

AMÍLCAR CABRAL ROLE IN THE LINGUISTIC IDENTITY, MULTILINGUALISM AND POST-INDEPENDENCE PROCESS IN CABO VERDE

MIGUEL ROSA DUQUE

miguel.duque@usj.edu.mo

He is a distinguished designer within the design industry with over 30 years of experience. He is an assistant professor at the University of Saint Joseph (China) and has taught previously at Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau Polytechnic University, and Beijing Normal-Hong Kong Baptist University in China. He holds a PhD in Communication from the University of Macau, with a focus on virtual reality research, a Master of Design in Virtual Environment Design from the University of Saint Joseph, and a Bachelor of Arts in Multimedia Design from Curtin University in Australia. Renowned for his multidisciplinary education and commitment to fostering student creativity and consistently exceeding expectations, Miguel's pedagogical philosophy emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and inquiry, encouraging students to question and interact with contemporary design paradigms. <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4558-4796>

JOSÉ MANUEL SIMÕES

jmsimoes@usj.edu.mo

He received a postdoc in Communication Science from the Portuguese Catholic University (2017) and a PhD in Global Studies from the University of Saint Joseph, Macau-China (2011) with Summa Cum Laude. He has a master of Arts in Communication and Journalism from the Faculty of Letters of Coimbra University, Portugal, and a bachelor's degree in International Journalism from the Superior School of Journalism, Porto, Portugal, where he taught for seven years. He is an associate professor and University of Saint Joseph Head (China) of the Media, Art & Technology Department until 2024 and the coordinator of the Communication and Media Master Programme since 2016. He published worldwide and participated in exhibitions, conferences, and academic committees on three continents. He published 11 books and is the editor, organiser, and co-author of five other books related to journalism and culture. He has also published extensively in international academic journals and media outlets, especially about ethics and communication and media. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0730-7780>

Abstract

This study explores how Amílcar Cabral influenced Cabo Verde's linguistic identity and advanced the idea of multilingualism, especially after the country gained independence. Being one of the main leaders in the liberation struggle against the oppressive Portuguese colonial regime, Cabral was aware of how tightly linked language was to cultural and national identities. Cabral's move to encourage the use of Kriolu, the local creole language, was the highlight of efforts to unify the ethnic groups of Cabo Verde and helped generate a sense of national pride through the nation's cultural identity. Moreover, by emphasizing multilingualism, Cabral was able to strike a balance between Kriolu and Portuguese, thereby creating a linguistic culture that recognizes the colony's past and the future to be shaped by the global community. This research investigates Cabral's language policies and the influence of these policies on the various sectors of education, politics, and cultural expression in post-independence Cabo Verde. We reveal how Cabral's concepts of language policy and identity continue to shape discussions in Cabo Verde today, thereby highlighting the key role linguistic diversity plays in the nation's ongoing socioeconomic progress.



Keywords

Amílcar Cabral, multilingualism, linguistic identity, national identity, decolonization, liberation struggle, cultural expression, language ideologies.

Resumo

Este estudo analisa a influência de Amílcar Cabral na construção da identidade linguística de Cabo Verde e na promoção do multilinguismo, particularmente no período subsequente à independência nacional. Enquanto uma das principais figuras da luta de libertação contra o regime colonial português, Cabral compreendeu profundamente a estreita relação entre a língua, a cultura e a afirmação da identidade nacional. A sua valorização do crioulo cabo-verdiano (kriolu) constituiu um elemento central do projecto de unidade nacional, contribuindo para a coesão social e para o fortalecimento do sentimento de pertença e orgulho identitário entre os cabo-verdianos. Paralelamente, ao defender uma perspectiva multilingue, Cabral procurou estabelecer um equilíbrio entre o crioulo e a língua portuguesa, promovendo uma cultura linguística capaz de reconhecer simultaneamente o legado histórico colonial e as exigências da inserção de Cabo Verde num contexto global. O presente trabalho examina as concepções e orientações de Cabral em matéria de política linguística e discute o impacto dessas ideias nos domínios da educação, da governação e das manifestações culturais no período pós-independência. A análise evidencia que as reflexões de Cabral sobre língua, cultura e identidade continuam a influenciar os debates contemporâneos em Cabo Verde, sublinhando a importância da diversidade linguística como um recurso estratégico para o desenvolvimento social, cultural e económico do país.

Palavras-chave

Amílcar Cabral, multilinguismo, identidade linguística, identidade nacional, descolonização, luta de libertação, expressão cultural, ideologias linguísticas.

How to cite this article

Duque, Miguel Rosa & Simões, José Manuel (2026). Amílcar Cabral Role in the Linguistic Identity, Multilingualism and Post-Independence Process in Cabo Verde. *Janus.net, e-journal of international relations*. Thematic Dossier – Geopolitics of Anxiety: Ideology, Identity, and (Un)Bordering in Contemporary Europe and Asia, VOL. 17 Nº. 1, TD4, October 2026, pp. 158-174. DOI <https://doi.org/10.26619/1647-7251.DT0726.7>

Article submitted on 26 June 2026 and accepted on 21 August 2026.





AMÍLCAR CABRAL ROLE IN THE LINGUISTIC IDENTITY, MULTILINGUALISM AND POST-INDEPENDENCE PROCESS IN CABO VERDE^{1,2}

AMÉLIE LU YUQING

Introduction

Born in Guinea-Bissau to Cape Verdean parents, Cabral thus showed a double belonging, which informed his criticism of small, localized nationalisms. Cabral was a strong opponent of any of the exclusive nationalisms of the Cape Verdean or Guinean factions, arguing that structural unity would avoid post-colonial fragmentation. Both legally and historically, Amílcar Cabral is recognized in Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde as the founder of the nationality. He advocated binationalism thru PAIGC, convinced that the two regions had a joint struggle for independence and common historical destiny. Amílcar Cabral holds a unique position in the Lusophone African anti-colonial imaginary in that his political practice was inseparable from his conception of culture and identity. For Cabral, liberation was not only a military and administrative transformation of colonial power but also an ideological and cultural reorientation of the colonized society to reverse the cultural alienation imposed by Portuguese rule. In his 1970 address at Syracuse University, Cabral argued that colonial rule was sustained by the creation of a social gap between indigenous elites and the popular masses through the systematic repression of local culture (Carter & Aulette, 2009). In the Cabo Verde context, the legacy of Portuguese rule, as it intersects with creolization, migration, and island-based social formation, and Cabral's ideas about culture and national consciousness together provided a framework for revaluing and reimagining linguistic life (Carter & Aulette, 2009).

