
ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN MOZAMBIQUE: BETWEEN HISTORICAL INJUSTICES AND STRUGGLES FOR THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the mediations of ethnicity and social class in the process of democratization of access to higher education (HE) in Mozambique as part of public policies. Such a model, to include the Whole, strictly respected the income criteria, without adopting the ethnic criterion that would contemplate the populations of the central and northern regions of the country. Based on the statistical data provided by the Mozambican Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, in the period between 2010 and 2020, we seek to sustain the thesis that, considering the pattern of Mozambican ethnic relations, producer of ethnic/regional asymmetries among groups with specific ethnic marks, ethnic inequalities have in political power their offensive and powerful motto, at the same time that isolated social class is insufficient in the understanding and overcoming of the ethnic problem in HE. The results point out that the discriminatory and institutional mechanisms experienced in the context of HE do not undermine the importance of the idea of its expansion, inclusion and democratization of its spaces; ethnicity, in its political and cultural biases, operates in a relational and independent way with social class in the context of production of regional and ethnic asymmetries in Mozambique in access to HE.

Keywords: Higher education; Regional asymmetries; Ethnic discrimination; Expansion of access.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mozambique is a country rich in ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. With more than 20 different ethnic groups, the country faces significant challenges in relation to ethnic inequalities in access to HE. Although it has made considerable progress in expanding higher education in recent years, ethnic disparities still persist that affect the access and participation of certain groups in the HEIs of the country.

The effects of ethnic discrimination are historical in Mozambique. Mozambican institutions are marked by ethnic discrimination, as well as the history of social inequalities in the country that begin with a racist matrix. However, the government does not recognize the existence of this type of discrimination when creating public policies aimed at promoting the rights of the population at the national level.

This non-recognition is related to the belief that there would be no ethnic or even racial discrimination in the country. This idea dates back, in part, to the racist character that prevailed, openly, in the Portuguese colonial system, spreading the separation of whites and indigenous people based on skin color, ethnic groups (considering the three regions of Mozambique: north,

center and south), and the post-national independence period, in 1975, through the discourse of national unity.

The national edification consists of three great moments¹. The first is based on the consolidation of the unitary identity and the common heritage, which Gebrewold (2009) designated as “imagined community”, made up of heroes, myths, symbolic places. Then, the State initiates a process of valorization of local and ethnic identities, through various languages and cultures present in the country to the musical and artistic expressions. Finally, the State begins to disseminate local and national cultural productions, obeying a vision of cultural democracy, with a view to involving the largest possible number of people and groups (Landgraf, 2014).

In this regard, the studies of Gebrewold (2009), Chichava, (2008) point out that several African countries and their political elites tried to “unite” all their peoples through the construction of a “nationalist²” sense designed to transcend ethnic differences, mobilize the population against external aggressors and encourage them to sacrifice economic priorities for national unity and identity. Nationalists seek to raise awareness among group members to associate themselves with the shared group, their common opponent or enemy.

They politicize group members to control, influence or enlist their collective interests (Simon, Klanderma, 2004). This politicized collective identity fosters, therefore, “processes of (self)stereotyping at the cognitive level, processes of prejudice at the affective level and processes of conformity and discrimination at the behavioral level” (idem, p. 459). In the same direction, Gebrewold (2009) suggests that the permanent construction of national identity and stereotyping are characteristic elements of nationalism.

This nationalism, according to Janis (1982 apud Gebrewold, 2009, p. 83) is generated when one continuously points to a real or imaginary enemy of the collective, creating, thus, a dualistic world of “Inside” versus “Outside”; “We” versus “They”, in order to unify individual perceptions and interests in common objectives, combining actions, coercion and persuasion. This categorization of inside to outside is based on the collective memory that stores and recalls past information, however, constituted by this information and common memory. In this sense, we understand together with (Billing, 1995, p. 29) that “invented permanences” help to transcend the intra-group differences. They are the collective memory that consists of a recollection that, at the same time, is a collective forgetting and, therefore, “the nation that celebrates its antiquity forgets its historical actuality, as the violence that made it exist”.

In the Mozambican context, the strategic interest in nationalism and, consequently, in ethnicities seems to have in view the instrumentalization of the divisions and ethnic divergences, in order to accommodate the project of national unity. Moreover, the interest in ethnicities slips into the need to quell possible claims or political uprisings based on ethnic exclusion, in order to domesticate the different ethnic groups and gain their loyalty.

These moments, however, are not so linear, depending very much on the approach that the institutions adopt towards ¹ their citizens, as well as the citizens identify themselves with such proposals.

² We choose, together with Gonçalves (1999, p.49), nationalism as a “social and cultural movement that finds in the national claim, from the symbols to the very demand for a National State, an ideological construction”, therefore, conception of ideology in the Marxist sense, of formation of an ideological program with its own social expression, from the expression of class to the expression of social means.

In addition, both ethnic discrimination, tribalism and the values inherited from the colonial system were seen as factors of disaggregation of national unity, given that Mozambique is characterized by being a country with an enormous multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual diversity, coexisting with problems such as: racism tribalism, divisionism as one of the most visible products of colonialism.

