

## THE PAIGC WITHOUT CABRAL: AN ASSESSMENT

### An Interview with Gerard Chaliand

[The following is the transcript of an interview granted to Ufahamu on February 8, 1973 (barely two weeks after the assassination of Amilcar Cabral) by Gerard Chaliand, a man with a remarkably intimate knowledge of both Cabral and the PAIGC in particular and Third World movements of national liberation in general.

Gerard Chaliand is a French citizen, born in 1934 in Brussels. After earning a degree from the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris (Sorbonne), he embarked on a series of travels which have taken him to several parts of the world, and in the course of which he was able to conduct extensive research on movements of national liberation, armed struggle, and problems attendant on the establishment of socialism. Places he has visited include countries in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia, and West Africa. Between 1962-1964 he resided in Algeria where he was the Editor-in-Chief of the Algerian weekly, *Revolution Africaine*, focal point for most of the representatives of national liberation movements in Africa and Asia. He was also one of the founders, along with F. Maspero, of the well-known review, *Partisans*.

In addition to three books of poetry (his first was *La marche tetue*, 1959), he has published seven books which have been widely acclaimed and translated into many languages (among them English, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Arabic, and Italian). Those that have appeared in English include: *Armed Struggle in Africa: With the Guerrillas in Portuguese Guinea*, *Monthly Review Press*, 1969 - an account of his visit in May/June, 1966, to the liberated areas with Amilcar Cabral; *Peasants of North Vietnam*, *Penguin*, 1973 - an evaluative summary of ten years of independence. His forthcoming book from *Viking Press*, *The Revolution in the Third World: Myths and Prospects*, will summarize his first-hand experience on the subject.

During the past three years, Gerard Chaliand has also visited the United States, lecturing in major American universities. In 1970, he was a visiting professor at U.C.L.A. Ed. note]

QUESTION: *How would you assess the PAIGC without Cabral?*

ANSWER: First of all, I would like to point out the fact that now in the Portuguese-controlled areas of Africa I consider the PAIGC to be the best revolutionary party. By the best party I mean its theoretical sophistication at the leadership level, its cohesiveness, again at the leadership level, and the fact that it has been built through a long struggle without any major internal crisis from 1956 up to 1972. This is a party which is well structured, with good leadership -- not only Cabral but also other people in the central committee -- which has close links with the Guinean population. This has not been the case in all the Portuguese colonies and this was not the case in many African parties in the colonial days, when they had initiated their movement of national liberation. You could have good leadership outside but without being in really close contact with the internal population. These other parties did not have the same presence in the villages which has marked the PAIGC.

So, after all this, it still must be said that the loss of Cabral will weaken the PAIGC very much. It will weaken it, and it's no use saying that they will be stronger after him rather than before him simply because his death will give everyone renewed strength. Things should be looked at politically. To lose an overwhelming leader like Cabral is something of importance. (All things considered, to lose Lenin in the case of the Soviet revolution was something important and the revolution never went through after him as it did before. However, I am not trying to draw any comparison.)

QUESTION: *But if, as you mentioned earlier, the party has had an excellent structure -- good mobilization, cohesiveness, solidarity -- how can you support your assertion that Cabral's absence is bound to weaken the movement?*

ANSWER: To weaken, of course, is not to destroy. To be weak is not to collapse. But to be weak is to be less strong than you were. So, let us see how important Cabral was to the PAIGC. First, it must be remembered that Cabral was the founder of the party. From the beginning he was the political head. As you know, he was trained as an agronomist in Portugal, then sent to Angola and Guinea Bissau. This is unlike all the other leaders in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. He at least knew his country and its society intimately. For at least two years he was in the countryside conducting an agricultural survey which was published in 1956. (In the *Boletim Cultural da Guine Portuguesa*, Vol. XI). It was something like the state of the nation, how things were going in the rural

areas which means 80-85% of the population in 'Portuguese' Guinea. He knew exactly the kind of society he was dealing with. This is invaluable. He was not mechanically trying to copy the Russians or the Chinese. He knew exactly what his own society was and he was dealing concretely with its own realities. That's a point which is typically Cabral at the beginning -- good knowledge of his own society, and, secondly, the capacity to consider the necessity of having a party.

