

# Amílcar Cabral: Liberator, theorist, and educator

Via [Liberation School](#)

Amílcar Lopes da Costa Cabral was born September 12, 1924 in Bafatá, Guinea-Bissau, one of Portugal's African colonies. On January 20, 1973—48 years ago today—Cabral was murdered by fascist Portuguese assassins just months before the national liberation movement in which he played a central role won the independence of Guinea-Bissau.

This particular struggle was waged for the liberation of not just one country—Guinea-Bissau, where the fighting took place—but also for another geographically-separate region, the archipelago Cape Verde. Cabral and the other leaders of the movement understood that they were fighting in a larger anti-colonial struggle and global class war and, as such, that their immediate enemies were not only the colonial governments of particular countries, but Portuguese colonialism in general. For 500 years, Portuguese colonialism was built upon the slave trade and the systematic pillaging of its African colonies: Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome e Principe, Angola, and Cape Verde.

Despite the worldwide focus on the struggle in Vietnam at the time, the inspiring dynamism of the campaign waged in Guinea-Bissau—together with the figure of Cabral—captured international attention. In the introduction to an early collection of Cabral's writings and speeches, Basil Davidson (1979) describes Cabral as someone who expressed a genuine "enduring interest in everyone and everything that came his way" (x).

Like so many revolutionary leaders Cabral was "loved as well as followed" because "he was big hearted" and "devoted to his

peoples' progress" (xi). Due to his leadership and brilliance, "governments asked his advice" and "the United Nations gave him its platform." However deserved it was, Cabral never indulged in this praise, and instead focused solely on his commitment to the liberation and self-determination of the world's working-class and oppressed.

The Portuguese colonization of Guinea-Bissau was backed by Spain, South Africa, the United States, and NATO. Summarizing the pooled imperialist power wielded by Portugal in a report on the status of their struggle Cabral (1968a) elaborates:

*"In the basic fields of economics, finance and arms, which determine and condition the real political and moral behavior of states, the Portuguese government is able to count more than ever on the effective aid of the NATO allies and others. Anyone familiar with the relations between Portugal and its allies, namely the USA, Federal Germany and other Western powers, can see that this assistance (economic, financial and in war material) is constantly increasing, in the most diverse forms, overt and covert. By skillfully playing on the contingencies of the cold war, in particular on the strategic importance of its own geographical position and that of the Azores islands, by granting military bases to the USA and Federal Germany, by flying high the false banner of the defense of Western and Christian civilization in Africa, and by further subjecting the natural resources of the colonies and the Portuguese economy itself to the big financial monopolies, the Portuguese government has managed to guarantee for as long as necessary the assistance which it receives from the Western powers and from its racist allies in Southern Africa."*

Despite the immense power of their enemies, the struggle led by the relatively small population in Guinea-Bissau prevailed, remaining a beacon of inspiration to this day.

As a result of his role as a national liberation movement

leader for roughly 15 years, Cabral had become a widely influential theorist of decolonization and non-deterministic, creatively applied re-Africanization. World-renowned critical educator Paulo Freire (2020), in a 1985 presentation about his experiences in liberated Guinea-Bissau as a sort of *militant consultant*, concludes that Cabral, along with Ché Guevara, represent “two of the greatest expressions of the twentieth century” (171). Freire describes Cabral as “a very good Marxist, who undertook an *African reading of Marx*” (178). Cabral, for Freire, “fully lived the subjectivity of the struggle. For that reason, he theorized” as he led (179).

Although not fully acknowledged in the field of education Cabral’s decolonial theory and practice also sharpened and influenced the trajectory of Freire’s (1921-1997) thought. Through the revolutionary process led by Cabral, Guinea-Bissau became a world-leader in decolonial forms of education, which moved Freire deeply.

That is, because of the villainous process of Portuguese colonialism, which included centuries of de-Africanization, re-Africanization, through decolonial forms of education, was a central feature of the anti-colonial struggle for self-determination.

## **Cabral’s dialectical unity, building the Party, and the “Weapon of Theory”**

Cabral engaged the world dialectically. As a theory of change, dialectics has been at the center of revolutionary thought since Marx and Engels. Cabral wielded it with precision. Dialectically grasping how competing social forces driving historical development are often hidden or mystified, Cabral excelled at uncovering them, and in the process, successfully mobilized the masses serving as the lever of change.

