

# ON ANGOLAN POST-COLONIAL CULTURAL IDENTITY PRACTICES IN THE CLASSROOM: THE TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' CONSTRUCTS

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## RESUMO

Este trabalho tem como objetivo explorar alguns dos fatores históricos pós-coloniais que podem ter moldado a identidade cultural Angolana de hoje. A inclusão de certas práticas escolares, bem como sua construção sociocultural, são interpretadas sob o escopo da ciência da humanidade e sua relação com a educação, a Antropologia da Educação. Os resultados apontam para um crescimento das iniciativas informais e estratégias flexíveis de escolarização para que um maior alcance de beneficiários tenham o direito de cidadania e legalidade assistidos.

**Palavras-chave:** Antropologia da Educação, letramento, escolarização, empoderamento.

## ABSTRACT

This paper aims at exploring some post-colonial historical factors that may have shaped the Angolan cultural identity to this date. Certain school practices, as well as its sociocultural construct, are interpreted under the Anthropology of Education, the science of humanity and its relation to education. The results point at the growth of non-formal and flexible schooling strategies so that a wider range of recipients have their citizenship and empowerment rights assisted.

**Key words:** Anthropology of Education, education, schooling, empowerment.

## Introduction

The present study examines a selection of data on Angola and its schooling system with the objective of focusing on identity issues. The complexity of a people's construction may be permeated by collective and individual values. Therefore, it is important to investigate how education describes its scope and audience. The intended question is: What are the perceptions of the teachers in Angola that support their self-description of identity? Education, in capital letter, is the term used here for the College of Education major, whereas education, in small letter, refers to a schooling system in general.

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This work also takes into consideration the Human Development Index (HDI), which is a composite statistic of a country's life expectancy, education, and income developed by the United Nations Development Program; and the Education for All (EFA). EFA measures teaching efficacy and literacy rates across countries. By combining these two indexes with socio-cultural issues, we intend to balance objectivities and subjectivities. Any attempt of describing someone from a distance must, at least, not underuse adjectives. When people go to a museum, they place their faces very close to the masterpiece to analyze the material. They are not able to see the totality, but they can describe every detail solely. When people pull their heads back, distancing themselves from the masterpiece in a museum, they can catch the image in totality. Nevertheless, the details are lost in the material. This work is the same. The distance provides valid information about the totality. Yet, it restricts the access to the richness of life.

Angola is located in the Southern Africa region, among the countries of Namibia, Zambia, and Congo. The Atlantic Ocean is to its west. After declaring its independence from Portugal in 1975, Angola suffered a civil war that lasted 27 years (between 1975 and 2002). Diamonds and oil are also important resource factors about the Angolan territory, reason why many dynamite mines were strategically placed around its lands. Huombo, centrally located, is the area that is most *contaminated* region due to these landmines. More than 80,000 Angolans have been deadly injured by them (OPPONG & KALIPENI, 2005). To this day, data show that 80% of hospitalized cases are landmines victims who must have one or more limbs amputated (ALBERTYN, BICKLER, VAN AS, MILLAR & RODE, 2003). It is also said that 15 % of the Angolan population continues to be risking their lives daily.

Moreover, Angola has mostly been growing its economy from oil and diamonds resources (DAVIES, 2011). The side effect of these landmines on the economy, however, is that since most of the current market is based on agriculture, there is minimum estate for growing anything whatsoever. The land is simply not fruitful. Thankfully, humanitarian efforts to reach "healthy" HDI (ENGINEER, ROY, & FINK, 2010), set off after the war, began clearing the Angolan land. One instance is the National Inter Sectorial Demining and Humanitarian Assistance, which started demining roads and cities to, then, clear the Angolan land for agriculture. Another example is the "Miss Landmine Beauty Contest". Thousands of victims take part, and the show is casted by BBC®. The contest has been

organized by the country's demining commission with the aim to restore the women's self-esteem, as well as raise the world awareness about the millions of landmines that remain littered in Angola. The assumption of a literally disrupted, dismembered people is that it portrays historical and other colonizing factors about the Angolan cultural identity.

In summary, this research hypothesizes there is a transfer of the Angolan post-colonialism identity constructs and power relations to classrooms nationwide. Who are these people? Who is represented in the classroom? The reason the question focuses on identity is because power relations and agency can be constantly reordered, reconsidered, and resumed in society, when there is institution and hierarchy leveling. In other words, culture is taught at a top-down movement, not necessarily as a negotiation.

