

"NO FIST IS BIG ENOUGH TO HIDE THE SKY": A REPORT
ON THE FURTHER LIBERATION OF GUINÉ

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Món pa más què grandi è ka na tapa ceí

No fist is big enough to hide the sky

(Peasant saying of Guinea-Bissau, used especially of colonialist threats and repressions)

It is a saying that Amílcar Cabral particularly liked: he used to apply it to situations of momentary setback with all the glee of a man for whom the drily satirical wit of village humour was a valued armament against adversity. He also used to apply it in its other sense, and without any laughter: in its sense of grim and angry defiance of some new outrage of colonialist military repression or destruction. It is a saying that his comrades will have applied, in this second sense, to the murder of Amílcar Cabral on 20 January this year, shortly after half-past ten at night, by a clutch of traitors acting on a plan devised by General António Spínola's staff in Bissau.

The "fist" of that conspiracy cut short, at the age of 46, the life of a revolutionary man of action whose practicality has given the movement that he founded, the PAIGC of Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands, a success beyond question; of a revolutionary thinker whom history may see, and whom the history of black people will surely see, as among the most penetrating and original of our time. His work speaks for itself; and these pages will try to show the developmental stage that the PAIGC, under his leadership, had reached in the moment of his assassination. But his writings have already brought this work, and the concepts upon which it has rested, a recognition that reaches across the world. No other African has achieved this kind of general importance; it is a measure of the loss that all must suffer by his death.

This recognition has sprung from an acceptance of Cabral's intellectual depth and unfailing honesty of purpose and of language. But more than that, and more important than that, it is evidently the recognition that here at last is a thinker who has known how to build a firm bridge between Africans, emerging as they are from all the

confusions of the "colonial condition", and the common fund of revolutionary experience in the rest of the world. His supreme gift, perhaps, has lain in knowing how to close that "ideological divide"; how to explain the rest of the world to his own people and his own people to the rest of the world: not in any superficial or emotive or merely descriptive sense (many others have done that), but in terms of material reality and the conditions for progressive change.

Yet here again one has to take him as he was: for whatever he said or wrote, whether for internal use or general explanation, was always and inseparably couched in the language of specific and demonstrable experience, of the "here and now" and how to operate upon it. His work and thought have taken shape at a time when the reformist nationalism of the black world is giving way, through sheer incapacity, to a revolutionary nationalism which only now begins to find its road ahead. But his work and thought have also taken shape at a time when leftwing thought in the rest of the world has almost nothing to offer Africans except the models or the slogans of circumstances vastly different from those of Africa. Cabral possessed the wisdom and the largeness of understanding that could relate these models to the African condition, but could also, and crucially, illuminate that condition, and its needs and potentialities, in their own reality and right.

His central idea in this respect was that the colonized peoples must "re-enter their own history"; must cease to be part of the history of others in the sense that others would command the drama; must be free in a liberated future to continue the development of their own development stopped by colonial intrusion. The lessons of others could help, were even indispensable: but as lessons in the development of others, not as models for Africans. They might borrow much from the common fund of revolutionary experience elsewhere, they would have to borrow much: but what they borrowed they must equally refashion and adapt, digest and assimilate, until it became part of something indigenous, and therefore new. In all this, perhaps needless to say, he was miles away from the flatulent or merely feeble opportunism of fashionable evasions such as "African Socialism" and the like. But contempt for that kind of thing never for a moment led him into accepting an evasion of another sort, the evasion of thinking that Africans should merely follow where others show the way.

Admirers of this or that persuasion have tried to pin labels on him. Cabral hated labels. Partly, of course, he rejected labels from a practical awareness of the damage they might do to wide acceptance of the PAIGC's aims and achievements. Much more, he rejected them from principle. He had thought insistently about means and ends, taking all the obvious models and manifestoes into account, as well as others not so obvious. But I believe that he was sure that revolutionary

thought, for him, could take shape only in revolutionary action, and that this action, if it was to be effective, must be and must remain specific to time and place. Just as he took it for granted that scientific analysis of reality was the necessary condition of effectiveness, so too did he take it for granted that the analysis, while standing as it must upon classical foundations, would reach original approaches and conclusions. "Come and see what we have done, what we are trying to do", he tended to reply to those who taxed him on doctrinal issues. "If you find it good, that will please us. If not, we shall listen to your criticism."

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 Portuguese control. Even more, however, it called for this 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 Tricontental in Havana in 1966, "any movement of national liberation which fails to take account of this basis and objective of national 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 in the condition of those productive forces, we see that the phenomenon of *national liberation* is necessarily one of *revolution*".

