

**Abstract:** In this article, I discuss *Os meus três amores* by Carmen Pereira. The text subtly reveals her role in overcoming Amílcar Cabral's initial skepticism about the role of women in Guinea-Bissau's revolution. Literary in style, *Os meus três amores* foregrounds repeated instances of the tension between militancy and motherhood. Its genre-crossing nature – traversing the boundaries between a diary, a memoir and testimonial with contributions from multiple narrative voices – highlights the complex web of referentiality and authority inherent to autobiographical writing.

**Keywords:** Carmen Pereira, Amílcar Cabral, Women in independence struggle, Guinea-Bissau, diaries, Odete Semedo, autobiographical fiction

### **Carmen Pereira's *Os meus três amores*: The Voice of Militant Motherhood in Guinea-Bissau**

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Carmen Maria de Araújo Pereira was the first woman to act as the president of an African country. As the speaker of the People's National Assembly of Guinea-Bissau in 1984, she took over as president for three days during Nino Vieira's transition from military to civilian head of state. The daughter of the first lawyer from what was then Portuguese Guinea, Pereira joined Amílcar Cabral in the independence struggle in the 1960s, rising to the highest ranks of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence

of Guinea and Cape Verde). She played many roles in that struggle and in the subsequent politics of independent Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau but claims, in her posthumously published *Os meus três amores* (2016) [My Three Loves], that the most important thing she ever did was to lead a group of twenty girls to the Soviet Union at the height of the anticolonial conflict (Pereira 2016: 140). That declaration is part of a positioning of Pereira through her valedictory text that gestures towards a political maternity as much as remembering what it was like to be a mother and a militant.

As I will discuss, *Os meus três amores* in its genre-crossing form highlights the referential complexities of autobiographical narrative and, in its content, subtly asserts the fundamental part Pereira played in turning the PAIGC into a movement that prized the equality of the sexes.

The impulse behind the publication of *Os meus três amores* was Odete Semedo, one of Guinea-Bissau's most acclaimed poets and a leading figure in today's PAIGC. For Semedo, Carmen Pereira's life story is indistinguishable from the liberation struggle (Semedo 2016: 11). Semedo, to whom Pereira entrusted the manuscript of her diary, ensured it was published as part of the Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa's [National Institute of Study and Research's] collection 'Palavras de Mulher' [Women's Words], a series that seeks to recuperate and conserve for posterity the voices of women who played pivotal roles in the history of independent Guinea-Bissau.

Semedo's fundamental mediating role in what straddles the boundaries between memoir, autobiography, diary and the bildungsroman of a revolutionary woman is recognized in *Os meus três amores*'s subtitle: 'uma visão de Odete Costa Semedo' [Odete Costa Semedo's vision]. The work's format includes pages from Pereira's diaries, an interview of Pereira by Semedo, family photographs, and

testimonies about Pereira from her relatives, leading politicians and poets, as well as those who fought alongside her against Portuguese colonialism. As such, the format fashions a particular kind of life-writing in which a collective voice at times takes control of a narrative framed in the ‘feminine singular’ (to borrow the title of the volume edited by Claire Williams and María José Blanco).

When Semedo declares, ‘a sensação com que se fica ao ler o diário da tia Carmen é a de estar diante dum romancista’ (Semedo 2016: 8) [the sensation one gets reading Elder Carmen’s diary is that one is in the presence of a novelist], she highlights the story-telling structure of *Os meus três amores*, in which the ‘truth’ of Pereira’s life emerges in the interplay between memory and fiction, the ‘two strands in autobiographical writing that constantly negotiate the space of writing’ (Gudmundsdóttir 2003: 54). Semedo continues, ‘as histórias alheias que atrevessaram a vida da autora da biografia fazem o leitor voltar para a realidade e a verdade de uma história de vida contada na primeira pessoa. É uma sensação de estar a velejar num entre-lugar, entre a realidade e uma quase ficção’ (Semedo 2016: 8-9) [the stories of others who crossed paths with this biography’s author bring the reader back to reality and the truth of a life story told in the first person. It feels like sailing in an in-between space, between reality and near-fiction].

