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Tavares, M. (2019). Of hippopotami and mad women: Cosmopolitanism debated in Paulina Chiziane's João, o hipopótamo. *Journal of Romance Studies*, 19(3), 443–468. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jrs.2019.28>

Published in:
Journal of Romance Studies

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

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Of Hippopotami and Mad Women: Cosmopolitanism debated in Paulina Chiziane's
João, o hipopótamo

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ABSTRACT (136 WORDS)

In 2012, the famous Mozambican bookshop Minerva Central launched the anthology entitled *A Minha Maputo é...* (Gonçalves 2012) [My Maputo is...] to celebrate both the city of Maputo's 125th anniversary and the bookshop's 104th anniversary. This article focuses on the short story entitled 'João, o hipopótamo' (2012: 71-76) [John, the hippopotamus], by Paulina Chiziane, which places the narration in Nampula, thus invoking the realities of a predominantly Makua cultural group, and of the co-existence of different versions of Islam and matriliney. The main argument of this article is that by discussing gender identities and relations and invoking practices of legal pluralism observed in a context specifically located outside Maputo, the author unveils the problematic inherent to the construction of a national narrative as a cosmopolitan one built from above, which neglects to give equal value to different cultures.

KEYWORDS (8 WORDS)

Paulina Chiziane, Maputo, Cosmopolitanism, Makua, Islam, Matriliney, Gender

Introduction

I am a person who moves about, who comes and goes, and twists and turns. That's my experience of life, and that's the reality that I describe in my books. Fiction? I'm not sure what that is. I would prefer to say that my starting point is a kind of reality that's mine and to which I add some details. Could that be fiction? I don't know.

— PAULINA CHIZIANE

In 2012, the famous Mozambican bookshop Minerva Central launched the anthology entitled *A minha Maputo é...* (Gonçalves 2012) [My Maputo is...] to celebrate both the city of Maputo's 125th anniversary and the bookshop's 104th anniversary.¹ Claiming that writers have the responsibility of dreaming and reinventing the city and the country, Vitor Gonçalves, the bookshop's manager, states in the preface that the anthology aims at paying homage to the land and to those who humanise it, through their work, and by preserving its memory (2012: 5). To this end, twenty-four Mozambican contributors (amongst them writers, artists, intellectuals and politicians) were invited to write about their perceptions of the city, in various formats (e.g. short-stories, autobiographic accounts, poetry, etc.).

The present article presents a socio-literary reading that focuses specifically on one short story of the anthology, by Paulina Chiziane, entitled 'João, o hipopótamo' (2012: 71-76) [John, the hippopotamus]. Concentrating on the representation of gender and legal pluralism in Mozambique, this short story is the only piece in the anthology that clearly positions the narrative in a setting outside of Maputo. Right at the start, the action is placed at the margins of the Lúrio River, in the north of the country. This river, whose source is located at the Niassa province, establishes the limits between the northern provinces of Nampula, Cabo Delgado and

¹ All translations into English are my own unless otherwise stated.

Niassa; its mouth is between the cities of Pemba and Nacala. As such, this geographical shift is also a cultural and a religious one, as the story takes us to Nampula, to the realities of a predominantly Makua cultural group, and of the co-existence of different versions of Islam and matriliney.² The protagonist of the short-story is Safi, a Makua woman who finds herself unwillingly caught in a kind of romance triangle, with her husband João and con-man Muhala, João's brother of the initiation rites. Considering all these important aspects, the main argument of this article is that by looking at the intersection of gender and legal pluralism in a specific context located outside the limits of urban Maputo, Chiziane challenges notions of top-down cosmopolitanism (Gilroy 2005: 58-83) that tend to be homogenising and dangerously ethnocentric. Her choice of text for the collection and the short-story itself will thus be read as acts of cosmopolitanism from below and proof of the author's cosmopolitan commitment (Gilroy 2005: 58-83).

A minha Maputo é...: Cosmopolitanism Debated

A minha Maputo é... [My Maputo is...] aims at celebrating the city of Maputo and Minerva Central, the historic bookshop founded on April 14, 1908, by João António de Carvalho (or Carvalhinho). To that end, the following authors were invited to contribute to the anthology: Aldino Muianga, Alexandre Chaúque, António Cabrita, Aurélio Furdela, Calane da Silva, Carlos Serra, Eduardo White, Emmy X, Hirondina Joshua, Manuel Jesus, Juvenal Bucuane, Lucílio Manjate, Márcia dos Santos (Rinkel), Mbate Pedro, Mia Couto, Paulina Chiziane, Renato Caldeira, Rosa Langa, Salim Sacoor, Sónia Sultuane, Teresa Noronha and Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa. Additionally, Aires Ali, the then Prime Minister, and David Simango, the Mayor of Maputo, were also invited to share their thoughts on the city of Maputo. Along

² Contemporary Nampula is one of the northern provinces of Mozambique. The homonymous city of Nampula is its capital city and widely known as the capital of the north, because it is the largest provincial capital city in the north of the country.

with those twenty-four texts, ten selected photographs were included in the anthology. These are images of landmarks, iconic activities and emblematic views of the city. Ultimately, the aim of the bookshop was to offer the anthology to Maputo schools for free, as a means to stimulate youngsters to read more, especially the work of national authors.

According to the preface put forward by the anthology's editor, Gonçalves, *A minha Maputo é...* [My Maputo is...] aims at recognising the value of Mozambican writers' contributions to the intellectual development of the country's citizens over the years (2012: 5-6). Invoking Pablo Neruda and his belief that poetry can change the world, Gonçalves's text goes on in a nationalistic tone, emphasising the writers' sociocultural responsibility towards the people and Minerva Central's important role as mediator in this process of providing Mozambicans with the best creations of the sons and daughters of the land. Gonçalves's preface is followed by texts by the then Prime Minister of Mozambique (2010-2012), Frelimo's Aires Ali, and by the Mayor of Maputo (2008 to present), Frelimo's David Simango; and a photograph of the nine metre high statue of Samora Machel which was inaugurated in 2011 at Praça da Independência [Independence Square] in Maputo, and aimed at celebrating the 25th anniversary of Samora's death.³ So, on the one hand Gonçalves's preface suggests that writers, as cultural and artistic creators, have the power to influence politicians in the latter's enactment of power that ultimately brings about changes in the trajectory and identity narratives of a people. On the other hand, it creates a visible association between the construction of the national narrative and the identity narrative of the ruling party, Frelimo, which is represented as being legitimately responsible for governing the city and the country. This attitude is consistent with the argument advanced by Maria Paula Meneses and Boaventura Sousa Santos, that, in Mozambique