Thus the specific revolutionary "doctrine" that he held was concerned with displacing the structures in place, whether colonialist or traditionalist or an uneasy symbiosis of the two (and this is the symbiosis that all colonized peoples inherit from their past), by a process of self-development that would create new structures. If the method was "armed struggle", this implied no thought that violence might possess some virtue in itself. I doubt if anyone could be less "Fanonist", in the usually accepted sense of thinking that violence does possess some virtue in itself, than he was. If he had ever suffered any doubts on that subject (and there is no evidence to this effect), they had long since vanished, for in 1960-1 he had very well known the disastrous line applied to Angola by the "Fanonists" of that period, and by those who were induced to accept Fanon's advice. But dealing in the specific, he saw armed struggle as unavoidable, at any rate after 1959. Being unavoidable, it was a reality from which gains as well as losses could be drawn. The measure in which gains were drawn would be the

degree in which the integrated force of revolutionary attitudes out-paced the disintegrating confusion of reformist compromise.

Everything must turn, accordingly, on the degree of *mass participation* that the PAIGC could inspire and organize. Only those who free themselves can achieve freedom. But only those can free themselves who have understood that freedom is the struggle against oneself, against one's own weaknesses of knowledge or perception, as well as against the enemy who denies freedom. Liberation, on this view, above all means participation, active participation, in a process for whose consummation mere adherence or support is not enough. To achieve this kind of participation the PAIGC, with whatever failures and shortcomings, have directed their whole effort. And the nature of this effort is no doubt the central indicator of the typological difference between this revolutionary nationalism and the reformist or "populist" nationalism of the movements for "primary decolonization" during the 1950s and early 1960s. These achieved mass support; mass participation, in the sense of continuing individual and collective involvement displayed by the populations of the liberated areas of Guinea-Bissau, or of comparable populations in Angola and Mozambique, had a lowly place on their agenda. But on the PAIGC agenda, and almost from the start, it has been almost everything. That is why the assassination of Cabral, though imposing an irreparable loss, could not halt or even more than momentarily check the onward drive of the PAIGC towards its objectives.

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The following report was written after a stay of twenty-seven days in some of the liberated areas of Guinea-Bissau, last November and December, and another dozen days of discussions at the chief external office of the PAIGC in Conakry, capital of the neighbouring Republic of Guinea. It was written, in other words, before the assassination. But I think it can wholly stand in its implications for the present and the future. And it can do this not only because of how things really are in the liberated areas, but also because the PAIGC had and has a collective leadership in mid-flight of fulfilling plans laid down, for the present and the immediate future, in 1970. A number of rumours were spread around in the wake of the murder, mostly it would seem by busy little hands in Dakar and in Lisbon, to the effect that the murder arose from a political split within the leadership. To anyone who knew this leadership these rumours could only appear silly; they were in any case without foundation.

The basic facts on the nature of the leadership can be quickly summarized. Up to 1963 its numbers were very few, and its degree of internal democracy very narrow; these were the conditions of

clandestine work in the early years. But in 1964, with the clearing of a small liberated area, these conditions could be changed. This meant calling together, and for a period of many days, every individual in the movement who had taken a lead in one or other part of the country, who had acquired some local authority, who had assumed some general degree of responsibility. In the military situation of 1964 it was extremely difficult to do this; and it was impossible to do it without stopping active struggle for several months. Discussing this last December, Cabral and Aristides Pereira told me that in the event they found that it set back by six months the actual progress of their struggle "on the ground". But, commented Cabral, "it was all the same indispensable. We had to get to know each other, we had to see who we all were, we had to reorganize".

I have sketched the reorganization elsewhere. Effectively, it meant the election by this forest conference of a central committee of forty-five members (with twenty candidates); a political bureau of twenty members, and five candidates; and a small day-to-day executive. This continued with a few changes until April 1970, by which time the PAIGC was a much larger organization than before, and with many new young leaders coming to political maturity through their work. Reflecting this enlargement, the central committee was then displaced by a "Supreme Council of the Struggle", numbering eighty-five persons; these in turn elected a central committee of twenty-five, and this elected a small war council and a small executive. Plans were sketched for further enlargement.

These plans were ripened in August 1971. It was then decided that a general election should be held in 1972, throughout the liberated areas, and with as high a registration of voters as several months of work to that end could achieve; this would create councils for each of the fifteen liberated regions, and these elected councils would then select about a third of their number who would form the majority of a National Assembly. This would be another exercise in the widening and intensifying of mass participation in political life, in the building of a new society. "We form our National Assembly", I heard Vasco Cabral (head of the PAIGC economic planning department and incidentally no relation of Amilcar's) telling a regional council in the course of one of these meetings of selection, "precisely so that our people shall be able to participate more fully in directing its affairs and promoting its interests". But the general election and the National Assembly would also achieve two other purposes. It would mark the beginning of a separation of powers between State and party, legislature and executive; this was another constant theme in election speeches that I heard. Thirdly, it would provide a democratic basis for a declaration of the independence of the State of Guinea-Bissau. (A

comparable declaration for the Cape Verde Islands must necessarily be deferred, until conditions there make one possible; eventually, a liberated Cape Verde archipelago will be federated with Guinea-Bissau, and each will have its own territorial structure.)

