

When the Nation Kills the Tribe: The paradox of a School Curriculum Suitable for All¹

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Introduction

This article is substantiated by the understanding that the act of defending public school lies on the radical theoretical investment in deconstructing fundamentals that often organize the ways through which we reason about the functioning of this institution. We focus the challenges posed by the elaboration of a unified school curriculum in Mozambique, by questioning the meanings given to the school environment as a privileged *locus* where one can struggle for the hegemony and empowerment of new social actors. It is possible stating that the investment in the meaning given to the school environment in Mozambique, which is beyond the political antagonism, has been shared by colonizers and the revolutionary liberation forces. We problematized these attempts of standardizing these meanings and, based on a post-structuralist and post-colonial perspective, we discussed the limits of a unified school curriculum conceived as the axis of a national identity project.

We used the theoretical contributions from Stuart Hall (1992; 1996) and Homi Bhabha (1994) to argue education projects focused on designing the ideal identity of a new national individual by articulating the essential and realistic meaning of culture and identity. Such approach allows us to advocate for the need of thinking about the development of a school curriculum the goes beyond the essentialist and realistic logic, which minimizes and/or does not take into consideration the pluralities and differences responsible for turning us into “humans” – not into an “ideal human subject”, but into “speaking, gathered and precarious beings” (Lopes, 2013, p. 8). This curriculum would be based on a theoretical investment capable of favoring the denaturation of exclusion processes justified by the will to build a common identity necessary to construct a nation.

Education in Mozambique: improving natives’ moral and spiritual conditions

Although the *Organic Statute for the Portuguese Catholic Missions in Africa and Timor (João Belo Decree from October 13, 1926)* was taken to Mozambique in 1498, it only gave the Catholic church the mission of educating and “civilizing” indigenous peoples (as natives were called at that time) in 1926. According to Mazula (1995), the approved statute triggered the official colonial education in Mozambique, which aimed at “ensuring political hegemony and the cultural orientation of the



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dominating colonial class over traditional and primitive societies, which were seen as stagnant to the zero-degree temperature of History” (Mazula, 1995). The project was based on a clear Eurocentric discourse substantiated by a standardized European culture – of the colonizer. Such discourse triggered comparisons and the hierarchies used to justify the elaboration of a school curriculum that aimed at “gradually conducting wildlife indigenous to a civilized life by forming their self-sense of Portuguese citizenship and by preparing them to the struggle of living, in order to make these individuals more useful for society and for themselves. [...], it is done by outspreading the Portuguese language and habits among them” (Mazula, 1995, p. 80).

The civilizing project adopted by the colonizer was based on the denial and destruction of “indigenous/native” cultures and on the imposition of European values, habits and costumes. Based on Bhabha (1994), this process allowed colonizers to construct stereotypes to delegitimize other meanings by addressing them as threatening differences. We understand these stereotypes as discursive processes marked by hierarchical and classificatory relationships. They are discursive processes that organize the colonial rhetoric; thus, they signify indigenous/natives, and their culture, as “savages”, “primitive” and “cursed”, because black individuals were/are identified as Caim/Cam descendants who, based on the Christian tradition, killed his own brother. These are discursive construction processes focused on annihilating indigenous/native cultures in order to build the “European civilizing project”.

Besides the *Organic Statute for the Portuguese Catholic Missions in Africa and Timor*, schooling processes were reinforced by *Ordinance n. 312, from May 1, 1926*, since they were seen as instruments to promote the European culture. This ordinance separated the learning/teaching process provided to whites and blacks and created the *School of Indigenous Teachers and the District School of Arts and Crafts*. These teaching projects aimed at providing rudimentary labor training to indigenous/natives (Zawangoni, 2007) and at ensuring the hegemony of the Portuguese language as official language to the detriment of the approximately 41 languages⁴ spoken in Mozambique.

The Mission Statute was approved in 1941 and gave the Catholic church the responsibility to teach indigenous/native individuals. This teaching approach was defined as nationalist and practical for what colonizers understood as “perfect nationalization, indigenous moralization and the acquisition (by their part) of labor habits and attitudes, depending on sex and on the convenience of regional economies; [...]moralization, abandonment to laziness and preparation of future rural workers” (Gasperini, 1989, p. 16).