The ideal of an ethnically or racially democratic country is a supposed nationalist notion that has been strongly criticized by Mozambican authors dedicated to the study of ethnic relations (Chichava, 2008; Bussotti & Nhaueleque, 2022; Mabongo, 2015; Lavieque, 2020, Tambe, 2023, among others). These studies demonstrate the ethnic and racial nature of social inequalities in Mozambique. The research indicates that the southern region of the country, especially the capital Maputo, has been the most privileged in all aspects and significantly superior when compared to the central and northern regions. This is largely due to the higher concentration and volume of colonial apparatus and investments in that área.

Among these inequalities, access to higher education (ES) stands out. Analyzing statistical data provided by the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Higher Education, Technical Professional (MCTESTP), and the 2017 census, research by Langa (2014), Miguel, Tambe and Costa (2021), Tambe, Costa, and Gonçalves (2022), Tambe (2023) shows that over 70% of higher education institutions are located in the southern region of the country, particularly in the city of Maputo. This puts young people from the central and northern regions at a disadvantage.

In Mozambique, literature on access to higher education and its relationship with ethnic discrimination is incipient or almost non-existent³. This is due to social ideals constructed through symbolic and cultural associations between nationalism and a single tribe. The constant construction of national identity and stereotyping are produced, reproduced, and later naturalized in unequal interpersonal and institutional relationships, perpetuating exclusion and the producers of ethnic asymmetries.

The regional inequalities observed in Mozambique manifest themselves in the dynamics of socioethnic relations and, acting as an ideology, attempt to legitimize and naturalize hierarchized, collective, and/or individual predispositions and differences among social or ethnic groups. This denial is primarily part of the political foundations and the Mozambican black elite, whose main objective is its reproduction and maintenance. Therefore, the choice to expand higher education, as noted by Noa (2011) and Rosário (2013), served to legitimize an unmistakable and narrowly political motivation, as well as to support initiatives where market and private interests take precedence over a genuine commitment to placing knowledge as a fundamental tool.

Thus, in the context of the democratization process of access to higher education in Mozambique, where public policies adopted for comprehensive inclusion have prioritized income criteria, disregarding the ethnic inclusion of populations in the central and northern regions of the country, the main **problem** under discussion in this article is: How does this strict focus on income criteria, to the detriment of ethnic recognition, impact equitable access to higher education in these

In addition to the two referenced studies in this work that delve into the ethnic dimension of access to higher³ education, only two more studies are mentioned that address ethnic discrimination in schools in Mozambique: Lázaro and Martins' (2020) research sought to understand the sociopolitical, economic, and educational impact that segregationist actions had on Mozambican schools; and the study by Gomundanhe and Choé (2022) focused on reflecting on ethnic-racial prejudice in a Portuguese school.

regions? What are the challenges and resulting implications of this approach for promoting truly inclusive and representative higher education in Mozambique?

The **hypothesis** of this study is that the lack of consideration for ethnic criteria may lead to an inadequate and insufficient representation of populations in the central and northern regions in higher education, hindering genuine inclusion and reflecting historical injustices that still shape the Mozambican educational system.

Therefore, we emphasize the importance of addressing regional and/or ethnic inequalities in access to higher education in Mozambique, as Tambe (2023) notes, as they result from sociopolitical problems that have received little attention from intellectuals and researchers or have been suppressed, neglected, and poorly resolved in the country⁴. With this proposal, there is an expectation that the country can move towards entering a very promising phase of reducing socioeconomic and ethnic/regional inequalities in higher education, critically exploring the intersection between historical injustices, struggles for the right to education, and current policies for democratizing access to higher education. Similarly, it is a way to examine how the absence of ethnic criteria can perpetuate disparities and limit the inclusion of specific groups in the central and northern regions of the country.

1.1. Ethnic Relations and Democratization in the Distribution of Higher Education in Mozambique

Higher education (HE) in Mozambique has experienced significant growth concerning the number of students, including new admissions, enrollments, and graduates. This growth is attributed to the establishment of new institutions of higher learning. Mozambican authors such as Matos and Mosca (2010), Taimo (2010), Rosário (2012), Langa (2014), Miguel, Tambe, and Costa (2021), Tambe, Costa, Gonçalves (2022), Tambe (2023), Mandlate and Nivagara (2019), among others, demonstrate that Mozambican higher education has expanded in terms of both students and institutions nationwide, primarily through private means, making the subsystem elitist. This expansion occurs privately, with tuition fees beyond the reach of a significant portion of the population. In 2010, there were 42 institutions of higher education, compared to fewer than 3 public ones in the 1980s until the early 1990 (MCTESTP, 2016). Langa (2014) observed a rapid growth in institutions of higher education in Mozambique between 1995 and 2014, increasing from 3 public institutions to 46, accompanied by a rise in the number of students from around 4,000 to approximately 130,000. Tambe, Costa, and Gonçalves (2022), Tambe (2023) noted an increase from only 3 existing public institutions in 1993 to 59 in 2022, with 24 being public and 35 private. Approximately 70% of these institutions are concentrated in the city of Maputo, with the remaining distributed across the other 10 provinces.

