

INTRODUCTION.

AMÍLCAR CABRAL: REVOLUTIONARY LEGACY AND CONTEMPORARY RESONANCE

Aurora Almada e Santos

Instituto de História Contemporânea
Universidade Nova de Lisboa
Avenida de Berna, 26 C, 1069-061 Lisboa, Portugal
auroraalmada@yahoo.com.br
ORCID: 0000-0002-5753-7015

Carlos Lopes

Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance
27 Burg Road, 7700 Rondebosch, South Africa
carlos.lopes@uct.ac.za
ORCID: 0000-0001-6754-7017

Pedro Vaz Goulart

CAPP e ISCSP, Universidade de Lisboa
Campus Universitário do Alto da Ajuda
Rua Almerindo Lessa, 1300-663, Lisboa, Portugal
pgoulart@edu.ulisboa.pt
ORCID: 0000-0001-6599-5043

The centenary of Amílcar Cabral presents an essential opportunity to reflect on one of the most influential political and intellectual figures in Africa's anti-colonial struggles. His life and work symbolise the complex transition from colonial domination to independent statehood, but also from externally imposed models of development to an endogenous praxis of liberation, rooted in culture, history, and people's agency.

The global momentum for decolonisation accelerated after the Second World War. Across Africa and Asia, demands for sovereignty intensified, fuelled by growing nationalist movements and supported by shifts in the international system. The creation of the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation in 1961 formalised this new global agenda. Yet, by that time, several African nations had already gained independence, and many more would follow throughout the 1960s.

Portugal, however, stood apart. The authoritarian Estado Novo regime linked its survival to its colonial empire, insisting that Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, East Timor, and the Estado Português da Índia (Goa, Daman, Diu, Dadrá, and Nagar Haveli) were not colonies but "overseas provinces". This semantic camouflage did little to alter the colonial realities of exploitation, cultural subjugation, and racial hierarchy. As other European empires negotiated transitions to independence, Portugal clung to an anachronistic imperialism, forcing anti-colonial movements to choose between submission and armed struggle.

In this context, Amílcar Cabral emerged as a central figure. Born in Bafatá, Guinea-Bissau, to Cabo Verdean parents, Cabral's life embodied the intertwined destinies of Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde – a connection he would later enshrine in the program of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC). Cabral's formative years in Lisbon during the 1940s and early 1950s were decisive. There, he engaged with a wide circle of African students and intellectuals, participating in the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império*, where anti-colonial ideas circulated alongside cultural and literary projects.

Among his interlocutors, the Angolan Mário Pinto de Andrade stood out as his main intellectual alter ego. Their friendship was more than personal; it was a sustained dialogue on the nature of colonial oppression, the role of culture in resistance, and the theoretical underpinnings of liberation. Mário de Andrade would later become Cabral's biographer, ensuring his legacy was both chronicled and critically examined. Other members of this network, such as the also Angolan Agostinho Neto, the Mozambican Marcelino dos Santos, and Francisco José Tenreiro, originally from São Tomé, also played crucial roles in the political

and cultural emancipation of Lusophone Africa. Yet Cabral's contribution was distinctive: he developed a theory of liberation that transcended nationalist slogans, articulating the decolonisation of the mind, the valorisation of indigenous culture, and the strategic use of knowledge for social transformation.

Cabral combined his training as an agronomist with political leadership, uniting scientific analysis and revolutionary praxis. He understood that liberation could not be reduced to military victory or political independence; it required a redefinition of development rooted in dignity, equity, and cultural affirmation. His assassination in 1973, just months before Guinea-Bissau's unilateral declaration of independence, deprived the continent of one of its most visionary leaders. Nevertheless, his intellectual and political contributions continue to resonate globally.

Intellectual influence and debates

By the late 1960s, scholars were already recognising Cabral's broader significance. One of the first was Ronald Chilcote (1968), who explored Cabral's writings as more than tactical reflections; he saw in them an original synthesis of Marxist analysis, African cultural nationalism, and agronomic insights that laid the foundation for a unique political economy of liberation.

Since then, many scholars have engaged with Cabral's writings and speeches, exploring their contributions to debates on culture, race, people, liberation, the formation of the political subject, the environment, modernisation, among other ideas. Furthermore, scholarship has examined the PAIGC's actions in the struggle for the independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde, covering various aspects including guerrilla warfare, diplomacy, transnational solidarity and communication strategy (Barros & Santos, 2020). The interplay between Cabral's ideas and what he described as revolutionary practice has dominated explanations of how and why Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde achieved independence. Although Cabral's thought has been the subject of extensive scholarship, the complex dynamics involved in the practical application of his ideas – such as potential tensions, ambiguities, and inconsistencies – remain relatively underexplored and merit further research.

More recent work has revised and argued against armed liberation movements. Leonard Wantchekon, in a provocative address at the African Economic History Network at Wageningen University in 2015, argued that violent independence movements in Africa had primarily led to autocracies. In an updated quantitative comparative view, García-Ponce and Wantchekon (2023) report that

urban protests tend to lead to democratic institutions, while rural insurgencies are inclined to promote autocracies.

Applying to Guinea-Bissau, this could suggest that the country's current instability is an inheritance from those days. Obviously, the present is not a direct, deterministic result of the past but a complex web of events, processes, and personalities. Several authors have analysed its instability more profoundly, for example, Sousa et al. (2025).

More importantly, García-Ponce and Wantchekon's (2023) analysis omitted each country's differing starting points or social conditions. Their premise is that independentist leaders "chose" violence or not, as if it were not profoundly intertwined with the historical and social conditions of their country, not controlled for in basic regressions, particularly colonial violence. The colonial apparatus often did not accommodate the participation of locals in protests. For example, in Portuguese Guinea, urban protests were held at Bissau port in 1959, with local dockers on strike for better conditions. Their suppression at gunpoint became known as the Pidjiguiti massacre. The "option" for armed struggle came only afterwards.

