

## The right to education for democracy in Mozambique: Hermeneutic analysis in the light of the political liberalism of John Rawls

*Direito à educação para a democracia em Moçambique: Uma análise  
hermenêutica à luz do liberalismo político de John Rawls*

*Derecho a la educación para la democracia en Mozambique: Un análisis  
hermenéutico a la luz del liberalismo político de John Rawls*

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### ABSTRACT

In a democratic State of constitutional law, education is a fundamental right and enables citizens to actively participate in the deliberations and political decisions of the nation. It is therefore up to lecturers to encourage their students to adopt a dialogical and critical stance towards the reality that surrounds them. In Mozambique, the right to education is guaranteed in the current Constitution of the Republic and is part of the fundamental rights, duties, and freedoms of every citizen. It assumes that the right to education for democracy favours ideological impartiality in the formation of liberal political culture, promotes political virtue and strengthens constitutional democracy. The aim of this article is therefore to carry out a hermeneutic analysis of the political education project in Mozambique and, based on John Rawls' Political Liberalism, to propose some elements that favour the fostering of responsible and democratic citizenship.

**Keywords:** Constitutional Law. Education. State. John Rawls. Mozambique.

### RESUMO

Em um Estado democrático de direito constitucional, a educação constitui direito fundamental e habilita o cidadão a participar ativamente nas deliberações e decisões políticas da nação. Assim, cabe ao docente suscitar nos seus educandos uma postura dialógica e crítica diante da realidade que os circunda. Em Moçambique, o direito à educação é garantido na atual Constituição da República e faz parte dos direitos, deveres e liberdades fundamentais de cada cidadão. Parte-se do pressuposto de que o direito à educação para a democracia favorece a imparcialidade ideológica na formação da cultura política liberal, promove a virtude política e fortalece a democracia constitucional. Sendo assim, o objetivo central deste artigo é fazer uma análise hermenêutica do projeto político de ensino em Moçambique e, com base no liberalismo político de John Rawls, propor alguns elementos que favoreçam a promoção da cidadania responsável e democrática.

**Palavras-chave:** Direito Constitucional. Educação. Estado. John Rawls. Moçambique.

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## RESUMEN

En un Estado democrático de derecho constitucional, la educación es un derecho fundamental y permite a los ciudadanos participar activamente en las decisiones políticas de la nación. Corresponde, por tanto, a los docentes animar a sus educandos a adoptar una postura crítica y dialogante ante la realidad que les rodea. En Mozambique, el derecho a la educación está garantizado en la actual Constitución de la República y forma parte de los derechos, deberes y libertades fundamentales de todo ciudadano. Se parte del supuesto de que el derecho a la educación para la democracia favorece la imparcialidad ideológica en la formación de la cultura política liberal, promueve la virtud política y fortalece la democracia constitucional. El objetivo de este artículo es, hacer un análisis hermenéutico del proyecto de educación política en Mozambique y, a partir del liberalismo político de Rawls, proponer algunos elementos que favorezcan la promoción de una ciudadanía responsable y democrática.

**Palabras clave:** Derecho Constitucional. Educación. Estado. John Rawls. Mozambique.

## INTRODUCTION

The needs of contemporary society require that education prepare members for society who, enjoying democratic freedom, participate in fundamental decision-making processes of their nation and, aware of their rights and duties under the Constitution, promote a culture of peace, justice, and equity in the society. For this reason, the right to ‘education for democracy’<sup>1</sup> is an urgent necessity, not because it is lacking in depth, but because, based on this right, individuals can live their citizenship with greater integrity and security.

Focusing on the educational reality in Mozambique, access to this right is an existential challenge for most of the population. The Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique establishes that education is a right of all the people in the country and, at the same time, a duty of the State and the family (Art. 88). However, it should be noted that, although the State enacts laws that democratise education and free access for all sectors of the society, many Mozambican children, for countless reasons, are deprived of this right. In fact, it can be said that, while there is equality of opportunity in accessing this right, there is a clear difference in results. The latest census conducted in Mozambique in 2017 shows a 40% illiteracy rate in the country and 38% of children aged 6 to 17, at that time, out of school (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2019, p. 35).

Within such a context, it is appropriate to study Rawls’ work, given that, more than just seeking to understand ‘how it is possible for a stable and just society of free and equal citizens, deeply divided by religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines, to exist over time’ (Rawls, 2000b, p. 33), he formulates a conception of political justice for a constitutional democratic regime that values ‘impartiality’<sup>2</sup> in its

- 1 Roughly speaking, the concept of education for democracy by John Rawls finds its hermeneutic correlation in his procedural model based on a hypothetical contract in which people would orchestrate their actions based on the principle of justice established under the “veil of ignorance.” Theoretically, education for democracy gives individuals a certain rational autonomy, so that they can understand political culture and thus become direct participants in the construction of a citizenship rooted in equity and justice (Rawls, 2003, p. 223). Within this perspective, it is assumed that, educated for democracy, people would constantly fight for the defence of individual freedom, equal opportunities, and the distribution of the advantages of social cooperation, from which everyone, especially the less fortunate, would benefit. This view is further explored by John Rawls in his concept of property-owning democracy presented in *Justice as Fairness* (§ 42).
- 2 Given that Rawls seeks to establish principles of justice that aim to regulate the lives of individuals in a given society, when it comes to education, the concept of impartiality in the construction of public education policies can be conceived as a factor by which society can be educated to establish principles and values that respect the equitable terms of social cooperation (reasonableness), thus promoting a decent life for all (rationality). Thus, education, being the path, by which one reaches the “original position” under the veil of ignorance, promotes in each citizen a sense of democratic justice and equity (Lima, 2020, p. 22). In this regard, the idea of impartiality in education presupposes a very altruistic educational programme from which all members of society would benefit (Rawls, 2000b, p. 59).

pedagogical and educational method, proposing educational pedagogies that are sufficient to lead the individual to act as a free citizen, 'without the need for external sanctions, or at least not in the form of rewards and punishments imposed by God or the State' (Rawls, 2000b, p. 35).

