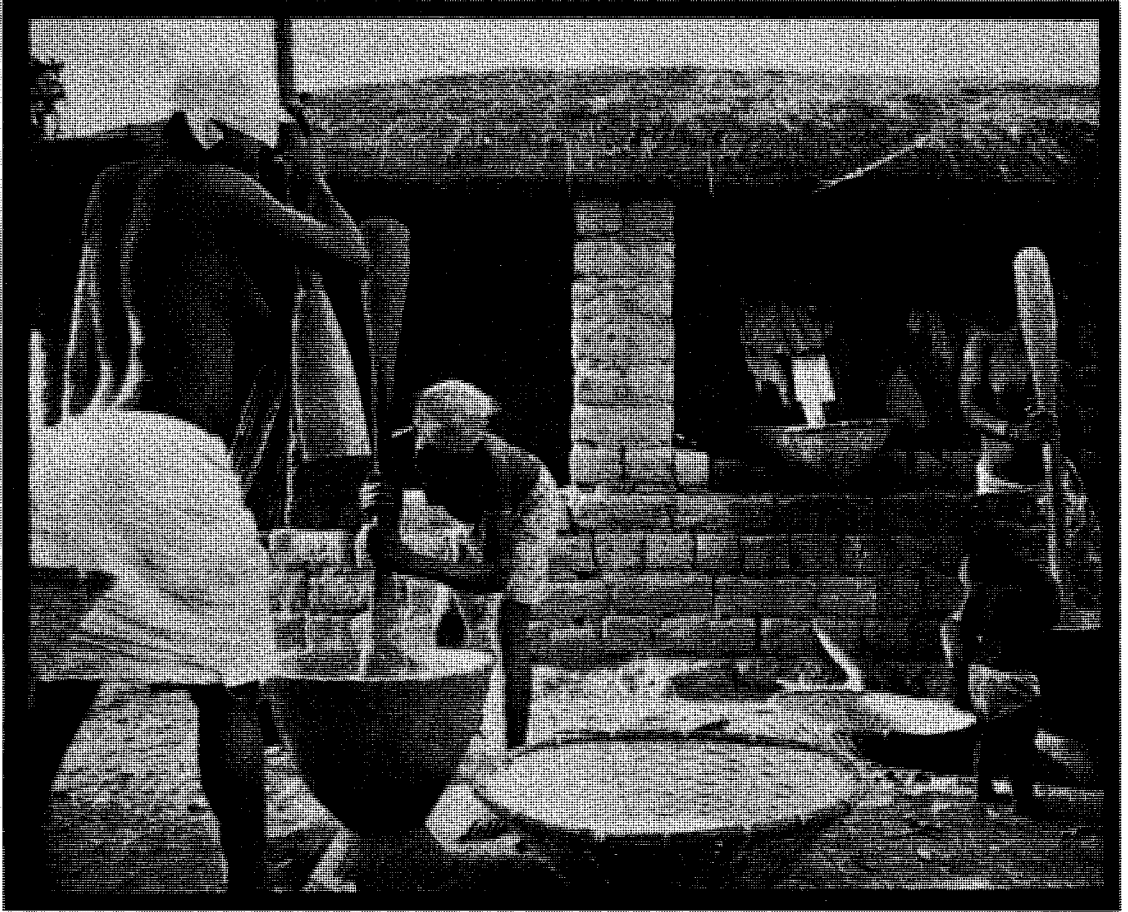


GUINEA-BISSAU:

Aspects of a Difficult Transition



Women of Tchugué Village, Guinea Bissau.

by Ole Gjerstad & Chantal Sarrazin

Ole Gjerstad and Chantal Sarrazin recently completed their three month stay in rapidly changing Guinea-Bissau. Through numerous life histories, interviews and photos, they have documented some significant aspects of life under Portuguese rule, the role of the Party and the people in the liberation war and the problems PAIGC now faces in transforming a colonized Guinea-Bissau into a socialist country. Interviews with prominent PAIGC leaders on problems and developments in the economy, educational system, trade union movement, status of women, Party organization and popular justice will appear in forthcoming issues of LSM NEWS.

Upon her return, one of Chantal's first tasks will be to work up the materials she has gathered for publication and prepare for an LSM audio-visual speaking tour. Ole remains in Africa covering events in Southern Africa and exploring the volatile and changing situation in Zimbabwe and Angola. After attending Mozambique Independence Day celebrations in Lourenço Marques and visiting rural Mozambique, he will be off to Zambia, Angola and possibly Namibia.

Impressions from a Liberated People

"Always keep in mind that the people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone's head. They are fighting to win material benefits, to live better and in peace, to see their lives go forward, to guarantee the future of their children..." During three weeks of *tabanca* (village) life in the southern-most Tombali Region, the reality of Amílcar Cabral's simple but essential message was fully borne out as we talked to the villagers, recorded life histories, and observed entire new villages springing to life upon the ruins left behind by Portuguese bombers and commando units.

In Tombali the scars of war are everywhere. Since 1964 the Party effectively controlled most of the region, but Portuguese troops still occupied a number of posts from which they guided bombers to their targets and periodically launched raids to terrorize the population. Empty ammunition cases, rather than rocks or sandbags, are used as protection against rainy season floods. The forest undergrowth is only now curling its green leaves around the charred trunks where Fiat jets dropped their bestial loads of Canadian and American napalm just a few years ago. Guiledge, Guadamael, Bedanda: the battles fought here will no doubt get their space in Guinea's future history books.

