

Perspectives of Sociology in the portuguese-speaking african countries

Perspectivas de la Sociología en los países africanos de lengua oficial portuguesa

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Abstract

This research examines some of the challenges faced by the African Countries of Portuguese Official Language (PALOPs) in consolidating Sociology as a relevant area of knowledge, both in the university and school settings. The justification lies in the lack of studies on African Sociology and the limited cooperation between Brazil and these countries in this field of knowledge. In these emerging nations, both the university and this knowledge area are new and lack institutionalization. The lack of investment in education by the State and linguistic obstacles make the process even more challenging. To address this, a hypothetical-deductive methodology will be employed, using some of the limited bibliographies on the subject, as well as structured and semi-structured interviews with African teachers and students. The results demonstrate a significant potential for cooperation between countries and a mutual willingness to understand what is academically produced. The initiatives already developed indicate the possibility of positive exchanges among teachers, researchers, and students. In conclusion, the article points out that Sociology has a crucial role to play in Africa. In the PALOPs, Brazil is viewed as a major partner in the academic context but is considered less relevant in its potential. Thus, the prospect of closer collaboration is deemed healthy and necessary due to Sociology being a new area of knowledge in African countries.

Keywords

Sociology, PALOPs, university, decoloniality, cooperation, Brazil, teaching practice, development.

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Resumen

La presente investigación analiza algunos de los desafíos enfrentados por los Países Africanos de Lengua Oficial Portuguesa (PALOPs) en la consolidación de la Sociología como un área de conocimiento relevante, tanto en el ámbito universitario como escolar. La justificación radica en la falta de estudios sobre la Sociología africana y la escasa cooperación existente entre Brasil y estos países en este campo del saber. En estos países en desarrollo, tanto la universidad como esta área del conocimiento son nuevas y carecen de institucionalidad. La falta de inversión en educación por parte del Estado, la estructura precaria, las dificultades de cooperación académica y los obstáculos lingüísticos hacen que el proceso sea aún más desafiante. Como metodología hipotético-deductiva, se utilizarán algunas de las escasas bibliografías sobre el tema, así como entrevistas estructuradas y semiestructuradas con profesores y estudiantes africanos. Los resultados demuestran que hay un gran potencial para la cooperación entre los países y una voluntad mutua de conocer lo que se produce académicamente. Las iniciativas ya desarrolladas señalan la posibilidad de intercambios positivos entre profesores, investigadores, estudiantes y formuladores de políticas públicas. En conclusión, el artículo señala que la Sociología tiene un papel importante que desempeñar en África. En los Países Africanos de Lengua Oficial Portuguesa (PALOPs), Brasil es visto como un gran socio en el ámbito académico, pero poco relevante en su potencialidad.

Palabras clave

Sociología, PALOPs, universidad, descolonialidad, cooperación, Brasil, práctica docente, desarrollo.

Introduction

The Social Sciences in Africa have played a crucial role in understanding and analyzing the social, political, cultural and economic dynamics present on the continent. Africa's rich ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity, together with the historical and contemporary complexities, make the Social Sciences play a vital role in the contextualization and interpretation of African experiences. Colonial history has played a significant role in shaping African societies, profoundly influencing social and political structures. The Social Sciences in Africa have been devoted to examining and dismantling the consequences of colonialism, including its ramifications today, such as socioeconomic inequalities, ethnic tensions, and differences in access to resources and political power.

Our method was scientific research with literature review and interviews (structured and unstructured) with students and teachers of PALOPs. Sociology is a new area of knowledge in the young African Countries of Portuguese Official Language (PALOPs), which have also had the creation of universities as something very recent. Its development is imperative to seek cooperation with other countries. Brazil, with a common language and past, should be a privileged actor in this cooperation, but it is not the case. Despite the fact that the development stage of this area is different between countries, common problems and challenges are observed. The Brazilian experience in the field of Sociology, mainly with regard to institutionalization, whether in the university or school context, can serve as a stimulus and impulse for the development of Social Sciences in PALOPs. Decolonial thought inspires us in the production of the article, since it criticizes the perspective of the modernity of knowledge linked only to Eurocentric or American thought. Latin and African countries are not considered relevant partners in the construction of knowledge.