This paper assumes that the right to democratic education in the teaching and learning process of Mozambican students is rarely promoted, and if there are exceptions, it becomes a privilege for minorities, and thus a challenge and a gap in the formation of Mozambican citizenship. Due to the lack of pedagogical training that broadens horizons and fosters the development of critical thinking in the light of the reality, most Mozambicans only participate in the political life of the nation at electoral times. Thus, we agree with Ngoenha (2014, p. 170) when he insists that "the quality of political citizenship depends, first and foremost, on a thorough education in political rights, that is, the right of each individual and each group in particular to collective decision-making processes."

In consideration of the aforementioned elements, the objective of this paper is to provide a philosophical reflection and hermeneutic analysis of the pedagogical political project that guides educational policy in Mozambique in the light of Rawls' (2000a) thinking in his work *Political Liberalism*. Therefore, in order to more effectively address the proposal, the study is divided into three sections, namely: the right to education in the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique; education: a fundamental, political and civil right and duty of the State; and education for democracy: a hermeneutic critique of the pedagogical political project for education in Mozambique in the light of John's political liberalism. The decision was taken to adopt Rawlsian philosophy due to the belief that it offers fruitful philosophical proposals with the potential to inspire education agents in new projects of humanisation and social transformation in this country.

## THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE

Rawlsian literature suggests that, in any reasonably fair constitutional democratic state, there should be a constant quest to promote a certain impartial equality of opportunity — especially in education. Otherwise, not all parts of society will be able to participate in public debates or contribute to public, social and economic policies in the nation (Rawls, 2001, p. 64). Thus, as a fundamental right, "education should be designed to reduce, rather than exacerbate, class barriers" (Rawls, 1999a, p. 161-162).

It is widely acknowledged that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established education as a human right from the outset. Consequently, with the universalisation of human rights, education has come to occupy a reasonably important place in all Member States of the United Nations. Since 1948, this right has been affirmed in several global treaties, including the United Nations Convention on Education, Science and Culture, the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UNESCO, 2007, p. 7). Mozambique, as a member state and signatory to UN resolutions, has enshrined education as a right and duty of the state since the Proclamation of Independence in 1975. Indeed, in the initial constitution of the Republic, Mozambique committed to establishing the requisite conditions to ensure that no national citizen would be deprived of this right.

As stated in Article 31 of the constitution of the Popular Republic of Mozambique, work and education are recognised as the rights and duties of all citizens. In order to combat the consequences of colonialism, the state has a responsibility to promote the conditions necessary for the extension of these rights to all citizens (Mozambique, 1975). Furthermore, the constitution stipulates that "all citizens of the Popular Republic of Mozambique enjoy the same rights and are subject to the same duties, regardless of colour, race, sex, ethnic origin, place of birth, religion, level of education, social or professional status" (Mozambique, 1975).

The present Constitution of the Republic maintains the same deliberation made by the former legislator, but has been supplemented by the stipulation that it is the responsibility of the Mozambican State to promote the extension of education, continuing vocational training, and equal access for all citizens to enjoy this right (Moçambique, 2004). As demonstrated in this article, the State has taken on the responsibility of promoting and organising the teaching and learning process in the country. This responsibility is delineated in Law No. 18/2018 of 28 December, which sets the following elements as general principles:

a) education, culture, training and balanced and inclusive human development are the rights of all Mozambicans; b) education as a right and duty of the State; c) promotion of responsible and democratic citizenship, patriotic awareness and the values of peace, dialogue, family and the environment; d) promotion of the democratisation of education, guaranteeing the right to fair and effective equal opportunities in access to and success in schooling for citizens; e) organisation and promotion of education, as an integral part of educational action, under the terms defined in the Constitution of the Republic, aiming at sustainable development, fully preparing individuals to actively participate in political, economic and social life, respecting human rights and democratic principles, cultivating a spirit of tolerance, solidarity and respect for others and for differences; f) inclusion, equity and equal opportunities in access to education; g) secularism and non-partisanship of the National System of Education (Moçambique, 2018).

As can be seen, the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique and Law No. 18/2018 of the 28<sup>th</sup> of December on the National Education System in Mozambique adhere to the directives outlined in Article 26 of the Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates:

1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. 2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. 3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Moçambique, 2018).

When considering the legislation of the Republic of Mozambique in its entirety, there is a clear alignment between the Constitution and the principles of Rawls' philosophical system, particularly with regard to the promotion of citizen participation in deliberations concerning constitutional principles and fundamental issues of justice (Rawls, 2000a, p. 52). As elucidated in the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique and the principles of Rawls, the rule of law is obligated to promote awareness of citizenship and democratic responsibility. Furthermore, the rule of law is tasked with upholding the value of democratic peace, the family, sustainable development, and frank and open dialogue between different ideological, partisan and/or political conceptions. It is evident that this responsibility does not lie exclusively with the State in its capacity as the proponent of democratic political culture. The family and society play a fundamental and indispensable role in this process, as will be discussed in the following sections.

## EDUCATION: A FUNDAMENTAL, POLITICAL, AND CIVIL RIGHT AND A DUTY OF THE STATE

The concept of education as a fundamental, political, and civil right was universalised with the consolidation of the United Nations Charter. Recognised by various sovereign states, the Charter highlighted education as an individual right. The Charter established that human beings have the right to education from birth. Therefore, the state has a moral duty to ensure that none of its citizens are denied this right, working alongside families to achieve this.