Ever the pioneer, Hilary Owen provided the first significant account of the strategic slippages between fiction and autobiography in writing by women in Portuguese-speaking Africa in her analysis of the Mozambican Lina Magaia’s work. One of Owen’s insights was understanding how Magaia ‘locates herself as the “National Mother” in a clear attempt to authorize and unify her testimonial narratives, from above, as a strategy of national address’ (Owen 2010: 113). Owen points out that Magaia achieves this by ‘speaking as the mother of her own real children’ (113)

and drawing ‘on maternal suffering as a discourse of testimonial authority’ (114). As I will discuss, Carmen Pereira’s text attempts something similar in an even more self-consciously autobiographical form, aided by the mediation of Semedo, to whom she confesses in a poignant answer to Semedo’s probing questions about the sacrifices made for the revolution, ‘esteve à minha frente optar por ficar com os meus filhos ou aceitar e cumprir a missão do partido’ (Pereira 2016: 140) [I was faced with choosing between staying with my children or agreeing to and completing the party’s mission].

Pereira’s consecration in the text as Guinea-Bissau’s ‘National Mother’ runs in parallel with her subtle re-evaluation of the nationalist hero Amílcar Cabral’s image as a feminist hero to which I will return. She tempers his image with her recollections about the realities as she remembers them of the early days of the PAIGC.

The genre-challenging format of *Os meus três amores* adds to the forcefulness of Pereira’s portrayal as the ‘National Mother’. The portrait is both an ideological act that seeks to guarantee Pereira’s place in the national canon of independence heroes and a narrative trope that draws the reader in through a maternal tone. For Blanco and Williams, life-writing has always blurred the boundary ‘between fiction and reality, giving it the appeal of authenticity, yet the stigma of narcissism’ (Blanco and Williams 2017: 2). The accounts provided to us by life-writing often give additional sources of information on famous historical characters from an affirmed subjective perspective that allows authors creatively to write through, and often challenge, settled versions of major events. This certainly applies to Carmen Pereira’s *Os meus três amores*. The leading players in Guinea-Bissau’s revolution, from Amílcar Cabral, and his brother Luís, to Nino Vieira and Titina Silá appear as characters in Pereira’s book. Their foibles and vexations alongside their vision and differing levels of

commitment to the national cause emerge from her diary's pages. Titina Silá, who was killed on her way to Amílcar Cabral's funeral, is celebrated in Guiné-Bissau as a hero – the day of her assassination is National Women's Day. The diary tells us about Silá's uneasy relationship with future president Nino Vieira, and how his womanizing led to her appeal to Amílcar Cabral to swap military fronts with Carmen Pereira so that she would not have to confront her partner's infidelity (Pereira 2016: 50). Cabral agreed to the substitution which is how Pereira ended up in the south of the country, where she became the first woman to found hospitals in the liberated zones of Guinea-Bissau. Pereira's account of this substitution leaves the reader with a sense of her commitment and value to the revolutionary cause while tangentially peddling a negative view of Vieira, as a superficial philanderer, a view that may have been coloured by his later expulsion from the PAIGC, to which Pereira remained loyal until the day she died.

Pereira died shortly before her diary went to press, a fact explicitly lamented by Semedo in her introduction. Pereira's death at some point during the editing process of the book haunts the narrative that follows. As Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir points out, the narrative structure of autobiographical writing is 'of prime importance for the way in which the autobiographer establishes causality and meaning in his or her life story' (Gudmundsdóttir 2003: 60). Episodes are selected to make retroactive sense of a timeline, seen in the rear-view mirror of a narrator who experienced, or at least purports to remember, the events described, and who expects to experience future events too. For Gudmundsdóttir, 'where the ultimate determinants of meaning lie is inherently problematic in autobiography' (87) because the reader is denied the satisfaction of a definitive ending. The autobiographer generally lives on, and so 'endings in autobiography must always in some sense be

based on contingency rather than authority as the life that is narrated is not finished' (87).

