

# The Role of Women in the Revolution

## A. Sekou Toure



### *Introduction* by Qaraandin

*There has never been a successful revolution in which women did not take an active role. On the battlefield and off.*

*In “The Role of Women in the Revolution,” Sekou Toure explains why the liberation of Afrikan women is as important as Afrikan liberation. He reminds us that if there is no equality of the rights and duties of all elements of the community then no one is truly free.*

*The pictures that I added to Sekou Toure’s words show that throughout history women all over the world have armed themselves and fought for liberation for their people.*



### **THE POSITION OF WOMEN**

If African women cannot possibly conduct their struggle in isolation from the struggle that our people wage for African liberation, African freedom, conversely, is not effective unless it brings about the liberation of African women.

It was not until the colonial system introduced its shameful practices of oppression and exploitation that the role of women in African society became distorted in its forms and contents, resulting in the insane disqualification which our free countries must liquidate thoroughly.

A people's freedom is not measured by the rights that a fraction of this people enjoy; it is measured by the degree of equality of the rights and duties of all elements of the community, irrespective of creed, education, race, sex or wealth.

Under foreign rule the traditional patterns of African society were gradually supplanted by negative values; this process eventually resulted in the degradation of the position of women in our society, depriving them of their most sacred human rights.



Yaa Asantewaa

It should be recalled that in several African societies matriarchy conferred upon women a paramount social and even political role and that quite generally the participation of women in the economic, social and cultural life used to be no less than that of men, while in family life she enjoyed full authority to care for the interests of the family and educate the children.

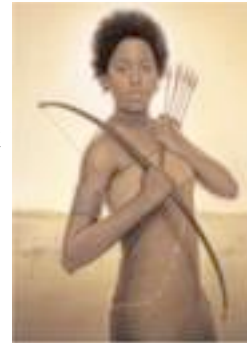
However, colonialist examples of spoliation, arbitrary authority, oppression and exploitation brought about a reversal of the traditional social order, victimizing women most cruelly. Now, fortunately, the progress of decolonization and African unity which dominates Africa's political situation is tending to put the process of evolution of our people on a quite different path from that which the colonial and imperialist powers had been trying to impose on us.

The condition of womanhood in Africa is one aspect of the general condition of the African peoples which was seriously impaired by colonial oppression and exploitation. The economic exploitation which robbed our people of their riches and of the fruits of their labours, while making for the prosperity of financial and economic trusts in the "metropolises," spared no single section of the African population. Our countries were regarded as reservoirs of raw materials that they had to export in huge quantities to feed Western industry. Our workers had to sustain the crushing burden of all-out exploitation of their physical and intellectual energies for a wage not even sufficient to secure adequate food. As to our farmers, the colonial system regarded them only in terms of export crops, while thousands died of starvation every year. Thus, the economic life of African territories was dominated by the law of colonial profit: buying African primary commodities dirt cheap and selling imported manufactured goods at a profit of two hundred, three hundred, or five hundred per cent. In war times, Africans were enrolled as cannon fodder; European wars made countless widows and orphans, plunging many African families into mourning.

In the context of that over-all predicament, was it possible to think of the emancipation of African women while the peoples to which they belonged were subject to the most inhuman slavery, one which transforms the slave into a thing, a tool, an instrument for the welfare of his master?

Whereas continent-wide slavery, imposed by feudalism and colonialism, was the main feature of the economic and social relationship which obtained in our countries, there were also internal practices of domination, exploitation and oppression within African society itself. In addition to the evils generated or aggravated by imperialist rule, African women knew forced marriage, arbitrary divorce and permanent insecurity in their family life, especially in old age.

In societies where there is a sharply divided social structure of hostile classes, the four physical groups of young and old, men and women are blurred by class considerations and interests and so have only a very superficial influence on social relations, even helping to accentuate class differences. Thus the movement for female emancipation, which once enjoyed a period of relative glory in capitalist countries was essentially bourgeois. One understands full well how the working wage-earning woman, who was the victim of shameful wage and employment discrimination in those countries, had a keen sense of the nature of this exploitation and of her proletarian condition. In fact it was due to her active solidarity with the proletarian movement, through the trade-unions that the most flagrant abuses and exploitations of the wage-earning women were wiped out.



Nzingha

On the other hand, in societies where the community relations of a subsistence economy have not been fundamentally altered by history, social classes are not distinct, but the physical groups or categories have played an important role. They were responsible for the growth of several forms of social organization, due to the part which each played in the production process, and this varied according to the specific conditions of their environment. The forms of organization were often very different from one society to another, but all without exception helped to strengthen social harmony and solidarity, to develop community life and to consolidate its internal balance.