This study addresses Cabral's influence on Cabo Verdean culture and linguistic life, focusing especially on how Cabralist ideas, such as culture as a 'common heritage' and as a battleground, influenced discussions of language, identity, and social cohesion. In the past, Cabo Verdean Creole (Kriolu) was a language of communication "shunned and denigrated" by those in power; during colonial times, its use was banned in government buildings and schools (Carter & Aulette, 2009, p. 213). In the modern era, the

¹ Conflict of Interests - The authors have identified no conflicts of interest.

² Acknowledgment - The authors acknowledge the use of Microsoft Copilot in assisting with the improvement of English grammar, the formatting of references, and the standardization of citations in this work. All intellectual content, arguments, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions remain the sole responsibility of the author.



archipelago exemplifies a typical diglossic speech community, where Portuguese functions as the “High” (H) language for formal authorities, education, and global navigation, and Kriolu functions as the “Low” (L) language, the “language of the heart” or “mother tongue”, for daily life, music, and emotional expression (Carter & Aulette, 2009, p. 214). Understanding Cabral's influence, however, demands attention to both policy and lived language practices because this Portuguese–Kriolu relationship differs by island and social class (Cardoso et al., 2025; Carter & Aulette, 2009).

The central idea is that Cabral's approach to culture as rooted yet dynamic contributed to processes of cultural revival and linguistic revaluation in Cabo Verde, particularly by strengthening arguments for the legitimacy of Kriolu and for multilingual coexistence rather than simple replacement (Carter & Aulette, 2009). This legacy can be seen in the current “Total Bilingualism” practice in education, which aims to accord equal respect to both languages to enhance learning outcomes and social equity (Cardoso et al., 2025, p. 3).

This research uses an interdisciplinary approach to draw on historical evidence of Cabral's philosophy and contemporary sociolinguistic data. It reflects on the ways in which cultural forms of music and literature like mornas and the works of poets like Jorge Barbosa have maintained ethnic consciousness (Carter & Aulette, 2009). It also acknowledges that Cabo Verdean culture is not uniform; the regional variation between the Barlavento (Windward) and Sotavento (Leeward) dialects presents ongoing challenges for language standardization (Cardoso et al., 2025). Finally, the paper's organization demonstrates the interplay of cultural theory, political mobilization, and language ideology over time, from the historical background of Portuguese colonialism to present-day attempts to build a bilingual education system that empowers all Cabo Verdeans.

The Intellectual Foundation: Culture as the "Weapon" of Theory

In 1966, Amílcar Cabral delivered his famous speech "The Weapon of Theory", presented during the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, Cuba. The importance of revolutionary ideology and culture in the struggle for national liberation from imperialism is highlighted in his speech (Cabral, 1966). For Cabral, theory was never a speculative or purely academic exercise, but a strategic instrument essential for understanding and transforming the concrete socio-economic reality of a colonized people. Often described as an “innovative and complex organic intellectual-activist” and a “transdisciplinary critical social theorist” (Rabaka, 2014, p. 14), his education as an agricultural engineer provided him with a unique scientific perspective on the Guinean and Cabo Verdean terrain, allowing him to perceive the socio-economic structures of colonial exploitation through the literal soil of the land (el Nabolsy, 2019; Fonseca, 2025). In his landmark 1966 Havana address, Cabral argued that the ideological deficiency of many national liberation movements was one of the greatest weaknesses of the anti-imperialist struggle, asserting that "nobody has yet successfully practiced revolution without a revolutionary theory" (Cabral, 1979, p. 559).

Central to this intellectual foundation was Cabral's materialist understanding of history, where the level of productive forces is the driving force of history. Cabral innovatively



questioned the traditional Marxist primacy of class struggle as the single determinant of human development, arguing instead that class struggle is only the motive force in certain historical periods (Cabral, 1979; van Veen, 2016). He posited that the underlying mode of production dictates the broader trajectory of human evolution, meaning that societies existed in history even before the appearance of social classes (Cabral, 1979; Wick, 2006). By shifting the focus to productive forces, Cabral was able to re-integrate African folk social formations—which colonialists had labeled "stateless" or "a-historical"—into the mainstream of world history (Magubane, 1971, p. 76). This theoretical shift challenged Eurocentric linearity and provided a scientific basis for the dignity and historical agency of the African peasantry (Saraiva, 2022; Wick, 2006).

As Cabral noted, the fundamental characteristic of imperialism is the denial of the historical path followed by the dominated people, through the usurpation of their right to develop their creative potential. (Cabral, 1970; el Nabolsy, 2019). Colonialism acts as a force that impedes natural social evolution, keeping the colonized society linked to the metropole's history like a "wagon of their train" (Wick, 2006, p. 62). Thus, national liberation is fundamentally defined not merely as political sovereignty or a change in the color of the leadership, but as the regaining of a people's historical personality and their return to history through the total destruction of foreign domination (Cabral, 1970; Magubane, 1971). In this framework, culture is not a mere superstructural effect of economics but an essential and determinant element of a people's history (Cabral, 1970; Chabal, 1981). Cabral famously described culture as the "fruit of history", likening its role to a flower that holds the responsibility for forming the "seedling" that generates the continuity of history (Cabral, 1973, p. 50). Culture reflects the dynamic synthesis established by the social conscience to resolve material, spiritual, and social conflicts at every stage of a society's evolution (Cabral, 1970; el Nabolsy, 2019). For Cabral, culture is a social reality independent of the will of individuals, yet it remains the primary vehicle for identifying with fundamental problems and aspirations for progress (Cabral, 1970). Because foreign domination can only be maintained through the permanent, organized repression of a people's cultural life, Cabral posited that "national liberation is necessarily an act of culture" (Hamilton, 2021, p. 95).

