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REVIEW

The syndrome of assimilated provincialism: education in Angola, from colonialism to colonialities

El síndrome del provincialismo asimilado: la educación en Angola, del colonialismo a las colonialidades

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ABSTRACT

Using qualitative research, bibliographic research, and critical document analysis, this article analyzes the adversities that permeate Angolan society, which, having experienced unprecedented cultural repression carried out by the Portuguese colonial-fascist regime, currently faces the dilemma of colonialities that, directly or indirectly, influence the functioning of institutions that, once alien to the ethnic-cultural practices that characterize the Bantu way of being and doing in the world, lead to widespread sociocultural alienation. Unsurprisingly, one of the central institutions most affected by this phenomenon is academic and educational institutions, particularly in specific areas of the social sciences and humanities. Given their nature, it is these institutions that should be at the forefront of such an important and unavoidable task for a state that values itself and truly wants to be sovereign and independent: the "decolonization of minds and, consequently, of institutions". The results indicate that, as it is a historically and socially constructed phenomenon that affects all spheres of society, it can be deciphered and combated only through a historically and socially oriented analysis based on a specific concept for the context in question, the Assimilated Provincialism Syndrome.

Keywords: Education, Angola; Colonialities; Provincialism; Assimilated.

RESUMEN

Mediante la investigación cualitativa, la investigación bibliográfica y el análisis crítico de documentos, este artículo analiza las adversidades que impregnan la sociedad angoleña, la cual, tras haber sufrido una represión cultural sin precedentes llevada a cabo por el régimen colonial-fascista portugués, se enfrenta actualmente al dilema de las colonialidades que, directa o indirectamente, influyen en el funcionamiento de instituciones que, al ser ajenas a las prácticas étnico-culturales que caracterizan la forma de ser y de actuar en el mundo de los bantúes, conducen a una alienación sociocultural generalizada. Como era de esperar, una de las instituciones centrales más afectadas por este fenómeno son las instituciones académicas y educativas, particularmente en áreas específicas de las ciencias sociales y las humanidades. Dada su naturaleza, son estas instituciones las que deberían estar a la vanguardia de una tarea tan importante e ineludible para un Estado que se valora a sí mismo y que verdaderamente desea ser soberano e independiente: la «descolonización de las mentes y, en consecuencia, de las instituciones». Los resultados indican que, al tratarse de un fenómeno construido histórica y socialmente que afecta a todas las esferas de la sociedad, solo puede descifrarse y combatirse mediante un análisis de orientación histórica y social basado en un concepto específico para el contexto en cuestión: el síndrome del provincialismo asimilado.

Palabras clave: Educación, Angola; Colonialidades; Provincialismo; Asimilado.

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INTRODUCTION

Concepts and contextualization

Assimilated provincialism syndrome is, so to speak, a phrase that titles one of the subchapters of my master's thesis (Sala, 2024). It is worth clarifying first that the three words that make up the phrase are well known in scientific and academic circles, so they are not new in themselves. However, their adaptation and interconnection, which results in the title of this article, is the result of a theoretical-conceptual innovation that serves to highlight a sui generis phenomenon of a historical-sociological nature, which affects both the political-academic milieu and Angolan society as a whole, as we will see later.

According to the literature, Stockholm Syndrome refers to an emotional condition in which, once kidnapped and sodomized, the victim begins to admire and creates a certain emotional dependence on the aggressor, normalizing such actions. Once released, the victim feels helpless and, with the need to be accepted, constantly seeks the approval of their former kidnapper, submitting themselves to humiliating, if not humanly unacceptable, situations (Abeijon, 2009).

The concept of the syndrome mentioned above has more or less global and general applicability. In the specific case of Angola, it is a more provincial syndrome because, as stated in the literature and documents of the colonial era, such as the Indigenous Statute of 1954, in the stages preceding the decline of the Portuguese fascist-colonial regime, Angola ceased to be called a colony and, in the official documents of Portugal and the local administration, came to be designated as an overseas province. Although, as we know, it continued to be a colony in fact.

