

## Rite as a training and pedagogical process: Education challenge in Guinea-Bissau



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### Abstract

Rites are the main articulators of the values that shape the behavior of African people, Bissau-Guineans in particular. Therefore, in Guinea-Bissau, one should not build a school curriculum without relying on this educational heritage left by ancestors. As a way of contributing to a better understanding of the Bissau-Guineans' educational reality, for the construction of a school curriculum that dialogues with the Bissau-Guineans' educational diversity, this research was developed with the objective of analyzing and reflecting on the importance of rites in the formative and pedagogical process in Guinea Bissau. Thus, it took advantage of the contributions of works that focused on the subject under consideration. Starting from a qualitative approach, using bibliographical research, we reflected on the need for a curriculum that considers the Bissau-Guineans' social reality. The results showed that the pedagogy of the rite constitutes a mirror for Bissau-Guineans society and should be included in the country's school curricula.

### Keywords

rites; education; curriculum; Guinea-Bissau.

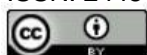
### Ritos como processo formativo e pedagógico: desafio de educação na Guiné-Bissau

### Resumo

Os ritos são os principais articuladores dos valores que moldam o comportamento dos povos africanos, guineenses em específico. Portanto, na Guiné-Bissau, não se deve construir currículo escolar sem se apoiar nessa herança educacional deixada pelos ancestrais. Como forma de contribuir para melhor compreensão da realidade educacional dos guineenses, para a construção do currículo escolar que dialogue com a diversidade educacional dos guineenses, desenvolveu-se esta pesquisa com o objetivo de analisar e refletir sobre a importância dos ritos no processo formativo e pedagógico na Guiné-Bissau. Assim, valeu-se das contribuições de trabalhos que se debruçaram sobre o assunto em reflexão. Partindo duma abordagem qualitativa, utilizando a pesquisa do tipo bibliográfico, refletiu-se sobre a necessidade de um currículo que leve em conta a realidade social dos guineenses. Os resultados apontaram que a pedagogia do rito constitui um espelho para a sociedade guineense, devendo ser inserida nos currículos escolares do país.

### Palavras-chave

ritos; educação; currículo; Guiné-Bissau.



## Los ritos como proceso formativo y pedagógico: reto educativo en Guinea-Bisáu

### Resumen

Los ritos son los principales articuladores de los valores que configuran el comportamiento de los africanos, en particular de los guineanos. Por lo tanto, en Guinea-Bisáu no se debe elaborar un plan de estudios escolar sin basarse en esta herencia educativa dejada por los antepasados. Como una forma de contribuir a una mejor comprensión de la realidad educativa de los guineanos, para la construcción de un currículo escolar que dialogue con la diversidad educativa de los guineanos, esta investigación se desarrolló con el objetivo de analizar y reflexionar sobre la importancia de los ritos en el proceso formativo y pedagógico en Guinea-Bisáu. Así, se aprovecharon los aportes de trabajos que se centraron en el tema en consideración. Partiendo de un enfoque cualitativo, utilizando una investigación bibliográfica, se reflexionó sobre la necesidad de un currículo que tenga en cuenta la realidad social de los guineanos. Los resultados mostraron que la pedagogía del rito constituye un espejo de la sociedad guineana y debería incluirse en los planes de estudios escolares del país.

### Palabras clave

ritos; educación; plan de estudios; Guinea Bisáu.

## 1 Introduction

On the west coast of the African continent lies a small country called Guinea-Bissau, with a geographical area of 36,125 km<sup>2</sup>. In this country, the cultural diversity of a people who preserved countless customs and social values is highlighted. In this study, we analyze one of the most fascinating pedagogical practices of this people: the rites.

Why the rites? During my Pedagogy course at the University of the International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (Unilab), one of the phrases that struck me most in the classroom was: "The school curriculum has to be designed according to the realities of the students". After the internship courses, I began to realize the problematic nature of the phrase from the following account: "Theory is one thing and practice is another". So, thinking about the school curriculum in Guinea-Bissau, I raise some questions, because I believe that we can't build the school curriculum for Guineans without considering the national reality.

