



**CLAIM  
NO EASY  
VICTORIES**

THE LEGACY OF  
**AMÍLCAR CABRAL**

EDITED BY  
FRANCIS MURRAY  
AND JUSTICE J.B.

# **CLAIM NO EASY VICTORIES**

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AMILCAR CABRAL**

**EDITED BY  
FIROZE MANJI & BILL FLETCHER JR**

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## IO. CABRAL

### HIS THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR TIME

Mustafah Dhada

#### Cabral Under Gaze

Several works<sup>43</sup> to date assess Amílcar Lopes Cabral, Luso-Africa's pre-eminent nationalist and thinker who spearheaded the fight to oust Portugal from Guinea-Bissau and the adjacent islands of Cape Verde. Some embed him in the context of this fight.<sup>44</sup> A handful focus

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43 Basil Davidson, *The Liberation of Guiné: Aspects of An African Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968; Gérard Chaliand, *Armed Struggle in Africa: With the Guerrillas in "Portuguese" Guinea*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969; Lars Rudebeck, *Guinea-Bissau, A Study in Political Mobilization*. Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1974; Oleg Ignatiev, *Amílcar Cabral, Filho de Africa: Narração Biográfica*. Lisbon: Prelo, 1975; Oleg Ignatiev, *Três Tiros da PIDE: Quem, Proquê e Como Mataram Amílcar Cabral?* Lisbon: Prelo, 1975; Stephanie Urdang, *Fighting Two Colonialisms: Women in Guinea-Bissau*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979; Patrick Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral, Revolutionary Leadership and People's War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; J. McCulloch, *In the Twilight of Revolution: The Political Theory of Amílcar Cabral*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983; R.E. Galli and J. Jones, *Guinea-Bissau: Politics, Economics and Society*. London: Francis Pinter, 1987; Ronald H. Chilcote, *Amílcar Cabral's Revolutionary Theory and Practice: A Critical Guide*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991; Joshua Forrest, *Guinea-Bissau, Power, Conflict, and Renewal in a West African Nation*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992; and Mustafah Dhada, *Warriors At Work, How Guinea Was Really Set Free*. Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993.

44 B. Davidson, G. Chaliand, and L. Rudebeck.



on him almost exclusively;<sup>45</sup> and a few discuss his political ideas.<sup>46</sup> The perspectives they offer vary. One set sees him as a Marxist-Leninist,<sup>47</sup> a hyphenated Gramscian-Marxist, Africa's answer to Lenin,<sup>48</sup> a "revolutionary par excellence",<sup>49</sup> or as good as Karl Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and others who "left us a legacy of revolutionary experience."<sup>50</sup> Others, persuaded by a lack of references to doctrinal tracts in his texts, seem less convinced of his portrayal as a hard-core ideologue and find him to be a Marxist in method but not ideology; a socialist; a revolutionary democrat perhaps.<sup>51</sup>

The resultant portrait, however, leaves Cabral fundamentally a Marxist, but with perspectives exogenous to him unchallenged. Today, Cabral emerges a composite of twenty or more characteristics, each competing with the other for attributive supremacy in the Marxist canon. There is evidence to suggest that Marx and Mao may well have influenced him.

But Cabral was far more complex than that. Almost all the scholars in the field acknowledge this to a degree. One or two scholars even go so far as to construct him as "Africa's philosopher King,"<sup>52</sup> and "the supreme educator in the wisest sense, or an empiricist devoid of ideological dogmatism and rigidity,"<sup>53</sup> making this type of assessment in the context of revolutionary thought. One author elects to project him as a humanist, a pragmatist, an undaunted optimist at the end, a dominant, friendly,

