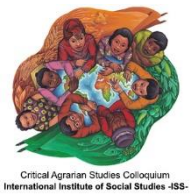

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Navigating spaces between the stomach and the purse: food securing, gender and agricultural commercialisation in northern Mozambique

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Navigating spaces between the stomach and the purse: food securing, gender, and agricultural commercialization in northern Mozambique

Katharine Howell

Abstract

"The reason there is food insecurity here is that people sell all the food they produce."

In Nampula province, northern Mozambique, this is how development agencies and government extension workers frequently explain local food shortages. In this region, people practice agriculture and secure their food in liminal spaces. Between the stomach and the purse. Between chronic malnutrition and poverty, between what the hoe can produce and what money can buy. Farmers negotiate trade-offs between caution against the vagaries of the market, and the need to participate in the cash economy, from buying soap to paying school fees.

Transitions from subsistence to commercial agriculture across the world have been well documented and critiqued. However, the changes to agriculture and rural life such transitions entail are often more incomplete, ambivalent and contingent than these accounts suggest. What can insights into the embodied, everyday experience of life in the margins between subsistence and commercial agriculture tell us about food sovereignty?

This paper draws on 16 months' intensive ethnographic fieldwork in rural northern Mozambique to explore the agency of smallholder farmers in positioning themselves between subsistence and commercial agriculture and negotiating the trade-offs involved. It considers the gendered dimensions of such negotiation, especially the commercialisation of sexual relationships. The paper also examines how colonial and contemporary agricultural interventions have reinforced the subsistence/commercial dichotomy and hence particular gender dynamics. It asks how future farmers' movements could address the challenges and frictions of participation in both commercial and subsistence spheres, valorising the creative and ambivalent ways in which local people maintain moral economies, navigate increasing inequality, and manage to secure food for their families.

Introduction

Before embarking on the doctoral research on which this paper is based, I studied for an MSc in 'Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security' at a UK university. After my first PhD fieldwork visit to Mozambique, I was speaking to a renowned plant scientist in charge of the food security post-grad course. 'I can't believe I didn't know what a cassava plant looked like before I went to Mozambique,' I told him; we had studied almost exclusively the holy trinity of well-funded research: wheat, maize and rice. 'Maybe you could think about including cassava in the course'. He

thought about this for a moment, and nodded in indifferent agreement. 'Yeah, we could do a bit more on *novel* crops, I guess.'

Nearly a year later, Flávia's[1] house was in flames. We glimpsed the shimmer of heat in the air before we could see the smoke. It was towards the end of the dry season; her children were roasting peanuts in dried grass near the house and within moments the roof was alight. Everything was destroyed: money, documents, clothes, plastic buckets and aluminium pans crumpled like burst balloons, only a handful charred coins and erotic beads emerging intact from the ash. The recently harvested store of dried cassava stacked carefully inside the house smouldered on for days, impervious to the buckets of water friends and neighbours carried up from the river.

The day after the fire, I visited Flávia and her husband Eduardo as she sat crying in the shell of her home, her posture, gestures and words echoing those of a bereavement. In the fire, she and her family had lost not only their possessions but their food security: the peanuts and rice they had stored, the seeds they had saved, and in particular the dried cassava that was supposed to see them through the 'difficult time' between the start of the growing season and the first harvests.

A few days after this – the fire had finally burned itself out – I was working in a field near Flávia's house. I was with a group of women who were harvesting onions but they suddenly stopped and straightened up to watch a procession of women carrying basins of dried cassava on their heads move along the road and take the path up to Flávia's house. At the head of the procession was the mother of Flávia's son-in-law, who lives in the next neighbourhood. The women with her were members of her church: not Flávia's friends or neighbours, connected to her only by this convoluted relationship, but mobilising to her aid in a time of crisis. Later in the week, the men and women of Flávia's own church gathered early in the morning carrying their hoes, to help Flávia and Eduardo harvest the cassava they still had in their fields. They had originally intended to leave this for another year to increase in size, but now they had no option. Without cassava, how would they eat come February? Without cassava, what would they sell to raise the cash to pay their children's school fees, or to buy cooking oil, or to begin rebuilding their house?

As the weeks went by, Flávia and Eduardo started to come to terms with the disaster and find ways to survive the growing season, but some of the implications of the fire were beginning to be felt elsewhere. The family reliably produced large amounts of dried cassava and compared to some local families, sold a small proportion of it. This meant they held plenty back in reserve for the 'difficult time'. This meant that if other households were struggling to get enough food, they could do a deal with Flávia and Eduardo, exchanging a day's farm labour for a basin of dried cassava. The poorer households in the community regularly relied on this system to ensure their food security. But if Flávia's cassava store had gone up in smoke, what would that mean for them?