According to Duarte Júnior (1984), the word "reality" is used routinely in the most different contexts and fields of activity, but we rarely stop to think about its meaning, since, at first glance, the concept seems so obvious that we consider it unnecessary to question it. However, the obvious is the most difficult to grasp, argues the author.

We can't help but agree with the author's argument, since when we try to outline Guinea-Bissau's reality, we must understand it in the plural, given that Guinea-Bissau is a multicultural country, with more than 27 ethnic groups, each with its own culture, language and educational system. It is worth emphasizing that the educational system mentioned here refers to the endogenous education system linked to the cultural tradition of the Bissau-Guinean people, which differs from the official school education system developed by the state; the latter is co-opted by values and customs foreign to the vision of the Bissau-Guinean people since it is based on Western methodological and epistemological assumptions with content, methods, and objectives that are opposed to those of the country's reality since it denies everything that is the most authentic representation of the Bissau-Guineans' way of being: their history, their culture, and their language. Furthermore, it links Guinean history to the arrival of the colonizers, with their "civilizing" presence, because they consider themselves to be more "evolved, civilized and advanced".

Defining the Bissau-Guineans' educational reality is a hard task, once it demands deep reflection. According to Duarte Júnior (1984, p. 12), "[...] to work with reality is to question the meaning of human life, a life that, endowed with a reflexive consciousness, has constructed its concepts of reality, from which it exercises itself in the world and multiplies itself". Still according to this researcher, reality is not something given, that is there offering itself to human eyes, eyes that simply register it like a mirror or camera, because the human being is not a passive being, who only records what is presented to their senses. On the contrary, the human being is the builder of the world, the builder of reality. From these considerations, it can be seen that realities are elements of culture imprinted on the daily lives of human beings; they are things that can be seen, touched, and felt; reality is a very broad concept that can be seen and interpreted in different ways.

Concerning the social and educational dynamics of life, Bissau-Guinean reality involves countless habits and behaviors that define the moral, ethical, and customary values that shape the behavior of its people. Faced with these realities, it is necessary to problematize a school curriculum that is integrated with the educational diversities imprinted on the daily lives of the ethnic groups that constitute Guinea-Bissau. Therefore, before getting to the problem of the curriculum, we must first ask: how do Bissau-

Guineans conceive of education? What are the common characteristics of the educational system of Bissau-Guinean ethnic groups?

To answer the questions above, it is necessary the architecture of the Bissau-Guianese education system, a particularly important paradigm since it allows us to enter the "black box" of the pedagogical project left by our ancestors, in other words, the educational matrix of the Bissau-Guinean people. In this way, we aim to outline the common characteristics of the educational system of the Bissau-Guinean ethnic groups, their methods, and mechanisms of operation, in order to offer us clues to show how the values, customs, and knowledge that shape the behavior of the Bissau-Guinean people are defined.

In this context, we draw on the contribution of Djaló (2012) in his work entitled *The Mestizo and the Power: identities, dominations, and resistance in Guinea*, in which the author dedicates the first chapter to reflecting on traditional Bissau-Guinean society, analyzing in detail the organization of Bissau-Guinean ethnic groups and their main forms of socialization. Let's see how the author summarized the organization of traditional Bissau-Guinean society:

Overall, traditional Bissau-Guinean society is structured and integrated into a very rigid system of values and behavior, based on tradition and established social order. The integration of the individual into such a society is done through the family, the clan, the ethnic group, the age group, and the social class, considered to be norms that explain the absence of individualism because each individual is obliged to act and conform to the social norms, the system of values and the discipline of the group (Djaló, 2012, p. 24).

The forms of organization described above are based on class and age. According to Djaló (2012), they correspond to the different stages of an individual's socialization, since they precisely establish the rights and duties of each individual in their community. According to the author, the transition from one phase to another is the subject of certain initiation and passage rituals, in which the person is subjected to tests that prove their maturity for the transition. Djaló (2012, p. 30) adds:

These socialization mechanisms assign each member of the community their rights and obligations, their social position, define obligations, and the learning of habits, customs, and tradition. They thus reinforce in each member of the community a sense of cohesion and a duty of solidarity, of mutual assistance and excluding any form of individualism.

