Feminist Reflections

DEFEATING THE THREE-HEADED MONSTER: A FEMINIST REFLECTION ON GENDER

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The concept of *Gender* was originally created by feminist movements in order to assist the struggles for emancipation and equality between women and men. Nevertheless, in the last two decades, we have witnessed an exacerbation in the co-option and appropriation of the word and the concept for other purposes that have nothing to do with social transformation that generations of feminists have been fighting for all over the world.

Rethinking *Gender* means thinking critically, that is, asking questions about our reality in order to go beyond our background and also what is obvious. The main objective of this reflection has two main dimensions. On the one hand, it aims to denaturalize the discrimination, oppressions and privileges that exist based on different sexual identities and expectations built around them; on the other hand, to reactivate the potential of the concept of gender for the political and emancipatory transformation of our world.

Therefore, we start from the assertion that there is no Social Justice without Gender Justice to highlight the constitutive interdependence between Society, Justice and Gender, and express our commitment to a feminist vision of Mozambique and the world and the necessary and urgent transformations.

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Introduction

Gender is a concept created by feminist social and intellectual movements that allows us to understand the social construction of bodies and different sexual identities, as well as, the roles, behaviors and status which each society establish, in a given historical period. It is a way of giving concrete meaning to the existing unequal power relations, and also to the resistance carried out against the oppression generated by them. Therefore, Gender is a relational category that allows to explain the exclusivity of the privileges of some against the discrimination of the majority in the various spheres of life: personal, community, political, economic, cultural (Butler, 2004).

The concept of gender is an in permanent construction idea, as referring to social relations built around sexual identities, we need to consider the contexts, history, territories and bodies. Therefore, it is a complex concept and can have different meanings depending on the historical moment, society and culture where it is produced and used. So, it should be taken into account that there is no universal concept of gender that can be thought of, regardless the space and time. Its complexity comes, thus, from its ability to transform itself within each culture, assuming different priorities, different ways of explaining it, different social practices and expectations.

This reflection is a feminist essay on gender and it is structured as follows: Firstly, I try to rethink the concept of gender, placing the debates that brought it to the centre of twentieth-century feminist debates in time and space. I conclude by stating the political and epistemological principles on which I anchor the development of my reflection,

and which clarify my standpoint. Then I try to discern some of the characteristics of our current world and discuss why they are important for rethinking the concept of gender today. In the third section, I go deeper into the relationships between contemporary political economy, the victimization of women and beings who think of themselves as feminine, and I begin to state some principles for thinking about gender in a political way for emancipation. Finally, I reflect on the problems posed by the Mozambican reality without, however, losing sight of paths to the future and hope based on the experiences, ideas and horizons opened up throughout the Rethinking Gender project.

I. Rethinking Gender: the first steps of a path that are made by walking

In the late 1940s, French feminist Simone de Beauvoir asked, in her book 'The Second Sex', 'Why is a woman the Other One?' And answered immediately: 'It is about knowing how nature has been revised in her throughout history. It is about knowing what humankind has made of the human female' (1975: 67). One of the important contemporary feminist debates was launched: the social creation of femininity and masculinity. In other words, the concept of gender ceased to be a merely biological category, becoming an idea that allowed us to understand and explain the contingencies of what it means to be a woman (or a man) and highlighted the inequalities built around the invention of hierarchical opposition between woman and man.

From the 1960's and 1970's, in Europe and North America, Gender Studies have consolidated as a discipline. Born out of the intense feminist debates of the end of the century (Braidoti, 2011), although slightly different, Gender Studies and Feminist Studies deepened as the world system was dominated by neo-liberal individualism. It became clear that it was not enough to adhere to the concept of gender for the approach, processes and results to have a feminist character. The concept of gender, despite being the result of a strong criticism of socially and historically constructed systems of inequalities between women and men and, therefore, claiming a structural transformation of politics, economy, science and culture, has often been used to create essentialist ethics that maintain the subordination and minority of beings who think and represent themselves as feminine. From the 1990s onwards, several authors (Elson, 1992; Sparr, 1995) draw attention and show that both the cooperation and development policies carried out by the countries of the global north, as well as

African institutions such as the African Union and NEPAD seem to have adhered to this depoliticized version of gender in its programs and policies.

Although neo-liberal capitalism is an incubator of an apolitical and even conservative vision of gender, it acts in articulation with both patriarchy and contemporary forms of colonialism to impose a dominant, and even universal, vision of what should be the relationships between human beings who identify as women or men (Cunha, 2014, 2015).
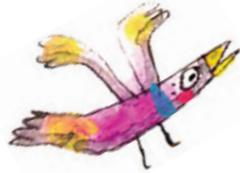
Questioning and rethinking the concept of gender aiming a fair and emancipatory transformation of the world we live enforces us to understand and assume, from the outset, that the neo-liberal globalization we live in weakens social ties, leaving helpless people vulnerable (Mate, 2017: 17; Tshabalala, 2015; Manzanera-Ruiz, 2009; Marín-Sánchez, 2006). The weakness of social ties and qualifying as obscurantists and obsolete all sociabilities that do not submit to the logic of capitalist markets (where everything is sold and everything is bought) produced an atmosphere in which gender became a product of exchange or brand of a group that is increasingly distant and insensitive to the real conditions of life of those people whom it calls women or qualifies as female. In the words of Akinbobola (2019), we are facing the flowering of neo-liberal and/or market feminisms that create what is called *gender blindness* under the guise of a rhetoric of *gender-sensitive* policies while offering approaches only market-oriented and not accepting substantive criticism of its inability to structurally change the state of affairs and

persistent inequalities, whether in the world in general or in African societies in particular. We therefore need to question whether the combination of the three main systems of oppression, which I call here the three-headed monster – capitalism, colonialism and hetero-patriarchy – makes room for social justice based on gender justice. The main challenge is to ask to what extent this *three-headed monster* is responsible for the prejudices and value judgments that transform half of humankind into unequal, vulnerable, incapable and subaltern beings and, therefore, unable to fully live their humanity.

