This is the Accepted Manuscript of the article published by Taylor & Francis in *Anthropology Southern Africa*, Vol 46, No 2, 2023, available at https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2023.2247442

# Resilience and Methodological Resistance: Ethnographies of Mozambique during Pandemic Times

Special Issue

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## Introduction

Drawing from Mozambique as a site of ethnographic inquiry, this special issue of *Anthropology Southern Africa* looks at the intersection of pandemic times and the challenges to the ethnographic method that this poses. The volume presents new

ways of rethinking and reimagining the ethnographic method to understand resilience and methodological resistance that anthropologists working about Mozambique have produced. This introduction will (i) explore the pandemic experience, followed by (ii) the study of Mozambique as a site of ethnographic inquiry and conclude with a broader debate on the (iii) nature of ethnographic method within contemporary anthropology.

The articles in this issue explore different approaches of anthropologists within their ethnographies of Mozambique, focusing on different key issues related to their personal and situated experiences, sharing a common understanding of methodology based on trust, collaboration, negotiation and critical knowledge production. In this sense, the authors discuss the political and epistemic significance of different kinds of lived trajectories of research to investigate “who we are and from where we speak”, and the implications for the kind of ethnographic knowledge produced about Mozambique - inscribing a ‘highly situated’ description (Geertz 1988). Generally, in anthropology, ethnography is no longer about describing the so-called ‘other’ but bringing into the debate the anthropologist’s own *uncertainty* and *displacement*. This means that “anthropology no longer speaks with automatic authority for others defined as unable to speak for themselves “(Clifford 1986, 10). In order to specify the discourses in ethnography, the questions that structure this issue are “toward a specification of discourses in ethnography: who speaks? who writes? when and where? with or to whom? under what institutional and historical constraints? (Clifford 1986, 13).

In doing so, we bring a critical approach towards southern epistemologies, addressing the historical and political constraints of the ‘other’ in African settings (Meneses 2021, Cunha and Casimiro 2019, Mbembe 2016). The nature of the site of inquiry in Mozambique requires a permanent (re)conceptualization of the ethnographic method itself due to several disruptions in the political, social and economic landscape, particularly how the COVID pandemic added another layer of complexity to the development of ethnography.

## Pandemics within the Mozambican landscape of research

Our journey started in September 2022, at the VIII Congress of the Portuguese Association of Anthropology (APA), at the University of Évora (Portugal). One of the conference panels called for anthropologists who were based or working in and about Mozambique and was an important site for the debate on the impact of COVID in Mozambique. The debate at the conference led us to a broader reconceptualization of what the ethnographic field required us to do within a pandemic. In this process, new colleagues joined us, ones that could not be there in presence, as we are all ethnographers of disruption with a longstanding fieldwork experience in Mozambique. Together, we shared our experiences around resilience and methodological resistance, using the pandemic as a moment of reflection on the ability to carry out ethnography in uncertain contexts. Our result is an exploration and constant (re)invention of epistemologies and innovative methodologies in ethnographic practice, supported by collaboration in the sense of constructing a common space that allows different visions of going into the field - in presence or at a distance - "a space of being in the world together, allowing for different understandings of our being" (Pandian 2019, 3). In this common space, we share not only our incursion into the field but also a collaborative collation of data, using documents, photographs, and other primary sources, that our participants shared with us. This allowed us to continue doing ethnography, particularly when disruption brought resilience as a way of continuing work in the field using methodologies of resistance. For us, "ethnography, our signal form of practice and expression, shares so much with literary genres like fiction, memoir, and travelogue" (Pandian 2019, 6), allowing us to use several data formats such as life histories and historical sources, that symbolize resilience within the political and social context in Mozambique.

What do we mean by a "We"? When speaking about "We", we are bringing a collective notion of developing ethnography that is shaped by our ethnographic Mozambican experience. This praxis is related to disruption in the sense of resilience and methodological resistance anchored in the notion of conceptual diffuse borders. In fact, "one of the challenges of writing about resilience is that there is no clear definition of what resilience is" (Grove 2018, 30), adding that "resilience reconfigures thought and practice on human–environmental relations

around a will to design". According to Grove (2018, 5), resilience is the "will to design [which] signals the effort or striving to intervene in and adapt to a complex world from a position of necessarily partial knowledge"[1].