The author's analysis has served as a beacon because it allows us to see the architecture of the endogenous education system more clearly. Reading the book, we

realized that rites are present in all of Guinea-Bissau's ethnic groups. As such, we can say that rites are the rhizome of Bissau-Guinean's endogenous education system since they are present in every ethnic group and social stratum. We also see that rites play a significant role in the organization of Bissau-Guinean society, imprinting codes and values that shape the behavior of the Bissau-Guinean people. Given these findings, the following research question arises: what are the roles of rites in the organization of Bissau-Guinean society?

It is well known that in Guinea-Bissau, rites are one of the main cultural manifestations, full of tradition and customs aimed at forming and inserting young people into society. So, when we think about the country's education system, we can't ignore the importance of rites in the formative process of the Bissau-Guinean people since they are the web that connects the unity of this people on a broader level, linking together ethnic groups separated in space, isolated from each other because of the difficulties of contact. According to Wilson (*apud* Turner, 2013, p. 23):

Rituals reveal values at their deepest level [...] people express in rituals what touches them most intensely and, since the form of expression is conventional and obligatory, the values of the group are revealed. I see the study of rites as the key to understanding the essential constitution of human societies.

The above illustrates the concern of this research to better understand the socio-cultural and educational reality of Guinea-Bissau through rites. Therefore, this study aims to analyze and reflect on the importance of rites in the formative and pedagogical process in Bissau-Guinean society.

## 2 Methodological path

To create this work, we used a qualitative approach, using bibliographical research, and consulting works related to our theme. Once the topic and research problem had been defined, a bibliographic survey was conducted to establish the state of the art. Completing this stage allowed us to orientate the research route, identifying how the object of study is being discussed at a national level. The survey also identified aspects that have not yet been investigated, allowing us to connect our considerations with the scientific community's debate on the subject, with the aim of contributing to it.

According to the researchers Romanowski and Ens (2006), the state of the art is an important contribution to building the theoretical field of an area of knowledge, since it seeks to guide the researcher about the field in which the research is conducted, its gaps in dissemination, making it possible to identify innovative experiences investigated that point to alternative solutions to the problems being researched and to recognize the contributions of the research in the constitution of proposals in the area of study. For them, the state of the art is not just about identifying production, but analyzing it, categorizing it, and revealing the multiple approaches and perspectives.

Based on these considerations, we searched two databases: the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDBTD) and Portugal's Open Access Scientific Repository. We chose these two databases/websites for two reasons. Firstly, because they are representative of productions from Portuguese-speaking countries. Secondly, since they are easy to read, as they are in Portuguese. It's worth highlighting that the attempt to erase the memory and history of colonized peoples makes it difficult to access materials for building work like this. Therefore, our first search with the combination of the descriptors: "rites; education and Guinea-Bissau" and "rites, formation and Guinea-Bissau", in the BDBTD and in Portugal's Open Access Scientific Repository, yielded no results. It is also worth noting that we did not use a time frame to restrict the search.

The absence of results with the descriptors mentioned above confirmed our intuition as a researcher immersed in this epistemological field of Western academic knowledge that places the epistemology of colonized peoples on the margins of scientificity. It forces us to reproduce the colonial logic of domination that helps legitimize the coloniality of knowledge by marginalizing the endogenous knowledge of colonized countries. Woodson (2018), in his classic work *The Miseducation of Black People*, tells us that the architects of our education don't want us to leave the circle of control. We agree with the American historian when he argues that:

If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one. (Woodson, 2018, p. 89).



The architecture of the academic production system tends to guide us towards the back door. However, to escape the circle of control, we need to break the paradigm. We do not intend to break the paradigm as a simple act of stubbornness, but to build a new reference. Therefore, our interest is to bring the educational theories of the Bissau-Guinean people closer to their educational practices, recognizing that the crisis of science is the fundamental phase for the development of a more mature science (Kuhn, 1978). Therefore, we chose to use combinations of the following descriptors: rites, education, and Africa; rites, formation, and Africa; rites and education, in the same databases mentioned above. In the search, we found a significant number of works on rites in education. Given the volume of research identified, we decided to restrict the search to the period 2007 to 2022. In the first mapping, we noticed works in various fields of study: Anthropology, Human Sciences, Theology, Applied Social Sciences, and Education, among others. The diversity of areas highlights the relevance of the topic.

