

PROCESSES OF ETHNIC AND CULTURAL MARGINALISATION IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA. THE CASE OF THE AMAKHUWA OF MOZAMBIQUE

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ABSTRACT

Although the ethnic question has never been an explicit element in the construction of the Mozambican State, it has always characterised the country's public life with relevant but generally disregarded tensions. During the liberation struggle, two ethnic groups allied, the “intellectuals” Ronga and the Makonde “guerrillas”, excluding the other peoples of Mozambique from this process that would indelibly mark the history of the post-colonial country. In the socialist era, the motto “kill the tribe to make the nation” continued to procrastinate “ethnic disregard”, prefiguring an unsuccessful attempt to impose the authoritarian socialist model formulated by the Ronga and Machangana onto the rest of the country. The same situation occurred with the democratic turn of the 1990s. Faced with formal pluralism, the elements of power, as well as prioritised cultural and artistic elements, were, once again, those produced in the south (timbila and marrabenta) and in the north, by the Makonde (mapiko and sculptures), to the detriment of other peoples, including the Amakhuwa, the most populous group in Mozambique. International donors and researchers contributed to this process of ethnic marginalisation by accepting and developing the agenda proposed by the Liberation Front of Mozambique, interpreting traditional practices, such as initiation rites, as violations of human rights. The research presented here explains how this long process of ethnic disregard was, in fact, a political program designed and implemented from the beginning of the liberation struggle and continued, with adaptations, until today, directly influencing the diffusion of local cultural and artistic production. The approach used is historical in nature, intermixed with analyses of Mozambique's political and cultural policies.

KEYWORDS

ethnic disregard, national identity, marginalisation, artistic production

PROCESSOS DE MARGINALIZAÇÃO ÉTNICA E CULTURAL NA ÁFRICA PÓS-COLONIAL. O CASO DOS AMAKHUWA DE MOÇAMBIQUE

RESUMO

Apesar de a questão étnica nunca ter constituído um elemento explícito na construção do Estado moçambicano, esta sempre caracterizou a vida pública do país, com tensões relevantes,

mas geralmente negligenciadas. Durante a luta de libertação, dois grupos étnicos aliaram-se, os “intelectuais” ronga e os “guerrilheiros” maconde, de facto excluindo os outros povos de Moçambique deste processo que irá marcar indelevelmente a história do país pós-colonial. Na época socialista, o lema “matar a tribo para fazer a nação” continuou a procrastinar o “esquecimento étnico”, prefigurando uma tentativa, malsucedida, de impor o modelo socialista autoritário formulado pelos ronga e machangana a todo o resto do país. A mesma situação se deu com a viragem democrática da década de 1990. Neste caso, diante de um pluralismo formal, os elementos de poder, assim como culturais e artísticos privilegiados foram, mais uma vez, os produzidos no sul (timbila e marrabenta) e no norte, pelos maconde (mapiko e esculturas), em detrimento de outros povos, entre os quais os amakhuwa, o grupo numericamente maioritário em Moçambique. Para este processo de marginalização étnica contribuíram doadores e investigadores internacionais, que aceitaram e desenvolveram a pauta proposta pela Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, interpretando práticas tradicionais como os ritos de iniciação sob o ponto de vista da violação dos direitos humanos. A pesquisa aqui apresentada traz evidências de como este longo processo de esquecimento étnico foi, em boa verdade, um programa político pensado e implementado desde a luta de libertação e que continuou, com as necessárias adaptações, até hoje, influenciando diretamente na difusão da produção cultural e artística local. A abordagem usada foi de tipo histórico, com contínuos cruzamentos com a análise política e as políticas culturais de Moçambique.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

esquecimento étnico, identidade nacional, marginalização, produção artística

1. INTRODUCTION

The formation of modern States has gone through complex processes, leaning toward bureaucratic-administrative centralisation and the exaltation of common elements among the various peoples that make up the new political entity. In the case of Europe, this process was constructed through the merging of different territories, with different laws, different habits and, sometimes, different languages (Gustafsson, 1998). Therefore, the modern European State was formed from this mosaic, following a long journey that began with the dissolution of the two main medieval institutions — feudalism and the empire(s). War was one of the weapons used to define the European State towards forming a national ideology necessary to unify the young nations ideologically. In a very simplistic way, this is how the modern nation was “invented” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

The process of formation of the African nation-States was at the same time both faster and more diversified. Only after the end of the World War II did most African territories under colonial rule achieve their independence. It was faster because these territories became independent, usually with no need to take up arms, in a short period of time. The main exceptions were the former Portuguese colonies, which underwent bloody liberation struggles to gain independence from Lisbon. Moreover, the process was diversified due to the varied inclinations of the former metropolises. France, for example, forced African nationalists to take up arms to gain independence in a few cases (such as Algeria), while it chose to negotiate in almost all other circumstances.

