

STUDIES on National Liberation

The PAIGC's Political Education for Liberation in Guinea-Bissau, 1963–74



Cover:

A teacher writes on a blackboard at a PAIGC school in the liberated areas in the Guinean forests, 1974.

Source: Roel Coutinho, *Guinea-Bissau and Senegal Photographs (1973–1974)*



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A child's drawing made at a school in the liberated area of Candjambary, 1974.

Source: Roel Coutinho, *Guinea-Bissau and Senegal Photographs (1973–1974)*



Whether in Cape Verde or anywhere else in the world, education is the fundamental basis that underpins the work of the emancipation of every human being and the conscientisation of mankind¹, not in relation to individual or class needs or conveniences, but in relation to the environment in which he lives, to the needs of the community, and to the problems of the humanity in general. ... Today, education aims at the full realisation of man, without distinguishing race or origin, as a conscious and intelligent, useful, and progressive being, integrated into the world and his (geographic, economic, and social) environment, without any sort of submission. For this and because of this, the issue of education cannot be treated separately from the socioeconomic question.

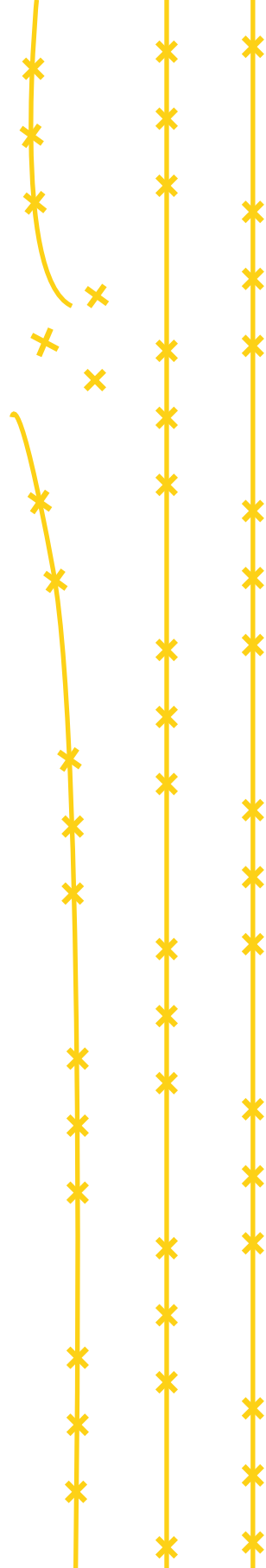
– Amílcar Cabral, 1951²

The PAIGC's Struggle for Liberation

The liberation struggle against colonialism, if it is to be a total liberation struggle, is not only for the political conquest of territory ('flag independence'); it is a struggle to liberate the people from the tentacles of colonialism. The liberation struggle is a social and political phenomenon that gains strength when colonised people organise themselves to reclaim their political and economic sovereignty and to dismantle and destroy the institutions that overpower their own sense of themselves and their capacity to control the fruits of their labour. The liberation struggle employs – at different times – a range of means to end colonial domination, from armed struggle to economic strikes to educational projects, programmes, and cultural resistance.

It was within this context of colonialism and oppression and through the process of becoming conscious of these structures that the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) was created in September 1956. Founded by a group of anti-colonialist *militantes* ('militants') primarily from Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, *A Geração Cabral* ('The Cabral Generation') – named after the anti-colonial Bissau-Guineans leader Amílcar Cabral – emerged to lead the struggle for liberation from Portuguese colonialism.³

Born in Guinea-Bissau with an extensive diasporic network, the PAIGC emerged out of a long tradition of resistance in Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, and Portugal. In a struggle that lasted from 1903 to 1936, the people of



Guinea-Bissau revolted against the *imposto de palhota* ('hut tax'), a property tax that was imposed on people's homes and that, across colonial Africa, was used to force people into wage labour. In the case of the Cape Verdean Islands, a significant peasant uprising known as the Revolt of Ribeirão Manuel (1910) struck out against the deplorable conditions of subsistence in the countryside. In Lisbon, the political centre of Portuguese colonialism, discontent grew – particularly after the Second World War (1939–45) – amongst the more politically organised African students who had come from colonised territories to pursue university studies in Portugal. From the state-created *Casa dos Estudantes do Império* ('House of the Students of the Empire'), African students created the *Centro de Estudos Africanos* ('Centre of African Studies'). The political curiosity of African students found expression in clandestine study groups housed in the private home of the Espírito Santo family from São Tomé and Príncipe. Their home became a hub where critical political thought around national independence and liberation began to emerge amongst African students. Amílcar Cabral (1924–73), who was studying agronomy in Lisbon at the time, emerged from these experiences to lead struggles in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde and became one of the most influential anti-colonial African liberation leaders. Inheriting the collective outcomes of these political and intellectual rebellions, young Africans discovered their generation's mission: to fight for Africa's independence from colonialism. Later, in a fictional narrative that laid out the path taken by these groups of young people and their desires for liberation, Angolan writer Pepetela would describe them as *A Geração da Utopia* or 'The Generation of Utopia'.

In 1961, six years after the creation of the PAIGC and after several attempts to negotiate independence with the Portuguese colonial regime, the party officially began an armed liberation struggle in the name of total independence. Led from within the forest territories of Guinea-Bissau, the armed guerrilla struggle lasted from 23 January 1963 until April 1974. On 24 September 1973, challenging Portuguese colonial rule and international diplomacy, the PAIGC declared independence for Guinea-Bissau, though this was only officially recognised by the Portuguese government on 10 September 1974.

The objective of the PAIGC's struggle was very clear: independence and liberation of two colonised territories, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, which were

politically and culturally connected by the historical developments of colonialism. In order to achieve this, the PAIGC sought to:

1. Overthrow colonial institutions of oppression and exploitation, and
2. Create a project of national reconstruction to pursue the economic, political, and social liberation of the people. This project would fight against the toxic residues left by colonial structures in the bodies and minds of the people.

These objectives were further elaborated on in the Party's Major Programme, which was made up of nine sections.⁴ The first section demanded the 'total and unconditional national independence of the people of Guinea and the Cabo Verde Islands [and] the end of all colonialist or imperialistic relationships, ... revision or revocation of all agreements, treaties, alliances, and concessions made by the Portuguese colonialist'. The second and third sections defended national 'economic, political, social, and cultural unity', emphasising the union between Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde for the 'construction of a strong and progressive African nation, on the basis of suitably consulted, popular will'. The fourth section complemented these last two by defending African unity. The fifth section focused on what kind of government to implement in the territories after independence, namely one that is 'democratic, anti-colonialist, and anti-imperialist' and committed to the principle that all citizens would be equal 'before the law, without distinction as to nationality or ethnic group, sex, social origin, cultural level, profession, position, wealth, religious beliefs, or philosophical conviction'. The sixth section focused on economic independence, a structured economy, and the development of production 'governed by the principles of democratic socialism'; the seventh section on 'justice and progress' at the social, educational, and cultural levels; and the eighth section on national defence and how it was 'linked to the people and directed by national citizens'. Finally, the ninth section explained how its international policy aimed to be developed 'in the interest of the nation, of Africa, and of the peace and progress of humanity'.

