



Advancing Sociology in Portuguese-Speaking African Countries (PALOPs): Perspectives and Challenges

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Abstract

This paper highlights some of the challenges faced by the Portuguese-speaking African Countries (PALOPs) to consolidate Sociology as a relevant area of knowledge, both at university and school level. For this purpose, we will rely on part of the scarce existing bibliography on the subject, as well as on interviews with African teachers and students. Decolonial thinking inspires the elaboration of this article, as it criticizes the perspective of the modernity of knowledge solely linked to Eurocentric or American thinking. In these young countries, the university and this field of knowledge are new and lack institutionalization. The lack of investment by the State, the precarious structure, the difficulty of academic cooperation, the persistence of a strong coloniality in the production of knowledge and linguistic obstacles further complicate the process. It is important to seek synergy between countries, with exchanges of experiences and international cooperation - including Brazil - and also between professors and students in the struggle for the consolidation of the discipline.

Keywords: *Sociology; PALOPs (Portuguese-Speaking African Countries); University; Cooperation; Decolonial Education*

Introduction

Social Sciences in Africa have played a crucial role in understanding and analyzing the social, political, cultural, and economic dynamics present on the continent. The rich ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity of Africa, coupled with historical and contemporary complexities, make Social Sciences vital in contextualizing and interpreting African experiences. Colonial history has significantly shaped African societies, deeply influencing social and political structures. Social sciences in Africa have been dedicated to examining and dismantling the consequences of colonialism, including its current ramifications such as socioeconomic inequalities, ethnic tensions, and disparities in access to resources and political power.

Our method involved scientific research, including a literature review and interviews (structured and unstructured) with students and professors from the PALOPs. Sociology is a new area of knowledge in the young Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOPs), where the establishment of universities is also very recent. Its development relies imperatively on cooperation with other countries. Brazil, with its shared language and history, should be a privileged actor in this cooperation, but this is not what we observe.

Although the stage of development varies in each country, there are common problems and challenges. Brazil's experience in sociology, especially regarding institutionalization, whether in the university or school context, can serve as a stimulus and driving force for the development of social sciences in the PALOPs. Decolonial thinking inspired this article, as it criticizes the perspective of modernity of knowledge solely linked to Eurocentric or American thinking. Latin American and African countries are not considered relevant interlocutors in knowledge construction. This work is part of the struggle against the monoculture of knowledge. It is necessary to legitimize and give voice to other forms of knowledge.

Democratizing knowledge. Deconstructing education that associates knowledge only with the Western world. This is how decolonial thinking aims to dismantle the coloniality of knowledge, which continues to disregard the knowledge of oppressed and historically marginalized peoples from Brazil and Africa. It is in the "ecology of knowledges," to use the concept of Portuguese author Boaventura Sousa Santos, where dialogue occurs among the various forms of knowledge that can be considered important for the advancement of social struggles. Thus, we seek the epistemologies of the South, which can be defined as a set of knowledge produced and validated from "the experiences of all social groups that have been systematically victims of injustice, oppression, and destruction" (SANTOS, 2019, p. 17) caused, among other factors, by colonialism.

Senegalese historian and anthropologist Cheikh Anta Diop (1981) saw education as a crucial means for the development and empowerment of African nations. He advocated for an education that incorporated true African history and empowered future generations.

The first part of the document will emphasize the difficulties in developing sociology in Portuguese-speaking African countries. This area of knowledge is new in these countries and lacks greater institutionalization. Issues such as infrastructure, funding, persecution, and the coloniality of knowledge will be addressed. Next, a reflection on decoloniality in the African context will be presented. Inspired by intellectuals such as Paulo Freire and Frantz Fanon, decolonial authors highlight the need to produce knowledge from the perspective of Africa and Africans, thus avoiding the continuation of a coloniality that views the continent and its people from a Eurocentric colonialist standpoint. Lastly, the perspectives of sociology in the PALOPs will be discussed. In this final section of the article, the research results will be outlined, along with possible future avenues for the development of this important area of knowledge.

Sociology in the PALOP and Its Adversities

The challenges facing Social Sciences in the African continent are immense. Sociology in the PALOP is undervalued and poorly funded in the countries. Many research projects are funded by international agencies, which determine the agenda of these studies based on geopolitical issues and the strategy of these countries.

