

Speaking and eating: cultural stereotypes and the undervaluation of ancestral experiences in Southern Mozambique¹

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Abstract

The article aims to analyze how stereotypes associated with national languages and typical dietary practices contribute to the reproduction of cultural hierarchies and the devaluation of ancestral experiences in southern Mozambique. It starts from the understanding of language and food as symbolic systems structuring identity and social organization. Based on a qualitative approach and critical literature review, the article engages with Bourdieu (1977), Lévi-Strauss (1966), and Mary Douglas (1966) articulating them with Mozambican researchers, like Chimbutane *apud* Gomes (2022), Ngunga (2021) and Timbane (2015, 2017) and Brazilian researchers: Gonçalves (2004) and Tempasse (2005), who discuss language, culture, and power. The results indicate that mother tongues and typical foods are frequently associated with backwardness or low social standing, while Western-based patterns are naturalized as superior. In light of symbolic violence, it is demonstrated that such processes legitimize social distinctions and weaken cultural belonging.

Keywords: Cultural stereotypes; Mozambique; symbolic violence.

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Falar e comer: estereótipos culturais e subvalorização das vivências ancestrais no Sul de Moçambique

Resumo

O artigo tem o objetivo de analisar como os estereótipos associados às línguas nacionais e às práticas alimentares típicas contribuem para a reprodução de hierarquias culturais e para a subvalorização das vivências ancestrais no sul de Moçambique. Parte-se da compreensão da linguagem e da alimentação como sistemas simbólicos estruturantes da identidade e da organização social. Com base em abordagem qualitativa e revisão bibliográfica crítica, o artigo dialoga com Bourdieu (1977), Lévi-Strauss (1966) e Mary Douglas (1966), articulando-os à pesquisadores moçambicanos, como Chimbutane *apud* Gomes (2022); Ngunga (2021); Timbane (2015, 2017) e brasileiros, Gonçalves (2004) e Tempasse (2005) que discutem língua, cultura e poder. Os resultados indicam que línguas maternas e comidas típicas são frequentemente associadas ao atraso ou baixa posição social, enquanto padrões de matriz ocidental são naturalizados como superiores. À luz da violência simbólica, demonstra-se que tais processos legitimam distinções sociais e fragilizam pertencas culturais.

Palavras-chave: Estereótipos culturais; Moçambique; violência simbólica.



Hablar y comer: estereotipos culturales y la subvaloración de las experiencias ancestrales en el Sur de Mozambique

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo analizar cómo los estereotipos asociados a las lenguas nacionales y a las prácticas alimentarias típicas contribuyen a la reproducción de jerarquías culturales y a la devaluación de las experiencias ancestrales en el sur de Mozambique. Parte de la comprensión del lenguaje y la comida como sistemas simbólicos que estructuran la identidad y la organización social. Basado en un enfoque cualitativo y una revisión crítica de la literatura, el artículo dialoga con Bourdieu (1977), Lévi-Strauss (1966) y Mary Douglas (1966), articulándolos con los investigadores mozambiqueños, como Chimbutane *apud* Gomes (2022), Ngunga (2021) y Timbane, (2015, 2017) y los investigadores brasileños Gonçalves (2004) y Tempasse (2005), quienes abordan el lenguaje, la cultura y el poder. Los resultados indican que las lenguas maternas y las comidas típicas se asocian frecuentemente con el atraso o la baja posición social, mientras que los patrones de origen occidental se naturalizan como superiores. A la luz de la violencia simbólica, se demuestra que estos procesos legitiman las distinciones sociales y debilitan el sentido de pertenencia cultural.

Palabras clave: Estereotipos culturales; Mozambique; violencia simbólica.



Introduction

Since the dawn of humanity, communication and food have represented central dimensions of social life, acting simultaneously as forms of symbolic expression, survival, and collective organization (Canesqui; Garcia, 2005). Through language, expressed in signs, gestures, and words, and through dietary practices, which involve the search, preparation, distribution, and consumption of food, human groups construct meanings, regulate social relationships, and assert cultural belongings. Everyday experiential knowledge, understood as empiricism, results from the historical accumulation of shared knowledge and practices within communities (Gava, 2016). Such knowledge guided the constitution of ways of living (*modus vivendi*) and acting (*modus operandi*) that, over time, solidified as identity and cultural references for societies. In this sense, ancestral experiences are not restricted to a heritage of the past, but constitute active elements in the interpretation and organization of modern social practices.