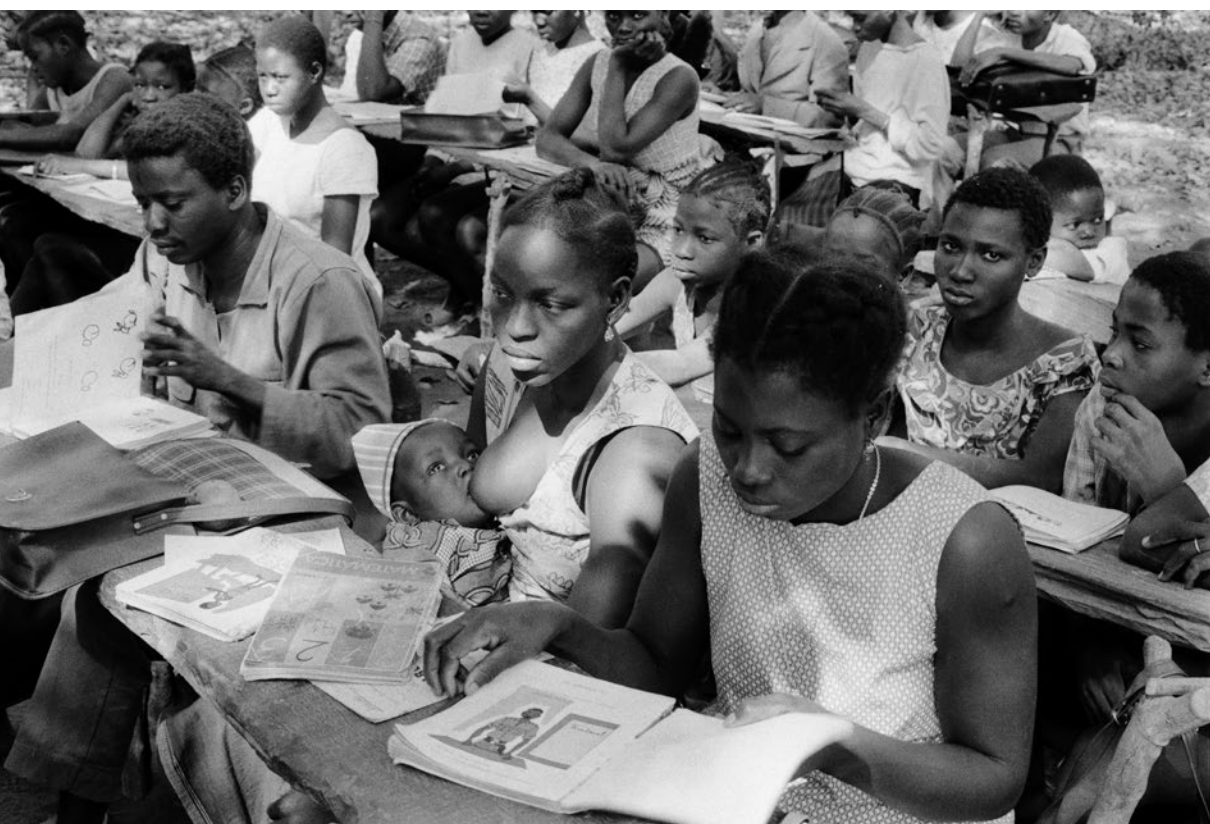
To fulfil the objectives of the national liberation movement and to put into practice the programme and strategies designed for liberation, one had to be ready to face significant obstacles. The majority of the population was experiencing

great levels of impoverishment and underdevelopment, exhibited in high infant mortality rates, cyclical famines, high percentages of illiteracy, a lack of public infrastructure and services, and underdeveloped to non-existent industrial sectors. In a speech given at a mass meeting in London, October 1971, Amílcar Cabral explained the dismal situation:

the lack of protein and many basic foods holds back the development of our people. In some regions, there has been an 80% infant mortality rate. Throughout the golden age of Portuguese colonialism, we had only two hospitals with a total of 300 beds in the whole country and only 18 doctors, 12 of them in Bissau.

As for schools, there were only 45 of them, and they were Catholic missionary schools, only teaching the catechism. There were 11 official schools for *assimilado*⁵ children. There were no secondary schools at all in [Guinea-Bissau] until 1959; now there is one. ... There were only 2,000 children in schools throughout the country. And you can imagine the kind of teaching. It was a deliberate decision to prevent the development of our people, just as they did in Angola, Mozambique, and the other colonies.⁶

The path to liberation required leadership that lived by Cabral's often quoted words: 'Tell no lies ... claim no easy victories'. As such, in the pursuit of national liberation, the PAIGC was faced with the task of creating anew the processes, structures, and spaces that could begin to attend to the material needs of the people and the needs of the political struggle. Investing in education became a fundamental pillar of the liberation struggle that was necessary at the levels of political, economic, cultural, and armed resistance. Combating illiteracy, fear, and ignorance, education would become the means through which African people could begin to reclaim and regain their voices and emerge as politically conscious and active members of society, both within their country and in the course of world history.



A student at a PAIGC semi-boarding primary school in the Sarà region reviews the mathematics textbook for grade one, produced for the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) by Joachim Kindler and financed by the German Democratic Republic (DDR) under the International Solidarity Committee, 1974.

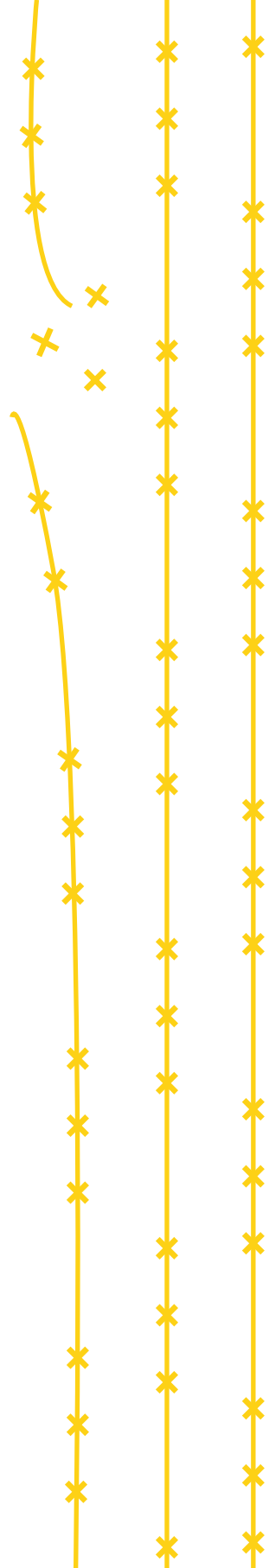
Source: Roel Coutinho, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal Photographs (1973–1974)

The PAIGC's Education Project

The first party congress of the PAIGC, known as the Cassacá Congress, took place between 13–17 February 1964 in the southern liberated area of the Guinean forests. The 'liberated areas' or 'liberated zones' (terms often used interchangeably in the party writings) were the major territories under party control; here, Portuguese access or influence was very limited and virtually non-existent. By 1971, two-thirds of the country was governed by the PAIGC.⁷ In these territories, the party developed the beginnings of a revolutionary state that prioritised providing the inhabitants with people-centred basic services such as healthcare, judicial organs, education, and small commerce. These liberated areas played an essential political function in the liberation struggle.