All this was carried through in 1972, and everything was ready, by the outset of 1973 and at the time of Amilcar's destruction, for the calling together of the National Assembly, the declaration of independence, and the request for world-wide recognition. Much else was also prepared on the military side; new offensives with new means were ready to begin by close co-ordination of the commanders of the regular army and its articulated village militias. Acting on their plot devised in Bissau, the assassins tried to decapitate the organization of the chief external office in Conakry: they killed Cabral, kidnapped Cabral's right-hand man and intimate friend, Aristides Pereira, and tried to kidnap others who happened to be in their offices that night. In this last the plotters failed and took to flight, while Aristides Pereira was happily rescued from their hands. Yet it is even possible to assert with confidence that the loss of these other leaders, besides Cabral, would still have made no long-term difference to the due completion of the PAIGC's political and military plans.*

That is not to underrate the ~~great~~ importance of these men inside their movement; it is merely to say, what all the evidence supports, that the movement has passed far beyond the point where any individual loss, however sorely felt, can now destroy it. These men who generally manned the external office in Conakry were of large authority and experience, but they were still, so far as the leadership was concerned, only the "visible fraction of the iceberg": the rest were inside the country. In fact, only two serious questions of immediate action seem to have posed themselves. One was whether the obvious successor as secretary-general, Aristides Pereira, would be fit enough to take on the work as a permanency, for the assassins had severely wounded him on 20 January. The other was the question of making

* Who were the assassins? All save one who was killed that night were taken into PAIGC custody, where they made very full admissions; one of them, the bodyguard Goda, committed suicide after his confession by seizing a rifle and shooting himself. From these and from ancillary evidence a full and detailed picture is now available. The plot was prepared and carried through by a small group of traitors infiltrated into PAIGC ranks as "deserters" from the Portuguese armed forces, working together with another small group of "malcontents" who, for one reason or another of personal failure, had met with severe criticism or punishment by the PAIGC. One of these, the naval officer Inocencio **Cani**, had been lately amnestied by Cabral after serving a term in prison, imposed on him for selling on the black market of Conakry a motor from the naval launch that he commanded. None of the assassins was even remotely of political importance in the PAIGC, and no aspect of the plot reflected any kind of split within the leadership of the PAIGC, or, indeed, within any part of the movement.

sure, or as sure as reasonably possible, that no other traitors infiltrated by the Portuguese still lurked in the movement's ranks.

The Portuguese, for their part, greeted the news of the assassination (passing over the failure of the kidnapping) with strong words and bold threats about what they would now do. It had become their customary attitude on such occasions; they had behaved in exactly the same way, pushing out *communiqués* of ill-concealed triumph or frank enjoyment, after the assassination of the Mozambican leader, Eduardo Mondlane, in January 1969. But the villagers of Guinea-Bissau have their salty saying for language of this kind. *E ka n'lidura di lagarto qui tudjibu canoa passa*, which means: "It's not the dirty looks of the crocodile that will stop your canoe from crossing the river", their implication being that what will stop your canoe is your own failure of care or courage. How little likely is any such failure now may be inferred, I think, from the situation one could live in and examine at the end of 1972. In reporting on that, it may be useful to begin by setting the scene.



"Sharp and fine evening light; good going since about 2 p.m. at usual 4 m.p.h. or so. High tide, so not much mud." Afterwards, with luck, such notes can shift the tenses of recalled experience. A single word can do that: in this case, for example, *mud*. To move about the seaboard zones of these great forests, forked by estuaries and ocean creeks or farmed in plains of rice that push away one woodland border from another with miles of dyke and paddy, you must endure a wilderness of mud. And at low tide, of course, you must wade still further so as to reach canoes or leave them. This the peasants do not mind. Whether or not they carry burdens on their heads or weapons on their shoulders, the peasants float across these shores with a barefoot elegance of levitation. The booted foreigner plods and then, shin-deep, gets stuck. Made presently aware, the peasants come floating back again and help him out.

Today we have taken canoes across a couple of minor rivers, and walked and talked, and come before sundown to the ocean creek which divides these islands of the southern coast from the mainland's *terra firma*, though it is not always that. These sectors are part of the southern liberated regions. By virtue of their location and relatively dense population, they and other sectors on this tour can be counted among the most important in the country. They reach over on the west to the borders of the Rio Grande, the great ocean estuary of Bissau, and on the north to the savanna lands beyond the Corubal; and they can certainly be taken, allowing for local differences elsewhere, as representing the general situation in all the liberated regions.

On this November day, the seventeenth since I crossed the frontier from the Republic of Guinea, we have marched hard from the central villages of Como and reached the brink of this wide ocean creek with a little time to spare before the canoes will be assembled. A long sleeve of darkness, nearly a kilometre wide, separates us from the mainland and the rest of the way we shall march tonight. The sky is clear above this ocean creek, for the rains of 1972 are almost over, and beyond the creek, as they glow like luminous mushrooms in the night, we can see where the lights of the Portuguese garrisons at Catio and Bedanda to one side, and at Cabdue and Cassine to the other, make small circles on the skyline.

Hard beset by PAIGC ambush, these garrisons have long since ceased to possess any communication with each other, save by naval convoys from Bissau once a month or occasional helicopter sorties. **Tonight** we shall cross the water and approach two of them. Tomorrow we shall continue by day, skirting these garrisons within three or four kilometres while we march along the regular lines of communication of the PAIGC. But now there is an hour to rest and eat.