In the case of Pereira, the reader knows that she died *in medias res* of the book's production, something that reconfigures the autobiographer's contingency through the prism of her editor Semedo, whose 'vision' informs and largely orders the narrative. For Shari Benstock, the fundamental question underpinning life-writing is 'where does authority rest for writing "autobiography"?' (Benstock 1988: 7). In the case of *Os meus três amores*, Pereira's contingency as autobiographer is, at some level, overwritten by Semedo's authority as ultimate editor.

Pereira begins the diary section of her book by defining what her reader is about to read as 'a minha biografia e a minha fala, o meu último desejo' [my biography and my speech, my last desire] (Pereira 2016: 30). The testamentary echo of her words underpins a desire to leave for posterity an account of what it was really like to be a woman and a mother who not only had to fight colonialism but also had to fight to be allowed to join the struggle against colonialism. Unlike the Angolan Deolinda Rodrigues's posthumously published diary (2003), which itself was mediated by her editor-brother and one-time deputy-president of the MPLA, Roberto de Almeida, Pereira's account is not an encouragement to join a revolution, but rather a potent, subjective description of the gender-coded level of sacrifice the struggle for independence implied. In fact, although it is classified as a diary, it lacks the conventional hallmarks of a dating system, and is often closer to a story told in the first person and inflected in memoir.

Pereira's autobiographical account bears comparison with that of Dolores Ibárruri (1895-1989). Like Pereira, Ibárruri, who was widely known as 'La Pasionaria', was famous for her impressive oratory and her leftist leanings. In 1962,

Ibárruri published her autobiography, *El único camino*, from exile in Moscow. For Gina Herrman, *El único camino* is a classic communist bildungsroman (Herrman 2010: 31), tracing its author's journey from ignorance to influence. For Herrman, the communist memoir typically reflects on 'the process by which political beliefs and commitments become imbricated in the process of identity formation, thus belying the commonly held belief that intimacy and ideology are lived out in separate spheres' (Herrman 2010: xii). Communist life stories often 'dictate a series of existential phases: conversion, some form of trial or struggle (often war), and tests of faith that ideally inspire the militant to renew his or her vows of commitment to the party' (Herrman 2010: xiii). Both Ibárruri and Pereira's accounts contain such elements – Ibárruri fought in the Spanish Civil War and Pereira was on the frontline of Guinea-Bissau's independence struggle, often coming under direct fire from Portuguese mortars that sought her out as a high-value propaganda target, as one of the testimonies of those who fought alongside her included in *Os meus três amores* recalls (Pereira 2016: 303). Both became ideologically committed to movements with communist leanings, and made great sacrifices in terms of family life for the parties they served. However, over five decades separate the publication of *Os meus três amores* and *El único camino*, and most significantly, the fall of the Berlin Wall.

While Pereira's account contains multiple references to the international communist community, with training trips to Cuba and the USSR, it modifies the model of the communist life story by creating the image of a militant who not only was fashioned by the party but was able to correct the course of the party she served by being true to who she was – a mother before all else.

The diary is, in some respects, Pereira's act of what Blanco and Williams term 'creative imagination' (Blanco and Williams 2017: 2), published nearly half a century

after most of the events with which it engages. It avoids the ‘stigma of narcissism’ Blanco and Williams identify as a common accusation hurled at life-writing through the collective form it takes. In her critique of Georges Gusdorf’s influential argument that ‘the cultural precondition for autobiography [...] is a pervasive concept of individualism’, Susan Stanford Friedman asserts that Gusdorf’s ‘emphasis on individualism does not take into account the importance of a culturally imposed group identity for women and minorities’ (Friedman 1988: 34). Pereira’s work is presented as ‘os segredos de mais de setenta anos de vida’ (7) [the secrets of more than seventy years of life] by a ‘verdadeira narradora de histórias’ (8) [true narrator of stories], handed over to Semedo who furnishes part of the identity of the narrative voice.

