

AMILCAR CABRAL: REWRITING HISTORY THROUGH POETIC DICTION

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Abstract

The discourse on Africa, particularly from an African perspective, challenges the dominant narratives shaped by European glorification since the 15th century. As articulated by Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe, writing about Africa necessitates a corrective approach to the narratives that glorify the European endeavor that has lacerated the African continent for centuries. History over history, landscape over landscape; thus, the European domination that obliterated the existing order must, in turn, be disavowed, exposed, and redacted in the rewriting that corrects it. Mbembe highlights the importance of restitution and reparation—*sine qua non*, the effects of the “colonial wound” (W. Mignolo, 2005) cannot be resolved: “Reparation, furthermore, is necessary due to the cuts and scars left by history” (Mbembe, 2017). We will explore how this necessary reparation of history is reflected in some poems by Amílcar Cabral, which grapple forcefully with the myths arising from the “dreamily imperial” vision (Eduardo Lourenço, 2014) that has shaped much of the literature written in Portuguese. Paradoxically, writing about Africa and reclaiming its history from the epistemology of bad faith, constructed by a hegemonic Eurocentric perception, has required many African authors to engage with the symbols that embody this ideology. Committed to the liberation struggle of his homeland and the African continent from the bonds of colonial oppression, Amílcar Cabral understood the struggle for emancipation as an act of culture, rooted in the reclamation of the cultural identity of the oppressed. In a time very different from today, and for a spirit mobilized by what would become the effective struggle—the revolution and the war to be fought, both in the minds and on the fields—against colonial oppression, as experienced by Cabral, the time is not (yet) one for demanding reparation in the terms proposed by Mbembe. However, in his poetry, one recognizes a subtle but persistent gesture of rewriting or correcting a mythical vision that supports a particular history and the epistemology it entails. We will reflect on the significance of the symbols that emerge from



this puzzle of reconstructing a historical narrative, articulating it with more recent poetic expressions that elaborate on the theme of the need for reparation as a cornerstone for identity building.

Keywords

Poetry; history; symbol; colonialism; reparation.

Resumo

O discurso sobre África, particularmente a partir de uma perspectiva africana, desafia as narrativas dominantes moldadas pela glorificação europeia desde o século XV. Como articulado pelo filósofo camaronês Achille Mbembe, escrever sobre África exige uma abordagem corretiva das narrativas que glorificam a empresa europeia que lacerou o continente africano durante séculos. História sobre história, paisagem sobre paisagem; assim, a dominação europeia que obliterou a ordem existente deve, por sua vez, ser desautorizada, exposta e reconfigurada na escrita que a corrige. Mbembe destaca a importância da restituição e da reparação — sine qua non, os efeitos da “ferida colonial” (W. Mignolo, 2005) não podem ser resolvidos: “A reparação, além disso, é necessária devido aos cortes e cicatrizes deixados pela história” (Mbembe, 2017). Exploraremos como esta necessária reparação da história se reflete em alguns poemas de Amílcar Cabral, que lidam de forma contundente com os mitos decorrentes da visão “oniricamente imperial” (Eduardo Lourenço, 2014) que moldou grande parte da literatura escrita em português. Paradoxalmente, escrever sobre África e resgatar a sua história da epistemologia da má-fé, construída por uma percepção eurocêntrica hegemônica, exigiu que muitos autores africanos se confrontassem com os símbolos que corporizam essa ideologia. Comprometido com a luta de libertação da sua pátria e do continente africano dos laços da opressão colonial, Amílcar Cabral entendia a luta pela emancipação como um ato de cultura, enraizado na reconquista da identidade cultural dos oprimidos. Num tempo muito diferente do atual, e para um espírito mobilizado por aquilo que viria a ser a luta efetiva — a revolução e a guerra a travar, tanto nas mentes como nos campos — contra a opressão colonial, tal como vivida por Cabral, o momento não é (ainda) o de exigir reparação nos termos propostos por Mbembe. Contudo, na sua poesia, reconhece-se um gesto subtil mas persistente de reescrita ou correção de uma visão mítica que sustenta uma determinada história e a epistemologia que esta acarreta. Refletiremos sobre o significado dos símbolos que emergem deste puzzle de reconstrução de uma narrativa histórica, articulando-o com expressões poéticas mais recentes que desenvolvem o tema da necessidade de reparação como pedra angular para a construção identitária.

Palavras-chave

Poesia; história; símbolo; colonialismo; reparação.

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*Onde a poesia não estiver nada de real pode ser fundado. (...)
A poesia é primordial e anterior à política.
[wherever poetry is not present, nothing real can be founded. (...)
Poetry is primordial and prior to politics.]
Andresen (1977)*

Introduction

The discourse on Africa, particularly from an African perspective, challenges the dominant narratives shaped by European glorification since the 15th century. As articulated by Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe (2017), writing about Africa necessitates a corrective approach to the narratives that glorify the European endeavour that has lacerated the African continent for centuries. History over history, landscape over landscape; thus, the European domination that obliterated the existing order must, in turn, be disavowed, exposed, and redacted in the rewriting that corrects it. Mbembe highlights the importance of restitution and reparation - sine qua non, the effects of the "colonial wound" (W. Mignolo, 2011) cannot be resolved: "Reparation, furthermore, is necessary due to the cuts and scars left by history" (Mbembe, 2017, p.183). We will explore how this necessary reparation of history is reflected in some poems by Amílcar Cabral, which grapple forcefully with the myths arising from the "dreamily imperial" vision (Lourenço, 2018) that has shaped much of the literature written in Portuguese. Paradoxically, writing about Africa and reclaiming its history from the epistemology of bad faith, constructed by a hegemonic Eurocentric perception, has required many African authors to engage with the symbols that embody this ideology. One of the difficulties has been the use of Portuguese, the 'language of the colonizer' and one of the six 'imperial languages' (Mignolo, 2011, p. 47) - an issue still being dealt with today, and one that Amílcar Cabral addresses in his writings, not without causing controversy and discomfort, as we shall see.

¹ Declaration of Interest - The author declares that there are no known financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have appeared to influence this research. The author has no competing interests to declare.



Presented at Lisbon's Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation from November 15, 2024, to January 13, 2025, *dance not dance* marked the seventh edition of the project *For a Timeline to Be – genealogies of dance as an artistic practice in Portugal*, initiated in 2016 by Ana Bigotte Vieira and João dos Santos Martins. The exhibition concluded a two-year program of performances, talks, and films researching New Portuguese Dance and mapping histories omitted from mainstream art and cultural narratives².