Genesis of this volume

This special issue of *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos* is the result of a convergence of academic trajectories and collective interests. Our collaboration draws on different disciplinary backgrounds and generations yet shares a commitment to reassessing Cabral's legacy in the context of contemporary debates.

The idea first emerged within the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI), which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2025. EADI's Working Group on Institutions and Development in Portuguese-speaking Countries has long served as a platform for rethinking development and decolonisation. Within this space, discussions around critical development studies converged in Melber, de Alencastro et al. (2023) and Melber, Kothari et al. (2023), and raised the need for a Lusophone Africa's contribution to gain momentum.

The proposal to focus on Cabral originated from Mike Powell, a member of EADI and contributing editor of the *Review of African Political Economy* (ROAPE). Drawing on his personal and professional connection with Basil Davidson, one of Cabral's closest friends and a chronicler of African liberation, Powell insisted that Cabral deserved renewed attention, not as a static icon, but as a living interlocutor for present-day struggles. His reflections culminated in an interview

and article for ROAPE, framing Cabral's relevance for contemporary political and intellectual debates (Zeilig et al., 2023).

At the same time, we were each engaged in independent work on Cabral. Our collective efforts converged during a panel at the EADI General Conference 2023 in Lisbon, where we debated the relevance of Cabral to contemporary struggles against inequality, dependency, and epistemic injustice. Dr. Clara Carvalho, editor of *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, encouraged us to propose a special issue, recognising the timeliness of the theme.

Structure of the volume

This volume brings together contributions that explore different facets of Cabral's legacy – historical, intellectual, cultural, and political – with a shared aim of demonstrating his continued relevance. The articles do not merely revisit the past; they open pathways for engaging with Cabral's ideas in today's debates.

"Reimagining African narratives: Amílcar Cabral's revolutionary contributions" (Carlos Lopes & Peter Karibe Mendy) situates Cabral within the broader landscape of Pan-Africanism and decolonial thought, emphasising his role as an independent thinker who challenged orthodoxies and proposed original solutions to Africa's structural challenges.

"Amílcar Cabral and the instrumental and utilitarian role of the Portuguese language in the struggle for independence in Guinea and Cape Verde" (Julião Soares Sousa) examines Cabral's strategic use of the Portuguese language as a political tool, while critically analysing the tensions between linguistic hegemony and cultural resistance.

"Social movements in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde: Dialogues, legacies, and reinterpretations of Cabral's thoughts on culture" (Miguel de Barros, Sumaila Jaló, Redy Wilson Lima & Alexandro Robalo) analyses how social movements reinterpret and mobilise Cabral's reflections on culture, connecting them to current struggles for social justice and equity.

"Para uma meta-análise do pensamento de Amílcar Cabral" (Carlos Cardoso) is an essay presenting a critical reading of Cabral's corpus, mapping the evolution of his ideas and their diverse interpretations, while offering a framework for renewed engagement with his thought.

"Participation and social policies in Portugal under the spectre of Amílcar Cabral" (Pedro Goulart) is a shorter essay on the lack of voice of afro-descendants in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area and how social movements are using Cabral's legacy to become an organised minority and eventually improve their living conditions.

The volume is complemented by topical book reviews including contributions from Leslie James, Pedro Goulart, and Zac Peterson that further enrich the dialogue and provide broader historiographical perspectives and open new lines of inquiry:

- R. Joseph Parrott, *Dream the size of freedom: How African liberation mobilized new left internationalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press)
- Rui Lopes and Natalia Telepneva (Eds.), *Globalizing independence struggles of Lusophone Africa: Anticolonial and postcolonial politics* (Zed Books)
- Carlos Lopes, *The self-deception trap. Exploring the economic dimensions of charity dependency within Africa-Europe relations* (Springer)

Cabral for our times

At the core of this special issue lies a shared belief: Amílcar Cabral's work is not a closed chapter of history but a set of ideas and practices that remain urgent today. His reflections on culture and politics, sovereignty and development, epistemology and action, continue to inspire and challenge. In an era marked by global inequality, ecological crisis, and renewed forms of coloniality, Cabral's call for the decolonisation of minds and systems is as relevant now as it was in the 20th century.

We hope this collection will serve not only as a tribute to Cabral's centenary but as a platform for new dialogues that reimagine liberation, justice, and development in the 21st century.

Acknowledgements

We thank the funding of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) that allowed for the translation and language verification of several of the papers in this volume.

References

- Barros, V., & Santos, A. A. e. (2020). Introduction. Amílcar Cabral and the idea of anticolonial revolution. *Lusotopie*, 19(1), 9-35.
- Chilcote, R. H. (1968). *Emerging nationalism in Portuguese Africa: A bibliography with analytical introduction*. Stanford University Press.
- García-Ponce, O., & Wantchekon, L. (2023). Critical junctures: Independence movements and democracy in Africa. *American Journal of Political Science*, 68(4), 1266-1285. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12798>
- Melber, H., de Alencastro, L., Lopes, C., & Powell, M. (2023). *Decolonisation of development studies: An unfinished agenda*. EADI Policy Paper.
- Melber, H., Kothari, U., Camfield, L., & Biekart, K. (Eds.) (2023). *Challenging global development. Towards decoloniality and justice*. Palgrave-Springer. (open access)
- Sousa, R. R. P., Herpolsheimer, J., & Cuadrado, J. (Eds.) (2025). *Political instability in Guinea-Bissau*. Routledge.
- Zeilig, L., Powell, M., & ROAPE Collective. (2023). Amílcar Cabral and the liberation of Africa: Reflections and dialogues. *Review of African Political Economy Blog*.