

BODY, VOICE, AND ACTION: AMÍLCAR CABRAL'S DISCURSIVE PERFORMANCE IN THE CALL TO ANTICOLONIAL RESISTANCE IN CABO VERDE AND GUINEA BISSAU

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Abstract

This study proposes an original approach to understanding the success of Amílcar Cabral's leadership through an analysis of the performativity of his speeches. In light of the central place of orality in African culture and the power of vocality - the physical presence and embodied dimension of communication - the singularity and effectiveness of Cabral's engagement with his comrades become evident. His interventions simultaneously articulate the call to armed resistance, ethical and moral formation, and the dissemination of scientific knowledge among populations historically deprived of formal education. The corpus of analysis is comprised of two fundamental sources: *Análise de alguns tipos de resistência* (Analysis of some types of resistance; 1979), a transcription of lectures delivered in Creole at the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC) cadre seminar in 1969; and the programming of Rádio Libertação, the party's broadcasting station since 1967. This dual corpus makes it possible to observe different modalities of enunciation and reception—from the live word in the formative context of the seminar to the mediated word transmitted through radio waves. The theoretical framework guiding the study is Paul Zumthor's *Performance, recepção, leitura* (Performance, reception, lecture; 1990), which argues that the nature of performance directly shapes the knowledge produced and transmitted. Thus, Cabral's vocal performance not only communicates but also aims to transform and inscribe knowledge into the bodies and memories of the combatants, constituting an act of culture and a central instrument of formation and resistance.

Keywords

Amílcar Cabral, anticolonial resistance, discursive performance, Paul Zumthor.



Resumo

Este estudo propõe uma abordagem original para compreender o êxito da liderança de Amílcar Cabral através da análise da performatividade dos seus discursos. À luz do lugar central da oralidade nas culturas africanas e da força da vocalidade, entendida como a presença física e a dimensão corporizada da comunicação, torna-se evidente a singularidade e a eficácia do modo como Cabral se relacionava com os seus camaradas. As suas intervenções articulam simultaneamente o apelo à resistência armada, a formação ética e moral e a difusão de conhecimento científico junto de populações historicamente privadas de acesso à educação formal. O corpus de análise é constituído por duas fontes fundamentais: Análise de alguns tipos de resistência (1979), transcrição de palestras proferidas em crioulo no Seminário de Quadros do Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC), em 1969; e a programação da Rádio Libertação, estação radiofónica do partido em funcionamento desde 1967. Este duplo corpus permite observar diferentes modalidades de enunciação e recepção, desde a palavra viva no contexto formativo do seminário até à palavra mediatizada difundida pelas ondas radiofónicas. O enquadramento teórico que orienta a investigação assenta na obra *Performance, recepção, leitura* (1990), de Paul Zumthor, segundo a qual a natureza da performance condiciona directamente o conhecimento produzido e transmitido. Nesta perspectiva, a performance vocal de Cabral não se limita a comunicar; procura igualmente transformar e inscrever conhecimentos nos corpos e nas memórias dos combatentes, constituindo-se como um acto de cultura e um instrumento central de formação e resistência.

Palavras-chave

Amílcar Cabral; resistência anticolonial; performance discursiva; Paul Zumthor.

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BODY, VOICE, AND ACTION: AMÍLCAR CABRAL'S DISCURSIVE PERFORMANCE IN THE CALL TO ANTICOLONIAL RESISTANCE IN CABO VERDE AND GUINEA BISSAU^{1,2}

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Introduction

Amílcar Cabral's leadership in the anticolonial struggle in Cabo Verde and Guinea-Bissau has been widely studied from different perspectives political, military, diplomatic, and pedagogical. However, a fundamental dimension of his activism remains relatively unexplored: discursive performance, understood as the set of *vocal*, bodily, and relational strategies that endowed his words with a singular transformative force. This study proposes an original approach to understanding the success of Cabral's leadership, focusing on an analysis of the performativity of his speeches and his capacity to mobilize, educate, and transform listeners into active subjects of resistance.

In light of the central place of orality in African culture and the power of *vocality* - the physical presence and embodied dimension of communication - the singularity and effectiveness of Cabral's engagement with his comrades become evident. His interventions simultaneously articulated the call to armed resistance, ethical and moral formation, and the dissemination of scientific knowledge among populations historically deprived of formal education. This multiplicity of discursive functions reflects Cabral's conception of the liberation struggle as an integral process of the transformation of consciousness, in which the spoken word played a decisive role as military action.

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

² Acknowledgments - The authors dedicate this study to the memory of Amélia Sanches Araújo (1933–2026), whose voice became an instrument of liberation. In 1967, she took up a microphone in an improvised studio in Conakry and helped free two peoples. Her voice continues to resonate far beyond the physical space she once inhabited, remaining alive in the histories and memories she helped shape. This research was supported by the University of Macau through Start-Up Grant SRG2024-00008-FAH "Avant-Garde Movements in Non-hegemonic Portuguese-Speaking Contexts". The authors gratefully acknowledge this support. Furthermore, the authors acknowledge the use of Microsoft Copilot in assisting with the formatting of references and the standardization of source citations in this work.



The corpus of analysis comprises two fundamental sources, corresponding to two distinct modalities of enunciation. The first is *Análise de alguns tipos de resistência* (*Analysis of some types of resistance*; 1979), which gathers the transcripts of lectures delivered in Creole at the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC) cadre seminar in 1969, in the Conakry region. Here the context is of copresence, in which Cabral's living word addressed an audience of militants from various fronts of the struggle, with heterogeneous levels of schooling and diverse ethnic origins. The second source is the programming of Rádio Liberdade, the party's broadcasting station since 1967, which amplified Cabral's voice beyond geographical and political borders, reaching isolated combatants, populations under colonial occupation, Portuguese soldiers, and listeners in the diaspora. This dual corpus makes it possible to observe different modalities of enunciation and reception - from the live word in the formative context of the seminar to the mediated word transmitted through radio waves - and to reflect on continuities and discontinuities between bodily presence and the ubiquitous presence enabled by technology.