Despite not being the main objective of this feminist reflection, the debates about gender and the need to rethink it are linked with the discussion about the very concept of woman. Many feminists have been discussing since the 1990s whether the concept of woman, which results from a dual vision of gender and which intends to be universal, is not, in itself, an oppressive and annihilating category of the existential diversity of these beings who think and claim to be feminine[1]. This debate has been led mainly by African, Asian and Latin American feminists, for whom their experience as black and chicana women was decisive in understanding the colonial and hetero-normative potential of the concept of woman born in western feminisms. Among others, I highlight the following: Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), Ifi Amadiume, 1998, Sílvia Cusicanquí (2010), María Lugones (2010), Karina Bidaseca and Vanesa Laba (2011) Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (2017)[2], Patricia McFadden (2018). They

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1. It is because I am aware of colonial and hetero-patriarchal potentialities that the category 'Woman' may contain that I use the expression beings who think and call themselves feminine in this introduction in order to clarify my analytical position. However, for the sake of economy of reading, I continue this reflection using the word 'Woman', even though in this use the problems and limits that I now clarify in this footnote are taken into account. Please, dear reader, when reading Woman in this Feminist Reflection, take into account that I do not assume any universalist drive in this word and concept.

2. The original book was published under the title *The Invention of Women*. Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses by the University of Minnesota in 1997.

stand for two main things. One: the concept of *woman* considered as universal hides the diversity of ways in which the different femininities exist in the world and express themselves, giving primacy to straight, white and Western identities. On the other hand, they highlight how this concept perpetuates conditions of oppression and discrimination

in the majority of people we are used to call *women*, inherited from European colonialism. Basically, these authors, who are also feminist activists, show how this dominant and mono-cultural concept of *women* can be a variation of the concept of *gender* co-opted by current neoliberalism that operates through patriarchy and new forms of colonization of territories, bodies of women and science.

Thus, I list some of the principles on which I lay my reflection on rethinking gender and which guide the analysis that follows:

- We, as feminists, need to go back to our roots and wonder, at all times, why, particularly rural women, displaced, disabled, elderly, children, fisherwomen, peasant women, *muqheristas* or informal sector sellers, living with HIV/AIDS, in the suburbs, are not fully involved in the society, movements and institutions with the power of decision? Aren't they women?

- We need to listen with extra attention to everyone, even those who don't want the same thing as us, who don't talk like us, who don't explain women's human rights

3 Since the Portuguese language allows the declension of the feminine and the masculine, and assuming that the universal masculine is a form of symbolic violence which should cease to exist, I will always use the feminine followed by the masculine in this text in order to politically and cognitively account for the diversity present in society

and feminism like us. After all, don't we all need to struggle side by side?

- We need to learn to appreciate the diversity of cultures, languages, cosmovisions and experiences that exist in our continent and in the world in order to create bonds, make alliances because no one is emancipated alone or closed in his/her own small world;

- We need a lot more than filling in structures and being numbers in graphs and statistics. Gender Justice is not only achieved by increasing the presence of women in state bodies, the judiciary or economic corporations; nor by the number of times the word gender appears in speeches and projects to please authorities and funding institutions;

- We need critical thinking; to break away from all *machismo*, sexist, homophobic and transphobic behaviors, even those that don't seem to be or that, inadvertently, we are accepting as natural. We need to question any *status quo* that drives most people away from decision-making structures;

- We need to understand that those who have privileges (most are men, rich and hetero) will keep benefiting if no one claims for justice. From the perspective of those who have privileges, sharing authority and power does not bring them any benefit, so they resist change and invent discourses and practices that demean those who want to change things. Therefore, democratic participation in decision-making processes is always a struggle and a dispute for which persistence, courage and a good dose of courage are required;

- We need to take advantage of all the strategies, invented by us or by others, in Africa or any other continent that can help us to live better, with more dignity and more justice. That is why we want the law of quotas and parity at 50% at all levels

of power and social structures; positive discrimination practices to compensate those who are still disadvantaged or who have had no other opportunities, whether in education, politics, health or employment;

- We need to question the State about its political will to effectively implement the good laws we already have as well as positively change those that no longer serve us. An advanced legal framework alone will not solve everything, but it is a key resource for ending impunity and protecting many social groups that continue to suffer systematic abuse and violence, especially girls, women and LGBTQ+ people;

- We need to accept and make people accept that we are not all the same and that there are differences between us, whatever our sexual identity and *gender*. In order to have Gender Justice, the principle of one size doesn't fit all must be guaranteed.

Repoliticizing the concept of gender means, therefore, making it capable of being a horizon and a tool for everyone who is ready to build justice with equal benefits for everyone and without the privileges of a few.

to take into account today, when speaking and using gender as a category, concept or idea with the aim of human emancipation from all oppression. I list below those that in my opinion are fundamental.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been an increasingly acute awareness of the deepening of structural inequalities in the world. The slogan *we are the 99%* that was launched by the Occupy movement in 2011 in the United States of America, intends to demonstrate this: 1% of the world population enjoys the well-being and wealth produced in the world versus the other 99% who live without being able to enjoy the benefits that their own work generates. In comparative terms, we can see that for the African Continent, the Human Development Index – HDI) for 2020 shows that, of the 32 with a low HDI, 29 are African. On the contrary, of the 66 countries with a very high HDI, 38 are European and of the 52 with a high HDI studied, 6 are European. There is no European country in the medium, low and very low HDI chart. This simple comparison demonstrates the extreme and persistent inequalities and disparities between different regions and continents of the world (UNDP, 2020: 347 ff.).

2.Taking another step forward: the concept of *gender* and the world we live in

Since the first formulations of the concept of *gender* and its dissemination from the 1960s onwards, the world has undergone deep changes. The diverse knowledge and feminist practices have identified new issues, limits and contradictions that are necessary

In our century, several political forces throughout the world that rose to power and formed authoritarian, economically neo-liberal, socially conservative and misogynist governments (Santos; Mendes, 2017). This conservative backlash of these political regimes, many of them pro-fascist, are against the human rights of women, and other sexual identities that do not conform to the male ideal: white-western-owner-warrior. They propagate the idea that the so-

called 'gender ideology' is the root of all evil. With this they seek to bring back what they call the 'natural order' of things. This includes maintaining male privileges based on their supposed intellectual, social and emotional superiority and advocating a return to the 'traditional' roles of men and women within and outside the family. This always means that the 'good' woman is the one who takes care of the 'home' selflessly and obediently.