Given the large number of papers published, the first exclusion criterion was the analysis of titles, so we looked for themes that relate to rites and education/training with a focus on African countries. As a result, we selected 11 studies, all of which were conducted in Brazil. The papers illustrate that researchers are concerned about the importance of rites in the individual's formative process within society, especially in black African communities.

### 3 Analysis and discussion of the found data: rites and education in Guinea-Bissau: challenge and perspective

**Chart 1 – Results of the state of art**

Year	Studies titles	Author(s)
2022	Cultural practices and women's schooling in Mozambique: a path to redefining initiation rites	Aida Duarte Binze
2006	Traditional autochthonous education and modern official education: effects of autochthonous initiation rites on the academic performance of initiated students	Candido Josse Canda
2015	Year-end cleaning ritual pedagogies: cultural assumptions of knowledge produced in Umbanda	Luiz Osmar Mendes
2008	Education through initiation rites: contribution of the ma-sena cultural tradition to the formal curriculum of schools in Mozambique	Antônio Domingos Braço

2009	Education by other eyes: learning and cultural experience among the Indians of the Hinterland Kiriri Bahian	Sílvia Michele Macêdo
2013	Black body in Cachoeira/BA/Brazil: rites and paths in the city's educational context	Lilian Quelle Santos de Queiroz
2019	The university ceremonial as a preservation of the institutional memory of the Federal University of Ceará	Cláudia Maria de Albuquerque Lordão
2013	The purpose of the rite in the school space: a symbolic approach to the first day of school	Jailson da Silva
2013	The decline of the rites of passage and its consequences for young people in contemporary societies	Paulo Rogério Borges
2015	Initiation Rites as knowledge production spacetimes: narratives and dialogues in Nampula Moçambique	Roberto da Costa Joaquim Chua
2017	The role of initiation rites in the yaawo community: case of the city of Lichinga-Mozambique	Óscar Morais Fernando Namuholopa

**Source:** Authors (2023).

The previous section presents the mythological path followed in the construction of the work, starting from the search criteria to the survey and results. This section focuses on the analysis of these investigations, identifying approaches of interest to our research, considering the research questions presented above.

The studies presented in Table 1, especially those by Binze (2022), Braço (2008), Canda (2006), Chua (2015), and Namuholopa (2017), were crucial to our study. These studies allowed us to see how the pedagogy of rites is an important articulator of the identity of African peoples, since it preserves the cultural and educational heritage of African peoples. They also helped us realize that rites preserve the African cultural heritage based on educational, formative, epistemological, ethical, cultural, philosophical and moral principles, which form the socio-cultural identity of African peoples. Indeed, we realize that we are heirs to this long tradition and that it is part of our mission to preserve them, because they carry our memories and stories.

According to Braço (2008), in African society, because it is predominantly of oral tradition, education takes place more intensely and formally through initiation rites, since they shape daily life, organize educational systems in cultures and trace paths that guide new generations.

Canda (2006) adds that rites have always been an excellent school, because they educate society not only by transmitting the practical technical knowledge required



by life, but also by structuring the individual's social life. For the author, rites are not only found in religious life, but are diluted in social life, in various categories, such as: agrarian, funerary, magical, communal or association, expiation, passage, initiation, procreation, among others, because they exist within society. Regarding the social function of rites, he states that:

Rites, although they are subject to what is conventionally known, have the function of conserving and integrating culture, linking the present to the experiences of the past, bringing back to life events and feelings whose meaning would be forgotten or changed completely if there weren't this rigorously uniform form of repetition. In this sense, it can be said that the rite constitutes a set of forms of cultural and social procedures with multifaceted functions, each of which corresponds to a set of moral values, beliefs, feelings, social roles and relationships within the overall cultural system of the community where the rite takes place (Canda, 2006, p. 38-39).