The theoretical framework guiding the study is Paul Zumthor's *Performance, recepção, leitura* (*Performance, reception, lecture*), which argues that the nature of performance directly shapes the knowledge produced and transmitted. Throughout a career dedicated to the study of medieval poetry and oral traditions, Zumthor developed a set of concepts—performance, vocality, antepredicative knowledge—in light of which Cabral's vocal performance not only communicates but also transforms and inscribes knowledge into the bodies and memories of the combatants, constituting an act of culture and a central instrument of formation and resistance.

The study has three sections: The first presents Zumthor's theoretical foundations, highlighting the notion of performance as an act of presence and the materiality of the voice as an emanation of the body. The second analyzes Cabral's discursive performance at the 1969 seminar, examining his choice of Creole, didactic style and use of agrarian metaphor, provocative tone and direct confrontation with militants, concern with ethical and moral education, dissemination of scientific knowledge, and construction of a culture of work and discipline of time. The third section addresses Rádio Liberdade, the PAIGC's broadcasting station since 1967, as a device for amplifying Cabral's voice, discussing its multiple roles—military coordination, countering disinformation, political education, cultural affirmation, psychological warfare, and international dissemination—and the performativity of radio listening. The concluding remarks synthesize the main findings and highlight the relevance of a performative approach to Cabral studies and to a broader understanding of national liberation movements.

With this approach, the study aims to contribute not only to the historiography of the anticolonial struggle but also to the dialogue between performance studies, intellectual history, and postcolonial critique. In this sense, it aligns with recent theoretical proposals that argue that the critical reevaluation of colonial narratives requires a "structural change in institutional epistemologies" (Louwerse, 2025, p. 272), insofar as Cabral's discursive performance does not merely criticize colonialism but constitutes an "act of re-creation... that subverts the traditional separation of past and present, challenging established frameworks and foregrounding the knowledge held within ancestral memories and lived experiences" (p. 272).



The Living Voice and the Present Body as Sites of Knowledge

Paul Zumthor's work offers a particularly suitable conceptual framework for analyzing communication in contexts marked by a strong presence of orality. Over the course of a career dedicated to the study of medieval poetry and oral traditions, Zumthor developed a set of concepts that allow us to think of the word not merely as a vehicle of information, but as an event, as presence, as action.

Performance as an Act of Presence

In the opening chapter of *Performance, réception, lecture*, Zumthor evokes a childhood memory that functions as the primal scene of his theoretical reflection. He recalls the street singers who animated Paris in the 1930s, around whom small groups of listeners—about fifteen to twenty people—would gather to hear songs of elementary melody, purchase broadsheets with the printed lyrics, and, in the final stanza, sing the refrain in chorus. The author emphasizes that the truly mobilizing element was not the song itself, as a textual or musical object, but the spectacle in its entirety: the performer, their gestures, the interaction with the group, and the surrounding urban environment. All these elements—and not only the text or the melody —“were part of the song. They were the song”³ (Zumthor, 1990, p. 29). What remained from this experience, the author writes, was the perception that the song could not be reduced to text or melody, but included the performer, their gesture, the group, the street, the sky.

The childhood memory illuminates the central concept of Zumthor's reflection on performance as an act (its mode of concrete existence) through which a work is fully realized in a context of the copresence of the emitter and the receiver. Zumthor draws on the tradition of ethnological and linguistic studies of the 1970s to support this perspective, citing “*Breakthrough into Performance*” by folklorist Dell Hymes, for whom the activity of a person within their cultural group can be classified into three types: behavior, defined as everything produced by any action; conduct, which is behavior oriented by sociocultural norms, whether accepted or rejected; and performance, which is conduct in which the subject assumes responsibility for communication (Hymes, 1973, as cited in Zumthor, 1990, p. 31). Performance thus implies the subject's commitment to their act of speech. For Zumthor, performance realizes, concretizes, brings something from virtuality into actuality, appearing as an emergence within a cultural and situational context (p. 31).

This notion is particularly fruitful for understanding Cabral's interventions at the 1969 seminar. Each lecture was a unique moment, an emergence that transformed the seminar space into a site of intensive formation. More than transmitting information, Cabral created, in each intervention, a shared experience in which the word became an act and the listeners were converted into active participants in the process.

³ All translations from non-English works are by the authors except where other translators are credited.



Vocality and the Materiality of the Voice

One of Zumthor's most original contributions is the distinction between orality and vocality. Orality refers to the fact that a discourse is transmitted through the voice; vocality, broader in scope, involves not only the history and material presence of the voice itself, but also the entire constellation of values, affects, and sensory experiences that are mobilized in the act of listening. For Zumthor (1990), the voice "is a thing. It possesses full materiality" (p. 85). Its traits are describable and interpretable, and upon them multiple symbolisms—personal and mythological—are founded.

This materiality of the voice binds it inseparably to the body. The voice is "an emanation of the body," that which "sonically represents it in its fullness" (p. 27). When we hear a voice, we do not access merely informational content; we establish a relationship with a present body, even if mediated. Therefore, Zumthor insists on the idea that "the poetic text signifies the world. It is through the body that meaning is perceived there" (pp. 77–78). By "poetic," Zumthor means here not a literary genre but a quality of language that mobilizes the body in its totality, summoning sensory and affective energies that everyday, merely informative language tends to attenuate or erase.

This emphasis on the materiality of the voice points to what Zumthor, following Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, designates as "antepredicative knowledge"—a knowledge prior to discursive rationality, accumulated through sensation and constituting the ground upon which all aesthetic experience is built. In dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's notion of an originary perception preceding conceptual reflection, Zumthor considers it "an accumulation of knowledge belonging to the order of sensation and which, for whatever reason, does not surface at the level of rationality, but constitutes a substratum of knowledge upon which the rest is constructed" (p. 78). This knowledge "cannot be reduced to the decoding of analyzable signs; it derives from a process irreducible to particular movements" (p. 79). Poetry, like performance, activates this antepredicative knowledge, making the body the privileged site of perception and meaning-making.