This substantial progress has been accompanied by an unequal distribution of institutions of higher education and students in the three regions of the country. For instance, the gross rate of new admissions in the central and northern regions of the country remains low compared to the southern region due to various factors, including ethnic discrimination and poverty. In other words, there is a historical regional distribution of inequality in the availability of spaces and access to higher education in Mozambique. This results in the undue benefit of access to higher education

According to Lavieque (2021), ethnic conflicts are primarily political, and the state needs to address them to promote⁴ overall development in the country, reduce regional imbalances, and ensure that political actors can transcend their ethnicity. Only by doing so can social exclusion and the marginalization of other groups cease to prevail.

for students from wealthier families, and overall enrollment remains disproportionately in the south and metropolitan areas.

The establishment of private institutions of higher education raises the issue of the financial inability of many families to cover the costs of their children's education outside their familiar environment and provinces. This often necessitates geographic relocation for education (Tambe, 2003).

The Strategic Plan for Higher Education (PEES) 2012-2020, in establishing equitable and quality access as one of its strategic objectives in higher education, clearly expresses the government's intention to adopt mechanisms that allow all citizens the opportunity to graduate and contribute to the country's development. However, contrary to this government discourse, imbalances in access persist in this subsystem of education across the three regions of the country.

Simultaneously, the socioeconomic changes accompanying this post-secondary boom, despite recent economic development, position Mozambique as one of the poorest countries globally. It ranks 181st out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index, indicating a mere growth of 0.41%. The per capita income was USD 624 in 2014, remaining low even with a 7% average GDP growth between 2010 and 2015 (INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND, 2015; UNDP, 2015). However, in 2017, the GDP growth was 3.7%, slightly lower than the 3.8% in 2016. Nevertheless, the real average per capita economic growth since 1995 was an impressive 5.9% per year. Despite this successful period of economic growth, proportional improvements in some key economic and socioeconomic indices have not followed, leading to high levels of poverty (UNFPA, 2017).

The poverty level was 69.7% in 1996/7, 52.8% in 2002/3, and 51.7% in 2008/9 (UNFPA, 2017). Although there was a significant drop between 1996 and 2002, the poverty level barely changed. In 2014, about two-thirds of the population lived below the poverty line of USD 1.90 per day (UNDP, 2015, INE, 2016). The Household Budget Survey (HBS) of 2015/16 shows that by 2014, the national poverty rate was still 46.1%. This figure represents a substantial decrease of 5.6% since 2008 and a significant decline of 23.6% since 1996. However, this occurs alongside an over 200% increase in per capita income during the period 1996-2014 (UNFPA, 2017; INE, 2016), supporting the claim that the benefits of economic growth are not translating into gains for many people, and inequality has been increasing in different provinces of Mozambique.

Socioeconomic indicators analyzed by Tambe, Costa, and Gonçalves (2022), Tambe (2023), INE (2017, 2021) reveal, for example, that the central and northern regions of the country are at the lowest levels of poverty and education, facing various obstacles. For instance, in 2014/5, "Niassa's poverty was still above 60% of the population and had increased significantly compared to its levels in 2002 and 2008." The same occurred in Cabo Delgado and Nampula, so that concerning the northern provinces as a whole, "the overall poverty rate increased between 2008/9 and 2014/15 from 45.1% to 55.1%, therefore, a rate higher than that of 2002/3 (UNFPA, 2017, p. 25).

Contrastingly, the poverty rate in Maputo city (the capital) reduced to 11.6%, and in Maputo province to 19.9%. The relatively weak decrease in the poverty rate in many provinces, coupled with a high population increase, suggests that the absolute number of people in poverty is approximately the same as in 1996/97 (Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2016). While overall numbers have decreased, this pattern of regional inequality has changed little and may, in some aspects, be more divergent than 20 years earlier.

These data reflect the existence of diffuse ethnic discrimination, which, however, is effective and negatively impacts everyday life. In this context, we also understand that it has been a matter of recognition demands based on the idea that human beings have the right to equal respect.

On the other hand, the political context of the discourse on the expansion of higher education, in particular, results from the restructuring of the Mozambican state in the post-civil war era that lasted 16 years and the adoption of multi-partyism in the early 1990s, culminating in the first presidential and legislative elections. This restructuring not only involved the expansion of the educational network but also the role of the state in the economic development of the entire national territory. The public opinion echoed from all quarters, as Rosário would say, "with voices of high volume."

According to Rosário (2013), for the expansion of higher education to occur, there were debates and heated discussions that necessitated a reconsideration of the ownership of institutions of higher education, including the issue of expansion. This was mainly because the state acknowledged its weaknesses and the issues raised by the assertive voices that marked the conflict over democratizing access; however, until then, this issue was not a priority on the government agenda. Therefore, various understandings were presented: "the exclusion of parts of Mozambique, which worsened latent conflicts and rekindled some voices that justified the civil war as a result of fundamentally internal problems; regional asymmetries" (p. 36).

So far, it seems evident that exclusionary practices with a racist character that openly prevailed in the colonial system, propagating the separation of whites and indigenous people based on skin color, ethnic groups (considering the three regions of Mozambique), placing women in the domestic sphere, engendering structural and institutional racism, organizing relations between the white population and other groups, persisted until 1975. Unfortunately, after independence, a path was opened for new forms of exclusion. Here, it is no longer solely skin color that prevails, but ethnic and regional origin, the dominant political ideology, as well as the bank balance of families, specifically the Mozambican black elite heirs of Europeans.

