

**PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL POLICIES IN PORTUGAL  
UNDER THE SPECTRE OF AMÍLCAR CABRAL**

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## Participation and social policies in Portugal under the spectre of Amílcar Cabral<sup>1</sup>

To liberate Guinea and Cape Verde, Cabral mobilised and embodied different knowledge forms to mount a successful strategy.<sup>2</sup> His undergraduate degree in Agronomy and later training provided him with technical knowledge. During his lifetime, Cabral was also a connector of people and ideas. His travel log illustrates this: He visited more than 100 countries, sometimes multiple times (Santos, 2023), from which he brought learning from other experiences – practice-centred knowledge.<sup>3</sup> However, learning from the field experience was crucial for a deep understanding of the complex reality of the future Guinea-Bissau. Following his undergraduate degree, he was posted at several places, providing in-depth first-hand knowledge on the intertwined local views (local knowledge) and conflicting arenas based on ethnicity or the coloniser-colonised relationship (political knowledge).<sup>4</sup>

Cabral's influence across Africa has been documented in several seminal documents, including some by the contributors of this special issue, e.g., Mendy (2019).<sup>5</sup> Less has been said about the influence of Cabral outside Africa, with a few exceptions (e.g., Cravo, 2024; Parrot & Lawrence, 2022), and fewer have been said about its influence today, particularly in the African descendant communities in European cities. Their study is particularly topical as these are found to be generally underprivileged, despite social policies, often living in ghettos and without equal opportunities in health and education (e.g., Machado et al., 2005; McEachrane, 2021; Small, 2018; Van Landeghem et al., 2024; Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). Motivated by culture to socio-political issues, how can these communities interact better with European social policies?

This contribution will focus on the role of local and political knowledge dimensions. Local knowledge is instrumental in integrating the views of estranged communities to build more inclusive and better public and social policies. Arm-chained bureaucrats need help identifying local needs and priorities while local

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Goulart and Tavares (2022) suggest four sources of knowledge: technical, local, political, and practice-centred.

<sup>3</sup> Santos (2023) systematises Cabral's intense travelling to forge key alliances and harvest knowledge and support worldwide.

<sup>4</sup> Integrating the different forms of knowledge is natural, depending on the perspective. For example, César (2018) refers also to the interconnection of technical and political knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Mike Powell's recent section on the *Review of African Political Economy* is <https://roape.net/2023/10/13/amilcar-cabral-speaks/>

communities know their problems better. While this still needs to be framed with other knowledges, local knowledge is important for effective policies.

Complementarily, it is also important to acknowledge that there are different wills in confrontation. Instead of relying on top-down policies, participatory processes can provide ownership, which is a key to having meaningful policies that can help transform underprivileged settings. In 2022, only 35% of Portuguese believed they benefited from equal opportunities in life, in contrast to 63%-69% in Nordic countries (European Commission, 2023). These figures show further disbelief since 2017. Particularly, relocated communities feel deprived of ownership and the right to fundamental choices (Cardoso & Perista, 1994). Without ownership, engagement, and belief, no life improvement is possible.

Cabral's learnings and teachings may positively influence the everyday participation of neglected neighbourhoods in Portuguese civic life. Lopes (2011) reminds us that Cabral stressed the importance of interacting with reality as people fight for practical things that improve their daily lives, not ideals. Not only are these areas with less social equipment, but they are also areas with lower voting participation. Civil society organisations and social policies can bring about change by engaging with socially and politically deprived populations. Participation is not the buzzword it used to be, but it can become transformative in certain conditions.

## **Cabral's legacy and the Portuguese revolution**

The year 2024 is important in Amílcar Cabral's legacy. On 12<sup>th</sup> September 2024, Cabral would celebrate 100 years, while just one year and a half earlier, in January 2023, passed 50 years after his murder. 2024 is also the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1974, the Carnation Revolution that ended the dictatorship in Portugal and paved the way to the decolonisation of Angola, Cape Verde, East Timor, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

In this light, Cabral has been remembered as a key person in the process that led to the end of the dictatorship in Portugal. After all, his independence movement, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), provided the most challenging colonial war field for the Portuguese army in the then so-called Portuguese Guinea. It is important to stress that Cabral did not confuse the colonial policies with those of the Portuguese. The Portuguese were under dictatorship, and therefore, he did not target the Portuguese people as the enemy, as he stated in various official documents and speeches.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Still in Lisbon, he had also dedicated his thesis to Alentejo's agricultural daily workers.