In addition, these regimes and their currents of political thought have served to justify cultural, social and economic practices of dismantling rights and guarantees that call into question many of the gains made in the 20th century in terms of social justice and levels of equality and inclusion of women and the LGBTQ+ community (Moreira, 2019). On the contrary, gender has still been used to reinforce austerity and impoverishment policies, especially for girls and women and also for all other beings that represent themselves as feminine (Federici, 2013).

On the other hand, development cooperation policies carried out by countries in the global north generally adopt *gender* as a central requirement for accessing and enjoying the benefits made available to countries in the global south (Vietez-Cerdeño, 2017). Generally, this means that the organizations and institutions they support must demonstrate the 'gender sensitivity' of their policies and budgets. They must be available to change the parameters of their rhetoric, including Gender Equality and other similar expressions that become abstract principles without any transforming power. Furthermore, the concept of *gender* that is used is one that is thought and developed in western countries that take little or no account of the contexts, cultures and local knowledge of the societies to which it is exported.

This apparent centrality of *gender,* imposed from the top down, combined with the growing bureaucratization and technical control of cooperation projects and programs and the exacerbation of a conservative cultural atmosphere in the 'supported' countries has been generating several negative impacts (Akinbobola, 2019). I identify the following: first, is the reduction of the concept of gender to a bureaucratic criterion of eligibility to access funds and international recognition. This situation has exercised an often imperceptible but effective discipline on social movements and organizations, making their interpretations of gender, the cultural potential for equality between women and men existing in their cultures, their knowledge and transformation agendas irrelevant. Second, is the emergence of local elites of gender specialists who, without a critical spirit, become capable of mobilizing resources and relating to funding institutions without ever calling into question the neo-colonial potential that this system represents. Third, is to have created an organizational and political culture that often makes the concept of gender coincide with that of 'Woman', becoming yet

another instrument of discrimination and minimization of female identities, qualifying gender, derogatory to 'mere women's things'.

The experience lived throughout 2020 with the novel Coronavirus pandemic has exposed, among other things, the tragic depth of inequalities in the world and, especially, the permanence of vulnerabilities, discrimination and violence imposed on women of all kinds of ages and from all corners of the planet (Butler, 2020; Galindo, 2020; Federici, 2020). Of course, not all women and girls suffer to the same degree, nor do they face the effects of oppression and the pandemic on an equal footing. However, it is good not to forget that the millenary experience of women has taught us that no matter the crisis, calamity or tragedy, they are always the hardest hit, the least protected and the least listened to. Therefore, a *gender* category that assumes all its critical potential and analysis of inequalities is essential to understand what is really at stake. In this regard, it is argued in two senses.

Firstly, there is a systematic devaluation of the work of women and girls in our societies, especially care giving at the family and community level. However, these works account for the generation of a great non-payed and non-monetary economy, but one that never ceases (Federici, 2013). This means three things that must not be forgotten when rethinking the *gender*. First, it is proven that this economy, produced by women and girls, is three times greater than that of the entire technological sector in the world (OXFAM, 2020). Second, much of the wealth accumulation of the richest 1% of people on the planet would not be possible without the unpaid work of women and girls (Orozco, 2014). Therefore, inequalities are rooted in a concept of gender that subordinates and exploits work and determines the social functions and subordinate status of people who represent themselves as female.

Thirdly, the most insurgent reflections on *gender* today is the assertion that during this pandemic, the economy did not stop. Nevertheless, the economies that produce life incessantly have been functioning at their maximum capacity to protect, feed, shelter, cure, care, produce food, clean, support and love (Cunha; Valle, 2021). Without her, no one would have survived. For all these reasons, contemporary political economy needs to be rethought in order to rethink *gender*.

Thus, it is important to note that *gender* is much more than an analysis category or a relational category. *Gender* is an instrument for reading the world and imagining its transformation. Therefore, *Gender* Justice is much more than *Gender* Equality. It is not just about women and men and the relationships between them; it is not just about equal opportunities, the inclusion of different sexual identities in politics and societies. What it is really about is to think of a world where justice is materialized in the equitable distribution of material and symbolic resources; in the fully access of everyone

respect and dignity; in a division of labor in which we are all responsible for maintaining the conditions to flourish life and well-being for all; where gender is a permanent condition of resistance to all types of oppression and discrimination and without which one cannot enjoy all the goods that humanity and Mother Earth generate at every moment.

Therefore, thinking critically about the concept of gender aims to rescue its potential for structural transformation in order to arrive at a substantive and concrete social justice for all.

3.Rethinking gender: deepening relationships, looking for meanings, thinking about emancipation

3.1.The man woman dichotomy and what lays beyond

As I explained earlier, *gender* is a concept that aims, among other things, to read and explain the unequal power relations between different sexual identities that are socially constructed. For this reason, gender is different from the concept of sexual identity or sexual orientation. *Gender* always involves society's view and expectations of the individual and groups with shared identities. Sexual identity, on the other hand, is an intimate relationship of each person with their own body. It is how one identifies oneself, how one thinks and represents oneself as a female, male or other sexual identity that does not fit into these two groups. Sexual orientation is how each human being relates affectively and emotionally with other human beings, which includes the experience of their sexuality. This is another complexity factor that we must understand and take into account when thinking about gender and the structural oppressions that each person may be subject to.

Far from being a new idea, of which the LGBTQ+ movements have been their main messenger of our time, the sexual identities of human beings, which go far beyond the female-male pair, are a reality in many cultures and societies. For example, various peoples of origin in the Americas, such as the Dakota, recognize the existence of a multiplicity of sexual and gender identities within their national community (Jacobs; Thomas; Lang, 1997); the Bugi people of Indonesia recognize 5 different sexual identities that correspond to as many genders[4]. In India, there are hijra people considered to be the third sexual identity or third *gender*, which is beyond being a woman or man[5]. In Uganda, the Nilotic lango, Iteso and Karamojan people recognize a third sexual identity and *gender* which they call mudoko daka[6]. In Nigeria, there are the yan daudu (Sinikangas, 2004) and in Lesotho the motsoalle[7].