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45 Chabal and McCulloch

46 *ibid.*

47 J. McCulloch, p. 57.

48 *ibid.*

49 Gérard Chaliand, "Amílcar Cabral," *International Journal of Politics*, 7, Winter 1977-1978:3.

50 Ronald H. Chilcote, *Amílcar Cabral's Revolutionary Theory*, p. 13.

51 P. Chabal, pp. 31, 37, 67, 144, 158, 167, 168, and 169.

52 C. Chapman, "Africa's Philosopher King" *The London Times Higher Education Supplement*, 19 August 1983:12

53 P. Chabal, pp. 31, 37, 67, 144, 158, 167, 168, and 169.

tolerant, charismatic leader- a teacher,<sup>54</sup> while another claims him to be a unifier of people.<sup>55</sup>

Those that see Cabral as a complex personality, above or outside doctrinal Marxism, do so as part of a discourse on the armed struggle and the diplomacy for liberation that accompanied it. These scholars focus on a specific area of his life pertinent to a given discourse.<sup>56</sup> Such works attempt to encapsulate Cabral in a broader context, but are seen by critics as only partially successful in capturing Cabral's essential core.<sup>57</sup> These works are subsequently determined as having failed to see him outside hagiography.

Cabral himself saw his leadership to fight for liberty as part of a larger whole. "Nobody is indispensable," said Cabral. "...An achievement is worthwhile to the extent that it is an achievement of many...even if one pair of hands is taken away."<sup>58</sup>

Placing aside Marxist influence on him, it could be argued that Cabral was Cabral, a complex meta-racial African.<sup>59</sup> As such, a closer look at his life and works suggests a triad governed him: external inputs, internal reflection and reflexive action. Viewed this way, he emerges deservedly complex, intact, and with a core of his own rather than that of a Marxist derivative.

No one has yet produced a full-scale, stand-alone and up-to-date biography on him, much to everyone's regret—Chabal's 1980 monograph on Cabral and Chilcote's latest<sup>60</sup> *Opus Bibliograficae* notwithstanding. Paulo Freire perhaps comes nearest to the jugular as does Mário de Andrade, describing Cabral holistically,<sup>61</sup> from inside out as it were, as a dialectically unified personality—a public figure internally balanced between words and actions.<sup>62</sup>

54 P. Chabal, pp. 31, 37, 67, 144, 158, 167, 168, and 169.

55 T. Kofi, "Prospects and Problems of the Transition from Agrarianism to Socialism: The Case of Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique," *World Development* 9,9-10:856

56 Dhada, *WOW*.

57 Dhada, *WOW*, 139-148.

58 Amílcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*. London: Heinemann, 1980, 96.

59 Amílcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, p. xii.

60 Ronald H. Chilcote, *Amílcar Cabral's Revolutionary Theory*.

61 Paulo Freire, *Cartas à Guiné-Bissau de uma Experiência em Processo*. Lisbon: Moraes, 1978, 18

62 *ibid*

Indeed, Cabral saw himself this way—as an ordinary man who lived life intensely and drew from it experiences that gave him direction.<sup>63</sup> His reflections informed his actions, springing forth in the end as analytical responses calibrated for praxis. Cabral was immensely creative in this way, and the balance between words and actions informed his strategies throughout his professional and political career.

To understand the context of his experience, Cabral reflected over empirical evidence, explored viewpoints in normative discourses and engaged in vigorous discussions and discords with friends living a colonial reality similar to his; all of which cumulatively neutralized the toxicity of the colonial experience mining him within.

The colonial experiences—structural, environmental, racial and creative in nature—had brought Cabral to witness poverty, drought (catalyzed by asymmetric colonial agricultural policies), economic marginality, racial profiling and preference in the Bissau civil service, abuse of the rule of law in the colonies and in the metropolis and restrictions on creative liberties in the media and the performing arts.

Furthermore, travels on professional assignments to Angola had brought him face to face with the inner workings of plantation economy, as did his travels and discussions with political activists, party officials, and networking contacts in Egypt, Guinée-Conakry, Morocco, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Senegal, Tunisia, China, and the United Kingdom and a host of other countries in Africa and Europe.<sup>64</sup> In Guinea itself, he and his team traveled over 60,000 kilometers, visiting 2248 hamlets<sup>65</sup> to produce a 200 page commissioned report evaluating the colony's agricultural demography.