The difficulties faced in the field would condition the views of the Portuguese serving officers, including some of the most influential figures in Portugal in the years to come, such as António de Spínola (General and Governor), Fernando Salgueiro Maia (Captain), Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho (Captain) or Vasco Lourenço (Captain).<sup>7</sup> The indivisibility of the Portuguese regime and its colonies would lead to internal discontentment and external isolation and mark its fall. The Armed Forced Movement uprising on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1974, unusually led by captains, would be joyfully greeted by most Portuguese.

Accordingly to Cabral's influential role, an exhibition on his life was included in the commemorations of the 50 years of 25<sup>th</sup> April 1974, breaking a long-standing taboo. Cabral was portrayed as engaged, resourceful, and meticulous (Neves & Martins, 2023). The exhibition's location in Benfica, farther from the city centre and closer to some of the outer suburbs of Lisbon, intended to reach other publics, including afro-descendants. The exhibition also received institutional visits from the Portuguese President, the Parliament President, and iconic figures such as Manuel Alegre.

## Cabral lives in Lisbon today

Despite the difficulty from the Portuguese right and centre-right to acknowledge that 25 of April comes hand in hand with the decolonisation, as referred by the Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa,<sup>8</sup> Cabral also lives in Portugal today. In a polarised world, amidst discussions on whether there is structural racism and the election growth of a far-right party, the other part of Portuguese society has been increasingly aware and mobilised against racism and colonial mentality.

In academia, there has been a surge in interest in Cabral. At the Portuguese national level, research projects such as "*Amílcar Cabral, da História Política às Políticas da Memória*" (PTDC/EPH-HIS/6964/2014, led by Rui Lopes) at NOVA University of Lisbon led a resurgence in interest in his figure. This project culminated in a themed section in the *International History Review* (Lopes & Barros, 2019). More recently, a conference at ISCSP, Universidade de Lisboa, the former

<sup>7</sup> Vasco Lourenço would be removed from the preparations for the military coup as he was sent to the Azores before the 25<sup>th</sup> of April to dissuade dissent in the army. However, Otelo and Salgueiro Maia were key in the uprising promoted by the army captain's movement as mastermind and enforcer, respectively. Spínola held high ranks during the dictatorship, with ethically controversial war policies in Guinea, and eventually proposed a "compromise" solution for the conflict. Spínola would be installed as the first president post-dictatorship as the captains searched for legitimacy of higher ranks. Later, Otelo and Spínola would become the radical left and right spearheads.

<sup>8</sup> At "Amílcar Cabral, uma Exposição", [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_xtXn0qr8VE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xtXn0qr8VE)

colonial institute that used to train the colonial administration,<sup>9</sup> co-organised with other key organisations, has remembered Cabral's worldwide contribution from the perspective of researchers from Africa, Europe, and North and South America.<sup>10</sup>

There have been other celebrations or evocations, sometimes more informal, sometimes more institutional, in Amadora, Braga, Coimbra, Évora, Faro, Porto, and Setúbal, particularly in September 2024, regarding his 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He has named avenues in Entroncamento and Sacavém and roads in Bobadela, Lisboa, Monte Abraão or Setúbal. Cabral is such an unavoidable figure that even *Revista Portuguesa de História Militar*, published by the Ministry of National Defence, dedicates him a bio in the category of political leadership.<sup>11</sup>

## Cabral in the suburbs

However, it is in the real world, as Lopes (2011) reminds us, in the outer suburbs of Lisbon, where Cabral matters even more. Cabral memory is instrumental in helping community leaders or activists connect with youngsters and their heritage. In local associations, Amílcar Cabral iconography or readings are usual assets for changing youth lives in suburban contexts where public and social policies are absent or insufficient. A reprinted version of the famous pedagogue Paulo Freire (2020) highlights the importance of education in Cabral's thought and practice.

