Between spirits and rights:
Social navigation of women in
Southern Mozambique

Henny Slegh

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<th>Mozambique</th>
<th>Maputo Province</th>
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<td>% below poverty line</td>
<td>54% (2003)</td>
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<td>Female illiteracy</td>
<td>68% (2003)</td>
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Source: World Bank website
Preface

In 2004 I got involved in the design and implementation of a psycho-social intervention program, in collaboration with Mozambican psychologists and the Mozambican Women Organisation (OMM). One of the communities of a district in the suburbs of Maputo was on the Mozambican news, after a series of incidents of rape committed by mutilados (ex-soldiers and war victims), who attacked women while working at their machambas (agriculture smallholdings). The incidents provoked a vicious circle of violence at a family level and the OMM invited a group of Mozambican psychologists for consultation and assistance of victims.

The consultation evolved into a problem assessment program with the population in the community to get insight in their perceptions of the most disturbing problems in their daily life. The results showed a huge amount of problems caused by violence against women and we started to introduce women’s rights. Subsequently, a group of women in the community has been trained in psychosocial support for women and families that are victim of domestic violence.

A remarkable incident happened in the first training I gave. In a role play about violence against women one participant became possessed by spirits. As a western trained psychotherapist I thought that the training had triggered her trauma and that she had a memory flash. However, the participants reacted immediately with, “no problem, a spirit from Eliza comes out to speak”. While Eliza’s body was shaking, the participants surrounded her and communicated with the spirits in Shangana, the local language. After a while, Eliza opened her eyes, reshaped her hair and looked at me: “The spirits at home don’t know what I have learned today. They think we joke with them.”

My interest for the subject of this thesis stems from this moment. The experience made me aware of the disturbing impact when contrasting knowledge systems interact. The difference in perceptions about health and wellbeing between me and the participants as well as the impact of new insights on the socio cultural environment had my interest and attention for the following years. Through working with women with severe health and mental problems caused by partner and family violence, I came in touch with many contrasting insights into the
place and role of women in the Mozambican society. Without the patience, confidence and trust of all the women who shared their stories with me, I would have never got the insights and knowledge I have gained now.

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this thesis to the women in the district of Machava, who have been teaching me in their culture. In the first place I want to express my gratitude to my colleague, friend and teacher Marcelina Chai Chai. She introduced me in the Mozambican culture and especially in the world of women. We have met one another in endless and inspiring discussions about the problems of women in Mozambican society and the role of culture and psychology in finding a way out of suffering. In five years of working together we have managed to create a place for women who suffered from gender-based violence. In this thesis I reflect on this process in an attempt to show the complexity of dynamics that emerge when different knowledge systems meet one another, interact and intermingle.

I thank my supervisor, Professor Annemiek Richters, for her encouraging and critical advices in helping me to structure my experiences, knowledge and opinions in writing the thesis.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the three most important men in my life, Jolke and our two sons: Jolke and Jorrit for their comments on drafts and for their assistance in editing this thesis; Ignas for being around and bringing in other important things in life than doing research. Above all I thank Jolke for his confidence and interest in my pioneering approach of working in the field. The many debates around the kitchen table (Bossema 2006) have been not only important to continue the work but also to write this thesis.
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1 Introduction

Everyday life of a Mozambican woman in a semi-urban community in the outskirts of Maputo is characterized by managing resources for survival and dealing with problems of ill health and family violence. The way she copes is determined by her personal history, her support systems (mainly family and community) and the socio-cultural environment of her wider society.

Mozambican society is shaped by a long history of colonial suppression and a brutal civil war which left behind a devastated country. The main pillar of Mozambican support systems, the family, was severely affected by war-related loss of family members and internal migration patterns, followed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic which is still causing many deaths yearly. The patriarchal nature of the society is reflected in male dominance in all aspects of the societal discourse. The unequal power relations between genders determine the main problems women have to face in everyday life. Another dominant characteristic of Mozambican society is the presence of ancestor spirits, the spirits of the dead. These spirits play an important role in people’s lives as regulators of social and spiritual life, needed to restore health and prevent illness and disease.

For many women this cultural tradition is still a guide in understanding the cause of problems and ill health, even though many new responses have been introduced in the current society. The explanation of problems caused by family violence or HIV/AIDS is often found in the spiritual world. However, the HIV/AIDS epidemic resulted in a flood of international organizations, introducing other perspectives on health problems. Health education and empowerment of women were considered as new targets for improving women’s health and well being. The new insights were intermingled with prevailing insights about the position of women and the role of spirits in managing health and wellbeing.

Although most NGO interventions and many donor directed programs focus on training of women, hardly any anthropological research has been done into the effect of the information provided by these trainings on women’s own perspectives. In this qualitative, exploratory study I examine how women incorporate new insights into women’s right into their own
cultural systems of knowledge. In what way does new knowledge influence the way they deal with gender based violence and the way they navigate their life of hardships in society?

1.1 The study field

My previous work in a number of communities in Machava district provided an excellent opportunity for my research. From 2004-2008 I was involved in the design and implementation of a training and support program on women’s rights in these communities. The program evolved over the years into a centre for training and psychosocial assistance to victims of domestic violence for all fourteen communities of Machava.

The name of the centre is Ca Paz, referring to its twin goals of capacity building on domestic violence and offering victims a place of peace. The centre builds on the social capital of the community in coordination with public services of health, police, and social action of the district Machava. The centre organizes trainings for representatives of the communities, including traditional healers and midwives, church leaders, and members of women’s organizations. The participants are trained as volunteer social activists and provide place, support and protection to women and families with social problems. These volunteers mobilize women and identify victims in using a Bons Vizinhos (good neighbors) model. In this model they have learned how to organize “safety networks” and “safe places” for victims in the community and they refer people to the centre when more assistance is needed. The Bons Vizinhos also disseminate information about women’s rights, the new Mozambican family law and basic health education by performing role plays at central places in the communities.

I witnessed a wide range of dynamics and responses at a community and individual level from 2004-2008. In 2009 I returned to Machava for a focused anthropological research to study the impact of the newly gained insights on women’s lives. The previous work facilitated easy access to a group of over one hundred women who had been trained in women’s rights.

Machava district is located on the outskirts of Maputo, at a distance of 20 km from the city centre. The district is divided in fourteen administrative units each with an own secretário (local administrator). The population of this area is estimated at 140,000 inhabitants who live at distances ranging from 0-40 km from the centre Ca Paz. The area has been severely affected by the civil war from 1982-1992 and contains a mixed population of people
originating from other provinces in the country who settled in this area after the war. The
district is part of the province of Maputo and is located at a distance of 100 km from the
border with South Africa. Many men work as migrant labor in South Africa.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The burden of socio-cultural changes in the aftermath of war seems to fall on women in
particular. Many international and donor directed intervention programs focus on
empowerment of women by addressing unequal gender relations. In the historical and socio-
cultural context of Mozambican society ancestral knowledge and spiritual power have always
played a major role in understanding the causes and cures for problems. The arrival of new
concepts about gender relations and human rights contributes to new opportunities for health
and wellbeing of women and families, but at the same time these concepts contrast with
prevailing perceptions about the place of women in society.

This confusion is represented in the dynamic of responses to the introduction of new ideas
about women’s rights and issues about health and wellbeing. This dynamic strongly interacts
with the socio-economic and cultural changes in Mozambique after the civil war. In the
middle of this turbulence of change, women navigate their lives between cultural insights and
newly promised rights. The way women try to grasp their rights while they also have to fulfill
their female obligations to men and family in order not to provoke the bad spirits is part of the
hardship they face every day. My aim was to examine the way women cope with these
contrasts, how they incorporate new knowledge in their life and in what way new perspectives
can contribute to support women in creating a life free of violence.

1.3 Research objectives

The objective of the study is to get an understanding of the cultural dynamics of responses to
the introduction of new concepts about women’s rights and gender based violence. I assume
that a focused study at the micro-level of the community will provide insights into the
particular responses from the community as well as from individual women. These insights
can contribute to improved knowledge about the cultural dynamics that come into play when
western and non-western information meet one another. A better understanding of these
dynamics will also increase knowledge and insights into women’s basic needs for support and
protection in life. This can contribute to designing more adequate and culturally appropriate
community-based training programs. My main research question is as follows: how does
cultural traditional knowledge interact with new, western based knowledge and how does this interaction affect the way women navigate in society?

My sub questions:

- How did women, trained by a psychosocial support program, incorporate new information about women’s rights and HIV/AIDS in their coping strategies?
- How do women perceive their female gender role and position in their family and community and how do they relate this to new concepts of women’s rights?
- What do women consider as the main dangers in their daily life and what do they need to feel supported in life and protected against maltreatment and risks of disease?
- What role do women ascribe to the spirits in dealing with the burden of increased risk on HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence?
- What is the influence of unequal gender relations on the way women navigate?

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In chapter one I presented my research questions that aim to investigate how western based knowledge interacts with the socio-cultural knowledge of women in Mozambique who have to deal with gender-based violence. In Chapter two I describe the research methods I have used in this focussed qualitative anthropological study and the ethical consideration that are involved in doing research. In chapter three I describe three theoretical perspectives used in the thesis. A critical medical anthropological perspective is adopted to explore the influence of power relations on women’s life and the way new knowledge is incorporated. A psychological perspective is taken to examine individual coping of women and an anthropological approach includes the socio-cultural influences on coping strategies. The concept of social navigation is adopted as a new perspective to explore the interactions between coping strategies of women and the socio-cultural environment. How do social forces influence the way women cope with stress and navigate their life in society?

The results are presented in the three subsequent chapters. In chapter four I describe the particular context of the Mozambican society as a construction of different fields of power and knowledge, shaped by a political history with several changes in the socio cultural context. In chapter five I focus on the coping and navigating dynamics that emerge as a response to newly imported knowledge at community level. Chapter six describes how
women have incorporated new insights into women’s rights in order to enlarge their possibilities in life by social navigation. The concluding chapter argues that knowledge is incorporated following and own dynamic of responses that is strongly influenced by existing knowledge, the regulation of power relations and seeking better chances to survive.
2 Research methods

This study is focused on women who are trained in the psychosocial support program of the centre Ca Paz. Most of them have experienced violence in their own families and they have to deal with daily problems of ill health, disease and poverty.

Part of the data for this study was collected between 2004 and 2008 when I lived in Maputo. These data consist of ethnographic accounts and several case studies of women who became involved in the psychosocial trainings and the centre. Furthermore, as consultant for psychosocial support programs I have done a survey, focus group discussions and interviews with service providers, police officers and women organizations in 2006. As a resident in Maputo for five years, I have followed the debates in public discourse and media about violence against women, the application of the family law with basic rights for women as well as the debates about HIV/AIDS and its relation with gender inequality. All these different sources of information have been used for the present thesis.

The main part of the data was collected during a three week field visit in May 2009 to the same centre and the same communities. At arrival I got a warm welcome from a group of women singing and dancing to celebrate my return. In this meeting I had the opportunity to explain the purpose of my visit as a researcher who had come back to learn from their experiences after the training. My explanation about my interest in contrasting and conflicting information resulted in a strong agreement about the importance. I underlined that participation was completely free and voluntary, without any obligations towards me, the centre or any other organization. I also explained that my work would not create jobs or money, but only would produce knowledge and opportunities to inform the world about women lives, not only showing their problems but also their strengths to survive.

2.1 Sampling and methods

Most of the women loved to talk about their opinions and experiences and wanted to participate both in interviews and discussion groups. I used a convenience sampling for the interviews, since all informants are linked to Ca Paz. I conducted 17 in-depth interviews, held two focus group discussions and distributed a written questionnaire among 75 women. Moreover, I participated daily in the assistance of victims at the centre and I accompanied a
psychotic woman to a divine session with the traditional healer. I also visited two communities and three Bons Vizinhos at home. The interviews were conducted at the centre, at people’s home in the community or at locations in town and the focus groups took place in the centre. All conversations and interviews were in Portuguese and in case a woman only spoke the local language Shangana, I had the aid of a translator.

A possible bias is related to the fact that I have been working in the centre from 2004-2008 and many people know me as trainer and doutora (in Mozambique a very common title for everybody who studied something). This may have influenced some respondents, especially when they interpret my questions as an evaluation of their work. Therefore, I used different samples of women for my interviews: one group with whom I had worked before and a second group consisting of women I had never seen before. Furthermore, the use of different methods and techniques reduces the risk of biased information. Therefore I also held a written questionnaire and interviewed a number of professionals in order to verify the information.

**In-depth interviews**

An important task of the researcher is to create an atmosphere and environment in the interview that encourages participants to develop an account on important issues and that facilitates them in telling their stories (Green and Thorogood 2004). I used in-depth techniques, with topic lists on the specific issues I wanted to address. I organized the topics in four main themes related to women’s life in dealing with hardship: Place, Support, Protection and Justice. What is their perception of their own place and role in society? How do they feel supported and stimulated in life, and where do they find protection against threats and dangers? How do they perceive justice regarding to hardship and gender based violence in their life?