A key outcome of the congress was the political and military reorganisation of the party, with important restructuring regarding:

- The reinforcement of popular power;
- The regulation of economic, administrative, judicial, educational, and social assistance activities in the liberated areas; and
- The creation of the *Forças Armadas Revolucionárias do Povo* (FARP, or 'Revolutionary Armed Forces of the People'), which included the guerrilla groups, popular army, and popular militia.



Among the resolutions that came out of the congress was the need to enhance knowledge. This took place by creating schools, investing in the education of adults and youth, and encouraging individuals to invest in their own education for the betterment of party cadres. In the directives that Cabral wrote for the congress, he highlighted how, in order ‘to carry on the victorious development of our struggle’, the PAIGC would need to:

Set up schools and develop teaching in all the liberated areas. ... Improve the work in the existing schools, avoid a very high number of pupils which might prejudice the advantage to all. Found schools but bear in mind the real potential at our disposal to avoid our having to later close some schools because of a lack of resources. ... Constantly strengthen the political training of teachers... Set up courses to teach adults to read and write, whether they are combatants or elements of the population. ... Little by little set up simple libraries in the liberated areas, lend others the books we possess, help others to learn to read a book, the newspaper and to understand what is read.⁸

The creation of a national consciousness about Portuguese colonialism and the need to struggle for national independence and reconstruction under the umbrella of a pluralistic but singular Guinean identity was a significant obstacle that the party had to face at the beginning of the struggle, in which the PAIGC’s education project played a key role.

Developing mobilisation campaigns to popularise the party directives from the Cassacá Congress became an important process for educating the general population as well as for training within the party’s organisational structures. Through the work of the *comissário político* (‘political commissar’), these campaigns became a significant activity for the party. Congress directives invited PAIGC militants to ‘give the widest possible distribution of the party newspaper, hold sessions for collective reading (in a group) and lead those who are reading into a discussion and into expressing views on what they have read’.⁹

Under the shade of mangrove trees, open sessions were held with the general population. The mobilisation campaign concentrated on dialoguing about the practical aspects of daily life under Portuguese colonial rule. In January 1969, during an interview recorded at the International Conference in Support of the Peoples of Portuguese Colonies and Southern Africa in Khartoum, Cabral shared the content of these conversations and the goals that they aimed to achieve:

Telling the people that ‘the land belongs to those who work on it’ was not enough to mobilise them, because we have more than enough land, there is all the land we need. We had to find appropriate formulae for mobilising our peasants, instead of using terms that our people could not yet understand. We could never mobilise our people simply on the basis of the struggle against colonialism – that has no effect. To speak of the fight against imperialism is not convincing enough.

Instead, we use a direct language that all can understand: ‘Why are you going to fight? What are you? What is your father? What has happened to your father up to now? What is the situation? Did you pay taxes? Did your father pay taxes? What have you seen from those taxes? How much do you get for your groundnuts? Have you thought about how much you will earn with your groundnuts? How much sweat has it cost your family? Which of you has been imprisoned? You are going to work on road-building: who gives you the tools? You are bringing the tools. Who provides your meals? You provide your meals. But who walks on the road? Who has a car? And your daughter who was raped – are you happy about that?’¹⁰

The meaning and impact of colonialism needed to resonate with people on the most personal level in their daily lives. The open sessions intended to raise the people’s consciousness about what was happening to them on their land and were crucial to the PAIGC mobilisation campaigns and the early development of political education, also known as ‘militant education’.¹¹

Such conversations with the population and the broader investment in education contributed to the party’s larger aim to ‘combat, without violence, harmful practices, the negative aspects of the beliefs and traditions of our people... [and]

all particularisms (separatist feeling) prejudicial to the unity of people, [and] all demonstrations of tribalism, of racial or religious discrimination'.¹² The sessions not only contributed to raising and solidifying people's consciousness about the struggle, but also to establishing administrative, political, judicial, economic, and social structures in the liberated areas. These structures and processes promoted a great shift in people's lives and were crucial to reinforcing the political development of their consciousness. As Cabral noted in the congress directives:

The people struggle and accept the sacrifices demanded by the struggle, but in order to gain material advantages, to be able to live in peace, to see their lives progress, and to ensure their children's future. National liberation, the struggle against colonialism, working for peace and progress – independence – all these are empty words without meaning for the people unless they are translated into a real improvement in standards of living. It is useless to liberate an area if the people of that area are left without the basic necessities of life.¹³



A student uses a microscope during a PAIGC medical consultation in a college in Campada, 1973.

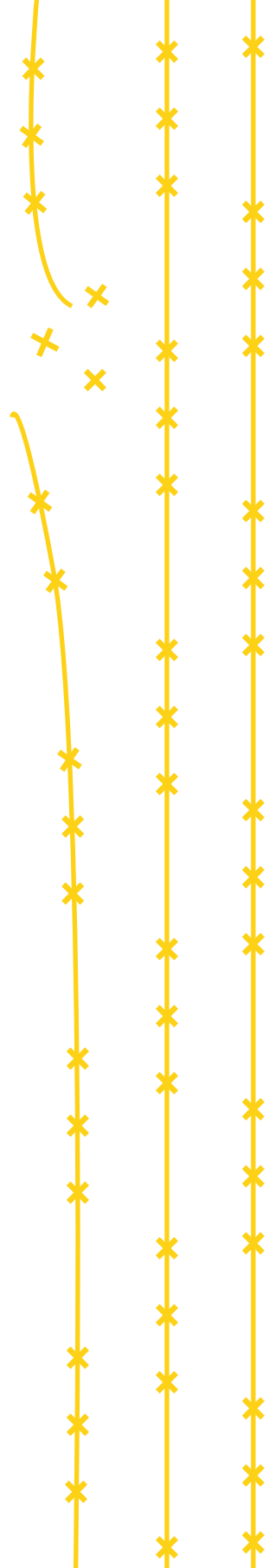
Source: Roel Coutinho, *Guinea-Bissau and Senegal Photographs (1973–1974)*

PAIGC Schools in the Liberated Areas

Under the struggle's watchwords 'all those who know should teach those who don't know', the PAIGC developed two simultaneous educational projects, one for adults and another for youth. The underlying goals of developing education systems in the liberated areas were, in Cabral's words, 'to destroy, through our resistance, everything that makes our people like dogs – men or women – to let us advance, grow, and rise up, like flowers on our land, all that can make our people valued human beings'.¹⁴

Between 1963 and 1972, the PAIGC developed educational facilities for three groups: youth, adults, and military personnel. Educational initiatives for adults and military personnel had been carried out since the mobilisation work of the early years but were strengthened and institutionalised during this period through the creation of schooling and education infrastructure. *Escolas de Tabanca* ('village schools') and *internatos* ('boarding schools') were built in liberated areas – with the exception of two boarding schools that were located in neighbouring countries (*Escola Piloto* in the Republic of Guinea and *Escola Teranga* in the Republic of Senegal).

