

**AMÍLCAR CABRAL AND THE INSTRUMENTAL AND  
UTILITARIAN ROLE OF THE PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE  
IN THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE  
IN GUINEA AND CAPE VERDE**

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## **Amílcar Cabral and the instrumental and utilitarian role of the Portuguese language in the struggle for independence in Guinea and Cape Verde<sup>1</sup>**

*The struggle for national liberation in the Portuguese colonies raised extensive debates and critical reflections regarding whether liberation movements should adopt the coloniser's language as a tool for contesting colonialism or prioritise linguistic decolonisation as part of their resistance efforts. In the specific case of the PAIGC, the topic was the subject of multiple discussions, as evidenced by the interventions of its leader, Amílcar Cabral. Indeed, the existence of different positions regarding the matter reveals the complexity of the issue. This paper will examine Amílcar Cabral's theoretical contributions to the sociolinguistic debate on the use of the Portuguese language by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). It also aims to update existing knowledge on the subject.*

**Keywords:** Amílcar Cabral, Portuguese language, instrumental and utilitarian, Guinea and Cape Verde, national liberation

## **Amílcar Cabral e o papel instrumental e utilitário da língua portuguesa na luta pela independência na Guiné e Cabo Verde**

*A luta pela libertação nacional nas colónias portuguesas levantou grandes debates e reflexões críticas sobre se os movimentos de libertação deveriam adotar a língua do colonizador como um instrumento de contestação do colonialismo ou priorizar a des-colonização linguística no âmbito dos seus esforços de resistência. No caso específico do PAIGC, o tema foi objeto de múltiplas discussões, como é demonstrado pelas intervenções do seu líder, Amílcar Cabral. De facto, a existência de diferentes posições sobre o assunto revela a complexidade da questão. Este artigo analisa as contribuições teóricas de Amílcar Cabral para o debate sociolinguístico sobre a utilização da língua portuguesa pelo Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC). Procura igualmente atualizar os conhecimentos existentes sobre o tema.*

**Palavras-chave:** Amílcar Cabral, língua portuguesa, instrumental e utilitário, Guiné e Cabo Verde, libertação nacional

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When Viriato da Cruz, the renowned leader of Angolan nationalism, declared that “language is like the stone that David and Goliath threw at each other” (Da Cruz, 1960), he was highlighting a powerful metaphor about the role of language in colonial and anticolonial struggle. The statement reflects Da Cruz’s understanding of language as a tool that could be wielded by both the coloniser and the colonised. Language no longer belongs exclusively to a people, culture and civilisation when it transcends a geographical border. This principle seems evident in the case of the Portuguese language in the territories colonised by Portugal in Africa, as well as all its vicissitudes, semantics, and phonetic derivations, since it began to penetrate different geographies of the world.

It was from the second quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards that what can be called the linguistic globalisation of modern times was inaugurated, giving rise to various creoles with a Portuguese lexical base, such as those from Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. The emergence of Creole was also influenced by contributions from other European languages (French, Spanish and Danish) and West African coastal languages, such as Mandinka and Wolof, which are very present in Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau Creole (Lobban, 2018; Rego, 2015; Rougé, 2006).

The debate surrounding the origin of the Creole language(s) of Guinea and Cape Verde remains unresolved, with no consensus having been reached among scholars. According to Couto, the Creole language most likely emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the region between the Casamansa River and the Cacine River (Couto, 1994). These areas were frequented by European caravels and served as important trading ports.

However, the Cape Verdean ethnologist and historian, Antonio Carreira, offers a different explanation of the origin of the Creole of the islands. According to him, Cape Verde’s Creole was formed on the island of Santiago in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and later introduced to the west coast of Africa (Carreira, 1982). However, we cannot rule out the possibility that there were several centres in the development of Creole: the insular nucleus (which originated on the island of Santiago), and several centres on the mainland. The latter refers to various towns and ports on the African coast between the Senegal River and the Rio Grande de Buba, frequented by traders, sailors, pilots and missionaries (Portuguese, Spanish and other European nationalities). Examples include the ports of Arrecife and Rufisco (Santos, 1993), or the centres of Joale, Ale, Caçao, Cacheu, Tubabodaga (now Farim), Bissau, Guinalá (now Quinará) and Biguba (now Buba), where Creole societies began to emerge.

However, this process of globalisation of the Portuguese language, which radiated from the Iberian Peninsula to these different geographies, should not be

seen as the only exclusive and most powerful legacy that Portugal, as a colonial power, left to the different areas of its colonisation, as argued by Amílcar Cabral (Benoît de L'Estoile, 2023; Kohl, 2018).

