

SOVEREIGNTY UNDER CONSTRUCTION: AMÍLCAR CABRAL AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF LUSOPHONE COUNTRIES IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

Under the title "Sovereignty under Construction: Amílcar Cabral and the Reconfiguration of Lusophone Countries in the International System", this article examines the theoretical evolution and contemporary applications of sovereignty in the Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP), focusing on the intellectual and political legacy of Amílcar Cabral. It analyses how classical Western notions of sovereignty - from popular sovereignty theories to the Westphalian state-centric model - were reinterpreted by anti-colonial thought to construct an endogenous framework of national liberation. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative, historical-analytical approach anchored in critical conceptual reconstruction, thematic content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis across Cabral's core primary texts and contemporary diplomatic literature. Mobilizing Samir Amin's structural critique of unequal development, the paper demonstrates that political independence without economic "delinking" resulted in an "unfinished sovereignty" marked by peripheral integration into the global capitalist system. Finally, it explores how PALOP states currently navigate this structural tension, leveraging variable geometry and strategic autonomy across multilateral arenas (CPLP, ECOWAS, SADC, UN) to assert their agency in an emerging multipolar order.

Keywords

Amílcar Cabral; CONCP; Sovereignty; Self-Determination; PALOP; Decolonization.

Resumo

Sob o título "Soberania em Construção: Amílcar Cabral e a Reconfiguração dos Países Lusófonos no Sistema Internacional", este estudo examina a evolução teórica e as aplicações contemporâneas do conceito de soberania nos Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (PALOP), articuladas com o legado intelectual e político de Amílcar Cabral. Analisa-se como as noções ocidentais clássicas de soberania - das teorias da soberania popular ao modelo estatocêntrico de Vestfália - foram reinterpretadas pelo pensamento anticolonial para refundar uma práxis endógena de libertação nacional. Metodologicamente, o estudo adota uma abordagem qualitativa e histórico-analítica fundamentada na reconstrução concetual crítica, na



análise temática de conteúdo e na Análise Crítica do Discurso do corpus documental de Cabral e da literatura diplomática contemporânea. Recorrendo à crítica estrutural de Samir Amin sobre o desenvolvimento desigual, o trabalho demonstra que a independência política formal sem "desconexão" económica gerou uma "soberania inacabada", marcada pela integração periférica no sistema capitalista global. Por fim, investiga-se como os estados dos PALOP negociam atualmente esta tensão estrutural, mobilizando a geometria variável e a autonomia estratégica em fóruns multilaterais (CPLP, CEDEAO, SADC, ONU) para afirmar a sua agência num sistema internacional crescentemente multipolar.

Palavras-chave

Amílcar Cabral; CONCP; Soberania; Autodeterminação; PALOP; Descolonização.

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Introduction

African decolonization constituted one of the most transformative processes of the twentieth-century international order. The downfall of European colonial empires profoundly altered the configuration of the international system, enabling the emergence of new sovereign states and expanding the number of actors within multilateral institutions. Among the various national liberation movements of this period, those in the Portuguese colonies stand out due to the longevity of their armed conflicts, Portugal's fierce resistance to decolonization, and the intellectual depth of the leadership guiding the anticolonial struggle. Within this context, Amílcar Cabral occupies a unique position. Recognized as a revolutionary leader, political strategist, and theorist, Cabral developed an original reflection on national liberation, culture, sovereignty, and development that extended far beyond the immediate context of Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde. His influence resonated across other African liberation movements - notably in Angola and Mozambique - and remains a key reference point for understanding the challenges faced by post-colonial African states (Chabal, 2002; Mendy, 2019). The literature on Cabral highlights distinct dimensions of his legacy: Patrick Chabal (2002) underscores his ability to articulate revolutionary theory with political practice; António Tomás (2007) emphasizes his intellectual trajectory and strategic vision; and Peter Mendy (2019) frames him as one of the most significant Pan-African thinkers of the twentieth century. These interpretations converge on a central insight: Cabral's originality lies in his seamless integration of cultural identity, political emancipation, and economic transformation.

This study builds upon the premise that Cabral's paradigm of "unity and struggle" extended well beyond the military dimension of liberation. It posits that Cabral formulated a conceptual framework of sovereignty understood as an ongoing process of political, economic, and cultural assertion. This perspective is crucial for analysing the trajectory of

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the Portuguese-Speaking African Countries (PALOP) and their persistent challenges within a contemporary international system marked by power asymmetries, economic interdependence, and shifting multipolarity.

Accordingly, this analysis addresses two interconnected questions: to what extent did Cabral's thought and political action shape the state-building processes and international standing of Lusophone African nations? And do the contemporary structural challenges of the PALOP reflect an incomplete sovereignty, or are they manifestations of global dynamics affecting post-colonial states universally? This article argues that Cabral was not merely a liberation leader, but the conceptual architect of a distinct African model of sovereignty. The obstacles these states face today do not signal the failure of the Cabralian project; rather, they reflect enduring international structures of dependency that render sovereignty a continuous process of negotiation.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative, historical-analytical approach anchored in critical conceptual reconstruction and contextual political theory (Skinner, 2002; Koselleck, 2004). Rather than treating Amílcar Cabral's writings as a static or formal academic construct, the research subjects his core primary corpus—encompassing political speeches, programmatic pamphlets, and strategic essays—to systematic thematic analysis (Bardin, 2018) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013). This methodological framework allows for the interrogation of how Cabral's strategic discourse was operationalized during the anti-colonial liberation struggle and how its ideological imperatives continue to project onto contemporary post-colonial state-building, regional integration, and foreign policy architectures in Lusophone Africa (Yin, 2018).

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Theoretical Framework: Sovereignty, Post-Colonialism, and African Agency

Analysing Amílcar Cabral's contributions requires an interdisciplinary conceptual framework situated at the intersection of History, Political Science, and International Relations. This study anchors its analysis in three core concepts: Westphalian vs. substantive sovereignty, post-colonial structural continuity, and African agency.

