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Sexualized bodies: Masculinity, power and identity in
Mozambique

Abstract

Drawing on ethnographic work carried out among Mozambican men living in Maputo (the capital of Mozambique), this paper intends to describe how subordinate men from a poor background are reconstructing their masculinity through the explicit sexualization of their self. It has been shown that among poor Mozambican men the lack of money or other material goods is compensated by complex practices and a variety of discourses on sex and sexuality. Sexuality, and its bodily enactment, is then used to reconstruct a powerful sense of manhood, which may take a variety of forms ranging from identification with the norm of the ‘good lover’ to more struggle-based discourses. All of these strategies imply an explicit investment in various forms of ‘bodily capital’, which may lead to the building up of a phallogentric masculinity, though women’s sexual agency is not ignored. In male discourse, a value is attributed to goods, whether material or symbolic, which function discursively according to an imagery of economic exchange as if the body were a commodity, a discursively constructed capital of manhood. Through a number of ethnographic examples, I will contend that we can consider masculinity as a complex structure of capitals that can be enacted in different spheres and with different meanings. As a result, different power hierarchies can be reconstructed and a degree of plurality may be incorporated into what we consider hegemonic masculinity. Sexuality and sex, while performed through a bodily *hexis* and discourses on power and control, are at the core of these processes and represent a vital constituent of the male self.

Key words

masculinity, sexuality, bodily capital, Mozambique (Southern Africa), power, performance

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Introduction

I arrived in the city of Maputo, Mozambique's capital, hoping to grasp gender relations and, in particular, the ways in which masculinity is being (re)built. To my amazement I was immediately immersed into a very complex society. This southern African city seemed, at the first glance, a melting-pot of effervescent and lively diversity in a number of rather different, though highly detectable, aspects. The billboards announcing all sorts of products for sale and publicizing modern mobile phone technology, internet gadgets, fancy cars, newly opened fashion shops, and rich and attractive individuals, often portrayed in a highly sexualized manner, contrasted starkly with the poverty stamped on the bodies and faces of the majority of the local populace, who were caught up in a daily struggle for survival.

Indeed, Maputo appeared as a rich terrain in which to investigate the encounters and striking contrasts between the rich and the poor, the black population and the white, men and women, strangers and locals (e.g. Appadurai 1996). However, even among the individuals affected by the epidemic burden of poverty, which sculpts the lives of those living in this corner of the globe, a watchful eye immediately recognizes evidence of what we so readily recognize as Western patterns of consumerism – ranging from the wearing of jeans or sun-glasses to the use of mobile phones or the enactment of a certain body *hexis*. A body *hexis* that reveals itself (as Bourdieu proposes) as a pattern of postures that are simultaneously individual and systematic insofar as they are linked to a system of techniques that involves both body and tools, while being associated and charged with an array of social meanings (Bourdieu 1977). At both levels, the body appears as highly sexualized. Moreover, the bodies and routines of Maputo's inhabitants seem marked by a mix of symbols, which, noticeably associated with sex and sexuality, catch the immediate attention of anyone who has just landed at Maputo International Airport.

As I walked through the streets of the city, which is clearly divided along strict class lines between the modern centre, built of cement, and the poor reed (*caniço*) neighbourhoods that surround it, three basic ideas immediately came to my mind: the men's complex and variable masculinities, the bodily enactment of male power that could be expressed in many different ways, and the economy of exchange, in which everything

and everyone seems to have acquired a certain value, whether material or symbolic (Araújo 1999). For me, the public exhibition of material goods (which, even if only accessible to a few, feed the aspirations of the majority of Maputo's inhabitants) and the display of indisputably sexualized bodies were the starting points in my analysis of the connection between Mozambican masculinities, sexuality and male power (e.g. Attwood 2009).

Drawing on ethnographic work carried out between 2005 and 2010 among Mozambican men living in Maputo, I intend to give a critical description of how subordinate men – to use Connell's terminology – from a poor background are reconstructing their masculinities through the explicit sexualization of their bodies and their selves (Connell 1995). In my view, this phenomenon may lead to the building up of what we could term phallogentric masculinities. In spite of all the changes concerning the empowerment of women, it is still evident that men are more powerful overall than women (Aboim 2009). And, all in all, they are more powerful simply because they are men in a historically established environment that values masculinity over femininity. This implies, of course, taking different forms of male ascendancy into account: from public precedence to sexual phallogentrism, a term coined by Derrida to refer to the attitude of giving priority to the masculine (phallus) in the construction of cultural meaning (Derrida 1972). In this sense, there is certainly a hegemony of the male category, though it operates through complex and socially differentiated forms of domination (Hearn 2004). So, the term phallogentric does not merely refer to male dominance during intercourse or just to the physical notion of phallus, but rather to a gender order in which men, even those that we might consider subordinate in the context of a given society, are still a dominant category. A similar idea was also suggested by Therborn, when reflecting on gender relations and change in African societies (Therborn 2004). Furthermore, the importance of male sexuality, which is still underpinned by cultural views of the penis as a symbol of power, has been fairly documented by a number of authors in their research on African masculinities (e.g. Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, Groes-Green 2009, 2011, Lindsay and Miescher 2003, Morrell 2001, Ouzgane and Morrell 2005, Silberschmidt 2004, 2005).

For a number of reasons, ranging from concern with the HIV/Aids epidemics in sub-Saharan Africa to the recognition of sexuality and sex as paramount to the understudying of men's power and enactment of masculinity, sex and the body have become key factors in disentangling the changes in gender relations in this impoverished corner of the globe (Passador 2009, Karlyn 2005, Gune 2008, Groes-Green 2011). Sex and sexuality have therefore received more attention because they have been perceived as explicitly linked to gender power and the hybrid ways through which it is reproduced (Morrell and Swart 2005, Bhana et al. 2007, among others). But, in spite of the recent interest and accumulated knowledge on the subject, there is still a vast reality to be grasped.