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4 See here: https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/mundo/2021/05/4924552-o-lugar-do-mundo-que-reconhece-5-generos-diferentes.html Last access in 15062021.
5 See here: https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/religion-context/case-studies/gender/third-gender-and-hijras Last access on 15062021.
6 See here: https://en.linkfang.org/wiki/Mudoko_dako Last accessed on 15062021.
7 Go here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motsoalle Last accessed at 15062021.

On the other hand, there are human societies where sexual identities are transitive, which means that, throughout one's life, they can assume different identities. Therefore, it also changes their behavior, their status and the way they think and are thought of by their communities and families. As an example, it can be pointed out that, in societies such as Igbo, in the current Nigeria, what determines the sexual status/identity in the family is neither the biological sex nor even the gender that was constructed until a certain point in life (Amadiume, 1998). So, there are biologically female people, who were raised as women, but who will assume the status of husbands in adulthood; or boys, biologically male, raised as boys who will assume the status of daughters. In several Amerindian nations in America, when a child is born, he/she can be recognized as a girl or boy during a certain period of life. When they enter adolescence, this can change completely: whoever was raised as a girl becomes a boy and vice versa.

This means that the diversity of sexual and gender identities is socially constructed, the result of historical contingencies and denying this fact, is a form of violence as it refuses integral humanity to millions of people.

As can be inferred from what has been presented and argued above, in many societies, *gender,* sexual identity and sexual orientation are said through other words and certainly through other ideas about expectations, behaviors or status that are attributed to different people. Thus, rethinking gender also means recognizing that the concept can be strange in certain human communities and that this word, and the contents we put into it, does not serve to say the pluralism of human experiences and knowledge in this regard. We also need to assume that we still have a lot to learn and that we still don't have the vocabulary to handle all this richness of identity that is inscribed in human bodies. As the well-known African saying goes, the lioness must

tell the story of the hunt, otherwise we will only know the hunter's or the lion's version.

3.2. The many claws of the three-headed monster: gender and intersectionality

Another important issue to discuss is the intersectionality of systems of oppression at both the personal, individual and social levels. Feminists have long understood that oppressions, to which the bodies and lives of female beings are subject, have multiple origins and act in layers, overlapping and mutually reinforcing. Thinking from Mozambique, it is important to remember that, during colonialism, women had already understood and experienced that it was not enough to be a woman to understand the discrimination to which they were subjected.
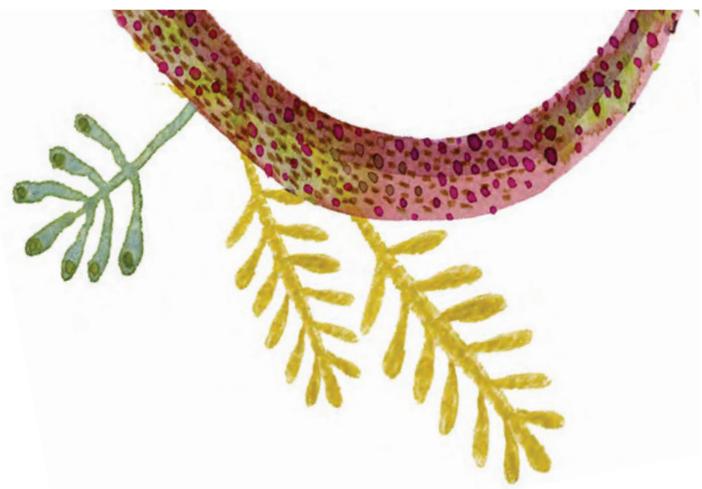
Being a black woman deepened her vulnerability to violence and poverty. However, being a black and illiterate woman, for example, exponentially increased the degradation of their social status and their possibilities of freeing themselves from the constraints imposed. We can see this masterfully explained in the poems of Noémia de Sousa, to give an example; or it is still explicit in several other works (Castelo, et al, 2012; History Division, 2000; Chilundo et al, 1999; Gentili, 1998).

However, the word intersectionality, a concept that allows us to grasp this articulation of multiple axes of inequalities, which intersect and accumulate to form specific forms of discrimination, was coined in 1989 by the black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). Since then, it has been widely used to designate the articulation of different factors, such as race, education, social class, literacy, sexuality, religion, physical appearance, which create layers of oppression or privileges that each one of us experiences. Intersectionality is not just about the multitude of what oppresses and violates us, but also about what can allow us to resist and act in favor of our total human dignity. Rethinking gender and activating its revolutionary vocation means, therefore, understanding those structural realities that can condition or free us.

From the idea of intersectionality, there is an issue that I think is very important to discuss. The so-called liberal feminisms fight for the representation of women in different structures of society without, however, calling into question these same structures. These feminisms, which are still dominant and well represented in cooperation policies, for example, are concerned with *Gender* Equality, often thought of as a formal requirement and abstract principle, rather than with the emancipation and effective transformation of living conditions of victimized and impoverished groups. They also place

emphasis on the individual experience of each woman or each being that represents himself/herself as such and on what each one manages to achieve for himself/herself. The focus is individual and centered on each person's merit to free himself/herself from what he/she considers to be his/her oppression.

Rather, I argue that intersectionality must be understood beyond our experiences as individual identities, subject to multiple juxtapositions of factors and aspects that daily influence our individual lives and the way we are recognized. For feminisms committed to a political vision of *gender*, the insistence on making the experience of intersectionality a mere individual issue has several negative effects that need to be identified and reflected upon.

The first is that it reinforces an individualistic view of the human experience, whether that of oppression or emancipation, weakening the ties and alliances that need to be built in order to transform the world. Thus, it is possible to justify welfare policies that aim to support those in difficulties, but without changing the regimes and systems that generate these vulnerabilities. In other words, insisting on a purely identity vision of intersectionality can lead us to a world where there are no, or not legitimized, political projects for substantive and concrete change in the conditions for realizing our inalienable human dignity. The second effect, which follows from this first one, is the loss of the eminently political character of this concept, as the systems of oppression that over determine the different individual existences are neglected. In this

regard, it seems appropriate, in this process of rethinking the concept of *gender*, to carry out a short reflection on what is called here the political economy of the intersectionality of systems of oppression.