The manifestations of these practices make it possible to overcome reductionist readings that disregard the cultural dimension of social behaviors, while simultaneously favoring the understanding of current customs as processes of continuity, adaptation, and historical re-signification (Oliveira, 1998). Habits, choices, and practices can thus be interpreted as expressions of collective memory (Silva; Marçal, 2012), identity, and cultural freedom of groups, rather than as outdated vestiges.

As Silva and Marçal (2012) point out, experiences lived even by a single individual can acquire a collective character within the scope of social memory, since the memories associated with them are shared, evoked, and socially reinterpreted. However, when conceived as closed, functional systems dissociated from broad sociocultural contexts, ancestral experiences face significant limits at the institutional level (Canesqui; Garcia, 2005).



Policies and practices that ignore local knowledge tend to generate social resistance or produce limited results, especially regarding the dimensions of “speaking and eating,” which are frequently the target of normative interventions. Conversely, initiatives that engage in dialogue with the values, knowledge, and experiences of communities reveal greater potential for adherence, sustainability, and social efficacy.

Canesqui and Garcia (2005) emphasize that local knowledge is associated with culturally constructed beliefs, often interpreted in a reductionist manner as “magic,” which contributes to its delegitimization. At the same time, cultural diversity is not always positively recognized in social spaces, particularly in educational, work, and leisure institutions. In these contexts, cultural stigmatization stems, to a large extent, from the non-acceptance of the “different and the unknown” (Canesqui; Garcia, 2005), leading to the devaluation of intangible cultural heritage.

Mozambique fits into this context, distinguishing itself by the plurality of peoples, languages, and traditions that constitute its sociocultural identity. Although Portuguese is the official language, several Mozambican languages of Bantu origin coexist and are used as important vehicles for the transmission of knowledge, values, and collective memories. Similarly, traditional dietary practices express ways of life, social relations, and identities historically constructed by different communities.

In this regard, the devaluation of local knowledge manifests particularly clearly in relation to national languages, which, according to Menezes (2013, p. 24), “were sidelined from schools due to historical and political factors.” Such logic of marginalization is likewise observed in typical dietary practices that historically are placed in a secondary position across different institutional spaces, to the detriment of dietary references considered modern or hegemonic (Woortmann; Cavignac, 2016).

In light of this background, the present study aims to analyze how stereotypes associated with the use of national languages and typical



dietary practices manifest in educational, work, and leisure spaces in southern Mozambique, and to understand how these stigmas contribute to the undervaluation of ancestral experiences and the reproduction of cultural hierarchies in contemporary social space.

Methodological approach

The article is framed within a qualitative approach, of an exploratory and interpretative nature, and is oriented toward understanding meanings (Gil, 2008; Perez, 2012). In this context, such meanings are attributed to linguistic and dietary practices in the social spaces of southern Mozambique. It is based on the assumption that language and food constitute socially constructed symbolic systems, the analysis of which requires the apprehension of the senses, representations, and power relations that underlie them.

From a methodological point of view, the article is based on an analytical and critical literature review, which constitutes the documentary corpus of the article, linking contributions from classical theoretical works by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966), and Mary Douglas (1966). These classics, in turn, are articulated with contemporary Brazilian and Mozambican researchers such as Baccega (1998), Gonçalves (2004), Tempasse (2005), Woortmann and Cavignac (2016), Chimbutane apud Gomes (2022), Ngunga (2021), and Timbane (2015, 2017), respectively, in the fields of anthropology and sociology, from academic productions on language policies and cultural practices in Mozambique, as well as experiential narratives of the authors, mobilized as interpretive devices for the analysis of linguistic and dietary stigmatization processes.

