Amilcar Cabral, Cabralism, and Pan-Africanism

The dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization

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The important thing is to proceed to critical analysis of African cultures in the light of the liberation movement and the demands of progress – in the light of this new stage in the history of Africa. We may be aware of its value in the framework of universal civilization, but to compare its value with that of other cultures, not in order to decide its superiority or its inferiority, but to determine, within the general framework of the struggle for progress, what contribution African culture has made and must make and contributions it can or must receive. – Amilcar Cabral, Unity and Struggle

No one can truly wish for the spread of African culture if he [or she] does not give practical support to the creation of the conditions necessary to the existence of that culture; in other words, to the liberation of the whole continent. – Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth

Introduction to Cabralism: Amilcar Cabral’s critical theory and revolutionary praxis

The Cape Verdean and Bissau-Guinean revolutionary, Amilcar Lopes da Costa Cabral, connects with and contributes to the Africana tradition of critical theory in several poignant, provocative, and extremely profound ways. First, it should be mentioned that “[a]lthough he did not start out or train as a philosopher,” Cabral, according to the Nigerian philosopher Olufemi Taiwo, “bequeathed to us a body of writings containing his reflections on such issues as the nature and course of social transformation, human nature, history, violence, oppression and liberation.”¹ Second, and as eloquently argued by the Eritrean philosopher Tsenay Serequeberhan, Cabral’s ideas led to action (i.e., actual historical, cultural, social and political transformation and, ultimately, revolutionary decolonization, revolutionary re-Africanization, and national liberation). Consequently, in many ways Cabral “represents the zenith” of twentieth century Pan-African revolutionary theory and praxis.² Third, and
finally, Cabral’s writings and reflections provide us with a series of unique contributions to radical politics and critical social theory, which – à la W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, Claudia Jones, George Padmore, Aimé Cesaire, Léopold Senghor, Louise Thompson Patterson, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Angela Davis, Walter Rodney, the Black Panther Party, and the Combahee River Collective, among others – seeks to simultaneously critique the incessantly overlapping, interlocking, and intersecting nature of racism, sexism, capitalism, and colonialism in contemporary society. Consequently, this essay offers an overview of Cabral’s critical theory, what I call “Cabralism,” and his contributions to the evolution of the Pan-African idea and movement.

Return to the source: tradition, insurgent innovation, and revolutionary decolonization

One of the major dialectical dimensions of Cabralism is Cabral’s concept of “return to the source,” and it hinges on his contention that one of the strengths of a revolutionary nationalist movement, such as the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (in Portuguese: Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde/PAIGC), is that it preserves precolonial traditions and values but, at the same time, these traditions and values are drastically transformed through the dialectical process of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization. In other words, precolonial traditions and values are altered by the protracted struggle against the superimposition of foreign imperialist cultures and values and the reconstitution and synthesis of progressive precolonial and recently created revolutionary anti-colonial African traditions and values. Therefore, according to Cabral: “The armed struggle for liberation, launched in response to aggression by the colonialist oppressor, turns out to be a painful but effective instrument for developing the cultural level both for the leadership strata of the liberation movement and for the various social categories who take part in the struggle.” Anticipating that many may misunderstand him, as they historically have and currently continue to misunderstand and misinterpret Frantz Fanon’s concepts of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary self-defensive violence, Cabral further explained his conception of the national liberation struggle as a “painful but effective instrument.”

As we know, the armed liberation struggle demands the mobilization and organization of a significant majority of the population, the political and moral unity of the various social categories, the efficient use of modern weapons and other means of warfare, the gradual elimination of the remnants of tribal mentality, and the rejection of social and religious rules and taboos contrary to the development of the struggle (i.e., gerontocracy, nepotism, social inferiority of women, rites and practices which are incompatible with the rational and national character of the struggle, etc.). The struggle brings about many other profound changes in the life of the populations. The armed liberation struggle implies, therefore, a veritable forced march along the road to cultural progress.