Other movements of power are also covered. In this work, women empowerment is related to religion, identity and language to outline the Angolan roots. Women empowerment permeates children identity. When women are given a chance to study, they hold the power of changing their surroundings (ROGERS, 2004). A wider sphere benefits from this level of education. The *corpora* in the literature review cover Angola linguistic formation, culture and classroom practice as the sustaining tripod of interaction at different levels of power: accountability, national standards development and local assessment. By no means does this paper intend to exhaust such complex topic. The methodology focuses on expressions of identity, which enriched in examples of the Angolan arts and poetry, and the discussion describes the findings on documented material in order to promote areas of future research on schooling in Angola.

### **Existing academic debates on post-colonial Angolan education**

Education in a country can be a structured system that offers traceable tools on prospects and deficiencies (ROGERS, 2004). In *Education for All or just the Smartest Poor*, Abadzi (2004) takes us through a detailed documentation about education in Sub-Saharan African countries. One example of a traceable tool in Education is the Education for All (EFA). Abadzi (2004) explains that twenty-eight countries are at a high risk of not achieving EFA, which covers 25% of the world's population (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2002, p. 16), and Angola is one of them. The monitoring reports admit that EFA is not possible by 2015, despite the world's great strides in providing primary education to

the poor.

Whether Angola relates to a culture of poverty depends on the applied theoretical perspective, conceptual framework and purpose. Indeed, factual information demonstrates that literacy rate in Angola is rather low, 67.4% of the population over the age of 15 (RAUPP & RAMOS-MATTOUSSI, 2012). With regards to literacy in Angola, Davies (2011) defines the restoring state functions as the most constricting feature of post-conflict territories and education development. The author explains *fragile states* go beyond poverty, “but a brittleness linked to the inability to maintain security and the very basic well-being of the population” (p. 158). A notably negative label to Third World countries, the term also comprehends governance corruption, security issues, and educational deficits, faced by 9% of the world’s population. In this work, Davies (2011) draws on Afghanistan and Angola data because many of the features aforementioned are latent in both places. In the case of Angola, oil may place the country on a rather *profitable* baseline, and at the same time, make it even more dangerous.

The legitimacy of the state itself, and the degree of trust in it, can be intrinsically related to the dispute of natural sources, which implicates the Angolan schooling legitimacy, too. Davies (2011) explains that the vicious circle is closed when the state provides an education system in which people have lost faith, and, in turn, the educational system is powerless to foster change in the political system. The brilliant conclusion that Angola needs to see *normality* with fresh eyes proves some common features found in ex-colonies and fragile contexts until today. “Corruption is normal. Violent solutions to problems are normal. Lack of transparency is normal”, states Davies (2011). The vicious circle of resilience must be broken for Angola to seek liberation, and therefore, to enhance its political will, and education.

In a way, contrary to these findings, Engineer, Roy, & Fink (2010) investigate Angola’s position in what is claimed to be “healthy” HDI. Life expectancy is taken as an indirect measure of healthy years lived. Promisingly, the authors demonstrate that some outlier countries, including Angola, experience notable changes in rank. According to Hicks (1999), “to be sure, indicators and longevity do not reveal directly the health-quality of those life spans [...]. This indicator points to the more essential element of this dimension – the expansion of “life opportunity”.

What other components permeate education in Angola to an identity extent? In a

double-edged sword, authors reach dichotomous, not necessarily opposite, conclusions. While analyzing the Alfalit Literacy Program in Angola, Raupp & Ramos-Mattoussi (2012) point the literacy facilitator's affiliation with the church, and shared values are motivation factors for women to stay in the program of study. Although religion as an institution is not targeted in this study, structure and power are embodied at home and at school. Njoh & Akiwumi's (2012) review also confirms Raupp & Ramos-Mattoussi's (2012) findings by describing the impact of religion on women empowerment. Three religions, indigenous African, Islam and Christianity, comprising Africa's triple heritage, are considered. Christianity correlates with each of the four Development Targets specified for women empowerment under the third of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including raising the: (1) percentage of school-aged girls in school, (2) female adult literacy rates, (3) female share of non-agricultural employment, and (4) female representation in government. African indigenous religion correlates with MDG 3. Furthermore, Islam is inversely linked to each of the four MDGs. A composite index incorporating values on these MDGs was developed and employed as the dependent variable in a multiple regression model. The model is statistically significant, and confirms the hypothesis of an existing link between women empowerment and religion, but not only Christianity. Therefore, any meaningful effort to promote women empowerment in Africa must account for the continent's three main religions (NJOH & AKIWUMI, 2012). All in all, women empowerment and religion can be seen as potential factors that construct the Angolan identity through language inside and outside school. If women feel entitled, they teach their children to fight for their rights.

