

José Vicente Lopes. *Cabo Verde: Os Bastidores da Independência*. Praia — Mindelo, Instituto Camões/Centro Cultural Português, 1996.

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Compared to the mainland countries of Mozambique, Angola and even Guinea-Bissau, the recent history of Cape Verde has not attracted very much academic scrutiny, which is surprising given its unique independence process and its early political links with Guinea-Bissau under the banner of one political party, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). There are, of course, exceptions. Colm Foy's now dated analysis of the country's Marxist regime and programmes (*Cape Verde: Politics, Economy and Society*— 1988) focuses relatively little on the tensions at the heart of the liberation movement. Similarly, Basil Davidson's *The Fortunate Isles: a Study in African Transformation* (1989) is inevitably inflected by the idealism gained from the author's close personal association with Amílcar Cabral and the PAIGC/PAICV leadership of the first fifteen years of independence, most notably Aristides Pereira. Richard Lobban's *Cape Verde: Crioulo Colony to Independent Nation* (1995) conveys similar sympathies for those who brought Cape Verde to independence, but benefits from the changes that occurred in the early 1990s, and is a subtler, more nuanced interpretation of the development of this island state in the context of its traditional position as an economic and cultural entrepôt between Europe and West Africa.

The above are general studies and, of course, particularly useful for those who do not understand Portuguese. For those with a knowledge of the language, José Vicente Lopes's monumental work, *Cabo Verde: Os Bastidores da Independência* not only plugs a huge gap in our knowledge of Cape Verde's political history and the fortunes of its major personalities between the 1950s and 1981, but also slays one or two sacred cows along the way. Rather than a historical study in the traditional, academic sense, Lopes's book is an exhaustive piece of investigative journalism, during the making of which the author undertook extensive archival work and interviewed many well-known figures, as well as a range of lesser players. Nor does he limit himself purely to politicians, for there are useful and informative incursions into literary and cultural debates, most notably that over the role of the *Claridade* movement

in defining Cape Verdean literature, and the polemic surrounding Creole in the aftermath of independence. The opinions of Lopes's interviewees are reproduced, often competing and conflicting with each other. Lopes, who is himself one of Cape Verde's foremost journalists, limits himself to periodic reflections, inviting us to pick our own path through the undergrowth of truths and half-truths. The effect is that of a polyphonic narrative that makes history come alive. Like characters in a novel, the witnesses to events reappear during the course of the narrative, to cast their judgement again and again on matters viewed through the prism of memory. At the same time, the relative absence of a judgemental omniscient narrator makes the account of Cape Verde's recent history more vivid and complex than more traditional, ideologically biased accounts, with their tendency to assume that all colonial administrators were venal and all freedom fighters morally unblemished. Most historical accounts, for example, of the assassination of Amílcar Cabral in 1973 take it as a given that it was the work of the Portuguese secret police, a last desperate attempt to forestall the inevitable military defeat facing the colonial army in Portuguese Guinea. *Os Bastidores* neither denies nor supports this notion. What it does is to place Cabral's charismatic leadership within a local context, in which there were rivalries within the nationalist movement itself, opportunists on the fringes, petty jealousies and surprising examples of megalomania, which even include Cabral's "host" the Conakry Guinean dictator, Sekou Touré, for whom the presence of such a prestigious liberation leader not only threatened to reduce him to playing second fiddle but potentially shattered his own regional ambitions for a "Greater Guinea."

Although the research begins in 1910, with the advent of the first Portuguese Republic and ends in 1981, particular emphasis is placed upon the first five years of Cape Verde's independence from Portugal (1975-80) because, in the words of the author, it was during this time that the structures that still characterize Cape Verde today were put in place, and because, after nearly twenty years of independence, it was easier for his interviewees to look back on the events of those five crucial years dispassionately. It was during that period that the newly independent republics of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau lived an unlikely betrothal under the banner of one political party that aspired to the eventual union of the two countries. Much attention has been placed on the 1980 coup in Bissau that brought this union to an end. Traditionally, it has been assumed that "Nino" Vieira's "movement of readjustment"—the ousting of the regime of the first president, Luís Cabral—was due to the latent hostility of the Guineans against

the Cape Verdean leadership of the PAIGC. Lopes's investigation presents, once again, a much more complex view of events. Irrespective of those Cape Verdeans (especially in the windward group) who desired some sort of continued association with Portugal, there was a certain amount of friction between the young radicals who returned from Lisbon, influenced by revolutionary ideologies culled from books and proponents of the notion of "continuous revolution," and the PAIGC leadership in Cape Verde, which consisted largely of people who had participated in the guerrilla war on the mainland, and which adopted a cautious and pragmatic approach, in contrast again to the more militaristic sibling government of the PAIGC in Bissau. By the time of Vieira's coup, there is little doubt that, in spite of the crocodile tears shed over the separation by the Cape Verdean branch of the party, there was little love lost between Bissau and the more cosmopolitan, well schooled and relatively liberal Cape Verdeans in Praia. Once again, Lopes's panoply of protagonists reflect upon the intricacies of the events of those five years.

In spite of the author's intention to place particular emphasis on the period leading up to 1981, and the founding of the PAICV (Cape Verde's successor to the PAIGC), we must not forget that the book was only published in 1996, and that it was designed to recall the pioneering years of Cape Verdean independence at a time when democratic change and free elections had transformed the country from a one-party state into a parliamentary democracy. Moreover, although it cannot be doubted that the demise of the Soviet Union and analogous events of 1989 must have played some part in this political transformation, Lopes's study also demonstrates that the potential for democratic change was unleashed by the events of 1980, as evidenced by a growing movement of disenchantment among a younger generation of Cape Verdeans during the 1980s. Indeed, it could be argued that Vieira's coup in Guinea-Bissau freed Cape Verde from its "socialist revolutionary" African status, returning it to its traditionally more pragmatic vocation. Perhaps the most lasting epitaph to that generation of post-independence leaders is its idealism. In the words of one politician of the period commenting on the economic policies of one of his more quixotic colleagues, who dreamed of a cement works in the archipelago at a time when there was an international glut, and a shipyard at a time when shipbuilding was in crisis, "one needs to dream to get things done, but one needs to keep one's feet on the ground too." On balance, history will show that Cape Verdeans managed to tread a fine line between these two Cervantine extremes.

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