Furthermore, it contributes to the feeling of national consciousness, the sense of belonging to the same community, and of maintaining the status quo of the borders established by the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. Alongside the significant and enduring legacy of the Portuguese language, these are undoubtedly among the distinctive marks that imperial Portugal sought to impose on its territories. Even today, as noted by scholars such as Ernest Gellner (Gellner, 1993) and José Carlos Venâncio (Venâncio, 2000), territorial and ethnic rationalities in these regions often do not align. Nevertheless, Portuguese remains the official language in these former colonies. The three dimensions mentioned – national consciousness, sense of belonging to the community, and maintenance of colonial borders – indeed served as important benchmarks for the African elite challenging Portuguese colonialism after World War II. These dimensions, anchored to language, were intertwined with the ideological tools of Marxism, Pan-Africanism, and Negritude that African leaders employed in their struggle. The assumption of these dimensions as references was not without its dilemmas. In the specific instance of the PAIGC, it can be argued that there was a lack of comprehension regarding the rationale behind the maintenance and defence of a language – Portuguese – within the liberation movement's educational institutions. This language was perceived as the language of the coloniser or the language of the foreigner.

In defence of Guinea and Cape Verde, and especially in the former, where Creole and a plurality of mother tongues and ethnic groups existed, the situation was complex. The critics of the liberation movements argued that the coloniser language had been (and was) used by colonialism to exclude the vast majority of the population in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea. This was accomplished through several legal provisions, namely the Colonial Act (*Acto Colonial*) of 1930 and, for example, the *Estatuto dos Indígenas Portugueses da Guiné, Angola e Moçambique*, published on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1954, and also by the actions of the regime itself, through its mechanisms of coercion. For example, the exclusionary colonial system accentuated the dichotomy between the so-called “civilised” and the “indigenous”. The former were all those “individuals of black race or their descendants” who had assimilated Portuguese cultural, civilisational and linguistic values (Rudebeck, 1974). The latter, also of the “black race or their descendants” who were deemed to lack “illustration” (education or cultural refinement), and were therefore deprived of civil and political rights. The change of status, in the

context of the *indigenato*, implied, among other things, speaking the Portuguese language correctly (United Nations Office of Public Information, 1970, p. 7).

These rules prevented the majority of Africans from enjoying full citizenship, which in itself was highly exclusionary. The social and political exclusion of around 99% of people in Guinea, as well as the indiscriminate violence (armed, physical and psychological), would justify and explain the emergence of modern nationalism and the national liberation struggles, led essentially by a petty-bourgeois elite who did their schooling, political and ideological training between their territories of origin and Portugal.

It should also be noted that the penetration of the colonial ideology generated great ambiguities in this elite from the outset of their socialisation process. That is why, in the specific case of Amílcar Cabral, all the rhetoric about the importance of the Portuguese language would place that language at odds with the mother tongues or with Creole, engendering debates, and criticism from some of his co-religionists. Looking at the other main or effective liberation movements in Angola (MPLA) and Mozambique (FRELIMO), one can even say there were discrepant positions and perspectives between these three movements on the language issue.

It is, therefore, our intention in this article to study precisely this interaction and evolution of the linguistic debate, essentially with Amílcar Cabral and within the framework of the struggle for independence in Guinea and Cape Verde. The focus of this analysis will always be on the promise of a radical transformation of colonial structures, which animated the PAIGC leadership in the process of revolutionary rejection of colonial assimilation and the assumption of a new political, social and cultural order. We will then try to answer the following relevant question, which Odeté da Costa Semedo (Semedo, 1996) and Moema Augel (Augel, 2007) have already asked: What language should be adopted in this process of rejecting and contesting colonialism?

In an attempt to answer this question, we will primarily use archival material from the Mário Soares Foundation (FMS) – *Casa Comum* – which preserves and makes available (online) an important collection on Amílcar Cabral and the PAIGC. At the same time, we will also review the literature that has addressed the central question under analysis. This paper will be divided into three sections, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The first section addresses how the debate on the adoption (or not) of the Portuguese language unfolded across the liberation movements of Portuguese colonies throughout the 1960s. The second section will focus on how the PAIGC and its then leader, Amílcar Cabral, viewed and conceived the adoption of the Portuguese language from a

dual perspective: as an instrument of domination, but also of liberation. Finally, a third section will analyse the pragmatic and instrumental character with which Cabral viewed the Portuguese language, especially regarding how it served to communicate and express reality.

## The linguistic debate within the national liberation movements

As a starting point for our analysis, it is worth noting that although he was born in Guinea (Bafatá, 1924), Amílcar Cabral was of Cape Verdean descent. His parents (Iva Pinhel Évora and Juvenal Lopes Cabral) were both originally from the island of Santiago (Sousa, 2016a). This condition of Amílcar Cabral is highly relevant when analysing his stance in the debate on the so-called language of the coloniser – the Portuguese language – during the struggle for independence of Guinea and Cape Verde. It has to be said that the same debate ran through the MPLA and FRELIMO. In addition to being Cape Verdean through *ius sanguinis*, Cabral also benefited from *ius soli* because he was born in Guinea (Sousa, 2016a). However, he didn't belong to any Guinean ethnic group, essentially meaning that Cabral was detribalised (Sousa, 2008). Therefore, his position of ethnic "neutral-ity" placed him in a privileged and comfortable place to claim inter-ethnic unity and, consequently, to profile himself as the artificer of the new national consciousness that was being built through the national liberation struggle (Sousa, 2008). As Alexis Wick argues (Wick, 2005), these are two elements that the leaders of the national liberation struggle would never do without. To these must be added the intangibility of the borders inherited from colonialism. There is no doubt that the process of school socialisation and assimilation will also have contributed to the assumption of what Alexis Wick named "frames of reference" (Wick, 2005), which would be extended to the Portuguese language in Cabral's specific case. This set him apart from his colleagues in the other liberation movements, such as the MPLA (Agostinho Neto) and FRELIMO (Eduardo Mondlane), who did belong to ethnic groups. The former was an Ambundo ethnic group, the latter a Chope. For example, it was not until the MPLA's 1974 party programme that it gave national and ethnic minorities the freedom to use their languages and create their scripts. Before that, the 1962 Immediate Action Programme only advocated the protection of nationalities and ethnic minorities.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> AMSF, "Programa de Acção Imediata do MPLA" (1962). Documents belonging to Jorge Campinos to which his wife, Maryvonne Campinos, kindly gave us access, 04628.024 (casacomum.org).