Soon after independence, nation-building began to be constructed on an invented history based on old traditions used to justify a unity achieved without bloodshed. That

is the case of Ghana: the seminal study by Kimble (1963) reveals that nationalist or proto-nationalist tendencies began to appear as early as 1852, during the first supratribal movements in the territory of the Gold Coast. According to classic studies of this West African nation (Coleman, 1958), that is also the case in Nigeria. Nationalism and its narrative served to unite both linguistically and culturally various populations against both external and internal threats; such is the case of Ethiopia, one of the symbols of African resistance against the Europeans (Gebrewold, 2009).

The African countries colonised by Portugal had to take up arms to gain their political independence. This “naturally” gave these countries as much as they needed to build a feeling of nationalism, something the other African countries were not to have. Even so, their historical-nationalist narratives somehow sought to establish links between the resistance developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Campos, 2016; Gonçalves, 1999; Monteiro, 2011) and the more recent struggles against the Portuguese colonials. The historical narrative of these new independent nations was constructed, according to official historiography, with the building of the liberation movements in these three countries: in 1956 for both the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, respectively, and 1962 for the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo). Starting from the “founding act”, the construction of a narrative made of epics, heroes, victims of Luso-Fascist colonialism, internal traitors, remarkable moments and dates began. That was a relatively simple exercise, which led to the construction of official historiography that remains, in these countries, unchanged until today, with attempts at criticism hardly acknowledged in the public space of these nations, as demonstrated by the case of Mozambique as discussed here (Bussotti & Jacquinet, 2021; Khan, 2016).

The article presented here is based on an essential assumption: like any process of building a new nation, there was in the Mozambican case also the tendency, as will be described below, to enhance the presuppositions of national unity starting from a symbolic bond that the liberation struggle brought to peoples as diverse as those living in the geographic space of Mozambique (Dambile, 2014). An alliance of two ethnic groups carried this out: the Machangana and Maronga from the south, who dominated the formation of Frelimo, led by Eduardo Mondlane until he died in 1969; then continued under the leadership of Samora Moisés Machel. It was only in the election of the new president that ethnic cleavages stood out clearly (Ncomo, 2003); Makonde guerrillas from Cabo Delgado formed a second group. They took on such an important role that it was impossible not to recognise them as having an important place within Frelimo. The slogan of the “liberators” was that no allusion should be made to the ethnic components that were forming the new Mozambican nation, giving priority to national identity, “Mozambicanity”, still to be invented. This operation passed the temporal space of the liberation struggle, permeated the socialist experience of Samora Machel, and continued, with the given differences, to manifest itself until today, even after the democratic opening of the 1990s.

In various circumstances and by different international actors, Mozambique has been used as a model, first of an Afro-socialist experience, then as an example of

pacification and democratisation. In a socialist era, as recorded by Macagno (2009), the ideal of the “new man” corresponded perfectly to what many South American exiles in Mozambique, as well as European researchers, mainly Italians, had in mind as a rescue model for the peoples of the south of the world, disseminating this image in their own countries. These intellectuals looked with extreme suspicion at ethnic issues. The most prestigious magazine of that time, *Estudos Moçambicanos*, produced by the Center for African Studies at Eduardo Mondlane University, never mentioned ethnic matters, adopting class or historical perspectives instead (Bussotti, 2006). With the democratic opening, starting in the 1990s, the disillusionment of intellectuals and leftist movements was counterbalanced by “new friends”, the liberals of the international financial community. They also spread the idea of Mozambique as a successful case for the African continent internationally. One of the many examples of this trend can be found in an important text that compares the Namibian peace and reconciliation process with Mozambique (Paris, 2004). This document attributes the stability and peacefulness of the Mozambique case to the fact that the civil war that ended in 1992 was the fruit of international work that brought it about, ignoring completely the internal reasons that also contributed to that conflict. Liberal policies and later the democratic opening will also have contributed considerably to the country’s stabilisation.

