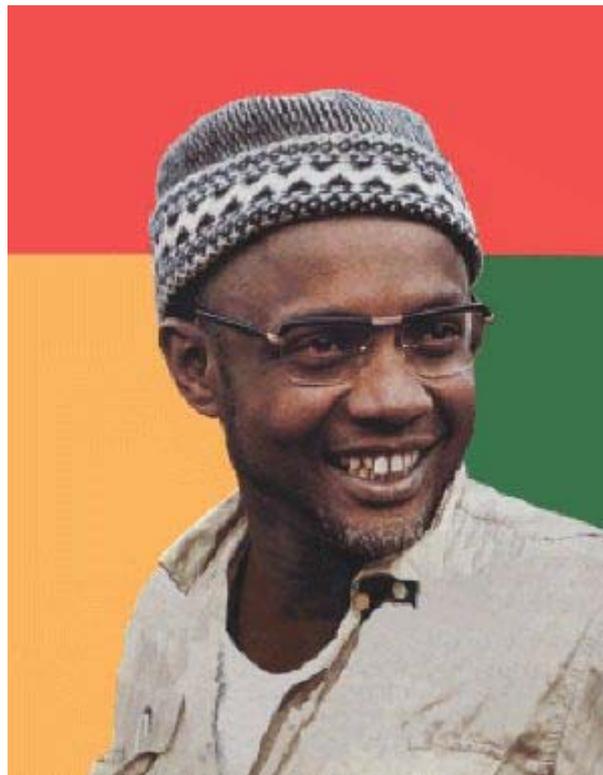


**REMEMBERING AMILCAR CABRAL, POET, REVOLUTIONARY, POLITICIAN
AND MILITARY STRATEGIST.**

“A people who free themselves from foreign domination will be free culturally only if, without complexes and without underestimating the importance of positive accretions from the oppressor and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture, which is nourished by the living reality of its environment, and which negates both harmful influences and any kind of subjection to foreign culture. Thus, it may be seen that if imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture.”

Amilcar Cabral, “National Liberation and Culture” (1)



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Amilcar Cabral (1924-1973)

On 20 January, 1973 Amilcar Cabral was kidnapped in Guinea-Conakry and shot by an assassin in the service of the Portuguese secret police, PIDE. (2) The African world was aghast with shock and many of the African intellectuals were devastated. Cabral was a symbol of a new leadership emerging on the continent. A fearless leadership which was viscerally anti imperialist but non racist. A leadership which was willing to talk to the colonialists but was determined to be independent in thought and action. The Portuguese know why Cabral had to go. With Agostinho Neto, Angola, Eduardo Mondlane, Mozambique, Cabral had coordinated and spearheaded a series of military actions against the Portuguese in their colonies in Africa that would weaken the fascist colonial power in Lisbon and finally oblige them to accept and grant independence to their African colonies.

The collapse of the Portuguese empire was a prelude to the 25 April 1974 Revolution in Lisbon. Not only did the oppressive colonial wars exhaust the resources of the Portuguese fascist State and thereby hasten its demise but many of the soldiers from the colonial wars returned home with new ideas about liberty. In contact with the colonial peoples, especially with the PAIGCV (*Partido africano da independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde*), MPLA (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*) and FRELIMO (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*), the Portuguese soldiers had learnt to understand the meaning of freedom; they asked themselves why they were fighting thousands of miles away from home to defend a regime that was oppressing their families and friends. They came into contact with Marxist ideologies that were forbidden at home by the fascist regime of Salazar and Caetano. Thus Cabral, Neto and Mondlane contributed directly or indirectly to the demise of the fascist regime in Portugal and thus paved the way for a new free and modern Portugal. The Portuguese should remember this when they enjoy their freedom and other Europeans come with proposals directed against the African peoples.

Manuel Alegre, the Portuguese writer and politician, has acknowledged that the various commanders of the Portuguese army were attracted by the ideas of Cabral and that it was in fighting against the PAIGCV that many of the soldiers understood the need for effecting what was to become the 25 April 1974 revolution. In an interview which Cabral gave to Manuel Alegre, Cabral addressing himself directly to the Portuguese people, asked them why a people who had always defended their own liberty would support the Fascist Salazar government in its oppressive wars in the colonies. As an African fighting colonial oppression, he was ready to fight side by side with the Portuguese in Portugal to regain their liberty. According to Manuel Alegre, many young soldiers, hearing Cabral's appeal deserted that very evening the colonial army. (3)

In any case, the Portuguese and their secret police PIDE understood the importance of Cabral for the freedom fighters in the Portuguese colonies. Cabral enjoyed the absolute confidence of Agostinho Neto and Eduardo Mondlane whom he had known in Lisbon where

they created an African Studies Centre (Centro de Estudos Africanos) in 1948, ostensibly to study African culture.