Writing for *Buala*, Rui Eduardo Paes presents an in-depth appraisal of the exhibition, its context, and its significance. Particularly noteworthy is his understanding of New Dance - and of the exhibition itself - as "something imminently political," an "embodied staging" of what Chantal Mouffe names as conflict, at the very core of the building of a society aspiring "to be free and equal", opposed to consensus. Paes notes that *dance not dance* "incorporates the cultural genealogies of African dances and those of the Black diaspora in the Americas", spanning "from Josephine Baker to the National Ballet of Guinea-Bissau, (...) and from Charleston to breakdancing", thereby attesting to "the process of contamination of the Western (and Portuguese) coloniser by colonised and neocolonised Africa after independence." According to Paes, the exhibition also echoes "Samuel R. Delany, Octavia Butler, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Robert Springett, Funkadelic, Earth, Wind and Fire, Lil Nas X, Afrika Bambaataa, Herbie Hancock and Sun Ra" ... Likewise, it resonates with "the exaltation of Blackness by Léopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Amílcar Cabral, Agostinho Neto, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), James Baldwin, and bell hooks." This framework, states Paes, is not explicitly referred to, but should instead be perceived "as a meta-narrative" (Paes, 2026).

Amílcar Cabral holds a place of his own in the genealogy of eminent revolutionary leaders and intellectuals, particularly in relation to "the exaltation of Blackness." His thought and life serve as a source of inspiration for a global project of social transformation - here articulated through an insurgent artistic practice centred on dance, 53 years after his death. Let us try to understand why he is perceived as exemplary through the lens of poetry: first, through that written by others, and secondly, through his own.

The myth: the "African Guevara"

Amílcar Cabral met a treacherous and violent death in 1973, in Guinea-Conakry, at the hands of two fellow party members from the very organization he had founded in 1959, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC). The involvement of the Portuguese authorities was not ruled out at the time. The shock caused by the passing of a political leader of his stature and the tragic circumstances of his assassination made a profound impression on his contemporaries. Let us dwell on a few poetic expressions in which his figure and his death are evoked.

Alda Espírito Santo, a native of São Tomé and Príncipe and a foundational figure both for the liberation struggle and for the poetry that echoed it, met Amílcar Cabral—the son of

² Source: <https://gulbenkian.pt/en/agenda/exhibition-dance-not-dance/>



Cabo Verdeans born in Guinea-Bissau - in Lisbon when they were both university students. The Casa dos Estudantes do Império (House of Students of the Empire), created in Lisbon in 1943–44 by the *Estado Novo* to domesticate university students arriving from the then-designated overseas provinces, quickly inverted the purpose of its creation, becoming a center for revolutionary thought and the anti-colonial movement they spearheaded, and founding a Centre for African Studies. Many of them emerged as distinguished political leaders, writers, and artists, committed to the fight against colonialism and the liberation of their native territories, which had been under Portuguese rule since the 15th century.

Alda Espírito Santo wrote a beautiful “Requiem for Amílcar Cabral”, dated from “20/1/73”, the day of his death:

*Chora terra bem amada
O teu filho bem amado
Morto fisicamente
Por balas assassinas.
Guevara de África
te baptizaram
Dias antes
Da cilada trágica.
Na historia da terra africana.
Teu nome ímpar
apontará aos filhos
do país natal
a dignidade da tua vida
Cimentada com teu sangue
Cimentada com
o sacrifício da existência inteira
a esperança do futuro
Duma terra sem madrasta.
As páginas do porvir
Contarão ao mundo*

*[Weep, beloved land
Your beloved son
Physically dead
By murderous bullets.
Guevara of Africa
they baptized you
Days before
The tragic trap.
In the history of the African land.
Your unique name
will point out to the children
of your native country
the dignity of your life
Cemented with your blood
Cemented with
the sacrifice of your whole
existence
the hope of the future
Of a land without a stepmother.
The pages of the future
Will tell the world*

*a força da tua personalidade dinâmica
ao serviço da tua inteligência
Canalizada
Para os arrozais
da parcela
do golfo enquistado
onde mãe Iva
te doou à terra
Não chores mãe Iva.
A terra de África inteira
De pé
A teu lado
Saúda a figura gigante
Do Grande Líder
Da África Ocidental*

*the strength of your dynamic
personality
at the service of your intelligence
Channelled
To the rice fields
of the plot
of the enclave gulf
where mother Iva
gave you to the land
Do not weep, mother Iva.
The land of all Africa
Standing
By your side
Salutes the giant figure
Of the Great Leader
Of West Africa*



*Terra bem amada
O sangue do herói
Será transfusão
Nos anais da tua história.
(Santo, 1978, p.117-118)³*

*Beloved land
The hero's blood
Will be a transfusion
In the annals of your history.]*

According to gender conventions, the poem is a funeral elegy, lamenting someone's passing and praising the dead. Anthropological research states that at the roots of this genre, in various parts of the globe, dirges were chanted by female voices. This ritual of farewell, which marks the process of mourning and was taken on by women, fulfilled two purposes: to console the community going through loss, allowing them to experience a catharsis of their grief, and at the same time to free the deceased, allowing for their transition to the afterlife. This afterlife where Alda Espírito Santo's lament places Cabral involves him deeply in the destiny of the mourning community. This farewell and panegyric transform into a tribute to Cabral as a symbol of the revolution—the "Guevara of Africa"—, a martyr guaranteeing "the hope of the future," "Cemented with your blood / Cemented with the sacrifice of an entire existence." Emotion and solemnity mark the towering rise of the leader to the scale of the continent he emblemizes and which his death will galvanize: "The land of all Africa / Standing / (...) / Salutes the giant figure / Of the Great Leader / Of West Africa. / Well-beloved land, / The hero's blood / Will be a transfusion / In the annals of your history."

Two other women, younger poets, include tributes to Cabral in their work, confirming the tutelary and revolutionary nature of the figure invoked by Alda Espírito Santo. Vera Duarte, a Cabo-Verdean poet, dedicates her "The primordial poem" to Amílcar Cabral:

*então
a tua voz
feita das vozes
ecoou
(...)
cruzando o céu das ilhas
circulou por África
pelas terras verdes da Guiné
pelas terras secas do Sudão
e fez-se ouvir na Europa
fez-se ouvir nas Américas
fez-se ouvir pelo mundo
Do teu gesto singelo
do teu olhar solidário
do aperto caloroso da tua mão
Brotou o sangue redentor
do poema primordial*

*[Then
your voice
made of the voices
echoed
(...)
crossing the sky of the islands
circled through Africa
through the green lands of Guinea
through the dry lands of Sudan
and made itself heard in Europe
made itself heard in the Americas
made itself heard throughout the
world
From your simple gesture
from your solidary glance
from the warm grip of your hand
Sprouted the redeeming blood
of the primordial poem*

³ Unless an alternative source is credited, all poem translations are by the author.