Other than military installations and a few administrative structures the Portuguese left virtually nothing in the countryside that will be of use to the people of independent Guinea-Bissau. Ten miles of blacktop road connecting the Tombali administrative center, Catio, to the strategically important Cufar airstrip constitutes the most visible sign of advanced technology. The run-down airport buildings are now occupied by a PAIGC boarding school whose students are doing their best to fix it up. Plans for new classrooms and a rice husking factory in the empty hangar are being developed, but money and equipment have yet to be procured. In the meantime, the 170 students make do with what they have and concentrate, above all, on learning as much as possible. With the country beginning on a new course, their future responsibilities will be great. Catio itself is but a dilapidated church and a few former colonial buildings, four or five stores and the garrison. Judging from the look of things the neighboring *tabancas* might as well have been situated in the remotest forest of the country, as far as their access to modern technology goes. The Portuguese created a "strategic village" here early in the war, but many of the villagers have now moved back to their original *tabancas*.

Out here in the Tombali countryside the crude, super-exploitative nature of Portuguese colonialism stands out starkly. The merchants who bought rice, peanuts and palm oil, and the administrators and *eipaíes* (administrative police) who enforced terms of trade, collected taxes and rounded up "free" native labor when needed were its representatives. Later, the army arrived to help out. The many rivers provided transport so virtually no infrastructure was necessary and social services such as schools and hospitals were virtually absent. Spínola's "better Guinea" policy made no difference at all to the *tabancas* in the bush and across the rice fields of this large region.

Tchugué Village

Our base is Tchugué, a *tabanca* of about 500 Balantes on the Bolama River. We are well received by the regional Party leadership and, after travelling by jeep from Catio, arrive one scorching afternoon with our entourage of interpreters, political commissars and FARP (People's Armed Revolutionary Forces) militants. The first thing we see is a barbed wire fence and a sign with *Zona Minada* painted in red over a skull and crossbones background. We pass an observation post and two abandoned artillery positions before reaching the first huts.

"Our" political commissars have worked in the region since the political mobilization period 15 years ago and know the people well. After briefing the village committee they call a meeting of the whole population - a *comicio* - where we are introduced and the objectives of our visit explained. In the shade of a huge mango tree we talk about North America, LSM and the importance of internationalism. Our words are translated into Balante and, amidst the screaming of babies and general disorder of foraging pigs, goats, chickens and fighting dogs, we are worried the message may not be clear. But our worries are proven groundless. An old peasant, one of the *homen grandes* (village elders), gets up and limps over to our table to welcome us. "We are very glad and honored that you have come such a long way to work with the people in our *tabanca*, you who are friends of our Party and our people. Unity and friendship between our peoples are important for us and we will do all we can to cooperate in your work. Thank you." His words are borne out over the next couple of weeks as we receive gifts of pigs and chickens and experience the strong sense of community still binding the Balantes of Tchugué together.

At the tape recorder taking life histories, over cups of *kana* - the potent sugar cane brew - at the "people's bar" or by glowing fires in the clear, refreshing nights we relived the history of Tchugué and its people since the arrival of the Portuguese. It is a fascinating story filled with hardship, suffering and recently, all the cruelties of war; about a people who wanted to live in peace, but who finally saw no other option than taking up arms and risking their lives. Why? "We were so tired," was the common answer. "We worked hard but the Portuguese took all we had and treated us worse than animals. When the Party asked us to fight, we looked back and found we had nothing to lose."

Exploitation through trade, crushing tax burdens and forced labor - these life circumstances of the Tchugué people made revolution a feasible option. But the spark to ignite the fire had to be provided from without. Illiterate, parochial and firmly anchored in thousand-year traditions, the Guinean peasants were themselves unable to challenge a repressive system based on modern technology. PAIGC provided the option. When Nino arrived as the first Party mobilizer in 1960, his words fell on fertile soil and were soon echoed clandestinely throughout the region. "Mobilizing the Balantes was not so difficult," explains Kau Sanbu, the veteran commissar in one group. "They were the most exploited of all and once you found a friendly *homen grande*, he would work on the rest of the population."

The chiefless Balante social structure worked in PAIGC's favor. With the hierarchically structured tribes mobilization was far more difficult. "Among the Fulas," says Kau, "we would start with the poorest peasants. Once we had built up a solid basis, they would call their chief to a meeting and try to force him to cooperate." Those who were aligned with the Portuguese and did not accept, of course, became dangerous liabilities and some did not survive the mobilization period. Revolution, to paraphrase Mao, is no tea party. The colonialists' brutal response to the Party's efforts helped drive the population into PAIGC's camp. In Tchugué alone, about 15 people were killed on suspicion of working for the Party.