In this line of reasoning, my main aim is to examine the ways in which sexuality and its bodily expression are central aspects in men's assertion of manhood, though the reconstruction of power through sexuality and sex is by no means straightforward. Quite the opposite, it involves many-sided tensions between different imageries of masculinity that cut across the lines of generation and social class and are permeated by different appropriations of custom and Westernized symbologies – always a central constituent in the processes that recreate the self (Aboim 2009, Osório 2006, Virtanen 2005).

In sum, sex and sexuality, along with the scripts on which they are performed, cannot, as I contend, be conceptualized as singular processes separate from other arenas of social relations, power and the gender order (Gagnon and Simon 1973, Simon and Gagnon 1999). If *cathexis*, the dimension in which Connell would include sexuality, is gaining a renewed and perhaps more acute significance for an understanding of the making of masculinities – particularly when many men's lack of materially visible capitals (whether financial or political) impedes them from displaying public power, as in the case of poor Mozambican men – this movement has relevant consequences. We are invited to rethink the meaning of hegemonic masculinity and the ways in which it operates, not only as a process of men's domination over women but also that of some men (those who can exert materially-based power) over other subordinate and marginalized men (Connell 1987). The aspirations and resistance of the 'subordinate', even if mainly operating at the symbolic and performative level, should be interpreted vis-à-vis the material side of male power, and the consequences of such processes should be critically incorporated into our conceptualization of masculinities and men. This text unfolds along these lines in two ways.

Theoretically, resorting to a number of ethnographic examples, I will contend that we can think of masculinity not only as a set of hierarchically organized configurations of practice, which, in accordance with Connell, form a hegemony in which some groups of men are dominant while others are simply subordinate, but also as a complex structure of capitals, whether material or symbolic. Rather than a linear hierarchical system whose ultimate goal is the domination of women by some men, while others simply comply with it, we can see each capital (whether material or symbolic) as capable of being mobilized and performatively enacted in different spheres and with different meanings. Rather than a hegemony with stable power hierarchies based on the cultural rule of a specific group or class of men, in the Gramscian sense, male power can be reproduced through tension and struggle, resulting in different views of power itself and even in different and plural forms of male dominance, depending on what, in a given context, defines the proper meaning of being powerful (Gramsci 1979, cf. Donaldson 1993, Hearn 2004). Though performed through a certain bodily *hexis* and discourses on power and control, sexuality and sex are at the core of these processes and are thus a vital constituent of the male self (Bourdieu 1980, Foucault 1979). Therefore, to grasp the dynamics of sexuality,

we need to further develop a perspective that gives us a better understanding of male dominance as pervaded by tension, and that simultaneously considers the agency of women as key actors in (re)producing a given gender order.

From the empirical point of view, I focus precisely on the tensions that permeate men's constructions of their masculinities by paying particular attention to the role of the bodily performance of sexuality among men from a poor background who live in Maputo. Three specific tensions will be explored.

Firstly, I will take a generational perspective, to account for the somewhat conflicting views associated with the different generations' perspectives on male power: they result in an opposition (sometimes subtle, though still an opposition) between the older men's praise of patriarchy as the real and truly legitimate form of male power and the younger men's construction of the figure of the 'good lover', that is, the sexually powerful man. In addition, as regards sexuality and gender, the different ways through which older and younger men perceive women, and notably their sexual agency, are of paramount importance in tackling generational change. Indeed, generational change has been revealed as an important aspect of the understanding of sexualized masculinities and the recreation of male power in Africa, as noted by a number of authors (e.g. Cole 2010, Durham 2004).

Secondly, it is also important to explore the tensions associated with the different ways of using sex and sexuality to resist subordination related to material factors, particularly as regards the ways in which custom and global imageries have become enmeshed and generate different interpretations of the 'good lover' ideal (Groes-Green 2009, 2011). In a way, sex can almost be interpreted as a metaphor of struggle insofar as many men are compelled to reconstruct their masculinity and power in an almost desperate attempt to avoid the feeling of marginalization and subjection that results from their exclusion from what is considered hegemonic: de-racialization, financial and professional success, social and domestic power, consumerism, and so forth.

Finally, and most importantly, the central role played by sexuality must be placed in the context of particular social dynamics in which money appears discursively opposed to sex, thus revealing a third important thread. The tension between different capitals echoes the striking inequalities between different social groups: the affluent and privileged, on the one hand, and the poor and excluded, on the other. The latter have their bodies as their only possessions in the economy of symbolic exchange, as Bourdieu would say (Bourdieu 1980, 1998).

As I will argue below, when developing an approach to masculinities that incorporates the concept of capital, possessing certain valued goods (from an attractive body to a sexual reputation) compensates for the lack of other goods (money, public power, etc.) in this marketized environment. In my view, sexuality and men's sexual scripts can only be fully comprehended through a perspective that brings power and subordination into the equation. By power, I mean the power of some men over others and the overall male

domination of women. This perspective involves considering power as simultaneously material and performative, as well as including women in the analysis.

In the field: Doing research in Maputo

As mentioned above, my research addresses change and complexity in the construction of masculinities in a southern African locus, urban Maputo. In our endeavours to understand the current rebuilding of masculinities in this post-colonial context, sex and sexuality were key topics that emerged in the narratives of almost all the men who participated in in-depth interviews. For most men in contemporary Maputo, the discursive construction of a life narrative is, in various ways, a form of 'sexual story-telling'. For many, sex and sexuality are realms of manhood, particularly when, as today, the old breadwinner model is fading among the poorer segments of society. Indeed, one of the main issues in addressing the men's plurality and adaptation is related to sexuality and intimacy and, for that reason, it is of the utmost importance that we tackle the tensions and ambivalence permeating the relationship between 'sex' and 'power' (e.g. Aboim 2010, Robinson 1996, Segal 2007).