In this special issue, resilience is used both to describe the persistence of continuing doing ethnographic fieldwork despite the constraints in the location (e.g., wars, extreme climate events such as cyclones, floods, and power imbalances); as well as the use of methods that constitute resistance in the sense of contesting dominant epistemologies. This revolves around a changing set of research practices after 1975 in Mozambique within a broader context of the epistemologies of the South. Methodological resistance deals with the collaborative and participatory notions of doing ethnography in Mozambique, situated within a specific historical and political context of marginalization within global development. We contest the notion of Africa as the 'other' within the legacy of colonialism, and counter power relations and the imbalances of elites that rule the country, within a pattern of poverty that describes general society (Mbembe 2016).

Our work in doing ethnography in a precarious and marginalized context (Grove 2018), looks for acts of resilience in and about the field, bringing collaborative and participatory approaches to anthropology. This not only calls for people's voices but a wider historical and social commentary that allows us to develop methodological resistances such as the ones described by each author of this special issue.

In doing so, we address methodological and ethnographic practices in Mozambique within the notion of disruption and uncertainty within pandemic times. Indeed, the Covid pandemic in Mozambique is comparable to previous disruptive events such as military conflicts, including the war of liberation, civil war, reopening of the armed conflict and the new insurgence in the North of the country; as well as other epidemic events such as HIV/Aids and cholera; and climatic vulnerability marked by frequent floods and cyclones. From the daily practice of ethnography in Mozambique, the reports and academic works produced show us that situated knowledge is fundamental to evaluate the adaptability and skills that reshape the use of ethnographic method, particularly as a means to construct a thick description of historically and culturally specific

elements of significance. Within this context, we use a constant questioning of social science practice when in the field.

The methodological approaches applied by the anthropologists working on Mozambique since the country's independence in 1975 have their roots in various ethnographic approaches largely carried out in the colonial period.[2] The rupture with the colonial roots of ethnographic research in Mozambique took shape during the first two decades after independence, in 1975, at the University Eduardo Mondlane (UEM). This is the oldest university in Mozambique, developed under the shadow of Apartheid in South Africa and the regional postcolonial landscape in neighbouring countries. Both in the Faculty of Arts and at the Centre for African Studies (CEA), multiple research projects took place, including critical approaches of the multiparty system and liberal economy, particularly after the Fifth Congress of Frelimo party in 1989. This history allows us to see the movement away from ideological positionalities present at the beginning of the social sciences tradition in the country (Morier-Genoud 2009; Fernandes 2012, 2017; Cruz e Silva et al. 2015).

In this sense, the Rome Peace Agreements of 1992, representing the General Peace Accords, theoretically ended the war between Frelimo and Renamo, and brought new perspectives of looking at Mozambique as a site of ethnographic inquiry. These approaches emphasize the similarities between doing research within a global pandemic moment and challenge us to readapt the classical anthropological method of inquiry. From the 1990s a multiplicity of ethnographies developed in Mozambique, anchored in post-colonial epistemologies, that brought subalternized and silenced voices into account. These developed new perspectives on power, questioning authority and political parties' positionalities and the socio-economic impact of donors and public policies. This demands a kind of research that allows anthropologists to continue doing research within a context that posits a critical production of knowledge (Khan, Meneses and Bertelsen 2018). As stressed in a recent report, the funding available to develop contemporary ethnography about Mozambique "comes mainly from external donors who focus on global, rather than national, priorities" (World Health Organization 2021; see UNESCO 2021).

When addressing the research landscape in Mozambique, and as underlined by Castel-Branco (2022: 22), it is not easy to “maintain theoretical, methodological and analytical rigour, despite pressure to simplify and adopt new academic and political fashions that often have no real rationale”. To do that, there is the need to collaborate and strengthen connections between researchers based in and out of the country, which has always been the way Mozambique produces knowledge. The Covid pandemic allowed for (re)connection and (re)sharing of research strategies in the anthropological community in Mozambique, which is inscribed by various constraints in terms of funding and recognition, as well as innovative methodological shifts.

As one of the “four horsemen of leveling” (Scheidel 2017), the Covid pandemic in Mozambique brought much of the same issues that anthropologists faced globally, namely reduced access to the field and financial constraints. However, the ethnographic experience of Mozambique as a site of inquiry also brought methodological innovation, within a common ground: sharing experiences of restlessness, creating a need for innovative and critical methodologies, and highlighting the role played by establishing and/or maintaining relationships of trust in the field. We all experienced encounters in the field of inquiry surrounded by constant uncertainty and moments of disruption.

