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**A shift in focus: when gender empowerment is a consequence rather than an action.
A case study of the Ursuline Mission in Beira, Mozambique**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a case study to investigate the nexus between development, gender empowerment and religious belief within the context of a mission operated by a congregation of Ursuline nuns in Beira, Mozambique.

Gender empowerment is interpreted as a vector of development and the research aims to investigate the non-traditional nature of the gender empowerment efforts that the nuns (or shareholders) provide for the women of the local community (or stakeholders). The aim of the thesis is to answer the research question: *What role does gender play within the discourse of the shareholders and how does that affect the stakeholders?*

The first part of the thesis is dedicated to the creation of a theoretical framework of concepts related to development, gender and religion, so that they may be related to the data collected during the analysis. The information about the mission and its projects was taken directly from members of the mission on site through interviews, and is used as the basis for the case study. The empirical data is, necessarily, limited, however the mission is considered an emblematic example of gender and development being achieved outside of academic and/or more formal institutions, which is the reason for the relevance of this topic in the field of development. The analysis is conducted through an inductive methodological approach and an analytical framework (inspired by Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis) where the empirical data is related to the theories from the theoretical framework, in order to bridge the gap between the academic and theoretical concepts and their real life consequences and application. Before the analysis there is a presentation of a contextual framework which describes: the country of Mozambique's history, a brief consideration about Faith Based Organisations' work in the field of development, details of the religious order of the Ursulines and, finally, the context of the mission itself. In the analysis section the shareholders' approach to gender empowerment is divided into three macro areas: articulations of gender and empowerment, gender and empowerment in projects and practice and gender and faith. After that, both parts of the research question are answered in the discussion. The thesis concludes that the Ursuline nuns' grassroots approach to gender empowerment on multiple levels, the discursive one, the material aid one and the educational one, has the opportunity and potential to make real change in the lives of the women targeted by their efforts, truly shaping their social relations, materially

helping them with their health and in their efforts to escape poverty. Testimony of the success of these efforts can be considered a form of proof and rudimentary impact assessment needed to justify exploring the topic further.

1. Introduction

Gender inequality remains a “major barrier to human development” (United Nations Human Development Report, 2022). To contrast that, gender *empowerment* is also one of the main vectors of development, and as such it is both a means and an end to achieve it.

Empowerment can be defined as

“an interactive process through which less powerful people experience personal and social change, enabling them to achieve influence over the [...] institutions which affect their lives, and the communities in which they live” (O'Brien and Whitmore, 1989: 309);

therefore “gender empowerment” applies here as the aforementioned process related specifically to [cis] women in circumstances where they are less powerful than their [cis] male counterparts in any given situation.

International aid agencies, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and philanthropies in developing countries strive to lessen gender inequality and achieve human development through formal agreements and step-by-step plans and programs. This thesis explores alternative practices that aim to achieve gender empowerment in developing areas without relying on the formal indications of development projects focused on gender considered mainstream today. One instance of this kind of alternative practice can be found in a specific case that this thesis will describe and explore.

Still recovering from a tumultuous past, the African country of Mozambique has been the recipient of efforts of the Catholic Church to create and maintain a peaceful and developing future (Newitt, 2017). One of the means of these efforts was the establishment of a catholic university and the envoy of several monastic congregations to found and establish religious Christian missions across the country. One such mission is the basis for the case study that inspired this research.

The purpose of this Master's thesis is to investigate the impact of a faith-based institution's efforts on gender empowerment in a developing country: that of the Ursuline mission in Beira, Mozambique. The research will investigate how the world view of the “shareholders” (the Ursuline nuns who operate the mission) affects the outcome of gender empowerment among the “stakeholders” (members of the local population influenced by the mission). As such it will delve into the Ursuline nuns' understanding of the nexus between religion, development and gender equality.

1.1 Problem Formulation and Subject Delimitation

The preliminary research for this thesis was well underway when the interviews with the Ursulines in the mission took place and the data that was gathered from them led to a radical change to the initial problem formulation and research question. The basis for the thesis had initially been to research the impact of gender equality as a western concept (Kantola and Verloo, 2018) in a non-western context that would recognise it as such and thus, perhaps, reject it in some way. While the attitude towards gender equality in Africa is still reactionary - “Gender equality is not African” (Appendix A) - it is not because it is perceived as especially western or foreign to the people of Mozambique. Because of this, the research shifted its focus towards the practical application and practices of gender empowerment that the members of the mission were implementing in their everyday lives as a fascinating and relevant example of gender empowerment that develops ‘organically’.

The research question then develops from the starting off point for non-traditional gender empowerment at the micro level in development context and how it can be proven to be effective, even if difficult to quantify. *What role does gender play within the discourse of the shareholders and how does that affect the stakeholders?*

The correlation between cultural and social factors surrounding the shareholders lies in their relationship with faith and gender equality as pertaining to their religious order and the effects of that on the stakeholders are the subject of the analysis. The concepts of formality (or informality) regarding gender empowerment are also central to the research because of the unconventional nature of the mission’s gender empowerment efforts, since they are not a priority *formally*, but appear to be implemented successfully *informally*.

There are limitations to this research, which are that the information is not formally collected and that the empirical data is, necessarily, limited. However, this case study specifically can be inserted into a broader and more global context of gender empowerment in development practices that is worth investigating further.

In its narrower scope this research still proves that focusing on the nexus between local, national, regional, transnational and global levels in politics, development and international relations (here represented by the good gender mainstreaming practices in the community around the mission of Beira, in the context of Mozambique and its history with the Catholic

Church) makes for an interesting and emblematic case study in the field of global gender studies.

This researcher is interested in cases in which so-called “unconventional” development practices may be equally or even more effective than conventional practices, and in uncovering the mechanisms by which unconventional practices work. Especially considering the evidence of “policy evaporation” (Longwe, 1995) in regards to gender mainstreaming, investigating the origins of alternative practices may serve to suggest solutions that are more sustainable in the long run.

1.2 Structure

The structure of this thesis is as follows: the first introductory chapter presents the research topic, as well as the problem formulation and research question. The second chapter consists of the literature review and contains a brief history of relevant development practices, terminology related to gender equality, gender empowerment and religion related to gender. The theoretical framework is present in the third chapter and in it the theories relevant to the analysis, development theory and gender mainstreaming, are presented and detailed; with subsections dedicated to intersectionality, gender as a tool for development, and the relationship between gender and development. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the methodology and contains the explanation of the methodological approach and object of research, as well as descriptions of the data collection, method of analysis, choice of methods and limitations. The fifth chapter contains the analytical framework as a reference for the analysis and includes a section about the inspiration for the Discourse Analysis that will be used, as well as a section about the theory-driven analysis as well. The contextual framework for the case study is presented in the sixth chapter and it details the context of the mission; it is comprised of an introduction to the case study and presentation of Mozambique, and brief sections about faith based organisation work in the field of development, Christian missions, a brief history of the Ursuline Order and, finally, details on the specific mission in Beira. The seventh chapter contains the data analysis divided into three categories: articulations of gender empowerment, gender empowerment in projects and practices, and faith and gender. In the eight chapter the analysis findings are summarised and research the question is answered; and finally the thesis reaches its conclusion in the ninth chapter.

2. Literature review

Literature regarding development, gender, religion and even the interconnectedness of the topics (i.e. gender and development, gender and religion, development and religion etc.) exists and is very broad and varied, nevertheless this thesis is set out to contribute to the field by researching one particular niche which relates to all three.

This literature review will provide an overview of the existing research in the field that this research addresses. While not directly attached to the analysis, the topics present in this chapter are vital for understanding the relevance and historical and academic contexts of the theoretical concepts cited in chapter 3.

2.1 A brief history of Development

In 1949 the United States president Harry Truman publicly acknowledged the duty for nations that had much more wealth and the alleged tools and knowledge to have gained that wealth to “relieve the suffering” of those living in poverty in nations that were not as wealthy. (Truman, 1949). The Truman doctrine aimed to bring about the conditions necessary for replicating the world over the features that characterised the “advanced” societies of the time, i.e. technicalisation of agriculture, high levels of urbanisation and industrialization, widespread adoption of then-contemporary cultural and educational values, growth of material production and living standards etc.. The term “underdevelopment” was introduced into the mainstream and proceeded to effectively change the meaning of development itself and radically alter the way the world was viewed/divided (Rist, 2008) so after 1949 the world found itself to be divided in terms of developed or underdeveloped. The developed/underdeveloped dichotomy implied that although countries (global South) might be ‘lagging behind’ others (Global North) they could ‘catch up’, which is a worldview that is still widely accepted today. The new dichotomy was tied to US interests (especially anti Russian expansion) and veered towards dismantling the old colonial empires while also opening up access to new markets. Critically, it maintained the gap between different regions/countries, justifying the potential intervention by other countries (i.e. US) in the name of development and progress. This attitude, while somewhat less overt, can still be found in development projects today i.e. not addressing the root causes for poverty because they have colonial roots.

The next step in development theory was the development Economist Michael Todaro's definition of the discipline; Todaro defined development as not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multi-dimensional process involving reorganisation and reorientation of the entire economic and social system (Todaro, 1985). Arturo Escobar reinforced this view by adding that development constituted a "top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of progress" (Escobar, 1995) with no care or consideration for society and culture or the cultural process, citing culture as "a residual variable, to disappear with the advance of modernization" (ibid.), and primarily as a system that would universally apply technical interventions to deliver goods to a target population, thus becoming even destructive to the very countries it was meant to uplift out of poverty (ibid.). Later, development scholar Amartya Sen introduced the concept of freedom in development stating that development is a process of improving the quality of all human lives (Sen, 2000) and that expanding freedom should be both the goal and means of development (ibid.).

Two major threats to Sen's concept of development are posed by elements recognised in Modernisation theory and in dependency theory. Björn Hettne's concise yet accurate definition of modernisation theory recognises it as a manifestation of the "central tradition in Western social thought" (Hettne, 1989 p. 250) which she defines as "evolutionism" (ibid.), with the implication that there exists an endogenous process with the result of an awakening of the potential that lies dormant in every society (ibid.) Hettne continues by stating that for all intents and purposes, modernisation is equivalent to so-called Westernisation, because it becomes a logical argument for this theory that, having the West arrived to modernity earlier than the rest, it therefore should "serve as [a] model" (ibid.) for the rest of the globe and also the reason for development in the fifties and sixties was seen as an "imitative process" (ibid.).