During my fieldwork in Maputo (2005, 2006, 2010), I carried out 40 in-depth interviews with men from different age groups and with different work activities and family arrangements, though they were all from underprivileged or less privileged backgrounds, ranging from extreme poverty to 'lower middle' class situations. The research is, then, of an ethnographic type, although it combines different observation techniques:¹ on the basis of in-depth interviews with lower to middle class men of several generations living in urban and 'rurban'² areas, they included field observations and a large set of informal conversations, many of them taking place at different points in the research. In fact, a proportion of the interviewees were re-interviewed several times, between 2005 and 2010.³ Furthermore, my research work was carried out in a number of different geographic areas. The majority of the men lived in very poor neighbourhoods (many of them in Mahotas, Hulene, Mafalala, Polana *caniço*, Maxaquene, Xipamanine), which are known as the rurban city. Many, however, went into the 'cement city' every day to sell something on the streets or try to earn a living as guards or taxi-drivers. Some of them, the younger and more impoverished, lived on the street or went home, if they had a home to go to, only a few days a week (e.g. Groes-Green 2011). A minority of the interviewees, particularly those belonging to the lower middle-class, inhabited the city centre, even if not in the fancy upmarket neighbourhoods that are expanding in urban Maputo today. Quite the opposite, these relatively well-off men lived in the poorer areas of the cement city, most often in dwellings that lacked basic sanitation. Even so, there is a sharp class contrast – among the many we find in Maputo – between those who have a poor house in the cement city, those who have a home, even if it is made out of reeds, and

those who are homeless. As we will see, the categories mobilized to talk about sex and sexuality intersect with these social differences and must therefore be interpreted as discourses related to the possession of different (and quite unequal) forms of capital.

Contact with men from these different groups was initially established through local informants who helped me to build up my field network in different spatial and social settings. Subsequent interactions were developed using the snowball method. Some of the interviewees were members of the same family unit, which enabled me to compare male and female discourses (though my focus here is on the men), as well as the generational changes within a family lineage. In order to obtain the qualitative material, which is the core of the research, I had to develop closer connections of trust with a number of the interviewees. Information was then obtained during various meetings, home visits and other occasions allowing interaction, e.g. when attending family celebrations, going out with the children or ‘hanging out’ with informants and interviewees. Trust was mainly developed by helping out at moments of crisis, e.g. when a family member was ill, advice and information were needed or even a hand was welcome with daily activities. This sometimes included being of assistance in street-vending activities (a traditional female activity that has been appropriated by men, now the majority among those selling on the streets, as Agadjanian has pointed out) or even helping people to find jobs as guards or housekeepers (in the case of women) (Agadjanian 2005).

The research carried out in Maputo enabled me to gain knowledge of the values and meanings discursively reported and to reconstitute the life trajectories and daily practices of individuals, including, of course, the aspects of sex and sexuality. After a few years of fieldwork in Maputo, my first impression – that of an extreme complexity built on a dense web of inequalities – was very largely still valid. The majority of men seem to be caught between different worlds of meaning, each of which conveys different codes for practising masculinity and performing sexuality (Aboim 2009). Men’s discourses and performative practices are, thus, quite hybrid (Altman 2001, Hodgson 2001, Morrell and Swart 2005, among others). Men are creating a sort of mix between the imageries of the pre-colonial ‘old days’ (which are retained, for instance, in the spiritual respect for their ancestors or in the practice of the *lobolo*)⁴, when masculinity was ‘pure, powerful and uncontaminated’, the legacies of the Portuguese colonial period (which, from the late nineteenth century onwards, brought about significant changes in the lives of the local populations)⁵ and, lastly but more importantly, the symbologies of the ‘modern’ postcolonial society. This has been transformed by political and institutional settings, by a multinational capitalist economy and by the spread of a Westernised symbolic order (strongly influenced by the action of women’s organizations in the fields of gender and development, the impact of international migration, and even the mass media). In this vein, we must interpret the data in the broader context of globalization and transnationalization processes,⁶ which continue to reinforce a dividing line, even if it is sometimes subtle, between

the ‘West and the Rest’ (Connell 2009). With the men’s sexual story-telling, we need to take into account the impact of Western imageries, and the aspirations they bring together, on the ways the men are making use of their sexuality to rebuild their subordinated masculinities in order to regain some power. Drawing on Gagnon and Simon’s sexual scripts theory, I was able to read men’s sexual stories from a perspective that does not neglect gender power as the main generator of men’s discourses about sex and intimacy (Gagnon and Simon 1973). These scripts are filled with tensions that are always the result of inequality and otherness. The assertion of masculinity through sexuality reveals not only a diversity of scripts but also the inner struggles for power and self-empowerment that are a constituent of masculinity and of a given gender order, where subordination and domination, rather than linearly opposed, as in Connell’s original formulation, are most commonly intertwined (Connell 1987, 1995). In this sense, sex and sexuality are a wide open window that allows us to grasp other key processes of social differentiation.

In the section that follows I will examine the tensions between different views of masculinity and male sexuality.

Patriarchy and sexuality: Generational discourses

Traditionally characterized by the patrilineal structures of family and social organization that constituted the customary basis of male dominance – legitimized through the symbolic figure of the patriarch – the city of Maputo has witnessed rapid change over the past few years. One of the key factors within these processes (along with migration, a neo-liberal capitalist economy, gender and development initiatives favouring women’s rights, unemployment and impoverishment, etc.) is the remarkable growth in the population. In 1997, particularly on account of the internal migration from rural areas, this reached nearly a million inhabitants (989,400), with many of them facing huge problems of unemployment, poverty, health and poor living conditions. Nevertheless, migration to the city has changed the ways of life of the rural populations, and also made them more susceptible to Westernization (e.g. Andrade 1998, Lubkemann 2004)⁷. However, one major consequence of social and gender change in Maputo is what we may see as a generational contrast, which can be quite sharp. This contrast translates into conflicting views of manhood, power and sexuality and sets the notion of the ‘patriarch’ against that of the ‘good lover’. In a way, this generational conflict mirrors an inner tension in any masculinity, that is, the enduring opposition between a familialized but powerful, and a sexually predatory manhood (Bourdieu 1998, Connell 1995).

Indeed, building on pre-colonial custom and the patrilineal family system that upheld men’s power as absolute rulers of their households, Portuguese colonial policies under the right-wing authoritarian regime of the ‘Estado Novo’ (1926–1974) were also keen to disseminate the ideals of a male breadwinner model, instigating, or even forcing, Mo-

zambican men to enter the wage-earning system. This ideological view was also supported by Christianisation processes and the fallacious archetype of the *assimilado*⁸, which to a certain degree survived as a legitimate model long after being abolished in 1961 (Arnfred 2001, Isaacman 1992). Pre-colonial custom and the impositions of colonial ideology conspired to construct men as breadwinners, an ideal that still moulds the aspirations of many men, particularly in the older generation.