Traditionally conceptualized since the Peace of Westphalia (1648)³, as absolute, supreme authority exercised within a bounded territory, sovereignty has long functioned as the foundational pillar of the modern international system. However, international relations scholars, such as Krasner (1999, cited in Gonçalves, 2017), have demonstrated that "Westphalian sovereignty" rarely manifests in absolute terms, being continuously compromised by economic, military, and political interdependencies. In post-colonial

³ The "Peace of Westphalia" refers to the treaties signed in 1648 in Münster and Osnabrück, which concluded the Thirty Years' War in Europe. It established the foundational principles of the modern international order, centered on territorial sovereignty, non-intervention in internal affairs, and formal legal equality among states.



Africa, this dichotomy between *de jure* statehood and *de facto* autonomy acquired severe systemic dimensions. Inheriting arbitrary colonial frontiers, extractive economic structures, and bureaucratic apparatuses designed for subjugation rather than governance, newly independent states achieved legal recognition without proportional decision-making autonomy. This structural contradiction prompted foundational critiques of formal sovereignty by thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah and Samir Amin, who posited those neocolonial mechanisms — ranging from monetary dependency to asymmetrical trade patterns - covertly constrained post-colonial states from charting self-determined developmental trajectories (Mango, 2023; Paulo, 2026).

Post-colonial theory further complicates this landscape by analyzing how colonial power structures endure within state-building processes. Achille Mbembe (2001) argues that the post-colonial condition rarely marks a clean historical rupture; rather, it represents a complex entanglement of colonial continuities and institutional transformations. In Lusophone Africa, scholars such as José Luís Cabaco (2007), Severino Ngoenha (2004), and Carlos Lopes (2019) have extended these debates by linking identity formation, political economy, and state legitimacy. Lopes (2019), in particular, stresses that overcoming inherited structural vulnerabilities requires African nations to systematically convert their indigenous political and material assets into leverage within the international political economy.

Concurrently, the analytical shift toward "African agency" in contemporary International Relations challenges orthodox perspectives that reduce post-colonial states to passive objects of Great Power competition. As Chipaike and Knowledge (2018) observe, agency emphasizes the capacity of African actors to negotiate international constraints, shape multilateral agendas, and assert strategic autonomy. It is precisely within this framework that Amílcar Cabral's intellectual and diplomatic legacy proves visionary. Decades prior to the formalization of "African agency" in international relations discourse, Cabral demonstrated how a subaltern liberation movement could systematically mobilize transnational solidarity, influence multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, and alter global normative frameworks regarding anti-colonial resistance. Consequently, analysing the Cabralian project requires an approach that balances structural constraints with transformative agency, framing sovereignty not as a static legal grant, but as an ongoing process of political assertion and negotiation.

"Unity and Struggle": The Cabralian Theory of Sovereignty

The political thought of Amílcar Cabral stems from a foundational imperative: establishing the theoretical and material conditions that allow colonized peoples to reclaim their historical agency. Although literature frequently emphasizes his leadership of the armed struggle conducted by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC)⁴ (Comitini, 1980), his conceptual contribution extends far beyond military

⁴ The origins of the PAIGC (*Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde*) can be traced to the African Independence Party and Liberation Front of Guinea and Cabo Verde (*Frente de Libertação da Guiné e Cabo Verde* – FLGCV). The founding charter of the FLGCV was signed on 19 September 1959 by Abel Djassi (Amílcar Cabral's *nom de guerre*) and Zain Lopes (also known as Rafael Barbosa), among others; see *Casa*



strategy. Rather than presenting a formal, codified academic doctrine, Cabral's political writings implicitly challenge the classical Westphalian paradigm of sovereignty (Krasner, 1999, cited in Gonçalves, 2017). Through an analytical reconstruction of his primary works, his framework can be understood as resting upon four interwoven pillars: historical agency, political emancipation, economic autonomy, and cultural assertion (AHS, n.d.; Vecchi, 2020). While Cabral did not formalize this taxonomy into a rigid system, these dimensions articulate a holistic vision of self-determination.

The foundational concept of "unity and struggle" - which served as the central principle of the PAIGC - synthesizes this broader paradigm. Cabral maintained that no anti-colonial movement could achieve meaningful liberation without constructing political cohesion capable of transcending ethnic, regional, and socio-economic divisions (Cabral, 1984, pp. 19, 46). This formulation departed significantly from romanticized nationalist currents that posited the nation as a pre-existing, static entity. Conversely, Cabral conceptualized the nation as a dynamic political project under continuous construction, forged through collective mobilization against colonial subjugation. As Patrick Chabal (2002) observes, this position reflected a sophisticated understanding of the socio-cultural fabric of Portuguese Guinea. Recognizing that colonial governance relied heavily on instrumentalizing ethnolinguistic fractures to suppress collective resistance, Cabral argued that national unity could not be administratively decreed; it had to develop organically through political conscientization and popular participation.

The centrality of culture constitutes a cornerstone of Cabralian political thought. In his seminal 1970 address at Syracuse University, Cabral famously asserted that "national liberation is necessarily an act of culture" (Cabral, 2020; Santos, 2020). This proposition marked a major shift within post-colonial studies by expanding the scope of liberation beyond state-centric and military parameters. As Maria do Carmo Santos (2020) highlights, Cabral recognized that colonial domination functioned not merely through territorial annexation or economic extraction, but through the systematic erosion of indigenous cultural matrices. Consequently, cultural resistance represented far more than a defensive preservation of tradition; it functioned as an active, strategic reinterpretation of history to construct autonomous futures. Expanding on this point, António Tomás (2007) argues that Cabral's cultural thesis avoided both essentialist nostalgia and abstract universalism. Rather than conceptualizing African culture as homogeneous or immutable, Cabral understood it as a dynamic product of historical conditions, emphasizing that revolutionary political strategies had to adapt continuously to localized material realities.