From the above, we can see that celebrating the rite means valuing the community, because "I am because you are" also becomes an element that unleashes forces capable of taking us over or perceiving us as a community through the relationships we weave from the rites (Chaua, 2015).

These two points allow us to understand that rites organize individual and collective life. This concept is also defended by Silva (2013), who preserves the idea that the rite carries the symbolic content of individual and collective behavior, since it follows certain rules intended to be repeated, based on a previously determined scheme, to organize life through norms pre-established by the group, in order to keep memory, culture and tradition alive, uniting all human diversity based on a structure of what is true, significant and important for the group.

The reflections presented above make us realize that education through rites harmonizes the educational and cultural diversity of Guinean ethnic groups, conceiving the unity of all their diversity. In this sense, we consider it essential to study rites in order to understand Guinean society. Furthermore, studying the pedagogy of rites in Guinea-Bissau is one of the best ways of getting to know the rich cultural and educational heritage of Guineans, since in Guinea-Bissau the educational process is marked by the presence of rituals of various kinds, since it is through them that individuals are prepared to play an active role in society.

Thus, it can be said that the pedagogies of rites are devices through which Guinean society produces the knowledge necessary for its survival, passing it on from

generation to generation by educating young people. This endogenous pedagogical project takes place through organized teaching, in places where structures are designed specifically for the guidance of young people, usually in sacred spaces. According to Namuholopa (2017), the spaces for these types of rituals are usually in isolated places, to avoid contact with the remaining members of the community. The measure of isolation seeks to create an atmosphere of tranquility, both for the community and for the initiates themselves, because of the sounds and songs. According to the author, the space should be close to a water source, to make it easier to use this resource for various necessary purposes. Once the spaces have been defined, the young people are taken for training. During the process, the young people are prepared to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills, both to preserve and defend the institutions and fundamental values of society and to adapt to changing circumstances and the emergence of new challenges.

In training, young people learn fundamental aspects for their positive life in the society in which they live, their role and duties as members of the community. Among the main lessons, we can highlight personal and collective hygiene, caring for nature, forms of agricultural production, hunting, knowledge of medicinal plants, fishing, arithmetic, codes and ethical principles of the community, rules of work, secrets of art, religion, handicrafts, among others. According to Braço (2008), these forms of insertion help the individual to integrate human life in its most diverse varieties, since they fill the person's existence as a member of a society with meaning and significance.

The educational systems of the Bissau-Guinean ethnic groups, in accordance with the philosophy of life of each group, are responsible for the formations highlighted above. Therefore, the idea that the Portuguese found people without culture, without civilization and without history is not only mistaken, but also false, because the form of education in Guinea-Bissau unfolds through socialization within the extended family or through rites of passage, in which adults explain to children how they should behave in certain circumstances. It is worth reflecting on the word "circumstance" here. According to Somé (2007), in the West, people tend to standardize everything, so when describing a ritual, people think that it applies to all situations in the same way. According to the author, in ritual, standardization doesn't work, since the ritual has to be specific to the people involved.

Thus, in Guinea-Bissau, education through rites is linked to life and through life, since children educate themselves by taking part in the functions of the community. The specificity of the pedagogy of rites presented here is linked to the pedagogical vision of traditional peoples. According to Canda (2006), training, evaluation and re-education in these societies take place over a lifetime and last a lifetime. In the same vein, Brandão (2007, p. 10-11) explains:

Education is, like other forms of education, a part of the way of life of the social groups that create and recreate it, among so many other inventions of their culture, in their society. Forms of education that they produce and practice, so that they reproduce, among all those who teach and learn, the knowledge that runs through the words of the tribe, the social codes of conduct, the rules of work, the secrets of art or religion, crafts or technology that any people need to reinvent every day, the life of the group and that of each of its subjects, through endless exchanges with nature and between men, exchanges that exist within the social world where education itself dwells, and from where it helps to explain - sometimes to conceal, sometimes to inculcate - from generation to generation, the need for the existence of its order.

