

COMMUNITIES' PRACTICES OF PROMOTING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND OTHER KNOWLEDGE IN MOZAMBIQUE

PRÁTICAS COMUNITARIAS DE PROMOÇÃO DA SAÚDE SEXUAL E REPRODUTIVA E OUTROS CONHECIMENTOS EM MOÇAMBIQUE

SILVA, Lurdes da Balbina Vidigal Rodrigues da.¹

Abstract

This paper has the objective of describing three ways of the communities' practices of promoting sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and related knowledge in Mozambique, namely: direct daily teaching and direct participation of the young in the community's activities; initiation rituals; and oral literature. The methodology of the study is based on literature review on papers about SRH in Mozambique and data analyses from ARPAC² data on Mozambican culture and heritage collected in the 1980.

Key-words: Communities' practices, sexual and reproductive health, initiation rituals, oral literature.

Resumo

Este trabalho tem o objetivo de descrever três maneiras de práticas de promoção da saúde sexual e reprodutiva (SSR) e conhecimentos relacionados em Moçambique, nomeadamente das comunidades: diária de ensino direto e participação directa dos jovens em actividades da comunidade; rituais de iniciação; e literatura oral. A metodologia do estudo é baseado na revisão da literatura sobre documentos sobre SSR em Moçambique e analisa dados de dados ARPAC sobre a cultura moçambicana e do património coletados em 1980.

Palavras-chaves: práticas "comunidades e saúde sexual e reprodutiva, rituais de iniciação, literatura oral.

Introduction

¹ UEM/Moçambique

² A major Ethnographic study made by the Government in Mozambique in the 1980's

This chapter has the objective of describing three ways of community practices of promoting sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and related knowledge in Mozambique. Mozambique, as many other African countries, has an oral culture and tradition, although it is also greatly influenced by written culture. The country was formerly a Portuguese colony until 1975. During the colonization period, the Mozambicans were forbidden to use their languages and customs under the pain of severe sanctions by the Portuguese administrators. The African languages and oral cultures were seen as inferior and the Mozambicans had to assimilate Portuguese culture and language. For instance, to get a public job during the colonization period, Mozambicans had to speak Portuguese language fluently and they had to assimilate the culture as thoroughly. As a result of the Portuguese policy of eradicating local cultures, many Mozambicans were forced to embrace Portuguese customs and left behind their own African cultures, languages, religions and beliefs. Upon gaining its independence on 25 June 1975, rather than rejecting this colonial legacy, Mozambique adopted Portuguese as the official language as well as the language of national unity.

Currently, Mozambique has a population of about 23,7 million (INE 2012) and it is a multicultural country. There are about 21 cultural groups and minority Indian and Asian communities, whereby the following are the largest three cultural groups: Changana (in the south region of Mozambique), Sena (in the center of the country) and Makuwa (in the north region).

According to INE (2012), only 6.5 % of the Mozambican population speak Portuguese as their first language, whereas 93.5% have one Bantu language as their mother tongue. Furthermore, **only 60% of the country's population speak Portuguese** and those are mainly in urban areas. Most of the country's population speaks one or more of the Bantu languages. This implies that most of the countries citizens' knowledge, including the promotion of sexual and reproductive health (SRH), is transmitted (apart from the formal institutions such as schools) orally, through the following means: direct daily teaching and direct participation of the

young in the community's activities; initiation rituals; and oral literature (Rosário, 2007).

These three means of transmitting SRH and other knowledge to young people are going to be described taking into account the following questions: who teaches; when do they teach, what do they teach, to whom do they teach, and why do they teach? The analysis will be done in the three main languages/cultures in Mozambique, namely: Changana (south region), Sena (center region) and Makuwa (north region).

The methodology of this study results from ARPAC³ data on Mozambican culture and heritage which has been collected in 1980 but have never been analysed and from literature review on papers about SRH in Mozambique.