Thus, the MPLA and the PAIGC were the only movements to explicitly acknowledge the possibility of using indigenous languages and Creole, although it must be said that neither liberation movements expected this to happen immediately.

FRELIMO's political stance was marked by a conservative character. Notably, the party refrained from direct reference to the linguistic issue. However, its 1962 and 1968 programmes did affirm the unity of the Mozambicans. This assertion was underpinned by the party's advocacy for equality, respect for regional distinctiveness, and the eradication of divisions among the various ethnic groups. These principles suggested a concomitant replacement of colonial cultural norms with a revolutionary cultural and educational agenda (Reis & Muiuane, 1975, p. 106).

In 1968, Mondlane highlighted that the historical period up to that point had been characterised by linguistic, cultural and historical divisions. However, he went on to argue that the future was being established on a basis of unity, despite considering the various forms of linguistic expression, dances, music and regional idiosyncrasies to be positive. Therefore, the Mozambican leader saw no incompatibility between the existence of various ethnic groups and national unity (Reis & Muiuane, 1975, p. 106). It was within this framework that the decision was taken to adopt Portuguese as the written language in education and national unity whilst simultaneously upholding the principle of plurilingualism within society and in the field of education. The use of Portuguese would only continue until the conditions were created for the adoption of the national languages in Angola and Mozambique, and of Creole in Guinea and Cape Verde.

The issue of adopting the Portuguese language was a subject that was debated very little by FRELIMO when compared to MPLA and PAIGC. Cabral was the leader who discussed the issue most openly, a fact related to his ethnic neutrality. This ethnic "neutrality" is believed to have influenced his positions in the language debate within the PAIGC, as will be discussed below. In this debate, it was important to know whether political, armed, economic and cultural resistance should be supplemented by linguistic resistance. This latter term implied, in the immediate and medium or long term, the rejection of the coloniser's language, which at the time was considered by some of his co-religionists to be alien. Cabral was undoubtedly in favour of a revolution that implied the radical transformation of colonial structures, but for a long time, he believed this should not call into question the importance of the Portuguese language and its adoption by the national liberation movement.

Cabral's defence of the Portuguese language, especially in education, science, and even officially after Independence, posed a serious problem when communicating with his fellow party members and the general population. As a result, on numerous occasions, Cabral relied more on Creole to communicate with his associates than on Portuguese, which was used only in more formal situations. These include the following: New Year's Message radio broadcasts; interviews involving audiences in Portugal, such as those granted to Portuguese opposition media outlets based abroad, like *Rádio Voz da Liberdade* in Algiers (Algeria), *Polémica* magazine (in Switzerland), or *Anticolonialism* (in London). Moreover, PAIGC itself used the Portuguese language in all its propaganda documents and education provided in areas considered under its control.

Despite being used by Cabral and in PAIGC schools, Portuguese remained a secondary or even tertiary language in the daily lives of Cabral's associates and the general population of Guinea-Bissau. The situation would not change with the advent of the country's independence (Morgadinho, 1977). In Guinea, the dominance of national languages and Creole (Kriol) over Portuguese is evident. Nevertheless, while recognising the importance of Creole and ethnic languages, Cabral prioritised Portuguese in education, science, and technology due to its instrumental and utilitarian value. What mattered to him was its importance in relating to the world, transmitting technical and scientific knowledge, and contributing to the unity of a multi-ethnic and multilingual territory (Rothwell, 2008).

For Cabral, the capacity of Creole and mother tongues to offer this utilitarian and instrumental value was hindered by significant issues concerning the transition from oral to written forms. Additionally, the geographical limitations in the use of both Creole and ethnic languages, in contrast to Portuguese, represented a notable challenge. For this reason, Cabral resisted pressure from his coreligionists to teach in the mother tongues (Balanta, Mandinga, Fula, Mancanha, Manjaco) or Creole. Cabral insisted on the necessity of thorough study for the use of Creole and even mother tongues in teaching.

