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ARTICLE

Underground Revolutionaries: The PAIGC, Leninism, and the Decolonization of Cabo Verde

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Abstract

The "revolutionary script" of Leninism was foundational to how the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC) and Amilcar Cabral imagined the course of decolonization. Under-utilized archives and party documents highlight that the impact of the political-organizational model of Lenin was an early source of inspiration for PAIGC leaders, a fact which historians have not investigated in detail. The manner in which Leninism influenced the PAIGC was neither linear nor dogmatic, however. Dating from early exposure to Marxist texts in underground study circles to aborted attempts at launching armed struggle, party leaders constantly improvised upon the script with which they based their anti-colonial revolution.

Résumé

Le « scénario révolutionnaire » du léninisme a constitué un élément central dans la manière dont le Parti africain pour l'indépendance de la Guinée et du Cap-Vert (PAIGC) ainsi qu'Amilcar Cabral ont conceptualisé le processus de décolonisation. Des archives peu exploitées ainsi que des documents relatifs au parti mettent en évidence que l'influence du modèle organisationnel de Lénine a constitué une source d'inspiration précoce pour les dirigeants du PAIGC, un aspect qui n'a pas été examiné en profondeur par les historiens. La manière dont le léninisme a influencé le PAIGC n'a cependant été ni linéaire ni dogmatique. Depuis l'exposition précoce aux écrits marxistes au sein des cercles d'études clandestins jusqu'aux tentatives infructueuses de déclencher la lutte armée, les dirigeants du parti ont continuellement ajusté le cadre sur lequel ils ont fondé leur révolution anticoloniale.

Resumo

O "guião revolucionário" do leninismo foi crucial para o modo como o Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) e Amílcar Cabral conceberam o processo de descolonização. A consulta de arquivos que têm sido pouco explorados e de documentos do partido coloca em evidência o forte impacto do modelo de organização de Lenine enquanto fonte de inspiração inicial para os líderes do PAIGC, facto que não tem sido investigado em profundidade pelos historiadores. A forma como o leninismo influenciou o PAIGC não foi, porém, nem linear nem dogmática. Desde a exposição precoce a textos marxistas nos círculos académicos clandestinos até às tentativas falhadas de lançar a luta armada, os líderes do partido improvisaram constantemente sobre o guião que lhes serviu de base para a revolução anticolonial.

Keywords: Cabo Verde; Anti-Colonialism; PAIGC; Amilcar Cabral; Marxism

Introduction

The first text Amílcar Cabral read as a student at the *Instituto Superior de Agronomia* in colonial Lisbon was Vladimir Lenin's "The Agrarian Question" (1961). This study was done "in secret ... [since] political books in general, notably those by Lenin, had been banned" by the Portuguese regime, according to a November 1969 speech given by Cabral in a meeting of the Soviet Club in Conakry.[1] "Forbidden fruits are the tastiest," Cabral joked to the audience listening to him speak on the theme of "Lenin and the National Liberation Movements." This paper explores the relation between Leninism and underground politics in the development of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde's (PAIGC) program of revolutionary decolonization, particularly regarding Cabo Verde—an archipelago of ten islands 370 miles west of Senegal, home to less than one million people. I deploy the term "Leninism" in the fashion that Cabral did: the attempts of the PAIGC to "assimilate and respect in practice the great and rich lessons of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin" to their own "concrete conditions," a Leninist phrase which Cabral utilized often. I argue—through a historical analysis of some of the PAIGC's "underground" operations—that their successes and challenges regarding decolonization can best be understood as part of a Leninist "revolutionary script" which was adapted and improvised upon by Cabral and the party, to borrow from the work of Baker and Edelstein (2015, 2).

The idea of the revolutionary script is useful in understanding the trajectory of Caboverdean decolonization as rooted in a broader history, but also in understanding the subjectivity of the historical actors themselves. Baker and Edelstein stress that scholars "have largely overlooked a defining feature of revolutions and of revolutionary history—namely, the self-conscious awareness with which revolutionaries model their actions on those of revolutions past" (Baker and Edelstein 2015, 4). The praxis of Cabral and the PAIGC has been explored in numerous scholarly articles and monographs. The dominant trend, exemplified by scholars such as Patrick Chabal, is one which places Cabral outside, or above, the question of ideology and specifically claimed that "Cabral, who used Marxist theory in his analytical texts, consistently refused to be drawn

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into ideological discussions or definitions" (Chabal 1981, 88). This is despite the fact that Cabral wrote about Lenin (and, by extension, Marx) more than he did any other historical or contemporary political figure, and utilized Leninist principles and conceptions in more than just "analytical texts." Although both Chabal and Cabral looked favorably upon the rejection or "lack of ideological dogmatism," Cabral considered the hatred of dogma to be one of "Lenin's lessons." Cabral was explicit that he took "fruitful lessons" from Lenin "that refer to the moral behavior of the fighter, *to his political action, to revolutionary strategy, and to revolutionary practice* [emphasis added]." With an attention to the role of the "revolutionary script," the attempts to distance Cabral and the PAIGC's self-professed debts to Leninist principles prevent a fuller understanding of what made the party successful in its efforts and therefore what is generalizable and universal about its history for further studies of decolonization.

On the history of lessons learned from past revolutions, Baker and Edelstein assert that "Marx rewrote the script of the French Revolution; Lenin revised Marx; Mao revised Lenin; and so on and so forth" (2015, 2). These "revisions" were due to the wildly different contexts in which each movement existed, rather than a desire to "revise" past scripts. While Cabral and the PAIGC would "revise" the script of urban proletarian revolution as a tactical orientation, the party leader remained committed to representing the interests of "revolutionary workers" above all else, as he expressed in his famous "Weapon of Theory" address. In the same speech, he reflected on Lenin's maxim from *What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* that "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice" (Lenin 1961, 369). Cabral edited this to say that "nobody has yet successfully practiced revolution without a revolutionary theory" (Cabral 1979, 123). Lenin's 1902 pamphlet can be read as the origin of the Leninist revolutionary script, where he proposed to build a clandestine revolutionary party which would organize the working class against the repressive Tsarist state in Russia. The PAIGC operated in the Leninist tradition in the sense that it was a clearly structured revolutionary party organized around a revolutionary program toward the overthrow of the existing state in colonized Guinea and Cabo Verde—albeit with numerous important distinctions from that of Tsarist Russia—guided by "revolutionary theory." The pillars of Leninism as an organizational model, according to historian of Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution, Paul le Blanc, was the "integrity of the revolutionary program" alongside the hierarchical practice of democratic centralism where larger lower regional bodies are subordinated to democratically elected but numerically smaller higher national bodies, such as a central committee or political bureau (Le Blanc 2016, 92).[2] These principles were the internal foundation from which the Leninist revolutionary script was played out. Combined with the tactical necessity and problematic of the underground, the adaptation of the Leninist script is thus legible in the closing sentence of the party's original statutes: "as long as *the clandestine situation in which the Party is forced to live due to Portuguese colonial repression continues, the Political Bureau may be established, in whole or in part, outside of Guinea* and, preferably, in one of the neighboring countries [emphasis added]."[3] Underground organizing and clandestinity was not a strategy in and of itself, but a tactical orientation of the Leninist party to further the aims of its

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political program in conditions of repression. On this question, Cabral wrote that "Lenin gave a very useful lesson to liberation movements … never confuse strategy and tactics [emphasis in original]," referencing the "Leninist conception of strategy" (Cabral 1969).

