Miguel de Barros

Ancestrality, reconstruction, and democracy

Raquel Paris

| Guinea Bissau |

translated by Shawn Provost

Miguel, I would like to hear where you come from, and I thought we could begin with you speaking a bit about your childhood and about your youth, because we know that it's in these moments that there's usually a schism or some major event.

Miguel de Barros: I will not speak about myself, I'll speak about my country. And speaking of my country, I can start with where I fit in, so as to not build myself up too much. But I will point out the elements that are the most essential, critical, and innovative.

My country, Guiné-Bissau, is situated on the west coast of Africa. It is 136,000 km2 and, as I was saying, has a territory equivalent to the state of Sergipe [Brazil] and a population of almost 2 million inhabitants. This country has more than 33 ethnic groups. Of these 33 ethnic groups, each has its own language, its own culture, its own social systems, and its own structures for collective management. In this territory there are extraordinarily beautiful things, for example, it was the last pre-colonial African empire. That is, before the arrival of Westerners, there was not only civilization that existed here, but also an idea and an administration that was the Empire of Gabu. At one point the empire of Gabu was part of the greater Empire of Mali, but after a fight and with the victory of another ethnic group, it

was able to gain its autonomy from the Empire of Mali and thus it was the last pre-colonial civilization in Africa. It was in the territory of what today is Guiné-Bissau, a land full of history.

In this territory, we also find very interesting cultural dynamics. For example, there are ethnic groups whose political structure is oriented towards a logic of a vertical society. These are regulated societal structures such as, for example, a monarchical regime, with the notion of "noble blood," with lineages which have the power to rule and administer their own space. But there are other ethnic groups that profess religions of African matrices, whose social models are completely horizontal. There are no chiefs, there is no regulated structure, the land is collective property, and work and its products are collective goods. It is a whole world of solidarity and interaction, of mobilization, that allows the essence of life to be shared from a collective point of view. There are still other ethnic groups that have their entire social structure founded in matriarchy and led by elders, for example, the Bijagós.

The property belongs to the woman; the house belongs to the woman; it is the woman builds the house and the woman that provides the surname. They are the holders of the sacred, the spiritual, and are the ones with the greatest decision-making power and deference within the community, and often they are the Bijagós. Now imagine, it was within this territory with 33 ethnic groups each with its own language and organizational model, that there appeared a language that does not belong to any of the ethnic groups, nor is it Portuguese. It is Crioulo, which is understood as a factor of cohesion and national unity that was used as an instrument in the anti-colonial struggle. It is an extremely important element, but even with all of these characteristics, they had to confront many adversities.

Portugal claims that it was 500 years of colonization, but this was never the truth. It was 500 years of struggle and resistance. Portugal never succeeded in consolidating a colonial administration in this territory because these groups were not homogeneous, and as such, they were able to disrupt colonial interests. So much so that it was effectively only in the last one hundred years of Portuguese presence in Africa that they were able to piece together some administrations in the coastal regions. There was intense resistance, including popular revolts in the territory of Guinea-Bissau that resulted in the deaths of

Portuguese military administrators. So this is a space known as a space of resistance. But this is also why Portugal's view toward its relationship to the colony that was Guinea-Bissau was, most of all, one of a colony to be exploited.

If you were to look at the academic manuscripts in Portugal, even now, they speak of the discoveries and commercial products of Guinea-Bissau. There were slaves, ivory, gold, and other elements; these three were the principal elements of commercialization. And so, what did this do? It made it so that the management of the colonial administration was entrusted to the military and men of the army. Never, in this period, did Guinea-Bissau or Portuguese Guinea have a civil administration. It was always under the control of a military regime. And what was the surprise? When the liberation struggle began in the early 1960s, after a stevedore massacre triggered a revolt in the port of Bissau, the popular movement was able to take on armed struggle. After some time, eight or ten years, it already had 90% of the territory under its control. But it was the worst battlefield for Portugal because, after 11 years of war, it left defeated—significantly defeated—and the divisions that were created in the movement were pivotal in the division that later appeared in Guinea-Bissau itself.