The question that nagged me as I witnessed these events was this: How did this South American tuber – 'a novel crop' in the eyes of conventional agricultural science - come to play such a central role in determining both life and death of people living in northern Mozambique?

[1] All names and locations have been changed.

Cassava (also known as manioc, or *mandioca* in Portuguese) was first domesticated in Brazil and introduced to what is now Angola in the 1600s, initially in the fields of Portuguese settlers. By the late 1700s, it was replacing millet and maize as the staple crop in the disintegrating Kongo kingdom, preventing famine during a period of uncertainty and political volatility thanks to its resilience and long harvesting period (Vasina, 1966). Vasina suggests that cassava was being grown in northern Rhodesia by the end of the nineteenth century, brought from Angola by Ovimbundu traders. Yet in twenty-first century Mozambique, cassava is crucial to the livelihoods of small-scale farmers, not only as a famine crop but as a cash crop too. It is key to involvement in political economies, but is firmly embedded within moral economies as well. How do people interact with these different spheres on a daily basis? What are the tensions and trade-offs between them, and what does that mean for food security?

This paper uses the example of dried cassava to explore experiences of navigating the liminal spaces between political and moral economies. It draws on 16 months of intensive ethnographic fieldwork in a rural neighbourhood in Mozambique in 2015 and 2016. This research is particularly timely as it sits within the region of northern Mozambique where in the Nacala Development Corridor, the site of several current controversies over changes to and the commercialisation of agriculture, as well as a long history of economic and agricultural interventions through the colonial, socialist and neoliberal eras.

I first sketch out the theoretical context of these liminal spaces, using insights from moral economies and feminist political ecology to explore how we might theorise lived experiences 'between the stomach and the purse' (Nally, 2011). I look briefly at the historical context of cassava in northern Mozambique and its conventional framing as a famine crop, before turning to ethnographic reflections on its current role in everyday food security in this region. The paper considers two cases which illustrate the ways in which people engage with both political and moral economies and the ambiguity and liminality of these engagements: the economies of dried cassava and of gender dynamics. It then positions these within the wider social context, particularly trends of commercialisation and the current volatility of prices and markets in Mozambique. It explores the role of outsiders and local people in reinforcing, challenging and negotiating dichotomies between political and moral economies. Finally, it asks what all this means, in theory and practice.

Theorizing Marine Commodity Frontiers

Industrial production and its expansion rely heavily on the accelerating use of raw materials and energy, among other factors. Industrialized economies seek new and high quality natural resources that can be extracted and processed cheaply, easily and safely in return for higher profits (Bunker 1996, Krausmann *et al*. 2008). One way to explore the interaction between the world economy and local ecosystems, or 'the interrelationships between production in one place, and the expansion of capitalist space in general' is provided by Moore (2000, p.411), who elaborates on the concept of 'commodity frontiers' by framing capitalism as a 'world-ecology' where nature and labor are simultaneously appropriated and exploited to produce commodities for exchange (Moore 2010a, 2015). Building on this theoretical framework, he studies the expansion of commodity frontiers—a

term usually associated with the geographical expansion of the extractive industry that removes natural resources and raw materials from the earth, such as oil and minerals—by focusing on the production side of these frontiers from a world-historical perspective (Moore 2000; Orta-Martínez & Finer 2010; Conde & Kallis 2012; Andreucci & Kallis 2017). Commodity frontiers are expanding mainly in order to meet the rising material and energy demands of industrialized economies resulting from their increased social metabolism, and to broaden the scale and scope of the commodification of natural resources (Moore 2000; Conde & Walter 2014).

The expansion of commodity frontiers helps the operations and capital accumulation of extractive industries in three ways. First, when the quality and/or quantity of a natural resource is decreasing, it enables them to replace the extracted resource with a better quality and/or more abundant resource from another region in return for higher profits (Moore 2010a). Second, it allows them to relocate to new geographies, nationally or internationally, whenever socio-ecological conflicts arise due to environmental degradation caused by the extraction activity (Martinez-Alier *et al.* 2010; Conde & Walter 2014). Third, it gives them the possibility of moving their activities to places where profit margins are higher and production is cheaper or safer—in terms of exploitation of labor, appropriation of nature or socio-political power exercised in the new area (Hilson & Yakovleva 2007). Overall, with the expansion of commodity frontiers, raw materials are extracted in places far away from where they are processed, marketed and ultimately consumed.