As Armindo, a man in his sixties, who still carries the marks of the colonial past, explains:

Men should rule at home... it's their role to protect (*guardar*) their wives and provide for their children. Today everything is changing, but that's bad, very bad... youngsters just want to have fun and no responsibility... that's not a man, a man must be a *hosi*⁹, a true chief, responsible... Otherwise, he is not a man...

Armindo, who still works long hours as a taxi driver, makes an effort to support his family but, in spite of his defence of a patriarchal masculinity, the truth is that his meagre earnings are insufficient to provide for his family. This inability to provide generates a feeling of frustration that is shared by many men of his generation. Moreover, like many others, Armindo combines his notion of traditional responsibility for and power over women and children with a view of male sexuality that allows men a high degree of sexual freedom. In spite of cherishing his 'familial masculinity' and living with just one woman, Armindo still goes out with his mates for a night in town every Friday night, which in his words is considered the 'men's night'. Some of his hard-earned money is then spent in bars, drinking and hanging out with prostitutes. He and his mates are *habitués* of the bars of *Rua Araújo*, a street known for its prostitution, in downtown Maputo. As he says:

Men have to escape, it's our nature. I work so hard and every Friday night it's my night. Once I even had a steady mistress, a sort of a second wife, but now it's impossible. It's too complicated and expensive... So I go out and I do what all men do... I just chose a woman to alleviate all my stress and pay, that's all. A man who doesn't go out for sex is a sissy or a coward controlled by a woman. That's not a real man, either.

Armindo's discourse reflects key traits in how sexuality and women's agency – sexual but not only – are perceived by the older generation, showing the double standard that codifies male performance through the balance of traditional responsibility and predatory sexuality. A predatory sexuality, however, that is kept under control and seeks justification in the old custom of polygamy (Arnfred 2001). If it is impossible, for many, to have more than one woman or wife, then other forms of sexual expression are looked for and

considered legitimate. In any case, women are secondary players in this game and the concern with female pleasure is almost absent. Sexual scripts are discursively presented as being written mainly by men, even if a few older women, also interviewed, clearly complain and sometimes describe a secret rebellion against male rule. However, for most women from older generations, obedience and allegiance are sensed as normal, in and outside the bedroom.

In contrast, the younger men have assumed the norm of the 'good lover', even if in very different ways (e.g. Groes-Green 2011). These may range from a strong will to become a 'companion' and value women's sexual needs and sexual agency (in accordance with what Groes-Green labelled 'philogynous masculinities') to a profound apprehension and a division between their respect for women as sexual beings and a vision of sexuality where women's pleasure is first and foremost a male achievement and a way of asserting male power (Groes-Green 2011). In either case, younger men seem much more aware of women's sexual demands and power, a view that was also very important among most of the female interviewees, with a number of younger women emphasizing their capacity to have some control over men, even of 'putting them in a bottle' – a local expression that is applied to men who are faithful and thereby seen as controlled by women. Among younger men, even those who live with steady female partners, the second discourse, which underlines male virility, appeared to be more common and emerged as soon as men gained trust and broke the initial barrier of political correctness. Indeed, if the younger men's sexual scripts are marked by the norm of the 'good lover', which radically contrasts with the older men's discourses, this is by no means an easy process to disentangle. Most discourses mix different references, resort to different justifications and reveal a wide array of tensions related to sexuality and sex, as well as difficulties in dealing with women's sexual agency.

Many young men, whether living with a steady partner or not, do not deny the importance of custom and use traditional polygamy to validate their sexual options. Some of them end up jumping from woman to woman, even if, discursively, they cherish ideals of the companionship couple, the interacting family or the committed father, which are slowly embodied through education, the imageries broadcast by the media and the increasing familiarity with a Westernized gender order. This is the case of Orlando, a street-vendor of handicrafts and a variety of other products brought illegally from South Africa. He is in fact a smuggler (*muqueirista*) who now lives with two women, both of them mothers of his children. As he says, his plan was to 'make a home' (*fazer o lar*) with his first girlfriend (even if he had a number of other sexual encounters). But an unexpected pregnancy, which resulted from his habit of unsafe sex, left him with no other option than to take his second girlfriend (who was kicked out of her home by her parents) to live with him and his first girlfriend. He deeply regrets this unexpected event and shows himself divided between the notion of responsibility, the ideal of a romantic and intimate re-

relationship with just one steady partner, and the untamed wish to gain value through his sexual skills as a ‘good lover’. The notion of responsibility, in this case, is simply related to his careless sexual encounters; as he says, ‘I should use condoms, but that’s how it is... I feel manlier and girls prefer it that way too!’

In many cases, such as that of Orlando, in spite of the desire to be a ‘good lover’ who gives pleasure to women, young men justify their self-doubt and their manhood by appealing to custom and ‘naturalizing’ polygamy as an expression of the male need for sex. This is a fairly widespread discourse that translates into a practice commonly regarded as ‘urbanized polygamy’, called *amantismo*¹⁰ (Arnfred 2001). Men can still have several women, but without granting them the official status they had under the customary rules of polygamy. For this reason, ‘amantismo’ in fact downgrades those women’s social position, in spite of the increasing acceptance of women’s sexual agency in general. In a way, as we have seen, the value awarded to women’s sexual pleasure, and particularly to their more demanding sexual agency, reflects a central generational divide in matters of sexuality.

Reinventing sexual categories: Sex as a metaphor of struggle and resistance

Alongside the generational change in sexual scripts and the increasing importance of the norm of the ‘good lover’ – which causes many men a certain difficulty in juggling with women’s increased agency and their own need to assert manhood through sexuality – it is of great importance to examine the various ways in which this ideal is being mobilized. In this vein, the tensions that are associated today, among different groups of unprivileged men, with forms of resisting subordination through sex and sexuality can only be fully grasped if we examine how custom and global imageries appear entangled in men’s sexual story-telling. As a result, we need to break down the norm of the ‘good lover’ in order to understand the links between sex and power and, particularly, the way in which sex can ultimately be perceived as a metaphor of the struggle against subordination.