We sit around the verandah of a large village house, a company of a couple of dozen soldiers of the PAIGC, two or three political workers, a PAIGC leader who is Vasco Cabral, head of the movement's economic planning department, and a foreigner who is myself. The sun falls into the western ocean. and almost from one moment to the next it is cool again, even cold with the breath of the long night ahead. We lean against each other, for everyone is tired; and we are glad when three women of the house bring bowls of rice and roasted chicken legs. There are incidents of **clear** simplicity and calm in this forest war, and this is one of them.

Not far away, perhaps fifteen kilometres, an artillery battle is in full swing. Arafane Mane, who is in charge of our party, explains it to me. The Portuguese commanding general, António Spínola, has his main garrison in these parts at Catio, on the estuary of the Cumbije river that flows into the ocean creek which we shall cross. Just now, it seems, he is planning a big offensive raid with troops from Bissau. To that end he is trying to tar the eight kilometres of dirt road which separate Catio from **his** only available jet-bomber airstrip at Cufar, where he also has a garrison. With a tarred road he can probably guarantee a land communication between Cufar and Catio, at least for a while. If so, he can use the airstrip to supply Catio, and *vice versa*; and this will help his raid. Well aware of all that, the army of the PAIGC has set itself to stop him from tarring the road.

This particular contest will go on for most of the rest of the time that I am in the region. Day after day, it follows a familiar course. Late in the afternoon two or three small bombers of FIAT-91 type

(manufactured for NATO, and sold to the Portuguese by the West German Defence Ministry) appear from Bissau. They drop their bombs into the forest around the Cufar-Catio road, and then shoot off their cannon in the same blind way. I have watched them doing it several times. Not knowing the precise location of PAIGC units, Spínola's aircraft are reduced to hitting at random. As soon as they have done that, towards sundown, these PAIGC units move in and bombard the garrisons, as well as the road between them, using bazookas, mortars, and, occasionally, 122 mm ground-to-ground rockets. The latter can be distinguished, even from a distance, by the sharp roar of their explosion. This evening we hear several such explosions.

When we have eaten and rested, it is time to go across. Our village host is in charge of all boat movements in this locality, for the PAIGC leave no such matters to chance, and comes now to say that the canoes are ready. He is a powerful rice farmer with a lively smile, manifestly proud of his responsibilities. "Years ago", says Arafane, "when the Portuguese tried to push us out of Como island, back in 1964, it was this man who always managed to paddle across with supplies of ammunition from the mainland." Since then the Portuguese have not set foot on Como island, nor in any part of the Como sector, since 1965. These are liberated areas with nearly eight years of complete self-rule behind them. I am the first European to come here since the visit of a distinguished French cinéast in 1964.

The boats are at the brink of a high tide. We embark silently, and paddle out across mirrors of grey water lit only by a failing moon and the distant glow of Portuguese garrisons. It is a routine journey, and has nothing in the least of the "romance" which has somehow got itself attached, by a terrible misunderstanding, to the nature of guerrilla operations. Disembarking on the other side, we shall plunge at once into the grim reality of knee-high mud and numbing weariness. Neither is romantic by any stretch of the imagination.

But it is not a bad moment for thinking about the position of the PAIGC: about its position today, and its prospects for tomorrow. The boats go swiftly with the paddling of tried arms and hands, but the tide is running the wrong way, and it will take some time to reach the other bank. Sixteen years after six men first began the journey of the PAIGC, where has the movement got to upon this eve of 1973?



The PAIGC was launched in great secrecy, in Bissau, during the autumn of 1956. In France the Fourth Republic had just passed the *loi cadre* that was to open the way for the political independence of French Africa. In Britain the government had just agreed to the

political independence of Ghana, and were getting ready for the same concession to Nigeria. All this was anathema to the Portugal of Oliveira Salazar, whose government continued to repeat that the colonies of Portugal were organic provinces of the mother country—were in this respect in Europe and not in Africa at all—and, as such, already enjoyed as much political independence as could possibly be good for them: *sous entendu*, that the dictatorship could afford.

Having tried persuasion by demonstrations and illegal strikes, and duly met the bullets of the colonial police, the handful of men who formed the PAIGC began to prepare for armed revolt. They had asked for reform, and failed to get it. Now they would embark on revolution, even if, at the time, they had little idea of how any such revolution could be carried through.

But they had one firm idea about this. Success could only come, they thought, from mobilizing the rural people of the countryside. Today it may seem a very obvious conclusion. Over nine-tenths of the population were rural people; only 0.03% had achieved "assimilation" into Portuguese society, and most of these were overseas, tucked away in quiet little jobs in Portugal or in other Portuguese colonies. For the rest, the towns of Guinea-Bissau displayed an unpromising confusion of more or less rootless people whose common conviction was that whatever black people might be capable of doing, they were not going to be capable of ousting white people from positions that white people were determined to hold.

