



ÁFRICAS NA PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO



FINDING NEW COPING MECHANISMS: THE IMPACT OF HIV AND AIDS ON WOMEN'S ACCESS TO LAND IN MOZAMBIQUE

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A sessão *Áfricas na Pós-Graduação* apresenta resultados de pesquisas de Mestrados e Doutorados concluídos cujas temáticas, linhas de abordagem, procedimentos metodológicos e/ou contribuição teórico-conceitual são considerados relevantes.

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Biografia acadêmica da pesquisadora. Sónia Marisa James Seuane terminou seu curso de Bacharelado e Licenciatura em Antropologia

Cultural na Universidade Eduardo Mondlane em 2002. Em 2008, concluiu o Mestrado em Artes no Institute of Social Development at the Western Cape University com uma dissertação consagrada ao impacto que a pandemia do HIV e SIDA teve nas estratégias de subsistência das mulheres rurais em Moçambique, destacando a navegação das mulheres moçambicanas nesta dura época.. Desde então atua como antropóloga, pesquisadora e consultora

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Abstract: In this thesis, I focused my discussion about land as major asset in a poor and mainly agricultural country like Mozambique. And the fact that many scholars and policy makers are concerned about the escalating number of young widows that have had their land and other assets expropriated after the deaths of their husbands, mainly due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The convergence of the colonization process, the civil war (that took over 16 years in Mozambique) and the modernization and development process has been systematically trapping women in the interface between traditional and modern social organization. Now, with the spread of HIV and AIDS, young women and children whose only source of subsistence is their land have been losing their traditional rights, and they face the cultural changes brought about by a new social order, which does not support them after the death of a husband or father.

How can you define your master's thesis?

This text is a summarization of my Master thesis submitted in 2008 to the Institute of Social Development at the Western Cape University. In the study, I explored the impact that HIV and AIDS pandemic had in the livelihood strategies of rural women in Mozambique. My intention was to highlight the navigation of Mozambican women through this harsh era.

What was the objective that guided the research?

The overall objective of the study was to analyze the coping mechanisms related to land and livelihoods that women adopted and still using, as a strategy to survive the impact of HIV and AIDS in a new social order. The study focused on the perceptions and representations that women had about those new rules and how they positioned themselves as social agents in the society. It also examine the impact of the modernization process on their relationship with the land as they navigate tradition and modernity.

Can you explain the context of the thesis research?

Owing to the largely unexplored nature of the topic, the study was exploratory and descriptive held in six districts of two provinces of Mozambique. Research methods largely focused on a sample of approximately 60 individual interviews with selected women, community



leaders, local government officials and community members during a considerable period of time (more than a month with constant feedback sessions with the main stakeholders). My role as researcher as a young western educated woman was crucial through all process; my own personal conflicts of modernity and tradition were valuable to the outcomes of the research.

Living conditions in Mozambique have been particularly difficult, and it is becoming one of the most threatening times for Mozambican girls and women, especially. We are living in the era of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. More and more women are losing their partners and rights to resources such as land, communities are losing their cohesion and supportive networks and children are growing up in a very testing environment. Above all, it is very difficult to predict what the future will be like for Mozambicans. Current research studies are mostly focused on the clinic aspects of HIV and hardly any are concerned with the consequences which the pandemic has for the social cohesion and dynamics of Mozambican villages and communities.

This study was to understand how AIDS pandemic further complicates Mozambican woman lives that have already been complexed by colonialism, patriarchy, civil war and modern capitalist structures.

AIDS is affecting adults in the prime of their lives and as a further consequence we have been witnessing a loss of the social fabric of norms and values that protected women and children's human rights (their access to land and other determinant resources and services). This situation forces many women to become heads of their families and to struggle to endure in this severe environment. They have to resort to different cope mechanisms in order to guarantee their own and their children's survival. Many of the strategies they are adopting are harmful and pose life-threatening risks to them, while other strategies challenge the social order that was imposed based on different gender norms, although many women resent the new roles that they now have to assume.