This conception of knowledge emerging from sensation and the body resonates with contemporary approaches to the relationship between aesthetics and decolonization. Louwerse (2025) observes that contemporary Black artists have activated "characteristics of the Baroque—theatricality, illusion, excess and hybridity—[to] construct alternative narratives that challenge the 'false absences' of the European self-narrative and center Black identities" (p. 276). Just as Cabral's vocal performance mobilizes the listeners' "antepredicative knowledge," inscribing knowledge into the body, Black baroque aesthetics operates as a "practice that emerges from and engages traits characterized as baroque but specifically accommodates the experience of New World slavery and its continuing impacts" (Willis, 2023).

Amílcar Cabral's Discursive Performance at the 1969 Seminar

In November 1969, in the Conakry region, a PAIGC cadre seminar was held that brought together militants and party officials from the various fronts of struggle. Over six days, Cabral delivered a series of lectures in Creole, in which he addressed the different dimensions of resistance—political, economic, cultural, and armed—later transcribed into



Portuguese in *Análise de alguns tipos de resistência*. This seminar was part of the broader strategy of political education pursued by the PAIGC, which conceived of the war of liberation not merely as a military confrontation but as a struggle for the transformation of the combatants' consciousness. The audience, heterogeneous in ethnic origins and levels of schooling, posed a considerable pedagogical challenge: to communicate effectively with former sepoys (locally recruited African soldiers who had served under Portuguese colonial command), peasants from the liberated areas, and young students who had joined the struggle. The choice of Creole, instead of Portuguese, as the language of the living voice highlights Cabral's concern with establishing immediate communication with his listeners.

The Choice of Creole: Language of Recognition and of Experience

The decision to speak in Creole is, in itself, a performative act of great significance. Portuguese was the language of the colonizer, of administration, of the schooling to which few had access. Creole, by contrast, was the language of the *tabanca* (village), of the family, of shared experience. By choosing Creole, Cabral was not only ensuring linguistic comprehension but also establishing a relationship of complicity with his comrade-listeners, inscribing his discourse within the cultural and affective universe familiar to them. As Serinaldo Araújo (2024) emphasizes, paraphrasing Paulo Freire, Cabral "did not speak or write in a complicated way that would hinder understanding for the people and his fellow fighters" (p. 243).

This linguistic choice corresponds to what Zumthor designates as *vocality*: It is not merely a matter of using the voice to transmit words, but of mobilizing an entire set of values and affects linked to the experience of listening. Cabral's voice in Creole was not the same voice that spoke Portuguese at international conferences or in the party's official documents. It was a voice that drew closer, that created intimacy, that spoke to the body and not only to reason. This linguistic option is inscribed in what British sociologist John B. Thompson (2011) defines as the ideological *modus operandi* of unification, specifically in the strategy of standardization or symbolization of unity. By speaking in Creole, Cabral forged a collective identity that transcended ethnic divisions—Balantas, Fulas, Mandingas, Manjacos (all ethnic groups native to Guinea-Bissau)—that had historically been exploited by the colonizer to divide and dominate.

It is important to note that Cabral recognized the limitations of Creole as a language incapable, at that time, of expressing all the concepts necessary for political and scientific education. In the seminar, he explicitly addressed this issue, revealing a pragmatic attitude toward language:

For us, it makes no difference whether we use Portuguese, Russian, French, or English, as long as it serves us - just as it makes no difference whether we use tractors from the Russians, the English, the Americans, etc., as long as, once we have taken our independence, they serve us to till the land. Because language is an instrument, but it may happen that we already have a language that can serve and that everyone understands. So we are not going to make everyone learn Russian - it is not worth it - especially since



we have a language, Creole, which is similar to Portuguese (Cabral, 1979, p. 106).

This passage reveals an instrumental conception of language, but also a concern with accessibility. Creole is chosen not on a whim or for linguistic imposition, but because it is the language that “everyone understands,” the language that makes it possible to establish immediate communication with the seminar’s audience.

Analysis of Discursive Performance in the Transcripts

The transcription of the lectures preserves, albeit imperfectly, significant traces of the discursive performance of 1969. A close reading of the text allows, in part, the reconstruction of Cabral’s discursive strategies and the ways in which they were deliberately crafted to generate powerful effects on his listeners.

Didactic Tone and Use of Agrarian Metaphor

Cabral frequently resorts to metaphors drawn from the everyday experience of his peasant listeners in order to explain abstract political concepts. Right at the opening of the first lecture, devoted to political resistance, he establishes an analogy between the resistance of a people and the decision of a peasant family:

Our resistance, comrades, can be compared to the following. Take, for example, a family, a tabanca in our land, who needs to cultivate rice. They have two measures of rice. They know that if they take one measure to sow, there will be a shortage, because the rice will not be enough to eat. But they take that measure, sow it, and, if it works well, they may later harvest ten, twenty, or even thirty measures, depending on the land. This is similar to the resistance of a people, comrades (Cabral, 1979, p. 7).

The image is immediately comprehensible to a rural audience. It translates, in concrete terms, the logic of sacrifice made in the name of a future harvest. Resistance, like sowing, requires an initial investment that seems to contradict immediate necessity, but which is the condition for long-term survival. This ability to translate complex concepts into simple images can be seen throughout the work. In the same lecture, Cabral defines resistance in terms that any peasant would have understood: “Resistance is a natural thing. Every force exerted upon any object gives rise to resistance, that is, to a counterforce. And the counterforce to colonialist and imperialist power is the national liberation movement” (p. 9).

The physical law of action and reaction becomes a political metaphor. Colonial oppression naturally generates resistance. It is not a matter of moral choice, but of a necessity inscribed in the very nature of things.



Provocative Tone and Direct Confrontation

Cabral's speech assumes a provocative tone, confronting militants with their shortcomings and limitations. In the section devoted to economic resistance - where he identifies agriculture as its "main aspect" (p. 48) - he openly criticizes "some leaders and party officials, who at all levels have not given due importance to our economic resistance" (p. 44). In particular, he points out that political commissars and other officials rarely reflected on the country's wealth in livestock (in the case of Guinea-Bissau), and at the same time they neglected to increase agricultural production.