- Five women who participated in the first pilot training group were interviewed on the way they have integrated the knowledge they gained in 2004 and on how they look back at the implementation process in the community.
- Seven women who have been trained by other trainers in later programs were interviewed on their life and the impact of the trainings.
- Five professionals who collaborate with the centre and daily deal with problems caused by family violence were interviewed on their professional and personal opinions.

**Focus group discussions**
I also held two focus group discussions. This method has a potential for producing considerable information in a fairly short space of time (Green and Thorogood 2004). Since confidentiality is needed to guarantee privacy and safety for women to talk about violence at home, I started all groups with an introduction on safety and confidentiality rules. Most of the women who know me are used to the rules I have always applied: everything told in the centre will always remain within its walls. The first group discussion was held in the second week of my stay with volunteers of the centre. The discussion focused on the impact of their work and their newly acquired knowledge on their private lives. The second group discussion was held in my last week with thirty women and we discussed the impact of the trainings. Originally I had planned to invite ten women only, but I changed my mind because many more women wanted to have the opportunity to participate in the discussions.

Survey
In addition to the oral interviews I designed a written questionnaire for trained Bons Vizinhos. This questionnaire contains a fixed list of closed questions and statements about values and norms related to health and rights for women, socio-cultural practices and violence. The use of a survey was convenient for my research because I have been working already for some years in this field and as a researcher I am “relatively knowledgeable about the expected answers and the number of respondents being interviewed is large” (Hardon et al 2001: 209). The survey was pre-tested among a group of five women and after some adjustments and new tests, I distributed them among the thirty women in the focus group discussion. In total I distributed 70 questionnaires and I got back 58 completed ones.

Participatory observation
As a participatory observant in Ca Paz, I had the opportunity to be part of the activities in and around the centre. I was at the centre daily and participated in assisting women and had chats with staff, local leaders of the community and OMM women who visited the centre. These informal conversations in and around the centre were also used for data collection. Furthermore I visited some of the communities and accompanied a Bom Vizinho in assisting a woman. In my role as participant observer I have been shifting between the roles of the doutora they knew before, the Mae (mother) who supports doutora Marcelina (the director) in running the centre, and the researcher who wants to understand the Mozambican culture and women’s problems.
2.2 Ethical considerations

As one of the founders and trainers of the program, my new role as a researcher was ambiguous. Many people in the communities knew me as doutora Henny, the white senhora who helps women, who likes Mozambique and always has questions. Over the years I had many different roles for the women in the communities and at the centre: as a psychologist, as a helper and teacher, as a nice rich white lady and as a friend, but also as an exploitative branco (white person) who only collected information, but did not bring food. Although I gained a lot of trust and confidence, I have also disappointed expectations of women who hoped to get a nice job or financial support.

Returning as a researcher did not provoke very different reactions. From my previous experiences I learned to cope with the emotional impact of working daily with women and children living in extremely violent situations and in extreme poverty. As a researcher I am not in the position to intervene and solve problems, but I see it as my obligation to give moral support and facilitate help or access to (public) services if needed. Moreover, I have learned over the years the importance of “engaged distance” in being connected to the women, keeping in mind the proper distance. I have tried to use that experience also in my new role as researcher.

Finally, in the previous years I always asked the participants and women if I was allowed to use the data and pictures for research and publications. Most people were happy to know that their stories would be told somewhere else. All data in this thesis are used in agreement with people involved by an oral consent. Although none of the women indicated the wish to hide their identities, I decided to use other names for the Bons Vizinhos in order to protect their privacy.
3 Theoretical approach

In this study I examine the way women have integrated newly imported knowledge in coping with gender-based violence in the context of their socio-cultural environment. The research question can be examined from many different angles. I have limited myself to three main perspectives. To explore the influence of unequal power relations on women’s life and knowledge systems within the socio-cultural environment I adopted an interpretative and critical medical perspective. In an attempt to analyze the dynamics of interactions between the socio-cultural environment and the individual coping of women, I adapt coping theories from psychology as well as anthropological perspectives about the role of culture in coping. Finally, I adapted the relatively new concept of social navigation as an interesting approach to focus on particular dynamics of individual coping strategies within a changing environment.

3.1 Interpretative and critical medical perspective

This qualitative study takes an interpretative approach with a focus on people’s own interpretations of the world. Opposed to a positivistic view that assumes ‘a stable reality’ and ‘value free’ truth, an interpretative approach seeks to understand phenomena within their particular context. “The positivistic methods and aims of natural sciences are unlikely to be useful for studying people and social behavior: instead of explaining people and society, research should aim to understand human behavior” (Green and Thorogood 2004: 12).

The study can be situated in the theoretical frameworks of interpretative anthropology and critical medical anthropology. The aim of the study is to understand how women integrated new knowledge in the way they cope with health related problems caused by gender-based violence. The interpretative approach is focused on the point of view of the participants in the study. In order to understand how women perceive their problems, how they cope and what they need, I tried to grasp the women’s perceptions on the meaning of the role as a woman in society.

To get an understanding of this role, I explored the role and meaning of spirits on women’s lives. Kleinman introduced the interpretative and meaning-centered approach as a way to explain health phenomena in the context of a culture. I used his concept of the explanatory model of illness (Kleinman, 1980) to explore women’s ideas about the cause and symptoms of
their condition and problems, as well as their perceptions about their needs for protection or support.

In order to understand the way newly imported knowledge is incorporated in their life, I tried to grasp the meaning and explanations of the women themselves. How did the new knowledge interact with the existing insights and strategies regarding dealing with problems, suffering and illness?

For the purpose of my study I make reference to the local perceptions of illness. Therefore I distinguish among disease as a biomedical phenomena and illness as a psychological and social phenomenon. “Disease is seen from the perspective of the doctor and refers to malfunctioning of biological and psychological process, whereas illness refers to the psychosocial experience and meaning of perceived disease” (Kleinman 1980:72). Since different health traditions are involved in women’s perceptions, the explanatory model is a convenient way to look at the different health care traditions comparatively. The particular meaning women give to experiences and the insights they have on how to deal with problems is constructed within the socio-cultural context. “Knowledge is what people employ to interpret and act on the world: feelings as well as thoughts, embodied skills as well as taxonomies and other verbal models. Knowledge is not characterizable as difference: indeed, the same or similar knowledge is obviously used and reproduced in different populations to provide grounds for their thoughts and actions. But there are also very divergent bodies of knowledge and different ways of knowing within populations as well as between them” (Barth 1995: 66).

The impact of gender inequality on women’s health is approached from a feminist perspective. The male dominance and the subordinated position of women in the Mozambican society are linked to ideologies of control and power of men over women. This inequality is embodied in women’s burdens and their problems are reflected in different phenomena in present society like gender based violence and feminization of HIV/AIDS. The high prevalence of infections among women has revealed how gender inequalities and hierarchies take control over their own bodies away from women (Cruz e Silva et al 2007). A critical medical perspective is also adopted in studying how everyday forms of structural violence have shaped people’s everyday reality and social relations (Farmer 1996, Schepers-Hughes 1992).
In order to understand the way new knowledge about women’s rights gets integrated in Mozambican society, a feminist approach is taken. The claims of knowledge are strongly connected and tied to social structures of domination. The new perspectives are introduced within the world view of a masculine dominated society in Mozambique (Osorio 2004).

The relationship between knowledge and power is also approached from a critical perspective. The power of western-based knowledge in relation to esoteric knowledge based on cosmological insights from the ancestor world plays an important role in the introduction of HIV/AIDS programs and women’s rights perspectives in the present society. The way women have incorporated new knowledge about women’s rights in their socio-cultural system of knowledge, might be linked to differences in socio-economic status. Most of the women are very poor and western based knowledge may be associated with perspectives on work and financial support. Moreover, achieving knowledge will automatically lead to increase of power over others who do not have that knowledge.

3.2 Psychological and Anthropological perspective on coping with violence

A body of literature has been produced over the last decades on the way women cope with distress caused by armed conflict, everyday violence of living in conditions of poverty and different forms of gender based violence (Herman 1993, WHO 2002, Diaz 2001, Kumar 2001, Schepers- Hughes 1992). There is clear evidence that women suffer from severe consequences of sexual abuse and violence committed by partners and family, in war and in peace (Herman 1993, Van der Kolk 2000). Several studies show the physical, psychological and socio-economic consequences on women’s lives. Distress caused by conflict and violence has been an important research topic for psychologists and psychiatrists as well as for anthropologists and sociologists.

Ethnographic research in post-conflict areas has shown that general statements on psychiatric disorders are contested, since people make sense of their own experiences within a particular culture (Bracken et al 1998). Nevertheless, women suffer from severe ill making consequences and develop strategies to cope with their problems. The way they cope is influenced by various personal factors as well as by the socio-economic and cultural context they live in. In my study I particularly focus on the interaction between women’s coping and her socio-cultural environment. In the following part I explain how I use the concept of coping in my study.
Abused women experience a range of feelings related to the violence, from confusion about what caused the violence to hopelessness about the possibility of stopping it. Sometimes women consider suicide as an option to escape violence (WHO 2006). The most common reaction on cruelties in life is to banish them from consciousness. An ingenious psychological defensive system of denial and maintaining silent are surviving strategies that aim to forget what is considered as too cruel to exist in human life. The conflict between keeping silent and the wish to cry out with pain is inherent to psychological trauma and takes place at an individual level. However, the process occurs both on individual and on social level. In societies there is a need to return to order and justice, and the individual person has to cope with distress within the prevailing insights of the specific society. Therefore, the meaning of the traumatic event(s) will be constructed within the social environment. However, cruelty needs to be told, before it can rest. The impact of individual psychological suffering remains hidden in a society that does not recognize the injustice of abuse and violence (Slegh 2006).

Denial of the severe impact of violence on health and well being of women contributes to the way women cope with injuries, mental problems and tasks in daily life. Although the problem of violence against women in Mozambique is on the political agenda, the responses from society at public service level are limited. (Forum Mulher 2006). Most people consider violence as a private matter that has to be resolved within the own family. Thus women who suffer from problems of gender based violence are not supposed to find support and acknowledgement for their suffering, but have to find other ways to cope with it.

In my study I apply the concept of coping in the way it is used in psychology and psychiatry. The concept of coping derives from psycho analytic psychology and refers to a persons’ ability to solve problems and reduce stress (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). They describe coping as a way to deal with burdensome situations. Coping is defined as a process of constant changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to meet internal and external demands. The way people deal with burdensome circumstances is also determined by the estimation they (can) make about the best way to deal with it. Therefore, the researchers refer to the importance of cognitive factors in coping with stress. Two main groups of coping behavior are distinguished: problem oriented coping and emotion oriented coping (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). The problem oriented style is characterized by an active and cognitive driven approach of problems while the emotion oriented style is focused on emotions. Some studies assume that the problem oriented style is most effective in situations where people have a certain level
of control, while the emotion oriented style is more effective in circumstances where people have no control (Sanderman et al. 2000). Other factors like personality characteristics play a role in coping styles, but for the aim of my study I focus on mentioned situation related coping styles.

Thus, I consider coping of women as a way to deal with burdens caused by circumstances of gender based violence within a male dominated society. As described above are women compelled to hide the direct cause of their problems in coping with their distress. Following Lazarus’ theory, coping of women is influenced by the way she will meet internal (needs) and external demands to find relieve for burdens. Thus, the coping style she will use to meet these needs and demands depends on factors of control on her own life, her environment and the personal estimations. However, the personal (internal) needs of a person who has to endure violence and abuse will be colored by confusion, feelings of hopelessness to control the abuse, fear and isolation. In many cases they lost a place in life, feel unprotected and isolated and blame themselves for what has happened (Perquin 1997). Self blaming, losing control and isolation can be understood as forms of emotional coping. Therefore, I assume that women coping with gender-based violence will have a more emotional oriented coping style, as long as they have hardly any control neither over the environment nor over their own body.

In order to analyze her coping strategies, I build on the development needs theory from a psycho motor therapy system, designed by Al Pesso (1973; 1988). This psycho-analytical oriented method of psychotherapy is based on the perspective that the development of a human being is not only genetically determined by heritage and family characteristics, but also by the interactions with the environment. The early interactions of a new born baby with parents or caretakers are considered as essential in the fulfillment of basic needs. Pesso distinguished five basic development needs that derive from the development of human life in the womb. The womb offers the embryo a place, nurture, support, protection and limits that are essential for the embryo to develop into a human being with the potential to survive outside the mothers’ body. These needs will remain important in the physical and socio-psychological development of a human being for the rest of life. The way the basic needs are fulfilled in the early years of life at a physical and symbolical level will influence a person’s strength and capacity to cope with life.
Although the theory is developed as an analytical instrument for psychotherapy, I consider the model a useful reference to approach the internal needs that play a role in the way women cope with violence. For the purpose of my study, I highlight the needs for a place, support and protection as most relevant for women coping with problems caused by violence.

