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ABSTRACT

This article argues that Amílcar Cabral adhered to some of the essential elements of the philosophical discourse of modernity. This commitment led Cabral to endorse an anti-essentialist, historicized conception of culture, and this in turn led him to conceive of cultural liberation in terms of cultural autonomy as opposed to the preservation of indigenous culture(s). Cabral's attitude towards languages is employed as a case study in order to demonstrate how emphasis on Cabral's commitment to the philosophical discourse of modernity can help explain why he could denounce 'colonialist culture', while also defending the PAIGC's (Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde / African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) use of Portuguese as an official language. This essay argues that Cabral makes a significant distinction between foreign influences and foreign domination in the realm of culture. Cabral conceived of the anti-colonial struggle in the realm of culture as a struggle against the latter rather than the former.

KEYWORDS

Amilcar Cabral; African philosophy of culture; African modernity; African languages; African philosophy

Introduction

In this article I attempt to make sense of Amílcar Cabral's pronouncements on culture, specifically in relation to cultural resistance and cultural liberation in a colonial context, by situating them vis-à-vis his overall commitment to modernity as a philosophical orientation. I argue that while Cabral does not explicitly discuss or present modernity (or modernism) as his overarching philosophical orientation, a careful reading of his writings on culture allows us to detect his commitment to at least some of the essential elements of modernity as a philosophical orientation.¹ I then attempt to show that Cabral's commitment to some of the essential elements of the philosophical discourse of modernity leads him to endorse an anti-essentialist, historicized understanding of culture and identity. I argue that Cabral's anti-essentialist, historicized understanding of culture and identity allows him to think of cultural liberation as the assertion of indigenous identity and agency without thinking that cultural liberation must necessarily take the form of preserving all (or even most) existing cultural practices and beliefs systems. This is a point that Cabral makes explicitly in his *Analysis of a Few Types of Resistance* (Cabral 2016a), which is a transcription of Cabral's directives to a seminar held for cadres of the PAIGC (*Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* / African Party for the Independence of

Guinea and Cape Verde) in November 1969. This text has only recently been translated into English, and consequently it has not yet been adequately discussed in the Anglophone literature on Cabral.²

Amílcar Cabral (1924–1973) was the leader of the liberation struggle which culminated in the overthrow of Portuguese colonialism and the independence and unification of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. Cabral was instrumental in founding the PAIGC in 1956, and he led the party until his assassination by agents of the Portuguese colonial state apparatus in January of 1973.³ Cabral's historical significance goes beyond his status as the leader of an African national liberation struggle because of his importance as a theoretician of the problems facing post-independence African states. Cabral's work is characterized not only by theoretical sophistication but also by a concern with concrete reality. He persistently emphasized that theories, no matter how sophisticated they are, must always remain in contact with concrete reality, and that they must depart from an analysis of concrete reality, including the lived experiences of the individuals for whose emancipation such theories are formulated (Cabral 1969, 159).⁴ Cabral's theoretical work has had a tremendous influence across the African continent as well as globally. It has influenced iconic figures of the Black liberation struggle in the United States such as Angela Davis (Davis 2013), thinkers from Egypt (Amin 2013; Sharawy 2013), Senegal (Dembélé 2013), Nigeria (Jinadu 1978; Taiwo 1999, 2013; Jeyifo 2007), Eritrea (Serequeberhan 2003, 2004, 2017), Lebanon (Sharawy 2014, 194–195) as well as thinkers and activists from many other countries, including, of course, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde where his legacy is constantly being deployed in order to critique the ruling elites (Nafafé 2013).

Cabral argued that the failures and difficulties experienced by some African countries that had already attained independence stemmed from a lack of clear theoretical orientation:

the ideological deficiency, not to say the total lack of ideology, on the part of the liberation movements – which is basically explained by ignorance of the historical reality which these movements aspire to transform – constitutes one of the greatest weaknesses, if not the greatest weakness, of our struggle against imperialism. (Cabral 1979c, 122)⁵

Cabral's concern with theoretical issues has led to him being described as 'arguably the greatest theoretician' of the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movement in Africa (Jeyifo 2007, 140). Cabral's work thus represents a treasure trove to anyone who is interested in modern African political and social philosophy, as well as to anyone who is interested in modern African philosophy of culture.⁶

With respect to scholarly work on Cabral's thought, there has developed a significant literature on his political and social thought. For example, there has been scholarly work on his theory of imperialism (McCulloch 1981), his approach to the construction of a multi-national state (Lyon 1980), his sociological analysis of the dynamic forces in a colonized society which make the development of a national liberation movement possible (Magubane 1983; Gupta 1986), more general surveys of his political thought (Chilcote 1968; Mukandabantu 1983; Chabal 2003), and several attempts at understanding his views on culture (Anise 1975; Jinadu 1978; Duarte 1984; Ishemo 2004; Jeyifo 2007).

However, the philosophical aspects of his work have not received the same level of attention. With some important exceptions being Olúfemi Táíwò's encyclopedia entry surveying ways in which Cabral's work can be approached from the standpoint of philosophy (Taiwo 1999), as well as more recent work outlining Cabral's philosophical contributions to

philosophical methodology, the manner in which he can be placed in a tradition of African critical theory, as well as his philosophical account of coloniality as an ontological and epistemic condition (Serequeberhan 2004; Rabaka 2016; Wood 2016).⁷ While some Cabral scholars have discussed Cabral's work as it pertains to the concept of modernity (Jeyifo 2007), there has been no attempt to present Cabral's attitude towards modernity as a *philosophical discourse*. Even in Reiland Rabaka's work where Cabral is placed in a tradition of 'African critical theory', to use Rabaka's own expression, Cabral's attitude towards modernity as a philosophical discourse is not discussed (Rabaka 2016).

