



Peter Karibe Mendy. *Amílcar Cabral: A Nationalist and Pan-Africanist Revolutionary.* Ohio Short Histories of Africa Series. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019. Illustrations. 237 pp. \$14.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8214-2372-1.

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Amílcar Cabral, Intellectual and Political Leader: A Guinea-Bissauan Perspective from the Diaspora

This review was quite a challenge given that Peter Karibe Mendy is an internationally renowned historian, former director of the national research institute Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa (INEP) in Guinea-Bissau from 1994 to 1998, and currently professor of African history at Rhode Island College.[1] His research covers modern and contemporary African history, the history of slavery, and transatlantic relations, and he has written extensively on the subject under consideration. Being Guinea-Bissau-born myself, a historian and academic who graduated reading Mendy's works and who has engaged with topics closely linked to those of the book, I found the challenge to be even greater. So is the responsibility to review his latest political biography of Amílcar Cabral (1924-73), an iconic national figure who led Guinea-Bissau to independence. I consider myself part of the "younger generation" engaged with national and Pan-African causes—to whom this author dedicates this book—the so-called Cabralistas.[2] Whereas, on the one hand, my in-depth knowledge of Mendy's intellectual and human dimension allowed me, to some extent, to conduct a transversal

reading of the text and comprehend liminal issues and the "unspoken," on the other hand, it demanded taking a measured distance to allow for a critical and balanced view of the biography as a whole. Importantly, this book conveys a positive view of Guinea-Bissau in line with the systematic practice of younger Guinea-Bissauan generations in promoting the country. At the same time, it values an endogenous view based on local African perspectives on the history of the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde, and the African continent more generally, while raising a new set of possibilities for reading and interpreting its history.

Cabral and his role in the struggle for Guinea-Bissau's liberation (1963-74) have been the subject of academic interest since the 1960s, though much of the reflection is of foreign origin, as the author points out in the book.[3] Their contributions represent, in general terms, pioneering research on Cabral's political and intellectual trajectory and his theoretical contributions to the liberation struggle. The book under review forms part of twenty-five volumes published so far in the Ohio Short Histories of Africa series. In addition to a list

of illustrations—maps and three images of Cabral—the volume comprises a total of ten chapters and an extensive bibliography.

Written in a clear and accessible style, the book is the result of detailed bibliographical research along with systematic observations made over the years by the author, yielding a broad, dense, and substantive reflection on Cabral's contributions to the liberation struggle as the leader of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde (PAIGC), as well as in the broader context in the African continent. The author's objective, as he states in the introduction, is to demonstrate the importance of Cabral's leadership by focusing on his political and intellectual challenges and achievements based on four characteristics that the author considers most relevant: the competent organization and conduct of one of the most successful liberation struggles on the African continent; the capacity to mobilize more than a dozen ethnic groups around a binational cause; the ability to lead a united front against Portuguese colonialism in Africa; and the writings and theoretical reflections of Cabral that remain of great relevance today.

In the preface, the author briefly summarizes the trajectory of his own life: born in Gambia (West Africa) of Guinea-Bissauan parents, in the final phase of the British colonial presence, he grew up with various other refugee families who had fled the colonial violence in "Portuguese" Guinea. Indeed, these were the first stories he recalls about the repressive nature of Portuguese colonialism on his parents' home *turf*.^[4] Moving from Gambia to the United Kingdom, Mendy narrates his experiences as a young student from Guinea-Bissau still under colonial rule at the time, engaged in political activism; his university readings about colonialism and Cabral as a revolutionary and Pan-African theorist inspired the author's vision of Cabral as an incontrovertible political figure in the fight against colonialism in Africa during the past century.

Mendy develops his thesis from four key aspects that contributed, in his view, to shaping the future leader's personality. First, Cabral's family history was marked by resistance and struggles against the recurring famines in Cabo Verde; his parents, Juvenal Cabral and Iva Pinhel Évora, "voluntarily" migrated to "Portuguese" Guinea in 1911 (where Cabral was born in 1924); and socio-racial barriers were prevalent in a system where the "civilized" status (persons with Portuguese citizenship), which Cabo Verdeans enjoyed under colonial rule in contrast to most Guinea-Bissauans, conditioned the possibility of accessing formal education, to the point of assigning most Guinea-Bissauans to a rudimentary education. Second, the author underlines Cabral's higher education (between Cabo Verde and Portugal) in the post-1945 global context, which, marked by deep polarization and ideological opposition, enabled Cabral to acquaint himself with revolutionary black nationalist and Pan-Africanist literature. A third aspect concerns Cabral's experience in Guinea-Bissau's rural areas and the beginning of the mobilization campaigns and the organization of the struggle in the 1950s. According to the author, "binationalism," that is, pursuing a strategy based on treating Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde as one nation, was the most suitable formula found by Cabral to face and overcome Portuguese colonialism. In this sense, the author discusses the exogenous and endogenous factors that contributed to the successes achieved, placing the centrality in the Pan-Africanist approach and appeal of Cabral. Pan-Africanism, as an idea of African unity and solidarity, only made sense if considered in the broader framework of political struggle in which the whole continent engaged proactively. This reflection by Cabral was one of the key pillars of the PAIGC's praxis and one of the elements that favored the internal cohesion of the movement and collaboration at the international diplomatic level. Fourth, the author addresses the difficult process of mobilizing and organizing the struggle, which, while effective in leading to the country's independence, also resulted in