Land is the most important asset that Mozambique has. Of the total population, 80% depends on agriculture for their subsistence, and about 65% lives in the rural areas (PARPA, 2001: 5). Recent debates around this topic point to the unanimous view that agriculture is the major factor in the development of Mozambique and women are the main source of subsistence food production. The republic's constitution stresses that land is the universal means of enrichment and



well-being for the people and because of that, it ensures that access to land is the right of the all-national citizens without any kind of discrimination, including gender discrimination.

Although the Mozambican Land Law of 1997 (19/97) guarantees equal rights among all Mozambican citizens, customary law continues to take precedence over constitutional law. Several empirical studies (Norfolk, 2004: 25-28; Tanner, 2005: 15;; Seuane, 2005: 4-8) point out the gender inequality in the access and control of land; to be more specific, “being men or women” determines the distribution of the assets within the family, the community and the country.

Mozambique has been through many processes that influence the social fabric (values and norms) of its communities. The colonization process, with its emphasis on assimilation into Portuguese culture alongside the strong support of the Christian church, created an “African otherness” (Chilisa, 2005: 660). After Independence, a civil war raged for 16 years, leading to debilitating factors such as: population migration, impoverishment, loss of families networks and location, and the creation of new forms of livelihood based on individualism, utilitarianism, etc. In the aftermath of the civil war there was a massive introduction of developmental politics and practices which in the long run resulted in failure because they were, and still are, based on principles unfamiliar to the local realities and contexts. Finally, the HIV and AIDS pandemic added its burden to this situation.

The past four decades, we have witnessed the spread of the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) in Mozambique. Only in the last two years, was estimated that 38.000 people died with AIDS related causes (CNCS, 2022). This pandemic is already considered one of the most destructive epidemics in recorded history (UNAIDS, 2005). Many reports warn of the dramatic situation in the Sub-Saharan Africa, which is already called the epicenter of this pandemic, and most critically warn about the high prevalence rates among sub-Saharan women (UNAIDS, 2005: 6; Müller, 2005: 10; UNAIDS, 2004: 3). The same reports assert that sub-Saharan Africa is home to 25.8 million people living with HIV - the equivalent of 66.6% of all people living with HIV world-wide and home to 77% of all women with HIV. The IMASIDA (2018) estimates the prevalence in Mozambique at 13.2%, with a very large difference between the sexes, with the highest prevalence being among women, with 15.1% compared to men, which is between 10.2% (2018, Spectrum).



This HIV and AIDS era is marked by a notable growth in the number of young widows with young children that have land as their only source of subsistence and who have been victims of the expropriation of their land and other assets (Villareal, 2006: 1; Munthali, 2002: 14). Although Mozambique has endorsed a number of international and national laws that guarantee the propriety rights of all citizens, particularly women, customary laws still direct the lives of rural communities.

The existing literature shows that research about HIV and AIDS has only been undertaken in recent years. Although the impact of the pandemic has been felt for several years, researchers did not go beyond clinical and public health concerns. Research has been conducted into the impact and incidence of HIV and AIDS in specific sectors such as transport, fishing, mining, and more recently agriculture. Within the agricultural spectrum we can find literature on land issues and production systems. In Africa, this kind of research is more common in the Anglo-Saxon tradition with countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi leading the literature (Izumi, 2006: 2). Therefore, as many authors substantiate, investigations into the impact of HIV and AIDS on women's land rights and access, inheritance and women's impoverishment because HIV and AIDS are even more recent (Müller, 2005; Villareal, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2003; Munthali, 2002; Izumi, 2006). Some authors as Chilisa (2005: 661) believe that this lack of knowledge about the impact of the HIV and AIDS on people's lived histories and social organization is the crucial factor in the failure of all the efforts to reduce and prevent the alarming spread of HIV and AIDS.