Let us not forget that we are talking about 1956. In 1956 there were no independent African states with the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia. Cabral was essentially the founder of the party. From 1956 to 1959 came the organization of cells in the main cities like Bafata, Bolama, and Bissau. The kind of people he got in the party were semi-intellectuals, skilled and unskilled workers, unemployed people, etc.; the leadership was made up of intellectuals, Cape Verdeans at the beginning and, after that, more Guineans. But, in 1959, after the failure of the strike of Pidgiguiti, Cabral understood that the kind of strategy which focused on the building of an urban party with cells was bound to be a failure. They were heavily repressed by the PIDE (secret police); the president of the party at that time, Rafael Barbosa, was under arrest; a lot of the members of the party were also arrested, at which time Cabral had to leave for Conakry in 1959 (the Republic of Guinea had become independent in 1958). He was the one who decided that a change in strategy was called for. I don't say he was the only one, of course, but it was mainly due to his vision that they went from the strategy of building an urban party to one of building a party in the rural areas. Let us remember that he had high-ranked cadres and superior cadres at that time but he lacked middle cadres. The middle cadre is the person who is semi-literate or completely illiterate, who is the 'son of the people' coming from the village and who is able to stick to the village because he belongs to it. In other words, Cabral changed the strategy from urban to guerilla warfare within rural areas inside 'Portuguese' Guinea.

By the late sixties, guerilla warfare had become fashionable but it wasn't in 1959. You had to think about those things by yourself. It wasn't in the literature in the bookstores or on posters. In Africa the kind of guerilla warfare which was being attempted (I am not speaking of Algeria), the only serious kind of warfare was the *maquis* of the Cameroun, the UPC led by Reuben Um Nyobe -- someone who has been forgotten, but who deserves to be better known. The rest of the actions were short and swift insurrections within towns which were crushed immediately (one could cite the case of an attack in Luanda, Angola in February 1961). Another strategy which

was used in those days was to have a friendly neighboring country which would give you logistical support. You could have a small commando group who would hit and run back if they could. There was no political preparation for a protracted fight, and there was no fighting inside with the people sticking to the villages. In other words, Cabral's strategy was rather new in the African context.

*QUESTION: Since you cite the experience of the Cameroun, you recall that the absence of Um Nyobe caused the deterioration of the struggle in the Cameroun. Do you mean to relate that to the situation in Guinea Bissau?*

*ANSWER: I don't want to make comparisons. Too often they prove to be irrelevant. But as far as guerilla strategy is concerned he did not commit the error of having commandos outside, sending them inside and then getting them outside again. He created two things as far as armed struggle is concerned:*

Number one. A lengthy mobilization of the peasantry in about three years, from 1959 to about the beginning of 1963. That is, a political preparation of the peasantry which was basic for creating links and ties with the people and explaining to them why they were fighting or why they were preparing to fight against Portuguese colonialism and how they would do it, as well as to see who would be an agent for the Portuguese and who would be willing to participate in the fight. He didn't commit the same kind of errors which were made by Guevara, for instance. I saw a newspaper where they say Cabral is Africa's "Guevara." Maybe it's nice as a title, but, in fact, on the grounds of armed struggle and strategy, he was a lot wiser than Guevara. The error of Guevara was that he started the struggle without an initial political preparation of the peasantry. He expected that the example of his fighters would be enough to mobilize the peasantry. In the case of Peru and Bolivia, this failed. The kind of job Cabral did in 'Portuguese' Guinea was to prepare the conditions for an armed struggle by politically mobilizing the peasantry.

Secondly, he didn't start his armed struggle in one particular place which could be the focus of repression. He was smart enough not to start just at the border. He selected a whole area in the south of the country which was not too far from the Republic of Guinea. That was in 1963, and then a few months later, he established a second front not too far from the Senegalese frontier. In other words, there was a wide-spread zone of guerilla activity from the very beginning in 1963. It's obviously harder to repress guerillas who are in many places than it is to deal with those at one particular

point possibly with the support of three or four villages or none at all.

So this is, as far as guerilla strategy is concerned, the originality which Cabral brought to the African context. I'm not saying that this has not been done in other parts of the world. It has been done by the Chinese and the Vietnamese against the French. But what was done by the NLF, for instance, was not known in 1959 and the Vietnamese experience was itself not very well known. Cabral in an interview said he had not read Mao Tse-Tung until 1961. So, step by step, he discovered what had to be done.

In addition, I would like to add several other points in connection with the liberated zones. He did not consider these zones only militarily liberated. He thought that to really liberate an area you had to modify the administrative and political structures. What the Algerians, during the war of liberation, were not able to do because French repression was too strong (some people may disagree with me), but what the Chinese and the NLF did and what Cabral was the first to do in Africa was to create in the village context a new administration, a new legitimacy. Two women and three men were elected at the head of village committees, local militias were constituted (they were in charge of local production, rice, communications, logistics, etc.), a health officer who was generally a woman was sent for every half dozen villages, and a teacher was sent for every half dozen villages. It was because of a lack of cadres that he couldn't do more. He also decided on the creation of a people's store where you could barter your rice for clothes, etc. This entire organization became more complex and sophisticated as the years progressed until the final level was reached in 1972 with the general elections in the liberated areas.