*com que construímos o futuro
E porque amo
o teu gesto e a tua gesta
ofereço-te nesta canção
o som desta nação
que não deixaste aprisionar
no seu destino colonial
(2018, p.37-38)*

*with which we build the future
And because I love
your gesture and your heroic
deeds
offer you in this song
the sound of this nation
that you did not allow to be
imprisoned
in its colonial destiny]*

Once again, Cabral assumes gigantic proportions, gaining a global dimension, starting from his original impact in Africa: “your voice/ made of the voices/ of all the voices// echoed (...) crossing the sky of the islands/ circled through Africa/ through the green lands of Guinea/ through the dry lands of Sudan// and made itself heard in Europe/ made itself heard in the Americas/ made itself heard throughout the world”. The praise delves into the proximity, the warmth, and the reality of his imagined and idealized presence: “From your simple gesture/ from your solidary glance/ from the warm grip of your hand”. Like in Espírito Santo, Amílcar’s Duarte becomes the soil from which redemption sprouts, the sacrificial lamb whose martyrdom justifies and empowers the revolutionary African who received his legacy: “Sprouted the redeeming blood/ of the primordial poem/ with which we build the future”. Poetry and the fight against colonialism are one and the same. His actions (*gesto*) are deeply correlated with the heroic legend he became (*gesta*), and he is hailed as the liberator of the nation: “And because I love/ your gesture and your heroic deeds (*gesta*)/ I offer you in this song/ the sound of this nation that you/ did not allow to be imprisoned/ in its colonial destiny”.

Conceição Lima, a São Toméan poet from Duarte’s generation who refers to the assassination of Cabral as a scar (Lima, 2011, p. 85), sings of him in much the same terms: “Chove na capital que morto libertaste” (“Rain falls upon the capital you freed in death”). This line brings together the death of the guerrilla leader and the liberation he brought about through his sacrifice (Lima, 2011, p.89).

Duarte appeals to the “Jovem inconformado” [“Unresigned youth”], who “Do sonho à doce utopia (...) te entregaste à luta (...) Em tempos de pesadelo colonial// Tu que és Amílcar e Aristides (...) / E és tantos e tantas / combarentes da liberdade” [“from the dream to the sweet utopia (...) you gave yourself to the struggle (...) In times of colonial nightmare // You who are Amílcar and Aristides (...) / And you are so many, men and women / freedom fighters”] (Duarte, 2018, p.39). Hence, Amílcar Cabral is hailed in a persistent African poetic tradition of songs of mourning and praise as an iconic model for African revolutionary youth. He is still the object of a tribute paid to him with exalted gratitude.



Amílcar!
Há hélice & sonho
na raiz da árvore que tomba
Há sangue e ombro
na pele do tambor que rompe

E da pedra
E do Sol
Que move
O sangue e o rosto da pirâmide
Não há Janeiro
Não há Novembro
Que não seja
Uma península de dor
Entre duas bandeiras
(Fortes, 2010, p.268-269)

Amílcar!
There is a propeller and a dream
at the root of the tree that falls
There is blood and a shoulder
in the skin of the drum that
breaks

And of the stone
And of the Sun
That moves
The blood and the face of the
pyramid
There is no January
There is no November
That is not
A peninsula of pain
Between two flags

In the recurrent African stream of tribute to Amílcar Cabral, his name is always synonymous with affection, utopian dreams, and idealism, but also with pain and struggle (“There is a propeller and a dream at the root of the tree that falls// There is blood and a shoulder/ in the skin of the drum that breaks”), celebrated as an inseparable whole (“A peninsula of pain /Between two flags”), as seen in the poem entitled “Amílcar” by the Cabo Verdean poet Corsino Fortes. *Mantêhas para quem luta! A nova poesia da Guiné-Bissau* [*Mantêhas to those who fight! The new poetry of Guinea-Bissau*] is a collection of texts by several poets that was edited by the National Council of Culture in 1977, in Bissau, Guiné, and re-edited in 1993. The title, in creole, means “Warm greetings to those who carry on the fight.” We will dwell on two poets published in this anthology who evoke Cabral and his perennial meaning and value. The Guinean Tony Tcheka (António Soares Lopes Jr.) grounds his appeal for the people’s heroic commitment to the future in the merit of Cabral and other legendary references, dreaming of a future with no more “Botas estrangeiras espezinhando o nosso sentimento/ A nossa cultura .../A nossa razão ...” [No more “Foreign boots trampling our feelings / Our culture ... / Our reason ...”]. Again, Amílcar’s blood, his sacrifice, along with his moral virtues – a deep sense of service and humility –, are at the root of the people’s unity and fight against any kind of oppression, striving for freedom, dignity and identity:

Mantêhas trago para ti
Mantêhas de quem o povo serviu
Mantêhas de quem, sendo simples
Grandemente o povo serviu
Mantêhas daquele que sucumbindo
Com o próprio sangue o inimigo acertou
(A luta é assim, exige Sacríficos)
(Tcheka, 1993)

[Mantêhas I bring to you
Mantêhas from one who served
the people
Mantêhas from one who, being
humble,
Greatly served the people
Mantêhas from he who, in
falling,
Struck the enemy with his own
blood
(The struggle is like this, it
demandes sacrifices)]



The Guinean poet Nagib Said is one of those who continue to pay homage to Cabral as a top reference for their moral and total engagement with their nation's progress: "E juro-te, farei como tu fizeste./ Darei o meu sangue palpitante por esta terra bem amada,(...) Quero que saibas/ No frio da tua tumba,/ Que o faço com orgulho e esperança /(...) Por uma Guiné e Cabo Verde voltados para o progresso". ["And I swear to you, I will do as you did. I will give my throbbing blood for this beloved land, (...) I want you to know, In the chill of your tomb, That I do it with pride and hope/ (...) For a Guinea and Cabo Verde turned toward progress"]. Nagib Said publishes an hymn to poetry, as a driving foundational force: "Dizem-me que não há poesia na minha terra,/ Mas eu não me submeto!/ (...) Nós somos poetas (...) / Nós somos poesia. E,/ Se somos poesia.../ São para vós os poemas que eu canto,/ Madrugadas do meu país,/ Poemas de dor e de riso em gargalhadas,/ Poemas de força, poemas de mim". ["They tell me there is no poetry in my land, / But I do not submit! / (...) We are poets (...) / We are poetry. And, / If we are poetry... / The poems I sing are for you, / Dawns of my country, / Poems of pain and of bursting laughter, / Poems of strength, poems of me"] (Said, 1993). We will see that Cabral shared this very same inspirational vision of poetry, which continues to drive idealistic young poets bound by a love for their nation.

