

### 13. TO WANT AND TO LIVE

#### THOUGHTS FOR TODAY, INSPIRED BY AMÍLCAR CABRAL

Lewis R. Gordon

There's a Charles Mingus song, "Cumbia & Jazz Fusion" (1977), that always makes me think of Amílcar Cabral. "Mamma's little baby don't want Uncle Ben's, Aunt Jemima, and Shortbread," Mingus objected.

Mamma's little baby wants truffles  
Mamma's little baby wants diamonds  
Mamma's little baby wants good schools so he won't act like no damn fool! ...  
Mamma's little baby wants all the fine things in life....<sup>90</sup>

Colonialism, Cabral and Frantz Fanon once reminded us, splits the world into two kinds of beings: Those for whom supposedly the bell of history tolls and those who are expected to manufacture the bell without glory and, at the end of the age, memory.<sup>91</sup>

Misguided memory leads, as well, to a story of erasure in which past aspirations are also lost. Thus, as we lament the abuses of imposed

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<sup>90</sup> See Charles Mingus's album, *Cumbia & Jazz Fusion* (Atlantic Records, 1977).

<sup>91</sup> See, e.g., Amílcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts*, trans. and ed. by Richard Handyside (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), and *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*, with an introduction by Basil Risbridger Davidson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), and Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

directions on our ancestors' path, we often fail to ask whether such aims were not also independently theirs.

Inspired by Cabral, Olúfémí Taíwó recently explored some of these considerations in his meditation on modernity, aptly entitled, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*.<sup>92</sup> The empirical verdict on contemporary Africa, it seems, is a conclusive judgment of failure. This failure is not, however, accidental, but an additional violation is to offer a misdiagnosis of its causes and bases of its continuation. There is, after all, so much to learn from Africa's presumed failures, especially as Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff have been arguing, much of late modernity is becoming the laboratory experiment its progenitors thought contained to latitudinal points by and below the equator and longitudinal ones confined by Atlantic and East Indian Ocean shores. What ultimately is Africa but the current state of humanity globally understood?<sup>93</sup> Here is the proper diagnosis, at least as articulated by Taíwó in his homage to Cabral.

First, a major mistake in understanding the contemporary situation of much of Africa is the conflation of colonialism with modernity. This leads to the response amongst many African leaders and intellectuals (some of whom are both) to the rejection of *modernity* and colonialism. Taíwó, again echoing Cabral, contends, however, that the problem isn't a consequence of colonisation and the advancement of modernization. It is one of colonisation and a deliberate aborting of the project of modernization. The abortion of modernisation served the purpose of radicalising exploitation. Cabral, we should remember, was an agronomist. He took seriously the efficacy of modern techniques in the production of a likewise organisation of life. As rural communities face the encroachment of modern political and

92 Olúfémí Taíwó, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010).

93 See Jean and John Comaroff, "Law and Disorder in the Postcolony: An Introduction," in Comaroff and Comaroff (eds.), *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 1–56 and the provocative, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving Toward Africa* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2011).

economic conditions, the proper response was not to hide themselves in sand but to look directly in the eyes of the modern situation.

To unpack this modern situation it is necessary to distinguish colonisation from modernization. The former was more the province of colonial administrators. The latter, historically in Africa, was more the path of Christian missionaries and Islamists. Taíwó adds to this, drawing upon recent historical studies such as the Comaroffs' *Of Revelation and Revolution*, that colonisation should be studied through further distinctions, such as settlement colonisation, political exploitation, and settlement exploitation.<sup>94</sup> Each has its tale, but the dynamics of political power shift according to the goals to which settlers aspire. Some, after all, were missionaries who actually believed their faith. As proselytizers, they sought converts who subsequently spread the Word. Whether they were Europeans or Africans didn't matter to many, and we often forget that the spread of Christianity in non-Christian areas was done by indigenous peoples and their hybrid, Europeanized offspring.

There were, however, settlers who didn't come to save souls, but sought instead to dominate them. Political exploitation was their proverbial cup of tea, and as that grew, the beverage turned to the intoxicating one of power. Such interests could very well have been conducted from metropolitan centres, however, but for the need for local administration, which meant the addition of settler administrators. So, while, for good or ill, one group sought to create Christians, similarly to those who sought (and continue) to create Muslims before them; another group, inspired by Lord Lugard's lessons from Britain's "mistakes" in India, emerged who did not seek the production of localized power in native hands. Cultivated dependency was the aim of this group, which meant the retardation of human relations, as

94 See Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1991) and *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Volume 2: *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

guardianship structures were put into place and asymmetric conditions of wealth followed.<sup>95</sup>

Cabral saw this process not only in terms of the word and the sword but also in terms of the systems through which both were to be replaced. For as proselytizing presented settler culture as divine and colonial administration as omnipotent, there was also the danger and paradox of secularized divination—as science, too, offered its colonial potential in terms of an omniscient force. To argue against science promised little more than technological peril. So, Cabral understood, as did Fanon, that demystifying science was an important task of decolonisation and liberation. But such a task needed to be done without collapsing into a normative colonial practice of guardianship. Epistemic decolonisation required, in other words, active participants, active minds, people who took responsibility for what they ought to know. So the revolutionary significance of transforming practice into praxis was posed, and how more material could such an effort be without the demonstration, from arms to cultivation of land, offered by the military forces under his leadership?