Cabral knew that the people must not only abstractly understand the interaction of forces behind the development of society, but they must forge an anti-colonial practice that concretely, collectively, and creatively see themselves as one of those forces. To do so, however, the masses had to be organized into and represented by a Party.

In 1956, Cabral helped found the African Party for Independence (PAI), which later became The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). The PAIGC was the first ever communist party in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, and its founding was a monumental and inspiring feat.

In *The Weapon of Theory*, a 1966 address in Havana, Cabral articulated the inseparability of national liberation and socialism, telling the attendees that “in our present historical situation – elimination of imperialism which uses every means to perpetuate its domination over our peoples, and consolidation of socialism throughout a large part of the world – there are only two possible paths for an independent nation: to return to imperialist domination (neo-colonialism, capitalism, state capitalism), or to take the way of socialism.”

Cabral had to build the party and its indispensable culture of militant discipline from the ground up. Cabral’s ability to meet the new party members where they were at as co-learners speaks to his role as a pedagogue of the revolution. Delivered as a series of nine lectures to PAIGC members in 1969, Cabral (1979) covers the basics of the revolution, including its organization. He describes the PAIGC as a party in the Leninist tradition by referring to it as “an instrument of struggle” comprised of those who “share a given idea, a given aim, on a given path” (85).

Of course, revolutionary crises do not emerge from the correctness of ideas alone, but are driven by deteriorating economic conditions, and a crisis in the legitimacy of the

state and its ability to meet the peoples' needs. In the 1940s there were several droughts that left tens of thousands of Cape Verdeans dead. Portugal's barbarism and indifferent response, situated in the context of the mounting poverty and suffering within its African colonies, began to alienate even the most privileged strata of the colonial state.

What made Cabral one of history's great communist leaders, outside of the larger historical moment that provided an outlet for his talents, was his theoretically-informed tactical flexibility, which was essential for a constantly shifting balance of forces. *In-the-midst-of-struggle* decision-making, in other words, is enhanced by theory and organization, which enables the ability to quickly grasp the immediate and long-term implications of the shifting calculus of power.

For example, in 1957 in Paris, Cabral and two Angolans formed the Movimento Anti-Colonista of Africans from the Portuguese colonies during the Algerian War. The three, in Angola, would go on to form the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. What developed was one of the toughest anti-colonial fights in Africa.

It is only fitting that in his opening remarks in the first of the nine 1969 presentations to party members Cabral would choose as his place of departure an explanation of PAIGC's "motto" or "theme," the phrase "unity and struggle" (28). Defining the concept of unity dialectically, Cabral insists that "whatever might be the existing differences" within the people, "we must be one, an entirety, to achieve a given aim. This means that in our principle, unity is taken in a dynamic sense, in motion" (28-29).

The idea that unity is a *movement* and process of composition means that it is "a means, not an end. We might have struggled a little for unity, but if we achieve it, that does not mean the struggle is over" (31). The Party's role here "is not

necessary to unite the whole population to struggle in a country. Are we sure that all the population are united? No, a certain degree of unity is enough. Once we have reached it, then we can struggle" (31).

To explain struggle, Cabral likens it to the tension between centrifugal force and gravity. As a concrete example Cabral notes that for a spaceship to leave the Earth it must overcome the force of gravity. Cabral then characterizes Portuguese colonialism as an external force imposed upon the people and only through the combined force of the people united can the force of colonialism be overcome.

In the address, Cabral theorized the dialectical nature of movement and change focusing specifically on how the anti-imperialist struggle must emerge from the concrete conditions of each national liberation movement.