The PAIGC's schools abroad were coordinated by *Instituto Amizade* ('Friendship Institute'), created by the party in 1965, with permanent representative offices in Conakry and Dakar. The institute was non-political with 'humanitarian purposes', as its statutes describe, and worked in close collaboration with the education



department of Guinea-Bissau's liberated areas. It therefore functioned as a 'sort of outline of a Ministry of Education' within the party structure.¹⁵ The institute coordinated all aspects arising out of party directives, from running schools to developing curricula and materials to managing and distributing scholarships abroad. During the liberation struggle, the PAIGC was offered scholarships from countries such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, Hungary, Yugoslavia, the German Democratic Republic, Romania, the United States, and the Soviet Union. The institute was also responsible for organising and coordinating adult seminars, training cadres, educating social service workers such as schoolteachers, and tracking the rapid growth of school life during the liberation struggle.¹⁶

The core educational structures of the PAIGC were developed through broader mobilisation campaigns and educational processes for children and youth coordinated by the Friendship Institute. There was also a group of facilities for adults: *Lar Sami* in Ziguinchor and *Lar de Dakar* in the Republic of Senegal as well as *Lar do Bonfim* (also known as *Lar de Conakry*) in the Republic of Guinea.¹⁷ These were multifunctional centres that served as party representative offices for administrative and political functions, small hospitals and recovery centres for those injured as a result of the armed struggle, and educational spaces that provided literacy programmes and political education courses for those who were recovering from injuries. In 1966, the party created two other centres for the adult population and the military: the *Centro de Reciclagem e Aperfeiçoamento de Professores* ('Centre for Improving and Retraining Teachers') and the *Centro de Instrução Política e Militar de Madina do Boé* ('Political and Military Instruction Centre of Madina do Boé'). In 1964–65, the PAIGC education system had 50 schools with 4,000 students total in the liberated areas; this increased to 127 schools with 13,361 students and 191 teachers by 1965–66 and to 159 schools with 14,386 students and 220 teachers by 1966–67.¹⁸ In a 1973 report about the development of the PAIGC education system between 1963–73, the total numbers of trained party cadres and students in the liberated zones were recorded as follows:

Today, the party has 164 primary schools in their liberated areas, where instruction is carried out by 258 teachers, serving a total of 14,531 students, of whom about a third are girls. ... Today, in less than ten years, the PAIGC formed 36 university cadres and we have 46 cadres of higher

technical training; 241 cadres of professional and specialised education; 174 trade union and policy cadres; and 410 healthcare cadres. In addition to those already formed, we have at this moment 422 students receiving middle and higher training abroad who will be joined by about 100 students this year.¹⁹

In order to gain a fuller appreciation of the PAIGC's education initiatives and achievements during the liberation struggle, it is necessary to study the approach that guided their political education and consciousness work, which reached beyond conventional childhood education and literacy programmes.



A makeshift PAIGC school in the liberated areas built with leaves and branches, hidden under trees to avoid being spotted by aircrafts, 1974.

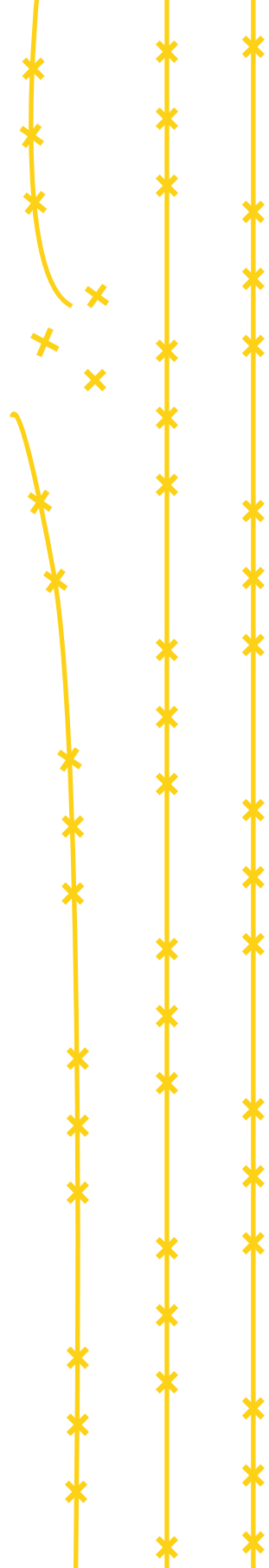
Source: Roel Coutinho, *Guinea-Bissau and Senegal Photographs (1973–1974)*

A Militant Approach to Education

Many African countries declared their independence in the second half of the twentieth century, led by their liberation movements and in interaction with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles around the world. The PAIGC, along with the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and others, was deeply influenced by communist and socialist ideologies. The adoption of the term *militante* or 'militant' to identify particular members of the party, for example, was drawn from the revolutionary frameworks of the PAIGC's international contemporaries.

Submerged within the ideological, political, social, and armed movement, militants were characterised by their disciplined adherence to the liberation struggle and active engagement within the fight to achieve total independence from the Portuguese colonial government. In 1974, Samora Machel – a military commander, leader of FRELIMO, and socialist in the tradition of Marxism-Leninism – provided the following definition of militants and militancy:

The militant is he who lives the worries of the organisation and who, through the creative application of our line of thought in the detail of everyday life, becomes a model servant of the people for everyone, the builder of the new society. The task entrusted to him is carried out with the sense that its objective is to serve the people,



and in receiving his mission from the people, he consecrates everything to them, including his own life.²⁰