Crucial to the Cabralian theory of sovereignty is its critique of post-colonial elite formation. Cabral harboured deep concern that newly emerging ruling classes would replicate colonial modes of exploitation upon inheriting the state apparatus. In his landmark 1966 address at the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, he famously called upon the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie to commit "class suicide" - to renounce its structural privileges and align its material interests directly with the popular masses (Almada, 2023). As Peter Mendy (2019) observes, this imperative sought to prevent the institutionalization of post-colonial oligarchies and ensure that formal independence translated into substantive socio-



economic transformation. While contemporary scholars acknowledge the idealistic dimensions of this expectation, its diagnostic relevance remains acute in light of the governance crises and elite capture that affected numerous African states in subsequent decades.

Finally, Cabral's reflection incorporates an international dimension that directly informs modern foreign policy studies. Rejecting narrow autarkic nationalism, Cabral recognized that liberation unfolded within a global political economy structured by asymmetrical power relations (Goulart, 2024). Liberation was therefore simultaneously a domestic imperative and an international negotiation. The strategic alliances constructed by the PAIGC with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations, and Third World solidarity networks demonstrated the practical deployment of this vision. Sovereignty, in Cabral's formulation, was not synonymous with isolationism; rather, it signified the capacity to engage the international system autonomously while safeguarding national strategic interests. By synthesizing culture, political economy, institutional legitimacy, and foreign policy, the Cabralian paradigm provides a comprehensive framework for examining the ongoing state-building trajectories and international assertion of the PALOP in the twenty-first century.

Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde: From Liberation to State-Building

The liberation struggle led by the PAIGC represents one of the most comprehensively examined historical instances of anti-colonial resistance in twentieth-century Africa. Nevertheless, conceptualizing the Guinean experience solely through a military lens obscures the analytical depth of the state-building model crafted by Amílcar Cabral and his leadership. Founded in 1956, the PAIGC emerged within an international and domestic context defined by the Portuguese *Estado Novo* regime's rigid refusal to concede self-determination to its overseas territories. Grounded in the official doctrine of a "pluricontinental and multiracial nation," the colonial state explicitly denied the legitimacy of African nationalist claims, systematically closing constitutional avenues for political emancipation and driving anti-colonial movements toward armed resistance.

The Pidjiguiti massacre of August 1959 - in which colonial authorities violently suppressed striking dockworkers in Bissau - marked a decisive turning point in this trajectory. The incident demonstrated to the PAIGC leadership the impossibility of securing self-determination through exclusive peaceful protest (Cabral, 1984). Consequently, the movement systematically mobilized for armed resistance, formally initiating military operations in 1963 (Comitini, 1980). However, the movement's strategic effectiveness stemmed less from military superiority than from its premature institutionalization of state functions within the "liberated zones." Under PAIGC administration, these areas established schools, primary healthcare centers, agricultural production cooperatives, and popular tribunals (Cabral, 1984; Cabral, 2016, pp. 99-100; Chabal, 2002). Unlike contemporary insurgencies that focused resources predominantly on guerrilla warfare, the PAIGC constructed an operational alternative state apparatus that generated domestic political legitimacy long before de jure independence was attained.



Crucial to this institutionalization process was the strategic prioritization of education. Cabral maintained that genuine sovereignty required an educated citizenry capable of driving socio-economic transformation and executing state functions (Cabral, 1984, pp. 255–257). Schools within the liberated zones served dual purposes: providing basic literacy and fostering national consciousness that transcended ethnic identities. This structural preparation culminated in the unilateral proclamation of the independence of Guinea-Bissau in September 1973 at Madina do Boé (Caldeira, 2024). Although Portugal recognized Guinean independence only following the Carnation Revolution of April 1974, the PAIGC had already secured substantial international recognition. On November 2, 1973, United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/3061 (XXVIII) formally recognized the sovereign state of Guinea-Bissau (UN, 1973), representing a major diplomatic triumph that validated Cabral's doctrine of linking military control to multilateral legitimization.

Concurrently, the Cabo Verdean trajectory exhibited distinct socio-geographical characteristics. The archipelago's insular geography and demographic specificities precluded the replication of mainland guerrilla warfare strategies. Nevertheless, Cabral's overarching political framework guided nationalist mobilization across the islands. The attainment of Cabo Verdean independence in July 1975 reflected the strength of the clandestine political networks established over preceding decades, combined with international diplomatic pressure favoring decolonization.

The initial post-independence era exposed the acute structural challenges inherent to post-colonial state-building. Severe resource scarcity, administrative deficits inherited from colonial rule, and hostile international economic conditions constrained the immediate realization of the PAIGC's socio-economic agenda. Despite these impediments, the governance frameworks of both Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde remained deeply shaped by the Cabralian intellectual lineage. As Julião Soares Sousa (2007) argues, the endurance of the Cabralian legacy resides in its integration of pragmatic political strategy with a long-term vision of structural transformation. Rather than providing transient tactical guidelines, Cabral's political thought articulated a comprehensive doctrine of nation-building that continues to frame governance debates across Lusophone Africa.

The Systemic Impact on Lusophony: The Spillover Effect in Angola and Mozambique and the Fall of the "Estado Novo"

The victorious insurrection and subsequent state consolidation in Guinea-Bissau under the intellectual aegis of Amílcar Cabral did not unfold in isolation, nor did its implications remain confined to the West African theatre. On the contrary, the Guinean experience functioned as the strategic fulcrum and catalyst for a systemic process of attrition that irreversibly undermined the political, economic, and military foundations of the Portuguese colonial empire (Gomes, 2020). The internationalist coordination among national liberation movements across Portuguese colonies achieved institutional form with the founding of



the Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP)⁵, established during a historic summit in Casablanca in 1961 (BNP, 2016).

Under Cabral's theoretical and diplomatic leadership - as its primary conceptual formulator—the CONCP developed into a permanent platform for transcontinental political-diplomatic coordination and strategic intelligence sharing. This alliance unified the programmatic agendas of the PAIGC, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), and the Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe (MLSTP). Through this collective framework, these movements projected a unified voice in international forums, effectively neutralizing Lisbon's diplomatic attempts to isolate the various combat fronts or portray anti-colonial forces as fragmented transnational insurgencies. While the ultimate collapse of the Portuguese colonial regime resulted from a complex convergence of economic exhaustion, international isolation, and military fatigue, Cabral's strategic direction of the CONCP served a pivotal catalytic role. This influence was notably highlighted during the landmark Dar-es-Salaam meeting in October 1965, documented in the "*CONCP – 2ème Conférence des Organisations Nationalistes des Colonies Portugaises – Résolutions*" (CONCP, 1965), which concretely demonstrated the collective political and military alignment led by Cabral, as synthesized below.