With the advent of provincialism, the Portuguese fascist-colonial regime created a new category of citizens, the assimilated. Thus, the assimilated were natives who rose to the category of "quasicitizens," fifth-class citizens, inferior to the Portuguese but superior to the indigenous, who, despite constituting the majority of the province's population, were not considered citizens because they remained native in terms of their spirituality and behavior (Portugal, 1954). Therefore, the assimilated were acculturated Africans, who were natives of the overseas province of Angola who shed their cultural practices, habits, languages, and customs to resemble Europeans; dress, speak, be, and live with the colonizers; and be accepted.

It is from this context that the phrase Assimilated Provincialism Syndrome emerges, which, despite the end of political colonization, remains in Angola today in the forms of colonialism and neocolonialism, permeating all spheres of society, from top to bottom, from the political elite in power to the opposition, from academics to ordinary citizens. In this specific article, we focus on the Assimilated Provincialism Syndrome that affects educators, academics, and the education system as a whole in Angola, with a strong critical bent toward the political leadership class, which constitutes the centralized guardianship of the entire academic/educational system in the country.

METHODS

In this article, bibliographic research and critical document analysis methods are used. For document analysis, the 1954 Portuguese Indigenous Statute was used, which established the status of the native populations (Africans) of the overseas province of Angola and other Portuguese colonies. The bibliographic research was based on relevant bibliographies from the literature in the field, in dialog with the subchapter "Angolan Sociologists, Sociology Teaching, and the Syndrome of Assimilated Provincialism" from the master's thesis "Proposals for the Construction of Sociological Epistemologies in Angola" (Sala, 2024). The results indicate that, more than being and knowing, assimilationism in Angola was designed as an instrument of long-term institutional (neo) colonization, that is, a transgenerational power project. As it is a historically and socially constructed phenomenon that affects all spheres of society, it can be deciphered and combated only through a historically and socially oriented analysis based on a specific concept for the context in question, the Syndrome of Assimilated Provincialism.

PROBLEMATIZATION AND DIAGNOSIS

Assimilated Provincialism Syndrome, a disease that plagues society and, more specifically, the Angolan educational system, is a problem whose explanation can be found only through a sociohistoriographical analysis, starting from an analysis of the phenomena that are at the origin of the construction of the system itself. To a certain extent, we can say without reservation that the ideological vacuum in which educational institutions find themselves inert, which originates from nothing more than the absence of true national ideals and geopolitical strategy at the level of the political institutions of guardianship, allows for the maintenance of a model of education, curriculum, and projects that are foreign to the sociocultural realities of the peoples of Angola.

To understand this a little better, it may be necessary to provide a brief historical and sociological reminder of the different political and ideological paradigms that are at the origin of the formation of Angolan social thought, each of which, in its own way, has shaped the model of education and teaching system that currently prevails in the country.

Portuguese colonialism, fascist in essence, shaped a racist and ethnocentric education system during the occupation of Angola, based on the exaltation of the Portuguese-speaking identity to the detriment of worldviews and cosmogonies, as well as ancestral African knowledge and practices. From the colonial state's point of view, the customs of the peoples of Angola were inferior to those of the Portuguese and should be validated and/or canceled according to the latter's interpretation. According to Article 1 of the Indigenous Statutes, "the accommodation and use of indigenous customs is limited by morality, the dictates of humanity, and the higher interests of the free exercise of Portuguese sovereignty" (Portugal, 1954, p. 202).

Postindependence Marxism, which was based on a motto of unification with a view to building a homogeneous national identity, saw Angola's ethnic and cultural diversity as an obstacle to its project of building a monotonous socialist nation. On the other hand, Euro-Western liberal modernism, which is based on supremacist ideals, paints the cultural practices of the peoples of Angola as archaic, if not noncultures (Sala, 2024).

As antagonistic as they may seem, it is possible to find a consensus between the abovementioned ideological strands: Euro-Western supremacism. The common denominator is that each in its own way, they all consider Western societies to be the most advanced form of civilization to the detriment of other peoples and cultures. As Quijano (1991, p. 22) observes, the fact that Western Europeans "imagined themselves to be the culmination of a civilizational trajectory from a state of nature also led them to think of themselves as the modern ones of humanity and its history, that is, as the new and at the same time the most advanced of the species."