This connection between development and westernisation, and the "imitative" processes and practices that ensued, led to many criticisms of the model, especially from subjects in developing countries that were badly hit by economic crises that started in Western countries. For example, the Great Depression led to "a great divide" (Hettne, 1989) in the mainstream economic theories of development and created an environment for a "peripheral theory of economic development" (ibid.). The vision of the global economy as the flow of resources in a flowing from a "centre" to a "periphery" structure became the foundation of what would later be defined as the dependency approach: a new perspective on how the international division of

labour and resource management left the periphery underdeveloped (Hettne, 1989 pp. 253-254). Dependency theory thus rejected the notion that underdeveloped countries were simply “pre-developed” versions of Western ones, as was the claim of modernisation theory. Nevertheless, the flow of resources from periphery to centre that dependency theorists acknowledged was real and continues to be an obstacle for developing countries.

Leaping ahead to contemporary development approaches, author Björn Hettne argues in the article “the development of development theory” that it had taken a long time to realise that, in different parts of the world, development has always been influenced strongly by the dynamics of the “total world economy” (Hettne, 1989). That then led to a rather widespread perception of the fact that each country actually had its own, unique, development issues which, in turn, are imposed by conditions both internal and external to them (ibid).

More aspects of development theory that are more directly relevant to the analysis are present in chapter 3.

2.2 Terminology related to Gender Equality

This section of the literature is primarily focused on Johanna Kantola and Mieke Verloo’s article titled “revisiting gender equality at times of recession: a discussion of the strategies of gender and politics scholarship for dealing with equality” as a basis for further discussion in the analysis. The choice of this article specifically comes from the fact that, while researching for texts that considered the concept of gender equality in relation to the terminology often used to describe it and, out of the literature carefully read in preparation for the writing of this thesis, it proved to be the one that most succinctly and directly addressed how the concept of gender equality is treated in academic research and thus familiar to this particular researcher and subsequent analysis. Kantola and Verloos observations on “escaping equality” prove to be particularly interesting in relation to the binary view of gender that is present in the collected data. Escaping equality is presented here as meaning the ways the “multiple meanings of gender equality” (ibid.) are avoided by utilising other words that are essentially synonyms but are nonetheless undefined, such as euphemisms like “gender sensitive” or “women-friendly”, in order to avoid confrontation with the political essence of gender as a political science discipline and research milieu (ibid.). In a policymaking context, the authors argue, this distinction is meant to be purposefully ambiguous (ibid.) and while the sentiment may be shared by the researcher,

it is important to related to the analysis especially because, gender equality as an issue that continues to be “partly dismissed as a feminist elite ideology foreign to some European countries“ (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017) is a notion that “did cross over to Africa” (Kantola, Verloo, 2018) and is thus relevant to the parts of the analysis where “gender equality” is talked about as a “women’s issue” or that it “affects women and men”.

2.2.1 Terminology related to Gender Empowerment

The definition of gender empowerment provided in the introduction implies a question of power. A concise and precise explanation of power and its relation to gender can be found in Charmes and Wieringa’s 2003 article “Measuring Women’s Empowerment: An assessment of the Gender-related development Index and the Gender Empowerment Measure”. They reference Foucault’s work in defining power as being deployed at “all levels” of society, from state level to interpersonal relations (Charmes and Wieringa, 2003), and permeating all discursive formations as well (ibid.). Gender, still referencing Charmes and Wieringa, is “primarily a relation of power” (2003) and it is therefore important to recognise the power structures that are underlying in the context in which, in a binary view of gender, people of one gender would find themselves to be “less powerful” (Section 1) than the other. Gender conceived as an analytical tool (Section 3.2.) opened up research (and gender studies) to seeing the categories of ‘women’ and ‘men’ not as “biological phenomena (sex), but as cultural constructions (gender)” which the authors call “unstable” (Charmes and Wieringa, 2003). The considerable theoretical consequences of this shift are at the basis of gender empowerment as a concept. According to the authors, the process of empowerment of women should be focused on three fronts:

“exposing the oppressive power of the existing gender relations, critically challenging them, and creatively trying to shape different social relations.” (Charmes and Wieringa, 2003)

The reference to shaping different social relations is one that is particularly relevant to this research.

2.3 Religion related to Gender

The concept of religion is quite complex to define or examine, being “charged with difficulties that have thrown its study into contestation” (Von Stuckrad, 2013 p. 5) and can even be

categorised as a distinctive cultural phenomenon instead of a mere aspect of culture (Smith et al. 2013). Within the realm of social science, a definition of religion that explains how it relates to society (a functional definition) surmised that religion provides a point of view that is useful to people who need to “cope with questions of meaning” and be brought to worship together (Aune, 2015). Thomas Luckmann defines religion as “the transcendence of biological nature by the human organism” (1967 p. 49). Getting into a more detailed description of religion beyond the brief one presented above would be outside of the focus and scope of this research. Nevertheless, this short section of the literature review is dedicated to texts that discuss the relation between religion and gender.

In this section, special attention is given to Orit Avishai, Afshan Jafar and Rachel Rinaldo’s article from the February 2015 edition of the Journal “Gender and Society” titled “A gender lens on religion”. The aim of the article is to introduce the idea of gender and religion as “mutually constitutive social categories” (Avishai et al. 2015). Secularisation thesis theorised that religious practices and even beliefs would inevitably diminish and subside with the advent of modernisation (Section 2.1), and when that failed to happen, scholars found themselves more interested in religion than before (Avishai et al. 2015); however the “centrality of women to religious movements, and the gendered nature of many religious institutions and practices” (ibid.) were not part of the newfound academic interest (ibid). Avishai et al. argue that that is in part because of the legacy of Western feminism that considered religion a patriarchal institution, and thus placed feminist who considered themselves secular in open opposition to any kind of religious perspective in their written production. Moreover, the secular feminist approach would end up producing critiques of theology “blaming religious institutions for continued oppression and disempowerment of women” (ibid.).

While there is not much evidence of the effects of secular feminist critiques of religion on measuring gender empowerment in areas where religion is a strong influence on societal life, more recent, if scarce, literature in the field has shown that even within apparently oppressive institutional and cultural context, religious women can still achieve and maintain agency. That is an argument that is present in Jawad Syed’s 2010 article “Reconstructing gender empowerment” where it is highlighted that gender and religion have been separated from each other in the field of development studies due to a distinctly Western secular bias. Syed claims that “Western feminists” (Syed, 2010) fail to recognise the “mobilising properties” (ibid.) of religion and the “high value” (ibid.) that faith based traditions within religions such as the three monotheist ones [Islam, Judaism and Christianity] place on women’s role within the family,

because the family is viewed as a central societal unit (ibid.); Syed emphasise this point because the contemporary measures of gender empowerment¹ do not take into account the fact that in societies where religion is prominent in everyday life, assessing women's empowerment based on their participation in "formal economic activities or incomes" (ibid.) would be misleading (ibid.).

This thesis hopes to contribute to the type of literature where gender empowerment and religion are not decoupled by secular bias.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter the theoretical framework will serve as a reference list for the principal concepts that will then be used during the data presentation/ analysis of the theory driven-case study. The parts of the theoretical framework selected for this thesis and, among the academic and research literature relevant to the case, two macro theories have been topics: development and gender. The topic of gender, with its terminology clarified in the previous chapter, has also been divided into three subcategories: gender mainstreaming, gender as a tool for development and gender and religion.

3.1 Development Theory

Development theory factors into this theoretical framework because, while not being referenced directly or formally by the subjects in the case study, it can be identified as the main driving force behind the establishment of the mission itself. Utilising the United Nations guidelines for the Sustainable development Goals, 'development' is hereby defined as a strategy to "ending poverty and other deprivations" which "must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth" (sdgs.un.org). This is the most succinct and concise definition for a discipline with a long and complex history whose main points relevant to the analysis will be briefly summarised in the next few paragraphs.

Jan Nederveen Pieterse argues that it is widely assumed, in the context of social science, that realities are constructed socially (Pieterse, 2010). The way that people talk and about "social

¹ Syed's article is especially critical towards the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) used by the United Nations development Program, which measures empowerment on a basis of economic/political participation.

realities” affects laws and the ways they are interpreted as well as policies and thus, it is no longer a question of perception merely registering reality, it becomes a form of shaping it. Similarly, knowledge itself does not only reflect reality, it constructs it (ibid.).

“Theory is a meeting place of ideology, politics and explanation. Framing, defining the field, the rank order of questions, are the business of theory. Is development theory a matter of social science or of politics?”
(Pieterse, 2010 p. 3)

This is the starting point for the consideration of this specific theory in this thesis: development is the lens through which to view the efforts of gender empowerment in the Beira mission. Development theory, once again according to Pieterse, is defined as the “organised intervention in collective affairs according to a standard of improvement.” (ibid.). What should constitute said improvement and what would be an appropriate intervention can vary according to historical context, relations of power, class and culture. “development theory” continues Pieterse, “is the negotiation of [the aforementioned] issues (ibid).

According to Amartya Sen, as mentioned in section 2.1, the two reasons freedom should be the primary element of development are that the enhancement of freedom should be, primary and ultimately, the only acceptable evaluation of human progress and that the achievement of development is dependent on the free agency of people (ibid.). Sen continues stating that development entails the double expansion of freedoms in that it also consists of removal of various types of unfreedoms (ibid.), that it should serve as an extension of the people’s personal capacities and, as such, should also be evaluated in terms of ‘the expansion of the capabilities of people to lead the kind of lives they value and have reason to value’ rather than concentrating on rising GDP, technical progress or industrialisation (ibid.). Nevertheless it is hardly ever the case that development practices prioritise freedom in the way that Sen suggests, instead they are more focused towards achieving economic growth or participation in the global labour market (Charmes and Wieringa, 2003).

Another aspect of development is the need to talk to the “victims” of development and cover their basic needs first. This can be accomplished by putting people first and focusing on the community; it is still very difficult to think about improvement on the local level without involving the State. The State’s reticence towards NGO action might come from the fact that the

communities that would benefit from that action are located within the state framework and context and their singular improvement might upset a delicate balance.