In fact, a range of paratexts that surround Pereira’s diary, including a *cantiga* written in honour of Pereira by José Lopes and a preface by Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, reinforces the sense that this rendition of Pereira’s life story is not a solo act but a collective endeavour that rests on a network of voices. These voices foreground a diegetic sequence in which the marginal becomes the mainstream – the colonized African woman becomes the head of state.

The title of the diary, *Os meus três amores*, most probably points to Pereira’s three children but it could just as easily reference ‘family, party and country’. It clearly does not reference the three men with whom she formed relationships at various points in her life before concluding ‘já não dava mais para ter um companheiro. Estava a ser muito difícil gerir esse tipo de relação e decidi ficar só, trabalhar e acabar de cuidar dos meus filhos’ (Pereira 2016: 126) [having a partner no longer worked. It was really tough to manage this type of relationship and so I decided to stay on my own, to work and to finish bringing up my sons].

An over-arching tension to emerge in Pereira's account of the independence struggle and her subsequent life in the politics of Guinea-Bissau is that between family obligations (often although not always coded through motherhood) and a commitment to the party and its goals. She provides gripping first-hand testimony about the evolution in thinking vis-à-vis women's place in the struggle, history and revolution. She claims Amílcar Cabral once asked her 'que amor eu tinha, se era amor à pátria ou amor aos meus filhos? Encarei Cabral e disse-lhe que o meu primeiro amor era amor à pátria' (139) [which love did I have, whether it was love for the homeland or for my children? I looked Cabral in the eye and said my first love was love for the homeland]. In Pereira's account, Cabral replies by sending her to the USSR on a mission to help educate twenty young women, who were functionally illiterate, as a means to prove her militancy. He reassured her that the party would look after her children, something that pained her but that she accepted as necessary.

In her analysis of Ibárruri's autobiography, Gina Herrman points out how *La Pasionaria* 'employs confessional anecdotes from her private life, especially her struggles as an impoverished mother, so that she connects emotionally with her reading public' (Herrman 2010: 34). Pereira can be seen to do something very similar. She repeatedly emphasizes the personal deprivations she endured for the struggle, and most particularly the moments she feels she sacrificed her biological motherhood in the service of the nation. However, as Herrman points out in relation to Ibárruri, 'these episodes ultimately work in the service of the construction of [her] political maternity, and revelations of intimacy are constantly deferred' (34). A similar process occurs in Pereira's diaries. The reader is enjoined to feel empathy for a mother whose children were sent by the party to Cuba against her instincts and in the face of harsh family criticism, while understanding that Pereira assumed a maternal role, first for

those women whom she mentored during the liberation struggle, including those she chaperoned and effectively taught in Moscow, and then, for the nation as a whole in the post-independence era. At the same time, Pereira is repeatedly circumspect about her relationships, particularly with her first husband. Like *El único camino, Os meus três amores* is devoid of any ‘revelations of intimacy’ that may distract from a sense of driven purposefulness that characterizes the portrayal of Pereira’s life.

Pereira’s narrative offers a codicil to the widely held image of Amílcar Cabral as one of Africa’s leading male feminists. While her diaries never question his role as father of the nation, her subtle re-appraisal of Cabral bolsters her fashioning as the ‘National Mother’ because of how she recalls incidents in which she ‘maternally’ changed the ‘father’s’ mind.

Unlike other leaders of independence movements, Cabral is often depicted as putting the interests of women at the heart of the revolution. Patrick Chabal describes how ‘Cabral vigorously encouraged the education of girls and sought to combat the restrictions which the Muslims imposed on the social advancement of women’ (Chabal 1983: 118). He was primarily responsible for insisting that the five-member village committees that administered liberated zones during the war for independence had at least two women in positions of responsibility (Chabal 1983: 107). As Stephanie Urdang points out, ‘from the beginning of political mobilization for the war of liberation [...] the need for equality between men and women was made an explicit and integral part of the overall revolution’ (Urdang 1981: 120). The movement, according to W.O. Maloba ‘encouraged women to join the revolutionary struggle not only to dislodge the Portuguese oppressors but also to free themselves’ (Maloba 2007: 23). Yet, Pereira’s explanation of how she came to join the movement undermines

that vision of a PAIGC pushing for women to be part of the struggle from its inception.

