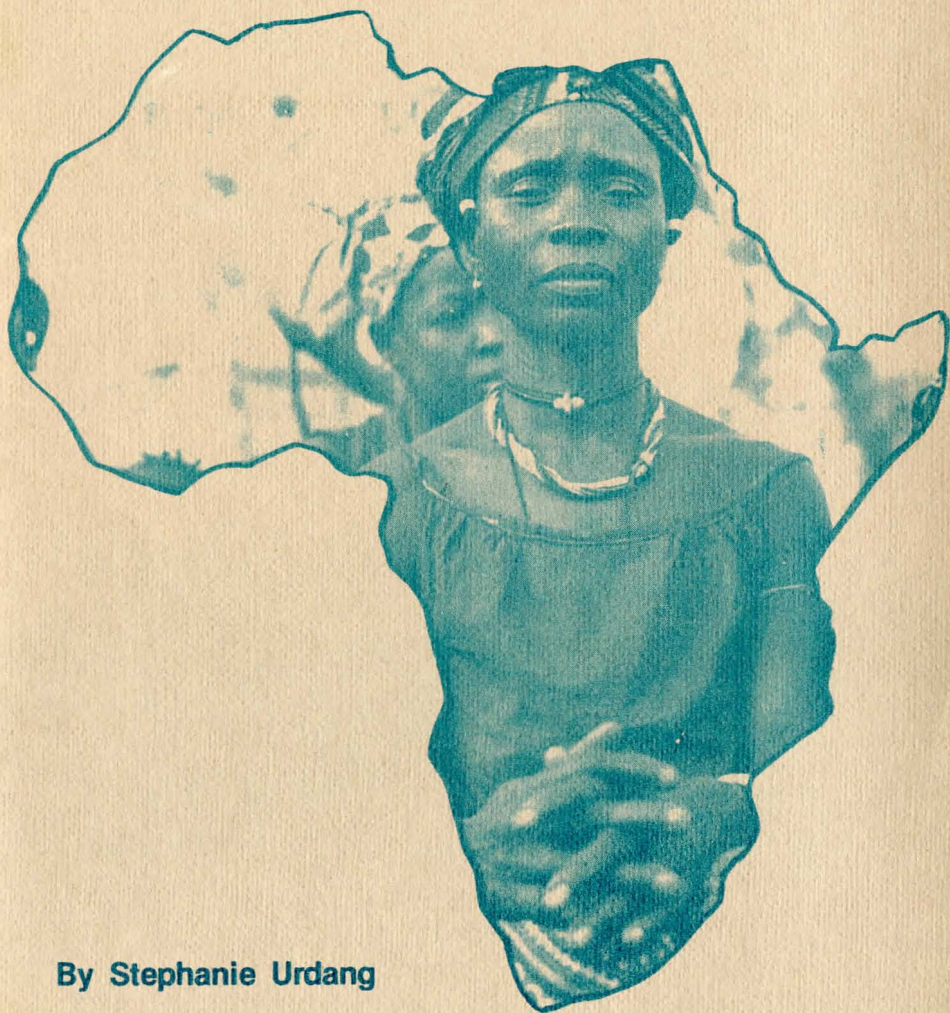


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**A REVOLUTION
WITHIN A REVOLUTION:
WOMEN IN GUINEA-BISSAU.**



By Stephanie Urdang

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A REVOLUTION WITHIN A REVOLUTION: WOMEN IN GUINEA-BISSAU.

Part 1. Guinea-Bissau and the Liberation Struggle

"Liberation of the people means the liberation of the productive forces of our country, the liquidation of all kinds of imperialist or colonial domination of our country, and the taking of every measure to avoid any new exploitation of our people. . . . We want equality, social justice and freedom. . . . Liberation for us is to take back our destiny and our history."

—Amilcar Cabral, 1971, London

In 1956 the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) was founded by Amilcar Cabral and a group of comrades. Their goal was to liberate their country from the brutal oppression that was imposed upon it by Portuguese colonialism. Within eighteen years their goal was achieved and the Republic of Guinea-Bissau became the newest member of the United Nations in September 1974. It was a victory greeted by progressive people throughout the world with enthusiasm and support and somewhat begrudgingly acknowledged by non-progressive forces such as the United States, who had supported Portugal militarily through NATO for the duration of the war.

Guinea-Bissau is a small country with a population of 800,000, wedged between Senegal to the north and the Republic of Guinea (Conakry) to the south on the west coast of Africa. It is a truly agricultural country, the staple product being rice. Ninety-five per cent of the population are peasants. There are ten to twelve different ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau, the largest of which are the Balante comprising 30 per cent of the population. A further 30 per cent are Muslim, the largest group being the Fula who represent about 12½ per cent.

Portuguese Colonialism

Portuguese presence in Guinea and on the Cape Verde Islands

dates back for 500 years. But their presence until the end of the 19th century was one of trading, slave-trading in particular, rather than political control. This began to change about eighty years ago when the imperial powers of Europe (Britain, France and Belgium) participated in what came to be known as 'the scramble for Africa', and sliced up the continent according to their desires. Portugal realized at that point that it would have to entrench itself politically in its colonies (Mozambique and Angola were also controlled by Portugal) if it did not want to lose out to its three European neighbors. Portugal met much resistance at first in its attempts to solidify its hold on Guinea-Bissau. But by the mid-thirties it had managed to take control of the whole country through the use of army and police. By now fascism had become a reality in Portugal itself and this was reflected in the savage repression imposed upon its colonies.