War in the Bush

Political success was followed by military victories. In late 1963, the Portuguese merchants and troops were driven from Tchugué with heavy losses, but not before they had managed to destroy much of the *tabanca*. What they left undone, the bombers later

finished. Life in liberated Tchuguê was by no means easy, but hope remained - a vision of what a free Guinea could be like. "After all," an old peasant told us, "with the Portuguese and all their taxes gone, we had enough rice and could get what other things we needed from the Party." A people's store where surplus rice was exchanged for cloth, soap or other essentials was established in the nearby bush. Embryonic medical care was provided by the local FARP units or at the Guerra Mendes bush hospital some four miles away. And through the elected *tabanca* committee the Tchuguê people, for the first time in generations, came to play an active role in shaping their own destiny.

While on the strategic defensive, Portuguese troops employed tactics of terrorism against the population in liberated areas. Tchuguê had more than its share of NATO bombs and napalm and, in 1968, the *tugas* (Portuguese) launched heliported commando raids in an effort to again destroy the village. "The first group landed over there and our militants engaged them to give the people time to get out." A FAL (Local Armed Forces) guerrilla recounts the attack while pointing out the various places of battle as we walk around the *tabanca*. "Then, as we were busy with the first group, a second load came in from over here and attacked us in the rear." When the troops retreated, five PAIGC soldiers lay dead and several *morangas** were destroyed.

This attack was led by Fuab na Digua, the former Portuguese-appointed "chief" of Tchuguê who became an officer of the "commandos africanos," the brutal task force used in Spínola's attempted "africanization." He had early on become the most disliked person in the region and his activities during the war added to the villagers' hatred of him. With whomever we talked, the subject of Fuab, the "exploiter," "traitor" and "murderer" invariably came up. He is now in the Catio jail, waiting to be brought back to Tchuguê to stand trial before the local Popular Tribunal.

Still the Portuguese were not through. In 1972 as a last desperate move to halt PAIGC's advances they implanted their forces in a number of Tombali villages, including Tchuguê. First came the paratroopers, then the helicopters and river craft. They dug trenches and underground shelters, lined the *tabanca* with mines, barbed wire and machine gun nests. They wrote their names in the fresh cement of their bunkers: Miguel Figureido, João da Costa, Paulo Lopes. Many were to leave Tchuguê only in coffins as several of their ground patrols were wiped out in the bush and hardly a week passed without an attack by the Party for the remainder of the war. The craters from mortar shells, the collapsed shelters and burnt out huts add a visual dimension to the stories of those villagers who stayed to look after their property.

A Confident People

Jose Kassem, the Lebanese merchant, remembers 25 April very well: "When I heard about the coup in Lisbon on the BBC 6 p.m. news, I grabbed a bottle of brandy and went over to see the Portuguese captain. We poured two solid drinks and I raised my glass: 'To your early return to Portugal.' He looked at me. 'Watch your mouth.' When I told him the news, he wouldn't believe me - it wasn't until the eight o'clock news that he could hear for himself. The whole camp was jubilant. From that moment on, the troops did nothing but sit around and drink beer. Our militants could walk openly right into the *tabancas*."

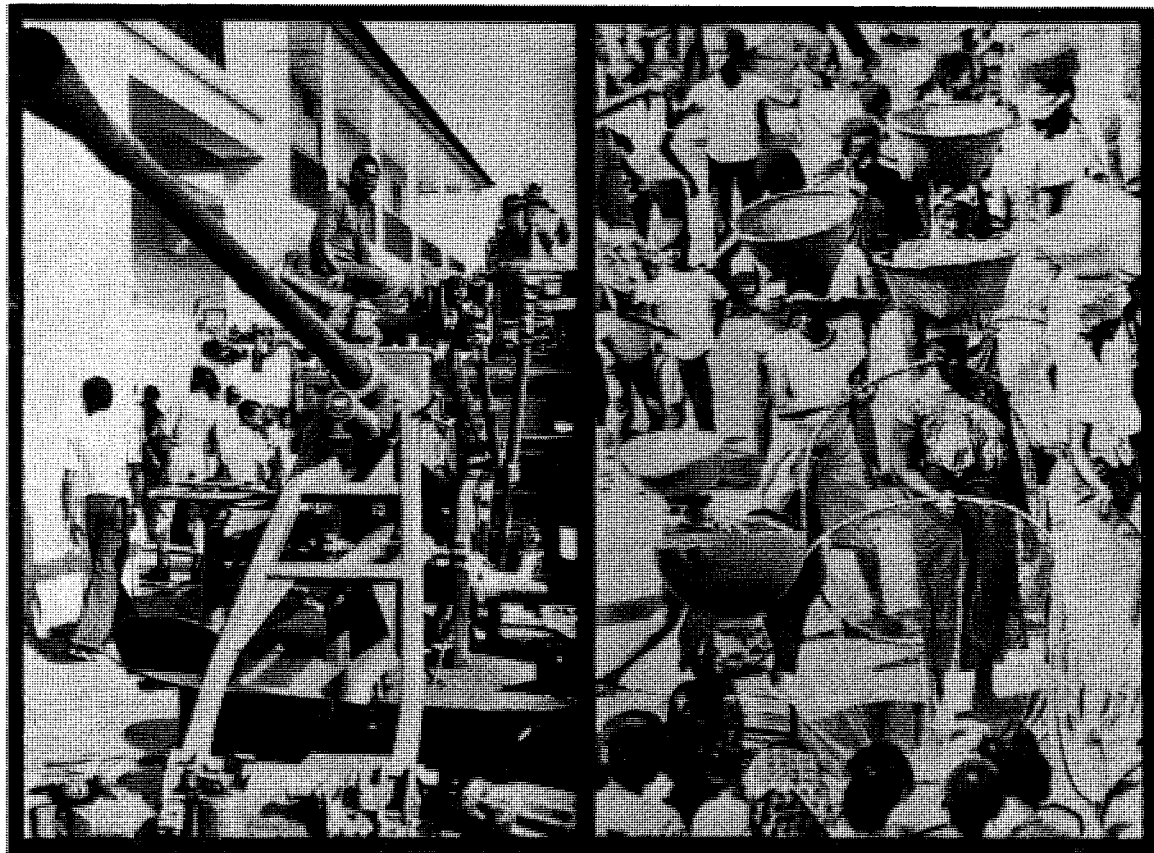
Now, one year later, the village has found a new pace. In September PAIGC cadre arrived to set up a primary school, medical post and a People's Store. With people returning from years in the bush, the *tabanca* committee has been working overtime to resolve disputes over field and cattle rights; only now is its work load tapering off. Every second night the youth practice the *n'gnae* (Balante dances) for hours to the traditional songs. But most of all we notice the construction activities. Every *moranga* is adding at least one hut for the next rainy season, which is due in about a month. Dry yellow straw, neatly cut and bundled, stands ready to make up the roofs. Once the rain starts falling, all efforts will be turned to the huge open rice fields almost encircling the *tabanca*. Even last year's crop yielded a surplus of more than one hundred tons which is being shipped to rice-hungry Bissau.