The philosophical discourse of modernity

I follow Táíwò's account, which draws on G.W.F. Hegel and Jürgen Habermas, of what constitutes the philosophical discourse of modernity. According to Táíwò, the essential elements of that discourse are the principle of subjectivity, the centrality of reason, and the belief in progress (Taiwo 2010, 78–81). By the 'principle of subjectivity', Táíwò refers to Hegel's idea that what distinguishes modernity as a historical epoch and as a philosophical discourse from other historical epochs and other philosophical discourses is the axiological importance assigned to an individual's ability to choose what to do with their lives (Taiwo 2010, 76). At the political and social level this commitment to the principle of subjectivity involves a commitment to self-governance and self-determination. Cabral conceived of the role of the PAIGC in the liberated areas in terms of assisting people in setting up structures that would enable them to govern themselves: 'we must be permanently mobilizing, organizing our people, helping our village committees to hold their meetings to discuss their difficulties, *helping our people to govern themselves*, to solve their own difficulties' [my emphasis] (Cabral 1979a, 101).⁸

By the 'centrality of reason', I mean that for the subject of modernity any given set of institutions, web of beliefs, or practices, can be regarded as legitimate if and only if one can produce reasons that justify its existence (Habermas 1990, 18). The fact that an institution or belief has always existed is not regarded as sufficient for its justification. A corollary of this idea is that modern science insofar as it embodies human rationality is an important evaluative standard when it comes to assessing beliefs that purport to describe the natural world (e.g. beliefs about the causes of lightning and thunder), as well practices that purport to draw on such beliefs (e.g. medicinal practices).

It is important to note that, within the philosophical discourse of modernity, modern science is a source of normative justification *only in so far as it embodies human rationality*. This is important because the label of 'science' has been affixed to pseudo-scientific 'justifications' for beliefs such as: the innate inferiority of women, the innate inferiority of Africans and peoples of African descent, and other beliefs of this kind. However, historically speaking, the alleged justifications have all been refuted through the rigorous application of standards of scientific reasoning and experimentation (which themselves have evolved historically). Hence, they have been refuted by way of internal critique, i.e. a critique which adheres to the standards of evaluation that the propagators of such pseudo-science purport to uphold (Taiwo 2010, 117–118).

Cabral himself was trained as a scientist, specifically as an agronomist, and he used his scientific knowledge as an instrument against colonialism (Schwarz 2013). Cabral thought that science (and its attendant gains) 'should be at the disposal of all of the world's people'

(Cabral 2016a, 101). This commitment to reason (and consequently to science) as the primary source of normative justification is also evident in Cabral's approach to the construction of a modern national culture in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde: 'our culture should be developed on the basis of science' (Cabral 2016a, 123). Within the context of the philosophical discourse of modernity there is also the idea that science liberates human beings to the extent that it disenchant nature (Habermas 1990, 16). Cabral subscribes to this thesis, and he argues that the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde should strive to liberate themselves from what he perceives as their (relative) weakness in the face of nature:

no one should think that the culture of Africa, what is really African and so must be preserved for all time, for us to be Africans, is our weakness in the face of nature ... we should not persuade ourselves that to be African is to believe that lightning is the fury of the deity (God is feeling angry). We cannot believe that to be African is to think that man has no mastery over the flooding of rivers. (Cabral 1979a, 58)⁹

Note that I eschew the usage of the term 'Western science' and I use the term 'modern science' quite deliberately. For there is an important distinction to be made between modernity and 'Western Civilization' (or 'the West'). The two concepts are not co-extensive, and they do not mean the same thing. It is true that some European philosophy and social theory did and does partake in the philosophical discourse of modernity, but this does not mean that European philosophy and social theory only partook in that discourse. For example, the justification of colonial rule can be, and historically has been, criticized for being in contradiction with some of the main principles of the philosophical discourse of modernity.¹⁰ The Portuguese scholar Filipa César argues that 'Cabral works with the tools of Western science in order to diagnose the conditions of the people of Guinea-Bissau in relation to soil degradation' (César 2018, 265). This statement is correct, but only if we replace the concept of 'Western science' with the concept of 'modern science'.¹¹

By the 'belief in progress', I mean that individuals and societies that believe in progress as a normative ideal are primarily future-oriented in the sense that they consciously seek to change their social environment for the better (Habermas 1990, 5). This means that their orientation towards existing institutions is not primarily one of preservation but rather transformation. This does not amount to claiming that preservation is always precluded, but it means that the primary questions posed are about how to improve existing conditions (and improving existing conditions may imply preserving aspects of existing institutions and belief-systems that are assessed to be positive). This a commitment that Cabral clearly adheres to: 'the most important thing for the liberation movement is not to test the uniqueness or nonuniqueness of the popular culture but to undertake its critical analysis as a function of the needs of the struggle and *progress*' [my emphasis] (Cabral 2016b, 179). In fact, Cabral thought of the national liberation struggle as part of 'the broader struggle for progress' (Cabral 2016b, 179). Cabral was quite clear in seeing this commitment to the ideal of progress as something to be proud of, 'we ... [are] proud of our attachment to the ideal of progress' (Cabral 1979f, 252).

With respect to the literature on Cabral's views on cultural modernity, it should be noted that some of the most significant scholarship on Cabral's views on culture is characterized by a conflation of the concept of modernity with the concept of modernization. For instance, Biodun Jeyifo (2007) uses the two concepts interchangeably, even though he

admits that ‘they mean quite different things and [refer to different] historical, cultural processes’ (Jeyifo 2007, 125). On the other hand, Adele L. Jinadu (1978) uses the concept of ‘modernization’ when he discusses Cabral’s thought, but he does not define it, nor does he make any distinction between it and the concept of modernity as a philosophical framework. I do not wish to suggest that Jinadu’s analysis is rendered entirely inadequate because of the absence of this distinction. In fact, Jinadu’s argument that the concept of modernity (or ‘modernization’ in Jinadu’s account) that is endorsed by Cabral does not include the exploitation of the rural areas by the urban centers is important (Jinadu 1978, 128). However, this point is more adequately understood when we make a distinction between embracing the philosophical discourse of modernity and embracing modernization theory.