For example, Portugal had a very large contingent of the military, but the majority of these military men were local militias, and they were used to fight against their own brothers. This is an important element because, in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau, Portugal created a policy of social and racial segregation called the Indigenato Law which forced indigenous to prove their civility to have the status of a Portuguese citizen. And so for this various categories were created, from *grumetos* and heathens to assimilated and civilized, "civilized" being those who were already Portuguese.

This meant a lack of access to education and basic services, lack of civil rights, and that people had to prove, through their baptism, through the adoption of Portuguese norms, through the combination of knowing how to speak Portuguese, eating at the table with a fork and knife, or having a wooden bed and not a mattress on the floor—a set of things that *a priori* barred any possibility that people had of being considered full citizens.

So when independence occurred, the country also inherited this division, this whole system of segregation. But worse than that, when it came to the unilateral independence proclaimed by the liberating movement, the PAIGC (*Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde)* in 1963, which was recognized only a year after the proclamation by Portugal in 1964, it was proven that, throughout the entire colonization period, only fourteen people had had access to higher education—that is, they had a degree, they had been graduates—who were natives of Guinea-Bissau.On the one hand, you have racial segregation, you have the absence of an administration, and you have no knowledge. And the whole economic and commercial structure was set up along the route of the colonizer, having no internal infrastructure to allow, for example, capacity for development. So this is the State inherited from the colonial regime. It was a State with a high level of segregation, with a weak infrastructural capacity and human capital. It was also one that ridiculed and greatly diminished all that could have come of popular cultures and traditional knowledge.

But returning to the PAIGC, the Liberation Movement defined very important things: education took priority, for example, and it was a culture based in the question of identity and the construction of a new frame of reference, but it was also a planned economy and there was the question of African Unity. It was thus that the battle for Guinea-Bissau's independence—led by Amilcar Cabral—was fought in step with Cabo Verde and for the independence of all other countries under the colonial yoke.

Because of this, from 1974-84, a revolution took place. The level, for example, of people with access to education expanded. Schools were set up in all national spaces, but even before independence, the PAIGC, in the areas it was able to liberate, founded schools. They were schools in the liberated zones, and [the PAIGC] created a huge campaign where fourth-grade students had to teach first-grade students. This attracted many people to the point where, from 1977 to 1979, an illustrious Brazilian arrived there, as an exile, to work and to implement the pedagogy of the oppressed: Paulo Freire. He lived for two years in Guinea-Bissau. And he set up the literacy brigades in his mother tongue, along with the Theater of the Oppressed and many other things. And this enabled, on the one hand, not only the increase in access to education, but also the improvement in literacy rates. And it was a moment of effervescence. In ten years, we had almost three hundred people who achieved graduate degrees and returned to Guinea-Bissau, and the country grew. This created a very

good moment.

But what then happened? At the end of the 1980s there was an oil crisis that led to a new rationality in terms of public development aid, and who enters the game? The IMF, the World Bank.

Alberto Aleixo: A global readjustment.

Miguel de Barros: In Africa, it is called the Structural Adjustment Program. I think it was more of a structural maladjustment program. What happened in the case of Guinea? I was born in 1980, and at that time there was a division caused by questions of identity between those who were originally from Cape Verde, who were in the colonial public administration but who also participated in the liberation struggle and were in political power, and the native population who demanded more power. This brought on the first coup, which took place in 1980.

I was born, and four months later, the coup. So I am the fruit of this transformative period. At six years of age, I watched the economic liberation, the end of the planned economy, and the beginning of what they called free trade and the reduction of State capacity. What I can say about this time of the 1980s is four things that mark me in a very clear way: first, from the food point of view, we had a diversified economy, we had integrated production, agriculture, fruit growing, horticulture, riziculture, forestry, fish farming. And almost everything made it to our tables because the market allowed this exchange, this distribution. And there was also an aggressive pastoral service that supported producers. This is over. Then they said that the country needed to pay its debts, the country needed to attract foreign exchange, so the country needed to produce for a market, and then we entered into a monoculture production logic. And what monoculture? Cashews. To export enough cashew nuts to be able to repay the debts and attract currency. So the economy became radically impoverished. And there was a weakening of the middle class to transform the urban space, and a rural exodus, because the State did not exist in rural areas, and the impoverishment of families. So it was a very tense period.