Negative connotations tied to the term “development” have been recognised by scholars, for example, because in many cases its nature as a sum of practices which aim at improving the human condition has been betrayed and, as critic Aram Ziai puts it, “numerous practices which have definitely not improved the human condition have been carried out in the name of ‘development’” (Ziai, 2013 p. 124), and thus it would be advisable to renounce the connection between actually effective life-improving practices and the terminology which is inextricably linked to “certain Eurocentric, depoliticising, and authoritarian implications” (ibid). In this thesis the term development will be used to mean practices that aim to improve the life of the stakeholders but the problematic aspects pointed out by Ziai have been acknowledged and deemed deserving of further consideration.

The notion of development as a multidisciplinary field of research is what helps guide the analysis of this thesis.

3.2 Gender Mainstreaming

One definition of the concept of “gender” that can be used in this research is the one provided to us by Painter and Ulmer, which adds emphasis on the ways specifically women are affected by it, and states the following:

“The concept of gender provides an analytical framework that does not focus on women but on the processes that recreate and reinforce inequalities between women and men. [which] are not only a cost to women but to society as a whole and must be regarded as societal issues rather than as ‘women’s concerns’.” (Painter and Ulmer, 2002 p.8)

They continue on by commenting on the fact that it is broadly recognised that gender inequality is not about “women’s lack of integration in society or lack of skills, credit and resources” (ibid), but that the inequalities women experience are created directly by the institutions and social processes that constitute the context of women’s lives (ibid). Gender mainstreaming thus becomes the system through which shareholders can ensure the dimension of gender - with all of its history and place within the social context in question - is taken into consideration at all

times. This approach, however interesting and inclusive, is not immune to criticism. For example there would appear to be some cases in which the focusing on “gender” rather than on “women” has led it to become actively self defeating, by allowing the focus of the conversation to be shifted from solely on women, to women and men, and finally back to men (Baden and Goetz, 1998). Some feminist theorists would argue that actual gender mainstreaming is an impossible goal to achieve because obstacles to gender mainstreaming aren't due to hardships in accepting the concept of it, but rather to the patriarchal opposition to feminist goals the strategy implies (Lombardo, Meier 2006).

According to Wendy Harcourt, the conceptual framework that permits us to distinguish between attributes of people such as gender, race, class, ability etc. was, crucially, “developed together with western culture and is conveyed and structured by social science and contemporary language” (Harcourt 2016). Mentioning gender mainstreaming as part of the theoretical framework is vital to its re-emergence later in the analysis.

3.3.1 Intersectionality

The concept of “intersectionality” first arose within the context of the Black feminist community in the United States and was brought into the mainstream by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991, who described the way various inequalities could interact as an intersection, like the ones used to regulate traffic, specifically in reference to gender, race and class (Crenshaw, 1991). The so-called “intersecting inequalities”, which are dimensions of inequality that intersectionality takes into account, are often dynamic and changing, which makes intersectionality an apt lens through which to observe instances that are still occurring or belong to a very recent past.

It will be referenced briefly in this thesis because of the vulnerable position in which the stakeholders of the mission find themselves in is often “at the intersection” of different conditions that cause further disadvantage with respect to the already disadvantageous nature of their gender, such as living with HIV, being victims of gender based violence etc.

It is also critical to note that, just like the concept of gender mainstreaming mentioned in section 2.3, intersectionality constitutes a smaller part of the analysis than other concepts do. This is also due in no small part to the far-reaching “geographic travels of intersectionality” (Hancock, 2016) which go beyond national borders, thanks to the studies and action of activists and scholars alike, as well as beyond the field of pure academia (ibid). Thus it is important to note

that, in this day and age, intersectionality is both a “complex of social practices” (May, 2015), which include collective contestation and solidarity, and the analytical framework it started as (ibid).

Moreover, intersectionality studies present three “overlapping sets of engagements” (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013 p. 785) that Sumi K. Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall have identified as: 1) discursive debates about the scope of intersectionality as a theoretical paradigm; 2) political interventions that deploy an intersectional lens and 3) applications of an intersectional framework (ibid). The analysis in this research will focus primarily on number 3, but always keeping in mind the other two as inextricable parts of the theoretical framework.

3.3.2 Gender as a tool for development

In this section gender as a tool for development will be briefly explored.

“Gender equality advances human rights and is also essential in the fight against poverty” (Painter and Ulmer, 2002).

Within the context of “development” as mentioned in section 2.1., early development theories in the 1950s either ignored women altogether or went as far as considering them a hindrance to progress itself. It was only following the first wave of feminist movements in the 1960s that women’s issues gained traction as agenda items for international donors. It was only in the 1970s that an approach emerged from a network of female professionals and was called Women in development (WAD). The founders of the WAD approach questioned the economic “trickle down” effects of development, claiming it did not improve women’s rights, at best bypassing them completely, and at worst actively contributing to the deterioration of their status through denied access to education, land and technology. (Razavi and Miller, 1995). After seeing that an increasing involvement of women led to significant economic growth (Tinker, 1990), a turning point occurred when the Women in development approach shifted its focus from providing more economic opportunities for women to actually reducing inequalities between men and women (Staudt, 1997). However it remained a strictly western approach, so much so that women in developing countries felt the need to more clearly and vocally express their argument that this particular development model was outright ignoring their voices and interests. A point that made sense from a socio-cultural perspective, seeing as how western

women were, and, arguably, remain to this day, more focused on achieving equality with men, while their developing world counterparts wanted to improve the livelihoods of both men and women, who were facing issues such as unemployment, poverty and substandard working conditions together. (Lister, Carbone et al. 2006) This new vision, the WAD approach, shone a light on the necessity for new perspectives to properly develop policies for socio-economic and political change, perspectives not solely focused on women (Sen and Grown, 1987). Unfortunately in the 1980s the new “development orthodoxy”, added stress on developing countries to fix their economies through structural adjustment programs, resulted in expenditure cuts and loss of public jobs, actions which ultimately castigated women in terms of loss of opportunities in formal and informal economy. (Elson, 1995). Nevertheless, a victory for gender equality was the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1980: a major human rights tool which established women’s rights a matter of international law, making sure that woman’s needs and interests were reflected not only in “traditional women’s areas”, such as family planning, health, education etc. but in issues of development as well. (Lister, Carbone et al. 2006). A new approach then fused itself with the more traditional Women in development one by the late 1990s, the so called Gender and development approach, which consisted in using concepts such as “gender” and “gender relations”, instead of “women”, in order to better understand how power imbalances were re-shaped by development strategies and, furthermore, by examining the differences in class, religious beliefs, ethnic background etc. as structural conditions causing disadvantages to women (Young, 1989). It is the very beginning of an intersectional approach to gender mainstreaming.

Another integral part of the making of women’s inclusion in policy making history was the series of four World Conferences on Women organised by the United Nations, which were specifically focused on women’s issues. The conferences, which took place in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995, were dedicated to devise plans of action to advance women’s rights, discuss the issues at hand with various government delegates and NGO representatives, and review the progress in the implementation of the previous conferences’ goals. A significant turning point for the gender equality global agenda, however, was the establishment of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: an agenda for women’s empowerment considered the key global policy document on gender equality. It was adopted unanimously by 189 countries, and it set strategic objectives and actions for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality

in 12 critical areas of concern: women and poverty, education and training of women, women and health, violence against women, women in armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanism for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment and the girl-child. Beijing is also the first place we encounter the language of gender mainstreaming, it being defined as “a strategy to enhance the impact of policies to promote gender equality” in its first five year review (unwomen.org).

3.3.3 development and Gender Empowerment

Liesbeth Van der Hoogte and Koos Kingma state that gender is the facet of individual identity that is most addressed in the aims of development agencies (Van der Hoogte and Kingma, 2004), and the promotion of gender equality has become a common part of development practice (ibid.). Women’s struggle to achieve equal rights is emphasised as a collective action against those who would deny them those rights (Van der Hoogte and Kingma, 2004); this collective action is in direct relation to “men at the level of government and society” (ibid.) as well as having a “strong personal dimension, since the majority of women coexist with men at household level” (ibid.). Thus it is an important aspect of development to promote gender empowerment at both macro and micro levels. As Janet Saltzman Chafetz puts it, the “deeply rooted gender division” exists both outside and inside the household (Chafetz, 1990).

Even without referencing specific objectives, such as ‘rights’, Naila Kabeer defines empowerment as “the ability to make choices” (Kabeer, 1999 p. 2) a concept which is inextricably linked to *disempowerment* because it implies that the ability to choose has at some point been denied (ibid.). And the position of women in societies has usually been one of disempowerment, with scholars generally agreeing that one of the main causes of this disadvantage is related to economic and political inequality (Morley, 1995). The main cause of obstruction to women’s participation in the labour market and economic/ political life has, historically, been gender bias, therefore it is a core objective of gender empowerment to contrats that as much as possible. There is much debate on what are the most effective processes to achieve this, but the current trend is the one focusing on women’s participation in the economic sector, especially since there is proof that having a job provides a dimension of empowerment to women of industrialised societies and developing countries alike (Syed, 2010).

4. Methodology

This chapter contains the methodological references to the research, data collection and selection and analytical approach.

4.1 Explanation of the methodological approach

This thesis takes a theory-driven case study approach to investigate little-known methods of gender empowerment - in a broad sense - which are in development in a context where it is not formally acknowledged or required. The case in question is a Catholic mission established in the city of Beira, Mozambique, and operated by members of the Ursuline order. This mission represents an example of what the researcher considers “applied gender mainstreaming” at a micro-level with significant progress and results that derive directly from the members’ personal convictions rather than from a formalised aim to fulfil determined criteria.

The research is qualitative and the primary data was collected in interviews with the mission’s resident head nun, sister Anna Fontana, with additional contributions from sister Alberta Lobba and sister Natalia Salazar. The theory-driven aspect of the research is derived from a review of literature concerning development, gender and religion which underpins the inductive methodological approach of the analysis. A combination of Discourse Analysis (inspired by Critical Discourse Analysis) and relating the coded data to the theoretical framework will be used to answer the two parts of the research question and thus understand how the nuns’, hereby referred to as shareholders, conception of gender empowerment, faith and equality affects the stakeholders.