The bibliographic selection favored the aforementioned works relevant to the analysis of symbolic violence, cultural stigmatization, and language policies in Mozambique, prioritizing productions with consolidated theoretical relevance and contextual insertion in the Mozambican scenario. Regarding the empirical material, the analysis was conducted in three stages: initially, an



exploratory reading of the selected works was carried out, identifying central categories such as symbolic violence, *habitus*, and social distinction. Next, these categories were articulated with empirical examples related to linguistic and dietary practices in southern Mozambique. Finally, a thematic interpretation was developed, guided by the problematization of the dynamics of cultural hierarchization present in educational, work, and family spaces.

The use of experiential narrative is grounded in the epistemological perspective that recognizes the situated character of social knowledge and the impossibility of absolute researcher neutrality. By assuming their own insertion in the field under analysis, the article approaches a reflexive tradition that understands experience as a privileged space for the manifestation of the investigated symbolic structures. Narratives are not mobilized as representative data, but as instances revealing the mechanisms of symbolic violence and cultural distinction that permeate daily life. The analytical focus of the article concentrated on how stereotypes associated with “eating” and “speaking” operate as instruments of social distinction, contributing to the reproduction of symbolic inequalities in the contemporary Mozambican context.

Results and discussion

This section organizes and problematizes the research findings through an analytical movement that prioritizes the tensions, ambiguities, and contradictions emerging in the subjects’ experiences. Rather than merely describing facts, the discussion seeks to point out the shifts, adaptations, and negotiations that contrast everyday life, allowing for an understanding of how certain practices gain visibility, are re-signified, or, on the contrary, are relegated to zones of silence. By connecting different analytical levels, the section proposes a reading that emphasizes the effects of dynamics on forms of recognition and social positioning, giving primacy to a dense understanding of ongoing processes. To initiate the analysis, the section opens with the first thematic axis, which examines ancestral experiences in urban contexts,



highlighting how processes of visibility and contrast are orchestrated in the encounter between different cultural reference points.

From cultural diversity to stigmatization: ancestral experiences in urban contexts

Cultural diversity constitutes a structuring element of contemporary societies, especially in environments marked by colonial legacies and intense urbanization processes. In these realities, ancestral experiences associated with mother tongues and traditional dietary practices are frequently reformulated in light of values linked to modernity, schooling, and social prestige. In transitioning from community contexts to urban, educational, and work spaces, such practices become subject to dynamics of symbolic power that encourage the valorization of references considered Western, to the detriment of local knowledge and expressions.

Thus, one observes the constitution of mechanisms of cultural exclusion that operate both at the level of language and that of food, understood here as central dimensions of identity and social experience. According to Woortmann and Cavignac (2016, p. 70), this involves the “consumption of innovation in modernity made tradition,” in which certain cultural standards are naturalized as superior, while others are classified as inadequate or backward. It is within this framework that Tovala, Teixeira, and Muara (2025, p. 84) propose the notion of “cultural massacre,” understood as the systematic process of delegitimization, reconfiguration, and silencing of ancestral practices and knowledge in scenarios marked by symbolic hierarchies. Such processes, although formulated theoretically, manifest in concrete ways in daily practices, especially in how knowledge and customs are named, consumed, and socially recognized.

An illustrative example of this dynamic manifests in the designation of traditional food preparations, which vary according to territory. By way of example, the mixture based on roasted peanuts or cashew nuts with sugar



and cassava flour, known in southern Mozambique as *mwalina* (Inhambane), *xikhabha* (Gaza), and *lifetse* (Maputo), comes to be called *molina* in the urban space. Thus, the renaming of typical preparations, or the substitution of ingredients and restriction of their consumption—historically influenced by the presence and linguistic mediation of the Portuguese colonizer—translates into symbolic violence, which emerges by transforming culturally situated preferences into universal criteria of social distinction (Bourdieu, 1977). Such terminological alteration, far from being neutral, results from historical relations of subordination and prejudice toward African cultures, often justified by alleged difficulty of pronunciation in the Portuguese language.