At the epicenter of this feminist reflection on gender is the recognition that there are three major systems of oppression that act in concert and intersectionality. They are capitalism, colonialism and hetero-patriarchy. Each one of them enhances the destructive and violent character of the others.

3.3.Three hearts defeating the three monster heads. The *gender* of emancipation.

It is known that hetero-patriarchy is the most atavistic and transversal form of production of inequalities in the world. These inequalities are not just social and economic, but are above all ontological, that is, related to the dignity of each being. Hetero-patriarchy does not discriminate and minimizes only the female part of humanity, but considers that these beings are flawed in humanity on principle (Cunha, 2014). In other words, they are less human beings than males, invested with sovereignty over them by some order that transcends them. Furthermore, patriarchy is hetero-normative, that is, it defines heterosexuality as normal, and all other forms of sexual expression are considered deviant and monstrous. By sacralizing the figure of the 'father', not only from a biological point of view, but above all from a symbolic point of view, it makes it untouchable and unquestionable as shown in literature since the 1970s of the 20th century (d'Eaubonne; 1977; Rubin, 1977).

Through this philosophical and cultural artifice, the idea is created that the exercise of paternal power over the children and females of their group is not only natural, but also sacred. Any dispute or disobedience is absolutely intolerable and generates endless punishments. Hetero-patriarchy takes on many forms and hues depending on the history and concrete contexts in which it manifests itself. However, it is easy to see its existence and strength in the most cultural norms, in song lyrics, in oral stories, in literature, in political speeches or in advertising that is repeated over and over again on television or radio. Therefore, rethinking gender also means paying attention to how the concept is appropriated by patriarchy to reduce it to a technical measure, a bureaucratic criterion and a cultural weapon against the Human Rights of Women and the LGBTQ+ community. On the other hand, European colonialism, over the last five centuries, has been adding layers of exclusion, indignity, exploitation and devastation to colonized bodies and territories. Of all of them, it has been those of the women - and of all the other identities that do not conform to patriarchal masculinities - in the colonies that have been most affected by this violent drive for conquest and exploitation. They were turned into a bargaining chip to carry out political alliances; they were and are equated with cattle for the purposes of trade and the accumulation of wealth for their masters; they have been treated as mere incubators for slaves, for soldiers to die in wars or for cheap labor; they are conceived as objects of men's sexual pleasure, soulless, voiceless and unwilling; they are the brute and silenced labor force to whom no right or agency is recognized, much less wisdom or ability to think and decide.

Thus, in addition to the discrimination already exercised by hetero-patriarchy against women, colonialism actively produced a new condition that was even more excluding and violent for most of them. The division between human

beings became abysmal: there were now human beings with the maximum dignity: that would be the white European males; human beings with diminished dignity: white European women; beings with little dignity: colonized men; and beings without any dignity: colonized women (Cunha, 2014; McFadden, 2006; Mama, 1995; McClintock, 1995). Furthermore, colonialism co-opted to this ideology of exclusive male privileges the local elites who saw in this opportunity an effective way to increase and maintain their power and accumulate their power and wealth at the expense of the lives, work and bodies of women of all ages.

It can be argued that with the political independence achieved in the last century, colonialism ended. However, a close look at reality shows that many facets of colonialism remain active. There are still colonies that are under the political purview of western countries. Many of the colonial-type relationships, such as slave labor, continue to exist in many parts of the world. This is also evident in the way in which, in contemporary cultural practices, and under the argument of African authenticity, the beliefs of male superiority in private, community and public life continue to proliferate and how this has led to the multiplication of crimes against their life and the dignity.

Finally, capitalism, as a dominant economic system in the last three centuries, rests on two main pillars: the first is the idea of the capitalist market as the only functional one that acts as a self-conscious entity and with a universalist and totalitarian purpose; the second is that everything can be sold and bought (Orozco, 2014). Who can buy, own and decide what has or not value, is the person who has wealth and power to do so. It is clear that these are the 1% who are mostly white males from the United States of America and China. They thus become the measure of all things. Furthermore, capitalism has reduced work to a commodity that can be sold and bought,

contrary to the secular idea of work as a human activity that provides for the necessities of life (Polanyi, 1944/2001). Therefore, he invented the idea of opposition between the space of productive, salaried work and the space of reproductive, unpaid work (Federici, 2004; Cunha, 2015). One of the major consequences that follows from this is the idea of a sexual division of labor that naturalizes spheres marked by the essentialization of the feminine and the masculine and reinforces gender expectations based on the subordination of identities that see themselves as feminine.

For capitalism it was necessary to invent the woman as a 'housewife', responsible for the care and infrastructure of life and the necessary conditions for production and the consequent accumulation of capital. At the same time, it was essential to make all this work invisible and subordinate. Therefore, the work of women and girls has been qualified as non-work, that is, menial activities, or considered to be things of their nature, which they cannot avoid doing. Therefore, the work of women, performed outside the industrial sphere, services and monetized commerce, that is, those that are carried out in the domestic or community space, as they are not paid, cease to be work or, at most, they are considered reproductive work. In this scope are all the works that escape the mercantilist logics of accumulation, profit and individual benefits. All of these works were devalued and proclaimed as not essential to the so-called global economy. However, it is they who guarantee the conditions without which life cannot exist during all environmental, food, health, food, security, political and economic crises.

The three-headed monster pressure on our lives and the lives of our communities and nations is continuous and powerful. Achieving Social Justice with *Gender* Justice requires us to look carefully at these realities and discern how they emerge and act in our societies. Transforming our lives and the world, therefore, implies clarity about our goals, about our resources and limits, as well as about our abilities to denaturalize the idea that little or nothing can be done to change the current state of affairs. Gender, in its most powerful sense, allows us to show that these things are social constructions and that, through our citizen and solidary political action, another world can emerge with other rules and with more human horizons.