Beyond Cabral's individual influences, there is a wide range of scholarship relating to the radical and transnational networks of solidarity built by the PAIGC and its leading member, Amílcar Cabral. This literature primarily relates to the state relations with socialist and communist states forged by the party, notably with Cuba, China, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Soviet Bloc of Eastern Europe (Gleijeses 1997; Telepneva 2023; Sousa 2020; Amado 2020), although there were also significant ties with non-socialist states as well (Gleijeses 2005). These ties were instrumental in providing the practical, material, and political aid necessary to make the PAIGC a force which could successfully challenge colonial rule. However, this paper's focus is not on the state, or the PAIGC as a future state actor, but on the party *as a revolutionary party*.

In recent special issues, scholars Aurora Almada Santos, Rui Barros, and Victor Lopes have charted the expansive, and yet to be explored, dimensions of the existing scholarship around Amílcar Cabral and the PAIGC, yet the particular subjectivity of the revolutionary party does not come into play (Santos and Barros 2020; Lopes and Barros 2020). While Santos and Barros highlight the "almost exclusive focus on the PAIGC and Amílcar Cabral" across the literature which makes it "difficult to reconcile the top-down with the bottom-up approach and to depart from the tendency to attribute an active role only to a very narrow group of players," that focus is nevertheless one which has largely been unable to understand what made the PAIGC such a distinct force in the era of decolonization (Santos and Barros 2020, 13).

On this latter point, Barros and Lopes note that Cabral was "widely regarded as a key thinker of African emancipation, alongside Frantz Fanon and Kwame Nkrumah" and cite political scientist of Marxist governments Colm Foy in saying that "despite the preoccupations of the world with the Vietnam war, little Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde captured the imagination of the international community" (Lopes and Barros 2020). A biographer of Cabral, and founding member of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, Mario Pinto de Andrade, has similarly said that "the name of Amílcar Cabral is spontaneously associated with two great figures who marked the course of events in Africa in the 1960s," referring to Patrice Lumumba and Kwame Nkrumah. Notably, Andrade distinguishes Cabral from the two "through [his] creation of a structured political party, the PAIGC" (Andrade 2024, xxxiv).[4] While this paper, on the one hand, offers a new perspective from which to study the PAIGC—that of the revolutionary party in the Leninist tradition—it also does so focused on an understudied dimension: the place of Cabo Verde in the history of the PAIGC. Santos and Barros have noted the "almost exclusive focus on Guinea which prevailed for a long time in the studies of the independence struggle" (Santos and Barros 2020, 16).

Unlike its sister organizations in the CONCP (Conference of the Nationalist Organizations in the Portuguese Colonies)—the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO)

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—the PAIGC was *founded* as a revolutionary party, whereas the others were founded as broad-based "movements," a distinction that Cabral himself noted.[5] Only in 1977 did the MPLA and FRELIMO declare themselves to be "workers parties" and formally adopt the principles of Marxism-Leninism, due to an increasing material and ideological reliance on the Soviet Union amid deepening US- and apartheid-backed counterinsurgencies. The PAIGC, on the other hand, never did formally adopt the "worker's party" nor Marxist-Leninist moniker, despite the fact that from its onset it declared itself a "party" in contrast to its CONCP counterparts.[6] Taking the historical and theoretical framework of the Leninist party should therefore not be mistaken as a wholesale identification with the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), USSR or even "Marxism-Leninism" as it was understood during the Cold War and Sino-Soviet split. The Cold War framework has been liable to encourage the idea that "anti-colonial movements and radical organizations" were often seen as "Soviet proxies rather than independent actors," whereas the Leninist framework can embrace the localized application of Marxist principles (Bianchini, Sylla, and Zeilig 2023, 17).

Cabral's 1969 speech on "Lenin and the National Liberation Movements" has not been utilized by scholars in an assessment of Cabral and the PAIGC. Housed in the *Fundação Amílcar Cabral's* (FAC) Amílcar Cabral Archive in Praia, Cabo Verde, the speech is one of many party documents which remain to be critically analyzed in an assessment of the PAIGC. This paper utilizes the 1969 Conakry speech as part of the primary source material to better understand Cabral and the PAIGC's conception of Lenin and the underground—especially given that they read Lenin clandestinely. Reading this speech complicates the scholarly narrative on Cabral, which seeks to distance him from past ideological tendencies, a narrative which Cabral himself pushed in the tense global geopolitics of the anti-communist Cold War, and should lead to a reconsideration of the role political ideology played in the development of the PAIGC's praxis. Beyond the 1969 speech, the Amílcar Cabral Foundation holds a large folder containing meeting notes, correspondence, and another lengthy address of Cabral's during a visit to the Soviet Union which has not been rigorously considered in the academic literature on this question. In general, there still remains much untapped material at the FAC's Amílcar Cabral Archives.

This paper also relied on documents from the massive digitized Amílcar Cabral Documents and Mario Pinto de Andrade collection available online through casacomum.org as well as oral histories and personal archives offered by militants and leaders of the PAIGC. The specific individuals are Silvino da Luz —a PAIGC militant who received military training in Algiers and Cuba before going to become a top government official in independent Cabo Verde—and Luis de Matos Monteiro da Fonseca—another future government official who was a leader of the underground party cells in Cabo Verde during the 1960s before being captured by PIDE (International and State Defense Police). These interviews were conducted in 2022 and 2025. My research benefited from my familial connection to Luis Fonseca, whose insights as a former PAIGC militant and political prisoner informed my approach to understanding the party's underground networks. This relationship deepened my engagement with the lived tensions between archival narratives and personal memory in the study of

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Cabral and the PAIGC. As both researcher and descendant of this history, I am attentive to how familial oral histories complicate and enrich institutional archives. Many of the Caboverdean leaders and members of the PAIGC are still alive today and retain documents from the liberation struggle, in addition to the trove of memories they carry with them, the continued preservation of which is an urgent task for historians, as well as those of "ordinary" Caboverdeans who lived through the period in question here, although the focus of this paper is on the upper-echelon of the party ranks.