In the PAIGC's liberation struggle, 'militant' was used as an umbrella term for all those who consciously participated in the struggle, whether they were combatants, commanders, political commissars, 'responsible workers',²¹ teachers, nurses, doctors, or civilians. The party considered the militant to be the key participant in the vanguard of the struggle, with the following considerations in mind:

a good militant (like a good citizen) is the one who does his duty properly. He is the one who, in addition to doing his duty, succeeds in improving himself each day so as to be able to do more and better. ... [A]ll those in our land who are ready to put an end to Portuguese colonialism and ready to follow the party's watchwords and to respect and carry out the orders of our party leadership – they are of the party. But tomorrow the party will mean only those who have exemplary moral conduct, as men and women worthy of our land. It will mean those who work and have work, for there can be no place for idlers in our party. It will mean those who dedicate themselves body and soul to the programme of our party in our land, ready to fight any enemy.²²

During a seminar for PAIGC members held between 19–24 November 1969, Cabral explained how, in the 'service of the liberty and the progress' of the Guinean people, the militant should defend at all costs the advances being made in the liberation struggle.²³ The militant should 'live among the people, before the people, behind the people ... [and] must work for the party in the certainty that they are working for the people in our land'.²⁴

Becoming a PAIGC militant was considered a conscious act. As such, 'some specific evidence that one satisfies certain requirements' was to be given to the party leadership that exhibited knowledge about its programme and principles. The militant should also have been active in organisational work that sought to achieve the party's objectives in practice.²⁵

To achieve these goals, this militant vanguard, or what the PAIGC called the *militante armado* ('armed militant'), also needed to be actively leading or engaged

in political education about the struggle amongst adult civilians, party members, youth, and children. The militant vanguard needed to be the driving force behind politically educating those strategic groups that could be forged into political instruments for the liberation struggle and for national reconstruction after independence. The creation of such a vanguard, as Cabral outlined during the November 1969 sessions, should be ‘constantly more honed, more sharpened, more perfected, and our people must constantly embellish it’.²⁶

It was in this context that the PAIGC developed their concept of *educação militante* (‘militant education’, also referred to as political education). This term was not used often in PAIGC archival documents until in 1978, when the term was adopted to characterise the education system developed during the struggle.²⁷ The PAIGC’s conception and practical application of militant education were deeply influenced by the specific historic moment in which it emerged and shaped by a number of factors: African liberation struggles and their anti-colonial positions; pan-African movements and the African unity principle; the Cold War and socialist ideological blocs; the Non-Aligned Movement and international solidarity; the period of internal armed conflict in the Guinean territory; and the international human rights struggle of the liberation movement in the realm of the United Nations.

Militant education was a committed, engaged, and conscious anti-colonial educational process focused on an expansive concept of liberation ‘rooted and supported by the realities and necessities of the community’ and principles of decolonisation. Its ‘pedagogical role combined three aspects: political learning, technical training, and the shaping of individual and collective behaviours’.²⁸ Through this education, students and citizens would be guided to develop themselves fully and encouraged to give conscious contributions to the sustainable development of the newly independent country. Militant or political education was applied to the training and formation of three groups: the militant teacher, the militant combatant, and the militant student.

The Militant Teacher

Militant teachers abandoned their daily lives to join the struggle; they came from the working class (artisans, service and urban industry workers, etc.), the peasantry (farmers and rural land-dwellers), and a few from the petty bourgeoisie (former primary school teachers, former government employees, and students). Their ages varied from 15 to 25 years old, and students recruited from Portuguese colonial schools to join the struggle were also trained to become PAIGC militant teachers.

For a militant teacher, one's profession and work entailed more than preparing classes, teaching the set curricula, and grading students' academic performance: militant teaching sought to transform behaviours and habits, overcome past experiences, rethink and produce new knowledge, and adapt to the changing world and the demands of the liberation struggle. In this way, becoming a militant teacher was to undergo two simultaneous processes: to decolonise the existing educational materials and to produce new school curricula and materials as part of the PAIGC's broader educational work. In this way, the militant teacher was both a pedagogical resource and a mirror of the liberation struggle's ideals. Until the publication of the first school manual in 1966, PAIGC teachers had to operate using colonial manuals and material. For example, teachers had a double task when using the Portuguese spelling manual: apart from fundamentals such as teaching the alphabet, it was also their work to critically interpret the message that the Portuguese books transmitted and reformulate it in a way that was more relevant to the students' universe.²⁹

However, for this to happen, the teachers themselves had to go through their own process of decolonisation to deconstruct and dismantle the colonial knowledge that was imposed on them by the Portuguese government. Although the party developed training courses for teachers which addressed themes such as pedagogy and the acquisition of pedagogical skills, the process of becoming a militant teacher was largely characterised by the teachers' re-investment in and re-evaluation of their own education and knowledge. This often took place through early apprenticeships in the classroom together with their students.

Teachers in these schools found themselves in a position in which their knowledge, skills, and attitudes could work to create learning environments that encouraged critical thinking amongst students. The process of questioning, interrogating, and sparking curiosity not only built confidence in the students; it also transformed the teachers into agents of change. Although the militant teacher and militant combatant were engaged on different fronts in the struggle for independence and liberation, both were tasked not only with carrying out daily technical, logistical, and operational functions (such as contributing to running schools and participating in running military operations), but also with consciously training and politically educating the future generation that would lead the country to liberation and post-independence reconstruction. In this process, it was their responsibility to develop the pedagogical approaches and materials – as well as the emotional conditions – that would cultivate the principles and goals designed by the party.

The Militant Combatant

Inspired by the Cuban military training model, the Political and Military Instruction Centre of Madina do Boé was created in 1966 by PAIGC Commander Pedro Verona Pires, who had received military training in Cuba. Following the PAIGC's directives, it was important for the party's military to be conscious of the liberation struggle's political strategies: the revolutionary armed forces could only wage an effective military campaign if they knew why the struggle was necessary and what the intended outcomes were. Political lessons about colonialism and the principles and goals of the liberation struggle were an integral part of their training.

Due to the high illiteracy rate in Guinea-Bissau, the instruction centre also promoted literacy classes for militant combatants. Teaching reading and writing skills was a crucial aspect in the military not only because it was necessary for engaging and comprehending party materials, but also because it was required for developing military logistics, preparing attacks, communicating between fronts and the party headquarters, and understanding military coordinates and technology.