Yet the idea of "mobilizing the countryside" was at that time far from obvious. First of all, most revolutionary precedents had suggested that you should "begin with the towns". Then the task of overcoming peasant scepticism, peasant conservatism, appeared *appallingly* difficult. And the difficulty seemed all the greater because most of the active members of the clandestine PAIGC—and they were perilously few in those days—were men and women of the towns. Or else they were natives of the Cape Verde Islands where the colonial situation was somewhat different, and where, in any case, they spoke none of the languages of the mainland save the *lingua franca* of Créole.

This is not the place to attempt even an outline of all that was done between 1956 and 1972. Briefly, though, the pioneers of the PAIGC set out boldly to mobilize the peasants, and slowly, painfully, they began to have success. Their greatest effort in this direction came in the years 1960–62, and now they were assisted by a widespread reaction against the mounting repression with which the Portuguese replied to their work and its results. By the end of 1962 they felt strong enough to launch their armed resistance, and this went well. By 1964 they had achieved enough popular support, and enjoyed enough military success, to establish small liberated areas in which they at

once began to plant new structures of rural self-government. By 1967, the time of my first visit, they had greatly enlarged these areas as well as their structures of self-rule, primary education, medical care, commercial organization and other such activities. Since then they have continued in the same direction. Today, I think, it is reasonable to say that they have effective political and military control over most of the rural areas of the country, and are about to embark on operations which will strengthen the positions they already hold and will enlarge their impact on Bissau and other chief towns.

General Spinola, of course, denies any widespread PAIGC control. He continues to speak of the PAIGC military presence merely as "invasion from the republics of Guinea and Senegal", although the evidence of several dozen foreign visitors is unanimous in agreeing that the PAIGC is a thoroughly indigenous organization whose presence and control can be examined in every region of the country, save for the neighbourhood of Bissau and the Fulah grasslands of the far north-east. My own observations lead to the conclusion that the PAIGC now dominates the whole life of the country, reaching with its clandestine organization into the heart of every town still occupied by the Portuguese. And it is only on this hypothesis, indeed, that one can begin to explain the actions and reactions of the Portuguese themselves. Why otherwise can it be that the embattled and besieged garrisons of Spinola increase in number as one gets further from the frontier, and nearer to Bissau?

The interesting question is no longer whether or not the PAIGC is the dominant factor throughout Guinea-Bissau, for this is a question that is settled even in the mind of General Spinola, as his recent policies of "reconciliation" amply show. The interesting question is to know how the PAIGC have achieved their remarkable growth, and, now that they have reached the turning point, what they will do next.

One finds them full of a quiet confidence. And it is not difficult, living in their camps and settlements, to see why. The heroic years of initial struggle, of lonely effort largely ignored by the rest of the world, lie behind them now. Before them, though still lit by the flames of napalm and of shattered villages, there opens the prospect of years of reconstruction which will bring the difficult and yet easier problems of peace. The journey of this revolutionary nationalism has reached a new phase.

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Asked again why they have failed to win this war in Guinea-Bissau, to which (on a per *capita* comparison of the populations of Portugal and the USA) they have long committed an army larger than the largest US army in South Vietnam, the Portuguese regime

falls back on a second explanation. Yes, they will agree upon being pressed: it is true that the rural people support the PAIGC, but they do this only because the PAIGC have terrorized them.

One cannot help thinking it the argument of men who refuse to face the reality of their own defeat. For it is an explanation which entirely ignores the fact that a guerrilla resistance which is not an *increasingly* popular resistance is one that irrevocably fails. Every historical example one can bring to mind, above all within the last thirty years, bears out the truth of this. If the cause of the PAIGC has prevailed, it can only be because an ever-growing number of people have willingly embraced it.

Travelling in areas under PAIGC government, the visitor finds the evidence of this on every hand. But in this respect, perhaps, there is nothing more convincing than the ideas and attitudes of those pioneers of the PAIGC—Amilcar Cabral and his brother Luiz, Aristides Pereira, Bernardo Vieira, Osvaldo Vieira, Chico Mendes and others like them—who have led the PAIGC since the 1950s. These ideas and attitudes, as one quickly discovers, are concerned above all with the problems of broadening and intensifying even the large degree of popular participation which they have so far achieved. No doubt they may be strong enough now to impose their will; yet they remain resolutely attached to the methods of political persuasion with which they began.

"We are armed militants, not militarists", Cabral has said in a characteristically neat turn of phrase, and it seems to be the basic lesson that they teach to everyone. For liberation, as one may hear it repeated in dozens of "forest conversations" and meetings, can be of no value unless it means the liberation of the mind, the widening capacity of everyone to think and act for themselves. They would betray their whole purpose as well as invite defeat, they will tell you time and again, if they were to fall back on "orders from above". Such orders might be obeyed in these liberated areas, for the PAIGC has great prestige as well as commanding armed force; but orders from above cannot educate. Only the experience of voluntary participation, of "educated participation", can do that. And it is this kind of participation which can alone make liberation more than a change of masters.