Such segregating policy was established by Colonial Law n. 238, from May 17, 1930, which, among other aspects, highlighted the concept of separating the learning/teaching system between whites and blacks. The law addressed that “African children [...] at school-age are not in the same conditions as European children at the same age; therefore, they cannot attend elementary school, at the same time” (Mazula, 1995, p. 80). The approval of the segregating policy points out that the so-called ideal European cultural standard would not be fully accepted by indigenous-native peoples, even if they were prone to give up their own culture. In other words, “Europeanization of indigenous/native” individuals did not imply eliminating differences that justify the discrimination between whites and blacks.

According to Gonçalves (2015, p. 107), “the [work] of the white colonizer was the only way to civilize black individuals based on a process through which these individuals would be forced to gradually abandon their own costumes”. Intellectual formation was

only available to colonists, and it would allow “students to pursue their studies until the higher education” (Mazula, 1995, p. 80).

Yet, based on the author,

The colonial educational system was divided in two subsystems based on different learning/teaching approaches: the official one [elementary school], which is available for colonists’ children (or to children in similar status) – this approach [...] aims at giving children the fundamental knowledge instruments and the bases of a general culture in order to prepare them for social life -; and other approach for indigenous⁵ children, which is well-articulated to the structure of the dominating system in all its aspects. [...] It aimed at gradually take these individuals from wildlife to the civilized life of educated peoples, the autochthonous populations of foreign provinces. [...] Rudimentary elementary school aims at civilizing and nationalizing indigenous individuals in the colonies by outspreading Portuguese language and costumes among them (Mazula, 1995, p. 80).

In order to educate and have broader control, colonists introduced an efficient school curriculum to civilize indigenous individuals and to qualify them as man-power to fulfil colonial interests. The educational system applied by the Catholic Mission made evidenced the lack of interest in forming intellectual skilled man to autonomously think about the future, but in forming persons who could reproduce the narrative of stigmatizing replicators of their own culture in favor of the Portuguese/European one. As stated by Paulo Freire “it would be naive to expect the oppressor elites to provide a libertarian character” (1987, p. 73).

Actually, it is necessary highlighting that the hegemony of the Portuguese colonial education faced resistance. Other European nations made inroads in the African continent to fight for territory and, according to Ngoenha (2000), the situation was not different in Mozambique. However, these disputes are not in the scope of the present manuscript, mainly because, despite the rivalries, they shared the concept that indigenous/native individuals are inferior, that they could and should be forged in order to fulfil colonial interests. The Swiss Mission, which took important actions in South Mozambique, alphabetized locals in their mother language; however, without overcoming the prejudice and the construction of stereotypes to delegitimize indigenous/native individuals (Ngoenha, 2000).

Before taking office in June 25, 1975, during the pre-nationalist period and amid military confrontations with colonists, the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) implemented an educational model for indigenous/native children in liberated zones. Areas managed by the nationalist movement in Mozambique were the cradle of Mozambican education (Gonçalves, 2015).

The aim of this initiative was to replace natives’ alienated consciousness by a new culture (Gasperini, 1989), to unleash native citizens from colonial oppression and alienation through education, to prepare these citizens to build the Mozambican nation (Gonçalves, 2015). The idea was to “trigger an inner conflict in each individual. A cultural conflict to destroy the most dangerous fronts of the enemy, the reactionary positions in our minds. The army [...] should hold the competence to educate the people, to free them from the colonial and tribal cultural hegemony” (Gasparine, 1989, p. 23). Besides the liberation by arms, FRELIMO leaders knew that they need to build a cultural hegemony to consolidate the nationalist power.



Based on the concepts of FRELIMO leaders, a new hegemony implied fighting colonists and tribes. According to this viewpoint, the slogan **“Killing the tribe to build the Mozambican nation”** guided school curriculum policies after the national independence in June 25, 1975. All these events took place within a context in which the Mozambican education (1975) was compromised by a deep economic crisis that set limitations to the project of the new government to provide education to the population. Among factors boosting this crisis, one finds the flee of Portuguese citizens and of some Mozambicans who supported Portugal, the absence of a National Education System (NES) and of its derivatives (school curriculum plans, educational policies and strategies, etc.).

Strong efforts were demanding in order to face the great challenges ahead; accordingly, it was necessary to create, back in 1975, an educational framework linked to the new government and managed by the so-called Education and Culture Ministry, which launched the first NES proposition in 1981. This proposition was named General Guidelines for the National Education System, approved in 1983 (Law n. 04 from March 23, 1983), which aimed at “forming the New Man free from obscurantism, superstition and from the bourgeois and colonial mentality, a man who advocates for the socialist society” (Moçambique, 1983, p. 113).