The ideologies changed, but the internal scenario remained practically unchanged. Once again, donors (this time western and liberal) financed a “development industry” made up of large private investments associated with the funding of local non-governmental organisations according to agendas generally defined by these same donors (Macamo, 2006), esteeming those cultural manifestations and artistic activities indicated by Frelimo as priorities and very limited to particular geographic areas and ethnic groups. Particularly the regions of Sofala (with the presence of Ndau and Sena), Nampula (with the presence almost exclusively of the Amakhuwa) and Zambézia (with the Amakhuwa and Machuabo), all territories hostile to Frelimo, were penalised in this process of giving importance to local cultures, which received only cosmetic measures, for instance, the declaration of the first capital of Mozambique, the Island of Mozambique, as a world heritage site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

This research, in the perspective of “ethnic disregard”, will first focus on the mechanisms that led to the exclusion of the ethnic agenda in Mozambique, then demonstrate how the ethnic groups outside the Machangana–Makonde alliance, especially the numerically majority group, the Amakhuwa (almost 30% of the country’s population), were marginalised, even in their artistic productions, thanks also to the support of the international community.

2. THE DISREGARDED ETHNIC QUESTION. A BRIEF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In 1975, when Mozambique gained its independence, there was no Mozambican nation, but only a very vast territory, left as a legacy of Portuguese colonialism. The idea of a Mozambican nation had to be completely “invented” not only from a material point

of view but also and above all, from an ideological and spiritual point of view. A very old and well-known debate has caused “a lot of ink to flow” from the pens of distinguished scholars from Mozambique with different ideas. Indeed, where Cahen (1994) argues that Mozambique was (and probably still is) a “State without a nation”, Elísio Macamo (1996) challenges some of the supposed indicators used by Cahen to reach this conclusion. Both authors, however, find a (single) point of convergence: Frelimo, in its “fever to unite” (Macamo, 1996, p. 356), neglected the “ethnic question”. Lacking a common foundation for the peoples of Mozambique, some authors have argued that Mozambican identity emerged, at least in the first phase, as a result of their opposition to Portuguese colonialism (Landgraf, 2014), with its increasingly worse violence and its segregationist policy (Cabaço, 2007). An identity, therefore, developed out of opposition, as in many similar circumstances it has happened elsewhere.

The construction of a nation consists, in general, of three great moments. The first is based on consolidating a united identity and common heritage. It is the phase that Anderson (1983) called an “imagined community”, made of myths, heroes, and symbolic places. Next, the State begins valuing local and ethnic identities, starting from the various languages and cultures present in the national territory and including artistic and musical expressions. Finally, in the third phase, the state begins to disseminate national and local cultural productions, according to a posture of “cultural democracy”, to involve the greatest possible number of people and groups belonging to the nation-state (Landgraf, 2014).

These three phases are not particularly linear and depend on the institutions’ approach toward their citizens and how citizens identify with their proposals.

However, in the case of the African reality and the Mozambican reality, the three phases mentioned above need a radical revision: the “democratic” culture diffusion phase has never been attained in Mozambique. Today it is a country considered non-democratic, authoritarian, even about opinions and artistic expression (Statista, n.d.). And secondly, ignorance of the ethnic question has crystallised power relations, including cultural manifestations, which continue to this day. Therefore, the country never got beyond the first of those phases, with “incursions” into the second and third due to the 1990s democratic opening. As Macamo (1996) recalls, ever since the socialist era, the State has organised music and dance festivals showing the ethnic, linguistic and cultural richness of the Mozambican mosaic; rather than spontaneous or democratic expression, the regime has placed artistic expression and cultural activities at the service of politics and ideology. Especially in the centre and north, these “policies proved to be extremely insensitive to the rites, values and temporalities that constitute the identities of those peoples” (Landgraf, 2014, p. 15).

3. DISREGARD IN ACT: NOTES ON THE ETHNIC QUESTION IN MOZAMBIKAN POLITICS

The act of forgetting the ethnic question by the Mozambican state (to use the benevolent expression of Macamo, 1996) was not just an institutional matter, limited to

government action. On the contrary, it was pervasive and, with few exceptions, crossed the various spheres of political, social and cultural life in the country.

In political terms, the bases of the post-colonial nation-building process are found in the Samorian socialist ideology, based on a key concept: a “new man” free from exploitation either by colonialism or modern capitalism, but solidary, anti-tribal, anti-regionalist and anti-religious (Cabaço, 2007). The crusade against “traditions” began very early, under the slogan “kill the tribe to give birth to the nation”, meaning it would be necessary to eliminate any kind of cultural and linguistic difference for a new nation to emerge from the ashes of exploitative colonialism (Macagno, 2009; Nhantumbo, 2020).