Language represents instrumentality. Abadzi (2004) suggests that instructional time, student information coding, teacher rapport, and financial support to health and developmental may compromise schooling. Language is another intriguing shaping aspect of the Angolan identity construction in education. A language never comes alone when used to describe a people, i.e., language, culture, and subculture form a tripod that sustains interaction. Portuguese is Angola's official language. In school, six national languages, added to six national cultures, and six national subcultures are presented along with Portuguese daily. Proportionally, 90% of the sample surveyed on the Alfalit Adult Literacy and Women Empowerment Project (RAUPP & RAMOS-MATTOUSSI, 2012: 25) speak Portuguese at home. When the World Bank's Operation Evaluation Department (OED) is

involved, the language used for basic-skill instruction should not be merely considered as the cultural prerogative of a country (ABADZI, 2004).

Women empowerment and identity are correlates. When women are empowered, and “no longer fooled by their husband; they can help their children in school” (RAUPP & RAMOS-MATTOUSSI, 2012: 25). De Muro, Mazziotta, & Pareto (2011) proposed methodology of a multidimensional development and poverty measurement, in much, aggregates for a study on international political and economic discourse. “Complexity also implies multidimensionality”. Only by scanning income per capita, and low expenditure, one may claim to apprehend development, claim the authors. Landmines, church affiliation, languages and cultures, post-colonial recognitions are a few layers of the fastest growing economy in Africa with an 11.1% GDP growth in the past ten years.

Angola counts on the Ministry of Education, and a 9.89% allocation to Education (RAUPP & RAMOS-MATTOUSSI, 2012). Initiatives along with the private sector continuously try to accommodate adult literacy, as well. National standards granted individual states and municipalities a significant degree of autonomy. Interestingly, the confluence of these two sets of national standards attracts much attention and interest about international parameters in Education. Furthermore, local assessment is also undergoing decentralization.

The Governance Assessment Portal ([gaportal.org](http://gaportal.org)) publicized that in late 2012, Chevron Angola awarded World Learning a one-year grant to improve the capacity of communities and organizations to implement development programs in the Cabinda province of Angola.

The program increases the accountability of municipal governments to their constituencies and achieves broad community participation in decision making on and oversight of local public investments by developing municipal plans. Key program initiatives include reinforcing the capacity of municipal administration and community-based organizations (CBOs) to jointly create, implement, and monitor social and economic development plans and programs; strengthening the capacity of CBOs to drive their own development plans and establish links with civil society; improving vulnerability assessments and municipal plans to help local administrators and civil society respond to crises; and developing socially inclusive policies, plans, and services.

During the Angolan Civil War, nearly half of the schools were reportedly looted, and destroyed, leading to another problems with overcrowding. The Ministry of Education

hired 20,000 new teachers in 2005 and continued to implement teacher training. Decolonization from Portugal; however, influenced teacher rapport in the sense of what is perceived and taught to be an Angolan. In the next section, the Angolan literature and art material is intertwined students' and teacher's class constructs on their identity.

### **Art of thought method**

Post-colonial settings may have a different approach to recognize their own elements in the culture of borrowing.

Gerdes (1988) raised the possibility of using the Angolan rich drawing tradition of the Tchokwe people to multiculturalize their mathematic curricula. Examples included rich illustrations that both expressed their local art, as well as provide material to be worked in conjunct with the syllabus re-evaluation. Gerdes (1988) structured pictographs uniquely by going through a process of nation building. Therefore, the reinforcement of an indigenous art integrates ethnic groups, regardless of the fact that there are majorities, or minorities.