Meanwhile, the relationship between labor and capital in production processes has been changing as well; production for sustenance has gradually been replaced by the production of commodities for exchange. Consequently, exploring different commodity frontiers is essential in order to 'track not only capitalist expansion but also the unevenness of that expansion' (Moore 2000, p.411), and this requires uncovering the strategies of capital accumulation. According to Moore, the expansion of commodity frontiers offers two such strategies (2010b). The first, called 'commodity widening', refers to relocating the extraction to new geographies whenever the raw materials exploited in a region begins to diminish in terms of quantity or quality; this opens new areas to extraction and leads to the greater commodification of natural resources. The second is termed 'commodity deepening' and describes increased extraction and intensified production at a given site through socio-technical innovations, as observed in going deeper for mineral extraction or the industrialization of agriculture (Moore 2010b, Knapp 2016).

Here, we will add the analysis of a third strategy that we call 'commodity marketing', which enables further capital accumulation by expanding products to new markets while maintaining current position in existing ones. This strategy aims to ensure demand is created for intensified production, and markets are secured for *commodities* produced for exchange. To examine this strategy, we will still follow the commodity frontiers approach, which focuses on primary production as opposed to commodity chain analysis that focuses on the final product. However, because all of these three strategies work together to generate horizontal, vertical and taxonomic expansions, we will also look into the 'commodity marketing' strategies of these firms, which seek and secure markets to exchange the commodities produced by their increased and intensified production. Thus, by looking at capitalism 'as an ecological regime that reproduces itself through new

commodity frontiers' (Campling 2012, p.255), we will examine both the supply and the demand ends of commodity production for exchange in an interlinked manner.

Although the expansion of commodity frontiers and the subsequent commodification of marine spaces occurred relatively later, they occurred at a rapid and intense rate, resulting in complex and interrelated agrarian changes that can only be understood through meticulous political, economic and ecological analyses. Capture fisheries are a noteworthy example of the expansion of commodity frontiers based on the extraction of living resources. Especially from the 1950s onwards, expansion intensified horizontally, vertically and taxonomically (Pauly *et al.* 1998; Longo *et al.* 2015) as a result of the commodity widening and commodity deepening strategies fishing companies employed, which enabled them to boost their catch and their profits (Campling 2012). Through these strategies, the fishing fleets of different countries moved from exploited or overexploited marine areas to new seas that offered a higher 'ecological surplus', or increased their catch rate with advanced technologies in 'mature frontier conditions' where ecological surplus was shrinking and stocks were dwindling (ibid.). This is how new marine areas and resources became commodified (Clausen & Clark 2005; Longo & Clausen 2011; Campling 2012; Longo & Clark 2012).

Expansion on the basis of these strategies resulted in the global overexploitation of marine resources and the collapse of important fish stocks in some regions (see Bavington 2009, for the depletion of the Newfoundland cod fisheries; Radovich 1982, for the collapse of California's once abundant sardine stock). Fish has long been considered a renewable and 'inexhaustible' resource; a view prevalent especially until the late nineteenth century and still echoed by some in the fishing industry today (Pauly et al. 2003; Bavington 2009). Yet recent studies show that industrial fishing intensified so much in the second half of the twentieth century that 'peak fish'—the maximum amount of fish that can be captured, followed by continuous, fluctuating decline—was already reached in late 1980s (Watson and Pauly 2001, Pauly and Zeller 2014). This level of intense exploitation not only threatens the sustainability of fish stocks and the marine ecosystem but also hits fishing companies hard, since the declining catch rate puts a severe limit on further capital accumulation. Following the expansion strategies of capital in capture fisheries, a relatively recent development in marine spaces has been the emergence of intensive marine aquaculture production (Veuthey & Gerber 2012; Longo *et al*. 2015), in which aquaculture 'provides a spatial and sectoral frontier to industrial capture fisheries by enrolling new places, practices and environments in fish production' (Saguin 2016, p.18).

Unlike fisheries, which were once common resources, aquaculture requires enclosing marine spaces and allocating them to private property, where production process can be better controlled. As a rapidly-growing food production sector, it employs technological advances to compensate for the rising costs of finding, extracting and transporting a resource that is declining in quantity and/or quality—in terms of size or marine trophic level—in other words, it has become a 'technological treadmill in natural resource industries' (Bridge 2009, p.1229). As such, it is a new commodity frontier in marine areas, the development and expansion of which was achieved mainly through commodity deepening strategies, advanced technology and intensified production (Saguin 2016). It represents a new type of investment in the same marine space—and new opportunities for capital accumulation—instead of having to head further offshore or go to other countries'

seas in order to catch more fish. In short, it involves not the geographical expansion of a commodity frontier but rather a spatial transformation in seafood production, achieved by enclosing marine areas.