"However, since at the same time they attributed to the rest of the species belonging to a category that was, by nature, inferior and therefore earlier, that is, the past in the process of the species, Europeans also imagined themselves to be not only the exclusive bearers of such modernity but also its exclusive creators and protagonists. What is remarkable about this is not that Europeans imagined and thought of themselves and the rest of the species in this way—this is not a privilege of Europeans—but the fact that they were able to spread and establish this historical perspective as hegemonic within the new intersubjective universe of the global power structure" (Quijano, 2005, p. 122).

The official document on the status of indigenous peoples that Portuguese fascist colonialism imposed on Angolans stated that "without weakening the legal protection afforded to indigenous peoples, special situations in which they may find themselves on the path to civilization should be considered" (Portugal, 1954, p. 200). Being on the path to civilization was understood to mean assimilation, that is, the acculturation, spiritual and behavioral Europeanization of the peoples of Angola.

In Angola, some of the professionals trained in Portugal, mainly in the field of social sciences and humanities, are employed in academic institutions and strategic departments of state public administration (Sala, 2024). "The first generations were composed of sociologists trained in the then metropolises, while later generations are composed of both locally trained sociologists and those trained in European countries" (Merlen, 2021, p. 318).

With respect to what Merlen (2021) says, this in itself is not a problem, as long as these professionals are equipped with critical thinking and are aware that they are Africans and are in Africa. However, recent discourse points to a worrying situation. It is terrifying, to say the least, how many educated people and so-called r social analysts are making speeches apologetic to colonialism, ignoring the hierarchy of races established in Angola under Portuguese occupation and automatically belittling the struggle of the heroic peoples of Angola who, with splendid bravery, expelled the fascist plague from the land of their ancestors.

To refresh the amnesiac memory of these educators, academics, politicians, and so-called sociopolitical analysts, aspiring to be "intellectual sipaios," it is necessary to recite, once again, the iconic statutory document on indigenous peoples authored by the regime whose image they are currently seeking to whitewash. According to this document, indigenous people of the colonies are considered to be black people "or their descendants who, having been born or habitually lived in them, do not yet possess the education and individual and social habits required for the full application of the public and private rights of Portuguese citizens" (Portugal, 1954, p. 201).

The logic of the assimilated provincialism syndrome is paradoxical, creating narratives according to which Portuguese educators, academics, and social scientists are renowned as true connoisseurs of Angolan history and sociological reality (Sala, 2024). In 2024, I said, and I reiterate, that the historical and social truth of a country is unknown when the legitimacy of narratives "falls on the former colonizer, the same one who established a rigid regime of racial hierarchy based on the constitutional subordination of the local native population in relation to European settlers" (Sala, 2024. p. 116).

The Assimilated Provincialism Syndrome that affects many educators and academics in Angola would not, so to speak, be something that would cause so much concern if these professionals kept their complexes to themselves, keeping them on a personal level. The problem is that, in fact, institutions are made up of people who, whether they admit it or not, are ideological in essence. As such, it is a phenomenon that directly or indirectly "affects the collective thinking of institutions and determines the possibilities of rupture, autonomy, or maintenance of the subordinate link with the organizational structures and systems of the former colonial metropolis, especially in the field of education" (Sala, 2024, p. 116).

The irresponsibility of many professionals, those who should be at the forefront of the process of decolonizing minds operating from the country's academic and educational institutions, generates a cascade effect, creating a popular imaginary that is, to say the least, subalternized. This paints the racist and supremacist former colonizer as the one who possesses knowledge about the country's historical and social truth (Sala, 2024).

One of the main characteristics of the assimilated provincialism syndrome is that it converts the assimilated Native African, now in the context of an independent Angola, into the main spokesperson and avid defender of the interests and ideals of the former colonial metropolis. If, during the colonial period, assimilation was a strategy for survival and a mechanism for social advancement determined by the conditions of cultural and material poverty imposed on the peoples of Angola, taking into account the ethnic and racial hierarchy established in the colony, today it is an illusory mechanism of social prestige voluntarily adopted, determined by the condition of spiritual and cultural alienation that strongly affects part of the country's political and academic elite.