In the same vein, Chichava (2008) and Mabongo (2015), denouncing ethnic discrimination in Mozambique, state that nepotism flourished and ethnic discrimination intensified under these conditions, where Mozambicans from the southern region became new colonizers of the central and northern parts of the country. This, in turn, negatively affects the distribution of public policies in all aspects. Understand that the issue is not the capacity or personal integrity, nationalism of individuals, but rather discrimination based on ethnic origin. It became crucial to take measures early on to avoid transferring power to considered inferior ethnicities.

Therefore, we emphasize the importance of addressing regional and/or ethnic inequalities in Mozambique, as they result from sociopolitical problems that have received little attention from intellectuals and researchers, or have been suppressed, neglected, and poorly resolved in the country. As mentioned earlier, there is significant reluctance in political and academic spheres regarding the recognition and discussion of ethnic issues due to nationalism and an ideological policy of ethnic democracy. According to Tambe (2023, p. 261), another mechanism of ethnic exclusion is based on a strong belief that the regional/ethnic imbalances experienced in Mozambique would be explained solely by class relations and not equally by ethnic relations.

The lack of proper consideration and recognition has been denounced as a form of oppression and depreciation of the group's image. This negative aspect is "so destructive that

collectively competes to diminish freedoms, opportunities, and potentialities, as well as to reduce access to wealth and power" (D'Adesky, 2006, p. 51).

This is very tragic, considering that the gaps in ethnic relations, the history, and the history of Mozambican higher education have been left out of the inequalities in access to higher education. Their implications can be severe for the nation, as we may not be able to trace the historical development of our educational system.

The importance of history for a nation cannot be overstated for any reason. National awareness, patriotism, and total commitment to the values and ideals of any people/nation cannot be enhanced by the people without consistent historical education. Otherwise, we would be facing what Hayes (1966, p. 5-6), as mentioned earlier, considers nationalism as a "historical process that establishes nationalities as political units, forming modern institutions from tribes and empires," indicating "the principle and historical process that intensify nationality awareness and a political philosophy of the nation-state, insinuating that loyalty to the ideal or the national state is superior to all other loyalties." In this sense, pride in one's nationality and belief in its intrinsic excellence and mission are integral to nationalism by disregarding intra-group specificities.

We are not denying the importance of national unity; it encourages pride in national achievements. Still, we are pointing out that it must be accompanied by social justice for all regions of the Mozambican territory, just as we question its use to legitimize ethnic and/or regional divisions, suppressing minorities, undermining human rights, as education is. In this context, Gómez (1999), Cabaço (1997), and Mazula (1995) argue that the discourse of national identity can be classified as purely political discourse if it does not take into account the existence of various ethnicities that exist throughout the national territory.

Recalling Thompson (2002), the discourse of national unity at the expense of ethnicities is a means of controlling power, that is, ideology as a system that sustains domination relations⁵ through universalization, historical narratives, and even the invention of a common tradition that justifies existing power relations, masking them through subtle or perennially unifying discursive strategies. Thus, the discourse of democratizing access to higher education must be intertwined with the power webs that construct it.

In the context of this article, we understand that ethnicity, birthplace, nationalism, and race are distinct concepts; however, their interrelations reflect the complexity of Mozambican and/or human identities, highlighting the importance of a holistic approach to understanding cultural diversity.

Adopting the conception of Da Matta (1997), Silva and Soares (2011), ethnicity refers to a social group that shares cultural characteristics such as language, customs, common history, and religion. It is a social construction that encompasses cultural identity elements, often transmitted from generation to generation. Ethnicity is not necessarily related to biological characteristics but rather to "cultural and social aspects, similar experiences that would link individuals, peoples, and societies in the same group" (Silva & Soares, 2011, p. 108).

Race, on the other hand, is generally associated, according to Silva and Soares (2011), Campos (2016), with physical and biological characteristics, such as hair type, skin color, etc. It is essential to emphasize that the concept of race is socially constructed and lacks a substantial

⁵ This author identifies five mechanisms of ideology operation: legitimation, unification, dissimulation, fragmentation, reification.

biological basis, as historically racial classifications have been used to categorize and distinguish human groups and yet do not reflect the genetic complexities of human diversity.

Naturalness, according to Frota Júnior (2004), is related to the place of birth and upbringing or the geographical origin of a person. Naturalness does not automatically imply ethnic or racial characteristics; it is geographical information that can be independent of other identity elements.

In this direction, we recognize that these categories are intersectional because a person's identity may involve a complex combination of these elements. Remembering that Mozambique has a history (including socio-economic) marked by ethnic, racial, and geographical inequalities dating back to the colonial period, affecting access to education over time. Thus, the association we make in this study between naturalness, ethnicity, and geographical origin reflects the need to consider these differences as criteria for providing additional educational opportunities to historically marginalized groups, as well as ensuring that higher education policies are culturally inclusive and sensitive, as part of an effort to create an academic environment that reflects the richness of cultural diversity in the country.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article focuses on higher education (HE) statistics at the national level in Mozambique between 2010 and 2020. We obtained and merged data from the Ministry of Science, Technology, Higher Education, and Technical Professional Training (MCTESTP) and the general population census of Mozambique provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2016, 2017, 2021). As a bibliographic research with qualitative scope, we also chose to screen works that have been self-censored⁶, avoided in scientific and political realms by various official entities in addressing matters related to ethnic and regional discrimination in Mozambique. This was done to protect the position of the dominant power.