The work is inserted in the fight against the monoculture of knowledge. It is necessary to legitimize and give voice to other knowledge. Democratize knowledge. Deconstructing education. It is in this way that decolonial thinking seeks to topple the coloniality of knowledge, which is maintained with contempt for the knowledge of the oppressed and historically marginalized peoples in Brazil and Africa. It is in the “ecology of knowledge”, to bring the concept of the Portuguese author Boaventura Sousa Santos, the dialogue between the various knowledge that can be considered important for the advances of social struggles. Hence, the epistemologies of the South are sought, which can be defined as a set of knowledge produced and validated based “on 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.

Sociology contributes to the decolonization of knowledge by challenging Eurocentric perspectives and promoting the inclusion of African voices in the production of sociological theories and understandings. Another relevant aspect is that, with the rise of democratic movements in many African nations, Sociology plays a fundamental role in analyzing the processes of democratization, civic participation and governance. It also highlights the importance that Sociology in Africa has in understanding the interactions between education and development. Analyzing the role of education in promoting equality, inclusion and economic development is an area of great relevance.

Sociology in Africa is closely linked to the analysis of social movements and resistance, from colonial times to contemporary movements. This includes the fight against oppression, racism and the pursuit of social justice. In this context, it is also included that this knowledge facilitates intercultural dialogue by promoting mutual understanding between different ethnic groups, religions and communities in Africa. This is crucial to foster social cohesion and mitigate conflict. Africa has experienced significant social, political and economic changes over time. Sociology helps document and understand these transformations, providing insight into the drivers and consequences of social changes in the region.

In the first part of the work, emphasis will be placed on the adversities to develop sociology in the African countries of official Portuguese language. This area of knowledge is new in these countries and lacks institutionality. Issues such as infrastructure, financing, persecutions, coloniality of knowledge, among other aspects, will be present. Next, the reflection on decoloniality in the African context. Inspired by intellectuals such as Brazilian Paulo Freire and Frantz Fanon (born in Martinique), decolonial authors point out the need to produce knowledge with the eyes of Africa and the African, thus avoiding the continuation of a coloniality that thinks about the continent and its people with the Eurocentric colonialist vision. And finally, the perspectives of Sociology in PALOPs. In this last point of the article, results of the investigations are presented, with possible ways to follow for the development of this important area of knowledge.

Methodology

Sociology in PALOPs and their adversities

There are challenges faced by the Social Sciences on the African continent. The objective of the research is to understand how sociology teaching works in PALOPs and, with it, to cooperate in the exchange of academic products, such as conferences, workshops, seminars and research material. The work is ongoing, as it is a process that requires follow-up.

Sociology in PALOPs is undervalued and underfunded in countries. Many research projects are funded by international agencies, which determine the agenda of these studies by geopolitical and strategic issues of these countries.

According to Angolan researcher Cesaltina Abreu, most civil society groups and organizations in Africa depend on the international community for funding, and even the approval of their action programs, ending up uncritically incorporating concepts and practices, without the necessary reflection on their adaptation to the context in which they are going to be applied (2006, p.117). According to the sociologist and professor of 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, due to the need to deepen knowledge or understand a given phenomenon. As the African philosopher Paulin Hountondji (2008) points out, African social scientists must realize that they are conducting research oriented by external interests, with the intention, first and foremost, of satisfying the interests of the North.

The fragility of democracy and democratic institutions in Lusophone Africa also impacts the lives of sociologists. Many social scientists feel persecuted by the state, society and the family. According to Lopes (2023), in the reality of Guinea-Bissau, persecution manifests itself when the intervention is based on criticism of poor governance, corruption or nepotism. Many social scientists choose silence (or self-censorship) to avoid such persecutions, given the multiplicity of risks they face, including job loss and even physical violence, as in the case of Guinean journalist António Aly Silva. Not only do teachers feel persecuted or have their freedoms curtailed, there are also reports of students wanting to address certain academic issues. The case of Paulo Estefane, from the University of Licungo, in Beira, is mentioned, who was inhibited to address Montesquieu's theme on the division of powers due to the difficulty of working on this issue in the political context of Mozambique, where such division is not clear in practice (LEPECS, 2023).