Culture, Poetry, and Emancipation

Hence, Amílcar Cabral is perceived as a mythical figure in various pantheons—in that of the struggle for his country's independence, in that of the great leaders of the anti-colonialist struggle in Africa, and in that of the great thinkers and political leaders of the 20th century, whose lessons can benefit all those interested in the fight against oppression and the construction of a more just society. A man of action and a theorist of the revolution he set in motion, he always distinguished himself through his assertion as a man of culture—an intellectual who defined culture as the fundamental piece of resistance against oppression, particularly imperialist oppression in its colonialist dimension. In the opening of his "National Liberation and Culture," delivered in 1970 , as part of Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture, he cites the caricatured but highly significant episode of Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda minister, who would draw his pistol from its holster every time he heard the word "culture" (Cabral, 1974, p.12).

The emancipation struggle was, for Cabral, an act of culture, says the Guinean writer Odete da Costa Semedo, and is rooted in the reclamation of the oppressed's cultural identity (Andrade, 2018).

The complete domination of one people over another would always involve the annihilation of their cultural identity, which is simultaneously a fruit of their history and that which determines it, giving it form and meaning. The "especially backward Portuguese colonialism" (another quote from Cabral) reflected this need to erase the history of the other through its policy of assimilation - the denial of an African identity (Cabral, 1973, p.7).



The question I am interested in discussing here concerns the poet. “Amílcar Cabral, in his youth, was essentially a poet,” states the Cabo Verdean author José Luís Hopffer Almada (Andrade, 2018). Ever since his days as a high school and university student, he bore witness to himself through poetry. In a 1946 text published in *Seara Nova*, when he is 22 years old, he writes in a poem entitled “A minha poesia”:

A minha poesia sou eu

*... Não, Poesia:
Não te escondas nas grutas de meu ser,
não fujas à Vida.
Quebra as grades invisíveis da minha prisão,
abre de par em par as portas do meu ser
— sai...
Sai para a luta (a vida é luta)
os homens lá fora chamam por ti,
e tu, Poesia és também um Homem.
Ama as Poesias de todo o Mundo,
— ama os Homens
Solta teus poemas para todas as raças,
para todas as coisas.
Confunde-te comigo...
Vai, Poesia:
Toma os meus braços para abraçares o Mundo,
dá-me os teus braços para que abrace a Vida.
A minha Poesia sou eu. (Cabral, 2021)*

*[My poetry is me
... No, Poetry:
Do not hide in the caves of my being,
Do not flee from Life.
Break the invisible bars of my prison,
throw wide open the doors of my being
— go out...
Go out into the struggle (life is a struggle)
the men out there are calling for you,
and you, Poetry, are also a Man.
Love the Poetry of all the World,
— love all Men
Release your poems to all races,
to all things.
Merge yourself with me...
Go, Poetry:
Take my arms to embrace the World,
give me your arms so that I may embrace Life.
My Poetry is me.]*

In this text, published at the age of 22 years old, Cabral rejects poetry as a solipsistic or intimate expression (“Do not hide in the caves of my being, do not flee from Life. (...) — go out...”) ; instead, poetic diction projects itself onto the world (“Go out into the struggle (life is a struggle) the men outside are calling for you, and you, Poetry, are also a Man”).

It goes deeper, however, than the rejection of introspective poetry, focused on the emotions of the self. Cabral is at core a humanist, and that is one of the reasons why even his political thought made a deep impression on Portuguese minds, alluring many young Portuguese into the field of the anticolonial arena. The Portuguese poet Manuel Alegre was deployed to Angola in 1961, when the war for the independence of several Portuguese colonial territories in Africa began. Engaging in political activity leading to an attempted military coup in Luanda, Alegre was arrested and sent back to Portugal. He deserted and fled to exile, in Algiers, from where he continued his political fight against the Portuguese colonial regime. Alegre attests that many Portuguese officers ended up being won over by the thought of Amílcar Cabral, impressed by his cultural dimension and deep humanism, becoming aware of the necessity of political reform, both in the so called colonies and in Portugal as well. Cabral repeatedly stated that his feud was against the Portuguese regime of Salazar, not with the Portuguese people. In a symposium held in Cabo Verde on Amílcar Cabral in 1984, Alegre would underscore the “cultural double



meaning” of Cabral’s political system of thought: he understood that ‘by liberating themselves, the oppressed also lead the oppressor to liberate themselves. By disarming them, they arm them. That is to say: the national liberation process of the colonized people is also a process of cultural liberation for the people of the colonial country” (Ribeiro, 2024, p. 39).

Let us return to the idea of poetry. Its vocation should be rooted in service - a universal service (“Release your poems to all races,” embrace the World) - while simultaneously it should be understood as a vehicle for the full expression and wholeness of the lyrical subject (“give me your arms so that I may embrace Life. My Poetry is me.”)

Three poets writing in Portuguese, Amílcar Cabral was studying Agronomy, Francisco José Tenreiro, a poet from San Tomé and Príncipe, studied geography; and the Portuguese Ruy Cinatti studied Agronomy and anthropology, before traveling to the then African colonies and fall in love with Timor. The recognition of poetic diction as a vehicle for existential testimony and the pursuit of truth, combined with the scientific and technical training that their professions would bring them, are characteristics that Cabral shared with the São Toméan Francisco José Tenreiro and with Ruy Cinatti, the Portuguese brother to the Timoreneses.

In *Cabo Verde. Boletim de Propaganda e Informação* published in 1952 in Praia, by Imprensa Nacional, ano III, nr 28, we find an article by Amílcar Cabral on poetry: “Apontamentos sobre poesia Cabo-verdeana” [“Notes on Capeverdean poetry”].

The epigraph is significant: by the Portuguese poet Miguel Torga, a *presencista* who found his own path, Cabral’s choice of it is, in itself, equivalent to a poetic program:

«Não me doi nada meu particular.
Peno cilícios da comunidade.
Água dum rio doce, entrei no mar
E salguei-me no sal da imensidade.»
(Cabral , 1952, p.5)

[Nothing of my private self hurts me.
I suffer the cilice of the community
Water of a Sweet river, I entered the
sea
And I salted myself in the salt of
immensity]

The entire article focuses on the rejection of poetry centered on the private sorrows of an individual self (“Nothing of my private self hurts me./ I suffer the cilice of the community”), as opposed to the poet's commitment to the sorrows of his community (“imensity” versus “private”), which it is every poet duty to express, with the assumed purpose that this poetic gesture corresponds to a form of effective social intervention.