The main focus of our analysis is on the numbers of new student admissions and graduates by province of birth, aggregated by region (south, central, and north) in all public higher education institutions (HEIs) in Mozambique between 2010 and 2020. The choice of public HEIs is due to their offering nearly free education during the day, as opposed to private institutions, which are fee-based. This may facilitate access for more disadvantaged segments of society, thus reducing regional and ethnic asymmetries, enabling a more democratic perspective on access to higher education.

For instance, out of the total of 237,777 students in Mozambican higher education, 57% of this number studies in public HEIs, even though they represent only 39%, or 24 out of the 59 existing HEIs in Mozambique (MCTESTP, 2020; INE, 2021). Therefore, public HEIs offer more access opportunities, even though they are numerically inferior to private institutions.

Moreover, the chronological period covered by this research (2010–2020, approximately) is challenging to investigate due to the relative scarcity of documentary reconstruction, the near absence of studies on ethnic inequalities in access to higher education, the renewal of ethnic studies

According to Lavieque (2020, p. 226), this scenario leads to the situation where, "without observing any specific ⁶ normative command, some works are declassified based on the author and their origin, inventorying approximations or detachments from the regime's hordes, resulting," hence, in some works being deemed politically incorrect and understood as reactionary replicas, in contrast to others that align with the government's line and enjoy official recommendation in all political, social, and cultural arenas.

in Mozambique, and the lack of statistical data in some years⁷, especially around a period that can be defined, in general terms, as the emergence of new forms of its expansion and consolidation of the subsystem.

In 2012, for example, four HEIs did not provide statistical data to the competent authority, namely MCTESTP, which hinders accuracy in the treatment of statistical information. In this sense, we worked only with the available data provided by other institutions. In 2015, Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM), the first and largest HEI, did not provide statistical data. However, MCTESTP (2017, 2020) considers statistical data as a tool for producing evidence of sector achievements at the national level. Through this, it is possible to analyze the fulfillment of goals outlined in government plans, aiming to create assertive policies regarding the country's development. UEM, however, is the HEI with the highest number of students, corresponding to 19% of the Mozambican higher education population. The lack of this data does not bias the necessary analyses from the perspective of the objectives we aim to achieve in this article because the existing data enables a greater understanding of the overall picture in Mozambican higher education.

Thus, our analysis plan followed two phases. Firstly, we investigated the distribution of new student admissions and graduates at institutional, regional, and province of birth levels to examine the relationships between the number of new student admissions and economic conditions in each province. Secondly, due to the number of HEIs in the capital Maputo, we used the sample mean t-tests based on basic Excel 2013 to assess percentage differences from other provinces.

With this endeavor, we understand that the dynamics of ethnic and regional inequalities in access to higher education and the specific alterities of each group that makes up the Mozambican population should be analyzed from a historical perspective as processes and strategies (social, political, economic, cultural, and symbolic). This contradicts essentialist and nationalist perspectives of analysis. In this regard, it is also important to analyze the awakening of ethnic identities that led to the expansion of Mozambican higher education and the adverse effects of a democratic conception for its regional access.

3. Relationship between ethnic discrimination and the distribution of the population in higher education by province and region.

The summarized statistical data for the 11 Mozambican provinces (Table 1) and the three regions of the country - south, central, and north - indicate that the student population in higher education has grown during the 10-year period of our analysis (2010 to 2020).

Table 1: New student admissions by province of origin, 2010 to 2020.

For example, as of the writing of this article, data for the years 2018 and 2019 had not yet been made available by ⁷ the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Higher Education and Professional Technical (MCTESTP).

Region	Province of Birth/Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2020
South	Maputo Province	1365	1103	987	1009	1857	2007	679	3947	3966
	Maputo City	5171	2749	2955	7900	5787	2603	9123	4933	20466
	Gaza	708	580	519	3705	642	1423	1301	2264	3375
	Inhambane	837	568	1062	228	1806	2254	1560	2426	2463
Subtotal		8081	5000	5523	12842	10092	8287	12663	13570	30270
Central	Sofala	1295	429	362	2573	1741	470	3001	3328	6843
	Manica	401	282	395	909	949	1470	1344	1876	3489
	Tete	658	208	395	1802	1131	2672	1706	1664	3737
	Zambézia	564	590	600	1606	2068	1635	1657	2883	4834
Subtotal		2918	1509	1752	6890	5889	6247	7708	9751	18903
North	Nampula	715	371	479	2519	2067	2786	2873	2414	6689
	Cabo Delgado	328	217	140	545	758	964	878	996	1924
	Niassa	367	143	126	530	845	890	907	906	1557
Subtotal		1410	731	745	3594	3670	4640	4658	4316	10170
Total		12409	7240	8020	23326	19651	19174	25029	27637	59343

Source: The authors based on statistical data provided by MCTESTP between 2010 and 2020.

