

Namúli Mount, the Identity and the Landscape of Gurué

Rute Sousa Matos*

Landscape, Environment and Planning, Center for the History of Art and Artistic Research; University of Évora, Évora, Portugal

***Corresponding Author:** Rute Sousa Matos, Landscape, Environment and Planning, Center for the History of Art and Artistic Research; University of Évora, Évora, Portugal.

Received: March 24, 2022; **Published:** March 31, 2022

Abstract

This reflection arises from a look at the African landscape, the mountains and their ecosystems, the agriculture, the heritage, communities and identity. This is about the landscape, which integrates man and territory, and its multifunctionality that includes the production system (agriculture), protection (ecosystems, flows and ecological processes) and the cultural system (communities and the way they build space). This set constitutes a complex and relational system resulting in the identity of a region and the communities that inhabit it.

The excessive exploitation of natural resources and the tendency towards the growth of an economy based on tourism, causes the transformation of the landscape to occur in the sense of losing its character, its culture and, consequently, its identity.

The objective of this work is to identify invariants of this landscape, which can be considered in future proposals for planning and management plans for this area, in order to preserve the Gurué landscape and its identity.

Through an analysis of the existing cartography and bibliography, the natural systems, their flows and processes and the cultural and heritage elements of this area were first identified and characterized. Based on this diagnostic phase, invariant elements (either natural or cultural) that determine the culture and identity of this landscape and must therefore be safeguarded and maintained, were identified. The guidelines appear later, in this sense - the preservation of fundamental values in the culture and identity of Namúli Mount and the landscape of Gurué, where it is inserted.

Keywords: Namúli; Gurué; Landscape, Multifunctional; Identity

Introduction

Mountains are often associated with isolation and an archaic economy. However, there are mountains that are prime locations. Some because of their wealth, others because they constitute a refuge and still others because they are sacred, symbolic and mysterious places. This is the Gurué region, in Upper Zambézia Province, Mozambique - a landscape deeply marked by tea plantations, in the peripheral reliefs of the Namúli mountain system.

The existing tea plantation was introduced by the Portuguese, causing a drastic change in the landscape, giving this region a new identity based on this cultivation. The mountainous landscape dominated by green tea plants and colonial factories, among other heritage prior to independence, lakes, waterfalls, make Monte Namúli and Gurué a hub of development and attractiveness in the Zambézia region.

Among the extensive tea plantations, Mount Namúli is a hydrological source that sustains communities and biodiversity, including some endemic species. This wealth makes it appealing for visits by the curious, for scientific expeditions and essential to preserve

itself as one of the richest and most diverse ecosystems on the planet. Also the symbolism associated with Namúli - in particular for the Lomwé communities - is fundamental for the preservation of their identity.

Consequently, it is our objective to identify invariants of this landscape, which will be considered in future proposals for planning and management plans for this area, in order to preserve the Gurué landscape and its identity, composed of multiple identities, which include biodiversity, symbolic value and livelihood activities. The aim is to restore the multifunctionality of the landscape and diversify the activities practiced, with the inclusion of communities in the planning process, guaranteeing them better living conditions. For this, an extensive bibliographic and cartographic research was carried out on this region; identified, crossed and superimposed elements, flows and invariant processes in the constituent systems of the landscape - natural and cultural heritage - in order to obtain the expected result.

Reflection

About the concepts of mountain, identity and landscape

The concept of mountain, as the concept of landscape, has different approaches, either according to the different areas of knowledge that study them, or according to different historical, cultural, economic and social contexts. However, in general, mountains, as well as forests, the sea and any landscape of more difficult humanization, are always present in our imagination and in the collective imagination [1].

A bibliographic review makes this diversity of approaches clear, demonstrating that, both historically and culturally, the mountain landscape has always been the focus of attention. It was often referred to as rude, primitive, isolated and with an archaic economy [2, 3]. But also as privileged places, some because of the richness they present due to the rainy climate or the soil, or as being densely populated by the population demand, not necessarily following the rule of poverty and emptiness [3]. The mountain can still be seen as a refuge, a shelter for shepherds, farmers, nomads, but also a sacred, symbolic and mysterious place [4].

According to the Portuguese dictionary, identity is the set of characteristics (name, gender, fingerprints, affiliation, place of birth, etc) of an individual, considered for recognition.

In the field of anthropology, identity comprises a set of signs, influences, among others, that defines the relational understanding of an entity, whether human or not, which is noticed through the difference before others, perceived by others or by itself. In this case, then, identity is related to the idea that it is necessary to have another person and its definitions in order to be able to compare with another individual and with its definitions and have the difference between them.