Nothing promises a future better than that which encourages participation in its making. The meditation on modernity, then, cannot be a passive or nostalgic one on uncompleted Christianity or Islam. For they, too, we should remember, were themselves products of prior conflicts on modernization. As a product of Roman conquest of Judah, the fusion that led to Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism required the price of forging the future on different terms than the normative worlds that preceded it. Many ancient peoples, crushed under the heels of Roman conquest, only saw one future: Rome's. Rome, however, didn't understand that one cannot dominate so many

95 See F.D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1922). Lugard's counsel is well known among Africanist scholars of colonialism such as the Comaroffs and Taiwó, but see also for the context of Portuguese colonization see, in addition to Cabral's writings, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (ed.), *Democratizing Democracy: Beyond the Liberal Democratic Canon* (London: Verso, 2007).

and remain the same, and as Judah offered a different conception of the future than Rome—a linear future with an end instead of a cyclical order of constant returns—a new reflection of urgency demanded a different consideration for many under Roman rule, who now thought about nothing less than the end of the world.<sup>96</sup>

Islam, as we know, rejected the regulations of order afforded by Christianity and Judaism and asserted a different future without realizing that any model of perfecting the earth leads, inevitably, to questioning the practice of perfecting.<sup>97</sup> The future, in other words, is a question that enabled subsequent generations to question the validity of the present. And if the present can legitimately be questioned, the onus emerged from that discomfiting query rolling down the inclines of history: What is to be done?<sup>98</sup>

Cabral understood that whatever was to be done required addressing the many dimensions through which and in which human beings live in the world. The revolutionary task was not simply one of eliminating domination but also cultivating and building a livable world. He, an agronomist, understood that food and shelter were necessary but only partial conditions of a human world, but the future also required thought and the production of symbols that make human beings at home in their

96 For this pluralistic conception of modernity, see, e.g., Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985); Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. and ed. by Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996); Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and "Justice Otherwise," in Leonhard Praeg (ed.), *Ubuntu: Curating the Archive* (Scottsville, SA: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2013); and Walter Dignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

97 Cf., e.g., Ali Shariati, *Man and Islam*, trans. Fatolla Marjani (North Haledon, NJ: Islamic Publications International, 1981).

98 I am speaking, of course, of Vladimir Lenin's pamphlet, *What Is to Be Done?: Burning Questions of Our Movement*, trans. Joel Fineberg (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990 [original 1902]).

time. The modernization question for him, then, was not one simply of development, since even that concept, as Sylvia Wynter has shown, requires interrogating on whose terms, on whose standards, it could be made manifest.<sup>99</sup> The task of such inquiry is to transform the meaning of the future, with an acute understanding that every future depends on what precedes it. There is, in other words, no such thing as emerging, outside of its relations with anything else.

So, as Africa today and the Global South in general reflect on what is to be done in these early years of the new millennium, in which the acceleration of time already demands taking seriously the need to prepare for the twenty-second century, we could also reflect on what could be learned from this brilliant revolutionary cut down in 1973 at the age of forty nine.

Cabral's life and thought teach us that humanity must take seriously its responsibility for its future. To forget that this struggle involves negotiating and transforming a human world is to forestall our agency at our peril, since, as we already know from climate change and economic disaster, most, if not all of it, is in human hands. This does not mean that we have the capacity to live forever, like gods, but it does mean that we should recognize the very human limitations and struggles we face as we take on a challenging future.

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<sup>99</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "Is 'Development' a Purely Empirical Concept or also Teleological?: A Perspective from 'We the Underdeveloped' in *Prospects for Recovery and Sustainable Development in Africa*, ed. by Aguibou Y. Yansané (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 299–316.

## 14. CABRAL AND THE DISPOSSESSION (DEHUMANIZATION) OF HUMANITY

Jacques Depelchin<sup>100</sup>

It has been pointed out that the assassination of Amílcar Cabral marked the end of a sequence of history (Michael Neocosmos), namely the end of politics through armed struggles.<sup>101</sup> In the process of thinking and rethinking the legacy of Amílcar Cabral, is it possible to say anything that has not been already said, either by himself, or by those who have written about him? Is it possible to go beyond just citing words and/or phrases that reconnect to his vision of an emancipated Africa? Is it possible to accept that, from the end of World War II, if not before, history has unfolded as imposed by the most powerful economic and political forces?

Discussing Amílcar Cabral, in a way, is no different from discussing other iconic and revolutionary figures whose lives were cut short precisely because of how they were perceived by their enemy. The long history of freeing Africa and Africans from the legacies of enslavement, colonisation, apartheid and globalisation seems like a never-ending task. The task

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<sup>100</sup> Hugh Le May Fellow at Rhodes University, July-December 2012—Visiting professor history department, Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana, Bahia Brazil

<sup>101</sup> For a detailed analysis of this see Michael Neocosmos's essay "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (im)possible: Re-thinking Militancy in Africa." Today" which was first produced as a report for CODESRIA, and then appeared in *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*, vol 1(2): 263-334 (November 2009). : <http://interfacejournal.nuim.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Interface-1-2-pp263-334-Neocosmos.pdf> Accessed on November 27, 2012.