As a continuation of this political and ideological mobilisation work and the education of civilians, the PAIGC created the *Brigadas de Trabalho Político* ('Political Work Brigades') in 1968, which were re-organised under the name *Brigadas de Acção Política* ('Political Action Brigades') in 1970. According to the Political Action Brigades' 1971 statutes, their core functions were:

to strengthen the party's political work... [and] to strengthen and develop the political consciousness of militants, combatants, and populations, [as well as] the explanation and popularisation of the party's watchwords and other directives in all fields of our activity. ... [The brigade] must have materials for the realisation of its function (party documents, newsletters, press releases, photographs, and other audiovisual media) that are provided by the party leadership. The brigade, like any other organism of the party's political leadership, must live in the heart of the people.³⁰

The Militant Student

It was under the slogan 'Education, work, struggle' and the salutation 'long live the PAIGC, strength, light, and guide of our people in Guiné and Cape Verde!' that the party started to train what it would consider to be 'the best sons and daughters' of the nation, namely militant students and students of the youth organisation *Pioneiros do Partido* ('Party Pioneers').³¹ In 1966, alongside the inauguration of the boarding school *Escola Piloto* in Conakry, the PAIGC created the Party Pioneers for students between the ages of 10 and 15 years old who had concluded their first year of primary education. As an 'organisation of [the] vanguard', it aimed to create spaces and processes that would produce militant students. According to its statutes, the Party Pioneers aimed to contribute to a quality education for children based on the principles of the party and to reinforce love for the Guinean and Cape Verdean people, dedication to the struggle, respect for the family and schools, and 'fondness for justice, work, progress, and liberty'. Its goals and activities sought to make all of its members 'worthy militants' of the party and 'conscious citizens' capable of taking on the great responsibilities of national reconstruction in the future as well as the 'uncompromising defence of the conquest of the revolution'.³²

In addition to the work involved in being a good student, other tasks of the militant student included:

to discuss everything that concerns the struggle, school, and land. They should meet with parents, ... leaders, officials, militants, fighters, foreign friends, and all those who are interested in the [Party] Pioneers' work. They should organise sports competitions, drawing, games competitions, singing, handwork, etc., both with school students and with other pioneers.³³



PAIGC militant combatants use their resting time to learn to read and write, putting into practice one of the Party Watchwords to ‘demand from responsible workers of the Party that they devote themselves seriously to study ... [and] constantly improve their knowledge, their culture, their political training ... [and] constantly learn’, 1974.³⁴

Source: Roel Coutinho, *Guinea-Bissau and Senegal Photographs (1973–1974)*

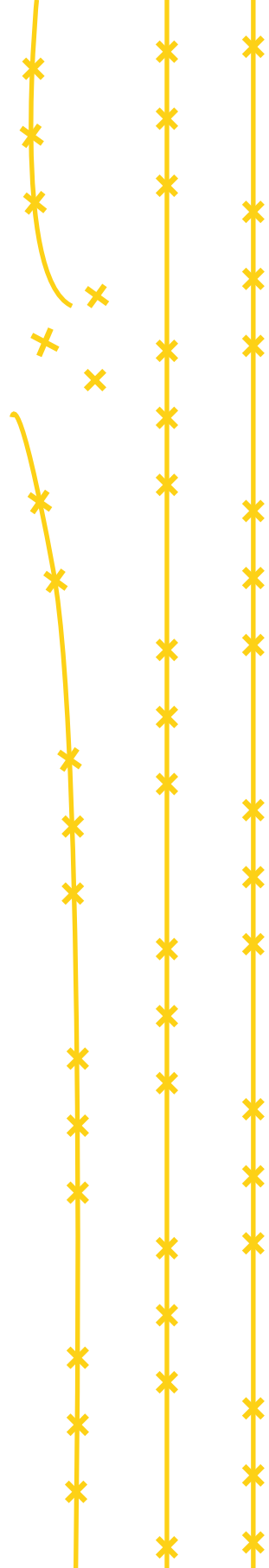
Transforming Pedagogical Materials and Curricula

Political education was obligatory in every front of the struggle and was one of the PAIGC's highest priorities. As Cabral explained in a seminar to party members in November 1969:

It is necessary to struggle with political consciousness in one's head. It is necessary that we be aware that it is the consciousness of a man that guides the gun, and not the gun that guides his consciousness. The gun counts because the man is behind it, grasping it. And it is worth more the more the consciousness of the man is worth [and] the more the man's consciousness serves a well-defined, clear, and just cause.³⁵

The PAIGC's militant or political education was anti-colonial and African-centred in its objectives, aiming to dismantle the biased, hierarchical, and oppressive education system and practices inherited from Portuguese colonial education. It brought new knowledge and experiences of social life to school manuals and curricula, placing an emphasis on learning about the concrete realities of the African people, the historical processes that they were challenging at the time – that is, colonialism – and the violent and structural relations that emerged from its practices.

Equally as important was the special emphasis placed on learning and teaching strategies of resistance against colonial practices. The experiences of African people,



their past, their present, and their future had to be at the heart of this new education. The school curricula needed to grapple with and be shaped by the forms of knowledge that existed in local communities. With these new approaches to knowledge, the PAIGC intended to cultivate in the learners a personal sense of obligation to themselves, their peers, and their communities. As early as 1949, Cabral advocated for knowledge production to focus on the existing African realities through his research experiences of the agricultural conditions in Portugal and its African territories.³⁶ He argued that one of the best ways to defend the land lay in learning and understanding how to use the soil sustainably and consciously improve the benefits we reap from it.³⁷ To know and understand the land was a form of defending the people and their right to better their living conditions.

The curricula developed for the education of the militant student was comprised of several subjects, from mathematics to Portuguese language learning, gymnastics, art, geography, science, theatre, and music. Between 1966 and 1974, the PAIGC developed four school manuals for the first to the fourth grade and four manuals for the fifth and sixth grade. These included one manual on general African history, one on the history of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, another on political lessons, and, finally, a translation of *A Short History of Pre-Capitalist Society* (the first volume of a two-volume study written by D. Mitropolsky, Y. Zubritsky, V. Kerov, and others in 1965 at the Patrice Lumumba Friendship University in Moscow, USSR). PAIGC school manuals were created collectively by teachers and other militants and printed in Uppsala, Sweden by the printing house Wretmans Boktryckeri. Cabral's transcribed speeches and writings were also used as teaching materials.

In addition, the party developed a range of media, including newspapers such as *Jornal Libertação* ('Liberation Journal') and the international French-language *PAIGC Actualités* ('PAIGC News') and a youth magazine, *Blufô – Órgão dos Pioneiros do PAIGC* ('*Blufô*: Organ of the PAIGC Pioneers'),³⁸ which was also widely read by adults. In addition, the party founded the *Rádio Libertação* ('Liberation Radio'), which broadcasted daily news about the struggle and contributed to the PAIGC's adult education programme.

Curricula for Children and Youth

Strongly inspired by the party's political and ideological orientation and influenced by global circumstances at the time, the PAIGC curriculum for children and youth was divided into two phases: from first to second grade and from third to fifth grade, each with a different scope. Political education for the first and second grade was dedicated to the history of the liberation struggle. Here, themes such as the creation of the PAIGC and its structure and organisations, heroes and heroines, and goals and programme were central. Teaching about the liberation struggle would in turn require discussing colonialism, oppression, exploitation in general, and Portuguese colonialism in particular.