In addition to the identity of an individual, there are also collective identities and cultural identities. Each individual is a member of a community. Its family, friends, neighbors and fellow citizens form a group that shares cultural and emotional bonds. These ties configure the collective identity of a people. The collective identity is, synthetically, what differentiates one human group from another [5].

A group builds its own identity when, in addition to its history and language, it shares various cultural elements, namely symbols, popular traditions, folklore, gastronomy, among others. We can therefore say that the landscape also reflects the essence and identity of peoples, theirs and that of a country. To understand the meaning of this statement, we must understand the concept of landscape and how it determines its identity and of everything associated with it.

In 2005, the [6] designated landscape as “a part of the territory, as perceived by populations, whose character results from the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. From the analysis of the list of the existing definitions, we can say that the concept of landscape is a holistic concept, where, on a physical substrate (geology, physiography, hydrology, soil, climate) living beings, animals and plants act in a complex way, and the man, holder of a certain culture, giving rise to a certain image. This image is, therefore, much more than what is seen, bearing ecological and cultural meanings (including economic and social meanings in the latter). For authors of ecological training, the landscape is the sensory perception of the underlying ecosystem. For authors with an aesthetic or literary background, landscape is the portion of space that is covered with a glance.

The convergence of the various disciplines and authors in order to integrate both approaches and perspectives into the concept of landscape verified in recent decades, reflects the return to a lost multifunctionality, intrinsic to the concept of landscape, and the acceptance of its understanding as a complex and dynamic system resulting from cultural and natural processes in constant transformation. Any approach to landscape should, therefore, integrate a holistic, integrative, inclusive and multifunctional understanding [7].

This landscape, integrative and multifunctional, inclusive and holistic, phenosystemic and cryptosystemic, cultural identity of a people, cradle of identity elements that are also fundamental for the economy, for society and for the environment, we can find it, complex and promiscuous, by the world from its origins.

The landscape of the Gurué region, in Mozambique, is known for its mountainous orography, dominated by Mount Namúli – the 2nd highest in the country – for its biodiversity and for the vast tea plantations, ex-libris of the region.

About Namúli Mount, the identity and landscape of Gurué

Mount Namúli, with 2,419 m, is the highest peak of a granite massif – and the second highest in the country – located in Gurué, Zambézia province, in north-central Mozambique.

Namúli is part of the complex landscape of Gurué, built by a great diversity of systems, whether ecological or cultural, and the result of its biological wealth and a sedimentary of stories and experiences that constitute heritage and give it an identity.

In addition to all the biological wealth, biodiversity and associated ecological importance, which makes it designated as a key biodiversity area of priority level 1, by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), as an important area for bird conservation (IBA) and as an important area for plant conservation, by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) [8], the Namúli has, even today, a sacred character and a recognized refuge, both by the communities that inhabit it, or by visitors who have to obtain authorization from the traditional authorities (Régulo (Kingsley) or Queen) to climb it [9]. It's symbolic character makes it still today a place of preference for holding weddings, especially for communities, but also for the population of the city of Gurué itself.

Above 1200 m of altitude, Mount Namúli has an area of approximately 200 km² of granite peaks associated with small plateaus between 1800 and 2000 m. In ecological terms, it is important to mention the importance of some of its ecosystems, namely: the humid mountain forest, with an extension of about 1100 ha, most of it located above 1700 m, with only about 135 ha of scattered forest of average altitude below 1600 m. The most important habitats for biodiversity conservation are upland grasslands over peat and evergreen rainforest (both mountainous and mid-altitude) [10].

Agricultural occupation will always have occurred in this region; first with a subsistence character, by the local communities, transforming the landscape with their small clearings and crops; later by the Portuguese settlers, who recognized its agroecological conditions, and introduced the tea crop here, in the 30s of the 19th century [11]. This agriculture crop completely transformed the landscape. It occupied the soil along the entire Licungo valley up to an altitude of 1200 m, rarely higher, as well as on the southeastern slopes, on east of the Namúli massif, up to 800 m. It led to the emergence of the city of Gurué, an economically prosperous city, transforming a rural space into an urban space, with all its associated dynamics, and other localities around Namúli also belonging to the administrative post of Gurué. Gurué's tea plantation may have been the largest in southern Africa, which was very important in Mozambique's economy.

The landscape has been transformed. The construction by local communities was associated with a construction of space dictated by production. However, both have adjusted to each other, cohabiting and creating a new landscape with a new identity.

With the civil war, the tea factories were forced to close, as were many of the other services; much of the population migrated, the tea plantation was abandoned and the local economy collapsed. Only the natural systems of Namúli and a new readjustment of the communities that continued to inhabit it took their course, leading to a new transformation of the landscape.