Cabral’s concept of “return to the source,” therefore, is not only, as shall soon be shown, a “return to the upwards paths of [Africans’] own culture[s],” but also “a veritable forced march along the road to cultural progress.” This “return,” similar to that of Aime Cesaire, is a critical “return” that “is not and cannot in itself be an act of struggle against domination (colonialist and racist) and it no longer necessarily means a return to traditions.” Rather, the “return to the source” that is at the core of Cabral’s critical theory (i.e., Cabralism) is
a conscious anti-colonial and revolutionary step, however inchoate and anxiety-filled and, he asserted, the “only possible reply to the demand of concrete need, historically determined, and enforced by the inescapable contradiction between the colonized society and the colonial power, the mass of the people exploited and the foreign exploitive class, a contradiction in the light of which each social stratum or indigenous class must define its position.”9

In defining their position(s) in relation to, or, better yet, against the colonialist and imperialist powers, each member of the colonized society – individually and collectively – chooses, must as a matter of life or death, will themselves into becoming revolutionary praxis-oriented participants, active anti-colonial agents in the dialectical process of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization, the protracted process of rescuing, reclaiming, and reconstructing her or his own sacred humanity, history, and heritage.10 In Cabral’s candid words:

> When the “return to the source” goes beyond the individual and is expressed through “groups” or “movements,” the contradiction is transformed into struggle (secret or overt), and is a prelude to the pre-independence movement or of the struggle for liberation from foreign yoke. So, the “return to the source” is of no historical importance unless it brings not only real involvement in the struggle for independence, but also complete and absolute identification with the hopes of the mass of the people, who contest not only the foreign culture but also the foreign domination as a whole. Otherwise, the “return to the source” is nothing more than an attempt to find short-term benefits – knowingly or unknowingly a kind of political opportunism.11

The “return to the source” can be said to translate into Africana critical theory of contemporary society as the much touted “cultural revolution” that many have often argued proceeds and must continue throughout the national liberation struggle.12 Culture, when approached from a dialectical perspective, can be reactionary or revolutionary, traditional or transformative, decadent or dynamic, and the “return,” in light of this fact, must at the least be critical if it is to transcend and transgress futile attempts, as Tsenay Serequeberhan sternly stated, to “dig out a purely African past and return to a dead tradition.”13 The “return,” therefore, is only partially pointed at historical recovery, socio-political transformation, and revolutionary reorganization. There is another, often over-looked aspect of Cabral’s concept of “return to the source” that simultaneously and dialectically strongly stresses revolutionary cultural restoration and revolutionary cultural transformation.14

Indeed, Cabral argued, it is prudent for Africans to develop critical dialogues and “real” relationships with precolonial and traditional African histories and cultures, but he also cautioned them to keep in mind the ways in which colonialism and Eurocentrism, and the struggles against racial colonialism and for revolutionary re-Africanization, impacted and affected modern African histories and cultures, consequently creating whole new notions of “Africa” and African cultures and traditions. What is more, and what is not always readily apparent, is that the dialectical process of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization calls into question the very definition of what it means – ontologically, existentially, and phenomenologically speaking – to be “African” – that is to say, “African” in a world dominated by European imperialism. To put it another way, Cabral’s dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization calls into question what it means to be “black” in a white supremacist colonial capitalist world. The dialectical process of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization at its core, then, redefines “Africanité,” or “blackness,” if you will.15 It finds sustenance in Fanon’s faithful
words in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he declared: “Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men,” of a “new humanity,” and the “thing” which has been colonized becomes man,” by which he means becomes human, becomes African, by providing revolutionary answers to the question(s) of liberation and the question(s) of identity, “during the same process by which it frees itself.”

There is a deep, critical self-reflexive dimension to Cabral’s concept of “return to the source,” one which, similar to Fanon’s theory of revolutionary decolonization, openly acknowledges that the colonized transforms, not simply the colonizers, but themselves through the dialectical process of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization. Their theory and praxis, situated in a specific historical moment, emerges from the lived-experiences of their actually endured struggles, which in one way connects them to the past but, in another way, connects them to the post-colonial and post-imperial future. The “return to the source,” then, should not under any circumstances be a return to tradition in its stasis or freeze-framed form, but, as Fanon has firmly stated, Africana critical theorists – he uses terms such as the “native intellectual,” the “native writer,” and the “man of culture” – who wish to think and act in the best interest of the wretched of the earth “ought to use the past [read: indigenous traditions, narratives, histories, heritages, views and values] with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope.”