**Basic needs: place, support, protection and justice**

In the first place, women will search for a **place** that provides recognition and acknowledgment. Having a place implies the right and acknowledgement of existence, to be a “some-body”. Furthermore, she searches for **support** of others to enlarge the opportunities to survive, improve chances and resolve problems. Support includes having access to education and knowledge as well as access to resources like land, work and money. **Protection** is needed against dangers coming from the outside world, varying from bad luck, diseases, abuse and maltreatment by others.

As argued in the previous part about individual coping people do seek for meaning for what happened. When a victim does not find acknowledgement for her suffering, the meaning of violent acts can turn into introjections of self blame, guilt and self rejection (Van der Kolk 1996). Several trauma studies have demonstrated the need of acknowledgment of suffering caused by injustice in healing processes and reconciliation (Herman 1993, Van der Kolk et al 1996). Feelings of unfairness and injustice are connected with personal and moral values of human dignity and perceptions about right and wrong. These insights strongly determine how a person copes with problems of abuse and the way justice is searched for within the environment. Therefore I consider the need to find **justice** an important element in the way women cope with injustice and abuse that occurred in their life.

**Coping and culture**

The cultural and social environment plays a main role in the way people define and express distress as well as the way they cope with problems. The contributions from the anthropological field revealed the imposing attitude of Western interventions in post-conflict and war areas. Programs were focused on alleviating distress and trauma, regardless of the specific coping systems within the context of the culture. This resulted in inappropriate and ineffective interventions, while local resources and systems were ignored and people were presented as passive victims (Bracken et al, 1998). Several scholars have concluded that the influence of culture on the way people cope with distress cannot be separated from the
cultural environment that provides the insights and knowledge in dealing with stressful events. In a study on cultural variations in clinical presentations of depression and anxiety, Kirmayer (2001: 23) concluded: “Cultures influence the sources of distress, the form of illness experience, symptoms, the interpretation of symptoms, modes of coping with distress, help seeking and the social response to distress”. He highlights in his paper the importance of approaching cultures not as static entities, but as “ever-changing constructions that emerge from interactions between individuals, communities and larger ideologies and institutional practices” (ibid: 22).

Consequently, the cultural environment in Mozambique can be approached as a changing and moving society, which is influenced by newly imported knowledge from Western countries and the broad range of responses to rapid change that took place in Mozambican society in the aftermath of war. Kleinman and Becker (2003) related rapid social change and economic growth in low income countries with increased problems of mental illness. The disruption of traditional structures and the decreased role of former support systems have influenced people’s coping systems. Kleinman and Becker see changes not only in sources of stress, but also in support systems and idioms of distress.

Several anthropologists (Honwana 1996, Nordstrom 1998, Igreja 2007) have examined the cultural responses to the traumatic consequences of the civil war in Mozambique. They describe how traditional insights accommodated to people’s needs in coping with the distress caused by experiences in war. Alcinda Honwana described the important role of traditional healers in reconciliation and social integration after the war in Mozambique. Caroline Nordstrom considers “the creative resources that Mozambicans developed to survive and end a very brutal war” as the “most sophisticated” she had ever seen. Victor Igreja demonstrated the emergence of a new type of healers in Gorongosa district, able to treat the wounds of women that had been victims of rape and abuse during the civil war. These studies refer to treatment practices stemming from cultural traditions and the role of spirits who accommodated to societies’ demands, but they do not address the specific influence of the changing world on the way people cope within their environment. In approaching coping as ‘a process of constant changing cognitive and behavioral efforts’ as I explained earlier, people will change, adapt and accommodate to the demands of the environment. To get a better insight in the dynamic of women’s coping strategies in relation to their environment I have examined the concept of social navigation.
3.3 Social navigation

The word navigation stems from the Latin word ‘navigare’. It is composed of the words navis (ship) and agare (drive) and means ‘to steer a ship’. The word is in general used to describe how people find their way in the middle of unknown or unordered environments. In anthropology the concept has become popular in understanding people’s different strategies and tactics in conflict areas. Recent studies (Vigh 2008, Utas 2005) describe the way people develop strategies and tactics to enlarge their survival opportunities in the context of war and conflict. They underline the influence of the social environment on these strategies and tactics used by people when dealing with threat and danger. Vigh distinguishes strategies and tactics as different actions that people undertake to survive in a particular environment. He defines strategy as a “process of demarcating and constituting a space” (2008:6) for predicting and calculating certain opportunities to reach a goal. A tactic is defined as the “process to navigate them” (2008:6), referring to the immediate actions that are needed to attune and respond to social forces and events within the social environment.

Both anthropologists describe social navigation as “a motion within a moving field” and they explain the influence of a specific social situation on the way people ‘move’, act and try to survive. Vigh uses the concept of social navigation in describing how soldiers in Guinea Bissau “guide their lives through troublesome social and political circumstances” (Vigh 2008: 10). He explains how strategies depend on the constant moving and changing society in crisis. Utas (2005) takes the same perspective in an account of a woman, living in the war zone of Liberia, who constantly attuned her strategies in navigating her life. He highlights the complexity of considering this particular woman as victim, survivor or aggressor, since her actions are directed by the specific social situation. Thus, her actions are brought into motion by the movements in this society and she accommodates her strategies for survival in navigating her life like a captain navigates a ship in a rough ocean.

Although the concept provides an interesting angle to approach women’s coping strategies within the changing environment of Mozambique, I also see some constraints of the concept of social navigation in relation to the concept of coping. Vigh and Utas underline the metaphor of “motions within a moving field” to explain the way people’s actions are directed by the environment. An unstable field demands ‘tactics’ as immediate responses to the
moving environment in attempts to survive: “How people guide their life in troublesome circumstances”. Therefore, tactics will change and likewise coping will change.

However, internal psychosocial dynamics produced by distress, fears and danger in the way people navigate, remain out of sight in the concept of social navigation. Therefore I complement the concept of social navigation with the coping theory of Lazarus (1984). Both concepts focus on the way people deal with their life in troublesome circumstances that can be reflected in the way they navigate. In this study I approach the way women deal with their problems from both perspectives: (i) the psychological discourse in analyzing the way women deal with problems and adapt their coping in response to change and (ii) an anthropological perspective on the way social forces change coping styles of women as reflected in the way they navigate.

The coping strategies of women, affected by gender-based violence, are influenced by physical and psychological injuries and social suffering. Moreover, the coping strategies are shaped within a socio-cultural environment that is characterized by control over women, by males and spirits. The concept of navigation underlines the importance of “the relation between the environment people move in and how the environment itself moves them, before, after and during the act” (Vigh 2008: 7). Women coping with hardship and violence interact, explore, respond and accommodate to the social environment when searching for best opportunities to survive. However, the environment also moves the others, the women, who are severely affected by violence. To approach the socio-cultural environment of women in Mozambique as a “moving field” enabled me to examine the dynamic of responses to new knowledge at macro, meso and micro levels of society. The concept of navigation as a way of coping within a moving field of unpredictable conditions, enabled me to analyze the way women cope in interaction with their environment. The community responses to incorporation of new knowledge and the way women navigate their life within society between the demands from spirits and insights into women’s rights, can be understood from the perspective of social navigation.
4 The Mozambican environment

In the previous chapter I argued how women, affected by consequences of violence, seek for a place, support, protection and justice in order to deal with distress and pain. The interaction between a woman’s needs, cultural insights and changing environment is reflected in the way she navigates her life. In this chapter I describe the particular context of Mozambican society as a construct of different fields of power and knowledge, shaped by a political history with several changes in the socio-cultural context. This environment creates the field in which women navigate their life, pushed forward by the search for survival and directed by social forces.

Mozambique has a long history of violence and conflict that has had a deep impact on the present society. The society is not only marked by the traumatic impact of colonial occupation and war, but it is also characterized by the import of knowledge systems in several stages of its history and their interaction and partial integration with the already existing knowledge systems and connected norms and values. In historical order three new socio-cultural knowledge systems can be distinguished. Firstly, ideas stemming from the Portuguese colonial occupation, including new religions and religious practices. Secondly, the socialist ideology after independence introduced by the liberation movement FRELIMO and thirdly, the knowledge systems and moral values embedded in the western relief and development programs that emerged in the aftermath of war. The new insights were imposed on society and demanded accommodation of existing insights, social norms and values. The penetration of various systems of knowledge within the last three decades have resulted in an extreme complex society with various forms of aggregation, expression of interests, legal systems and conceptions about justice (Sousa Santos et al 2004).

4.1 The four dominant knowledge systems

In this section I will elaborate the analysis of how these knowledge systems have impacted on the socio-cultural and political environment of the society and how they interact. Together they determine the present socio-cultural dynamics in Mozambique, in which these knowledge systems co-exist and partially overlap and in which Mozambican women have to find their ways to cope with violence and everyday problems. The present society is characterized by a dynamic of responses to crisis and change stemming from the four main
sources of knowledge: the ancestor spirits, the churches, the FRELIMO ideology and western based human-rights perspectives.

(i) The indigenous traditional insights: ancestor spirits

The Mozambican society is characterized by the presence of ancestor spirits. The traditional indigenous insights have been overruled by and merged with imposed knowledge systems but they have always remained at the core of Mozambican society. The socio-cultural practices are rooted in the belief that after the death the spirits will remain and interact with the living world. Most Mozambicans speak about tradições (traditions) as the main source of knowledge to restore health and wellbeing in life. Although the traditions have been exercised throughout Mozambican history, they have been changed, accommodated and adjusted to different timeframes and locations in the country (Feliciano 1998, Honwana 1996). These practices are rooted in the cosmological worldview in Mozambique, characterized by an explanation model of bad luck and misfortune caused by witchcraft or punishment of immoral behavior by ancestors.

The spirits of the death are considered as mediators between the death and the living world. The knowledge, wisdom and insights of the ancestors are communicated to the descendants by means of their ancestors’ spirits. The ancestors have to be respected by the living descendants through ceremonies and rituals, but also by acting in accordance with social and family rules. Any form of disrespect of social and family rules may result in imbalances in the spiritual world. Such an imbalance may be revealed in bad luck, illness and disease in a particular family and recovery can be achieved through interaction with the ancestors’ spirits. On the other hand ancestor spirits are also considered as protectors of the descendants against evil spirits. A good relationship with the ancestors’ spirits and good behavior will be rewarded with their protection against evil spirits.

The spiritual world is also the realm of evil spirits coming from an external power of feiticeiros (witchcraft) who are focused on the destruction of life power of a certain group or person. The feiticeiros have the power to manipulate evil spirits that bring harm to another person. “The witch eats the life power of the victim. Witchcraft is often seen as a consuming force” (Stewart and Strathern 2004). From this cosmological perspective the origin of disease, illness and misfortune is interconnected with disturbed relations of the living with the ancestors.
(ii) New religions and religious practices

Mozambique was controlled by Portuguese colonialists, who were poor and crude. Most settlers were illiterate and came from impoverished parts of Portugal (Hanlon 2008). The colonialists have used many ways to control the population; most of them based on use of military power and economic subordination, including slavery. Christianity has been used to ‘civilize’ the ‘backward indigenous’ population and to introduce a new system of norms and values. The Portuguese rejected and oppressed Mozambican cultural values and practices, which they considered dangerous and punishable. Rejection of the spiritual beliefs served as a control mechanism. Although the Catholic Church prohibited the cultural traditions, they never disappeared but socio-cultural insights merged with Christianity.

The churches and different doctrines from religious movements in surrounding countries have been mingled and accommodated to the socio-cultural reality of the ancestor cult. The so-called Independent African Churches combine local religious notions of illness causation with Pentecostal beliefs in the healing power of the “Holy Spirit” (Pfeifer 2002) These churches are not formally linked to intercontinental evangelical organizations. These churches have undergone an “explosive proliferation in Central Mozambique” that can be understood as a response to a variety of social problems caused by growing inequality in the last decades (Pfeifer 2002).

The majority of churches have incorporated the role of spirits in causing bad luck or illness in various ways. Accordingly, the churches got an important role in dealing with distress and problems and finding protection against evil spirits. The huge variety of churches in Mozambique demonstrates how the socio-cultural traditions have incorporated the religious knowledge systems into own theories and practices.

(iii) FRELIMO ideology

The Portuguese colonial occupation ended in 1975 after an independence fight that took ten years. This fight was led by the Mozambican liberation movement FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique). It declared Mozambique a socialist nation with a Marxist-Leninist orientation. The main message of FRELIMO was to fight underdevelopment by building a modern socialist nation. One of its targets was to eliminate the ‘obscurantismo’, referring to the obscurity of traditional beliefs and health practices. In this new nation cultural
traditions were forbidden and the population had to be educated with new socialist norms and values. The oppression of indigenous traditions by FRELIMO gave rise to the resistance movement RENAMO and contributed to the civil war which only ended in 1992. RENAMO, supported by anti-socialist countries, displayed themselves as defenders of socio-cultural traditions and found their followers among rural people in the middle and north of the country. However, they lost support of the population during the civil war, due to the use of extremely brutal strategies.