This frankness, far from discouraging, appealed to the need to overcome obstacles. Cabral, who himself shared the same difficulties and demanded of everyone the same level of commitment, spoke from within and to the party. The critique is all the more effective insofar as it is accompanied by concrete examples and proposed solutions, as can be seen in the following passage:

There was, for example, a case in which one of our officials wrote asking me to send milk for two newborns because there was no milk to give them. But the children had been born in an area of our land where there were cows that had calved—all of them. In truth, anywhere, in any household where there were cows that had calved, he could have found and obtained milk for the children. I told him to look for cows to get the milk, because I would not send any. And he succeeded (Cabral, 1979, pp. 51–52).

The anecdote illustrates one of Cabral's central concerns: the need to foster initiative and autonomy among trainees, rather than letting them passively wait for solutions from above. Narrating this episode in vocal performance ensures that the lesson strikes the listeners with an immediacy rooted in their lived reality, making it not only intelligible but also highly memorable, as it is anchored in a concrete story and a recognizable situation.

Ethical and Moral Education

One of the most notable aspects of Cabral's lectures is his constant concern with the ethical formation of militants. The liberation struggle, according to Cabral, aimed, on the one hand, to expel the colonizer from "our land" and, on the other, to construct a new man, capable of building a just and free society. This ethical dimension permeates his entire work. As Jiménez Martínez (2023) observes, "for Amílcar Cabral and his followers it was not only a matter of making the population of the liberated territory literate, but also of ensuring that it became part of the vanguard fighting for independence" (p. 194). In a particularly significant passage, Cabral defines the objectives of resistance in terms that transcend the mere conquest of political power:

Our objective cannot be to take over the governor's palace in order to do in our land what that governor intended to do. Nor to occupy the house of the district chief or the administrator. Our objective is to dismantle the colonial state in our land so that we may create a new, different state, founded on



justice, on labor, and on equality of opportunity for all the sons and daughters of our land, in Guinea and in Cabo Verde (Cabral, 1979, p. 10).

This vision required a profound transformation of behaviors and attitudes. Cabral does not hesitate to denounce practices he considers incompatible with the values of the party, such as theft, corruption, or abuse of power over the population. In a passage that reveals his concern with the integrity of the combatants, he declares:

Our combatants are honest, serious, decent, and dignified people - the finest sons of our people. Therefore, when one of our combatants, in the course of war, comes across a watch, a bracelet, a gold chain, or any other item taken from the enemy, he must show it to his commander, to his leadership, and not keep it for himself. Otherwise, he is no longer a combatant for the liberation of his land, but a highway robber (p. 68).

The distinction between the combatant and the bandit is fundamental. The combatant fights for a collective cause; the bandit exploits war for personal gain. By vocally articulating this distinction with clarity and force, Cabral's performance contributes to shaping the listeners' ethical consciousness, creating a sense of honor and dignity associated with being a combatant. The concern with ethical formation also extends to relations with the population. Cabral repeatedly warns against abuse:

In order to advance our struggle within the framework of economic resistance, we must avoid overburdening our people, lest they think that our party also seeks to exploit them.

We have always given comrades the directives not to abuse the people's goods - their chickens, their cows. If they offer, we accept, but we must not demand anything, nor should we take anything by force (p. 60).

This insistence on respect for the population was as much a matter of principle as it was a strategic necessity. The liberation war could only be won with the active support of the masses. Any abuse undermined that support and, with it, the chances of victory.

Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge

Another notable dimension of Cabral's performance is his concern with spreading scientific knowledge in an accessible way. In the section devoted to cultural resistance, we find passages in which he explains natural phenomena traditionally attributed to supernatural forces. Referring to the "iran," a spiritual entity in which many believed, Cabral ironically remarks:

Concretely, for example, I am African, and it could be that, like other Africans who still exist, I might convince myself that for certain things to happen in my life, it would be necessary to satisfy the will of the "iran." And the "iran"



says that what I asked of it in our conversation can only be fulfilled if I take alms from a little three-year-old girl, to kill, to make a sacrifice, and then everything I desire can be realized. This still exists in Africa and, if we look closely, perhaps there are still people who believe in it in our land (pp. 72–73).

Cabral's response to this belief is blunt: "Let us go and look for this 'iran' until we find it, to kill it, because this is an 'iran' of the Tugas [a popular and colloquial designation for the Portuguese, used in various African contexts]; it was the *Tuga* who put it there, it does not belong to our land" (p. 73). Irony and humor function as instruments for dismantling superstitions that, in his view, kept the people in a state of dependence and fear. Yet it is in his explanation of meteorological phenomena that his effort to disseminate scientific knowledge becomes most evident:

In our culture, everyone must know, by tomorrow, even if we hold dances when there are thunderstorms, that a thunderstorm is the collision of two clouds—one charged with positive electricity and the other with negative electricity—and when they collide, they produce a spark, which is the lightning, and a noise, which is the thunder. It is like when one takes two electric wires, positive and negative, and touches them together, producing a spark. That is what lightning in the sky is: the electricity of the clouds. The noise is the meeting of two clouds, which is called thunder (p. 85).

But Cabral does not limit himself to describing the physical phenomenon; he teaches his listeners how to calculate the distance at which a storm is located, thereby demonstrating the practical usefulness of scientific knowledge:

So much so that, taking into account the speed of sound in air, when one hears the thunder, one can calculate where one cloud meets the other, because light travels faster than sound. One sees the lightning and after a while hears the noise of the thunder. Between the moment when the lightning is seen and the moment when the noise is heard, if for example it is five seconds, we can calculate where the two clouds meet, at what distance from us, because the speed of sound in air is 340 meters per second. Therefore, if one counts the seconds from the moment the lightning is seen [to the moment the thunder is heard], then in our example, multiplying five by 340, one obtains 1,700 meters. That means that the two clouds met at a distance of 1,700 meters from where we are and produced the thunder and the lightning (pp. 85–86).

In explaining the relationship between the speed of light and the speed of sound, Cabral not only demystifies the phenomenon of thunder and lightning, but also offers his listeners an instrument of understanding and control over the world around them. This knowledge, accessible to all, stands in contrast to belief in the "iran" - which could only



be accessed through intermediaries and which kept the population in a state of dependence and fear. Science, in this context, is not bookish or elitist knowledge - it is a tool of practical emancipation, returning to people mastery over their environment.

