

REVIEWS

Comandante Pedro Pires. Memórias da luta anticolonial em Guiné-Bissau e da construção da República de Cabo Verde. [Commander Pedro Pires. *Memories of the Anti-Colonial Struggle in Guinea-Bissau and of the Construction of the Republic of Cape Verde*. Interviewed by Celso Castro, Thais Blank and Diana Sichel]. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV/Praia: Instituto Pedro Pires, 2022, 218 pp.

Africa looks for its specific identity by stressing its history. After decades of post-decolonization disillusionment, and in the position of one of the world's less developed continents, pressing questions arise among Africans. What was the meaning of the liberation struggle? Do youngsters, new generations, know the colonial past and are they able to appreciate the contemporary independence? Is the independence a real one, or it is a new dependence? Does democracy work properly? In the course of rebuilding international relations, mainly to the detriment of Africa, such doubts call up publications that reflect unquiet discussions on the existence, function and future of African states originating in a different way when compared to long-formed European ethnic states.

Such discussions mark new publications concerning the history of Cape Verde, a nation created since the 15th century by European merchants and African slaves as part of the Portuguese colonial empire. Drought, misery and subjugation marked the colonial history of the community, part of which emigrated to the USA, Portugal and other parts of the world in order to save naked life. On dispersed islands any liberation struggle was impossible. Cape Verdeans, however, led difficult guerrilla warfare in the jungle of mainland Portuguese Guinea between 1963 and 1974. Amílcar Cabral (1924-1973), the Portuguese-Guinean descendant of Cape Verdean parents, was able to unite nationalists of both colonies under his leadership in the African Party for the Independence of Guinea [Guinea-Bissau] and Cape Verde (PAIGC). Despite his death by murder the movement managed to win the war against the colonial power. Only a few of Cabral's fellows have survived until now. Fifty years after proclaiming the independence of the Republic of Cape Verde, they are feeling the necessity of reminding and re-narrating their experiences, liberating enthusiasm, and sacrifices to young people who are forgetting their past along with the price of liberation. That is why new books emerge on the twentieth-century history. Carlos Reis has summarized the outline of the nationalist movement in his work "From the Struggle for Independence of Cape Verde to Longing of the Future" (*Da*

luta pela Independência de Cabo Verde às Saudades do Futuro. Praia: Rosa de Porcelana, 2024). Old warrior Manuel Maria Monteiro “Manecas” dos Santos (born 1942) disclosed his life experiences to Rosária Luz, who has published Santos’s memories under the title „Manecas Santos, A Biography of the Struggle” (*Manecas Santos, uma biografia da Luta*, Praia: Rosa de Porcelana, 2024).

Three Brazilian academicians Celso Castro, Thais Blank and Diana Sichel made an effort to keep alive the memories of Pedro Verona Pires (born 1934), the most merited Cape Verdean freedom fighter and statesman. A prominent participant of the liberation movement – therefore called *comandante*, the first prime minister (1975-1991) and the third president (2001-2011) of the insular Republic of Cape Verde – Pires gives an account of the endeavours of his generation.

Pires was born in a rural family on the volcanic island of Fogo. When he attended primary school in Fogo’s capital city São Filipe in the early 1940s, a famine extirpated half of the island’s population. Later on, he continued learning in Mindelo on the island of São Vicente. In 1956, Pedro Pires started studying in Lisbon. In the capital city of the Portuguese empire, he became aware of the world’s political trends, the most important of which was the decolonization of Africa. As a member of the subjugated colonial community he felt a personal humiliation in the same way as his colleagues from other Portuguese African and Asian colonies that were renamed “overseas provinces of Portugal” in 1951. After 1960, the “year of Africa,” Pires decided to give a hand to overthrowing the colonial yoke. He took part, in 1961, in the flight of a group of African nationalists from Portugal to go into exile in order to prepare a joint anti-colonial resistance.

An incredible life adventure began. Side by side with Amílcar Cabral, Pires supported the liberation movement as an activist of the PAIGC in various European and African regions. The “direct action” against the colonial administration grew into a guerrilla war in the Portuguese Guinea territory in 1963. Within the armed resistance structures Pires ascended to the top during the next ten years of war. Along with other Cape Verdeans he represented the most decided hardcore of PAIGC leadership. He had to face reform activities of the governor António Spínola in 1968, an internal crisis in the resistance movement leading to the murder of supreme leader Cabral in 1973, and the final guerrilla offensive culminating in the unilateral proclamation of independence of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau in September 1973. After the Portuguese “carnation revolution” of 25 April

1974, Pires proved to be not only a military leader, but also a hard negotiator. Due to his harsh diplomatic efforts, the reluctant Portuguese recognition of the independence of Guinea-Bissau in 1974, and the independence of Cape Verde in June 1975 resulted in an absolute success of the PAIGC party.

The construction of the independent state of Cape Verde is the most interesting part of Pires's memories. As the first prime minister Pedro Pires took over idle islands without many natural resources. Instead of the previously presupposed brotherhood, sealed with the common PAIGC under the leadership of the joint PAIGC president Aristides Pereira as head of the Cape Verde Republic, the 1980 coup in Guinea-Bissau expelled Cape Verdeans from the continent and left Cape Verde isolated. After this break, the slightly transformed PAICV (African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde) maintained the policy of one ruling party that guaranteed control over the economy, reforestation, and the distribution of foreign aid.

Pires took exceptions to the democracy abruptly introduced in 1991. The defeat of the PAICV during the first open elections, and the victory of the opposition Movement for Democracy (MpD), disturbed the small Cape Verdean community. The preceding one-party-rule was condemned and personal invectives and accusations were turned against the defeated prime minister. His daughters were not allowed to study in Cape Verde, the family did not even have decent habitation. Pires recognized the new democratic system, but he did not agree with the demonstrative change of national symbols, nor with various anti-social measures of the new government. However, his patriotic feelings and self-confidence remained intact. That is why he succeeded as a PAICV candidate in the presidential election of 2001. During two terms he served his nation as the highest magistrate in an unselfish way. A successful government pulled the country from a low grade of development to the medium status of developed nation. The open foreign policy of "all directions" fostered security and a good reputation of Cape Verde. Pires appreciated the advantage of Portuguese language within the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), nevertheless, he rather advocated bilateral relations as a much more effective means of international communication.

After handing over his presidency, according to the democratic rules, to the elected independent follower Jorge Carlos Fonseca in 2011, president Pires did not stop his political activities. His "Instituto Pedro Pires" has been offering counsels and consultation services to all individuals and/or organizations dealing with Cape Verde. The former prime minister and

president took part in debates and conferences both at home and abroad, regardless of his advanced age. Let us commemorate his visit to the Czech Republic in 2022, occasioned by awarding him a medal of merit of the University of Hradec Králové.

Reading this book based on short questions and realistic answers, readers find out the global dimensions of the African decolonization process. The USA, Cuba, Brazil and great parts of Africa and Europe were the places where Pedro Pires worked in various phases of his life engagement. A long row of statesmen and people of consequence from the second half of the twentieth century and the first quarter of the twenty-first century march through the text. Pires, a modest and wise old man, was repeatedly asking the most important questions: How should historical truth be preserved? What kind of influence makes historians omit the real chain of events many times? Why is the historical experience so essential? How could it be explained and exploited nowadays?

The “oral history” method, which consists in interviewing a witness, is undoubtedly able to give answers and advice. The sincere devotion to his people, combined with the enormous range of work done by Pedro Pires in the course of his long life, is the best recommendation for this inconspicuous book on the Cape Verdean *comandante*, an outstanding leader of Africa, and a patriot of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

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