* A group of huts close together, normally housing one family.

The wounds of war are not yet closed. Live ammunition still makes it dangerous to burn the fields in the usual manner. Only two months ago a truck heading out from Catio hit a forgotten mine, killing Kau Sanbu's wife and three children. Maybe that is why he never talks about himself though he is by far the liveliest comrade on our team. But on the whole, people's eyes are on the future; on how to translate their hard won independence into concrete and material improvements. The government has exempted the hardest hit villages from taxes for the next three years; *morangas* must be rebuilt and herds restocked. Schools, medical posts and people's stores are constructed by collective effort. The essential difference from the past is in the incentive. "Now we know that we ourselves will benefit from what we do. That's why we work hard even if the war is over."

To us, the work that has to be done seems immense. The peasants of Tchuguê, who slaved and toiled for the colonialists, then fought and suffered through the armed struggle, have a different perspective. They are proud of their hard won freedom and optimistic about the future. "If you come back in two or three years, you won't recognize this place." Their optimism is rooted in the self-confidence and self-respect that the revolution has implanted among Guinea-Bissau's peasant masses. Self-respect and self-awareness: Men and women who fifteen years ago knew nothing of the world outside their own region, now receive us - Whites from 8,000 miles away, unable to speak or understand their language - as comrades in a common struggle. Before we leave, one of the FARP militants tells us: "Our revolution is against colonialism and imperialism. Your work is no less important than ours. To us, you are comrades in struggle against imperialism all over the world."

At the end of the dusty road, on the edge of the rice paddies lining the winding Bolama River, these words convince us that the revolution in Guinea-Bissau is a real step forward for the whole of mankind.



May Day celebrations in Bissau, 1975. (C. Sarrazin/LSM)

"We Don't Accept Being Treated Like Animals"

Caby na Iuk is a Tchuguē homen grande (elder) who worked with us to collect information on his people and the armed struggle in the Tombali region.

I was born here in Tchuguē more than 70 years ago and have lived here all my life. As a small boy I looked after the animals and when I got a little older, my father taught me to work in the fields. All the work was done in groups; together we cultivated the plots of each *moranga* in turn. After work we boys gathered for the *n'grae*, the old Balante dances, like our ancestors had done before us. It was only when the war began that these traditions started to disappear.

My father was the one who told me how to live like a Balante. He said that a man must learn to work hard early in his life, he must never steal from the other villagers or insult anybody. He taught me how to fight with sticks to defend myself, but told me never to use knives or other dangerous weapons. "This is how my people always lived and this is how you shall live too," he said.

When my father was a boy, there were no Whites in Tchuguē. His father had told him about a white tribe living somewhere in Guinea but it was only when my father was older that the Portuguese arrived in our *tabanca*. They had many weapons. In other villages where our people resisted, the Whites brought in Fulas and Mandingas with guns and since we Balantes had nothing but sticks and swords, there was little we could do.

We continued to work hard but never got rich. How could we when the Portuguese never paid us the value of our work? For a huge basket of rice we were paid only 15 escudos (about 60 cents). This is why we grew up to hate the merchants: we never saw the fruits of our labor.

Later, the Portuguese started forcing us to work on the roads. They came and gathered all the men and took us far away. We worked hard from sun-up to sun-down and weren't even allowed to stop for a drink of water. When the food we had brought was finished, we had to find things to eat in the bush at night. So for many days we ate almost nothing. And they would beat us for the smallest thing, with sticks, whips or the *palmatoria*.*

We paid all kinds of taxes: on people, huts, animals and even bicycles. At my father's death I slaughtered ten cows in his homage. When the Portuguese found out, they demanded 1,000 escudos in taxes, 100 for each cow. I tell you, they took everything we had!