4.1.1 Object of Research

The choice of this particular mission as a case study for this thesis comes from three main points of interest. The first one is that it is an establishment operating in a developing country with a colonial past, which always poses complexities worth investigating from an intersectional point of view. The second point of interest is that it has to do with development aid, a sometimes controversial (Ziai, 2013) practice that can lead to dependency. In this case, however, the

particular *charism*² of the development aid institution that leads to gender mainstreaming tendencies within a broader development context. The biggest issue faced by the stakeholders is poverty and targeting women specifically helps all of them collectively. Special attention is given not only to providing the women with means to become economically independent/less dependent on aid, but also to providing the tools to become more independent on an emotional and social level: an aspect that is often overlooked in development projects focused on a meso or macro level of tackling poverty.

4.2 Data collection

The first step to research was to make an effort to meet in person with the members of the Ursuline order present in the city where the research was based and conducted from and ask them to recount to the best of their abilities their *charism* and its effects on the mission work of their colleagues currently abroad. Then it was only a matter of acquiring the necessary contacts with the nuns *in loco* at the mission and scheduling the interviews. Special attention was focused on the need to draft interview questions in such a way to avoid leading questions that drive to particular or pre-determined answers.

The interviews were conducted in the native languages of the interviewees, two in Italian and one in Spanish, with the interviewer being a native speaker of Italian and having a DELE B2 language certificate in Spanish. They were then translated using the translation software DeepL for maximum accuracy. The interview with Suor. Anna Fontana has particular relevance because it was the primary source of information on the Mission since she is the person currently in charge of its operations as well as working as an English teacher at the University that is located in Beira.

As mentioned in section 1.1, the initial research focus shifted while the data collection was well underway, and it was precisely due to the presence of elements of the theoretical framework in the interviews that they could be conducted with direct references to development, religion and gender empowerment.

² In the terminology of Christian religious orders, the word “charism” is used to refer to the set of values, special characteristics, traditions and spiritual orientation that pertains to the vows that members of those orders have taken.

4.3 Method of analysis

The interviews - which are collected in Appendix A - were coded and analysed through the twofold lens of Discourse Analysis (the study of communication and meaning and their relation to the social context) and a confrontation between the theoretical framework and the reported results of the mission's gender empowerment efforts in the region.

4.4 Choice of methods and limitations

The choice of an analytical framework comprised by Discourse Analysis – inspired by Critical Discourse Analysis – and a theory-driven analysis comes from the nature of the data itself and the fact the object of research is a contemporary empirical reality with limited information about it readily available at such a great geographical distance.

This thesis is referred to as a case study because the aim of a case study is that of uncovering and exploring complex issues through the examination of one specific situation, such as exploring gender empowerment practices in the field of development through the examination of as an Ursuline mission in Mozambique. One definition of case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 2003). According to the researcher, this thesis fulfils the above criteria.

The use of the term “case study” is justified in this thesis also by Christian Lund’s definition of case study as “edited chunks of empirical reality where certain features are marked out, emphasised, and privileged while others recede into the background” (Lund, 2014). The focus of this thesis is on the gender empowerment efforts taking place in the mission rather than on their overall religious and development related efforts.

The case study is also a very common research design, often chosen for its method flexibility during the research, even if it does present various disadvantages, such as a lack of standardised data (Burton, 2000), – and such is the case of this research – ; not only that, during the data collection procedure they require certain standards of preparation for the researcher as well such as flexibility, listening skills and comprehension (ibid.).

The analysis for this specific case study is also partially based on interviews with subjects and thus special attention must be paid even before starting the analysis on the actual discourse.

This type of discourse analysis in general is also based on what could be considered “details of speech (and gaze and gesture and action) or writing” (Gee, 2010) that are considered relevant to the context and to the arguments that the analysis attempts to make (ibid). The judgements of relevance as to what goes into a transcript and what is left out are ultimately theoretical judgements (ibid) based on the analyst's own conception and theoretical framework of how contexts, language and interactions work both in general and within the specific context that is being analysed (ibid). Therefore the transcripts stand as entities in and of themselves and are not outside of the analysis, but part of it (ibid). This is to preface that large part of the interview transcripts will be present in the analysis.

The limitations of this thesis are the fact that the data could only be collected through informal interviews (because of the unavailability of different empirical data such as contracts and paperwork etc.) and that it was necessarily limited due to the nature of the mission as a *de facto* development project (but a *de jure* establishment of religious proselytism). It was therefore not possible to conduct a true impact evaluation research.

Nevertheless, it is the researcher's belief that the findings of this research are relevant to the academic field of gender empowerment and can be generalised through their relation to the theoretical framework and that this case study specifically can be inserted into a broader and more global context of gender empowerment in development practices that is worth investigating further.

5. Analytical framework

The analytical framework for this thesis develops on two fronts: the first part of the research question will be answered using a method inspired by, and extensively drawing from Discourse Analysis (DA); the second part of the research question will be answered by analysing the interview data on the basis of the theory. In this chapter both approaches will be briefly presented and detailed.

5.1 Discourse Analysis

The Discourse Analysis utilised in this thesis is inspired by elements of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

CDA is defined in this thesis from a post-structuralist Foucauldian perspective as "...a term that denoted that way in which a particular set of linguistic categories relating to an object and the ways of depicting it frame the way we comprehend that object" (Bryman, 2016: 531). The object in question, as is presented in this research, is all words pertaining to the gendered sphere of [cis] womanhood, such as "women" and "femininity" and how these terms relate to the shareholders and their interactions with the stakeholders. CDA will be used as a qualitative analysis method to describe, explain and interpret the selected data (Chiluwa, 2019 p. 6). The section of the analysis dedicated to answering the first part of the research question will be conducted using CDA to recognise the instances of use of gendered terminology and contextualise them according to the theory.

While utilising CDA it is also acknowledged that the researcher takes a favourable stance within the area of research thus is unable to be "neutral" about it (Van Dijk, 1993) and for this reason, the researcher's stance on the research matter can be found in Appendix D. The researcher also acknowledges that "there exists no universal knowledge" and the data collected is local and context sensitive within the geographical area of the case study (Van Dijk, 1993). Still according to Van Dijk it is necessary to clearly state the "point of view, perspective, principles, and aims, both within...[our] discipline and within society at large" (ibid.) so it is the hope of the researcher that this thesis may contribute to the field in a useful and constructive way, much like the very shareholders whose discourse will be analysed.

5.2 Theory-driven Analysis

The second part of the research question will be answered by analysing the data gathered from the interviews on the basis of the theories presented in the theoretical framework, highlighting the role of the theory in the overall analysis but especially, as mentioned in section 4.2, the presence in the interviews of elements of the theoretical framework. Elements of the theoretical framework and literature review will also re-emerge in the discussion.

6. Contextual framework

6.1 Introduction to the Case Study Rationale

The narrowing historical and socio-political context of the case study's subject will be presented in this chapter, which is vital to understand the origins of the discourses that will be identified in the analysis.

The broader focus of this research is the focus on the nexus between local – national – regional – transnational and global levels in politics development and international relations; therefore the good gender mainstreaming practices in the community around the mission of Beira, in the context of Mozambique and its history with the Catholic church, make for an interesting and emblematic case study in the field of development studies; and the brief insight on the history of the Ursuline order as the basis for their “feminist” (the term here is used anachronistically) roots makes it relevant to global gender studies.

6.2 Mozambique

Mozambique is a country in southeastern Africa bordered by Tanzania to the north, Malawi and Zambia to the northwest, Zimbabwe to the west, Swaziland and South Africa to the southwest and the Indian Ocean to the east. It is now an independent country and a former Portuguese colony. The Portuguese arrived with Vasco da Gama's voyage in 1498, and they began their gradual process of colonial rule and settlement in 1505. The Portuguese dominion of Mozambique was characterised by an exploitative government and brutal labour conditions for the local population (Newitt, 2017). The colonists remained to rule Mozambique for over four hundred years, after that time, as recently as 1975, Mozambique gained independence and has been known since then as The People's Republic of Mozambique (ibid). Just two years after that, Mozambique plunged into a bitter civil war that lasted from 1977 to 1992 (ibid). Once the threat of further civil war was banished by peace talks, Mozambique held its first multi-party election in 1994 and has since remained a stable republic of the presidency, even if it does, to this day, maintain a low voter turnout (ibid).

Mozambique is currently one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world , with low per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), human development, equality measures and average life expectancy. Nevertheless, since 2001, the country's annual GDP growth rate has been among the highest in the global ranking (ifad.org, 2015).

Mozambique has only one official language and it is Portuguese, and is the second language of about half of the population (Newitt, 2017). Common indigenous languages include Swahili (the

second most common native tongue spoken), Makhuwa, Sena and Tsonga (ibid). The country's population is that of 29 million people, most of whom are of Bantu ethnicity, with others coming from different ethnic backgrounds (ibid). Data from the most recent census shows that largest religion in Mozambique is the Christian confession (44.23%), with 27.19% of the Christians being Catholic, followed by Islam, Judaism and traditional African religions (IV recenseamento geral da população e habitação, 2017).

As mentioned in the first paragraph, shortly after achieving independence, the country suffered a long and violent period of civil war between the The Front for Government of the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO). These conflicts caused chaos and instability during the first decades of the country's independence, which led to unsuccessful policies, centralised planning failures, and resulting economic collapse. They also crossed national borders because neighbouring Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa participated in actions of sabotage (Newitt, 2017). This period was also marked by a mass egress of people from Portugal or even just of Portuguese origin, widespread famine, and the disruption of public infrastructure (ibid). During most of the civil war, the government formed by FRELIMO was unable to control the population that lived outside of the urban areas because their isolation from the capital essentially “cut them off from it” (Newitt, 2017); instead, RENAMO-controlled areas covered about 50% of rural areas in a number of provinces, reportedly depriving them of vital goods and services, such as healthcare services, for years (ibid). The problem was exacerbated when the government effectively reduced healthcare spending, which led to the war being marked by human rights abuses on both sides of the conflict (Newitt, 2017).

After tense peace talks that will be described in the next paragraph, Mozambique held elections in 1994, which were widely accepted as free and fair, although not so completely as to not warrant suspicion by some nations and observers alike; the country then proceeded to join the United Nations (Newitt, 2017). By mid-1995, more than four million refugees who had sought refuge in neighbouring countries had returned to Mozambique, part of the largest repatriation movement in sub-Saharan Africa, with only about one 1.7 million exiles having returned home (ibid).