A similar occurrence, concomitantly, is observed in contexts of family and work sociability, where there is a tendency to conceal the consumption of typical preparations, such as *xiguinya*—a mixture of cooked cassava, pounded peanuts, pumpkin leaves, *nyemba* beans², and *cacana*³—intensifying the devaluation of symbols and ancestral experiences in daily urban life, in line with the dynamics of adjustment to norms of social prestige previously noted. The same applies to the linguistic field, given that languages constitute central instruments of communication, socialization, and identity construction.

In the African context, as Tchimboto (2024, p. 53) points out, mother tongues result from the “coexistence between two or more autonomous languages, one European and others African.” In Mozambique, however, this coexistence was historically marked by relations of imposition, in which Portuguese was promoted as the dominant language, leading to the devaluation of national languages in relation to socially prestigious Western idioms as a result of the colonial heritage (Chimbutane apud Gomes, 2022; Timbane, 2017). Academic debates on linguistic stigmatization reveal that the use of mother tongues in social spaces, including as a strategy to clarify linguistic codes, is often conceived in a pejorative manner, reinforcing historically constructed symbolic hierarchies. Subsequently, processes of stigmatization also extend to naming practices within the family. As Firmino (2008) observes, the attribution of a



traditional name alongside an official one reflects the coexistence between two symbolic orders, given that

Emerges in two worlds: the “traditional,” from which symbolic elements derive that sustain ethnic identity—socially constructed as “genuine”—and the “modern,” locally regarded as exogenous, associated with social mobility and the activation of a cosmopolitan, trans-ethnic identity (Firmino, 2008, p. 132).

In practice, the traditional name tends to be restricted to the family space, being concealed in school, professional, and leisure environments due to being considered socially devalued. By way of example, surnames (*apelidos*) Mondlane, Mandlaze, Mandlate, Thobhele, Guiamba, etc., were modified to Monjane, Manjaze, Manjate, Tovela, Djamba, respectively. Such a strategy exposes the internalization of cultural stigmas and the effort of subjects to adapt to dominant symbolic norms, often at the expense of denying central elements of their cultural identity. In light of Bourdieu (1977), the restructuring of names can be perceived as an adapted strategy to the demands of the social field, in which subjects, guided by a *habitus* shaped by symbolic domination, accumulate socially recognized symbolism.

The onomastic modification thus manifests the efficacy of emblematic violence, which operates invisibly by converting cultural arbitraries into naturalized evidence, leading agents themselves to consent, often unconsciously, to the devaluation of their original identity references. The fact is that this set of practices reveals the depth of symbolic violence, which, beyond regulating what one eats or how subjects are named, defines which forms of expression are legitimate or socially acceptable. It is within this horizon that the marginalization of mother tongues is inscribed, particularly in educational and work spaces, where linguistic prestige norms, resulting from colonial imperialism, operate with greater intensity.

Within this broader framework of cultural hierarchization, in which practices and knowledge are continuously classified and evaluated according to criteria of social legitimacy, language assumes a particularly sensitive



role. If, on the one hand, dietary practices illustrate processes of visibility and concealment in daily life, on the other hand, mother tongues reveal, in a predominantly incisive manner, the mechanisms of symbolic regulation operating in institutional spaces. It is, therefore, in this analytical shift—from the global plane of cultural experiences to the specific field of language—that the following discussion is situated.

Languages, symbolic power, and exclusion in educational and work spaces

Language represents not only a means of communication, but also an instrument of identity construction, reproduction of power relations, and differentiated access to social, educational, and professional spheres. In the African arena, languages play a fundamental role in primary socialization, as well as in the transmission and preservation of history, knowledge, and cultural values from generation to generation, constituting the foundation of individual and collective identities in communities whose oral tradition sustains social existence (Timbane, 2015, 2017; Zossou, 2021).

However, the structuring role of African languages was historically tensioned by the imposition of European languages during the period of slavery and colonialism, a process that caused the silencing and devaluation of local cultures and identities. In the process of constructing African nation-states, local languages were systematically framed as obstacles to political unity and the project of modernity. As Ngunga (2021, p. 88) explains,

[...] por causa da sua diversidade em muitos países, eram vistas como nocivas ao processo de criação de uma nação unida, forte e próspera. Por isso tinham de ser eliminadas para não exacerbar os ânimos tribais porque os territórios africanos são, geralmente, multiétnicos e multiculturais. Além disso, o seu papel na construção da nação com uma administração moderna era nula por causa de se encontrarem em estágio incipiente do seu desenvolvimento, sem sistema de escrita nem descrição, o que se traduzia na sua incapacidade de comunicar conceitos modernos e científicos.