According to Gasperini (1989, p. 32), “the first seven years after the independence were featured by a reformation implemented to change the inherited system in order to avoid the collapse of the only formation framework available in the country”. From 1975 until NES approval in 1983, the teaching/learning process was managed by the Education and Culture Ministry, which used FRELIMO’s educational experiences in the “freed zones”.

The Marxist-Leninist-socialist discourse widespread by nationalist revolutionaries substantiated an emancipatory educational project, which implied killing the tribes, as stated Samora Machel, the President of the Popular Republic in Beira, in 1980: “we kill the tribe to give birth to the nation” (Lima, 2016, p. 19).

Law n. 4 from 1983 implemented NES; the revolutionary government made it clear that the aim of education is to overcome autochthonous habits and costumes, since “through initiation in the tribe, through dogma and superstition, religion and sorcery, and tradition, the individual was prepared to accept exploitation as a natural rule and, thus, to reproduce it in his/her age group, family, tribe and race” (Moçambique, 1983, p. 23). Thus, the aim of NES was to contribute to the “formation of a Mozambican Man with patriotic consciousness, scientifically qualified, professionally and technically trained and culturally free” (Moçambique, 1983, p. 23). After the colonists were expelled, the tribe became a threat for the construction of a new nation, it became an enemy to be defeated. Accordingly, Paredes (2014) states that, based on Samora Machel, racism, tribalism or religiousness should be confronted “with the same weapons used to fight colonialism. Killing the tribe to give birth to a nation constituted, and that also constitutes, the main driver of the Mozambican revolution” (p. 145).

In a paradoxical way, the Portuguese language remained as the official national language, and we understand such policy as a manner to confront the tribe and to establish a “national unity” (Chichava, 2008, p. 8). NES approved in 1983 stated that education should “widespread, through teaching, the use of the Portuguese language to contribute to the consolidation of the national unity” (Moçambique, 1983, p. 15). Therefore, based on this goal, FRELIMO established some standards to:

Encourage the confrontation to the use of the mother language in sectors of life and collective labor such as production, handcrafting, school environment,



cafeterias, meetings, sports and cultural activities, as well as to encourage the use of Portuguese as the language of national unity. Therefore, there was no difference between the colonialist and “nationalist” regime when it came to language matters and national cultural values. Both regimes saw these factors as barriers to their political interests, so they fought against them to silence the voice of social subjects. (Cossa, 2007, p.71)

After a civil war that lasted 16 years (1977-1992), the political structure in Mozambique went through many reforms that ended up in the approval of a new Constitution in 1990, which opened room for a multiparty democracy that favored the approval of NES Law n. 6 from May, 1992. This law disrupted the Marxist-Leninist principles and implemented more liberal educational concepts, among them the use of national languages. At this point in time, NES started “valuing and developing the national languages by promoting their progressive introduction in citizens’ educational process” (Moçambique, 1992, p. 8). The National Education Policy (NEP) was improved in 1995 through Resolution n. 8 from August 22, 1995 in order to reinforce NES. This new law, among other principles, established the “definition and application of mother-language introduction modalities as the languages to be taught in the first grades of elementary school (1st and 2nd grades)” (Moçambique, 1995, p. 179).

Despite the legal initiatives, still some citizens advocated that the inclusion of national languages in the school curriculum should have a primary, rather than secondary, dimension, as it was expressed in the content of NES’ text. There are also the ones who advocated for the need of having a unified – but multicultural - school curriculum capable of covering the plural Mozambican culture; although, without losing the dimensions of a school curriculum driven to the construction of a national Mozambican identity.

From this point on, we will introduce the contribution from post-colonial reflections by authors such as Stuart Hall (1992; 1996) and Homi Bhabha (2004), who argue that, despite the antagonism between the Portuguese Colonizer and FRELIMO’s nationalist forces, the educational projects expressed in both school curriculum propositions are based on the idea of having discipline matrixes as instruments to form an idealized identity. This identity, in the first place, would be easily forged through the imposition of certain values understood as “more appropriate” - according to nationalists, the Marxist-Leninist-socialist ideas. In both cases, we can see the construction of an idealized and essentialized identity.

On the other hand, we also problematized the proposition of a unified multicultural school curriculum, since such proposition carries along all the limitations and inaccuracies observed in the multiculturalism concept.

Building a national identity: symbolic violence and theoretical fragility

Hall (1992) states that we insist in operating the idea of identity and advocates for the impossibility of giving up the terminology; therefore, it is necessary scrapping the meanings given to it, mainly when it comes to the attempt of standardizing an identity project and to the assumption that it is possible to put this project in place based on a school curriculum proposition. However, the construction of an identity project remains in course due to the ways adopted to think education itself and all educational projects. The herein addressed Mozambican case expressed the concern about different perspectives, which, by the way, are shared by colonizers and colonizers/revolutionaries.