It is in this context that the Vatican started seeing Mozambique as a possible target for Faith Based Organisation (FOB) aid, especially thanks to the St. Egidio community - a lay Catholic association dedicated to social service - which also has a high profile in the area of peace

negotiations, in addressing the AIDS epidemic in Africa, and in its opposition to capital punishment, all the while taking an ecumenical approach in all of its work. It was with the assistance of the St. Egidio community that plans to establish a higher education institution - what would become the Catholic University of Mozambique (UCM) - emerged during the peace talks between Frelimo and Renamo. The peace talks took place in Rome because the St. Egidio Community offered their own city as a “forum [...] for both sides to meet without preconditions” (Newitt, 2017). The turning point came during when the negotiations reached a stalemate in June of 1992; in order to have them open up again the Archbishop of Beira, Dom Jaime Pedro Gonçalves, presented the idea of establishing a state-of-the-art university in northern Mozambique, therefore the Catholic Church promised to redress the inequalities of higher education institutions in Maputo. This is apparently one of the main points which later led to the signing of the peace agreement between Frelimo and Renamo on October 4, 1992 (Newitt, 2017).

So in 1996 the Catholic University of Mozambique was established and merged with the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU) a private, cohesive university, in the area known as the Universidade Catolica de Mocambique (UCM), and has been officially recognized by the Mozambican Ministry of Education and Culture. Since UCM was established as a contribution to peace and reconciliation, when it opened its first faculties in Beira and Nampula, the first two faculties to be established were the Faculty of Economics and Management (Beira) and the Faculty of Law (Nampula) because these were considered the educational foundations that were needed in order to “mould people who would work for peaceful and democratic development” (Appendix A).

For a more contemporary perspective directly at the source, the testimony of Sister Alberta Lobba from Appendix A provides a harrowing look at the situation in the present day.

According to Sr. Lobba, the effects of 550 years of colonialism, “without education, without choice” (Appendix A) rendered the people of Mozambique “not responsible for their own existence” (ibid). Because the colonisers provided work and food, Mozambicans were not stimulated [to progress on their own].

Africa as a geographical region remains very rich, and has “mineral resources of all kinds and in large quantities, but multinationals are exploiting it” (ibid). While Mozambique’s economy is based mostly on agriculture, the industry sector is growing and so are their aluminium, petroleum production and chemical manufacturing plants. Sr. Lobba continues by stating that “70% of the copper that Italy uses is produced [there]” and Eni [the Italian energy company A/N] and other multinational corporations drilling for oil (ibid). This “new colonisation” is affecting the

people who are still “unable to make their own choices”(ibid). The workers who extract the gold are not protected and many are killed and buried [in the gold mines]. “The goods they [the people of Mozambique] offer us [Westerners profiting off them] for them come at a steep price” (ibid). Poverty and ignorance, coupled with local corruption tend to lead to inhuman contracts, since the multinational corporations have the upper hand (ibid). In Mozambique, continues Sr. Lobba, “land is not bought and sold, but in Dondo [part of the dioceses of Beira N/A], and not only there, the government is selling large tracts of land (where rice is produced) to foreign states, depriving families of their livelihoods” (ibid) and it is a dynamic seen in many African realities that are products of colonialism or have lived under colonial rule for any prolonged period of time.

6.3 Faith Based Organisations’ Work in the Field of development

The most common types of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) operating in the field of development are primarily a-religious (also known as ‘non-religious’ or ‘secular’) ones.

These NGOs state their mission and values in secular terms, for example, to end poverty, to dignify every human being on earth, to fight injustices, etc. Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) generally do not reject these values but they rather integrate them with elements, motivations, justifications that come from their own religious backgrounds. Moreover, the global development agenda, with its planning and policy making ramifications remains secular (Frost et al, 2018). No mention of religion or religious communities are to be found in strategies such as the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable development (UN 2015) or the United Nations resolution on the Sustainable development Goals (SDGs) (ibid). While many religious institutions have been operating and still operate in the field of development - with their positive and negative aspects - their more “secularised” presence in the global field of development (for example JRS: the Jesuit Refugee Service or HIAS, a Jewish American refugee support NGO) has moved the “discursive spheres of religion and development” closer together (ibid) even if the discourses taking place at their nexus do so within a secular framework (ibid), much like this thesis itself. The discourse remains based on a Western-initiated and widespread “secular distinction” (Gräb 2016) between the secular - or profane- and the religious - or sacred- (ibid). Within this context the implicit assumption is that the activities of the religious communities operating in the field of development can be separated into spiritual and non-spiritual; as this research aims to show, that may not always be possible or relevant.

6.4 Christian Missions

In the Christian tradition, a mission is an organised effort to spread religion to new converts, usually in countries where Christianity is not the principal confession. Their primary characteristic is that missions involve sending people and groups to different countries in order to carry on evangelism and provide services such as educational or hospital work (Pontificie Opere Missionarie n.d.). Missionary work is organised by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (Ibid.). Since the Second Vatican Council (an ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church that took place between 1962 and 1965) missionary work coming from the Church has undergone profound change (ibid.). Reform has seen missionary work prioritise issues of social justice and strive to avoid the dangers of cultural imperialism or economic exploitation that often accompany religious reform; so Christian missionaries recognize that the administration of justice as a form of social assistance is also an important part of the evangelising work.

It is important to note that before Vatican II, it was believed that the desired salvation outside the Catholic Church was allowed to be very limited, but because of the Council's emphasis on individual conscience, baptism was seen not only as a common practice of salvation but as an actual ecumenical calling of the people who adhered to the Christian faith to spread the “good news of God's love”, also known as the Gospel, to all people leading by example and acting out of true kindness, which their universal and unifying creed that applies to all the “children of God”, meaning everyone (ibid.).

In 2016 Pope Francis established the Department of Integrated Human development in Rome Curia to oversee the many Catholic outreach programs promoted by the Vatican. Not that such a mission is new; Caritas Internationalis is an organisation of Catholic charities, development, and community services that began shortly after Pope Leo XIII's book Social Encyclical Rerum novarum in 1893. Today, the Church's missionary work through its various religious organisations and clergy is definitely more involved in choosing to assist the poor and focus on the importance of human development rather than in directly converting people to their own religion. A mainstream example of this today are the Jesuit missions, such as those in Africa and India, that are heavily involved in teaching and continuing to help the poorest rural people rather than attempting to convert people directly. More recently, the current trend in Asia and

Africa has been detailed in articles mostly about Jesuit educational institutions and institutions, and the same can be said of other Catholic groups and their religions and denominations.

While missions from the Catholic Church in Portugal have been sent to Mozambique since colonial times, the majority of the missions present in the country today are of more recent envoy (Newitt, 2017).

6.5 The Religious Order of the Ursulines

The founder of the Ursuline Order was Angela Merici (c. 1474-1540) a woman from Brescia, Italy, who reimagined what “consecration to God” (Marocchi, 1988) could look like in the Sixteenth Century. In 1531 Merici founded the order and named it the “Company of Saint Ursula”, after the “legendary liberator of Cologne during the siege of [the] Huns” (ibid.) and patron saint of education, and on 25 November 1535, the day of the feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria, a great spiritual woman of the Middle Ages, the first women took their vows (ibid.). The novelty of Merici’s approach was that it developed outside of the structure that defined women’s religious life for centuries - the monastery- but placed the consecrated women “into the world” (Marocchi, 1988). The women chose to dedicate themselves to God but would do so not from within the walls of a cloister, but from within their families and communities (ibid.); they ‘did not take formal vows, did not live in a convent and did not wear a habit’ (Mazzonis, 2004) or observe particular rituals typical of monastic life, except for meeting regularly to pray together (ibid.). Their *charism*, expressed in a conscription left by Merici, is to “dwell among the people whom they serve, without a divisive factor as a religious practice, and live without a cloister” (ibid.). Their main focus has always been on educating women and girls, and caring for the sick and needy (Marocchi, 1988).

"The [Ursuline]

Model [is] to imitate is the life of the apostles and the virgins of the
earliest church, Martha, Thecla, Ursula, Agnes, Cecilia,
Catherine, who consecrated themselves to Christ but remained
in the world” (Marocchi, 1988 p. 8)

To this day, members of the Ursulines order follow the original way of life established by their founder, living independently, taking responsibility for their own well-being, often having secular jobs, but officially dedicating their lives to the service of the Church.

The secular nature of this order is what makes it unique in its alternative proposal for women since the 1500s, with its key element being the consecration of the nuns in the world through "the dignity of women in relation to God" (Mazzonis, 2004).

6.6 The Ursuline Mission in Beira

Members of a congregation of Ursuline Nuns were sent by the Pope to post-civil war, newly democratic, Mozambique because they were already operating in portuguese-speaking Brazil so that they may be open to "the various poverties" present in that particular context and to "offer a space to manage" the challenges of the new reality. And the establishment of the University was "the first step toward a peaceful rebuild" (Appendix A).

The city of Beira is a relatively small city, with a downtown area that was built by the Portuguese colonists and sprawling outskirts where the neighbourhoods become more and more rural and poor the greater their distance is from the city centre. The mission's name is "Comunidade Jubilar", Jubilee Community, and, unfortunately, its efforts have become more and more essential to the area since Beira was also "destroyed" by the idai cyclone in 2019, right before the global covid-19 pandemic "made the poverty situation even worse" (ibid).

7. Analysis

7.1 Introduction to the analysis

In this chapter the data gathered from the interviews with the nuns from the mission will be analysed. The aim of the analysis is to correlate the way the nuns refer to elements from the theoretical framework in their everyday lives and work in, and around, the mission and from there to investigate the role that gender and religion play in relation to the development goal of gender empowerment. The aim of this research is both to answer the initial research question – *what role does gender play within the discourse of the shareholders and how does that affect the stakeholders?* – and to determine what it could entail for further research into other, non-traditional, approaches to gender mainstreaming in development, and exploring its potential.

The analysis will be conducted using two methodological strategies, one for each part of the research question: first, an analytical approach modelled on Discourse Analysis, inspired by Critical Discourse Analysis, will be used to investigate the role of gender within the shareholder discourse; and second, the interview data will be analysed starting from an understanding of the key notions from the theoretical framework in order to describe the ways the stakeholders are affected.