Through the institutional mechanism of the CONCP, Cabral succeeded in universalizing his revolutionary methodology, generating a profound spillover effect, strategic emulation, and mutual solidarity across the Angolan and Mozambican fronts. The influence of his framework on prominent leaders—most notably António Agostinho Neto in Angola and Samora Moisés Machel in Mozambique—was structured around three core doctrinal and operational vectors that reconfigured the nature of Lusophone African nationalism:

- i.* Liberation as a Total Social Revolution: Decolonization was conceptualized not as the mere "Africanization" or administrative replacement of colonial personnel, but as the structural transformation of inherited socio-economic relations. It demanded the dismantling of feudal, colonial, and capitalist modes of production that sustained human exploitation in both agrarian and urban spheres.
- ii.* Subordination of the Military Wing to Political Leadership: The armed struggle and tactical operations were strictly subordinated to the ideological direction and programmatic objectives of the political party. This principle reflected Cabral's explicit

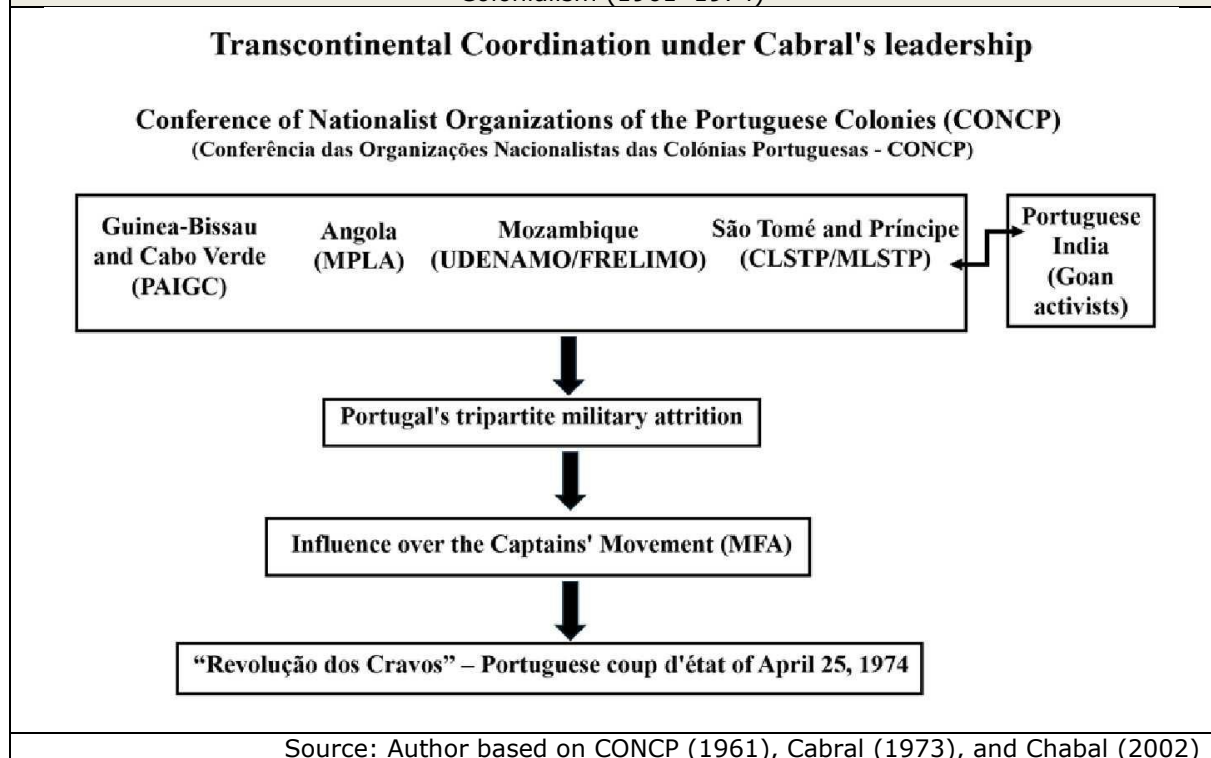
⁵ The Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies (*Conferência das Organizações Nacionalistas das Colónias Portuguesas* – CONCP) was founded on April 18, 1961, in Casablanca, Morocco. It had its roots in the African Revolutionary Front for the National Independence of the Portuguese Colonies (*Frente Revolucionária Africana para a Independência Nacional das Colónias Portuguesas* – FRAIN), established in 1960 in Tunisia. The CONCP represented Angola, through the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* – MPLA); Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, through the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC); Mozambique, initially through the National Democratic Union of Mozambique (*União Democrática Nacional de Moçambique* – UDENAMO) and later through the Mozambique Liberation Front (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* – FRELIMO); São Tomé and Príncipe, through the Committee for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe (*Comité de Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe* – CLSTP), subsequently the Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe (*Movimento de Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe* – MLSTP); and Portuguese India (Goa), with representation and support from Goan nationalists, particularly prior to the territory's integration into the Indian Union.



directive to "combat the craze for militarism and make every combatant an exemplary militant of our Party" (PAIGC, 1969, p. 5).

Civic, Trans-Ethnic, and Anti-Racist Nationalism: Cabralian doctrine rejected ethnolinguistic, regional, or racialized divisions, promoting instead the historical forge of an anti-colonial civic identity—the political and anthropological emergence of the African "New Man" (Neto, 1975; Machel, 1974)⁶.