Cabral attached great importance to culture in all its manifestations and his revolutionary theories and praxis had been solidly based on the culture of Cape Verde and Guinea. As a trained agronomist, Cabral knew his country very well, having travelled through the length and breadth of the country doing research both as a student in Lisbon and later as an official in the colonial period for the Portuguese administration.

Cabral, like Agostinho Neto, was also a poet. His poetry often reflected his experience as an agronomist and often, the real conditions of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau. He did not believe in art for art's sake.

“Poetry, like any artistic manifestation, and apart from any individual characteristics, emanating from the personality of the poet, is necessary a product of the milieu in which it is expressed. That is to say, however great the influence of the individual may be on the work he produces, it is always, in the final analysis a product of the social complex in which it was produced.” (4)



CAPE VERDE (© Wikipedia)

This conception of Cabral is exemplified in his poem “*Regresso*”, also known as “*Mamãe Velha*” which has been sung by Cesária Évora, Cape Verdian leading singer, and Caetano Veloso, Brazilian legendary musician, on the CD “*São Vicente di longe*”, (2001). In this poem, the main theme is the rain which seldom falls on the islands. The islands of Cape Verde live a cruel irony of nature. They are all surrounded by the mighty Atlantic Ocean but do not

have enough rain. It happens often that it does not rain for years and therefore the land is not fertile enough for large scale agriculture. The result is that the islands are poor and many Cape-Verdeans are forced to emigrate to other countries such as the United States, France and Portugal. The islands are deprived of many of their inhabitants. The poem discusses the effect a hint of rain has on the island and its inhabitants. Their land would be improved, the economy would have a better basis and they would have more qualified professionals at home instead of them all emigrating. It is no surprise that Cabral in *Mamãe Velha* and in another poem, *Ilha* deals with the existential problems of the islands and the dream of their inhabitants; to have sufficient quantity of rain which would turn those island into green pastures.

Amilcar Cabral is considered by most Africans as an outstanding leader. He has a great prestige and is usually put in the same category as Africa's great personalities: Abdel Gamal Nasser, Ben Bela, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Touré, Patrice Lumumba, Nelson Mandela, Agostinho Neto, Eduardo Mondlane, and Samora Machel.

The assassination of Amilcar Cabral stands in a long line of prominent African politicians eliminated by Western imperialism in its attempts to stabilize its political hegemony in Africa. Ever since Western Europeans arrived on the coasts of Africa in the XV-XVI centuries they have sought to exploit the resources of the continent and its peoples by all means possible. They have tried to ensure that leaders in African countries are amenable to European designs and those who could not be persuaded that being under European rule was the best thing for Africans were either eliminated in battle or sent to exile (see Prempeh of Asante, Behanzin of Dahomey and Oba Ovonramwem of Benin). In modern times, they have tried to corrupt these leaders and if that did not work, they simply eliminated them (see in addition to Cabral (Cape Verde), Eduardo Mondlane (Mozambique), Felix Moumie (Cameroon), Sylvanus Olympio (Togo) and Patrice Lumumba (Zaire). Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana) escaped several assassination attempts. Western imperialism has always reserved for itself the possibility of resort to violence if persuasive methods fail to achieve the desired objectives; violence has been used by Western States to achieve the objectives, or to demonstrate their determination of will and purpose.

The Eurocentric epistemological order that supports the hegemonial system of the West has tried to offer explanations about the failing leadership qualities on the African continent: corruption, inefficiency, vainglory, tribalism etc. But whenever we have had leaders dedicated to the cause of their peoples, they have been mostly eliminated. The Eurocentric theory gives the impression that the continent is somehow cursed and could never bring out good leadership or make any useful contribution to civilizations hence the tendency to dismiss accounts about ancient African empires - Ghana, Mali, Songhai and where this is not possible, for instance in the case of Egypt, to assert that such a civilization was not African at all. But

was it European? The Eurocentric approach is apparently able even to move countries out of continents.