Modernization theory reached its ‘apogee’ in Walt W. Rostow’s theory of stages which he formulated in his 1960 book, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Payne and Phillips 2010, 67). According to Rostow a fundamental aspect of the transition from a ‘traditional society’ to a ‘modern society’ involves re-investing surplus from agriculture into industry (located in urban centers), hence, siphoning off surplus from rural areas. This thesis is explicitly rejected by Cabral. Cabral argues that the economic focus of the PAIGC should be on agriculture: ‘it’s agriculture today, agriculture tomorrow, and maybe still agriculture later on’ (Cabral 2016a, 100). He also criticizes those who argue that ‘we in Guinea and Cape Verde should work only in industry and cease with agriculture’ (Cabral 2016a, 113). The point is that, as the Bissau-Guinean economist Carlos Lopes has pointed out, Cabral rejects some of the fundamental claims of modernization theory (Lopes 1987, 149).¹² Hence, if we conflate the discourse of modernity (qua philosophical discourse) with modernization theory we will not be able to develop a coherent account of Cabral’s theoretical claims. One can adhere to the philosophical discourse of modernity without adhering to modernization theory (Amin 1987).

Cabral’s modernist philosophy of culture and cultural liberation

I argue that placing Cabral’s views on culture and cultural liberation within the context of his commitment to some of the key elements of the philosophical discourse of modernity allows us to make sense of some of his pronouncements on culture, which prima facie seem to be in tension with one another or that perhaps can even be taken as contradictory. For instance, on the one hand Cabral claims that ‘of course, we have to throw away everything in our schools insofar as it was made by the colonialists’ (Cabral 2016a, 132). Yet on the other hand, Cabral emphasizes the utility of the Portuguese language and the need to employ it in teaching the natural sciences amongst other things: ‘Portuguese (the language) is one of the best things that the *tugas* [whites/colonialists] left us’ (Cabral 2016a, 134). Another example would be Cabral’s insistence that ‘we want to be ourselves – Africans from Guinea and Cape Verde and not *tugas*’ (Cabral 2016a, 115), while also emphasizing that ‘we have to rid our culture of everything insofar as it is antiscientific’ (Cabral 2016a, 124).

Without placing such pronouncements within the context of Cabral’s commitment to the philosophical discourse of modernity as I have described it above, it might appear that Cabral’s commitment to cultural liberation is not a complete, unwavering commitment. However, once we recognize that for Cabral cultural liberation amounts to cultural autonomy (commitment to autonomy being one of the key philosophical commitments of

modernity), as opposed to the preservation of indigenous culture per se, many of Cabral's claims which prima facie appear to be in tension to one another, turn out to be in fact perfectly consistent.¹³

I claim that the lack of attention to the philosophical foundations of Cabral's views has led to an undermining of Cabral's credentials as a theoretician by influential Cabral scholars such as Patrick Chabal.¹⁴ Chabal claims that 'it is neither useful nor legitimate to claim, as have some analysts, that Cabral's writings form a systematic or self-sufficient body of ideas' (Chabal 2003, 167). Chabal argues that 'Cabral was primarily a man of action' and that 'the majority of his writings are party documents and they reflect the very specific purpose and audience for which they were intended' (Chabal 2003, 167).

In approaching Cabral's writings in this way, Chabal is influenced by Christopher Clapham (1970), whose work he cites approvingly on this point (Chabal 2003, 167). Clapham argues that the thought of African political leaders (and more specifically African political leaders from the period of liberation struggles) lacks systematicity, and that it is pointless to seek systematic theorization in their writings. Chabal also claims that 'he [Cabral] was loath to commit himself to any ideology or theory' (Chabal 2003, 167). Chabal's claim is perhaps justified in relation to the debate regarding whether Cabral was a Marxist.¹⁵ However, from the fact that Cabral refused to label and situate himself in relation to a Cold War taxonomy of political ideologies, it does not follow that Cabral did not subscribe to a more fundamental, i.e. philosophical, theoretical orientation.

In this respect, this article attempts to build on Jinadu (1978)'s critique of Clapham's thesis that the thought of African political leaders in the period of the liberation struggles consists of ideas that 'are plucked by any [African] politician from the air he breathes and marshalled ... to fit his own situation and inclinations, the audience he is facing and the purposes he wants to achieve' (Clapham 1970, 13). It should be noted that my criticism of Chabal's work on Cabral is directed at the manner in which he adopts Clapham's thesis in his study of Cabral, but I do not claim that Chabal uses this thesis in order to undermine the historical significance of Cabral (he clearly does not do that, for he claims that the success of the PAIGC would not have been possible without Cabral). I am only claiming that his adoption of Clapham's thesis undermines the status of Cabral as a theoretician.

My methodological approach is to attempt to see whether emphasis on Cabral's commitment to some of the key principles of the philosophical discourse of modernity can adequately explain apparent contradictions in his work, and demonstrate its theoretical coherence as the product of a modern (or modernist) philosophy of culture, without resorting to the hypothesis that Cabral's pronouncements on culture are the pronouncements of somebody who was only interested in addressing specific audiences and situations, and not in developing general theories. In other words, I am arguing against the claim that when we closely examine Cabral's writings on culture 'we find a series of planks from several barely consistent planks' (Clapham 1970, 7). In this sense my methodological approach is to take seriously Jeyifo's claim that:

what we have in his [i.e. Cabral's] work by way of the philosophy of decolonization, especially in the domain of cultural theory, marks perhaps the highest point of theoretical elaboration prior to the consolidation of recolonization in its present stage. (Jeyifo 2007, 140)

From a conceptual standpoint cultural liberation understood in the Cabralian sense as cultural autonomy is not incompatible with the preservation of indigenous culture, but it also

does not entail it without additional premises based on context specific evaluations. To justify the preservation of a given set of beliefs or practices one would have to ask the following questions: is it compatible with the commitment to autonomy? Is it compatible with the commitment to reason as the primary source of normative justification? Is it compatible with the ideal of progress? One should understand this approach to cultural liberation in relation to the fact that the philosophical discourse of modernity contains a commitment to thinking of human individuals as being collective makers of their history. To be modern is to consciously think of oneself as a subject of history; as a maker of one's history and consequently a maker of one's cultural identity in so far as cultural identity is a function of one's history (Quijano 2000, 547; Amin 2009, 13–14).