According to Angolan researcher Cesaltina Abreu, most civil society groups and organizations in Africa depend on international community funding and even approval of their action programs, often incorporating concepts and practices uncritically without necessary reflection on their suitability to the context in which they will be applied (2006: 117). According to sociologist and professor at the

Lusophone University of Guinea, Diamantino Lopes (2020), the State or government does not invest in higher education and scientific research, and this field is covered by international organizations, depending on the need to deepen knowledge or understand a particular phenomenon (D. Lopes, personal communication, June 2023). As African philosopher Paulin Hountondji (2008) points out, African social scientists themselves have had to realize that they conduct research guided by external interests, primarily intending to satisfy Northern interests.

The fragility of democracy and democratic institutions in Lusophone Africa also affects the lives of sociologists. Many social scientists feel persecuted by the State, society, and family. According to Lopes (2023), in Guinea-Bissau's reality, persecution is observed when interventions criticize bad governance, corruption, or nepotism. Many social scientists choose silence (or self-censorship) to avoid persecution, given the multiple risks they face, including losing their jobs and sometimes even being physically attacked, as in the case of Guinean journalist António Aly Silva. Not only professors feel persecuted or see their freedoms censored, but there are also reports of students who have wanted to address certain academic topics. This was the case with Paulo Estefane, then a sociology student at Licungo University in Beira, who felt inhibited from addressing the topic of Montesquieu's separation of powers due to the difficulty of addressing this topic in Mozambique's political context, where this division is not clear in practice (LEPECS, 2023).

Research infrastructures are precarious and require greater investment. According to researcher Maria Paula Meneses, universities depend heavily on international funding for their operation, and state universities compete unfairly with local and international private universities, making the peripheral situation of public African universities still a reality (2016, p.350). Carlos Cardoso, a researcher at the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), based in Dakar, agrees with Meneses and points out that these higher education institutions are of dubious quality, including lack of motivation among professors (2017: 91). The researcher further notes that the participation of Lusophone African researchers in CODESRIA activities is low, particularly those aimed at graduate students. This reflects the underdevelopment of the higher education system in general, as well as research institutions in social sciences. The Lusophone community in CODESRIA programs has minimal representation (2017:94-97).

The impact of neoliberal policies since the 1990s also contributed to the weakening of higher education in the PALOP. Cost-cutting measures in education affected the quality of teaching and research, as well as curriculum plans. According to professor and researcher Teresa Cruz e Silva, in Mozambique, as in other African universities, curricular reforms that took place in public universities in the late 2000s imposed and "sold" the Bologna Process as an unavoidable means to meet the demands of integration into more global educational system processes. However, these reforms were marked by marginalization of local social agents, with insignificant public consultation. The challenge of academic autonomy is tested when market-oriented neoliberal policies come into play in education. Neoliberalism had/has particular (and ongoing) impacts on the African continent, and they were/are strong. According to Ossome (2015): "in many countries, the second wave of neoliberal policies (political liberalization imposed by international institutions) has reinforced the paradox of a State that is both omnipresent and completely absent" (Ossome 2015, 14).

African academic production is not absorbed by governments, and much of it is produced in Western journals. Brain drain is an African reality. According to Lopes (2020), the impact is devastating, as Guinea-Bissau has people trained in various sectors dispersed worldwide, unable to contribute to the development process. According to the professor, this is always discussed in academic forums, but there is no concern on the part of political leaders (D. D. Lopes, personal communication, June 2023).

Thinking about Africa from a Western perspective is a big mistake. The concepts brought forth are produced in the West. It is the coloniality of knowledge that we seek to combat. It is essential that social sciences about Africa are produced by Africans.

The institutionalization of sociology in the PALOP seems to be a significant challenge. According to professor Adérito Manuel, from CINE, sociology in Angola went from being ignored and prohibited after independence to being accepted and promoted. From 1991/1992 onwards (the Second Republic), Sociology began to be recognized in Angola by the democratic State, with the proclamation of the Angolan Association of Anthropologists and Sociologists (COSTA, 1997: 94-96), by the publication of research works by sociologists and other social scientists in the public sphere, by its inclusion as one of the subjects in secondary education courses, by its institutionalization at the university level as a subject, undergraduate, master's, and doctoral specialty in Social Sciences, and by the participation of sociologists in scientific events (national and international) (KAJIBANGA, 2009: 197-201).

On the other hand, as the birth of Sociology in the country became a reality, difficulties also arose. Adérito Manuel (2022) speaks of the difficulties for professors to access works, even didactic ones. Production on the teaching of sociology in Angolan schools and universities is scarce, and it is very difficult to produce this material at a very high cost. The few academic journals that have appeared, such as the Angolan Journal of Sociology, were short-lived and lasted from 2008 to 2014. The professor acknowledges that Sociology needs better organization in the country, including seeking cooperation with other countries (A. Manuel, personal communication, December 2022). According to professor Antonieta Ortet (2022), from the University of Cape Verde, the production of sociological teaching materials in the country also depends on foreign textbooks (A. Ortet, personal communication, December 2022).