## **The Portuguese language as an instrument of domination and liberation**

Within the framework of the struggle for national independence, Cabral's thoughts and reflections on the linguistic debate appear in at least four documents/texts: in the *Plano para Instrução e Cultura do PAIGC*, inserted in the 1962 Statutes and Programme (Rudebeck, 1974). In an interview with *Rádio Voz da Liberdade* (of the Portuguese opposition to the Salazar regime in exile in Algeria)

in 1969, during lectures given at the Staff Seminar held in Conakry in November 1969. We refer to the following texts: *Análise dos tipos de resistência. Resistência cultural* (1969); *Para a melhoria do nosso trabalho no plano exterior: 1 - A nossa guerra perante o Governo português. 2 - Em África* (1969).

The first document in which the linguistic issue was addressed not only in the case of Guinea but also of Cape Verde was the *Plano para Instrução e Cultura*, integrated into the PAIGC's Statutes and Programme. For Guinea, it advocated the possibility of developing the native languages and the "Creole dialect" with "the creation of a script for these languages" (PAIGC – *Statuts et Programme*, 1962). In the case of Cape Verde, the "development and writing of the Creole dialect" was accepted (PAIGC – *Statuts et Programme*, 1962), which was not at all strange because Cabral had left us at least two short notes on Cape Verdean Creole in the 1940s. The note was addressed to his then-girlfriend (later his wife), Maria Helena, about a poem in Creole entitled "*Bêjo Caro! (Confissão de Zé Badiu)*", written in Creole and dated 1949, the author of which was Amílcar Cabral's father, Juvenal Cabral (Amado, 2021). In his concise annotations, Cabral underscored the significance of his father's inaugural use of Creole, positing it as a medium for articulating the intricacies of Cape Verdean sentiment, devoid of any tarnish. Moreover, he contended that this act of expression offered a glimpse into the influence of Camões's universal language on dialects, giving rise to novel expressions such as "*novas almas*" ("new souls") (Amado, 2021). And he made a promise to Maria Helena that on the day she understood Creole, she would get to better know "one of the facets of the People of Santiago" (Amado, 2021). Cabral's remark is curious when he suggests that understanding a language helps us to know what we are.

As Abel Djassi Amado suggests, despite this presumed importance attributed to Creole in expressing the deepest feelings of the Cape Verdean people, Cabral later, in 1962, classified it as a dialect and the mother tongues as languages (Amado, 2014, 2021). Although Amílcar Cabral and his father, Juvenal Cabral, agreed that Creole was the only way to express Cape Verdean feelings, Abel Djassi Amado believes that this was a way of devaluing Creole or subordinating it to the European language (Portuguese) from which it derived, as Cabral himself said in 1949 (Amado, 2021).

In 1963, at a meeting of Cape Verdean leaders in Dakar, Cabral argued that Creole was one of the "Cape Verdean aspirations for autonomy", "marked by the African presence".<sup>3</sup> According to him, these Africans were "people who already

<sup>3</sup> AMSF, "O desenvolvimento da luta em Cabo Verde", photocopy of the report of the meeting of leaders of the PAIGC, held 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> July 1963 in Dakar, folder 10198.014 (casacomum.org).

had their language, but to carry out their work together, they created a new language – Creole".<sup>4</sup>

There was no explicit mention of the Portuguese language in the education plan already mentioned. However, we can always assume that its being kept as a vehicle language was implicit and unquestioned, even though the development of Creole was encouraged. This could not represent a direct alternative to Portuguese in the struggle for the training of leaders and, consequently, for the emergence of a New Man. In the context of the struggle and competition with colonialism to train leaders for the future development of the two territories (Guinea and Cape Verde), as Cabral defended, it was imperative to adopt a swift yet strategic approach, eschewing opportunism and maintaining a keen sense of realism (Cabral, 1979; Freire, 2016). For this reason, the same tool that was already available – the Portuguese language – had to be used, especially in the PAIGC schools. In this way, Cabral wanted to counteract the obscurantism, fear and ignorance of the population (Rudebeck, 1974), but also to challenge the colonial regime. As Lars Rudebeck argues, education became an important element of the emancipatory struggle and a tool to be used in the struggle to improve the material living conditions of the population (Rudebeck, 1974). It can also serve as a powerful instrument of political mobilisation as it had served Portuguese colonialism (Rudebeck, 1974).

For the PAIGC, education brought with it the question of what language to teach in the context of the anti-colonial struggle. This question began to take root in 1964. It was at this time that Cabral's movement held its sixth staff conference, which was to become its first congress, in Cassacá, in January of that year. During this congress, social issues, among others, were discussed, including the question of education, and the slogan "create schools and spread education in all liberated areas" and "those who can read will teach those who cannot" (Cabral, 1979) was adopted.

It's no coincidence that most of the first PAIGC schools (50 in September 1965), were opened in the second half of 1964, shortly after the Cassacá Congress, while others were opened even earlier (in 1963) (PAIGC, 1965).