Many studies on gender issues by e.g. Wanyaki (2003: 68), Meer (1997: 15), Whitehead and Tsikata (2003: 16), Bonate (2003: 100) and others have demonstrates that women's access to land rights is insecurely based on customary law, and that access usually depends on their link to a male relative (father, brother and mainly husband). As Meer (1997: 18) points out, married women are often forced to remain in problematic, or even violent, relationships in order to secure the income and other resources vital to their own and their children's survival. Thus, as Villareal asserts, single women, divorced women or widowed women are disadvantaged in their access to land. However, women are the main work force in the subsistence agriculture (Villareal, 2006: 2), and in many instances, the responsibility of the group's food security is in their hands. Theoretically, there is no common tribal law stating that women cannot have access to land in their



own right, but in recent years more and more women have been prevented from having access to land by powerful gender hierarchies and inequalities as well as women's lack of the tools needed to be integrated into the so-called "global economy".

In this scenario, Mozambican women are dealing with the consequences of colonialism that have burdened and institutionalized patriarchy in its aim to shape the colonized in its image. Women have to deal with the capitalist development structure that in many cases neglects their needs and role in the community contexts; they have been displaced and witnessed the loss of their cultural identity in the age of the civil war. After surviving all this, women have now been struck with the HIV and AIDS pandemic that is in many circumstances reversing a not so friendly gender reality, thereby creating a more difficult and uncertain future for them and their children.

Given these circumstances, the question that arises is: What does all this mean for the women and how will women adapt and cope with such pressures (loss of their rights to land and partners, patriarchy, civil war and modern capitalist structures) in order to survive?

The overall research question addressed in this thesis is: Given the influence of the historical contexts of colonization, the civil war, development and the modernity process that Mozambique has undergone, what are the coping mechanisms related to land access and retention (livelihood mechanisms) that women are adopting as strategies to survive the impact of HIV and AIDS?

The main objective of the study is to analyze the coping mechanisms of women in the HIV and AIDS context.

The main research objective is supported and deconstructed by several specific objectives that allow for a better reflection on what this research trail should be. It was of most importance to understand the perceptions and representations of change that woman have about the influences that the three phenomena (modernity, civil war and the development practices) have created in Mozambican society. It was also necessary to analyse and understand women's perceptions about their role and identities in society. This has resulted in an interesting research exercise as the women, despite their apparent submission to the social rules and norms are in many instances challenging those norms in order to survive, although many women are not comfortable with the new roles that they now have to assume.



As land is central to the overall analysis and to Mozambican women's lives as prime food producers it was necessary to describe the women's relationship with land – whether it is spiritual or cultural (traditional); whether it is only economical or practical (more modernized). In the context of the current social phenomenon, it is indispensable to identify the core social norms and values which have become more modernized; and to identify which social norms reflect the traditional systems regarding land (livelihood) access, control and property rights.

One of the main conclusions of this work is that at the crossing point of modernity and tradition, the social norms are being transformed and re-interpreted fundamentally, placing women and their children in a vulnerable position. The fact is that there is a social and values crisis and, in those moments, individuals do whatever they feel right in pursuit of their objectives.

On the other hand the women of Tete and Cabo Delgado districts had different coping strategies some of these include women entering spaces that “traditionally” were relegated to the men; many others are based on their local knowledge of seed conservation and planting; the “traditional” brewing of local drinks and baking cookies; the management of the manufacture of herbal medicine and other strategies related to food production and saving money through informal safety networks.

Another strategy found, was women's engagement in transactional sex in order to boost the household incomes. Often women even accept being in problematic/violent relationships to achieve both monetary stability and social respect. The problem of this copy mechanism is that in the era of HIV and AIDS, this strategy can lead to infection or re-infection of women in an environment where she has few possibilities of surviving this pandemic.

What is your impression when completing the thesis?

As a final analysis, it was important for me, as researcher, to reflect on how I, as an educated African woman, understand the perceptions and representations of the women of my society.

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