"What exactly is colonial exploitation in my country like?" said Amílcar Cabral. "It is important to see how it differs from that in Angola and Mozambique. In Guinea the climate is not very good, and also a great resistance was put up against the Portuguese invaders, so we don't have settlers as in Mozambique and Angola. We were exploited by commerce and by heavy taxes. You must also understand that the slightest attempt on our part to gain our rights was answered by severe and often bloody repression by the Portuguese".¹

The people of Guinea-Bissau were taxed for every conceivable and inconceivable thing. Besides hut and head taxes, they were taxed, for example, for the palm trees that grew on their land, for every pound of rice they grew, for cultural dances and entertainment that they held in the evenings. People lived in extreme poverty, their livestock taken from them in lieu of taxes. They were jailed for the slightest offense and rounded up for forced labor. There were no social services, reflected in the infant mortality rate of 6 out of 10 and the illiteracy rate of 99 per cent.

The Party

In the same speech quoted above, Cabral spoke of the formation and early years of the Party.

"Our Party was formed in 1956 by six (Africans) from Guinea and the Cape Verde islands.² We set up an underground party in Bissau, and extended it to other urban centers. We believed at that time that it was possible to fight by peaceful means. With the help of an underground trade union organization we launched some strikes against the Portuguese and we held some demonstrations, but the Portuguese always answered us with guns. On 3rd August 1959, during a workers' strike in Bissau, they killed 50 African workers and wounded more than 100 in 20 minutes. That finally taught us a lesson: in the face of Portuguese colonialism, and we think, im-



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"The children are the flowers of our revolution and the principle reason for our fight."

perialism in general, there is no question of whether you use armed struggle or not. The struggle is always armed because the colonialists and imperialists have already decided to use their arms against you. We decided, at an underground meeting in Bissau in September 1959, to stop our demonstrations, to retain our underground organization but to move it to the countryside to mobilize the people, and prepare ourselves for armed struggle. " 3.

The political mobilization of the people lasted for about two years and was a crucial factor in developing mass participation, a fundamental principle of PAIGC. About one thousand mobilizers were trained by Cabral in Conakry, the capital of neighboring Guinea, and sent into the interior, each responsible for a village or group of villages. At first they lived in the forest and made contact with one or two people whom they could trust. These would bring friends and slowly the mobilizer would build up support and be able to hold village meetings. Only when PAIGC felt it had strong support from the peasants did the first armed action begin in January 1963. Ten and a half years later, with two-thirds of the country liberated, PAIGC declared the Republic of Guinea-Bissau. It had established schools, hospitals, people's stores, a system of justice based on people's courts, and a system of local and regional government. Elections had been held the year before throughout the liberated zones for a National Assembly.

On January 20, 1973, Amílcar Cabral was assassinated in Conakry by agents of the Portuguese colonialists. He did not live to see the war of liberation end in victory. The coup in Portugal in April 1974 which threw out the fascist regime of Caetano was in part a direct result of the wars in Africa which were draining the already fragile Portuguese economy and bringing about much disillusionment among the people. Members of the Portuguese army—the Armed Force Movement—brought about the coup and took over the government. In the months that followed, all its colonies were granted independence or dates set for the transfer of power.

The Armed Struggle

The armed struggle was seen by PAIGC as a necessary means to throwing out the Portuguese colonialists. It was by no means an end in itself. Discussing this with a group of Afro-Americans and Africans in New York in 1972, Cabral said:

“Maybe I deceive people, but I am not a great defender of the armed struggle. I am myself very conscious of the sacrifices demanded by the armed fight. It is a violence against even our own people. But it is not our invention—it is not our cool decision; it is the requirement of history. This is not the first fight in our country, and it is not Cabral who invented the struggle. We are following the example given by our



Early morning march. Teodora Gomes in foreground.

grandfathers who fought against Portuguese domination 50 years ago. Today's fight is a continuation of the fight to defend our dignity, our fight to have an identity—our own identity.”⁴

The armed struggle is therefore an unavoidable and important part of the revolution. As Cabral says further: “Like everything else in the world, it has two faces—one positive the other negative—the problem is in the balance. For us now, it (the armed struggle) is a good thing in our opinion, and in our condition because this armed fight helped us to accelerate the revolution of our people, to create a new situation that will facilitate our progress.”⁵ However of paramount importance is the development of a new society without exploitation of any kind. Liberation does not simply mean throwing out the colonialists. “We want equality, social justice and freedom. . . . Liberation for us is to take back our destiny and our history.”⁶ Cabral talks about this in an address to a meeting of peasants in 1966.