In the last decade of the 20th century, after the peace accords in 1991, the rehabilitation of the local development started again. Commerce and local administration were reactivated and the State sold many of the plantations to private companies, which provided some formal employment in the city of Gurué [12]. However, tea pots have been aging without being renewed and a little amount of the tea is packaged in Mozambique, being exported raw to other countries. The current owners of the teapots are foreigners, or representatives of foreign companies; they want maximum profit and they are not interested in investing or promoting the Mozambican brand of tea, thus losing the brand and origin (Namúli and Licungo). Some tea pots are being replaced by macadamia plantations. These plantations are fenced, with electric fences, leaving only a guarded path for people to access their villages or the main road. Like luxury resorts, they have swimming pools and golf courses for the owners and their friends to use. For a long time, tea pots used wood from native forests to dry tea leaves; however, it appears that they have been replaced by eucalyptus plantations, leading to yet another transformation in the native forest landscape.

Thus, more than the employment and casual contracts of tea plantations, the main economic activity around Mount Namúli continued and continues to be subsistence agriculture, which is why there are more and more people settling in this area and on the slopes of Mount Namúli. The main crops are cassava and sweet potato, some maize, sorghum and beans. In fruit production, the orange is to be highlighted. In its frutification epoch it is possible to see lines of trucks loaded with oranges, heading towards the city. According to the Director of the Mozambican Agricultural Research Institute (IIAM), there are also very interesting apple varieties in the region. Papaya and mango trees are also found in large quantities, as well as cashew trees, although in smaller quantities. The practice of small-scale horticulture, for sale, has been increasing, particularly tomatoes and potatoes. The products are sold in the city of Gurué, in its surroundings and even in other cities in Zambézia and Nampula Provinces. For many of the population of the Malema valley this is probably one of their biggest sources of income. There are also some small livestock producers in the Namparro valley, on the northern slopes of Namúli. These breeders raise their cattle at an altitude between 1200 and 1400 m, and in some of the plateaus with pastures above 1800-2000m. Cattle graze alone or are guarded by young shepherds who camp next to the pasture [13]. Also noteworthy is the manufacture of charcoal by local communities, which is sold on the side of the road, in burlap sacks. It is a source of energy for cooking, since electricity does not reach everywhere and, when it does, it has many cuts. In the city it is resold by truck drivers. Not being a big deal for those who produce, it constitutes a recipe and an activity. However, these practices place an increasing load on the system. The use of fire and selective logging already have a considerable impact on these ecosystems, resulting in the occupation of clearings with an increasing number of cultivated plots and areas grazed by domestic cattle, causing increasing fragmentation in the forest. Also in the mid-high forest, its destruction by fire and its subsequent cultivation becomes worrying, as is the degradation of riparian galleries below 1600m.

Fires are another problem. They are usually carried out in September to install the “machambas” (horticultural gardens). Before, they were done in a rotating way, not always being burned in the same areas. However, with the exponential growth of population (8 million at the time of independence to around 30 million today), they are no longer “rotating”. This creates a serious problem in the natural regeneration of native species, as young plants die from fires.

The landscape continued and continues to transform itself in its constant dynamics, typical of life and of the natural systems that build it. However, the threats to which it is subject mean that its potential and aptitudes are supplanted by weaknesses and by a need to safeguard and protect elements and systems that are fundamental for its preservation and its identity. We call these elements, these systems and these communities, the landscape invariants that, as the name implies, should remain, not in a static way but dynamically, responding to the challenges and the new realities that are posed to them over time.

About Namúli Mount invariants, about Gurué identity and landscape

We consider determinants and fundamentals in this landscape and in the identity of this region, and therefore should be considered as its invariants: i) the communities that traditionally inhabit and administer the Namúli. They are mostly Lomwé-Macua and, according to their “Régulo” (Kingle), they have made Namúli their home for hundreds of years, deeply respecting this place. The Lomwé-Macua give a sacred character to the Namúli, attributing to it the origin of the first man and the first woman, also justifying the need

to obtain permission from the traditional authorities, with a ceremony of exchange of offerings, to ascend it; ii) The biological richness and biodiversity of species, habitats and ecosystems, not common in Southern Africa, which is associated with Mount Namúli, making it essential in flows, processes and ecological balance; iii) subsistence agriculture balanced with the carrying capacity of natural systems at higher altitudes and along river banks; iv) the tea pots, ex-libris of Gurué. Although they were introduced by the Portuguese, they are part of this landscape, its history and its identity, like the biodiversity of Monte Namúli or subsistence agriculture.