Elements from the theoretical framework are more or less already present in the various testimonies, but not explicitly so. This chapter is an attempt to extrapolate those elements and examine in detail the role they play in shaping their reality as shareholders and that of the stakeholders, the three macro areas on which the analysis will focus on are: 1) articulations of gender and empowerment, 2) gender and empowerment in projects and practice and 3) gender and faith.

7.1.1 The mission's approach

The particular approach used by the shareholders in the mission has been identified by the researcher as fitting the parameters to be considered gender mainstreaming (Section 2.3) and concerning gender empowerment as a tool for development (Section 3.3.3.). However, the question “how does gender mainstreaming work in the mission?” was posed during the interview with Sr. Fontana and it is relevant to the discourse analysis to present the answer that was given in full. What would formally be defined as ‘gender mainstreaming’ is “more of an attitude” (Appendix A) or underlying current in the Ursuline mission of Beira, and it starts with “reframing the relationships [the women] have with each other”, women both on the shareholders and stakeholders side, that is. To this effect the issue of gender mainstreaming does not lay in any decision formally agreed upon before the start of a project, but instead lies in the “peaceful, more humane” (ibid.) way all members of the community are treated, including the women. This emphasises the informality of the shareholders’ approach to gender mainstreaming and empowerment without erasing the validity of their efforts.

7.2 Articulations of gender and empowerment

“To think about it in theory is different from being embodied in the social fabric and starting from there”-
Sister Anna Fontana, as translated from Appendix A

In this section selected data will be analysed by exploring the role that discourse plays in the Ursulines from the mission's beliefs and *charism* and how that relates to their concept of gender empowerment. The term "discourse" is here used aspirationally, since the informal nature of the mission's work and collected data provides insufficient basis for a discourse analysis that goes beyond what was detailed in the methodology (section 4.3).

However it was kept because the researcher recognises an element of empowerment (section 2.2.1) in the way that words surrounding femininity being connotated positively flows from the shareholders to the stakeholders and this was one of the better-known methods to highlight that.

While conducting research for this thesis the researcher was well aware of the fact that terms such as "empowerment", "participation" and "gender" became buzzwords of the 'alternative development paradigm' that was opposed to industrialisation/modernisation/economic development, especially in the late 90s (section 2.1). Nevertheless, as empowerment still remains on the agenda for those who engage in development practices as agents outside of state powers, it remains a topic of analysis according to its most basic definition, provided by the UN Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions (2002) , which is titled "eradicating poverty, including through the empowerment of women throughout their life cycle, in a globalising world".

"Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

In this context, education, training, awareness raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources, and actions to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality are important tools for empowering women and girls to claim their rights." (unwomen.org, 2002)

The following analysis will argue that these parameters for gender empowerment are being met through the actions taken by the shareholders in the mission to improve the lives of the stakeholders.

It is also important to note the shareholders' own definition of "gender empowerment" as extrapolated from the translation of the interview with Sister Natalia Salazar in Appendix A.

According to her, gender empowerment means having the ability to visualise those spaces that have been given to [women] over time and not cease referring to and thinking of them as “obvious” (Appendix A). She further explains this thought by stating that sometimes “simple things” (ibid.), such as the ability to wear trousers or travel alone are overlooked, even though they were actually forbidden for women not too long ago (ibid.). The key to true gender empowerment is thus to “not forget” the “path [that] makes [women] look with awareness at the places, the forms, the spaces, that little by little have [been] achieved through the struggle of thousands of women who are [still] fighting this battle” (ibid.). Sr. Salazar also inadvertently made a case for discourse analysis in this very research study when stating that “empowerment” is also knowing that through language “we transform realities. Naming things differently opens up a world of possibilities that we sometimes saw as distant but that by naming them we make them real, close to us” (ibid.). This concept that possibilities of gender empowerment can be ‘drawn near’ in contexts and situations where they appear to be “distant” or difficult to achieve is a pillar of the kind of grassroots, bottom-up approach that is required at the micro level of realities such as the mission in Beira.

The primary inspiration for this thesis can best be summarised by Sr. Fontana’s own definition of it and the way that relates to the mission’s efforts. According to Sr. Fontana, as translated from Appendix A, “gender empowerment” is the direct consequence of teaching people how to want to improve their life. It, unfortunately, just so happens that the people who are the most in need of this new [to them] knowledge and means to achieve it, in the particular socio-cultural context that constitutes the community around the mission, are women.

Sr. Salazar answers the question about how she would describe the relationship between development and women’s empowerment in particular, in a way that emphasises the points of gender as a tool for development (section 3.3.2). According to Sr. Salazar, development is “[a] reaching, it is that quest to achieve something, [...] achieving a goal beyond what is expected.” (Appendix A). The chosen path to and steps taken to achieve that goal complement empowerment, specifically gender empowerment, because the unevenness of the process - “steps that stumble and are not understood” - and the fact that sometimes the stakeholders themselves need help to better understand the process and make it so that the end result can be sustainable (Appendix A). When “the women are made conscious” of their own empowerment (Appendix A) that is what lets them be capable of continuing the process by themselves, no matter how long it takes, and how many times they have to be helped (ibid.).

According to Sr. Fontana one of the main objectives of the mission's approach to gender empowerment is to offer assistance to the mothers "experiencing particular hardship" (Appendix A) in the community a "decent livable space" (ibid.). That is considered "step one" in their journey towards gender empowerment (ibid.). This can be achieved by helping the women through projects that have had to do with the major issues affecting them, such as various hygiene, nutrition and pregnancy education and sensibilisation workshops, as well as a distribution of powdered milk to new mothers (ibid.). The focus on hygiene, paired with the de-stigmatisation of pregnancy through sensibilisation workshops not only helps the women achieve better health for themselves and their children, but contributes to their overall confidence and worth. While in adherence to the principles of development detailed in the theoretical framework, especially those related to gender empowerment and its measurement in economic participation (sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2), there also appears to be an 'organic' attention paid to the women who are mothers or supporting children, which recalls Syed's "family as a fundamental societal unit" (2010) from section 2.3.

The second step towards gender empowerment for the stakeholders of the mission can "only take place once the basic necessities are taken care of" (Appendix A). This "operation to achieve [women's] self sustainability" (ibid.) is actually twofold, because it provides the women with both concrete/material and more abstract/immaterial elements which work in tandem to reach the end goal.

The funding, as well as the nuns' presence at the meetings, served as an initial external support, but, as the women recounted during the meetings, they themselves were the ones who benefited the most simply from being in contact with each other and sharing their experiences, for example, on how to deal better with both the clients and their families (Appendix A).

Given this evidence, while the main formal objective of the project remains the development of entrepreneurship for the stakeholders, listening to them, giving them the opportunity to listen to each other, and giving them a chance to get out of their own reality whilst helping them to "take their lives in their own hands" (Appendix A) was, according to the shareholders, arguably the more impactful result.

These opportunities of communal growth are an occasion to reinforce the positive discourse around stigmatised femininity; having the stakeholders exit a situation of isolation - "not leaving

them closed in on themselves” (Appendix A) - and having them enter on their own terms a context which allows them to better their lives through the direct dialogue and communication with other women in a situation similar to theirs/ to whom they can relate is a way to “reevaluate the so-called feminine reality, which is perceived as negative [in the area] but even merely acknowledging its existence makes it more positive. That new positive connotation of it makes it so that [the women] can express their femininity in the fullest sense” (ibid.). Introducing positive connotations to femininity and womanhood to replace the negative ones on a linguistic and communication level brings the work closer to the discursive level described in the methodology.

As will be described in detail in the next section, the mission also operates some projects that provide material aid, but in the periods of time when they projects are unable to provide the materials [section 7.3.1], the self sustainability objective is still pursued through educational “meetings for women’s leadership” which are periodically held at the mission. The discourse utilised during these meetings focuses on the shift from powerlessness to agency that the women experience through the professional training, as well as through the simple contact with other women in similar situations. The role of the shareholders - or “those who encourage and support women in this context” (Appendix A) - is to ensure that the stakeholders “feel good about being women” (ibid.). Since a particular emphasis is placed on the importance of “having energy” (ibid.), it is vital that the stakeholders be equipped with enough emotional resources, in addition to material ones, to face the hardships that characterise their social context, which go “beyond gender equality” (ibid.), such as situations social isolation, [domestic] violence and/or marital infidelity. One of the goals of gender empowerment is used to achieve what Sr. Fontana refers to as “social redemption”, in reference to the fact that gender inequality affects the women’s position within the social fabric of the community, often relegating them to the margins of it. Still, according to Sr. Fontana the “starting point of social redemption is the woman herself being able to strengthen her energies to face personal and family situations” (Appendix A) and once the process has begun, through access to education and then training, what is left to do is to “strengthen what they are as women” (ibid.), so that they may find it within themselves to accept and understand that they have intrinsic value not in spite of their gender, but because of it. As has been shown in this section, the discourse surrounding women, or more specifically, femininity and womanhood, is a vital part of the mission’s gender empowerment efforts, and, as described in section 7.4, the positive connotations ascribed to it by the shareholders can be traced directly to their *charism* and beliefs.

The conclusion to this section is possibly the most emblematic example of positive woman-related discourse coming directly from the shareholders to the stakeholders is a prayer from Appendix C.

The featured figure of worship in the mission's church, with related *ad hoc* prayer, is Mary [the mother of Jesus Christ, the primary figure of worship in Christian religion A/N] who is referred to as "Maria, Mãe de África" [Mother of Africa]. In this prayer the elevation of womanhood is explicit. Three lines stand out as particularly relevant; the first one is the beginning of the prayer and states as follows: "Our Lady, Mother of Africa [with a] face [...] that smiles and cries on the breasts of the women of our land" (Appendix C) indicates a kind of projection towards the figure of worship while ascribing to her a compassionate gaze for the women specifically. It becomes evident in the following line that the compassion is warranted because it continues with: "Our Lady, Mother of Africa / heart of a woman / where the universe fits [and] gravitates suffering, abandonment, bitterness, despair" (Appendix C). This line evidently highlights the struggles of the women in the community and emphasises how the "heart of a woman" (ibid) is at the centre of these struggles, and possibly, through the dimension of religious faith, a solution. However the most striking example of the nexus between faith and gender belongs to the last line which concludes the prayer with "Mary, our Mother teach us to celebrate with you the wonders [...] of our being women, just like you" (Appendix C), creating what Durkheim would call "collective effervescence" (Durkheim, 1912) around a very clear celebration of gender. This prayer was not formally conceived as one of the "empowerment training sessions" from Appendix A, and thus supports the conviction that it did indeed form organically.