He believed that for the liberation movement to succeed, it must base its action on a thorough knowledge of popular culture, distinguishing between the progressive and reactionary elements of tradition (Cabral, 1970). This re-Africanization of the mind or return to the source was not a blind retreat into the past, but a critical retrieval and reinvention of indigenous values intended to support a modern, autonomous society (el Nabolsy, 2019; van Veen, 2016). By weaponizing theory through the lens of culture, Cabral ensured that the struggle for independence was as much about reclaiming the soul as it was about the technical requirements of warfare (Lopes & Barros, 2020)

The "Return to the Source": Critical Re-Africanization of the Mind

For Cabral, this was not a universal requirement for all sectors of society but a specific ideological intervention directed at the native elites and the petty bourgeoisie who had been assimilated into colonial culture (Cabral, 1973). Under the Portuguese system of "ultra-colonialism", a tiny minority of Africans were granted the status of *assimilados*, a



privilege contingent upon disdaining their own African heritage and adopting the language, religion, and social manners of the metropole (Magubane, 1971, p. 72). This created what Cabral described as a "socio-cultural drama" for the petty bourgeoisie: they were cut off from their own people by education and social status, yet they remained marginalized and were never truly accepted by the foreign ruling class (Chabal, 1981, p. 40). This marginalization created a problem that compelled these alienated individuals to seek a new identity by turning back toward the masses (Cabral, 1973).

As the class with the technical knowledge to manipulate the state apparatus inherited from the colonizer, they were the next heirs to power, yet their class interests often aligned with imperialist capital (Chabal, 1981). To lead a true revolution, this elite had to abandon its privileges and identify completely with the working masses, becoming the revolutionary workers (Cabral, 1979; Davidson, 1984). This was not an elitist back to the past, but a critical recovery and reinvention of cultural values to sustain a modern autonomous society (van Veen, 2016). This approach characterized identity as a dynamic synthesis of spiritual and material elements in constant transformation, which permitted Cabo Verdeans to see this as the basis for national solidarity and revolution (Cabral, 1970; el Nabolsy, 2019; Saraiva, 2022).

Crucially, Cabral argued that this return was unnecessary for the popular masses, particularly the rural peasantry who constituted the vast majority of the population (Cabral, 1973). Unlike the westernized elite, the masses had remained the undisputed repository of indigenous culture, keeping their traditions alive in the villages and forests despite centuries of organized colonial repression (Cabral, 1970, 1973). For them, culture remained a strong factor to preserve their identity even when politico-military resistance had been crushed (Carter & Aulette, 2009; Cabral, 1970). Therefore, the return to the origin was specifically an ideological reconversion for the uprooted intellectual and civil servant classes who needed to harmonize their personal reality with the historical reality of their country (Cabral, 1973; el Nabolsy, 2019).

He emphasized that the return did not imply a blind or romantic retreat into the past or a "tabula rasa" rejection of all external influences (Chabal, 1981, p. 56). Instead, it was a critical retrieval and reinvention of indigenous values intended to support a modern, autonomous society (van Veen, 2016; el Nabolsy, 2019). Cabral believed that culture must be analyzed as a "function of the needs of the struggle and progress" (el Nabolsy, 2019, p. 5). Human progress depends on the resolve of people to take on and overcome obstacles. Civilization grows, learns and develops because of hardship and conflict. Without adversity there is no progress, no movement in life. Life without adversity is stagnant.

He famously insisted that while the positive aspects of tradition should be preserved, those that were "antiscientific"—such as belief in magical explanations for natural phenomena—had to be discarded through a process of education and self-criticism (el Nabolsy, 2019, p. 5). This important return aimed not just to restore the past but to use historical knowledge to ensure a future based on justice and dignity (van Veen, 2016). By framing decolonization as an act of culture, Cabral ensured that the struggle for independence was as much about reclaiming the national soul and historical agency as it was about seizing political power (Cabral, 1970; Rabaka, 2014).



Linguistic Resistance: The Power and Status of Cabo Verdean Creole (Kriolu)

Linguistic identity serves as a foundational cornerstone of Cabo Verdean nationhood, with Cabo Verdean Creole (Kriolu) acting as the primary vehicle for cultural resistance and national unity. For nearly the entire population, Kriolu is defined as the "language of the heart" or the "mother tongue", representing the dynamic synthesis of the material and spiritual condition of the archipelago's people, whereas Portuguese remains the formal language of the colonizer. This linguistic situation is characterized by sociolinguists as diglossia, a state in which two languages coexist within a single community but are assigned distinct social functions and prestige levels (Carter & Aulette, 2009, p. 214). In this hierarchy, Portuguese was historically imposed as the "High" (H) language of education, government, and business, while Kriolu was relegated to the "Low" (L) status, reserved for informal settings, family life, and emotional expression (Carter & Aulette, 2009, p. 214). This linguistic structure was part of a larger colonial reality characterized by "cultural subjugation and racial hierarchy" (Santos et al., 2024, p. 2). The preservation of Kriolu allowed Cabo Verdeans to maintain a separate identity from their colonizers, using the language to express solidarity and criticize power structures (Carter & Aulette, 2009).