1. Direct daily teaching and direct participation of the young in the community's activities

According to Rosário (2007), in the three main regions of Mozambique (north, center, and south), the family and the community are responsible for transmitting knowledge to children and young people. For Rosário (2007), it is under the family scope that the young find space to learn the “science” and everything that will enable his/her integration in the community life. The Words and gestures are the two main instruments for the youth exercitation, not only for the tasks directly linked to the family but also to the community. The family and community provide knowledge for youth integration in the community daily, based on their gender, although the contents taught are complementary (Rosário, 2007; Martínez, 2009; Pesquisa Etnográfica de Moçambique, 2010). Thus, from the early stages of life in Changana, Sena and Makuwa communities, girls observe and practice women's daily activities and boys observe and follow men's activities in the community, according to their age. For example, girls learn how to clean the house, cook, and take care of the

³ A major Ethnographic study made by the Government in Mozambique in the 1980's

younger siblings by first observing and following their mothers' and other community ladies' daily activities and later by executing the tasks themselves. This process of learning is quite similar to the *Caipiras* education in Brasil. The Brazilians *Caipiras* also have an oral culture. According to De Campos (2011), the Brazilians *Caipiras* boys and girls learn their activities by observing, first, and by helping, later, their fathers and mothers daily activities. By the age of 12, both boys and girls are able to perform adults' activities.

Boys, for instance, learn how to fish, hunt, build a house, and other activities by helping their fathers and other communities' men in their daily activities.

As a result of these daily activities, girls and boys acquire knowledge on how to behave in the community, learn basic health practices, their role in the community and other important issues for their community integration.

However, there is a particular moment when boys and girls are educated together. This occurs at night, during the fraternity moment around the fire, where boys and girls sit together to acquire knowledge from the oral literature, a content that will be explained later in this chapter. Thus, an adult or elder person from these communities is responsible to tell oral literature, with more emphasis on the oral short stories to the youth. The oral short stories have the objective of both entertaining and educating the young people and other communities' members (Rosário, 2007).

2. Initiation Ritual

In the three cultures, youth need to pass through initiation or transitional rituals in order to be considered and accepted as an adult. This is a second ritual, out of the four rituals, after the birth, followed by marriage and death rituals. These rituals correspond to the cycle of life. The initiation or transitional rituals are very important

in rural areas as they focus on three main aspects of the individual in society: the sexual and reproductive health, the role of woman and man in society, global knowledge to be accepted as an adult in society. Kotanyie and Krings-Ney (2009) point out that initiation ritual educate the youth to behave respectfully between genders and generations. After this ritual, the youth is considered ready to get married and they can actively participate in their communities' life. Otherwise, the person who does not participate in these rituals is never considered as an adult, even if he/she is at an elderly age. For example, Kotanyie and Krings-Ney (2009) report the case of men from Zambézia province, in the central region of Mozambique, who had not taken the boys' initiation ritual during the period of temporary prohibition in the early 80. According to Kotanyie and Krings-Ney (2009, p. 494) the "men from Alto Molócwé who had not undergone initiation (due to its temporary prohibition after independence) were put under such social pressure that after the end of the Mozambique's civil war in 1994, they took part in the boys initiation rites retroactively. Moreover, the young learn that they should not talk about themselves and not even with adults and elders because talking about sex in these societies is a taboo.

As mentioned before, the transmission of knowledge and SRH in the society is based on gender. Thus, the initiation ritual is delivered mainly in most rural areas and suburbs of the cities in North and Central regions of Mozambique, by adult specialists, to boys and girls separately, and at a very distinct moment in time, as described below. Each ritual based on gender in Sena, Makuwa and Changana cultures.

2.1. Girls' initiation rituals

This ritual can be done in groups or individually. Although there are some variations between the north, central and south regions of the country, its contents are similar, differing only in their methods of teaching.