Thus, from the commitment to the principle of autonomy, combined with the thesis that one's identity is a function of one's history, we can derive a commitment to an anti-essentialist, historicized conception of identity. It is anti-essentialist because it rejects the thesis that there are trans-historical properties that define a people's cultural identity. It is historicized because it is open to the possibility that the institutions and beliefs which are taken by a given group of people to be defining features of their cultural identity can be consciously transformed (and even deliberately undermined) by that group of people. Given this understanding of cultural identity, we can make sense of Cabral's call for 'struggle without unnecessary violence against all the negative aspects, harmful to man, which still form part of our beliefs and traditions' (Cabral 1979e, 243). In this respect, this article builds upon the work of Shubi L. Ishemo and Lopes, insofar they have argued that Cabral had a dynamic conception of societies (and consequently of cultures) as evolving entities, and insofar as they emphasize that Cabral was a proponent of the development of a 'technical, technological, and scientific culture' (Ishemo 2004, 67) and that Cabral's 'teachings were unhesitatingly directed towards the dismantling of socially retrograde structures' (Lopes 1987, 31).

Cabral points out, 'identity is not an immutable quality precisely because the biological and sociological facts that define it are in permanent evolution' (Cabral 2016b, 168). If we, following Cabral, think of identity as an expression of culture (Cabral 2016b, 169), we can draw on Cabral's definition of culture in order to provide further support for the thesis that Cabral's commitment to some of the key principles of the philosophical discourse of modernity leads him to develop an anti-essentialist, historicized conception of cultural identity, and as a result, an anti-essentialist, historicized conception of cultural liberation. Cabral defines culture in the following terms: 'culture is the dynamic synthesis of the material and intellectual reality of society and expresses relations both between man and nature, as well as between the different groups of men within the same society' (Cabral 2016b, 169).

The first element to note in this definition is the emphasis on dynamism. Which is precisely what we would expect from an anti-essentialist, historicized conception of culture. The second element to note is that Cabral establishes a close connection between culture and specific material conditions, in so far as culture expresses relationships between humans and their natural environment, and in so far as it expresses relationships between humans in a given society which are grounded in social structures that have their specific histories. Cabral claims that 'the fundamental characteristic of culture is its close, dependent and reciprocal connection with the economic and social reality of the environment, with the level of productive forces and the mode of production of the society which created it' (Cabral 1979d, 149). What follows from this is a rejection of

the idea that there are racial cultures: 'a profound analysis of cultural reality removes the supposition that there can be continental or racial cultures' (Cabral 1979d, 149). This is so because the causal connection between culture and material conditions means that without the existence of sufficiently similar material conditions, cultures cannot be identical. For different material conditions lead to different conflicts across a given set of societies, and culture as 'a synthesis of the checks and balances society devises to resolve the conflicts that characterize it at each stage of history' will vary as a function of those conflicts (Cabral 1979d, 149).

Cabral's thesis that the conflicts which characterize society change as a function of time is significant because it allows him to recognize the importance of existing cultural institutions and practices, while also maintaining the ability to judge them in relation to whether they serve their function of resolving the conflicts that exist in society *in this specific historical juncture* (given that the conflicts in a society that is fighting for national liberation are quite different from the conflicts that characterize a colonized society prior to the initiation of the struggle for independence).¹⁶ In short, this approach allows Cabral to provide normative justification for inherited aspects of culture (as having been justified by the functional roles that they fulfilled in previous stages of the society's history), while also not being bound to them. As Cabral puts it: 'the important thing is to proceed to critical analysis of African cultures in light of the liberation movement and the demands of progress – in the light of this new stage in the history of Africa' (Cabral 1979d, 150).

The Portuguese language as case study

Cabral was aware of the way in which an essentialized view of culture and of what it is to be African can be used to undermine the struggle for national liberation by collaborators with the Portuguese colonialists. Moreover, the Portuguese attempted to play on the divide that existed between the Cape Verdeans, whom the Portuguese regarded as more 'European', and the Bissau-Guineans, whom the Portuguese regarded as more 'African' (Kohl 2016a, 2016b). Furthermore, some of the local elites whose cultural influence was reinforced by the Portuguese colonialists, when they were co-opted by the latter, had extensive knowledge of indigenous languages and could as a consequence claim to be more authentic representatives of indigenous cultures, with reference to an essentialized view of indigenous cultures, than some of the leaders of the PAIGC who were only fluent in Portuguese and Creole:

No one should have a complex because one doesn't know Balanta, Mandinga, Pepel, Fula, or Mancaha. If one knows, even better, but if one doesn't know, one has to make sure that others understand, even if by gestures. But if one is working hard in the Party, one moves forward. Because who knows more Manjaco than the traitor Joaquim Batican? Who knows more Fula than the traitor Sene Sané; who knows more Fula hypocrisies than the traitor Tchern Rachid? Comrades, be patient; but who knows more Balanta than the traitor Fuab? (Cabral 2016a, 134).

In the passage above Cabral is doing two things. First, he is showing how fluency in indigenous languages is not a sufficient condition for being 'of the people' of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde in this particular historical juncture, because having an indigenous language as one's first language is compatible with collaborating with the Portuguese colonialists who are acting to thwart the national liberation struggle of the people of

Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. In fact, the Portuguese colonial authorities successfully co-opted elites in socially stratified societies in Guinea-Bissau. Specifically, the Portuguese were successful in co-opting the Fula chiefs, who in turn employed their authority in order to encourage their people to fight for the Portuguese (Chaliand 1969, 18; Lyon 1980). Cabral notes that amongst socially stratified societies, the interests of the Portuguese colonial state apparatus led it to 'protecting and reinforcing the cultural influence of the ruling classes, who are its allies' (Cabral 2016b, 164).

The second thing that Cabral is doing in the passage quoted above, is that he is showing that knowledge of an indigenous language is not a necessary condition for being considered 'of the people' of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. If we consider the specific political context, we can understand his motivation for doing so. Most of the core leadership of the PAIGC were Cape Verdeans or the children of Cape Verdean and Bissau-Guinean couples. Most of them spoke Portuguese or Creole as their first language (Lyon 1980). This was used against them in the propaganda of the Portuguese and their allies in an attempt to sever the ties between the leadership and the majority of the party's supporters who were Bissau-Guinean. Consequently, Cabral had to develop a criterion for belonging to the people that is independent of one's first language.