Building on Saguin's conceptualization of aquaculture as a new frontier for capture fisheries, we will examine the recent growth in marine intensive aquaculture in Turkey to uncover its three-pronged—horizontal, vertical and taxonomic—expansion, and how this became possible through the commodity widening, commodity deepening and commodity marketing strategies employed by aquaculture firms. In line with our analysis, we argue that intensive aquaculture is not the final marine commodity frontier; rather, expansion continues within the aquaculture industry, in close relationship to capture fisheries, by transforming the practices and spaces of seafood production. In this way, we aim to contribute to existing research on the expansion of fishing-related human activities in marine areas, and the literature on commodity frontiers; thus, to the broader literature on the political economy and ecology of agrarian change in marine spaces.

Context

Incomplete Commercialisation

The concept of moral economy has historically been used to refer to several different phenomena. In this paper, I draw on two interlinked understandings of 'moral economy': moral economy as socio-economic system, and moral economy as critique.

Thompson (1971) is largely credited for bringing moral economy into common academic usage. Thompson's work the role of social contract in determining class behaviour in 19th century English society explored how in this 'moral economy' the threat of peasant riots acted as a guard against food scarcity. Moral economy was also adopted by peasant studies to explore the social conditions for peasant resistance against capitalist domination (Scott, 1976) and to describe the non-capitalist systems - usually characterised by risk aversion - whose erosion by colonialism and the incursion of market capitalism may lead to such resistance (e.g. Watts, 1983). These interpretations share a view of moral economy as a set of social norms governing material exchanges, which demonstrate rationalities beyond those elevated by neoclassical economic logic. Even the most seemingly irrational of social groups, the rioting crowd, is shown to underpin food security and hence human survival.

Moral economy has provided a useful basis for emphasising the importance of values and social norms, and in critiquing of the impacts of commercialisation on peasant livelihoods. More recently, moral economy has been suggested as a normative critique of capitalism, a way of bringing justice, and a consideration of social relations beyond the human, into economics (Sayer, 2015). Post-capitalist scholars such as Gibson-Graham (1996) and Gibson et al (2010) have developed the concept of diverse economies to acknowledge the co-existence of non-capitalist economies and forms of exchange, even within neoliberal societies, with this analysis mostly focusing on the post-industrial global north.

However, moral economy also come under considerable critique itself for its tendency to dichotomise between (often romanticised) pre-capitalist peasant

modes of exchange and socio-economic organisation and the individualist rationalism of neoclassical, capitalist political economy (Götz, 2015). Götz suggests it serves 'as an umbrella term for obsolete customary titles and ways of life prior to the great leap from traditional society to the modern market system' (p. 147), often considering moral economies as if they exist in isolation (Palomera and Vetta, 2016). Recent years have also seen an attempt to radicalise moral economy by re-focusing on class and capital, and by moving beyond the historic binaries of market versus peasant economies, recognising the 'entanglement of values' which characterise most economies (Palomera and Vetta, 2016: 415).

In this paper, I consider empirical examples of such entanglements. I use the term moral economy to refer to non-commercial exchanges of goods, money and services which happen both within and alongside market economies. Although in some cases – for example the distinction between the exchange of sex for gifts and commercial sex work – the boundaries may not be clear, what is being examined here is the importance (or not) of social norms beyond market value, and their material implications.

Wilson (2013)'s study of everyday moral economies in food production, distribution and consumption in Cuba highlights the importance of scale and how shifts from socialist to neoliberal government policy play out in a local setting, as well as illustrating the workings of different, often conflicting, moralities at different scales. This paper also takes long-term ethnographic exploration of everyday food securing as its point of departure, using feminist political ecology to further complicate understandings of how moral economies are performed and negotiated at this everyday, microcosmal scale through personal and community relationships, and through embodied, lived experiences (Harcourt and Nelson, 2015). It is to explore the embodied and affective, as well as discursive, dimensions of these issues that an ethnographic methodology was adopted.