“In our Party we have sworn to give our lives for the liberation of our people and the building of our country. For this reason we must have a clear picture of the struggle and its difficulties. Girls, women, **homen grande** (male village elders)—you are all sons and daughters of the people and each of you must understand why we are fighting. It is time to put an end to the suffering caused by colonialism—but we must also put an end to the backwardness of our people. **There is no point to our struggle if our only goal is to drive out the Portuguese.** We want to drive them out, but we are also struggling to end the exploitation of our people, both by white and by blacks.”⁷ (my emphasis)

Economic & Social Revolution

Basil Davidson, a British journalist who has written extensively on Guinea-Bissau, discusses this in an article published in the **Socialist Register 1973**:⁸

“What they were doing, what they are doing, is to struggle for the freedom that will enable the populations of the mainland and islands to ‘re-enter their own history’ and ‘continue with their own development.’ The central task in their circumstances (and Cabral, so far as I recall, never attempted any definition not derived from specific circumstances) must therefore be ‘to liberate the means and process of (these populations’) productive forces’. That called for ousting to be done in such ways and with such methods as would be, for each participant, an individual process of mental and institutional development, the necessary prelude to a new society. ‘In our thinking,’ he told the Tricontinental in Havana in 1966, ‘any movement of national liberation which fails to take account of this basis and objective of liberation may well be fighting against imperialism, but will not be fighting for national liberation.’ And since the liberation of the means and process of the productive forces of Guinea-Bissau could be achieved only by a ‘profound mutation of the

condition of those productive forces, we see that the phenomenon of **national liberation** is necessarily one of **revolution.**' "

According to PAIGC (and strongly reflected in its program), the liberation of women must be a conscious and integral part of that revolution, and further, the revolution cannot be a successful one without the full participation of women. It was to look at this aspect of the revolution that I visited liberated zones of Guinea-Bissau in April, May, June 1974, spending a further four weeks with PAIGC in the Republic of Guinea (Conakry) and Senegal. The war was still in progress while I was there, although by the end of May an informal ceasefire had been declared and the bombing had ceased.

My first trip was to the South front for three weeks, accompanied by Teodora Gomes, a regional political worker concerned with youth.⁹ As such she had a highly responsible position in the Party. She could speak nine languages, none of them English. I could speak English! This was probably my greatest frustration, overcome to a large extent by having an interpreter with us all the time. Teodora had grown up in the south and joined PAIGC when she was seventeen. She spent five years studying child-psychology in the Soviet Union and took up the position of political worker on her return at the end of the 1960's. She is an extremely vibrant, militant and warm individual and I grew to feel deep respect and love for her.

On my second trip for one week to the East front I was accompanied by Fina Crato, a 21-year-old filmmaker who was working in the Information Division of the Party. Fina had studied in Cuba for

Teodora Gomes, at the time regional political commissar in the South. Accompanied author for three weeks to the South.



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four years as a filmmaker, after growing up under and being educated through PAIGC. During this second trip I spent quite a lot of time with women of her age who had been young girls at the time that PAIGC began mobilizing, and was very impressed by their spirit and the lucid way in which they talked about their experiences and about PAIGC.

Teodora and Fina are examples of women who are playing an ever increasing role in the revolution. How this has been achieved is discussed in the following account of the impressions I gained from my visit.

Part 2. Two Colonialisms

"One of the principles of our fight is that our people will never be free until the women are free as well."

—Amílcar Cabral, 1971

"In Guinea-Bissau we say that women have to fight against two colonialisms. One of the Portuguese, the other of men," said Carmen Pereira to me on my second day inside the liberated zones of her country. She is one of the leaders of the Party, being on the PAIGC Executive Council and the vice-president of the National Assembly. At the time she was responsible for the social reconstruction program of the whole south front and as such held one of the top political positions within the liberated zones.

Two colonialisms? It was a concept I heard repeated many times during my visit and is reflected in the practice of PAIGC in regard to women. I was struck by it, because as we women in Europe and North America are trying to grapple with the development of a coherent theory, the very concepts we are using can be found in a revolutionary situation such as Guinea-Bissau. Although the women I met spoke of fighting "male colonialism", men are not seen as the enemy—as little as the Portuguese people were seen as the enemy when fighting Portuguese colonialism. The fact that the Portuguese people were not their enemy was amply demonstrated by the coup. Colonialism, as a system of oppression, is seen as the enemy, and not the people who perpetrate it. All too often they themselves are victims of the same enemy. The women of Guinea-Bissau are fighting to change men's—and women's for that matter—attitudes that oppress women. It is a fight they feel that must go on within the context of the total revolution to free Guinea-Bissau from colonialism and to build a new society. One cannot be achieved without the other.



Carmen Pereira, one of the leaders of the PAIGC.

"We fight two colonialisms".

For Women Life Was Doubly Hard

In order to understand what changes are being brought about through the social and national reconstruction program of PAIGC, some sense of what is being fought against is helpful.

I asked many women what life had been like living under Portuguese colonialism. In the south I spoke to a Balante peasant woman, Bwetna N'Dubi, who was one of the first women mobilized and a member of the first village council. She is now an elected regional deputy, acting as liaison between the population and the members of the National Assembly for the area. She, like most of her countrypeople, had no formal education and cannot read or write.