The criterion that is emphasized by Cabral is 'working hard in the Party' in the interest of a modernist national liberation project. Cabral makes a distinction between those who belong to the population of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, and those who belong to the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (Cabral 1979a, 89). For Cabral the criterion of belonging to the people is one that shifts historically: 'it must be clearly defined who are the people at every moment of the life of a population' (Cabral 1979a, 89). This is established based on participation in a common project at a given historical juncture: 'In Guiné and Cape Verde today the people of Guiné or the people of Cape Verde mean for us those who want to chase the Portuguese colonialists out of our land' (Cabral 1979a, 89). Non-participation in this common project means not being of the people, even if one was born and raised in the land: 'the rest are not of our land even if they are born there. They are not the people of our land; they are the population, but not the people' (Cabral 1979a, 89). Cabral does not connect this distinction explicitly to his historicized understanding of cultural identity. However, we can see how an anti-essentialist conception of cultural identity which is driven by a modern philosophical commitment to autonomy, with its conception of humans as makers of their own history and their own identity is what justifies this distinction.

Moreover, given Cabral's view on the dynamic nature of culture, it is entirely possible that he may have believed that Portuguese and Creole (especially the latter) are already indigenous languages (i.e. African languages), or that they were well on their way to becoming indigenous languages. For by the mid-twentieth century, Portuguese and Creole had been spoken in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde for over four hundred years.¹⁷ Creole (or *Kriol*) is a 'mixture of Coastal Mande languages and Portuguese' (Hawthorne and Nafafé 2016, 33). There is evidence from historical linguistics to show that the 'origins of the Creole language that is currently spoken in Guinea-Bissau and the Senegalese Casamance can be traced back to the sixteenth century' (Kohl 2012, 650). In many ways, Creole was a language of resistance that allowed the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde to assert their agency in the face of attempts to impose on them, without their consent, the use of Portuguese as a language for everyday communication. In fact, the Portuguese

colonial administration unsuccessfully attempted to ban the use of Creole in the 1910s (Kohl 2016b, 191). Moreover, the PAIGC was successfully able to employ Creole as a medium for *oral* communication during the struggle (Hawthorne and Nafané 2016, 39). The PAIGC's gamble on Creole as a lingua franca paid off, even if Creole was never accorded the status of an official language. The percentage of Guinea-Bissau's population who speak Creole increased from 44% in 1979 to 90.4% by 2009 (Kohl 2018, 158).

If as Cabral claims, 'culture, like history, is necessarily an expanding and developing phenomenon' (Cabral 1979a, 49), then perhaps there is no reason to believe that Portuguese and Creole cannot be considered indigenous languages without displacing other languages like Balanta, so that the number of indigenous languages actually increases as a function of time. Moreover, we can see how it would be inaccurate to say with Ladun Anise that for Cabral, 'religion and language constitute the anchor of cultural essence' (Anise 1975, 47). Anise ascribes this view to Cabral because he underemphasizes the modernist philosophy of culture that Cabral subscribes to, which led Cabral to criticize essentialist conceptions of culture. If one does not pay sufficient attention to this philosophical framework, then one could also think that Cabral understood cultural liberation as a 'desire to restore traditions' (Anise 1975, 47).

Perhaps because Creole is in part based on languages that are conceived to be 'indigenous African languages', Cabral's implicit claim that Creole should be understood to be an African language will perhaps not raise much controversy. However, Cabral's explicit championing of the use of Portuguese and his implicit claim that it can be conceived of as an African language will perhaps raise some objections given the current debates on language on the African continent. In a recent issue of this journal, Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o (2018), Biodun Jeyifo (2018) and John Mugane (2018) engaged in a debate over whether English (and by extension, French and Portuguese) could be regarded as African languages. In the context of this debate, Ngūgĩ identifies the use of the former colonizer's language as the official language of the postcolonial state with the carrying out of the 'linguistic pacification programmes' that were undertaken by the colonizing powers (Ngūgĩ 2018, 126). Moreover, he argues that in such cases, the result is 'foreign languages assuming the mantle of the identity of the national' (Ngūgĩ 2018, 126).

Jeyifo, on the other hand, argues against Ngūgĩ, that English (and by extension, French and Portuguese) is now an African language (Jeyifo 2018, 135). Moreover, he argues against what he takes to be Ngūgĩ's commitment to 'absolute autochthony' in relation to the issue of languages on the African continent (Jeyifo 2018, 135). Jeyifo argues that his position is a Fanonist position vis-à-vis the stance taken by Ngūgĩ (Jeyifo 2018, 137). I argue that elucidating Cabral's modernist philosophy of culture especially in relation to the issue of language choice can contribute to debates on language choice in the African context. Specifically, I argue that once we reconstruct Cabral's views on the use of Portuguese, we can understand Jeyifo's views in this debate as an expression of not only a Fanonist position, but also as an expression of a Cabralist philosophy of culture.

For Cabral, colonialism was a crime because it undermined the autonomy of the colonized. It did so by negating what Cabral calls the 'historical process' of the colonized people: 'one can say that ... the main effect produced by the impact of imperialism on the historical process of the dominated people is paralysis, stagnation (even in some cases, regression) in that process' (Cabral 1979c, 128). Part of this negation of the historical process of the colonized involved the manner in which colonialism attempted to destroy

the elements of indigenous culture that were incompatible with its aims and the elements which could form points of resistance. This was done through cultural domination, i.e. ‘the dogma of the supremacy of the culture of the ruling power over the dominated people’ (2016b, 166). The important point here is that Cabral is not discussing ‘cultural influence’, he is discussing ‘cultural domination’.

The distinction is important, because cultural domination implies that the dominated party in the relationship is not given any choice over whether or not to accept the cultural elements that are imposed on it. Cultural influence, on the other hand, is not to be understood as a form of domination, at least insofar as influence is understood in terms that emphasize the agency of the party that is influenced, i.e. the party in question is in a position to assess the utility of some cultural practice and to freely choose whether to adopt it or not. National liberation (and cultural liberation, which is a necessary condition for national liberation according to Cabral) is based on ‘the inalienable right of every people to have their own history; and the aim of national liberation is to regain this right [which has been] usurped by imperialism’ (Cabral 1979c, 130). Having one’s own history does not mean that one does not adopt techniques, practices and beliefs from other peoples. It means that one is free as much as possible to decide if and when to adopt techniques, practices and beliefs from other peoples.