³ Built in North Korea, the statue weights 4.87 tons and it presents Samora standing with his eyes on the horizon and his right index finger in the air, in a gesture which was immortalised in various photographs and videos of Mozambique's first president.

public administration is highly politicized in the sense that the building up of the administrative capacities of the State are [sic] seen as a way of consolidating the political leverage of the ruling party, Frelimo. This top-down conception is consistent with a bottom-up view, the view of the people for whom the administration structures are Frelimo structures. (2009: 131)

Focusing on the texts by Ali and Simango, both politicians choose to focus on the transformations that Maputo went through along the years (geopolitical, socioeconomic and cultural), celebrating its cosmopolitanism. Ali seems to understand this cosmopolitanism as the co-existence of people from different sociocultural backgrounds in the city:

Com o passar do tempo, fui me apercebendo que as acácias que a simbolizam, no mapa turístico, não se estendiam à totalidade das zonas suburbanas, ao mundo de homens e mulheres que diariamente fluem pelas artérias geometricamente definidas nos espaços verdes que colorem a cidade do cimento. As acácias são parte da cidade. Não são a totalidade da cidade. Com esse detalhe, aprendi a amar a diferença; aprendi a aspirar os múltiplos odores que vão evoluindo pelos quatro cantos da cidade. (2012: 7)

[Over time I realized that the acacia trees that symbolize it on the tourist map did not extend to all suburban areas; to the world of men and women who daily flow through the geometrically defined arteries in the green spaces that give colour to the cement city. The acacia trees are part of the city; they are not the whole city. In this detail I learned to love the difference; I learned to inhale the multiple odours that rise in the four corners of the city.]

Ali refers to the association between the acacia trees (which are characteristic of Maputo) and the city as one that emerges from a touristic perception of Maputo, suggesting that the people

who live in the suburban areas of the city (as opposed to the cement city, inherited from the colonial rule) and occupy the city every day originate from other sociocultural universes. This reference directs us to two very important aspects of the history of the city. Firstly, it invokes Frelimo's formal recognition of the suburbs as part of Maputo, after the party took over the city at independence. At the same time, it acknowledges the population of refugees who moved into the capital city throughout the years, coming from all parts of the country to escape the internal conflict or during the years of drought and floods (Fernandes and Mendes 2012: 1362-1379). Ali recognises the importance of these other cultural universes that, in his point of view, also constitute Maputo, and underlines his love for the multiplicity encapsulated in the city.

Simango, on the other hand, claims that Maputo is a cosmopolitan city *par excellence*, characterized by the harmonious coexistence of people from different cultures and races in a unity of differences:

Efectivamente, Maputo é, por excelência, uma Cidade cosmopolita. Ela tem o orgulho de receber cidadãos oriundos de diferentes partes do país e do Mundo, portadores de culturas, raças, costumes diversificados, que, numa convivência harmoniosa, a transformam na capital da unidade na diversidade, na capital cultural moçambicana, africana e do mundo. A simpatia, a hospitalidade das suas gentes e a riqueza da gastronomia de Maputo são o reflexo desta simbiose. (2012: 9)

[Indeed, Maputo is a cosmopolitan city per excellence. It is proud to welcome citizens from different parts of the country and the world, who have diverse cultures, races and customs. In a harmonious coexistence, these citizens make Maputo the capital of unity in diversity; the Mozambican, African and world cultural capital city. The friendliness and hospitality of its people and the rich gastronomy of Maputo reflect this symbiosis.]

Simango seems to value a synchronisation of differences that ultimately transform diversity in sameness, through the creation of a new hybrid cultural form. Both politicians seem to view Maputo as a microcosm of the whole country (and even the world, for Simango), and both justify the city's cosmopolitanism on its ability to tolerate and absorb difference. As representatives of a privileged urban elite, one might question the extent to which their perception of cosmopolitanism is representative of the experience of the majority of the population. Historically, the cultural diversity that characterizes Mozambique was not always acknowledged and celebrated, and this will inevitably have left its mark in the capital city. Perceptions of cosmopolitanism are constructed and change across time; of particular relevance here is the fact that they reflect the ideological agenda of specific elites but also the solidarity bonds created by minority groups.

Cosmopolitanism is a topic that has been extensively researched and revisited by different scholars from different angles (good examples are Gilroy 2005; Appiah 2007; Bhabha 2017), most recently in a volume edited by Francisco Bethencourt (2018) which focuses specifically on the Portuguese-speaking world, from the early modern period to the contemporary world. For the reading of this text by Chiziane, Gilroy's considerations on cosmopolitanism are particularly relevant. In *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Gilroy (2005) discusses cosmopolitanism in a variety of forms, focusing on modern and contemporary debates. The critic identifies and criticises a kind of cosmopolitanism, common in the twenty-first century, which emerges from forces that exert control over the national states from above:

Most contemporary debates over human rights, globalization, and justice use "cosmopolitanism" to refer to the elaboration of a supranational system of regulation that opposes or contains the national state from above. (...) In the names of cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism, these particular moral sensibilities can promote and justify intervention in other people's sovereign territory on the grounds that their

ailing or incompetent national state has failed to measure up to the levels of good practice that merit recognition as civilized. These adventures, military or economic, may be against the interests of the people in the poorer and less developed regions of the earth, but that does not matter. Though they are a majority of people on this planet, they can be overlooked, and their experience is not accepted as part of our world's portrait of itself as a world. (2005: 59-60).

At the same time, Gilroy believes that practices of cosmopolitanism from below can provide alternative 'conceptions of humanity that allow for the presumption of equal value and go beyond the issue of tolerance into a more active engagement with the irreducible value of diversity within sameness' (2005: 67). The appeal of these practices of what Gilroy calls "'vulgar" or "demotic" cosmopolitanism' lies both in their ability to challenge the centrality of the state and its imposed top-down conceptions, and in their commitment to finding 'civic and ethical value in the process of exposure to otherness' (2005: 67). The proximity to otherness is also an opportunity to distance oneself from one's own culture and history, which ultimately allows for solidarity with others and enhances self-knowledge (2005: 67). In this respect, Bethencourt adds that practices of cosmopolitanism from below are 'linked to solidarity between different minorities and disadvantaged populations' (2018: 1).

