
Reviewed by Ângela Benoliel Coutinho (Instituto Português de Relações Internacionais (IPRI))

Published on H-Luso-Africa (May, 2023)

Commissioned by Philip J. Havik (Instituto de Higiene e Medicina Tropical (IHMT))

The promotion of education carried out by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) in the context of the armed struggle in Guinea-Bissau between 1963 and 1974 has already been addressed by some authors.[1] Despite their contributions, it is, however, a topic that merits further treatment. Sónia Vaz Borges proposes such an analysis centered on a key question: What was the role of education in the social and political revolution that took place during this period?

The book is divided into four chapters. The first is dedicated to the different forms in which an anticolonialist platform was built in the colonial societies of Cape Verde and the so-called Portuguese Guinea, and the second focuses on PAIGC training structures based upon a very comprehensive approach while further developing some specific issues. The third chapter deals with the various levels of PAIGC’s militant training. Finally, a brief fourth chapter addresses the continuity of this experience during the early postindependence years in Guinea-Bissau.

The methodological notes of twenty-one interviewees are presented, mainly teachers and students who worked and studied in the education system that PAIGC established in the late 1960s and 1970s. They include two senior leaders and two foreign collaborators. Special attention is paid to the author’s justification of her methodological options regarding the conduct and treatment of these interviews. A list of printed sources and an extensive bibliography are provided, demonstrating the functionality and pertinence of the methodological approach adopted.

Many new sources are explored in the book, which is in itself a significant contribution to the literature. Its main objective and achievement is the presentation and discussion of what was an educational project of the PAIGC in the context of the struggle for political emancipation of Bissau-Guineans and Cabo Verdeans. The author concludes that this was a fundamental—but under-researched—aspect of the well-known armed guerrilla struggle for independence of the two countries.

In fact, this project shows several facets, which are explored here: the output of press agencies, newspapers, and radio programs; and teachers’ training and that of adults, going far beyond the well-known formal educational infrastruc-
tures established in the liberated regions under PAIGC control after the Cassacá Congress in 1964. The public discussions promoted by PAIGC in the villages, the seminars held for the training of staff and guerrilla fighters, and the political training aimed at women and children are also subjected to analysis. The liberation movement invested in experimental teaching and education by art, having also obtained hundreds of scholarships abroad for its young cadres and activists, for technical and higher training in the countries of the so-called Socialist Bloc. Several institutions were created as part of this educational project, which started before the armed struggle, namely the School for Militant Leaders, the Pilot School, the Teacher Training Center, a kindergarten, boarding schools, and semi-boarding schools, in addition to the official PAIGC schools in the villages it controlled.

The author also adopts some concepts that could be refined, as they may prove useful for the analysis of these and other historical experiences of social transformation mentioned in the book—first and foremost, the very concept of "knowledge" and that of "militant education"; but also, that of "walking archives" and of "transformative intellectuals." The author carries out a highly detailed and unprecedented analysis of certain aspects of PAIGC’s "militant education" project, focusing on the regulations and routines it established, school administrations, teacher training courses, the drawing up of school manuals, and adult training programs. Based upon the various interviews conducted, we are presented with aspects that have been little explored so far, for example, the negotiations undertaken by PAIGC militants and political-military leaders with the populations of the various villages to establish their schools. These projects met with various challenges, above all operating in war zones bombed by the Portuguese air force. We thus learn that several strategies were adopted, and that practical solutions were identified by means of constructive dialogue between all parties. To avoid shelling, itinerant schools were set up, with easily transportable material, as were schools that worked on muddy soil during the rainy season for several years. Negotiations were also made by these “transformative intellectuals” in order to promote girls’ attendance of school, an important part of PAIGC’s political project, which its leaders refused to abandon.[2]

This book thus opens new areas of research that will need to be broadened. First, the clandestine work done by PAIGC militants in several African and European countries, which mainly focused on Cabo Verdean communities in the diaspora. In Guinea-Bissau, it would be of great interest to gain a better understanding of how the PAIGC managed the knowledge of traditional African cultures, which are particularly diverse in Guinea-Bissau. What relationship was established with the various communities on this issue and what role did this ancestral knowledge play in PAIGC’s educational project?