Research infrastructure is precarious and requires increased investment. According to researcher Maria Paula Meneses, universities rely heavily on international funding for their operation, and state universities compete on unequal terms with local and international private universities, thus maintaining the peripheral status of African public universities as a reality (2016, p. 350). Carlos Cardoso, a researcher at the Council for the Development of Social Sciences Research in Africa (CODESRIA), based in Dakar, agrees with Meneses and highlights that these higher education institutions present a dubious quality, even with the lack of motivation of teachers (2017, p. 91). The researcher points out that the participation of lusophone African researchers in

the activities of CODESRIA, especially those aimed at postgraduate students, is limited. This reflects the poor development of the higher education system in general, as well as that of social science research institutions. Lusophone presence in CODESRIA programs has little expression (2017, pp. 94-97).

The impact of neoliberal policies from the 1990s also contributed to the weakening of higher education in PALOPs. Cost reduction in education affected the quality of teaching and research, as well as curricula. According to professor and researcher Teresa Cruz e Silva, in Mozambique, as in other African universities, curriculum reforms in public universities in the late 2000s imposed and “sold” the Bologna Process as an inevitable means to meet the demands of integration into the more global processes of education systems. These reforms were marked by the marginalization of local social actors, with negligible public consultation. The challenge of academic autonomy is tested when market-oriented neoliberal policies come into play in education.

African academic productions are not absorbed by governments, and much of it is published 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 of activities scattered around the world, unable to contribute to the development process. Although it is discussed in academic forums, according to the professor, there is no concern on the part of political leaders.

Thinking about Africa from the Western perspective is a big mistake. The concepts introduced are produced in the West. It is the coloniality of knowledge that is intended to combat. It is essential that the Social Sciences on Africa be produced by Africans.

The institutionalization of Sociology in PALOPs seems to be a great challenge. According to Professor Adérito Manuel of ISCED, Sociology in Angola went from being an ignored and forbidden discipline after independence, to being recognized and promoted. From 1991/1992 (Second Republic), Sociology began to be recognized in Angola by the democratic State, by the proclamation of the Angolan Association of Anthropologists and Sociologists (Costa, 1997, pp. 94-96), by the publication of research works by sociologists and other social scientists in the public space, by becoming one of the disciplines of secondary education courses, by its university institutionalization as a discipline, bachelor’s, master’s and a specialty in the doctorate of Social Sciences, and by the participation of sociologists in scientific events (national and international) (Kajibanga, 2009, pp.197-201).

On the other hand, while the emergence of Sociology in the country was beginning to come true, difficulties also arose. Adérito Manuel (2022) mentions the difficulties of access to works by teachers, including didactic works. The production on the teaching of Sociology in Angolan schools and universities is scarce, being very difficult the elaboration of this material and with a very high cost. The few academic journals that emerged, such as the Angolan Journal of Sociology, had a short life span and lasted from 2008 to 2014. The professor acknowledges the lack of organization of Sociology in the country, including in seeking cooperation with other countries. According to professor Antonieta Ortet (2022), from the University of Cape Verde, the production of teaching material on Sociology in the country also depends on manuals from abroad.

In addition to the lack of regularity in the production of academic journals of Sociology in the 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 without proper reading between the data. The researcher points out that there is often a lack of a theoretical framework that bases the analysis (2017, p.102). More postgraduate courses need to be strengthened and created, and methods of analysis and theoretical support as a research tool need to be refined. The scarcity of scientific activities in the field of Social Sciences in PALOPs should be a cause for concern.

According to Angolan professor Felipe Morais, scientific associations play a crucial role in the development of science. The author urges a greater effort by the actors of Angolan Sociology to take responsibility for creating the ethos of science (2023, p. 81). In this sense, the active presence of students in the construction of this institution is essential. This is what the Community of Sociology Students of Angola (COESO) thinks. 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.

It is important to encourage students to create their Sociology communities in their countries and, perhaps boldly, to create the Lusophony Student Community, with the aim of cooperating between countries in the academic field. Undoubtedly, this will have a reflection in the search for the institutionalization of the area in the various realities. A fundamental agenda is the implementation of school sociology as a compulsory discipline in secondary

education in countries. It is present and offered in Angola in all areas of secondary education as an optional. In Cape Verde it is offered in the Humanities area, in the 12th year of schooling. In Guinea-Bissau, Sociology emerges in the area of Social and Human Sciences, also in the 12th year. In Mozambique, Sociology is not offered in schools in the country. In São Tomé and Príncipe, sociology is in the last three years of secondary education. It should be believed that, following the Brazilian example, strengthening school sociology is an important step to strengthen the area of knowledge in university education.