This exposition points out how the process of delegitimizing African languages was historically constructed and naturalized, sustaining modern practices of exclusion, particularly in institutional spaces.

In Mozambique, this process materialized through an assimilationist policy aimed at consolidating the Portuguese language as the language of the entire population (Ngunga, 2021). For Mazula and Severino (1995), such dynamics gave continuity to forms of political and social domination, hindering cultural decolonization and maintaining the rift between colonizing and colonized society.

In this context, the institutionalization of this hegemony was consolidated with Law 4/83, of March 23, 1983, which exclusively established Portuguese as the official language of national unity and communication, aiming at the “formation of the new man free from obscurantism, superstition, and bourgeois mentality” (No. 1, Art. 4) (Moçambique, 1983), targeting the eradication of illiteracy, the introduction of compulsory schooling, the training of personnel for the needs of economic and social development, in addition to scientific, technological, and cultural research. According to Muara (2020, p. 53), “it is the first law that officially and in a regulated manner brings together Educational Policies in Mozambique.”

Both Ngunga (2021) and Chimbutane apud Gomes (2022) understood this strategy as a risky attempt to build a nationalist vision (one language, one nation, one territory) to the detriment of a nationalist philosophy (an African language of broad communication), considering the country’s linguistic reality. As a consequence, local languages remained circumscribed to family and community domains, contributing to the stigmatization of their speakers and the marginalization of the country’s linguistic and cultural diversity. Such subjugation, which positions these peoples as potentially incapable, manifests explicitly in the way speakers of mother tongues are socially connoted.

In this regard, Timbane (2015, p. 96) notes that these individuals are labeled as “backward, inferior, intellectually delayed, and savage.” Thus, a symbolic



association is established between Portuguese and modernity, development, competence, and social mobility (Timbane, 2015), while national languages are relegated to a condition of inferiority. Paradoxically, as Ngunga (2021) argues, Mozambican national languages constitute the mother tongue (L1) of more than 80% of the population and are structuring to the cultural and cognitive practices of communities, being essential for learning development and effective social participation. Even so, they have been historically discriminated against in the educational system and institutional spaces.

During the colonial and post-independence periods, students were forbidden and discouraged from speaking their mother tongue under penalty of sanctions, as pointed out by Ngunga (2021) and Timbane (2015). As a result of this, (Ngunga, 2021, p. 96) emphasizes that

[...] although a reasonable number of Mozambicans managed to abandon their cultures and languages, millions of Mozambicans were unable to attend school or attended for only a few days or months and then dropped out because of the hostility and violence that characterized the school linguistic environment.

The symbolic violence described by Ngunga (2021) extends over time and is also manifested in the prohibition, within the family context, of the use of mother tongues. Empirical experiences lived in the province of Sofala indicate that the use of the Ndau and Sena languages was discouraged in the family space, on the grounds that such languages would compromise the learning of Portuguese. Another scenario of the devaluation of mother tongues is described in the study conducted by Covane (2022) with the participation of bilingual education managers and teachers, mothers responsible for education, and a primary education trainer, as illustrated in the quote below:

Teacher Isabel (fictitious name) highlights the activity she carries out as being very important—that of teaching a Mozambican mother tongue—but feels despised for it, both by colleagues who do not have bilingual classes and by some people in society and her family. During the conversation, Isabel shared that one day she felt very bad because



her daughter called her expressing regret over having been assigned a bilingual education class (Covane, 2022, p. 104-105).

Faced with this dilemma, Castiano and Ngoenha (2013) advocate the need to include local knowledge and values in the curriculum as a way to build a contextualized and socially relevant education. In the same line of thought, Patel (2022) argues that in a multilingual and heterogeneous society such as Mozambique, linguistic hegemony or the exclusive use of Portuguese in the educational process, combined with the continuity of imported models and methodologies, produces pedagogical, cognitive, and cultural exclusion, inhibiting democratic participation and contributing to academic underachievement and dropout rates. It is in this context that Benson (1997) reinforces the emergence of bilingual education as a response to school failure aggravated by instruction conducted solely in the Portuguese language in the post-independence period, aiming to adapt the teaching-learning process to the learner's linguistic reality.