*"We know that the development of a phenomenon in movement, whatever its external appearance, depends mainly on its internal characteristics. We also know that on the political level our own reality – however fine and attractive the reality of others may be – can only be transformed by detailed knowledge of it, by our own efforts, by our own sacrifices. It is useful to recall in this Tricontinental gathering, so rich in experience and example, that however great the similarity between our various cases and however identical our enemies, national liberation and social revolution are not exportable commodities; they are, and increasingly so every day, the outcome of local and national elaboration, more or less influenced by external factors (be they favorable or unfavorable) but essentially determined and formed by the historical reality of each people, and carried to success by the overcoming or correct solution of the internal contradictions between the various categories characterizing this reality."*

Cabral knew that to defeat Portuguese colonialism in Guinea-

Bissau, the liberation struggle could not merely reproduce the tactics of struggles from other contexts, like Cuba. Rather, every particular struggle has to base its tactics on an analysis of the specifics of its own context. For example, while acknowledging the value of the general principles Guevara outlined in his *Guerilla Warfare*, Cabral (1968b) commented that “nobody commits the error, in general, of blindly applying the experience of others to his own country. To determine the tactics for the struggle in our country, we had to take into account the geographical, historical, economic, and social conditions of our own country, both in Guinea and in Cabo [Cape] Verde.”

Responding to Guevara’s argument, based on the experience of Cuba, that revolutionary struggles go through three predetermined phases or stages, Cabral stated:

*“In general, we have certain reservations about the systematization of phenomena. In reality the phenomena don’t always develop in practice according to the established schemes. We greatly admire the scheme established by Che Guevara essentially on the basis of the struggle of the Cuban people and other experiences, and we are convinced that a profound analysis of that scheme can have a certain application to our struggle. However, we are not completely certain that, in fact, the scheme is absolutely adaptable to our conditions.”*

Cabral’s assessment was also informed by the dialectical insight that the conditions in any one country do not develop in a vacuum unaffected by external forces. Not only were deteriorating conditions in Portugal, the imperial mother country, shifting the balance of forces in favor of national liberation movements in its African colonies, but the emergence of these struggles coincided with the successful revolution in China in 1949.

Conscious of this larger dialectical *totality*, which points to

the interconnection between seemingly separate, unrelated parts, Cabral consciously fostered solidarity with Portugal's working-class. Representing the colonized Indigenous peoples of Guinea-Bissau Cabral successfully reached out to the oppressed of Portugal in solidarity against their common class enemy, the fascistic Portuguese capitalist/colonialist class.

With dialectical theory and the spirit of anti-colonialist and anti-capitalist unity the revolutionary forces in Guinea-Bissau routinely freed Portuguese prisoners of war. Cabral (1968c) used such occasions to make public statements designed to educate and win over Portugal's persecuted working-class to shift the balance of power away from Portugal's fascist state.

Cabral spoke directly to the 20,000 Portuguese conscripts urging them to consider their class interests above and beyond the national chauvinism their ruling class fed them.

*"In the framework of our struggle for national independence, peace and progress for our people in Guinea and the Cabo Verde Islands, the freeing of Portuguese soldiers captured by our armed forces was both necessary and predictable. This humanitarian gesture, whose political significance will escape nobody, is the corollary of a fundamental principle of our party and of our struggle. We are not fighting against the Portuguese people, against Portuguese individuals or families. Without ever confusing the Portuguese people with colonialism, we have had to take up arms to wipe out from our homeland the shameful domination of Portuguese colonialism."*

Central to this message Cabral (1968c) offered insights regarding the awful treatment of not only prisoners of war in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, but of the civilian population as well:

*"Members of our armed forces captured by the colonial troops are generally given a summary execution. Others are tortured and forced to make declarations which the colonial authorities*



*use in their propaganda. In their vain but nonetheless criminal attempt at genocide, the Portuguese colonialists carry out daily acts of terrorism against the peaceful inhabitants of our liberated areas, particularly against women, children and old people; they bomb and machine-gun our people, reducing our villages to ashes and destroying our crops, using bombs of every type, and in particular fragmentation bombs, napalm and white phosphor bombs."*

The liberation of the Portuguese was connected to the liberation of Portugal's African colonies. If the Portuguese ruling class began losing control in Africa, it could also fall in Portugal, and if it fell in Portugal, it would fall in Africa.

Rather than a theoretical position worked out abstractly in isolation, it was formulated practically. It had serious and determinant results. Portuguese officers refused orders to fight in Africa, and some formed an Armed Forces Movement that supported the demands for independence.

The Portuguese soldiers led a rebellion against fascism at home, which ended more than 40 years of fascist rule. It opened the door to a popular upsurge that nearly claimed power for the Portuguese workers. These social convulsions in the imperial center in turn facilitated the independence of Portugal's African colonies.

