

# **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN GUINEA-BISSAU AND CAPE VERDE: DIALOGUES, LEGACIES AND REINTERPRETATIONS OF CABRAL'S THINKING ABOUT CULTURE**

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## **Social movements in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde: Dialogues, legacies, and reinterpretations of Cabral's thoughts on culture**

*Amílcar Cabral's statement that "the struggle for liberation is, above all, an act of culture" has been a vital element in the construction of narratives, forms of organisation and mobilisation of social collectives for the transformation of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verdean society. However, there is a notoriously odd absence and/or lack of formal endogenous Cabralist education, which has in the assumptions of its culture an important catalytic source of activist production. This article, which is based on ethnographic and collaborative research carried out over the last decade in these two countries, sets out to address the challenge of rescuing Cabral's ideals expressed through new forms of socio-cultural intervention within a framework of participatory and counter-colonial democracy. We will seek to understand how public processes of revindication and the creation of spaces for active and full citizenship have produced entities capable of revolutionising both societies.*

**Keywords:** Cabral, culture, revolution, social movements, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde

## **Movimentos sociais na Guiné-Bissau e em Cabo Verde: Diálogos, legados e reinterpretações do pensamento de Cabral sobre a cultura**

*A afirmação de Amílcar Cabral de que "a luta de libertação é, antes de mais, um ato de cultura" tem sido um elemento estruturante na construção de narrativas, formas de organização e mobilização de coletivos sociais para transformação das sociedades bissau-guineense e cabo-verdiana. Porém, é notória a ausência e/ou carência de processos formais endógenos de educação cabralista que tem nos pressupostos de cultura uma importante fonte catalisadora de produção ativista. O presente artigo, que tem como base pesquisas etnográficas e colaborativas realizadas na última década, nestes dois países, parte do desafio de resgatar os ideais cabralistas no seio de novas formas de expressividade de intervenção sociocultural inseridas num quadro de democracia participativa e contra-colonial. Procurar-se-á compreender como os processos públicos de reivindicação e recriação de espaços de cidadania ativa e plena têm constituído entidades capazes de revolucionar ambas as sociedades.*

**Palavras-chave:** Cabral, cultura, revolução, movimentos sociais, Guiné-Bissau, Cabo Verde

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## Culture – the means and instrument of liberation in Cabral's thinking

The concept of culture in Amílcar Cabral's work is founded on the praxis of the struggle for liberation in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, as is his entire revolutionary theory, which is based on the constant dialectic between revolutionary practice and the theory which is born of it. For Cabral (1972, p. 210), culture is a kind of seed from which the struggle for liberation germinates, insofar as a people under the colonial yoke "can only create and develop the liberation movement by keeping their culture alive, despite the permanent and organised repression of their cultural life".<sup>1</sup>

Thus, because the popular masses always preserved the essence of their culture, Cabral (1972, p. 213) considered that they should not be confronted with the problem of "returning to their roots", or "cultural rebirth", as advocated by certain petty-bourgeois tendencies in the liberation movement that he led. In fact, it would be contradictory to propose to the very people who were resisting colonial domination through the practice of their culture, that they should return to the roots they had never abandoned. On the contrary, Cabral assures us, it was the indigenous petty-bourgeois elite that needed to make a conscious effort to detach itself from its assimilated identity that had been acquired through the process of colonial formation to which it had been subjected throughout its life, and reconnect with the popular masses whose cultures it had learned to view with contempt and as inferior in relation to the culture of the coloniser.

As Rabaka (2009) demonstrates, Cabral called this condition "re-Africanization of the spirits" and it was an indispensable step for members of the native petty bourgeoisie if they truly wanted to fight alongside the popular masses for their liberation, one of whose main objectives was the "resumption of the rising paths of their own culture" (Cabral, 1972, p. 228), which had been denied them under the framework of imperialist domination.

But what would Cabral's concept of culture actually be? He himself gives us the answer to this question in his famous speech to UNESCO on *The role of culture in the struggle for independence*:

Culture is the dynamic synthesis in individual or collective consciousness of the historical, material and spiritual reality of a society or a human group, of the relationships existing between man and nature, and between men and social categories. (Cabral, 1972, pp. 227-228)

<sup>1</sup> All direct citations were translated.

One thing mentioned by Cabral in this concept of culture seems particularly relevant to us. This is the dynamic character he attributes to culture. This is fundamental to understanding why Cabral (1972) proposes, within the framework of the national liberation struggle, the “development of a richer, more popular, national, scientific and universal culture” (p. 236). In fact, in his analysis of different types of resistance to colonial rule, Cabral (1979) links the concept of culture very closely to the struggle for liberation, insofar as he defines it as a process that must lead the people to understand the “concrete situation of their land in order to transform it in the direction of progress” (p. 83).

This concept of culture, emphasising its dynamic and progressive character, had as its first objective the “unity of our people, the need to fight and develop in each one of us a new idea, which is *patriotism*, love for our land, as one single thing” (Cabral, 1979, p. 81). By associating the aims of “unity” and “patriotism” with the idea of cultural transformation in Guinea and Cape Verde, Cabral demonstrates his understanding that the fight against colonialism could only be successful through the union of the cultural differences that set apart the peoples of Guinea and these with that of Cape Verde.

This issue received special attention from Cabral at the Leaders' Seminar held in November 1969, in Conakry, during which he provided an in-depth approach to the foundations that underpinned the practice of unity within the PAIGC. For Cabral, the problem of unity existed in three phases: unity in Guinea, with a markedly multi-ethnic and, consequently, multicultural people; unity in Cape Verde which, while not as multi-ethnic, had its own specific problems of division between different social layers of the native population; and, finally, unity between Guinea and Cape Verde, which was more complex, especially because the colonial state had long been employing Cape Verdeans to carry out administrative duties in Guinea, generating distrust towards the Cape Verdeans, who were seen as black colonists (Cabral, 1974).