Chiziane, subversive committed cosmopolitan

All of the above is important when we consider Chiziane and her selection for the anthology. Born in Gaza province in 1955, Paulina Chiziane is one of the best-known contemporary authors in Mozambique. Her literary works often present reflections on located constructions of gender identities and systems of gender power, as is the case of this short story. In it, the author brings the discussion to Nampula in a collection that is meant to celebrate

Maputo. In interpreting this move, it is imperative to note that Chiziane has always been quite outspoken about her views on the responsibility of Mozambican authors towards the community, and on the need for the nation-to-be to acknowledge and embrace all Mozambican cultures. When commenting on the Mozambican novel's ability to relate to the cultural diversity in the country, the author was critical of the stance of many Mozambican authors, stating that

It's true that we can write about love or about those themes which are most dear to us, but I think that in a country like ours it's too much of a luxury simply to write about the things we need for ourselves... Now, the Mozambican novel has moved some way forward, but much more work needs to be done. The Mozambican writer needs to know his own ground and all these different cultures if he is to be able to write a book that will, in some sense, be more Mozambican than what we have now. (Leite et al. 2014: 206)

For Chiziane, Mozambican authors must prioritise collective responsibility over individual aesthetical pleasure, because they have some power to raise consciousness. In stating that Mozambican literature needs to be *more Mozambican*, Chiziane is arguably criticising the ethnocentric dominance of Southern cultures in the aesthetic realm, which is in her perspective replicated by Mozambican authors' lack of knowledge of the Mozambican cultural landscape, or lack of interest in engaging with such pressing matters.

Speaking specifically about her perception of what a Mozambican nation is, she departed from her own experience to state that

When I was living in Zambézia I felt like a foreigner. I feel closer to the South African people in Cape Town than to the people in Zambézia. It is very distant. Everything is completely different: the language, the culture, the customs. I am traveling inside the

country more and more, and I find huge differences. So, I think to myself: What is a country? What is my country? Unfortunately, those that can talk about the country, those that can write about the country, they're all confined to this same space, and they all give the idea that the country is Maputo, this suburb, this park, this street. This country is much more than that. (...) I am not trying to say that all the cultures should fuse into one, nothing of the sort, but when will each of these cultures evolve to be part of the overall picture, this combination of things that will enable us to say "We are the nation"?' (2014: 203)

Chiziane acknowledges her own lack of knowledge of her country's cultural diversity and her willingness to fight that lack. However, she is also aware of the fact that she is in a privileged position to do it, because she can travel inside the country, which is something that some of her fellow writers might not be able to do. This might explain her high sense of obligation, and it certainly demonstrates her cosmopolitan commitment as a Mozambican writer through the creation of an opportunity for 'estrangement from one's own culture and history' (Gilroy 2005: 67) and exposure to an otherness that is homely (rather than transnational or global), and can be found in the other cultures of Mozambique that are beyond the limits of urban Maputo. Therefore, it can be argued that through her contribution, Chiziane questions cosmopolitanism as it is conceived from above by a political elite and potentially remains unchallenged by some of her fellow writers.

Putting forward a short story entitled 'João, o hipopótamo' [John, the hippopotamus], Chiziane chose to contribute with a narrative that is placed in the Nampula province, a region whose population is predominantly Makua (the biggest ethnic group in the country, historically characterised by extensive miscegenation and interchange with other ethnolinguistic groups at

its origins) and Muslim.⁴ Yet, far from the Nampula province being a random choice of location, this is where the first capital city of what is now Mozambique was established – Ilha de Moçambique, or Mozambique Island. Mozambique Island was a typical Swahili port-city strongly characterised by miscegenation (through intermarriage of the Islamic elites with local Africans), cross-culturalism and the influence of Islam, which became the capital of the then Portuguese East Africa at the beginning of the sixteenth century (Newitt 2004: 21-37). The city prospered substantially due to slave trade, but after abolition and the trade's subsequent relocation to other coastal ports that evaded the enforcement of abolition (Angoche, for example), the decline of Mozambique Island slowly began. This process culminated with the capital city being transferred to Lourenço Marques, later Maputo, in the south, by the end of the nineteenth century (Newitt 2004: 34-37). This is, nonetheless, the region that gave Mozambique its name and it has featured prominently in Mozambican literature over the years, particularly in poetry, as a symbol of the intricate and contradicting relations that are at the origins of a Mozambican identity (Secco 2012; Chaves 2002; Falconi 2008 and 2013).

In invoking a northern region so unmistakably linked to the Indian Ocean in an anthology that is so clearly meant to be celebrating the southern city of Maputo, Chiziane also joins the many other Mozambican authors who have written about Mozambique Island as a symbol of literary uniqueness and alternative cosmopolitan identities. In the words that Nazir Ahmed Can used to describe the work of these poets of different generations:

Com efeito, em seus poemas, o *Índico-estético* – espaço de uma concepção específica da literatura – e o *Índico-ético* – lugar que assinala os caminhos alternativos da nova

⁴ Although we are not given details of the specific location where the narrative develops (which would potentially be of some relevance here, considering the coexistence of different versions of Islam in the region), the city of Nampula is explicitly mentioned in the short story. References are also made to two counties in the province. These counties are Monapo (in whose woods the initiation rites for boys are meant to have taken place) and Mozambique Island (where the two main male characters are meant to have gone to consult with sorcerers and healers). Chiziane refers to Mozambique Island here and elsewhere (2008) as O'hipiti. In Emakhuwa language, the name of the island is Muhipiti.

nação – enlaçam-se e, como contraponto ao imaginário político da capital institucional, seja ela a Lourenço Marques do tempo colonial ou a Maputo do período pós-colonial, formam um mosaico de imagens que corteja a diversidade étnica e, sobretudo, a combinação de formas culturais, artísticas e identitárias. Daí que a incorporação do Índico, enquanto eixo temático ou motor de escrita, extravase a Ilha em si, anunciando um cosmopolitismo e uma modernidade que essa extensa rede de poetas observa com nostalgia. Cabe ainda recordar que, para além do hibridismo cultural que pelas ruínas e ruelas da Ilha se respira, na relação com esse espaço, que, no dizer de Rita Chaves, constitui uma ‘metonímia de uma história maior’, se projetaram ‘as conturbadas relações com o país em composição, a nação em montagem, esse chão convulso onde, em movimento, se articulam desejos e tensões’ (CHAVES, 2002). (2016: 5).