The “return,” simply said, is not to the past, but to the “source” – or, as I am wont to say, sources (plural). The source(s) of a people’s identity and dignity are, according to Cabral, contained in their history and culture: “A struggle, which while being the organized political expression of a culture is also and necessarily a proof not only of identity but also of dignity.” A people’s history and culture (and, following Fanon, we may add language) contain and convey their thought traditions, belief-systems, and value-systems. These traditions and systems are – under “normal” circumstances – ever-evolving, always contradicting, counteracting and overturning, as well as building on and going beyond, the ideologies and theories, and the views and values of the past. Which is why, further, the “return” is not and should not be to the past or any “dead” traditions, but to those things (spiritual and material) from our past (e.g., ideologies, theories, views and values) which will enable us to create a present and future that is (or would be) consistently conducive to the highest, healthiest, and most humane modes of human existence and experience.

The weapon of theory, the weapon of culture, dialectical decolonization, and revolutionary re-Africanization

Cabral’s concept of “return to the source” is doubly-distinguished in its contributions to the Africana tradition of critical theory in that it enables us to critique two dominant tendencies in Africana liberation theory and praxis. The first tendency is that of the vulgar and narrow-minded nationalists who seek, or so it seems, to expunge every aspect of European culture, collapsing it almost completely into European colonization, without coming to the critical realization that: “A people who free themselves from foreign domination will not be culturally free unless, without underestimating the importance of positive contributions from the oppressor’s culture and other cultures, they return to the upwards paths of their own culture.” To “return” to the “upwards paths of [Africans’] own culture” means sidestepping the narrow-minded nationalists’ knee-jerk reaction to everything European or non-African, and it also means making a critical and, even more, a dialectical distinction between white supremacy, anti-black racism, and Eurocentrism, on the one hand, and Europe and
other cultures’ authentic contributions to human culture and civilization that have, or could potentially, benefit the whole of humanity, on the other hand.23

The second tendency that Cabral’s concept of “return to the source” strongly condemns are those, usually Europeanized, petite bourgeois, alienated African’s living in colonial metropoles, who seem to uncritically praise Africa’s precolonial histories and cultures without coming to terms with the fact that:

Without any doubt, underestimation of the cultural values of African peoples, based upon racist feelings and the intention of perpetuating exploitation by the foreigner, has done much harm to Africa. But in the face of the vital need for progress, the following factors or behavior would be no less harmful to her: unselective praise; systematic exaltation of virtues without condemning defects; blind acceptance of the values of the culture without considering what is actually or potentially negative, reactionary or regressive; confusion between what is the expression of an objective and historical material reality and what appears to be a spiritual creation of the result of a special nature; absurd connection of artistic creations, whether valid or not, to supposed racial characteristics; and, finally, non-scientific or ascientific critical appreciation of the cultural phenomenon.24

Cabral advocated a “critical analysis of African cultures,” and in doing so he developed a distinct dialectical approach to Africa’s wide-ranging histories, cultures, and struggles. This is extremely important to emphasize because too often Africa historically has been, and currently continues to be, engaged as though its histories, cultures, and peoples are either completely homogeneous or completely heterogeneous; as if it were impossible for the diverse and dynamic cultures of Africa to simultaneously possess commonalities and distinct differences. Cabral’s critical theory of culture, also, includes a unique comparative dimension that recommends placing what Africans consider to be the “best” of their culture into critical dialogue with the contributions and advances of other, non-African cultures. This, he argued, was important in order to get a real sense of what Africa has contributed to world culture and civilization, and to discover what world culture and civilization has historically contributed to, and currently offers Africa.25 In his own words:

The important thing is not to waste time in more or less hair-splitting debates on the specificity or non-specificity of African cultural values, but to look upon these values as a conquest by a part of mankind for the common heritage of all mankind, achieved in one or several phases of its evolution. The important thing is to proceed to critical analysis of African cultures in the light of the liberation movement and the demands of progress – in the light of this new stage in the history of Africa. We may be aware of its value in the framework of universal civilization, but to compare its value with that of other cultures, not in order to decide its superiority or its inferiority, but to determine, within the general framework of the struggle for progress, what contribution African culture has made and must make and contributions it can or must receive.26

For Cabral, it is important to understand both the particularities and universalities of African culture within the specific context in which the war for national liberation is being waged. Therefore, an Africana critical theorist must not simply be conversant with, for example, Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, Gramscism, Fanonism, Guevarism and the Frankfurt School, among many others, but also, and more importantly according to Cabral, the cultural
groups, political parties, social organizations, and religious affiliations in the milieu one is seeking to radically transform. This is to say, even as he stressed “not wast[ing] time in more or less hair-splitting debates on the specificity or non-specificity of African cultural values,” Cabral was keen not to diminish the importance of understanding the cultural conventions, “tribal mentality,” and “social and religious rules and taboos contrary to the development of the struggle.”