"My family were peasants and they worked in the fields and grew rice. When they needed something they took rice to the Portuguese stores and traded it, or sold it for money. But they had no way of knowing the cost of the product they were buying, and the Portuguese paid what they wished for the rice. There was nothing they could do about it. If you argued about the price, you would be beaten. With the money you received you had to pay taxes for everything—palm trees, domestic animals, land. If you were unable to pay the taxes, you were beaten and put in jail. Then to pay for the land, your family would be taken by force and made to work for nothing." Bwetna went on to describe how she had been forced as a young girl to work on the construction of a road, without pay, living in the forest, somehow finding her own food. Those who tried to escape were severely beaten. She added: "We had no possibility to go to school.

There **were** no schools. Neither were there any hospitals or doctors."

Women's work was extremely hard. Besides contending with the effects of Portuguese colonialism—women as well as men were rounded up for forced labor and the heavy taxes affected them as much as the men—they were virtually the sole providers of food. This meant tending to agriculture at every stage from planting the seed to harvesting. In addition their work included preparing the food for cooking, many hours of pounding each day, cooking, collecting water from the well, washing clothes, caring for the children. Men's work tended to be seasonal such as doing the more physically taxing tasks associated with agriculture, building huts, hunting. Besides, the customs surrounding women—particularly among the Muslim ethnic groups—treated them as inferior and expected them to remain in the background. Their husbands were chosen by their father, often at the age of two or three years. Polygamy was frequent and divorce for women impossible.

Despite the importance of the provision of food, the most fundamental task for any society, little status was gained from it and politics was the domain of men. A PAIGC document on the role of women states this clearly. "In spite of the importance of women in the life of African peoples, it is only rarely that they take an active part in political affairs. In our country, women have almost always been kept out of political affairs, of decisions concerning the life which they nonetheless support, thanks to their anonymous daily work." ¹⁰



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Women's work in a Fula village, East Front.

The Liberation Struggle Brings Changes

During the four weeks I spent inside the then liberated zones of the country, I witnessed vast changes. There were schools, hospitals, clinics, people's stores, a system of justice through people's courts and a system of local and regional government established throughout the liberated areas. Kumba Kolubali, a member of the village council in her Fula village in the east commented on the changes.

"The Party has made many very good changes to our lives," she told me. "I am very happy with the new life we have here. At the beginning when the first PAIGC comrade came here to talk to us we were very afraid. We did not know him and thought that he was dangerous and would take our things and not pay for them. But we soon learnt to understand and respect what he was saying. He said that the Party believes that everybody is equal and that we are all one people. He talked about all the bad things that the Portuguese were doing which we understood very well indeed. Now I see the light and know that everybody is my brother and my sister. Today we don't think about color or ethnic group the way we did before and we know that everybody is from Guinea.

"Now that we have forced the Portuguese out through the war, we are able to live much better than before. We have shops that we can go and buy from, which was impossible before and the goods are cheaper. And now all the boys and girls must go to school. We have hospitals that are free. Now we have clothes and are well dressed. We had no clothes before and had to go barefoot. I have seen many things with the Party that I could never have imagined before. We have so many things today that I could not have even dreamed about yesterday. I am very happy for my people and I am very happy that the Party exists."

Women also spoke about the changes that had come about for them as women. "My mother was not free," Bwetna told me. "She had to always ask my father's permission for the smallest thing. Her work was very hard, the usual work of women—cooking rice, fishing, working in the fields, pounding rice, feeding her children. I first heard about women's rights at the beginning of mobilization. I understood what was being said immediately, that equality is necessary and possible. Today I work together with men, having more responsibility than many men. This is not only true for me. I understand that I have to fight together with other women against the domination of women. But we have to fight twice—once to convince women and the second time to convince men that women have to have the same rights as men."

The need for women to be liberated was part of the PAIGC program from the beginning and is reflected in a directive that states:

"Defend women's rights, respect women (children, youth and adults) and make them respected; but convince the women of our country that their liberation should be their own achievement, by their work, attachment to the Party, self-respect, personality and steadfastness before everything that could be against their dignity."

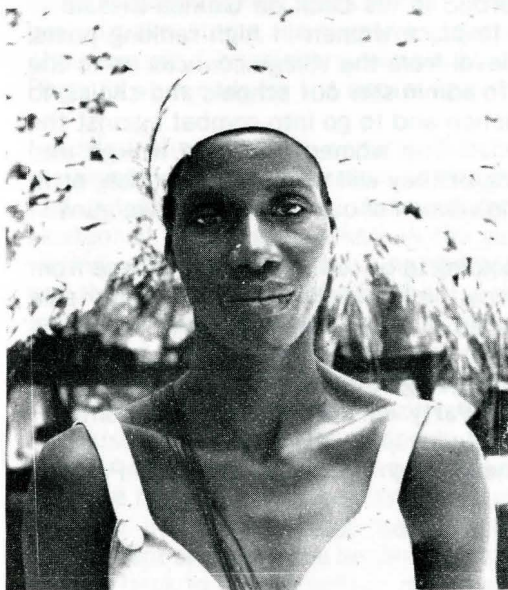
It is also reflected in Cabral's statement that: "Our revolution cannot be a successful one without the full participation of women."