It also reflects on the challenge, to a large extent, of the presence of the “colonial library”, a term introduced by Valentin Mudimbe (1988). According to the Congolese philosopher, most of the work done on Africa reflects Eurocentric references, narratives about the continent whose roots developed during the colonial period. This knowledge still forms the hard core of knowledge deposited in libraries and taught at universities around the world about Africans and Africa. According to Mudimbe, these works and the representations they contain contributed to “inventing” Africa as a space of difference and inferiority (1998, p. 208). The “African library” needs to be expanded, with African authors reflecting on the continent and its diversity.

Black American thinker Bell Hooks, in her book *Teaching transgression* (2019), argues that education as a liberating practice is one that aims to know what is “beyond the borders of what is acceptable”, creating new visions. To this end, an epistemological proposal that criticizes hegemonic thinking and its intended universality, such as decolonial and its immense internal variety, presents as a fundamental starting point in the attempt to create an education that increases the capacity to be free (2019, p.13). In this way, in these brief words, the article sought to reflect on important challenges and some paths that exist to consolidate Sociology as an area of relevant knowledge among the African Countries of Portuguese Official Language (PALOPs).

Thinking about decoloniality in the African context

Reflecting on the work of the teacher and researcher, both in the school environment and at the university level, is an important task for any teacher who seeks to improve their work activity. Constantly thinking about their practice, seeking to update themselves is fundamental in their pedagogical

commitment, even questioning the contents taught and the curricula, which are political decisions loaded with ideologies.

In this way, we question what is the interest in deconstructing the classical curricula. It is important to make it clear that we understand the importance of the political dimension in the field of education; therefore, curricula represent disputed political arenas when it comes to content construction. In other words, the selection of themes and their arguments are relevant ideological objects. Thus, it is easy to perceive that knowledge produced outside the European/Western context has never been valued in either Brazil or African countries.

Even with African independence and numerous intellectual debates, a colonial perspective continues to dominate the global North's policy toward the African continent. Researcher Maria Paula Meneses (2016) states that a detailed reading of this process allows us to see that imperial policies were, essentially, reformulated, maintaining the hegemonic conception of the North over the South.

Likewise, decolonial thinking helps us to understand that curricula are products of a historical context with different times and spaces and are often produced in a disobedient way (knowledge, dialogues, emotions, for example). If our identity carries with it not only individual but also collective memory, we can understand that subordinate groups such as Africans, Latinos and indigenous peoples are still seen as barbarians. I mean, not modern. The colonial vision persists in the form of contents, curricula and in educational practices in the educational daily life. It is the vision of the coloniality of knowledge.

In his work "Letters à Guiné-Bissau", Paulo Freire recounts experiences of his visits to that African country with the purpose of making the local population literate without the perspective of colonialist education, "(...) because Guinea-Bissau does not start from scratch, but from its cultural and historical sources, from something proper, from the very soul of its people, which colonialist violence cannot kill" (Freire, 1978, p.10). The author himself also points out that "(...) inherited colonial education, whose main objective was the 'de-Africanization' of nationals, discriminatory, mediocre verbalist..." (1978, p.15). Freire identified in the liberation struggles the political and also cultural emancipation of the Guinean people. In this way, he sought to overcome the oppressive past by looking at the very reality, multiple and complex, of the population of that African country. The silencing of memories is a consequence of colonialism, which the author intended to combat.

In this way, it is necessary to have counter-narratives. Seek the balance of knowledge. Legitimize other knowledge. Education must combat prejudice of any kind type, and how it can work in this deconstruction if it often becomes the legitimizer of traditional curricula. Tradition, in this case, is often folklorized in books.

Some public policies in Brazil emerged and were important in this attempt at deconstruction. The African History in Schools Act brought important elements to the school environment, mainly in terms of teaching materials, but it was insufficient and little changed the reality in institutions. Another example is Afro-centered 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 valorize the knowledge, history, traditions and perspectives of African and Afro-descendant communities.

It is necessary to look for other knowledge. It is essential not to prioritize intelligence. Traditional knowledge, seen as common sense, reflects the Eurocentric vision, still strongly persistent in the Brazilian and also African educational environment.

Democratize knowledge. Deconstructing education. This is how decolonial thinking seeks to topple coloniality, which is sustained by contempt for the knowledge of oppressed and historically marginalized peoples in Brazil and Africa.