The Nacala Corridor

The fieldwork which forms the basis of this paper was carried out in 2015 and 2016 in a rural neighbourhood, henceforth referred to as ‘Bairro’, in Nampula province, northern Mozambique. Mozambique was colonised by Portugal until 1975, when its then socialist liberation front came to power before the country suffered 15 years of internal conflict, fuelled by Cold War interests (Newitt, 2005). Following IMF-led structural adjustment in the early 1990s, Mozambique's economy has seen periods of rapid growth but widening inequality and persistently low human development scores (UNDP, 2016). 2015-16 was a particularly volatile period in Mozambique, as the discovery by international finance organisations in early 2016 of secret loans amounting to US$2bn accumulated by the previous government (implicating some members of the current administration) and the temporary stopping of loans and aid to Mozambique’s government by the IMF and the G14 (Hanlon, 2016). Meanwhile, politically motivated violence, mostly in central Mozambique, fed ongoing concerns about a return to war and disrupted transport along a crucial arterial road (Bowker et al., 2016).

Nampula province lies at the heart of the Nacala Development Corridor, which stretches from the Malawian border to the port of Nacala, close to the former colonial capital and slave port of Ilha de Moçambique. The geographical rationale for the corridor is most obviously the railway, built in the mid-twentieth century and rehabilitated post-war, which carries coal mined in Mozambique's far-western

province of Tete, through Malawi and to Nacala for shipping. This infrastructure is operated by Vale as the Corredor de Desenvolvimento do Norte (Northern Development Corridor), which also comprises some projects intended to stimulate development and economic growth around the railway corridor (PEDEC, . However, the Nacala Corridor also encompasses large swathes of agricultural land further from the railway, notably in Zambézia province to the south, where there has been increased interest in soybean production (Smart and Hanlon, 2014).

The most publicised development programme proposed in the Nacala Corridor is ProSAVANA (Programme to Develop the Savanna of Northern Mozambique). This controversial project was initially devised as a trilateral intervention, between the governments of Japan, Brazil and Mozambique, to recreate Proceder, a Japanese project in Brazil in the 1990s credited with kick-starting the 'cerrado miracle', the transformation of the *cerrado* region of southern Brazil into a major soybean-producing area. The proposal, particularly a leaked Master Plan in 2013 and a further Master Plan published in 2014, led to concerns about land-grabbing and the promotion of large-scale commercial production to the exclusion of small-scale family farmers, who make up [percentage] of Mozambique's agricultural production (Smart and Hanlon, 2014). ProSavana has met with considerable protest from civil society and peasant groups in Mozambique, Brazil, Japan and beyond, leading to the development of a new Master Plan more oriented towards small-scale farmers and the needs of 'vulnerable groups' such as women and young people (ProSAVANA, 2015) and a civil society 'Mechanism' for monitoring ProSavana's activities. At the same time, political upheaval and the economic downturn in Brazil resulted in a rapid rolling back of its development co-operation activites (UNAC, 2012). While some planned elements of ProSAVANA, such as research into soil and seed varieties, have gone ahead, the extent of agricultural modernisation and commercialisation promoted by the project has so far been confined to a number of small pilot projects carried out with producers' associations in the Nampula province section of the Nacala Corridor. It was with one of these small-scale producers' associations that the fieldwork on which this paper is based was carried out.

Navigating stomach and purse in a Mozambican neighbourhood

"The reason there is food insecurity here is that people sell all the food they produce."

I heard this point made many times over the duration of my fieldwork. I heard it from other researchers; from Western volunteers working in Nampula's hospitals and schools; from district agricultural extension workers; from local community 'activists' employed by NGOs; from people in the community talking about each other. Although details differed – one conversation was specifically about how people sell eggs in order to buy dried fish, rather than eat the eggs – the received wisdom was the same. So was the implicit blame on small-scale farmers, suggesting that food security and nutrition problems were a result of poor husbandry, an incautious overreliance on the cash economy to meet their needs.

This is ironic given the kinds of food security interventions taking place in Bairro and across northern Mozambique, which tend to focus on commercialisation as a solution to poverty and food insecurity, and as desirable in itself. Of the five

agricultural development interventions happening in Bairro during 2015-2016, four (including the ProSAVANA pilot project) were based on the two intertwined principles of modernisation (especially the increased use of commercial inputs) and commercialisation (increasing yields, crop quality and market access to maximise sales). I argue that this emphasis, while also reflecting the dominant productivist paradigm in food security policy and practice, is a fundamental axis of the continued advance of capitalist interests into peasant agriculture across the world (Nally, 2016). What is particularly interesting here is how, although local people have been involved in commercial agriculture for decades, their livelihoods remain only partially integrated in the market economy.