The indicators for higher education (ES), as shown in Table 1, indicate the persistence of ethnic inequalities in access to higher education in Mozambique. Based on the research results released by MCTESTP between 2010 and 2020, it is possible to visualize the inequalities and disadvantages accumulated by the population of the provinces in the central and northern regions of the country compared to the population of ethnic groups in the provinces of the southern region, a situation that has been ongoing since the colonial period.

For example, in 2010, the city of Maputo had the highest admission rate with 5,171 new students, accounting for 41.67%, followed by the province of Maputo with 1,365 students, representing 11%. However, Sofala province had 1,295 (10.4%), and Cabo Delgado province had the lowest rate with 328 new students, accounting for 2.64%.

Similarly, if we analyze the data for 2013, where the numbers of new admissions almost tripled, the situation of access disadvantages persists among different provinces, with Maputo leading with 7,900 (33.86%), followed by Gaza province with 3,705 students, representing 15.88%. Sofala province had 2,573, Nampula 2,519, and Niassa 530, with percentages of 11%, 19.78%, and 2.27%, respectively. In 2016, Maputo city led with 9,123 new students, accounting for 36.44% of the total. However, Sofala province presented 3,001 (11.99%), and Nampula had 2,873 (11.47%), respectively the third and second provinces with the highest number of new students. Cabo Delgado province had 878 students, and Maputo province with 679 students were the provinces with the fewest new students, with percentages of 3.5% and 2.71%, respectively.

These data highlight the importance of reflecting on the reduced ethnic or geographical presence of the populations from the central and northern regions of the country in Mozambican universities and their potential to transform a space that, until recently, constituted a place for the training of professionals predominantly from the southern region. This transformation could challenge a society that historically insisted on valuing a single civilizational component, simultaneously male, white, and heterosexual. In this way, it configures itself as what Braga and Lopes (2007) understand as a space for the reproduction, expansion, and institutionalization of

ethnic-racial discrimination, and therefore, an important element in the structuring, updating, and preservation of an unjust, hierarchical, exclusionary, discriminatory, and culturally naturalized pattern of social relations.

Bowen and Bok (2004) observe that systematic studies demonstrate the educational effects of diversity. These authors note that there is no denying the favorable impression [in the U.S.], shared by students of all ethnicities and races, regarding the value of diversity in education. This means that critically thinking about access to higher education, from the perspective of questioning the existing socio-ethnic relations in Mozambique, signifies "seeing the entry of larger ethnic groups into the university as a vector of high transformative power for the university itself" and simultaneously "studying the means for achieving this transformation in an invasively democratic and pluralistic direction" (Braga & Lopes, 2007, p. 28).

In the same direction, looking at Table 1 in 2020, it is also evident that the student population in higher education (ES) is more concentrated in the city of Maputo, with 20,466 new students, corresponding to 34.4%, and graduation rates of 29.7% in total. However, the provinces of Nampula hold 6,689 (11.2%) and Sofala with 6,843 (11.5%), respectively, the third and second provinces with the highest number of new student admissions. Meanwhile, Niassa presents 1,559 students, and Cabo Delgado with 1,924 are the provinces with the fewest new ES students, accounting for 2.6% and 3.2%, respectively.

Aggregating provincial data into regions, the indicators point to an overvaluation of incoming students in higher education in the southern region of the country. In 2010, the southern region concentrated more than 8,081 new students in Mozambican higher education, accounting for 65.12%, while the central (2,918) and northern (1,410) regions had 23.51% and 11.36%, respectively. In 2014, it is also observed that the student population in higher education is more concentrated in the southern region, with 10,092 new students, corresponding to 51.35% of the total. However, the central region holds 5,889 (29.9%), and the northern region has 3,670 (18.67%), respectively, the second and third regions with the lowest number of new student admissions.

For the year 2015, the central and northern regions of the country present indicators with a lower number of new student admissions in higher education, with 6,247 in the central region and 4,640 in the northern region, accounting for 32.58% and 24.19%, respectively. Meanwhile, the southern region has the highest rate of new student admissions with 8,287, corresponding to 43.21% of the total.

These data point to studies on identity markers related to ethnicity, race, body, understanding that they do not develop in isolation and independently of strong social pressures related to other social markers such as gender, sex, age, class, origin (social, geographic, or natural, etc.), physical-mental condition. According to Braga and Lopes (2007), these social demarcators could not be considered in isolation, disregarding the contexts of their production, the various connections they establish with each other, and the diverse effects they produce.

Deborah Britzman (2003), for example, explains that the body cannot be lived in installments and considered together, as body markers act on each other in ways that appear unpredictable and surprising. That is, the author understands that it is important and necessary to also pay particular attention to the processes of constructing ethnic, racial, or racialized identities, origin (social, geographic/natural), as they tend to revolve around the production and circulation of naturalizing social representations, not only regarding ethnicity and race but also gender,

sexuality, body, among others. Therefore, racism, ethnicism, class, origin (social, geographic, or natural), sexism can intersect and reinforce each other.

On the other hand, Roberto da Matta (1997) understands that wherever discriminatory logics, from an ethnic-racial [and geographical/natural] perspective, have been put into practice, the representation and identification of the "other" have never been a peaceful point, and many of its potential targets have known how to undertake creative strategies to try to escape them or, at least, loosen the ties.