These experiences and encounters, reflections and normative inputs shaped him and his thinking, which subsequently informed his strategy for national liberation from Portuguese colonialism. Cabral thus rose above his condition to serve as a normative future, a call befitting the greater good above the need of the personal and the present.

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63 Amílcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, p. xii.

64 Mustafah Dhada, "Guinea-Bissau's Diplomacy and Liberation Struggle" *Portuguese Studies Review*, IV, 1, 1995: 20-40.

65 Dhada, *WAW*, 146.

## **His Writings and Thoughts**

One of Cabral's first most significant nontechnical texts analyzed the social structures under colonialism. It was published as a seminal paper in August 1964.<sup>66</sup> Cabral drew inspiration for this narrative from two sources: archival research of Portuguese colonial documents in Lisbon during his student days in the late 1940s and 1950s and studies in demographic agronomy undertaken during his stay in Bissau prior to the formation of his bi-nationalist movement. *Warriors At Work*, a monograph on the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, gives a detailed breakdown of Cabral's thinking here.<sup>67</sup> This structural analysis highlighted Guinea-Bissau as a tapestry of eighteen social segments of fragmented dependencies, serving sectors of the colonial demography in a complex structural web. Each segment was assessed according to its position and privilege under colonialism, the degree of depletion of its sovereign identity or a mixture of both. At one extreme, a segment was seen as having been denuded of a will to create transformational change, while another segment was identified as nihilistic, unable to entertain change for a future without colonialism. This sector, according to Cabral, was unwilling to engage in revolutionary actions driven by a goal for self-determination, or what he called "an individual's mastery over nature"<sup>68</sup> (nature here signifying the status quo).

Two years later this analysis became a blueprint for action to oust Portugal from Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, during the mobilization drive, which also drew on his critical readings of literary works, poetry and drama and his experience as a former radio talk show host. Again, a detailed narrative of how this campaign was executed and how it entailed performance-based canvassing are to be found documented in broad strokes in Patrick Chabal's seminal work<sup>69</sup> and in *Warriors At Work*,

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66 Amílcar Cabral, "The Struggle in Guinea" *International Socialist Journal*, 1, 4, August 1964: 428-446.

67 Dhada, *WAW*, 224-226.

68 Ibid.

69 P. Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral, Revolutionary Leadership and People's War*.

though the latter engages in a more Cartesian perspective, sticking very close to the evidence while eschewing generalities lacking documentable specificity.<sup>70</sup>

In 1966, Cabral finally completed constructing a theoretical template for liberation, which distilled what he saw, what he learned in the field, as it were, and what he could draw from it. He revealed this template in early summer of that year during his visit to Cuba at the formation of *Tricontinental*, a 3<sup>rd</sup> World Solidarity organisation.<sup>71</sup> The meeting proved critical for him and his organisation to solicit material support, much needed for the armed struggle. Cabral sought to attract donors in two ways: by demonstrating the strength behind his movement and by conveying the visionary caliber of his leadership. To this end, he delivered a tightly woven presentation suggesting his movement to be solidly grounded in sound theory. This presentation, namely, “The Weapon of Theory”<sup>72</sup> proved to be the first of several public texts outlining his thinking on the social construction of identity, culture, and liberty.

Three years later Cabral deployed the Weapon of Theory framework to analyze the crises that his bi-nationalist movement faced. The analysis engendered a seldom-examined five-part study on political to economic, armed and cultural types of resistance.<sup>73</sup> It was this analysis that helped him and his movement tackle internal dissent and external challenges related to the armed struggle against Portugal. Discourses in

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70 Dhada, *WAW*, 6-7, 9-12, 214-15, 222-24,

71 Dhada, *WAW*, 177.

72 Amílcar Cabral, “The Weapon of Theory,” Address delivered to the first Tricontinental Conference of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America held in Havana in January, 1966. <http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/cabral/1966/weapon-theory.htm>, accessed 22 January 2013.