Another important element which marks me from this period is that the State stopped financing the education system. For example, I studied in primary school and had eight teaching hours -- four hours in class, and four extra hours of extracurricular activities, such as music education class. Before we learned to play piano, xylophone, and guitar, we had to learn to play traditional Guinea-Bissau instruments: corá, bombolom, balafon, djembê, to perceive the sonorities and how they present themselves within our spirituality, within our identity. And the songs we learned were sung in Crioulo. We sang ethnic songs first to later understand Beethoven and other accompaniments. That is, we were not completely excluded from what was worldly culture, but we had our own popular culture.

There were also disciplines such as productive work. For us, school meals came from the production of the school itself, which supplied its school cafeterias, where not only students but also teachers participated. The whole school community mobilized to produce their school meals. Why is this important? It allows for the participants to develop a perspective of a nutritional food education. We knew how to measure the plant beds, we knew how to graft the plants, and how an orange and a lemon can make a mandarin. We knew all this. This also ceased to exist and we started to have school cafeterias where the flour was imported, the sugar was imported, and with canned food for the boys and girls to eat.

There was still an interesting discipline at school called “workshop,” which included all that was artistic: cutting and sewing, working with clay, sculptures. There was still a discipline called militant formation that was the historical and political consciousness of the country: what was Africa, what was slavery, colonization, who are the heroes and why do people fight for liberation, and what is the behavior of the New Guinean Man and Woman in a context of independence.

Amilcar Cabral said: "Think with our own heads, walk with our own feet, and have dignity like any citizen of the world. The militant formation class was very much an embodiment of this phrase. It was activism, it was a way to mobilize the people that did not go to school just to be a professional, but to be citizens of their country and Africa, to transform Africa**.** This all came to an end with the demands of the World Bank. We had three classes, four periods because the city was pushing and demands increased. Afterward, they reduced the periods,

and the school ceased to be a space for creative thought, and became a space of memorization, where the most affirmative content ceased to exist. They started to introduce disciplines such as social education. There was a kind of disconnection from the educational system with the commitment to transform society.

Worst of all, when you leave the education system, you have no technical competence to mediate the relationship with the labor market. This led to a strong division in society in ways that challenged the various regimes and also led to a certain kind of neo-colonization, because the curriculum was adapted to the international agenda, which did not correspond to the national agenda, and also did not satisfy the condition of citizenship of the student himself. It is in this scenario of division, with political tensions, that we seek political liberation.

Although the internal situation was tense, the Paris Club, along with international financiers, said: "From now on we can give development aid, but only if you enter into democracy, only if you start to have elections." That is to say, the process of democratization of the country was not a process built from an internal agenda, nor through a commitment to the sense that democracy was wanted.

In this context, in 1994, we went to our first elections with more than half of our population illiterate, who did not know the meaning of their vote, but knew how to vote for the vote to be validated. This led to the construction of political parties with ethnic, regionalist, and populist tendencies whose interest was to play the political game to safeguard their entry into Parliament in order to benefit from state resources. Result: After 45 years of independence we have 49 political parties. But what does this mean in the capacity for, or the commitment to, the social-political project of transformation? Zero.

From this perspective, the country entered a system of coups d'états, into a situation of great social tension and of civil war, albeit with no refugee camp. It’s understood that the division is political, but the coexistence is perfectly peaceful. It is in this context that we were already in the youth associations and started with very strong actions of youth

mobilization around the most critical issues for young people: hope for the future, transition to adulthood, right to education, mobility, and this allowed for the creation of a truly associative youth movement that triggered several actions and allowed us not only to judge the role of the schools, and how incompetent they were but, above all, to safeguard some integration for young people, because ours is the country with the lowest rate of violence in West Africa. At all levels, there is ethical, civic behavior.

And for fragile states such as Guinea-Bissau, post-conflict with all the issues of identity, and all the financial weaknesses, what happens is that you have a neocolonial approach that removes from these states the capacity to be free thinkers and to implement their own policies. But at the same time, it positions them as if they have internal problems with each other. It is the saying, “In the house of the poor, everyone is hungry and no one is right.” Even so, very interesting dynamics have emerged in social movements. Political forces have been created with people who have no tradition of political positioning and with the vision and mission of social transformation. Lots of youth movements, women’s movements, peasant movements, and this has allowed for a much more pragmatic approach in the public sense of civic rationality.