In his critique of Cabral's revolutionary theory, Tomás (2018) argues that it presents two problems, the first being what he calls the “disjunction between what Cabral actually did and the way we currently write about the subject”; and “[the] second concerns a disjunction between the nationalist imagination and ethnic reality” (p. 53). We will not discuss here what Tomás considers to be the “first problem” of Cabral's revolutionary theory, because it does not fall within the scope of discussion in this article, but we are interested in refuting the second problem he raises, that “Cabral acted within a nationalist framework, trying to unite a vast set of ethnic and racial groups, when the context in which he operated required that particular attention be paid to the ethnic problem” (p. 53).

As we stated previously, Cabral's entire revolutionary theory is founded on the process of struggle for independence and always tries to ensure that theories would not determine the practice of the struggle – whether political or armed – against the Portuguese colonial power. Contrary to Tomás' thesis, Cabral's nationalism was not detached from the context of its application, neither in the specific cases of Guinea and Cape Verde, nor in the conception of the project of a binational state that united the two territories and peoples. Cabral analyses the two sociocultural contexts in his speech to the aforementioned Seminar of Leaders of 1969, where he exposed the challenges arising at each stage of unity that he proposed, including the most complex and problematic layers of the union between Guinea and Cape Verde. For example, the PAIGC leader recalled the fact that until 1879 Guinea was governed from Cape Verde and that many Cape Verdeans served in the colonial administration in Guinea, as a result of greater advances in education on the islands, which contributed to them being seen by Guineans in the same light as white colonists. This feeling of distrust towards Cape Verdeans existed even among PAIGC fighters, as their leader explained at the 1969 seminar (Cabral, 1974).

However, the Cabralian concept of culture will not be understood in its entirety if we do not fully understand the dynamic and nationalist aspects. Above all, it is the illumination of the dynamic nature of culture that allows Cabral, within the framework of the liberation struggle, to propose an advance towards the creation of a national culture, which would be impossible if this creative movement did not start with unity between the different ethnic groups (and cultures), in particular in Guinea.

Lopes (1986, pp. 12-16), reproducing a chronology proposed by João Barreto on the dispersed resistance of ethnic groups spread throughout Guinea, which was dominated by Portuguese colonialism, recorded a total of 36 confrontations between indigenous ethnic communities and colonial military expeditions, between 1588 and 1902. Péliissier (2006, pp. 42-43), in a more recent study, lists 81 confrontations involving Portugal and different ethnic groups in Guinea, between 1841 and 1936. However, none of these acts of "dispersed resistance" prevented the colonial administration from establishing itself in the territory. This not only disproves the theories of those who think that there was no resistance to colonial occupation before the creation of the PAIGC for "unified resistance", but also helps us to understand the progressive dimension of "unity and struggle", as a slogan that served as a basis for ideological guidance to the liberation movement. "Unity", as examined here previously, holds the key to the defeat of Portuguese colonialism and to the foundation of an "African nation forged in

struggle" (Cabral, 1973, p. 150), although the initial design of this nation to give shape to a binational state did not materialise after independence.

The centrality of culture in Cabral's revolutionary thought and action is best summed up in the statement that a "society that truly frees itself from the foreign yoke, resumes the rising paths of its own culture" and, therefore, "the struggle for liberation is, above all, an *act of culture*" (Cabral, 1972, p. 228). The concept of culture that Cabral proposes is progressive and therefore refuses an uncritical "return" to its original roots and does not close in on itself. On this upward path towards the creation of a new, scientific culture which asserts itself as part of the great cultural heritage of humanity, Cabral warns us of the need to combat all the negative aspects of our culture, while not confusing it with the culture of the coloniser, and without disdaining the positive aspects of the foreign culture.

In the creation of a "national culture", Cabral did not find a magic formula to solve the ethnic problem in Guinea, nor did he shy away from examining this problem based on an understanding of the context in which this theory was applied. On the contrary, as Rabaka's study on Cabral's theoretical legacy (2009) demonstrates, and as we seek to show here, Cabral's theoretical foundations on culture are the result of his long revolutionary praxis. On the one hand, we are faced with a theory that sought to analyse the complex transformational processes that native cultures underwent, especially after attempts to eliminate them by the coloniser, even though they managed to preserve their "essence". On the other hand, Cabral uses his profound knowledge of the diverse and dynamic nature of culture to design a binational entity, whose structure stems from the cultural dynamics found in the specificities of the social contexts in which they are developed.

The Cabral and PAIGC social project was bold and contained risks. But what revolutionary project, in the sense of a radical transformation of the current reality, moves forward without confronting risks of various natures?

In addition to the Cabralist notion of culture, the concept of *artivism*, understood here as artistic manifestations of an activist nature and, therefore, of political intervention and resistance (Raposo, 2015), is used to understand youth practices of protest art in the contexts that the article focuses on. In agreement with Mesquita's (2011) approach to *Activist art and collective action*, the dynamics of artistic activism examined here propose, with all their limitations and strengths, intervention for social and political change in the context of their engagement.