7.3 Gender empowerment in projects and practices

In the previous section the role that discourse surrounding women plays in the mission, from shareholders to stakeholders, was analysed with a framework inspired by Discourse Analysis. In this section, the data from the interviews will be analysed in relation to the theoretical framework to explore the ways in which that translates into gender empowerment practices and how those affect the stakeholders. The primary example of this is represented by their most recent development project focused on women: the Tabitha Project (Appendix B), which will be described in the next section.

While on the topic of gender empowerment in practices, it bears mentioning that, in addition to the issues of health and hygiene described in section 7.2, the biggest health concern that is

present in the community is that of individuals living with HIV/AIDS. In the review article “Combined structural interventions for gender equality and livelihood security: a critical review of the evidence from southern and eastern Africa and the implications for young people”, from the Journal of the International AIDS society, it is stated that the fundamental driver of HIV since the 1990s has been identified as that of gender inequalities (Gibbs et al, 2012). In sub Saharan Africa [in 2008] it was women who comprised 61% of the totality of those living with HIV as well as 60% of new infections (ibid.). An even more troubling statistic is that *young* women (from 15 to 24 years of age) were 2.5 to 4.5 times more likely to be infected with HIV than young men (ibid.). The critical structural drivers of HIV in southern Africa, other than gender inequalities, is that of livelihood insecurity, and both of these factors disproportionately affect young people, “specifically how these two factors intersect” (ibid.). Internal and external interventions are progressively attempting to alter these structural factors as a course towards HIV prevention (ibid.) and the efforts of the Ursuline nuns of the Beira Mission are trying to tackle those exact factors. Sr Lobba in particular is involved in “health pastoral work” (Appendix A) and has learnt and applied the “bio-energetics method” (ibid.) to discover and cure illnesses. While planning to prepare to do “serious work [in the Beira mission]” the nuns take advantage of what the territory has to offer, as Sr. Lobba states that she would like an additional room in the medical facility for “placing healing herbs” (ibid.).

Hardly any gender specific projects and actions are formally decided *a priori*, the plans for the projects that are created, developed and implemented by the mission do “not always coincide with reality” (Appendix A) because setting expectations can be very challenging in this context (ibid.). Which makes the *skills* and know-how, both required of the shareholders and passed on to the stakeholders, “the most important thing” (ibid.) that is taken into consideration in every aspect of the mission’s work. Inversely, the main fear and obstacle to the mission’s work is the risk and possibility of creating dependencies (Section 2.1).

7.3.1 The “Tabitha” project [Appendix B]

The project with the most quantifiable efficacy, in both terms of gender empowerment and development impact has been the “Tabitha” project.

The project is a still ongoing (as of 2022) a micro-financing endeavour with the aim to assist a number of women in building their own small business - “set up a shop” (Appendix A) - where they have complete decision-making control over what to purchase and what to sell.

Microfinance has been a promise of economic and social change for the past 30 years (Ngo, Wahhaj, 2012) and its targeting of women specifically is regarded as a “major strategic move” (ibid.) for effective social development (ibid.).

The “primary goal” of the project is that the women no longer be dependent on charity aid (section 2.1), in fact, the women that are chosen to take part in the project are usually amongst the “poorest and most in need” (Appendix A) members of the community. The selection parameters consisted of observing and taking note about which women are the ones that most often come knocking on the mission’s door to ask for food or money; and the rationale behind this choice was that those are potentially the stakeholders “with the greatest possibility of redemption for themselves and their family” (ibid.), families which more often than not include the children of deceased relatives of varying degrees.

Once again, the project’s aim is twofold: not only to provide the stakeholders with the initial funds and basic training they need to start their business, but also providing long lasting intellectual skills and expertise through the chance of learning how to manage a line of credit (Appendix A). In addition to that, the project’s special attention towards the women’s personal growth, as a means of gender empowerment and development, will have them engage in monthly follow-up meetings with the rest of the project stakeholders. During the meetings the Ursuline nuns in charge of the projects [the de facto project managers] would only be present to monitor the meetings and occasionally take notes; the stakeholders would spend the entire time talking amongst their peers, a practice which allows them to compare and learn good practices from each other. These combined efforts help the stakeholders “grow and rise above their [socio-economic] level” (Appendix A) with some of them even being able to set aside some of their savings (ibid.), this topic will be developed further in the discussion.

According to Sr. Fontana, the key to this particular project’s success lies in the fact that “nothing was suggested or imposed” (Appendix A) the women were free to make decisions regarding every aspect of the process: from what to sell, to where to buy it, and how much to sell it for; and thus the stakeholders maintained complete control over their actions beyond the loan. Sr. Fontana defines the results of the combined approaches and efforts of the “Tabitha” project as “pure gender empowerment for [the women]”, because they are finally given a chance to really listen to each other and share their experiences, which is something that women in developed countries might take for granted, but that is not so common or normalised in Mozambique (ibid.).

The material objective of the project is to donate a sewing machine to each woman, as well as offering them professional training in working with fabric, dressmaking, small textile repair techniques, cutting and sewing (Appendix A). The more abstract objective is also achieved through the training sessions because they serve the ulterior, but not less important, purpose of pulling the women out of isolation and in inserting them in a new context where they not only are able to learn something new, but they can also feel comfortable in seeking self help or new ways to improve their living conditions. This process is essentially “giving women a chance” (ibid.) to make it on their own through their work.

With the exception of the “Tabita” project, all of the mission’s gender empowerment efforts are not documented and formalised as such, so while gender empowerment is undoubtedly an aim, a “formal” one even, in practice it is most often informal and created/implemented on the spot, as opposed to it being planned beforehand.

7.3.2 Gender and education

“[People] know little of an Africa that studies and promotes itself” Sr. Fontana (Appendix A)

Sr. Fontana is not only head of the mission in Beira, but also works at the Catholic University of Mozambique (UCM). At UCM she comes in contact with both students and teaching staff. She states in her interview that “[people] know little about” the African people who everyday pursue their educational and academic journey in order to help themselves and their respective countries, such as the members of UCM. Sadly the most well known image of Africa that people have of it outside the continent is that of “the poor Africa”, populated by women and children who are experiencing the consequences of extreme poverty in their lives (Appendix A).

However, education has proven to be one of the main gateways out of extreme poverty and of gender empowerment, since the lack of basic school education for young girls is quite possibly the main cause of gender inequalities among the younger population (Gibbs et al, 2012). It is precisely these most vulnerable members of the community that are the recipients of the targeted assistance the mission is there to provide. The majority of the mission’s financial resources are allocated to projects dedicated to supporting children’s access to school and education.

The multi-step approach starts with outreach toward children who are not in school and through that a “communications channel” is opened with the children’s families so that the shareholders can learn from them directly and subsequently understand how to better help them. It is often

the case, for example, that the mothers of the children are widows or have been entrusted with caring for orphaned children from their extended family (nieces and nephews or grandchildren) or that the male heads of family have been widowed and need help supporting their children before and/or if they remarry. Once the families take advantage of the opportunity to send their children to school, the shareholders' objective and efforts shift towards keeping them in the educational system "for as long as possible" (Appendix A) and that is a "top priority" (ibid.) for the mission. The more girls drop out of education because of pregnancy or having to take over duties at home, the harder it will be for them to overcome situations of hardship exacerbated by gender inequality, such as domestic violence, and the younger they are when they drop out the more time and effort it takes to assist them in acknowledging their difficult situations and seeking the necessary help to escape them.

While efforts to engage both young girls and young boys in receiving basic education are the fruit of "more and more people realising" (Appendix A) the importance of educating young people, and the aspect of bringing attention to women is becoming more widely acknowledged even at a "social and institutional level" (ibid.), gender empowerment at the university level is not very present. This may be, in part, due to the university's location, which emphasises the still very steep gap between the areas that are more or less rural. The more rural the area, the more it is expected and not challenged that "the girls, they stay at home" (ibid.). There appears to be a slight but steadily growing trend of considerations and policies related to the presence of women in management areas, but they are usually limited to an acknowledgement of the need for training sessions/workshops to specifically prevent women from being delegated to "certain roles" traditionally associated with their gender and thus at odds with some of the management positions themselves; a situation that recalls the references in. Still, the members of the UCM staff that are also part of the mission make it their priority to offer opportunities for dialogue about the restrictive gender roles for women with their male colleagues, since they do "collaborate more with men" (Appendix A) than they do with women.

7.4 Faith and gender

The Ursuline order's *charism* (section 6.5) is in and of itself focused on women's empowerment in unconventional ways since its origins. The environment of consideration for women community life among them gives the nuns years of experience referring to gender specific

terminology with respect and care and that is the type of discourse that they carry with them when they are assigned to any mission.

In an interview in Appendix A, Sr. Anna Fontana claims that she also finds the concepts on which the mission is built on “present in her own belief system” (Appendix A). She finds the building principles “in the Gospel, in the Ursuline congregation and their *charism* and way of being” (ibid.). Valuing women and promoting their well being and social redemption is also something she finds within herself, stating that “whoever is around [her] knows that [she] is for women” from the beginning and until the end (ibid.). This firm belief in principles of both faith and gender equality, which are deeply, and seemingly equally ingrained in Sr. Fontana, is what guides her in her role as a supporter of her faith as well as a shareholder in the mission. This is the foundation of her operations during her tenure as primary responsible for the mission and appears to be cohesive with the principles of sustainable development as presented in this thesis (chapters 2 and 3).

More explicitly, the concepts of “service” and “equality” are also at the basis of both the mission and her personal attitude. To delve deeper into this statement, Sr. Anna goes on to say that “in the Gospel, Jesus always valued women and gave them missions” (ibid.) as well as providing many instances worthy of deep theological reflection and analysis about Jesus’ most meaningful and/or revealing encounters being with women (ibid.). This firm belief that women’s worth and value are inherently tied to the life of the primary figure of worship of Christianity serves as a pillar of the aforementioned operations ongoing within the mission.