But at the same time, it is leading to the improvement of the current actors in the political system. Now there have been better candidates, the parties all come with programs, the deputy candidates are known, there are public debates, and there is very thorough scrutiny (of candidates). For example, in the last elections, I directed the civil society group that conducted the electoral monitoring. There were more than 480 national monitors who supervised voter registration of the civic education campaign and the electoral campaign for nine months and even counted the votes and transported the ballot boxes. So that gave greater security and greater confidence that it is indeed possible to make sure things go well.

Now, economic rationality does not have to be based in the extractivist model, in the World Bank model. We have to rethink a philosophy that brings together food sovereignty, productive sovereignty, economic sovereignty, and financial sovereignty. And on the question of financial sovereignty, there is a very important issue that is the currency of Guinea-Bissau, a West African currency that also has parity and reference with the old

French currency, the French Franc. Our currency is the Franc. Who retains the royalties to guarantee exchange rate safety? France. We pay France to use a currency that not even France wants. It's things like this that we have to deal with.

So the challenge for African countries is to be able to emancipate themselves politically and to construct a model of transformation that allows them to at least have the same vision of what possibilities exist for effectively building more endogenous processes and to see that these endogenous processes allow mobility, services, goods, capital, but also relations and partnerships between equals.

Alberto Aleixo: On average, regimes, governments, how long would they last?

Miguel de Barros: We've never had a government that has come to the end of its mandate. We had 20 years of democracy, we had 5 elections, and we had 10 coups. This is the regime. The country since 1984 has lived under tutelage, and from 1984 to 1991 it lived under the tutelage of the IMF and the World Bank. From 1995 until now it has been in the custody of ECOWAS, the Economic Communities of West African States, with a regional currency. And then from the military interposition force. And from 2000 on with the presence of the United Nations special office for peacekeeping that never fired a shot. This was more to justify the status of something that does not exist, because no one shot anybody and there is no civil war or anything like that.

Now this context has indeed allowed for the emergence of a much more active civil society, and political liberation actually took place in 1994 with the first multiparty elections, but in 1991 there was also the first recognition of some NGOs. For example, Tineguena, where I am, was founded by Augusta Henriques who worked with Paulo Freire in 1991, and became an environmental organization. They were the most progressive women and eco-feminists, but other organizations emerged as well, such as the *Guinean League for Human Rights*, action for development, an intervention focused on agriculture for the communities. *Alternar*, which is very much concerned with education, was in its first phase an extremely militant organization among these NGOs, but it was also extremely professional, with a high

level of training and close links with the community and local structures.

In the post-conflict period, in 1998 and 1999, we moved from this regime to a kind of explosion of organizations, more focused on intervening in emergencies, but with a lot of international, foreign organizations coming within the propaganda of public aid for development. That is, I am going to finance a project for food security, but whoever does this project is a European NGO, who buys the equipment is Europe, comes with the technical assistant from Europe, does not pay taxes, and comes with a thought structure that is European. So where's the public aid?

Everything must be done in the context of its origin. And in Guinea-Bissau, this, in a way, enabled the recovery of two things. The first thing is all of the popular, traditional organizations, which were not within this chain of cooperation, and another was the emergence of certain social movements—which I wrote a book about, the *History of Civil Society*—which are politically organized people or organized collectives. The articulation between these two movements of popular and traditional groups allowed for the rescue of certain cultural values. For example, the setting up of mutual credit systems. Groupings of fish sellers have a revolving credit system. With this revolving credit system each month there is one that gets the money so she (the fish seller) can make the investment she wants, and within her groupings they create funds for mutual health, and are building their own agendas and the national NGOs are giving structure, and are assisting to manage it as if it were a co-management scheme.

This has allowed, for example, the creation of areas protected by community management, the creation of funds to support female entrepreneurship, such as initiatives created to fund scholarships for girls to enter university. This created a boom in the country and the informal economy became more popular than the formal economy. I have said that about the informal economy: that there is nothing that is more formal than it. People pay their taxes, even if they just have a space on the floor, to expose their products. They pay the Ministry of Finance and they pay the Ministry of Commerce. Everything is connected. Now, the rationality is not to contribute to pay taxes to the State, but that the surplus-value has to be for the investment of economic activity, because it is this that generates capacity after building self-government.