The core question to debate is whether poetry should be “disinterested” (striving for art for art's sake) or “interested,” with the answer being unequivocal from Cabral's perspective: “It is not possible to consider art (Poetry, in the present case) independently of man-as-a-social-being. “Art is and must be, to deserve such a designation, a product of Man for Men.” (Cabral, 1952, p.5). This very debate, concerning the purpose of art and its tight and strict dependence on the socio-economic context, drove heated and radicalized discussions in Portugal, with reciprocal pronouncements of various kinds of



anathema. The adherence to Marxist ideology, with the recognized primacy given to economic factors, is evident in Cabral's train of thought, but there is no place for bitter radicalizations. The text elegantly discusses poetic premises that are, in reality, translated into ideological options.

Cabral draws a dividing line between the period before and after the magazine *Claridade*. Before *Claridade*, poets marked by a strong classical culture dominated, which "detached" ["desprendidos"] them from the archipelago and its people, forgotten in favor of singing about "amor, o sofrimento pessoalíssimo, a exaltação patriótica e o saudosismo" ["love, highly personal suffering, patriotic exaltation, and saudosismo"] (Cabral, 1952, p.6), within a framework where economic reality is neglected in favor of philosophy, religion, and morality. Education, which was elitist, was centred around the seminary in S. Nicolau, and the intellectuals influenced by it alienated themselves from the realities of the people, who expressed themselves through *Mornas*. One should note Cabral's critical sensitivity regarding the poetic diction resulting from this subservience to classical culture, marked by a "sacred respect for meter, the agonizing submission to the handcuffs of rhyme" ["respeito sagrado à métrica, a confrangedora submissão às algemas da rima"], Cabral, 1952, p.6), which he obviously deplores.

Claridade corresponds to the moment when "Cabo Verdean Poetry opens its eyes, discovers itself, — and it is the breaking of a new dawn" ["A Poesia Caboverdiana abre os olhos, descobre-se a si própria, — e é o romper duma nova aurora"] (Cabral, 1952, p. 7) bringing to light the social reality of the islands and their people. Cabral demonstrates a sober eloquence: "The poets, now, are common men walking hand in hand with the People, and with their feet firmly planted on the ground" ["Os poetas, agora, são homens comuns que caminham de mãos dadas com o Povo, e de pés fincados na terra"] (Cabral, 1952, p.7). Intellectuals, whose ranks now include those coming from 'humble folk,' are centered in Mindelo, accompanying the democratization of education. The transformation observed in literature would also show the strong influence of movements such as Portuguese *Presencismo* and Brazilian modernism. From this influence resulted - note the subtlety of Cabral's prose - merely the change in "the guidelines of Cabo Verdean poetry": "The Poet, instead of looking at the clouds, should seek the meaning of his poetry in the reality in which he lives" ["O Poeta, em vez de olhar para as nuvens, devia buscar o sentido da sua poesia na realidade em que vive"] (Cabral, 1952, p. 7). This was followed by the ephemeral magazine *Certeza*, which takes the paths opened by the "*Claridosos*" further, projecting political-social consciousness onto a global scale.

The conclusion of Cabral's article corresponds to the proposal of a clear poetic program: the levels reached by *Claridade* and *Certeza* must be "transcended," rather than fixing the song on the dream of an evasion that mitigates the effects of insularity, drought, and poverty. "The prison is not the Sea" ["A prisão não está no Mar"]. The dream of the Cabo Verdean people, and of the poet who identifies with them, is not "wanting to leave" [«querer partir»]; it is a dream of "Another land within our land" [«Outra terra dentro da nossa terra»] (Cabral, 1952, p.8).



Thus, what appears configured as an analysis of the literary landscape of Cabo Verde actually results in the proposal of a political direction that literature must assume, committing itself not only to the representation-denunciation of a situation, but to its effective transformation. Also noteworthy is the serene progression of Cabral's argumentation, the fine elegance of his analytical discourse, and the effectiveness of the two metaphors with which he closes his proposal, which unveil the root of the people's perception of their situation while simultaneously correcting it. With this text published in 1952, Cabral stands out as an insightful literary critic, as well as a brilliant writer.

The intricate question of the use of the Portuguese language

Let us quickly recall the regime formally established by the *Estado Novo* in 1954, through Decree-Law No. 39,666, which determined the conditions for natives (in Guinea, Angola, and Mozambique) to "elevate" themselves from the status of *indígena* (indigenous) to that of *assimilados* (assimilated), thereby becoming Portuguese citizens. These conditions focused on the way of dressing (European style), the religion professed (Christian), exercising a profession, and adopting European-based customs, in addition to speaking the Portuguese language correctly. As it occurred everytime colonialist projects were to be put in place, Africa, its history, its cultures, and its languages were meant to be erased; its traditions and customs, deemed inferior, were to be abandoned in favor of the *mission civilisatrice* that Europe invented for itself in other continents. It would not be long, already during the years of the war in Africa, before the hallucination proclaimed in the slogan "Portugal, one and indivisible, from Minho to Timor" emerged ("Portugal uno e indivisível do Minho a Timor").

The use of the Portuguese language by writers who denounce colonial oppression in their work has been a topic addressed in literary texts, critical essays on literature, and post-colonial studies. It is felt that for some, it is a burden they carry—the weight of a history in which colonial domination rested upon the suppression of the colonized culture, in a process aimed at the loss of their identity. Cabral has several texts in which he analyzes the fundamental importance of this phenomenon, arguing that political and economic domination necessarily implies the suppression of the culture of oppressed peoples (Cabral, 1974, p. 12). Thus, Creole and indigenous languages were subjected to the contempt and even the repression inherent to the process of acculturation conducted within a colonial context. The use of indigenous languages and Creoles therefore possesses a value of resistance, in the sense that it translates into a form of preserving a cultural identity that others wished to see wither away.