Consequently, whenever Cabral speaks of cultural liberation he is speaking of freedom from ‘foreign domination’ as opposed to ‘foreign influence’ (Cabral 1979c, 130). This is important in light of Jeyifo’s distinction between two theses in relation to the language debate. The first thesis is that English (and Portuguese, and French) ‘was forcibly imposed on Africa and Africans’ (Jeyifo 2018, 134). The second thesis is that English (as well as Portuguese and French) are not and cannot become African languages (Jeyifo 2018, 134–135). No one, including Cabral, disputes the first thesis. The real object of dispute is the second thesis. In relation to this point, we must emphasize that Cabral thinks that Portuguese can become an African language if it is *autonomously* chosen by the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. This is quite different from undertaking a violent ‘linguistic pacification program’ which tramples upon the autonomy of the population, and which Ngũgĩ rightly criticizes. However, it does not follow that Ngũgĩ is correct to claim that Portuguese or English cannot become African languages, even if they are autonomously embraced by Africans.

When we take into account his understanding of cultural liberation as freedom from domination along with Cabral’s emphasis on progress as a normative ideal, and his endorsement of rationality as the foremost criterion of normative justification, we can understand Cabral’s attitude towards the Portuguese language.¹⁸ At first it might appear that Cabral contradicts himself when he says that:

our cultural resistance consists of the following: while we liquidate the colonial culture and the negative aspects of our own culture in our spirit, in our midst, we have to create a new culture, also based on our traditions, but respecting everything that the world has won today for serving people. (Cabral 2016a, 117)

While also claiming that ‘Portuguese (the language) is one of the best things that the *tugas* [the colonialists] left us’ (Cabral 2016a, 134), and that:

we of the Party, if we want to lead our people forward for a long time to come – to write, advance in science – our language has to be Portuguese. And this is an honor. It’s the only

thing we can appreciate from the *tuga*, because he left his language after having stolen so much from our land. (Cabral 2016a, 136)¹⁹

There seems to be a clear contradiction between claiming that colonial culture is to be liquidated, while also upholding and justifying the use of Portuguese as the official language of the party. After all is it not the case that Portuguese is a fundamental feature of 'colonial culture'? I think that the answer for Cabral, perhaps surprisingly, is that it is not. The reason for this is that 'colonial culture' is understood by Cabral in terms of 'foreign domination' and not 'foreign influence' per se.²⁰ Portuguese was an instrument of colonial domination when its use was enforced by the colonizers. However, if one has mastered the language and then freely decides to use it (and specifically to use it to advance the cause of the national liberation struggle), then it is no longer an instrument of colonial domination according to Cabral.

Cabral has an instrumental view of language, he claims that 'language is not evidence of anything, but an instrument for men to relate with one another, a means for speaking, to express realities of life and of the world' (Cabral 2016a, 134–135).²¹ This understanding of language as merely an instrument is perhaps open to objections. However, my aim is not to defend Cabral's conception of language. Instead I aim to show how emphasis on Cabral's modernist philosophy of culture can help us make sense of his views on the use of Portuguese as an official language. The point is that for Cabral the genesis of a cultural element is not significant. We can see that Jeyifo's position is a Cabralist one insofar as his insistence on the manner in which English can be used as a 'linguistic weapon working for Africans on the African continent', and thereby attain the status of an African language, accords with Cabral's undermining of the idea that an African genesis is a necessary condition for a language to become African (Jeyifo 2018, 138).

The key factors for Cabral are whether a given cultural element is compatible with the struggle for autonomy, reason as an epistemic criterion, and progress as a normative ideal:

we should not avoid something because it's from a foreigner, or again, because it's foreign; if it's already good and we have to accept it immediately, then it's not worth refusing. That's not culture. It's crazy, it's a complex – be it of inferiority or stupidity. (Cabral 2016a, 137)

What is emphasized in this passage is whether a given cultural element contributes to the progress of a given people, as opposed to its foreign origins (with the implicit assumption that after a certain point in time this element will cease to be foreign).

In fact, Cabral is open to the possibility that, at least in principle, some of the cultural factors that were brought about as a result of colonialism could be integrated in a manner that contributes to progress: 'our task should be to remove what isn't useful and to leave what is good. This is because colonialism does not only have things that are useless' (Cabral 2016a, 116). It should be recognized that Cabral is not claiming that colonialism was good (he clearly despised colonialism) or defensible. He is only pointing out that some of the things that were brought about by colonialism are useful tools for undermining colonialism and for the construction of a modern national culture.²² It is important to make a distinction between who introduced a certain kind of discourse or certain cultural elements and who controls the directions in which that discourse or those cultural elements develop.²³

Moreover, Cabral in criticizing those who refuse to even consider the possibility of borrowing from others is arguing that the utter refusal to consider oneself as an autonomous

agent who can rationally decide to assimilate elements from a foreign culture involves a return to the colonial situation insofar as in the colonial situation the colonized subject is treated as an inferior being that is without autonomy.²⁴ For Cabral, affirming the capacity to choose is a negation of the complex of inferiority that the colonizers attempted to cultivate. In this respect his attitude towards the adoption of Portuguese is compatible with the claim that ‘we have to destroy the political ideas that the colonialist *tugas* put in our people’s heads’ (Cabral 2016a, 92). The ‘political ideas’ referred to in this context are ideas that portray Africans as incapable of making rational choices (where rationality is assessed in procedural terms). Hence, rejecting the opportunity to choose would not be a negation of those ideas, it would be an affirmation of them. The important thing to note is that the result of autonomous choice is not as significant as the process of choosing. In other words, the criticisms that are leveled by Cabral in the quotation above cannot be legitimately directed at somebody who has thought carefully about the matter and has managed to produce sound arguments as to why Portuguese should not be the official language of the PAIGC.