The *tugas* appointed a Balante "chief" in our village, Fuab na Digna. This Fuab made us all suffer. Whenever someone built up a small herd of cattle, he would confiscate it or have the person pay extra taxes to him personally. He made people work in his fields for no pay and took rice from the plots of others. When we complained to the Portuguese administrator, he told us to shut up and go home. Fuab was also the only one in Tchuguē who had a rifle for hunting in the forest.

We all got very tired of this Portuguese colonialism. Our god put us here on earth so we could at least have something, to live together in friendship and cooperation. But how can we tolerate somebody who treats us as the colonialists did? We don't accept being treated like animals, beaten and killed for nothing. That is why we united in the Party to put an end to colonialism.

One night Nino came to my *moranga* and told me about a party which was preparing a war to chase the Portuguese from Guinea. He said there was no place in our country where the people could live in peace and prosperity and that we had to save our children from this system. I knew he was right, that we had to resist. The life of

*A wooden paddle with conical holes drilled in it. When hit with a *palmatoria*, skin and tissue are drawn up into the narrowing holes, if hit hard and often enough, and the skin will break.

one person is nothing for the freedom of a whole people. I was the first one in our region to know and I only told a few trusted people about it. In other *tabancas* the Portuguese got to know and killed many people.

My people suffered much in the war. When the Party attacked Tchuguê, the *tugas* destroyed everything before they left. Later, the planes and helicopters killed and destroyed even more. But when the *tugas* later returned with many troops and installed themselves, I refused to flee. I said to myself: "They may kill me, but I will stay and look after my things. I'm too old to start again with nothing." Life became very difficult with the Portuguese back. For example, one day they took my best cow and when I went to get it back, they killed it right before my eyes and insulted me before they let me go home. I hope I will never again have to go through things like that.

Now the time has finally arrived when we can live in peace and enjoy the products of our work. In my *moranga* we are building new huts to house all my children and grandchildren. Later we will join with the others in reconstructing the whole village to make it a good place for the young people to grow up.

Whoever comes to my people as a friend is received as one. The Portuguese took advantage of our friendship to exploit us, so we had to chase them back to Portugal. For a long time we believed that they were the only white tribe in the world. Colonialism closed our eyes to the world around us. But now the Party has changed this and when we meet people like you - from a faraway country and who work with our Party - we shall do all we can to help you in your work. It is a pleasure for me to tell you about my life and the war in our village. And I will gladly do the same for any other friend from abroad who comes with the same mission.



(C. Sarrazin/ISM)

Caby na Iuk

Contradictions of a Lagging City

With the AK (submachine gun) at the ready, friendly but alert, they guard all public buildings and strategically important spots in town. Their uniforms still represent an odd selection of Portuguese left-overs and donations from various countries. We have no reason to doubt their effectiveness, however; out in the bush their determination and discipline proved far superior to that of the well-dressed Portuguese commandos we encountered in Lisbon two months ago. Most of these peasant PAIGC fighters first set eyes on Bissau eight months ago when they arrived with the liberation forces. A strange experience, perhaps, since not only does the city with its street lighting and tree-lined avenues provide a striking contrast to the traditional *tabanca*, but the mentality of its population is also vastly different. In most ways Bissau was the Portuguese stronghold in this small and overwhelmingly rural country.

Still, it was here that the small group of nationalists who founded the PAIGC in 1956 took the first steps toward building the liberation movement. Among the wage workers and those whom Amilcar Cabral later identified as the "revolutionary petty bourgeoisie," the Party recruited many of the men and women who carried out crucial tasks during the armed struggle: Nino, Chico Mendes, Osvaldo and Carmen Peireira. But in the city the colonialists were strong and the movement was isolated from the masses of Guinea's population. The Pidjiguiti massacre and waves of arrests forced a reconsideration of strategy upon Cabral and his comrades: the main terrain of battle had to be the countryside.

With the progress of the armed struggle, conditions in Bissau became increasingly difficult. As in Vietnam, masses of refugees descended on the capital to escape the acts of war that destroyed villages and took the lives of many civilians. But escape to what? With its population swelling from 25,000 to perhaps double that figure during the course of the war, Bissau had little to offer but a miserable life of poverty and destitution in the crowded *bairros*, African quarters built in distinct separation from the Portuguese part of town. Housing and food were scarce, and the black market featured exorbitant prices. The price of a chicken, for instance, went up ten-fold in the course of five years, and agricultural products such as rice and corn became difficult to obtain as increasingly larger areas of the countryside fell under PAIGC's control and were cut off from the towns. In this climate it is no wonder that violent crime, theft, prostitution, alcoholism and drug abuse flourished.

The Occupied City

Throughout the war a network of clandestine PAIGC cadre worked in the city, spreading Party propaganda and mobilizing people to join the struggle. The work was dangerous; hundreds of militants suffered torture and death at the hands of PIDE criminals who had operated in Guinea since 1957. And given the existing conditions, the colonialists found plenty of Africans to serve their cause as quislings working against their own compatriots. In this way Guinea-Bissau proved itself no different from other countries facing similar circumstances; occupying powers have always found elements ready to collaborate.