Table 1. Cabral's leadership within the CONCP and Its contribution to the collapse of Portuguese Colonialism (1961–1974)



This Cabralian paradigm generated an internal ideological friction between "modernizers" and "traditionalists" within Afro-Lusophone liberation movements (Pinto, 2001, p. 87). While the "modernizers" endorsed a universalist, progressive political vision—as formulated by Cabral—the "traditionalists" remained tied to localized traditional authority structures. Both the PAIGC and FRELIMO successfully integrated or marginalized traditionalist factions early in their struggles. In contrast, the MPLA faced a more precarious dynamic in Angola due to acute internal factionalism. Nevertheless, all three dominant movements ultimately aligned under the leadership of the "modernizers," who increasingly adopted progressive, anti-imperialist, and Marxist-Leninist organizational frameworks during the conflict (Pinto, 2001, p. 87).

⁶ This perspective was articulated by Agostinho Neto during the proclamation of Angolan independence on 11 November 1975 (Neto, 1975), and was similarly emphasized by Samora Machel during the swearing-in of Mozambique's Transitional Government in 1974 (Machel, 1974).



In Mozambique, FRELIMO operationalized the Guinean model of "Liberated Zones" with remarkable structural rigor across the northern provinces of Cabo Delgado and Niassa. These regions were converted into social laboratories for popular self-governance, women's emancipation, and collective agricultural production, effectively dismantling Portuguese administrative and fiscal control (Machel, 1977, p. 54). In Angola, despite severe internal fractures—exemplified by the rivalry between the MPLA, Holden Roberto's National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA), and Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which was exacerbated by Cold War geopolitics—the MPLA's intellectual leadership consistently drew upon Cabral's theoretical corpus to assert its political legitimacy and formulate its vision of a secular, progressive state.

The systemic impact of Cabralian praxis extended fundamentally to the metropole itself. Portugal's prolonged engagement in asymmetric counter-insurgency operations across three simultaneous theatres devoid of military resolution precipitated severe economic strain, societal destabilization (manifested through mass draft evasion and emigration), and the moral erosion of the *Estado Novo* regime. Young officers within the Portuguese armed forces, confronted daily with the tactical resilience, logistical sophistication, and political coherence of the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau, increasingly engaged with anti-colonial literature and political manifestos within their garrisons (Almada, 2019).

The *Movimento dos Capitães* (Captains' Movement), which orchestrated the revolutionary coup of April 25, 1974, in Lisbon—overthrowing the dictatorship of Marcello Caetano and establishing Portuguese democracy—was directly catalyzed by this epistemological shift. The explicit acknowledgment by senior military figures, such as General António de Spínola in his seminal work *Portugal e o Futuro* (Spínola, 1974), that the colonial crisis admitted only a political and democratic resolution, derived directly from the strategic stalemate imposed by the PAIGC on the ground. Consequently, within the framework of interconnected global history, the restoration of democracy in Portugal and the sovereign emancipation of Lusophone African nations emerge not as isolated events, but as twin dimensions of a single historical process of universal liberation (Almada, 2019).

The Reconfiguration of the Lusophone Space after Decolonization

The independence of the Portuguese colonies in Africa catalysed a profound transformation in the political configuration of the Lusophone world. Prior to 1974, the official doctrine of *portugalidade* (Portuguese identity) was intrinsically tied to imperial discourse, projecting a political community hierarchy centred upon the metropole. Decolonization rendered this imperial logic entirely unsustainable, compelling a fundamental redefinition of bilateral and multilateral relations between Portugal and the newly emerging African states. This transition did not proceed in a linear fashion; rather, it was marked by structural tensions, historical ambiguities, and complex negotiations that reflected both the heavy weight of colonial legacies and the imperatives of the post-colonial international order.

This post-imperial reconfiguration unfolded within a highly volatile global environment. Achieving statehood during the height of Cold War geopolitical rivalries, the newly independent Portuguese-Speaking African Countries (PALOP) - Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Cabo Verde, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe - frequently found themselves



transformed into arenas of superpower competition. Despite these systemic constraints, the PALOP systematically sought to assert their strategic autonomy. Admission to the United Nations represented a pivotal threshold in this trajectory, providing these states with *de jure* legal recognition and formal access to multilateral decision-making bodies. As post-colonial scholars such as Achille Mbembe (2001) observe, independence represented a dual reality of structural rupture and institutional continuity: while colonial political apparatuses were formally dismantled, inherited vulnerabilities - including mono-crop economic dependency, fragile administrative structures, and external geopolitical pressure - persisted under new post-colonial dynamics, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Macroeconomic Insertion Matrix and Structural Indicators in the PALOP and an Additional CPLP State

Structural Indicators and Macroeconomic Insertion in the PALOP (and CPLP)			
Country	Type of Global Integration	Primary Product or Asset	Dependence / Critical Fragility
Angola	Rent-Dependent Commodity Export Economy	Crude Oil (90%)	High / Bilateral External Debt
Cabo Verde	Advanced Tertiariized and High-Value Services Economy	Governance and Stability	Low / Moderate
Guinea-Bissau	Export Monoculture (<i>Assetization</i>) and Transit Economy	Cashew Nuts (85%)	Extreme / Institutional Fragility and Drug Trafficking
Mozambique	Global Energy Integration Hub	Electricity, Natural Gas (LNG), and Coal	High / Insurgency and Security Vulnerability
São Tome and Príncipe	Rent-Dependent Island Economy and Maritime Transit	International Aid ($\pm$ 18%) Tourism ($\pm$ 11%), and Cocoa ($\leq$ 80%)	High / Fiscal and Exchange Rate Vulnerability
Equatorial Guinea (CPLP)	Primary-Based Oil Enclave Economy	Crude Oil and Natural Gas (LNG)	Extreme / Energy Price Volatility

Source: Author based IMF (2026), UNCTAD (2025), and Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2024)

Concurrently, this structural transition created new avenues for regional and international cooperation. The Portuguese language - historically deployed as an instrument of colonial administration - was progressively reinterpreted and reclaimed by African states as a medium for sovereign dialogue, diplomatic concertation, and multilateral engagement. This evolution culminated in 1996 with the establishment of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP). The creation of the CPLP represents one of the most visible expressions of the post-colonial reconfiguration of Lusophone international relations, establishing an intergovernmental platform explicitly founded upon principles of sovereign equality, non-interference, and mutual cooperation.