A tribe kills itself, above all, by eliminating its most visible manifestation, its language. The choice of Portuguese as the official language would have seemed to be obvious and necessary, despite later criticisms not historically grounded (Mariani, 2011). However, the young Mozambican State went further: in practice, it wanted to “encourage the fight against the use of the mother tongue in the sectors of collective life and work” in diverse environments, ranging from professional activities to schools and sports and cultural activities (Cossa, 2007, p. 71). For example, on the school grounds, it was strictly forbidden for students to communicate in their mother tongue — in this case, emakhuwa. Sometimes, even the parent of a student found to speak their mother tongue was summoned, as happened personally to one of the authors of this article in Nampula. This type of student was labeled as undisciplined and possibly punished. That was the most revealing aspect of the centralising and culturicidal intentions of the Mozambican socialist State, according to an ideological standpoint that would “repeat (...) the same assimilationist and intolerant grammar in the face of cultural particularisms” as the colonial state had done (Macagno, 2009, p. 21). Although with a greater degree of tolerance and the opening of some Bantu linguistics courses in a few public universities in the country, mainly Eduardo Mondlane, this scenario did not undergo major changes even after the democratic turn of the 1990s.

The second dimension of nation-building and tribe elimination is the school. Law 4/1983 (Lei n.º 4/1983, 1983) established the national education system to combat local languages and practices, such as traditional marriage. At the linguistic level, this was done through teaching in Portuguese, conveying the principles of Marxism-Leninism. The “new man” had to take root in this modernising and “enlightenment” project, which the teacher had to transmit to his students with a “prescriptive, previously designed and articulated” teacher training curriculum: in short, an imposition impossible to oppose (Nhantumbo, 2020, p. 611). With the democratic opening, the vision of the first 15 years of independence underwent some changes: the national education system was updated through Law 6/1992 (Lei n.º 6/1992, 1992), but, regarding the acceptance and promotion of teaching in local languages, the achievements have been limited: while it is true that, in Gaza and Tete, pilot experiments were launched for bilingual Portuguese-local language teaching, it should be noted that, until today, these are pilot projects that have remained isolated, without their institutionalisation at the national level (Nhantumbo, 2020). Even in the third law that regulates education in Mozambique, Law 18/2018 (Lei

n.º 18/2018, 2018), the dimension of local cultures and languages did not make great advances, leaving the ethnic issue still omitted. In parallel, the school textbook was shaped according to the historical narratives that the socialist revolution needed, becoming a prime means of building the “new man” (Borges & Mindoso, 2018). Until today, manuals, mainly on national history, have hardly been changed, praising the epic of liberation and the heroes that made Mozambique independent.

The third and final political dimension relevant for this study concerns cultural policy in the strict sense. Here too, the process of centralisation and forgetting of the ethnic question was evident. Cultural study centres and cultural houses were created in 1977, both under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture. Above all, the cultural houses had the objective of spreading the national culture, therefore the ideal of the “new man” and the modern Mozambican nation (Borges, 2001). After 1983, with the approval of laws disrespectful of human rights (Nhaueleque, 2020), the authoritarianism of a State threatened by an increasingly aggressive civil war was translated, in cultural terms, into the extinction of the Ministry of Culture, whose sector became a secretary of state, only to be classified as a ministry again in 1987. Institutional changes in culture have continued until today, a sign of the Mozambican government’s uncertainty about how to approach this matter. A change of some importance took place in 1997, with the approval of Resolution 12/97 (Resolução n.º 12/97, 1997), the first to define the country’s cultural strategy. Despite recognising religious and ethnic diversity, funding to put these guidelines into practice has been modest. The plan 2006–2010/2011 itself (Bussotti & Gundane, 2019) intended to promote and value Mozambican culture, but still with “culture” in the singular sense and with the intent to promote patriotism. During this period, the then-president Guebuza, in a speech delivered at the “National Festival of Culture”, re-emphasised the relevance of culture (singular) as a means of achieving national unity (Bussotti & Gundane, 2019), thus giving it a secondary role. In truth, politicisation and weakening of local cultural manifestations continued, albeit with slightly different modalities, even after the democratic opening. An example of this weakening dates back to 1978. At the time of the first “National Festival of Popular Dance” (2–3 July 1978, Maputo), groups that addressed social issues were penalised compared to those that dealt with political and patriotic issues (Chibanga, 2019). Today, traditional singing and dancing groups are often used to witness official ceremonies without any reference to their epistemologies, values and traditions, becoming objects of mere folklore to satisfy the demands of the political power of the day.

4. DISREGARD IN ACT AND OVERCOMING IT: THE ETHNIC QUESTION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL STUDIES

Should the ethnic question be excluded from the political agenda in the socialist period, including the research of social scientists closest to the government, the scenario would somewhat be different when considering the literature related to the social sciences after the democratic opening. In this case, traditional practices became the object

of scientific study, as demonstrated by investigations around lobolo, initiation rites, religions and traditional medicines.