Cabral goes further, projecting this need for scientific knowledge into the future of the nation. In a particularly incisive passage, he confronts his comrades with the deficiency of their own knowledge: "But comrades, tomorrow, to advance seriously, not only the leaders, but all children of nine years of age, must know what the acceleration of gravity is. In Germany, for example, all the children know this" (pp. 104–105). He contrasts the scientific backwardness of his land with the advancement of European countries, not to humiliate his listeners, but to challenge them: Scientific knowledge is not an innate privilege of Europeans; it is a conquest that any people can achieve, provided they organize and discipline themselves. For Cabral, science is a factor in development and autonomy—an indispensable condition to ensure the future nation does not exchange colonial dependence for a new form of subalternity.

These passages on the importance of disseminating scientific knowledge in the construction of a new nation illustrate well Cabral's conception of culture: It is not a matter of preserving traditions intact, but of transforming them in light of scientific knowledge, thereby losing one's identity in the process. Vocal performance is the privileged vehicle of this emancipatory pedagogy. By explaining complex phenomena in accessible language, Cabral affirms above all the possibility of a rational understanding of the world, a necessary condition for the construction of a free and developed society.

The Construction of a Culture of Work and of a Discipline of Time

A recurring theme in Cabral's lectures is the valorization of work, particularly agricultural labor. In a society marked by the colonial hierarchy, which despised manual labor and associated culture with bookish knowledge, Cabral seeks to invert this scale of values:

At the same time, we must try, as I have told you, to develop more and more each day respect for those who work, to raise high the value of labor, to convince the children of our land that agricultural work must not be despised; on the contrary, it is the purest, healthiest, and most valuable work in our land today. Unfortunately, in our African minds, working is still considered something of little worth, especially plowing the land—for those who plow the land only get things to eat, because it is the work of the wretched (p. 46).

This passage reveals a sharp awareness of the symbolic hierarchies inherited from colonialism. Agricultural labor, devalued and associated with "misfortune," needs to be rehabilitated. Cabral does not limit himself to defending this rehabilitation in abstract terms; he proposes concrete measures:

What we want tomorrow in our land is the following: that the names of those who are praised be only those who produce the most. Those who produce the most rice in our land—whether a person, a family, or a cooperative—are the ones whose names must be raised high, with prizes. Whoever produces



the most groundnuts, whoever is able to produce the most palm oil, and so on, comrades, are the best people of our land. And we must punish severely, criticize severely those who do not work to produce what is necessary within our land, within the framework of our economic resistance (p. 61).

The proposal to associate social recognition with agricultural productivity is a way of transforming the culture of work, of creating new values and new models of excellence. Vocal performance, by enunciating this proposal with clarity and conviction, contributes to its dissemination and internalization.

This new culture of work, however, requires a fundamental complement: time discipline. Cabral insists on the need for militants to respect schedules and meet deadlines: "We must have a notion of time, in our culture, in our action. It was not we who invented the clock, but we must have a notion of time, comrades" (p. 91). This critique of unpunctuality is not a mere administrative remark; it is a pedagogical intervention on the very notion of time:

If it is necessary to get up at five in the morning, they get up at nine; if it is necessary to make an ambush starting at four in the afternoon, on that day they do not arrive, they only show up the next day and find that the Tugas have already passed... How many times have our commanders failed attacks or ambushes, simply because of delay. Some delays are justifiable, because our conditions are difficult, but others are merely a lack of interest, lack of awareness, lack of order, of decision.

Sometimes a comrade is given a mission to deliver a letter quickly to a certain place. On the way, if he finds some form of amusement, he immediately stops for three or four days, and eventually arrives one day. That cannot be. In this way, we cannot even win the war, much less build a country (p. 92).

In a culture where, as Cabral observes, "we think of an ambush, we are very satisfied, but we take no practical measures to ensure that everything goes well" (p. 93), keeping to schedules is a form of discipline that transforms will into concrete action. Unpunctuality is not a fatality; it is a choice that compromises the effectiveness of the struggle.

The Transcript as a Monument of a Performance

The publication of the lectures in book form raises an interesting theoretical problem. The 1979 book is a trace, a vestige of a performance that we cannot recover in its fullness. The voice, the gesture, the presence, and the reaction of the audience have been lost. Zumthor's *Performance, recepção, leitura* helps us think through this issue. The reading of a poetic text, he writes, is always "the apprehension of an absent-present performance" (Zumthor, 1990, p. 56). The reader strives to restore, through imagination, the lost unity of the original performance. In the case of Cabral's lectures, the reading of the transcribed words summons in us the image of a voice, of a body, of a historical



moment. The transcription is a *monument* that allows us, albeit in mediated form, to access the performative energy carried by the words. This mediation, however, is not neutral. The passage from orality to writing always entails losses and transformations. As Zumthor (1990) notes:

In the situation of pure orality, ... "formation" takes place through the voice, which carries the word; the first "transmission" is the work of a figure who, in word, uses his living voice, which is necessarily linked to a gesture. "Reception" is effected through hearing accompanied by sight, both directed toward the discourse thus performed. [...] In the situation of reading, by contrast, formation passes through writing, and reception is a second-degree vision (pp. 65–66).

Despite these limitations, the transcript preserves precious elements of the original performance. The rhythm of the sentences, the repetitions, the direct addresses to comrades, the changes of tone – all of this, in some way, survives on the written page and can be recovered by an attentive reader. The analysis presented here is, in this sense, an attempt to restore, through critical imagination, the presence of Cabral's voice at the founding moment of the 1969 seminar.

Rádio Libertação and the Mediatized Word

As Amélia Sanches Araújo, the main announcer of Rádio Libertação (Radio Liberation), recalls in a 1998 interview published in Aristides Pereira's (2003) book, the PAIGC began regular broadcasts of the mediatized word, transmitted over the radio waves, from Conakry on July 16, 1967 (p. 330). The first attempts to create a radio station date back to 1965, with a small Soviet short- and medium-wave transmitter, but the experiment failed due to the weak signal power, which did not allow it to reach Bissau (p. 333). It was Cabral who recognized the importance of the idea of a party station and nurtured it, eventually, in 1966, sending Araújo and four other comrades for nine months of training in the Soviet Union (Pereira, 2003, p. 333). The team began by broadcasting for fifteen minutes, three times a day, progressively increasing airtime to half an hour as reception in good conditions was confirmed (p. 333).