Portuguese was the language of instruction in the pilot school set up in Conakry in November 1964. Sónia Vaz Borges assures us that it was the written language that most teachers knew (Borges, 2019). Borges goes even further, highlighting the fact that the PAIGC's adoption of Portuguese was a pragmatic option, explained by the fact that it was a language known by a group, as op-

<sup>4</sup> AMSF, "O desenvolvimento da luta em Cabo Verde", photocopy of the report of the meeting of leaders of the PAIGC, held 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> July 1963 in Dakar, folder 10198.014 ([casacomum.org](http://casacomum.org)).

posed to those who considered it a foreign language (Borges, 2019). Borges sees access to Portuguese for the entire population as a guarantee of equality and the democratisation of knowledge (Borges, 2019).

Nevertheless, the functioning of the “tabanca” schools was very much conditioned by the development of the armed struggle for national liberation and the greater or lesser capacity of the leaders in charge. *O Nossa Livro 1<sup>a</sup> Classe* was the first textbook distributed in schools in the areas of Quinará, Nalus and Komo (in southern Guinea) and it was printed in Uppsala in 1964 (PAIGC, 1964). It would be replaced by a new revised edition in 1966 with the title *O Nossa Primeiro Livro de Leitura*, also printed in the same city and country (PAIGC, 1966). Subsequently, textbooks would be produced for the Second (PAIGC, 1970), Third (PAIGC, 1974) and Fourth grades (PAIGC, 1972), joined by the textbook of *História da Guiné e Ilhas de Cabo Verde* printed in Paris in 1974 (Sousa, 2023).

Another material used as a reading textbook was the PAIGC’s newspaper – *Libertaçāo* (PAIGC, 1965). In 1965, a project was initiated to publish new reading materials for primary school students. This project included the creation of new reading books for primary classes, a work of fiction written in both Portuguese and Creole and a compilation of traditional Guinean short stories (PAIGC, 1965).

Another innovation that demonstrates the significance of the Portuguese language in the context of PAIGC instruction is the use of a literary work by the Bulgarian poet, writer, and translator Dora [Petrova] Gabé (1888-1983), who possessed considerable expertise in children’s literature. The book is entitled *Nos Nossos Olhos de Criança* (In Our Eyes as Children) and was illustrated by the also Bulgarian Néva Touzsousova (1908-1991).<sup>5</sup>

From the outset, Cabral was resolute in adopting the Portuguese language not only as an instrument of liberation but also of national unity. In our assessment, the Angolan nationalist Viriato da Cruz provided the most succinct summary of the instrumental nature of the Portuguese language, closely following Amílcar Cabral’s stance on the matter. In a text written in 1960, Viriato da Cruz expressed his view of the Portuguese language in Angola: “Portuguese is undeniably a European language, fundamentally alien to Angola. It was introduced and imposed on the indigenous population” (Da Cruz, 1960).

For the Angolan nationalist, language was indeed viewed “like an instrument” (Da Cruz, 1960). The Europeans used it to subjugate Africans, imposing an ideology that facilitated their domination in Angola. Conversely, Angolans repurposed this same language “as a language of liberation and the dissemin-

<sup>5</sup> Centro de Intervenção para o Desenvolvimento Amílcar Cabral (CIDAC), Dora Gabé, *Nos Nossos Olhos de Criança*, BAC-0103 – Livros de Leitura, doc NC/2.

nation of the ‘ideology of liberation’ among both Angolans and the Portuguese themselves” (Da Cruz, 1960).

When articulating his stance on this debate, Viriato da Cruz employed an analogy using, as you have already seen, the biblical figures of David and Goliath to illustrate his point. He wrote: “One uses the sling, the other the hand. One attacks and offends, the other defends himself. Who owns the stone?” (Da Cruz, 1960). His metaphor of David and Goliath cleverly encapsulates Viriato’s view on the instrumental nature of language in the particular context of the struggle for national liberation.

Indeed, there seems to be a significant convergence between Cabral’s and Da Cruz’s perspectives on language, particularly concerning its instrumental nature in the context of African liberation movements.

Manuel Ferreira, a scholar of African literature, also addressed the problem of the Portuguese language in post-colonial African nations. He argued that the appropriation of Portuguese by formerly colonised countries involved transforming it from the language of the coloniser to “the language of us, the ex-colonised” (Ferreira, 1984). According to Ferreira, this process meant that Portuguese ceased to be solely the language of the Portuguese (and the Brazilians) and became Mozambican, Angolan, and so on (Ferreira, 1984).

It is important to note that we first encountered this aspect of Cabral’s thinking through two key sources: an interview with *Rádio Voz da Liberdade* in 1966 and a speech and lectures delivered during the seminar held in Conakry in November 1969. These speeches and lectures from the 1969 seminar resulted in two important texts, which have already been discussed. The seminar was a crucial event, where Cabral addressed internal party issues and sought to strengthen support within the PAIGC. These speeches and lectures gave rise, as has already been said, to two previously mentioned texts: “*Análise de alguns tipos de resistência 3 – Resistência cultural*” and “*Para a melhoria do nosso trabalho no plano exterior 1 – A nossa guerra perante o Governo português. 2 – Em África*” (PAIGC, 1969). During these speeches and lectures, Cabral delved deeper into his reflections on the linguistic question. This exploration of language issues was likely influenced by the broader African context in which these debates were taking place. Indeed, in Africa, two antagonistic schools of thought emerged regarding language policy, each advocating for a different approach. One group argues that colonialism imposed its domination by banning the use of mother tongues and Creole languages, while others are more inclined to return to African languages. These contrasting viewpoints reflect the complex linguistic legacy of colonialism in Africa, bringing together other issues like identity, national unity, and cultural

sovereignty. For this group, which includes Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire, there was no dissimilarity between neo-colonial policy, economic relations, and cultural and linguistic neo-colonialism expressed through the use of the languages of the former colonisers.