During the colonial period, Portuguese officials deliberately denigrated Creole as an inferior dialect, often describing it as a corruption of Portuguese and a sign of the return of an old trait or habit (Saraiva, 2022). To maintain a rigid social distance between the colonizer and the colonized, the use of Kriolu was strictly prohibited in schools and government buildings, creating a wall around the indigenous population (Carter & Aulette, 2009). This linguistic pacification was intended to stifle the intellectual development of the African population and ensure that a minimally educated group would prioritize European values and historical narratives over their own heritage (Mendy, 2003, as cited in el Nabolsy, 2019). By presenting Portuguese as the only medium for theoretical thought, science, and progress, the colonial administration sought to instill an inferiority complex in Cabo Verdeans, suggesting that their native tongue was a barrier to civilization and entry into the modern world (el Nabolsy, 2019).

Amílcar Cabral and the PAIGC recognized that reclaiming the national soul required a direct challenge to this linguistic and cultural hegemony. They strategically used Creole as a tool for mobilization and literacy, bridging the critical gap between the revolutionary leadership and the rural masses, who were largely illiterate at the start of the struggle (African Information Service, 1973). In the liberated zones, the party implemented militant education programs that utilized Kriolu to foster a new national consciousness and empower peasants to do it for themselves (Borges, 2019; Fonseca, 2025). This was not merely a functional choice but an ontological reclamation; by elevating the status of Kriolu, Cabral helped Cabo Verdeans recognize their unique linguistic heritage as a source of revolutionary pride rather than a mark of colonial shame (Saraiva, 2022). The struggle itself served as a "cultural crucible," where the use of a common tongue helped forge a unified nation from diverse ethnic groups (Chabal, 1981, p. 55).

Cabral distinguished between colonialist culture and the Portuguese language itself, asserting that the latter could be wielded as a weapon for liberation without



compromising one's African identity (el Nabolsy, 2019). He rejected essentialist views that claimed speaking a European language made one less African, emphasizing instead that the utility of a language in achieving independence and progress was what mattered most (Cabral, 2016; el Nabolsy, 2019).

An example of the nature of Cabo Verdean identities is the different ways people speak Kriolu in Cabo Verde. The country has two sets of islands called Barlavento (Windward) and Sotavento (Leeward). While Barlavento (centered in Mindelo, São Vicente) historically held prominence as an intellectual, literary, and artistic centre, and Sotavento (specifically Santiago) holds political dominance and the largest speaker population (*Badiu* Creole). Every person has their way of speaking. People who in the Northern (Barlavento) islands may sound more like Portuguese but people, from the southern islands keep their West African language traditions. However, Swolkien and Cobbinah (2019) propose that the Cabo Verdean Creole (CVC) from Santo Antão variation is a phonological outlier in the archipelago. Its distinctive character is the result of a specific socio-historical pathway, a settlement in the early 16th century and centuries of great geographic isolation, which permitted separate internal evolution of the original proto-CVC. These advances were further reinforced by extensive interaction with dialectal Portuguese in the 18th and 19th centuries, resulting in a variation which has a perceived Portuguese flavour, but which is not the result of a separate process of re-creolization.

All these different ways of speaking come together to create layers of identity within Cabo Verdean-ness (or Kabuverdianidade). Such conflicts have created a pluricentric linguistic situation for Cabo Verde. Language planners and teachers have had to operate under a two-variety approach (for both Barlavento and Sotavento varieties) instead of choosing a standardized national variety. The advantage of such an approach is the preservation of regional differences; however, it complicates the standardization of Cabo-verdiano within the government, education and legal domains where a uniform orthographic standard is required.

Despite centuries of marginalization and official repression, Creole persists as the most widespread symbol of Cabo Verdean identity, both on the islands and within the global diaspora (Carter & Aulette, 2009). It remains the primary language of music, most notably the *morna*, as well as poetry and oral tradition, serving as the medium through which Cabo Verdeans preserved their ethnic consciousness during the long years of silence (Ludtke, 1989; Carter & Aulette, 2009). The practice of linguistic resistance in contemporary Cabo Verde has evolved from ideological discourse to the practical utilization of the Dual Language Education (DLE) approach, which operates as a vehicle for cognitive justice. New evidence from the *Si ka fila tudu, ta fila un ponta* initiative (If Everything Is Not Achieved, at Least Something Is), ran between 2013 to 2019, the program created a tremendous influence. The lessons obtained from this initiative provided useful insights into effective approaches that could be deployed in schools in Cabo Verde to foster bilingualism. It indicated that the "linguistic barrier" found in early education programs is particularly significant in areas that can be defined as "remote islands or in schools with poorer families" where very little interaction with Portuguese is evident (Cardoso et al., 2025, p. 15).



The multilingual program succeeded because of the focus on appreciating the importance of the native tongue or Cabo Verdean Creole, just like Portuguese. The first step involved ensuring that the teachers had the competence to use Cabo Verdean Creole as a subject and as a main language in teaching other subjects such as Mathematics and Science. This program was based on a model referred to as Total Bilingualism, also called Dual Language Education. It involved using Cabo Verdean Creole and Portuguese equally in the teaching process. The two languages were considered as subjects and as the languages used to teach other subjects, thus enabling the learners to become literate in the two languages at once. Here, each language was used equally, half of the time, so that the students could develop proficiency in both languages. This balance allowed the students to become competent in speaking, reading, and writing in both languages. As a result, the learners achieved great success academically. The multilingual program also helped the learners develop positive attitudes, gain civic responsibility awareness, and improve their analytical thinking skills. These improvements were reflected in the performance of the students in all areas of the curriculum (Cardoso et al., 2025).