To explore Leninism and the underground in the decolonization of Cabo Verde, this paper is divided into two sections and starts with the origins and prehistory of the PAIGC as an organization, rooted primarily in the clandestine organizing of petit bourgeois Caboverdean students and soldiers in Salazarist Portugal. There is also discussion around the PAIGC's organizing in the trade unions in Guinea, during a period when there was an uncritical adoption of Marxist and Leninist revolutionary schematics. The next section of the paper turns to an analysis of the party's attempt to develop the anti-colonial struggle on the Cabo Verde islands. Archivally, this section primarily relies on the meeting minutes of a "Cadre Conference" held in Dakar in July 1963 focused on advancing the struggle in Cabo Verde, a copy of which was given to me by PAIGC leader and militant Silvino da Luz, who took part in the meeting. From there, it concludes with a discussion of the party's abortive attempt to launch an armed struggle on the islands with the help of Fidel Castro and the Communist Party of Cuba, also based on archival party documents, and the subsequent improvisation on the revolutionary script written by the PAIGC itself.

Despite the ability of the party to wage an armed campaign and militarily defeat the Portuguese in Guinea, the same never occurred in Cabo Verde. There, struggle remained underground until the April 25, 1974 coup in Portugal, which finally brought the PAIGC into public activity for the first time. Concluding remarks on the strategy and tactics of the PAIGC highlight how the party fit into and reflected the Leninist tradition of revolutionary organizing. By centering the PAIGC's adaptations of Leninist praxis—from clandestine organizing to the fraught revolutionary script regarding Cabo Verde—this paper not only challenges depoliticized readings of Cabral's thought but also reframes the archipelago's decolonization as a contested site of ideo-practical improvisation within the broader arc of twentieth-century revolutionary struggles.[7]

Building the party, building the underground, 1952–63

The founding of the PAIGC is officially recorded as having taken place on September 19, 1956 in Bissau, Guinea. According to the canonical record, Amílcar Cabral chaired the meeting—which consisted of several more founding members, all of whom were of Caboverdean descent—and, according to Mario Pinto de Andrade, declared that "the party must be organized in a clandestine manner to evade colonial police surveillance" (Andrade 2024, 40). Not only were the founding members all of Caboverdean origin, they belonged to a professional class of primarily Caboverdean colonial administrators and civil servants, which

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had arisen at the turn of the twentieth century due to the exigencies of Portuguese colonial expansion in Guinea. Caboverdeans, classified as "citizens" rather than "natives" in the Portuguese colonial schema, were allowed the opportunity to study in Portugal with the explicit aim of administering the colonial state in Guinea. Serving the colonial state in Guinea was a release valve for thousands of Caboverdeans who suffered under extreme conditions of regular colonial famines. As Cabral himself said in a 1969 lecture to PAIGC cadres, "the colonialists let Caboverdeans study, because they needed to train people as colonial agents ... Just as the English used the Indians in colonialism and the French used the Dahomeans, so the Portuguese used the Caboverdeans, educating a certain number" (Cabral 2025). In the 1940s, Caboverdeans like Amílcar Cabral (as well as many other students from the Portuguese colonies) would enter university in Lisbon during World War II and the subsequent postwar wave of decolonization and anti-imperialist movements. The university became the cauldron in which they would receive their formative education in both political education and clandestine, or "underground," organizing.

The beginnings of the students' political and clandestine work took place in study groups on "Marx and a range of other works that discussed progressive social ideas" with the intention of studying past revolutionary experiences and theories to develop a strategy which could liberate the Portuguese colonies in Africa (Andrade 2024, 30). It was in this context that Cabral admitted to having read Lenin in secret, likely referring to his text "The Agrarian Question and the Critics of Marx," which is where Cabral could have inherited the formula, later expressed in his 1966 "Weapon of Theory" speech given in Havana, "that the most important thing" in the march of history is "the level of technological development, the state of the productive forces" (Lenin 1961, 109).[8] Nevertheless, both Cabral and Andrade are clear in their recollections that the works of Marx and Lenin—difficult to come by—were pivotal in the formation of their political and organizational careers.

Underground study groups took place around the *Centro dos Estudos Africanos* (CEA), or African Studies Center, in 1951. Much of the subversive study of the CEA was conducted during Sunday meetings, disguised as social gatherings, where music played loudly over the radio to evade government surveillance while the students engaged in political discussions about the future of their African homelands (Andrade 2024, 32; Tomas 2021, 46–47). Following university studies, Cabral worked as the Director of the Agriculture and Forestry Services under the Overseas Ministry of Portugal from 1952 to 1955. He and others organized meetings at the house of Sofia Pomba Guerra—an exiled member of the Portuguese Communist Party. It was at these meetings where Cabral met or reacquainted with other Caboverdeans who would go on to found the party working for the colonial administration, such as Aristides Pereira, Fernando Fortes, Abilio Duarte, and his own half-brother Luis Cabral. Together, they would "listen to Portuguese broadcasts on Radio Moscow, or read forbidden novels and newspapers, such as *Avante!*, the official publication of the PCP [Portuguese Communist Party]," which was banned in Portugal. As in Lisbon, "with the gramophone turned up to full volume," many of these gatherings took place under the guise of parties and cultural gatherings to evade colonial surveillance (Tomas 2021, 57).

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This trajectory shares parallels with the experience of Lenin as a young professional intellectual who was a part of the underground study group known as the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class in the late nineteenth century.

Given his experience working for the Portuguese colonial state—first in Guinea and later in Angola—Cabral would in 1960 issue a public appeal (under the pseudonym of Abel Djassi) to "Guinean and Cape Verdean civil servants and employees," urging them to "put yourselves on the side of our peoples, share in our liberation struggle and regain your dignity as men and Africans." The tasks at hand were clear, according to Cabral: "organize clandestinely in all places of work" and turn each post into a "combat post into a fortress of combat for the immediate destruction of Portuguese colonialism" (Cabral 1979, 158).

Cabral's employment allowed him to travel widely and frequently, and generally provided cover for clandestine activity. In November 1957, Cabral travelled to Paris to participate in a meeting which would lead to the formation of the short-lived Anti-Colonial Movement (MAC), a precursor to CONCP. Andrade recalls this meeting for its "ideological mimicry and dogmatism, as well as the failures to understand the social components of the colonized masses," where Cabral put forth the erroneous idea that "the Guinean proletariat has the role of leading the anti-colonial struggle" (Andrade 2024, 55). The "dogmatic positions"—emphasizing the centrality of a miniscule Guinean working class—of the Paris meeting were uncritical applications of Marx and Engels' prognostications in the nineteenth century and Lenin's leadership of the Bolsheviks in the run-up to the Russian Revolution. Here, the revolutionary script was adhered to in a rigid manner. However, these positions would soon be altered through experience rooted in clandestine action, leading to an emphasis on the rural sectors of Guinean society as the agent of transformational change. Later, in his 1969 speech in Conakry on Lenin, Cabral would reference the Bolshevik leader's hatred of dogma, explaining how "critical assimilation of the knowledge or experiences of others is as valid for life as it is for struggle" and adding that "the philosophical or scientific thought of others—even if perfectly valid—cannot be the only basis for us to think and act, or, in other words, to create" (Cabral 1969).