The colonialists used all means at their disposal to try to turn Bissau's inhabitants from the liberation movement. People were forced to attend political meetings and the radio became a full-time propaganda tool. The Africans most susceptible to this political offensive were naturally those who depended directly on the Portuguese for their living. And with the impossible job situation, the most miserable elements could be bought off for a few hundred escudos. "For \$10 a month apiece, even Portuguese sergeants could afford two or three African servants," a Party organizer told us with a sad smile. "And the Africans, often peasants just arrived from the interior and not used to having cash, thought they were getting a good deal."

In fact, the question of jobs was an important one, since without proof of valid employment, Africans were forcibly enrolled into the colonial forces. Volunteers were

indeed very few until Spínola, as part of his "better Guinea" scheme, started to grant rank and higher pay to Blacks in an effort to "africanize" the war. He conceived of his plan as a double-edged sword, intended to at once split the Africans and take some of the pressure off the white troops in the field. Toward the end of the war these *commandos africanos* were usually to be found in the front lines during major confrontations.

More numerous, however, than those who actively worked against the Party, were those who just continued to work in the service of the colonial status quo and their own material interests. They included virtually the entire small community of white merchants and craftsmen - the civil servants usually being engaged by virtue of their employment - and the non-revolutionary sectors of the African petty bourgeoisie, mainly functionaries and government employees. Among the latter, in particular, many came to adopt the habits and values of their colonizers, moving into the "civilized" part of town, substituting scotch and martinis for *kana* and palm wine and taking in every third rate western or karate movie shown in Bissau's only theater.

Problems of Transition

This, in brief, was the situation when the PAIGC and its government arrived in the capital last September. From the revolutionary countryside to the politically lagging city, from tents and straw shelters to villas and multi-storied office buildings; the problems of transition are bound to be many. Immediate measures have included an all-out campaign against drug abuse, both by way of educational programs over the radio and the introduction of stiff sentences for users and pushers alike. In fact, the People's National Assembly last May approved the introduction of capital punishment for trafficking. As for prostitution, most of it seemed to disappear with the Portuguese forces. Many of the women had been brought here from the Cape Verde Islands and had already returned before the official installation of the PAIGC government, while the locals appear to have given up their *métiers* before special decrees became necessary. By the end of the year monuments to old colonizers were also torn down, and street names changed: General Arnaldo Schulz Avenue became United Africa Avenue and the former Rua Padre Lopes is now named after Guerra Mendes, one of the guerrilla commanders who fell in battle.

An ingenious combination of legal and political measures has been employed to deal with theft. For example, the weekly "Wake Up!" radio program was used to interview arrested thieves and fully broadcast their names and addresses. The embarrassment this brought upon the culprits helped cut the number of thefts by two-thirds over the last six months.

Other campaigns are just getting underway. Colonialism has so distorted the economy of this potentially rich agricultural country that in Bissau all foods except rice, fish and some fruits and vegetables are still imported from abroad and available at prices only the wealthy can afford. French cheese is \$3.50 a pound, green beans 80 cents for a 12 oz. can and there is no fresh milk, only evaporated, sweetened stuff from Holland, again prohibitively priced. Though self-sufficiency in foods is a priority with the government, a few seasons will obviously be needed just to return the dislocated economy to its pre-war level. In the meantime all food prices have been frozen and marketing control of rice, an essential staple, was instituted as a first measure against the horde of greedy speculators - Whites and Africans alike - who have taken advantage of the change in government to fill their own pockets, while blaming the liberation movement. Economic sabotage in the most direct sense!

Traitors Still at Large

While such problems can easily be identified and dealt with as part of the "transition complex," other potentially more explosive contradictions with far deeper roots still require much struggle to resolve. Again, they go back to the influence of colonialism; its divide-and-rule tactics are still effective with certain elements of



C. Sarrazin/LSM

A time for revolutionary vigilance in Guinea Bissau.

the population. After the failure of Spínola's putsch in Portugal 11 March, a plot was uncovered here aiming at "the physical elimination of the Party leaders and the seizure of power by a small group of traitors," according to a government statement. This group was made up of "elements directly in contact with Spínola; left behind by him in the hope of one day restoring colonialism and defending imperialist interests." This statement followed a week of 9 p.m. - 6 a.m. curfew during which the military was put on alert and all guards reinforced in Bissau, as in the rest of the country.

Did the plot come as a surprise to the PAIGC? The struggle against reactionary elements has certainly been fought in the open, both in the *bairros* and the city core. After the war, only those proven directly responsible for crimes against the population were arrested, leaving at large a great number of collaborators openly hostile to the liberation movement and responsible for the circulation of reactionary propaganda.

The list of those arrested in March is dominated by ex-officers of the *commandos africanos*, but also includes former PIDE agents and one well-known businessman who faithfully served the colonialist cause. Closely linked with foreign interests, particularly intent upon eliminating the revolutionary PAIGC on the strategically important Cape Verde Islands, they still represent a threat to the new regime.