In the end, the Covid pandemic represents a degree of commonality within our site of inquiry. Because of that, we decided to compare our experiences with the changes experienced during at least the last two decades of ethnographic practice to understand the current landscape of ethnography and ways of developing anthropology in Mozambique. The pandemic brought us together instead of putting us apart. Our social distance did not mean an absence of reflection and/or going into the field, whatever the definition of the field we may encounter (Günel, Varma and Watanabe 2020, Postil 2016, Gray 2016). From the articles gathered in this special issue, it is possible to draw a common conclusion on three areas that underpin our ethnographic practice: (i) caring and nurturing for ethnographic relationships based on trust; (ii) negotiation, cooperation, collaboration, mutuality, participatory approaches and ways of connecting with people in the field and (iii) knowledge production processes within a context of uncertainty, disruption and constant change.

## Mozambique as a site of ethnographic inquiry

As an ethnographic site of inquiry, Mozambique offers a long tradition of resilience and methodological resistance. This is built upon a dialogue between insider-outsider perspectives of researchers based both in and out of the country, who share the same uncertainties in addressing the prevalent social reality. All of us have been doing ethnography about Mozambique and face several challenges that the pandemic has highlighted. Being a native or a non-native anthropologist is a historically situated condition, and cultural factors such as gender or socioeconomic class are as central as our ethnic or religious identities (Narayan 1993). Bearing in mind that our identities are multiple, complex, dynamic, and fluid (Hall 2001), developing our ethnographic practice was intertwined with our understanding of the relationship between us and the field, knowing that the way we translate cultural experiences reflects how we practice ethnography (Agar 2011).

In colonial times, ethnographic inquiry in Mozambique was mostly used to describe and classify the 'other' as an object and not a subject of inquiry. In modernity, the subject became part of the research process itself. In the years before independence, history was one of the social sciences that defied a unique vision of society and social relationships. In 1976, after the independence of Mozambique, through the suggestion of the rector of UEM, Fernando Ganhão, the Centre for African Studies (CEA) was created by Aquino de Bragança and later, Ruth First (a South African academic and journalist, and anti-apartheid activist), together with a small group of Mozambican young scholars from the History Department. Along this process, collaboration ties were established with other scholars from various origins. They developed a specific line of inquiry, bringing a critical vision to methodologies in practice (Bragança and O'Laughlin 1984; Fernandes 2011). This line of inquiry was supported by the notion and practice of collective work, research and teaching as interconnected practices, and the practical issues knowledge production and research and teaching, at one of the most innovative research centres in Southern Africa (Ganhão 1983; Coelho 2008; Thomaz 2021). At the time, Ruth First argued that researchers needed to have access to as much literature as possible to develop critical thinking and that field research was essential (Darch 2017). The way of doing research at the CEA

was considered “innovative and outside of the normal academic practice of the time” (Darch 2017: 112). The history of CEA, which became a truly international research centre, is important to understand how anthropology was shaped in Mozambique. Researchers at CEA focused on the way social sciences were born in independent Mozambique, describing other ways of developing research.

At the same time, another line of inquiry in the field of social sciences was developed, between 1978 and 1982, when documents were collected as part of a National Campaign for the Preservation and Promotion of Culture in Mozambique. In 1983, the Mozambican Institute for Socio-Cultural Research, known as Arquivo do Património Cultural (ARPAC), was created because of an agreement between the Mozambican state and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to preserve the cultural heritage of the country. In 1984, France supported ARPAC “through the anthropologist Michael Samuel, to train professionals in historical, anthropological and sociological research” (Bussoti and Gundane 2019: 181).

Both, the CEA and ARPAC share a common feature: the people of Mozambique were regarded as central within the research process, as active agents of social transformation, or an influence as a political actor. This approach to social inquiry, in which the object became a subject in the research process, was one major outcome of the Mozambican social sciences after independence, which still underpins current anthropological practice. This way of looking at the subject, and the localization within the social process itself, has been explored by several anthropologists since the 1970s and 1980s. Christian Geffray, for example, researched the internal dynamics of civil war in Northern Mozambique in the early 1980s. His book on *La Cause des Armes au Mozambique* (1990) “marks an epistemological shift from previous studies” on “the nature of the armed conflict between Frelimo and Renamo”, particularly with the analysis of the “relationships between the Frelimo state and rural societies to understand the reasons for these social ‘uprisings’” (Florêncio 2002: 352-353[3]).