Building Womens' Participation and Leadership

At the time of mobilization, when the trained mobilizers went into the countryside to win the support of the peasant, the questions of women's liberation and the need for equal rights was raised. At first only a few women would attend the village meetings called by the mobilizer. But these women would tell others what was being said and encourage them to attend. Gradually more women gained enough confidence to go themselves, and so the numbers rose steadily. Although most of the women showed diffidence at first, there were women like Bwetna who set examples of what could be achieved. She was one of the first people mobilized and was part of the core group of two women and two men through which the mobilizer in her area contacted the rest of the village. In fact, she mobilized her husband. She was one of the members of the first village council elected in the liberated zones.

Once the armed struggle had begun—two years after the beginning of mobilization—and the first areas of the country were liberated, village councils were elected in each village to replace the

Bwetna N'Dubi, Balante woman.
(Quoted in article)



traditional councils or chiefs. They attended to the organization of the day to day life of the village and acted as a liaison between the population and the Party and the army. PAIGC stipulated that at least two out of five members of the council must be women. In this way, it was assured that women would be brought into the leadership at a village level, and through experience gained there, could later enter broader areas of responsibility. In order to achieve this the resistance of both men and women to having women on the council and so entering 'political affairs' had to be circumvented. The way this was done to reach women through their traditional work. Each member of the council had a particular task. The women were to be responsible for providing rice for the guerrillas, an extension of their work. Once on the council they participated in the collective decision-making and now there are women vice-presidents and presidents of village councils, as well as women like Bwetna who have taken on much wider responsibility since then.

There is another facet that makes this tactic important. It gave additional status to the work of food provision. On or off the council it would have been the women's duty to provide food for the guerrillas as men could not have done it. By making it a job of the council it heightened the status by giving it political content.

I was told that Amilcar Cabral and other Party representatives spoke consistently about the need for women to participate in the revolution. It formed part of the on-going political education that began with the mobilizers and has not stopped since. This is brought out in an address that Cabral gave to a meeting of peasants in 1966, which Gerard Chaliand recorded in his book on Guinea-Bissau.

"Comrades, we are going to place women in high-ranking posts, and we want them at every level from the village councils up to the Party leadership. What for? To administer our schools and clinics, to take an equal share in production and to go into combat against the Portuguese when necessary. . . . The women and girls will go into villages as nurses or teachers, or they will work in production, or in the village militia. We want the women of our country to have guns in their hands. . . .

"Comrades, young girls are going to be coming into the village from our bases. But don't let anybody think that these girls are up for sale as brides. They will get married if they wish, but there will be no forced marriages. Anyone who does that is worse than the Portuguese. These young girls are going to work in the villages, go to school, be in the militia, and the Party will exercise complete control. . . .

"Women must hold their heads high and know that our Party is also their Party." ¹¹



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Center, member of a People's Court in the East.

Tradition and Social Reconstruction

An important part of the social reconstruction program is the eradication of traditions that go against the principles of the PAIGC and are hence exploitative. At the same time PAIGC sees the need to give renewed status to their culture and national history. A Party directive of the early 1960's states: "Oppose without violence all the prejudicial customs, the negative aspects of the beliefs and traditions of our people. Oblige every responsible and educated member of our Party to work daily for the improvement of their cultural formation. . ."

Among the negative aspects which affect women are forced marriage (which Cabral refers to above), lack of divorce for women and polygamy. Marriages arranged by parents are virtually non-existent at this stage. I asked all the young women in the villages I visited, who had married during the past few years, how many had had their husbands chosen by their parents. None had. According to traditional custom a young girl had to accept the husband chosen by her father, most frequently a man much her senior because he would be in a better economic situation. Today divorces are a possibility for everyone. Before there was no divorce and a woman could not leave her husband. She was his property for which he had paid a "bride price"—gifts that were given to her parents by her husband-to-be from the time the marriage was agreed upon. A man could 'repudiate' his wife if for any reason he felt she was unsatisfactory—lazy, disobedient or whatever he decided was not permissible. She would be sent back to her parents in disgrace. He could mistreat her, beat

her and she had no redress.

I was told that at the beginning of the struggle, many women joined in order to escape the fate of an arranged marriage, or to procure a divorce from a man they did not love and had been forced to marry. The Party thus played an important role in providing protection for women when they first began to resist the customs that oppressed them. Today divorces are heard by the People's Courts and cases of forced marriage can be brought by the daughter before the court.

Overcoming the practice of polygamy is a lengthier process. It is seen as oppressive because it is one-sided—only men have the option of more than one spouse—and because of the rivalry and unhappiness that generally existed between co-wives. Fidelis d'Almada, the Commissioner (Minister) of Justice spoke to me about this.

"The Party is against polygamy in principle. But you cannot change the customs of the people overnight, or they will turn against you. It is not only a question of the pleasure of having two or three wives. Wives work in the rice fields, as well as the men. They are an economic necessity. We have to move, but we have to move slowly."

For members of the Party, he said, polygamy is simply not allowed, even for practicing Muslims. For the peasant population the process is slower. Obviously one cannot go into a village and tell all the men to divorce all their wives barring one. Political **responsables**¹² discuss polygamy continually with the population, explaining why the Party is against the custom. Moreover, a process of limitation has begun in so far as a man cannot take a 'replacement' wife if his wife divorces him or dies, unless he only had one in the first place. Already many young women are refusing to allow their husbands to have more than one wife and women who are unhappy in a polygamous marriage are able to get a divorce. In this way the custom will disappear in the coming generations.