Over the last decade, the authors of this article have produced ethnographic work on the different dimensions of youth in both Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, emphasising the relationship of urban youth with social and political activism in

the field of the arts (Barros & Jaló, 2021; Lima, 2020; Lima & Robalo, 2023; Robalo, 2016). Avoiding the classic formula of ethnographic studies in an urban context centred on a specific artist, group or neighbourhood, the research is part of a methodological framework that seeks to transcend neighbourhood dynamics. Based on the term “circuit”, it shows the movement of groups throughout the city as a way of understanding creativity in the way it appropriates public space. The understanding of the similarities and/or differences of the “hip-hop circuit”, focusing on its oral and visual expressions, in Bissau and Praia, began with a collaborative and non-comparative study of how rappers have rescued Cabral’s pan-Africanism (Barros & Lima, 2012, 2018, 2021), with this work being a continuation and expansion of these joint reflections. Following on this logic, we start from the challenge of looking critically at the concept of culture in Cabral, as a way of simultaneously mobilising and giving identity to social collectives, with a view to understanding how it was being reinterpreted and experienced within new forms of expression of sociocultural intervention within the framework of participatory and counter-colonial democracy.

Thus, in the introductory section, we sought to outline a framework that discusses the concept of culture in Amílcar Cabral as an instrument of resistance and liberation of peoples. This Cabralist notion of culture still serves as a basis for understanding how *artist* dynamics work as means of demanding sociocultural transformations in both contexts. In the second section of the article, a brief analysis is made of how the legacy of the liberation struggle that founded the two nations was erased from their education, this being one of the main consequences of the abandonment of liberation educational practices, which were a key foundation of both educational systems until the beginning of the 1990s. In the following section, we have sought to map and characterise the public processes of reclaiming and recreating spaces of active and full citizenship, triggered through collective dynamics of *activism* as an alternative mechanism of opposition to political power, but also as a way of revindicating and disputing the structuring memories of Guinean and Cape Verdean identities.

## **Between the opacity and revindications of formal endogenous processes of Cabralist education**

Colonial education in Guinea, as in all African territories under Portuguese rule, was based on segregation and acculturation, so dear to colonial ideology in general. For a long time, the colonial educational system practised in Guinea comprised two main divisions. Official education, which was limited to the chil-



dren of Portuguese colonists and the insignificant portion of the assimilated native population, and basic education, intended for native children from families considered uncivilised by the colonial administration (Jaló, 2020; Koudawo, 1996).

This stratification of the school population was anchored in the foundations of Portuguese colonisation enshrined in the Colonial Act of 1930 – updated in 1933 – and in the Political, Civil and Criminal Statute of Indigenous Peoples, commonly known as the Statute of Indigenous Status, applied to Guinea after its revision in 1954. While the first law established the objectives of Portuguese colonisation as a plan of domination and civilisation of “barbaric and uncultured” peoples, the second law determined the conditions for a native to become “assimilated”. This was a social status that guaranteed elevation to a level of social stratification above the rest of the population, which was considered uncivilised and indigenous, but which still offered no guarantee or prospect of equality with the colonists (Jaló, 2020).

According to the provisions of the Indigenous Statute, a native was only granted assimilated status if he could prove that he spoke Portuguese fluently and had the economic possibilities that guaranteed him a Portuguese-style life. For Amílcar Cabral (1960), a profound connoisseur of the Portuguese and Guinean realities, “if the Portuguese had to meet these conditions themselves, more than 50% of the population would not have the right to the status of ‘civilised’” (p. 54), especially because they would be far from ensuring compliance with the economic criterion established for this purpose. On the other hand, these data presented by Cabral in 1960, one year before the formal revocation of the Indigenous Statute, indicated that only a scant 0.3% of the population of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea, territories where the Indigenous Law was applied, were considered “assimilated”, as a result of profound contradictions between the colonial design of acculturation and the practice of the policy.

According to Koudawo (1996, pp. 73-74), two factors explain these contradictions when seen in the light of colonial teaching practices in Guinea. First, while publicly preaching the objective of assimilating the native population by imposing the use of the Portuguese language, the colonial administration left the task of teaching in rudimentary schools to Catholic missionaries, who promoted the use of native languages to facilitate their main objective of evangelisation. Second, the basic education provided to indigenous people was limited to four years of learning and did not guarantee a bridge to official education, and certainly did not allow those who completed this basic schooling to continue their studies.



This situation of profound backwardness in the field of education in Guinea, which only had its first high school in 1958, five years before the start of the armed struggle for independence, would continue even after the revocation of the Indigenous Statute in 1961. From 1968 onwards, with the implementation of the “Better Guinea” policy, during the government of António de Spínola, the situation changed for the better, as a result of the challenge by the PAIGC to the colonial administration, given that the party had begun to guarantee education services, among other social services, for the population of the liberated areas (Borges, 2019; Jaló, 2020; Koudawo, 1996).

The issue of education, together with culture, occupies a prominent place in Amílcar Cabral’s revolutionary thought and action. Teaching people to read, write and think based on the appropriation of scientific knowledge was one of the main objectives of the PAIGC’s fight against colonial domination. For Cabral, science and education held the same level of importance as culture in the social project forged in the struggle for liberation. In fact, these three designs merged into a single objective: to guarantee the progress of all productive forces in the nation that was to be born from independence (Cabral, 1972, 1979).

Therefore, in 1964, a year after the start of the armed struggle, the first schools were opened – in the wake of the 1<sup>st</sup> PAIGC Congress, held in Cassacá, a town in the south of Guinea-Bissau – in the liberated area of the interior of the country. Later, in Conakry, the capital of neighbouring Guinea, and in Ziguinchor, Senegal, boarding schools were opened, where some of the students who completed primary education continued their studies at the subsequent levels (Borges, 2019).