From around the 1930s and 40s (according to elderly respondents' estimations), a number of Portuguese and Indian-Portuguese settlers moved into Bairro and set up large-scale (~200ha) tobacco plantations. Although respondents talked negatively about colonialism in the abstract, many inhabitants of Bairro were nostalgic about the pre-Independence decades during which local men were mostly employed on these plantations or by the railway. According to local history, women were not employed by the Portuguese and instead maintained small plots of land to feed their families. Following independence, the new socialist government obliged local people to move into a communal village on the site of one of the old plantations, but this was abandoned after the outbreak of war when people fled to towns or hid in the mountains to avoid raiding troops. This period also saw the recruitment of local people as contract farmers of cotton and tobacco for Cuban, Indian and Mozambican companies.

In the post-war period, farmers' associations have become increasingly popular as mechanisms for accessing NGO and government support, and this has been linked to a shift to producing cash crops for the national market, using inputs provided through these associations. In Bairro, key crops grown predominantly for the market are maize, onions, cabbages, pigeon pea and sesame. Contract farming in the area has declined rapidly following a dispute with a tobacco company over farmers using the fertiliser provided as part of the contract on their independent onion crops. Some low-input crops, including sorghum, rice, peanut and cowpea, continue to be grown primarily for subsistence, although they may be sold or bartered in small quantities within the neighbourhood. The crop I will consider in this paper, however, is a member of both categories, and hence plays a unique role within Bairro's agro-food system: dried cassava, known as *makhaka* in the local indigenous language Makhuwa.

The trade-offs: dried cassava

"Shot-gun" weddings often happen in Bairro, almost as often as unplanned, extra-marital pregnancies occur. Although they are usual, older people talk disapprovingly of the latest hasty marriage, two teenagers with hardly a patch of land between them. One woman talks about the ideal marriage, with a sense of moral superiority which is belied by her own life history: the couple get betrothed, with the consent of the families on both sides, and they plant a field of cassava. That way, once they get married - in church or witnessed by the neighbourhood's party secretary – they will have something to get them started: something to eat, something to sell. In Bairro, the bride's bottom drawer is a cassava crop.

All households in Bairro grow cassava. Most cultivate a mixture of varieties to provide sweet cassava for immediate consumption and bitter cassava for peeling,

drying and storing. This *makhaka* can then be broken up, pounded into flour, sieved and used to make a kind of porridge, called *karakhata*. This food was the dietary staple from September onwards, increasingly important as stores of maize and sorghum ran out. By February, some families are just eating karakhata and green leaves (often cassava leaves, *ntikwa*). Because of its history, as already discussed, and its role in this 'hungry season', cassava is frequently considered by policy makers and development workers as a famine crop, important in terms of preventing absolute food scarcity.

However, cassava is also a cash crop and a bargaining chip. In September and October, *comerciantes* arrive, both in the *bairro* itself and in the nearby towns and crossroads, looking for *makhaka* to buy. (Elsewhere in Nampula province, fresh cassava also has market value as the raw ingredient for Impala beer.) Some *comerciantes* are local entrepreneurs, while others travel from the city or the coast. Some pay with cash, some with sacks of *nkusi*, the dried fish which is a popular accompaniment for *karakhata.* Cash from *makhaka* is a key income source for the majority of households in Bairro, especially for those not producing other cash crops like onions and pigeon pea, or in years when the price for these commodities is low. Some producers allow their *makhaka* to be darkened by the first showers of the rainy season, knowing that black *makhaka* is more in demand in coastal areas and gets a better price. Smaller quantities of *makhaka,* such as small basinsful, can also be exchanged with neighbours or small-scale entrepreneurs in the town for important foodstuffs like oil and *nkusi* and cheap household goods such as plastic basins.

As the 'difficult time' for food availability approaches in January and February, households known to have a large supply of *makhaka* are likely to be approached by others offering to work on their *machambas* in return for an agreed quantity of *makhaka.* People frequently spoke of the importance of not selling all their *makhaka,* of keeping enough back to last them through until March so that they wouldn't have to do this. When I first arrived in Bairro, members of the Baptist church I attended with my host family contributed one basin of *makhaka* per household to my host mother and me, because, I was told, I 'had nothing'. When Flávia and Eduardo's house burned down, taking most of their *makhaka* store with it, one of the first thing the community (in this case members of the church again) did after the initial extinguishing of flames and the provision of meals and blankets was to help them harvest the *makhaka* remaining in their fields. The family were known for storing most of their *makhaka* and usually having some available in the rainy season for *ganho ganho*, so it was of additional concern to other families that they should have some put away.