So, this is a very favorable environment for the appropriation of civic and political consciousness, which allowed a country where the political system is extremely sexist to approve, for example, the quota law, in which 36% of parliamentary representation is occupied by women. These are things that are happening. I was talking about school lunch, which previously was all imported, but we managed to pass three very important guidelines in the space of three years. We first brought the State into the education system to introduce, in the curriculum, food and nutritional education classes and environmental education classes. Last year, we had the State to accept that at least 30% of purchased food for school meals would have to come from peasant family agriculture. And of this 30% coming from peasant family farming, 30% will have to be bought directly from women. That's already happening.

The number of girls in schools is increasing, economic capacity is increasing, the possibility of food education has increased because of the vegetable gardens. And we now have approved our zero-hunger by 2030 strategy, where the government, at the initiative of civil society, already has a long-term strategy. It is these things that happen, you have a country with an institutionally fragile state, but it has an extremely strong and active civil society that manages to take on the public agenda, that which is of collective interest. And at the same time, in its much more spontaneous structure, civil society here has the ability to make demands of the military members that instigate coups, to protest against corrupt ministers, to protest against the United Nations for not playing its part, and against the existence of a currency that has a neoliberal and neocolonial basis in the French system. So we are in the best phase of civic activity in Guinea-Bissau.

We in Guinea-Bissau have a favorable context, in which the state does not finance civil society, the state only makes some exemptions, so civil society has better autonomy to procure funding. For example, I refuse to seek funding from the European Union. I look for the militant foundations that have a shared vision with us, do not want to know about the projects, but want to finance the emancipation processes, and instead of the logic of doing projects of short duration and of immediate impact, I elaborate on our strategic thinking in which I introduce the strategy to build the capacity for economic and financial autonomy. What does that mean? It means income-generating activities, creative economy, sustainable entrepreneurship, so that within your political proposal you always have a part that allows

you to attract resources for self-financing.

Organizations that can reach this level have the highest level of autonomy and have the greatest ability to avoid all schemes of political co-optation. Now, organizations develop their business plan, their human resources management plans, their funding plan, and how to transform their own name into a brand, something sellable, with products. It could be a delivery service, it could be food products, it could be knowledge production or applied research, it could be monitoring public policy. This allows you to have elements within the organization that work not only as professionals but as activists, and at the same time create a relationship, a kind of equity within your own proposal.

In Canada this is happening in a very beautiful way, and in some African countries this is also starting to happen. In Guinea, we have decided that in the next five years we will not be competing for EU funding. We will seek alternative funds and generate our own funds, and discover things we did not know we could do. For example, we can create brands of land and sea products, fleur-de-sal, organic honey, organic soap, palm oil, brown rice. These are all things that we had and that we did just for the sake of doing, but now we are supporting local communities and family cooperatives, microenterprises, and associative models, or associations made up of only women producers. And we do marketing: brand development and distribution. And 90% of sales goes to the producer and 10% goes to us, to do all the sales promotion activity and pay the wages.

So for what is crucial for us, we do not need financing, but for what we want to bring as a stimulus, there we will seek financing that is complementary and does not call into question our vision. This is very important. Then, to safeguard against the potential for co-optation, we have two more interesting projects. The projects that have the lowest volume of funding but also the ones that have the greatest impact are the ones monitoring public policies. We are monitoring everything exploits natural resources, fishing, oil, mines, heavy sands, and we get sought out by other entities to provide information, to render services. And they pay us, because we show how the state complies with national or international directives on the issue of natural resource management and we are integrated into platforms that give us money to do this work.

We monitor governance as an electoral process and also receive donations from philanthropic organizations to continue doing this work because it is important to safeguard democracy. We manage a line of food products produced by peasants, the farmers, for school meals, and instead of buying food from outside the country we are buying directly from these producers and safeguarding that they continue to receive the money and that their products make it into school meals.

Raquel Paris: How have the youth been leading in these democratic spaces and the struggle for democracy?

Miguel de Barros: In West Africa, more than 60% of the population is young, under 40 years of age. Incidentally, the last award I received was exactly for figures of distinction in West Africa who are involved in a process demonstrating that his majority that has been ignored within the process of transformation, and within the decision-making processes of politics. So they organized a gathering of young people from the private sector, from politics, from civil society, from the diaspora who participated in building this alternative vision. Why is this important? Because despite having a majority, public policies are not always aimed at the young. But the most aggravating part of this is that we have a society that is gerontocratic in Africa, with the affirmation of the power of the elders and above all a macho power and very centered on those that are already in the decision-making structure.