The heavy legacy of the multiple episodes of war and armed violence and the impact of structural adjustment policies during the 1990s had a lasting effect on the research landscape in Mozambique. As argued by Sumich (2007: 8), “liberalisation was not undertaken by the Frelimo elite due to ideological

conviction or in response to a massive popular demand, but because it seemed to be the only way to end the war and remain in power", adding that this "was also the most promising avenue to ensure the continued infusion of large amounts of desperately needed foreign aid". After 1994, economic development "was export-oriented and not geared towards industrialisation, hence creating little local sustainable development and few jobs" (Castel-Branco 2003), which resulted in unbalanced economic growth. "Most investments went to the south of the country, while the centre and north lagged behind" (ibid). The neo-liberalist period in Mozambique underlines the importance of the international community, which was able to influence national politics "through the distribution or withholding of aid and by insisting on structural reform", bears similarities and continuities with the colonial period (Sumich 2007: 5). In the anthropological landscape of research, Gonçalves (2019) argues that professional consultancies financed by international organizations, constraints national knowledge production, specifically in the field of anthropology. However, Gonçalves (2019) highlights the validity of such knowledge produced in equal conditions as in academia. He gives several examples of anthropologists developing consulting research that informs their anthropological research, such as, for example, "post-war trauma with Victor Igreja—all of whom drew extensively upon consultancy-based research conducted over many years" (Gonçalves 2019: 429).

Indeed, and according to Cruz e Silva (2002: 76), the Mozambican State "subordination to the Structural Readjustment Programmes and the consequent reform programme introduced in the country had direct effects on the weight of social policies in the State budget and on its capacity to contradict the impacts of neo-liberal policies"[4]. Thus research agendas are constrained to the needs of the international agenda versus national state interests. At the same time, anthropology continues to produce research that highlights voices of the post-war landscape. One example is Victor Igreja, a Mozambican anthropologist, who refereed by Gonçalves (2019), with his colleagues Janna Colaizzi and Alana Brekelmans, concentrated on the post-war generations and legacies of the civil war in Mozambique based on a longitudinal 14-year study, from 2002 to 2015 (Igreja et al. 2021).[5]

Following a path engaged in critical ethnographic practice and the epistemologies of the South (Meneses 2021, Cunha and Casimiro 2019), a new group of anthropologists continues to develop anthropology in Mozambique in the present. Studies on gender and sexuality in Mozambique are developed by Esmeralda Mariano and Sandra Manuel, both Mozambican anthropologists, at the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology of UEM, and Brigit Baignol, from the Department of Anthropology of the University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa)[6]. Again, cooperation between local and international anthropologists continues to be a distinctive mark of ethnography in Mozambique. While it is not the purpose of our introduction to develop the details of these historical endeavours of ethnography in Mozambique, it is a valid context to consider the value of contributions of anthropologists, which is far more than one single genealogy[7].

## Nature of ethnographic method in contemporary anthropology of Mozambique

The Covid pandemic brought the authors of this special issue together, as mentioned earlier, allowing us to reflect critically on the nature of ethnography and how to develop a multi-situated method when facing disruptive times. Because we all face reshaping forms of uncertainty, our dialogue begins with a focus on the nature of the field in Mozambique to understand the changing nature of the ethnographic method. With that aim, debating how we develop research as anthropologists of Mozambique, we explore ideas of resistance and resilience within ethnographic methodologies. With the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to reimagine the way of doing ethnography. This was also due to financial constraints that affected social sciences and made international travel impossible, as Xénia de Carvalho and Maria Paula Meneses describe, and even locally in Mozambique, as described by Fernando Florêncio, José Adalima and Elísio Jossias. To unveil the specificities of the ethnographic site, we challenge anthropologists that have been working based in and out of Mozambique during at least the last two decades.