The emancipation of women was considered a priority by the FRELIMO government during the social transformation of the country after independence in 1975. The Mozambican Constitution of 1975 declared “the elimination of colonial and traditional structures of oppression and the mentality that underlies them” and stated that “emancipation of women is one of the States essential tasks” (Berg and Gundersen 1991, Santos and Cruz 2004). Women’s rights were extended to all public areas, introducing a radical change in a society of traditional rules where men and women were supposed to occupy a completely different place.

The government organized campaigns against traditional practices like lobolo (bride wealth), polygamy, initiation rites and premature marriages. These customs were considered as exploitation and oppression of women and had to be eliminated in the new society. In order to implement the new principles of gender equality in the legal system, new laws were introduced in a popular justice system. People from the communities were elected as judges in local popular tribunals and considered to use “common sense and justice” according to the new socialist ideologies of equality. In this sense the local tribunals were seen as a way to educate the people in new ideas and values of gender equality, without applying codes or formal laws.

The OMM, the Mozambican women organization, established in 1973 as a part of FRELIMO, was responsible for the implementation of gender politics. However, they were mainly focused on political mobilization of women while the male-dominated party made the policies. The main effect of new policies was the improved access for women to legal institutions. But the failure of any measurements in society to implement women’s’ rights had created a situation of “de jure equality and de facto discrimination” (Berg and Gundersen 1991: 269).
The newly imposed socialist ideologies of FRELIMO did not result in the disappearance of socio-cultural traditions nor did they result in changes in power relations between genders. Several reports refer to the cultural power of the ancestral spirits whose esoteric knowledge even became used as strategies during the civil war. This power also resulted in the adjustment of the FRELIMO politics towards recognition of the traditional healers and the establishment of AMATRAM (the National Association of Traditional Healers) at the end of the 1980s (Matshine 2005, Honwana 1996). Thus, despite the introduction of forced re-education programs and rejection of traditional practices, the cultural insights again survived and followed their own dynamic in Mozambican society.

The same can be concluded about the emancipation politics of the new government. Although women’s access to public life has improved, the male dominating norms make the discourse for a subordinated role of women in society. A recent study on the role of community courts in the resolution of cases of domestic violence conducted by Arthur and Mejia (2006) confirms the findings of a study ten years before. In collecting opinions about the meaning of women equality among the community judges, they found various forms of reconciliation of the principle of gender equality with local values and traditions. Although some new elements were integrated in their verdicts, the local values and traditions dominated the discourse. The authors describe how the new ideas coming from women’s rights organization were considered as the cause of eruption of domestic conflicts (Arthur and Mejia 2006).

(iv) Introduction of women’s rights

At the end of the war, the country was in extreme crisis also as a result of natural disasters of drought and famine. On top of all of this came the devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic, especially for women. The estimated prevalence in southern Mozambique is now 26 % (UNAIDS 2008). The epidemic seems to strike merely women and girls as demonstrated by several reports about the feminization of HIV/AIDS. The most recent report by UNAIDS, WHO and UNICEF in the Epidemiological Fact Sheet on HIV and AIDS in Mozambique (2008) states that “gender inequality has a clear demonstrable impact on the epidemic”. Women in Mozambique represent 58% of the HIV positive adults (15-49 years). This gender disparity is even more striking in the 20-24 year age group where young women living with HIV outnumber men by 4 to 1. The Global Coalition on Women and Aids in 2004 stated that “in several African countries the risk of HIV among women who have experienced gender based violence may be up to three times higher than among those who have not”. A survey in 2004 among two thousand women, conducted by the Ministry of Women and Social Action
and UN organizations, concluded that over fifty percent of Mozambican women have experienced violence in their life and that in one third of the cases the woman’s partner was the perpetrator (MMAS 2004)

The severe consequences of the war, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the socio economic situation of extreme poverty attracted a flood of western based relief programs with human-rights perspectives and economic development programs over the last two decades. The rapid changing environment of society has contributed to decline of social cohesion and increased social tensions, reflected at all levels of society. Moreover, the western intervention programs contributed to the role of gender inequality on women’s (weak) health conditions.

The 1995 Beijing International Women Conference led to a global focus on women’s rights. This meeting has been an important marking point for the recognition of the existence of the widespread phenomenon of violence against women all over the world. In a relatively short period Mozambique became overwhelmed with the spread of new information and insights about health, human rights and gender equality. The donor directed programs facilitated the implementation of many new NGO’s to defend women’s rights, with or without specific ideas or knowledge about the complexity of the phenomenon of family violence.

Furthermore, the HIV/AIDS campaigns promoted a human rights perspective by addressing the role played by gender inequality in the spread of the virus. New knowledge about health, human rights and gender relations entered into a society where people maintain strong relations with the spiritual world of ancestors. The incorporation of new biomedical knowledge and human rights perspectives in the local knowledge systems is illustrated in the responses to the HIV aids epidemic (Matshine 2005). The externalization of the cause of the HIV/AIDS epidemic as a disease that came from foreigners fits easily in the connotation of witchcraft that provokes bad luck. This means that a family that is affected by HIV/AIDS can be considered as being polluted and has to be avoided or rejected in order not to become contaminated by the pollution. Evidence shows many examples of women who were rejected after being diagnosed with a HIV infection; they are considered as bewitched, bringing bad luck to the family. The biomedical explanation of a virus that causes the disease does not fit into the explanatory model of many people, because the biomedical model only explains that the virus is bringing harm, but they do not explain why the virus is doing so.
The same dynamics can be identified in explanations of violence against women, provoked by evil spirits of the woman coming from her family or send by witchcraft. The family problems are translated in terms of spiritual imbalance caused by immoral behavior of the woman or her family. Likewise empowerment of women with new knowledge about women’s rights is often explained as the cause of increased cases of domestic violence, since the changes in power-relations between genders cause disharmonies in families.

In summary, Mozambique has been invaded by new western based knowledge systems several times in the recent history. The way the different systems of knowledge have been incorporated into the prevailing socio-cultural traditions demonstrates the power and strength of the traditions that have been surviving up until today. Nevertheless, the influences from abroad, as well as the problems in aftermath of war have a strong impact on insights and available knowledge systems in present society. The way women cope with contemporary problems of violence and family demonstrates how different sources of knowledge are used, adapted and integrated in order to find best survival opportunities.

4.2 Model

Based on the historical and theoretical description in my thesis, I have designed a model representing the interplay between women’s coping strategies and the present society. This dynamic is focus in my study and fieldwork and the model aims to simplify the complexity of interactivity between women and different knowledge systems that have been integrated in society. Therefore, the model distinguishes between the different systems that are in reality strongly intermingled. However, as I will demonstrate in the results of my fieldwork, the way women cope with distress within this complex society, is characterized by navigation between the different fields of insights. The present society is displayed by two lines. One line represents the historical political events and the other line symbolizes the socio cultural perspectives. How women search a place, support, protection and justice is displayed in the circle, as a navigating system, moved by women and the motions coming from the changing contemporary society.
The society is symbolized by two main axes: The horizontal axis represents the political history until the contemporary society. The vertical axis represents the socio cultural context of cosmological insights and cultural traditions and women’s rights.

The axes divide the society in four main quadrants that represent specific knowledge systems:

1. The ancestor cult with insights coming from spirits and the spiritual world. This knowledge is rooted in the Mozambican cultural traditional history.
2. The quadrant of the history and introduction of women’s rights displays the period of FRELIMO socialist ideology. Women emancipation campaigns and elimination programs against traditional practices were dominating the knowledge systems.
3. The management of spirits in contemporary society is characterized by African churches that integrated and rejected the spiritual beliefs. This perspective is focused on reconciliation of conflicts in families.
4. The human rights perspective of western based knowledge introduced in aftermath of war and as responds to HIV/AIDS epidemic that promotes rights for women

The circle in the middle symbolizes the basic needs of women who are searching for survival. I have used the concepts of basic needs from the psychomotor therapy system (Pesso 1973, 1991) as described in the in previous chapter. In dealing with daily violence, women search for a place, protection, support and justice. The way they try to meet their needs demonstrates
how they cope with violence in their life and move between different insights coming from the social environment. The circle symbolizes a turning wheel indicating four basic needs that can be turned to one of the four quadrants. In the next chapter I explain how women in the communities from my fieldwork, navigate their life by switching between four different perspectives in society in search to meet their needs and create the best chances for survival.
5 The community

In the previous chapter I have analyzed socio-cultural dynamics at the macro level of the Mozambican nation. In this chapter I will focus on the coping and navigating dynamics at community level. In the description of the results from my fieldwork I will focus on the implementation process of the psychosocial support program in one of the communities. By zooming in on the dynamics that emerged when the program was introduced, I will demonstrate how integration of newly imported knowledge was incorporated in the community. The responses and changes in the community reflect also how the community as ‘a moving field’ shaped and adapted the scenery for women dealing with daily problems of family violence. In chapter six I will then analyze how changes at a community level influenced and shaped women’s’ individual coping tactics of navigation in society.

5.1 A story about cow heads and women’s rights

I will introduce the dynamics of responses to the introduction of women’s rights at community level with a long but illustrative story. A pilot program for psychosocial support to women started in 2004 in a community situated, in the suburbs of the capital of Maputo. The population of the area is estimated at approximately 12.000 families, with an average of 5 persons per family. The community is headed by a local administrator, the secretário, which is a paid job. The whole area is divided in 20 quarterões, small neighborhoods that consist of around 600 families each. Each quarterão elects a chefe who represents the inhabitants at community level. These chefes are volunteers and have to follow up orders of the secretario when something has to be organized.

In 2005, after the first training of seven weeks, the group of 28 women who had been trained had to be presented to the community as conselheiros (social advisers) for family problems. The group had already demonstrated their new knowledge by taking several initiatives to improve access for the population to health, police assistance and education. This had resulted in the establishment of a monthly mobile health brigade from the ministry of health, in collaboration with the police office and the organization of a birth registration campaign for children. The secretário of the community, Sr. Alberto, was very proud of the new initiatives in his community and he agreed that the conselheiros had to be presented to the whole
population of the community. He promised to mobilize the population with the assistance of the chiefs of the quarterões.

A week before the presentation a huge campaign for birth registration of 3,000 children was organized. The campaign was one of the initiatives of the pilot program and had been implemented in collaboration with national authorities and the secretário. All conselheiros had been involved to inform the population about the importance of registration. On the first day they prepared the school area where the birth registration took place and helped to organize the enormous number of people who arrived to register their children for free. The huge amount of people was not easy to manage and people started to fight for a place in the long queues in the burning sun. Marcelina, who was the coordinator of the campaign, interfered and found out that the fight was provoked by the fact that six chefes de quarterões (out of 20) had asked the inhabitants of their neighborhood to pay 50 meticais (two dollar) for a place in the queue. The people who had paid became angry when they did not get a preferential treatment.

Marcelina stopped the activities for ten minutes and called the chiefs together in one of the classrooms in the school. The chiefs involved explained that it was their responsibility to organize the families of their neighborhood and to put their names on a list. The costs of paper and a pencil had to be paid, since they earn no money as chef. She explained them, in name of the new group of conselheiros who fight against abuses of rights, that this was an example of abuse of rights that had to stop. Without any comments the chefes left the classroom and the campaign went on. By the end of the week 3,000 children had a birth registration that gave them access to school. The community leader was very proud of this initiative of the conselheiros and everybody forgot about the small incident.

However, the event got an interesting follow-up in the week of the presentation of the women group. The secretário told us that everything was organized: the local dance and music group were invited, and he had ordered the chiefs to mobilize the population. Unfortunately, he could not invite big bosses from the district if we did not have whisky and food. Since the women group did not have money and we, trainers, did not want to create any association with being a NGO with food and money, we decided not to react to the secretary’s hints. The next day we arrived early in the morning in the community and found only the group of women, dressed in nice capalana’s (Mozambican traditional dress) for the presentation.
Nobody of the community had arrived, not even the *secretário* nor the families of the women. After one hour it became clear that nobody would arrive for several reasons: The chiefs had complained at the *secretário’s* house about Doutora Marcelina and the *conselheiros*. They had shown lack of respect for their position as chief. The families of the women were not officially invited by the chiefs, so “they did not know where to go”. The *secretário* called us that he suddenly had a funeral and was not able to contact the music and dance group anymore.

The following Monday we first visited Sr. Alberto in his office, to hear his version of the problems. His office is at the *circulo* (the centre of the community) where a big tree provides shadow for everybody waiting for the community meetings and gatherings that are always organized there. The wall is decorated with a picture of the president of Mozambique, and several posters and flags with FRELIMO slogans. He greeted us friendly as always and invited us to sit at a small bench in front of his desk. After the usual exchange about the health situation of each other’s family, he started to explain the problems of the proposed meeting. Although he did not speak a word about the incidents with the chiefs at the campaigns, he made clear that chiefs need to be respected. The community can only be mobilized when they will be received with honor and pleasure. When I asked him how we could express this respect, he started to laugh and explained: “*We, in our community, have a real party when we can eat together the head of a cow. When we give our daughters away to their new husbands, we receive one, two or even more heads of cows. Eating the head together will make everybody satisfied and will keep bad spirits at a distance in the future*”.