Before going ahead in our analyses, it is important highlighting that our arguments do not aim at delegitimizing any project of a new world, not even at minimizing the ethical responsibility we have to fight for it (Lopes, 2013). However, this responsibility must



always trigger the reflection about exclusion processes involved in such struggle for a new world. Based on this perspective, we aim at deconstructing the foundations that support the sense of nation and the identity that organizes the identity discourses and justifies the school curriculum propositions such as that of the unified school curriculum. We argue that these discursive articulations involve certain logic and practices that reinforce the exclusion process in school environment (Pereira, 2017).

Hall (1996) remembers that questions about multiculturalism and differences are in the mainstream of debates about education, which are also incorporated to official school curriculum policies. On the other hand, he acknowledges that, despite its different concepts, multiculturalism tends to lie on a vague idea of respecting and tolerating diversity and differences. Hall (1996) insists that the lack of a theory about identity and differences helps their naturalization, essentialization and crystallization. He calls the attention to the implications of policies focused on concepts such as those defining difference, identity, diversity and alterity. Bhabha (2011, p. 84) states that multiculturalism became “a word similar to a hanger where everything is hanged on”, he goes on in his critics to the discourse of liberal theorists about the subject, which, according to him “experience the fragility of its principles of “tolerance” [emphasis added by the author] when they try to resist the pressure from the review” (p. 83).

The reflection of the author concerns the language studies field, and it implies stating that identity and differences are not essential, but actually, they are factors spread around the world that long to be discovered, revealed, respected or tolerated; moreover, they constitute themselves as acts of language. In its turn, language is always featured by indetermination and instability (Derrida, 1997) - linguistic signs just become intelligible within a system of meanings.

Laclau and Mouffe (1987; 2001) also help us understanding the process to produce identities and differences, they refuse the essentialist approaches of social relationships and reinforce the precarious character of any identity. They advocate for the theory that the production of antagonisms is the main condition for the construction of political identities. According to Laclau and Mouffe (2001), the antagonistic cut works in the discourse as a barrier to separate “us” from them. This mutual exclusion relationship also enables identity construction; it is the impossibility to constitute identity and the force to deny it. Therefore, it is possible concluding that identity itself is always defined as a negative factor, thus, identity can exist prior to the establishment of an antagonistic relationship derived from a discourse.

Antagonism stops the construction of an identity supported by itself; the presence of the “other” stops identity to be fully established (Laclau; Mouffe, 1987; 2001) - identities are reinforced by what they are not.

Derrida (1997) problematizes the illusion of seen the linguistic sign as the presence of the referent or of the concept. According to him, this illusion is always necessary to make the linguistic sign work; however, the full presence is always postponed. A framework does not have any meaning at first, the linguistic sign is always marked by differentiations, by the postponement of the presence and by the difference itself (Derrida, 1978; 1997), in a way any exterior reference can be the factor definitely connecting the concept to the linguistic sign.

Hall (1996) highlights that processes to reinforce identity affirmation produce differences that, in their turn, always imply inclusions and exclusions in compliance with the interests of different social groups. These processes are discursive strategies focused on guaranteeing a privileged access to social assets, besides being classifications and hierarchizations produced either by the discourse of European colonizers or by that of FRELIMO’s nationalist leaders who seek a certain cultural standard able to make citizens



build the “desired Mozambican nation”. However, Hall (1996) also points out that the language game itself, which projects different identities and works to standardize them based on a logic and on a particular grammar focused on standardization, also allows fleeing from these attempts to standardize/fix an ultimate meaning.

Bhabha (1994), inspired by Derrida’s deconstruction concept, also provides important elements for the aforementioned reflection by investing in destabilizing binarisms that rule hierarchical and classificatory relationships capable of organizing the colonist rhetoric. Nevertheless, these binarisms substantiate the contemporary thought, just as the Marxist-Leninist discourse does when it confronts emancipation to alienation by giving the sense of alienation and ignorance to values shared by the tribes. We understand the problem behind this statement; however, it does not mean to disregard asymmetric power relations, hierarchizations and the consequences of patriarchal practices of tribes in the lives of their women, for example. Actually, we aim at discussing that these practices need to be understood in a particular context, even when they are supposed to be confronted. They cannot be seen as more or lesser legitimate than the ones exercised by any social group when they are defined within a certain context, since they are a discursive production. They imply a dispute for meaning in the world, despite the discursive meanings given to the sense of “world” that colonizers and nationalists try to standardize.