The book would also be enriched by information on the selection criteria of the former militants interviewed, or the itineraries followed by the historian to reach them. Since PAIGC worked with more than one generation of militants, a critical analysis of the excerpts from the interviews is required, each in its spatial-temporal universe, to the extent that there are marked differences in worldview between those recruited in the 1950s and early 1960s and the generation that joined the ranks of the PAIGC a few years later. After all, the latter generation had already been confronted with the reality of war and the obligation to fulfill mandatory military service in a context of armed conflict. These differences are also notorious among the militants who had the opportunity to pursue academic studies in Portugal or other European countries, and among those who failed to gain access to secondary education in their home territories.

In the first chapter, a discussion of the analysis and perspectives proposed by the historian of education Maria Adriana Carvalho in her study on
secondary education in Cabo Verde, would have been of great interest.[3] Both the founders and many PAIGC cadres at various levels, and many teachers and protagonists of the educational project the movement set in motion, studied in these institutions in the archipelago during the period Carvalho discusses. The author could have explored the interviews with some of the movement's main leaders and first militants conducted by the historian Leopoldo Amado and published in the autobiography of Aristides Pereira, the erstwhile president of Cabo Verde,[4] or the various publications authored by José Vicente Lopes (with extensive interviews with PAIGC leaders).[5] Nevertheless, the author's use of excerpts from unpublished testimonies, photographs, maps, and several other documents that have not previously been studied or quoted, greatly enrich the text and stimulate further reading.

In the concluding chapter, the author considers the role of education in revolutions and in the "liberation struggles" of the twentieth century, in a comparative perspective that will assist future studies. She establishes that the PAIGC carried out a process of "education for revolution," according to the definition proposed by Maurice Geary.[6] In view of these results, it would be very useful to associate this process with the theoretical legacy of PAIGC's leader, Amílcar Cabral, which has received considerable attention from scholars around the world. This would connect the educational project with the movements' international politics, which have gained greater definition over the years, and with its alliance with intellectuals, artists, and activists from NATO countries.

Indeed, since Portugal was a founding member of the Atlantic Alliance in the context of the Cold War, its war efforts were supported by the countries that comprised it, especially with regard to the supply of arms. In these circumstances, independence movements in Portuguese colonized territories did not engage directly with the governments of these countries, which did not officially recognize them as such. The aid of support committees, artists, journalists, intellectuals, and religious organizations in these countries was of crucial importance in this respect. It would also be of interest to look at the overlap of PAIGC's educational project with its so-called cultural policy. The latter included record production, an enterprise of musical and poetic creation by militants that served as a communication interface with Bissau-Guineans and Cabo Verdeans in general, as demonstrated by Moacyr Rodrigues's work on the archipelago's musical traditions.[7] So far, relatively less is known about how music was used to spread PAIGC's political messages in the context of armed struggle in Guinea-Bissau.[8]

Based upon the interesting analysis presented in this book, it would be worth carrying out a study comparing the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde with other emancipatory political and social movements in the second half of the twentieth century, and also with regard to other liberation struggles, especially those on the African continent, which are mentioned by the author. Sonia Vaz Borges's book, which is written in a straightforward and simultaneously precise style, not only provides an important contribution to the history of the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, but also to the wider history of education in Africa.

Notes


[2]. An expression used by the author, from Henry Giroux, "meaning that teachers possessed the knowledge, the skills and the attitudes to question, understand and interrogate and eventually even act as agents of change" (p. 120); see also Giroux, Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critic-


[8]. See for example, the biographical novel on José Carlos Schwarz’s music written by his widow: Teresa Schwarz, *Silêncio Entre Duas Notas* (Bissau: Nimba, 2019).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/h-luso-africa


**URL:** https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=56875

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.