According to Koudawo (1996), the education of the masses was an important part of the PAIGC’s struggle against colonialism, in that, by guaranteeing access to education for social classes excluded by the colonial education system, the PAIGC not only exposed the limitations of colonial educational policies, but also made it possible for the ideological confrontation with the colonial regime to take place in the context of education. For Cabral (1979), it was imperative to “remove everything that was done by the colonialists that reveals their mentality” (p. 99) in PAIGC schools. In addition to denoting the anti-colonial and liberating ideological character of the party’s educational practice, this statement by the PAIGC leader was later reinforced with the declaration of the engaged and politicised nature of teaching. These traits of liberation ideology transmitted in the Party schools were applied both in the design of textbooks, “talking about our Party, our struggle, our land, the present and future of our people, the rights of our people”, and in the pedagogical domain, about which Cabral stated:

For us, pedagogy is what teaches children about our struggle, the rights of our people, the Party, our Party Anthem, the value of our Party, in addition to their A, B, C, the Cat and the Fox, the Wolf and the Chibinho, etc. (Cabral, 1979, p. 99)

Ultimately, Cabral defended educational practice integrated into the social, cultural and historical dynamics of the context in which it was to be implemented. This educational vision of liberation prevailed in Guinea-Bissau until the early 1980s. In the early years of independence, the construction of this vision benefitted from the crucial involvement of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian philosopher and pedagogue (Freire, 1978; Freire & Guimarães, 2011). Later, it failed to resist the transformation of the country, which was caused largely by neoliberal economics with strong political implications. Education was one of the most strongly affected areas, with the educational concept of liberation being abandoned, followed by the progressive degeneration of the entire educational system (Martins & Monteiro, 1996).

This transitory political-ideological milestone in the PAIGC, then a party-state, inaugurated an era that continues to this day, characterised by the contradiction between educational content, pedagogical models, curricular design and the sociocultural context of educational practices. In other words, education has ceased to serve as an instrument for building social progress in Guinea-Bissau, as was desired at its foundation during the national liberation struggle.

In Cape Verde, the educational process was implemented at different historical moments and presents a very unique picture. We can speak of formal education that was in force during the colonial regime, where, as Robalo (2023) demonstrated, this model sought to fulfil an ideological objective rather than anything of a pedagogical nature. Suffice to say that a robust education system was only implemented relatively late on, since ecclesiastical education prevailed for a long time, which essentially fulfilled the same colonial desideratum (Carvalho, 2019; Moniz, 2009).

It is no coincidence that the local intellectual elite, literate and “formal”, were the tiny fringe of the population that had benefitted from academic training provided by the colonial regime, having made use of the instruments made available by the latter. Hence, the language, discourse and approaches used in teaching were deeply embedded in the colonialist project.

However, the decision to take on the anti-colonial fight, carried out by the PAIGC, under the leadership of Amílcar Cabral (1977/2013), at least contributed to an attempt to dismantle the colonial education system, which had been in place without any major setback for several centuries. With the advance of the

armed struggle in Guinea and the clandestine struggle in Cape Verde, a new chapter in history was being written.

During the combat against colonialism in Cape Verde, the tight control of the PIDE and the type of political struggle being carried out meant it was not possible to open educational spaces such as the Pilot Schools, as existed in the liberated regions of Guinea-Bissau and in Conakry. However, it was precisely within the institution of schools that several initiatives of resistance and anti-colonial contestation emerged (Anjos, 2013a). Young Cape Verdeans of the time sought mostly to achieve this by writing revolutionary and anti-colonial poetry to challenge the colonial situation that prevailed at that time.

From 1975 onwards, with the proclamation of national independence, Cape Verde had a set of objective and subjective conditions (linked to the idea of “re-Africanization of spirits”) to build an educational system that was capable of breaking away from the serious problems inherited from colonialism, but which would only work with formal independence (Reis, 2019). The then party-state developed numerous initiatives as a way of affirming an education model concerned with national reconstruction and focused on the “re-Africanization of minds”. Several nationally developed initiatives demonstrate this concern, as do others resulting from pan-African solidarity.

Some examples of this are paradigmatic in the new political and pedagogical context. First, the creation of new curricular programmes, which sought to break away from the colonial imagination and reaffirm African personality (Reis, 2019). Secondly, Paulo Freire’s active presence in the literacy campaigns carried out after independence must be considered. Freire was in Cape Verde in 1977 and 1979, where he directed the Cultural Action Institute, an entity responsible for initiatives linked to literacy. The October 1979 Seminar for Training Regional Literacy Coordinators is one of the defining moments of the presence of this important figure in critical pedagogy (Varela, 2023). Thirdly, a unique event in which Cape Verde took part was the 1st Meeting of Ministers of Education and Educators of the former Portuguese colonies, held in Bissau in February 1978 (“Iniciou-se ontem”, 1978). Last but not least, as a way of showing its commitment to advancing work in the field of education, the Cape Verdean government sent 50 primary school teachers to Angola in June 1979, as a gesture of solidarity in favour of education (“Professores caboverdianos”, 1979).

However, as Moniz (2009) noted, despite the attempts of the party-state (PAIGC/PAICV) to make a clean break from colonial education, what often actually prevailed was the reproduction of the colonial education model. Along the same lines, Paulo Freire noted, while working on the literacy project, that the elite

who inherited power in Cape Verde largely did not break with colonialism despite some leaders having proclaimed the need for a “decolonisation of minds”, as the last stage of decolonisation (Freire, 1978; Freire & Guimarães, 2011).

As Robalo (2023) demonstrates, the paradigmatic example of the continuity of colonial praxis in education is linked to the place given to the Cape Verdean language, which continued to be banned as a language of instruction. Indeed, the elite of the time reinforced the superior position of Portuguese as the language of instruction, seeing it as the only language capable of producing an intellectual, scientific and pedagogical discourse.