Although the CPLP is frequently subjected to academic scrutiny regarding its institutional limitations and execution capacities, the organization plays a meaningful role in consolidating mechanisms for political consultation and enhancing the collective diplomatic leverage of its member states. For the PALOP, the platform provides an additional institutional mechanism to amplify their international visibility and exercise collective agency within broader multilateral forums. Evaluated through the lens of the Cabralian



legacy, this evolutionary trajectory is of notable conceptual interest: Cabral consistently advocated for a sovereignty that was outward-looking and integrated into global dynamics, yet firmly grounded in the political autonomy and self-determination of African peoples. The construction of collaborative frameworks among equal, sovereign states stands fully aligned with this original vision.

The PALOP in the Contemporary International System: Between Multilateralism and Strategic Assertion

The international integration of the PALOP constitutes one of the most significant dimensions of the post-colonial evolution of the Lusophone space. Upon achieving independence, these states confronted a structural challenge extending far beyond domestic institutional consolidation: asserting their sovereignty within an international system characterized by acute economic, technological, and military asymmetries. While political independence secured formal international legal recognition, it did not automatically dismantle the structural constraints inherited from colonial rule. As conceptualized by Samir Amin (1974, *apud* Chambisso, 2025), the historical integration of African economies into the capitalist world-system occurred from peripheral positions, structurally conditioning their pathways for autonomous development. This vulnerability became acutely evident across the PALOP, whose national economies remained heavily reliant on primary commodity exports and external development assistance.

To navigate these structural limitations, the PALOP developed diversified strategies of international insertion, prioritizing active engagement within multilateral institutions. Participation in the United Nations system proved vital from the outset. Multilateralism provided new post-colonial states with an institutional framework where the principle of sovereign equality partially counterbalanced material power asymmetries. Within the UN, the PALOP have consistently advocated for multilateral governance reform, self-determination, and equitable sustainable development—a diplomatic orientation deeply rooted in their anti-colonial liberation struggles, during which international solidarity proved indispensable for legitimizing claims to self-determination. Key historical milestones within this framework included UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960 ("*Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*") and the establishment of the Special Committee on Decolonization (Committee of 24) via Resolution 1654 (XVI) of 27 November 1961 (Santos, 2009).

Crucially, diplomatic support was mobilized through the Organization of African Unity (OAU, now the African Union) alongside an extensive transnational network of non-governmental, political, and solidarity organizations. These included Portuguese anti-fascist and anti-colonial opposition channels—such as the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império* (CEI); the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP); the Patriotic Front for National Liberation (*Frente Patriótica de Libertação Nacional* – FPLN), founded in Rome in 1962 and headquartered in Algiers; and the Portuguese Socialist Action (*Acção Socialista Portuguesa* – ASP), founded in 1964 by figures such as Mário Soares. Institutional and humanitarian assistance was further channelled through official bodies—such as the Development Assistance Committee of the Council of Europe (indirectly via Swedish development aid)—



and multilateral agencies like UNICEF, which executed direct assistance programs in PAIGC-controlled liberated zones. Furthermore, a wide array of international non-governmental organizations actively supported the cause, including *The Angola Comité* in the Netherlands; the Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea (CFMAG) in the United Kingdom, closely affiliated with the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM); and the Organization of Solidarity of the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), based in Havana.

In the post-colonial era, active participation in African regional integration mechanisms represents a foundational pillar of the PALOP's foreign policy architectures. Angola and Mozambique play strategic roles within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), contributing to regional security and economic integration. Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde participate in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with Cabo Verde simultaneously leveraging its geographic positioning to strengthen transatlantic partnerships with both West African and Atlantic structures. This multi-layered institutional integration illustrates a defining feature of contemporary global politics: overlapping regionalism and diplomatic multi-alignment. Rather than operating exclusively within a single institutional domain—whether the CPLP, the African Union, or the United Nations—the PALOP strategically articulate distinct diplomatic identities tailored to their national security and economic priorities.

The establishment and expansion of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) in 1996 must be conceptualized within this broader framework of diplomatic multi-alignment. Although the organization possesses modest resource capacities compared to traditional regional blocks, it serves as an indispensable forum for political concertation, normative consensus-building, and South-South technical cooperation. Scholarly literature emphasizes that the geopolitical value of the CPLP derives not merely from its policy outputs, but from its unique capacity to bridge sovereign states across four continents. For the PALOP, the platform provides an additional diplomatic arena to project their strategic interests, expand bilateral partnerships, and amplify their operational leverage within the wider multilateral architecture.

Evaluated through a Cabralian theoretical lens, the engagement of the PALOP in contemporary multilateral organizations represents the structural continuation of the struggle for sovereignty through diplomatic instruments. If the primary objective during the anti-colonial struggle was securing international recognition for national self-determination, the post-colonial imperative has shifted to converting that formal statehood into substantive strategic autonomy. In this sense, Cabralian praxis demonstrates that sovereignty must never be conflated with autarkic isolation or passive non-alignment; rather, it consists of the capacity to navigate complex global interdependencies autonomously while safeguarding the national margin of political decision-making.

Unfinished Sovereignty? Dependence, Neocolonialism, and Multipolarity

Reflecting upon the sovereign trajectories of the PALOP requires a critical examination of the structural challenges confronting these states within the contemporary global political economy. Although political independence was secured half a century ago, persistent



vulnerabilities continue to evoke central debates articulated within the theoretical corpus of Amílcar Cabral. Chief among these issues is the persistence of structural economic dependence. Most African nations continue to occupy peripheral positions within the international division of labor, remaining specialized in the extraction and export of primary commodities while relying heavily on imported high-value-added manufactures. In his seminal trilogy published between 1970 and 1990—*Accumulation on a World Scale*, *Imperialism and Unequal Development*, and *Maldevelopment: Anatomy of a Global Failure*—Samir Amin demonstrated that the core structural dilemma for former European colonies lay in their merely "formal" independence. In practice, post-independence Africa was subordinately integrated into the global capitalist system through a model of dependent peripheral accumulation, wherein domestic industrialization—the essential catalyst for any autonomous development project—was systematically marginalized (Chambisso, 2025).