## **De-Africanization and anti-colonial resistance**

The small region in West Africa that the Portuguese would claim as Guinea-Bissau contained more than a dozen distinct ethnic groups. Slavers worked tirelessly to sew divisions between them. These divisions enabled slavers to enlist one group to facilitate in the enslavement of others. This anti-African divisiveness would lay the foundation for centuries of

de-Africanization.

Describing the role of colonial education in this epistemic violence Walter Rodney (1972/2018), in his classic text, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, explains that, “the Portuguese...had always shown contempt for African language and religion” (304). Whereas secondary schools were established for colonists, education beyond two or three years of elementary school for Africans was rare. Consequently:

*“Schools of kindergarten and primary level for Africans in Portuguese colonies were nothing but agencies for the spread of the Portuguese language...[T]he small amount of education given to Africans was based on eliminating the use of local languages.” (304)*

The devastation of such practices reflects reports that European colonists with smaller African colonial holdings like Portugal were amongst the most desperate and thus cruelest in their efforts at maintaining their occupations. Consequently, Indigenous resistance to Portuguese colonialism was so widespread for so many centuries that colonial rule was always limited to specific regions. In other words, colonial forces were never completely able to conquer what amounts to the state power of indigeneity.

It is therefore not surprising that the Portuguese were not able to rely merely on state violence for social control, but required intensive ideological manipulation as well. The attempt to eradicate Indigenous languages and cultures was crucial. Toward these ends, the colonial authorities propagated a hypocritical discourse that claimed *their* colonies were integral to the metropolis or mainland while simultaneously brutally exploiting them.

# **Fascist Portugal and the struggle**

The brutality in which the Portuguese ruling-class managed its African colonies would eventually be directed at its own working-class with a fascist turn in 1926. Rodney (1972/2018) explains that “when the fascist dictatorship was inaugurated in Portugal in 1926, it drew inspiration from Portugal’s colonial past” (244).

The decline of Portuguese capitalism that gave way to Portuguese fascism would only deteriorate with the global capitalist crisis of the 1930s. Consequently, the desperation of Portugal’s capitalist class intensified. For example, when Salazar became the dictator of Portugal in 1932, he declared that the “new” Portuguese state would be built off of the exploitation of “inferior peoples” (quoted in Rodney, 244).

Whereas the French ruling class had moved to neocolonialism by 1960, Portugal’s decline had rendered it still largely backward and feudalistic. Out of desperation, Portugal became even more dependent on ruthlessly exploiting peoples not just in its colonial holdings, but within its own national territory.

Fascist Portuguese leaders, therefore, employing increasingly violent forms of social control, rejected African demands for self-determination. In response to the growing wave of national liberation movements in their African colonies, the Portuguese establishment sent armed forces to repress the struggle. Rather than cower in the face of Portuguese fascism and overall deteriorating conditions, national liberation movements grew and spread.

## **Relations with China**

Following the establishment of the PAIGC, Cabral settled in Guinea’s capital, Conakry. Cabral immediately reached out to

China's Guinean embassy in 1960.

Since the emergence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, China had established a clear commitment to the anti-colonial movements in Africa. For example, in 1955 at the Bandung Conference, in which 29 African countries participated, China established foreign policy principles based upon supporting oppressed nations' right to self-determination. In 1957, China organized the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference and in 1960 founded the Chinese-African Peoples' Friendship Association, in which Cabral enthusiastically participated.

Cabral and other leaders of PAIGC became regular guests at the Chinese embassy in Conakry. In 1960, the PAIGC received an invitation from the Chinese Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity to visit China. A delegation from the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) was invited as well. During this visit, China agreed to use their military academies to train combatants from both the PAIGC and the MPLA.

Training included instruction in guerilla warfare, the history of the Chinese Revolution and agrarian revolution, and socialist theory. The first group trained in China would serve as the PAIGC's embryonic core fighting cadre.

As a result of Cabral's leadership and diplomacy, China would emerge as one of Guinea-Bissau's first supporters in the early stage of its struggle for independence. China provided the PAIGC with a great diversity of support, from weaponry to assistance broadcasting radio messages denouncing the regular, horrific crimes of the Portuguese military in Guinea-Bissau. With support from China on one hand, and Portuguese brutality on the other, the anti-colonial struggle intensified between 1963 and 1974.