His message was loud and clear: we only could get our *conselheiros* presented to the population after buying the heads of a cow and making a party together. Sr. Alberto had referred to the ceremony of *lobolo*, where the man’s family will pay the girls family a bride wealth. After this ceremony she will be owned by the husband and his family. Probably unconsciously, he interpreted the resistance of the community as caused by the fact that they had not received anything, but also because we had taken their women by training them in new rights, and therefore we had to pay for them. We discussed the issues with the women group and decided to organize a new presentation, including a party with three cow heads, drinks and music.
The new happening was planned two weeks later. Since I was the only driver and owner of a car, I went with one of the women to the market to buy the three cow heads and bring them to the community. The heads had to be cooked all night in huge pans, and one of the *conselheiros*, Ana, offered her house as cooking place. When I arrived in the afternoon with the heads, Ana was very nervous. First she did not want me to leave the car in front of her house, and then she suggested me to take the heads back home for the night. I asked her why and in a very low and suspicious voice she whispered in my ear: “*The heads cannot stay in my house in the night, because somebody will come to take them away*”. I asked her if she had no locks on the door. Then she explained me that locks would not help, because it would be the evil spirits that would come to eat the meat. She referred to her fear for witchcraft, to people who would use their power to send evil spirits to steal the meat. Since Ana really seemed anxious and afraid, I called Marcelina to ask her opinion. She immediately understood the problem and asked me to come back to town with the heads for the night. According to Marcelina many people believe that bad spirits live from blood and meat, and that the meat will capture attention from jealous neighbors or other people in the community with bad ideas in mind. In order not to bring the *conselheira* in trouble, it would be better to take the heads to town and bring them back very early in the morning to be cooked. I returned to town with three cow heads in the back of my car.

When we arrived the next morning, the *circulo* was full of activities, the local music group played the drums and people came from all corners of the community to participate in the happening. The district administrator, the commander of police, the OMM president and other local chiefs of the community were arriving. The *conselheiros* were dressed in the same *capalana’s*, T shirts and caps and gave a wonderful presentation about their new role and activities in the community. Everybody agreed on the importance of women’s rights that would contribute to eliminate the bad practices of abuse of women and children in families. The commander of Police promised the installation of a police post in the community to support the initiative of the *conselheiros*. The presentation had been successful and everybody was invited to eat from the three cow heads and *chima* (favorite Mozambican food), prepared by the women. Afterwards, the most important reactions about the happening were: “*Everybody managed to get something to eat*”.

5.2 Community interactions, part 1
The dynamics of responses to the introduction of the new activities of the empowerment of women in the community illustrate the multiplicity of levels that became involved. The new activities impacted on the existing power relations, resulting in a movement of community forces to reestablish the power balance into recognizable patterns. Likewise, the new knowledge became incorporated into existing structures within the community. In order to reflect on the impact of the particular responses, I use the concept of basic needs (see chapter 3) as a model for understanding the dynamics between the new knowledge in the women group and the community.

Need for a place: The story indicates the importance of recognition and acknowledgment of having a place in the community. The conselheiros wanted to present themselves to the population of the community in order to get a place and acknowledgment as group of helpers and facilitators for the population. Their role and function was new and not yet part of existing local structures in the community, therefore a special ceremony was planned to inform the inhabitants about the new activities. The ceremony for recognition of the conselheiros could only be accepted after certain conditions had been met. The right to get a place for the women group in the community had to be compensated by a party for everybody with the heads of cows. The community has the right to receive the heads of a cow, since they gave away their ‘daughters’. The meaning of the ceremony was associated with the exchange of goods: the heads of the cow had to be eaten with the whole population in order to prevent dangers and bad luck. Thus, the ceremony showed similarities with the traditional cultural practice of lobolo and the exchange of goods may be interpreted as the rights of the conselheiros on a place in their new family, the pilot program. In other words, the right to a place for women is strongly connected with control and dependency of others. This meaning may have created certain expectations that have fuelled the dynamics and problems later in the process that I will describe in the last part of the chapter.

Need for support: The example shows how support is strongly connected to interdependency of the different actors within the community. Access to education and knowledge of public services contribute to improved chances of a position in the community. The women got support by training and were stimulated to share their knowledge with others in the community. The new knowledge not only supported them in personal life, but also changed their positions in the community. The added knowledge about access to public services, the new family law and rights for women, empowered the women. Consequently, their position,
as persons with specific knowledge, improved their power in the community but at the same
time created vulnerability to competition. The changes had created disparities in the existing
power balance of the community. The chiefs felt threatened in their positions and sabotaged
the presentation of the group and *conselheira* Ana feared the attraction of evil spirits who like
“to eat the meat” in her house.

The movements in the power balance extended to the local structures of the community when
the *secretário* received complaints of the chiefs who felt disrespected. The *chefes* are his arms
and legs in the community and he depends on their support in doing his job. He could not take
the risk of going ahead with the happening without the support of his *chefes*. Without the
backing of the leaders of the community and without anything to offer to his superiors he
could not invite his bosses. Although his superiors were proud of the improvements in the
community, he was not able to let “them eat” and profit personally. Therefore he proposed a
presentation where bosses and chefs could eat from the same food. This helped him to satisfy
his bosses and to neutralize the power crisis with the *chefes* who felt neglected. The dynamics
from within the community seem to be related to the disturbance in the power balance in
provoking competition and the attraction of evil spirits.

**Need for protection:** The story also illustrates how dangers can be provoked by the
disturbance of existing power relations. Witchcraft and evil spirits play an important role in
regulation of power and the distribution of wealth according to the ruling insights in the
community. The disturbance of power relations and the neglect of existing privileges in the
distribution of wealth and power can provoke evil spirits and resistance. The women need
local authorities and police officers to protect them against violence and abuse of aggressive
partners and family members. However, dangers from outside are not only coming from
abusive partners or violence at home, but also from evil spirits manipulated by witchcraft. The
car of a white lady outside her house and the heads of the cow may attract thieves and evil
spirits who will come to eat. The story illustrates how changes in existing (power) relations
lead to responses and reactions as attempts to restore the original balance within the
community using traditional insights. The jealousy and competition provoke evil spirits and
dangers and in order to prevent the evil spirits to enter, people have to hide their possessions
or benefits. This power conflict generated community and group dynamics as I will illustrate
later.
The need for justice: The first presentation was sabotaged after the incidents of bribing at the registration campaign and after the chefes complained at the local administrators’ house for not being respected in their position. The frustration was translated in resistance to further cooperation and they did not invite the population. The power of being a chefe was undermined and although they knew that bribing was illegal, they justified their action as “work for writing down the names and informing the neighborhood about the campaign”. They suspected that the group of conselheiros and doutora’s received money and “ate alone” from the campaign without sharing the benefits. The disrespect for their positions as chefes and not sharing the “benefits” of the campaign was perceived as injustice and abuse of their rights as chiefs.

5.3 A story about revenge of the spirits and eating from the doutora’s

The establishment for a place for the conselheiros group was not yet finished after the ceremony. Sr. Alberto’s comparison of the payments of the lobolo with cow heads, which have to be eaten jointly in order to prevent evil spirits in future, referred to the risk of jealousy and dangers of competition. When the food is shared, people will be satisfied and not be challenged to take revenge. However, the ceremony was just the beginning of the promise on a better future, but without more “food to share” the spirits came back for revenge. During the year the activities of the women developed and became visible in the community. They accompanied many women and families to hospital, collaborated with an HIV/AIDS homecare team and brought many cases of violence to the police help desk. In collaboration with the new local administrator, Sr. Paulo, we discussed the possibilities of the establishment of an own place in a palhota (reed house) for the women in the community. In this place they could meet one another, and people from the community could come there for help and advice. Sr. Paulo promised to look for a proper place and after many weeks he called the group together to offer a piece of land where they could build a palhota, not far from the circulo.

A gate of bushes separated the plot from the surrounding houses and at first sight the place had not been entered for a long time. Huge plants and bushes had overgrown the whole area and two ruins of previous palhotas were still visible under the trees and plants. My first impression was that this was exactly what the group needed: a place with a garden and palhotas. Together with a group of fifteen women we stopped before the gate of bush. I tried to find an opening in the gate and noticed that the other women stepped back from the gate.
Without any words they collectively had decided not to enter the place. They were sure: “The place has bad spirits”. I wondered how they knew and one of the elder OMM ladies, Maria, told me that the shape of the ruins indicated that this had been the house of a curandheiro (traditional healer). She explained that the older women of the group knew this house of Dona Magdalena, a curandheira who had died seven years before after being poisoned by a medical plant. Together with Maria I entered the garden and I asked her if she was not afraid, she smiled and said that the spirits did not want her anymore because she was in the menopause.

Just the two of us entered the palhota, which was full of old pots, pans and instruments from the healers’ practice of Dona Magdalena. Maria explained me that after her death, Magdalena did not get a proper burial by her family. They had rejected her and her body was buried in the graves of the poor. This was the reason that the spirits of Dona Magdalena were not quiet and were still wandering around at the place. Every single thing from her belongings had remained untouched, because nobody had dared to enter the place since she had died. While walking around in the garden full of exotic and beautiful plants I was wondering whether the spirits could harm me as well. I asked the group of women, who were still hiding at the other side of the bush gate. They started laughing and responded: “The spirits will not harm you, because you don’t know our spirits, so you don’t know what you have to fear”.

The group was very disappointed about the place that was offered and saw the new problems as a sign of bad luck for the program. The bad spirits took revenge, since they were not satisfied with food. “Why do the doutora’s always come from town, without bringing any food”? They wanted to consult Sr. Domingo, the president of AMATRAM in the community, about his opinion. The next day we returned with Domingo and while the group was waiting outside, Domingo gave his first impressions on the matter. He knew that Dona Magdalena had been the novice curandheira of Dona Maria, another famous curandheira. After her death, Dona Maria wanted to take over the land and huts from her student. But Magdalena’s spirits did not allow Maria to enter the place and caused problems in Maria’s life. So the place remained untouched until today. He advised to come back with some of his colleagues who are possessed by different kinds of spirits, to explore the area and take away all objects that might provoke unrest among Magdalena’s spirits.

A meeting was organised one week later with the secretário, Domingo, the women and doutora’s and 7 curandheiros from the community. After a long debate about the case of
Magdalena, Domingo proposed a plan to explore the place with all *curandheiros*. They needed to hold a ceremony and offer a goat and some chickens to ask the spirits what they needed to be satisfied and leave the people in peace. The *secretário* was not willing to pay the bill of 750 Meticais (25 euro) so all eyes were on me. After the meeting we sat with the group under the big tree and they decided that it might be a better plan to spend the money in the group instead of bringing it to Sr. Domingo. The spirits could always come back and *conselheiros* would not feel safe to work in this house, moreover they thought that nobody of the community would ever come to visit the place. “*How can we give a safe place to victims of violence at this site?*”

The following year was characterized by many similar actions, the secretary offered places that were not existing, full of spirits or occupied by others who wanted money. Rumors and gossips about witchcraft in the group and discontent about lack of recognition in payments were increasing and some women did not come anymore to the meetings. One of the gossips was that the *secretário* had offered the group to start an own ONG and that they together could profit from donor money. This had to be kept as a secret for the *doutora’s* from university, because the community did not need them anymore, since they had never brought food or money.

Eventually, together with the OMM, police and the district department of social action, we managed to find a space for training and assistance of victims for all communities at a more central location elsewhere in the district. The *conselheiro* group in the community interpreted this advance of the program as a rejection of them. Their unique position was endangered when they had to share the benefits of trainings and meetings with other communities. In the weekly meetings we felt that something was going on, but we did not know exactly what it was. Until the day that one *conselheira* visited Marcelina at home to tell her that the *secretário* had a plan how they could try to eat from the *doutora’s* before they left. An action group of five women wanted to bring us to the local tribunal and accuse us of not having paid salaries for the work they had done. The anger and frustration of the lack of recognition in the community was focused now on the two *doutora’s* and we became isolated and rejected by the group. The OMM intervened and “educated” the *conselheiros* to stop their “bad behavior”. We invited them to take fully part in the establishment of the new centre Ca Paz and integrated the group in the new trainings. The name *conselheira* was replaced by the term...
Bons Vizinhos (good neighbors) referring to the informal quality of the activities of women in the communities.

5.4 Community dynamics; between spirits and rights, part 2

Apparently, the search for an own place became disturbed through the intervention of spirits. The lack of recognition was explained in different ways: the spirits wanted revenge and provoked them to claim their rights in court. The doutora’s had abused them, because they did not share their food (income) with them. When I returned to Mozambique for my field research in 2009, I visited the community and spent some days with the women of the conselheira group. In a conversation with Emma, one of the members from the beginning, I asked her how she looked back at this process afterwards and she started laughing: “You brought us the knowledge about our rights and we first practiced this on you. This was an error but now we forgot about everything. We are united now again and I am very happy with everything I have learned. Now I have an important position in the community, I am doing well now.”