One of the most urgent and hardest tasks is to know how to bring together the different struggles for rights, recognition, representation and access to resources of al sorts. All fights are important and necessary. In order to recreate the revolutionary vocation of the concept of gender, it is important to realize that although, at certain times, some struggles may go ahead, at others, others will take the lead. The strategy is to reinforce each fight with the others. It is to forge every day, a path that is made on the way, mutual commitments articulating ideas and ideals; talk and collaborate to achieve the goods

that are common and the benefits that will accrue to everyone. This task requires an understanding of reality and a deep practice of democracy, including valuing diversity; the break with personality cults and individual achievements as the paramount life goal. Perhaps this is the hardest work we have ahead of us: incessantly looking for what can unite us and what can empower us to make progress individually and collectively. There are neither more or less pure feminisms nor more or less enlightened feminists. Accepting these classifications means that we let ourselves be divided and misunderstood in the essentials: acting to transform our lives and transform the world so that we all fit into it with the utmost dignity and respect for our differences and our stories. Recognizing, uniting and caring are the hearts of our emancipation and will defeat the monster. They are also the reasons that can support our struggles from the past and today, and can be said as follows:

- We must **acknowledge** that there are unequal power relations based on sexual identities

- It is necessary to state that this inequality has generated death and all sorts of violence, discrimination and unhappiness and that we need to **unite** to end them;

- It is essential to mobilize the knowledge and experiences forged in these sufferings to take **care** of **ourselves** and take **care** so that nothing can stay the same.

Mozambique: the open paths to feminist justice for all

I advance with the following thesis: Social Justice is either feminist or it is not. This statement is based on the revolutionary character of a concept of gender that

I recognize as being able to read and problematize the reality in which we live, questioning and denaturalizing the systems that produce violence and discrimination, as well as the privileges that exist based on different sexual identities. In this sense, there cannot be Social Justice without Gender Justice. In this sense, I argue that Justice is a horizon towards which we direct our gaze, our actions and also our hopes; and a tool that allows us to gather the strength to make the path, walking.

It is a process of deep democratization of social and political relations and of our minds. Therefore, democratic, concrete, viable and fair alternatives have to take into account the different spheres of social life, recognizing and valuing the knowledge of the peripheries, be they geographic, political or identity. Thus, we will be able to bring to the fore all the democratic resources that exist within our cultures and societies rather than the violence and authoritarianism that is emerging as a way of governing and controlling. A feminist perspective of a feminist justice seeks democratic alternatives that can transform our societies into truly inclusive political projects. Changes begin when after reading our world we are able to imagine the world we want. Rethinking gender must not escape this double exercise.

Starting from the present Mozambican reality, I will then point out some of the problems that I have identified and that concern us, and then present the thirty horizons, one for every million Mozambicans, which recognize themselves in their diversity; are united to achieve peace and prosperity for all; and take care to guarantee a dignified future for all of your children.

I list the most critical as follows: (Cunha, 2021):

a) Mozambique is a country where the majority of the population are women, especially young girls. The prevalence of girls' early and forced marriages is very high; HIV infection is over 13% and affects 3 times more women than men; violence against women reaches alarming levels - one in 3 reports that they have already suffered some type of violence in their lives; only 1.4% have secondary education and in rural areas 71.6% are illiterate; women are responsible for providing food and caring for vulnerable and/or dependent ascendants and descendants. There is no data available on the LGBTQ+ community or the problems they face but a recent partial assessment by LAMBDA (2021) show that violence against this community is a reality;

b) Mozambique has about 30 million inhabitants and has only 2,473 doctors, of which more than 400 are foreigners. According to a study by the Ministry of Health, there is less than one Health Unit per 10,000 inhabitants. The census, carried out by the National Institute of Health also reveals that 19% of the 1,643 health units do not have electricity, 12% do not have a water source inside or on the premises of the unit and that 21% do not have a bathroom for patients;

c) In Mozambique, as in many other countries, emigration for economic reasons is a transversal reality. Forced displacements for reasons of war, involuntary resettlements due to the massive exploitation of the country's agricultural, mineral and energy resources and those due to environmental tragedies are also reasons for serious concern. Women and girls are even more vulnerable to violence, health problems, in particular sexual and reproductive health, violation of their rights and guarantees of rights, drastically reducing their ability to live
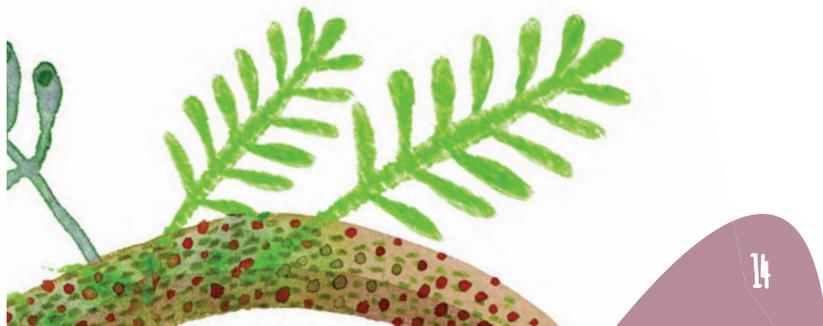
their lives with dignity and respect. This reality of forced displacement and resettlement increases the risk of infection by the new Coronavirus and other endemic diseases, aggravating its consequences. Human mobility in these cases is no longer a right to become more of a risk to life;

d) Military conflicts in the centre (Manica and Sofala) and the war in northern Cabo Delgado) of the country are causing the destruction of essential infrastructure (bridges, roads, health units, schools, administrative offices); the death of thousands of people; the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands; the cut in the supply of essential goods for life; the rapid urbanization through an drastic increase in population concentration in provincial or district cities; widespread fear and panic; the normalization of violence as a method of conflict resolution; and the increase in female prostitution as a bargaining chip for access to essential goods for survival;

e) In countries such as Mozambique, the capacity to disseminate information at national level is quite limited. In addition, the linguistic plurality of the country, its territorial extension, the absence of mass communication infrastructure (radio, television, cell phone, newspapers) and the weak capillarity of State services in many areas of the country, particularly in remote rural areas, where a good part of the population is concentrated, introduces another risk factor in an alarm situation;

f) Freedom of the press and expression has been under threat in many ways. In addition to some people attacked, others were murdered and several journalists were arrested and some have been missing for months.

g) Just like many other countries in Africa, Mozambique has a very porous economy being strongly dependent on foreign aid. There is practically no industrial fabric and the country is totally dependent on the outside for manufactured products. Food sovereignty is seriously threatened by the massive importation of agricultural products from abroad and by the lack of investment in peasant family farming and nearby commercial circuits. This means an enormous weakness in the face of drastic changes in the global and regional economy. In the event of a calamity, the country has profound difficulties in responding adequately to the challenges that are posed to them.