In the 1990s, a proposal for a reform of the educational system emerged that was concerned predominantly with creating a new legislative framework, as well as new programmes and curricular content. However, as Monteiro (2014, p. 276) says, despite this supposed concern with connecting the educational system and the local reality, “there is no sign of an effective assumption of the desire to dismantle colonial educational legacies, especially in secondary education”. According to Monteiro (2014, p. 276), two factors may be at the root of this lack of commitment. On the one hand, the lack of financial resources, which forced the country to seek external financing; on the other, the fact that the “authors mapping the reform were almost all specialists from the former colonising metropolis”. And so one of the most important figures to lose his central place in history was Amílcar Cabral.

In ideological terms, it was also in the decade of the 1990s that neoliberalism gained enormous prominence in terms of educational policies. In Vieira's understanding (2019, p. 49), through the efforts of the “World Bank (WB) and the African Development Bank (ADB), the educational process is entering a new phase”. Thus, the author states, “the major political options implemented in the education sector began to be directly determined by the neoliberal principles postulated by experts from supranational financial institutions” (Vieira, 2019, p. 49). Given the advance of neoliberal ideology in governance in Cape Verde in the educational system, new materials were being developed and there was a move to break away from the model in place during the governance of the “single party” (PAIGC/PAICV), which contributed to the process of “decabralisation”, to use an expression coined by Cardina and Rodrigues (2023).

The distancing of the educational systems of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde from the Cabralist ideals on which they were founded, as a direct consequence of the profound dysfunction of state institutions, has triggered protests of various kinds, with a greater incidence in artistic productions among young people. Youth intervention music stands out, mainly rap, and urban arts collectives mo-

bilised around the production of murals that establish dialogues with the historical past of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, through open-air proposals for the rescue and projection of figures that mark social memory, but whose stories and the events in which they were protagonists – largely in the struggle for national liberation – are not part of state education curriculum in either country.

It is also of interest to highlight the fact that this youthful musical and artistic dynamic is taking place in a context in which, in Guinea-Bissau, there is a concerted attempt to erase the living memory of the struggle for liberation by the current heads of the state. Three examples help us prove the truth of this statement. In 2020, the government of Guinea-Bissau named two streets/avenues in Bissau after presidents of countries in the West African sub-region with personal links to the President of the Republic, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, namely Macky Sall, President of Senegal, and Muhammadu Buhari, President of Nigeria. The latter raised the most controversy in the public debate, given that the name of the Nigerian President was given to an avenue previously called Caetano Smedo, paying homage to the man who fought for the independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. In an attempt to avoid objections to the change of the avenue's name, the Guinean government argued that only part of the avenue had been named after Caetano Smedo and that the rest of it was to be named after Muhammadu Buhari.<sup>2</sup> However, our research has found this claim to be untrue: the official address of Tiniguena, a well-known national NGO which is over 30 years old, and whose HQ is on the part of the avenue that had its name changed, is still registered as Avenida Caetano Smedo.

Since 2021, by decision of Umaro Sissoco Embaló, the President of the Republic, the independence of Guinea-Bissau has been celebrated on 16 November, Armed Forces Day, and not on 24 September, the day of the unilateral proclamation of independence. This act, the details of which we do not have the time or space to discuss here, is part of the growing militarisation of political power that the country has faced in the last five years. More recently, in July 2024, the Guinean government issued an order forbidding the use of any non-governmental material celebrating the centenary of Amílcar Cabral in public, justifying the prohibition by the fact that it was preparing an official state tribute to the leader of the independence struggles of Guinea and Cape Verde.

This attempt to forcibly erase the memory of the struggle for liberation has been reinforced by Decree No 01/2023, issued by the government of Guinea-Bissau, which abolishes the national holidays of 3 August and 23 January. This first date marks the massacre of Guinea-Bissau dockworkers in colonial trading

<sup>2</sup> For more information see: <https://www.odemocratagb.com/?p=26627>

companies by the repressive colonial forces, in Largo de Pindjiguiti, in 1959, who were protesting for higher salaries. The second date is the anniversary of the start of the armed struggle for independence in 1963. In other words, they are two milestones of the nationalist resistance for the independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

In Cape Verde, the attempt to erase and whitewash historical memory is also evident. For example, in 2011, the Portuguese Adriano Moreira was honoured at the University of Mindelo, even though he was the figure responsible for the reopening of the Tarrafal Concentration Camp, which was an example of the repressive Estado Novo regime. This can be confirmed by ordinance No 18 539 of 17 June, 1961. Ironically, this tribute was paid on the same day that worldwide Human Rights are celebrated.

Along the same lines, statues of figures linked to slavery and colonialism remain standing in the country's central squares, despite all the challenges from activists and academics. Conversely, dates linked to the anti-colonial struggle have been systematically "forgotten", as is the case with the date of birth of Amílcar Cabral. It is no coincidence that the Cape Verdean parliament rejected the resolution that proposed a celebration of the centenary of Amílcar Cabral's birth. All the members of the MpD party, the majority party in parliament, which supports the current government, voted against the proposal.

Therefore, the mobilisation around youth artistic movements in both countries is part of what Molden (2016) considers to be the construction of a counter-hegemonic memory, as they seek to resist attempts by leaders of state institutions to silence or impose official narratives on the past. Along the same theoretical lines, for Mesquita (2011), these activist art practices – which we prefer to call *artivism* – presuppose "writing a counter-history for a culture of opposition" (p. 29), and it is precisely this characteristic of opposition in relation to the official narratives about the past that configures the productions of the *artist* movements analysed in this article.

## The mobilisation of social groups to transform Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verdean society

In the post-independence period in both Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, children's and youth organisations such as Abel Djassi's Pioneiros and the JAAC-CV, started during the armed struggle in the 1960s, were responsible for the party-political indoctrination of the generation that Cabral presented as the "Flower of the Revolution", with a view to transforming it into the driving force of development



from the perspective of pan-Africanism. In the 1980s, when the discourse of the African crisis was spreading (Mamdani et al., 1988), the PAICV, who had already separated from the PAIGC, found a way out of the supposed crisis in the thesis of modernisation, inspired by functionalism and institutionalism.