This history can be gleaned from a 1973 PAIGC report by Abilio Duarte on the history of the party's infiltration of, or "assault" on, the Portuguese trade unions in Bissau (Duarte, as cited in Andrade, 2024, 131–33). Duarte, Elisee Turpin, Joao Rosa and Luis Cabral—all early PAIGC leaders of Caboverdean descent—organized workers in the Trade and Industry Employees Union of Guinea under the nose of management and the precolonial union leadership for months in the run-up to elections. According to Duarte, preparations began in "mid-1956," and it was in January of the next year—following the official date of the party's formation—when they "were prepared to carry out" the "assault" on the colonial union management (Andrade 2024, 132).[9]

When the elections came, after months of clandestine organizing with the African workers in the union, the party leaders presented themselves as candidates and won an overwhelming majority of the votes—taking the Portuguese by great surprise. This was part of the party core's strategy at the time: to gain

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influence in the organs of colonial civil society and win over critical sectors of the urban masses toward the idea of independence from Portugal. Andrade refers to this electoral victory as a "primitive battle" which "reinforced the patriots' conviction that only the existence of a political and clandestine mechanism would allow them to effectively confront the repressive machine of colonialism and see the aspirations of the popular masses triumph" (Andrade 2024, 39). Duarte himself in the 1973 report referred to this victory as short-lived, due to the colonial state's intransigence in working with the new leadership who sought to create a "true union movement."

Trade union activity came to a head in 1959 with events that drastically changed the direction of the liberation movements in Portuguese-colonized Africa. An attempted dockworkers' strike for higher wages, no doubt organized in part by PAIGC cadre, resulted in the massacre of dozens of Guineans by the Portuguese at the Pidjiguiti docks in Bissau. This state violence pushed Cabral and the PAIGC leadership to move away from nonviolent urban organizing and prepare for armed struggle. This entailed sending the majority of cadres to the countryside to develop a base among the peasantry who were now, rather than the miniscule Guinean proletariat, seen as the popular base from which to drive the anti-colonial struggle (Andrade 2024, 60–61; Mendy 2019, 102–103).

The formative years of political organizing and ideological training by much of the top leadership of the PAIGC took place in the cauldron of clandestinity where, as young students and professionals, they sought to evade the watchful eye of colonial authorities. They operated in an underground fashion not out of choice, but necessity, as was the case for Lenin's Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) in Tsarist Russia. Primarily urban intellectuals and professionals, their underground activity was initially centered on the cities and directed at the proletariat and semi-proletariat, in a strategic orientation drawing direct and oft-uncritical inspiration from Marx and Engels' writing in *The Communist Manifesto* and later Lenin's in *What Is to Be Done*, emphasizing the leading role of the trade union movement. Cabral's later declarations in 1969 and the analysis of the social situation in Guinea during the 1957 MAC meeting, combined with the practical experience of the PAIGC up until 1959, highlight a parallel between the trajectory of the PAIGC in its formative years and the RSDLP, which would soon change course.

The subsequent shift away from an urban-based political strategy toward armed struggle rooted in the rural peasantry mirrors the experience of other revolutionary *parties* which led national liberation struggles. While the tactics and progression of the PAIGC's struggle followed that of many other revolutionary anti-imperialist movements, Cabral emphasized in another moment of reflection that "the first time I faced a book of Mao Tse-Tung's was in 1960," (Cabral 1973, 87) well after the PAIGC was established and its core group of founders had accumulated years of clandestine experience. That there were similarities between the trajectory of the liberation movements such as the Communist Party of China and the PAIGC led Cabral to believe that "all kinds of struggle for liberation obey a group of laws" which operate on a general level (Cabral 1973, 86–87). This was a central motif in the development of the revolutionary script—although there was room for improvisation, there were

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still "laws governing the evolution of all human societies," an idea which was at the center of Cabral's conception of revolutionary theory (Cabral, cited in de Bragança and Wallerstein 1982, 107). Cabral and the PAIGC had moved away from the idea that the above-ground trade union struggle and nonviolent appeals to existing political and civil structures would lead to any progress in the nationalist and anti-colonial struggle, and would later reflect on their early dogmatism at a 1969 cadre seminar in Conakry.[10]

Another example of reflection on this earlier moment would come from a 1969 interview with the revolutionary Cuban periodical, *Tricontinental*:

> That was a crucial, decisive moment, because it showed that our Party was following a mistaken line and that it lacked experience. At that time the Party knew nothing of what was happening in the world, and we had to progress on an empirical basis. It wasn't until 1961 that I got to know the works of Mao Tse-Tung. Our lack of experience made us think that we could fight in the cities with strikes and so on, but we were wrong and the reality of that moment showed us that this was impossible. (Cabral 1970, 157)

Per Baker and Edelstein, the PAIGC *revised* the Leninist script of revolution they were following at the turn of the 1960s to achieve their program of decolonization. Regardless of their exact historical knowledge on the struggle of the communist parties in Russia or China, the PAIGC had passed through a similar understanding of what was to be done in order to defeat the colonial state, and later understood this to be part of a general "group of laws" pertaining to social movements. They no longer saw the struggle in the trade unions as primary, and saw to it to intensify the nature of their illegal and clandestine organizing. Whereas for Lenin and the Bolsheviks in *What Is to Be Done* this meant the creation of a clandestine "all-Russian" newspaper network in preparation for armed struggle, for Cabral and the PAIGC—also like Mao and the People's Liberation Army, or Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh—the move away from trade union organizing meant direct preparations for guerilla warfare as urban cadres were sent to the countryside. This is often understood as a shift away from the typical Leninist model focusing on urban workers as a mass base, however, the shift itself was only possible due to the party's past urban underground organizing. It was, rather, the "critical assimilation" of past revolutionary experience with the current reality of Guinea and Cabo Verde: integrating and discarding the thought and practice of others as necessary. In this case the script of the proletarian revolution was discarded in favor of the more recent phenomenon of peasant war.

Following the shift towards the peasantry, in June 1961 forty-one African students clandestinely organized a "great escape" from Portugal with the intention of joining the liberation movements challenging Portuguese rule in Africa. Another nineteen would later escape, bringing the total to sixty. Orchestrated with the help of North American students and a protestant pastor, the students managed to sneak across the Portuguese and Spanish borders to arrive in France, utilizing safe houses and falsified documents (Marcum 1969; Harper and

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Nottingham 2017; Andringa 2015). "Operation Angola," as it was known, consisted primarily of Angolans, but also saw the escape of six Caboverdean students —several of whom would play a major role in the further development of the PAIGC's anti-colonial struggle: Pedro Pires, Osvaldo Lopes da Silva, Jose Araujo, and Maria da Luz among them. When Pires and Lopes da Silva arrived in Accra in September, they wrote a letter to PAIGC leader Aristides Pereira asking how they could get in contact with party representatives, declaring that they were willing to suspend their studies to join the struggle and requested a ticket to join them in Conakry (Pires and Lopes da Silva 1961).