One of the main devices of this process of generalized self-assimilation is found in the area of language, which can be observed in nothing less in the very constitution of the Republic of Angola (Angola, 2010), which, in its Article 19, establishes Portuguese as the sole and exclusive official language of the country, imposing itself on the academic and educational systems. This article attests that Angola's political ruling class, which emerged from the postindependence Republic and has remained in power to this day, constitutes a group of patients suffering from first-order Assimilated Provincialism syndrome, maintaining the infection of this social disease by making it official at the legal and institutional levels.

This legal provision bears a close resemblance to the supremacy attributed to the Portuguese language by the indigenous statute of colonial Portugal, which, in its first article, states that education established in the colonies and intended for indigenous populations should prioritize the dissemination of the Portuguese language. The possibility of employing native languages is configured in a context that would have as its sole and exclusive purpose the dissemination and consequent supremacy of the Portuguese language (Portugal, 1954). From a general point of view, this problem is no longer restricted to national languages (ethnic languages) since Angolan Portuguese has been an indisputable fact for some time. It also includes the marginalization of Angolan Portuguese within the educational system through the use of the grammar of Portuguese from Portugal, which is still in force, and the use of expressions and technical-scientific language that are alien to the Angolan sociolinguistic context (Sala, 2024).

For the elite suffering from Assimilated Provincialism Syndrome in Angola, speaking Portuguese well means sounding as close as possible to a Lisbon accent, which borders the ridiculous because it is so forced and exaggerated. For the alienated elite, such self-deprecation (in fact) translates into the status quo and a mechanism of social differentiation (Sala, 2024). This neocolonial mentality, now self-imposed, has become one of the primary mechanisms of colonial assimilation, as provided for in the indigenous statute. In the aforementioned statute (Portugal, 1954), Article 56(b), Chapter III—behind only the age of majority (18 years)—speaking Portuguese correctly was the main requirement for Africans to lose their indigenous status and have the possibility of acquiring Portuguese citizenship, which, let us remember, was never full.

Taken together, these findings lead us to conclude that, given the similarities and the reproduction of the political and social assumptions of colonization by the current neocolonial government of Angola, followed by part of the academic elite, the colonialities of being and knowing would be political assumptions intended to maintain Euro-Western cultural hegemony over time, which, despite its abstract nature, is a more complicated instrument of power when compared to the more easily detectable political-military occupation of the past. In this vein, one of the characteristics that makes Assimilated Provincialism Syndrome a difficult social disease to combat is the fact that those who suffer from it are unaware that they are suffering and mistakenly consider themselves to be free and mentally decolonized citizens.

COUNTERMEASURES TO ASSIMILATED PROVINCIALISM SYNDROME (DECOLONIZATION)

Theoretical-sociological counternarratives

Lauer (2016) emphasizes the collaboration of African scholars in denying the existence of local academic production prior to the arrival of Europeans and draws attention to their role in the process of legitimizing Western academic authority over local ones.

This discursive mythology ignores the interdependence of accumulated successes, often stolen, from different cultures, religious heritages, and geographical regions, over several centuries and up to the present day. In doing so, we collectively maintain the comfortable conviction that, after all, there is a superior tradition of knowledge that, once mastered and sufficiently adopted in its technical aspects and value implications, will solve the problems of two-thirds of the world (Lauer, 2016, p. 1522).

As a result of a historical process of sociocultural alienation based on Western ideological assumptions, a great misconception has been created within Angolan society in which, on the basis of a hegemonic vocabulary, the concepts of modernity and tradition are placed on opposite sides. Thus, Euro-Western theoretical-conceptual approaches are interpreted as synonymous with modernity and therefore refer to the developed world (Sala, 2024).

On the other hand, African knowledge and practices are considered traditional and therefore archaic and backward (Sala, 2024). Falola (2007, p. 24) rebukes this line of thinking, observing that "we have already rejected the idea that modernity is a linear progression from the traditional to the modern. We have also rejected the idea that the source of modernization is solely Western." As Indian intellectual Prabhat Patnaik said, "believing that the curricula and course content of third-world universities should be identical to those of metropolitan universities is, in itself, a symptom of the hegemony of imperialism".

Since the era of neoliberalism implies the hegemony of globalized financial capital and since this capital requires a globalized (or at least homogeneous) technocracy, the emphasis shifts to having a homogeneous educational system at the international level to train such a technocracy; obviously, such a system must necessarily emanate from the metropolis. This means an educational system not to decolonize minds but rather to recolonize them.