The revered São Toméan poet Alda Espírito Santo refers to the "bitter gap" that exists within her: she wished she could address the women of her country in their natural, "singing" Creole, instead of having to resort to a "borrowed language." ("Irmãs, do meu torrão pequeno/ Que passais pela estrada do meu país de África (...) Há em mim uma lacuna amarga — Eu queria falar convosco no vosso crioulo cantante/ Mas irmãs, vou buscar um idioma emprestado/ Para mostrar-vos a nossa terra/ O nosso grande



continente” [“Sisters of my little native land/ Who pass along the road of my African country (...)/ There is a bitter void inside me — I wanted to speak to you in your sing-song Creole/ But sisters, I am going to borrow a language/ To show you our land/ Our great continent”] (Santo, 1978, p.81). The Guinean author Maria Odete Semedo reveals the same painful perplexity:

*Em que língua escrever
As declarações de amor?
Em que língua cantar
As histórias que ouvi contar
Em que língua escrever
Contando os feitos das mulheres
E dos homens do meu chão?
Como falar dos velhos*

*In which language should I write
Declarations of love?
In which language should I sing/
The stories I heard told?
In what language to write
Recounting the deeds of the women
And of the men of my land?
How to speak of the elders*

*Das passadas e cantigas?
Falarei crioulo!
Mas que sinais deixar
Aos netos deste século?
Ou terei que falar
Nesta língua lusa
E eu sem arte nem musa
Mas assim terei palavras para deixar
Aos herdeiros do nosso século
Em crioulo gritarei
A minha mensagem
Que de boca em boca
Fará sua viagem
Deixarei o recado
Num pergaminho
Nesta língua lusa
Que mal entendo
(Semedo, 1996, p. 12-13)*

*Of the steps and the songs?
I shall speak Creole!
But what signs to leave
To the grandchildren of this century?
Or will I have to speak
In this Lusitanian language
Even without art or muse
Yet this way I will have words to leave
To the heirs of our century
In Creole I will scream
My message
Which from mouth to mouth
Will make its journey
I will leave the message
On a parchment
In this Lusitanian language
Which I barely understand*

Faced with the duality of choosing (“In which language should I write/ Declarations of love?/ In which language should I sing/ The stories I heard told?”) between the Portuguese bequeathed by colonization and her native Creole - the latter being suited to expressing her cultural traditions, to which Portuguese remains foreign (“How should I speak of the elders,/ Of the steps and the songs?/ I shall speak Creole!”) - she chooses to express herself orally in one while reserving the other for writing. Semedo underlines her distance from Portuguese, which she feels inevitably forced to resort to, and her estrangement from a language that was imposed upon her (“Or will I have to speak/ In this Lusitanian language, / Even without art or muse,/ Yet this way I will have words to leave/ To the heirs of our century?/ In Creole I will scream/ My message, / Which from mouth to mouth/ Will make its journey. / I will leave the message / On a parchment, /In this Lusitanian language/ Which I barely understand”).



The solutions found by writers vary, with the most common and productive being the appropriation of the colonizer's language, which thus becomes creolized and transformed. Inocência Mata (2009, 2019) speaks of a process of reinventing Portuguese —a sentiment that is shared by many African writers.

Amílcar Cabral holds a pragmatic stance toward Portuguese, which currently seems to constitute a solid base for cohesion in the various African nations that have made it an important part of their viability project, as a common expression, an official state language, and educational vehicle - a kind of *lingua franca*- alongside the existence and protection of creoles and indigenous languages that thus do not compete for national prevalence. At the heart of the period of armed struggle, Amílcar Cabral, though lucidly aware of the ways in which imperialism weaves the erasure of indigenous cultures, perceived the value of using Portuguese as a language of communication in territories with multiple dialects.

The forcefulness of Luandino Vieira's declaration that "the Portuguese language is a war trophy" (Mata, 2007, p.16) does not seem to coincide with his own assessment. In a party seminar, Cabral would explain his choice of Portuguese as a privilege vehicular language for education. To his comrades, in that same intervention, later collected in the book *PAIGC: unidade e luta* (Lisboa: Nova Aurora, 1974), Cabral defended the temporary use of Portuguese as the language of science, during a period when the study of Creoles had not yet developed their full potential: "We, the Party, if we want to move our people forward, for a long time to come, to write, to advance in science, our language must be Portuguese. And that is an honor." (Montezinho, 2014). To reinforce his argument, Cabral adds: "for us, it is all the same whether we use Portuguese, Russian, French, or English, as long as it serves us, just as it is all the same to use Russian, English, or American tractors, etc., as long as, upon gaining independence, they serve us to plow the land".

Cabral defends the teaching of Portuguese as an advantage: "the Portuguese (language) is one of the best things the *tugas* [Portuguese] left us, because language is proof of nothing more than an instrument for men to relate to one another: it is an instrument, a means to speak, to express the realities of life and the world." The Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire, an admirer of Cabral as an educator and a revolutionary, lamented what he considered an error on Cabral's part—the failure to recognize the ideological burden involved in the use of a language, which is always a determining factor in what could be done with it. He commented in a note to Cabral's book: "Amílcar's indisputable misconception." (Romão, Gadotti, 2012, p. 69). In a conference held in 1985, Freire felt the need to justify what he perceived as Cabral's lack of judgment with an explanation given to him by Cabral's widow: the historical and social context would have driven Amílcar Cabral to take that stand, to avoid sectarianism and rejection against all things Portuguese, including Portuguese themselves: "...against Portuguese culture, against the Portuguese language, against everything that was Portuguese. And Cabral needed to eliminate the risk of that perspective growing, which for him—and I agree—would weaken the struggle itself." (Freire, Apud Romão, Gadotti, 2012, p. 70-71).



Cabo Verdean Corsino Tolentino considers this as one of Amílcar Cabral's most daring and successful theses. "What seems extraordinary to me is that Amílcar Cabral had the lucidity and courage to defend the Portuguese language, as he did at that time, while simultaneously promoting the Creole of Guinea and Cabo Verde as a lingua franca and an element of national identity. Furthermore, feeling himself a soldier of the United Nations from the very beginning, the protagonist of a struggle that, being political, had a natural vocation for preferring the weapon of theory to the power of weapons, Amílcar Cabral promoted the Creole of Guinea and Cabo Verde, valued African languages, defended the Portuguese language, and cultivated as many languages of European origin as he could" (Montezinho, 2014).

One leans toward agreeing with Tolentino's perspective. In view of the choice made by African Portuguese-speaking countries that opted to have Portuguese as one of their official languages, Cabral's proposal does not seem so wrong or unreasonable today. His lack of prejudice and hatred toward Portuguese culture, Portugal or the Portuguese people may explain the appropriate pragmatism of his proposal. In various interventions, he always made very clear that he distinguished the fascist regime of the *Estado Novo* from the Portuguese people oppressed by that very same regime. As the Portuguese poet Manuel Alegre underscores, the Portuguese language was also the language of those who resisted the Portuguese authoritarian colonialist regime. And Cabral believed that the triumph of the liberation of the Portuguese colonies would undoubtedly affect the fascist regime oppressing Portugal, contributing to its ending.

Graduating in agronomy from the University of Lisbon, the leader of the armed struggle against Portuguese colonialism was also a humanist, a man of culture, profoundly knowledgeable about Portuguese reality, the history of Portugal, and the symbols that defined it, as we will see through the analysis of one of the most beautiful and interesting poems in the Portuguese language that he left us.