Pereira discovered the existence of the movement by accident. Her first husband, Tito Lívio Vaz Fernandes, with whom she did not have a happy marriage although details about him are sparse in her diaries, fled Bissau for Senegal in 1961. He was being persecuted by the Portuguese secret police because of his membership of the PAIGC. A few years earlier, she had become curious about his activities. Rooting around in their house after a group of suspicious-looking people had met there, she came across ‘vários documentos debaixo da cama, estatutos, bandeira’ (Pereira 2016: 129) [several documents under the bed, statutes, a flag]. She challenged Tito when he returned home, telling him that she had read the papers and wanted to be part of the struggle too. Her husband told her she could not join the revolution, and nor could she mention it to anyone, as the movement was secret, and his comrades would assume he had betrayed it if they discovered she knew.

While Pereira is adamant in her description of Amílcar Cabral as ‘muito amigo das mulheres’ (130) [a great friend of women] who ‘estudava uma pessoa, dava-te vários trabalhos para ver até onde serás capaz de chegar’ (130) [would study a person, and give you several jobs to see what you were capable of], she also reveals the prejudices the PAIGC leader held about women in the early years of the independence struggle. In answer to a question by Semedo, who points out that Cabral, one of the leading intellectuals of his time, theorized relatively little about equality of the sexes, but was responsible for putting into practice mechanisms that sought to overcome gender prejudice, Pereira replies: ‘ele dizia que as mulheres gostam muito de contar passadas, e que se nos contasse o que ele pretendia, [...], nós, talvez, iríamos contar passadas, e as passadas não ficam num sítio, elas vão, e antes de

ele realizar algo já estaria tudo descoberto' (133) [he used to say that women really like to gossip, and that if he told us what he was up to, [...] we would, perhaps gossip, and gossip does not stay in one place, but goes around, and before he could actually do something, everything would be discovered]. In other words, for Cabral, women had a predisposition to reveal important secrets in a way that men supposedly did not. They could not be trusted to discern and, for that reason, needed to be kept out of the revolution. Nearly three decades after Pereira's initial encounters with Cabral, another great male feminist African revolutionary leader, Thomas Sankara, critiqued macho militants for stereotyping women as, among other things 'gossips' (Sankara 1990: 33) in the way Pereira claims Cabral once did.

To be clear, Pereira is extremely positive about Cabral. He was, without doubt, the greatest intellectual and political influence on her, and she is in no way challenging his primary role bringing Portuguese colonialism in Africa to an end, and also as one of the greatest male champions of women's rights on the continent. Her portrait, however, subtly reveals her part in his intellectual development, particularly in his attitude to the importance of women in and for the independence struggle.

A key characteristic of Pereira's portrait of Cabral is that he led by listening and learning. Despite being an unsurpassed theorist of the role of revolution in the independence struggle, he did not allow theoretical assumptions to stand in the way of his own self-development. He always sought to critique and overcome his own prejudices. Eventually, as Pereira points out, 'Cabral descobriu que as mulheres eram de confiança e eram fiéis. Ele depois veio a dizer-me que se ele soubesse levaria as mulheres às reuniões' (133) [Cabral discovered that women were trustworthy and loyal. Later he even told me that if he'd known, he would have taken women to the (revolutionary planning) meetings].