In Africa, the customs which bound and on the whole still do bind the relations between the social categories, suited the evolutionary demands of the community in the period of subsistence economy.

The matriarchal forms of organization show clearly that there was no discrimination against women in Africa. One can even go so far as to say that polygamy did not call in question her social equality, being at that time a social as well as an economic necessity.

We should remember that in numerous African societies, where there was a matriarchy, the woman had a leading social and political role and compared with the man generally had an equal, if not superior share in social and cultural life. But we should also remember that under colonial rule, because our working masses were reduced to extreme poverty, polygamy became yet another means of intensifying abhorrent exploitation practices.

This is why we say that the human condition of the woman was--and in many many cases still is--that of the slave of a slave.

The woman was regarded by her companion as a commodity, one of his belongings; her dignity and personality were trampled upon. The slightest pretext was a motive for

divorce: even if a woman had been a source of joy and a faithful companion to her husband for thirty or forty years she was always in danger of being repudiated, parted from her children; she could even be forced to return the dowry and the value of the jewels, garments, and other gifts offered to her on the occasion of her marriage.

Since the woman herself was regarded as an object her personal belongings became the property of her husband, who had the right to use her and her properties as he pleased, without any restriction. The Dowry, which was meant to be a symbol of friendship and union between two families linked in their descent became a source of speculation.

Thus, forced labour had its prolongation in the exploitation of women--an exploitation which, indeed, exceeded the social necessities imposed by history; contrary to our principles of social freedom and respect for the human person, social discrimination kept our sisters in subjugation, unskilled, and confined to domestic or subordinate tasks.

Without wishing to return to an archaic conception of traditional family life we should struggle vigorously for the transformation of such habits.



Tamil Warriors, Sri Lanka

Our mothers and our sisters fully realized that social liberation must be preceded by liberation from foreign domination, and throughout Africa played an important and often decisive part in the struggle against colonialism for national liberation. Today they can proudly claim to have contributed to the irreversible victory of the African peoples over the forces of domination, exploitation and oppression. By her active and courageous participation in the struggle to win national sovereignty, the African woman has earned the unwritten right to play a full part in national reconstruction and in the historic rehabilitation of our peoples.

What ways are open to us to achieve this reconstruction and rehabilitation? Appreciating as we do our social values, to which our human virtues are linked, we should rely on them to show the way, which will preserve the human categories of our society from being penalized or arbitrarily discriminated against. This is why Guinean women have been enthusiastic in their support of the P.D.G.'s policies, which are based on a total democracy in order to assure rapid evolution of the nation in absolute harmony and social justice. However while this path gives absolute equality to women, it also demands certain commitments on their part in order that political liberty can serve our social liberation.

National liberty would be meaningless if it allowed the persistence in any form whatever, of the oppression and exploitation, of the social degradations the personalization and discriminations introduced by the foreign oppressors.

In order to ensure that their action is positive, women ought to attack all the obstacles to their liberation, but above all they should give support to everything that will lead to social equality between men and women.

After having been harshly disqualified for a long time, the African woman yearns to be

treated with dignity, she wants to become man's equal, to have her place in society and her role fully restored to her and she is ready to accept all her human responsibilities, political, economic, social, cultural, and in the home. The African woman is so determined, her demands so legitimate, that in all African countries she plays an active role and is entirely aware of her responsibilities.

It is not enough to wish for the liquidation of polygamy or the dowry to put an end to these practices. The most important thing is to fight for the freedom of marriage, the regulation of reasons for divorce, the education and vocational training of our daughters. It is through the struggle for effective representation of women in our institutions that real emancipation will become possible and that social equality between man and woman will be achieved.

Far from creating divisions the struggle of our women is a sector of the front in the great movement for African emancipation; it is one of our instruments to speed up the liberation and social advancement of our peoples.

In this context our women's organizations assume a political character which demands from every woman conscious and consistent militancy, a high degree of political awareness and active participation in national and African activities.

Some would like to confine our women to their domestic duties or to see their organizations occupy themselves with charity, visits to hospitals or kindergartens, contests or beauty competitions. Yet, in the context of revolutionary Africa such activities come only in second place as they tackle only superficially the harmful effects of our historic conditions, failing to combat the fundamental causes of our economic difficulties and social shortcomings.