It is epistemological racism that must be attacked. Non-European knowledge must not be inferiorized. It is in the “ecology of knowledge”, to bring the concept of the Portuguese author Boaventura Sousa Santos, the dialogue between the diverse knowledge that can be considered important for the advances of social struggles. In this way, we will combat monocultural hegemony of unique pattern, androcentric (predominance of male culture) and linked to whiteness. Subalternated voices must be recognized in everyday life, especially in the day-to-day of education. This is because we easily perceive features of coloniality in the school or university environment. The epistemologies of the south are a set of epistemological interventions that denounce the suppression of the innumerable ways of knowing of the peoples and nations that were subjected to the colonization process (Santos and Meneeses, 2009, p.13).

In this way, we observe a kind of cultural genocide that silences voices, narratives, cultures and knowledge. It is the idea of the epistemology of the

north, the reproduction of the knowledge of the victors either in school or in university. It is the Eurocentric reading of the production of knowledge. According to Zulma Palermo:

Opting for a decolonial position that exercises resistance to this state of affairs, implies locating oneself in a place of undoubted intellectual struggle and also means the need to debate with other ways of conceiving resistance to domination by power. (Palermo 2010, p. 50)

It is understood that, to transform reality, advises Mignolo (2008), it is necessary an “epistemic disobedience” that questions the hegemonic patterns of knowledge production, which have become dominant by marginalizing, silencing and delegitimizing diverse knowledge, such as those of African and Latin intellectuals.

There are resistances that must be exploited, such as examples of anti-racist, Afro-centered education and affirmative action quota policies in Brazil, the theory of decoloniality that was born in Latin countries, and the social activists who are growing up in the PALOPs. In this way, we seek that decolonial gap, a fissure in the system that allows us to work with other knowledge. It is in the struggle that the knowledge of the vanquished is produced.

Results and conclusions

Perspectives of Sociology in PALOPs

As seen before, despite progress, the Social Sciences in Africa face significant challenges, including a lack of adequate funding, limited infrastructure, and the need to strengthen local research and teaching capacities. Overcoming these obstacles is critical to fostering robust and relevant research that can inform policies and practices for 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 area 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 num-

ber of meetings between sociologists in PALOPs is insufficient. Expanding knowledge by participating in a larger number of university events will certainly 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 in the obligatory of Sociology as a curricular discipline in secondary education can serve as an important support for the increase of this area of knowledge in PALOPs. As a result of this obligation, employment opportunities for teachers, material production, congresses and other academic activities were expanded. Sociology grew stronger, even at the university level. The further institutionalization of Sociology in Lusophone Africa also goes through the expansion of this area into secondary education.

Students have a fundamental role in strengthening the Social Sciences in PALOPs. The experiences of the Community of Sociology Students of Angola (COESO) and the Nucleus of Afro-Brazilian Studies of the Teaching of Sociology (NEABES/UERJ) show how important it is to fight together. Seeking greater outreach among students in the context of Portuguese-speaking countries is critical and will surely have a positive impact on the quality of courses.

There is surely a growing demand for interdisciplinary research that addresses complex issues such as poverty, inequality, governance, sustainable development, and social justice. With continued investment in education, research, and institutional development, these countries may strengthen their capacity to produce relevant knowledge and innovative solutions to local and global problems.

Cooperation between Portuguese-speaking countries can also play a crucial role in promoting academic exchange and the advancement of Social Sciences in the region. The exchange of experiences, the offer of workshops and events, including the exchange of academic materials and products, is part of the cooperation. It is essential to prevent brain drain, giving priority to the assessment of vocational training.

The broadening of the participation of civil society is essential to seek the improvement of democracy and the formulation of public policies in education. African sociologists have much to contribute in this regard. At this point, liberties need to be expanded.

It is also important to value and preserve national languages, including from the perspective of oral tradition, which remains a significant part of the

cultural heritage in many African communities, highlighting the diversity and richness of forms of communication and knowledge transmission, included in the educational field of the continent.

The possibility of learning in local/national languages is the most important step in education to demarginalize and demystify local knowledge (Meneses, 2008, p. 356). Although Portuguese is the language of the colonizer, it should not be underestimated by its global reach and its various potentialities. The results obtained with the research contribute with valuable findings for the analyzed topic, especially considering the scarce previous research on the subject. This allows information to be provided to open new lines of inquiry.

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 are needed to achieve a greater presence of this area of knowledge in the curricula of schools and universities. This article seeks to encourage PALOP sociologists in this important initiative.

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