73 Amílcar Cabral, “Análise de Alguns Tipos de Resistência.” Lisbon: CIDAC Repository, 1969; Amílcar Cabral, “Análise de Alguns Tipos de Resistência: 1. Resistência Política.” Lisbon: CIDAC Repository, 1969; Amílcar Cabral, “Análise de Alguns Tipos de Resistência: 2. Resistência Económica.” Lisbon: CIDAC Repository, 1969; Amílcar Cabral, “Análise de Alguns Tipos de Resistência: 3. Resistência Cultural.” Lisbon: CIDAC Repository, 1969; and, Amílcar Cabral, “Análise de Alguns Tipos de Resistência: 4. Resistência Armada.” Lisbon: CIDAC Repository, 1969.

this five-part study ultimately went on to inform two of his subsequent and what later proved to be final texts on identity, culture and national liberation.

One text “national liberation and culture” was delivered on 20 February 1970 at Syracuse University, a year after Eduardo Mondlane’s assassination.<sup>74</sup> That same very text appeared in Wolfer’s critical 1980 edition *Unity and Struggle*.<sup>75</sup> The last text “The Role of Culture in the Liberation Struggle”<sup>76</sup> was crafted during the summer of 1972, six months before his own assassination, at ten-thirty at night on 20 January 1973.<sup>77</sup>

The Syracuse text proved challenging to deliver. Up to this point, Cabral, like other Luso-African nationalist leaders, was unwelcome in the US. Cabral had visited the United States once before, in New York in 1962, to convince the UN’s Fourth committee to recognise the bi-nationalist movement he was leading.<sup>78</sup> During the succeeding eight years, Cabral failed to gain entry into the United States; largely because the latter’s NATO-based alliance with Lisbon helped the United States with its Vietnam-focused logistic needs for military facilities and bases in the Azores.

In 1970, however, things changed. A few months before the event at Syracuse, the Vatican, which was in the throes of Vatican II and which was headed by Pope John the XXIII, recognised Cabral’s movement

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74 Eduardo Mondlane was assassinated near Dar-e-Salam on 3 February 1969 at the age of 41. Mondlane was American educated with an undergraduate degree from Oberlin and a doctorate from Northeastern. He was then heading the fight to free Mozambique had been assassinated near Dar-e-Salam. See, Anon, “In Memory of Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane ‘53,” Oberlin: Oberlin College, at [http://www.oberlin.edu/alummag/oampast/oam\\_spring98/Alum\\_n\\_n/eduardo.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/alummag/oampast/oam_spring98/Alum_n_n/eduardo.html), accessed 05 November 2012. See also, William Minter, “An Unfinished Journey,” *No Easy Victories: African Liberation and American Activists over a Half-Century, 1950-2000*. Washington, DC: Africa World Press, 2007. Also obtainable at <http://www.no-easyvictories.org/select/nev-front.pdf>, accessed on 05 November 2012.

75 Amílcar Cabral, Maurice Taonezvi Vambe, Abebe Zegeye and Michael Wolfers, *Unity and Struggle: Selected Speeches and Writings*. Pretoria, South Africa: Unisa Press, 2008.

76 Amílcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*.

77 Dhada, *WAW*, 46-48.

78 Dhada, *WAW*, 179.

and those led by fellow Luso-Africans fighting for self-determination in Angola and Mozambique. Thereafter, the American position on Luso-African nationalism softened. Cabral was not only granted entry to deliver the memorial lecture, but was subsequently invited to speak to the Senate hearings on the Portuguese colonies. Put differently, both Cabral and the text were received well, given the circumstantial trajectory of his entry into the United States.