As Maryinez Hubbard argued, Cabral, distinguished from many other African revolutionaries, was “an astute observer of the ethnic situation of his own country. He was aware of the potential strengths and problems” of the people of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau. As a consequence, “[h]e did not delude himself that they were a homogeneous mass who would respond to the liberation struggle in similar ways.”

In Cabral’s critical theory of national liberation, an analysis of the cultural conflicts, “tribal mentality,” and “social and religious rules and taboos contrary to the development of the struggle” is a necessity because for the movement to succeed its leaders must base their actions on “thorough knowledge of the culture of the people and be able to appreciate at their true value the elements of this culture, as well as different levels that it reaches in each group.”

Putting the dialectical dimension of his critical theory on full display, Cabral went even further to emphasize that the leaders of the national liberation movement must also be able to “discern in the entire set of cultural values of the people: the essential and the secondary, the positive and the negative, the progressive and the reactionary, the strengths and the weaknesses.” With this in mind, we witness that at the conceptual core of Cabralism is an emphasis on dialectical decolonization, a kind of decolonization that, literally, “discern[s] the essential and the secondary,” the “positive and the negative,” the “progressive and the reactionary,” and the “strengths and the weaknesses” of the “cultural values of the people.”

Cabral maintained the belief that culture must be politically analyzed in the new nation that is being forged on the battlefields of the national liberation struggle, where the ghosts of “tribalism” are eventually exorcised and the sectarianism of the past gives way to the principled Pan-Africanism, democratic socialism, and revolutionary humanism of the nation’s foreseeable future. Once again, culture must serve the dire needs of the struggling people, renewing and freeing itself from colonialism, guarding against neocolonialism, and providing the foundation for a new humanity and new identity that is slowly but surely emanating from all those actively involved in the national liberation struggle. This new humanity and new identity is a consequence of the armed struggle and the spirit of comradeship it cultivated among the people-in-arms.

Recalling Fanon’s contention in The Wretched of the Earth that “[d]ecolonization is the veritable creation of new men,” of a “new humanity,” as observed here, Cabral declared that the “armed liberation struggle implies … a veritable forced march along the road to cultural progress.” He also asserted that, when we take into account the fact that the national revolution, via the dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization, aids in the elimination of a great number of contradictions within the very varied social, political, cultural, and religious groups of the respective revolutionists, the national liberation struggle is “not only a product of culture but also a determinant of culture.”

In Cabral’s critical theory, it is not simply theory that can be utilized as a weapon, but also the new culture that grows out of the overarching processes and dialectics of decolonization, re-Africanization, and national liberation. In other words, Cabral’s critical theory is not only distinguished by its emphasis on the weapon of theory, but also the weapon of culture. Hence, at the core of Cabral’s concept of “return to the source” is his staunch belief that: (1) there must be “critical analysis [and critical reappraisal] of African cultures in the light of
the liberation movement and the demands of progress;” (2) the new culture that grows out of the collective processes and dialectics of decolonization, re-Africanization, and national liberation can be used as an effective weapon against colonial, neocolonial, and imperial forces; and (3) when and where culture is used as an effective weapon against colonial, neocolonial, and imperial forces, the people struggling for justice, freedom, and lasting liberation are then able to nurture the development of not only a new national culture, but also new ethical culture, political culture, scientific culture, and popular culture while simultaneously contributing to international human culture and civilization.\(^{34}\)