Today, Cabo Verde continues its journey toward balanced bilingualism, with modern educational programs seeking to integrate Kriolu into formal schooling alongside Portuguese to improve learning outcomes and promote social equity (Cardoso et al., 2025). These initiatives respond to calls for education based on the students' first language (L1), acknowledging that including local languages in schools can help students better understand the curriculum and connect with their cultural roots. By decolonizing the mind through the embrace of the Kriolu, the legacy of Cabral ensures that the cultural soul of Cabo Verde remains a dynamic force for dignity, social justice, and progress (van Veen, 2016).

The Instrumental Role of Portuguese: Science, Modernity, and Global Opportunity

In the decades since independence, Portuguese has evolved into a global bridge, linking millions of speakers across several continents as a vital super language (Correia, 2024, p. 366). Cabral was an astute diplomat who recognized that to win international support, the PAIGC had to communicate its cause to the United Nations and the global public in a recognized international language (Mendy, 2019; Lopes & Barros, 2020). His speeches in Lisbon, Paris, and Syracuse demonstrated his ability to master the language of the oppressor to demand its departure (Lopes & Barros, 2020; Cabral, 1970). By maintaining high literacy in Portuguese, the leadership ensured they were at the same literacy level as students in developed countries, preventing them from being marginalized in the global power (Wick, 2006).

While modern educational reforms seek to implement balanced bilingualism by integrating Kriolu into formal schooling, the instrumental value of Portuguese remains unchallenged as the nation's port for opportunity expansion. Cabral's anti-essentialist vision ensured that Cabo Verdeans would not have to choose between their African identity and their participation in the modern world (el Nabolsy, 2019; Wick, 2006).



Mastery of the Portuguese language remains a strategic asset in the ongoing movement toward dignity and progress (Cabral, 1970; el Nabolsy, 2019).

Amílcar Cabral's approach to the linguistic landscape of Cabo Verde was defined by a sophisticated and paradoxical ideology that simultaneously championed the indigenous language (Kriolu) while upholding the colonial language as a vital strategic asset (Hamilton, 2021; Saraiva, 2022). He famously described the Portuguese language as "one of the best things that the tugas [whites/colonialists] left us", a statement reflecting his refusal to allow emotional nationalist sentiments to obscure the technical requirements of a successful revolution (el Nabolsy, 2019, p.5;). For Cabral, the language of the colonizer could be seized as a "spoil of war" and transformed into a powerful "linguistic weapon" to be used against the very system that introduced it (el Nabolsy, 2019, p. 12).

Cabral's defence of Portuguese was deeply rooted in his commitment to the philosophical discourse of modernity, which prioritizes reason, progress, and the principle of subjectivity or autonomy (el Nabolsy, 2019). He argued that national liberation was not merely a return to a romanticized past but a "forced march" toward cultural progress (Cabral, 1970/2009, p. 18; Chabal, 1981, p.55). In this framework, Portuguese was not viewed as a symbol of cultural defeat but as an essential instrument for the assimilation of modern science and technology (el Nabolsy, 2019). Cabral posited that for the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde) to lead the people forward, it required a language capable of expressing the relative and tangible truths of modern scientific discourse (el Nabolsy, 2019; Cabral, 1979).

This instrumentalism was particularly evident in his analysis of the limitations of indigenous languages at that historical juncture. Cabral pointed out that neither Kriolu nor the various ethnic languages of the mainland possessed the specialized technical vocabulary required for modern military coordination or scientific instruction at that time (el Nabolsy, 2019). He noted, for example, that one could not easily express complex physics concepts, such as the "intensity of a force is equal to mass times the acceleration of gravity", in Creole during the 1960s (el Nabolsy, 2019, p. 13). To master the tools of modern development - such as the mechanics of a mortar or the data portraiture of a soil survey - the revolutionary cadre had to be fluent in a language with a standardized orthography and a deep technical lexicon (el Nabolsy, 2019; Saraiva, 2022).

Distinguishing Influence from Domination

Central to Cabral's argument was the distinction between colonialist culture and foreign influence (el Nabolsy, 2019). He argued that colonialism was a crime because it replaced cultural autonomy with foreign domination, negating the historical process of the colonized people (Cabral, 1970; Magubane, 1971). However, he insisted that influence was a neutral, and often positive, phenomenon if adopted through an autonomous act of choice (el Nabolsy, 2019). Cabral rejected the tabula rasa approach to culture, arguing instead for a critical retrieval and reinvention of cultural values (van Veen, 2016). He believed that refusing to use useful tools simply because they were of foreign origin was a sign of a "complex of inferiority" (Nabolsy, 2019, p. 13). By freely deciding to utilize



Portuguese to advance the cause of liberation, the African revolutionary was performing an act of sovereignty (el Nabolsy, 2019). Portuguese became an instrument of liberation once it was no longer enforced by the metropole but autonomously wielded by the liberation movement to communicate directives and conduct diplomacy (el Nabolsy, 2019). Cabral distinguished between the language itself and the political ideology from the colonialist implemented in the society (Cabral, 1979; el Nabolsy, 2019). In his view, using a standardized language from the colonizer did not compromise one's African identity so long as these tools served the project of national reconstruction (Cabral, 1970; el Nabolsy, 2019).

The instrumental role of Portuguese also extended to the strategic and diplomatic needs of the revolution (Lopes & Barros, 2020). Portuguese served as a *lingua franca* that connected the different liberation movements within the Portuguese empire - such as the MPLA in Angola and FRELIMO in Mozambique - through the CONCP (Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies) (el Nabolsy, 2019). This shared linguistic medium allowed for the coordination of military strategies and the circulation of revolutionary ideas, effectively turning the colonizer's language into a bridge for Pan-African solidarity (Lopes & Barros, 2020).