For those with a taste for revolutionary theory and its embodiment in praxis, the implications of these ideas and attitudes are of more than passing interest. When they began, like every other minority of their type, the pioneers of the PAIGC were obliged to substitute themselves for "the will of the nation". They had to do this all the more because then, and for a long time afterwards, they were (as they also say, recalling those days) "nationalists without a nation". Making this

"substitution", they did not forget their own weakness. When Frantz Fanon and other well-wishers urged them in 1960–61 "simply to begin", they stuck in their toes and refused, even at the cost of losing useful support. Others might think that the village farmer in Guinea-Bissau would "rally to the sound of a guerrilla rifle": they thought it far more likely that he would run away from it as fast as he could. They would accordingly begin, Cabral replied to such urgings, only when they were sure that they had persuaded a substantial number of rural people into active participation. Otherwise their act of revolutionary "substitution", no matter how well phrased or fought for, could degenerate only into an irresponsible adventure.

The task was therefore to set going a process whereby mass participation would gain steadily over minority substitution. They found this very hard in 1960–61, but they persevered. Even in 1963, after they had shown what they could do in the southern regions, where they first began armed resistance, peasant scepticism remained hard to overcome. I lived for ten days of last November in a forest camp, far inside the country, commanded by Osvaldo Vieira, inspector-general of the armed forces of the PAIGC; he it was who began resistance in the North. His group then, in 1963, consisted of ten men with three rifles. "The peasants didn't believe that we could hit the Portuguese, or even that we would try. 'You've scarcely any arms', they said, 'you're nothing'. So we had to show them." He laid an ambush, smashed three army vehicles, killed seven Portuguese, and captured eight weapons. "After that, it began to be different."

Today the process of making participation gain over substitution, but without the vanguard's in anyway abdicating from its task of leadership, has gone very far. Five years ago I heard an old man in the Kitafiné sector describing that process. He began by talking about life under Portuguese rule. He said it was "like living in a cave". But "we didn't think it could be different. Party work and Party talk: it's like a big lie at the beginning. But in the end it's the real truth." It is an explanation that Cabral liked to remember. That old man, he would tell you, had got to the heart of the matter with a minimum of words.

The secret of its success has lain in clearing liberated areas and then, inside them, building new structures of every-day life. Politically, these structures have consisted at the base—and the base is everything in this context—of a dense network of village committees which, as they became increasingly elective and representative in nature, have repeatedly taken over fresh responsibilities. On the Como group of islands, for example, there is a total of fifteen committees; at various meetings I was able to identify members of thirteen of them. In another sector I was present at a meeting of representatives of seventeen of the sector's committees.

At one level or another, these committees are concerned with every aspect of public life in their localities. They look to the full-time workers of the PAIGC for leadership, but are encouraged to take over as much responsibility as they are able. New activities are continually being added to their work. The latest in importance, initiated since 1970, is the formation of a network of village courts; each of these tribunals consists of a judge (or, as we should say in England, a justice or magistrate) and two assessors appointed by their respective village committee. They hear all cases, but send difficult ones to a sector court, and this in turn sends the most serious cases, those consisting of assault or other violence, to a supreme military court. Minor offences, such as trading with the enemy, are punished by fines in kind (usually rice) or assignment to portage services. Serious cases can be punished by imprisonment, but there is no capital punishment. A legal code, based on the transformation of customary law, is now in course of completion.

So it is that the force which promotes the enlargement of the powers and functions of these village committees is not only the administrative hand of the PAIGC but also, and probably even more, the new opportunities which the PAIGC have opened for them. One sees this especially in education and public health. The PAIGC began to found primary schools inside the country in 1964. Today they have 156 such schools, functioning where no schools have ever existed before, with about 250 teachers, as well as one secondary school and a nursery school in the Republic of Guinea. For October 1972, the breakdown of attendances showed the following results:

First Year	...	...	6,988 pupils	
Second year	...	...	849	
Third year	...	...	506	
Fourth year	...	...	172	
Fifth year	...	...		} Both in Republic of Guinea.
Nursery	...	...

Of this total of 8,574 pupils, 2,155 were girls: not a just proportion, according to Carmen Pereira, who is in charge of education in the South, but at least a start towards a greatly improved status for women among people who have often grossly abused the status of women in the past, and often continue to do so today. To this total of 8,574 in regular full-time schools, another 7,000 or so must be added who are men and women attending part-time adult classes of one kind or another, concerned chiefly with literacy and elementary arithmetic, in fighting units or hospitals, clinics or other institutions inside the country where they live and work.

Here again Cabral set the keynote in his 40-page *Palavras de Ordem Gerais* of 1965: a severe, concise but all-embracing guide to PAIGC work and behaviour. "Demand from responsible Party members that they dedicate themselves seriously to study; that they interest themselves in the things and problems of our daily life and struggle in their fundamental and essential aspects, and not simply in their appearances. . . . Learn from life, learn from people, learn from books, learn from the experience of others, never stop learning." There are many who find it hard to live up to such demands, and many, no doubt, who altogether fail. Yet the demands are still made.