The creation of a party radio station was part of a broader phenomenon that spread across Southern Africa, where guerrilla radios established themselves as "a very powerful technology for disseminating insurgent propaganda messages of the liberation movement and for mobilizing African workers, peasants, students, and youth in the struggle against white minority domination in the entire region" (Lekgoathi, et al., 2022, p. 4). This regional development was, in turn, embedded in a global phenomenon in which broadcasting was used as a political weapon, a practice that intensified during the Cold War (Cummings, 2021). Much like the CIA's clandestine broadcasts to Eastern Europe or the resistance radios of World War II (Ribeiro, Wagner, & Morriss, 2020), the PAIGC's station aimed to break the state's information monopoly and win hearts and minds. However, unlike many of those experiences, Rádio Libertação based its effectiveness not



merely on external propaganda, but on the creation of a listening community that, as will be shown, lay at the very heart of the nation-building process (Kind-Kovács, 2019).

Rádio Libertação, which broadcast in Portuguese, Creole, and several Guinean languages—Balanta, Bafada, Mancanha, Manjaco, Fula, and Mandinga—was “a radical experiment in collective cultural production” and “a praxis that is itself a source of anticolonial ideas about culture” (Reza, 2022, p. 859). The reach of the station went far beyond the borders of Guinean territory, extending to “Cabo Verde, Senegal, and even to some European countries, where our emigrants managed to capture the broadcasts” (Pereira, 2003, p. 334). The radio was part of the broader effort to break what Cabral’s close comrade Mário Pinto de Andrade called the “obscurantism” of Salazarist propaganda, which isolated the Portuguese colonies on the world stage and turned them into “zones of silence” (Fele, 1957, p. 71).

Rádio Libertação did not replace Cabral’s presence, but amplified it, granting him a ubiquity that his body could not have. According to Amélia S. Araújo, Cabral was the most assiduous contributor to the station, writing most of the editorials and texts that unmasked colonial propaganda (Pereira, 2003, p. 335). Cabral himself compared the broadcasts of Rádio Libertação to the “mouth cannon” (*canhão de boca*) of the national liberation struggle, a warlike metaphor that highlights the understanding of the mediated word as a front of combat as decisive as military action (Pereira, 2003, p. 333). In the 1969 seminar, when reflecting on the means of propaganda and information at the service of the struggle, Cabral emphasized the strategic importance of Rádio Libertação:

For this very reason, one of the greatest victories of our party is our Rádio Libertação, our newspaper, our press, our information, both inside and outside our land. We all know the strength, the value of our party’s Station, which makes propaganda for our people and which we must be able to improve every day, because this is an essential element, an essential means of our propaganda for propagating our resistance (Cabral, 1979, 96).

This approach by the PAIGC stands in stark contrast to the broadcasting policy of the Portuguese colonial regime itself. While Salazar’s Estado Novo (New State) demonstrated a chronic disinterest in investing in shortwave broadcasts to its empire, neglecting to create a unified and effective voice for the colonies (Ribeiro, 2014), Cabral recognised in radio a central instrument of struggle. Rádio Libertação, therefore, not only filled an informational void but also exposed the fragility of the colonial propaganda machine, which was never able to compete with the agility and authenticity of the PAIGC’s “voice”.

Zumthor observes that auditory media and the written word share three fundamental characteristics: They abolish the physical presence of the speaker; they free themselves from chronological time by making the voice reiterable and indefinitely repeatable; and they tend to erase the spatial references of the living voice, creating an artificially composed space (Zumthor, 1990, p. 14). Still, he acknowledges that “what is lost with the media, and thus necessarily remains so, is corporeality, the weight, the warmth, the real volume of the body, of which the voice is only an expansion” (p. 16). He sees auditory



media as “a kind of revenge, a forced return of the voice” (p. 15). The revenge of the voice, in the context of anticolonial struggle, was its capacity to reach where the body could not be. In Zumthor’s vision, the proliferation of song from the 1950s onward and the disdain of youth for reading are symptoms of a “resurgence of the vocal energies of humanity, energies that were repressed for centuries in the social discourse of Western societies by the hegemonic course of writing” (p. 15). This reflection proves relevant because it allows us to understand anticolonial radio not as a mere substitute for physical presence, but as a technology that reactivated vocal energies long silenced by the dominance of writing—a phenomenon that, in the context of anticolonial struggle, acquired a political and liberating dimension.

For the PAIGC combatants, hearing Cabral’s voice on the radio was a paradoxical experience. It was a form of presence, insofar as the voice carried with it the memory of the body, the familiar intonation, the recognizable rhythm. But it was also a form of absence, for the leader was not there, could not be touched, did not answer questions. This tension between presence and absence is, for Zumthor, constitutive of the experience of the media. The radio allowed Cabral’s word to cross borders, overcome blockades, and reach combatants isolated in forests and populations living under occupation. In this sense, technical mediation did not annul presence; rather, it multiplied and diffused it, transforming the leader’s voice into a device of ubiquitous presence that operated beyond the geographical and political limitations imposed by colonialism.

The Role of Rádio Libertação

Rádio Libertação assumed multiple roles in the PAIGC’s political and cultural strategy. One of its central functions was the coordination and moralization of the fighting forces. According to Amélia S. Araújo, the dissemination of combat actions on the various fronts encouraged and incentivized combatants and militants (Pereira, 2003, p. 334). At the same time, the radio became a central instrument in the fight against colonial disinformation. Amélia S. Araújo emphasizes that the station put an end to the time when the colonialists, including “Spínola and his agents, could freely spread their lies without the PAIGC being able to refute them” (p. 335). Cabral assigned information a central place in the anticolonial strategy, considering it a domain that required constant attention and systematic collection (Reza, 2022, p. 861).