Binationalism and the Forging of a Unified National Identity

Amílcar Cabral's political vision was fundamentally rooted in the principle of binationalism—the strategic and ideological goal of unified independence for both Guinea-Bissau and the Cabo Verde islands (Lopes & Barros, 2020; Parsa, 2017). Founded in 1956, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC) was unique among liberation movements for seeking the decolonization of two separate territories under a single, unitary political project (Lopes & Barros, 2020; Fonseca, 2025). This vision was not a mere tactical convenience; it was based on a "radical realism" that recognized the deep historical, blood, and interest-based ties between the mainland and the archipelago that had existed for centuries (Hamilton, 2021, p. 81). Cabral argued that the shared experience of Portuguese "ultra-colonialism" and racist dominance provided a common basis for a unified African identity that could and should transcend local ethnic differences (Magubane, 1971, p. 72).

To understand the depth of Cabral's binational project, one must first examine the colonial structures he sought to dismantle. Portuguese colonial strategy relied heavily on utilizing the archipelago as a base for trade and administration (Chilcote, 1968). In the colonial hierarchy, Cabo Verdeans were often classified as "citizens" or *assimilados*, while the vast majority of mainland Guineans were relegated to the status of "indigenas" (natives) (Chilcote, 1968, p. 380). This system deliberately created a socio-economic and cultural gap, frequently using Cabo Verdeans as intermediary agents of the colonial state to administer Guinea (Wick, 2006). Cabral recognized that these divisions were a form of linguistic and cultural pacification designed to keep the colonized people in a state of permanent atavism and inferiority (Saraiva, 2022).

Central to the construction of this collective identity was Cabral's innovative concept of the "nation-class" (Chabal, 1981, p. 38; Wick, 2006, p. 51). Drawing upon what he



famously termed his weapon of theory, Cabral challenged orthodox Marxist interpretations that regarded class struggle as the sole driving force of history across all social formations (van Veen, 2016). He argued that, within the colonial context, the principal contradiction lay not between social classes within the colonised society, but between the colonised population as a whole, conceived as a nation-class, and the colonial state (Chabal, 1981; Wick, 2006).

Cabral did not conceive of culture as a static repository of traditions; rather, he understood it as a historical and dynamic process that required critical recovery, reinterpretation, and renewal. The liberation struggle thus became a necessary vehicle for cultural transformation, compelling diverse ethnic communities to abandon practices deemed detrimental to social progress while fostering the emergence of a cohesive national consciousness (Cabral, 1970; Wick, 2006). Through the PAIGC, popular assemblies, schools, and healthcare facilities were established, gradually supplanting the colonial administration with institutions grounded in participatory governance and social justice (Borges, 2019; Wick, 2006).

This process contributed to a profound transformation of national consciousness, replacing colonial alienation with a sense of revolutionary dignity and collective self-determination. By emphasising unity in struggle, Cabral sought to forge a nation capable of accommodating cultural diversity while sustaining a shared commitment to anti-colonial resistance and national liberation (Cabral, 1979; Wick, 2006).

Cabral's vision of binationalism was also an exercise in decolonial internationalism (Mendy, 2019; van Veen, 2016). He believed that a liberated Africa must eventually move beyond nationalism to solve the basic problems of post-colonial development (van Veen, 2016; Wick, 2006). Binationalism was a practical step in this direction; if people as different as those in Guinea and Cabo Verde could find common ground, it would reveal the potential for broader Pan-African unity (Mendy, 2019; Wick, 2006). To support this, Cabral promoted a radical decentralization of power. He was against the idea of a capital, arguing that centralized ministries were signs of an emerging elite detached from the peasantry. He proposed that the government should maintain constant dialogue with the social base to avoid the elitist tendencies of the political leadership. This inclusive conception of citizenship invited all to participate in the construction of the new society (Wick, 2006).

Amílcar Cabral's assassination in 1973 was a tragic attempt to destroy the PAIGC and its binationalist vision (Fonseca, 2025). While the political paths of Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde eventually diverged in 1980, the foundations Cabral laid for a binationalist decolonial identity proved remarkably resilient (Fonseca, 2025; Wick, 2006). He remains posthumously celebrated as the *Fundador da Nacionalidade* (Founder of the Nationality), a title that reflects his role in founding the process by which two disparate peoples identified themselves as a unified, historical subject (Davidson, 1984; Wick, 2006).

Through Cabral's notion of "re-conquered history", Cabral guaranteed that Cabo Verdeans' identities would never be essentialist or ahistorical (Magubane, 1971, p. 84;). He opposed the theory of Africanness' trans-historical characteristics and asserted that identity can only be defined as the dynamic synthesis of spiritual and material elements that keep evolving (Cabral, 1970; el Nabolsy, 2019). Through this approach, Cabo



Verdeans could view their mixed identities not as atavism from the colonial past but as the grounds for national solidarity and revolution (Saraiva, 2022). Even today, these ideas persist among Cabo Verdeans who remain internationally connected yet intrinsically connected to the earth beneath their feet.

Binationalism and the "Founder of the Nationality"

Cabral's political vision was rooted in the principle of binationalism - the goal of unified independence for both Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde (Lopes & Barros, 2020). He argued that the shared experience of colonial dominance provided a common basis for a unified African identity that could transcend local ethnic and regional differences (Wick, 2006). Despite his tragic assassination in 1973, his legacy as the founder of the nationality [*Fundador da Nacionalidade*] remains secure. Scholars point out that he was the founder not just of a nation, but of the *process* by which a collectivity identifies itself and begins to build a post-colonial culture (Davidson, 1984; Wick, 2006).

Cabral's vision of the "New Man" and "New Woman"—citizens possessing a revolutionary consciousness that transcends colonial alienation—remains the ultimate goal of the Cabo Verdean project (Wick, 2006, p. 52). This "New Man" is characterized by the practice of democracy, criticism, and social justice, developed through the "cultural crucible" of the liberation struggle (Chabal, 1981, p. 55; Wick, 2006, p. 52). Cabral's insistence that unity is a means toward progress rather than an end in itself ensured that Cabo Verdean identity would remain a dynamic, open-ended project subject to perpetual review (Wick, 2006).