Taking as a paradigmatic case in the context of affirmative actions in Mozambican university education, Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM)⁸ started dedicating 5% of slots⁹ to students from the central and northern provinces of the country from 2002. According to Tambe (2023), this social quota seems to be used as an alternative to regional/ethnic quotas, assuming the idea of accepting ethnic exclusion through the exclusive recognition of the public university (particularly UEM, considered the mother institution and, therefore, a pioneer in this social quota), precariousness, or poverty, thus maintaining a politically destabilized tradition in the country.

Furthermore, the introduction of this 5% quota proves to be important in the process of social change in the university, as it begins to expand its possibilities of social justice and pedagogical mechanisms, albeit quite restricted and limited, regarding ethnic groups from the central and northern regions of the country.

On the other hand, in Tambe (2023) view, these data move in the direction of highlighting that what is stated in the National Education Policy and PEES, such as reducing disparities in gender, geographical region, rural and urban areas, as well as ethnic and linguistic groups, is nothing more than a political discourse of the day. There is still a significant, overwhelming regional and ethnic disparity, and thus, without an effective, equitable financial assistance system directed towards students from poor families, they may be prevented from participating in higher education due to financial, regional, and ethnic difficulties.

Disparities observed in the number of new student admissions are also evident in the numbers of graduates by province of origin and region. For instance, in 2010, the southern region graduated 59.1% of native students, the central region 25.4%, and the northern region 14.4%. In 2012, out of the 7,533 graduates in Mozambican higher education, 1,710 (22.7%) were from the northern region; the central region had 1,465 (19.4%), and the southern region had 4,358 (57.8%). Of the total graduates from the southern region, 3,670 are supported by the city of Maputo, accounting for 48.7% of the total, i.e., double the number of higher education graduations in the country. In 2014, 4,653 (52.4%) were graduated in the southern region, with 3,059 in the city of Maputo; the central region graduated 2,288 (25.7%), and the northern region 1,931 (21.7%).

In 2015, the northern region graduated 1,699 (19.1%); the central region 2,147 (24.5%), and the southern region 4,903 (56%), with 3,410 in the city of Maputo. In 2016, higher education

This is the first and largest higher education institution (IES) in Mozambique, headquartered in the city of Maputo.⁸ Its activities have a national scope and are carried out throughout the territory of the Republic of Mozambique, guided by the general and pedagogical principles outlined in Law No. 6/92, dated May 6, which approves the National Education System.

It involves a quota system reserved for at least 5% of the total admission slots for higher education at UEM, allocated⁹ to each province. This aims to ensure that each of the undergraduate courses offered maintains representation from these groups (UEM, 2019). It is noteworthy that within the framework of actions aimed at promoting measures to reduce regional and ethnic asymmetries in access to higher education in Mozambique, UEM takes a pioneering stance regarding groups facing greater challenges in accessing higher education, including women.

graduated 11,943 students, with 2,626 (21.9%) in the northern region; 2,892 (24.2%) in the central region, and 6,425 (53.7%) in the southern region, of which 4,142 were in the city of Maputo, accounting for 34.6% of total graduations in the country. In 2017, the southern region graduated 6,263 (50%) students, with 3,602 (28.79%) in the city of Maputo; the central region 3,655 (29.2%), and the northern region 2,590 (20.7%). Finally, in 2020, the southern region graduated about 9,474 (43.3%), with over half, 6,492 (29.7%), in the city of Maputo; the central region 7,166 (32.8%), and 5,209 (23.8%) in the northern region.

According to Tambe, Costa, and Gonçalves (2022), the degree of access to higher education can be explained by urbanization (urban density, disparities in family and neighborhood social contexts) and provincial access to infrastructure (high resources) in the city of Maputo compared to other provinces. This means that development has significant effects on access to higher education.

For example, data provided by INE (2017) indicate that Mozambique has 28,861,863 inhabitants, distributed as follows: the northern region with 10,302,121 inhabitants, equivalent to 35.7% of the country's total population; the central region has 12,007,996 inhabitants, representing 41.6%, and finally, the southern region has 6,551,746 inhabitants, accounting for 22.7% of the Mozambican population. Based on these data, it is observed that the northern region is the most populous in the country, yet it has the least participation in higher education, with only 13.6%. In turn, the central region has a 30.8% participation in higher education, although it is the second most populous region in the country. Therefore, the southern region is the most privileged and benefits the most from higher education, with just over 55.6% of the total student population in higher education. In terms of provinces, Maputo city has 11.1% of the total Mozambican population, and the two most populous provinces have 20.6% (Nampula) and 18.5% (Zambézia) but with less access to higher education.

Based on the above data, we understand that in times of university reform, where even state institutions want to take on the financing of students from the central and northern regions of the country, a broad debate about the modalities in which the quota policy at UEM is practiced [and will be practiced] seems to be necessary, as well as in other Mozambican higher education institutions.

Such a policy needs to be more carefully conceived for greater effectiveness. To achieve this, according to Teixeira (2000), it is essential to deeply understand the limits of institutional experiences, the virtues already underway or in the implementation phase. In turn, Carneiro (2003) points out that for universalist policies to correspond to their ideal conception, it is necessary to recognize the factors that have determined the reproduction of inequalities and to consider focusing as a means of correcting these historical asymmetries, not as an alternative to social policy.