[Indeed, in their poems, the aesthetic-Indian Ocean (the space of a specific conception of literature) and the ethical-Indian Ocean (the place that marks the alternative paths of the new nation) intersect and, as a counterpoint to the political imaginary of the institutional capital – be that colonial Lourenço Marques or postcolonial Maputo –, they form a mosaic of images that cultivates ethnic diversity and, above all, the combination of cultural, artistic and identity forms. Hence, the incorporation of the Indian Ocean as thematic axis or motor for writing goes beyond the Island itself, announcing a cosmopolitanism and a modernity that this extensive network of poets observes with nostalgia. In addition to the cultural hybridity that envelops the island's ruins and alleys, it is also important to keep in mind that it was in the relationship with that space, which, according to Rita Chaves, constitutes a ‘metonymy of a greater history’, that the ‘troubled relations with the country in configuration, the nation in assembly, that convulsive ground where desires and tensions are articulated, in motion’ were projected (Chaves, 2002).]

Of hippopotami and mad women

This takes us to ‘João, o hipopótamo’ [John, the hippopotamus], which is the story of Safi, a Makua Muslim woman, her husband João, and Muhala, João’s best friend and brother of the initiation rites. Placed at the margins of the Lúrio river, the narrative can be summarised as follows. João is a well-established and respected man who decides to travel to Mozambique Island with Muhala, to consult with important and powerful sorcerers and healers on how to become richer and more powerful in society. After the treatment, João and Muhala are told to go back home without having a bath or showering throughout the way. But because the journey was long and the temperature was high, João decides to go into the Lúrio river for a swim. He immediately turns into a hippopotamus. Muhala comes back to the village alone and tells the story of these events to Safi. He also informs her that he will be taking his brother’s place in the household, thus becoming her new husband and new father to her children. Safi cannot believe his story, and decides to consult with the community authorities, but they ignore her claim, as they had already learned about the whole story from Muhala himself and accepted his version of the facts, as well as his taking over of João’s household. At that moment, Safi decides that her only salvation is performance. She, therefore, pretends to believe that João is now a hippo, and as such, she must remain a devoted wife to him. This strategy allows her to buy time until the truth emerges. Eventually, João returns to the village and explains to the authorities what actually happened. Muhala, who had always been envious of João, stabbed him during the journey back home and pushed him into the Lúrio river. Muhala was convinced that João was dead. However, a fisherman found João, rescued him from the waters and took him to an elder lady, who healed him in secrecy for a very long period of time. Muhala is then chased by the angry community into the river, where he ends up being killed by a hippopotamus.

The discussion of gender constructions and relations in this northern, predominantly Makua and Muslim context, as proposed by Chiziane, directs the reader towards a reflection on the complex coexistence of civil law, customary and religious law in a place other than Maputo. In doing so, it allows for a reflection on the problematic nature of cosmopolitanism from above, represented by governmental legislation that aims at combining westernised conceptions of family and gender roles with customary law in an attempt to fuel ‘the process by which the traditional became a way of claiming an alternative modernity’ (Santos 2006: 64). Considering that this area of northern Mozambique distinguishes itself, particularly in matters gender-related, due to its matrilineal and Muslim societies, it is possible to claim that Chiziane, thus, opens up the discussion on gender constructions and relations by representing the reactions of the legal orders towards conflicts arising within the private sphere, in the local context of a village in the Nampula province.⁵ Indeed, Chiziane’s emphasis on positioning the discussion within the ethnic and religious specificities of a group is of particular relevance to

⁵ According to Liazzat Bonate, there is archaeological evidence that suggests that the coastal stretch of northern Mozambique was under Swahili rule since the eighth century, at least (2010: 574). This means that until the beginning of the twentieth century (when the Portuguese took control of the region following the nineteenth century ‘effective occupation’ military campaigns), the whole area was quite comfortably ruled by Muslim sultans and *shaykhs* [Arabic for xehe, chehe, xeque or xeique; a very respected knowledgeable man or the leader of a *confraria*, a brotherhood inclusive of women; religious association (Arnfred 2014: 272)] who rose to power through ivory and slave trade, which prospered in the region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Bonate 2010: 574-75). As such, Islam in that region carried a strong mark of Swahili tradition, as it combined influences of the African culture and of the regions of the Western Indian Ocean (Bonate 2010: 575). However, the inland expansion of Islam in northern Mozambique (due to the successful trade and the dynamic circulation and migration of people that it originated) led it to develop specific local characteristics. Bonate identifies two important aspects of it. Firstly, the fact that what was initially the religion of a coastal African elite (the Shirazi clans, who controlled Islam) was later extended to mainland Africans too; primarily, rulers and chiefs, followed by the general population. This allowed for an expansion of the faith, but also opened space for competing groups and interpretations of the symbols to emerge and challenge the established ones (Meneses and Santos 2009: 138). The arrival of the Shadhiliyya and Qadiriyya Sufi Orders in northern Mozambique in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century changed the way people perceived and practised Islam, simultaneously paving the way for a substantial growth of Islam in the region. The second fact Bonate emphasizes is that the Muslims from that region were matrilineal. Since the power and authority of the African chiefs originated from the fact that they were matrilineal descendants of the first-comers and, therefore, legitimate lords of the lands, Islam did not change matrilineality (Bonate 2006: 142-43). The region is, therefore, historically marked by the cultural coexistence of matrilineality and Islam, given that the majority of the population is Makua, matrilineal, matrilocal and Muslim (Arnfred 2014). In northern Mozambique, the kinship system is matrilineal and largely matrilocal, as opposed to southern Mozambique, where it is patrilineal and patrilocal. This means that the maternal uncle is the highest authority in the family. After marriage, the couple remains with the woman’s family (so, the man has to move in) and their children belong to the maternal lineage.