The "Chameleons"

Next to eliminating these reactionary elements, the Party's main task here remains the politicization of the city population. This is no small task, since even if general support was widespread in the *bairros* all through the war, it was not until the last year that the PAIGC could start to openly counter the many effects of colonial rule and a decade of near total military occupation. A network of Party *bairro* committees has been set up in the various parts of town - Bandun, Contum, Santa Luzia - to make the PAIGC known among the inhabitants and take up local problems. Years of slander and Portuguese propaganda will have to be overcome. It's difficult work and, here as in the countryside, ideas alone don't work miracles; to be effective, political education must be paralleled by concrete improvements in housing, transport, sanitary conditions and food supply, to mention but a few. Trade unions and the national youth organization, *Juventude Africana Amílcar Cabral* (JAAC), are now organizing to reinforce the urban presence of the Party.

The educated and "civilized" petty bourgeoisie, whose present position is as ambivalent as ever, remain isolated from the *bairros*. Their major concern, of course, is to retain their privileged positions and because the government still depends on them to run the administrative machinery they still have a strong hand, at least for the time being. In the long run, however, their class position is in danger. As functionaries without advanced skills or much economic power, most run the risk of becoming dispensable as a new generation of highly trained PAIGC cadre matures to set Guinea-Bissau on the road of independent economic development. Already, hundreds of youth are studying at universities and high schools abroad and a rapid expansion of the national educational system will soon make secondary schooling far less of a privilege than only a few years back. To remain, this class must therefore prove its loyalty to the revolution and the new regime. Displaying classic opportunism, some elements have gone all the way to display their sudden change of faith. Those who until 25 April were most directly aligned with colonial rule now show up plastered with Party symbols and enveloped in quasi-revolutionary rhetoric, often posing as "critics on the left" sounding off alarmist cries about the need to force the revolutionary process. They are the "chameleons," the "bourgeois opportunists" that responsible PAIGC cadre have seen fit to openly denounce. To advance their own interests they in effect sabotage the revolutionary transition that the Party is working for.

Only the first small steps have been taken to implant the revolution in the city of Bissau. It is a difficult and slow process, but one from which North American activists like ourselves can learn a lot. Can we organize people for a revolution that is not always in their direct material interest? How do we overcome the heavy weight of a decadent capitalist culture? How can we neutralize the "chameleons" that appear in one disguise or another in every revolutionary movement? These are problems that are by no means unique to the PAIGC, and the Party's experience in tackling them must be shared by revolutionaries elsewhere.

Among the Portuguese who have stayed behind there is a definite *fin de siècle* atmosphere as they eat their dessert banana with knife and fork and reminisce about what used to be. Though none have suffered confiscation or nationalization of their businesses and property, they view the future with uncertainty and refuse to openly speculate on the times ahead. Other foreigners who are here for purposes of "cooperation" of one sort or another appear genuinely disappointed over the lack of night clubs and "fun" life. "In Bissau," one overpaid American UN official said with resignation, "you either work your arse off or get out." Maybe that's not such a bad thing, after all.

...Since Pidjiguiti We Never Looked Back."

João Emilio Costa now works for the Bissau Port Administration. In 1959 he was part of the Bissau dockworkers' strike that ended in a bloody massacre at the small Pidjiguiti pier where 50 workers were killed and over a hundred wounded.

When I started working at the docks in 1949, conditions in Guinea were difficult. Many people were without work and food was always short. Our wages were almost nothing and the work hard, but we were glad not to be starving and accepted it, more or less.

This began to change after several years. More and more Africans became aware of what colonialism was doing to our country and tried to improve the situation. At the dock we formed a club to collect money and send youngsters to study in Portugal. But the Portuguese didn't like it and one administrator, Augusto Lima, tried to stop our activities. There was also an African worker by the name of João Vaz who always spoke against what we were doing. Some people in the club weren't dockers; Rafael Barbosa, for instance, was a construction worker and José Francisco, a sugar cane worker. They were both active in the Party and so were Caesare Fernandes, José de Pina and Paulo Fernandes who worked with me. But this was something very few people knew at the time.

Most of us worked for the big Casa Gouvêa company,* either on the dock or on boats taking goods to and from company shops all over the country. But with our low wages, life was becoming more and more difficult. The basic wage was only 10 escudos (approximately forty cents) a day. In 1959, after much discussion in the club and at work, we finally decided to ask for higher wages.

The manager was Antonio Carreira who had just left his post as colonial administrator to work with Gouvêa. Well, he refused even to listen. Of course this was the first time in Guinea's history that workers united to confront their bosses. So, Barbosa and Augusto Laserde said that we had to go on strike and show them we were serious.

On 3 August we all gathered at Pidjiguiti, about five hundred men. Nobody worked, neither on the dock nor on the boats. Carreira came down and shouted and swore, but we just looked at him without moving. At about 4:30 in the afternoon several trucks of armed police arrived. First they sealed off the gate to the street, then they ordered us back to work. When no one obeyed, they began moving slowly down the pier, now packed with striking workers.

This old captain friend of mine, Ocante Atobo, was leaning against the wall of the office shed. When the line of police reached the spot where he was, an officer suddenly raised his gun and shot him point blank in the chest. Ocante collapsed in a pool of blood. For a split second everyone froze - it was as if time stood still. Then hell broke loose. The police moved down the pier, shooting like crazy into the crowd. Men were screaming and running in all directions. I was over by my cousin Augusto Fernandes' boat, the "Alio Sulemane." Augusto, who was standing next to me, had his chest shot wide open; it was like his whole inside was coming out. He was crying: "Oh God: Joao kill me, please." But it wasn't necessary; when I lifted his head from the ground, he was already dead.