Reading between the lines of *Os meus três amores*, Pereira leaves her reader in no doubt of the importance of her role in dissipating Cabral's reluctance to sanction women's direct participation in the revolution. At the same time, she presents everything she did as part of a collective effort. She was always aware of the barriers of class and educational attainment in raising women's consciousness of the struggle. While Cabral 'apostou forte nas mulheres' (133) [bet the house on women], Pereira knew that 'a única coisa que dificultou era que as mulheres não tinham habilitações e as que tinham não foram à luta' (133) [the one thing that made things difficult was that women lacked formal education and those that had it did not join the struggle]. Her own path to the PAIGC had been thanks to her ability to read. This is why she felt the most important contribution in her life was leading twenty young girls on an educational mission to the Soviet Union.

The party leadership in Conakry was skeptical of the worth of the enterprise. Cabral set it as a test for Pereira – in particular, to glean the degree of her willingness to put her children second for the sake of the party, as she repeatedly asserts in *Os meus três amores*. Pereira had been to Moscow on a course on political theory along with nine other men, leaving her children behind because 'a luta exigia' (40) [the struggle demanded it]. She then returned to the USSR in charge of the group of women, most of whom could not read. Within three months, she claims that she had taught them enough literacy that they were able to copy phrases and sign a letter sent to Cabral from Kiev. 'Quando a carta chegou a Conacri foi como se fosse uma bomba, e muitos disseram que não era possível que em três meses as meninas tivessem conseguido isso' (47) [when the letter reached Conakry, it was like a bomb, and many said it wasn't possible that the girls had achieved this in three months].

Cabral's reaction, as reconstructed by Pereira, demonstrated his growing trust in the capacity of women to act as equals to men in the revolution: 'Cabral, como sempre se mostrou amigo e protetor das mulheres, mandou-me um telegrama encorajando as meninas e com a promessa de um dia visitá-las' (47) [Cabral, as always showed himself to be a friend and protector of women, and sent me a telegram encouraging the girls and with a promise to visit them one day].

As Cabral came to trust women in frontline positions of authority, he became increasingly aware of male comrades who did 'their utmost to prevent women taking charge, even when there are women who have more ability to lead than they do' (Cabral 1979: 71). In his 'Party Principles and Political Practice', he critiqued those men who 'do not want to understand that liberty for our people means women's liberation as well, sovereignty for our people means that women as well must play a part, and that the strength of our party is worth more if women join in as well to lead with the men' (Cabral 1979: 71). He pointed to those 'many folk' who 'say that Cabral has an obsession about giving women leadership positions', and who tried to sabotage this strategy at every turn. 'They can sabotage today, sabotage tomorrow, but one day it will catch up with them' (71). Given Pereira's account in *Os meus três amores*, Cabral appeared not always to have thought in such a feminist way, and it was part of Pereira's life story – her trajectory as a militant – that triggered progress in Cabral's feminist thinking.

In Pereira's portrayal, a central tension Cabral could not overcome was the role of motherhood in the revolution. He warned the women who returned from the USSR against falling pregnant. In a moment when he seemed to 'enlouquecer de tanta alegria' (Pereira 2016: 133) [be delirious with so much happiness] at the success of the women's mission, he cautioned 'num tom grave' [in an austere tone] that

‘nenhuma delas fosse ficar grávida, e quem ficasse grávida ia-se ver com ele’ (Pereira 2016: 133-34) [none of them should get pregnant, and whoever got pregnant would have to deal with him].

In Pereira’s account, even after Cabral outgrew his prejudiced view of women as inherently gossipy and thus a security risk to the struggle, he repeatedly saw children as a burden holding women’s participation in the revolution back. He did not want his female militants to be constrained by the obligations of child-rearing. He was not against children per se. Rather, he saw their education as a collective effort in which biological motherhood was secondary to the national cause. For Cabral, deploying people where their skill set was best suited was paramount. For him, Carmen Pereira was a natural and rare leader, who offered more to the revolution by founding hospitals in liberated areas, treating the wounded and educating cadres, than by staying at home rearing her off-spring and that of her relatively mediocre husband. His worldview ran counter to the trope of the womb-as-a-matrix-of-national-service that so distorted the liberation praxis of Mozambique and Angola. Yet, his position was not without its challenges, as becomes apparent through Carmen Pereira’s lived experience as she narrates it. It required a heavy price on her part, and she makes clear that although ceding the education of her children to others was a sacrifice she was willing to make for the greater good, it weighed heavily on her.