a tragic outcome: the murder of Cabral on January 20, 1973, on the eve of the unilateral proclamation of independence.

In the penultimate chapter, “A Luta Continua” (“The struggle continues”), Mendy assertively summarizes the main moments that marked the “final victory”—an expression often used by Cabral in his speeches—of the nationalist forces and the negotiations for independence. However, in the light of Guinea-Bissau’s political evolution in the following years marked by chronic political instability, the question needs to be addressed to what extent the country was ready to be independent without Cabral’s leadership. If, on the one hand, Cabral’s assassination drew the world’s attention to the issue of decolonization and anticipated the fall of the dictatorial regime in Portugal in 1974, on the other hand, independence based on the model “one party, two states” would lead to splits and internal divisions within the PAIGC. The coup d’état of November 14, 1980, historically known as “Movimento Reajustador 14 de Novembro” (Movement of Readjustment November 14th), would signal the end of political unity between Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde, and the renaming of the Cabo Verdean branch in Partido Africano de Independência do Cabo Verde (PAICV).

Mendy seeks to demonstrate the relevance of Cabral’s theoretical, intellectual, and political contribution to African independence beyond his two homelands. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, Cabral held that radical social transformation could not dispense with revolutionary theory and would only be feasible by means of a struggle for national liberation and the emancipatory capacity of the people. Overcoming imperialism meant, in Cabral’s view, using culture as a “weapon,” since colonial domination meant cultural oppression. Cabral saw “suicide of the petty bourgeoisie” and the “renaissance of a revolutionary working class” as the political solution, in order to preempt the “betrayal” of the aims of the anti-colonial struggle (p. 204). However, as it turned out later, the al-

liance of the petty bourgeoisie with neocolonialist interests did not allow for its “suicide” as a social class, or the implementation of revolutionary democracy.

The ten chapters are carefully structured and diachronically organized, anchored in African and global history, allowing readers to understand Cabral’s trajectory in its entirety as connected with world events. They cover Cabral’s early childhood in Guinea-Bissau, his adolescence in Cabo Verde, his higher education in Portugal, his work in the colonial civil service in Guinea-Bissau and Angola as an agronomist, his early leadership of PAIGC and preparation for the armed struggle, his leadership of the armed struggle, his political diplomacy on the African and international stage, his assassination in 1973, Guinea-Bissauan and Cabo Verdean independence, and his legacy. Given the context of nationalist aspirations and decolonization, it would be impossible to understand the dynamics of the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde unless framing them within larger reflections of the struggle for the unity of the African continent.

A first general consideration concerns the expository methodology (book structure) and the choice of chapter titles; the author presents Cabral’s trajectory over ten chapters, from a perspective of history and change. He does this by choosing to present some of the chapter titles in Portuguese—“Terra Natal,” “Terra Ancestral,” “Mãe Pátria,” and “A Luta Continua” (“Land of birth,” “Ancestral land,” “Motherland,” and “The struggle continues”)—and one in *Kriol* (the Creole language of Guinea-Bissau), “Cabral Ka Muri” (“Cabral did not die”), even though the book is written in English. This is a curious and interesting choice, which emphasizes crucial moments and times in Cabral’s life in an attempt to guide “Anglophone” readers into the realms of the “Lusophone” and “Kriolophone” world to which Cabral belonged—not in the least because he grew up first in Guinea-

Bissau, and then in the Cabo Verde islands, a Creole society with its own Creole language, *Kriolu*. It is also worth mentioning that, while Cabral's work remains relatively obscure in the English-speaking world, as the author mentions in his preface, his "invisibility" is even more evident within the context of Guinea-Bissau and the Lusophone or Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (PALOP) countries in general. Among other factors, it is relevant that most of the works by and those dedicated to Cabral and the history of liberation in general are not yet included in most school curricula and university programs, which leaves significant gaps in terms of a critical understanding of his overall political and theoretical contribution.[5] This is undoubtedly a question worth reflecting on, considering the important issue of the production and circulation of knowledge in Africa and the education of younger generations, a fact to which several African intellectuals have drawn attention.[6] A suggestion for further reading that could enrich Mendy's reflections, especially regarding the last chapter, "Cabral Ka Muri," is the edited collection of essays by Firoze Manji and Bill Fletcher Jr., *Claim No Easy Victories: The Legacy of Amílcar Cabral* (2013), which makes important contributions to Cabral's legacy and its relevance for the current struggles on the continent.