Based on statistical data published by the UN in 2022, it is evident that, despite this right being recognised and accepted by members of the organisation, much of the world's population lives on the margins of educational exclusion. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization — UNESCO's 2022 Global Education Monitoring Report, approximately 60% of young people aged 15 to 17 are not enrolled in school. While several governments are seeking to implement policies to encourage families and wider society to engage with the teaching and learning process, the report shows that there is a high rate of school dropouts.<sup>3</sup>

"Almost half of lower secondary school leavers in 18 countries with recent survey data do not achieve basic literacy, defined as the ability to read a simple sentence" (UNESCO, 2022, p. 28). Highlighting this issue in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, the document notes that:

The completion rate for primary education exceeds 90% in all regions except sub-Saharan Africa, where only two out of three children complete this level. However, this figure rises from 65% to 76% when those who arrived very late in the final year are included. In sub-Saharan Africa, 23% of primary school pupils and 31% of secondary school pupils are significantly older, which explains why the region has the largest discrepancy between timely and overall completion rates (UNESCO, 2022, p. 25).

Examining the situation in Mozambique, the most recent General Population Census, conducted in 2017, reveals that 63.6% of six-year-olds were out of school in 2007, a figure which increased to 73.4% over the following ten years. The same trend was observed among seven-year-olds, with the proportion not enrolled in school rising from 41.5% in 2007 to 65.6% in 2017 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2019). This indicates that Mozambique is experiencing a worrying phenomenon due to the increase in educational exclusion, which can have a negative impact on the perception and practice of citizenship. Education, as the training of citizens, carries with it the responsibility of positioning individuals as historical and political subjects who are capable of bringing about significant changes to social reality (Guebert and Rodrigues, 2021, p. 263). Consequently, the high illiteracy rate in the country poses an internal threat because, without education, "the vast world of administrative implementation of public policies is left without control, public discussion or participation" (Ngoenha, 2014, p. 172).

3 According to Zitzoski (2018, p. 18-19), several factors that contribute to school dropout rates and the difficulty of creating an academic culture among students are related to both pedagogical issues and human, professional, political, and social relationships, such as: a) communicating with students based on the content of the subject without relating it to their real lives, without discussing the problems of social reality, and without connecting one topic to another; b) the dominance of technocracy, of neutral knowledge, of professionals (technicians) who make no effort to engage in dialogue with popular knowledge in order to work with the people, thus reproducing the dictatorship of scientific-technical knowledge without the necessary contextualisation of it; c) the arrogance of fragmented knowledge, where each area settles into its own particular world and prejudices other knowledge and/or scientific areas as unimportant for practical action or solving concrete problems of everyday life in society; and d) the low potential for mobilising civil society in the process of building participatory citizenship, which requires the active involvement of everyone in decisions about public affairs, as well as in the oversight of public service providers.

The premises presented thus far emphasise that, although the right to education is enshrined in the constitutions of many states and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it remains a significant challenge for many nations and peoples. Therefore, real and concrete actions are required to guarantee this right for all individuals, regardless of their origin or social and economic status, and a philosophical and sociological hermeneutics is necessary to foster these actions. Before delving further, it is important to note that, in a democratic state governed by the rule of law, “the constitutional role of education is, above all, to promote citizenship” (Albrecht, 2022, p. 145).

Therefore, international law grants each state autonomy to promote and guarantee the consolidation of education and national citizenship culture within its territory. Ranieri (2013, p. 60-61) emphasises this fact on a global scale, highlighting that:

In general, international documents dealing with this matter, whether global or regional, recognise the right and duty of States to regulate education, based on the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as their obligation to finance education. This reaffirms that education must primarily address local social needs so individuals can integrate into their community.

From a Rawlsian hermeneutic perspective, establishing education as a fundamental right and duty of the sovereign state aims to reaffirm that, under the normative legislation of the democratic constitutional state, “all persons have an equal right to a fully satisfactory scheme of equal basic rights and freedoms for all, a scheme that is compatible with others, in which political freedoms and only these should have their equitable value guaranteed” (Rawls, 2000b, p. 47). With regard to education for democracy, the author highlights that a nation’s education system is just when people are neither disadvantaged nor favoured due to circumstances beyond their control, such as economic and social status, place of origin or cultural environment.

In this sense, education, being a fundamental political and civil right and a duty of the State, becomes a privileged place in which the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by law in society are enjoyed. Commitment to justice and equality in society led Rawls to believe that a theory of educational justice should not be regarded as such if it promotes differences within its internal system that harm people due to circumstances beyond their control (Gargarella, 2008, p. 26). Consequently, the democratic principles established in the educational system proposed by Rawls serve to reinforce the values and precepts of democratic society, thereby endorsing an objectively democratic and civic model of education. In this manner, the epistemological values inherent in the democratic education proposed by Rawls are transformed into a democratic political apology that aims to empower citizens to participate actively in the politics of their country.

An examination of the reality of Mozambique reveals that, although education is a right guaranteed by the constitution, there is a paucity of critical awareness and a dialogical reading of the reality surrounding the student. As was discussed in the previous section, education in Mozambique is considered both a fundamental political and civil right and a duty of the state (Art. 88). However, from a philosophical standpoint, it is understood that educational policy, due to a deficient management structure in its educational planning, lacks the mechanisms to implement what the Constitution of the Republic guarantees as a fundamental right of every Mozambican citizen.