In addition to the lack of regularity in the production of academic journals of sociology in Portuguese-speaking African countries, Cardoso points out that many studies remain monographic or ethnographic. Others are full of empirical data and often numbers, without an intelligible relationship between them or proper data reading. The researcher emphasizes that often a theoretical framework supporting the analysis is lacking (2017: 102). It is necessary to strengthen and create more postgraduate courses and improve analysis methods and theoretical framework as a research tool. The scarcity of scientific activities in the field of Social Sciences in the PALOP should be a cause for concern.

According to Angolan professor Felipe Morais, scientific associations play a key role in the development of science. The author calls for greater effort on the part of Angolan sociologists to take responsibility for creating the ethos of science (2023:81). In this sense, the active presence of students in the construction of this institutional framework is indispensable. This is the view of the Community of Sociology Students of Angola (COESO). According to the current president of the institution, António Arnaldo (2023), COESO seeks to strengthen the Social Sciences, especially Sociology, without forgetting the interdisciplinarity and complementarity of the Social Sciences through various activities and scientific research (A. Arnaldo, personal communication, June 2023).

It is important to encourage students to create their own Sociology communities in their own countries, and perhaps, in a bold move, create the Lusophone Student Community, with the firm purpose of cooperation among countries in the academic field. This will undoubtedly have an impact on the quest for the institutionalization of the field in different realities. A key issue is to make sociology a mandatory subject in secondary schools in the countries. In Angola, it is offered as an optional subject in all areas of secondary education. In Cape Verde, it is offered in the Humanities area, in the twelfth year of schooling. In Guinea-Bissau, Sociology appears in the area of Social Sciences and Humanities, also in the twelfth grade. In Mozambique, Sociology is not taught in schools in the country. In São Tomé and Príncipe, Sociology is taught in the last three years of secondary school. It must be believed that, following the

Brazilian example, strengthening school sociology is an important step towards strengthening this area of knowledge in university education.

It also reflects, to a large extent, the challenge posed by the presence of the "colonial library," a term coined by Valentin Mudimbe (1988). According to the Congolese philosopher, most works on Africa reflect Eurocentric references, narratives about the continent whose roots developed during the colonial period. It is these knowledges that continue to constitute the core of the knowledge deposited in libraries and taught in universities worldwide about Africans and Africa. According to Mudimbe, these works and the representations they contain have contributed to "inventing" Africa as a space of difference and inferiority (1998, p.208). The "African library" needs to grow, with African authors reflecting on the continent and its diversity.

American black thinker bell hooks, in her book *Teaching to Transgress* (2019), argues that education as liberating practice is one that aims to know what is "beyond the limits of the acceptable," creating new visions. For this, an epistemological proposal that criticizes hegemonic thought and its supposed universality, such as the decolonial and its immense internal variety, is a fundamental starting point in the attempt to create an education that increases the capacity to be free (2019, p.13). Thus, in these brief words, the article has sought to reflect on important challenges, and some paths that exist to consolidate Sociology as a relevant area of knowledge among the Portuguese-speaking African Countries (PALOPs).

Thinking Decoloniality in the African Context

Reflecting on the work of teachers and researchers, both in the school and university settings, is an important task for any educator seeking to improve their work. Constantly reflecting on their practice, seeking to update themselves, is fundamental to their pedagogical commitment, including questioning the content taught and the curricula, which are political decisions loaded with ideologies.

So, what sense does it make to deconstruct traditional curricula? It is important to clarify that we understand the importance of the political dimension in the field of education, so curricula represent political arenas in dispute for content construction. In other words, the selection of topics and their arguments are relevant ideological objects. Therefore, it is easy to see that knowledge produced outside the European/Western context has never been valued in Brazil or in African countries.

Even with African independence and countless intellectual debates, the colonial perspective still dominates global North politics towards the African continent. Researcher Maria Paula Meneses (2016) asserts that a detailed reading of this process shows that imperial policies have essentially been reformulated, with the hegemonic concept of the North over the South remaining essentially unchanged.