Political education for the third to fifth grade was more comprehensive than the curricula for the first and second grade and centred on the liberation struggle's dedication to internationalism. The PAIGC taught about similar struggles on the African continent, such as the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO); the Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe (MLSTP); the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA); and the Conference of Nationalist Organisations of the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP), an organisation for cooperation between the national liberation movements of the African territories colonised by the Portuguese. Such national struggles were explored in relation to other international issues, including:

- Diplomatic struggles such as fighting for international recognition of the colonial occupation of their territories by the Portuguese.
- Gender struggles aiming to advance the rights of women and children in a context in which feudal and colonial patriarchal domination were interlaced (which PAIGC leaders like Carmen Pereira referred to as 'two colonialisms').
- Historical struggles elsewhere such as the socialist revolution in Russia in October 1917 and the labour movement in Africa.

- Class struggle highlighting the connection between the PAIGC, trade unions such as the National Union of Guinean Workers, and the international working class.
- Racism, freedom, progress, national reconstruction, and African history (including the slave trade and the great empires that predated colonisation).

Writing school texts was central for transmitting the ideas defined in the school curriculum and for assisting teachers in transmitting dense information to school students in an accessible and interesting way. One way of doing this was to transform the liberation struggle of daily life, politics, and ideology into short stories and fables that explored human and militant civic behaviours and complemented the political or militant components of the curricula.

For the first and second grades, the teachers who were entrusted to create school manuals developed a broad range of lesson plans. In the curricula for the first to the fourth grade, political and ideological themes were adapted to school texts, intertwining concrete learning outcomes with texts that directly expressed the objectives of the liberation struggle, including the following titles:

- *The Major Programme of Our Party*, which introduced the party principles to first grade students.
- *The Great Patriot*, which addressed the theme of the militant combatant to second grade students.
- *The Past of Our People* and *Centuries of Pain and Hope*, concerning the history of Portuguese colonialism for third grade students.
- *The Poem of a Militant* and *The Objectives of Our Struggle*, which shared the core goals of liberation for fourth grade students.

Unlike past materials that represented far-flung scenes of colonial Portugal, these new materials and learning processes were embedded with the geography, social life, and organisation of the territories where the struggle for liberation

was taking place. Now one could find texts with titles such as *Life in the Tabanca* ('village') and *The Professions*, the latter of which revealed the local social structure and organisation. There was also a dedicated focus on scientific explanations of the natural world. Lessons addressed the marvels of nature such as oceans and the richness of botanical life. The goal was to demystify natural phenomena while taking care not to put into question the students' religious beliefs. Another important theme explored was how to use natural resources for the country's development in a sustainable manner.

However, PAIGC school programmes and texts did not always achieve the goals for education, particularly in school manuals from first to third grade. The great emphasis on celebrating the contemporary struggle, battles, and heroes of the PAIGC left topics on African culture and history almost unexplored in the school manuals.

Curricula for Adult Political Education

Adult political education at the Political and Military Instruction Centre of Madina do Boé followed the same topics as youth education but with a deeper analysis. The centre's instruction curriculum, *Programa para a formação do soldado FARP* ('Training Programme for the FARP Soldier'), consisted of 180 hours of classes during a thirty-day period, of which 60 hours were dedicated to 'political preparation'.

The political education curriculum for adults was divided into five sections. The first section was dedicated to history and geography, addressing themes such as 'the exploitation of our people by the Portuguese colonial government', as well as its consequences; 'the distinction between Portuguese colonialism and the Portuguese people'; and 'oppression'.³⁹ It was an important part of the PAIGC's politics to clarify that they were fighting an oppressive colonial structure – not its people. This made two issues very clear: first, that fighting people did not necessarily result in the elimination of the colonial structure and, second, that the Portuguese people were also victims of the oppression perpetrated by an authoritarian regime.

The second section of the curriculum was dedicated to the PAIGC's history and ideology, which more or less followed the same lines that were implemented in the curriculum for school children. However, greater focus and detail were given to the PAIGC's history, especially concerning its early mobilisations and the beginning of the armed struggle and its development, difficulties, and reality at the time. Discussions also focused on the party programme and principles as well as some of the struggle's weaknesses. Here, socialist and Leninist concepts such as criticism, self-criticism, democratic centralism, and revolutionary democracy were expounded upon in greater detail, shedding light on the political influences that the party received from other ideologies and how it intended to adapt them to the Guinean context.

The third section of the curriculum was dedicated to international issues. The purpose here was to contextualise the PAIGC's liberation struggle in the broader context of struggles that were happening around the world and to establish the connections between them. This aimed to highlight international themes such as the contemporary liberation struggle and decolonisation in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; the Cold War; imperialism; and anti-colonial organisations around the world. Discussions of topics such as imperialism, socialism, the 'Third World', and the liberation struggle against imperialism were central.

The fourth section focused on the sociological and ethnographic character of Guinea-Bissau in the present and future. Here, they covered topics such as religion, ethnicity, and racism, as well as the economy, organisational work, development, and planning methods. Religion needed to be confronted given its dominant role in social life and given that there was a concern that the strong influence of religious leaders could jeopardise the development of the struggle.

The last section of the programme was focused on the training and civic behaviour of the militant armed forces. This included gender equality and the expectation that combatants behave with discipline and comradeship both amongst each other and with civilians.



The daily schedule at a semi-boarding primary school in the Sarà region that seeks ‘to improve the services’ of the school, which is to be ‘strictly adhered to ... [but] changed if required by the circumstances’, 1974.

Source: Roel Coutinho, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal Photographs (1973–1974)

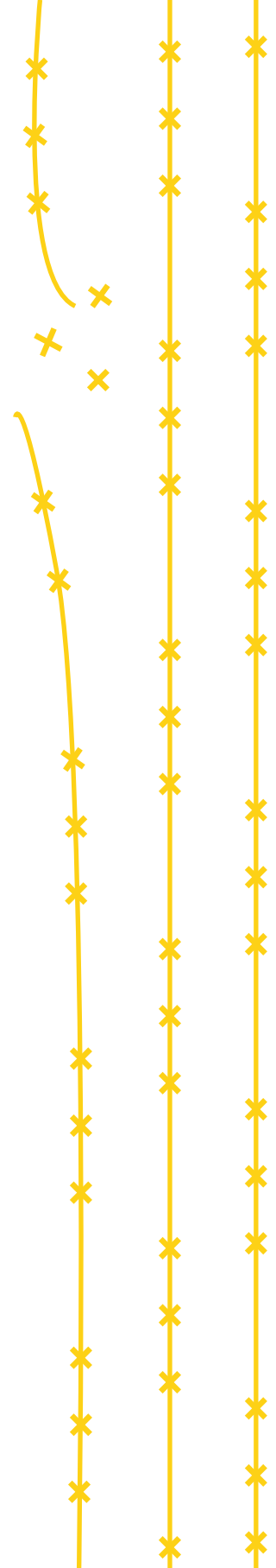


Education, Revolution, and Resistance

The PAIGC's liberation struggle and political education were not just ideals. They were a continuous process of reflection, organisation, and action that sought to develop a militant, anti-colonial, and decolonial consciousness in the minds and bodies of the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. Despite the fact that this iteration of the PAIGC's political education system existed only for a brief period (1963–74) and within a small territory, it remains an important part of the larger liberation struggle. The study of the PAIGC's educational practices during its liberation struggle forces us to leave the realm of the theoretical and engage with the concrete historical processes that unfolded. Delving into the material realm of how the struggle's ideals were put into practice in daily life and how they were transmitted to future generations pays homage to the revolutionary principles that guided the liberation struggle.