Margarida Calafate Ribeiro argues that Carmen Pereira ‘teve de mostrar não apenas que ser mãe e militante era possível, mas sobretudo que ser mãe a fazia uma melhor militante’ (Calafate Ribeiro 2016: 24) [had to show not only that being a mother and a militant was possible, but above all that being a mother made her a better militant]. There are instances when Pereira goes further, and implies that being a militant made her a better mother. She describes how the party determined her

children would be sent to Cuba to study. Ana Maria Cabral, Amílcar's wife, alerted her that she should hurry to Conakry to see them before they embarked for Havana. By the time Pereira arrived, they had left 'sem um beijo da mamã, senti-me só e desolada. Chorei muito!' (63) [without a mother's kiss, I felt alone and heart-broken. I cried a lot]. Pereira paints a picture of the episode in which she ostensibly blames herself for not arriving in time, and asserts she had no idea how to reach her own children. She was distraught for several months because 'falava-se mal de Cuba, e muitos camaradas perguntavam-me porque deixei que mandassem os três para Cuba' (63) [bad things were said about Cuba, and many comrades asked me why I let the three of them be sent to Cuba]. Rumours abounded about the horrendous conditions on the socialist island. Pereira feared her children would be exploited in the sugar cane fields. Cabral calmed her, reassuring her that Cuba was quite different to the rumours she heard, and guaranteed her children would be well looked after.

By the end of the year, Pereira was sent to Cuba as part of a delegation. There, she met up with her children again. Her joy at seeing them was compounded by seeing them so well, and in school learning. During her trip, 'os cubanos internacionalistas (...) permitiram que os três rapazes ficassem comigo' (64) [the Cuban internationalists (...) allowed the three lads to stay with me]. This is one of the times in the diaries that Pereira reveals the extent to which she really was a militant, whose commitment to the revolution was total. She questions neither the authority of Cabral to send her children to Cuba nor the authority of the Cubans to 'permit' her children to stay with her. At the same time, all her reactions are depicted as those of a loving mother, whose primary concern was the well-being of her sons.

When the time came for her to return to Africa, her youngest son, Armando, 'fez um escândalo que deixou todos nervosos' (64) [kicked up a fuss that left

everyone on edge]. He wanted to return to Africa with his mother. Pereira's reaction is somewhat curious, and demonstrates how she deemed motherhood to interact directly with militancy: 'como sou uma mãe forte, apesar de estar com o coração partido, fiz-lhe ver a necessidade dessa separação, embora depois levei horas a chorar no avião' (64) [as I am a strong mother, and despite being broken-hearted, I made him see the need for our separation, although I spent hours crying on the plane]. Her 'coração partido' is ambiguous and revealing of Pereira's unconscious. The broken heart of a mother is semantically haunted by the party (partido) to which she was committed. That party made her 'uma mãe forte' [a strong mother], able to exercise convincing reason over her tantrum-throwing son. She was both a mother and a militant, and stronger in both roles because of that fusion. As she puts it, 'com a ajuda de Deus e dos três rapazes, consegui mostrar ao Partido o que era ser mãe e militante' (33) [with the help of God and my three boys, I managed to show the party what it was to be a mother and a militant]. The reader of *Os meus três amores* is, however, left with the impression that although Pereira may have become a 'National Mother' as a result of her militancy and skill, her political maternity was earned through the sacrifice of being parted from her own children as they grew up.

Pereira confesses that whenever there was a meeting about women or children under the auspices of the Communist Party of Cuba, she was part of the delegation, 'para estar de novo com os meus três rapazes' (64) [to be together with my three boys again]. The confession is all the more potent because of her later assertion that 'nunca gostei de trabalhar com mulheres, embora eu sou mulher' (76) [I never liked to work with women, although I am a woman]. She claims that she does not know why, but that she always preferred to work alongside men, in party committees and in public life. To be in the company of women, and representing women, always bothered her.