# Anti-colonialism and decoloniality

An important part of carrying out the national liberation movement entailed knowing what issues to organize around.

Based on his intimate understanding of the uniqueness of the agricultural situation in his country, Cabral knew that the primary economic issue the majority peasant population faced was not access to land, as was the case in other colonies. Rather, the issue was unsustainable trade deals that were particularly devastating given the colonial insistence on *not* farming for sustenance but for export through single-crop production.

The demand for cultural and political rights in the face of fascistic Portuguese colonialism was another demand that resonated widely.

Cabral focused on the political developments required for building a united movement for national liberation. In his formulations, he argued that the armed struggle was intimately interconnected with the political struggle, which were both part of a larger cultural struggle.

Cabral's Marxist formulations on culture were important for the larger struggle and for resisting colonial education. He acknowledged that fascists and imperialists were well aware "of the value of culture as a factor of resistance to foreign domination," which provided a framework for understanding that subjugation can only be maintained "by the permanent and organized repression of the cultural life of the people" (1979, 139).

Resistance, for Cabral, is also a cultural expression. What this means is that "as long as part of that people can have a cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation." In this situation then, "at a given moment, depending on internal and external factors...cultural

resistance...may take on new (political, economic, and armed) forms, in order...to contest foreign domination" (140). In practice, the still living Indigenous cultures that led centuries of anti-colonial resistance would organically merge with, and emerge from within, the political and national liberation and socialist movements.

In practice, Cabral promoted the development of the cultural life of the people. Written as a directive to PAIGC cadre in 1965, Cabral encouraged not only a more intensified military effort against the Portuguese, but a more intensified educational effort in liberated areas of Guinea-Bissau. Again, while the national liberation/anti-colonial movement and the educational process of decolonizing knowledge are often falsely posed as distinct or even antagonistic, Cabral conceptualized them as dialectically interrelated:

*"Create schools and spread education in all liberated areas. Select young people between 14 and 20, those who have at least completed their fourth year, for further training. Oppose without violence all prejudicial customs, the negative aspects of the beliefs and traditions of our people. Oblige every responsible and educated member of our Party to work daily for the improvement of their cultural formation."*

A central part of developing this revolutionary consciousness was the process of re-Africanization. This was not meant as a call to return to the past, but a way to reclaim self-determination and build a new future in the country.

*"Oppose among the young, especially those over 20, the mania for leaving the country so as to study elsewhere, the blind ambition to acquire a degree, the complex of inferiority and the mistaken idea which leads to the belief that those who study or take courses will thereby become privileged in our country tomorrow."*

At the same time, Cabral opposed fostering ill will toward

those who had studied or who desired to study abroad. Rather, Cabral encouraged a pedagogy of patience and understanding as the correct approach to winning people over and strengthening the movement.

This is one reason why Freire (1978) describes Cabral as one of those “leaders always with the people, teaching and learning mutually in the liberation struggle” (18). As a pedagogue *of* the revolution, for Freire, Cabral’s “constant concern” was the “patient impatience with which he invariably gave himself to the political and ideological formation of militants” (19).

This commitment to the people’s cultural development as part of the wider struggle for liberation informed his educational work in the liberated zones. Freire writes that it also informed “the tenderness he showed when, before going into battle, he visited the children in the little schools, sharing in their games and always having just the right word to say to them. He called them the ‘flowers of our revolution’” (19).

## **Victory before Victory**

Even though Cabral was murdered before victory, the ultimate fate of Portuguese colonialism had already been sealed years before his death, and he knew it. For example, in a communique released on January 8, 1973, a mere 12 days before he was assassinated, Cabral (1979) concludes that the situation in Guinea-Bissau “since 1968... is comparable to that of an independent state” (277). Cabral reports that after dozens of international observers had visited Guinea-Bissau, including a United Nations Special Mission, the international legitimacy of their PAIGC-led struggle was mounting. It had become irrefutable that:

*“Vast areas have been liberated from the colonial yoke and a new political, administrative, economic, social and cultural life is developing in these areas, while the patriotic forces,*