When Jinadu argues that for Cabral, ‘there is a strong connection between culture and freedom, such that were the colonial subject to define himself in terms of the culture of the colonizer, he would to that extent not be a free man’ (Jinadu 1978, 125), he is making an inaccurate claim if by his claim he means to imply that anyone from a former Portuguese colony who decides to assimilate aspects of Portuguese culture is considered by Cabral to be an unfree (or mentally colonized) individual. Jinadu’s discussion of this point is interesting because he goes on to criticize this thesis, i.e. that retaining indigenous culture (or cultural preservation) defines freedom, because he thinks that this understanding of the relationship between culture and freedom precludes fruitful contact with other cultures, and that it constitutes an ‘overreaction against the cultural imposition and ethnocentric arrogance of the West’ (Jinadu 1978, 127). The problem here is that Jinadu’s criticism of the thesis that cultural liberation is to be understood as cultural preservation renders Jinadu’s position closer to Cabral’s own position. In other words, the position that Jinadu criticizes is not Cabral’s own position, but a position that Jinadu misattributes to Cabral.

For Cabral, the use of Portuguese is justified insofar as it is of utility in relation to precise communications which are crucial in the context of an armed struggle, since it can be written down, whereas Creole was not then a written language. Moreover, Cabral emphasized the necessity of using Portuguese in order to assimilate modern scientific knowledge. Cabral points out that indigenous languages (including Creole) do not have the vocabulary to express scientific terms in a concise manner:

I say, for example: ‘the intensity of a force is equal to mass times the acceleration of gravity’
How are we going to say this? How does one say ‘acceleration of gravity’ in our language? It doesn’t exist in Creole; we have to say it in Portuguese. (Cabral 2016a, 135)

Whether Cabral is correct in his account of indigenous languages as incapable of being deployed to express the discourse of modern science is not relevant for my argument, as I am not interested in showing that Cabral’s attitude towards Portuguese was correct. I am only interested in showing how emphasis on Cabral’s commitment to the philosophical discourse of modernity can help us make sense of his views on culture in general and language in particular.

Cabral's emphasis on the significance of acquiring modern scientific knowledge and the necessity of being able to write clear directives to party members is not sufficiently recognized by Christopher Kohl, who notes Cabral's emphasis on the use of Portuguese as the official language of the PAIGC but does not explain it (Kohl 2018, 166). A salient element is that the PAIGC needed a language with a standardized orthography that would enable the communication of written orders and directives in an unambiguous manner.²⁵ Moreover, Portuguese already had a relatively well-developed technical vocabulary for the description of objects and processes that it was necessary to refer to in the context of the military struggle (e.g. for the description of the parts and mechanics of mortars):

our language remained at the level of that world to which we arrived, in which we live, whereas the *tuga* – although he was a colonialist living in Europe – had a language that advanced a good bit more than ours, being able to express concrete and relative truths, for example, with science. (Cabral 2016a, 135)

This point also accords with Jeyifo's emphasis on the importance of writing (the existence of a relevant body of literature and a standardized orthography) in relation to the assessment of the use of languages such as English and Portuguese on the African continent (Jeyifo 2018, 142). Moreover, Cabral rejects the essentialist view that somebody who speaks Portuguese instead of Creole (or some other indigenous language) is thereby 'less African': 'We're not better children of our land if we speak Creole – that's not true' (Cabral 2016a, 134). Thus, Cabral implicitly claims that, when wielded as a weapon for the liberation of the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, Portuguese can be considered an African language.

Given Cabral's commitment to modern science insofar as it embodies human rationality (which as I have argued above is a key element of the philosophical discourse of modernity), one can understand why a given language's capacity for expressing scientific discourse is significant for Cabral, since for him the culture which is to be developed in the liberated areas must be developed in a way that is compatible with autonomy, the commitment to the centrality of reason as a source of normative legitimacy, and the ideal of progress:

Our cultures should be developed at the national level of our land, but without disparaging (or considering as lesser) the culture of others, and, with intelligence, availing ourselves of the culture of others – everything insofar as it's good for us, everything insofar as it can be adapted to our living conditions. Our culture should be developed on the basis of science, it should be scientific – which is to say, not involve believing in imaginary things. (Cabral 2016a, 123)

The point is that an understanding of Cabral's attitude towards the Portuguese language that locates it in the context of his commitment to the philosophical discourse of modernity provides us with a deeper understanding of Cabral's thought than an attempt to explain his attitude towards Portuguese by referring to his identification with 'European culture' and the fact that he had many personal ties with the Portuguese as Ronald Chilcote attempts to do (Chilcote 1968, 338).²⁶

Conclusion

As I have stressed above, the aim of this paper has not been to defend Cabral's views on specific cultural elements (e.g. the Portuguese language), instead I have attempted to show how understanding Cabral's pronouncements on culture as an expression of his

commitment to a modernist philosophy of culture can help us make sense of his views on what cultural liberation entails. I have argued that if we take seriously Cabral's commitment to some of the essential elements of the philosophical discourse of modernity, then we can realize that he viewed cultural liberation not in terms of cultural preservation, but rather in terms of autonomy in the realm of culture. This commitment to autonomy in the realm of culture leads him to adopt a historicized, anti-essentialist conception of culture, which takes seriously the idea that to be modern is to think of oneself as the maker of one's own history and to act on the basis of this self-understanding. I have attempted to show how emphasis on Cabral's philosophical commitments can supplement (but not supplant) other, more conventional approaches to the interpretation of Cabral's work. I hope to have demonstrated that even though Cabral never described himself as a philosopher, he developed a coherent modern African philosophy of culture that can be reconstructed from his writings.