The work of social scientists concerning the ethnic question in Mozambique and how it has been ignored since independence, however, seems to have followed a clear direction: on the one hand, some scholars focus on traditional practices in the south; on the other hand, attention has been drawn to the traditional rites of the north, in particular of the Makhuwa and, in part, Makonde culture. The space available here does not allow for as deep an analysis as this subject deserves, as it intersects with national and international power dynamics relevant in post-socialist Mozambique, which have helped to legitimise, once again, Frelimo's political monopoly and has been directly connected to the aforementioned "development industry".

This industry has brought Mozambique some central approaches to studying ethnic issues. Issues for which Frelimo does not have much sympathy but which paradoxically have ended up legitimising the Maronga/Machangana–Makonde foundational alliance.

The first perspective used in the study of traditional practices concerns human rights. This perspective — already evident in the new constitution of 1990 — was strengthened in Mozambican civil society after the foundation of the Mozambican Human Rights League in 1995, whose central figure was, for a long time, Alice Mabote.

This general approach to human rights was associated with a more specific approach to women's rights from a gender, feminist and western perspective. It was mainly promoted by the Nordic countries and their organisations (e.g., Oxfam or IBIS), which had already found relatively fertile ground, mainly in Maputo. Indeed, Frelimo had historically attributed importance to the role of women based on figures that were mythologised throughout the armed struggle; above all, Josina Machel, the first wife of Samora Machel, who died during the armed struggle in Dar es Salaam in 1971. The importance of this was reflected in the founding of the Mozambican Women's Organization in 1973, the main operational arm for recruiting and placing women within Frelimo. The Organization of Mozambican Women has always been a typically urban organisation, frequented by many Mozambican intellectuals, some of whom went on to found another organisation with strong ties to Frelimo (especially in the early years) but formally autonomous: the Fórum Mulher, which emerged in 1993 (Nipassa, 2020), and whose founders were renowned individuals in Mozambique, such as Isabel Casimiro, Teresa Cruz e Silva, and Ximena Andrade. Along the same lines as feminism, but with a more investigative approach, is the Women and Law in Southern Africa (WSLA) Mozambique, created in 1989, probably the central reference for studies on gender in Mozambique, mainly in the area of sexual and social rights, reproductive disorders and gender violence.

That was the atmosphere at the beginning of the democratic turn in Mozambique. One of the great advantages was that in the early 1990s, the tradition of socio-anthropological studies on ethnic issues was almost non-existent. As mentioned above, socialist Frelimo did not have this issue on its agenda, so the main references continued to be linked to two schools, which were often intertwined; feminist-inspired researchers in the 1990s intended to fight and overcome two things: on the one hand, the colonial school

and, on the other, the missionary school (Junod, 1898; Martinez, 1989; Nhaueleque, 2020; Thomaz, 2012). The emphasis on human rights and, above all, women's rights, with a feminist, Eurocentric perspective and aiming to create changes that were expected to be desirable, therefore represented a powerful theoretical weapon through which to interpret traditional practices.

The most active research institution in this area was WSLA Mozambique, which has published several books and a newsletter, *Outras Vozes* (Other Voices), in which the organisation's themes are addressed more synthetically, with a journalistic and popular style. It is possible to emphasise that there are three fields of investigative interest on the part of the WSLA: above all, the role of women in the electoral process and elections; second, domestic violence; and, finally, other publications on women's issues within specific contexts, mainly in the north of the country, such as a publication on discrimination and human rights of women in Pemba and the initiation rites (Osório & Cruz e Silva, 2018; Osório & Macuácuá, 2013).

The merit of this group of researchers is undeniable in raising awareness of the violence that women tend to suffer daily in the Mozambican reality, as other activist movements mentioned above boosted the approval of laws and public policies in favour of women. The consideration of traditional practices in the north of the country, above all the initiation rites, however, served to support a preconceived thesis rather than an understanding of the meaning of those rites for the women involved and society as a whole.

The preconceived thesis that was put forward was that the rites had a direct relationship with dropping out of school because, once undergoing the ritual, the girls preferred to stop studying to marry, usually older men. That is a thesis that had already been contradicted by previous research, incidentally also carried out by researchers whose adherence to feminism is not the question.

Signe Arnfred (2015), for example, had shown that, during socialism, initiation rites in the north were considered so backward that several campaigns carried the motto "down with initiation rites" (p. 186). Furthermore, the reaction of the Amakhuwa women was clear, according to the interviews that the researcher carried out: frustration due to the impediment imposed by Frelimo and loss of those community relationships that constituted one of the central elements of the rites.