Following this line of reasoning, decolonial thought helps us understand that curricula are products of a historical context, with different times and spaces, and that they are often produced disobediently (knowledge, dialogues, emotions, for example). If our identity carries not only individual memory but also collective memory, we can understand that subaltern groups such as Africans, Latinos, and indigenous peoples continue to be seen as barbarians. In other words, not modern. The colonial vision persists in the form of content, curricula, and everyday educational practices. It is the vision of the coloniality of knowledge. According to Australian professor and researcher Raewyn Connell:

"In Australia or Brazil, we do not cite Foucault, Bourdieu, Giddens, Beck, Habermas, etc. because they know something deeper and more powerful about our societies. They know nothing about our societies. We cite them repeatedly because their ideas and approaches have become the most important paradigms in the metropolis' knowledge institutions, and because our knowledge institutions are structured to take instructions from the metropolis (...) This implies that their theoretical

methodologies exclude colonialism. They do not write from the social experience of those who were colonized, or were involved in colonization, or are still immersed in a neocolonial situation. And, in fact, their theoretical imaginaries do not incorporate colonialism as a significant social process" (Connell, 2012:12).

In his work "Letters to Guinea-Bissau," Paulo Freire recounts experiences from his visits to that African country with the aim of educating the local population without the perspective of colonialist education, "(...) because Guinea-Bissau does not start from zero, but from its cultural and historical sources, from something of its own, from the soul of its people, which colonial violence cannot kill" (Freire, 1978:10). The author himself also points out that, "(...) colonial education inherited, one of whose main objectives was the 'de-Africanization' of nationals, discriminatory, mediocly verbalist..." (1978:15). Freire identified the political and cultural emancipation of the Guinean people in the liberation struggles. Thus, he tried to overcome the recent oppressive past from the multiple and complex reality of the population of that African country. The silencing of memory is a consequence of colonialism, which the author sought to combat. Amílcar Cabral, the Guinean independence leader, pointed out how to "walk on their own feet and be guided by their own head" (Cabral, 1975).

Thus, it is necessary to have counter-narratives. To seek a balance of knowledge. To legitimize other knowledges. Education must combat prejudices of any kind, and how can it work on this deconstruction if it often becomes a legitimization of traditional curricula? In this case, tradition is often folklorized in textbooks. Thandika Mkandawire (2015), an economist and sociologist from Malawi, emphasized the need for a more Africa-sensitive approach in research and development policies. He argued that academics and policymakers should consider local experiences and traditional wisdom when addressing the challenges facing African countries.

In Brazil, some public policies have emerged that have been important in this attempt at deconstruction. The African History Law in Schools provided important elements to the school environment, especially regarding didactic materials, but it was insufficient and did not do much to change the reality in institutions. Another example is Afrocentric education, which is an educational approach that places African culture and Afro-descendant experience at the center of the learning process. This educational paradigm seeks to incorporate and value the knowledge, history, traditions, and perspectives of African and Afro-descendant communities.

It is necessary to seek other knowledges. It is essential not to hierarchize intelligence. Traditional knowledge, seen as common sense, reflects the Eurocentric vision that still persists in the Brazilian and African educational environments.

Democratizing knowledge. Deconstructing education. This is how decolonial thought seeks to overthrow coloniality, which continues with its disdain for the knowledge of oppressed and historically marginalized peoples in Brazil and Africa.

It is epistemological racism that must be tackled. Non-European knowledge should not be demeaned. It is within the "ecology of knowledges," to use the concept of Portuguese author Boaventura Sousa Santos, where dialogue between diverse knowledges that can be considered important for the advancement of social struggles occurs. In this way, we will combat monocultural, monopartisan, and androcentric hegemony (male culture predominates) linked to whiteness. It is necessary to recognize subaltern voices in everyday life, especially in education. This is because we can easily see the traces of coloniality in the school or university environment. Epistemologies of the South are a set of epistemological interventions that denounce the suppression of the countless ways of knowing and being known inherent to peoples and nations subjected to the process of colonization (SANTOS & MENESES, 2009:13).

Thus, we witness a sort of cultural genocide that silences voices, narratives, cultures, and knowledges. It is the idea of Northern epistemology, the reproduction of the knowledge of the victors, whether in school or university. It is the Eurocentric reading of knowledge production. According to Zulma Palermo:

"Choosing a decolonial position that resists this state of affairs implies placing oneself in a position of undeniable intellectual struggle and also signifies the indispensable need to debate other forms of conceiving resistance to domination by power (...)" (PALERMO, 2010:50).

It is understood that to transform reality, as advised by Mignolo (2008), epistemic disobedience is necessary, questioning hegemonic patterns of knowledge production that have become dominant by marginalizing, silencing, and delegitimizing diverse knowledges, such as those of African and Latin American intellectuals.