This special issue of *Anthropology Southern Africa* opens with the beginning of the nation-building process in Mozambique. The article addresses

the origin of national (re)construction supported through the imposition of a dominant language, which was used to legitimize the policies of contemporary Mozambique, as a legacy of colonial times. The site of ethnographic inquiry is Bagamoyo (Tanzania) from 1970 to 1975, and the Liberated Zones of Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Tete (Mozambique), accessed through what the author calls an ethnographic interconnected line of inquiry (i.e., *being then*, collective work and hybrid ethnography), going back to the beginning of her professional path in ethnography. This is rooted in the legacies of Xénia de Carvalho's informal education network, framed by liberation theology and participatory research approaches within the collective work method developed by CEA at the end of the 1970s. She shares with the other authors of this special issue - Maria Paula Meneses, Fernando Florêncio, José Adalima and Elísio Jossias - the notion of co-existence in the field, which is referred by Xénia de Carvalho as "*being then"* (Gray 2016; Postill 2016), and she argues that the ethnographic line of inquiry is highly dependent on previous networks of shared contacts. Her work is the outcome of longstanding relationships and living experience in Mozambique, growing over the years, connecting the anthropologist with the field of inquiry. The nature of the relationship between herself and her participants, coming from different geographical locations around the world, allowed her to develop a provisional remote method of inquiry while the pandemic and lack of funding persisted. As Postill (2016) outlines, remote ethnography is not new (Postill 2016), just temporary, but requires experience. Going from the (hi)story of the Frelimo School of Bagamoyo, based upon the Mozambican literacy method of Paulo Freire of 1972, underpinned by critical pedagogy, Carvalho unfolds a largely (un)told (hi)story of the nation-building process based upon language. Xénia de Carvalho underlines that her participants described that speaking the national languages was to "speak dog language" and speaking Portuguese was to speak "White people language", meaning development[8]. These descriptions contradict the official (hi)story of the beginning of the nation and the literacy project of post-colonial Mozambique (Liesegang and Tembe 2005)[9].

Critically addressing the nature of ethnographic knowledge and practice, working at a distance as well, Maria Paula Meneses tells about her history, beginning with disruptive event: the history of her as an anthropologist that left

her country, Mozambique, in 2004, after being at UEM for almost two decades. Looking at her journey, Maria Paula Meneses challenges us to think about how an anthropologist can conduct participatory ethnography when connected to the field of inquiry at a distance or when facing disruptive events. She draws on her experience of conducting ethnography in Mozambique, in which the pandemic contributed to the persistence of research in a path of recurrent ethnographical methodological 'innovations' supported by 'building relationships of trust' (Meneses 2020a; 2020b). Meneses focuses on the approach of "patchwork ethnography" (Günel, Varma and Watanabe 2020), which brings together multi-site fieldwork, collaborative research, and archival resources. Maria Paula Meneses has worked on the lives of ordinary women in Mozambique, looking at their lives contextualized within suspicions of witchcraft and the armed liberation struggle (1960s-mid 1970s). The focus of this article brings the "multiple levels of subalternity and oppression" (Meneses 2020a), organized around three key obstacles that are highlighted to continue doing ethnographic research in Mozambique within uncertainty: the need to rethink issues related to restricted mobility, sociability and proximity. In doing so, Meneses underlines the theoretical and methodological challenges faced in shifting the focus of her research from Cabo Delgado to Tete after violent conflicts, Cyclone Kenneth and the outbreak of Covid. Supported by constant messages and communication with her participants, she questions her presence in the field and her relationship with others when facing stressful and exceptionally challenging situations, looking at the ethics of care. She reflects on collaborative research that represents a "single ethnographic site, occupied by multiple experiences shared by participants spread across the globe". In the end, Maria Paula Meneses addresses the need to extend the research network based on trust, confidence and care, allowing her to move into other provinces of Mozambique, using digital means to keep in touch regularly while at a distance. Her proposal is based upon a process of decolonization and depatriarchalization of "our mentalities and references" (Meneses 2020a).