The analysis of these processes can be deepened in light of Pierre Bourdieu (1977), for whom the school and the labor market operate as fields for the imposition of a legitimate language, converting dominant linguistic capital into symbolic capital. Thus, speakers of national languages are constrained to silence their repertoires under penalty of social disqualification. Variations in the pronunciation of Portuguese were labeled in the family context as “*pretoguês*” (black Portuguese), a term that denotes a derogatory perception of interference originating from local languages. Such an episode exposes the internalization of monolingual ideologies and the symbolic supremacy attributed to standard Portuguese.

This logic is also highlighted in the poem by Calane da Silva⁴, cited by Oliveira (2005), which reads as follows: “*Xicandarinha* no! Kettle, you dummy! retorted Mom, who, speaking with Uncle Dinasse in Ronga, only allowed us to dialogue in correct Portuguese” (Oliveira, 2005, p. 1). Such dialogue reveals processes of exclusion in which the abandonment of the mother tongue



becomes a tacit requirement for social inclusion, where cultural identities are produced within power relations. Therefore, the designations attributed to mother tongues, such as “*pretoguês*, dog language, *landim*, dialect, language of the blacks” (Timbane, 2017, p. 22), do not merely limit equitable access to knowledge and work, but also weaken forms of cultural belonging, reinforcing historically constructed symbolic inequalities.

In light of the thesis *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), both language and food can be understood as privileged fields of social distinction, in which legitimacy, prestige, and symbolic recognition are contested. The way of speaking and the way of eating do not constitute merely everyday practices, but rather embodied expressions of *habitus* that signal forms of belonging, social positions, and culturally valued capital. Just as certain linguistic varieties are invested with greater symbolic capital and converted into a legitimate standard, so too do certain dietary habits operate as markers of status, civility, and modernity. In both cases, hierarchization does not stem from intrinsic qualities of the practices, but rather from historical processes of consecration that transform cultural arbitraries into socially recognized criteria of distinction.

Traditional dietary practices, modernity, and cultural devaluation

Traditional dietary practices, as symbolic expressions rooted in the history and social organization of communities, constitute a privileged field in the dispute between local references and hegemonic models of modernity. In urban and institutional contexts, such practices are frequently reclassified as inadequate, unhygienic, or incompatible with lifestyles considered modern, being displaced into the private or family space. As Mary Douglas (1966) cited by Gonçalves (2004) points out, dietary practices are not limited to satisfying biological needs; they also organize social, moral, and symbolic orders.

In this same line, Tempasse (2005, p. 48) argues that “the act of eating involves, beyond the nutritional function (equal for all living beings), the symbolic



function (proper to human beings), the result of cultural constructions that determine what is edible in each society,” thus being characterized as a space for the production of meanings, distinctions, and sociocultural hierarchies.

In this way, the classification of food, according to Gonçalves (2004) and Tempasse (2005), is organized into categories such as: forbidden and permitted foods; everyday and festive foods; men’s and women’s foods; children’s and adults’ foods; poor people’s and rich people’s foods. This last designation, far from being neutral, exposes symbolic disputes and power relations, to the extent that it tends to associate the traditional with backwardness, rurality, or poverty, while the modern is frequently related to urbanity, progress, and social modernity.

The aforementioned dichotomy simplifies and obscures complex historical processes and contributes to the cultural hierarchization of dietary practices, which expand social distinctions and stigmatization. Therefore, the undervaluation of typical foods constitutes a concrete manifestation of food coloniality⁵ (Oliveira; Silva; Ferreira, 2024), by naturalizing hierarchies between what is perceived as traditional and what is recognized as modern.