Despite the fact that Cabo Verde represented a tiny fraction of the total population of Portugal's African colonies, Caboverdean students represented 10 percent of those involved in the escape. There were other individualized examples of clandestine escape from the clutches of colonial Portugal as well. One such case was Silvino da Luz who, like Pedro Pires, was in the middle of his compulsory military service when he fled to join the liberation movements in 1963.[11] Da Luz, unlike Pires, was serving in Angola at the time of his desertion and, earlier in Cabo Verde, had been one of the students who had been in Abilio Duarte's study circles back in 1958 (PAIGC 1963b). Exile, desertion and transnational mobility, as in the case of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, and Fidel Castro, had long played a role in the script of socialist revolution.

Improvisation and the revolutionary script, 1963–75

These escapes were the precursor to the convening of a meeting held on July 17–20, 1963, where a group of Caboverdean "leading cadre" in the PAIGC discussed "the development of the struggle in Cabo Verde." During the meeting, Cabral emphasized that the "experience acquired" following "the development of struggle in Guinea" earlier that year, combined with "the situation in Cabo Verde" and the "development of happenings on the African Continent," necessitated that a "decisive attitude" should be taken in regards to the islands (PAIGC 1963b).

The PAIGC, according to minutes taken by Maria da Luz Boal, had already made declarations to initiate the armed struggle in Cabo Verde that year. Cabral opened the first session with an acknowledgment that, through the process of criticism and self-criticism—a hallmark of Leninist organization—the party would decide whether "it was possible or not to initiate the armed struggle," a necessarily clandestine process. The first task was to analyze the "concrete situation of the Cabo Verde Islands." While the end goal was not to make a decision in that meeting itself, the aim was to "leave here with a concrete task to develop the struggle (PAIGC 1963b)." The usage of the phrase "concrete situation" is another reference to Lenin who wrote that "the living soul" of Marxism is "a concrete analysis of a concrete situation" (Lenin 1965).

Jose Araujo—one of the sixty Africans who had escaped Portugal—opened political discussion following Cabral's orientation with the suggestion that the party replace the agenda item "armed struggle" with "possible forms of struggle." This amendment was agreed to, and following the setting of the

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agenda for the meeting, Cabral issued a set of questions for discussion: First, should the meeting be announced? Second, should a document be published and if so, what kind? Third, should this document have details in it? Fourth, should they speak of the armed struggle? And fifth, should they issue a Caboverdean manifesto? A lively debate ensued with most cadres agreeing that some kind of document should be published regarding the meeting and their eventual resolutions, although the level of detail and agitation was contested. Some called for more caution and clandestinity than others, highlighting the potential for other forms of action. Cabral spoke last and gave the final word, clarifying that a document must be released and that it must indicate the development of the armed struggle in Cabo Verde. It would primarily serve the purpose of "agitation" and "mobilization" for both Caboverdean and Guinean cadre, while expressing the rights of colonized Africans to liberation by any means necessary. By this point, the Portuguese were "waiting for everything on all sides," and the importance of surprise regarding the *fact* of armed struggle had diminished (PAIGC 1963a; 1963b).

Vasco Cabral replied to Amílcar's thesis with the declaration that a political nucleus in Cabo Verde must be developed, for he did not "see how it would be possible to disembark and begin the armed struggle" without it. A "nucleus of reception" would be able to "establish connections with the masses" to ensure the success of the armed struggle. Abilio Duarte, who had spent the most time organizing in Cabo Verde, agreed, saying that his biggest worry was the Portuguese "extermination" of the guerrillas landing on the beach before they could properly disembark on the islands (PAIGC 1963b).

Again, the Secretary-General got the last word, invoking the example of the Cuban Revolution—a new addition to the script of Leninist revolution—to demonstrate the possibility of attempting such a landing: "the example of Cuba tells us that the disembarkation of courageous Caboverdeans would not constitute suicide," proclaimed Cabral. In 1956, eighty-two Cubans led by Fidel Castro had boarded a small yacht meant for twelve people in Mexico and set sail for Cuba to begin an armed revolution in eastern Cuba. When they disembarked, sixty-one of the guerrillas were killed by government forces. Despite this initial loss, within three years the Cuban revolution would triumph, having militarily defeated the US-backed dictatorship of Fulgenico Batista. With this historical precedent in mind, Cabral emphasized that "what Cuba tells us is that it is fundamental that this group faithfully interprets popular sentiment." Having triumphed only four years before the meeting in Dakar took place, the model of the Cuban Revolution became paramount for the PAIGC, and would become increasingly so in how it imagined the decolonization of Cabo Verde (PAIGC 1963b).

The Dakar meeting continued on Friday to discuss various "forms of struggle" in Cabo Verde, before having its closing discussion on armed struggle and the islands. Cabral again opened with an orientation to the PAIGC members present which identified the pros and cons of particular islands for guerrilla warfare; discussed particular strategies and considerations of effective guerrilla warfare in Cabo Verde; put forth the issue of cadres to take place in the operation; and

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raised logistical questions related to material and sustenance needed to maintain the armed struggle on the islands.

Pedro Pires noted that the conversation—among the final of the four-day meeting—revolved around the landing, but not the nucleus which was to receive the guerrillas. Vasco Cabral, who brought up this point of the political nucleus earlier, and Abilio Duarte, the first PAIGC organizer in Cabo Verde, agreed that both needed to be front and center. Amílcar reiterated the urgency to recruit cadres to actually partake in the armed struggle while ultimately agreeing with the need to develop a nucleus of people already on the islands. However, the minutes show Cabral insisted that "the landing must be carried out without any internal group knowing about it ... the group has to disembark by its own means." The internal networks would lay the political foundation for the landing among the population, build popular support, and make contact with the guerrillas once, and if, they had successfully disembarked (PAIGC 1963b).

On the final day, Cabral provided a synthesis of the days-long conference and designated leads for the completion of several "concrete tasks," with Pires designated as lead for recruitment and da Luz as lead for the armed struggle. Cabral also gave a final motivation to the comrades who had participated in the historic gathering: the "rapid acceleration" in the "process of struggle in Cabo Verde" was sure to follow (PAIGC 1963a; 1963b). Despite the development of and follow-up on the plans, they would not come to fruition due to factors which are covered in the following section, where the place of revolutionary Cuba becomes central in the advance of the PAIGC towards decolonization. The centrality of socialist Cuba—which Fidel Castro declared to be Marxist-Leninist in 1961—to the revolutionary project of the PAIGC highlights another instance of continuity with the Leninist tradition, although the manner in which that tradition was carried on would not go according to the script laid out by the party leaders in Dakar.

