

*Legacies and Losses: A Review of Claim No Easy Victories: The Legacy of Amílcar Cabral.*

By Fizone Manji and Bill Fletcher Jr. (eds.), 2013, CODESRIA and Daraja Press. 2013.

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This collection of essays explores the multifaceted nature of the Amílcar Cabral's legacy with the specific goal of understanding his relevance to contemporary politics. Ranging from his philosophical arguments about culture and colonialism to more concrete historical explorations of his impact on African American movements in the United States, the book is an accessible and valuable introduction to Cabral's thought. Although the dedication of more space to questions of gender and his relevance to Africa in particular would have been welcome, the book provides a rich exploration of pan-Africanism, internationalism, community organising, education, theories of revolution and Africana philosophy.

How does one elucidate a legacy? This is at base the question posed by the collection of thirty-eight essays that constitute this timely book about the life and work of Amílcar Cabral. As the independence leader of Guinea Bissau and Cabo Verde (until his assassination on 20 January 1973) Cabral sits alongside Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, Steve Biko, Thomas Sankara and Kwame Nkrumah as one of those rare figures that represents the meeting of revolutionary practice and deep philosophical thought. He interrogated topics ranging from revolution, nationalism, the politics of culture and history, pan-Africanism, the colonial and post-colonial state, and the question of class in colonial societies. His writing was prolific and his actions great. Nevertheless, as many of the contributors point out, his name seems to have slipped from the tongues of academics, activists, and politicians. It is precisely this historical elision that these articles seek to counter.

The collection opens with a preface by Mireille Fanon-Mendès France who insightfully lays out the social, political and philosophical conditions that make the collection an urgent contribution. The dream of flourishing

democracies that would be driven by the experiences and the needs of those most oppressed during the colonial period has failed to materialise. Instead, a series of abusive leaders and the growing power of neoliberal agendas have caused the disintegration of early aspirations for liberation. But what constitutes liberation in the contemporary moment? What resources can people today, in Africa and around the world, draw on to imagine and enact their desires? Writing that Cabral foresaw the “deceptive dawn of African independence”, Fanon-Mendès France argues that Cabral’s project of “building a new humanity” is therefore especially relevant to today’s need to remake political life and institutions.

Echoing Fanon-Mendès France’s belief in the contemporary relevance of Cabral’s political philosophy, Manji and Fletcher, in their introduction to the book, state that the collection seeks to understand Cabral in “four-dimensional view”, with the fourth dimension being “time” or “context”. This statement is one of the central pillars of the book as essays tend to either contextualise Cabral’s own historic moment, explore his argument that revolutionary thought and practice must be based in the historical conditions in which people find themselves, or have a comparative aspect either across discipline, region, or time in an effort to extend Cabral’s significance beyond his context. The book thereby ushers Cabral out of his moment and into our present, where his words are so vital for rethinking revolution and the conditions for emancipation. It provides insight about his influence in such diverse realms as US Black activism, Africana philosophy, education policy, and Marxist thought. The result is a rich introduction to Cabral’s writings, especially useful for those previously unfamiliar with his work.

To guide the reader, the book has been thematically divided into seven sections, namely “Introduction”, “Legacy”, “Reflections”, “Women and Emancipation”, “Pan-Africanism”, “Culture and Education”, and “Cabral and the African American Struggle”. In “Legacy” the reader is given a basic introduction to the historical context in which Cabral was writing. Essays by Nigel Gibson, Mustafah Dhada, Reiland Rabaka, Richard A. Lobban Jr, Ameth Lo, and Samir Amin, provide insight into Cabral’s biography, the context of anti-colonial struggles, and the central tenants of his thought such as his “weapons of theory” argument, the nuances of his call to “return to the source”, the question of “class suicide”, commitments to and criticisms of pan-Africanism, and his analysis of Marxism. Of special note is Carlos

Schwarz's detailed account of Cabral's work as an agronomist. Through this he delicately shows how Cabral's agronomy experiences provided the basis of his political thought and praxis in Guinea Bissau. The paper "Sons of the Soil" interestingly locates Cabral's thought within a comparative framework with Portugal by juxtaposing Cabral's ideas and actions with the writings of José Saramago. In doing this, it reveals how Cabral has seeped into Portuguese critiques of their own material and political conditions. The understanding of the anger of Portuguese peasants is framed in relation to the actions of anti-colonial fighters in Guinea Bissau. The categories through which Portuguese revolutionary practice are comprehended, therefore emanate from the former colonies. Excellent pieces for understanding Cabral's links to other African thinkers include Helmi Sharawy's exploration of African-Arab relations and Aziz Salamone Fall's essay which tragically investigates the crushing of revolutionary potential across Africa.