Underlying this choice was the belief that the consolidation of the nation and its development would only be possible if carried out in alliance with the former colonial powers, while not neglecting the economic and ideological support of the old socialist alliances of the revolutionary period. In Guinea-Bissau, the acceleration of the economic crisis, the devaluation of the currency and popular pressure led to the adoption of the market liberalisation project. These ideological positions paved the way for economic and political liberalisation, which in Cape Verde culminated in victory for the MpD, an avowedly liberal party, which accelerated the implementation of restructuring economic programmes. In Guinea-Bissau, PAIGC's staying in power after the 1994 elections did not stop the crisis, but did pave the way for the country to join the West African monetary economic zone, and to start using the CFA franc as its currency (Sangreman et al., 2006).

In practice, Cape Verde's ideological repositioning of the 1990s led to the replacement of the *re*-Africanization of their identity and a memory consolidated in the 1970s by a large group of pupils from the Liceu da Praia, who found in poetry "a linguistic bridge between the armed struggle that had occurred in Guinea-Bissau and the daily Cape Verdean life of small resistances to colonialism" (Anjos, 2013b, p. 123), in the *de*-Africanization of identity and memory (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2020). And thus began a process of erasing, silencing and the defamation of Cabral.

These events also paved the way for the process of NGOification of civil society (Barros & Lima, 2021), leading to the depoliticisation and transformation of civil society into a servile society (Costa, 2013). Still, outside the sphere of party-political influence, rap would become an important dissident voice of the youth that, despite its initial weak political awareness, gradually became an influence for resistance and denunciation by transporting infra-political discourses from private spaces to the public domain.

The introduction of hip-hop in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde occurred in the 1980s. Curiously, as previously mentioned, this was a period marked by the ideological work of (re)constructing the nation's identity – as socialist and African. Therefore, given the fact that many of its pioneers frequented spaces of pan-African ideological indoctrination, it is no surprise that this cultural movement emerged from the outset with a pan-African orientation, although this pan-Africanism manifested itself subconsciously in the majority of its main protagonists.



In the 1990s, when Cape Verdean rap was maturing, a process of indigenisation was triggered through the use of the Cape Verdean language. However, it was only in the 2000s that its re-Africanization took effect with the conscious integration of Cabralist and pan-African thought. Despite the parallel drawn by several activists between the culture of the coloniser and the commercialisation of hip-hop culture (Clark, 2018), due to its use as a kind of soft power in the propagation of the neoliberal ideology of North American imperialism and in the export of misogyny and violence (Abu-Jamal, 2006), rap is today described as a pan-African platform (Clark, 2018), as it has become the most powerful cultural expression in Africa through which old African identities are being deconstructed and reconstructed (Saucier, 2011).

Although rap's move towards Cabralist and pan-African themes coincided with the return of the PAICV to power, this was not driven by the party. It emerged spontaneously within youth collectives and pan-African activists who found in Cabral an important tool to fight against a kind of anomy and the ideological void experienced by young people. In Guinea-Bissau, this process occurred mainly after the political-military conflict of 1998/99, which overthrew the Nino Vieira regime, with Cabral's speeches and messages being reused in a new music of intervention, symbolising the rebirth of the era of ideologies.

These perspectives aimed to solve the problem of the identity crisis, which was the result of centuries of enslavement and colonial domination and still remained in the collective imagination, influencing young people. They were based on Cabral's thinking about how to adopt new Afrocentric behaviours to increase their self-esteem and create conditions for the (re)writing of their history, which was being silenced by the Eurocentric thinking reproduced by the formal educational system in the post-colonial period.

As a counter-colonial phenomenon (Lima & Robalo, 2019), rap brought out in young people what Pais (2007) called reflexive identities and aesthetic reflexivity, since it redirected their identity according to their social condition imposed by the constraints triggered by economic restructuring programmes. It sought to respond, by way of a transformative reflexivity, to the identification with a deviant urban performative aesthetic, even though it was first perceived as culturally strange to their universe. This work of historical recontextualization therefore depended on albums like *Regime de Crime* by Naka B, in Guinea-Bissau, and groups like *Ra-Teknolojia*,<sup>3</sup> in Cape Verde, and many others, which bridged the gap be-

<sup>3</sup> Created in 2000 by a Cape Verdean activist who returned from the US after his university education, it was responsible for importing North American Afro-centrism, associated with black conservatism. The group made rap a tool for African education and awareness, disseminated in several programmes on the youth channel of *Rádio Cabo Verde*, which they controlled. They were also very active in the neighbourhoods of the major cities of Santiago, where they organised a series of lectures.

tween the period of revolutionary struggle led by Cabral and the street demonstrations that marked the Cape Verdean urban landscape between 2005 and 2015, where rap was the main driving force, articulator and means of dissemination (Lima & Vicente, 2023).

In Cape Verde, parallel to the work of *Ra-Teknolojia*, the *Djuntarti* association emerged in the second half of the 2000s. Influenced by the *Shokanti* movement, a collective led by a Cape Verdean rapper based in the US, it created the Hip-Hop Konsienti Festival (FHHK), organised by a network of sociocultural activists from practically every neighbourhood in the city of Praia. Following the Cabralist logic of “thinking to act better and acting to think better”, it managed to mobilise a significant number of young people around themed Hip-Hop shows between 2008 and 2009. Conceived as spaces for reflection, although not always aligned with groups such as *Ra-Teknolojia*, both should be considered as spaces for political-identity awareness guided by two basic Cabralist principles aiming to reconnect young people with their ancestry: the re-Africanization of spirits and the return to roots.