The biography would have benefited from further exploring as a primary source, throughout the text, the oral sources mentioned initially by the author. Although he thanks his interlocutors in Guinea-Bissau—the "war veterans who generously granted me interviews, sharing valuable memories and knowledge about Cabral"—I did not find references to these sources in the book's chapters nor any mention of them in the notes (p. 12). For instance, in the fifth chapter, "Binationalism in Action," on passive resistance and preparation for the war, it would have been enriching to use narratives put forward by the interviewees—for example, on the vicissitudes of the strained relations between PAIGC and the Frente para a Independência da Guiné (Front for Guinean Independence,

FLING) in the dispute for hegemony—alongside archival and bibliographic sources.[7] These would have contributed, in my view, to broaden the reflective framework of the author, in line with the text's declared objective, to demonstrate the importance of Cabral's leadership and his achievements in political terms. The aforementioned interviews would also have enhanced the sixth chapter, "Conducting Armed Struggle," which addresses the schisms between the PAIGC and the Movimento de Libertação da Guiné (Movement for the Liberation of Guinea, MLG).[8] Nevertheless, Mendy underlines the important issue of leadership within the PAIGC, the tension between the "military" and the "armed militants" in the prolonged armed struggle that would subsequently have caused the progressive militarization of Guinea-Bissauan politics (p. 136). This leads us to a discussion of the concepts of "combatants" and "militants/armed militants." I believe, however, that on this relevant and timely topic, the integration of primary oral sources would have allowed for a more holistic reading of the process.

Finally, and no less importantly, Cabral's recognition of the role played by women in the liberation struggle and in nation building deserves more depth, in terms of sources and critical assessment.[9] In the case of PAIGC's women's organization, the Democratic Union of Guinea-Bissauan Women (UDEMU), a promoter of women's participation in the liberation struggle, it is worth questioning to what extent the organization promoted women's awareness of their own rights after independence in 1973-74 and what the practical outcome of UDEMU's campaigns was, taking into account the scope of the theme in the past and in the current context.

The important issue of the strategy and methodology of mobilization in the liberation struggle as well as its challenges are discussed in the fifth chapter and again in the last chapter, drawing attention to the "ideological deficiency" that characterizes various political parties in pow-

er today on the African continent. Mendy attributes this “deficiency” to an ideological gap that stands at the origin of one of the greatest weaknesses in nationalist movements, the inability to implement revolutionary theory, that is, to operationalize “revolutionary democracy”—accountability and political leadership, as well as effective popular participation in the decision-making processes on issues of general interest.

Pursuing this theme may open up new interpretative possibilities for the democratization process in Guinea-Bissau (and in Africa in general) and, possibly, lead to a better understanding of the paths that brought about the perpetuation of the political-military conflict and crises that have characterized Guinea-Bissauan political and institutional life in a more or less systematic fashion in the post-independence period, characterized by deep tension between the military and the political class on the one hand and by progressive militarization of state institutions on the other. Finally, in the tenth and closing chapter, the author poses an important challenge to the new generations of “Cabralistas” to whom the author dedicates this work: in an (African) world in which marginalization and poverty are a constant, governments have the responsibility to (re)build the states focusing on the best interests of the people. This issue demonstrates, in my opinion, the need to revisit Cabral’s theoretical thinking and his proposals for a “revolutionary democracy” in the light of post-independence developments and of critical African literature produced over the last two decades. Moreover, a series of theses and dissertations may assist the younger “Cabralistas” in their analytical and interpretative exercises, in the sense of thinking and building the Guinea-Bissau of the future.[10]

All in all, Mendy’s study is an essential work for those interested in the biographical trajectory of Cabral and his fascinating journey as a theoretician of the nationalist struggles in Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde, and Africa as a whole.

Notes

[1]. I would like to thank Philip J. Havik for his helpful comments and assistance in editing the review.

[2]. For a more detailed analysis of Cabralism, see Ricardo Godinho Gomes, *O PAIGC e o futuro: Um olhar transversal* (Lisbon: Editora Afro Expressão, 2001).