Citing Amin's (1990, *apud* Chambisso, 2025) analysis in *Maldevelopment*, Chambisso (2025) underscores the foundational thesis that 'political independence without economic delinking is an illusion.' This formulation explains why numerous post-colonial African states, despite winning legal statehood, rapidly confronted structural growth crises, acute external dependence, and extreme vulnerability to international commodity price volatility. What these political economies fundamentally lacked was what Amin (1990, *apud* Chambisso, 2025) conceptualized as economic 'delinking' (*déconnexion*) to complement formal political sovereignty. Within the PALOP context, this structural dynamic manifests through distinct empirical vulnerabilities

- Angola: Represents a paradigmatic case of resource concentration, where historical over-reliance on petroleum exports has dominated public revenues and foreign exchange earnings. While oil revenues underwrote post-war national infrastructure reconstruction, they simultaneously exposed the national economy to severe international market shocks and hindered industrial diversification.
- Mozambique: Faces analogous structural pressures regarding massive offshore natural gas reserves in the Rovuma Basin. While generating expectations of accelerated macroeconomic growth, these discoveries have triggered intense scholarly concern surrounding the "resource curse"—a dynamic wherein capital-intensive extractive abundance fails to translate into inclusive socio-economic development or broad-based institutional strengthening.
- Guinea-Bissau & Cabo Verde: Guinea-Bissau remains acutely dependent on mono-crop cashew nut exports, leaving its fiscal stability subject to global market fluctuations, while Cabo Verde confronts structural constraints inherent to small island developing states (SIDS), including resource scarcity and high exposure to external economic and environmental shocks.

Across these diverse national trajectories, the concept of neocolonialism retains profound analytical purchase, capturing the continued capacity of external actors to condition domestic political and economic policy horizons. Nevertheless, the twenty-first-century international system exhibits structural dynamics markedly distinct from those of the mid-



twentieth-century anti-colonial struggle. The rise of emerging powers—most prominently the People's Republic of China—has fundamentally altered the global distribution of power and financial capital. The expanding Chinese footprint across Africa constitutes one of the most intensely debated phenomena in contemporary international relations. Scholars such as Alden (2005) argue that Chinese engagement offers African states unprecedented strategic flexibility to diversify bilateral partnerships and mitigate historical dependencies on former Western colonial powers. Conversely, critics caution against emerging modalities of dependency associated with external debt sustainability and external control over strategic physical infrastructure.

Simultaneously, alternative scholarly perspectives highlight the operational framework of "co-evolutionary pragmatism" - a defining feature of China's contemporary African policy - which fosters sectoral convergence across agriculture, physical infrastructure, and environmental management. Under this pragmatic model, localized coordination mechanisms deployed within one sector can generate positive cross-sectoral externalities and alleviate systemic operational constraints in others (De, 2025). Parallel to this Asian driver, the European Union maintains substantial engagement through development cooperation, trade frameworks, and foreign direct investment, while non-traditional actors - including the United States, India, Turkey, Brazil, and various Gulf states - have systematically intensified their diplomatic and economic presence across the continent. This burgeoning multipolarity creates simultaneous strategic opportunities and complex policy trade-offs: while expanding foreign policy options for African decision-makers, it exponentially increases diplomatic complexity and demands heightened national negotiating capacity.

In this transformed geopolitical landscape, Cabralian theoretical reflections acquire renewed analytical urgency. Cabral's uncompromising emphasis on national political autonomy, endogenous socio-economic development, and the expansion of the sovereign decision-making capacity of African peoples provides an essential critical lens for evaluating contemporary global power configurations. Rather than representing a static historical threshold achieved once and for all in 1973 or 1975, sovereignty emerges in Cabralian thought as an unceasing, dynamic process of political and economic construction. To avoid an idealized or teleological reading of Cabral, however, it is necessary to acknowledge that his normative framework encountered severe structural frictions in historical practice. The post-colonial trajectories of the PALOP demonstrated that anti-colonial revolutionary solidarity frequently fractured into authoritarian centralism, acute institutional fragility, and persistent extra-regional dependencies, revealing a profound historical gap between Cabral's emancipatory projections and post-colonial *realpolitik*.



The Contemporary Relevance of Amílcar Cabral's Thought in the Twenty-First Century

More than five decades after Amílcar Cabral's tragic assassination⁷, his theoretical and programmatic legacy continues to occupy a central place in contemporary debates surrounding state sovereignty, sustainable development, culture, and political emancipation. This enduring presence results not merely from the historical significance of his leadership during the anti-colonial war, but primarily from the remarkable capacity of his theoretical corpus to provide analytical instruments for deciphering twenty-first-century challenges. Fundamental to this lasting relevance is the multidimensional nature of Cabralian reflection: Cabral never conceptualized national liberation as a single historical event or a simple administrative transfer of power. Rather, liberation was formulated as a continuous, multidimensional emancipatory continuum wherein formal political independence constituted merely the prerequisite stage for structural economic transformation, cultural re-grounding, and the active democratic participation of popular masses in shaping their national Destiny.

This holistic perspective proves particularly incisive within contemporary debates on African economic development. Over recent decades, numerous states across the continent have recorded robust macroeconomic growth rates alongside deeper integration into global markets. However, persistent structural deficits endure regarding severe socio-economic inequalities, technological vulnerabilities, fiscal fragility, and institutional weakness. As Carlos Lopes convincingly argues, the primary contemporary challenge for African states consists of translating raw economic growth into sustainable, high-value-added structural transformation (Lopes, 2019). This imperative displays profound conceptual affinities with Cabral's insistence on binding economic development to the internal buildup of technological capabilities, institutional consolidation, and national productive autonomy.