As I previously pointed out, one of the ways of (re)constructing masculinity in postcolonial contexts, in which there has been a reconfiguration of gender relations and a manifestation of severe difficulties in achieving masculine dominance either through traditional control or financial success, is to take advantage of the symbolic power attributed to male sexuality. These practices and ideals were found in the discourses of a number of the men with whom I interacted in the city of Maputo and its outskirts. Younger, unskilled men are facing the breakdown of employment opportunities and struggling to make a living by any means possible, from odd jobs to petty crime. In such harsh conditions, the most impoverished are building up their identities outside the traditional codes of male dominance, which means giving a much stronger significance to sex and sexuali-

ty and, generally speaking, to all forms of bodily capital that might be associated with sexual performance as a ‘good lover’. Sexuality has always been important to men’s identity. The novelty, if I can use this expression, is that sex now appears to be practically dissociated from other forms of public power over women and other men. It has gained a value of its own, whereas, before, as we can see in the older men’s discourses, it was more likely to be just a part of what it meant to be a powerful man.

I will elaborate on the notion of bodily or sexual capital in the following section. For now, let me focus on a few important examples of how young men are recreating old tokens and appropriating ‘new’ Westernized categories to describe their sexual performance as ‘good lovers’ and, consequently, their manhood.

Among the young men living in poverty, as also reported in the work of Groes-Green, one of the categories commonly used to describe a positive identity is that of a ‘*molwene*’. Originally, this Ronga word meant a homeless child or beggar but it has been given a new meaning in the voices of Maputo’s youngsters, many of them living on the street and facing extremely harsh conditions. In their discourses, some refused the negative connotation associated with the term and being a *molwene* had become, in many cases, the equivalent to being a ‘warrior’, a ‘real man’, as a man was in the ‘old’ pre-colonial days. The essence of the category recaptures the warrior nature of Mozambican men, with a strong rejection of the ‘soft’ manhood brought in by western modernity, capitalism and consumerism, a world in which these men are clearly relegated to a subordinate position. Thus, being a *molwene* can be envisaged as a transformed category that is mobilized in the struggle for male power: it is well expressed through a certain body *hexis*, often manifesting a degree of aggressiveness, as well as specific sexual scripts. In contrast with the former cases, these men do not feel the tension between responsibility, romantic love and predatory sex. In fact, underpinned by historical processes and a myriad of symbolic references, the men’s discourses reveal a variety of entanglements. As also argued by Hodgson on the subject of changing masculinities among Maasai men, the ‘modern’ is dependent on the ‘traditional’ to gain meaning (Hodgson 1999, 144). Indeed, the importance awarded to the body and sexuality, as capitals of manhood, is often justified through the juxtaposition of old and new symbolologies, which convey elements of recognition and diminish the feeling of subordination and powerlessness.

For the majority, being a ‘good lover’ may imply giving women sexual pleasure, though, most importantly, it is a way of demonstrating sexual virility and bodily power. In the end, the body and the phallus are the only capitals these men have to assert their masculinity. In this sense, the body can almost be conceived and used as a weapon against subordination in a very uneven battle.

This is the case of João, a homeless street-vendor who sells illegal or stolen merchandise and is regularly involved in that level of petty-crime. He is also a seasonal immigrant in South Africa. João brags about his powerful body and his sexual skills in a discourse

that tends to mix a degree of embodied aggressiveness with a good sexual performance. As he says:

I'm a true molwene, I'm in the lead... No one messes with me. I'm not like those 'showoffistas' who can't handle a fight and just think they are the best because of their fancy cars and expensive clothes... They are too soft ... The true Mozambican man must be a warrior [...] with me the girls are always satisfied... Those guys don't even know what women like.

However, as many other young men,¹¹ João hardly conceals his aspiration to take a larger share of the 'patriarchal dividend' that is inherent in a gender order underpinned by hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995). Even if he distances himself from the 'showoffistas' – richer men with financial resources – and denigrates the softer ways of wealthier men by asserting their sexual incompetence and impotence, the fact is that he also aspires to being able to show off.

He has made a great effort to obtain a pair of fashion jeans, trendy sneakers and hip sun-glasses. These few but very valuable goods complete his body style and, he does not deny, help him to attract desirable women in the harsh conditions of male competition. Of course, his sexual performance is what matters the most to his identity but, even so, the comparison with a 'richer other' is of paramount importance in the way sexuality is enacted and discursively prized as a capital of 'true' masculinity.

In the same spirit, a number of other categories of 'resistance' appear regularly in men's discourses, which make use of transnational imageries of power such as that of the *niggaz*, a local version of the black American hip-hopper that is believed to be extremely captivating for women. In fact, as said above, poor men work hard and even rob to buy the clothes that mimic the hip-hop style. Another common form of expression used by these men when describing their sexual conquests is the *ninja* imagery: through it they mimic a military character that, above all, symbolizes power and virility for those living in poverty, many of them petty criminals and gang members. As Emídio explained, after defining himself as a *ninja*, both in the street and in bed:

Broads like it hard... we can't be too soft. They like a good fuck, so they keep coming back. It's like war, I just go and get the one I want, I have my tricks, don't need nothing fancy... just know what they want and that's a good body and a big dick ((laughs)).

Many more examples could be given to illustrate the variety of sexual scripts of Mozambican men. However, the cases chosen to examine and dismember the many-sided meanings of the norm of the 'good lover', which ranges from an almost romantic view of sexu-

ality to an explicit use of sex as a sort of weapon against subordination, allow us to conceptualize sexuality as a key capital in the remaking of masculinity. Furthermore, we are also able to recognize the extent to which sexual scripts are deeply connected with the remodelling of categories in complex processes of appropriation that place sex and sexuality in a global economy of exchange. An economy in which custom gains new meanings and Westernized categories are put in place as devices for the redesigning of male identities in the context of transnational capitalism and cultural globalization. For many, the body and sexual performance are closely associated with metaphors of struggle, even war and resistance, a process that, while still maintaining the North-South divide in the global equation of power, generates renewed tensions amid the poorer segments of postcolonial Maputo (Connell 2009). All in all, sex comes into view as a capital that stands in distinct opposition to money, the last resort for those who lack other capitals.