This fact commonly expresses itself in family gatherings where serving dishes considered modern, even in situations of scarcity, represents a strategy of social acceptance and affirmation; however, Tempasse (2005, p. 52) also considers this act as a “ritual of hospitality.” It is important to emphasize that cultural hierarchization does not emerge spontaneously. It results from historical processes of cultural subalternization (Oliveira; Silva; Ferreira, 2024), which alter the values attributed to ancestral knowledge. Under this logic, culinary practices rooted in community experiences are discredited and subjugated as incompatible with ideals of urbanity and modernity.

In this framework, it is observed that the practice of taking food from home to the workplace, although common in the Mozambican context, assumes differentiated meanings according to the food transported. Individuals who occupy leadership positions or possess high academic capital, such as master’s



and doctoral degree holders, are frequently associated with behavioral expectations that include what they eat and how they speak. When such expectations are not met, stigmatizing expressions emerge, such as the saying “the ghetto didn’t leave the person.” This phenomenon was analyzed by Oliveira, Silva, and Ferreira (2024), who indicated that “foods, dietary habits, preparation methods, and ways of eating are valued, or devalued, even stigmatized, depending on their proximity or lack thereof to the colonizer” (Oliveira; Silva; Ferreira, 2024, p. 32).

The same logic manifests in the school context. A concrete example refers to children who take to school their snack made of foods socially marked as “typical of the periphery,” such as cassava, sweet potato, corn on the cob, *nxikwa* or *nxinguandza* (*pamonha*), *txobobo* (known in urban areas as *gulabo*), and bread with *badjia* (equally designated as *nyemba* bean fritter or *timbaweni*), becoming targets of derogatory comments and bullying practices, to the detriment of children who consume sandwiches, boxed juices, soft drinks, filled cookies, etc. Silva and Barros (2025) argue that what should constitute an expression of cultural belonging becomes a reason for exclusion, which intensifies positions of symbolic hierarchies in the educational space. Still in the same scenario, the authors emphasize that:

[...] school culture must break with the pedagogy of indifference and embrace the cultivation of empathy and the welcoming of diversity [...] recognizing that bullying is not “child’s play” is the first step toward a truly humane educational project (Silva; Barros, 2025, p. 5).

From this perspective, the school is called upon to problematize practices that silence local knowledge, promoting dietary diversity—much like linguistic diversity—as a constitutive value of social justice. In the conception of Sousa (2019), drawing on Bourdieu (1977), *habitus* refers to embodied dispositions that guide daily perceptions and practices, naturalizing historically constructed distinctions. Thus, the preference for processed foods of Western matrix over



traditional preparations does not constitute a mere individual choice, but an expression of socially produced dispositions.

The devaluation of typical foods manifests similarly regarding traditional preparations that, according to Oliveira (2005, p. 20), “do not attract by sight; they attract by taste.” Among them, dishes based on green leaves stand out, such as *mathapa* (cassava leaves), *mbowa* or *matsawu ya tinwembe* (pumpkin leaves), *nyangana* or *matsawu ya timbaweni* (nyemba-bean leaves), and *xiguinya* (a typical preparation from the southern region of Mozambique, based on cassava and green leaves). Generally, they are prepared with coconut milk, pounded peanuts, or cashew nuts, enriched with dried shrimp or edible insects, such as locusts⁶. Despite their nutritional, historical, and identity value, such preparations are frequently targets of prejudice and stereotypes, being associated with backward or low-prestige dietary practices, contributing to the reproduction of cultural hierarchies. This food reveals less an aesthetic issue; however, it directs all attention to taste, which is quite peculiar, as observed by Oliveira (2005), in addition to constituting a protective factor against the development of non-communicable chronic diseases (NCDs).

Gonçalves (2004), in turn, recalls that taste involves specific ways of preparing, presenting, and consuming food; through it, individuals and groups affirm distinctions and identities. The author adds that the gustatory experience goes beyond the strict sensory sense, assuming a central role in the construction of social symbology. Tempasse (2005, p. 48), for his part, indicates that “tasting the food triggers memory, emotion, affection, and other feelings.” This symbolic and emotional panorama of the act of eating, however, does not diverge from broader power structures.