*supported by the population, are fighting successfully against the colonialists to complete the liberation of the country.”* (277)

With this knowledge Cabral, again, denounces the “the criminal obstinacy of the Lisbon Government, which intensifies its genocidal colonial war against the legitimate rights of our people to self-determination, independence and progress” (277). Making the case for the formation of a new internationally-recognized state, Cabral argues that the people of Guinea-Bissau, through the leadership of the PAIGC, were already functioning as such:

*“While our people have for years now possessed political, administrative, judicial, military, social and cultural institutions—hence a state—and are free and sovereign over more than two-thirds of the national territory, they do not have a juridical personality at the international level. Moreover the functioning of such institutions in the framework of the new life developing in the liberated areas demands a broader participation by the people, through their representatives, not only in the study and solution of the problems of the country and the struggle, but also in the effective control of the activities of the Party which leads them”* (278)

To begin resolving this contradiction, in 1971 the Party voted to hold general elections in the liberated areas “for the constitution of the first People’s National Assembly” in Guinea-Bissau. After eight months of debate, discussion and outreach, elections were successfully held in 1972 in all of the liberated zones.

Several months after the election, Cabral (1979) issued another statement referring to the creation of the People’s National Assembly as “an epoch-making victory for the difficult but glorious struggle of our people for independence” (288). Underscoring how this was a collective



achievement of unity and struggle Cabral offered his “warmest congratulations to our people” (289).

He reminded the people that “a national assembly, like any organ in any living body, must be able to function in order to justify its existence. For this reason, we have a greater task to fulfill in the framework of our struggle” (289).

Cabral then announced that the PAIGC would be calling its first National Assembly to formalize their constitution thereby proclaiming to the world they exist and are “irrevocably determined to march forward to independence without waiting for the consent of the Portuguese colonists” (289).

Yes, Cabral was killed before the final expulsion of Portuguese colonialism, but, in a very real sense, he still ushered in a new, independent state.

## **Freire and Cabral's decolonial education in a liberated Guinea-Bissau**

As a pedagogue *of* the revolution Basil Davidson (1979) refers to Cabral as “a supreme educator in the widest sense of the word” (x).

The importance of education was elevated to new heights by Cabral and PAIGC leadership at every opportunity. It therefore made sense for the Commission on Education of the recently liberated Guinea-Bissau to invite the world's leading expert on decolonial approaches to education, Paulo Freire, to participate in further developing their system of education.

Freire was part of a team from the Institute for Cultural Action of the Department of Education within the World Council of Churches. Their task was to help uproot the colonial

residue that remained as a result of generations of colonial education designed to de-Africanize the people. Just as the capitalist model of education will have to be replaced or severely remade, the colonial model of education had to be dismantled and rebuilt anew.

“The inherited colonial education had as one of its principal objectives the de-Africanization of nationals. It was discriminatory, mediocre, and based on verbalism. It could not contribute anything to national reconstruction because it was not constituted for this purpose” (Freire 1978, 13).

The colonial model of education was designed to foster a sense of inferiority in the youth. Colonial education with predetermined outcomes seeks to dominate learners by treating them as if they were passive objects. Part of this process was negating the history, culture, and languages of the people. In the most cynical and wicked way then colonial schooling sent the message that the history of the colonized really only began “with the civilizing presence of the colonizers” (14).

In preparation for their visit Freire and his team studied Cabral’s works and learned as much as possible about the context. Reflecting on some of what he had learned from Cabral, despite never having met him, Freire (2020) offers the following:

*“In Cabral, I learned a great many things...[B]ut I learned one thing that is a necessity for the progressive educator and for the revolutionary educator. I make a distinction between the two: For me, a progressive educator is one who works within the bourgeois classed society such as ours, and whose dream goes beyond just making schools better, which needs to be done. And goes beyond because what [they] dream of is the radical transformation of a bourgeois classed society into a socialist society. For me this is a progressive educator. Whereas a revolutionary educator, in my view, is one who already finds [themselves] situated at a much more advanced*

*level both socially and historically within a society in process" (170).*

For Freire, Cabral was certainly an advanced revolutionary educator. Rejecting predetermination and dogmatism, Freire's team did not construct lesson plans or programs before coming to Guinea-Bissau to be imposed upon the people.