The process of rethinking the gender that results in this essay is the result of a collective project initiated by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation – Mozambique – which was only possible to carry out with the constant practice of discursive democracy among all the people involved. Over several months, ideas, difficulties, projects and experiences were discussed and shared. This process resulted in several reflections that are at the base of the vision of the world and society that I present below. The main lesson learned collectively is that gender, as we have thought and rethought, is fundamental in everyone's political action to live in societies where:

Where there is no room for violence

Therefore, the first thing that has to be done is to recognize that women and girls, as well as other discriminated sexual identities, have been, over the centuries, the people most victimized by all types of violence, especially in times of conflict, disasters, crises and pandemics. The second is to ask for forgiveness, publicly, as a society, for all the times we have remained silent or were, in some way, instruments of symbolic, physical, sexual, economic or emotional harm. The third is to implement more public policies with concrete and effective measures to protect them. Thus, in our feminist Mozambique:

• There is permanent collaboration between public entities and Civil Society Organizations to reach everywhere, means of denouncing any violence, such as the creation of free emergency telephone lines and a national network of institutions, such as pharmacies or associations, places with the tools to refer victims and report their aggressors to the competent police and judicial bodies;

• We have teams trained and equipped with adequate means to support women and girls by implementing immediate mitigation measures such as their quick removal from near by the aggressors;

• We have a national network of Safe Houses, properly equipped and operational to receive victims of threat, consummate or life-threatening violence, especially women and girls;

• We work together with local, formal and informal leaders, to identify and highlight cultural practices and beliefs that enhance equal power relations between women and men and positive conflict resolution;

• We have public health and education policies to promote joint work with local leaders, doctors, journalists, nurses, educators to culturally and politically delegitimize all acts of violence, showing that they are against our culture and identity and everyone's well-being

• There are Permanent Dialog Forums, at regional, provincial and national locations, where elected members of civil society, the State and companies participate to collaboratively identify problems related to violence and decide what to do to resolve them;

• No aggressor goes unpunished;

Where health is well taken care of because it is a common good

National priorities were reversed. Our greatest collective investment is made in social areas such as education, social security and health. Environmental disasters, war and pandemics have taught us how important it is to pay special attention to the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls, as well as their mental and emotional health. Without health and without them healthy, the whole society gets sick. We are expanding what we already have with the following measures:

• We have a public policy on family planning, sexual and reproductive health services, especially for pregnant women, nursing mothers and victims of sexual violence, with mobile, trained and well-equipped teams. Whenever necessary, they are able to perform their functions remotely using local radios and cell phones and other means that are available. In these teams there is always one or more people who speak the national languages of the territory where they work;

• We have a public policy of mobile teams made up of different health professionals with special training and adequate material to be able to provide primary health care and psychological support, particularly in remote areas of the country or to displaced populations. Whenever necessary, they are able to perform their functions remotely using local radios and cell phones and other means that are available. In these teams there is always one or more people who speak the national languages of the territory where they work;

• We have in all existing health facilities the means for counseling, family planning and free access to contraceptives, especially those of long duration. Therefore, there are practically no teenage pregnancies or obstetric fistulas;

• All health units in the country have electricity, drinking water and basic sanitation and health professionals have an adequate and sufficient supply of medicines and health protection equipment such as: reusable masks, disinfectant solutions, disposable gowns and gloves, among others;

• The state and government have public policies to regulate and control the implementation of the same health security conditions for private actors such as: companies in industry and commerce, services, intensive agricultural production, transportation and media;

• We have established circuits of rigorous information about the risks arising and measures to prevent the COVID-19 pandemic, HIV/AIDS, and other endemic diseases in the country. This information circulates in different languages and through various means of dissemination to reach everyone: SMS messages, radio, television (on open signal), posters, T-shirts, special calendars, among others;

Where women's work is recognized, valued and their rights guaranteed

We recognize that the care economy carried out by women and girls, is the largest and most resilient of all economies. Feeding, cleaning, protecting, teaching, producing and processing food, emotionally supporting family members, teaching children to grow up happy and healthy, farming, are some of the jobs that almost every woman in Mozambique ad throughout the world carry out. Thus, these activities, repeated day by day, with effort and courage, are necessary for life to happen and worth living. In addition,

the women trade, have jobs, sew, fish, are workers or saleswomen. If women stopped working, inside and outside the home, the world would stop. Therefore, in the world we want to live in:

- We have fiscal protection policies and the creation of transport and sales infrastructure to make viable, value and support the short production and commercialization circuits of food and other essential goods, carried out, especially by women;

- We have new employment protection laws that prohibit dismissals in the event of a crisis or pandemic and provide tax breaks to companies that keep jobs and comply with all labor rights. These laws are being permanently monitored by teams duly trained for this;

- Health security units are created to support entrepreneurs in the so-called informal sector;

- The ministries of economy and finance, together with organizations of the so-called informal sector of the economy, are creating mechanisms to assess the real economic value of this economy to incorporate the wealth produced in the calculation of the Gross Domestic Product – GDP of the country;

Where citizenship for all is a daily experience of sharing authority and power

It is known that wars, pandemics and other crises and disasters affect women and men differently. In many cases, the impact on women's lives is not only uneven but more violent, disproportionately hitting them as well as all those who depend on them. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that they, in their diversity, be able to decide on their lives and on those of their communities. They need to be present from the moment we start thinking about what to do, until the moment we assess what has already been done and decide what to do next. In our feminist Mozambique, the equitable sharing of authority and power to decide is as important as the very reason for existing. For this reason, we reject the idea that one size fits all and we have the following policies:

- We have the full Parity Law (50%/50%) as well as fully operational implementation and inspection mechanisms;

- The total parity of 50% women and 50% men applies to all levels and expectations of public life and involves women and men from various generations, from various sectors of society (civil society, state and economy), from all regions, speakers of several languages and with different types of skills;

- The freedom and independence of the media is guaranteed, guaranteeing everyone's rights to inform and be informed. There are no threats, no harassment, no attacks on those who think differently. On the contrary, the critical sense is welcome because we know that it is with it that we can move forward;

• We carry out a permanent and democratic oversight of the actions of security forces, police and military through secure mechanisms for reporting abuses, neglect and corruption, especially perpetrated against women, girls and the LGBTQ+ community;

Where Social and Gender Justice means peace, bread, housing, health and education for all

It is essential to create and maintain democratic processes of reflection and decision to reach peace and a development model based on sexual justice, food sovereignty, biodiversity preservation, the use of natural resources for the benefit of all and in the effective prevention of climate change. This requires the establishment of public policies that are necessary for a fair redistribution of wealth and the establishment of an effective and lasting Peace.