Hence, Oliveira, Silva, and Ferreira (2025) emphasize that, in the context of contemporary capitalism, foods can become instruments of domination when a given dietary pattern imposes itself as the only legitimate one, disregarding collective traditions and memories. Thus, what presents itself as



a simple preference or individual choice can reflect broad processes of cultural hierarchization and symbolic imposition.

Lévi-Strauss (1966) cited by Gonçalves (2004) concludes by noting that food is also a language that communicates culture, identity, affection, and social status through colors, flavors, and aromas. Therefore, its disqualification implies the denial of systems of meaning that structure social life. Similar to what occurs in the linguistic field, subjects tend to conceal or reformulate dietary practices as a strategy to adapt to dominant expectations. This movement impoverishes cultural diversity, while simultaneously weakening collective memories and community bonds. Therefore, questioning the devaluation of traditional dietary practices means challenging the very logic of exclusionary modernity and affirming the plurality of ways of existing, eating, and speaking.

Final considerations

The article allowed for the understanding that the practices of speaking and eating, far from being restricted to individual habits, constitute structuring dimensions of identity and of the symbolic organization of social life. In the southern region of Mozambique, both mother tongues and traditional dietary practices continue to be crossed by historical processes of cultural hierarchization that associate the local with backwardness and the Western with modernity and prestige. It became evident that linguistic and dietary stigmatization operates as a mechanism of social distinction, producing subtle yet persistent exclusions in school, work, and family spaces. Such dynamics reveal the efficacy of symbolic violence, which naturalizes inequalities and induces the subjects themselves to conceal central elements of their identities as a strategy for social insertion.

It is concluded, in this way, that questioning the undervaluation of ancestral experiences implies problematizing the foundations of a modernity that is constructed through the denial of diversity. The promotion of education and institutional practices committed to linguistic and dietary plurality reveals



itself as a paramount condition for strengthening social justice and cultural citizenship in the Mozambican context.

Furthermore, it becomes urgent that educational and cultural policies advance in the formal recognition of national languages and traditional dietary practices as living heritage, systematically incorporating them into curricula, teacher training, and institutional functioning. Such a movement is not restricted to symbolic valorization, but rather demands a redistribution of legitimized cultural capital capable of displacing historically naturalized hierarchies. In this sense, cultural decolonization presents itself as a rhetorical, political, and continuous pedagogical gesture of reorganizing the criteria of social legitimacy. The article, therefore, paves the way for empirical investigations that deepen the analysis of these dynamics in different regional and institutional contexts, contributing to a research agenda committed to cultural recognition, symbolic justice, and social transformation.

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Notes

- 1 Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence – Gemini, an artificial intelligence tool developed by Google, was used to assist in translating this article into English. The translated version was fully reviewed and adjusted by the editorial team to ensure fidelity to the original text, terminological accuracy, and compliance with the journal’s editorial standards. The tool was not used to generate the article’s arguments, analyses, or academic content.
- 2 *Vigna unguiculata* (L.) - Scientific name of nyemba beans (also known as cowpea).
- 3 *Momordica balsamina* - related to bitter melon (melão-de-são-caetano): it is a vegetable that grows spontaneously in backyards and fields in Mozambique. The leaves and fruits (tihaca) are prepared with peanut and coconut milk.
- 4 Raul Alves Calane da Silva – Mozambican poet, journalist, and writer. He coordinated the *Artes e Letras* (Arts and Letters) section of *Tempo* magazine in 1985 and served as head of the newsroom at Televisão Experimental de Moçambique in 1987. He was a board member of the Mozambican Writers’ Association and directed the Brazil-Mozambique Cultural Center in Maputo (Portal da Literatura, 2026).
- 5 A historical and structural process that imposes Eurocentric and capitalist dietary patterns, devaluing traditional cultures, such as Indigenous and African ones (Oliveira; Silva; Ferreira, 2024).
- 6 *Schistocerca gregaria** – rich in magnesium, copper, iron, and zinc, notably with a protein content ranging from 52.35% to 76%, an amino acid profile comparable to the standard established by the World Health Organization, and an energy contribution of 435 to 453 kcal/100g (Zielinska et al. *apud* Aguiar; Santos, Marchiori, 2021, p. 2).



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