Another decisive role of the radio was the political and ideological formation of its listeners, through the transmission of Cabral’s speeches, editorials, and messages, as well as information about the clandestine political struggle in Cabo Verde and programs of encouragement for militants who, “in the midst of the enemy, devoted themselves to mobilizing the people” (Pereira, 2003, p. 335). This formative function is crucial to understanding the PAIGC’s political strategy: The liberation struggle was not reduced to military action; it required a profound transformation of consciousness, and the radio was one of the main instruments of that transformation.

This work of cultural valorization through radio resonates with the experience of other guerrilla radios in the region. Akinniyi (2025) highlights that the “inclusion of women’s contribution within liberation movements” in various struggles “sheds light on women’s



agency in shaping the discourse and direction of Southern Africa's liberation struggles through radio" (p. 678). This is equally applicable in the case of Rádio Liberdade, where announcers such as Amélia Sanches Araújo played a central role.

The broadcasting of songs from different ethnic origins contributed to the construction of a national identity that transcended particular ethnic affiliations. The diffusion of songs satirizing Salazar, for example, reveals how popular culture appropriated the political message and transformed it according to its own logics (Reza, 2022, p. 873). As José Linga Nafafé (2013) observes:

The sort of national culture that Cabral envisaged appears possible only in the milieu imposed by colonialism, which is characterized by exploitation and domination without distinction, of all the ethnic groups of Guinea-Bissau. In effect colonialism itself becomes the common enemy (p. 35).

The radio was also an instrument of psychological warfare, particularly through the program dedicated to Portuguese soldiers. The demoralizing impact of Rádio Liberdade on the colonial forces fits into a pattern documented in the armed struggles in Mozambique and Angola. "The gravity of this threat is underscored by colonial counter propaganda and particularly a PIDE [the regime's secret police] official's assertion that these broadcasts were 'no less dangerous than the armed war'" (Akinniyi, 2025, p. 679). On this subject, Amélia S. Araújo tells us:

There was a special program exclusively dedicated to the Portuguese soldier. It was a program that sought to raise the soldiers' awareness of the absurdity of that war and to mobilize them against the war they were fighting without knowing why. As a consequence, many desertions began to occur. Indeed, many Portuguese soldiers deserted, and those of them who were willing were interviewed on Rádio Liberdade. That gesture had a tremendous impact on those who remained. It demoralized them (Pereira, 2003, p. 334).

This testimony reveals that the effectiveness of the radio was measured not only by its capacity to reach allies, but also by its ability to strike the adversary, sow doubt, and open fissures in the cohesion of the colonial army. The success of the program - attested to by the sheer number of desertions - demonstrates that the word, amplified by the radio, operated as a psychological weapon of great reach. Finally, the radio fulfilled the function of international dissemination of the struggle, making known to the world the reality of the war and the support obtained by the PAIGC (Pereira, 2003). The capacity to produce and broadcast its own programming, without depending on the colonizer's means, was already a form of resistance and an affirmation of sovereignty (Reza, 2022, p. 875).



The Reception of Rádio Libertação

The reception of Rádio Libertação cannot be understood merely as a process of transmission and reception of information. Zumthor's theoretical distinction between reception and performance offers an illuminating conceptual framework for thinking of listening to the radio as a transformative act. This understanding is corroborated by recent studies on guerrilla radios in Southern Africa, which demonstrate how "the invisibility and transience of sound allowed guerrilla radios to have sonic presence 'beyond the jurisdiction of colonial law but within the broadcast range of the colonial state and its territory'" (Akinniyi, 2025, p. 679).

Friederike Kind-Kovács (2019) demonstrates how, Radio Free Europe in the early Cold War, keen to understand the impact of its broadcasts, resorted to interviews with refugees to capture stories of clandestine listening, transforming them into evidence of its effectiveness and into narratives of resistance. Analogously, the collective and clandestine listening practices of Rádio Libertação were recalled by Amélia Sanches Araújo (Pereira, 2003) and documented by Reza (2022), testifying that the word amplified by the radio created communities of listeners who, through shared listening, collectively constructed the meaning of the struggle.

This distinction allows us to understand listening to Rádio Libertação as a performative act. Each moment of listening was not a passive reception of information, but a performance that actualized the virtualities contained in the word, and emitted and transformed them into lived experience. Zumthor (1990), drawing on John Langshaw Austin's theory of speech acts, affirms that "in poetry, 'to say is to act'" (p. 56). According to Austin (1962), certain utterances do not describe reality but produce an action in the very act of their enunciation, conferring upon language a performative dimension that goes beyond its merely constative function.

Applying this framework to Rádio Libertação, we can affirm that listening to the radio was not a passive act, but a performative one that involved the body, emotion, and interpretation. Cabral's voice, as it crossed the radio waves and penetrated the domestic space or the forests where combatants hid, inscribed itself in the bodies and memories of listeners, shaping their sensibility and their political identity. As Zumthor (1990) puts it, "The voice rests in the silence of the body. It emanates from it, then returns" (p. 85). Cabral's word emerged from his body and his conviction; when heard, it penetrated the body of listeners, inscribing itself in their memory and shaping their consciousness. Listening to the radio was thus a moment of political formation that operated beyond the rational content of the discourse, mobilizing the sensory and affective energies of the listeners.

This performative dimension of listening is particularly visible in the collective listening practices that the radio elicited. Stephanie Urdang's testimony about the PAIGC militant Teodora Gomes is illustrative:

One of Teodora's treasured possessions... was a small, black, scratched-up short wave radio. It accompanied her everywhere. Each evening a group of cadres would cluster around to listen to the news from Lisbon . . . suddenly the clear voice of the Portuguese announcer cut through the evening air...



when the newscast ended, everyone talked at once. Excitement competed with disbelief and loud voices argued each other down . . . Teodora's radio continued to bring word from outside (Urdang, 2017, p. 148)

The clandestine listening practices, documented by Reza in the wake of historian Marissa Moorman, reinforce this reading. Moorman (2018) describes "scenes of secret or semi-secret listening" by audiences who tuned in to guerrilla radios in Angola (p. 251). A Portuguese soldier stationed in Guinea confessed that he listened to Radio Libertação's programs "on the sly," without the knowledge of the base officers (Reza, 2022, p. 866). The simple act of tuning in to the forbidden frequency constituted a transgression that anticipated, on the symbolic plane, the political rupture that the armed struggle sought to consummate on the military plane. Clandestine listening was already a form of resistance—an affirmation of autonomy in the face of colonial authority. To quote Akinniyi (2025), "Both broadcasting and listening to guerrilla radio became subversive acts," strategically employed by liberation movements "to challenge the colonial monopoly on information and public discourse" (p. 679).