Casal da Boba in Amadora is an example of Lisbon suburbs, with many Cabo Verdeans or their descendants. The socio-economic difficulties (Bento, 2014) and the frequent association in news to crime, as denounced by José Baessa de Pina, bury the success stories of this neighbourhood (Reis, 2022). The only visible public entities are the police station and the school (Bento, 2014), but loosely connected to the community. The community faces difficulties occupying and using the space (Pardue, 2013), without even a playground for kids. Local and outside organisations have positively intervened in the neighbourhood via sports and arts (Bento, 2014). A recent unofficial renaming from Rua Marechal António de

<sup>9</sup> The intertwining of the protagonists is constant. Salgueiro Maia was going to be a student at ISCSP for 1969-70 but was mobilised for the colonial war. After the revolution, he would apply for a return (ISCSP, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.iscsp.ulisboa.pt/pt/servicos/comunicacao/eventos/conferencias/congresso-internacional-outras-leituras-sobre-amilcar-cabral> for more details.

<sup>11</sup> The bio is generally factual but argues at the end the contested thesis that the Portuguese political police (PIDE) had nothing to do with his death (Lousada & Oliveira, 2021). <https://www.defesa.gov.pt/pt/defesa/organizacao/comissoes/cphm/rphm/edicoes/ano1/n12021/bios/lidpolitica/cabral>

Spínola to Rua Amílcar Cabral symbolises reclaiming ownership of one's life: the change from the oppressor to the liberator.<sup>12</sup>

In Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, music and demonstrations inspired by Cabral mobilised previously under participating social groups, part of it called *artivism* (Barros et al., 2024). Just the fact of their participation brought change about. In Lisbon, Portugal, a demonstration named Marxa Kabral gathered thousands of participants, who marched in Avenida da Liberdade to commemorate his 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.<sup>13</sup> A coalition of several collectives of afro-descendants and other supportive organisations promoted it. Some of this new generation of activists have long CVs, such as Moinho da Juventude and Flávio Almada, probably the better-known references.<sup>14</sup>

Cabral's reference is still instrumental in the present, as a role model that can increase the aspirations of the minority groups (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006). This past role model compensates for the current invisibility of alternative living role models. Away from sports and arts, it is hard to find an African-origin personality of a similar high public profile to compete with Cabral's popularity, particularly after his martyrdom. In Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, it has worked to engage youth in civic and cultural life (Barros & Lima, 2012; Lima, 2020). The mainstreaming of Cabral provides a high-achieving role model to African descendants, but promoting Cabral's "descendants" is fundamental in the median run.

It is noteworthy to mention the surge of a new organisation called *Vida Justa*. Concerned with demanding a fair life for the underprivileged, often living in racialised neighbourhoods, the movement connects local activists and organisations in the Lisbon metropolitan area based on participatory activities. It attempts to bring bridges to neighbourhoods often disconnected from the urban and cultural grid. Its recent demonstrations gathered thousands of people.<sup>15</sup>

These bottom-up approaches to bringing about social change remind us of previous organisations in poor neighbourhoods following Portuguese democra-

<sup>12</sup> The renaming of the street is particularly relevant as Spínola had planned and failed to assassinate Cabral in November 1970 during *Operação Mar Verde* (Operation Green Sea), even if the role of the Portuguese authorities in his actual assassination in January 1973 is not clear (Fabião, 2019; Sangreman & Semedo, 2022). At the time, in the heat of the Cold War, others, such as Davidson (1973), had fewer doubts and pinpointed Spínola as the mastermind of the murder. Lousada and Oliveira (2021) argue for the opposite regarding the role of the Portuguese political police in an article published in a journal of the Portuguese Ministry of Defence.