An analysis of the national identity discourse is completely associated to local art. Thus, interpreting meaningful themes restores freedom in all senses. By doing that, Freire's (1970) pedagogical insights are restored and aligned with Angolan aspects of manipulation during colonialism. Freire (2002) demonstrated how dehumanization, as a process of force *per se*, occurs because of a distortion in history. Power is attractive. Only because of historical vocation, along with an ontological possibility, oppression is possible. It takes alienation, and a structure of models to be followed for humans to be oppressed. Recognizing the causes is the possible way of restoring human generosity. In school, this is problem-posing (Freire, 1970). The human condition is a prescription in many ways, and it is very difficult to walk always from the only familiar concept of impositions. It is practically impossible to break the cycle. That is exactly where education plays an empowering role.

Mayone Dias' (1971) article is written in Portuguese, the Angolan official language. It is through the expression of art that layers are uncovered. It is through the beauty of the language nuances that colors are revealed. As the artist writer proposes, it is in Angola, much more than in Mozambique, Guinea, or even Cape Verde, that poetry of the parallel nature is developed. Such claim has also revealed a high degree of vitality and, without

doubt, a more combative feature.

Using poetry as a teaching tool – The Angolan poetry underlies contemporaneity, a practical phenomenon of presenting genesis under current lenses, regardless the advantages, or the disadvantages. The author blames history, and Angola's constant search for autonomy. "In fact, Angola is relatively young in its African intellectual 'elite' culture" (MAYONE DIAS, 1971). Mario de Andrade, the Angolan poet, is largely studied in Brazil, where he lived in different periods of his life. Gathered in groups, the Angolan poetry is impressive because of the subculture it itself developed. It is as if diaspora separated an Africa from another. The Angolan poets use the means furnished by the Portuguese culture to repudiate the impact in the very same culture (ibid).

Based on Paulo Freire's theories (1970), the Brazilian educator who pledged social integration as education, d'Arlach, Sanchez, & Feuer (2009) analyze how nine community members view the service through interview and observations of Spanish-speaking Latino immigrants paired with English-speaking university students to teach each other their native language and culture. The authors find community members changing views of university students, i.e., from admiring them to seeing them as imperfect equals or from feeling helpless to finding a voice.

### **Findings brought into light for a better future**

A general movement of autonomy resulting from the European impact over the African substratum (MAYONE DIAS, 1971), Angola is relatively young at its intellectual elite culture. Anguish and loss are intimately associated with the unwinding of political issues (ibid). In classroom, these values permeate discourse. Boon (2011) proposes a multiplicity of dialogues in class in her work about Timor-Leste, also a former Portuguese colony located in Asia. Drawing from the definition proposed by Martin-Jones and Jones (2000), Boon applies the term multilingualism as the "multiplicity and complexity of repertoires and communicative purposes [...] in contexts of considerable linguistic diversity". Boon combines a cognitive-linguistic perspective (focusing on writing acquisition) with a socio-cultural perspective (focusing on literacy practices embedded in culture).

Teacher training outcomes are clearly differentiated by state-run or NGO's programs



in Angola. Nsiangengo & Diasala (2008) outline what it is to be considered rural Angola. The final aim of the program is to prepare primary teachers, who work with very poor children from the rural area. This innovative project aims at locating and developing commitment to the educational improvement, fostering new attitudes, knowledge and competencies in teaching and learning, providing training that will enable teaching in the future as well, building schools.

A successful initiative in a well-defined project re-energize its surroundings, filling the world with hope, “it can bring about many positive changes” (NSIANGENGO & DIASALA, 2008). Even at the level of administration, institutionalization and sustainability of the project are the conditions that have to be satisfied. Yet, this is only predictable. Obstacles emerge. Yet, many positive changes are brought to the Angolan educational system.

In Angola, “women are now better able to take part in civic life (e.g. voting), handle their own finances, be cognizant of their rights” (RAUPP & RAMOS-MATTOUSSI, 2012). These women’s children are eager for education “in a world marked by change and dominated by transience” (NSIANGENGO & DIASALA, 2008). And, the teachers are the bridge between accountability and community interaction. Nsiangengo & Diasala (2008) explain it requires firm involvement of the policy level for success of any project implementation. With so many disruptive conflicts, Angola’s identity can be lying in its unique diversity.

Further research points at areas of discourse and civil rights in Education, as well as career planning. Angola is reaching out. The world is becoming smaller. In the past, Angolans fought for surviving a long-lasting devastating civil war. Today they fight for recognizing their richness and diversity. This work has shown that there are many layers to describe a people’s identity. Most of them are related to so many other factors, it is practically impossible to describe it. It is as if someone were trying to find the first sand grain at paradise beach in Angola.

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