Public health is a third field for widening participation in new opportunities. On Como island, for instance, the village communities disposed of no health facilities in the time of Portuguese rule. Today there is a central clinic and several mobile ones. The central clinic has four beds for in-patients and thirteen nurses, eight of whom are women. Their main work is to treat out-patients who come from the villages of the sector. I picked up its register when I was there, and counted the names of 672 out-patients (including a handful of in-patients) for the month of October and four-fifths of November.

In October 1972 the PAIGC had 125 small clinics, nine small hospitals, and three larger hospitals that were staffed by fully-trained doctors (at least two of whom are Cuban volunteers, including one who was with Castro in the Sierra Maestra) inside the country, as well as three clinics and one full-equipped surgical hospital in the neighbouring Republics of Guinea and Senegal. Altogether these had 488 beds, of which rather less than 300 were inside the country. The total of nurses trained so far in Europe (mostly in the USSR) was ninety, with 169 others trained by the PAIGC inside the country. Eight PAIGC doctors have completed their training in the USSR or elsewhere in Europe; and as well as the Cuban doctors, there are three Yugoslavs in the main surgical centre in the Republic of Guinea. It is still very little, but it is a great deal more than it was before. As in other fields of social service, the difficulty now lies in an acute shortage of personnel with advanced training: whether as secondary school teachers, physicians, surgeons, or fully-qualified nurses and assistants. The very fact that this shortage is now being felt can offer some measure of the foundation work already done.



All this tells something about the way in which mass participation has been made to gain on minority substitution. But a chief part of this crucial process has lain in the formation of leaders at each level of responsibility.

In 1972 the PAIGC undertook a major reorganization of its political

and administrative systems so as to meet the needs of the movement's growth, and open fresh avenues for participation. "We decided to bring a lot of young men and women into positions of responsibility", Cabral commented on this, "and that was a thoroughly good thing, because we were tending to fall into a rut. We were beginning to have too many 'recognized leaders', we found, with a corresponding tendency to form 'groupings'. So we widened the leadership, and put an end to that." Late in 1972 one repeatedly found positions of political and military responsibility occupied by young men such as Caetano Barbosa, Paolo Cabral (no kin of Amilcar Cabral: the name is a common one), and many like them, who were only children when the armed struggle began. One found, in short, that a second generation had begun to relay those who began that struggle.

The three large zones into which the PAIGC have divided their country—South, North, and East—were each placed under the responsibility of three leaders, respectively in charge of political work, security and militia, and social affairs, the latter being known as national reconstruction. In the South, for instance, you find Chico Ba in charge of political work, with a whole network of full-time workers linking him with the village committees at the base. Now about thirty, Chico Ba was brought down from the North, where he had spent several years, by the action of another PAIGC principle: that of regularly moving full-time workers from one region to another. In charge of militia and security you find Carlos Correa, a PAIGC veteran of perhaps thirty-five who was once an accountant in a Portuguese trading firm; and thirdly, in charge of national reconstruction, you find Carmen Pereira, whose story opens another wide vein of understanding about the nature of the PAIGC.

Carmen told me her story on the evening of a visit to her pride and joy, the central boarding school of the southern regions. She comes of a relatively prosperous family, her father being a Bissau lawyer who counts, or used to count, as a notable. He refused to allow his four daughters to enter the Bissau lycée, although their "assimilated" status would have allowed them to do so, "because he thought we'd then go into the administration, and then would ruin our reputations". So they had to be content with four years of primary school and such ladylike occupations as they could find until they found husbands. Carmen took up needlework and looked after her mother. Eventually she married a suitable man, as it was thought, and was blessed in time with the birth of two sons and a daughter.

History took a hand when she was pregnant with her third child. "We first heard of the PAIGC in some broadcast, though of course I'd known Amilcar Cabral before that, simply as someone in the town. That was in 1961. Then one day I noticed my husband and two of his

friends up to something unusual. They had papers and these they hid in the house. But I thought I had a right to know what my husband was doing, so I found the hiding place and looked at the papers. They were documents about the PAIGC, a photo of Cabral, a drawing of a flag."

"When my husband reproached me, I told him that he should have told me about the Party, and not left me out. Nothing happened for a while: but then came 1962 and the repression in the towns. I went to stay in Bolama for family reasons, but when I came back it was in the time of arrests. My husband was threatened, and decided to go abroad and join the Party there." This was the period when Cabral had established a little semi-clandestine headquarters in Conakry, from where he directed the work of political mobilization inside the country.

Carmen was left to fend for herself, but by now she had thoughts of her own. "I decided to go to Senegal, and thanks to my father's help and contacts, I was able to get out with my two children and my baby. I decided I would work for the Party. In Senegal I met Amilcar, and he encouraged me. But I had three children to support as well as myself. So I went down to Ziguinchor [in the southern part of Senegal], and there I got work as a tailor, and with the money I earned I kept myself and the children and I also ran a resthouse for members of our Party who were in that region." She was about twenty-five, and she must have had a lot of courage, for not only was the PAIGC's future extremely doubtful at that time, but the Senegalese authorities were by no means very helpful, while her own understanding of politics had only begun to flower.