From Rawls’ (2000b, p. 77) perspective, when properly guided, education frees citizens and enables them to take responsibility for their goals, thereby influencing their evaluation of various claims. In this sense, it can be argued that education fulfils its role by enabling individuals to integrate into the public life of their society and develop an understanding of the dynamics of political justice in their country. In this regard, Rawls remarks that the State’s preoccupation with education stems from its capacity to foresee the future of its citizens. According to the author,

The state's concern for their education is linked to their future role as citizens. It focuses on elements as essential as the acquisition of the ability to understand public culture and participate in its institutions, the capacity to be economically independent and autonomous members of society throughout their lives, and the development of political virtues, all from a perspective that is itself political (Rawls, 2000a, p. 319).

Delving deeper into the same issue from the perspective of access to quality education in Mozambique, it is important to highlight that educational institutions derive great prestige from the history of this country and the world as a whole. It is widely acknowledged that they represent a privileged environment for the cultivation of critical thinking and the advancement of scientific culture. They are the primary agents for the advancement of scientific knowledge, which has been the dominant factor in the contemporary world. Assié-Lumumba (2006, p. 18) asserts that these figures embody hope and nostalgia. It has been argued that they facilitate the development of critical thinking skills and a comprehensive understanding of the social context.

Cognisant of the intellectual enhancement that educational institutions impart to students, the legislators of the current Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique stipulate that "access to public higher education institutions must guarantee equality and equity of opportunity and the democratisation of education, taking into account the needs in terms of qualifications and raising the educational and scientific level of the country" (Mozambique, 2004). It is evident that the objective of this initiative is to utilise educational initiatives to promote equitable opportunities and foster social justice in Mozambique. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the principles of equality and equity in education are contingent upon the presence of genuine freedom. As Guinote (2014, p. 12) elucidates,

Freedom in education will only truly exist when it allows everyone, regardless of their disabilities and according to their respective merits, to have access to the best that is available to all, and when freedom is not just the triumph of the strongest in the struggle for a particular good or service, in this case education.

Consequently, the necessity to rectify disparities in access to quality education in Mozambique has become imperative, as this pertains to the comprehensive array of references that interweave fundamental rights and fundamental responsibilities of the State and families. As a State concerned with guaranteeing the fundamental rights of its citizens, Mozambique can demonstrate its fidelity to the Constitution by ensuring "the integrity of its citizens, in the justice and decency of its national political and social institutions" (Rawls, 2001, p. 61).

With respect to the question of access to quality education in Mozambique, it has been observed that, in certain regions of the country, education is regarded as falling within the domain of secondary responsibility of the State. The State asserts that it is fulfilling its constitutional obligation; however, there is frequently a delay in the remuneration of education professionals, inadequate infrastructure for effective learning, and insufficient investment in the training and professional development of staff.<sup>4</sup> To illustrate this point, the 2024 Economic and Social Plan and State Budget (PESOE) proposal indicates that the government intends to reduce the hiring of new civil servants by 61%, with greater emphasis

4 According to Charles (2023a, p. 3), 'the disproportionate increase in expenditure on wages and salaries (from 9.8% of GDP in 2017 to 15.8% in 2022), combined with slow growth in tax revenues and increased debt servicing, has made public finances unsustainable. This has resulted in delays to salary payments.' This is reflected in the ratio of tax revenues to operating expenditure, which shows that operating expenditure far exceeds tax revenues. In 2022, the ratio of public expenditure to tax revenue was 123%. The government incurred operating expenditure of 284.9 billion meticaís and generated tax revenue of 232.4 billion meticaís.

on the education and health sectors. According to Charles (2023b, p. 1), the objective of this measure is to rectify irregularities in the single salary scale (TSU) and to implement mandatory reforms that will result in the dismissal of 25,278 civil servants and state agents.

In this scenario, the question that must be posed is whether a reduction in investment in human resources in the education and health sectors will enable the needs of the Mozambican people in general and the student body in particular to be met. In circumstances where the stability of services in these sectors is already questionable, it is pertinent to consider whether the current level of investment in the education of the Mozambican populace is sufficient. Such a reduction will undoubtedly compromise the quality and capacity of the public education system throughout the country. Those charged with implementing these measures appear to be overlooking the following fact:

The right to education allows marginalised adults and children to integrate into the community, promotes women's emancipation and protects children from sexual exploitation or labour exploitation. It also enables the spread of democracy, human rights and environmental protection, which are crucial values in the contemporary world. From this point of view, it is worth remembering that the effectiveness of the right to education and its repercussions mutually benefit the individual and the community. Private and public interests thus merge, as do local, regional and national interests (Ranieri, 2013, p. 56).

It is therefore essential to emphasise that public debate, whether academic or secular, necessitates the reframing and eventual renunciation of individual, institutional, partisan and political interests or convictions in order to establish a common good that is accessible and equitable to all (Zambam and Almeida, 2017, p. 1,503). As Ranieri (2013, p. 56) observes, "[e]ducation is a human rights imperative, the sustenance and guardian of life, which allows for the consolidation of citizenship as 'the right to have rights'". Consequently, the prevailing consensus among scholars is that the onus falls upon society, the international community, and the individual to strive for the implementation of this right.

As will be demonstrated in the following section, Rawls concurs with this line of thinking and asserts, in his theory of justice, that all social values, including education, freedom and opportunities, income and wealth, the foundations of self-respect, should be distributed equally in society, unless the distribution of one or all of them is in favour of the less fortunate (Rawls, 2002, p. 66). Education is regarded as both a value and a necessity, without which citizens cannot achieve their objectives or promote their goals.

Several authors consider it a primary good, although Rawls did not categorically state that it is part of this list of goods. It is evident that this constitutes a discussion that objectively falls outside the scope of this study. For didactic reasons, mention is made of the existence of this debate in the academies. Finally, it is important to emphasise that Rawls's work does not constitute a theory of education in the strict sense, but rather a political theory. As Rohling (2016, p. 394) observes, his approach to education is designed to underscore the pivotal role of education in the context of a constitutional democracy, taking into account both political and moral values.