[3]. Basil Davidson, *The Liberation of Guiné: Aspects of an African Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); Lars Rudebeck, *Guinea-Bissau: A Study of Political Mobilization* (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1974); Oleg Ignatiev, *Amílcar Cabral* (Moscow: Edições Progresso, 1984); Patrick Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People’s War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Ronald Chilcote, *Amílcar Cabral’s Revolutionary Theory and Practice: A Critical Guide* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1991); Mustafah Dhadha, *Warriors at Work: How Guinea Was Really Set Free* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1993); and Oscar Oramas, *Amílcar Cabral para além do seu tempo* (Lisbon: Hugin Editores, 1998).

[4]. “Turf” is used here as a translation from the Guinean Creole *tchon*, territory of origin both in geographical and symbolic terms that defines the relationship between individuals and communities by means of their ancestral origins.

[5]. It should be noted, however, that some important efforts have been made in Lusophone African countries (PALOP), both in terms of teaching and researching the life and legacy of Cabral and the liberation struggles in Africa. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the important work developed by the Amílcar Cabral Foundation and the Amílcar Cabral Chair of the University of Cabo Verde in terms of organizing conferences, seminars, and publications. Some of the publications to emerge in recent years that have critically reflected on Cabral and the dynamics of independence in Lusophone Africa include António Tomás, *O fazedor de utopias: Uma biografia de Amílcar Cabral*

(Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2007); Julião Soares Souza, *Amílcar Cabral (1924-1973): Vida e morte de um revolucionário africano* (Lisbon: Nova Vega, 2011); Tomás Medeiros, *A verdadeira morte de Amílcar Cabral* (Lisbon: Althum, 2012); José Eustáquio Romão and Moacir Gadotti, *Paulo Freire e Amílcar Cabral: A descolonização das mentes* (São Paulo: Editora e Livraria Instituto Paulo Freire, 2012); Patrícia Villen *Amílcar Cabral e a crítica ao colonialismo: Entre a harmonia e a contradição* (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2013); Daniel dos Santos, *Amílcar Cabral: Um outro olhar* (Lisbon: Editora Chiado, 2014); and Cláudio Alves Furtado and Livio Sansone, eds., *Lutas pelamemória em África* (Salvador: Edufba, 2019).

[6]. Théophile Obenga, *O Sentido da Luta contra o Africanismo Eurocentrista* (Luanda: Ed. Mulemba; Lisbon: Pedagogo, 2013); Jean-Marc Ela, *Restituir a História às Sociedades Africanas* (Luanda: Ed. Mulemba; Lisbon: Pedagogo, 2013); Thandika Mkandawire, “Maladjusted African Economies and Globalization,” *Africa Development* 30, no. 1 (2005): 1-33; and Kwesi Yanka, “A globalização e o acadêmico africano,” in *O resgate das ciências sociais e humanas e das humanidades através de perspectivas africanas*, ed. Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho (Brasília: Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão, 2016), 135-61.

[7]. The FLING, a political umbrella organization created in 1960 in Dakar, led by François Kankoila Mendy (no relation to the author), brought together seven Guinea-Bissauan nationalist organizations rivaling the PAIGC.

[8]. The MLG is a political organization established in Dakar by Benjamin Pinto Bull in 1961.

[9]. Patrícia Godinho Gomes, “From Theory to Practice: Amílcar Cabral and the Guinean Women in the Fight for Emancipation,” in *Claim No Easy Victories: The Legacy of Amílcar Cabral*, ed. Firoze Manji and Bill Fletcher Jr. (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2013), 202-11; Patrícia Godinho Gomes, “O estado da arte dos estudos de gênero na Guiné-Bissau: Uma abordagem preliminar,” *Outros Tempos*,

2015, https://www.outrostempos.uema.br/OJS/index.php/outros_tempos_uema/article/view/458/399; Stephanie Urdang, “‘But We Have to Fight Twice’: Reflections on the Contribution of Amílcar Cabral to the Liberation of Women,” in Manji and Fletcher, *Claim No Easy Victories*, 273-78; and Aliou Ly, “Promise and Betrayal: Women Fighters and National Liberation in Guinea-Bissau,” *Feminist Africa* 19 (2014): 24-42.

[10]. A number of MA and PhD theses by Guinea-Bissauans on Cabral and aspects of the liberation struggle are Tchernó Ndjai, “O pensamento político de Amílcar Cabral: Teoria e prática em momentos decisivos na libertação da Guiné-Bissau (1959-1969)” (MA thesis, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, 2012); Iadira António Impata, “Mulheres da UDEMU e a participação na luta armada de libertação: Trajetórias e movimentos organizados” (MA thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, 2020); and Artemisa Odila Candé Monteiro, “Guiné-Bissau: Da luta armada à construção do Estado nacional: conexões entre o discurso da unidade nacional e diversidade étnica (1959-1994)” (PhD diss., Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2013).

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