### **How He Viewed Culture, Identity, and Self-Determination**

Cabral saw culture as a process of individual and social consciousness, resulting in a dynamic synthesis. This synthesis engaged “the material and spiritual historical reality of a society or human group” as a discourse “between man and nature as well as among men and among social classes or sectors.”<sup>79</sup> Identity on the other hand, according to Cabral, was the affirmation or negation of characteristics by an individual along a “bio-social and historical” continuum.<sup>80</sup>

For Cabral, then, identity was an informed choice with which to affirm or negate a given culture. That choice was arrived at or catalyzed through a creative force. Education in its broadest sense was one such creative force, as were the fine arts and performance and radio theater. As such, this creative force played a clear multidimensional role as a rectifier of deficiencies, as a builder of capacity for choosing identity and as a tool for empirical, existential and iterative self-realignment. Whether catalyzed by forces outside one or from within, public-fora education was a trans-disciplinary key to progress. His own early multidisciplinary forays into poetry, dramaturgy, mass media arts and communication, the natural sciences and agronomy were a testament to this perspective, as was his inclination to use his colonized life as a

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79 Anon, *Guinea-Bissau: Towards Final Victory! Selected Speeches and Documents From PAIGC*. Richmond, Canada: Liberation Support Movement: 1974, 46.

80 *ibid.*

learning process. Life-long learning therefore transcended disciplinary bounds for creative self-growth.

When fed by external reflexive forces and processed internally through iterative analysis, a white could thus claim to be an African by choice, as could a Black elect to be a European in theory. In theory only; in practice, colonialism complicated the prospect of Blacks as Europeans.

Cabral saw colonialism as a complex shape-shifter, not a zero-sum entity dominantly developing Europe, as Rodney's text would suggest. In its totality, colonialism was a force of cultural occupation in Africa. In contact with the local population colonialism pushed, tugged and pulled the social fabric of the subjugated, shaking it loose, while driving the most susceptible to socio-economic extremities and the least vulnerable—and fewer in number—towards cultural and socio-economic collusive supremacy, in cahoots with the empire.

Assimilation policies proved singularly effective in furthering imperial interests here. They formalized entries for the assimilated into the upper margins of society, Cabral suggests. By using literacy prequalifiers, colonialism targeted such individuals for colonial agency, thereby inducing “desenraizamento”—alienation through upheaval. Ultimately, with this process in place, the assimilated assumed a colonialized identity, servicing Portugal as cultural occupationists. Such individuals lived, by their very definition, on both margins of society, estranged from their own culture and on the fringe of the dominant colonial culture. Their impact on the majority was pernicious, divisive, and variegated.

It is here that a return to the source must play a role in self-determination, a first step in the struggle to decolonise. To find themselves from within and in the context of their own culture, such individuals, according to Cabral, must return to the source. They must “re-Africanize,” build a series of biosocial and historical matrices on which to begin a process of self-validation and, by linear extension, wean themselves off colonialism.

Of course there is nothing to prevent such individuals from staying put. But to do so is to continue the validation of a culturally occupying force, which in turn was antiliberation, a choice outside self-determining history. Were such individuals to commit as it were cultural “suicide,” however,



they were not bound to construct a matrix from whence they originally sprang. They could turn to alternative sources of nonimperial culture, or graft a composite. In his own case he elected to re-Africanize, reclaiming his African roots while dermally retaining his Cape-Verdean socio-biological nativity. In short, he became a bi-nationalist.

It is not surprising that Cabral came to these sets of heuristic conclusions for his own process of self-determination. In retrospect, it is clear that this process was largely dictated by two sets of experiences mentioned earlier in this text. The first set sprang largely from his colonial encounters, before, during and immediately after his university days in Lisbon, before his arrival in Guinea-Bissau; and the second set emerged from the lived-in experience as a fighter leading the struggle against Portuguese colonialism.