Dona Olivia, one of the elder women in the group, suggested that the group had been destroyed by evil spirits: “We had tension in the group, caused by religious differences. Among the group members we had women from the Zionist church; they know how to manipulate evil spirits. Some of us were visited at night by feticheiras from the group. The evil spirits came into the group and divided us and took position of the mind of some of the members. They wanted to eat from you.” Dona Elena visited me several times at the center for a chat. The last day I asked her about her feelings and ideas about the problems in that year. She told me: “I cannot lie to you, and therefore I have to say that I forgot everything what had happened. I prayed in my church and this helped me to clean my heart. The things were bad and bad things can accumulate the sorrows in my heart. Since I have a very weak health, I cannot guard the things in my heart anymore. This is what I have learned from you, I just empty my heart from everything that is bad and since this time I never needed to use medicine anymore against tension.”

None of the women claimed to have had an active role in the action group, and nobody mentioned names of persons who had taken the initiative for the actions. The rumors about the role of the secretário have never been proved to be true, but the suggestions remain in the air when some women responded: “I don’t know who wrote that letter to the tribunal, I was
just ordered to sign”. The discontent of the conselheiros about the lack of acknowledgment in the community can be approached from different angles. The expectations of getting a job or financial support for their efforts were always present, even though the different actors in the program, OMM, the local authorities and Marcelina, were very clear about the voluntary character of the activities that were aimed to empower women of the OMM.

The involvement in the program of a “doutora branca” was a disturbing factor in the discourse. My role in the design of trainings and the program was in the first place focused on technical assistance of Marcelina and the local OMM ladies. Nevertheless I was often in the community, spoke with people, listened to the stories and went with Marcelina to all meetings for planning of the program. The visible and undeniable difference in economic status between me and the others had an important influence on all work related and private relationships. The inequality of power as a result of the economic differences created a delicate balance at my work in the community. I represented a good mother who supports other women but I also represented the negative mother, who did not feed her children well. The feelings of trust, respect and solidarity could easily transform into negative feelings generated by the injustice of power differences and inequality.

The three women explain the problems from three different perspectives. Emma referred to feelings of injustice and abuse when she explained the actions of the women as a result of a growing awareness of being abused at home and in society. The newly gained knowledge about rights was used to eat from me. Olivia referred to explanations from a traditional perspective when she linked the problems to the evil spirits coming from religious tensions. The evil spirits were manipulated by women of the Zion church and had divided the women group. The evil spirits wanted to eat from others (me) and were represented by the action group. Elena is a very religious Catholic woman and succeeded to empty her heart in the church and could not remember anything anymore.

An obvious element in the accounts about the problems in the group is the fact that nobody has responsibility for the actions. Responsibility is externalized to “others”: the secretário, the church, evil spirits, and new knowledge. The roots of problems remain vague and although different accounts circle around with rumors and gossips about the role of others, the answers remain in the air. After the actions turned out to be without any success, the group decided to change strategy and reintegrated with the running program in centre Ca Paz, without any
problem or feelings of guilt or shame. The externalization of responsibility enabled navigation between the different explanations. As a group they had been navigating first from victims, subsequently to accusers and finally to helpers. The explanations coming from different perspectives enabled them to navigate. In the next chapter I will illustrate how individual women cope with family violence and use different perspectives in the way they navigate their life.
Coping by individual women

The previous chapter focused on the socio-cultural environment of the community. In this chapter I will turn the lens on the individual women and on the way they cope with the consequences of gender-based violence. As I have argued in the theoretical framework, individual coping styles are aimed at reducing stress. The individual life stories are marked by hardship, suffering and illness, but also show strength, power and creativity in the way women find opportunities to survive. To illustrate this I will start this chapter with the life story of two women. The two stories represent the experiences of many other women who participated in my research. Other life stories I collected followed similar patterns in finding a place, support, protection and justice in life.

6.1 Teresa’s story

On a Monday afternoon one of the Bons Vizinhos arrived in the centre with Teresa, a neighbor who had become maluko (mad) a week before. Teresa was scratching her feet and her body and speaking in a distorted way about bichos (small animals) all over her body while keeping her eyes wide open, filled with fear. She seemed psychotic but after a while she managed to explain her problems and complaints of itching and pain in her body. Teresa, 38 years old and mother of five children, had been sent away by her husband a year earlier. When I asked her about the start of the problems she referred to 2002, the year that she had lost her six year old child, and she started screaming and scratching again. Her daughter, about twenty years of age, who had come to the centre with her mother, explained that her mother had been maltreated by her husband for years. He had another wife in the house and was beating her mother all the time and had thrown her outside the house several times, even at night and in the rain. After the death of the son, he started to accuse her of having evil spirits and she was sent back to her family in another province. Her family had sent her to a curandheiro (traditional healer) for treatment.

Teresa explained that she had become pregnant during this treatment, because the curandheiro had told her that her spirits obliged her to have sex with him. After the traditional treatment Teresa had returned to her husband’s house, but he had sent her away again, this time to her parents’ house. After giving birth to a son, she had left the baby with her family and returned to her husband’s house and four children. Her husband was living with another
woman and did not accept her as his wife anymore. However, she could stay in the house as an *empregada* (housemaid). Since she had no choice and wanted to live with her children she accepted his maltreatment and humiliations until the day that he threatened her with a knife, some months earlier. She had fled the house and got protection of the pastor of a church. A week before coming to the centre she had visited her husband, who was still living with her rival and her four children. Afterwards she had fallen into this state of speaking strange words, screaming at night and scratching her body.

The pastor accounted that she screamed continuously at night and that he could not have her anymore while making so much noise. I proposed to call a medical doctor for some medication that may help her to calm down for the moment. As soon as Teresa heard the word hospital she fell down on her knees, begging me not to bring her there. “*They will give me injections and I will die*”. She was really frightened and desperately anxious. She made clear that she wanted to go to the *curandheiro*, exclaiming: “*Only the curandheiro can cure me*”. After a brief discussion with my colleagues we decided to call Domingo, a befriended traditional healer in one of the communities. After one hour of questioning and throwing stones, shells and fruit pits the diagnosis was clear: Teresa had been poisoned by her rival with sand from the cemetery. The sand had probably been put in front of the door, while Teresa was visiting her husband’s house last week. The poison had entered in her feet and caused the itching. Later the poison caused the itching all over her body and the strange movements in her spinal cord. Domingo offered a treatment. However, he would have to call the husband to inform him about the problem and to pay the bill. Together they discussed a strategy how to invite the husband, who would probably be reluctant to pay the bill of 3,500 meticais (100 dollar). I left them there.

The next morning I visited the mobile health brigade in the community and suddenly I spotted Teresa in the middle of the crowd waiting to see a nurse. She came to me with a bright and smiling face and told me that she was feeling much better. Senhor Domingo had given her a treatment and she showed me her feet with blue stripes and spots, result of the ceremony. The poison had left her body and she was feeling tired, but relieved. I saw no sign of her psychotic, distorted behavior of the previous day anymore, except for her wide open, anxious looking eyes. She promised me to come back the following week, after the next visit to senhor Domingo. Later that week we received a letter from Domingo explaining the progress of Teresa’s state. He had discovered that Teresa was possessed by spirits of the *curandheiro* who
had abused and impregnated her. This man had died a year before and had sent his spirits to Teresa, because she had never paid the bill for her treatment. The spirits would bother her as long as she did not pay the bill. However, Domingo promised to help her with those spirits to remain calm. He suggested that she had to find work somewhere to find money for the payment. In the last week of my stay Teresa visited me to tell me that she was still doing well.

The *Bom Vizinho* had explained her that the abuses and maltreatment by her husband constitute an abuse of her women’s rights. She said: “Now I know that my suffering is caused by abuse of my rights and I will accuse my husband for this and I will claim my part of our possessions. I will find a job and make a life for myself and my children.” However, she also told us that she still had a treatment at Domingo’s house, and that her husband was refusing to pay the bill. She wanted the help of the centre to claim money from her husband for her treatments and for her rights to 50% of the possessions, in accordance with the new family law. When asking Teresa about the bill of the *curandheiro* in Gaza, she said that she was convinced that her parents had paid, but that he may be angry about something else. Therefore, she would continue with Domingo’s treatment, which would send away the spirits. When I asked her how she would manage to pay the bills, she concluded firmly: “Não e problema, vou procurar trabalho e viver uma vida independente.” (No problem, I will find work, and live an independent life).

6.2 Regina’s story

Regina also endured a life of suffering. Just as Teresa she succeeded to implement elements of the new perspective of rights in a visible improvement of her life and her position in the community. Regina is a *Bom Vizinho* (45 years old, mother of 5 children). She told me her story in one of the in-depth interviews. Regina had been maltreated and abused by her husband for many years. He was extremely violent, especially when he had used local drugs. His violence was very often related to jealousy and he accused her of having other lovers when she spoke with other men. Several times she ended up in hospital and she had lost two babies because his beating caused bleedings resulting in abortions.

The only place that gave peace was the church where she was taught to pray every day to send the evil spirits away. The beatings became worse every time and her husband started to rape her. She had learnt that a woman has to obey, keep silent and accept everything a husband says. “*Bater é amor*” (beating is loving), her parents had taught her. A husband who does not
beat his wife does not love her. One day, she had made some money with selling coals. Her husband found the money and took it away. He accused her of being a prostitute and a witch. He said that she used witchcraft in eating from other men.

Regina: “When I arrived at the centre, I did not have the strength to live anymore, not even for my children. I felt that I had failed as a mother, as a good wife. Doutora M. was the first person who explained me that I have rights as a woman and that I have the right say No to the maltreatment. She invited me to do the training. Since then my life has changed completely. I learned that my parents were wrong. What they told me was not true. I realized that the pain I have gone through was unjust and unfair. Nobody has the right to treat another person like that. My silence was the only solution because I did not know that I had rights. Before, I heard about women’s rights from campaigns in the community and the political meetings of OMM. I listened to the speeches and read the pamphlets but I never understood what was written. My head was empty and I always thought that the information was for other people. But the doutora’s in the centre put the information inside me, by listening to me and helping me to look at my own life and find solutions. I realized that I, as a human being, have rights and I saw that my suffering was caused by violence and abuse of my rights. The husband can be the boss in the house, but he has no right to be violent. Now that I know this, my life has changed completely. Many women come to my house to ask my advice and I help them to go to the police and to the hospital. My husband is now proud of me. He said that he had never known that a woman has rights, but that he would never beat me again. Now he even helps me in the house to clean and fetch water. You know, I am a respected person now. Last Christmas I got a present from the community women and they called me “a nossa salvadora” (our savior). I am safe now; nobody will get power over me anymore because I have the power. You know what, I am the feiticeira (the witch) of Ca Paz; I have the power in the community to cure other people. I have been accused of being a witch so often, but now I advise women not to react to such accusations anymore. They are all invented to control us and make us powerless.”

However, two weeks after the interview, Regina was beaten by her husband again. She called the centre and the police, she mobilized the neighbors and decided to separate from her husband. Nevertheless, the latest news I got from her is that she is still living with her husband and that they have resolved the problems with the help of the church and the OMM.

*Analysis of the two life stories*
The story of Teresa shows different forms of abuse facilitated by unequal power relations and dependency. The general line of her story is one of a life of submission to and dependency on persons and spirits, who possess her, control her and tell her what to do and where to go. Her wandering around can be better characterized as “floating” since she is coping with her problems while having no control over either herself or her environment. This corresponds closely to the emotional coping style as described by Lazarus (1984). Although more investigation is needed to clarify the role of emotions in the way she floated on pushes of others, I assume that her mental health problems can be seen as an emotional oriented coping style. The lack of control over her environment made her cope by floating. Submission to and acceptance of being controlled by others probably provided her with the best chances to survive. However, this way of coping also made her more vulnerable to abuse and continuation of violence, which occurred through the treatment by the *curandheiro* and the humiliations by her husband. Her mental state of “being *maluko* and having lost control” can be understood as the ultimate strategy to escape being controlled by others, since it turned her uncontrollable.

However, it is clear that her losing control is directed by her emotions rather than by cognitive choices. The confrontation with the perspective of women’s rights interacts with her former coping by acceptance, submission and flight. She feels empowered by the perspective of having rights for herself and feels the courage and power to claim money from her partner, find a job and create economic independence. In other words, she gets tools to control her environment and her coping strategy of flight and avoidance is transformed into fight. Her new tactics of responding to her circumstances do show elements of control and cognitive decisions. This more cognitive oriented coping style can be compared to the concept of Social Navigation, since tactics and a certain form of control are involved when navigators ‘steer’ their life through an unstable environment. Nevertheless, she remains dependent on the spirits who cause her problems and needs treatment by Domingo. But instead of drifting on the social forces in society, she seems to grasp new opportunities that may improve her chances, within the given context.