Cassava is also unique among crops grown in Bairro in that it is the woody stems, rather than an edible part (such as seeds, grains, grafted leaves or tubers), which are replanted. It is grown without inputs or irrigation, making it unusually independent from the push for commercialisation. Although agricultural research institutions have developed and promoted new cassava varieties in sub-Saharan Africa (Manyong et al., 2000), the majority of farmers in Bairro share different varieties through informal networks. Seeds for cereals, legumes and vegetables also continue to be shared in this way, but may be eaten or sold. More significantly, the marketing of 'improved', treated and certified seeds plays an increasingly role – thus far, a trend not seen with cassava. The flexibility in harvesting period which made cassava so popular in seventeenth century Angola remains important in

Mozambique's modern economy, allowing people to move elsewhere to seek employment or education opportunities but maintain a food source in their home neighbourhood. This is especially relevant for those who seek their fortunes in Nampula city or nearer the coast, where cassava is much more expensive.

The trade-offs: gender and sex

How do the politics of navigating the trade-offs between eating, selling and exchanging dried cassava play out on a daily basis? What happens when the demands of the moral economy come into conflict with those of the market? How can gender help us understand the politics and trade-offs involved? In the context of northern Mozambique, gender provides a useful lens for critically examining how moral economies are ignored and devalued. Both men and women play roles in the navigation of moral and political economies, but it is in relationships between them, particularly marriage and sexual relationships, that some of the most interesting dynamics emerge.

It is a cliché of gender and development that women are responsible for subsistence farming and food preparation while men tend to grow commercial crops and determine the use of household income (O'Laughlin, 2007). While this simplistic binary has frequently been critiqued and complicated (e.g. Carney and Watts, 1990), it persists in development discourse and particularly in the domain of food security. The received wisdom that women are more likely to spend money on children's nutrition or education than men can mask a complex intra-household division of labour and the relationships and interactions between men and women. However, it forms the basis of numerous development projects seeking to 'empower' women in order to improve children's nutrition, often through promoting income-generating activities or the cultivation of vegetable gardens. For example, one way this played out in Bairro and surrounding neighbourhoods was that child nutrition programmes were aimed exclusively at mothers, ignoring the role fathers may play in decision-making about food purchases, and whether to eat or sell particular foods. Such projects often draw on and hence reify gender binaries, with potential paradoxically disempowering results (Cornwall et al., 2007).

The majority of Nampula province's population are from the Makhuwa ethnic group, which is hugely diverse across time and space, in terms of socio-economic position, socio-political organisation, culture and history, including their experiences of religious influences (Islam and Christianity), Portuguese colonialism and commercialisation (Newitt, 2005). Elements shared across the Makhuwa include practices of matriliny and uxorilocality. Ancestral lineage (*nihimo*) is traced, and land tends to be inherited, along the female line, and when a couple marries they are likely to live with and work the land of the wife's parents, with women playing a key role in the organisation, production and distribution of food (Arnfred, 2007). However, there is significant disagreement between recent ethnographers over the extent to which women are able to exercise power, and hence whether societies are matriarchal or fundamentally patriarchal (Geffray, 1990; Arnfred, 2007; Martinez, 2008). Beyond this debate, it is important to note that these systems represent a complex, but incomplete, social mediation of who does what work on family farm, and who has control and ownership of food, money, land and labour. For example, in a matrilineal context in Malawi where although women nominally own land, men tend to control the (economic) means of production (Budlender and Alma, 2011), whilst elsewhere an interviewee commented that

although her husband was in control of money and made the purchases, she wrote the shopping list (Feldstein and Jiggins, 1994).

In Bairro, the navigation of moral and political economies is an intensely gendered process, illustrated by the ambiguous connections between sexual relationships and material expectations. In development discourse, sex, especially that within marriage, is usually seen as a purely domestic activity, and rarely considered in terms of its commercial implications (political economy), or even of pleasure and its role in forming and strengthening relationships (Jolly et al., 2013) (moral economy). However, in everyday life in Bairro, sex takes on a more ambivalent role. Respondents often discussed marriage in idealised terms as a moral economy in which both partners were expected to perform particular duties: broadly speaking (and not coincidentally, closely matching the stereotypes discussed above) the husband has responsibility as a provider and the wife as a carer. Women who saw their husbands as failing to provide – for example food, money, an adequate house, household goods or in some cases affection – would exercise agency in procuring those things elsewhere (cf. Groes-Green 2013). One mother of four in her mid-twenties had a farmer husband in Bairro and a lover, a trader of dried fish, in the nearby town. The lover gave her cash gifts which she used to buy clothes for her children, telling her husband the money was from selling thatch. Eventually, the situation was exacerbated when her husband spent his entire profit from a cash crop of pigeon pea on clothes for himself and their one son, and she left him and moved in with her lover. Neighbours expressed both pity and *schadenfreude* as they watched the abandoned husband fetch his own water and cook for himself, many implying that it was his fault for not keeping up his end of the conjugal bargain and adequately providing for his wife.