Upon arrival Freire and his colleagues continued to listen and discuss learning from the people. Only by learning about the revolutionary government's educational work could they assess it and make recommendations. Decolonial guidance, that is, cannot be offered outside of the concrete reality of the people and their struggle. Such knowledge cannot be known or constructed without the active participation of the learners as a collective.

Freire (1978) was aware that the education that was being created could not be done "mechanically," but must be informed by "the plan for the society to be created" (14). Although Cabral had been assassinated, his writings and leadership had helped in the creation of a force with the political clarity needed to counter the resistance emerging from those who still carried the old ideology.

Through their process revolutionary leaders would encounter teachers "captured" by the old ideology who consciously worked to undermine the new decolonial practice. Others, however, also conscious that they are captured by the old ideology, nevertheless strive to free themselves of it. Cabral's work on the need for the middle-class, including teachers, to commit class suicide, was instructive. The middle-class had two choices: betray the revolution or commit class suicide. This choice remains true today, even in the US.

The work for a reconstituted system of education had already been underway during the war in liberated zones. The post-independence challenge was to improve upon all that had been

accomplished in areas that had been liberated before the war's end. In these liberated areas, Freire (1978) concluded, workers, organized through the Party, "had taken the matter of education into their own hands" and created, "a work school, closely linked to production and dedicated to the political education of the learners" (17).

Describing the education in the liberated zones Freire says it "not only expressed the climate of solidarity induced by the struggle itself, but also deepened it. Incarnating the dramatic presence of the war, it both searched for the authentic past of the people and offered itself for their present" (17).

After the war the revolutionary government chose not to simply shut down the remaining colonial schools while a new system was being created. Rather, they "introduced...some fundamental reforms capable of accelerating...radical transformation" (20). For example, the curricula that was saturated in colonialist ideology was replaced. Students would therefore no longer learn history from the perspective of the colonizers. The history of the liberation struggle as told by the formerly colonized was a fundamental addition.

However, a revolutionary education is not content with simply replacing the content to be passively consumed. Rather, learners must have an opportunity to critically reflect on their own thought process in relation to the new ideas. For Freire, this is the path through which the passive objects of colonial indoctrination begin to become active subjects of decoloniality.

Assessment here could not have been more significant. What was potentially at stake was the success of the revolution and the lives of millions. This is a lesson relevant to all revolutionaries who must continually assess their work, always striving for improvement. In this way it was clear to Freire that they must not express "uncontained euphoria in the face

of good work nor negativity regarding...mistakes" (27).

From their assessment then Freire and his team sought, "to see what was really happening under the limited material conditions we knew existed." The clear objective was therefore "to discover what could be done better under these conditions and, if this were not possible, to consider ways to improve the conditions themselves" (27).

What Freire and his team concluded was that "the learners and workers were engaged in an effort that was preponderantly creative" (28) despite the many challenges and limited material resources. At the same time, they characterized "the most obvious errors" they observed as the result of "the impatience of some of the workers that led them to create the words instead of challenging the learners to do so for themselves" (28).

From the foundation Cabral played such a central role in building, and through this process of assessment, what was good in the schools was made better, and what was in error was corrected. As a pedagogue of the revolution Cabral "learned" with the people and "taught them in the revolutionary praxis" (33).

## Conclusion

Freire's work and practice have inspired what has become a worldwide *critical pedagogy* movement. Cabral is a centrally-important, yet mostly unacknowledged, influence of this movement. The attention to decoloniality occupies one of critical education's most exciting and relatively recent cutting edges, which demands a more thorough return to Cabral.

Reflecting on Cabral's contributions to decolonial theory and practice a decade after his time in Guinea-Bissau, Freire (1985), like Cabral before his death, continued to insist that, "we need to decolonize the mind because if we do not,

our thinking will be in conflict with the new context evolving from the struggle for freedom" (187).

In the last prepared book before his death, subtitled *Letters to Those who Dare Teach*, Cabral's influence on Freire (1997) seems to have remained central, as he insisted that "it is important to fight against the colonial traditions we bring with us" (64).

As the socialist and anti-racist movement in the US continues to grow in size and political sophistication, the educational lessons from the era of anti-colonial socialist struggles will also grow in relevance.

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