Furthermore, Cabralian thought retains exceptional analytical purchase in addressing contemporary crisis modalities of political governance. Throughout his writings, Cabral maintained a vigilant critique of power concentration and the systemic risk of post-independence ruling elites detaching themselves from the material interests of the popular base. His rigorous critique of the national *petite bourgeoisie* remains strikingly prescient in an era where multiple post-colonial polities navigate challenges associated with neo-patrimonialism, systemic corruption, clientelism, and institutional fragility. In this context, scholars emphasize the necessity of reclaiming indigenous African traditions of civic participation and institutional accountability to fortify the democratic legitimacy of contemporary state structures (Ngoenha, 2004, pp. 81–82). Although articulated within a distinct historical moment, this normative reflection directly intersects with Cabral's core imperative: ensuring that sovereign statehood yields concrete socio-economic benefits for the majority of the population.

In the realm of globalized culture and knowledge production, the Cabralian doctrine of "returning to the source" and culture as an instrument of liberation has acquired renewed

⁷ Amílcar Cabral was assassinated on 20 January 1973 in Conakry, the capital of the Republic of Guinea (Guinea-Conakry), directly outside his official residence within the PAIGC administrative complex in the city (Cabral, 1984, pp. 437–438).



theoretical urgency. While the intensification of global flows of information, capital, and people have broadened avenues for intercultural exchange, it has simultaneously heightened anxieties surrounding cultural homogenization, western hegemony, and the peripheralization of local identities. Cabral's defence of culture as the foundational matrix of historical resistance continues to inspire contemporary discourse on cultural pluralism, indigenous knowledge systems, and epistemological decolonization. As Achille Mbembe observes, a central imperative for contemporary African thought consists of dismantling representations inherited from the colonial episteme and asserting autonomous modes of interpreting the world (Mbembe, 2001). This task directly echoes Cabral's core premise: asserting the historical capacity of African societies to produce critical knowledge and formulate their own development paradigms.

Finally, the expanding scholarly focus on *African agency* in International Relations mirrors the operational essence of Cabral's political trajectory. For decades, traditional international relations literature depicted African states as passive subjects, structurally overdetermined by external superpower dynamics. Contemporary scholarship has vigorously challenged this subaltern framing, demonstrating that African states, regional institutions, and transnational movements actively shape global governance agendas. Cabral's diplomatic and revolutionary praxis stands as an exemplary historical model of this agency. Through a sophisticated integration of grassroots mobilization, rigorous intellectual production, and strategic international diplomacy, Cabral elevated a localized liberation struggle into a globally recognized cause for human emancipation. In an emerging multipolar order characterized by intense major-power competition, his uncompromising insistence on both political self-determination and intellectual independence offers an indispensable strategic compass for post-colonial states seeking to navigate global interdependencies without surrendering their sovereign decision-making power.

Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis developed throughout this study demonstrates that the intellectual and political legacy of Amílcar Cabral extends far beyond the historical boundaries of the anti-colonial liberation struggle that culminated in the independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde. While Cabral's historical stature remains inextricably bound to his strategic leadership of the PAIGC and the operational prosecution of the national liberation war, the enduring significance of his work lies primarily in his formulation of a holistic, multidimensional conception of state sovereignty—one capable of integrating political, economic, cultural, and international systemic vectors. Grounded in the fundamental premise that formal statehood does not exhaust the imperative of national emancipation, Cabral constructed a dynamic theoretical corpus that continues to offer vital analytical instruments for evaluating the post-colonial trajectories of the PALOP and the structural challenges confronting African states within the contemporary global order.

Central to this theoretical contribution is Cabral's conceptualization of "unity and struggle," which operated not merely as a tactical slogan for military mobilization, but as an integrated paradigm designed to solve the twin dilemmas of anti-colonial resistance and



post-colonial nation-building. By explicitly linking popular grassroots mobilization with cultural re-grounding, agricultural diagnostic rigor, and institutional development, Cabral established that true liberation demands the transformation of domestic productive structures and the democratization of sovereign decision-making. Furthermore, as this study has highlighted, Cabral's ideational influence was never geographically confined to Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde. His programmatic formulations and personal diplomacy exerted a profound catalytic effect on the liberation movements of Angola (MPLA) and Mozambique (FRELIMO), fostering a shared anti-colonial political culture across the African Lusophone space. This transnational circulation of revolutionary theory and administrative experience played a decisive role in shaping post-colonial state structures and laying the groundwork for durable inter-state solidarity across the PALOP.

The examination of the international integration of the PALOP reveals that the attainment of legal independence inaugurated an entirely new and complex phase in the struggle for sovereign autonomy. If the primary objective during the anti-colonial era consisted of securing international legal recognition for the right to self-determination, the post-colonial imperative shifted toward asserting political and economic agency within a global architecture characterized by acute structural asymmetries and peripheral capitalist accumulation. Within this international setting, persistent challenges—such as primary commodity dependence, fiscal vulnerability, institutional fragility, and major-power geopolitical competition—continue to condition the practical exercise of national sovereignty. The emerging multipolarity of the twenty-first-century international system presents a double-edged reality: while expanding the spectrum of strategic partnerships available to post-colonial states, it simultaneously heightens foreign policy complexity, requiring increasingly sophisticated diplomatic strategies to safeguard national autonomy.

It is precisely within this contemporary geopolitical landscape that Cabralian thought reasserts its profound theoretical urgency. Cabral's uncompromising emphasis on national political autonomy, endogenous socio-economic transformation, and epistemological self-determination provides an essential conceptual compass for interpreting the structural dilemmas facing the PALOP in the modern era. Far from representing a static historical milestone sealed at the moment of decolonization, sovereignty emerges in Cabralian praxis as an unceasing, dialectical process of political construction, institutional adaptation, and strategic negotiation against both external structural constraints and internal post-colonial frictions.

In the final analysis, the legacy of Amílcar Cabral remains exceptionally vital because it serves as an unyielding reminder that the true emancipation of post-colonial societies depends not merely on the capture of formal state apparatuses, but on the capacity to erect legitimate democratic institutions, foster inclusive structural development, and project autonomous agency within global power structures. His theoretical and practical work therefore continues to constitute an indispensable reference point for understanding contemporary *African agency*, the evolving geometry of South-South cooperation, and the strategic positioning of Portuguese-speaking African states within the contemporary international system.



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