peasant farmer who had been directly affected by the occupation of her plot and destruction of her production. (Interviews with Manuela Sucá, Mário Ali, Carlos D. and Bernardo Manuel, Issa Malanga, 1999).

Mainly influential men and preferably not young were summoned to the above mentioned meeting (Collective Interview with Women), as the *mwenye*'s brother, who took part in the event, was explaining: "it was a meeting of chiefs". In other words, it was an excluding process in which mainly the women were left out, even those who had been directly affected by the occupation of their plots."

During the whole process of resolution of this conflict, including the process of definition and demarcation of community lands, it is evident the "invisibility of women in the eyes of government officials..." as referred by Moore and Vaughan (1994:215).

By ignoring the women, by not recognising the knowledge they have about their community, by not considering them reliable interlocutors in the resolution of this conflict, these interventions of State bodies portray to the community a representation of power substantially associated with masculinity. By not recognising the important role of women within the community, they may put into test the social representation on the role of women and contribute to the eroding of the power they hold, in a society where access to land is effected mainly through them.

These facts are of particular importance given the fact that within a rural context, the acts of State institutions representatives, even those that are apparently insignificant, serve as reference, they represent behavioural models, in this case, models of authority and power

associated to masculinity and may even serve to legitimise processes of exclusion and inclusion within the “traditional” circles of power.

Consequences

According to the *mwenye*, the settlement of farmers had been beneficial since it had created an opportunity for wage employment and consequently for earning income to purchase bicycles and clothing, among other goods. The conflicts would have arisen only at the beginning and nowadays the farmer has good relations with the *mwenye* to whom he has said that “*he was his son and that now he was in his arms*”. The *mwenye* also made it a point to insist that now the farmer recognised his authority over the inhabitants of Issa Malanga, bringing before him those who, in the farmer’s opinion, had broken the law:

“When people from here misbehave or steal over there... [on the farmer’s land], now he usually brings them here...” (Mwenye from Issa Malanga)

If in the first case, the symbology of kinship is used to legitimate the relationship between the farmer and the *mwenye*, which would have a smattering of subordination on the part of the farmer in his role of “son”; in the second instance, the recognition of the *mwenye*’s authority is associated with his use by the farmer to serve the latter’s own interests.

Likewise, according to the *mwenye*, community members could continue cultivating land that was now part of the land allocated to the farmer as well as fishing in Luambala river and use the path of access to the same river. However, all these statements differ substantially from the accounts by women and men of different age groups and social status of Issa Malanga:

When I saw that... [the farmer] had taken my plot I was very sad, I cried... I was thinking: Now where will I farm? My plot had been taken away, where will I get food?” (Interview with Helena Sucá)

“Now we can’t go through this road [the one that leads to Luambala river] he [the farmer] usually forbids us [...] he says that we go there to steal. But that road has been there for a long time, he did not open that road.” (Collective Interview with Men)

Though the peasant farmers’ right of passage are enshrined in the law, as already mentioned, in practical terms, the relationship between the farmer and the peasant farmers is based on such unequal power relation and means such that, in effect, the latter see their right of passage barred in certain routes.

The loss of part of their land and lack of access to Luambala river and to adjacent forests has several consequences, among which a reduction of areas for cultivation in terms of quantity and quality. In concrete terms, the peasant farmers have lost the possibility of access to Nhamatuno’s mudflats/swamps whose use was shared among women and men from various communities, mainly for the growing of rice, and which are now part of the land allocated to the South African farmer. This is how the men’s group expressed their feelings:

“We used to go there grow vegetables [...], grow rice on the mudflats, gather mangoes planted by our forefathers...” (Collective Interview with Men)

Both women and men are now unable to carry out the recollection of a wide variety of fruits and edible plants, on which their diet was in part based, some of which grow next to the rivers and are used mainly during periods of severe famine, such as the *maculumo*, for instance. Likewise, if the Mosagrius Programme is implemented as per the plan, community members will not be able to collect the medicinal plants that exist in the forests, on which they depend to a large extent, given the fact that they neither possess economic means nor is there any health unit nearby.

Since it is a small community that started resettlement in 1996, after the war, the plots that have been cleared are still close to the houses and the women either use the branches of recently cut down trees or walk short distances to collect firewood. However, if all the land surrounding the community is effectively occupied as per the plan, the question to ask is where will the women obtain their only source of domestic energy that they currently have at their disposal.