Cabral contended that both a new humanity and a new culture grows out of the national liberation movement, which, in one way, is a conceptual continuation of Fanon’s thought in *The Wretched of the Earth*.\(^{35}\) However, in another way, Cabral’s critical theory – i.e., Cabralism – breaks new ground with its emphasis on disparate cultures converging through revolution to create a new humanity and a new national culture. In Cabral’s critical theory, as I discussed in detail in *Concepts of Cabralism: Amilcar Cabral and Africana Critical Theory*, colonialism and other forms of imperialism were the greatest obstacles to social transformation and authentic human liberation in Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau.\(^{36}\) Hence, his work stresses that it is the solemn duty of each and every Cape Verdiean and Bissau-Guinean to actively participate in the national revolution. However, part of what he meant by *active participation in revolution* entailed developing an openness to, and learning more about African cultures other than one’s own. Which is to say, at its core Cabralism is, in fact, a form of revolutionary Pan-Africanism. Coupled with his emphasis on *cultural openness* is also an emphasis on *historical grounding*. For instance, in *Return to the Source*, Cabral declared: “Ten years ago [i.e., prior to the national liberation struggle], we were Fula, Mandjak, Mandinka, Balante, Pepel, and others. Now we are a nation of Guineans.”\(^{37}\)

**Cabralism, revolutionary Pan-Africanism, and revolutionary humanism: Cabral’s critical theory of decolonization, liberation, and re-humanization**

History and culture, as we see here, play a special part in Cabral’s critical theory of national liberation, and he argued that careful and critical analysis of the specificities of African histories, cultures, and ethnicities is equally, if not more important, in national liberation struggles than broad-based theories touting everything from a distinct “black soul” and African personality to a collective African mind and African communalism.\(^{38}\) Not only were many of these theories, from Cabral’s point of view, historically, culturally, and sociologically inaccurate, but they were also extremely detrimental since they often glossed over important differences and precluded historical materialist and dialectical materialist interpretations of culture in the development of particular African societies – precolonial, colonial, or neocolonial. Moreover, from his African historical materialist perspective, the catch-all concepts and umbrella theories about Africa had a tendency to consistently downplay the many ways in which ethnicity, occupation, class, and religion often influenced participation, or non-participation, in revolutionary decolonization, revolutionary re-Africanization, and national liberation efforts.\(^{39}\)

However, Cabral also did not believe that endless hours should be spent searching for minute details in efforts to distinguish one African cultural or ethnic group from another. What was, and what remains, most important is that Africans’ critically analyze and assess their own histories, cultures, and struggles, and – this should be strongly stressed – develop a deeper comparative dimension in terms of placing their cultures into critical dialogue, not
only with each other, but with other, non-African cultures, especially those involved in anti-racist, anti-colonialist, and anti-imperialist struggles. Above it was demonstrated that a strong humanist strain runs through Cabralism, and here we may observe, again, his principled stand against imperialism and for revolutionary humanism. Even more, here we can see that in promoting a critical comparative dimension to the national liberation struggle, Cabral connected Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau’s national culture with global culture, their national history with world history and, most significantly, their national struggle with international struggles.

Cabral’s conceptions of national history and national culture indelibly informed his notion of the national liberation struggle. For instance, one would be hard-pressed to provide an answer to Cabral’s cryptic question: “Against whom are our people struggling?” – or, à la Cabral, Serequeberhan’s more recent query: “[W]hat are the people of Africa trying to free themselves from, and what are they trying to establish?” – unless she or he possessed a critical cognizance of the roots or “sources” of the particular history and culture in question; ever-willing and able to critically inquire into what and how specific historical, cultural, social, and political predicaments and impediments have been, and are being, transversed and transpired. In my view, Fanon captured this conundrum best when he stated:

A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people’s true nature. It is not made up of inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. A national culture in underdeveloped countries should therefore take its place at the very heart of the struggle for freedom which these countries are carrying on … No one can truly wish for the spread of African culture if he [or she] does not give practical support to the creation of the conditions necessary to the existence of that culture; in other words, to the liberation of the whole continent.

Fanon’s concept of national culture connects with Cabral’s critical theory in so far as both of their thought suggests a reliance on (or “return” to) those elements which the subjugated population have employed, and may continue to employ, to “describe, justify, and praise the action[s] through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.” This means nothing less than the oppressed undergoing a process of a “transvaluation of values” from the existing imperialist social set-up and a “revolution in values” that totally contradicts and overturns imperialist values, which are obstructions to the veritable creation of new human beings who envision and seek to bring into being a new humanity and a new society. Cabral’s critical return, understood as a “cultural revolution,” at its core calls for – to borrow Herbert Marcuse’s phrase – a “transvaluation of values.”