Notes

1. I will be using the terms 'modern' and 'modernist' as synonyms throughout this discussion.
2. This article draws on research undertaken for my dissertation on African Marxism (although for present purposes, I bracket debates over whether Cabral should be regarded as a Marxist).
3. Patrick Chabal provides a detailed political biography of Cabral (Chabal 2003). My focus in this article will be on Cabral's writings as a repository of philosophical insights, especially in relation to philosophy of culture. Hence, I will not be touching on Cabral's life as a political leader, except insofar as it provides the contextualization necessary for understanding his philosophy of culture.
4. For the most part, Cabral has been perceived as having been successful in doing so. Some scholars have even argued that the PAIGC, under Cabral's leadership, was 'the most successful nationalist movement in Black Africa and the first to achieve independence through armed struggle' (Chabal 2003, 2).
5. For instance, Cabral analyzed the causes which brought about the coup that ousted Kwame Nkrumah from power in Ghana in 1965 (Cabral 1979b, 114). Cabral thought that Nkrumah's underdeveloped ideological orientation at the time was one of the causes that brought about his downfall (Chaliand 1969, 42).
6. It should be noted that even though some of the issues that Cabral discussed had already been analyzed by Frantz Fanon, there are important phenomena that were criticized but not explained by Fanon, but which were explained by Cabral. For instance, while Fanon criticizes the post-independence African bourgeoisie for leading a parasitical existence based on siphoning off surplus from the countryside, he does not really explain why they do so, whereas Cabral explicitly attempts to give a structural explanation, from the standpoint of political economy, of why this has taken place (Bienen 1977). For a comparison of Cabral's views on class stratification and class struggle in Africa with Fanon's views, see Abdullah (2006).
7. Kariamuw Welsh-Asante (1990) describes Cabral as a philosopher, but she does not actually provide a detailed exposition of his philosophical commitments.
8. The election of a popular national assembly in 1972 under war-conditions before liberation was complete, an unprecedented event in the history of liberation struggles on the African continent, demonstrates Cabral's commitment (and that of the PAIGC) to the principle of self-governance (Chabal 2003; Davidson 1984).
9. This is also evident in Cabral's endorsement of the idea that humans can and should change their geographical reality:

our struggle grew so much that we must take advantage of it to transform even geographical reality, to the extent that we can. It would seem improbable, but it is the truth. For when we build dams, bridges, etc, we shall change the geographical

landscape of our land, we are going to make a new human geography that we are creating in our land. (Cabral 1979a, 60)

However, Cabral was also aware of the dangers of environmental degradation and he had tremendous respect for indigenous agricultural knowledge (César 2018).

10. For an extensive book-length discussion of this point, I refer the reader to Taiwo (2010).
11. In this respect I think that Rosemary E. Galli and Jocelyn Jones in their account of Cabral's views of the relationship between science and indigenous agricultural knowledge are correct to use the term 'modern science' instead of 'western science' (Galli and Jones 1987, 136).
12. Jeyifo notes Cabral's rejection of modernization theory (2007, 138). Therefore, it is slightly surprising that he does not systematically distinguish between the concept of modernity and the concept of modernization.
13. Tsenay Serequeberhan notes that for Cabral the 'return to the source' is not a return to the past (Serequeberhan 2017, 75).
14. Patrick Chabal's work is the object of criticism here because he has written the first full political biography of Cabral (first published in 1983 and reissued in 2003). Moreover, he was able to gain access to documents at the PAIGC headquarters which were not available to other researchers. He was able to do so thanks to the intercession of Cabral's half-brother, Luiz Cabral, who served as the first president of Guinea-Bissau after independence from Portugal was attained (Chabal 2003, 220). Consequently, it is no surprise that Chabal's work has had a very significant influence on the scholarly reception of Cabral.
15. When asked in London about the ideology of the PAIGC, Cabral responded: 'if you decide it's Marxism, tell everyone that it is Marxism. If you decide that it's not Marxism, tell everyone that it's not Marxism. But labels are your affair' (Cabral 1971, 20).
16. While Serequeberhan (2003) emphasizes that Cabral rejected the thesis that there exist trans-historical African cultural values, he does not explicitly connect this rejection to Cabral's endorsement of some of the key principles of the philosophical discourse of modernity, which is what I have attempted to do in the passages above.
17. As Walter Rodney notes, by the early sixteenth century the Portuguese had occupied all the islands that comprise the archipelago of Cape Verde and had started expanding trade networks with the area that now comprises the territory of Guinea-Bissau (Rodney 1970).
18. My discussion here is focused on the Portuguese language as an example. This model of analysis can be extended to Cabral's attitude towards gender issues and women's rights. We can use the conceptual framework of the philosophical discourse of modernity in conjunction with the work that has been done on Cabral's views on gender issues by the Cape Verdean scholar Ângela Sofia Benoliel Coutinho (2017), the Cape Verdean scholar and political figure Crispina Gomes (2006) and the Bissau-Guinean scholar Patricia Godinho Gomes (2013).
19. When Cabral claims that it is an 'honor', he seems to mean something similar to what the Algerian writer Katib Yacine meant when he said that he regards French as the spoils of Algerian victory in the War of Independence (Aidi 2014, 143).
20. There is also an implicit distinction being made between Portuguese culture and colonialist culture.
21. He also claims that:

for us, using Portuguese – like Russian, French, or English – doesn't matter, as long as it serves us, just as using tractors from the Russians, English, Americans, etc. doesn't matter, as long as they serve us in cultivating the land while gaining our independence. (Cabral 2016a, 136)
22. Micheal S. Morgado (1974) has also noted Cabral's belief that some of the effects of colonialism were potentially positive insofar as they could be made to contribute to progress.
23. For example, as Fredrick Cooper has pointed out, the discourse of economic development was introduced into the African context by colonial powers in the 1940s in order to legitimize colonialism, but it was employed by Africans in order to argue that colonialism, insofar as it impeded their development, was not legitimate (Cooper 1997).

24. The Portuguese colonial administration was based on 'a policy of association, of the European who thinks and the hand of the native that executes' (quoted from Mendy 2003, 43).
25. In Mugane's critique of the valorization of vertical English in relation to the horizontal Englishes that are spoken on the African continent, he argues that 'vernaculars are unrestrained and pervade the lives of ordinary people but the vertical dialect is highly regulated in the way it is written and spoken' (Mugane 2018, 151). However, it was precisely the fact that standard Portuguese was so highly regulated that made it useful for the conveying of high-level written military orders and political directives, as well as for communication between different liberation organizations in Portugal's African colonies in the context of the Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP). Note that to this day, Creole has not been given a standard orthography (Kohl 2018, 166–167).
26. When Chilcote speaks of 'European values' and 'African values' (Chilcote 1968, 388), he does not consider that Cabral thinks that strictly speaking there is no such thing as racial or continental values.

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