Remaking power hierarchies: Sex versus money

Capital is in fact a central concept in my approach to Mozambican men's sexuality, a view that is in tune with Groes-Green's use of the concept of 'sexual capital' (Groes-Green 2009, 2011). As he notes:

Some young men made women's sexual pleasure a priority in order to generate 'sexual capital', notably by developing sexual skills, using aphrodisiacs and grooming their looks in sexual relationships with girlfriends or lovers (Groes-Green 2011, 6).

The author also suggests that sex can become a tradable commodity and, in this vein, proposes that:

Sexual capital should be understood as a form of capital akin to other forms of capital (symbolic, cultural, social capital) as defined by Bourdieu (1977) and which at certain times become currencies that can be exchanged into economic capital (Groes-Green 2011, 50).

Following a very similar line of reasoning, I also adopt the notion of capital – sexual or bodily, to use Wacquant's (2004, 2005) terminology.

However, as a way of further exploring the heuristicity of the notion of capital in the context of my analysis of sex and sexuality and as a key concept for an understanding of masculinities as a complex structure of capitals, I believe that it is important to reflect upon the concept itself. Only through such an approach can we grasp the applicability of this concept to sexuality, as well as to masculinity and identity, and thus suggest an alternative to an excessively linear and hierarchical positioning of the dominant as opposed to

the subordinate, a reasoning that may well occur when we carelessly use the concept of hegemonic masculinity. In the conceptualization of capital, the definition proposed by Bourdieu is quite helpful insofar as it enables us to conceptualize capital not only as something with a material value but also as something (or someone) with a specific symbolic value: in this way it forges an economy of symbolic exchange (Bourdieu 1977). Nonetheless, Bourdieu's approach is not of much help if we want to conceptualize individuals as subjects who enact and produce power, as Foucault would argue (Foucault 1977). In this line of reasoning, if we want to take a step further and conceptualize masculinities as a structure of capitals, appropriated, transformed and performed by subjects, we need to enlarge our notion of capital. Of course, one way of tackling this problem could imply going back to Marx's conceptualization of capital and taking his theory of value as a main starting point (Marx 1988). However, in order to avoid the trap of an excessive materialism that obfuscates our view of domination as symbolic, poststructuralist approaches to power (such as that of Foucault) can be quite illuminating. That is perhaps the best way of providing concepts such as sexual or bodily capital with theoretical sustainability, and crystallized forms of socially produced value, which can be exchanged. In a way, following Baudrillard's (1996) reasoning on the 'object value system', signs and symbols can be exchanged as commodities insofar as meaning (which can equal exchange value in a Marxian sense) is created through difference. In fact, while sex appears as discursively opposed to money, it is awarded a specific value, which, even if expressed through physical abilities and sexual skills, does not disregard a number of consumption symbols that are seen as vital to creating a bodily 'style'. This style or form of 'showing off' chimes with what Mauss (1934) called the 'techniques of the body' but, in my view, must be placed in the context of transnational capitalism as an economy of meaning, too, that is sustained, as argued by Baudrillard, through consumerism rather than simply by material production. A body, a certain mode of performing, a penis, are then transformed into something more than mere flesh; they become symbols (insofar as they are assigned a value in relation to a specific subject) and signs (insofar as they gain a value in a system of interconnected and exchangeable objects).

Indeed, even if there is an undeniable plurality of sexual scripts and body performativity among Mozambican men (particularly in the younger generation) – which therefore obliges us to leave behind any singular view of sexuality or manhood – one important conclusion is related to the obvious commodification of masculinity (e.g. Beynon 2002). In postcolonial settings and among postcolonial agents from a poor background, there are various ways of dealing with the loss of power that point to the ongoing struggles between domination and subjection. One striking fact is that, by referring to commodification, I am merely reproducing the ways in which men organize their discourses and practices, always awarding a certain value to a certain good (material or symbolic), which mimics, to some extent, the capitalist dynamics of economic exchange, imported from

the west. A number of symbols, most of them related to sexuality, are appropriated by poor Mozambican men and used performatively to enact masculinity and avoid a feeling of complete exclusion. Frequently, masculinities are compelled to change, at least to a certain degree, when men have to adjust to a different gender order or to a different conceptualization of what hegemonic masculinity is (e.g. Donaldson et al. 2009). However, almost all of these strategies tend to imply a rebellious, though still dominant, attitude that hopes to reshape the features of male dominance (e.g. Connell 1995). In this sense, sexuality and its bodily performance can be conceived of as a capital that gains value insofar as it appears discursively opposed to money, in a 'market' of symbolic exchange.

In fact, poor Mozambican men, though not powerful in materialistic terms, do aspire to power and try to escape from their overall subordination (e.g. Connell 2005). The lack of money or other material goods is compensated, as we have seen, by complex practices and discourses on sex and sexuality. Sexuality and its bodily enactment are used to reconstruct a feeling of powerful manhood. In this train of thought, one common strategy is the emasculation of materially powerful men, whether they belong to the white or the black elites (e.g. Kimmel 1994). The emasculation of powerful men and the building up of a phallogentric masculinity may take a variety of forms ranging from explicit violence (towards women, for instance) to identification with the norm of the 'good lover', which, most commonly, implies explicit investment in forms of what we might call 'bodily capital' or 'sexual capital'. This emasculation is one of the most common ways of avoiding complete subjection (e.g. Groes-Green 2009, 2011, Wacquant 2004, 2005). In men's discourses a value is attributed to both material and symbolic goods, which function discursively accordingly to an imagery of economic exchange as if the body were a commodity, a discursively constructed capital of manhood. If poor black men are marginalized others, they also create their own universes of meaning, where white and black elites appear deprived of their manhood and represent emasculated figures, more susceptible to being feminized or even gay ('*a disease of white people or those who think as whites*', as a street vendor in Maputo said ironically, mocking rich men). The strategies of poor Mozambican men to maintain power under harsh conditions are of great importance to an understanding of how masculinity, even when deprived of its Westernized hegemonic features, is recreated through elaborate forms of otherness in which sex and sexuality are paramount. Bodily and sexual capitals represent added value and to some extent mirror the contrasts between different groups of men.