Among the combatants, the impact of the radio was profound, functioning as a factor of moralization and cohesion. Among the populations, the pleasure of hearing their language and their music on the radio was a form of recognition and affirmation of their dignity. Amélia S. Araújo imagines "the pleasure with which the populations, both from the liberated regions and from Bissau, . . . listened to their songs" (Pereira, 2003, p. 334). This pleasure, which Zumthor (1990) identifies as "the highest value of the spirit" (p. 108), resulted from the capacity of word and music to touch the body and mobilize vital energies—a process that radio performance fully actualized. Among the enemy, the radio provoked demoralization and desertion, to the point that colonial authorities attempted to interfere with the broadcasts.⁴

The reception of Rádio Libertação, in light of Zumthor's theory, thus reveals itself as a performative process that transformed listeners into active participants in the struggle. Listening was not an isolated act, but a collective practice that generated spaces of debate, interpretation, and political formation. The radio, by amplifying Cabral's voice and disseminating Guinean culture, created a community of listeners who, through shared listening, collectively constructed the meaning of the struggle and prepared themselves for the task of building a new nation. The word, amplified by technology and rooted in a community of listeners, operated transformations that physical violence alone could not produce, constituting itself as a device for the production of political subjectivity and the formation of a national consciousness that transcended ethnic and geographical boundaries. This process was not exclusive to Guinea-Bissau: Research on guerrilla radios in Southern Africa also reveals testimonies of listeners "who attribute their political awakening to these broadcasts, demonstrating that guerrilla radio stations not only

⁴ On Salazar's singular broadcasting policy in Portugal and its African colonies, which consistently neglected shortwave investments and failed to create a unified imperial voice, see Ribeiro (2014). For a broader context on the use of international radio broadcasting as a political weapon during World War II, which influenced subsequent Cold War strategies, see Ribeiro, Wagner, and Morris (2020). On CIA clandestine radio operations during the Cold War, including their role in psychological warfare (Cummings, 2021).



disseminated information but also inspired and mobilized individuals to join the liberation struggles” (Akinniyi, 2025, p. 679).

Conclusion

This study sought to demonstrate that the effectiveness of Amílcar Cabral’s leadership cannot be explained exclusively by the coherence of his political strategy, the accuracy of his sociological analysis, or the depth of his anticolonial vision. There is a dimension which, although frequently mentioned in the memory of his contemporaries, has been less explored in academic production: the performative dimension of his word. Paul Zumthor’s theoretical framework, centered on the notion of performance as an act of presence and on the materiality of the voice as an emanation of the body, proved particularly fruitful in illuminating this dimension, allowing us to understand how Cabral’s word—whether spoken in person at the 1969 seminar or amplified through the waves of Rádio Liberdade—operated transformations that went far beyond the transmission of information.

At the 1969 seminar, the choice to use Creole as the language of the living voice constituted a performative act of recognition and complicity, inscribing the discourse within the cultural and affective universe of the listeners. The didactic tone, accessible and punctuated by agrarian metaphors, allowed abstract political concepts to be translated into images immediately comprehensible to a rural audience. The provocative tone and direct confrontation of the militants’ shortcomings, far from discouraging them, appealed to their overcoming and assumption of responsibilities. The constant concern with ethical formation—the distinction between the combatant and the bandit, respect for the populations, the construction of a “new man”—reveals that Cabral conceived the liberation struggle as a profound moral transformation, for which the word was the privileged instrument. Finally, the dissemination of scientific knowledge, in accessible language and without arrogance, affirmed the possibility of a rational understanding of the world, a necessary condition for emancipation. In all these dimensions, vocal performance aimed to inscribe knowledge into the body and memory of the listeners, mobilizing the “antepredicative knowledge” of which Zumthor speaks and making the word a transformative event.

Rádio Liberdade, for its part, did not replace Cabral’s presence but amplified it. The mediatized voice shared with the living voice the same intonation, the same rhythm, the same conviction, but operated on a different register: It reached where the body could not be, crossed borders, overcame blockades, and penetrated domestic spaces and the forests where combatants hid. Zumthor’s distinction between reception and performance made it possible to understand that listening to the radio was not a passive act, but a performative one that involved the body, emotion, and interpretation. The collective and clandestine listening practices documented in the sources testify that the word amplified by the radio created communities of listeners who, through shared listening, collectively constructed the meaning of the struggle and prepared themselves for the task of building a new nation. The radio, by disseminating Guinean music and languages, affirmed a national identity that transcended ethnic affiliations, while at the same time demoralizing the enemy and opening fissures in the cohesion of the colonial army. The effectiveness



of Rádio Liberdade lay in its dual capacity: it served as an effective psychological warfare weapon, following the patterns of Cold War clandestine radios (Cummings, 2021), but, more importantly, it acted as a catalyst for the creation of a shared national identity, filling the void left by the neglect of Salazar's broadcasting policy (Ribeiro, 2014). In doing so, the PAIGC's radio anticipated post-colonial struggles for cultural and media sovereignty.

In synthesis, Cabral's discursive performance - both in the living word and in the mediated word - constituted a central device for the production of political subjectivity and the formation of a national consciousness. Its effectiveness lay not only in what he said, but also in how he said it, a dimension that forms the primary focus of this article: in the materiality of his voice, in its relation to the listeners' bodies, in its capacity to transform listening into experience and experience into action. This approach, inspired by Zumthor, makes it possible to move beyond a merely instrumental conception of language and to recognize the centrality of performance in the historical processes of social transformation. In this sense, it aligns with contemporary perspectives that understand performance not as mere representation or critique of the past, but as a creative act that actively intervenes in the present and projects possible futures (Louwerse, 2025). Performance, in this vision, goes beyond deconstruction to effect a structural transformation of forms of knowledge and relationships, forging new modes of connection between individuals, communities, and their histories.

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