The legacy of Amílcar Cabral in the development of culture in Cabo Verde lies in combining revolutionary theory with practice. He educated a country that culture is not only an ancient heritage to worship but their history lesson to be utilized as a means of survival and development. It was by giving culture the central role in the fight for freedom that Cabral turned it into an endless resource of courage and the main driving force for national reconstruction (Cabral, 1970).

Cabral's linguistic legacy is perhaps the most visible aspect of his influence on modern Cabo Verde. He recognized Cabo Verdean Creole (Kriolu) as the primary vehicle for cultural resistance and the people's language (Carter & Aulette, 2009). During the colonial era, Kriolu was denigrated as an "low-status dialect" and prohibited in official settings to maintain a social distance between the colonizer and the colonized (Carter & Aulette, 2009, p. 217). Cabral and the PAIGC strategically utilized Creole as a weapon for mobilization and literacy, bridging the gap between the revolutionary leadership and the illiterate rural masses (African Information Service, 1973; Fonseca, 2025).

His work continues to influence global anti-colonial strategies and Africana critical theory, offering a powerful critique of neo-colonialism and flag independence (Rabaka, 2014; van Veen, 2016). His legacy ensures that the cultural soul of Cabo Verde remains a dynamic force for social justice, rooted in the lived experiences of its people and its land (el Nabolsy, 2019; Saraiva, 2022). As Cabo Verde continues its journey toward balanced bilingualism and full social realization, Cabral's ideology remains the guiding light for a people who have re-conquered their history and their dignity. He remains, in the words



of his own philosophy, a simple African man whose duty changed the course of history for his people and the world (African Information Service, 1973).

Conclusion

Amílcar Cabral's revolutionary idealism reshaped Cabo Verdean identity as he recognized that the struggle for national liberation should be understood as both a political and a social struggle, of which culture is the main component. He argued that national liberation was not just a military and administrative change but a social and cultural revolution. National liberation required an act of culture to overcome the cultural alienation and the social gap established by the colonial administration. By treating culture as the fruit of history, Cabral was able to turn the independence process into an ontological struggle that allowed Cabo Verdeans to recover their historical personality and thus be protagonists of their own history and no longer mere pawns of the colonizers' game (Cabral, 1970; el Nabolsy, 2019; Magubane, 1971; van Veen, 2016).

The idea of the re-Africanization of the mind, or the return to the source, was a key point in Cabral's legacy and was specifically targeted at the alienated native elites and petty bourgeoisie of colonial assimilation (Cabral, 1973; Davidson, 1984). Cabral urged them to carry out class suicide in order to give up their colonial privileges and status of *assimilados* and become identified with the dreams of the masses (Cabral, 1973; Chabal, 1981). This was not an elitist back to the past, but a critical recovery and reinvention of cultural values to sustain a modern autonomous society (van Veen, 2016). This approach characterized identity as a dynamic synthesis of spiritual and material elements in constant transformation, which permitted Cabo Verdeans to see their mixed identities not as "atavism" from the colonial past, but as the basis for national solidarity and revolution (Cabral, 1970; el Nabolsy, 2019; Saraiva, 2022).

His most evident and lasting contribution to the contemporary Cabo Verdean society is undoubtedly his view on language which laid out the complexities and challenges inherent in the relationship between Cabo Verdean Creole (Kriolu) and Portuguese (Carter & Aulette, 2009). He dignified Kriolu which he saw as once "shunned and denigrated" by the colonial administration as an element that would facilitate national unity and as an intellectual weapon in the process of mobilization and literacy (Carter & Aulette, 2009, p. 213; Saraiva, 2022; African Information Service, 1973; Fonseca, 2025). But the world reality made him realize also that the Portuguese language represented a fundamental asset, a passage for the global community as well access to vast available scientific knowledge, modernization and international diplomacy (Cabral, 1979; el Nabolsy, 2019; Cabral, 2016). This position gave rise to the present policy of total bilingualism in the formal education system which consists of introducing mother tongue into the formal schooling along with Portuguese to facilitate the learning process and guarantee social equality (Cardoso et al., 2025; van Veen, 2016).

In the end Cabral has been hailed posthumously as the founder of the nationality, a testament to his role as the instigator of a process whereby two peoples came to consider themselves one historical agent (Davidson, 1984; Wick, 2006). His binationalist vision, although later abandoned in the political lives of Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde, paved



the way to an African solidarity through anti-imperialism and social justice (Lopes & Barros, 2020; Wick, 2006). It is the ideal of the New Man and the New Woman; those who have gained a revolutionary conscience and are thus able to transcend colonial alienation which will become the final goal of the Cabo Verdean endeavour (Chabal, 1981; Cabral, 1970; Fonseca, 2025). His blend of revolutionary thought and action guaranteed that the cultural essence of Cabo Verde would remain a vital force, grounded in its people and soil, forever characterizing him as a 'simple African man' who changed the course of history (African Information Service, 1973; el Nabolsy, 2019; Saraiva, 2022).

Amílcar Cabral's transformative leadership fundamentally redefined Cabo Verdean identity by placing culture at the absolute centre of the political and social struggle for liberation (Cabral, 1970; Wick, 2006). He remains one of the most towering figures in African history, celebrated not merely as a military strategist who led the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC) to victory, but as a profound cultural theorist whose ideas regarding radical realism continue to resonate globally (Lopes & Barros, 2020; Hamilton, 2021). For Cabo Verde, a nation forged at the complex and often painful intersection of Portuguese ultra-colonialism and West African heritage, Cabral provided more than a political platform; he provided a crucial roadmap for reclaiming a suppressed soul and a marginalized history (Mendy, 2019).