Post-structuralist contributions also substantiate our statement about the idea of achieving an identity project through a school curriculum, no matter its profile. Macedo (2006) provided us with the concept of school curriculum as a cultural enunciation practice, she supports this understanding about school curriculum based on Bhabha’s (1994) reflections about culture, who denies the idea of a culture limited to itself, of a culture free from the contamination of other cultures and from the global cultural. Bhabha (1994) advocates for the concept of culture as difference, as diversity and strangeness. According to this author, cultural translation and negotiation processes are highly complex, no matter if they are assimilative or antagonistic, besides generating affections and producing identifications.

We analyzed the civilizing process imposed by colonizers to natives and the process of forming the “New Man free from obscurantism, superstition and from the bourgeois and colonial mentality, a man who embodies values of the socialist society” (Moçambique, 1983, p. 113), who are guided by essentialist and idealistic ideas impossible to be achieved. We also argue that, far from being democratic and fair, the project of forming the New Man requires the elimination of tribes, whose culture becomes a threat to the project of the colonizer. The Universalist ideology gets stronger to the detriment of the construction of a “new society”; therefore, it contributes to maintain the socialist forces as hostages of an old segregational, discriminatory, explorative and exclusionist logic.

Finally, we also argue that the process to overcome this dead-lock cannot come from a multicultural pathway, from the elaboration of a unified school curriculum that encompasses all the cultural plurality in Mozambique. First, because, based on such statement, this curriculum brings along a concept of culture as a patrimony of symbols and values that can be transmitted and shared. We advocate for the discursive production of these symbols and values; moreover, as for the language field, we state the fluidity of these enunciations and the impossibility of standardizing them in definite. Based on our understanding, culture is an endless process of giving meanings; thus, based on the sense of enunciation, the meanings given to symbols and values are open to constant and endless negotiation and translation processes (Bhabha, 1996).

Secondly, still based on Bhabha (1996), we state the limitations of different multiculturalism types, which, in greater or lesser extent, advocate for the acceleration of the rhetoric about an undifferentiated and indifferent pluralism that fulfils the attempt to stop different subaltern cultural identities. Therefore, multiculturalism favors hierarchies and classifications that aim at reinforcing social control, it operates at the level of mere knowledge, but keeps these hierarchies and classifications subjected to a particularity defined as ideal.

The development of any school curriculum proposition always presupposes the exclusion of a difference that does not fit the unitary project. Choices, even the legitimate ones, are often arbitrary and contextualized; they need an ultimate sense of unquestionable truth to substantiate their superiority. Based on Macedo (2006), we state that the multicultural dimension of the school curriculum is not enough to include and encompass all cultures by eliminating the discrimination practices that produce differences through the discourse.

Conclusion

The reflections we have addressed based on theoretical coherence do not aim at proposing supposed solutions for the issues we have identified. At most, we intend to call the attention to the risks posed by certain formulations, just as Veiga-Neto (2008) warns about the need of questioning the fundamentals in which our certainties are rooted in, the soil that feeds our convictions about salvation through education. This is the aim of our reflection, which was boosted by the understanding that it is necessary breaking up with the dichotomous logic that organizes the contemporary thinking and that always stops us from taking positions in two alternatives in order to think about the challenges of the world.

The acceptance of the fact that we live in a world of plurality and differences is the way we have found to understand how the dichotomous logic favors and legitimizes exclusion. Based on such perspective, the Mozambican identity disruption between colonizers and nationalists happened according to rules set for a language game that, far from expressing the antagonism between them, evidences the same will to control cultural differences (Pereira, 2017).

The proposition of a unified school curriculum, in its turn, is also inserted in the same language game that tries to limit the emergence of cultural differences, since it lies on the conception of a curriculum supported by the assumption that it is possible to control the imponderable (Pereira, 2017). When all individuals integrate, or are forced to belong to a project such as the “Europeanization” or the project of the “nation” – in which singularities are understood as a threat – all these individuals lose their right to the difference, as warns Macedo (2015).

The aim of writing this article was to advocate for the idea that the construction of a democratic education implies the radical questioning of this logic. It is important highlight that, as states Laclau (1996, p. 24), “a democratic society is not the one where the *best* [emphasis added by the author] content prevails without questioning, but where nothing is ultimately achieved and where there is always the possibility of questioning”.

Notes

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⁴ See Ngunda (2012, p. 3).

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