Regina also changed her coping from endurance and silent suffering into an active attitude to fight for other women, as well as claiming her own rights. In doing so, she compares herself to a witch, a person with power. The power of new knowledge to help other people protects her against abuse. And although she was not able to control her husband’s violence, she
immediately mobilized help from others and called the police. Likewise she demonstrates a cognitive oriented coping style as she navigates between the different possibilities that will enlarge her chances. Apparently, she did not separate from him, but she navigated between the insights coming from the church and OMM and the new insights to claim her rights to a life without violence.

The stories of Teresa and Regina are only two of the many cases I have encountered during my work and research in Mozambique. Almost all accounts show how dependency, submission and evil spirits dominate women’s lives. Acceptance and keeping silent are considered as the most adequate ways to cope with problems of violence and can be compared with emotional oriented coping styles. The coping is focused on perceived dangers to health and wellbeing and is probably influenced by severe mental suffering. Moreover the lack of control over the situation compels women to float rather than navigate. However, empowerment and new perspectives strongly influenced their tactics and abilities to move between the different systems as I will explain in the following part.

6.3 The role of socio-cultural practices

The stories of both women point at the important role of socio-cultural insights in creating their perception of problems and their coping strategies of submission and acceptance. The outcome of the survey (among 75 trained women, 58 respondents) also confirms that the way women deal with problems of gender-based violence is strongly influenced by cultural practices. The church plays a major role in women’s life and the survey indicates that 90% of the women go to church. Seventeen different churches are mentioned, thus showing the enormous proliferation of churches in Mozambique. As main dangers in life the respondents list: HIV/AIDS (59%); violence (45%); poverty (35%) and witchcraft (33%). Regarding socio-cultural practices the responses are as follows: 43% have a kulaya in the family (family member for advice); 42 % practice lobolo (bride wealth); 40 % have family spirits; 22 % have been affected by witchcraft; 21% consult a curandheiro; and 17% practice cleansing of the death. In the next section I will look into each of these socio-cultural practices and insights in more detail.

**Lobolo**

Most socio-cultural practices in Southern Mozambique are related to rules for marriage, family life and reproduction. Many women are inclined to the practice of lobolo, which will
guarantee her a place in husbands family, the protection of the spirits and support from the in law family. The lobolo asserts a husband’s ownership of a wife since his family paid a certain amount of goods or money for his new wife (Bagnol 2006). The attempt of the new socialist nation to eliminate lobolo is still subject of hot debates among the population. In one of the two focus group interviews one of the Bons Vizinhos described lobolo as follows: “Look, there is a woman, she is pregnant and has one baby on her back, and one walking at her side. On her head she carries a basket with vegetables and in the other hand she carries her hoe. She goes to her machamba. Her husband walks in front of her, wearing a nice suit over his big belly. He looks proud, because he has produced so many things: children and food. They are on their way home, and when they pass the water tap he helps his wife to place the jerry can on her head. This woman has no life as a human being but as an animal that has been bought to produce”. Almost all the other women agreed, yet the majority was still against the elimination of lobolo. The practice is considered as the union of spirits of the two families, and without it the ancestor spirits will not know where she is. Moreover, they will not know where her children are and this will create many problems in the children’s life. Examples of children who suffered from fertility problems, problems at home, or who remained unmarried later in life, were seen as related to the ancestor spirits who had lost sight on their descendants.

The mingling of economic interests and spiritual abuses resulting in violence and family problems are considered as modern problems. The traditional practice shows respect for the union of spirits in creating a safe environment for children to grow up, and this element has to be continued. This debate displays the ambivalence and conflicting insights about women’s rights. On the one hand women show their dedication to the power of spirits and their rights to support and protection from the family-in-law and their spiritual world. On the other hand, they struggle to untie the narrow bonds of being possessed and controlled by husband and families who abuse them and take advantage. The new insights and opportunities of new rights are overshadowed by perceived risks and insecurity of losing traditional rights to protection and support of the family.

**Cleansing of the dead**

Another ritual that is still performed in Mozambique is the “Cleansing of the dead”. Nearly 20 % of the women in my research responded that the ritual is practiced in their family. These findings contradict with the conversations I had, since most women told me that the tradition
is not practiced anymore. They had learned from the HIV/AIDS campaigns that the tradition increases the risk on infection and therefore they use alternative rituals. The practice entails that a woman who has lost her husband must have sexual intercourse with one of the males in her family in-law. The family in-law has paid the *lobolo* which obliges them to take care of her in the future.

The meaning of the ritual is explained in many ways, varying from the right to her body since the family has paid for her to a necessary reunion of spirits in order to control bad spirits that can bring more bad luck. One woman told me that she was supposed to do the ritual and have sexual intercourse with her husband’s brother. However, she did not want this and invented strategies to avoid the ritual. According to her she would be protected from the ritual as long as she was wearing black clothes as a sign of mourning the death of her husband. Thus she told me, clapping my hand as a sign of understanding: “when needed, I will always remain in black.”

*Kulaya*

Many families have a *kulaya*, a person in the family with the special task and function to consult and mediate in family problems in accordance with the socio-cultural insights. Before a woman marries or leaves the house with a partner, she is taught by a family member, a *kulaya*, how to treat her husband well and how to behave in her husband’s family. All informants explain how they were taught the rules of being a good wife. They learned how to respect their husband, how to prepare his food and heat the water for bathing, to keep silent and never complain, and to accept everything a husband wants. As one woman said: “My *kulaya* taught me that women always have to obey, keep silent and accept everything. When he beats you, he loves you. You have to stand this”. Other women have similar experiences: “My *kulaya* told me: the secrets you have are just between you and your husband. And when you cannot stand it anymore, you have to tell your family in-law; they have to resolve it. But I informed them several times and they never did anything to resolve the problems. I could not tell my own family what was going on, because I knew they would not be happy. They saw my suffering, but nobody could do anything.”

*Role of spirits*
Good behavior of a woman is defined within the socio-cultural context of the society, where male dominance is considered as a natural fact. The traditional cultural insights explain the importance of marriage as a place for protection against disease, in the words of one of the interviewees: “A woman without a man cannot have a full life and she will always have problems. In our culture, unmarried women are often seen as victims of family spirits who claim them as the wife of a ‘spiritual husband’. The spiritual husband is often a young unmarried man, such as a soldier from war who has died too young. The ancestors of that soldier can demand revenge by possessing the daughter from another family. The spirits of the dead soldier will possess the girl and she will have all kinds of problems in life. Such a girl will never be able to have a happy marriage, because her spirits will always provoke problems like infertility and violence at home”

A woman can be accused of provoking her husband to be violent, because she has bad family spirits. Like Teresa, many women are sent to their families to resolve the problem of the bad family spirits. Paula told me how her problems were related to spirits from her grandmother: “We have a problem with spirits in my family coming from one of our ancestors. First the spirits were with me, without knowing that I had these family spirits. At the beginning of my marriage I fell ill and I did not become pregnant. My husband sent me back to my parents and I was treated by a curandheira. She told me that my ancestors wanted me to stay at home and prostitute myself to maintain my family. That is why my spirits provoked violence from my husband. The curandheira took these spirits from me and gave them to my sister. I went back to my husband, became pregnant and during my life I got ten living babies. However, my sister never got a living baby and she did not manage to find a husband who stayed with her”. This type of explanation of problems caused by violence is very common among men and women. The spirits of women are perceived as the cause of problems and are used as the reason for men’s maltreatment. At the police office and at centre Ca Paz we have seen many women with a husband who defends himself for not being responsible for his aggression, because the spirits of his wife made him do so. “My wife has bad spirits coming from her family. She speaks too much, is nervous and never stays in the house”.

**Role of witchcraft**

Afflictions by bad spirits can be caused not only by family spirits but also by the manipulation of feiticeiros (witches). The survey showed that 32% of the women perceive witchcraft as one of the main dangers in their personal life and that 22% of all women have experienced that
witchcraft caused bad luck or ill health. The dangers are explained in two ways: the danger to be afflicted by the evil spirits that are sent to you or the risk to become accused of being a witch. Several women attributed the problems at home to bad influences of rivals that came to destroy their family life. The rivals are accused of giving the husband a traditional medicine and use *curandismo* in order to take him away from his wife. However, in turn they can also become accused of using witchcraft in order to control their own husbands. The use of traditional medicines is often mentioned as a strategy of a wife to keep her husband at home and prevent him from having affairs with others. I have seen several men who came to the centre to complain because they suspected their wife of putting medicines that may take away his power and potentiality in his food or in the sleeping room. Although many women describe these practices, none of the women I have met said to practice them themselves. They only know friends, family or neighbors who do this.

My questions seemed to stimulate the informants to rethink their opinions on the role of spirits and witchcraft: “There are women using medicines to stop the beating and violence. This may help to change the husbands’ attitudes. But I don’t believe that women are witches who provoke violence: they suffer from violence and do not know how to stop it anymore.” The confusion about the existence of spirits and the role in the conflicts is also demonstrated in Paula’s statement; “The bad spirits may provoke violence, but nobody knows if the spirits really exist. You know, I think that violence is provoked by bad behavior of men. But women will stay in a situation of violence when they think that they have bad spirits, it is just a way to control them”. One informant showed her conflicting opinions about the existence of witchcraft: “Witchcraft has to be treated by the AMATRAM, but witches are rare. I never saw one or heard of one. I think that they don’t exist anymore; these were things of our old traditions. No, I don’t believe in witchcraft. These things are just inventions in people’s heads; they don’t exist but were created to have power over others.” A police officer, working at the helpdesk in one of the communities, stated: “When there is a conflict in the house and the husband says that the wife has spirits, then that is not true. Instead of finding solutions for the problem, he accuses his wife. I tell him: Even if your wife had spirits, you have to resolve this together and you cannot maltreat her and send her away”.

6.4 Role of gender inequality
The survey included questions on roles and rights of men and women, a topic that was also elaborated in the interviews. The idea that men’s domination is natural in gender relations is
reflected in women’s explanations of the problems at home. Men are perceived as the bosses at home and the owners of their female partners. A man has the right to be respected and give orders at home, and in turn his wife gets food, housing and respect from him. Problems of violence are often related to misbehavior of women: “When women don’t behave well at home, don’t clean the house and don’t prepare food before her husband returns home, they provoke violence.”

‘The nature of men’ is regarded as the reason why he has the right to have sex when he wants, since his body mandates him. Most women speak about privileges for men as rights of men: “I never was a victim of maltreatment, but he has these things of coming home late, being with other women: Homen é Homen! (A man is a man). His body demands to have sex.” Another woman describes her husbands’ need for other women as a problem of the body: “Having too much circulation of blood makes him vulnerable to becoming seduced by other women who want him. Therefore wives have the obligation to satisfy their husband whenever he is in need in order not to lose him to other women.”

The idea that domestic violence is provoked by women who neglect their female tasks dominates the discourse in families as well as in local institutions for conflict mediation, like police helpdesks, OMM and local community structures (Arthur, Mejia 2006b). The women are blamed for the problems and many women search forgiveness for their errors in church. Several women came to the centre to ask for a treatment to learn how to behave well, in order to stop the violence of the husband. The examples demonstrate how women intermingle rights and privileges of men with own perceptions on the right to existence.

Though the thesis focuses on women, it is interesting to note that new insights also have an impact on men. One of the male secretários in a community confirmed the positive impact of the trainings at all levels of the community, even in his personal life. In a very honest and open conversation he told me: “Since we have had these Bons Vizinhos in our community, something has changed. Normally I received many cases of violence at my office, but now they go to the centre to resolve the problems with the Bons Vizinhos. But maybe the violence is decreasing, since we learn to look at women in a different manner. I also learned to see that women have the right to speak, to make decisions and to complain when they are abused. Before we never got a response from our women; they accepted everything. I could beat my wife, but she said nothing and was not even screaming. She had escaped already (já fugiu) so
there was no body. But now they speak and respond like human beings, they give company in life. That is much better; therefore men may stop beating.”

Dealing with dangers: violence, witchcraft and HIV/AIDS

The survey and the interviews show that women regard violence, witchcraft and infection with HIV/AIDS as the main dangers in life. As argued throughout this thesis, the way women cope with these dangers is determined by dominating norms and values in the environment. As demonstrated by many women, a strategy of keeping silent, submission and acceptance is the most adequate one to cope with violence. Several women, like Teresa and Regina, refer to experiences of abuse and forced sexual relations. The trainings seem to have influenced their perceptions about these acts as is reflected in their use of language. One of the Bons Vizinhos:

“I never knew that being forced to have sex with your husband is violence. He forced me to have sex, even a couple of days after giving birth to my child; this was really violent. I started to wear trousers and tight leggings in the night, to avoid my husband to have sex when he was drunk and violent.”