And finally what appears to be the most interesting and intense parallel present in this section, develops from the direct comparison of the figure of Jesus Christ himself as “the humble and meek servant” seen as a comparison and way to help women and promote them as “humanising figures of peace” (ibid.). The view of women as “humane”, or further use of the word “humanity” is a reference to the Acts of the Apostles (ibid.), as it relates to “bringing out the best in ourselves and in others” (ibid.), meaning here that the use of religious terminology and analogies nevertheless contributes to the narrative of soft or gentle empowerment that appears to be both the root and the background of the shareholders’ relationship with the stakeholders.

In the interview from Appendix A, Sr. Lobba answered the question on whether she had learned anything directly from the women in the community with a reference to a traditional christian

prayer: Psalm 125. Sr. Lobba states that, in Mozambique, she “discovered the depth of Psalm 125 by observing the industriousness of the women, who reflect it very well” (Appendix A). She claims to recognise in them “the second part of verse 6 (“...in returning, she comes with joy, carrying her sheaves”)” (ibid.), especially when they return from their long day’s toil in the fields with a cheerful manner and a “a quick step, carrying the fruit of their labour on their heads”. This identification of the women’s disposition with a prayer is a confirmation of the fact that the theological framework is very much ingrained in the shareholders lives and therefore in their perception of the world but that it does not impede a rational and practical view of the stakeholders condition, noting that the cause of the women’s cheerfulness is that “after hard work and a long journey they have finally made a livelihood for their family! “(ibid.).

As further proof of the ever present, underlying connection between their work and their faith, even the name of the project mentioned in section 7.3.1 is a reference to a sacred text, as well as being a reference to the local fauna. The word “Tabitha” is the local word for gazelle and also, coincidentally, the name of a biblical figure from the Acts of the Apostles [in the New Testament]. Tabitha the religious figure was known to be an honest and hard working woman in the [early] Christian community, and therefore a good and positive example of a woman/femininity. Then there is the gazelle: a very “beautiful and familiar” (Appendix A) animal [who is native to the area] and its beauty comes from “its own self care and cleanliness” (ibid.), emphasis on its cleanliness also helps with the mission’s efforts to promote better hygiene practices among members of the community. Both the values represented by Tabitha, both the woman and the animal, make for a combination of positive examples for women, “with the hopes that they too can be just as well inserted [as them] into their social environment” (ibid.). Tabitha the biblical woman in particular is seen as a “humanising figure who can promote a different society” (Appendix A) and thus represents both the start and end point of the women involved with the project, “in the hopes that they may follow her example” (ibid.). The particular care with which words and discourses are used within the mission is yet another example of how seemingly without effort, approaches that are not formally constrained can be effective.

8. Discussion

In this chapter the findings from the analysis will be summarised and used to answer the research question.

8.1 What role does gender play in the discourse of the shareholders?

In adherence to their *charism* (section 4.1.1.), the Ursuline nuns operating the mission in Beira pay special attention to the most vulnerable members of the community: women. It has emerged from the data presented in the analysis that the special attention that is paid to women stakeholders was never something that was formally decided *a priori* within the mission's plans, but only emerged once the circumstances were assessed and operations focused on gender empowerment appeared to be the most effective way to assist those who needed it most in escaping poverty.

Starting from a tradition dating back to the Sixteenth Century (section 6.5), the Ursuline nuns operating the mission do so with an intrinsic predisposition to not only help the stakeholders of the mission, but to also do so without decoupling their stance on gender empowerment – even in a context where it is a 'foreign' concept – from their religious beliefs, and, in fact, drawing from those very beliefs the foundation for their gender empowerment efforts.

The main obstacle towards gender equality on a discourse level is that, in Mozambique, “culturally, [women] are not used to speaking about themselves” (Appendix A.), so the slightest encouragement that comes from listening to their voices and “what they have to say and when they choose to say it” (ibid.) enables them to consider themselves as women in a new, positive light. This approach's main goal is to “enable that half of humanity that has not yet had the opportunity to express itself” (Appendix A), without encouraging tendencies that might result in women becoming “a mirror of men in a negative sense” (ibid.), meaning that their social redemption should not be equal to men's [current] status in the sense that it would be overpowering over them and still willing to establish an unbalance of power. Ways to oppose the current unbalance of power remain those that manifest positive visibility for women in front of men ostensibly because “the women cannot be the only ones to grow” (Appendix A) the men also need to evolve; the risk is that if the men's mentality is not changed, they will be unequipped to deal with women who are self-sufficient and therefore no longer submissive, leading to possibly dangerous situations, and the status quo remaining unchanged. The mission's efforts are focused on fulfilling the need for a “common growth” for all, because, from a development point of view (section 3.1), that is what is most effective.

In regards to ever achieving gender empowerment, in the words of Sr. Salazar:

“Total empowerment may be a utopia, but it is this utopia, which sometimes seems unattainable, that drives us to continue taking steps to transform habits and beliefs, to break the barriers of language and to understand that our actions now will forge paths of openness for those women who will take over from us”. (Appendix A).

And thus, there is reason to believe that the work that the nuns are doing at the mission, despite the disadvantages brought by factors both internal (a background of socio-cultural misogyny) and external (hurricane Dai, the covid-19 pandemic) will continue to strive to achieve gender empowerment with all the resources at their disposal. And one such resource may well be helping to shape the discourse around them, since the positive conception of gender terminology surrounding “women”, “womanhood” and “femininity”, that is passed on from the shareholders to the stakeholders that constitutes an enabler of gender empowerment just as valuable as any material one.

8.2 How does it affect the stakeholders' reality?

Jan Nederveen Pieterse argues that it is widely assumed, in the context of social science, that realities are constructed socially (Pieterse, 2010). The way that people talk and about “social realities” affects laws and the ways they are interpreted as well as policies and thus, it is no longer a question of perception merely registering reality, it becomes a form of shaping it. Similarly, knowledge itself does not only reflect reality, it constructs it (ibid.).

“Theory is a meeting place of ideology, politics and explanation. Framing, defining the field, the rank order of questions, are the business of theory. Is development theory a matter of social science or of politics?”
(Pieterse, 2010 p. 3)

This is the starting point for the consideration of this specific theory in this thesis: development is the lens through which to view the efforts of gender empowerment in the Beira mission. And through their combined efforts on a discourse level and on a material one, they are indeed shaping the stakeholders' reality, arguably for the better.

According to the head of the mission, Sr. Fontana, the most effective means to achieve gender empowerment appears to be a combination of giving women more spaces to express

themselves through a “50/50 representation of women, even when they are seen as second class citizens” (Appendix A), and doing so by constantly monitoring the opportunities for small expedients and loopholes that can be used to this end within all spaces of the community. This is not unlike what Sen theorised about freedom in relation to development, since they both have the same goal: to improve the quality of life of everyone involved. (Sen, 2000(section 2.1)

The more evident impact on the stakeholders' reality is, of course, the material output of gender empowerment efforts like the “Tabita” project, something that is supported by research that confirms that having some form of economic self-sufficiency makes it possible for women to leave abusive partners and situations of domestic violence (Kabeer, 1997), since “work is [...] useful for escaping poverty” (ibid.).

Moreover the mission’s independent efforts appear to be in line with the objectives set by the The 2019 “Annual Trends and Outlook Report on gender equality in rural africa: from commitments to outcomes” which states that “[Achieving gender equality] means paying attention to both women and men, and not just to women alone.” A sentiment that echoes that of Sr. Fontana when she refers to “continuously reflecting with the men about valuing the women present in their lives” (Appendix A) while dealing with male staff at the university because, as of today, they still fill the majority of the higher positions.

The fact that the concept of “gender empowerment is not African” (Appendix A) does not mean that the people of Mozambique would not benefit as a whole from the most vulnerable members of society being uplifted through it. There are “many beautiful things and matriarchal cultures [in Africa]” (ibid.) but the reality remains that of patriarchal structures upholding all aspects of Africans’ everyday life. However, as amply demonstrated in chapter 7, many important aspects of that life are “in the hands of women” (ibid.) that is precisely the reason why this particular mission focuses on women in order to generally uplift the entire population and mitigate the effects of poverty. Proof of that comes from observing how the women use their savings: they are the only ones that do not keep or spend all of the money they make on themselves, but instead choose to set some aside for their children, to ensure they have a future (Appendix A), thus confirming one of Sr. Fontana’s favourite expressions: “To promote women” our interview concludes “ is to promote a more human and solidarity based economy” (ibid.). This is the nexus between faith, feminism and development that permits the social redemption in the area around

the mission: a more humane, more solidary economy, because its main actors (the women) do not neglect or overlook anyone.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the efforts of gender empowerment that the Ursuline nuns are making within their mission can be directly traced back to their own religious *charism*, as well as to their personal convictions and beliefs about gender equality. The combination of the two is what underpins their gender mainstreaming attitude and, arguably, the positive effect on the women surrounding the mission that come in contact with them. While it may seem perhaps even too unconventional for mainstream practices, this thesis would like to highlight the advantages of founding gender empowerment efforts on a strong personal faith in the cause, rather than an adherence to, for example, arbitrarily inserting Sustainable Development Goal number 5 (sdgs.un.org) in a project not designed with gender empowerment in mind.

The Ursuline nuns' grassroots approach to gender empowerment on multiple levels, the discursive one, the material aid one and the educational one, has the opportunity and potential to make real change in the lives of the women targeted by their efforts, truly shaping their social relations (section 2.2.1), materially helping them with their health and in their efforts to escape poverty. Testimony of the success of these efforts, such as the fact that some women are able to save the money, for themselves and their families, that they earned thanks to one of the mission's projects (section 8.2) can be considered a form of proof and rudimentary impact assessment needed to justify exploring the topic further.

Gender empowerment is indeed a vector of development (section 1), and the search for alternative solutions that may prove to be more sustainable in the long run than some current mainstream ones, is one worth considering without biases, secular or otherwise. And although they are of more difficult formats to track, people working and researching in the field of development should not underestimate the importance of non-formal, non-traditional practices of gender empowerment especially those made by women for other women.

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