In the Mozambican context, poverty explains why disparities in access to higher education, outcomes, and opportunities vary significantly from region to region. In this regard, Escobal and Torero (2005), in their study, also found that the increase in poverty is attributed to regional disparities in human capital investment and public infrastructure development in Uganda. This situation is similar to what is observed in Mozambique, particularly in the last two northern provinces of the country (Cabo Delgado and Niassa), where a large part of the population has been left behind, and armed conflict has emerged, despite recent natural resource discoveries.

For example, the provinces of Cabo Delgado and Niassa perform very poorly in almost all indicators, bearing in mind that these provinces are among those with the highest proportions of the population living in poverty. Consequently, the most educated population is found in the

southern region of the country (Tambe, Costa & Gonçalves, 2022), as also elucidated by Table 1 on higher education enrollments in 2013, for instance.

For these reasons, it is necessary, as Braga and Lopes (2007) suggest, to question what effects the adoption of policies to combat poverty and the implementation of affirmative actions can have in the face of the deterioration of social fabric resulting from neoliberal policies, especially because the university is, by excellence, "the locus" of pluralistic education, knowledge production, and rights consolidation" (p. 15).

Table 1: Distribution of enrolled students by province of birth, 2013.

Instituições Públicas		
Província	Contag em %	
Cabo Delgado	2560	2.6
Gaza	6029	6.2
Inhambane	5571	5.7
Manica	4966	5.1
Maputo Cidade	15648	16.1
Maputo Provincia	16636	17.1
Nampula	10110	10.4
Niassa	2979	3.1
Sofala	11425	11.8
Tete	3876	4.0
Zambezia	7322	7.5
Outros locais*	9982	10.3
Total Matriculados Públicas	97104	100

Source: Ministry of Science, Technology, Higher Education, and Professional Technical Education –MCTESTP - (2014).

Table 1 presents percentage indicators of enrollments by province of origin. Among the different provinces of the three regions of the country, students from the southern region represent 50.3% of enrollments in higher education (HE) in 2013, for example, while students from the central and northern regions represent a percentage of 49.6%. These results, therefore, highlight the disadvantaged situation in accessing higher education and the challenges of the present time for altering ethnic inequalities.

These data also show that the enrollment rate in higher education for students from the central and northern regions of the country is lower than the rate for students from the southern region, especially from the city of Maputo. As indicated by the data presented on ethnic inequalities that structure Mozambican social and ethnic relations, we can infer that Table 1 reflects the condition of the ethnic groups in the central and northern regions of the country, leading

to lower access to higher education and completion of secondary education and other social components.

As mentioned earlier, the historical denial of the right to education for the populations of the central and northern regions of the country, embedded in Mozambique's nationalist construction, which democratically justifies demands for higher education for such groups in Mozambican higher education institutions (HEIs), allows for a possible dialogue with the formation of the nation anchored in both past and present contexts, in Mozambican socio-ethnic relations marked by ethnic asymmetries among groups with distinct identities.

This historical denial, on the other hand, causes the country to miss the opportunity to harness the talent and potential of a significant portion of its population, while perpetuating socio-economic and ethnic inequalities since employment and income opportunities are generally directly linked to the level of education. Additionally, ethnic inequalities in access to higher education can fuel tensions and conflicts between ethnic groups, undermining the much-desired national unity, social cohesion, and stability of the country, as seen in the 16-year civil war and the current armed attacks in the northern part of the country, specifically in the province of Cabo Delgado.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Mozambican HE, historically, has proven to be elitist and, consequently, reproduces and legitimizes its cultural capital, excluding the population or ethnic groups from the north and center of the country from the university space, as HEIs have always been accommodated in the region south for a long time.

For example, statistical data provided by MCTESTP (2020) shows that the ES student population by province of birth is disproportionately distributed across the different regions and provinces of the country, with the city of Maputo being the one with the largest number of students (100,883 students corresponding to 42.4%, with new admission rates of 34.5% and graduation rates of 29.7%). The provinces of Nampula with 23828 (corresponding to 10%) and Sofala with 23402 (9.8%), represent, respectively, the second and third province with the highest number of ES students, while the province of Niassa has the lowest number of ES students, with 7473 students (3.1%).

Likewise, in 2020, regarding regional distribution, according to Table 1, it is observed that the majority of the ES student population is concentrated in the south of the country, with 133,467 students, that is, 56.1%, to the detriment of the central region with only 64,997 students (27.3%) and the northern region with 39,313 students, corresponding to 16.7%.

Therefore, the possibility of reducing this type of distortion could come from the development and implementation of specific public affirmative action policies that favor the increase of HEIs in these regions and, consequently, their young people, as they would promote the confirmation of groups' rights historically discriminated ethnic groups, in the case of ES. Such actions are understood as redistributive measures that aim to favor groups victimized by past or present cultural or socioeconomic exclusion (Feres; Zoninsen, 2006), going in the direction of implementing the vaunted discourses of democratization of access to higher education, on the one hand.

On the other hand, the possibility of reducing this type of distortion would consist in the expansion and development of HEIs in rural areas, in order to reduce geographic barriers to access,

as well as in raising awareness of the importance of ethnic equality in HE and the elimination of discrimination to change mentalities and create a more just and egalitarian society.

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