## **EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY: A HERMENEUTIC CRITIQUE OF THE PEDAGOGICAL POLITICAL PROJECT FOR EDUCATION IN MOZAMBIQUE IN LIGHT OF JOHN RAWLS'S POLITICAL LIBERALISM**

Education for democracy, in its broadest sense, aims to furnish individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to make informed personal, political and social decisions that are grounded

in democratic values. This process fosters autonomy of thought and the capacity for independent decision-making, thereby contributing to the development of a democratic citizenship. It is therefore recognised that education for democracy is not merely civic erudition or the expression of political convictions.

As posited by Benevides (1996, p. 228), the cultivation of democratic values is paramount in fostering awareness of dignity among members of a society, thereby empowering individuals to exercise their civic liberties more effectively. According to the author, it can thus be posited that public education in democracies functions as a curious political inversion, akin to a paradox: while it is initiated by the state, its objective is to fortify individuals before the state, rather than the inverse (Benevides, 1996, p. 228). In this context, when discussing this type of education, the author emphasises that

Education for democracy consists of active citizenship, which is defined as training for participation in public life. This involves participating as either an ordinary citizen or a ruler. Education is not just the social process that makes rulers aware of their rights and duties, and enables them to fulfil these conscientiously and intelligently. Rather, it is about enabling everyone to become potential rulers (Benevides, 1996, p. 228).

From this standpoint, Benevides (1996) aligns with John Rawls' concept of a well-ordered society, emphasising mutual respect and recognition among its members. This ideal is said to be best achieved through an education based on human values, with the pursuit of political justice serving as the overarching goal. Consequently, he proposes the notion that educational and cultural institutions within such a society must assume the responsibility of imparting education to its constituents and fostering an appreciation for their human values. According to Rawls (2003, p. 79), "this task of education falls to what we might call the broad function of a political conception."

As has been previously observed, this approach conceptualises education for democracy as a fundamental civic right, and as a medium through which fundamental freedoms can be established and experienced. Consequently, educational policy for this type of education must be designed in a way that is consistent and guarantees equality and equity among all members of the society (Rawls, 2000b, p. 349). For this reason, Rawls emphasises that, first and foremost,

the value of education should not be assessed solely in terms of economic efficiency and social welfare. The role of education is equally important, if not more important, in providing a person with the opportunity to appreciate the culture of his/her society and to take part in its activities, thereby giving each individual a secure sense of self-worth (Rawls, 2002, p. 108).

From Rawls' (2000b, p. 351) perspective, education for democracy is considered to be one of the "central spheres of application" of fundamental freedoms. This is due to the fact that it is conducive to the integral development of citizens and their specific empowerment to fully exercise their moral capacities as free and equal persons. As is evident, the principles of personal independence, self-respect and the ability to make fully informed decisions are, in essence, identified as the fundamental objectives of an education system that fosters democratic values.

Another significant aspect that must be given due consideration is that education for democracy, in the opinion of John Rawls, is founded on issues and forums of public reason. According to him, "the ideal of public reason applies to citizens when they engage in political argumentation in the public forum" (Rawls, 2000b, p. 264). It is therefore acknowledged that public reason, in its fundamental

nature, is oriented towards the collective good of society as a whole. Consequently, it is imperative to recognise that public reason is founded upon the principle of legitimacy. This suggests that “the exercise of political power is proper and therefore justifiable only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution whose essential elements can reasonably be expected to be endorsed by all citizens” (Rawls, 2000b, p. 266).

In this sense, according to the principles of Rawlsian democracy, the objective of education for democracy in a democratic state governed by the rule of law is to enable citizens to engage in political debate in a political forum, thus becoming citizens who adhere to a political project with maturity and full awareness. Therefore, “seeking to satisfy this condition is one of the tasks that this ideal of democratic politics requires of us. Understanding how to behave as a democratic citizen includes understanding an ideal of public reason” (Rawls, 2000b, p. 267). It is evident that the process of education for democracy, within the context of a democratic state governed by the rule of law, confers upon the individual the status of a free citizen, equal before the law, as an integral component of the collective body of the nation. It is hypothesised that this type of education will enable individuals to exercise their citizenship with a sense of justice in accordance with the democratic principles legitimised by their nation’s constitution.

As is evident, John Rawls’ conception of education for democracy advocates equal access to quality education, thereby enabling individuals to engage meaningfully in the political life of the nation. In this manner, Rawls’ proposal endeavours to furnish alternative means for all members of a society to possess full and “rational autonomy.”<sup>5</sup> Based on what has been discussed so far, it can be said that the education for democracy seeks the total eradication of political precariousness. In fact, Pedro Demo (1995, p. 2 *apud* Mazzuoli, 2014, p. 305) argues that,

The most significant challenge confronting citizenship is the eradication of political poverty, which is the underlying cause of the ignorance surrounding the notion of being a mere instrument of political manoeuvring. A non-citizen is, above all, an individual who, due to the inability to critically assess the marginalisation imposed upon them, is not equipped with the capacity to conceptualise an alternative history and to organise themselves politically in pursuit of that history. They see injustice as destiny. They make the wealth of others without participating in it.