In this sense, embracing the norm of the 'good lover', whether in more romantic or warrior-related forms (as *molwenes*, *ninjas* or *niggaz*, among other options), generally involves the emasculation of whiteness and of black elites (the rich *showoffistas*) as well as an array of tensions between different symbols of masculinity. These are often, even if not always, associated with different groups of men among those on the margins of material power. Paramount examples of these conflicting processes, which are so well revealed in

the men's sexual story-telling, are the oppositions between the figure of the warrior and the wise man, both of them imageries of what valued masculinity can be. Secondly, the metaphors of struggle and resistance that pervade sexual scripts often lead to a degree of ambivalence and discomfort, namely when comparisons are made between Mozambicans and South Africans. Some men, many of them seasonal immigrants in South Africa who have suffered episodes of discrimination and even humiliation, exalt Mozambican wisdom, self-control and non-violent sexuality as compared to the hyper-masculinity and violence enacted by both black and white (all of the latter referred to as *Boers*) South African men. In this uneven equation, the norm of the good lover, which has gained greater popularity among the young men, is often wielded in flexible ways, in an attempt to maintain a positive identity. Comparison with other men from very different groups and with different positions in the hierarchy of male power leads men to manipulate their sexual discourses and their views of women. In a way this flexible sexual scripting calls our attention to the fact that, even when rebelling against certain forms of power, men still aspire to a share of the patriarchal dividend (power and goods), a situation that Connell (1995, 79) defines as follows:

Masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the front-line troops of patriarchy.

Among poor Mozambican men, strategies to enhance bodily and sexual capital may have at least two consequences. Firstly, rebellious or protest discourse and practice do not always promote more equalitarian attitudes towards women. On the contrary, the rebellion of the 'marginalized' against the 'dominant' (in this case, representing 'sex versus money') may derive from an aspiration to receive a share of the 'patriarchal dividend'. In this vein, the feminization of other men is a very good example – not uncommon since the days of colonial imperialism – of how femininity is still used as a symbolic weapon of devaluation. Secondly, the entanglements between local categories – such as the *warrior* or the *wise man* – and globalized imageries – for instance, the black American hip-hopper, who has been transformed locally into the '*niggaz*' or the physically and sexually attractive man – suggest a rapid movement towards the commodification of masculinity promoted by the embodiment of the principles of a neo-liberal capitalist economy. As said before, in men's discourses a value is attributed to goods, whether material or symbolic, which function according to an imagery of economic exchange. In sum, it is my contention that masculinity can be conceptualized as a complex structure of capitals, each of which may be mobilized and performatively enacted in different spheres and with different meanings, often resulting in different power hierarchies. When men's power is being reconstructed through many-sided strategies, which are feverishly alive among Mozambican men, we must definitely rethink the concept of hegemony, as I have tried to

do to some extent, in ways that allow for a better account of postcolonial agency and the complex dynamics of domination and subjection. Particularly when we are dealing with changes in sexual ideals and practices that oscillate between a more equalitarian view of women's sexual agency and the construction of a phallogocentric form of male domination.

Discussion and conclusions

To conclude, it is important to review at least three main points, all of them crucial to an understanding of the processes of remaking masculinities through an emphasis on sexual and bodily capitals. The following remarks recall some of the processes whereby the gender order is being rebuilt in changing and pluralistic postcolonial contexts such as urban Maputo.

Firstly, it is important to bear in mind that men empower themselves in many ways and use a wide number of categories that range from those embedded in custom – such as the warrior or the wise man – to those linked to Western imageries of masculinity (such as the footballer or *nigga*). By using their bodies as if they were a 'capital' of manhood, men reflexively trade their bodily abilities in a sort of goods market, in which the body and sexuality are seen as opposed to money or other forms of institutional power. This allows marginalized men to achieve a feeling that they can be valued men without having money or any other form of materially based power. The rapid sexualization of masculinity creates a dividing line between generations, with older men being more faithful to traditional symbolic codes of patriarchy and, as a result, to the figure of the breadwinner who wisely controls the household.

Secondly, the sexualization of male power should be interpreted through the categories men use to describe themselves and others: the warrior, the street tough guy, the wise and self-controlled man, the breadwinner, the sexually attractive man, the 'showoffista', the emigrant, etc. All of these 'labels' represent the entanglement of local symbolic categories with global imageries, of which a few examples have been given. Most of these labels, which depict sex as a form of struggle, represent a kind of rebellion against the power held by others, though they simultaneously reveal a rejection of exclusion from what is hegemonic in terms of masculinity. Therefore, alternative and even marketized forms of building up masculinity are only partially rebellious, in that they do not always contribute to the emancipation of women and often comply with patriarchy. Giving women pleasure can be, for many, a central way of achieving power. Findings have shown that poor Mozambican men may not be powerful in materialistic terms – which, for instance, fairly diminishes their capacity to control women in accordance with either the old customary or breadwinner codes – but they do aspire to power and try to escape from their overall subordination.

The lack of money or other material goods is compensated by complex practices and discourses on sex and sexuality. Sexuality, and its bodily enactment, is used to recon-

struct a feeling of powerful manhood. The emasculation of ‘materially’ powerful men and the building up of a phallogentric masculinity, which may take a variety of forms ranging from explicit violence or mild aggressiveness to identification with the norm of the ‘good lover’ and investment in forms of what we might call ‘bodily capital’, is one of the most common ways of avoiding complete subjection (Wacquant 2004, 2005).