It is worth emphasizing that the pedagogy of the rites is processed orally and through primary contact, face to face, through the routine of daily life, in which everyone can learn something in any type of social relationship. For example, in Guinea-Bissau, we do not have signs saying that younger people should give up their seats, greet or help their elders with small gestures. However, all the children know that it is disrespectful not to offer their elders a seat so that they can sit down; they also know that it is disrespectful to pass by adults in the community without greeting them. These small gestures illustrate the relevance of rites in the daily lives of Guineans. Praxis is the main characteristic that underpins the educational philosophy of the pedagogy of rites. To support our reflection, we turn to Cá's words (2005, p. 25), who states the following:

Regarding education, in traditional African society there were no formalized teachers like in Western society, and there was no privileged place for the transmission of knowledge. The form of education was based on the example of each apprentice's behavior and work. Every adult was, in a way, a teacher. Education was not separated into fields and specializations of human activity. No one was educated only for a certain period of time but learned through life and knowledge over time.

Cá's (2005) reflection indicates that Guinean society has a conception and vision of the world that is strongly linked to its cultures and traditions. In view of this, when analyzing education in Guinea-Bissau, it is important not to lose sight of these forms of socialization, since in the pedagogy of rites, learning is linked to the circumstances of life. To be more specific, we turn to Somé's example (2007, p. 57), which, although it does not

deal with the Guinean context, illustrates well the circumstances of education through rites highlighted in this work:

I remember, as a child, how one of my grandmothers involved us in rituals. She would set up situations in which we had to create an appropriate ritual. She never interfered with our creativity. All she did was ensure that we moved forward. Like a mother teaching a child to walk, she would guide us a little and, when we fell, she would encourage us to keep trying.

For Hampaté Bâ (2010), the model may seem chaotic, but in fact it is practical and very much alive, because the lesson given on the occasion of a certain event or experience is deeply engraved in the child's memory. Hampaté Bâ's (2010) observations explain how the pedagogy of rites has survived to the present day. The way in which this oral document is transmitted highlights the peculiarity of the Bissau-Guinean education system, because in the pedagogy of rites, teaching and learning are not mutually exclusive, but complement each other and are bound up in the values and customs that shape the Bissau-Guineans' view of the world.

To better illustrate the importance of the pedagogy of rites in the organization of Bissau-Guinean society, we once again draw on the contribution of Djaló (2012, p. 30-31, emphasis added), who summarized the organization of Guinean society and its ritualistic processes in five classes:

a) **The infant class:** The first stage runs from birth until the end of breastfeeding, generally coinciding with baptism, i.e. until the age of five (with the exception of the islands of Caravela, Uno and Canhabaque, for whom the imposition of the name takes place on the eighth day). This stage corresponds to a precarious period of life, which is why individuals in this category cannot have first names in Manjacos and/or Mancanhas. b) **The impubescent class:** The second phase includes individuals approaching the second period of childhood. It lasts from baptism (imposition of the name) until puberty, coinciding with the rites of passage of the previous class and corresponding to the end of breastfeeding. During this phase, the child receives a preliminary education within the family. c) **The adolescent class:** The third phase corresponds to young people, who have gone through second childhood and are preparing for the rites of adulthood, the biggest of which is the Fanado (circumcision). This is a class in which young people learn to work, have fun and integrate the principles of community life. Together, they prepare to receive the rituals of their integration into social life. d) **The adult class:** The fourth phase lies between the fanaticism and the end of maturity, passing, of course, through marriage. It is the stage of fulfillment, which allows the person to enjoy all these rights. e) **The elder class:** the fifth and final stage corresponds to the prolongation of maturity and ends with death. The person then acquires the status of Great Man (the wise) and Great Woman (for women). They sit on the council of the Elders, a kind of assembly responsible for running the affairs of the community.