Cabral distinguished himself from other revolutionary leaders and theorists by the emphasis he put on culture and its role in the liberation struggle and in the transformation of society. He would have been in the forefront to rehabilitate African culture and to reclaim our culture, including the significant cultural objects stolen by the colonial masters and now located in many European and American museums. The colonial masters knew the need for every society to have its cultural icons and understood the power and significance that symbolic objects possess. They themselves will never part with cultural objects which symbolize their societies and their cultural achievements. But what should we think of some of our African leaders who show no interest in reclaiming our stolen cultural objects? How do we move forward in our cultural development when most of our cultural icons are elsewhere? When shall we tell the Europeans and Americans to stop the foolish talk and insults that our cultural icons are better preserved in Europe and America? Do they understand our culture better than ourselves when hardly any of them understand our languages? Have they all now become Africans and adopted African customs and religions as some of their museum directors would have us believe when they proclaim in their infamous Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums that our cultural objects have become part of their culture? Can they present and represent African culture better than the Africans? Cabral would have been amazed by such assertion and the lack of vigorous reaction on the part of many African leaders.

Amilcar Cabral showed by his own life and works the exemplary leadership which seems to be missing in some of the countries on the continent. He will forever be remembered by those who are not prejudiced as a selfless leader who contributed to the liberation of Africa and demonstrated that with the confidence of the people one could defeat an oppressor who had powerful armies behind him. African youth can only gain by learning about Amilcar Cabral and pondering over his writings, the problems and conflicts of his times. That is the least we can do for the memory of a man whose life was sacrificed in the pursuit of liberty.

Kwame Opoku.

19 January, 2008.

NOTES

(1) Lecture delivered on February 20 at Syracuse University as part of the Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture Series. Eduardo Mondlane, was the first President of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) who was assassinated by Portuguese agents on Feb. 3, 1960.
www.historyisaweapon.com

(2) The *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado* or PIDE, International and State Defence Police, was the main tool of repression used by the fascist authoritarian State of Portugal to repress and eliminate enemies, both within and outside its territory. It was also credited with the assassination of Eduardo Modlane, Mozambique.

(3) See “O duplo sentido cultural de obra de Amílcar Cabral”, *Pour Cabral, Simposium International Amílcar Cabral*, (17-20 January, 1983), *Présence Africaine*, Paris, 1987 p.164.

(4) *Obras Escolhidas de Amílcar Cabral*, Vol. I: *A Arma Teoria, Unidade e Luta* Editora Seara Nova, 1976, p.25-29.

POEMS OF AMILCAR CABRAL

The texts of Cabral's poems are in, *Obras escolhidas: a arma teoria*, pp. 23-24.

Regresso

*Mamã Velha, venha ouvir comigo
o bater da chuva lá no seu portão.
É um bater de amigo
que vibra dentro do meu coração.*

*A chuva amiga, Mamã Velha, a chuva
que há tanto tempo não batia assim...
Ouvi dizer que a Cidade Velha,
- a Ilha toda -
em poucos dias já virou jardim...*

*Dizem que o campo se cobriu de verde,
da côr mais bela, porque é a côr da esp'rança.
Que a terra, agora, é mesmo Cabo Verde,
- É tempestade que virou bonança...*

*Venha comigo, Mamã Velha, venha
recobre a força e chegue-se ao portão.
A chuva amiga já falou mantenha
e bate dentro de meu coração.*

ILHA

*Tu vives — mãe adormecida —
nua e esquecida,
seca,
batida pelos ventos,
ao som de músicas sem música
das águas que nos prendem...*

*Ilha
teus montes e teus vales
não sentiram passar os tempos,*

*e ficaram no mundo dos teus sonhos
— os sonhos dos teus filhos —
a clamar aos ventos que passam,
e às aves que voam, livres
as tuas ânsias!*

*Ilha:
colinas sem fim de terra vermelha
— terra bruta —
rochas escarpadas tapando os horizontes
mas aos quatro cantos prendendo as nossas ânsias!*

ISLAND

*Mother, in your perennial sleep,
You live naked and forgotten
and barren,
thrashed by the winds,
at the sound of songs without music
sung by the waters that confine us...*

*Island:
Your hills and valleys
haven't felt the passage of time.
They remain in your dreams
- your children's dreams –
crying out your woes
to the passing winds
and to the carefree birds flying by.*

*Island :
Red earth shaped like a hill that never ends
- rocky earth –
ragged cliffs blocking all horizons
while tying all our troubles to the winds!*

(The English translation was taken from, "AMILCAR CABRAL, Freedom fighter, 1924-1973", [Carlos Pinto Santos](#))

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