PAIGC sees education as the key to eradicating all negative traditions and entrenching the new society. Cabral said: "The children are the flowers of our struggle and the principle reason for our fight." The need for education is a constant theme. In the same address quoted above, Cabral said:

"Parents may no longer refuse to send their children to school. The children are caught up in chores. . . . But the children need to go to school just as the parents need the children's help. . . . I am an engineer. Perhaps there are people present who are smarter than I. But there are no engineers among them because there were no schools. The Party wants to give all the children of our people a fair chance. Our people's main enemy is Portuguese colonialism. But any adult preventing the education of our children is also our enemy."¹³

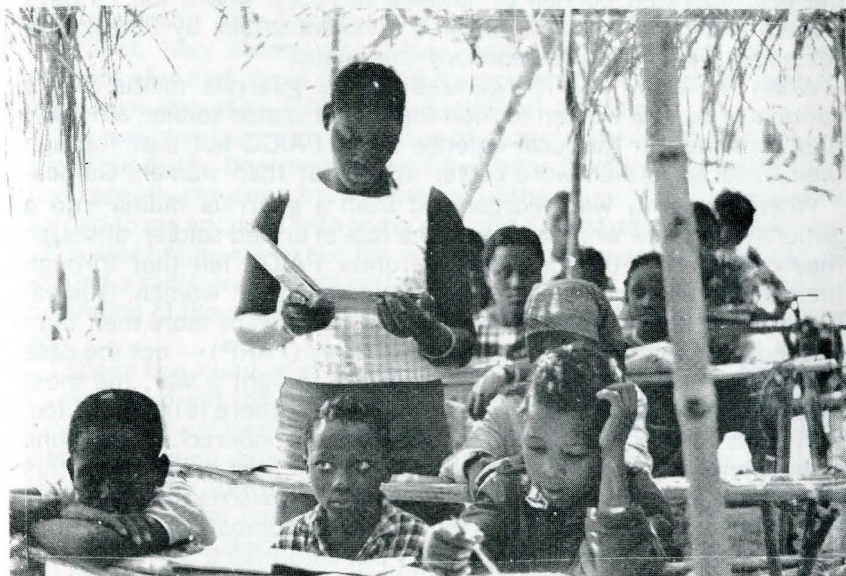
But it was not so much the resistance to sending sons to school that the Party found it had to contend with. It was sending their

daughter. What use could education be to girls, fathers reasoned, when they must get married and serve their husbands? Jacinta de Sousa Mendosa, the 19-year-old director of one of the main boarding schools inside the country talked to me about his.

"The problem is with the fathers. The girls are needed in the home to help their mothers, and they won't allow them to go to school. The politics of the Party is against this, and things are changing. But it is still a very big problem, particularly in this area which is Fula (Muslim). Our Party places great emphasis on the children because they are the future of our country. Political commissioners go to the villages and explain why education is so important, particularly for girls. They stress that we want to reconstruct a free society, a society without sex discrimination."

In all the schools I visited there were far fewer girls than boys, on average about 25 per cent. However at the secondary school in Conakry one-third of the students were girls. This is an encouraging percentage given it is from here that students go abroad for further study and that parents have to agree to allow their children to leave Guinea-Bissau for schooling in the first place.

In order to help overcome the detrimental traditions, and to enable the students to understand PAIGC program and discuss it at length, time is set aside each week at all schools for political education. The question of the role of women in the society and the need to fight against the domination of women is regularly a subject of these sessions. "We especially insist on the rights of women to the boys,"



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said Jacinta, "so that they understand that what they have learnt in their own homes regarding women is not true. The boys come to school with the opinion that because they are boys, they are superior."

Women in the Armed Struggle

There are growing numbers of women in all fields of work. Leaders in the Party, teachers, nurses, directors of schools and of hospitals, political workers. There were few women soldiers who went on combat while the war was still on, although many women were responsible for local defense. At the beginning of the war many of the women joined the militia and fought with the men.

"When the revolution reached its armed phase," states the PAIGC document on women, "and the groups of guerrillas reached the underground, women gathered information on the movements of enemy troops and prepared food which they took to guerrilla bases. Later when the military operations were intensified the women started to supply the front, making, like the men, long marches through the bush. They came from all regions of the country, crossing the length and breadth of the bush, and they accomplished this mission braving all sorts of difficulties and obstacles. The women finally went to guerrilla bases where they learned to handle arms and from where they went out to integrate with the groups of militia. Some of them fell as heroines on the field of honor. Examples of this are the women who fell on the free soil of the glorious isle of Komo, the first liberated portion of national territory, where for 75 days women alongside the men, resisted a violent attack by Portuguese colonialists who tried to reoccupy the island." ¹⁴

When the army was reorganized from a guerrilla militia into a national army, few women took on the role of armed soldier, although they remained in the local defense units. PAIGC felt that through their experience men were better in combat than women. Guinea-

When the army was reorganized from a guerrilla militia into a national army, few women took on the role of armed soldier, although they remained in the local defense units. PAIGC felt that through their experience men were better in combat than women. Guinea-Bissau is a small country, they said, and there were more men than needed who wanted to join the national army (FARP) — not the case in other armed struggles. PAIGC has had to fight a war, the most efficient army possible had to be a priority. But there is no doubt too, that guns and power are often equated. I wondered seeing guns **everywhere** and usually in the hands of men, just what effect this might have on the girls and boys growing up. Towards the end of the war, women were being trained to take part in combat with FARP, but independence came before this was put into effect.