I would like to elaborate further on the participation of women since Cabral profoundly altered the status of the woman. For instance, he forbade things like forced marriages. That's why a lot of women joined the party. There has been participation of women in decision-making and in the daily life at the village level. This is important. The women were inside the struggle. The idea of Cabral was as simple as that -- that half of the population was made of women. If they didn't participate, we would lose half of our strength.

Let's go to external policy. I would like to speak briefly of the role of Cabral as a diplomat. As a diplomat he was a very wise man -- an extremely wise man. Cabral wasn't the type of dashing leader, arms in hand, stating nice things with a lot of verbal inflation, the kind of machismo hero that has

been portrayed on many posters. He was rather a well-balanced man, who said things which were prudent and well-articulated. When you're a small country and a small party in the context of world power, you've got to be cautious. He knew exactly what was possible to be accomplished. He was a realist. He knew the limits of his strength and the strength of the movement he represented. For instance, in the African context, which wasn't a very friendly one, it's fashionable to speak against colonialism (although the OAU has not been that efficient). You are not helped very much when you lead a movement, but very often you are, in fact, restrained from doing your job by so-called friends (who might be neighbors). That was the case of Senegal up to a certain point. Senegal was supporting all the groups which were not even fighting, and the PAIGC couldn't even pass through their border. But those things are past, of course. Cabral was able to reach an agreement on those problems with neighboring countries. Due to his negotiating ability, he was also able to explain to other African countries that they were fighting against Portuguese colonialism.

On the international level in the sixties, he was wise enough to avoid the kind of splintering situation that a lot of other movements have known. Among them, the UPC of Cameroun. He avoided the Sino-Soviet dispute. He was asked to participate in international conferences on one side or the other, but he very wisely refrained. A very simple explanation was that his job was not to make such and such a statement against such and such state, but to fight against the Portuguese. His very job was to fight against Portuguese colonialism. On the other hand, he took co-existence very seriously. I am reminded of one of his speeches where he said, "To coexist peacefully you have to exist, and that is just what we are fighting for." Diplomatically, he was not only able to cope with African states and socialist states (he had friendly relations especially with Fidel Castro and Cuba), but he also had good, honest relations with Western peoples and Western states which were supporting the fight of the 'colonies' against Portuguese colonialism. This was the case with the Scandinavians, especially Sweden. In addition, he was not the kind of sectarian who did not want to speak to certain persons. After the Rome Conference of 1970, he was received at the Vatican as the representative of the Portuguese colonies along with Marcelino Santos and Dr. Neto. He went to visit the Pope. It was Cabral's idea, and it was truly a diplomatic coup. Let us not forget that Portugal is a self-avowed Catholic country, and as such the Portuguese have pretended to bring 'civilization' to every part of the world, especially to its 'overseas provinces.' Following the meeting, Portugal recalled its ambassador to

the Vatican which resulted in chilly relations between the two for some time.

As a diplomat, he also came to the United Nations. He was a man respected by people who were not even his friends. As a realistic leader, he could claim credibility. He would say, "Claim no easy victories, tell no lies." I think he put those words into practice as much as possible. When he came to the United Nations, last fall, he was able to report that inside Guinea they were having general elections to elect a state council. Eighty people were elected to represent the rural areas, and forty people were elected to represent the occupied towns, among them, Bissau, Bafata, and Boloma. This state council was meant to represent the legitimacy of the country. This was quite original, too. He did not, like many other leaders, create a provisional government in exile. To start with, he wasn't in exile. They were all actively fighting, so that there was no need for a provisional government. This state council was designed to last and to represent all the people who had been consulted, and this was one of the original means to step up to even more legitimacy at the international level.

To conclude on Cabral as a diplomat, he never missed an opportunity to explain that his people were not fighting against the whites or the Portuguese people as such. This was not meant to be a racial issue or something between two nations. He said they were fighting against a system and the domination of Portuguese colonialism and all those who were for colonialism in Guinea Bissau. He had contact from time to time with leftist groups in Portugal, and he wasn't even opposed to admitting that Portuguese culture was part of his own culture. In other words, he wasn't saying that everything Portuguese is bad.