Likewise Teresa now regards her treatment by the former traditional healer as abuse, and the maltreatments by her husband as violence. Regina realized that she was living in violence and that this caused her illness. The examples of the Bons Vizinhos also show how women have always perceived the violent acts as injustice, even though they had been taught the opposite. In the narratives women indicated clear opinions about the inhumanity and injustice of their sufferings caused by inequality. However, they explained me that rebellion and open resistance would only deteriorate the situation, thus making silence and acceptance the best strategy to survive: “I learned from my parents to keep silent. I never, ever agreed, but I had no choice”. The acknowledgement of the injustice of the acts seems closely connected to feelings that were kept inside. The awareness about injustice and abnormality of partner violence encouraged women to give other explanations to problems.

The survey demonstrated that 59% of the respondents see HIV/AIDS as one of the main dangers in their life. This result indicates that the majority is aware of the health risks. The trainings have increased the awareness still further. Nevertheless the possibilities to deal with these risks remain very problematic as is demonstrated in several accounts: “How can I force my husband to use preservatives when I cannot prove that he is infected. He tells me that he has the right to have sexual relations with me and he will use the preservatives with his
None of the women feel in the position to claim the use of preservatives, because this will provoke violence and problems. They pray and hope that they will not be infected and try not to think too much about this problem.

**Role of churches and FRELIMO**

Churches play a major role and almost all women go to a church to find protection against the influence of bad spirits. Although they mentioned 17 different churches I did not thoroughly explore the differences between these churches. I focused on the specific meaning for the women and found out that most women consider praying an adequate way to keep bad spirits away and control spirits in life. The fear for witchcraft and evil spirits is mainly managed by visits to churches where they learn that evil spirits don’t exist. “The Church has told me not to believe in evil spirits (...”). “In the church we learn to pray every day, so that the evil spirits will flee (...”). “Sparks are signs of having no confidence in God (...”). The confidence in the protection of God by praying is mentioned by almost all women as the most important place to find peace. “I go to church, to pray, to ask Deus for strength (...).” A pastor of the church explains: “In case of family problems and violence against women, the church encourages women to pray and ask Deus forgiveness for the errors and talk with family members to solve the problems at home”.

The churches aim to reconcile families within the framework of a gender ideology of male dominance. As explained by several Bons Vizinhos: “The church helps me to get the strength to stay in this marriage, because God has brought us together and we cannot disrespect his will”. “Divorce will provoke the bad spirits who will destroy my life and my children. So I have to hold on.” The pastor of a church told me that she always had taught women in her church only to talk to God about problems. However, in the training as Bom Vizinho she realized that she could ask for the help of others. “Now I go to the hospital and even to a traditional healer and I keep these secrets for myself, because in our church we are not allowed to use traditions.”

The OMM, key representative of FRELIMO’s emancipation policy, is still dominated by traditional norms and values in society. Two OMM women who work in different communities spoke with me about the contributions and objectives of their activities aimed at combating violence against women in the community. “The OMM helps women to keep their husband at home and reconcile families. We have to ‘educate’ women to show respect to the
husband and avoid violence and we educate men that they have to respect their wife. Divorce and separation of a couple is not an option when they have a house and children together. A woman is never allowed to abandon her children; that is against the law. So we help to resolve the problems within the family’. Apparently new concepts referring to the injustice of violence against women are integrated in the way churches and OMM approach problems of women. The impact of the new knowledge on women’s personal life is analyzed in the following part.

6.5 Breaking the silence

The survey shows that all Bons Vizinhos changed the ways they resolve problems in the families. The changes are displayed in different perceptions about the way women perceive themselves as a person with rights. All reactions of women show an important impact of the trainings: “I learned that I have the right to speak and to defend myself”. “I am a woman with rights for myself”. “I was always ill, and thought that this was caused by family spirits, but now I know that I was suffering from violence”. One of the eldest Bons Vizinhos (65) explains how the new knowledge changed her way of thinking: “Before I never had an opinion of myself, I just followed the rules of my mother, the church and the government. But now I learned to do ‘matematica do pensamentos’ (mathematics of thinking). I go home, sit on my mat, and start to think for myself. I realized that I can create thoughts inside myself that give me strength and courage.” Regina described a similar process of empowerment, when she said that she now experiences herself as a worthwhile person.

The general impact of the trainings seems to be related to the acknowledgement of women’s suffering caused by violence. Almost all women indicate that they found strength and courage to break the silence and started to talk about their problems. They realized that the problems were not restricted to the family, but that they occurred in many families. The conscience of being a victim of a structural problem of violence against women helped them to turn their private pain into public pain and suffering. Even though a man is regarded as the boss in house with the right to be respected and to ‘educate’ his wife, nobody agreed with the moral right to use force, humiliation and aggression. Although practices of violence and abuse are considered as ‘normal’ practices, (“every woman lives with violence in the house”), nobody perceived them as fair in the moral sense. The recognition of private suffering and illness caused by violence and the acknowledgement of the severe consequences of the phenomenon in society gave a place to inner feelings of justice. Many women revealed how they feel seen
and respected as a human being after the trainings. The new insights closely connect to inner knowledge about justice and injustice in life. The trainings encouraged them to connect with their own strength and power to regain the control over their body. In trying to get control over one’s own body and wellbeing, different strategies are used to find support and protection.

The empowerment of women resulted in new strategies to deal with violence at home. While they were used to keeping silent about the suffering, now they look for help outside the family. The churches remain an important place for moral support but the majority of informants declare to make more use of public services like the hospital, the help desk of the police and organizations for juridical assistance. The impact of having the knowledge not only resulted in higher self-esteem, but also in improved health conditions since women feel encouraged to pursue medical health. This is also reflected in several accounts of women who told me that they learned to become more responsible for their own body and health. One group of eight women had taken the initiative to do an HIV/AIDS test, since they saw this as a first step to get the control over their own bodies and health back. When two of the participants were diagnosed as sero-positive, they told me to be grateful to Ca Paz.

The knowledge about their health status gives the opportunity to get medicines and treatment. One Bom Vizinho: “Otherwise I would have died soon, anyway.” And another: “We can never confirm the fidelity of our husbands, and now we know that he can infect us with the disease. What can we do? We will not provoke violence by insisting on the use of preservatives, so we accept it in silence. But twice a year we do a test, and if something is wrong, we get medicines.” Although they know that they run serious risks, they don’t see any solution to the problem because they don’t have ‘an active voice’ in the negotiation about preservatives. An often applied strategy is to accept the inequality of power, trust in God and ask for his help, and use the services of the hospital. The empowered women experience various personal changes in their daily life due to improved positions in the community and within the family. The new knowledge about women’s rights and knowing how to get access to public services gives power to the women. This power seems to play an important role in the improved positions of women, as shown in Regina’s story, who calls herself now the feiticeira of Ca Paz, with more power than the traditional healers.
Conclusion

- The introduction of different knowledge systems over the last three decades in Mozambican society has demonstrated the power of socio-cultural traditions through spirits and an ancestor cult.
- The way women cope with gender based violence is determined by this environment, characterized by spirits and unequal power relations between genders.
- The introduction of knowledge follows an interactive dynamical process, to regulate power relations and improvement of individual chances.
- The introduction of women’s rights has been used to improve chances in life and has resulted in social navigation in society.

The introduction of different knowledge systems over the last three decades in Mozambican society has demonstrated the power of socio-cultural traditions through spirits and an ancestor cult. All new systems coming from Portuguese colonists, Catholic churches, Socialistic ideologies and Western relief programs have been incorporated within the existing norms and values of society. However, the dynamic of responses to the many -imposed -new insights has created a complex society, constructed out of many contrasting ideas and opinions. In my research I have identified a similar process of incorporation of new knowledge about women’s rights at a meso level of the community. The responses of community leaders to the introduction of a psychosocial support program demonstrate the strong influence of spirits and socio-cultural traditions. Likewise the dynamics within the women group of rejections, accusations and integration of the program showed the power of prevailing insights coming from spirits in the process of incorporation.

The responses in the community also showed how introduction of knowledge resulted in an interactive dynamical process, to regulate power relations and improvement of individual chances. The inferior position of women is narrowly connected with perceptions about spirits, witchcraft as well as available strategies for women to cope with violence and the risk for HIV/AIDS. Based on my findings about the incorporation of diverse systems of knowledge over the years in Mozambique, and the way women navigate within this environment I have developed a model as presented in chapter 2.
In this thesis I demonstrated how women, suffering from severe consequences of gender based violence, are coping with their problems by acceptance and keeping silent. The way she copes is determined by her socio-cultural environment, characterized by male dominance and spirits. The account of Teresa illustrates how coping strategies depend on insights coming from her society. She was disposed to accept abuse and maltreatment of her husband and had to submit herself to his control and demands of spirits. She found a place, protection and support within the context where women possess an inferior position. She has been coping with her problems by acceptance, submission and illness. Her mental problem of losing control can be perceived as a coping strategy; an ultimate response to injustice of abuse and oppression. A coping strategy that keeps her alive but is inadequate to live a humane life within the society. As a person without rights or voice, she has been drifting on the pushes of others and social forces coming from society. Without the skills and power ‘to steer’ her life as a captain of her own life through ‘troublesome circumstances’, she was forced to navigate like a floating ship without a steer on a rough ocean.

The ocean, as the moving field of the Mozambican society, pushed her forward, and brought her by coincidence in contact with women’s rights. The new perspectives enabled her to adjust her coping strategy and start to navigate between spirits and rights. The story of Regina illustrates how new knowledge in the first place is applied to improve chances in life. After years of coping with her problems by acceptance and endurance of violence, and submission she came in touch with new perspectives for women’s rights. The acknowledgement of her as a human being with rights, connected to the existing intrinsic knowledge inside herself about the injustice of abuse. This enabled her to adjust her coping strategy from coping by endurance into coping by social navigation. She became an active actor in searching a place, support and protection within her environment. As the “witch of Women’s rights” she uses insights coming from spirits and witchcraft that provide power, but also perspectives of women’s rights by breaking the silence about violence and abuse. Even though she is not able to control her husbands’ violence, she uses other sources to protect her life.

Thus, the introduction of women’s rights in a socio-cultural environment of male dominance where power inequality between genders is regulated by the spiritual world influenced coping strategies of women. The knowledge contributed to improve chances to survive and women used this empowerment to navigate their life between different insights within the socio-cultural context. In the context of the women in my research is social navigation considered as
a way of coping within society. However, the ability to develop tactics of navigation is strongly connected with available individual coping styles of the women. The available coping strategies determine the difference between floating on the pushes coming from social forces and the ability to navigate on social movements.

The findings of my research show that newly imported western based knowledge becomes incorporated at macro, meso and micro level of society by an interactive process with the socio cultural knowledge of the society. This process is characterized by a dynamic of responses that deregulate and reorder existing balances of power and prevailing insights. The incorporation results in an intermingling of the different systems that contributes to a more diverse and complex environment. At a micro level, the women showed how they used new insights in the first place to enlarge personal survival opportunities within their world. The changes in coping strategies, created by the psychosocial program, are reflected in the way they interact with their environment. From passive victims of violence, they become active actors in their family and community. In searching a place, support, protection and justice they switch between systems of knowledge in their environment. The interplay between new perspectives, personal drives to survive and the diversity of insights in their social cultural environment enabled them to become social navigators in society. For women in Mozambique social navigation can be regarded as a way of coping with gender inequality and consequences of gender-based violence.

Analyzing the dynamic of responses to new introduced knowledge contributes to a better understanding of the way new concepts are perceived and incorporated within the socio-cultural environment. The responses show the importance of the process at all levels of society that determines the results of a certain program. Moreover, the responses at an individual level demonstrate the importance of psychological discourse in coping with burdensome situations. The results show the significance of working in close connection with the existing insights, needs and perceptions of people themselves when contrasting concepts are introduced. More research in the particular insights and responses to the introduction of new knowledge may contribute to designing more adequate and culturally appropriate community based programs for health promotion.
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List of abbreviations

AMATRAM : Association of Mozambican Practitioners
HIV/AIDS: Human Immunodeficiency Virus /Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
FRELIMO: Frente de Liberação de Moçambique
Summary

In this thesis I present the results of my research on the way women in Southern Mozambique have integrated new knowledge about women’s rights into their own socio-cultural insights about dealing with problems caused by gender-based violence. The presented results are based on working experiences from 2003-2008 and findings from anthropological research in 2009 in Mozambique. In analyzing the impact of the introduction of a psychosocial support program, I argue that the incorporation of new knowledge produces a dynamic of responses at community and individual levels. The way women cope with problems caused by gender-based violence is determined by their socio-cultural environment. The fear for witchcraft, the visits to curandheiros and stories about illness caused by family spirits demonstrate the strong influence of ancestors’ wisdoms and warnings. However, the new knowledge is used in the adjustment of coping strategies to enlarge chances in life. While most women pray in the church to control the spirits, and silence the pain of the beatings, they seem not to feel inhibited by finding justice in life and break the silence about violence at home. They feel encouraged to explore new horizons where women have a place and rights, while navigating between insights coming from spirits, the blessings of the Lord and the emancipation politics of the ruling FRELIMO.