From this standpoint, Rawls posits that, if education means to cultivate critical thinking and equip individuals to function as active, equal, and free members of a society governed by a constitution, its pedagogical political project must be modelled on structural aspects that promote both rational and full autonomy. This means that, from childhood, people should be instructed to cultivate a sense of justice and political virtue, ensuring that they honour and embody their citizenship as guided by their nation’s constitution. In reference to this particular aspect, Rawls comments that:

The education of children should also prepare them to be fully cooperative members of the society and enable them to provide for their own livelihood; it should also encourage political virtues so that they want to honour the equitable

<sup>5</sup> When introducing the concept of rational autonomy and full autonomy, it is essential to clarify that, according to Rawls, rational autonomy “is expressed in the exercise of the capacity to formulate, revise, and seek to materialise a conception of the good, and to deliberate in accordance with it. It is also expressed in the capacity to enter into agreement with others (when reasonable constraints arise)” (Rawls, 2000b, p. 117). On the other hand, full autonomy is “realised by citizens when they act in accordance with the principles of justice that specify the equitable terms of cooperation that they would apply to themselves, when fairly represented as free and equal persons” (Rawls, 2000b, p. 122). Explaining further, Rawls states that full autonomy “is also achieved through citizens’ participation in the public affairs of the society and in its collective self-determination over time” (Rawls, 2000b, p. 122-123).

terms of social cooperation in their relations with the rest of the society. Some may object that requiring children to understand the political concept in this way is, in effect, although this is not the intention, educating them in a comprehensive liberal concept (Rawls, 2003, p. 221-222).

Adopting this approach might facilitate the establishment of multiple mechanisms that would enable individuals to experience freedom and justice within the societal context. As a process commencing at an early age for citizens, it would encompass constitutional culture and civic education, freedom of conscience and religious affiliation, amongst other elements. Regarding this educational process, Rawls remarks:

It will simply require that children's education include the study of their civil and constitutional rights, so that they know that freedom of conscience exists in their society and that apostasy is not a crime in the eyes of the law, all in order to ensure that, when they become adults, their adherence to this religious sect is not based on ignorance of their basic rights or fear of punishment for crimes that do not exist. Furthermore, their education should prepare them to be full members of the society and enable them to be autonomous; it should also encourage political virtues so that they desire to respect the equitable terms of social cooperation in their relations with the rest of the society (Rawls, 2000a, 317-318).

In this perspective, Zambam and Almeida (2017, p. 1502) emphasise that the right to education for democracy can be regarded as a priority, particularly in developing countries. As was discussed in the preceding section, education is considered to be a "fundamental public and subjective right."<sup>6</sup> This means that individuals are legally entitled to demand that the State guarantee their fundamental rights. Furthermore, it was emphasised that education is a political right because it guarantees active participation in the public life of society as an adult. Consequently, the promotion of education for democracy becomes a right of every citizen, as it fosters a fundamental comprehension of the values, duties and rights enshrined in the constitution (Rawls, 2000b, p. 247-248).

In this sense, John Rawls (2005) emphasises that, in any democratic state governed by the rule of law, citizens must be informed and empowered to understand the government's plans so that they can accept or reject them with full awareness (Rawls, 2005, p. 448). It is therefore vital that all citizens, irrespective of their origin, economic, cultural, social and political status, are guaranteed access to the information and understanding of these plans. It is from this perspective that Rawls draws attention to the fact that:

The less fortunate are not, if all goes well, the unfortunate and unlucky — objects of our charity and compassion, or, worse still, our pity — but those to whom reciprocity is due as a matter of political justice among those who are free citizens and equal to all others (Rawls, 2003, p. 197).

In this position, Rawls introduces a new hermeneutic critique to establish the relevance and indispensability of non-conditioned democracy, whether for its procedural pedagogical character or for its instrumental vigour (Zambam and Almeida, 2017, p. 1,502). As previously discussed, in Rawls's

6 According to Duarte (2004, p. 133), subjective public law 'is the capacity recognised in individuals as members of society, enabling them to enforce legal norms in their own interest'. Thus, it enables individuals to convert the abstract legal norms of a given system into something beneficial to themselves. While the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique does not characterise education as a subjective public right, it can be argued that it is because citizens can claim and demand compliance with this right. This is not to suggest that Rawls presented education as a subjective public right, but rather to emphasise that both the author under study and the Mozambican Constitution open up the possibility of considering it as such.

theory of justice, education serves as a conduit for the actualisation of justice as fairness. The concept of education for democracy is predicated on the notion that it enables individuals to attain authentic freedom, thereby fostering recognition of the fundamental rights and freedoms that are universally guaranteed to all members of society (Rawls, 2003, p. 60). It can thus be posited that this pedagogical approach assists in identifying “which conception of justice is best suited to specify the equitable terms of social cooperation between citizens considered free and equal, and fully cooperative members of society throughout their lives, from one generation to the next” (Rawls, 2000b, p. 45).

In this sense, the provision of education for democracy, as a tool for the consolidation of a democratic constitutional citizenship in a well-ordered society, must be provided equally and to the highest standard. This is not merely a matter of fulfilling a constitutional duty; it is also about seeking equity and justice in the lives of citizens. Therefore, it is not merely a question of ensuring the minimum stipulated by law; rather, it is about attaining the maximum that is necessary to achieve justice and equity. According to Freeman (2007, p. 96), the idea is to ensure that individuals are both visionary and capable of discerning opportunities for individual and social advancement. The objective is to foster an environment that encourages the pursuit and development of talents, with the ultimate goal of achieving economic growth and stability at a societal level.

A thorough investigation into the pedagogical policy project for education in Mozambique reveals several concerning issues. Firstly, the quality of education is poor and does not meet the concrete demands of the population regarding their economic and social growth. Secondly and perhaps most importantly, the gross enrolment rate in the country remains among the lowest in Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, with only 592 students per 100 thousand inhabitants (UNESCO, 2019, p. 56-57). Moreover, the document underscores that, with regard to access to higher education,

Equal access to higher education remains a challenge, especially for young people from poor families. This is also reflected in Mozambique’s educational pyramid, which has a very broad base, suggesting that millions of children are enrolled in primary school, but then narrows sharply to a point at the top, reflecting low transition rates from primary to secondary school and from secondary to tertiary education. A USAID [United States Agency for International Development] study found that, while 94 per cent of girls in Mozambique enrol in primary school, more than half drop out by the fifth grade, only 11 per cent continue on to secondary school, and only 1 per cent continue on to tertiary education (UNESCO, 2019, p. 58).