Early in the struggle, the party and its militants understood the crucial role and power of education to fulfil the goals of the liberation struggle. This led them to put into practice revolutionary ideals and initiatives such as:

- Creating schools across the liberated zones for youth, adults, and combatants. In addition to teaching, reading, and writing, the schools emphasised the development of education curricula based on the realities of the people and their struggle.
- Carrying out mobilisation campaigns to educate and raise the political consciousness of the population.



- Establishing political education as central in the process of national liberation and basing education in anti-colonial and decolonial practices.
- Developing school curricula and materials that reflected the reality of Africa in relation to other international struggles with the aim of pursuing the goals of total liberation.
- Valuing the importance of teachers' work, their role in the vanguard of the struggle, and their responsibility to the country's advancement.
- Establishing international networks for educational support. This included countries such as Cuba, Hungary, Yugoslavia, the USSR, Romania, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria, where students could continue their technical and higher education studies as well as cadre training.
- Producing and publishing media via their own platforms and channels for communication (newspapers, magazines, and radio), which functioned as additional educational material throughout the liberation struggle.

Together, political education and the revolutionary process became crucial for producing political consciousness and facilitating the struggle that led to national liberation. Political education was the most important way to keep the party's ideology alive and the only way to solidify the roots of independence required to imagine and create the future. Ideology, education, and conscious politicisation worked together in the PAIGC's political education process in a way that allows us to see the liberation struggle as both a political process and an educational praxis.

The PAIGC's experience of building schools in the forest, their pioneering form of political education, their development of emancipatory curricula specific to their context, and their establishment of international networks supporting this education process are both our legacy and inspiration. They are processes from which we must learn and advance as we envision and enact our struggles today.



Students inside of a PAIGC classroom in a primary school in the liberated areas, 1974.

Source: Roel Coutinho, *Guinea-Bissau and Senegal Photographs (1973–1974)*

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Endnotes

- 1 The writings of Amílcar Cabral, like many original texts from this period, have a historic and political value that should be interpreted contextually. For this reason, we have made the editorial decision not to modify the use of words such as ‘man’ and ‘mankind’ in the translations cited in this text and, in so doing, conserve its original content. However, we believe that it is necessary to clarify that, in re-reading and re-publishing these passages, we are faced with the intellectual exercise of entering into dialogue with and updating these ideas. This is especially the case when discussing the role of men and women in the revolutionary process. To read this text in today’s context – when we are faced with the historic challenge of building diverse feminist organisations – brings with it new political, social, and cultural coordinates that call on our militant creativity to rethink this notion, its significance, and its political and intellectual legacy.
- 2 Cabral, ‘A propósito de Educação,’ 24–25, our translation.
- 3 Pinto de Andrade, *A geração de Cabral*.
- 4 Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea*, 136–140.
- 5 During Portuguese colonisation, the Indigenous Statutes, dated from 1926 and applied in the territories of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau, regulated social hierarchies. There was the category of Indigenous people and the category of the *assimilado*. To be an *assimilado*, one had to go through a process in order to be considered a ‘civilised person’ and therefore considered to be a Portuguese citizen that followed Portuguese culture. It is important to mention that the *assimilado* was not a lifelong status and, as such, could be revoked at any time.
- 6 Cabral, *Our People are Our Mountains*, 5.
- 7 Cabral, *Our People are Our Mountains*.
- 8 Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 242–244.
- 9 Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 244.

- 10 Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea*, 128.
- 11 In the PAIGC archives, the terms 'political education' and 'militant education' are used interchangeably, although 'militant education' is the term more common in the curriculum design. In 1978, education ministers and teachers from Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe met in Bissau to discuss the education programme developed during the liberation struggle, as well as the future of education. From this meeting, the PAIGC developed a report where 'militant education' was first defined explicitly and articulated in a conceptual form.
- 12 Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 242–244.
- 13 Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 241.
- 14 Cabral, *Análise de alguns tipos de Resistência*, 12.
- 15 Ana Maria Cabral, Interview by Sónia Vaz Borges, 5 September 2013.
- 16 PAIGC, *O Analfabetismo na nossa terra (suas causas e consequências)*, 5, our translation.
- 17 *Lar* is the Portuguese word for 'home' but is also a term for an institution that provides services or assistance to a specific group of people.
- 18 Rudebeck, *Guinea Bissau: A study of political mobilisation*, 206.
- 19 PAIGC, *O Analfabetismo na nossa terra*, 4–5, our translation.
- 20 Machel, *Fazer da escola uma base para o povo tomar o poder*, 18, our translation.
- 21 The term *trabalhador responsável* ('responsible worker'), in the words of Stephanie Urdang in *A Revolution within a Revolution: Women in Guinea-Bissau* (1975), 'is a term used for party members who are responsible in their work for a particular area of the struggle', such as health and education. 'Their work entails political education rather than direct nursing, or teaching, etc'.
- 22 Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 89, 244.
- 23 Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 75.

- 24 Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 77, 97.
- 25 Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 103.
- 26 Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 87.
- 27 Before independence, the term *educação militante* appeared on an undated document related to the school curricula plan for students from the first to fifth grade, initially as a class title for the first and second grade. It was later substituted by the term *educação política* ('political education') when referring to students attending the third to fifth grade.
- 28 PAIGC, Comissariado de Estado da Educação Nacional, *Educação, Tarefa de toda a sociedade*.
- 29 de Deus, *Cartilha Maternal ou Arte de Leitura*.
- 30 PAIGC, *Para a reorganização e a melhoria do trabalho das Brigadas de Acção Política*, 5–6, our translation.
- 31 Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 64, 298.
- 32 Vaz Borges, 'Annex 14. Statutes of the Party Pioneers', 227–229.
- 33 PAIGC, *O nosso livro 4ª classe*, 20.
- 34 Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 243.
- 35 Cabral, *Resistance and Decolonization*, 79.
- 36 Vaz Borges, 'O trinómio terra, agricultura e camponeses na modelação revolucionária de Cabral', 97–100.
- 37 Cabral, 'Em defesa da terra', 15–17.
- 38 *Blufó* is a creole-derived word with several meanings, one of which is 'inexperienced young person'.
- 39 Vaz Borges, Sónia. 'PAIGC, CIPM curriculum', *Militant Education, Liberation Struggle and Consciousness: The PAIGC Education in Guinea Bissau, 1963–1978*, 137.

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