Djaló's (2012) classification illustrates the relevance of the pedagogy of rites in the organization of Guinean society, as it shows how Guineans imprint the pedagogical

ideas that are fundamental to building a world view. In the classification, it can be seen that children start living with rituals from an early age. This way of integrating children into the community is similar to that of the Matswa people of Mozambique. According to Canda (2006), the Matswa people introduce children very early on to traditional rituals as a way of making them identify with the group or collective that awaits them from the day they are born. This idea was also developed by Somé (2007), who says that children learn about intimacy and rituals from birth, so that when they mature, they become fundamental to their existence, developing a deep understanding of these issues. According to the author, in rituals, elders guide young people about intimacy, sexuality and ritual, so that they know what awaits them in the future, preventing young people from entering adulthood unprepared.

In Djaló's (2012) classification, it can be seen that education through rites takes place through stages that train the individual to occupy different places in society. These stages are accompanied by official acts, with formative processes that enable the person to take on an active role in society; the stages are regulated and monitored so that society in general does not suffer any embarrassment or damage. According to Genep (1978, p. 26):

It is the very fact of living that requires successive passages from one special society to another and from one social situation to another, in such a way that individual life consists of a succession of stages, ending and beginning in sets of the same nature, namely birth, social puberty, marriage, parenthood, class advancement, occupational specialization, death.

It is worth noting that the organization of Bissau-Guinean society is also divided by gender, as in other societies. According to Braço (2008), the social division of labor based on gender is the main variable in differentiating the education process, which justifies the existence of specific rituals for men and women. According to Somé (2007), the division by sex exists not to promote sexism or to make men and women equal, but to create an environment of respect, because men and women have their mysteries.

From what has been said so far, we can see that the pedagogy of rites dates back centuries and has survived to the present day thanks to the important role of orality. To legitimize our argument, we turn to the words of the great master of African oral tradition, Hampâte Bâ (2010, p. 167), who states the following:



When we talk about tradition in relation to African history, we are referring to oral tradition, and no attempt to penetrate the history and spirit of the African peoples will be valid unless it is based on this heritage of knowledge of all kinds, patiently passed down from mouth to ear, from master to disciple, over the centuries. This heritage has not yet been lost and resides in the memory of the last generation of great custodians, who can be said to be the living memory of Africa.

The specificity with which Hampâté Bâ (2010) describes orality has enlightened our thinking, since the author expresses one of the most beautiful pedagogical contributions of African peoples to world pedagogy. Indeed, the author's reflections contribute to the construction of the following question: if rites are one of the main means of producing the knowledge of the Guinean peoples, why are they not present in the official curriculum of the state's public education apparatus?

The answer to the above question was given by the Afro-Trinidadian historian Cyril Lionel Robert James (1938, *apud* Falola, 2007, p. 19), who stated that:

For many hundreds of years, in fact since shortly after the first contacts between Western civilization and Africa, it has been almost universal practice to treat African achievements, discoveries and creations as if Western civilization were the norm and Africans spent their time imitating or trying to catch up with the Western world or, even worse, if necessary, passing through its remote primitive stages.

The argument is revealing because, after the process of colonization, we began to see and reflect our realities through a European lens, because the European way of seeing the world provided schools with an effective mechanism for controlling the bodies and minds of colonized peoples. Therefore, the establishment of the school is one of the greatest European achievements in maintaining coloniality, since it educated African peoples to read the world from sources outside Africa.

Brandão (1982, p. 15) argues that "[...] the school does not have the weapons of dissuasion that the barracks have, but in its own way it has others that are more pertinent. It has the weapons of persuasion that the system uses to preserve itself as an idea and a reality". In view of this, the school was used to build a system on which the Portuguese could rely to promote colonial rule in Guinea-Bissau.

Nobles (2009), examining African people in the diaspora, argues that our oppressor tried to empty our minds of the meaning of being African, but he could not destroy the African within us. Therefore, he altered the perception of our sense of Africanness. According to the author, this altered sense of consciousness is the fundamental problem for Africans, Afro-Brazilians, and diasporans.



The reflections of Hampâté Bâ (2010) and James (1938) serve as a vaccine against the colonial system, as they make us realize that the meaning of decolonization dwells in the internal gaze, from the legitimization of the educational legacies left by our ancestors. We then begin to look at our reality with a sparkle in our eyes. It's worth noting that we saw the effect of the vaccine when we read Somé's (2007) famous work entitled *The Spirit of Intimacy*, mentioned above. In this work, the author presents pedagogical practices produced by the Dagara people of West Africa. In the exhibition, she wrote about the wisdom of her people, based on the daily life of their village, highlighting the importance of rites in the organization of African societies.