a deconstruction of Mozambique as an extension of homogenised cosmopolitan Maputo, for, as Meneses reminds us, ‘as relações de género não podem ser analisadas como ocorrendo isoladas das identidades étnicas. A separação das relações de género dos valores e solidariedade religiosas é igualmente inquestionável’ [‘gender relations cannot be analysed as occurring isolated from ethnic identities. The separation of gender relations from religious values and solidarity is equally unquestionable’] (2008: 84). The focus of the short story is on what happens when João, the husband of Safi, allegedly turns into a hippopotamus and Muhala moves to legitimately take his place in the household. The first thing that Muhala does is to invoke the initiation rites as the means to justify the relationship between both men, which is understood by all characters as being one that goes beyond consanguinity. In this respect, Osório and Macuácuá (2013) remind us that initiation rites are very important in the definition and transmission of gender roles and perceptions of sexuality, but also in terms of the generational transfer of cultural identities and social hierarchies. In Makua culture, the initiation rites reflect the intersection between matrilineal and Muslim cultures, being the means to simultaneously reaffirm the hierarchy of matrilineal parental power (so, the power of the maternal uncles) and the power of a Muslim religious identity (Osório and Macuácuá 2013: 189-90). If, on the one hand, the rites have an important component of repetition in this context, which allows for a recurrent exposure to the gendered ‘instructions regarding dos and don’ts’ (Arnfred 2014: 139), on the other hand:

(...) os ritos, mais que consolidar saberes, conformam comportamentos e valores que determinam a integração dos indivíduos no grupo, em que a circuncisão como fenómeno biológico e social se inscreve na passagem de um estatuto para outro, como se de um nascimento se tratasse. (Osório and Macuácuá 2013: 73)

[(...) more than consolidating knowledge, the rites adjust behaviours and values that determine the integration of individuals into the group, in which circumcision as a

biological and social phenomenon is inscribed in the passage from one status to another, as if it were a birth.]

Both João and Muhala go through the challenges of the initiation rites and are circumcised together during these rites of passage to adulthood, which creates a special bond between them: they are reborn at the same time as adults and active members of the community, but also as brothers. Hence the fact that Safi refers to Muhala as her brother-in-law who is more than just a brother-in-law:

Muhala é irmão do João. Os ritos de circuncisão, ligam os circuncidados num juramento de segredos e trocas de sangue, de onde nasce uma fraternidade superior e única. Os dois homens partilharam segredos inconfessáveis, beberam o sal e o fel da mesma cabaça. Visualizaram a cor vermelha e negra do ventre materno no acto do renascimento para o mundo dos homens, ainda impúberes, nos duros ritos de iniciação lá nas matas de Monapo. Por isso o Muhala e o João, são mais do que irmãos gémeos. Para Safi, o Muhala é cunhado mais do que cunhado. (2012: 71-72)

[Muhala is João's brother. Circumcision rites bind the circumcised in an oath of secrets and blood exchanges, out of which a superior and unique fraternity is born. The two men shared unconfessable secrets and drank the salt and the gall from the same gourd. They visualised the red and black colours of the maternal womb in the act of being reborn to the world of men, still impuberal, throughout the hard initiation rites out there, in the Monapo woods. That is why Muhala and João are more than twin brothers. For Safi, Muhala is her brother-in-law who is more than just a brother-in-law.]

The recovery of this special bond allows Muhala to go before the traditional and the official authorities, tell his story of João's transformation into a hippopotamus and claim his prize: the

belongings and the entire household of João, wife and children included. This is the instance in which the complexities of the particular setting arise, and Safi seems to be caught in the intersection of different law systems – which takes us to the intricacies of legal pluralism in northern Mozambique and its emancipatory potential for Mozambican women, in particular.

In a study of the Mozambican state and legal system, Boaventura de Sousa Santos claims that the emergence of legal plurality in the nation-state is largely due to the fact that Mozambique is a heterogeneous state, i.e. ‘it is characterized by the uncontrolled coexistence of starkly different political cultures and regulatory logics in different sectors (e.g., in economic policies and family or religious policies) or levels (local, regional, and national) of state action’ (2006: 44). Santos identifies three official and three unofficial entities/groups within the Mozambican legal system in a scheme. Regarding the official ones, the Supreme Court, the Provincial Courts and the District Courts are presented in this exact order in a pyramid organisation, the District Courts being the lowest courts and the ones that interact the most with the unofficial legal orders. Within the realm of the unofficial legal system, the Community Courts, the Traditional Authorities (*Régulos*), and Others (e.g. religious leaders and/or associations, particularly Muslim ones; healers belonging to AMETRAMO⁶; neighbourhood secretaries; local administrative leaders; NGOs) are presented in this exact order, from left to right, in a continuum of official/unofficial (so, Others being the most unofficial of the legal orders) (2006: 54-55). In Santos’s point of view, this legal plurality in contemporary Mozambique is quite complex. More than merely reflecting the coexistence of various legal orders in one social space, it actually reveals a historical trajectory of dynamic interactions between these legal orders, thus presenting itself as a new kind of legal pluralism that Santos refers to as legal hybridisation (2006: 46).

⁶ The Mozambique Traditional Healers Association.

On the subject of the emancipatory potential of legal pluralism for women, it is important to note that the Decree No. 15/200⁷ constructed the new category of ‘community authorities’ as a homogeneous and depoliticised one, which created new problems – certainly for women from matrilineal and Muslim societies. In a study on gender relations and the construction of gender identities through the analysis of multiple mechanisms for conflict resolution, in Angoche (Nampula province), Meneses verified that since traditional authorities have been re-introduced into the legal system, there is a growing tendency for them to enact a return of tradition in their decision-making processes that recreates masculine power (2008: 71-87). According to the researcher, this is due to the absence of public debate on cultural differences and human rights. The space for conflict resolution thus becomes the arena for the traditional authorities’ re-construction of a culturally accepted social order that privileges men and reinforces women’s subalternity (2008: 83).

With regards to religion, Santos reminds us that due to the influential historical presence of Islam in northern Mozambique, religious law became an important part of legal pluralism – especially with reference to family issues – which is here characterised by an ‘intense hybridisation between religious law and traditional law’ (2006: 60). According to Bonate (2006: 148-49), all Muslim groups in Mozambique (the African traditionalists, the Sufi Orders and the Wahhabis) build their discourses of power and gender around notions of Islamic Law, the *Shari’a*, but have different interpretations of it and distinct views about the extent of its application. In relation to the division of property, inheritance rights and to the notions of *wali*, *walaya* and *hadana*⁸, Bonate continues, the groups from rural or suburban settings (so traditionalists and Sufis) tended to be much more influenced by matrilineal ideology, as they

⁷ This Decree officially recognised the community authorities – understood to be ‘os chefes tradicionais, os secretários de bairro ou de aldeia e outros líderes legitimados como tais pelas respectivas comunidades locais’ [the traditional chiefs, the neighbourhood or village secretaries and other legitimate leaders recognised as such by their respective local communities] (Decree No. 15/2000: Article 1).