It is evident from these statistics that, despite the political-pedagogical project being endorsed by the Constitution of the Republic, it is failing to fulfil its intended function, and is consequently encountering a significant crisis in its implementation within society. The hypothesis that Rawls’ proposal to establish a democratic political culture among young people through academia is difficult to achieve in Mozambique is one that merits closer examination. It is hypothesised that, amongst a number of factors, the absence of adequate educational provision is a pivotal element in the exacerbation of social and economic inequalities (Rawls, 2003, p. 56). Consequently, as asserted by the author, it is imperative to

to regulate, through the laws governing inheritance and legacies, how people acquire property in order to make its distribution more equitable, to promote equal opportunities in education, and many other things. The validity of these fundamental norms of justice over time does not diminish, but rather enables the important values expressed by the notion of free and fair agreements sealed by individuals and associations within the basic structure, since the principles that apply directly to these agreements (e.g., contract law) are not sufficient on their own to preserve substantive justice (Rawls, 2003, p. 75-76).

In the context of these observations, the following questions must be posed: how can we ensure the active and continuous participation in society of members who, for various reasons, are deprived of the right to education? In the event of their participation, what assurance can be provided that their involvement in the political life of the rule of law will not be influenced by any prominent class or by the fear of committing infractions that are non-existent? In the absence of access to quality education, it is challenging to prepare members who are knowledgeable in political virtues and capable of questioning and, when necessary, enforcing their rights or duties as citizens based on the Constitution.

From this standpoint, questions can be raised concerning the centralisation of public service management and the absence of transparency in the management and development of the nation's educational policies. Indeed, the Education Ministry's strategic plan for education 2020–2029 explicitly condemns corruption in the education sector, acknowledging that the perception index for this phenomenon is notably high (Minedh, 2020, p. 22). This phenomenon, which has been observed not only in Mozambique but also in various regions worldwide, is of particular concern. Gamarnikow's (2013) observations pertain to Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which concerns the right to education:

Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is concerned with ensuring that all children have access to schools and an education system. This is important, especially in a context where, worldwide, 75 million children do not attend school and 776 million adults do not have a basic level of literacy (Gamarnikow, 2013, p. 195).

It is evident that the primary challenge confronting the political-pedagogical project of education in Mozambique pertains to its strategic and administrative instability. It appears that education is being conceptualised within the framework of utilitarian principles, a standpoint that, according to Rawls (2002, p. 30), “does not take seriously the difference between people.” Conversely, Rawls (2002, p. 29-30) contends that it extends “to the society the principle of choice for a single human being, and then extends the functioning, bringing all people together as one, through the creative acts of the sympathetic and impartial observer.” It has been established that pedagogical political projects grounded in utilitarian principles tend to exhibit a deficiency in the promotion of a sense of citizenship, creativity, solidarity, sustainability, responsibility, and autonomy. In order to stimulate these qualities in students, it is necessary to develop projects according to the needs of each society and the concrete reality of the students.

It can thus be concluded that John Rawls' political liberalism asserts that, in a constitutional state, a well-designed and accessible political project can promote full autonomy among citizens. This is achieved by ensuring that citizens are members of a society that adheres to the principles of justice<sup>7</sup> and democracy. These principles are adopted by education and ensure the dispersion of ownership of the means of production and human capital (Rawls, 2001, p. 139). In light of this,

<sup>7</sup> It should be clarified at this point that the approach taken in this article presents education for democracy as one of the means by which members of a given society would be brought to the “original position” where they would establish the principles of justice that would guide their conduct towards a just, participatory society with a well-structured system of cooperation. It is in this sense that Rawls (2001) states that the “original position” “represents the result of a rational process of deliberation under ideal and non-historical conditions that express certain reasonable requirements. There is no practicable way to implement this deliberative process and ensure that it complies with the conditions imposed. Therefore, when the result is achieved through deliberation by the parties in real situations, it cannot be corroborated by pure procedural justice. Instead of relying on real agreements, the result must be reached through analytical reasoning, that is, the original position must be characterised with sufficient accuracy so that it is possible to discover, based on the nature of the parties and the situation they face, which conception of justice is favoured by the balance of reasons. The content of justice must be discovered by reason, that is, by resolving the problem of agreement that arises in the original position” (Rawls, 2001, p. 326).

Rawls (1999b, p. 464) emphasises that education should foster students' ability to function as active and cooperative members of society, emphasising self-reliance and a foundation in political virtues. This, in turn, enables them to uphold the principles of fair social cooperation in their interactions with their peers and society at large.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that Rawls was not privy to the theoretical intricacies inherent in the evolution of Mozambique's pedagogical political project, nor did he have a comprehensive understanding of the concept of "quality education." These elements pertain to overarching doctrines. Indeed, the focus of his research is the establishment and solidification of a political culture within the societal context. In this regard, it is evident that the efforts of the State alone are insufficient. The family is obliged to collaborate in order to establish a society that is both just and equitable, and which is characterised by transparency. In light of this, Rawls elucidates that:

the central function of the family is to provide reasonably and effectively for the upbringing and care of children, ensuring their moral development and education for a broader culture. Citizens must have a sense of justice and the political virtues that sustain just political and social institutions. Furthermore, the family must perform this function by producing children in sufficient numbers to maintain a sustainable society (Rawls, 2003, p. 230-231).