The second section, "Reflections", dwells further on the topics introduced in the previous section. Essays by Lewis R. Gordon and Jacques Depelchin draw on Cabral's writings to address questions of epistemology, the difficulty of defining political conditions, and the significance of rethinking contemporary capitalism in relation to the remaking of the human. Wangui Kimari, William Minter, Maria Problet, Adrian Harewood, Filament Lopes and Demba Moussa Dembélé investigate the details of political organising, significance of "returning to the source" for the African diaspora, and trace the internationalist dimensions of how Cabral's work has been taken up. In a very moving interview, Augusta Henriques and Miguel Barros explore the intergenerational experiences, senses of loss, and political concerns of Guinea Bissauans. The two speakers work through their disappointments with Guinea's Bissau's independence and try to grapple with what the future holds, especially in relation to the dreams which Cabral's words proffered an earlier generation.

The final four sections address specific topics in relation to Cabral's thought. The section on "Women and Emancipation" while excellent, is surprisingly short at just two articles. The first, by Stephanie Urdang, is a personal account of the experiences (and eventual failure) of actions taken towards women's emancipation during the anti-colonial struggle in Guinea Bissau. The second, by Patrícia Godinho Gomes, is an account of the history of movements and policies aimed at improving the position of women in

post-independence Guinea Bissau. Both of these essays are rich resources for readers seeking an introduction to the question of gender in Guinea Bissau. However, given that Cabral was one of the few male anti-colonial thinkers in his questioning of the “gender-blind” and patriarchal nationalism that many African countries embraced, one would have expected that more space be dedicated to the question of gender within the collection.

Section five on pan-Africanism situates Cabral’s thought within a nexus of anti-colonial Black political theorists. Essays by Patricia Rodney et al, David Austin, Amrit Wilson, Perry Mars, and Explo Nani-Kofi therefore include comparisons of his and Walter Rodney’s thought, and links between his thought and Caribbean thinkers such as Fanon and CLR James. This section attentively grapples with the difficulties of building pan-Africanist solidarities across historically varied experiences of oppression, the problematics of Caribbean imaginations of Africa, and the difficulties of building pan-Africanism in a post-colonial era focused on nation-states. The section on Education includes an original reflection on the question of difference in Cabral’s writings by Olúfemi Táíwo. He draws on Cabral’s warnings against portraying reified tradition as a source of authenticity, to argue against the turn to essentialised practices and beliefs as representative of “some unique one-of-a-kind African culture” (278). He instead calls for a politics steeped in a recognition of change and history in Africa. Contributions also include essays by Brandon Lundy and N. Barney Pityana that investigate the importance of context and culture in designing educational practices, and an exploration by Miguel de Barros and Redy Wilson Lima of the remaking of Cabral’s words in contemporary Guinean and Capeverdean rap music as a form of memory-making and political subversion

The last section of the collection investigates the significance of Cabral’s works to African Americans. Papers by Bill Fletcher Jr, Kali Akuno, Ajamu Baraka, Makungu M. Akinyele, and Walter Turner focus on Cabral’s contribution to promoting internationalism within African American politics, reveal how his work created a space for the Black left to embrace a Marxist critique of US racism, and investigate his impact on specific African American movements such as the Black Panthers and the House of Umoja. The collection closes with a short piece by Angela Davis who draws on Cabral’s writings to ask the readers to think of a struggle that moves beyond militarism and violence, to a substantial remaking of consciousness – the need to build

of a new humanity as Fanon-Mendès France had reminded the reader at the outset of the collection.

While the collection is extremely comprehensive, strangely enough, very little of it explicitly focuses on Cabral's significance for Africa. While there are discussions of his historical connections to activists and thinkers in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea, and Zanzibar among others, the attempt to think through his legacy appears to focus more on the Caribbean and the US than contemporary Africa, where arguably his ideas are more needed than ever. From xenophobic violence in South Africa to the African Union's turning of a blind eye to repression in Ethiopia, Angola, Eritrea, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, and increasing restrictions on movements of Africans both inside and outside the African continent, topics such as African migration, political democracy in Africa, and the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism would have been fertile areas for this collection to explore. Their absence is a notable lacuna in an otherwise valuable and interesting contribution.

Nonetheless, the collection overall provides an excellent introduction to Cabral's thought. Some readers might find frustrating that the essays are decidedly mixed in terms of their presumed audiences – while some are deeply philosophical, others are far more practical, focusing on the everyday work of organising. Readers should centre their attention on what in the book they are seeking out as it is unlikely that all essays will be equally appealing to their interests. The book should not therefore be approached as simply an academic reflection about Cabral's writings, but rather a real attempt to explore, as indicated at the beginning of the review, the multifaceted nature of Cabral's contemporary legacy. As a collection it is a timely one and will be valuable for anyone seeking to be introduced or reacquainted with debates about revolution, colonialism and culture, nationalism, and pan-Africanism.