All of this is to say, Cabral’s critical “return to the source,” which unequivocally advocates cultural revolution, is a rejection of “traditional,” “conventional,” “established,” or “accepted” imperialist values and, what is more, retrogressive precolonial or traditional African values. His “return to the source,” in this sense, is more of a kind of historical and cultural critical consciousness-raising, a form of radical political education, social (re)organization, and revolutionary praxis that requests that or, rather, challenges the wretched of the earth to remain cognizant at all times of “our own situation” and “be aware of our things.” “We must respect those things of value,” contended Cabral, “which are useful for the future of our land, [and] for the advancement of our people.”
A “transvaluation of values,” first, requires that we “be aware of our things.” Meaning, we should possess an intimate knowledge of our past and present colonial and anti-colonial history, culture, and struggles. Second, it necessitates that we “respect those things of value, which are useful for the future of our land, [and] for the advancement of our people.” That is to say, “those things of value” which will enable us to create a new, post-imperialist society; a society without poverty and privilege; a society free from domination and exploitation; a society that utilizes science and technology as instruments of liberation as opposed to tools of domination; a society whose ultimate aim is the constant creation of those “new human beings” Fanon wrote so passionately about in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Such a society, further, demands what Marcuse called a “transvaluation of values” and, even more, it presupposes a new type of human being who:

rejects the performance principles governing the established societies; a type of man who has rid himself of the aggressiveness and brutality that are inherent in the organization of established society, and in their hypocritical, puritan morality; a type of man who is biologically incapable of fighting wars and creating suffering; a type of man who has a good conscience of joy and pleasure and who works collectively and individually for a social and natural environment in which such an existence becomes possible.

The new human beings with new values possess a new worldview, which is the determinate negation of the presently established imperialist worldview and value-system, in Africa or elsewhere. The connection between one’s worldview and value-system should be stressed because it is precisely these things which, to a certain extent, determine a person’s thought and behavior. An individual’s worldview and value-system becomes their “second nature” and as such provide beliefs, norms, and aspirations which motivate them, either consciously or unconsciously, to think and act either for or against the imperialist world-system.

**Conclusion: Cabral’s Pan-African pragmatism**

Unlike many other revolutionary leaders Amilcar Cabral genuinely valued culture (i.e., *the weapon of culture*) as an asset in and integral part of the national liberation struggle, even though the heterogeneity of Cape Verdean and Bissau-Guinean culture in many instances limited the rapid development of the national revolution. Instead of viewing the wretched of the earth in Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau as a *tabula rasa*, he argued that their respective cultures actually provide important elements of the foundation on which the new, decolonized, re-Africanized, and revolutionized Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau must be built. “Whatever may be the ideological or idealistic characteristics of cultural expression,” Cabral declared, “culture is an essential element of the history of a people. Culture is, perhaps, the product of this history just as the flower is the product of a plant.”

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Cabral’s contributions to radical politics and critical social theory in general, and black radical politics and Africana critical theory in particular, is his high level of conceptual consistency and pragmatism from the mid-1950s through to the mid-1970s. As *Revolution in Guinea, Return to the Source, Unity and Struggle* and, more recently, *Resistance and Decolonization* deftly demonstrate, although the words he utilized to express certain theories and praxes differed from time to time, Cabral was in fact articulating the same fundamental philosophy and core principles whether addressing the Conference of African Peoples in Cairo, the United Nations, the Frantz Fanon Center in Milan, the Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies in Dar es Salaam, the
Tricontinental Conference in Havana, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, Syracuse University in New York, PAIGC leaders and comrades, or Cape Verdean and Bissau-Guinean peasants in the villages. He did not alter the core concerns of his radical politics and critical social theory to appease his audience – although, as an astute ambassador of the people of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, in most instances he avoided rubbing them the wrong way or talking over their heads.\(^{54}\)