Silvino da Luz recalls the spirit and immediate effects of the 1963 meeting:

> It was the first important meeting *just* to discuss what to do in Cabo Verde. We had started the armed struggle in Guinea-Bissau a couple of months before and we decided that we should ... mobilize Cape Verdeans to train in guerrilla warfare ... From there, we mobilized the first small group of Cape Verdeans and I left with them to Algiers for military training.[12]

In addition to sending troops to Algeria, which Cabral would later call the "Mecca of revolution," the PAIGC sent a request to revolutionary Cuba to receive five of its cadre for military training, less than a month after the conclusion of the July Dakar meeting. Havana agreed to the request, but no further movement was made, to the chagrin of the Cuban chargé in Conakry. What led to further movement between the PAIGC and revolutionary Cuba was Che Guevara's December 1964–January 1965 visit to Guinea as part of the revolutionary government's attempt to support liberation movements across the colonized world.

Following Che's visit, consistent aid began flowing from Havana to the PAIGC in Conakry, and a United States attaché there reported that "Cuban military aid is

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reaching the Portuguese Guinean rebels, probably as a result of 'Che' Guevara's visit to Guinea last January." Still, the most significant collaboration between the two revolutionary entities would come as a result of the PAIGC's 1966 delegation to the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana. After Cabral gave his famous "Weapon of Theory" address to the conference attendees, he and Fidel Castro held a private meeting, followed by a three-day retreat to the Escambray mountains, where they discussed the possibility of sending aid and volunteers to Guinea, and receiving Caboverdean guerrillas for training in Cuba. Thirty-one guerrillas were to train in Cuba over the course of eighteen to twenty months in preparation to embark for Cabo Verde and start the armed struggle on the islands. The PAIGC in Guinea received thirty-one Cuban volunteers—the majority of whom were dark-skinned so that they would blend in with the population and be kept a secret—to develop the armed struggle on the mainland (Gleijeses 2002, 186–89).

Less than a month after Cabral's return to Conakry from Cuba, the Politburo of the PAIGC selected the core leadership of the operation, with Pedro Pires named the "principal leader."[13] By January 1967—a year after the Tricontinental, two years after Che's visit to Conakry, and three-and-a-half years after the July 1963 Dakar meeting—all thirty-one Caboverdeans had arrived in Cuba to receive training. Cabral would travel to Cuba to visit the group that month, where he held meetings with the Caboverdeans and the Cuban commanders to review the plans for the landing. Topics of discussion were similar to those held in Dakar, but of a more advanced nature. They discussed the "concrete situation" in Cabo Verde, "types of disembarkations," "immediate military actions," "political work," "immediate objectives and bases of support" and the "recruitment of more soldiers." Also discussed were the "special problems" of Cabo Verde such as "connections to the interior," and "food supply." Since the Dakar meeting, PAIGC leadership had furthered their plans for the disembarking in Cabo Verde, having decided upon making two separate landings, one in Santo Antao and one in Santiago.[14]

Upon his departure, Cabral wrote a letter to Fidel, thanking him for Cuba's support of the PAIGC struggle. The letter reveals that the party had named the operation after Fidel himself, "Operação Fidelidade," or Operation Fidelity. The naming was in reference to the militants' "fidelity to our people, our party, to the Cuban Revolution which helped us to make this mission possible," and above all else, "fidelity to your [Fidel Castro's] personal example as a revolutionary combatant." The emphasis on fidelity, loyalty, and principles was one which Cabral reserved for revolutionaries he held in the highest esteem, as in a 1967 speech in Moscow where he paid tribute to "Lenin [and] to all his comrades who knew how to remain faithful to the October Revolution" during its fiftieth anniversary.[15] To Fidel, Cabral stressed the exemplary training offered by the Cuban revolutionaries to the Caboverdean soldiers in the "new phase of our struggle which we must begin soon." His confidence upon leaving was high, noting that he was "certain [these comrades] will successfully accomplish the historic mission entrusted to them by our party."[16] Silvino da Luz, earlier named the principal leader of developing the armed struggle in general, recalls this

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spirit as well as the final months in Cuba with the revolutionary leaders and the circumstances which led to the mission being aborted:

> Amílcar had come and spoke with us ... Fidel came and said bye to us. To each one of us he offered an AK-47. We were on board waiting for the moment to come. Why didn't we go? At that time, Che was in Bolivia. It happens that Che was murdered. The Americans discovered that Cubans were infiltrating Latin America. So, they controlled, surveilled, the waters of Cuba ... So we arrived at the conclusion that leaving, when we arrived in Cape Verde, the Portuguese would be waiting for us. We would be *fundado* during the crossing from Cuba to Cape Verde. So we decided to halt, to suspend, the operation. From there, the whole group went to the Soviet Union.[17]

Unlike in Guinea, the meticulous planning undertaken by the PAIGC to develop the armed struggle in Cabo Verde would not pan out as intended. The fear of being *fundado*, discovered or "found out" by the authorities, put an indefinite pause on the operations. Also in October of 1967, the same month Che was killed while on a revolutionary mission in Bolivia (a fact which multiple party leaders remark on today), the Portuguese colonial police began arresting members of the PAIGC cells that had been organizing in preparation for the disembarkation on the two islands: Gil Querido, Jose Querido, Carlos Antonio Dantas Tavares, and Fernando Tavares in Santiago; Luis Fonseca, Lineu Miranda, and Jaime Schofield in Sao Vicente and Santo Antão. Both groups would be tried and sentenced to multiple years in the infamous Tarrafal prison camp on the island of Santiago (Lopes 2010). Years of preparation for the launching of a new front in Cabo Verde ground to a halt, and the already underground party presence on the islands was decimated. Again, the revolutionary script adopted by the PAIGC—now reliant on that of the Cuban Revolution—was unfit for the set pieces the party was faced with, and required further improvisation.

With the plans to disembark foiled, and their comrades in Cabo Verde arrested, the Cuba Group was then sent to the Soviet Union from 1968 to 1969 to receive what da Luz called "further training in sophisticated military equipment," and in particular, anti-aircraft weaponry. Stationed for several months in Skhodnia, a small town outside of Moscow, the Cuba Group received artillery training in self-imposed top-secret conditions, having little-to-no contact with the world outside of the group, according to Soviet historian Natalia Telepneva, before completing another training course in Baku (Telepneva 2023, 165; Lopes da Silva 2021, 174). The Caboverdeans who were in Cuba and later the Soviet Union were largely university students who had received the necessary education to undergo their course in advanced military science in the USSR. Following their training, the group arrived in Guinea, and several—such as Pedro Pires, Silvino da Luz, Olivio Pires, and Osvaldo Lopes da Silva (who had been studying in the USSR and served as translator within the group)—became top military officers in the PAIGC's Revolutionary Armed Forces of the People (FARP). Silvino da Luz recalls that the introduction of these Cuban and Soviet-trained guerillas marked "a great jump ... in the quality of the struggle in Guinea-

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Bissau."[18] The introduction of Caboverdean military commanders who could operate anti-aircraft weaponry was decisive in the PAIGC's eventual military victory over Portugal in 1973, which was made possible by the 1972 Soviet delivery of Strela-2 surface-to-air missiles secured by Cabral weeks before his assassination.