Quijano (2005), referring to intellectual resistance to the hegemonic historical perspective that asserts that modernity is a Euro-Western phenomenon, says, "Modernization does not necessarily imply the Westernization of non-European societies and cultures. One of the most commonly used arguments was that modernity is a phenomenon of all cultures, not just European or Western ones." (Quijano, 2005, p. 122). Furthermore, according to the author:

modernity and rationality were imagined as exclusively European experiences and products. From this point of view, the intersubjective and cultural relations between Europe, or rather Western Europe, and the rest of the world were codified into a whole set of new categories: East–West, primitive-civilized, magical/mythical-scientific, irrational-rational, and traditional-modern. In short, Europe and non-Europe. "The Eurocentric claim to be the exclusive producer and protagonist of modernity and that all modernization of non-European populations is therefore Europeanization, is an ethnocentric and, above all, provincial claim" (Quijano, 2005, p. 122).

For Yankah (2016), “as for the trauma of contact with the West, the humanities must relate it to the obsession with building an African modernity when the entire legacy of this project was based on violence”. The syndrome of assimilated (acculturated) provincialism is rooted in the behavior of the ruling class, according to which everything must conform to the system of the former metropolis (Sala, 2024, p. 118).

The acculturated elite that dictates the intricacies of the country’s political and institutional life ignores the sociocultural particularities of the peoples that make up the Angolan nation. They interpret Angola as a country in Africa rather than an African country, imposing foreign structural programs on society, such as the European Millennium goals (Sala, 2024), which are nothing more than political simulacra, given that corruption reigns supreme and overshadows any type of proposed initiative.

Countermeasures

The Constitution of the Republic of Angola is the document that contains the social pact of the peoples that make up the Angolan nation. Well, at least from a formal point of view. In fact, it is a document drafted by a dozen individuals loyal to the political regime in power and forcibly imposed on approximately 40 million Angolans. In the drafting of laws, decree laws, regulations, and educational memoranda, the few Angolan Africanist academics and intellectuals are neither consulted nor sought out.

Another issue is that the constitution of a country with a colonial and precolonial past such as Angola is a document that is too complex to be drafted and/or revised exclusively by lawyers. Multidisciplinary intervention is necessary, with the participation of sociologists, anthropologists, historians, educators, etc. Law for law’s sake is unfeasible, since, for example, in the recent past, the possession of colonies was a legally acceptable practice, safeguarded both by the domestic laws of the respective imperialist countries and by the international legal consensus articulated by these same countries. The fight against Assimilated Provincialism Syndrome must begin with a generalized Afrocentric revision of the constitution that determines the intricacies of the country’s sociopolitical life, the Constitution of the Republic of Angola. Curricular, educational, and academic reforms must have a solid legal basis supported at the highest level.

According to Yankah (2016, p. 149), “it is necessary for African intellectuals to help develop an African consciousness about development, a consciousness that would guide Africans in devising African solutions to African problems”. Falola (2007) also notes that in regard to achievements, inventions, and innovations made in Africa by Africans, their devaluation has been a repeated Western practice since the early days of contact with Africa. In the author’s view, it is as if “Africans spent their time imitating or trying to catch up with the Western world or, even worse, going through its remote primitive stages if necessary” (Falola, 2007, p. 19 apud Sala, 2024).

CONCLUSIONS

The Assimilated Provincialism Syndrome is a sui generis type of coloniality that affects all the structures of Angolan society in all its dimensions. This phenomenon can be deciphered, diagnosed, and combated only through a systematic sociohistorical analysis, covering the phase that preceded the contemporary Angolan state: colonialism. This syndrome is a form of subjective colonialism, which manifests itself in cultural and behavioral practices and in ways of acting, being, and doing in the world. It is false, and we refute the belief that history is a simple narration of the past. This means that if, on the one hand, the diagnosis of Assimilated Provincialism Syndrome requires a critical analysis of the historical process that marks the colonization of the peoples of Angola, its countermeasure involves a careful and in-depth look at the sociostructural dynamics of the pre- colonial Angolan states. Curricular and structural reforms of the teaching model, as well as of the education system as a whole, must be based on the proposed methodology, supported and protected by legal instruments at the constitutional level.

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