⁸ According to Bonate (2006: 151), *wali* is Arabic for ‘the legal guardian of the woman’; *walaya* is Arabic for ‘the father’s guardianship of children’; and *hadana* is Arabic for the ‘mother’s custody of children’.

lived ‘within the solidarity of a matrilineal kinship group and relied on subsistence agriculture’ (2006: 151). This means that conflicts such as the one represented in the short story, would normally be resolved within the family or kinship group, and only taken to the community courts or traditional authorities if one of the parties was unhappy about the resolution. Certainly, what is made clear by the results of fieldwork conducted in different areas of the Nampula province by both Bonate and Meneses (2008: 81-82) is that these cases would hardly be brought to the official justice. Yet, what we observe in Chiziane’s text is rather peculiar. Safi refers to her mother (the ‘mother of mothers’ in Makua culture⁹) only once, thus unveiling that hers is a matrilocal marriage.¹⁰ This happens straight after Muhala tells Safi the story about João’s transformation and claims his entitlement to João’s family and his possessions. Safi is aware that Muhala is lying, but since she does not have the means to disprove his story, she decides to play along. She, therefore, responds to Muhala by saying that she will notify her own mother of the new situation straightaway (Chiziane 2012: 73). Resting on the marital bed, he agrees to it, but instructs her not to tell anyone about who gave her all that information. However, there is no reference to an attempt being made to resolve the situation within the family or through kinship mediation. This suggests that this step was omitted for a reason, as we later learn that Muhala takes the case directly to the attention of the traditional and official authorities, who believe and support him.

This take us to the challenge that the text’s representation poses to the *modus operandi* of the un/semi-official legal orders in the context of legal pluralism. Had the conflict been taken to the attention of the family, Safi would potentially be in an advantageous position to refute the claims of Muhala, since her own kin would be making the decisions or mediating the discussions to resolve the matter. However, by bringing the case immediately to the traditional

⁹ In Makua culture, the ‘mother of mothers’ is the head of the household. She lives surrounded by her daughters, her daughters’ husbands and their offspring (who belong to her lineage).

¹⁰ Arnfred (2014: 241-42) points out that there are special circumstances in which after a few years, the son-in-law may ask the parents-in-law for permission to move with his new family to his own family’s land.

and official authorities, Muhala turns legal pluralism to his advantage, as he clearly searches for the instruments that best serve his interests.¹¹ He, thus, not only circumvents that potential advantage of Safi, but also reinforces his own power through the use of his experience of speaking within the sphere of public authority.¹² In Safi's words of, 'Enrolou o régulo e o povo com as mais belas palavras. Ele fala bem e argumenta maravilhosamente. A aldeia inteira acreditou, menos eu' (Chiziane 2012: 75) [He deceived the traditional chief and the people with the most beautiful words. He speaks well and argues wonderfully. The whole village believed him, except me]. As such, even though Safi attempts to question Muhala's versions of the facts and get the police to carry out a proper criminal investigation, she is unable to challenge the already established truth. Chiziane seems to suggest that by claiming a blood relationship between himself and João through the retrieval of the powerful bonds created during the initiation rites, Muhala is able to claim rights over João's possessions, and even the family of the alleged deceased. And all of this is achieved by forsaking the rights of the wife, now widow.

Yet, this scenario is much more in line with southern Mozambique patrilineal family forms, in which polygyny is common and levirate marriages – through which a widow is inherited by her husband's brother – are possible, even if less common nowadays.¹³ According to Arnfred (2014: 68-94), in patrilineal (which are often patrilocal) societies, a married woman and her children belong to the husband's family. This has much to do with the fact that a *lobolo* (often called bride price) is paid by the man to the woman's family in order to seal the exchange

¹¹ Santos reminds us that citizens are not passive in the whole process of legal hybridisation and do turn legal pluralism to their advantage, as when they seek for systems of conflict resolution, they look for the instruments that best serve their interests (2006: 67).

¹² Based on her analysis of divorce suits in Provincial Courts of Maputo, in 1983, Arnfred (2014:102) calls attention to this phenomenon as being recurrent: 'It was striking how frequently the women lost the case just because the men were smarter and more experienced in dealing with a public authority such as a Provincial Court'.

¹³ It is important to note that polygyny is allowed by Islam in Mozambique, even though it is not widely practiced in matrilineal societies (Arnaldo 2004: 143-164). However, even though according to Islamic Law a widow can voluntarily marry her brother-in-law, the Qu'ran forbids forced levirate marriage (Jones-Pauly with Tuqan 2011: 44).

between both families and initiate the new relationship between them. As such, if the husband dies, the levirate marriage is a way of maintaining the wife in the family to which her children belong (2012: 74). This is, nonetheless, a custom of patrilineal societies, that would not necessarily occur in a matrilineal society, in which the widow would continue to live with her own family, and in her own family's lands, with her children, who belong to the maternal lineage. At this point, the text seems to echo yet again the author's concern with the imposed cosmopolitanism from above, which reinvents a modernity that tends to exclude northern (and other) cultural traditions and replace them with others which are largely based on traditional southern customs and habits. In this particular case, this replacement which is sanctioned by the government is highly detrimental for women, as it officially endorses the erosion of female power within the matrilineal structure, by imposing expectations in line with a patriarchal setting. In the text, not only do the traditional and official authorities decide in favour of Muhala, but they also make no reference to Muhala's inherited obligations in the household as new husband – on the contrary.