Paulo Freire, as quoted by Birgit Brock-Utne, asserts that this imposition constituted a blatant violation of the structure of thought (Brock-Utne, 2000). In post-colonial Africa, from the 1960s onwards, a heated debate emerged regarding language use in literature and culture. This debate centred around two main perspectives: one of them was proposing the return to indigenous African languages as a means of decolonising minds and achieving linguistic independence. These perspectives emphasise the importance of using native languages to preserve cultural identity. The other defended the appropriation of European languages. This group included prominent African writers like Chinua Achebe, Gabriel Okara, Amos Tutuola and even Léopold Sédar Senghor. They proposed infusing these languages with "African blood" (Thiong'o, 1986). Others, like the African poet David Diop, saw the use of European languages as a temporary necessity. Cabral seems to favour Portuguese until there are conditions for the writing of Creole. But there are also signs that the choice of Portuguese would be definitive. Cabral remained firm in his defence of the Portuguese language, despite being aware that it was far from becoming a national language in Guinea (this is still the case today). Even so, he argued at the 1969 seminar that it should not be abandoned for lack of an alternative. This did not call into question what Cabral called "cultural resistance", which was nothing less than an apology for the decolonisation of the mind (Romão, 2012). In Cabral's words, decolonising minds meant "removing the culture of the colonialists" from the minds of Guineans and Cape Verdeans (Cabral, 2020). He admits that colonial culture influenced the culture of the people of Guinea and Cape Verde in some way. However, their culture should not be confused with that of the Portuguese (Cabral, 2020). According to Cabral, not all colonial culture is to be condemned. Rather, the focus should be on preserving the positive aspects and rejecting the negative ones. In this respect, Cabral places particular emphasis on aspects of the "human, scientific culture" of the Portuguese (Cabral, 2020). He even goes further, saying that we should respect "everything that has already been achieved in the world to serve mankind" (Cabral, 2020). Cabral considered language to be one of the elements of human and scientific culture bequeathed by the Portuguese. This perspective is exemplified by his assertion that "The Portuguese language is one of the best things the Portuguese left behind" (Cabral, 2020). According to Paula Medeiros, language had the "dimension of an ideological message for the construction of

national identity" (Medeiros, 2006). From this perspective, Cabral likely would have embraced Paula Medeiros's idea. He viewed the Portuguese language as a tool capable of unifying Guinean society while also serving as a means to acquire modern scientific and technical knowledge.

The PAIGC leader, Amílcar Cabral, refused to succumb to the facile demagoguery and opportunism of his political allies who advocated for teaching in Creole, Fula, Mandinka, Balanta, or other local languages. Cabral questioned the practicality of this approach, asking rhetorically how one would write in Balanta. He stated pragmatically: "To teach a written language, you need to know how to write it. Today, our written language is Portuguese" (Cabral, 2020).

## The instrumental role of language in communicating and expressing reality

In 1966, in an exciting interview with *Rádio Voz da Liberdade*, Cabral defended the need to maintain and preserve every possibility of "developing everyday fraternal cooperation, friendship and mutual aid with the Portuguese people", also free from fascist domination. This desire was linked to the notorious influence of Portuguese culture on Cabral, a fact he was keen to emphasise and express in the language he knew best – Portuguese:

Here I am, I speak Portuguese. I have a Portuguese education and culture. Where I come from, everyone who can read or write can read and write Portuguese. Many people even think in Portuguese. So, only if we were crazy would we want Portuguese to be completely discarded in our free and independent land, wouldn't we? (Cabral, 1966)

He concludes by stressing the need to maintain good relations with Portugal in the future:

In the interests of our people themselves, the economic development of our people, the cultural development of our people, it's not true; we who are conscious leaders must defend, and preserve all the possibilities of serious, fair relations with the Portuguese people tomorrow. (Cabral, 1966)

The only conditions he laid down were that the Portuguese people should try to stop the colonial war and that those involved in the war should not commit crimes against his people. He also emphasised his identification with the tragedies of the Portuguese people and the importance of Portugal in world history. He believed that it had opened "new worlds to the world" (Cabral, 1966).

Amílcar Cabral complained that there were people who wanted to “put aside the Portuguese language” because they were Africans and therefore shouldn’t use the “language of foreigners”. But the PAIGC general secretary did not doubt that in his party, if they wanted to “take the people forward” to write and advance in science, the language “had to be Portuguese” (Medeiros, 2006).