2.1.1. Girl's initiation rituals in Sena and Makuwa culture

Between ages 8 and 10, Sena and Makuwa girls, are submitted to a ritual to increase the vaginal lips. This ritual is called, in Sena language, *kukhuma matinji* and in Makuwa the ritual is called *othuna*. This ritual is taught by a godmother (*sankulo* in Sena) or a popular lady in the community, and it has the objective of exciting the partner during the sexual act (ARPAC, 1980; Kotanyie and Krings-Ney, 2009; Pesquisa Etnográfica de Moçambique, 2010). At that age, the godmother teaches the girls how to push vaginal lips, twice daily – very early in the morning and evening, with oil from a plant called *ricino*⁴, until they reach a desired length. To push vaginal lips to get *matinji/othuna* the girl first sits on the floor, opens and bend her legs, and secondly, she greases her thumb and forefingers in *ricino* and patiently, slowly and repeatedly starts pushing them out. The length of *matinji/othuna* is considered normal according to the wishes of the girl and the advices of the godmother. The girl only stops pushing *matinji* (her vaginal lips) after delivering her first child.

When girls start their first menstruation, the godmother or an adult woman, provides counsel/advice, teaches them how to clean/hygienic care, how to behave. Moreover, a girl learns that she should never have sexual relations during the menstruation period. While menstruating, the girl should never use salt while cooking. These measures, as it is believed in the communities, prevent girls from infections and the boys from hernia and other food contamination (ARPAC, 1980; Pesquisa Etnográfica de Moçambique, 2010).

After the menstruation, girls are considered to be ready to pass through initiation ritual. This ritual is actualized by educators who teach girls to take care of their body on a daily basis (hygiene and beauty, including during menstruation and pregnancy); take care of her husband; and take care of her family home.

⁴ Castor oil

In relation to the first point (take care of the body daily and during menstruation and pregnancy), the educators emphasize the importance of cleaning the body daily, pushing vaginal lips, as well as using *missangas*⁵ and other jewellerys to become beautiful (Bagnol and Mariano, 2009). Educators and other ladies participating in the ritual, also advice girls on issues related to pregnancy and how to prevent pregnancy using some herbs and cultural knowledge (Pesquisa Etnográfica de Moçambique, 2010). Additionally, girls are instructed on how to behave while pregnant. They learn that they should never have sexual relations during pregnancy and that they should avoid some foods such as monkey meat, turtle, and fish (Mwamwenda, 2005; Pesquisa Etnográfica de Moçambique, 2010). This will make their body healthy during that stage and the baby will be born strong, and without the features and behaviours of those animals.

Later, the educators teach how to take care of the husband, as shown:

“(...) ensinam-lhe também que deve ter um pano limpo que deve ficar debaixo da almofada para usar depois de dormir com o marido para limpar, este pano não pode se deixar à vista de outras pessoas. Depois de manter relações sexuais, a mulher deve limpar muito bem e com cuidado o sexo do marido com aquele pano, não é acabar de fazer sexo e virar pra o lado, não, ela também deve usar o pano para limpar o seu sexo para não sujar a cama. Ensina-se que a mulher deve ser activa quando tem relações sexuais com o marido, como beijar o marido, tem que respeitar os familiares do seu marido e que deve deixar sempre o almoço pronto para o marido” (Matrona, Mossuril, Entrevista individual) (Pesquisa Etnográfica de Moçambique, 2010).

“(...) they also teach them that they must have a clean cloth under their pillow. The cleaning cloth is to be used to clean their husbands after having sexual relation. This cloth should be kept in secret and should not be shown to people. After having sexual relations, the women must clean, very well their husband's penis with that cloth, and they should not turn to other side after sexual relations, and they must also clean their vagina to prevent the bed from becoming dirty “(An old woman, Mossuril, Individual interview) (Pesquisa Etnográfica de Moçambique, 2010).

According to the citation above, within this ritual, girl learns how to treat a man during sexual relations, how she should move her body during sexual relations, how and where to kiss her partner, how to clean herself and her partner after sexual relations, respect her husband's family and have meals prepared for her husband on

⁵ Small, rounded, and colored balls used by girls and women for beauty purposes

time. Additionally, girls are taught to never refuse to have sex with their husbands (Kotanyie and Krings-Ney, 2009). Furthermore, during this ritual, girls are taught to be housewives: to organize the house, receive guests, deal with their husband, their husbands' family and the whole community (ARPAC, 1980; Pesquisa Etnográfica de Moçambique, 2010).