Amílcar Cabral's metaphorical "Naus sem rumo" in Portuguese poetry

My inquiry rests on the analysis of a fragment from a very well-known poem by Cabral, "Naus sem rumo" ["Aimless Ships"], an allegory of the Cabo Verdean islands that transforms into a beautiful lyrical interpellation and historical vision. I question the moment in which Cabral crosses the *naus* (vessels) - into which he transforms the islands - with the caravels that docked there, in an encounter that many other poets consider conceptually inseparable from the Atlantic slave route that so shamefully marks a four-century history. To do this, however, we must examine what Eduardo Lourenço termed the "Atlantic exception" that Portugal imagined for itself, and the dark visions projected onto the caravels that emblematically draw the cartography of this "Atlantic exception," leaving cuts and wounds in a history for which reparations are demanded today.

Let us frame the proposed analysis with a brief comment of "Atlantic Exceptionalism" and the need to correct the colonial narrative.



Drawing from the analysis of Eduardo Lourenço (and expanded by other scholars, such as Vecchi and Margarida Calafate Ribeiro), the concept of "Atlantic exceptionalism" (Lourenço, 1999) refers to the historical self-image Portugal constructed. Following its early independence in the Iberian Peninsula, which was viewed through a providential, Christian lens, with the Discoveries Portugal imagined itself as a predestined "glorious imperial island"; after the historical trauma of the Battle of Alcácer Quibir, this identity transformed into a messianic "lost island" (Lourenço, 2018, pp. 18-20). Portugal used the empire—both real and dreamed—as an escape and a "refuge" to maintain an image of grandeur. This resulted in an "onirically imperial" nation (Lourenço, 2018, p. 57) that projected a singular self-image within European colonialism, a myth later exploited by the *Estado Novo* propaganda and reflected in its literature.

In contrast to this European myth-making, Achille Mbembe (2017) highlights the ontological suppression and erasure of pre-colonial African history. Driven by the rise of capitalism and imperialist ambitions during the Atlantic period (15th and 16th centuries), Western thought effectively erased an entire Afrocentric epistemology, replacing it with ideological fantasies that justified domination. This erasure of Africa determines the imperative for repair that is widely advocated in our time. Because of this historical erasure, writing about Africa from an African perspective requires correcting and dismantling the Eurocentric narrative that romanticized the colonial enterprise. To heal the lingering effects of the "colonial wound" (Mignolo, 2011), the colonial narrative must be exposed and rewritten. Ultimately, Mbembe emphasizes that restitution and reparation are absolute necessities (*sine qua non*) to address the deep historical scars left behind (2017, p. 183).

What weight do the symbols that emerge from this puzzle of reconstructing a historical narrative carry? Before we look at Amílcar Cabral's "ships" or caravels, let us see how shifting the geographical orientation modifies the historical perspective and subverts the symbolic-ideological mythmaking or mystification that follows in its wake. Before reaching Africa, the caravels depart from Portugal... more specifically and symbolically, from Sagres.

In many Portuguese poems, Sagres is viewed as a sacred, foundational site—the epic starting point of maritime adventure and discovery. Changing the geographical and cultural perspective transforms the historical meaning of symbols, effectively dismantling the ideological myths associated with them.

In a poem by Cabo Verdean writer Gabriel Mariano, titled "*Promontório de Sagres*" ("Promontory of Sagres"),



*Quem te nomeou de sacro
promontório
se de ti nos viria luto e
opróbrio?
[...]
Aqui o princípio foi de tudo.
E, todavia,
por cada proa que aos ventos
irrompia
não era o mar rumoroso que
gemia
mas a terra bem amada e
africana.
[...]
Oh quem puder adivinhar,
naquela hora,
o insolidário espérmen, a
escravidão futura.
(Mariano, 1993, p. 59)*

*[Who named you a sacred promontory,
If only mourning and reproach came from you?
[...]
Here was the beginning of everything. And, still
For each prow that the winds broke
It wasn't the roaring sea that moaned
But the beloved African land.
[...]
Oh who could guess, in that hour,
the insolidary sperm, the future slavery.]*

When looking at Sagres from across the Atlantic, the narrative completely inverts. The text highlights a poem by Cabo Verdean writer Gabriel Mariano, titled "*Promontório de Sagres*" ("Promontory of Sagres"). In this piece, the "sacred" promontory is stripped of its romanticism and exposed as the birthplace of "mourning, reproach, and future slavery." The departure of the ships is not celebrated as a triumph over the sea, but mourned as a violent, forceful violation of the African continent. What some Portuguese poetry frames as a glorious act of discovery and naming, African poetry in Portuguese denounces as brutal appropriation and violence. Ultimately, these opposing poetic voices create contradictory histories where the marginalized perspective works to expose and invalidate the colonial myth.

Now, let us examine Cabral's poem.

*Naus sem rumo
Dispersas,
emersas,
sozinhas sobre o Oceano ...
Sequiosas,
rochosas,
pedaços do Africano,
do negro continente,
as engeitadas filhas,
nossas ilhas,
navegam tristemente ...
Qual naus da antiguidade,
qual naus
do velho Portugal,
aquelas que as entradas
do imenso mar abriram ...*

*Aimless Ships
Dispersed,
emerged,
alone upon the Ocean ...
Thirsty,
rocky,
pieces of the African,
of the black continent,
the disowned daughters,
our islands,
sail sadly ...
Like ships of antiquity,
like ships
of old Portugal,
of the black continent ...
those that opened the entrances
of the immense sea ...*



*As naus
que as nossas descobriram.
Ao vento, à tempestade,
navegam
de Cabo Verde as ilhas,
as filhas
do ingente
e negro continente ...
São dez as caravelas
em busca do Infinito ...
São dez as caravelas,
sem velas,
em busca do Infinito ...
A tempestade e ao vento,
caminham ...
navegam mansamente
as ilhas,
as filhas
do negro continente ...*

*The ships
that discovered ours.
To the wind, to the storm,
sail
the islands of Cape Verde,
the daughters
of the vast
and black continent ...
They are ten caravels
in search of the Infinite ...
They are ten caravels,
without sails,
in search of the Infinite ...
To the storm and to the wind,
they travel ...
sail gently
the islands,
the daughters
of the black continent ...*

*- Onde ides naus da Fome,
da Morna,
do Sonho,
e da Desgraça? ...
- Onde ides? ...
Sem rumo e sem ter fito,
Sozinhas,
dispersas,
emersas,
nós vamos,
sonhando,
sofrendo,
em busca do Infinito! ...
(Cabral, 2015)*

*— Where are you going, ships of
Hunger,
of Morna,
of Dreams,
and of Misfortune? ...
— Where are you going? ...With no
direction and no purpose,
Alone,
dispersed,
emerged,
we go,
dreaming,
suffering,
in search of the Infinite! ...]*

The poem belongs to what critics define as the first phase of Cabral's poetic works, dating from 1943. Critics note that it is an "allegory of the Cabo Verdean islands as an integral part of the African continent." They appear outlined against the waves; their geographical situation subsumed in about 10 words. They are "pieces of the African (continent)", thus an intrinsic part of it. Are they "disowned daughters" because, as islands, they are hopelessly separated from it? Further along, it will be reaffirmed that they are "the daughters of the vast continent" ... Therefore, origin and belonging are unquestionably defined. But their particular condition is also marked: they are "alone", blending their movement with that of the sea, which is their ground. Their condition is in a way tragic; their identity is constructed from this dual insistence: their belonging to Africa; yet, being "loose" upon the waves, their particular destiny or particular condition—or what we might perhaps define as their Atlantic vocation—is also part of the matrix Cabral imagines for them.