It is however important to understand the perspective in which

PAIGC placed the armed struggle in its overall revolution. What was and is constantly stressed is that all work for the revolution is equally important. Soldiers are not seen as heroes above anybody else. The armed struggle is a means to an end and not the end in itself. Of paramount importance is work for the revolution. This is reflected in an address that Cabral made to meetings of peasants in 1966, also recorded by Chaliand. "There is no point to our struggle if our only goal is to drive out the Portuguese. . . We are also struggling to end the exploitation of our people . . . We want all the men and women of our country to be respected. For this the people must work. A country in which everybody has a chance to work is a prosperous country, for work is what enables us to make progress. Every man and woman must learn that work is their first duty." Later in the same speech he talks of the man or woman with the tool as being more important with the man or woman with the gun. That arms are no better than the tool of labor. "Between one man carrying a gun and another carrying a tool, the more important of the two is the man with the tool. We've taken up arms to defeat the Portuguese, but the whole point of driving out the Portuguese is to defend the man with the tool."¹⁵

Political and Personal Independence

It was the consciousness of the women's struggle that I found in the women cadres ¹⁶ I met, that gave me a glimpse of the future. As much as Bwetu N'Dubi and village councillors I talked to epitomized the changing situation for peasant women, so did the young women cadres—many of them from peasant background themselves—represent the new society that is emerging. Articulate, militant, confident, they spoke with ease about the revolution and their concept of it and about the need for women themselves to fight for their own liberation within the context of the Party.

One evening I sat with a number of young women and men around the table at the boarding school I mentioned before. My interpreter had recently returned from being out of the country for six years. He turned to me and said with some awe and a great deal of satisfaction: "It is amazing to me to see the way in which men and women can sit around a table and talk as equals like this. It was not possible at the beginning of the struggle or even six years ago. We have come a long way."

I spoke to a number of young women such as Fina Crato, N'Bemba Camara who was the chief nurse at the base I lived at in the east, Ule Bioja, a regional health **responsable**, other teachers and nurses who were still young girls of 9 or 10 when mobilization began and who grew up under PAIGC. I spoke, too, at length to Teodora Gomes, the regional political commissioner who accompanied me for my first three week visit, and Francisca Pereira, also one of the top women in the Party and on the delegation to the United Nations. They were 17 or 18 at the beginning of mobilization and in some ways their ex-



Stephanie Urdang

Fula woman, East.

periences in regard to men had been different.

The older women told me how difficult it was at the beginning to convince men to take them seriously. "Things have changed enormously since those days," Francisca told me. "But even up until the present this is still a problem. Men need to be polished! At the beginning they treated me as inferior. Even those with whom I had as much responsibility within the Party would think that whatever a woman does cannot be as good as they could do. 'Huh, she's just a woman' they would think. It's a continual fight. Although things are much better, I am still having to fight with my comrades about these attitudes—not towards me anymore, but towards the younger women in the Party who are just beginning to take on responsibility. There is no point in fighting for political independence if you don't also fight for personal independence."

Teodora too, spoke of this having been a grave problem at first, but now a diminishing one. She told me that Cabral used to say to the young men: "Women are not like shirts, you put on one today, another tomorrow." He insisted that women be treated with respect by the men, and if they flirted around casually, he would tell them to get married (presuming the woman agreed). Teodora laughed with delight and said: "There were many, many marriages in the early days of the Party!"

The younger women by nine or ten years appeared to feel that the problem was hardly there. And when it was, they felt in control so they did not get angry or feel that it was something they had to fight strenuously against. Jacinta put her view in the following words.

"Sometimes it is a problem because some men feel that they have to make advances to women, because if they do not, they are not men. It is true that men have these ideas. For example, a comrade came here a little while ago. He never been here before and he did not know the women here. After about one or two hours he began making propositions. Not directly, but you know how they are. If one woman likes him, if she has no commitment to another, she can accept if she wishes. We don't think that by accepting, it is a commitment for ever. For if a man has a desire, the woman has a desire as well. That is normal and it is the same for both women and men."

I spent much time in the company of women and men. I could sense nothing but equality and mutual respect between the two sexes, and I felt that this would have transgressed the language barrier if present. Fina told me that when she was studying in Cuba for four years she was with a PAIGC group consisting of her and three men. At all times she was treated as an equal comrade. This perception was endorsed by Jacinta and another teacher at the school, Maria da Goia who said that no problems arose in their work with male teachers. The point was demonstrated during an interview I was doing with Jacinta being held nearby. She jumped up and walked with firm step to the class. The teacher was a man and older than she. He was apparently teaching an outdated lesson. They discussed the problem amicably and he proceeded with the lesson along different lines, apparently accepting her authority without hesitation.