More recent studies have demonstrated that it is not possible to establish a direct relationship between school dropouts, early marriages, unwanted pregnancies and initiation rites. This fact was confirmed through investigations carried out by this article's co-author in Nampula (Nhaueleque, 2020) and in the recent publication by the National Institute of Statistics regarding the reasons for dropping out of school. Assuming that school dropouts tended to be higher in all northern provinces than in the others, the reasons people gave referred to different elements of initiation rites. According to the majority of respondents who stopped studying, school "is useless", "is too expensive", or "is too far away" (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2021). Also, according to this survey, school dropouts that are the most closely related to early pregnancy issues are more frequent in the south, namely in Gaza, than in the north.

Other studies carried out by international organisations have also considered such practices harmful. For example, according to the study carried out by a Dutch non-governmental organisation, Yes I do, the traditional practices would contribute to the high number of child marriages in Nampula, disregarding the fact that there could be economic factors imposed on families, for example, of seeing marriage as the only way out of poverty by reducing the number of mouths to feed (Pires & Baatsen, 2018). Likewise, initiation rites are considered among the principal factors used to explain the high rate of adolescent marriages in the country:

dangerous customary practices such as initiation rites have negatively affected the sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls in the country. Under the guise of initiation rites, these young girls are thought to be ready to become good wives. (Coligação para a Eliminação dos Casamentos Prematuros, 2020, p. 5)

Such superficial approaches, which make initiation rites an easy way to explain any social and cultural behaviour among the Amakhuwa, have strongly conditioned the representation of this culture both inside and outside Mozambique, avoiding, once again, a search for understanding its specificity and complexity.

Faced with this scenario, which has resulted in the epistemological impoverishment of the culture and language prevailing in Mozambique (emakhuwa), the approach was different in the south. “Situational analysis” is the standpoint generally adopted for studies of traditional southern practices. Both lobolo and syncretic cults, such as those of the Zione Church, received views of authentic gnoseological interest, seeking to extract the knowledge, epistemologies, and practices that such manifestations contained (Bagnol, 2008; Fernandes, 2018; Granjo, 2004; Honwana, 2002). In some circumstances, lobolo was even considered an expression of the resistance of local societies to both colonialism and repression by the Mozambican socialist state (Furquim, 2016).

If these studies have brought new knowledge to a field that was not much researched until the 1990s, there has been little research dedicated to other practices, certainly less peaceful and more violent, in the south of the country. For example, *kutchinga* has not been the subject of as many studies as lobolo. This form of levirate consists of the widow’s need to sleep (i.e., have sexual relations) with one of the brothers (preferably, alternatively, some relative) of her recently deceased husband. After this ceremony, according to local healers, necessary in terms of purification, usually, the two will marry, regardless of whether the man is already married or not: polygamy, especially in Gaza, by the way, the province where Frelimo always got the most votes throughout the country is a usual practice, so the issue does not represent any problem in that society. *Kutchinga* was only formally banned in 2012 (but to this day, it continues to be partially practised). Not because of the obvious violations and traumas it caused the subjugated women (Amadeu, 2021) — who, if they did not agree, were expelled from their husband’s house, losing all family possessions — but rather for contributing to the spread of immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS; *Ritual que Propaga a*

SIDA Interditado em Moçambique, 2012). In short, the formal ban on *kutchinga* had to do with public health rather than the widow's rights to freedom of choice. The government, social scientists and donors, nationals and foreigners have carefully addressed that. In central Mozambique, *kutchinga*-like practices (such as *pita-kufa*) have also been poorly studied and are generally related to reproductive health issues (fighting HIV/AIDS) rather than the violation of women's rights (Colher, 2017).

5. DISREGARD AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN MAKHUWA CULTURE

Initiation rites represent only the most visible element of how Makhuwa culture has been approached by researchers whose main objective was to demonstrate preconceived theses on gender issues without having a holistic view of that same culture. The same has been verified about cultural and artistic production.

In this case, the interests of Frelimo and the cultural industry found a “natural” confluence, so to speak, without major contradictions. Since the foreign institutions had limited knowledge of the Mozambican cultural mosaic, the local institutions guided the research agenda, leading, once again, to the prioritising of cultural productions from the south of the country.

Some facts seem unimportant and even lack enough background to appear in a text that purports to be scientific. These are curiosities derived from common sense and very present for those who experience the reality of Mozambique daily. On the one hand, there are typical expressions that even some foreigners have already learned: the *xingondo* designate those who live north of the Save River as inferior and who must subordinate themselves to the superior civilisation of the Maronga and Machangana of the south; the *khanimambo*, “thank you” in Changana language, which was made national, without considering that this term in central and northern Mozambique does not even exist; finally, the entire construct created around the Mmakhuwa woman, at the same time beautiful, mysterious and dangerous, using *mussiro* and knowing the ancestral secrets of witchcraft (Araújo, 2019).