Ultimately, then, what is made apparent from all of the foregoing is a portrait of a committed revolutionary: who was grounded in the history, culture, and struggles of the people of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, but who also had a deep and abiding respect for the histories, cultures, and struggles of the wretched of the earth worldwide; who was disinclined to engage in verbose theoretical speculation and mealy-mouthed discursive excess; who privileged concrete philosophy and critical theory over racial, political, or religious ideology; who “valued independence of thought more than adherence to [widely] accepted political doctrine[s],” and whose larger legacy is the critical theory and revolutionary praxis he created to describe, alter, and inspire the Cape Verdean and Bissau-Guinean revolution, as well as the wretched of the earth around the globe. It is Amilcar Cabral’s inextricable critical theory and revolutionary praxis that I have come to call “Cabralism,” because his theoretical and political work, literally, transcends orthodox conceptions of both Marxism and African nationalism.\(^{55}\)

Cabral’s contributions to critical theory offer contemporary critical theorists alternatives, not only to imperialism, but to the Eurocentrism of much of what currently passes as “critical theory.”\(^{56}\) And, further, his contributions do so without disavowing the crucial contributions that European and other non-African traditions of philosophy and critical theory provide for the Africana tradition of critical theory. When all is said and done, then, for Cabral the “return to the source” is not only about the dialectical process of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization, but also about revolutionary humanism and the promise of a liberated future where the “new humanity” that Fanon envisioned, and the “transvaluation of values” that Marcuse described, is a concrete, actually existing, ever-evolving reality. In other words, Cabral’s ideas and actions, which is to say Cabralism, provide us with a blueprint for a post-imperialist world.

Notes


Wars in Africa: Lisbon’s Three Wars in Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea, 1961–1974 (Soli-
7 Cabral, Unity and Struggle, 152. On Frantz Fanon’s concepts of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary self-defensive violence, see Reiland Rabaka, Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon’s Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 97–144.
9 Ibid., 63. In “The African Intellectual and the Problem of Class Suicide,” Maulana Karenga asserted, Cabral “argue[d] that making the choice of not betraying but leading the revolution and the masses requires that the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie commit class suicide … For Cabral, then, class suicide by the petty bourgeoisie is a process of transformed thought and transforming practice. It involves at a minimum the thrust to: (1) ‘strengthen its revolutionary consciousness’; (2) ‘reject the temptation of becoming more bourgeois and the natural concerns of its class mentality’; (3) ‘identify with the working-classes’; and (4) ‘be reborn as revolutionary workers, completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which they belong.’” See Maulana Karenga, “The African Intellectual and the Problem of Class Suicide: Ideological and Political Dimensions,” in African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity, eds. Molefi K. Asante and Kariamu Welsh Asante (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985), 92–93. The final four points Karenga emphasized were drawn from Amilcar Cabral, Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts, trans. and ed. Richard Handside (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 109–110.
11 Cabral, Return to the Source, 63.

For further discussion of Africamitié, see Rabaka, The Negritude Movement, 200–224.

15 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1968), 36–37. See also Rabaka, Forms of Fanonism, 49–144.


19 Cabral, Resistance and Decolonization, 75–156; Amilcar Cabral, Our People Are Our Mountains: Amilcar Cabral on Guinean Revolution (Nottingham, UK: Russell Press, 1971); Cabral, Revolution in Guinea; Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 206–248; Milani, “Decolonizing the Mind,” passim; Rabaka, Concepts of Cabralism, 183–218; Rabaka, Forms of Fanonism, 271–304.


23 Here it is important to observe that Cabral’s emphasis on a “critical analysis of African cultures,” and the development of a dialectical approach to Africa’s wide-ranging histories, cultures, and struggles intersects and overlaps with seminal ideas advanced by the Negritude Movement and its most noted intellectual heir and discursive detractor, Frantz Fanon. For further discussion, see Rabaka, Africana Critical Theory, 111–305; Rabaka, Concepts of Cabralism, 111–148; Rabaka, Forms of Fanonism, 72–88, 103–112, 169–179; Rabaka, The Negritude Movement, 89–344.


27 Ibid., 72.

28 Cabral, Unity and Struggle, 150.


33 Cabral, *Return to the Source*, 55, all emphasis in original.


47 Ibid., 57.


50 Obviously, along with Cabral and Fanon, here Herbert Marcuse’s critical theory has been incredibly influential on my conception of the “new human beings” or “new humanity” that revolutionary decolonization, especially as conceived of by Cabral and Fanon, brings into being. Other key works by Marcuse that have informed my analysis here, include Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1964); Herbert Marcuse,


53 Cabral, *Return to the Source*, 42.


55 Ibid., 187.