<sup>13</sup> A demonstration also named Marxa Kabral is held annually in Cabo Verde on 20 January, the date of Cabral's assassination.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Pardue (2014) and <https://anabelamotaribeiro.pt/flavio-almada-os-filhos-da-madrugada-333476>

<sup>15</sup> The headlines of its second demonstration in October 2023 appeared in several national newspapers, including "Fed up of choosing between paying the rent and eating" (*Público*); "VJ demands attention for housing, wages and transports" (*Observador; RTP*); "No one can live in Lisbon" (*Expresso; SIC Notícias*); and "For poverty not to be invisible or silent" (*Correio da Manhã*).

tisation (Goulart & Falanga, 2022). While they led to social gains for local communities, the challenge was keeping the commitment and engagement of locals (Cardoso & Perista, 1994).

## Epilogue: Social policies and participation from below

Europe's social model was long advertised as an asset compared to other paradigms. However, it always comprised very different realities, even if these are not immutable. Esping-Andersen (1990) proposed a seminal taxonomy separating liberal, conservative, and social democratic welfare regimes. Ferrera (1996) extended the taxonomy to include Southern Europe, which has a more fragile support system. Claveria and Sorić (2024) find that general redistributive policies both in Scandinavian and South European countries are finding difficult to respond to growing inequality. Therefore, the question is how the slacking public policies will respond today to the challenges urged by these communities. Processes and actors are key to the confrontation/conciliation of social policy administration and local communities.

Participatory processes can break vices from top-down policies, but, in practice, evidence on participation processes is ambivalent. Gómez et al. (2010) gathered divergent cases on "Participation for what: social change or social control?" suggesting it may lead to the opposite purpose. Several cases of participation have been disappointing. In the best-case scenario, "mainstreaming has depoliticised participation and made it a technical instrument. [How] to reaffirm the transformative and emancipatory potential of participation" (Berner, 2010, p. 2) is the key question. If meaningful participation is meant, consolidating these communities and their leaders is instrumental. Some, such as Thomson and Gill (2024), go a step forward to call an end to "instrumentalised politics" and a true participatory democracy, with an increased role for spaces of dialogue.

Social actors are often crucial to the success of participatory processes. Some police departments are now trying to connect to these estranged communities by enacting participation approaches to link up with improvements in the neighbourhood, but this raises concerns about whether they are adequate interlocutors. Given their traditional attrition with the inhabitants of some of these neighbourhoods, as supported by local and International Amnesty complaints, other actors should be prioritised as intermediaries. Just recently, the death of a citizen shot by a policeman led to riots in Zambujal, another neighbourhood in Amadora.<sup>16</sup> Due to spatial segregation (Cardoso & Perista, 1994), the complex

<sup>16</sup> This article was written earlier than these events in the aftermath of 21<sup>st</sup> October 2024.

identities identified in neighbourhoods such as Casal da Boba (Fernandes, 2006; Pardue, 2013) or Zambujal require local mediators and alternative approaches.

In the past, several public programmes have successfully improved peoples' lives in these neighbourhoods, even if they do not address structural issues. *Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária* (TEIP) and "Escolhas" addressed educational challenges, the former since 1996 on schools in socially vulnerable neighbourhoods, the latter since 2001 on socially vulnerable individuals. For example, TEIP was based on providing additional resources to schools in underprivileged areas, contextualising educational policies, monitoring, and network building between schools (Costa, 2022).<sup>17</sup>

In complement, Lisbon's programme Bip Zip funds bottom-up projects in "priority areas and neighbourhoods" since 2011 (Falanga, 2020), an experience which was scaled up nationwide by *Bairros Saudáveis* specifically targeting health and quality of life projects in socially vulnerable neighbourhoods. Given that the projects should come from embedded organisations such as *juntas de freguesia*/civil parishes, local associations, and NGOs, it aims to increase ownership. As Falanga (2022) puts it eloquently, "externally driven changes lower people's sense of control, and invited spaces of participation equally hinder the potential of place attachment for urban regeneration", in contrast to "internally driven changes through spontaneous community action developed in popular spaces of participation".

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<sup>17</sup> Private foundations such as Fundação Gulbenkian have also supported interventions on schooling, training, employment, health and leisure. For example, in Casal da Boba projects "Geração" (Generation) e "Oportunidade" (Opportunity) gathered local partners led by the city council (e.g., Machado & Matias, 2005).

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