Warriors from Peru

The feudal and colonial systems refused to give women the least chance of intellectual enlightenment and professional training. The woman was kept from political life. Her right to vote was denied her and so it is still in many African countries. National affairs were managed by only a portion of the people, with of course, the exclusion of women. The discriminations thus inflicted on the African woman in political life were paralleled by discrimination in the economic, administrative and social spheres. Economic discrimination barred the way to many professions, even if she had the talents needed; above all, it meant "unequal pay for equal work."

It is our deep seated conviction that these unfair practices, so harmful to the dignity and interests of our mothers and our sisters since they impede their emancipation and the full development of their personality, and traceable essentially to the nature of the political systems which existed--or are still in existence--in African countries.

The will to put an end to these practices presupposes the will to supersede them by fundamentally different ones. The will to secure for our women a life quite different from that which they were used to living means that we should agree to embark upon the path

of change in the quality of the material and moral living conditions of our peoples. Since the loftiest human intentions cannot be converted into concrete reality without a creative effort, without an action aimed at destroying what is doomed to death while satisfying our new aspiration--it all amounts to saying that the awakening of African women to consciousness must of necessity find expression in a practical struggle: struggle against colonialism and remnants of feudalism, struggle against capitalistic exploitation, against political, administrative and economic oppression, struggle against discrimination on account of creed, struggle against unequal pay, social insecurity, insecurity in family life, etc.

We must first of all break the bonds of colonial slavery so that our people are free to dispose sovereignty in matters of their own life and of their relations with other people.

To remove any misunderstanding let us clearly state that the independence we have in mind does not solely consist in the departure of the white representative of a system of exploitation which has no race or nationality and is rather defined by its production relationship and by the practices that it generates within the society.



Chinese Warriors

Genuine independence, that which frees both man and woman, finds expression in the fundamental reconversion of the old structures which generated the unjust practices of feudalism and colonialism and the no less unjust behaviour of the husband towards his wife.

We must promote a social policy that will free our women, who for too long have been subject to degradation and depersonalization, a policy which will rehabilitate the social castes which were considered "inferior," a policy which will wipe out any discrimination and injustice, owing to the dynamic and revolutionary contents of a new regime founded on the will and interests of the people.

We can say, therefore, that the human condition of womanhood in Africa will grow better as the principles of freedom, equality and democracy in the political, economic and social life of African nations are realized.

Unquestionably, the social condition of women is directly linked to the importance of the role that the people of their country actually play in the exercise of national sovereignty. In other words, the more sovereignty and freedom a people enjoys and the better it observes and enforces the principle of equality the better are the living conditions of women in that community.

The unjust practices engendered by the subjection of woman to man were linked to a given economic predicament and a false social organization. For all the laws that we may enact some of these practices will further debase our women so long as the objective causes which gave rise to them are not totally eradicated.

The basis and contents of our economic action, the revolutionary targets of our social policy, the deeply democratic practices introduced into the political life of our people since our achievement of independence have a powerful impact upon the evolution of the

Guinean woman, who has become alive to the values and huge creative potentialities she represents.

All the women of Guinea are members of the P.D.G. and participate actively on a footing of equality with men in discussions and decision making on all issues of communal, regional and national life.

Functions and offices formerly inaccessible to women are now held successfully by our sisters, who are worthily represented in nearly 4,500 municipal councils, 26 general councils, the executives of the 7,000 local committees of the 43 party branches as well as in trade-unions the National Political Bureau and the government of this Republic.

There will be no limitation to the enrolment of our sisters in the service of the economic, cultural and scientific development of the nation. We already have Guinean air hostesses; we shall have women pilots. Hundreds of nurses, social workers, midwives and teachers are being trained in our schools; we also want female doctors and high school teachers, veterinary surgeons and geologists. We have female ticket collectors, telephone operators, secretaries; we shall have female heads of departments and female cadres in our enterprises....



Namibian  
Warriors

Guinean women should cease being mere instruments of production in the nation's economic life or servants in family life. They must become conscious workers for the nation's economic reconstruction and partners having a full share in the family.

Far from deploring with crocodile tears the difficulties, objective and subjective, facing our mothers and our sisters, we have resolved to work for their emancipation all the more sincerely since this is a condition for over-all progress.

It is in this revolutionary outlook that the P.D.G. should reinforce the dynamic action for the political, professional and moral education of Guinean women which will make them the equals of men in all walks of life.

In giving our women their rightful place in our economic life the P.D.G. and the government mean to free them once and for all from their old inability to provide for their own needs and to embark them upon the path leading to rapid emancipation.

Then, instead of a community of master and servant, marriage will be the free association of conscious, equal partners.

The original purpose of gun control:  
to protect the Klansmen from their victims.



**Gun Control is Racist.**