As Arnfred reminds us, in matrilineal kinship systems men acquire status in society via women and it is through their wives that married men can access land (2014: 150; 241). Bonate (2006: 151) claims that in this kinship system 'a woman is viewed as a carrier of the biological and spiritual essence of a kinship group, holding power over its well-being in addition to that of the land/territory that it occupies'. As such, the first years of marriage are a period of trial for the husband, as he must prove himself continuously. Firstly, on the wedding night, it is his fertility and virility that are tested, rather than the woman's virginity. Secondly, the couple must live in the household of the woman's family, where the husband's behaviour can be scrutinised. Finally, even though wives control the food (linked to the land and, therefore, one of the most important elements of life in a matrilineal context) and husbands control the money that arises from crop production, the distribution and spending of the money must be very

carefully negotiated and agreed by both parties (Arnfred 2014: 239-41). Nonetheless, by merely inheriting João's position, Muhala succeeds in avoiding all the obligations, merely to enjoy the benefits of his new situation:

Os olhos de Muhala brilham de vitória. Conseguiu! Era toda sua, aquela linda viuvinha feita de mel e doçura. Iria parar por alguns tempos a sua carreira de vigarice: andar sempre à caça das viúvas mais lindas de Nampula, ricas herdeiras, ou andar atrás de solteironas laboriosas e ricas que não conseguiram marido por serem feias. Acabava de realizar a máxima proeza. Herdava a mulher do seu irmão de circuncisão, os bens, a família inteira. À noite, se ele quisesse, poderia até dar-se ao luxo de dormir à vontade, sem ter o trabalho de mover o sexo e a coluna para produzir mais um filho. Até os filhos, o seu mais do que irmão lhe deixava como herança. (2012: 73)

[Muhala's eyes shine with victory. He had made it! And now, that beautiful little widow made of honey and sweetness was all his. He would stop his con man career for a while; always on the hunt for the most beautiful widows of Nampula, wealthy heiresses, or chasing after laborious and rich spinsters who could not get a husband for being ugly. He had just accomplished the greatest deed. He inherited the wife of his brother of the initiation rites, his possessions, the whole family. If he wanted to, at night he could even afford to sleep easy without having to bother moving his genitals and his spine to produce yet another child. He was inheriting even the children of his brother who was more than just a brother.]

Through his own resourcefulness, and with the connivance of the traditional and official authorities, Muhala is, indeed, the victor.

Chiziane's criticism of cosmopolitanism from the top through the representation of this conflict is dual. On the one hand, the focus is clearly put on the transformation of masculinity in modernity and the changes in gender power relations within matriliney. As Arnfred reminds

us, modern society is so concentrated on money, that in these northern contexts the focus is shifting ‘from food, a female power domain, to money, which is under male control’ (2014: 249), which inevitably leads to a gradual erosion of female gender power and an increasing affirmation of male gender power. It is important to point out that it is João’s enormous ambition to become the greatest man in the village that triggers the conflict:

Tinhas a ambição de ser o maior da nossa povoação, bem sei. Já temos um tractor que lavra esta maldita terra, que ora inunda ora seca. Já temos a casa de alvenaria com janelas de vidro. Já temos painéis solares e electricidade. A camioneta Isuzu. Por sonhar com o barco a motor, procuraste espíritos maus, e acabaste no meio do rio, da lama e do canavial. (2012: 74)

[I know quite well that you had the ambition of becoming the most important person of our town. We already have a tractor that ploughs this damn land, which sometimes is flooded, and at other times affected by drought. We already have the house made of cement, with glass windows. We already have solar panels and electricity. The Isuzu truck. Because you were dreaming of the motor boat, you sought evil spirits, and ended up in the middle of the river, the mud and the cane field.]

It is made clear that it is con-man Muhala's sense of his own inability to achieve the kind of valuable masculinity represented by João (married to a beautiful wife, well-off financially, hardworking, ambitious) that ultimately leads him to attempt to kill him, and subsequently acquire the wife, the children, and the commodities. Yet, Muhala ends up being killed by the largest hippopotamus in the river, the same one that he had identified as being João, in a symbolic move that echoes the author’s condemnation of the kind of modern masculinity that João himself came to represent. It is also worth noting that throughout the period in which Muhala replaces João in the family the only thing he does is to feast on almost all the food and

animals, with a total disregard for the household organisation, in an excess that points at his attempt to compensate for his lack in terms of masculine representation in that setting. In doing so, he simultaneously strips Safi of a power which is intrinsically linked to women in that context – the control of food – and one of the most important ones to ensure the continuity of the family, which, again, resonates with the idea of ‘the gradual transformation of gendered power within the matrilineal context’ (Arnfred 2014: 248).

On the other hand, the emphasis is visibly put on the performance of the traditional and official authorities. According to Santos (2006: 41; 68-69), the figure of the *régulo* combines in himself legislative, judicial, executive and administrative functions and powers and, therefore, has an important role as an agent of conflict resolution. Dealing with a vast array of issues (from matters related to land to family and witchcraft issues), these traditional authorities are part of a wider network of legal institutions that may include the district/provincial courts, the police, and local political/administrative agencies. As such, they could be approached as primary instance for conflict resolution, as instances for appeal, or even to provide advice or evidence in specific cases handled by other legal institutions. The hearings are open to the public and normally held at the *régulo*’s residence; and throughout the sessions, the population can intervene and ask questions. Ultimately, after listening to the parties involved, the counsellors and the audience, the *régulo* makes his decision and attempts to settle the matter in a way that safeguards the continuity of peace between both parties and harmony within the community. When João returns to clarify the story and asks Safi about the reactions of the authorities when she complained about the case, she replies ‘Toda a gente aqui acreditou nessa história do homem-hipopótamo. É um bando de supersticiosas [sic], João. Não vale a pena contar com eles’ (2012: 75) [All the people here believed that story about the man who became a hippopotamus. This is a bunch of superstitious people, João. There’s no point in counting on them.]. Although the example is extreme, the outcome does seem to point in the direction of

the results of various recent studies about the re-emergence of the traditional authorities in northern Mozambique and the application and dissemination of the Family Law – and the problems arising from both of them. Based on research done in Angoche, Meneses argues that the reaffirmation of the legitimacy of the traditional authorities' power in society, since the beginning of the new century, has made room for the emergence of a rhetoric based on traditional values: a space in which masculine power re-establishes itself and prevails, especially in family disputes. In Meneses's words,

A procura de soluções para os conflitos dominantes vai no sentido de 'repor' e reconstituir a ordem social culturalmente aceite, reafirmando e reforçando uma subalternidade crescente das mulheres. Ou seja, a reinvenção da tradição actua como uma forma de controlo social e não como um espaço de reforço da emancipação da mulher, da igualdade entre homens e mulheres (Rosander 1997). Neste sentido, muitos dos 'novos' líderes tradicionais, devido à ausência de discussões públicas sobre as diferenças culturais, sobre os direitos humanos, utiliza este espaço de reconhecimento para reconfigurar os costumes e as práticas locais, reforçando a subalternidade da mulher (2008: 83).