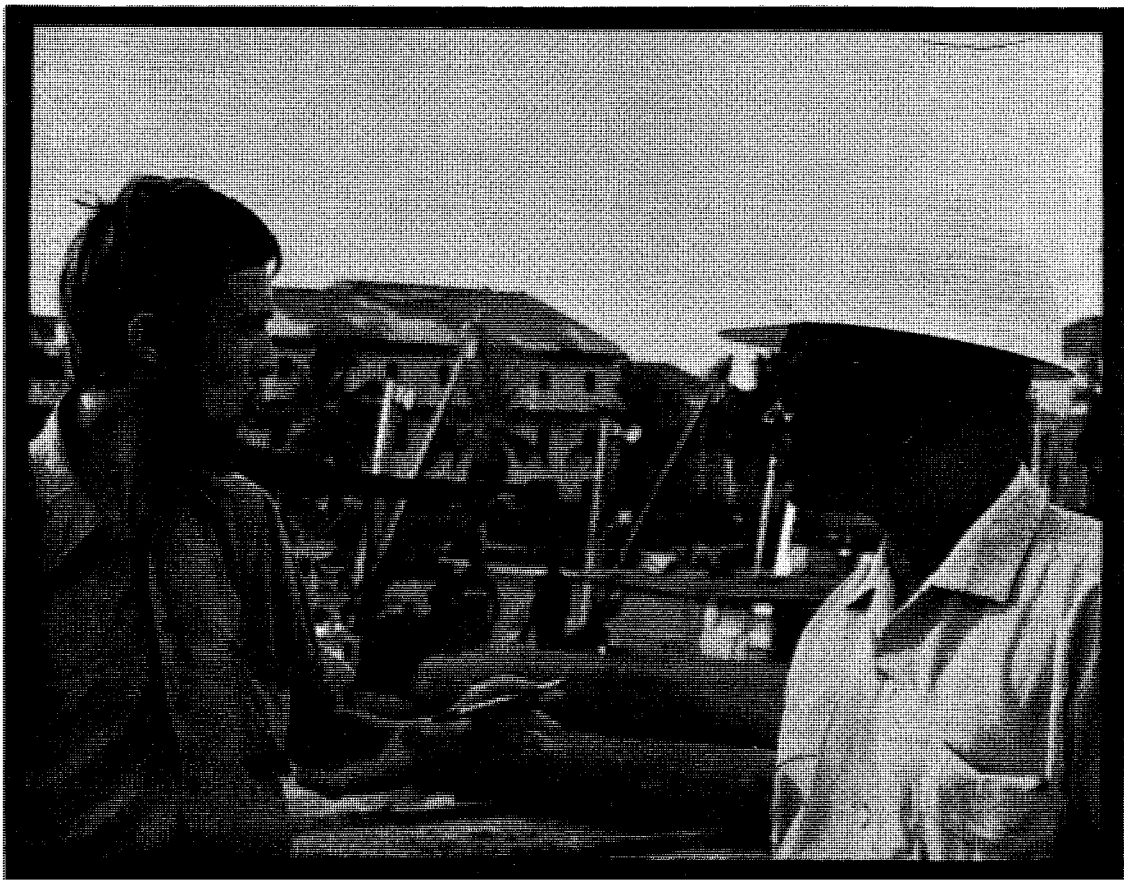
Now the men were running for the end of the pier. The tide was out so all the boats and *pirogues* (African canoes) were resting on the beach. To hide there, however, was impossible since the police, standing high up on the dock, were shooting right into them. One officer was kneeling on the edge, firing at those trying to get away in the water. All around me people were shouting, "Run, run!" but I stayed beside my dead cousin. "No, if they want to kill me, let them do it right here."

* Part of the giant Compania União Fabril's empire.

I don't know how long this had lasted when a PIDE inspector named Emmanuel Correia arrived and ordered the firing to stop. The last one to die was a boatman hiding in the mud under his *piroque*, out of sight of the police. A Portuguese merchant, however, spotted him from his apartment window and shot him in the back with his hunting rifle just after Correia had arrived. One Portuguese, Romeo Martins, always a friend of the Africans, had been trying to keep the police from shooting, but all by himself he couldn't do much.

When the massacre finally ended I saw dead and wounded men all over: on the dock, on the beach, in the boats, in the water - everywhere. Among the dead were Caesare Fernandes and José de Pina who had worked for the Party. Afterwards we were taken to the police for interrogation. For three straight days I had to report to the administrator, Guerra Ribeiro, who wanted to know who had organized the strike. My answer was always the same: "We all organized it; our wages are so bad we had no choice." Later, when Ribeiro had finished his inquiry, the wage went up to 14 escudos a day.

Soon after the massacre a message from Amílcar Cabral was secretly/circulated among us. It said that 3 August would never be forgotten and that we now had to organize to win our independence from Portuguese colonialism. Since then we never looked back. Many other workers and I joined the Party and started the difficult work of political mobilization here in Bissau. With the experience of Pidjiguiti behind us, we knew that we had to accept the risks and sacrifices of an armed revolution to win freedom for our people.



Ole Gjerstad with Costa at Pidjiguiti dock, discussing the August 1959 massacre.
(Chantal Sarrazin/LSM)