It was based on these conceptual premises that *Djuntarti*, a Cape Verdean pan-Africanist collective based in the Netherlands and supported by the *Fidjus di Cabral* association, organised *Marxa Cabral* – also known as *Marxa do Hip-Hop* – in January 2010. The event was conceived as an act of symbolic insubordination to celebrate the anniversary of Cabral’s assassination and brought together socio-cultural and community activists. In general terms, this was part of a broader programme of informal education, which included discussion groups, cultural exchange and a grand finale in the city’s historic colonial centre, bringing together all the elements of hip-hop. One of the key forms of representing Cabral brought in by *Djuntarti* was the use of his face in paintings. In fact, rap and graffiti were significantly the most representative forms of art in this movement, and it was from the time of the FHHK on that we began to see an increasing number of images of Cabral in the most diverse forms and styles, in particular in the city of Praia.

During the 2010 *Marxa Cabral*, the whole stage was covered in graffiti showing his image and powerful Cabral quotes, which made it quite clear that there was also a dispute between these “new” pan-Africans and the “older” generation (commanders of the struggle for liberation and the first leaders of the independent country), whom they accused of having betrayed their ideals (Barros & Lima, 2012). This dispute had as a backdrop the legitimacy of his legacy and the safeguarding of his memory (Barros & Lima, 2018).

In 2013, the *Marxa* was revived by the *Korrenti Ativizta* movement (later known as the *Pilorinhu* association), and renamed *Marxa do Povo*, which, in addition to the founding activists, was joined by local populations who, according to Cabral's thinking (1979), were already part of African culture and, therefore, did not need a process of returning to their roots. We are talking about demonstrations such as *Tabanka*, *Batuku* and *Rabeladus de Espinho Branco*, a religious group that had been socially repressed for decades, who held Cabral and the revolutionary banner of the PAIGC as one of its main references (Velloso, 2019). In the same way, the *Marxa* sought to encourage a turning back to Africa, mobilising the West African communities living in Cape Verde, particularly those from Bissau-Guinea.



Figura 1: Mural Titina Silá, Praia, Cabo Verde

Painting revolutionary figures with Cabral as a reference was another important practice brought back by *Pilorinhu*. The aim of their urban art programme<sup>4</sup> from 2018 to 2021 was to make urban art an instrument of community empowerment in two different ways. On the one hand, socioeconomic empowerment, as

<sup>4</sup> As part of the *Xalabas* project, financed by the European Union Delegation in Cape Verde, the main objective of this project was to contribute to greater integration of communities in the development of sustainable tourism, through the expansion and diversification of what was on offer to tourists in the *Achada Grande Frente* neighbourhood, where the *Pilorinhu* association originated.

it opened the way for developing an urban art circuit. This could provide some income for small local businesses, and include small self-financing projects developed in the community through the sale of a programme of visits promoted by the association. On the other hand, the initiative enabled identity empowerment, through the dissemination of paintings of local figures and daily life, as well as images and writings using the stencil technique, as a way of protecting the collective memory of the neighbourhood.

Two figures stood out in these paintings: Cabral and Titina Silá,<sup>5</sup> conceived collectively and executed by Vhils (Portugal) and Banksy (Kenya). Cabral's face was based on one of his most iconic photographs and was painted on the wall of the local secondary school. It was intended as a critique of the complete removal of his name and thinking from the Cape Verdean educational system and was also a tool for raising political awareness among the residents of the neighbourhood.

Alongside other *Pilorinho* association projects, with Cabral as its emblem, *Marxa Cabral* is without a doubt one of the most important symbolic landmarks of resistance, solidarity and emancipation. Over the years, it has come to represent the new counter-colonial political resistance and the continuity of the "revolution" in the face of new neocolonial challenges, since, as Mafeje (2005) points out, the demand for dignity and recognition continues to be the main banner of African social movements. This is largely due to the fact that there has been no real transition to equality and solidarity for social groups who find themselves in a position of socioeconomic disadvantage, which is precisely where the majority of these activists come from and what Cabral and his companions fought for.

More than a decade since it began, this cultural and youth event is today an important political and identity platform that brings together several Cape Verdean groups of pan-African inspiration, and in the last two years it has been organised by a council of activists and collectives calling themselves *Kualizon Movimentu Federalista Pan-Afrikanu*. This year, for Cabral's centenary, for example, the not-so-innocent launch of Brito-Semedo's book (2023), which is written with a Lusotropicalist agenda, questions the belonging of Cape Verdean identity to the African matrix and "blames" Cabral's generation for forcing Cape Verde to turn towards Africa. So, some new generation Cape Verdean pan-Africanists associated with *Kualizon*, proposed the construction of a pan-African mural entitled *Faces of Pan-Africanism* on one of the ramps in the historic centre of the

<sup>5</sup> Militant and combatant of the PAIGC who was born in 1943, in Cadique, in South Guiné-Bissau. She died on 30 January 1973 in an ambush by the colonial army in Rio Farim while he was travelling to Cabral's funeral in Conakry.

city of Praia. There are also collaborative paintings of revolutionary figures from Guinea-Bissau.

These collective mobilisations, despite the constant attempts to make them instrumentalised and part of institutional party-political colonisation, have managed to stay non-partisan as far as possible, remaining loyal only to Cabral's ideals. This year's *Marxa*, celebrating the centenary of Amílcar Cabral's birth, has teamed up with the Amílcar Cabral Foundation, bringing together former combatants and public figures linked to culture and politics.