"This went on to the end of 1963, and in that December the Party sent me to the USSR for ten months; and I left the children to be looked after in our resthouse." As for others in the PAIGC, the ten months in Russia were an introduction to the wide world as well as a chance to learn a skill. Carmen learned the elements of the nursing craft, and in 1965 returned to Russia as leader of the first large group of trainee-nurses who also spent a year there. By this time the PAIGC had formed a small "pilot school" in Conakry, and Carmen's children, like those of other PAIGC parents abroad on training, found a home there and a start to their school lives.

Returned from this second trip abroad, Carmen departed for the interior, for the tropical forests with all their unknown discomforts and dangers. She learned how to live among them, and has stayed there ever since. Her headquarters is a forest camp several days' hard marching from the nearest frontier; and this is the base from which she moves from sector to sector—there are eleven sectors in the South—on journeys that are ceaselessly demanding. But the journeys, as any

visitor may quickly see, are no more demanding than she herself, who is constantly urging, arguing, rearranging, and explaining with a tireless vigour.

In terms of the widening participation upon which the PAIGC has founded its whole system, Carmen is a lesson in herself, for this is a participation that has transformed her from a respectable little do-nothing into a leader of dynamic confidence and magnetism. Carmen may be exceptional even inside this extraordinary movement, just as she might well be exceptional in any society which knew how to evoke her talents. But she is none the less a characteristic example of the kind of young people who have grown into the capacities of leadership through participation in this struggle.



It would be easy to multiply such examples. Repeatedly, it appears, the process of "Liberation" can be far more than a merely political enlargement. For Cabral, a truly liberating movement has to be far more. He liked to say that true liberation implies "a veritable forced march on the road of cultural progress". For "if we consider what is inherent to this armed struggle for liberation: the practice of democracy, criticism and self-criticism, the growing responsibility of populations in the management of their life, the learning of literacy, the creation of schools and medical services, the formation of cadres who come from peasant and worker backgrounds, as well as every other such activity, then we see that armed struggle for liberation isn't only a cultural fact but also a factor of culture".

It is above all in this sense, as a factor of culture, as a further unwinding in the process of self-liberation, that one needs to interpret the whole electoral operation of 1972, stretching as it did over several phases and many months: long weeks of arduous political explanation in every liberated sector, the difficult compiling of a detailed electoral register among people still largely illiterate, the drawing up of lists of village candidates, the organization of balloting by direct and secret means, the calling together of the elected regional councils, and the rest. All this involved a persistent drawing-in of countless village people to the creation and management of institutions which, for them, are of an altogether new type. All this, in a much more than symbolic sense, meant firmly establishing "the base" at the "summit", even if "the base" itself—the dozens of national representatives who are almost all village farmers, whether men or women—would still need time to accustom themselves to this position and the responsibilities which flow from it. All this implied a fresh insistence upon practical democracy, a calling-up of new political strength from the grass-roots, and a consequent enlightenment not only for the people of the grass-

roots, but also for the full-time ranks of the PAIGC itself. All this, in short, marks another gaining of participation over substitution.

Formed by a democratic process infinitely more advanced and sensitive than anyone might have thought possible even in the recent past, this Assembly is the organ of independence. Its creation is the logical capping of a political system that has come into being over the ten years since armed struggle began in January 1963; and its representative nature can be seen in the people who compose it. In one sense they are very simple people, illiterate or nearly so, walking barefoot, knowing little of the world at large. In another sense, a more important one, they are people with a stern and vivid understanding of the realities they know, whether in the practice of their village lives or the practice of the struggle they have made their own.

They and their sons and daughters, brothers and cousins who are the full-time workers of the PAIGC, still have harsh years ahead of them. Only utopians could think otherwise; and these people are not utopians. What they claim and what they tell you is that they have made a start towards a democratic society, a society capable of "re-entering its own history" and "continuing with its own development". They have done this under conditions of extreme adversity and against obstacles of reckless military repression. Even with these handicaps, they have done it with success.

It is a claim that is hard to deny. There is a Twi saying, long current in Ghana, which runs: *Woforo dua a, wofi n'ase na womfi soro*, meaning that: "If you want to climb a tree, you must start at the bottom". The leaders of many other newly-independent states have ignored the advice. They have preferred to start at the top; and the results are what we know. But when the State Council of Guinea-Bissau turns to the rest of the world for recognition, and speaks in the name of the people of that country, it does so from the firm posture of having climbed its tree from the very roots.

(Since the above was completed, the following has happened:

1. On 18-22 July 1973, the PAIGC held a congress at which important decisions were taken. Among these was a further enlargement of the leadership structure, including the nomination of a four-man secretariat. Deputy secretary-general since 1964, Aristides Pereira was appointed in Cabral's place.

2. On 24 September 1973, the National Assembly met in the Boé liberated region, adopted a constitution, nominated a State Council, and declared the independence of Guinea-Bissau. Within two weeks, 62 countries had recognized the new State.

3. General Spínola has retired to Lisbon, "suffering from exhaustion".)