For Cabral, decolonization was not just a "Changing of the Guards" - replacing a white elite with a black one - but a total social and cultural transformation (Magubane, 1971, p. 72). As Cabral put it, for colonizers to be able to guarantee their supremacy over the colonies, they only have two options. These involve eradicating all members of the populace or ruling over them without losing their culture. However, because history has proved that supremacy and retention of culture cannot go hand-in-hand, colonizers opt for sustained cultural suppression (Cabral, 1970). Thus, the fight for independence was an ontological reclamation, a means for the Cabo Verdeans to bring back their personality root and return to history as subjects and not objects of colonial whim (el Nabolsy, 2019; Magubane, 1971).

His humanist conception of science allowed him to perceive the socio-economic structures of colonial exploitation through the literal land, ensuring that the cultural identity he sought to build was rooted in the lived experiences of the peasantry rather than the abstract ideals of the urban elite (Neves, 2017; Saraiva, 2022). This grounding in reality remains a powerful critique of neo-colonialism, as it emphasizes that true sovereignty requires the liberation of a nation's productive forces and its cultural autonomy (Cabral, 1970; Wick, 2006).

Cabral's influence continues to inspire modern educational programs, such as the Si ka fila tudu, ta fila un ponta project, which seeks to integrate the Kriolu into formal schooling alongside Portuguese (Cardoso et al., 2025). These initiatives respond to Cabral's vision of balanced bilingualism, acknowledging that education in the first language improves learning outcomes and promotes social equity by allowing children to ask questions and learn naturally (Cardoso et al., 2025). Through highlighting the importance of respect for both languages, and the creation of Kriolu as a respectable subject through teaching and grammar, the educational system successfully undermines the dominance of the colonial language hierarchy in culture (Cardoso et al., 2025; Santos et al., 2024).



References

- African Information Service. (1973). *Return to the source: Selected speeches of Amílcar Cabral*. Monthly Review Press.
- Borges, S. V. (2019). *Militant education, liberation struggle, consciousness: The PAIGC education in Guinea Bissau 1963–1978*. Peter Lang.
- Cabral, A. (1966). *The weapon of theory*. Address delivered to the first Tricontinental Conference of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, Havana, Cuba.
- Cabral, A. (1970). *National liberation and culture*. Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY.
- Cabral, A. (1973). *Return to the source: Selected speeches of Amílcar Cabral*. Monthly Review Press.
- Cabral, A. (1979). *Unity and struggle: Speeches and writings of Amílcar Cabral* (M. Wolfers, Trans.). Monthly Review Press.
- Cabral, A. (2009, August 10). (1970) Amílcar Cabral, "National Liberation and Culture" [Speech transcript]. BlackPast. Retrieved from <https://blackpast.org/global-african-history/1970-amilcar-cabral-national-liberation-and-culture/> (Original work published 1970)
- Cabral, A. (2016). Analysis of a few types of resistance. In R. Rabaka & D. Wood (Eds.), *Resistance and decolonization* (D. Wood, Trans.). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Cardoso, A. J., Bermingham, N., & DePalma, R. (2025). *Building bilingual education in Cabo Verde: A practical guide*. University of Liverpool Repository. <https://doi.org/10.17638/03192956>
- Carter, K., & Aulette, J. (2009). Creole in Cape Verde: Language, identity and power. *Ethnography*, 10(2), 213–236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138108099590>
- Chabal, P. (1981). The social and political thought of Amílcar Cabral: A reassessment. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 19(1), 31–56.
- Chilcote, R. H. (1968). The political thought of Amílcar Cabral. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 6(3), 373–388.
- Correia, M. (2024). Fifty years that changed the international status of the Portuguese language. *Revista de Llengua i Dret*, (82), 364–382. <https://doi.org/10.58992/rld.i82.2024.4279>
- Davidson, B. (1984). On revolutionary nationalism: The legacy of Cabral. *Latin American Perspectives*, 11(2), 15–42.
- el Nabolsy, Z. (2019). Amílcar Cabral's modernist philosophy of culture and cultural liberation. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. DOI: 10.1080/13696815.2019.1624155.
- Fonseca, D. (2025). Underground revolutionaries: The PAIGC, Leninism, and the decolonization of Cabo Verde. *African Studies Review*, 68(3), 557–578.



- Hamilton, L. (2021). Amílcar Cabral and Amartya Sen: Freedom, resistance and radical realism. *Theoria*, 68(167), 82–110.
- Lopes, R., & Barros, V. (2020). Amílcar Cabral and the liberation of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde: International, transnational, and global dimensions. *The International History Review*. DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2019.1703118.
- Magubane, B. (1971). Amílcar Cabral: Evolution of revolutionary thought. *Ufahamu*, 2(2), 71–87.
- Mendy, P. K. (2019). *Amílcar Cabral: Nationalist and pan-Africanist revolutionary*. Ohio University Press.
- Neves, J. (2017). Ideology, science, and people in Amílcar Cabral. *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, 24(2), 333–347.
- Parsa, A. (2017). Amílcar Cabral, resistance and decolonization. *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 30, 1031–1037.
- Rabaka, R. (2014). *Concepts of Cabralism: Amílcar Cabral and Africana critical theory*. Lexington Books.
- Santos, A. A. e, Lopes, C., & Goulart, P. V. (2024). Introduction: Amílcar Cabral: Revolutionary legacy and contemporary resonance. *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, (48), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.15847/cea48.43780>
- Saraiva, T. (2022). Black science: Amílcar Cabral's agricultural survey and the seeds of African decolonization. *Isis*, 113(3), 584–609.
- Swolkien, D., & Cobbinah, A. (2019). Cape Verdean Creole – Santo Antão: what we know so far. *Journal of Ibero-Romance Creoles*, 9(1), 162–193.
- van Veen, T. C. (2016). Concepts of Cabralism: A review. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 5(1), 79–89.
- Wick, A. (2006). Manifestations of nationhood in the writings of Amílcar Cabral. *African Identities*, 4(1), 45–70.