Before the mention of ships, the islands already “sail” “sadly”, “gently”, “Thirsty”, “Rocky”, the poem somehow sublimates their condition, converting them into ‘our ships’ (*naus*) that trace a course — “To the wind, to the storm”, but “With no direction and no purpose”, yet “in search of the Infinite” (3 times). Addressed in the poem, “Where are you going?”, they reaffirm their route, as well as the matter or the modalities of which this navigation is made, which are inseparable: “Dreaming, suffering”. If the “thirsty, rocky” islands had seen this difficult condition sublimated through their transformation into “our ships” that “sail”, the weight of this destiny is also transferred to the metaphorical ships they become: they are “ships of Hunger, of *Morna*, of Dreams, and of Misfortune”. That is to say, their tragic inclination or character will remain. This beautiful poem sublimates the tragic condition of the archipelago without canceling it out in that sublimation, but rather managing to find a balance, or a compromise, between what is an elegiac lament (Hunger, misfortune) and what is a hymn, a song of praise and exaltation of the ‘aimless ships’ that are the homeland.

Let us focus on the moment where the “aimless ships” that are the islands evoke the image of other ships exalted in the past, “Like ships of antiquity” (celebrated in other poems, in other histories), “Like ships of old Portugal”, which are “those that opened the entrances of the immense sea... The ships / the caravels / that discovered our / Islands”. An ancient symbol—enthroned by a certain historiography and literature—finds another symbol, the islands/ships, invented by the poem. Is one mythology being fought with another mythology?... even more interesting is how, in the continuation of the text, the analogy converts into an assumption of identity: the island-ships are truly—truly—transformed into 10 caravels, “They are 10 caravels without sails” tracing their undefined heroic path, the target of the new song, which thus uses and, in a way, cancels out the symbols of a mythology supplanted by the reality celebrated in the present.

In a time very different from today, and for a mind mobilized by what would be the effective combat, the revolution, and the war to be waged—in minds and on the ground—against colonial oppression, such as Cabral’s, the time is not (yet) that of demanding reparations in the terms put forward by Mbembe; but this poem corresponds to a gesture of subtle rewriting or correction of a history, and also of an epistemology, or knowledge about history; it also corresponds to the reversal of the meaning of one of the main symbols of the mythical narrative that on Portugal’s side (during the *Estado Novo* period, but not only during that period) was constructed over the historical events to which the text refers.

The Macanese Cecília Jorge, dealing with the empire at its crepuscular, final hour - which was Macau, 1999 - also uses the image of the caravels of the Discoveries to put the mythologization of the empire on trial, from a demystifying perspective:

*Pés de barro da lusitanidade
Caravelas de vela solta
Que se vão rasgando
No retorno à Pátria
(1999, Jorge 2020: 33)*

*[Feet of clay of lusitanidade
Caravels with loose sails
Tearing themselves apart
Upon the return to the Homeland]*



Cabral does not tear the sails of the caravels; rather, he transforms what for Gabriel Mariano was a symbol of the violence of the colonial adventure into a new symbol, which thus cancels out the first, inscribing upon it a meaning that corresponds to its reversal. And he does this in what I consider to be one of the most beautiful poems written in the Portuguese language.

Conclusion

Committed to the liberation struggle of his homeland and the African continent from the bonds of colonial oppression, Amílcar Cabral understood the struggle for emancipation as an act of culture, rooted in the reclamation of the cultural identity of the oppressed. In a time very different from today, and for a spirit mobilized by what would become the effective struggle—the revolution and the war to be fought, both in the minds and on the fields—against colonial oppression, as experienced by Cabral, the time is not (yet) one for demanding reparation in the terms proposed by Mbembe.

However, the examined poem subtly but consistently dismantles colonial mythologies, driving a critical reassessment of both historical narratives and the framework of knowledge built around them. By reframing the core symbol of the Portuguese Discoveries ships, the *naus* or *caravelas*, converting them into Cabo Verdean islands - African sacred ground -, the text connects historical reconstruction with contemporary discourse on the necessity of systemic reparation, establishing it as a foundational pillar for national and cultural identity.

Therefore, in some of Cabral's poetry, one recognizes a subtle but persistent gesture of rewriting or correcting a mythical vision that supports a particular history and the epistemology it entails. We reflected on the significance of the symbols that emerge from this puzzle of reconstructing a historical narrative, articulating it with more recent expressions that elaborate on the theme of the need for reparation as a cornerstone for identity building.

In the documentary "Conakry" directed by Filipa César, Grada Kilomba, a Portuguese artist, writer, and theorist of African descent, evokes the role of Amílcar Cabral as a visionary leader, through images that could have been lost during an agitated past. Cabral hosts in Conakry a cultural event, an exhibition visited by remarkable African intellectuals, political leaders, and artists, on the liberation struggle of the Guinean and Cabo Verdean people. A tranquil presence, Cabral is seen showing to Madame Andrée Sékou Touré objects from the Portuguese arsenal, unfolding for her a Portuguese flag confiscated from the Portuguese, without any bitterness, resentment, or hatred in his gestures or words.

Kilomba wonders about the pride she would have felt if the true history of Amílcar Cabral and other Africans had not been suppressed from the history books she learned from when growing up in Lisbon, the former capital of an empire that even today weighs upon the identity of both Portuguese and African people. The film frames restoring the



exhibition hosted by Cabral resurrect an event that in itself functioned as a gesture of presentation and preservation of empirical evidence to counter against intrusive memories of subordination — “the African continent is given a new body, its history is given a new language...”, says Kilomba in the documentary (Kilomba, 2016).

The memory of a man of Cabral's moral and intellectual stature, a poem like his beautiful “Naus sem rumo” ([Aimless Caravels]), help us deal with a “past that still consumes us,” as said by Ana Paula Tavares, the Angolan writer who in 2025 won the Camões Prize.

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