[The search for solutions to the dominant conflicts is aimed at 'restoring' and reconstituting the culturally accepted social order, reaffirming and reinforcing a growing subalternity of women. That means that the reinvention of tradition acts as a form of social control, rather than as a space for the reinforcement of women's emancipation, and for equality between men and women. In this sense, due to the lack of public discussions about cultural differences and human rights, many of the 'new' traditional leaders use this space of recognition to reconfigure the local customs and practices, thus reinforcing women's subalternity.]

In the urge to recreate tradition as a mystical place of power, gender relations are reconfigured and new positions of subalternity are created, with great negative impact on matriliney and on the locations of female power within it (Meneses 2008: 82-83).

Caught in this confusing web of judicial, religious and cultural power struggles and negotiations, women are forced to come up with creative ways of preventing the progressive erosion of their gendered power within matriliney. Although Safi tries to accept the decision of the traditional authorities (so, being an obedient wife and accepting Muhala as the new husband), she cannot bring herself to do it. She does not believe her husband is dead, and can see through Muhala's plan. She therefore comes up with a plan of recreating tradition as site of resistance and of an alternative modernity:

Vale mais agir do que falar, sabe disso. Na sociedade em que vivemos são precisas mil vozes de mulheres para contrariar o que diz um só homem, mesmo que seja vigarista. Vou ser aquela esposa macua que a tudo obedece e ao homem se submete. Não vou nunca discutir os ditames da tradição nem questionar as verdades dos antepassados. Alá vai fazer o resto. Ele é que fez o mundo e esta criatura má que dorme sem vergonha na cama do meu marido. (2012: 73)

[She knows that it is better to act than to talk. In the society that we live in, it takes a thousand female voices to refute what one man says, even if he is a crook. I will be that Makua wife who obeys everything and submits to the man. Never will I challenge the dictates of tradition or question the ancestors' truths. Allah will do the rest. He is the one who created the world and this evil creature who sleeps, shamelessly, in my husband's bed.]

Her strategy to avoid becoming his wife and maintain her freedom is the performance of madness. Given that, technically, her husband is not dead, Safi uses marriage and all the

obligations that come with it in a patriarchal setting as the means to officially reaffirm her attachment to João. Pretending to accept that João is now a hippopotamus, she starts accomplishing every task that is expected of a wife towards the hippopotamus identified as being João: spending time with it, giving it compliments, taking freshly cut grass for it to eat, and even organising a session of magic on the riverbank to celebrate its birthday (2012: 74). As such, by pretending to accept that João is now a hippopotamus, she reaffirms the validity of their bond through marriage, which prevents Muhala, even if temporarily, from claiming his brother's wife. Indeed, by creatively navigating through cultural, religious and legal systems, Safi is able to buy herself enough time until João comes back to reveal the truth. Her subversive use of traditional patriarchal family-based rules is the means to affirm her rights within her own patriarchal society, thus resisting the imposition of a legal culture that tends to erode female power and increase the inequality between men and women.

Interestingly, her ability to do so comes from her knowledge of cultural habits in patrilineal societies. This gesture echoes once again the author's stance regarding the need for Mozambican authors to know more about cultures other than their own or the ones that they find themselves living amongst (which tend to be southern) in order to make a more valuable contribution to a conception of *Mozambicanness* that, as Gilroy claims, can 'allow for the presumption of equal value and go beyond the issue of tolerance into a more active engagement with the irreducible value of diversity within sameness' (2005: 67). Chiziane's detachment (to a certain extent) from her own cultural background and exposure to the otherness of the Makua culture allows her to build this story in which she uses the judicial system to highlight the need to value and respect the rights of any people, of any cultural background – women in particular. Hers is an individual act of solidarity, but one whose impact might be profound due to the medium selected to convey the message. The construction of the character Safi throughout the short story is one which combines the positioning of women in different cultural settings

(matrilineal and patrilineal), thus linking them in solidarity as minorities. Therefore, Chiziane's short story can be read an act of cosmopolitanism from below.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if we keep in mind Gonçalves's claim that writers have the responsibility of dreaming and reinventing the city and the country, via their work, by preserving memories of the place, Chiziane's proposal appears to be a subversive one, which reveals a strong cosmopolitan commitment (Gilroy 2005: 67). Chiziane's choice of text for a collection meant to celebrate Maputo is in line with her claim that Mozambican authors have first and foremost a collective duty towards Mozambicans and the nation-to-be. Her portrayal of the northern Nampula province suggests a 'contraponto ao imaginário político da capital' [counterpoint to the political imaginary of the institutional capital] (Can 2016: 5), in a gesture that clearly points towards the need to give equal value to the cultures of groups other than the southern ethnic groups, which emerge historically associated with the city of Maputo. The focus on the history of the largest ethnic group in the country, the matrilineal and Muslim Makuas, allows for the emergence of alternative forms of cosmopolitanism through the recovery of diverse cultural trajectories (from the pre-colonial cosmopolitanism of the Swahili-influenced African societies to the vibrant miscegenation prompted by slave trade in the colonial era) and religious contests (from Afro-Islam, to the emergence of the Sufi Orders, followed by the more recent establishment of *Wahhabism*), all of which challenge the way Maputo and Mozambique by extension have been conceived by state-centred cosmopolitanisms from above.

In juxtaposing the complex history of Nampula with the portrayal of the city of Maputo advanced by the anthology, Chiziane turns the spotlight towards all the other alternative blind spots in the country that remain marginalised when there is only place for the celebration of the capital city (and everything that comes with it), thus displacing Maputo's cosmopolitanism

as the one that stands for the entire country. Additionally, it commands attention to the impact of religion on constructions of the *self*. Chiziane exposes the need to problematise universal conceptualisations of cosmopolitanism within, the country; conceptualisations that more often elide than give equal value to diversity, thus only telling one of many sides of a rich story. She hints at the fact that the creation of institutional egalitarian laws does not fully translate into achievement for all Mozambicans of equality across different genders, ethnic groups, social backgrounds, and religious faiths, and within a complex system of legal pluralism. In doing so, Chiziane emphasises the need to address the dangerous problems emerging from plural Mozambique – particularly with reference to legal pluralism, the return of tradition and the reconfiguration of gender relations within its discourse – rather than just celebrating a top-down cosmopolitan perception of a harmoniously multi-cultural Maputo.

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