If culture is to be developed on a scientific rather than an imaginary basis, it is clear – and this is the idea that emerges from Cabral’s reading – that it should also be based on a language that gives it the same scientific basis. From this point of view, culture should “tomorrow prevent any of us” from thinking “that lightning is a sign that God is angry”, that thunder is a voice speaking or that “Iran” is angry (Cabral, 2020).

Concerning the “language of the foreigner”, Cabral argued that one should accept what is acceptable and reject what is not, always applying the principle of critical assimilation. With intelligence, take advantage of everything that can serve personal and collective progress and adapt it “to the conditions of life” (Cabral, 2020).

As Conor O’Reilly emphasises, Cabral advocated critical assimilation in cultural resistance, meaning that knowledge imported from abroad should be selected and adapted to the reality of Guinea and Cape Verde or the African reality (O’Reilly, 2023). The idea naturally pointed towards a cultural synthesis that would give rise to what Cabral called universal culture. In the linguistic debate, he said: “We shouldn’t avoid something because it isn’t foreign” (Cultural Resistance). In this way, Cabral placed himself at the antipodes of Frantz Fanon’s thought, who argued that, “Speaking means being able to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but above all it means taking on a culture, bearing the weight of a civilisation” (Fanon, 2008; Sousa, 2016b). In this respect, Galvão et al. (2020) go further by pointing out that Cabral also distances himself from the Peruvian Marxist thinker José Carlos Mariátegui and the Kenyan essayist Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Cabral’s proposal advocated, in line with what Paulo Freire would defend in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the escape from a “banking conception” of education (Freire, 1972).

The issue of the adoption of the Portuguese language was first raised by Amílcar Cabral during the staff seminar that took place in Conakry in 1969. In this seminal moment, Cabral emphasised the importance of future relations with Portugal and its people while also underscoring the fact that his advocacy for the preservation of the Portuguese language was not motivated by any personal inclination:

Firstly, you see me here speaking Creole, which is almost Portuguese, comrades. Secondly, for those of you in this room who can read and write, it's only in Portuguese that you can do it, apart from one or two people who have studied a bit of English, perhaps even after our fight, or in French. (PAIGC, 1969)

As has already been mentioned, Cabral would never allow the Portuguese language to be abandoned unless forced to do so. And he left no doubt about the future direction: "In all our written culture, in all our written administration, in the early days, it will have to be Portuguese" (PAIGC, 1969).

He also stresses the importance of using Portuguese in the schools his party has set up: "We started teaching Portuguese in our schools, and although we made progress with Creole, the fundamental language of our school is Portuguese" (PAIGC, 1969).

For some of his co-religionists, Cabral's speech contradicted what should have been one of the goals of the national liberation struggle: the destruction of colonialism, which meant abandoning the Portuguese language. Paulo Freire emphasised the two paths left open to the national liberation movement during independence: break with colonialism or fall into a "sweetened colonialism" (Freire, 1985). Cabral would not witness this phase of independence, but we can assure you that he would certainly break with the system of colonial exploitation, rejecting Freire's sugary colonialism, which is nothing less than neo-colonialism. That didn't mean at all that it had to break off relations with Portugal, even in terms of staff training. In this way, political pragmatism led Cabral to admit the possibility of sending students to study in Portugal after independence. The argument was that it would be easier for those who had studied in Portuguese to continue their studies in Portugal because "the language problem" wouldn't arise (PAIGC, 1969). The problem at this level is how Cabral would counter neo-colonialism under these conditions. That will never be known. For Cabral, it wasn't enough for a man to be a producer, to have a full belly, a good politician or a warrior. He needed to progress culturally, to acquire more knowledge about the world and his surroundings. Although he acknowledged the undeniable influence of Portuguese culture in Guinea and Cape Verde, he refused to accept the idea that the culture of his people (i.e. the culture of Guinea and Cape Verde) was the "culture of the Tugas" [synonym of the Portuguese colonialists] in the process of resistance (Cabral, 2020).

The armed struggle would thus be the main aspect of this cultural resistance, which consisted of eliminating the bad things that colonialism tried to instil in the minds of the people and preserving what was good from their point of view (Cabral, 2020).

In particular, some aspects of human and scientific culture. It was not by chance that the PAIGC schools began to publish textbooks with new content, but without abandoning the Portuguese language. After all, it was possible to teach people to read and write in the language of the colonialists and, at the same time, to fight against those same colonialists. This was, in essence, what Cabral perceived as cultural resistance, although he admitted that for some, rejecting the negative aspects of colonial culture “meant returning to what Africans had been doing for five hundred or a thousand years” (Cabral, 2020).

The first act of resistance was, therefore, to consolidate the unity of the people and develop in each one the idea of patriotism, “love for our land, as one thing” (Cabral, 2020).

In response to the supporters who wanted to move forward with Creole or the mother tongues, he answered realistically:

Nobody should have a complex because they don't know balanta, mandinga, pepel or fula or mancanha. If you know it, all the better, but if you don't, you have to make others understand you, even if it's with gestures. But if you're working well in the Party, you'll get ahead... We have to have a real sense of our culture. (PAIGC, 1969)

Using certain scientific “clichés”, Cabral even asked: how would we say in balanta or mancanha “the moon is the earth's natural satellite”? (Cabral, 2020). It's possible to say it, according to Cabral, but it would take a lot of words to express the idea. And “the intensity of a force is equal to the mass time the acceleration of gravity”? “It's simply impossible to say in Creole. Only in Portuguese” (Cabral, 2020).