The 1968 arrival of the Cuba Group in the Soviet Union to train for a deployment to Guinea-Bissau coincided with the appointment of General Antonio de Spinola as military governor of the Portuguese colony, who developed the *Guiné Melhor*, or "Better Guinea" policy. "Better Guinea" sought to win over sectors of the Guinean population by pitting Guineans against Caboverdeans, who the Portuguese ironically called new colonizers of the territory (Vita 2023). Spinola also devised Operação Mar Verde, or Operation Green Sea, the failed and quickly aborted 1970 Portuguese invasion of Guinea-Conakry that targeted the PAIGC's headquarters in Conakry and sought to assassinate both Amílcar Cabral and Sekou Toure.

Meanwhile, in Cabo Verde a rare series of worker protests in 1969 in response to colonial abuses indicated an upsurge in anti-colonial sentiment despite the ability of the PAIGC to implement itself militarily on the islands (Keese 2020). Cabral claimed these "workers' revolts" as a result of "work under the direction of the party" such as the distribution of "thousands of pamphlets and other party documents" throughout the archipelago despite the fact that the party's political activity was "still clandestine" and unable to complete its mission of disembarkation. He specifically noted that the arrest of "patriots" such as Lineu Miranda, Jaime Schofield, Luis Fonseca, and Dantas Tavares in relation to the Cuba mission led to a "partisan and nationalist *explosion* which opened up new perspectives on our action" among the Caboverdean population (Cabral 2015). Although the underground organizing to set up a guerrilla front on the island failed to come to fruition, the very fact of their attempt contributed to a growth in anti-colonial consciousness, as well as the organic grievances of the Caboverdean population, and validated the overall program of the PAIGC to organize around revolutionary decolonization in Cabo Verde.

How did this happen? Luis Fonseca points to the trial period following their arrest. PIDE held the trial for the arrested militants from Sao Vicente in Praia thinking that they would be isolated from their local communities, which had the opposite effect. According to Fonseca, the trial itself "provoked the awakening of youngsters … people started to hear about the PAIGC for the very first time." Santiago residents were curious to see these PAIGC "terrorists" from the other islands, and saw them not as "sampadjudas"[19] but as Caboverdeans just like themselves. Furthermore, being held in the *cadeia civil* (civil jail) of Praia during their trial in 1968, the underground organizers were able to organize Caboverdean officials and guards "onto our side, so much so that when comrades brought some leaflets [to the jail] … we decided that the safest place to keep the leaflets was here." According to Fonseca, PIDE did not think to keep the activists under surveillance while they were incarcerated, enabling them to set up a network across the islands to distribute thousands of flyers (Fonseca 2025). This was the work of the party referred to by Cabral when discussing the buildup to the

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workers' revolts of 1969. It was also foundational in laying the ground for the acceptance of the PAIGC as a legitimate representative of the Caboverdean people when it was able to operate aboveground following the April 25, 1974 coup overthrowing the Portuguese *Estado Novo*, leading to the party's official declaration of Cabo Verde's independence from Portugal on July 5, 1975.

Despite the military focus of the Cuba Group shifting from Cabo Verde to Guinea, Amílcar Cabral never stopped thinking about developing the armed and clandestine struggle on the islands. Abilio Duarte had been sent to Nouakchott, Mauritania in February 1971 by Cabral to "create, with discrete work (necessarily clandestine in relation to everything and everyone who did not make up a part of the competent authorities), a base in Mauritania for the development of the struggle in Cabo Verde."[20] In particular, Duarte spoke with the Political Secretary of the ruling Mauritanian People's Party about "the possibility of an exchange between the base and Cabo Verde" as well as the possibility of setting up a radio connection. Duarte would get sick and be forced to return to the PAIGC office in Dakar before following up on the conversation. In January 1973, da Luz replaced Duarte as the responsible PAIGC officer in Mauritania whose mission it was to, in his words, "create a base for a disembarkation in Cabo Verde."[21] Caboverdean historian Jose Vicente Lopes also writes that in 1973, the PAIGC sent two party militants to Cuba from Lisbon to continue preparations for opening an armed front on the islands. This time, the assassination of Amílcar Cabral on January 20 of that year put a firm halt on the clandestine operations: the two militants left Havana and da Luz returned to Guinea-Conakry to attend the funeral services (Lopes 2002, 27–28).

While the party cells on the islands did contribute to preparing the ground for the arrival of the PAIGC, it was not at all in the manner envisioned—a clandestine disembarkation of guerrillas akin to the way the Cuban revolution was envisioned. Rather, the underground activists sat in jail cells distributing leaflets, as the local population were agitated by the fact of their arrest which was ostensibly evidence of their "failure," improvising upon the revolutionary script handed down to them by history and the party leadership.

Conclusion

Organizationally, Luis Fonseca described the aftermath of the post-April 25 moment as one of "spontaneity" and lacking in typical Leninist organization, as the PAIGC in Cabo Verde adjusted to its newfound legality. The hierarchical structure which characterized the party would take shape as leaders such as Silvino da Luz and Osvaldo Lopes da Silva returned in August of that year, and assume sharper form as the party introduced Leninist structures such as candidate members, geographic and work-place base groups, criticism and self-criticism and democratic centralism in the aftermath of independence, embracing a more open form of organization in the interim period of mass upsurge. Reflecting on building out the party structures in Cabo Verde, Fonseca noted that "this was the Marxist model [but] ... there was no effort to say well this is because this is Leninism, we just accepted it as a normal way of liberation movement

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organization."[22] If there was a script to the revolutionary practice of the PAIGC, it was not one which was revealed to all the actors involved. The party leadership were the ones familiar with and adapting the source material with the set pieces they had.

At a 1971 question-and-answer session following a speech in London, Amílcar Cabral was asked by an attendee, "To what extent has the ideology of Marxism and Leninism been relevant" to the struggle in Guinea. In response, Cabral called the ideology of Marx and Lenin a "very good ideology" which "should not be blindly applied." Otherwise, he stressed that "the labels are your affair; we don't like those kinds of labels. People here are very preoccupied with the questions... there's no necessity for us to be more Marxist than Marx or more Leninist than Lenin in the application of their theories" (Cabral, cited in de Bragança and Wallerstein 1982, 106-7). Scholars such as Patrick Chabal have taken this quote as a means to distance Cabral from ideological commitment, but in his 1969 speech in Conakry, Cabral highlighted that it was Lenin himself who provided the starkest lesson on the dangers of hewing to dogma, instead choosing to critically assimilate, rather than replicate, the lessons of Marx and Lenin.