Fernando Florêncio reflects on his personal experience of disasters within the context of floods that occurred during 2000, followed by political violence, with a focus on traditional Ndau authorities. Christina Toren's (2009) reflections on

intersubjectivity and ethnography are used as a collaborative process or mutuality, as Pina Cabral calls it (Viegas and Mapril 2012). Florêncio questions what the meaning of persisting “in doing ethnography, in a context in which informants are literally fighting for their survival?”. The author argues that the anthropologist can continue doing ethnography because of an “ability to understand the logics of local strategies, in their historicity and cultural context” and uses movement from one site of inquiry to another to continue doing ethnography, as Meneses describes as well. In his second fieldwork site, Fernando Florêncio examines the political violence of November 2000 in Manica Province, unfolding the relationships between Frelimo and Renamo after the Rome Peace Agreements of 1992. Florêncio uses material from his fieldwork diaries and brings the context to us, reflecting on the notion of intercultural contact (Clifford 1986), contact zones (Pratt 1986), and liminal zones (Hastrup 1992) which are understood “as a zone[s] of cultural and symbolic violence, the result of the anthropologist's hierarchical relationship with the subjects of his research” (Hastrup 1992: 122-123). Fernando Florêncio underlines the concept of “intersubjective construction of liminal modes of communication" (Rabinow 2012: 525) and reflects on the control that the Mozambican state imposed on the research agenda, especially when carrying out fieldwork as a foreigner anthropologist in rural areas. As he concludes, he felt “caught up and used, in quarrels and strategies between traditional authorities and the 'structures' of the local state apparatus, or even of the Frelimo party”. The idea of political control is also critically addressed by the two Mozambican anthropologists, that follow Florêncio’s article, highlighting the relationship between doing ethnography in uncertain contexts within the politics of development.

In doing so, Fernando Florêncio brings Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan’s (1998) notion of district spaces as political arenas, in which power relations are challenged. With that purpose, Florêncio looks at several social roles that the anthropologist assumes when in the field and how this impacts research, calling for more understanding of the perceptions of participants that classify the researcher (Sluka 2012). In that sense, Fernando Florêncio calls for the notion of cooperation, mutuality, and ethnographic co-production to produce ethnography,

within a frame of four ethnographies: from a context of disaster and its dimensions to an ethnography of conflict and violent conflicts.

In their article, José Adalima and Elísio Jossias critically address the landscape of Mozambique within imposed models during colonial and post-colonial times, connecting the dots between the end of the war in 1992 and the implementation of a developmental state model (Hanlon 1991). This was the outcome of planned and external interventions that underlined public policies during the last three decades. Going from Chinde and Cóbuè in Central and Northern Mozambique, these two anthropologists call for debate on the utopia of development and the "will to improve" (Li 2007), and examine the role played by NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) - this represents both the introduction of political pluralism and the implementation of development approaches. In Chinde, rural communities faced the arrival of NGOs and government programmes, in a scenario where a private company controlled most of the land, demanding changes in the local economy. In Cóbuè, an area that deeply felt both the colonial war and the civil war, the population saw their land and livelihood resources reshaped into "community conservation areas", a promise of development. Critically, José Adalima and Elísio Jossias look at ethnographic fieldwork in a context of uncertainty and forward the idea of ethnography as the outcome of a negotiation. In Chinde, for instance, access was gained through an NGO, which resulted in putting the anthropologist at the level of NGO officials, that could provide "for change". In Cóbuè, the anthropologist went to the field that was largely influenced by the district administration and a local association, since his possibilities of choice regarding field assistants and the place to live while in the field were reduced. As the authors reflect, "the uncertainty that characterised the management of this pandemic is similar to that of managing research in Mozambique". The authors call for the notion of partnership and negotiation in the ethnographic production process (Viegas and Mapril 2012; Marcus 2010; Pina-Cabral and Lourenço 1993), with a particular focus on the challenges of collaboration (Fabian 2001; Marcus 2010; Pina-Cabral 2011). Their aim is to understand a specific site of inquiry and examine how ethnographic knowledge is constructed, arguing that "ethnography is only possible due to the 'co-presence' (coevality) of the researched and the researcher in the same historical time"

(Pina-Cabral 2013), critically interrogating the notion of the “ethnographer as a neutral and objective observer” (Paerregaard 2002), Adalima and Jossias conclude that development “has generated uncertainty and pushed people to question the discourse underlying the proposed model of change”.

## Conclusion

Drawing from our ethnographies of Mozambique during pandemic times that are, by their nature, shaped by uncertainty and disruption, our resilience and methodological resistances emerge as key focal points over the last two decades of ethnographic inquiry. As mentioned earlier, all of us have a longstanding ethnographic experience and connection with Mozambique. We all share multiple identities that allow us to debate ethnographic practice and methodological issues when working in and about Mozambique. Using our common experience on establishing and maintaining relationships, we question the imposition of external and internal agendas. Using our discussions of what our participants shared with us, the last two decades of anthropology in Mozambique teaches us to think about the meaning of disruption and uncertainty. As the articles suggest, sound empirical knowledge can be evaluated only in relation to specific historical, cultural and material contexts. This approach not only contributes to collectively thicken the debates about the anthropological interpretive frameworks in Mozambique, but also opens up the scope of research being developed in and about Mozambique.