Finally, I would like to underline his contribution as a theoretician. If we look at political leaders in contemporary Africa, he probably has supplied the most original contributions. I don't see any other political leader in Africa who could be compared with Cabral. I would like to point out two or three things. Let's not forget about his contribution as an agronomist which, in fact, is that of an agronomist and sociologist put together. What he did was not just a rural survey of the Portuguese colonies but a socio-rural survey. (Frankly, he was as good a sociologist as any Ph.D. in the subject.)

Secondly, I would say that he has been a major contributor to revolutionary theory, especially in his speech in Havana in January, 1966, which has been called "The Weapon of Theory." In that speech, he brings out a very important thing. First,

he uses Marxist sociology, but not in a mechanical fashion. Related to our concrete conditions, he asks, what can we do with the sociological weapons of Marxism? He points out the fact that at least some of the peoples of Guinea-Bissau are not solidly differentiated into classes. Marx said that the motor of history is the class struggle. But what if there are no classes? What about the Balante, for instance, which is a society without a chieftainship, where the elders have moral prestige (but to be old is not to be in a class, just as being a student is not belonging to a class). In those societies where we do not have that kind of stratification, shall we admit that we are out of history? Certainly not, Cabral says. We are as much a part of history as anyone, but in a different framework, following our own dialectic. The motor of history is not necessarily the class struggle but the productive forces -- the men. He pointed out this thing which had never been pointed out by any theoretician on Africa, white or African.

Another original contribution to Marxist sociology and to the political history of Africa was to say that in our conditions, it's not the peasants who really form the leadership in Africa. Marxist-Leninism says that what is important is the dictatorship of the proletariat. Cabral says that we must admit that under our conditions the social group which takes leadership is a segment of the petty-bourgeoisie. Not all of them, however, since a great many of the petty-bourgeoisie remain neutral, some on the side of the Portuguese. But there is a segment which has been called the 'revolutionary intellectuals' or 'revolutionary semi-intellectuals.' They are the ones who feel involved, who realize that they are humiliated, who realize what colonialism is; that they and their own people cannot make it under colonial rule, that they are dependent, that they have no economic growth and no political future, and that they do not control their country. This segment of the petty-bourgeoisie is the vanguard of the revolution. If this group wants to go far, if they do not just want to take one or two steps to revolution, they have to "commit suicide" as a class. In other words, they cannot work for the interest of their own social group as such, but have to work with the idea and the ideology which represent the interests of all the people of the country -- the peasants, the workers, the poor people, the 98% of the majority who are oppressed and are not on the side of the Portuguese. (In my opinion this is a particular kind of a suicide on the part of the petty-bourgeoisie. They die as a petty-bourgeoisie and when independence is reached they resurrect as a bureaucracy. It's a nice suicide!) If this is a revolutionary group with a revolutionary ideology, this power is not to be corrupted as a group as in the neighboring countries. It is

not to work for the wealth of your own group. No, the aim is to develop the whole country, to try to improve the conditions of the population itself. This is the spirit of what Cabral means.

A final contribution of Cabral's is the speech he gave in 1970 at Syracuse on "National Culture and Liberation." There, he also sets forth highly original ideas on what the impact of colonialism was and how it can be resisted. Moreover, he outlined the place of the 'classes' in this delicate framework. In the last formal speech he made in October, 1972, at Lincoln University, he further elaborated on this question of class and culture.

On culture and Marxist sociology of the African revolution, Cabral, I am convinced, has made extremely original contributions which put him higher than any of the other leaders I know.

*QUESTION: In terms of the impact of Cabral's death on the party, is it conceivable that the remaining leadership has learned these lessons and can carry on with the same zeal?*

*ANSWER: I think that's a very good concluding question. I think that Cabral has really trained the party. He made it, and I have no doubt that the people I have met in the PAIGC will continue along the same line. I don't believe they will change strategically, or that they will attempt something radically different from what he has tried to build. But there is one thing which should also be said. When a movement experiences the loss of a man of Cabral's caliber, what can usually be expected is a split. If the party can avoid that kind of split, if the party remains united, and if it is capable of accomplishing good things with a good cadre, they can overcome problems in the short run. But in the long run the loss of Cabral will still be felt because, although the general line is drawn, things do change in time and the party will need a political head who can adapt new strategies and who has the genius and imagination to find new responses to new questions. On those grounds alone, Cabral will be hard to replace.*

To conclude. Amilcar Cabral was truly a unique man both as a theoretician and a practitioner. His writings and accomplishments have great significance for the entire world, not just for Africa. It will no doubt take many years for us to fully appreciate the enormous contributions of this man, but I am certain that as he becomes better known and understood his stature will rise rather than decline. Of this, I am absolutely convinced.

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