Such a folkloric vision of the culture and the Mmakhuwa woman reveals a central aspect of the construction of the Mozambican national identity: the almost complete lack of knowledge of this culture, its traditions and beliefs.

The two major investments that the Mozambican government made to enhance its artistic expressions, even outside the country, were concentrated, in the south, on marabenta and timbila. The timbila is a percussion instrument from the xylophone family, originally from Zavala, Inhambane province, from the Chope ethnic group, where, until today, there is a significant production of this instrument.

Zavala and, in general, Inhambane did not have a very good reputation among other Mozambicans, as the rumour had always been that the “manhambanes” had collaborated too closely with the colonial regime, precisely because of their history of timbila. In fact, several timbila groups were brought to Lisbon between the 1950s and 1960s, while in Mozambique, orchestras based on this instrument were often used to honour important

institutional figures, such as the governors-general. The characterisation of the Chope ethnic group as *timbileiros* always available to play for the regime did not help them to acquire a different status from the other Blacks (“indigenous”), but “they began to receive a special reputation” (Morais, 2020, p. 270). With the international fame acquired during the colonial period, the Frelimo leadership’s knowledge about the timbila was enough for the socialist State to prize it as a national heritage. Thus, at the “First National Festival of Traditional Song and Music” (held in 1980), timbila took the lead. The timbila, purged of its relations with the Portuguese colonial administration, became the first symbol of the cultural unity of the Mozambican people. This instrument acquired such importance that its image was placed on the first meticais note, replacing the Portuguese shield (Morais, 2020). Therefore, it was not difficult to imagine the reasons for the choice of the Mozambican government when, in 2004, it had to launch the candidacy of one of its artistic productions to be evaluated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The approval of this instrument as an intangible heritage of humanity came in 2005. Until today, the Chope timbila represents one of the cultural symbols of the country’s unity: a symbol that comes from the south, however, which is hardly known or acknowledged by the populations of the north.

The other element of the culture of the south of the country that took on national value was the marrabenta. Despite never having acquired the status of the timbila in national politics, more recently, the marrabenta has undergone a reevaluation of its rhythms and its two main exponents, Fany Mpfumo and Dillon Djindji. Also, in this case, the transition of this local dance and music (Maputo) onto the national stage was relatively simple. In the socialist period, the greatest obstacle was the mixture that marrabenta made of the traditional rhythms of southern Mozambique with other western rhythms, which aggravated the socialist elite of that time. However, the same elite invested in marrabenta as national music, including investigations carried out by students and teachers of the only higher music course in the country, which opened in the School of Communication and Arts of Eduardo Mondlane University at the end of the 2000s. Marrabenta was considered the rhythm of “periurban” and nationalist intellectuals, such as José Craveirinha, Noémia de Souza, Bertina Lopes and Luís Bernardo Honwana, all from Maputo (Laranjeira, 2010), as Cabaço himself (2007) emphasizes. This relatively late process of nationalisation of marrabenta is effectively represented by the Mozambican, Rui Guerra Laranjeira (2010): who declared it “the main musical rhythm of Mozambique” (para. 7). The testimonies that the Brazilian Conceição (2021) collected in Maputo from artists who experienced the evolution of marrabenta confirm what was said above. Musicians such as Wazimbo, for example, despite recognising the existence of other musical rhythms in various corners of the country, argue that marrabenta was the only music with sufficient strength “to become a Mozambican rhythm with national identity” (Conceição, 2021, p. 17). That is due to a meticulous political choice and the artistic merits of this music.

In the north, the most valued artistic productions were those of Makonde origin, which, it should be remembered, represent a minority even within the only Mozambican province where these people live stably: there are about 250,000 individuals living in

the Cabo Delgado Plateau, a province that has about 1,500,000 inhabitants, the vast majority of whom are Amakhuwa, followed by Kimwane and Swahili. The mapiko dance is probably the most famous manifestation of this ethnic group. It is a dance that follows a particular musical beat in which men in very elaborate masks dance to establish a bond between the living and the dead, material and spiritual, evoking the ancestors and expressing their visions about being in the world. Given its construction of a nationalist narrative in which the Makonde were the protagonists of much of the armed struggle for independence, the mapiko, with the transformations it had undergone since colonial times (Lopes, 2019), was immediately taken over by the socialist regime. On the other hand, the mapiko was “socialistized”, with masks that depicted Makonde military heroes or other allegorical characters representing the civic virtues of that time (Lopes, 2019). Makonde women, who also played an important role in the armed struggle, were allowed to participate in this dance. From this point forth, mapiko never ceased being a reference to Mozambican national unity. It became the subject of international research for its remarkable artistic and anthropological value and because the Maputo government politically directed it. The same is true of the Makonde sculpture, valued internationally.