The coexistence of these invariants built, over time and history, the essence of Gurué's landscape, being fundamental in the preservation of its identity. For this reason, they should be considered in any planning, management or patrimonialization action in this area. The ideal would be to obtain, naturally, without the need to establish constraints, the existence of a balance between the various components and systems (ecological, cultural, economic, ethical and social) that constitute this landscape and ensure its multifunctionality. However, aware of the difficulty inherent in this process, we present some recommendations to take into account in future management and planning actions: i) any planning or management action must involve the communities that inhabit the space from an early stage, in an interactive and collaborative way; the symbolic and sacred character of Mount Namuli as a cultural heritage, as well as the practices associated with it, must be preserved; ii) the biodiversity and biological wealth on Mount Namúli must be officially recognized and preserved above 1500 m altitude [14], conditioning the use of the land and the pressure exerted in this area; iii) subsistence agriculture should be encouraged, but in a controlled manner, safeguarding natural systems at higher altitudes and along river banks; iv) tea plantations must be preserved and encouraged, once again in a controlled manner, safeguarding the multifunctionality of the landscape; v) any action related to tourism must integrate the identified invariants, contribute to the multifunctionality of the landscape and to the identity of Gurué; vi) any urban expansion must obey a plan, safeguarding the richness of the resource that is this agricultural land.

Conclusion

Monte Namúli is present in the collective imagination of the Lomwé-Macua, but also of the Mozambican people and mountain lovers. As in [4] and [3], it is a privileged place for its biological and ecological wealth, but also a refuge throughout history and a sacred, symbolic and mysterious place for the Lomwé-Macua communities.

Gurué's collective identity and cultural identity is constructed by an amalgamation of several identities; they are peoples and their histories, realities and experiences, which have been shared, mixed and sedimented over time, allowing, however, to glimpse layers, but from which the whole stands out. This own identity, of shared histories, languages and cultures is represented in the landscape that reflects the essence of Gurué.

The Gurué landscape carries ecological and cultural meanings that reflect its complexity and which, as we have seen, resulted from natural and cultural processes in constant transformation. The biological wealth of Mount Namuli; the cultural richness of the symbolism associated with itself and with the Lomwé-Macua; the cultural, economic and social wealth inherent to the practice of subsistence agriculture and its communities and the production of tea, are the invariants of this landscape; those that determine its character and identity; as a whole they integrate and constitute systems that ensure that this landscape can be an integrative, an inclusive and multifunctional landscape. They should therefore be referred to as recommendations in any land, territory and landscape management and planning plan that may be drawn up. In this way, it will contribute to the cultural identity of Gurué, but also to its economy, society and environment, that is, to its sustainability and future preservation.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to Forestry Eng. Vasco Paiva, the most up-to-date information about this area.

Support funding

This research was financed with Nacional Funds through FCT – Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, within the scope of the project: CHAIA/UE (UI&D 112)/2020 – [Ref.^a UIDB/00112/2020].

References

1. Veyret Yves., et al. Mountains. Geographical discourse and issues, Dossiers des Images Economiques du Monde, SEDES (2001).
2. Ribeiro Orlando. Portugal, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Lisbon: Ed. Sá da Costa (1986).
3. Braudel Fernand. The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World, Lisbon: Publications D. Quixote 2 (1995).
4. Schama Simon. Landscape and memory. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras (1996).
5. Editorial Conceitos. "Collective Identity". São Paulo, Brazil (2017).
6. European Landscape Convention. Decree no. 4 (2005).
7. Matos Rute. The Reinvention of the Multifunctionality of Landscape in Urban Space – Reflections. University of Évora s. and. Dissertation presented to obtain the degree of Doctor in Landscape Arts and Techniques, Évora (2011).
8. Legado Namúli Consortium. "Mount Namúli – community conservation area in the Republic of Mozambique" (2021).
9. Alves T and de Sousa C. "Preliminary report of the 2nd Scientific Expedition carried out to Monte Namuli from 11 November to 2 December 2007", IIAM, Maputo (10) (PDF) Mt Namuli, Mozambique: biodiversity and conservation (2008).
10. Timberlake Jonathan., et al. "Mt Namuli, Mozambique: Biodiversity and Conservation". Darwin Initiative Award 15/036: Monitoring and Managing Biodiversity Loss in South-East Africa's Montane Ecosystems (2009).
11. Castelo Cláudia. The Portuguese way of being in the world. Luso-tropicalism and Portuguese colonial ideology (1933-1961), Library of Human Sciences, Lisbon: Afrontamento (1998).
12. Abecassis C. Memories in the Landscape.
13. Dunduro A., et al. Study on perceptions and customary practices of biodiversity management in communities adjacent to Monte Namúli. Maputo: Khaiya Editores & Services (2016).
14. Aquino A., et al. Notes on the forest in Mozambique, World Bank (2018).

Volume 2 Issue 4 April 2022

© All rights are reserved by Rute Sousa Matos.