• The Law, and its implementation and inspection mechanisms, have already been approved, of a Minimum Universal Income attributed by the State to all people who need it, namely women heads of households, to guarantee the right to a live life with dignity of everyone. The access to this income is decentralized and non-bureaucratic and is based on the presumption that each citizen is a person who neither lies nor cheats;

• A moratorium is in place to guarantee the supply of electricity and potable water, free of charge, to everyone during any state of emergency and in the subsequent phase of social and economic recovery;

• Daily inspection of prices practiced in formal and informal markets for goods essential to life is carried out and there are legal mechanisms for penalizing companies, traders and other economic agents that artificially cause shortages with a view to price speculation;

• We have joint commissions made up of women and men, from different sectors of society, for a broad dialogue with a view to the democratic revival of the Nation, in order to pursue the path of equitable, just development in harmony with Mother Earth;

• United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325/2000 on Women Peace and Security is being implemented to its fullest extent and forms part of the school curricula of all primary and secondary education as a educational tool for peace, human rights and transformative resolucion of violent conflicts;

• The whole country is at peace, the different religious and linguistic groups respect each other and the entire population benefits equitably from the riches that are common;

• No one tolerates or accepts any kind of corruption and abuse of power. Anyone who transgresses the law is denounced and punished according to the democratic rules we all help to build;

• We have a country free from hunger, transgenic seeds and pesticides. The knowledge of our peasants is respected and enters into a dialogue with other knowledge to produce safe, nutritious and sufficient food;

• The concessions of the Right to Use and Enjoy the Land – DUAT for tens of years and thousands of hectares

for the mega-projects that kill the land, exploit our wealth, displace our families and destroy our ecosystems and our lifestyle are forbidden;

• Women, girls and people of the LGBTQ+ community know that their bodies are their own, that they are gifts of their own pleasure and that the dignity and integrity of their bodies are respected and defended. That's why they dress as they like and that doesn't pose a risk or a danger to them;

• We continue to be able to dream every day about the world we want to have and make it happen.

Rethinking the *gender* is very exciting. We have to denaturalize beliefs long taken for granted; admitting many ignorances we didn't know we had; relearn how to be together and think collectively for the greater common good; join forces and build alliances; remain available to fight and to hold hands so as not to leave anyone behind; take care of our past, our present and the future of our children.

This is a reflection started, but never finished and it is this feeling of incompleteness and constant challenge that makes the world move and makes this concept, which has been so mistreated and co-opted, to return to what it was from the beginning: the radical feminist idea that we are different but we are equal and that we will only be saved in communion. ■

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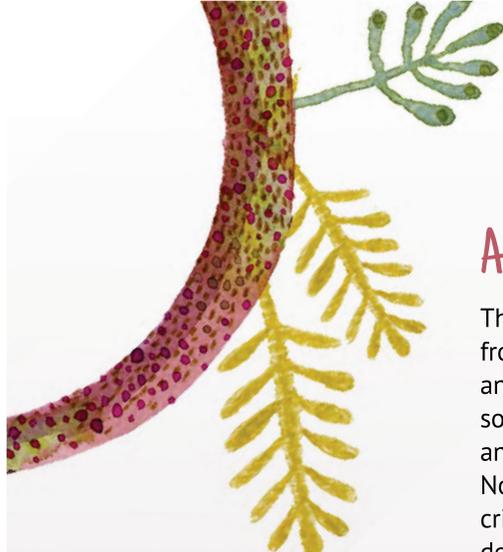
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The "Feminist Reflections" series shares relevant dissertations from the collective work of the African Feminist Reflection and Action Group. The group includes 40 scholar feminists, social activists and progressive women from trade unions and political arena of different regions of Africa. Since November 2017, the group has been meeting regularly to critically discuss the challenges arising from neoliberal development patterns and the current negative political reactions against women to contemporary African feminist activism. The meetings have been facilitated by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung office in Mozambique.
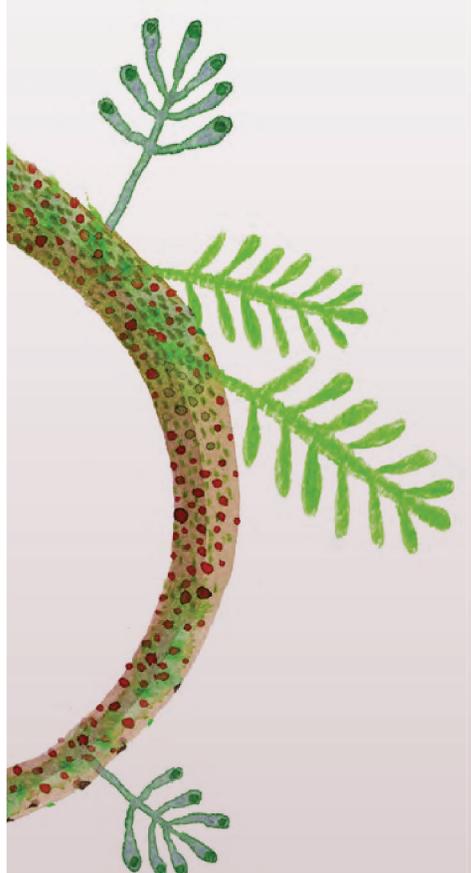
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