Women described their responsibilities as including cooking, fetching water and firewood, looking after their husband and children, and providing satisfying sexual experiences. Sexual acts were in themselves sites of exchange, where women who considered themselves good in bed, and especially if they performed Makhuwa post-coital penis-cleaning and labia-displaying rituals, expected material gifts such as capulanas (printed cloth wrappers) or money in return. In female initiation ceremonies, this was explicitly taught to teenage girls: guests threw coins into the laps of the initiates as they mimed these rituals.

In practice, this plays out on a scale more or less commensurate with income and expectation. Teenage boys with unreliable *ganho ganho* employment offered their young girlfriends pens, exercise books, money to buy snacks at school; in return they implied that their girlfriends might bring them food and engage in sexual activity with them. There was considerable rumour about girls who, not satisfied with stationery, sought relationships with older men in order to get a better return on their sexual favours. This seems to be part of a trend whereby, despite high youth unemployment, young men feel increasing pressure to provide their partners with the trappings of a new consumerist lifestyle – phones, underwear, money – in order to compete with other men (Archambault, 2013). Meanwhile, young (and, at least in Bairro, older) women are exercising agency but only within this limited arena, within which the youngest girls – some reportedly as young as 12 or 13 - are particularly vulnerable.

The female representative of a youth project working to promote entrepreneurship in Bairro talked passionately about these issues to local young female participants.

'Are you going to spend your whole lives waiting for a man to do something for you? Every time you want clothes, food, a motorbike, you have to ask your husband and wait for him to bring it?' I have conflicting feelings about this kind of intervention: must female empowerment necessarily be part of a shift to a more individualist economic mind-set? In which ways do moral and political economies each help and hinder gender equality? Or could asking this question in itself underestimating people's ability to hybridise moral and political economies to their own ends?

Conclusions?

In northern Mozambique, moral and political economies intersect and interact in myriad ways, but they remain distinct, and this distinction is important. Palomera and Vetta (2016: 428) warn against reducing moral economy to 'simply account for micro-economic practices, such as networks of reciprocity and obligation that often cushion exploitation and crisis effects, without linking them to power relations at large. Moral economy, above all, is about understanding the inner workings of capitalism and the qualities of social reproduction at particular historical times and spaces'. The case of dried cassava demonstrates how smallholder farmers in northern Mozambique exercise agency. On the one hand, they maintain cassava as a 'famine crop', a buffer against the vagaries of the market and the volatility of the prices they get for their main cash crops. It allows farmers to maintain basic household food security without dependence on Mozambique's increasingly influential agribusiness sector (subject to access to land – a controversial but important issue outside the scope of this paper). It forms the basis of a community exchange system which staves off food insecurity for even the poorest households. On the other hand, it provides a way for people – again, even the poorest people – to engage in the market economy. People demonstrate remarkable resourcefulness in negotiating trade-offs between these two spheres. In an intriguing parallel, where poverty and sexism have contributed to a lack of access to education and employment which excludes many young women from other livelihood opportunities, these women use their sexuality and (limited) agency to profit from dominant gender norms and expectations in order to secure better livelihoods for themselves and their families. Development interventions which focus exclusively on commercial agriculture, or exclusively on the domestic sphere, can miss some of the most fundamental frictions in rural Mozambican life, which occur at the apex between stomach and purse.

However, as Palomera and Vetta suggest, focusing on people's agency and ways of resisting the encroachment of commercial agriculture into their livelihoods can distract attention from the structural issues which mean they have to exercise this agency in the first place. Access to cash markets was crucial to people's ability to send their children to school or get adequate health care. During the research period, the national economic crisis triggered by the discovery of the secret government debt led locally to the doubling of the price of cooking oil in just two months. Cooking oil is crucial to people's sense of satisfaction with a meal and adequate nutrition (Huhn, 2013), and the price rises, combined with a low price for the onion cash crop, increased pressure on farmers to sell their *makhaka.* By the start of the growing season, many farmers were concerned about whether they would have enough *makhaka* to get them through until the first maize harvests. While the neighbourhood's moral economy was deployed to help Flávia and

Eduardo in a time of crisis, it is ultimately dependent on material conditions. Where the workings of Mozambique's political economy have compromised the amount of *makhaka* put away to eat, moral economy may not be enough to protect people from hunger. When people are navigating between the stomach and the purse, the most critical question remains this: who is holding the purse strings?

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