And we usually say this: “What is for us, without us, is against us.” I cannot say that I want to make a public policy focused on the issue of gender equity if these policies do not integrate not only the demands, but also the presence and the decision-making capacity of the women themselves. Why not? It is a policy for women but it has no validity, and it is the same with young people. It was only five years ago that a national policy for the youth of Guinea-Bissau came into existence, even though throughout the electoral process, the struggle for liberation was undertaken by youth. But this didn’t turn into anything concrete. In 1994, with the crisis of the educational system, there was the first youth protest, stopping all public, private, community, and self-managed schools, everything stopped to claim the right to education for young people.
The needs of young people have been decided upon within their own collectives. At that

time youth networks emerged, as much in the urban and rural spaces as in the diaspora. Moreover, in countries with Portuguese as its official language, Guinea-Bissau is the country with the most youth associations, and this is replicated in all its diasporas. It is just that these associations, as I said in the past, place great importance on the integration of courses in associativism, volunteering, project management, basic sanitation, communication, human rights, health management—all had these types of courses there, with youth universities, volunteer schools. That is, it allowed young people to begin to connect with each other. I met young people who had never left their locality, to go, for example, from the North to the South or to go to the capital. But these programs created by the associations allowed mobility and a very good connection, and they also favored the construction of projects and microprojects, and more young people started to have some occupation. But even so, it was not able to respond to all of the demands. We do not have, for example, a public system that gives scholarships. Universities have emerged very late, and young people do not have access to credit, so it has limited their activities to that more in the character of volunteering.

When the political conflict of 1998-99 occurred, the two parties, aware of this fragility and aware of the need for work for the war forces, recruited young people with promises of employment. The group, for example, that was with the government forces, was later integrated into the police. This happened also in Angola. But in the group that was affiliated with the other belligerent part of the military junta, all were integrated into the army—because young people with low schooling had no social and cultural capital, nor did they have any network of influence that could allow, for example, access to scholarships, or some other more attractive opportunity for mobility. So they chose to negotiate their participation in the belligerent forces of the war. Some received credit and opened their business. That happened in Guinea and in Sierra Leone. It happened in Mozambique, and it happened in all the countries that had this concern: "We have labor, which if not integrated in some way, will generate a much more perverse situation." And the young people also knew that they had no other possibility, so they also activated their strategy and negotiated their positions. But after two, three, and four years, with the emergence of the first public universities in Guinea-Bissau, there was a kind of renewal of hope, and wide enrollment of young people in university. But the universities, though they emerged in a context of empowerment, were also emptied of what would be the “real” opportunities, of employment

and of guarantees of knowledge and a diploma, this in contrast to, for example, universities in Portugal, Spain, France, but that's another story.

Then we started to have a phenomenon that we call there *Bancadas* (Benches), which is no more than a corner society. Young people decide to focus on the corners of the neighborhoods spend all day sitting talking about politics, talking about football, art, soap operas, talking about everything. Then people pass through the neighborhoods and find a number of young people permanently in these spaces. And then what happened: they put songs on the radio with shout-outs to the neighborhood Bancadas with something like... "We know that you are there, we are with you." That is, there is a contingency: "Let us put our plight out there so they can see what state they have left us in."

Raquel Paris: And this is intentional?

Miguel de Barros: It is very intentional. What happens? There begins to be a public critique: "Now the young people do not want to work, they spend all day sitting there, playing cards, making tea, and I don't know what else," because it becomes a very stifling sensation. Parents who see that their children are in a situation where they have no hope, they have no chance at having an influence on them. The leaders see that the partisan youths can not mobilize the young people on all of the benches, so the Bancada phenomenon begins. This "bench" phenomenon is accompanied by a strong intervention of the RAP music movement. Then the youngsters of RAP music began to authorize the speeches of the *independentistas*, to dialogue with these discourses, to seek the traditional communities, to make samples with American rhythms, and begin to denounce everything that makes up the youth's negative scenario. At first, a very negative reaction. "Oh, these boys are just swearing, or whatever." But then everyone consumes it. Everyone. Antenna radios give 3 hours of continuous RAP music only. You get on public transportation and it's RAP music. Even children. Everything is RAP music. Then there was a kind of critical asphyxia, everyone talking about RAP music, denouncing the issue of drug trafficking, denouncing the issue of corruption, denouncing political clientelism, denouncing everything, domestic violence. So, from 1999 to 2012, it was like, a boom. In fact, for the Guinean people in Cape Verde, Portugal, Brazil, the United States, everyone producing and putting something on