Further, it is important to point out that Cabral here is not advocating a process of individuation, as the term is used in Jungian psychology.<sup>81</sup> No. He is asking that the rediscovery of the new self be part of a larger social and cultural collective. He saw individualism as a scab, residually stripping native culture of its dignity. In a sense, Cabral is therefore at odds with Senghor's idea of validation of a dominant European colonial culture, particularly one that encourages subsumption of African social-cultural realities.

Once reconstructed, Cabral envisioned such de-assimilated elites catapulting ahead to lead the party. Even here, Cabral notes with caution, this sudden rise to power was fraught with peril for the party and ultimately the nation. One such peril was nepotism. Basil Davidson chose to call it mountain-topism, a term used by the Chinese under Mao's leadership to denote corruption and graft. Cabral was astute to recognise this as a possibility within his party—and for good reason. After all, these assimilated leaders had in the past abused power as enablers of cultural occupation under Portuguese colonialism.

He was therefore right to suspect that this trend would infect his own party, which it did in early seventies as it battled the efficacy of Spínola's

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81 Jolande Jacobi and R Manheim, *Complex, Archetype, Symbol In The Psychology of C. G. Jung*. London: Routledge, 1999, 113-114.

military campaign to undercut the Cabral-led gains in liberating Guinea-Bissau. Again, he used a combination of measures to combat nepotism, after having failed to eliminate it with draconian purges after public trials. The newly minted measures ranged from public fora education to workshops and problem-resolution based conferences involving party cadres as solution providers. Such tendencies, he firmly believed, could be obviated or dealt with through discipline, vigilance and public education, designed to defeat sectarianism with service for the benefit of the greater and larger whole. In effect, Cabral here was using his own version of “mini-Conference Nationale,” a *Magna Vox Populi*, if you like—a formalized institutionally sacred space in which “the people-as-no-one” negotiated conflicts and settled pressing issues of nationalist concerns as a lived-in experience under an ideological banner.<sup>82</sup>

### **The Conclusive Context**

Can Cabral’s thoughts and actions address the challenges we face in contemporary nationalist politics in Africa and beyond? As stated above, for Cabral culture was a relational matrix, governing humans in their natural context, a matrix openly adaptive towards an objective. Identity was an act of volition, docking one’s consciousness to a culture of choice, driven towards a purpose. Taken together, culture and identity, when operationalized this way, drove the dynamics of self-determination forward. Of course, where such dynamics derailed from its purpose, public fora or “self-determination conferences” ensured that both culture and identity were re-oriented towards the struggle for liberty under self-determination. This task of reorientation was achieved by negotiating conflicts collectively, in the Claude Lefortian sense of the world.

Put differently, the ailments festering in contemporary nationalism in Africa and globally could benefit a great deal from Cabral’s ideas as praxis. His concept of culture as a malleable force for national consciousness and nation building could prove immensely useful—in resolving

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82 See, Bernard Flynn, *The Political Philosophy of Claude Lefort: Interpreting the Political*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005.

crises in ideology, in addressing atomized partisanship and in tackling conflicts festered by identity politics, race, and warring cultures. His advocacy to dock identity to culture as a Cartesian choice could facilitate greater consciousness for an all-inclusive social pluralism, a pluralism that celebrates diversity and acceptance. Such a stance would therefore render identity an act of choice and not an inheritance dictated by accidents of birth and reinforced by divisive social conditioning. His framework of a national conference could well help address broader national crises threatening the very fabric of constitutional politics, national integrity and sovereignty. This concept has recently been proposed as an idea in praxis and is to be found in a published text penned by this author on the national crises that America faces.<sup>83</sup>

In a few words then, Cabral is indeed relevant in the world in which we presently live.

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83 For an example of how Cabral's Magna Vox Populi could be used for resolving a potential national crisis see, Mustafah Dhada, "America: Have We Crossed The Rubicon?" *Empirical*, November 2012, 39-48.