The investigation here into the place of the PAIGC in what has been referred to as the Leninist tradition is not one intended to label Cabral or his party as a "Marxist-Leninist" but deepen and expand scholarly approaches to the study of African decolonization in a global-historical perspective. While Keith Michael Baker and Daniel Edelstein—in their work developing the idea of revolutionary scripts as guiding the subjective reality of self-proclaimed revolutionaries—postulate that the revolutionary "event" of 1968 marked "the demise of the Leninist script of party-led revolution," the success, structure and "script" of the PAIGC reiterated by Cabral in his 1969 lecture on Lenin challenges this notion in the African context, where the impact of Leninism as a distinct framework has been understudied (Baker and Edelstein, 20). Unlike the direct south-south connections often made around an emergent Maoism in the 1960s, the development of the PAIGC presents a narrative emphasizing the remaining relevance of Leninism as a direct inspiration.[23]

Where Baker and Edelstein (2015, 2) write that "Marx rewrote the script of the French Revolution; Lenin revised Marx; Mao revised Lenin; and so on and so forth," it would be tempting to include Cabral alongside Mao as someone who "revised" Lenin. Rather, it makes more sense to place Cabral alongside Fidel Castro, whom he named the operation to disembark PAIGC guerrillas in Cabo Verde after. Three years after the Cuban Revolution overthrew the Fulgencio Batista regime, Fidel—in the context of the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union—declared for the first time publicly that "I am a Marxist-Leninist and shall be one until the end of my life." Cabral, unlike Fidel, never lived to see the triumph of the revolution nor the attainment of formal independence, to make any grandiose statements on the character of the PAIGC's revolution, nor to deal with the intricacies of postcolonial governance. The revolutionary anti-colonial history of the PAIGC, like that of the Cuban revolution, is unimaginable without the history of revolutionary organization dating back to Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution even if, for political reasons, the actors who made up the PAIGC did not admit the influence of the Leninist model in the same way

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Fidel Castro did, perhaps in large part due to the assassination of Cabral. Nevertheless, without acknowledging the impact of the Leninist model, or script, on the party and its leadership a full understanding of the PAIGC is impossible. Rather than a dogmatic fetish, the Leninist script of clandestine party-led organizing was the ideological raw material from which the PAIGC improvised its own path towards decolonization.

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Author Biographies. **Desmond Fonseca** is a doctoral candidate in History at UCLA. He is currently finishing his dissertation on the place of Cabo Verde and the PAIGC within the wider narrative of decolonization and anti-imperialist organizing. Desmond also serves as an editor with 1804 Books, an independent publisher based in New York City which has recently translated two works on and by Amilcar Cabral.

Notes

1. All quotes from the 1969 Conakry speech by Amílcar Cabral, "Lenine et le mouvement de libération nationale," Fundacao Amílcar Cabral, Arquivo Amílcar Cabra, box 2, folder 1, item 1, p. 1.
2. In the Party Guidelines of the PAIGC, it was defined as follows: "Democratic centralism means that the power to make decisions, give orders, set tasks and lead is concentrated in central bodies or entities with clearly-defined functions, but that these decisions, orders, etc. must be agreed democratically, based on the interests and opinions of representatives from the masses, in other words, based on respect for the opinion and interests of the majority."
3. (1960), "Estatutos do PAI", Fundação Mário Soares / Arquivo Mário Pinto de Andrade, Disponível HTTP: http://www.casacomum.org/cc/visualizador?pasta=10191.002.011 (2025-5-24)
4. In the years following Cabral's assassination in 1973, there were a number of academic texts which had either the PAIGC leader's place in the Marxist-Leninist tradition, and a wider literature which dealt with the question of "Afromarxist" regimes that has seldom been revisited (Blackey 1974; Chabal 1981; Chilcote 1984; Davidson 1984; Nzongola-Ntalaja 1984; Keller and Rothschild 1987; Keller 1992).
5. For more on this, see section II.6 of *Think to Better Act: Speeches at the 1969 PAIGC Seminar* (Cabral 2025).
6. "Why did we create a Party when others created movements? ... This didn't happen by chance, it's not because we like the word Party, rather it was with a clear sense of what was required, today and tomorrow. Because in our view, Party is a lot more defined, a lot clearer as an organization ... We called ourselves a Party right from the start so that everyone knew that we had very clear ideas about what path we had to follow, about what we wanted to do, in the service of our land and our people, in Guinea and Cabo Verde, and in the service of Africa and humanity in general, to the extent that we can make a contribution" (Cabral 2025, 97).
7. Historian Alexander Keese (2017) has written about the "improvised" nature of decolonization in Cabo Verde as well, albeit focusing on the transfer of power rather than on the anti-colonial process itself as improvisatory in nature.
8. Cabral could have also been referring to Lenin's *The Agrarian Question in Russia Towards the End of the Nineteenth Century* which shares many similarities to Cabral's 1953 agricultural census of Guinea-Bissau.
9. On the nature of the unions, Mario Pinto de Andrade writes: "The leadership of the union included European employees in high positions and, as an exception to the union's general rule, one or two Caboverdeans who practiced a liberal profession" (Andrade 2024, 39).
10. "I can have my own opinion on various matters, on how to organize the struggle, on how to organize a Party, resulting from things I've learned, for example, in Europe, in Asia, in other African countries even, in books I've read, documents, people who've influenced me. But I cannot seek to

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organize a Party, organize a struggle, according to what I have in my head, it has to be done according to the concrete reality of the land. We can provide many examples of this. We cannot seek, for example, to organize our Party the same way parties do in France or any other country in Europe or even in Asia. We started off a bit like that, but we gradually had to change in order to adapt to the concrete reality of our land" (Cabral 2025).

11. Amílcar Cabral (April 5, 1963) [Communiqué on Silvino Da Luz], personal collection of Silvino da Luz.
12. Silvino da Luz, September 2022, interview with author.
13. "Decisão do PAIGC designando os responsáveis pelo grupo de militantes a estagiar em Cuba" Documentos Amílcar Cabral, Fundação Mário Soares, accessed via casacomum.org.
14. "Notas de reuniões com quadros caboverdianos," and "Ordem do dia para reuniões com conselho cubanos" Amílcar Cabral Archive, Fundação Amílcar Cabral, Praia, Cabo Verde box 6 folder 1, file 1.
15. Amílcar Cabral, "Discurso sobre os 50 anos da Revolução de Outubro" Box 13, folder 5, Arquivo Amílcar Cabral, Fundação Amílcar Cabral.
16. Amílcar Cabral, Letter to Fidel Castro, January 1967, 04606.045.103, Documentos Amílcar Cabral, Fundação Mário Soares, casacomum.org.
17. Silvino da Luz, September 2022, interview with author.
18. Silvino da Luz, September 2022, interview with author.
19. Caboverdean slang for a Caboverdean not from the island of Santiago.
20. Abilio Duarte, "Relatorio da Missao a Nouakchott," Silvino da Luz Papers.
21. Silvino da Luz, September 2022, interview with author.
22. Luis Fonseca, April 2025, interview with author.
23. See Frazier (2020), Ho and Mullen (2008), and Mahler (2018).

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