2.1.2. Girl's ritual in Changana culture

Differing slightly from the Sena and Makuwa cultures in the central and north regions of Mozambique, in Changana culture, in the south of the country, girls are not submitted to the initiation ritual. However, the contents taught when girls get their first menstruation are quite similar to those taught in Sena and Makuwa cultures. The godmothers teach the girls how they should clean themselves, how they should hide the menstruation because it is considered as an impure state, and that they should never have sexual relations with their partners during menstruation (ARPAC, 1980; Kotanyie and Krings-Ney, 2009; Pesquisa Etnográfica de Moçambique, 2010). It is important to note that girls from the south of Mozambique do not have the ritual of pushing vaginal lips or *labia minora* or *matinji/othuna*. In relation to pregnancy prevention, some community's traditional healers are responsible for keeping some intimate things belonging to girls in order to avoid pregnancy. If the traditional healer dies and the girl does not know where she has buried the stuff, she will never get pregnant in her life.

In addition, knowledge about how women take care of the house and the husband is only taught when girls are about to marry. The lessons are not exhaustive as those that are taught in the Sena and Makuwa cultures. The Sena and Makuwa cultures girl's initiation rituals cover all aspects of the communities' life, with emphasis on the sexual education and its practices.

2.2. Boys' initiation rituals in Sena, Makuwa and Changana cultures

When boys reach puberty, they are submitted to the initiation ritual. In the three cultures, this ritual is delivered by the community's specialists with the purpose of teaching boys how to behave as adults, how to behave in community meetings, how to cope with marriage life and other important issues in the community. Within this ritual, boys are taught to respect the adults and the elders' word. Furthermore, boys are taught traditional dances, culture and stories. However, the circumcision is no longer done during the initiation ritual. Currently, most boys are circumcised in hospitals, by surgery, at the early ages, before starting the initiation rituals.

It is important to point out that in the Changana and part of Sena cultures, boys are taught to see themselves as superior and girls as inferiors. Boys learn that the role of girls is to give birth and take care of the house and family. If a woman does not give birth, she has no value for the family and for society at all. She is compared to a tree which does not give any fruit. For example, Kotanyie and Krings-Ney (2009, p. 495) point out that "a woman is socially recognised as a full person after motherhood".

Differing from Changana and Sena cultures, in Makuwa culture, boys learn to respect girls. This difference might be related to the fact that the Changana culture has a patriarchal lineage while Makuwa's has a matriarchal lineage. In the patriarchal lineages, man has the power to control the family because he is the main resource/source of the family's income. As a result of this, boys/men learn since childhood that they are superior to girls/women and that the girls/women function is to take care of the house and the family (Altuna, 2009). In the matriarchal lineages, the woman is the main source of the income because the main activity of this type of society is agriculture (Altuna, 2009). Therefore, men's view of the role of women differs from that in the patriarchal society. The Sena culture has both matriarchal and patriarchal lineage because it is located in the central region of Mozambique and has the influences of both lineages.

3. Oral literature

The word is the main vehicle of transmitting knowledge about unwritten values in societies. It is through the spoken word that all the knowledge and comprehension of socio-cultural, religious, norms and behaviour of such societies is organized. Being that the word is the main vehicle of transmitting knowledge and societies' moral values, there is a whole literature produced by the word and that literature is found in all societies' spheres, relating and describing the essential aspects of these societies life (Finnegan, 1974; Altuna, 2009).

Oral literature is, therefore, an expression used to refer to a set of oral texts in the form of prose or verse that are transmitted orally from one generation to another. The terminology was first used in the 20th century by the French Paul Sébillot in his book published in 1881 and entitled *Littérature Orale de la Haute-Bretagne* (Sousa, 2006; Souza, 2015).

Among such vast oral literature can be mentioned: oral short story, proverbs, poetry and songs (Finnegan, 1974; Ribeiro, 1989; Junod, 1995). **Oral short stories** are short narrative texts. They include legends, myths, fables and parables. **Proverbs** are popular knowledge phrases that give us advices, suggestions, and teachings. **Poetry** is the poem that is conceived and transmitted orally without the use of writing. These types of oral literature are presented in all local languages in all regions of Mozambique by adults with the objective of entertaining and educating within the communities' moral values.