We end with a common ground: the cover photograph of this special issue is the work of a young Mozambican anthropologist, a former student of UEM, Anésio Manhiça, working on photo-ethnography. This photograph challenged us to portray our site of ethnographic inquiry using an image embodying the resilience and methodological resistance we experienced during pandemic times, representing far more than the current health event. Anésio Manhiça describes the image as a representation of the archival work done during pandemic times, when the field was not always accessible due to disruptive events, which was marked by the wearing of the use of masks, grids and ‘capulana’[10] (scarves). The image portrays a woman working in a challenging setting, bringing to mind a contemporary anthropologist committed to the decolonization and

depatriarchalization of knowledge in Mozambique, representing methodological resistance, and calling for innovative methodologies based on different periods of time and spaces. The image portrays the possibility of continuing to do research even when it seems, apparently, almost impossible[11].

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1 To explore critical assumptions on resilience and the current state/living conditions, particularly within democracy and looking at African contexts, see Mbembe's (2019) notion of the 'living dead' and Necropolitics (*Necropolitics*. Durham: Duke University Press), based upon Agamben's theory of 'homo sacer'. To add a critical lens regarding Mozambique, see Bertelsen, B. E. 2021. "A lesser human? Utopic specters of urban reconfiguration in Maputo, Mozambique". *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 29(1), 87–107 and Gressgård, R. 2017. "The racialized death-politics of urban resilience governance". *Social Identities*, 1-16 for a critique on Mbembe's necropolitics.

2 See, for example, Junod, H. 1913. *The life of a South African tribe, 2 vol.* London: Macmillan & Co.; Dias, J. and Dias, M. 1964. *Os Macondes de Moçambique. Cultura Material, vol. II*, Lisbon: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar; Rita-Ferreira, A. 1967-68. *Os Africanos de Lourenço Marques*, Memórias do Instituto de Investigação Científica de Moçambique, 9 (C): 95-491; Correia de Matos, M.L.M. M. .1969. *Portuguese Law and Administration in Mozambique and Their Effect on the Customary Land Laws of Three Tribes of the Lake Nyasa Region*. PhD thesis. SOAS University of London. These publications, examples of modern ethnographic research, were supported by rigorous fieldwork. However, the colonial dilemma regarding European civilization versus local African cultures unavoidable cuts across these works.

3 Original in Portuguese.

4 In Portuguese.

5Victor Igreja and Carmeliza Rosário were part of our initial panel, presenting papers at the APA congress. Their comments on our first draft of the introduction for this special issue were very welcome. Many thanks to both.

6 See for example Brigitte Bagnol & Esmeralda Mariano (2008). "Vaginal practices: eroticism and implications for women's health and condom use in Mozambique". *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 10:6, 573-585, DOI: 10.1080/13691050801999071; and Manuel, Sandra (2021). "Performing Respect: Contemporary Strategies and Lived Experiences in

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[7] To explore in detail the history of how social sciences were developed in Mozambique, see, for example: Teresa Cruz e Silva, João Paulo Borges Coelho and Amélia Neves de Souto (eds). 2012*. Como fazer ciências sociais e humanas na África: questões epistemológicas, metodológicas, teóricas e políticas.* Dakar: CODESRI

[8] See Carvalho 2021.

[9] As noted by Liesegang and Tembe (2005: 13), "Portuguese was the language of the internal meetings [of Frelimo]. It was in that language that Mondlane addressed those who were going to training and starting the armed struggle" – original in Portuguese.

[10] Capulana is a type of printed material, worn as a sarong, a skirt or dress, headdress, shawl, towel, or to carry a baby on the back. Capulanas are primarily worn in Mozambique, but also worn in other African countries and called differently depending on the region.

[11] The original photograph done by Anésio Manhiça was in colour and in landscape form. In a collaborative work with an older Portuguese photojournalist, Carlos Ribeiro Silva, the proposal of Anésio found its meaning within the portrait form. We would like to thank Carlos for his guidance.