the market; and the radios playing clips, and replaying music videos on Youtube, then there is an atmosphere of saturation with the critiques made by young people. That is when the programs with funding for youth entrepreneurship begin to emerge. And then the action program tries to inaugurate a 2006 youth employment strategy in response to all the pressure young people were applying.

But the international structures, to justify some intervention, forced the most powerful networks to assume some of the youth associations' activities. That is, the associations that were fighting for this capacity needed to have their funding. But to have access to finance and do all the entrepreneurship activity, one either has to be officially legalized or has to be within a network to receive funding. Then, what has been called the precocious institutionalization takes place in the associations in their vying for funding.

And it is with this citizen movement that we come back to the slogan of Cabral: "To think with our own heads, to walk with our own feet." There is the Movement of Conscious Nonconformed Citizens, and their slogan is, "The people are not trash," in Crioulo "povuika trash." They started calling people to the street, and then you have a transformation, in a space of two years we have more than 20 youth movements that come together under the issue of the public agenda, and do not want to receive funding for their organization or for projects, but want to have their voice in the public sphere. We are in a moment of greater excitement, one of a certain competition, but also one of construction, because it must be a political agenda.

So there must be a profound reform, not only of the political elite that generate the defense structures, but also of those officers within the defense structures themselves. For this to happen, there must also be a restructuring of the judicial system itself.

And the Brazilian judicial system, in its own right, has an excessive dose of politicization, and this excessive dose of politicization legitimizes the violent character of the security force itself. And the most complicated is when Brazil believes that it is through the use of violence that it can solve a problem of social inequalities. It is not, for example, through the creation of the BOPE (Special Operations Battalion) and private security companies that one solves the problems of marginalization and violence, but rather through public policies

implemented by actors who have a commitment to respect for human rights.

But the big challenge now is that we have to defend human rights, including the rights of those who torture us. We have to be able to be radical but without losing humanism and without losing integrity. As we do this it means that we are not constructing our public discourse or our ability to mobilize based on someone else's agenda. If the right-wing Bolsonaro agenda is a matter of death, we will build the agenda of life and coexistence. So, that does not mean not talking about what they're talking about, that means talking differently. I think we have had difficulties constructing a discursive counter-current, not in terms of dialogue but in mobilizing the necessary bases.

Miguel de Barros: Now, I even have gotten to the point where, with my Brazilian friends, and I say I am right in believing that, with the Bolsonaro regime, we're going to take seven steps back…

Alberto Aleixo: Just like with Trump, right?

Miguel de Barros: Yes. But after this process, the level of awareness will awaken to the point that even children will speak things that no one could imagine. The more time passes, the smaller the chances are of building alternatives, to combat the opponent with alternative proposals, and not from his agenda. The conflicts within the Brazilian right are enough to annihilate them from within. So leave them be with their problems, but us, we are focused on building.

And this is what has to happen. Portugal did it very well. Portugal came to the elections with a right-wing government that was not an absolute majority. Those on the left who did not speak, joined and formed a parliamentary majority, approved the program, and formed the government. The second most voted party is in government, but no one else is in government. They are approving guidelines in parliament, and every year they discuss the state's general budget, increases for the national health system, increases for the national education system. Economically the country is growing, whereas before the country was

cutting everything, reducing everything, and with a policy that came from the World Bank, IMF, European Union, etc.

It’s that the problem is not, in my point of view, the possibility of winning the fight, but rather how we are going to build our alternative. And building our alternative requires that we determine who is best able to lead this agenda, where each one then continues to play their part. Now, the more fragmented, the worse, and this is the biggest risk I see here in the Brazilian case.