These cultural policy options are one of the main expressions of the indirect marginalisation of the artistic production of ethnic groups other than the Machangana and Maronga, and the Makonde. The Makhwa ethnic group has always felt excluded from the process of national unification, and the situation did not improve very soon after independence. For example, in the province of Nampula, the appointed administrators came, for the most part, from the south: Francisco Munguambe, of Chope ethnicity, was sent to administer Malema; Alberto Vasco Matavele, Changana, was appointed to coordinate the Provincial Services of Agriculture in Nampula, Vicente Lourenço Matavel, Changana, went to direct the Cotton Company of Nampula. As someone has highlighted, these were not particularly qualified administrators who had completed, at the most, elementary school, but people who were faithful to the socialist regime and, above all, from the Maronga ethnic group (Lavieque, 2020).

In Zambézia, in 1978, the same pattern occurred, with local populations complaining that the appointed administrators were all from the south (Chichava, 2008). The scenario did not change after changes in 1990 when small political parties with an openly federalist inspiration were formed between Zambézia and Nampula, which tried unsuccessfully to cast the ethnic question back into the mould of the new democracy. The political astuteness of Frelimo also contributed to this failure, which included a policy of co-optation. What happened with Rosário Mualeia in Nampula is an example. From secretary-general of the Association for the Development of Nampula, he was appointed governor of that province and then, after having performed the duties of deputy minister of tourism, he became president of the Ports and Railways of Mozambique.

However, the cancellation of troublesome voices through co-option did not resolve the ethnic question. The Makhwa ethnic group continued to feel a deep sense of exclusion from Mozambican public life, as the electoral results favoured the Mozambican

National Resistance demonstrated and the adherence of many young Amakhuwa to the Cabo Delgado insurgency.

The marginalisation of their cultural production directly reflects the construction of a nation-state based on the alliance between Maronga and Makonde. Studies on Makhuwa's artistic production are very limited. That is a curious fact that cannot be explained from a scientific point of view, as this culture has expressed, over time, songs and dances as relevant as the marrabenta: for example, tufo, of Arab-Swahili influence, n'sope, nakhula, nsiripwiti, rumba, among others, more Bantu-style rhythms, have interested western scholars as little as the Maputo government, except for a publication that aimed to get to know the tufa to make it fit better within the socialist ideology of the time (Ministério da Educação e Cultura, 1980). Probably, the cultural expressions cited above were too distant from Makhuwa cultural miscegenation to include its complex epistemology, which had (and continues to have) in these artistic expressions, as well as in the initiation rites, in the practices of traditional medicine and the role of women, an essential reference of an "other" vision of the world.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The epistemicide that Boaventura de Sousa Santos often talks about (Santos & Meneses, 2009) in terms of the north-south relationship is an indisputable fact; however, at least in the case of Mozambique, this culturicide took on the semblance of an ethnic conflict never made explicit (except for the current revolt in Cabo Delgado) within the formation of the Mozambican national State. The study presented here is only a first approach to the problem. It seeks to bring political, cultural and artistic evidence of how "ethnic ignoring" has to be read as a conscious construction, on the part of the two dominant regional ethnic groups, Maronga/Machangana and Makonde, to the detriment of all the others, especially those that did not adapt to the political monopoly of Frelimo, in the different historical periods of post-independence. The result was that a large part of these ethnic groups' artistic and cultural production and epistemologies were marginalised due to the crossfire compounded by the generalised ignorance regarding the subject, the pre-conceived study perspectives and the internal political interests of the party in the power.

The positive element that this study brings is that, in recent years, a literature that is still incipient but at least existing, in part cited here, is starting to see the Mozambican ethnic issue as one of the central aspects in the formation of the national identity of this country, requiring the recovery of forgotten and neglected epistemologies until today. Therefore, long work is awaiting young researchers who want to resurrect the cultural and artistic wealth of a Mozambican mosaic that has been reduced to the expression of dominant ethnicities.

Translation: Davi Barbosa and Sidney Pratt

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Luca Bussotti developed the data curation and methodology of the proposed article, and he also collaborated in the investigation. He was responsible for the project administration, supervision and validation and participated in the overall writing process (writing the original draft; review and editing). Laura António Nhaueleque developed the formal analysis and visualization of the proposed article, and she also collaborated in the investigation. She was responsible for the software and participated in the overall writing process (writing the original draft; review and editing).

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Submitted: 27/11/2021 | Accepted: 28/02/2022



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