She even resisted being head of the UDEMU, Guinea-Bissau's women's organization, and post-independence spurned the role to dedicate herself to work in the Ministry of Health.

UDEMU was charged with the mobilization of women in development projects. At its strongest, it focused on childcare provision and anti-alcoholism campaigns. Compared with the other independence movements in Lusophone Africa, the PAIGC took longer to establish a specifically women's movement, arguing for women's full participation in the struggle and not as an appendaged unit, at least once Cabral had concluded women were not all merely gossips. According to Joshua Forrest, by the 1990s UDEMU degenerated into a middle-class social club, based in Bissau, where it 'plays at best a symbolic role in perpetuating the myth that there is a genuine commitment to prioritize the progressive emancipation and equality of women' (Forrest 1992: 127).

Pereira may have sensed that a separate women's movement was destined to tokenism. She always strove to be treated as an equal to her male counterparts, while accepting the complete authority of the party, to the extent, as Semedo highlights, of 'colocando os filhos em segundo plano em ocasiões em que a missão era o Partido' (Semedo 2016: 11) [placing her children in second place when she had party business].

Pereira always juxtaposed the adventure of the revolution with the sacrifice that it and motherhood jointly posed. There was, however, never any doubt in her mind, and she swore that 'iria sacrificar-me para ser uma mãe exemplar' (Pereira 2016: 32) [I would sacrifice myself to be an exemplary mother]. Part of that exemplariness included redefining what motherhood could mean in the context of a

nation struggling for independence. Being a true mother meant, for Pereira, taking a leading role in the fight.

Her double-sacrifice – for party and children – brought her the opprobrium of the patriarchs around her. Her father was informed that she had ‘abandoned’ her children at the beginning of her involvement in the struggle, when she found them ‘com roupas completamente rotas, sem sandálias e fraquitos’ (42) [in complete rags, without sandals and very weak]. Her own reaction – as a someone who was brought up in the relatively high society of Portuguese Guinea’s assimilated elites – reveals her commitment to change and her understanding of the price that change entailed: ‘compreendi que era a luta’ (42) [I understood that was the struggle].

While Pereira repeatedly points to the necessary challenges negotiating motherhood and being a militant implied on a daily basis, she also demonstrates the need to be a ‘good’ wife or daughter are entirely patriarchal constructs that the party enabled her to elude. In other words, the liberation the party offered never discounted for Pereira the obligations of being a good mother – although it allowed the definition of what that meant to evolve. In contrast, her militancy was a way out of the confines of an unhappy marriage – a marriage that in the first instance had been a means to escape the unhappiness of seeing her mother’s anguished face as her father repeatedly womanized (Pereira 2016: 110). The result was that she had a marriage about which she ‘não gostaria de comentar’ (105) [would rather not comment], in an echo of the tact taken by La Pasionaria in *El único camino*. Thanks to the advances brought about by the PAIGC, Pereira was able to escape her marriage because Cabral asserted ‘cada mulher era livre de escolher com quem quisesse ficar’ (Pereira 2016: 121) [each woman was free to choose with whom they wished to stay].

*Os meus três amores* is, in part, a narrative that projects an explanation of how Cabral evolved to be so committed to the meaningful inclusion of and respect for women and their choices within the PAIGC. Its textual idiosyncracies – weaving an array of voices in the celebration of Guinea-Bissau’s ‘National Mother’ together with Pereira’s own posthumous testimony – simultaneously offers the unique perspective of a singular woman whose life and agency contributed to the independence of Guinea-Bissau and a testament to the elasticity of the autobiographic form. The honest expression of her anxieties as a mother dovetails with her unshakable, progressive conviction that stayed with her until the day she died. The resulting portrait is of a woman who prized motherhood so sincerely that she entrusted the education of her children to others, so that she could fight for a better future for all. In that sacrifice, the revolutionary and the mother were one.<sup>1</sup>

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