The oral literature presents the following main characteristics: (i) **antiquity** because it is impossible to identify the date of its creation; (ii) **persistence** due to the fact that the texts are subject to modifications and alterations as they reflect the values, desires and needs of the communities; (iii) **unknown author/collective author** because it is difficult to identify the author. This makes the text as part of the community; (iv) **orally** as it uses the word, with the use of rhythm, intonation, gestures; and (v) **co-presence of the narrator and the audience** in the same

space. In delivering oral literature, both the narrator and the audience are present (Finnegan, 1974; Sousa, 2006).

The oral short stories, considered to be the most representative type of oral literature, are especially told, in all cultures, by adults and elderly people during the nights near the fire (Rosário, 2008). The reason to choose this period of the day is to avoid lazy people in society. Rosário (2007) points out that the oral short story is the main vehicle of transmitting communities' knowledge as it covers all aspects of the society's life. That is, the themes of oral literature cover all aspects of society. Thus, oral short stories are used to solve many community's issues such as youth desired behaviour, SRH issues, community code of conduct, family life, marriage, friendship, etc.

The process of retaining knowledge by oral literature is through listening, memorizing, imitating/repeating and retaining (Da Silva, 2012).

Followed are presented, in a table, one example of a proverb and one of a song from Sena and Changana cultural groups:

Types of oral literature	Example	Meaning
Sena Proverb	<i>Mwendo ubodzi una vina utse?</i> (One foot can dance <i>utse</i> ?) Utse – is a traditional dance of the Sena cultural group.	This Sena proverb criticizes the individualism: one foot alone does not dance. You need the other foot – two feet – to dance <i>utse</i> .
Changana Proverb	<i>Kufunda kudlisa avutomi</i> (The education feeds the life)	This proverb points out that education is the key to life success.

Sena Song	<p><i>“Ntchunu ntchunu asa ntcherengesa”</i> (his waist is causing his pain);</p> <p><i>“Mamuna nkulu wa ipa nsolo iwe”</i> (The big man has lost his mind or he is gone immoral) (Thadzi, n/d)</p>	<p>This song criticizes a man with many mistresses. The song says that the man's behaviour in relation to women (because he has got many mistresses) is responsible for his pain. This is an advice about good sexual relations.</p>
Changana Song	<p>A ka Mukovelani nzi nga ta há phinda Ku famba wusiku (<i>I will never walk at night in Mukovelani</i>)</p> <p>Hakuva a mateka teka nzi tekile a milhoyo yo tala (<i>because I practice polygamy by marrying wives from several cultural groups</i>)</p>	<p>This song is an advice for those who have many wives. As polygamy, he is no longer free to walk at night in that region because all people know him.</p>

Source: ARPAC and Local Song in Sena Language

In conclusion, the transmission of SRH information and other knowledge in Mozambique takes place mainly through three means: direct daily teaching and direct participation of the young in the community's activities, initiation rituals, and oral literature.

In relation to the first means of transmitting knowledge, there are no significant differences between the Sena, Makuwa and Changana cultures. Adults of the communities and the family are the main source of transmitting basic knowledge for the children's integration into the communities' life, based on their gender.

The second means of transmitting knowledge in the Sena, Makuwa and Changana cultures is by the means of initiation ritual. Initiation rituals are mostly common in the rural areas and suburbs of the center and north of the country. This ritual marks the transition from childhood to adult life. Godmothers, godfathers and community's specialists, and traditional healers are responsible for executing this ritual. The contents of teaching differ between the two genders: girls from the Sena and Makuwa groups are mainly taught issues related to the daily body hygiene, pushing

vaginal lips (*matinji/othuna*), as well as use *missangas* and other jewelleryes for beauty. Girls from the Changana group do not undergo this ritual. However, their godmothers and some traditional healers are responsible for teaching them knowledge related to their SRH.

The last means of acquiring knowledge in local communities is by oral literature. All communities' knowledge is transmitted orally, by the spoken word. Adults and elders are the main sources of transmitting communities' knowledge to the youth. Oral short story is the most representative type of oral literature and it is told at night, around the fire. It covers all the areas of the communities' life and aspirations.

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