Eleven and a half years after the launching of the armed struggle, PAIGC was recognized as the legitimate government by Portugal. However PAIGC does not believe that independence means the end of the revolution. There is still the emerging new society to be fought for and the goal of a society free from exploitation—including sex discrimination. In regard to women, much has been achieved in just over a decade. But we must not forget that it is only a short space of time and that the road ahead is yet a long and hard one. That I could see part of the revolution in process was both exciting and inspiring. But what I saw was a beginning. I could gain some sense of the hard struggle ahead in the many women still hesitant and diffident about their role; in the men still harboring the beliefs that women should not have total equality.

Many women and men expressed the view that they have only begun. Their struggle for a new society, for a new woman and a new man will continue long after the last of the Portuguese soldiers have left their shores.

FOOTNOTES:

1. **Our People Are Our Mountains: Cabral on the Guinean Revolution**, a speech made in London, 1971 by Amílcar Cabral. Published by the Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola and Guiné, London. Page 6.
2. The Cape Verde Islands are 400 miles off the coast of Guinea-Bissau. They were taken over by the Portuguese when they first arrived in the area. The Portuguese populated the islands with people from mainland Guinea-Bissau, and besides both territories being colonized by the Portuguese, there are strong cultural and historical links between the Cape Verdeans and the Guineans on the mainland. PAIGC was fighting for the liberation of both Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde although the latter struggle was not in the form of armed struggle but through clandestine political work. Since the coup in Portugal, support for PAIGC and unity with the mainland has been strongly demonstrated throughout the Islands. A transitional government composed of PAIGC representatives and Portuguese was appointed at the end of 1974 and transfer of power to PAIGC and full independence will take place on July 5, 1975.
3. Ibid, Page 6.
4. **Return to the Source, Selected Speeches of Amílcar Cabral**. Edited by Africa Information Service. Monthly Review Press, 1974. This quote was taken from "Connecting the Struggles: An Informal Talk with Black Americans."
5. **Return to the Source**, ibid.
6. **Our People Our Mountains**, ibid. Page 8. A fuller extract appears at the top of the Introduction.
7. Gerard Chaliand, **Armed Struggle in Africa**. Monthly Review Press, 1971 Page 32-33.
8. Basil Davidson, "No Fist is Big Enough to Hide the Sky...: A Report On the Further Liberation of Guine. Published in **The Socialist Register 1973**, London 1974. Page 285.
9. Guinea-Bissau is divided into three fronts — South, North and East. Each front is divided into two or three regions and each region into sectors.
10. PAIGC, Report on the Politico-Socio-Economic Role of Women in Guinea and Cape Verde Island. Published in **Women in the Struggle for Liberation** by the World Student Christian Federation, 235 E. 49th Street, New York, N.Y. 10017. Page 52.
11. Chaliand, Ibid. Page 93-95.
12. **Responsible** is a term used for Party members who are responsible in their work for a particular area of the struggle — hence health responsible, responsible for education, for justice. Their work entails political education rather than direct nursing or teaching, etc.
13. Chaliand, ibid. Page 94.
14. PAIGC, ibid. Page 52.
15. Chalian, ibid. Page 33, 35. Generally Cabral refers to man and woman in his speeches. At times he uses just 'man,' although has said 'when I say man, I mean man and woman.' This was in 1966 before even we in the US were that conscious of sexist terminology.
16. I use the term cadre here as PAIGC uses it, to mean an active member of the Party in training for or having achieved leadership.

FURTHER READING

Amilcar Cabral, **Revolution in Guinea**. Monthly Review Press, 1971. A collection of Cabral's speeches.

Return to the Source, Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral, edited by the African Information Service. Monthly Review Press, New York 1974. Includes speeches that he made on his visit to New York in 1972 a few months before his assassination. Has a detailed bibliography.

Gerard Chaliand, **Armed Struggle in Africa**. Monthly Review Press, 1971. This is on Guinea-Bissau.

Basil Davidson, **The Liberation of Guine**. Penguin, 1969.

Our People Are Our Mountains: Amilcar Cabral on the Guinean Revolution. A pamphlet containing the speech and question-answer session given in London in 1971. Published by Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola and Guine, London. Available through the New World Resource Center, 2546 N. Halsted Street, Chicago, Ill. 60614 or American Committee of Africa, 164 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.

Two useful pamphlets for a short overview of the revolution in Guinea-Bissau are:

The Republic of Guinea-Bissau: Triumph Over Colonialism by Jennifer Davis. Available from the American Committee of Africa, address above. 50 cents.

Sun of Our Freedom: The Independence of Guinea-Bissau. Published by the Chicago Committee for the Liberation of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea (CCLAMG). Available from the New World Resource Center (same address as CCLAMG) as above.

For news month by month on the situation in Guinea-Bissau and southern Africa: **Southern Africa**, a monthly magazine published by the Southern Africa Committee, 244 West 27th Street, New York, N.Y. 10001. Subscription for individuals are \$6.00 per year; for Institutions, \$18.00 per year. Each issue: 60 cents. Sample copies will be sent on request.

On Women in Mozambique:

Mozambique, Sowing the Seeds of Revolution. A collection of speeches etc. by Samora Machel, President of FRELIMO. Contains the opening speech to the founding conference of the Mozambican Women's Organization in 1973, entitled: "The Liberation of Women is a Fundamental Necessity for the Revolution". Available from American Committee of Africa, address above. \$1.00 plus postage.