By emphasising the instrumental role of language in communicating and expressing reality, Cabral also assumed that it wouldn't be the adoption of Creole or mother tongues or the use of “bubu” that would make anybody more Guinean or more African, but what was inside our heads.

The realism with which Amílcar Cabral viewed the question of the centrality of the Portuguese language in the process of learning and resisting colonialism itself did not deny space for “dialects” or even Creole. It was his conviction that the utilisation of these languages should be contingent on a thoroughgoing examination of grammatical principles, phonetics and the establishment of an alphabet. He acknowledged that this could be a protracted process, and in the interim, Cabral regarded Portuguese as the sole viable alternative:

We of the Party, if we want to lead our people forward for a long time to come, to write, to advance in science, our language has to be Portuguese. And that is an

honour. It's the only thing we can thank the *tuga* [the Portuguese colonial regime] for because he left his language after stealing so much from our land. Until the day comes when having studied Creole in depth and found all the phonetic rules that are good for Creole, we can start writing Creole. But we don't forbid anyone from writing Creole; if someone wants to write a letter to Tchutchu in Creole, he can. Only he, in his reply, will write differently, but he will make himself understood. But for science, Creole is still no good. Even in Balanta, I remember one of our comrades, Ongo, who unfortunately died, we used to write in Portuguese, then we would switch to Creole and he would write in Balanta. Because it's possible to write Balanta, a person who knows a lot of Portuguese can write in Balanta (Cabral, 2020).

It is reasonable to assume that there were some differences in the approach to this complex issue between Amílcar Cabral, on the one hand, and Agostinho Neto and Mário de Andrade, on the other. The PAIGC leader was even concerned and cautious about such a complex issue, which has led some authors to see in his tolerance, flexibility and complacency towards the so-called "coloniser's language" a distancing of Cabral from Fanon's radicalism on the subject (Amado, 2014; Medeiros, 2006). The adoption of Portuguese as the language of instruction was generated by the need to train leaders and the absence of viable alternatives. This decision was further influenced by the recognition that Creole was not widely understood in many regions, leading to the conclusion that Portuguese was the most rational choice. Both were considered too poor to support teaching (Braudier, 1974). But we can be sure of one thing: the PAIGC leader would never have agreed with Fanon's point of view when he wrote that nothing should be spared to get rid of the traditions and language of the coloniser (Fanon, 1968), or when he argued that "speaking a language" was "assuming a world, a culture" (Fanon, 2008).

## Conclusion

The debate on languages in the process of national liberation struggles, especially in the case of Guinea, crossed the whole of decolonised Africa or all Africa in the process of decolonisation, and all the liberation movements of Portuguese Africa between the 1960s and 1970s. In the case of Guinea, and more specifically the PAIGC, the debate was intense, judging by the speeches made by its leader, Amílcar Cabral, on the subject. At stake then was the resolution of a dilemma that had arisen in the meantime, which was knowing which language to adopt in the process of anticolonialism. It seemed reasonable, at least to a more traditional

sector of the liberation movement, to opt for Creole or even the mother tongues, which were the alternatives to Portuguese. It was completely incomprehensible – it even seemed like a contradiction – for this sector to challenge Portuguese colonialism while at the same time preserving a fundamental and central aspect of the coloniser's culture, its language. The argument that some of Amílcar Cabral's comrades used for the adoption of Creole or mother tongues instead of the Portuguese was that the latter had been imposed by the colonial regime, which went against the goal of fully rejecting colonialism and asserting a distinct identity. Besides, the desire was still to prioritise African languages, culture and heritage. For them, the Portuguese language was still seen as an obstacle to the massification of education, which hindered efforts to spread education rapidly in the liberated areas.

Despite these arguments, Cabral maintained that Portuguese should be the main language of education and administration in the short term, while still allowing the study and development of Creole and mother tongues. For him, the process of cultural resistance meant separating the “wheat from the chaff”, rejecting what was bad about the coloniser and preserving what was good. He thus developed the concept of critical assimilation, which was basically the refusal of colonial assimilation and the acceptance of the Portuguese language, as long as it was stripped of colonial ideological elements.

Cabral's pragmatism on this issue would be crucial in demystifying the arguments of some of his comrades. He defended using the Portuguese language as a pragmatic tool for scientific and technical advancement in the struggle for independence in Guinea and Cape Verde. Despite pressure from some of his comrades to prioritise local languages or Creole, Cabral maintained that Portuguese was necessary for the PAIGC to lead the people forward in writing, science, and education. He argued that Portuguese could be used to resist colonialism while also acquiring modern knowledge and that its adoption did not negate the importance of studying and preserving local languages for the future. Thus, Cabral's instrumental view of language, and especially the Portuguese language, aimed to promote cultural synthesis and progress in the process of national liberation.

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