Figura 2: Mural Amílcar Cabral, Bissau, Guiné-Bissau

In Guinea-Bissau, the abandonment of Cabral's ideals was carried out through the capture of state institutions by interest groups within the armed forces and in the country's main political bodies, transforming them into machines that merely fight to win and stay in power, with no concern for the well-being of the people. This led to the weakening of the state, beginning with the coup d'état of 14 November, 1980, which brought Nino Viera to power for a period of eighteen years, and was made worse by the political-military conflict of 1998/99, which served to distance state institutions from the provision of basic services to the public, who could no longer see the state as an entity whose role was to improve living conditions.



The coup of 1980 ushered in a period of political-military crises, the consequences of which dragged on for a long time, and was marked by a considerable number of cultural demonstrations against the difficult state in which the Guinea-Bissau population was forced to live. Both in literature and music, there were protests against the crises of the “present situation” found in the legacy of the struggle for liberation and in the heroism of its protagonists, Cabral being the most frequently mentioned. They were forms of discourse that enabled an artistic expression of opposition to the political and military actors involved in the cyclical post-independence convulsions (Jaló, 2024).

However, since 2019, the most significant cultural protests have been led by young visual artists who met at *Galeria Jovem* under the initial mentoring of Cazé, an experienced Brazilian muralist, in the *Caminhos Urbanos* project. Their murals, found all over the city of Bissau, have sought to maintain a constant dialogue with the great current challenges of sociocultural, political and economic transformation in Guinea-Bissau, by problematising everyday life, and above all by representing the main protagonists of the liberation struggle.



Figura 3: Mural José Carlos Schwarz e Cobia Djazz, Bissau, Guiné-Bissau

Thus, the image projected of Amílcar Cabral eyeing the National Popular Assembly; the reproduction of one of Titina Silá's most iconic photographs holding a child in her arms and smiling at others on the way to school; or José Carlos Schwarz<sup>6</sup> staring down the street bearing his name, are a unique way of implementing Cabral's concept of culture (and cultural expression through art), as an instrument to be used in the service of progress.

This sense of protest found in the artistic movements of Guinea-Bissau is also deeply entrenched in the dynamics of social movements that wish to reclaim the Cabralist legacy based on the "re-Africanization of minds", seeing it as a design that enables the rescue and enhancement of the value of history, social memory and invisible native cultural practices. In this particular case, a social movement that describes itself as being Afro-centrist and pan-African, *Nô Raiz* (Our Roots), has led to events that include non-formal education; debate sessions between its members, based on the readings and discussion of Afro-centrist and pan-African works and authors, the production of urban art; and various forms of public intervention that enable new ways of approaching Guinea-Bissau and African cultures.

## **Conclusion: Cabralist counter-colonialism based on *artivism***

The frailties of education systems in African countries, aggravated by the implementation of neoliberal reform programmes, have contributed to the stripping away from the curriculum of Afrocentric and ideologically-driven subjects that postulated versions of history that might produce endogenous thought. To make matters worse, these reforms were based on assumptions that contributed to the removal of historical figures from the learning process, replacing them with narratives that were far from the daily life of their reality. This curriculum choice forced learners to deal with course contents that were mentally intangible, such as the introduction of Social Education in Guinea-Bissau, which focused on rights rather than on individual and collective responsibilities.

If in Guinea-Bissau the frailty of the state meant that the leadership of the educational reform was left to external actors, in Cape Verde they benefitted from the opposition coming to power, as it sought to dissociate the heroes of independence from the education system, in an attempt to produce a new ideological

<sup>6</sup> Considered to be a pioneer of contemporary Guinean music, José Carlos Schwarz was the lead vocalist of Cobiana Djaz, one of the most emblematic Guinean musical groups of the 1970s. He was born in Bissau on 6 December, 1949, and died in a plane crash on 27 May, 1977.



memory. This meant that political liberalisation in both countries took place in a context of triple crisis: political, economic and educational.

As a consequence, the process of decollectivisation of mass movements progressed in the midst of a paradox, in which disaffiliated young people were to be fought over by political parties, but at the same time opening the way for adherence to associative projects of various natures, which sought to encourage new forms of social integration.

However, the limitations of the two models, party politics, on the one hand – which was based on the leader culture and structures closed in on themselves; and associativism, on the other – which was very dependent on financing and the agenda of external donors – paved the way for the emergence and protagonism of informal communities of diverse social groups, such as young people and artists in both countries and their diasporas. By evoking messages and the conception of Cabralist images, these movements developed symbolic and cultural forms of production, which contributed to and are considered to be decisive in a process of (re)discovery, rescue, and valorisation of new narratives and trends in Amílcar Cabral's public work.

One of the most notable characteristics of this trend is *artivism* – a political-artistic and cultural movement of social and peripheral collectives using contemporary visual arts. Through their artistic creations, using aesthetics, narrative and performance, these collectives exhibit and represent, seeking to give new meaning to Cabralism as a means and instrument of transformation. In this way they contribute to Cabral, who has now been transformed into a concept which is gaining greater relevance and a broader following, thus encompassing new utopias and new strategies of struggle and resistance.

The basis for this *artist* confrontation of ideas presents us with a new possibility to read the issues of active and full citizenship, public positioning, forms of organising collective action, allowing this resignification to occur in spaces that denounce hegemonic and neocolonial narratives, while also challenging the current political system and economic model, which generate corruption, exclusion, poverty and conflict.

Cabralism in *artivism* is the movement of struggle and resistance that seeks autonomy, through politicized contingents that share visions about the world based on ideas that link them to Cabral. Through their work, be it rap, urban art, literature, plays, films, t-shirts or *súmbias*... they seek to affirm a form of Afrocentricity and demand a new construction of the cultural heritage of their people, affirming their version of history through narratives that are theirs by right and by legacy.

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