By the middle of the 19th Century, dried fish was already one of the goods transported in caravans and traded by Ayao in their long-distance trade network (Medeiros, idem:37). Nowadays, the men from Issa Malanga find that the possibility of fishing has to a large extent been restricted, particularly in Luambala river and, as I could observe, men now have to travel up to the distant Lugenda river to be able to fish. Men have also found that the possibilities of hunting and collecting honey, activities ascribed to them under the current gender division of labour, have been restricted:

We used to put snares over there to catch animals [...] and used to catch fish in Luambala river. During the dry season, fish from these small rivers go away, only in Luambala and Luangua rivers there's fish. But now we can't..." (Collective Interview with Men, Issa Malanga, 1999)

Though goods such as dried fish, honey and game meat are in part traded, as a means of obtaining cash, the remainder is used for consumption. Therefore, an important household strategy, which consists of diversification of activities to complement their agricultural work, is at risk. The impossibility of carrying out these activities may bring about serious consequences in terms of food security of this population, mainly during periods of natural disasters such as droughts and floods.

Another activity to consider is construction, which is the responsibility of both the spouses and generally involves other community members through systems of mutual assistance such as *Kamuchiziana* and *Ci-Jau*². Since large part of construction materials, namely stakes, bamboo and vegetable fibre come from surrounding forests, restrictions to their access could render construction of this type difficult or even unfeasible.

Thus, the knowledge acquired throughout the generations would to a large extent become useless. The accomplishment of Mosagrius Project, pursuing the same approach so far

² Mutual assistance systems by which the members of the community collaborate in the carrying out of arduous tasks, in the case of *kamuchiziana* by provision of food and in the case of *Ci-Jau* by [provision of food and a drink brewed locally from fermented cereals.

adopted in Issa Malanga, would put at risk the way of life of women and men who live in that area, without, however, providing them with alternatives which would represent an improvement to their current living standards.

Both women and men in Issa Malanga regard as a benefit accruing from the Mosagrius Programme, the possibility of wage labour in the vicinity of the village, as an additional means of obtaining cash. Regardless whether the contractual regime is permanent, seasonal or according to task, the average wage earned would correspond to approximately 300,000MTS (USD20) per month. However, even the earning of this cash has been difficult due to subterfuges used by the farmer, such as dismissals, for instance, as reported by one peasant farmer:

*“When it’s month end... and time comes to pay the money, he orders dismissal without pay.”
(Interview with Bernardo Ali, Issa Malanga, 1999)*

This situation was publicly acknowledged in a newspaper article, which states that non-payment of labourers’ salaries by farmers who are members of the Mosagrius Programme had reached such proportions that the government bodies became concerned (*In Domingo*, 13 February 2000).

Violence and fear are nowadays part of the day-to-day life of the peasant farmers in Issa Malanga, since, as I learned, threats and even aggression by the said farmer are frequent as the following extract illustrates:

“I continue to fish in Luambala river, but I don’t go via the road, I go through the jungle, I even hide, so as not to cross paths with the [farmer], so that there is no danger.” (Interview with Mário Assane, Issa Malanga, 1999)

Some men questioned the idoneity of some “traditional authorities” to fully represent the interests of the whole community. The conflict with the farmer settled within the ambit of the Mosagrius Programme had put to test this institution and it had also brought to light the issue of corruption:

“When these farmers arrived [...] there were immediately problems and the mwenyes had an argument with them. After sometime they bribed the mwenyes [...] The problem still exists up to now, workers are beaten up. I, myself, got five punches. But the leaders don’t protect us, they say nothing.” (Interview with Mário Mitha, Issa Malanga, 1999)

“They gave bicycles, good seeds to bribe the chieftains. Usually, they also give lifts to the chieftains to town...” (Interview with António Sucá, Issa Malanga, 1999)

I particularly noticed the fact that the *mwenye* had mentioned to me just the benefits of the Mosagrius Programme and had neither mentioned the unfair dismissals as an excuse for not paying the wage nor the instances of threats and aggression by the farmer in question.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the importance of the male figures within the *mbumba* and of the character equally masculine of the so-called “traditional authority”, it is necessary not to lose sight of other aspects related to the status of women in this society. Particularly, the fact that the progeny line is established via the maternal side and consequently children belong to the mother and to her lineage; the centrality of women and the power they hold within the household; the right of women to male labour; the fact that they can inherit and that is mainly through them that access to land takes place, as well as their participation in decision making on the use of the benefits of production.

However, the interventions of a Programme such as Mosagrius or of the State structures themselves that led the process of land demarcation ignored this reality, overlooked women, portrayed to the community a representation of power associated with masculinity and contribute to erode women’s power position within this community.

It seems necessary to carry out new investigations into the reality of matrilineal societies, which analyse them for what they are and not for how different they are from the current hegemonic model, and particularly analyse their capacity to adapt to change.

This case study puts to test, among other aspects, the capacity of the State to enforce the law; the possibility of reconciling some of the ideological premises underlying the Constitution and reflected in the political discourse with the implementation of a market economy; the effectiveness of the macro-economic policies at community level.

The conclusions drawn by the case study may contribute to put to question some of the assumptions underpinning the Land Act and its Regulation as regards the real exercise, on the part of the communities, of the rights granted to them within the framework of the legal instruments referred to. By the same token, they may also contribute to put to test the capacity of “traditional authority” to represent the various interests of the members of the community, namely those of women.

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