There are resistances that must be valued, such as anti-racist and Afrocentric education and affirmative action policies in Brazil, decoloniality theory born in Latin American countries, and social activists growing in the PALOP. In this way, we seek that decolonial breach, a fissure in the system that allows us to work with other knowledges. It is in the struggle where the knowledge of the defeated is produced.

Perspectives of Sociology in the Palop

As we have seen previously, despite progress, the Social Sciences in Africa face significant challenges, such as inadequate funding, limited infrastructure, and the need to strengthen local research and teaching capacities. Overcoming these obstacles is crucial to promoting robust and relevant research that can serve as a basis for policies and practices in support of sustainable development and social justice across the African continent.

Greater cooperation between countries through congresses, workshops, and other academic events is essential for the development of this important field of knowledge. The Luso-Afro-Brazilian Congress is an important initiative, but it still fails to bring together a significant number of social scientists. Institutional investment in humanities research is essential. The number of encounters between sociologists in the PALOP is insufficient. It is essential to exchange knowledge through a greater number of university events, which will undoubtedly increase the number of projects and academic products among countries.

In this context, it is also important to seek greater support from the Council for the Development of Research in Social Sciences in Africa (CODESRIA) and to strengthen the experience of the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB).

The Brazilian experience of making sociology a mandatory subject in secondary education can provide important support for the development of this area of knowledge in the PALOP. Since it became mandatory, the number of vacancies for teachers has increased, as has the production of materials, congresses, and other academic activities. Sociology has been strengthened, even at the university level. The greater institutionalization of sociology in Lusophone Africa also involves expanding this area in secondary education.

Students play a fundamental role in strengthening the Social Sciences in the PALOP. The experiences of the Community of Sociology Students of Angola (COESO) and the Center for Afro-Brazilian Studies for the Teaching of Sociology (NEABES/UERJ) show the importance of fighting together. Trying to bring students together in the context of Portuguese-speaking countries is fundamental and will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the quality of courses.

It should be affirmed that there is a growing demand for interdisciplinary research addressing complex issues such as poverty, inequality, governance, sustainable development, and social justice. With continued investment in education, research, and institutional development, these countries can strengthen their capacity to produce relevant knowledge and innovative solutions to local and global problems.

Cooperation among Lusophone countries can also play a crucial role in promoting academic exchange and advancing the Social Sciences in the region. The exchange of experiences, the organization of workshops, and the exchange of materials and academic products are part of cooperation. It is essential to avoid brain drain by prioritizing staff training.

Increasing the participation of civil society is fundamental in seeking to improve democracy and formulate public policies in education. African sociologists have much to contribute. At this point, it is necessary to expand freedoms.

It is also important to value and preserve national languages. Even from the perspective of oral tradition, which remains an important part of cultural heritage in many African communities, this highlights the diversity and richness of forms of communication and knowledge transmission, even in the field of education, on the continent.

The possibility of learning in local/national languages is the most important step taken in education to demarginalize and demystify local knowledge (MENESES, 2008: 356). Ngũgĩ (1986) underscores the importance of education as a means of liberation and empowerment. He argues that truly liberating education must be sensitive to local cultures and native languages, as opposed to education that perpetuates colonial structures. The author explores the role of literature in shaping political and social consciousness. He emphasizes the importance of literature as a tool for questioning dominant narratives and promoting awareness of social and historical issues. Although Portuguese is the language of the colonizer, it should not be disregarded for its global reach and diverse potential.

Final Considerations

Sociology plays a fundamental role in Africa, providing a deeper understanding of social dynamics, challenges, and possible solutions to promote sustainable development and social cohesion. However, efforts must be made to further develop this area of knowledge in school and university curricula. Social sciences help understand the complex social reality of Portuguese-speaking African countries. They offer conceptual and methodological tools to analyze social structures, power relations, and cultural identities, among other things. Therefore, it is essential to pursue a decolonial education, as reproducing the knowledge production dynamics of former metropolises will not contribute to the effective development of the Social Sciences in the PALOP.

Political sociology and political science also play an important role in understanding citizen participation, governance, and democratic processes in Portuguese-speaking African countries. Efforts must be made to combat the persecution of intellectuals and emphasize strengthening democratic institutions.

Social Sciences promote intercultural dialogue, facilitating a deeper understanding of the different communities and ethnic groups present in Lusophone Africa. Mobilizing students and teachers is essential in the pursuit of the institutionalization of this area of knowledge. This article aims to encourage sociologists from the PALOP in this important endeavor.

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