And I will say one thing, this movement of [Fernando] Haddad and [Guilherme] Boulos will only be an alternative if it is able to integrate women, blacks, and indigenous people at the highest level. That is it. It cannot be an elitist movement. The Lula model has already passed. One has to accept this and put Lula in his rightful place as one who built a fairer country. Lula cannot be the alternative of the future anymore, he cannot. Time has changed and when time changes we have to change too. If we do not, then we will be left behind, dragged about by changes that will happen without us as protagonists. The approach, energy, and message that Haddad brought us in this campaign is no longer of Lula's time.

Gabriele Roza: I don’t trust them. I think they are too white and too male to realize that there needs to be an innovation here.

Miguel de Barros: But they do not have to realize it. Elements have to be made that allow the understanding that this needs to happen. The challenge of social movements here is to require exactly this type of representativeness, not only at the bottom but at the top. And if that happens a lot of people will act in anticipation, giving new confidence to the left.

Raquel Paris: To conclude, I'm sure you know well the paradigms we use here as pillars of the institution, such as the Paradigm of Potency and the Pedagogy of Coexistence. For us to close I wanted you to explain, as you see it, how these elements are coming together in Guinea? How do these potencies begin to articulate to bring on this confrontation in the globalized world?

Miguel de Barros: There are three interesting endings in Guinea Bissau. Guinea-Bissau of the future, with greater awareness of the natural and cultural heritage of the new generations. And there is the issue of the demand for sustainability that has now become a guideline for almost all youth and feminist movements. Perhaps it is an institutional framework of NGOs, one that has gone beyond the vision of the new generation of the feminist movement, and also at a time when peasant organizations are gaining more visibility. Another important element is that there is another, much more qualified youth, with greater ownership of the country, who have a greater connection with the world and who is increasingly interested not only in political party life but also in social movements.

And from there you can also leave your generational legacy. This is very important. And lastly, there is also an increasing awareness of the issue of gender equality, which is also highly favored by the women's movement and with an increasingly active diaspora both in the political field and in the economic and cultural field. This is giving huge visibility to the women, to the young people who want a country, a diaspora, in the arts, but also in the leadership of some entities. What would be a uniting element for me would be to build a shared vision of the future, to be what we stand for today.

It is an agenda that only fits within an institutional and political framework, and thus has little possibility of being sustained. Now, if it is a shared vision for society itself, together with the political actors and the Guinean diaspora itself, we will be much more consequential and effective there. And I think that a great challenge that we have is something that will not be possible within a political misadventure of four years. First, we must begin to create a basis for the medium term. Then conditions are more favorable and that will allow for the renewal of institutions. This is what will also allow for the very idea of the effectiveness of public policies, and it will also allow people to feel that they are in a more effective situation with regards to their own participation, and this leaves me with some hope.

Making some parallels with the Brazilian case, for example, today some very important issues are being tackled. And this was more of a consensus among structures, even though they were about social demands, for example, racial quotas in universities. Why do I say this? There are structural elements for me. When society can not normally ensure equitable

policies, then it has to take affirmative policies to at least adjust for later normalizing. But in doing so, it has to be done in two logics: in a generational commitment, so that it is not just something episodic in a government with a favorable base to work with, and also, within what I think of as the Social Contract. This social contract has to involve political structures in power, and here I speak both of the organs that are in the government itself, such as the leaders and courts, but also bringing in the private sector. It has to be. And in this case also bringing in what are, for example, the social movements of the cultural field to build this capacity for bringing about these policies.

The State has to not only finance, but also have the private sector create employment spaces that would allow for the fulfillment of the affirmative alternative itself. The second thing you need to have is the ability to create investment and cultural development policies that create the possibility of universities and the market more egalitarian. When these dimensions enter, it creates a favorable ecosystem. That is, it does not add up to the need for a political agenda. This is what happened in the case of quota, this is what happened in the case of deforestation, this is what is happening now also on the issue of reproductive rights, because once again we have a political alliance that links the religious bloc with the political bloc. This type of alliance brings to power the most retrogressive and closed sectors. And they will cut off all freedoms that had been won, but not guaranteed. That is, there has to be a social contract that is much broader and that engages with the different actors, and later, protect its achievements.

Interview Date: April 2019
Collaborators: Alberto Aleixo, Gabriele Roza, Gabrielly Pereira e Thaynara Santos