In the preface to the book, Julia and Weller state that to read Somé's words (2007) is to witness profound truths; it is to awaken a part of us that has long been anesthetized. In fact, the author's words remind us that our ways of looking, communicating, dressing, behaving, and reading the world are legacies of the pedagogical practices left by our ancestors. Thus, she offers us an African pedagogical vision based on rites and invites us to be more ourselves, because the elements of rituals allow us to establish a connection with our own being, with the community and with the forces of nature. According to Somé (2007), we enter the ritual to call the spirit to show us the obstacles that we are unable to see because of our limitations as human beings, because rituals help us to remove obstacles between us and our true spirit and other spirits.

#### 4 Closing remarks

In the introduction to this work, we highlighted that the phrase "the school curriculum has to be designed according to the reality of the students" inspired this research, in an attempt to understand the educational process of the Bissau-Guineans. To this end, we sought to understand the architecture of the Bissau-Guinean education system based on the cultural and educational matrix left by our ancestors, in other words, the pedagogy of rites. We believe that, following this endeavor, we have raised pertinent questions about the diversity of the Bissau-Guinean people's education system. We also believe that we have answered our research question satisfactorily. During the analysis, we showed that the pedagogy of rites carries the values and customs that shape the

worldview of the Bissau-Guinean peoples. Therefore, we cannot build the school curriculum according to the reality of Bissau-Guineans without thinking about the importance of rites in integrating individuals into society. We believe that the integration of school curricula based on the Bissau-Guinean worldview will only become a reality once we take on the responsibility of working with values and principles that are imprinted in the daily lives of Bissau-Guineans; this living memory lies in the rite.

It is therefore essential that we face up to the challenges that lie ahead of us. In the analysis, it was also shown that the pedagogy of rites carries one of the most brilliant ancient civilizations of the African peoples, Bissau-Guinean in particular, harmonizing the cultural heritage of the different ethnic groups in space and time, based on the values and worldviews that underpin the identity of the Bissau-Guinean people. With this, we can say that the rites imprint values and customs that make us see and recognize our own image as Bissau-Guineans.

In this way, when thinking about Bissau-Guinean education, we cannot lose sight of the fact that education through rite aims at the uniformity of behavior, which does not exclude relevant personal gradations in this inherited social order. In addition, rites accompany motor habits, in routine social activities present on the cultural horizon through traditions that provide Bissau-Guineans not only with norms for action but also with frameworks for situational awareness and affirmation of Bissau-Guinean national identity. Rites preserve the richest pedagogical contribution of the Bissau-Guinean peoples to world pedagogy. The pedagogy of rites is not just about myths, illusions, and ideologies, it is about principles that operate at the level of the structure of Bissau-Guinean society.

If the observations presented in this paper are in line with the worldview of Bissau-Guineans, the debate on the importance of rites in the construction of Bissau-Guinean school curricula is unavoidable because the pedagogy of rites offers us a precise and detailed understanding of our socio-cultural and educational heritage and its contributions to the educational progress of the Bissau-Guinean people.

It should be noted that education through the rites developed in this work is not restricted to "radical" rites, considered "taboo", developed from time to time in "sacred" and isolated spaces, since not all Bissau-Guineans have gone through this process, but all Bissau-Guineans carry the effects of these rites, since they are in the daily lives of

Bissau-Guineans, defining the rules, values, and customs that shape Bissau-Guineans' reading of the world, differentiating them from other societies.

Thus, we end this endeavor with the feeling that there is still a long way to go if we want to build an inclusive school curriculum that respects all the diversity: cultural, educational, and epistemological, imprinted on the daily lives of the ethnic groups that make up Guinea-Bissau. Thus, we close this cycle happy to have realized that the pedagogy of the rite is like a mirror, in which Bissau-Guineans look at reflections of their lives and can say what is original and sincere for themselves.

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