It is acknowledged that access to quality education, as proposed by Rawls (2003), remains limited for many individuals. In this context, the Mozambican educational curriculum, in its constitutional genesis, could serve as a privileged space wherein society is instructed to recognise its shortcomings, challenges, needs and opportunities. This would facilitate the development of public policies that promote citizenship devoid of pre-established and biased political affiliations. In a similar vein, Honneth (2013, p. 555) asserts that education for democracy serves three distinct functions: "professional qualification, compensation for educational deficits related to family or environment, and general preparation for the role of a citizen."

It is evident that Rawls' concept of education for democracy can be regarded as a realistic utopia, as his theories, principles and moral concepts seek to delineate a reasonable and fair society. In the context of Mozambique, it is important to acknowledge that, while the right to enrol in school without charge is universally recognised, the high rate of school dropout indicates deficiencies in the management of the nation's political education initiative. Consequently, this section draws to a close with the ideal of a Mozambican society that is cognisant of its entitlements and obligations, and in which each citizen engages in the pursuit of augmenting their autonomy, freedom and active involvement in the formulation of the nation's public policies without the constraints of fear or coercion. Indeed, the promotion of impartiality in the context of public policy is predicated on the education of the populace in democratic principles, with the objective of fostering the adoption of such principles in the formulation of public policy. This, in turn, is expected to engender the capacity of citizens to engage in public debates and contribute to the development of public policy at the national level. As Zambam (2018, p. 135) asserts, "illiteracy stifles the political voice of the population and therefore contributes directly to their insecurity."

When people are educated for democracy, they are provided with knowledge of the legal guarantees already established in the country and can enjoy their rights and thus develop a sense of justice while participating in their social world as free and secure citizens (Rawls, 2001, p. 56). Consequently, educational policy, particularly in developing countries, should be regarded as a social policy that would ensure the realisation of other social rights. This is contingent on the definitions of the political project of governments, through local choices, the level of social participation and the form of intervention by the population (Moreira, 2018, p. 62).

To conclude, the process of education with regard to a democratic society is capable of increasing awareness and establishing the foundations for the legal norms that are to regulate the nation and be honoured by the people over time. As Rawls (2001, p. 57) explains, when people are educated for democracy, “they see these norms as advantageous to themselves and those they care about, and so, as time goes on, they are tempted to accept the law as an ideal of conduct”. This constitutes the foundation for the right to democratic education, which, in Rawls’ terminology, is referred to as moral learning.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The international community’s concern with the educational process stems from the need to empower people to become active members and participants in the political and social life of their nations. Consequently, the onus falls upon the educational system to empower individuals to comprehend the intricacies of political culture and proactively engage in the internal operations of the nation’s public institutions. This is essential for the economic sustainability of these institutions and the cultivation of a just and democratic political culture (Rawls, 2000b, p. 249).

Since the objective of political liberalism is to establish a political conception of justice that constitutes a self-sustaining vision (Rawls, 2000b, p. 53), the purpose of this paper is to provide a hermeneutic analysis of the pedagogical political project that regulates the education system in Mozambique. The aim is to enable education for democracy to restore a basic social structure characterised by a high standard of equitable justice, expressed in the character and attitudes of the members of society. Consequently, it is concluded that education for democracy is a tool through which a new political conception of justice based on public reason can be proposed. According to Rawls, this is nothing more than “the debate of citizens in the public sphere on constitutional foundations and questions of justice” (Rawls, 2000b, p. 52).

In light of the prevailing educational circumstances in Mozambique, it is evident that the implementation of an education for democracy paradigm consistent with Rawls’s conceptualisations represents a utopian ideal that is not readily attainable for the nation. Despite the National Education System’s formulation of legal statutes and regulatory proposals with the objective of regulating the educational structure, thereby seeking to ensure inclusion and equity in terms of student access, participation and retention in educational institutions, it is evident that social justice and the fulfilment of the right to education extend beyond the mere capacity to incorporate individuals into the teaching and learning process. Instead, it is crucial to ensure their active engagement as active members of society and contributors to the process of formulating public policies in the country, with the aim of guaranteeing justice, freedom and democracy.

The proposals set forth in this article posit that education for democracy functions as a catalyst for the establishment of a democratic culture, irrespective of students’ social, economic, racial, regional, and ethnic backgrounds, thereby ensuring equitable opportunities for all. As has been demonstrated, the political-pedagogical project of education for democracy is free from partisan political influences and, consequently, prepares students to participate in the construction of public policies with a high degree of sense of justice and a critical, analytical and dialogical stance.

Opting for this type of education will ensure a high standard of quality in the exercise of citizenship, free from arbitrary coercion. However, the realisation of this proposal is contingent upon the presence of a teaching staff that has undergone proper training and is committed to the establishment of justice and equity. It is precisely this type of educational agent that can ensure transparent, participatory, efficient management, free from corruption and social injustice. In this sense, John Rawls’ political liberalism becomes relevant to this hermeneutic critique, for, as Rawls states, “a broad education for all citizens is necessary for their deliberative participation in major decisions on political and social issues” (Rawls, 2000b, p. 161).

Finally, it should be recognised that Rawls' reflections on political liberalism are open to criticism and, consequently, any other approach in the specific context. It is evident that the proposal for the education for democracy is highly appealing and relevant from the point of view of Rawlsian theory of justice. Furthermore, in relation to the search for alternative ways to improve public education policies in Mozambique, the author's proposals become even more appealing. It is imperative to acknowledge that the primary objective of this article is to furnish a reflective hermeneutics on the pedagogical policies that govern the prevailing education system in the nation. The article further seeks to proffer alternative approaches to enhance the participation of Mozambican citizens in the nation's public life.

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