

Cabral: A Revolutionary of Double Belonging: The Ninth Pan-Africa Newsletter (2024)



Serge Attukwei-Clotey (Ghana), *My Mother's Wardrobe*, 2015.

One hundred years ago, on 12 September 1924, in Bafatá, a territory of what was then known as Portuguese Guiné (today, Guinea-Bissau), Amílcar **Cabral** was born. He moved to his parents' homeland, Cape Verde, when he was eight years old, when his father, a primary school teacher, retired. In Cape Verde, Cabral attended high school and started to write poetry. This double belonging would mark his life. And his death, too.

Cabral graduated as one of the best students in his school and moved to Lisbon, Portugal, in 1945 on an agronomy fellowship. His encounters with colonial racism were undoubtedly a motivation for his burgeoning nationalism. It was the era of dictator António Salazar, the father of the Estado Novo ('New State'), who dodged pressure to end Portugal's presence in Africa by integrating the colonies into the definition of Portugal. In the Estado Novo Constitution, Portugal did not have colonies but overseas provinces.

No wonder the struggle to end colonialism started in the empire's capital, with Cabral and other African students in Portugal, before spreading to Africa. Portugal had done so little to educate Africans that Portuguese authorities were aware that those talented few, such as Mário Pinto de Andrade, Agostinho Neto, Marcelino dos Santos, were destined to lead the anti-colonial movement. The surveillance, repression, and control over these students by the secret police taught them how to conspire against the empire. Once they finished their studies, they all set upon different paths. The Angolan nationalist Mário Pinto de Andrade worked at the francophone journal of the African diaspora, *Présence Africaine*, in the late 1950s. Agostinho Neto returned to Angola, to work on the incipient nationalist contestation. This band of revolutionaries brought all the techniques they had learned to the organisations they founded to end colonialism in Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guiné, and São Tomé.



Manuel Figueira (Cape Verde), *Pesando o peixe* ('Weighing the Fish'), 1978.

In 1953, Cabral moved to Guiné as an agronomist working for the colonial state. His position allowed him to move inside and outside the Portuguese colonial empires. He was instrumental in keeping the Lusophone counterinsurgency alive, travelling to other parts of the Portuguese empire (such as Cape Verde, São Tomé, Angola, and Mozambique) and other European centres (such as Paris, London, and Berlin), where Lusophone nationalists had found refuge from the crackdown led by Salazar's secret police. Because of his role in connecting and galvanising the whole structure of the Lusophone counterinsurgency, he was nicknamed the 'revolutionary messenger.'

In Guiné, Cabral founded the Partido Africano para Independência da Guiné e de Cabo Verde ('African Party for the Liberation of Guiné and Cape Verde' or **PAIGC**) which mobilised the youth for the armed struggle against colonialism. He used some of the insurgency techniques he learned amongst his peers in Lisbon, forming groups to discuss cultural issues. However, the agricultural census was his most decisive undertaking as an agronomist. It allowed him to visit the whole country and meet thousands of farmers. The census had been commissioned by the Food and Agriculture Organisation to enable a better understanding of agricultural production in the region. The foremost questions in Cabral's mind were: what was the relationship between agricultural production and the country's social structure, which ethnic groups were involved in the production of specific crops, and how much detail could the census gather on these topics? This experience not only profoundly enriched his knowledge of the future terrain for guerilla fighting, the best times of the year to conduct activities, and the ethnic composition of Guiné, but he also became acquainted with elders across the country. He would later persuade them to join the struggle.



Aida Muluneh (Ethiopia), *Sai Mado, The Distant Gaze*, 2016.

The anti-colonial war broke out in 1963, and although its goals were the independence of both Guiné and Cape Verde, the military uprising only took place in the former. Notably, Cabral never seriously considered ending the war through a military decision. Instead, he used war to prepare the country for the postcolonial order, creating liberated zones or zones out of Portuguese control. There, the people created their own forms of self-rule.

Cabral was brutally killed in 1973 before reaping the fruits of independence. Cabral's belief in the unity between Cape Verdeans and Bissau-Guineans fueled the independence of both countries. With the proclamation of Guinea-Bissau's independence in September 1974, the new government integrated members

of both countries, even if Cape Verde's government didn't. The circumstances of his death speak volumes to the issues of identity and belonging he obsessed over for most of his life. He was killed by Guineans who felt that Cape Verdeans had too much ascendancy in the PAIGC.



Nú Barreto, *La Source, États Désunis d'Afrique* ('The Source, Disunited States of Africa'), 2018.

The ousting of the first president of Guinea, Luís Cabral, brother of Amílcar Cabral, was also called a 'second death' because it put a definitive end to the dream of unity between both countries. Nonetheless, as I reflect on Cabral's legacy 100 years after his birth, I believe he accomplished the triumph for which he had sacrificed his life. His legacy has grown in stature in the years since his death, except perhaps maybe in Portugal, where as in his times, he is still considered a second-class Portuguese citizen, but his memory is held close by the black communities residing there. Closer to his home, attempts at reading his struggle for lessons today are more alive in Cape Verde than in Guinea-Bissau, but I see his vision of unity and liberation continues to inspire countless movements across Africa and the diaspora.

Warmly,

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