However – thirdly – I think that it is extremely important to grasp the processes underlying the use of such discursive categories, which ultimately contribute to maintaining the hegemony of men, even if the symbologies of masculinity have become more pluralized, diffuse and body/sexuality-centred (Hearn 2004). In this train of thought, there are, briefly, three key processes that must be taken into account: aspiration, mimicry and disenchantment. Men aspire to emancipation and to their share of hegemony, which they so often see as unattainable (e.g. Howson 2009). In an attempt to escape subordination, mimicry plays a key role insofar as strong entanglements between different symbols are constructed in a way that generates new categories and, also, new forms of enacting masculinity. The different forms of appropriating and enacting the norm of the good lover can be quite illustrative. Yet, there is also a degree of disenchantment produced by frustration and a feeling of unattainability. This is quite obvious when we analyse the ways in which (juggling with sameness and difference) men play with the categories of otherness offered by multiple interpretations of what the valued capitals of masculinity are. The truth is that a feeling of exclusion affects many men, who see themselves deprived of the material and symbolic ‘goods’ that would grant them a powerful masculinity. Sometimes a body and a penis are not enough. In a way, disenchantment is closely tied up with the awareness that they have been alienated and deprived of recognition and redistribution (e.g. Honneth and Fraser 2003).

In this line of reasoning, a fact of central importance that allows us to reflect upon the opposition between sex and money is related to the importance of transnational capitalism in reproducing power and inequality. More than just a material mode of production, capitalism – and the marketized discursivity that it upholds – almost appears as an ‘ontological’ reality that, in a forceful way, implies tying together the symbolic and the discursive with the material support that still underpins a patriarchal gender order, or more precisely, the continuity of patriarchy, even if sexuality and sex have gained a stronger value to define manhood and are almost viewed as independent forms of capital, at least symbolically. The idea of masculinity as a capital can only be understood in this way, which is, of course, highly indebted to Marx’s theorization of value and the many developments that followed. For now, the important aspect to retain is that the notion of capital can both include and weave together the discursive and the material. The marketized semantics of masculinities on the margins are, in this sense, closely linked to the hegemony of men, which implies different but effective strategies of appropriation, through sophisticated forms of competition and socially produced value, whether material or sym-

bolic. Though sexuality and sex are enacted through bodily *hexis* and discourses on power and control, they are at the core of these processes and represent a vital constituent of the male self.

Notes

- 1 Institutional cooperation with Eduardo Mondlane University also allowed me to carry out focus-group discussions with university students and to establish informal contacts with qualified young men and women. Furthermore, this institutional cooperation with Eduardo Mondlane University enabled me to apply a survey to a sample of 350 students, who represent a younger and more qualified stratum of the population. In addition, 20 women took part in in-depth interviews.
- 2 The term 'urban', used by Lie and Lund (1998), is quite accurate when referring to the semi-urban areas where people reproduce rural ways of life and economic production to survive in the city (cf. Arnfred, 2001, 2002).
- 3 The interviews and the informal conversations took place in Portuguese, which is widely spoken in Maputo, even if it is not the native tongue of most individuals. Words in Changana were used occasionally, particularly in informal circumstances, to describe specific episodes (ranging from illegal activities to sex) or, for instance, particular features of Mozambican manhood. In Maputo city, approximately 58 per cent of the population speaks Changana (also referred to as Xichangana or Shangaan) or Ronga (Xironga), a minor but similar language (Lopes 2001). In everyday language, alongside the informal use of Changana, the re-creation of the Portuguese language and the use of Brazilian Portuguese words and various Anglicisms (e.g. 'maning [i.e. many] nice') are extremely common.
- 4 Lobolo is the local word for bride-wealth or bride-price, a common practice in patrilineal societies. Lobolo is, in fact, a ceremony where the woman's lineage of origin is ritually and economically paid off to transfer its rights over that woman's offspring to the husband's lineage. For recent urban lobolo practices, see the work of the Portuguese anthropologist Granjo (2005), who stressed the hybrid systems of lobolo in urban Maputo, pointing out the combination between the traditional ritualization of marriage and the 'Westernized' values that are increasingly underpinning young urban couples' lives.
- 5 As Arnfred (2001) emphasizes, the introduction by Portuguese colonialism of paid work, money and Christianity into local communities led to significant changes in their forms of social organization.
- 6 For instance, the institutional framework provided by the new Family Law, ratified in 2003, which was a major starting point for the research, goes beyond the local and introduces both a historical and a globalized dimension by focusing necessarily on postcolonial themes of exchange between worlds, and the Westernization of traditional structures, practices and values (Aboim 2009).
- 7 On account of this, we must acknowledge the growing link between masculinity studies, transnationalism and globalization theories, with the focus on non-Western masculinities and, broadly, post-colonial gender issues. Several recent publications deal with this contemporary issue (e.g. Hodgson 2001, Connell, Hearn and Kimmel 2005, Lindsay and Miescher 2003, Morrell 2001, Ouzgane and Morrell 2005).
- 8 *Assimilado* was the Portuguese word officially applied to those Africans and *mestiços* considered by the colonial authorities to have met certain formal standards indicating that they had successfully absorbed (assimilated) the Portuguese language and culture. In principle, individuals legally assigned the status of *assimilado* took on the privileges and obligations of Por-

- tuguese citizens and escaped the burdens imposed on most Africans (the *indigenas*). The status of *assimilado* and its legal implications were formally abolished in 1961.
- 9 In the Machangana group, the political hierarchy is first of all associated with the *hosi* (wise chief), who is followed by the *nqulume*, *nduna*, *ndota* and *xindotane*. All these terms have connotations of responsibility and often appear in combination with the ideal of the *mulumuzana*, a Changana word that means ‘head of the household’ or ‘the chief of the household’ (e.g. Dava 2011).
- 10 This would translate into English as something like ‘philandering’.
- 11 Amongst others, I recall the following cases: Carlos, a travelling street-vendor who had several women without providing for any of them; Francisco, who survived from small business and drove an illegal goods truck over the border with South Africa whenever he had the opportunity; Cacito, who was able to set up an improvised gym with some stolen material and became the owner of a very popular business; and Gabriel, who refused to accept the traditionally female role of working in subsistence agriculture, abandoned his family and came to Maputo, where he tried to survive on the streets. Now he helps out his several girlfriends by finding second-hand merchandise to sell in a clothes market (called Calamidade, i.e. calamity), so that they can provide him with a percentage of the sales.

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