

**THE
MOZAMBICAN
WOMAN IN THE
REVOLUTION**

Frelimo Women's Detachment

*...schoolteacher, nurse, militiawoman,
guerrilla fighter*

FOR THE LIBERATION OF MOZAMBIQUE



THE ROLE OF THE WOMEN IN THE REVOLUTION.

by Josina Machel

It was in October, 1966, in a meeting of the Central Committee, that FRELIMO decided that the Mozambican woman should take a more active part in the struggle for national liberation, at all levels. It was decided that she should receive political and military training in order to make her more capable of fulfilling whatever tasks the revolution might demand of her. Thus, a few months later, in the beginning of 1967, the first group of women from Cabo Delgado and Niassa began their training. At first this was merely an experiment to discover just what contribution women could make to the revolution — how they would use their initiative, whether they were in fact capable of fulfilling certain tasks. The «experiment» proved highly successful and this first group of women became the founder-members of the women's detachment, and were scattered throughout the interior each with her specific assignment. It was soon discovered that they could play a very important role both in the military and political fields, but especially in the latter.

One of the prime functions of a women's army is, quite naturally, just like the men's army, participation in combat. In Mozambique the women's military activities are usually concentrated in the defence of the liberated areas, thus freeing the men for the offensive actions in the zones of advance. However, many of the women prefer the more active combats in the advance zones and choose to fight alongside the men in ambushes, and mining operations, where they have proved themselves as capable and courageous as any of their male comrades. As another aspect of this function, we have also women working in the Department of Security constantly on the look-out for enemy infiltration.

Although highly effective in the field of combat, their contribution has been less noticeable (just because of their relatively small numbers compared with the men) than their activities in the political field, where their impact has been far out of proportion to their numbers. Since 1967 the women have demonstrated that they have a key role in the mobilisation and political education of both the people and the soldiers themselves. In this work we explain to the people the need to fight, what kind of struggle we are waging with whom we fight, and against whom, what are the reasons for our struggle, what are our aims, and why we chose an armed struggle as the only means to independence. We explain the work we are doing and the results we have achieved so far. We explain how we are dependent to a certain extent on

foreign aid and which countries and organisations are helping us, and that, despite this help, we must be as self-reliant as possible.

In this connection, it is stressed that the success of the revolution depends on the combined efforts of everyone such that no one can be omitted, and thus the traditional rather «passive» role of women must be changed so that their abilities are used to the full. Women are encouraged to give their opinions in meetings, to participate in the various committees, etc. Here we have the rather difficult task of fighting old prejudices that women's functions should be confined to cooking, rearing of children, etc. It has been proved that we women can perform this task of mobilisation and education better than the men for two reasons. Firstly, it is easier for us to approach other women, and secondly, the men are more easily convinced of the important role of women when confronted with the unusual sight of confident and capable female militants who are themselves the best examples of what they are propounding. However, our activities are directed equally at the men and the presence of emancipated women bearing arms often shames them into taking more positive action.

In order to achieve self-sufficiency in the liberated areas, we explain to the people that agricultural production must be increased, not only for themselves but also to help feed the army, as the first duty of the guerrillas is fighting and thus they cannot always cultivate enough to supply their bases. We also need extra supplies to assist our comrades in the zones of advance where the constant military activity and the presence of enemy troops make regular agricultural production difficult. There is no question of persuading the people to participate in the war effort but they have to be explained the political basis and implications of the revolution, and while well aware that they themselves have certain important responsibilities in the struggle, they need guidance as to which particular fields they should work in. Once the people are fully aware of the situation they act without hesitation. In addition to increasing agricultural output, they help transport the sick and wounded, help care for the sick, help transport war material and organise themselves into militants.

In addition to its political work, the women's detachment also has extensive duties in the field of social welfare. We assist and give comfort to families

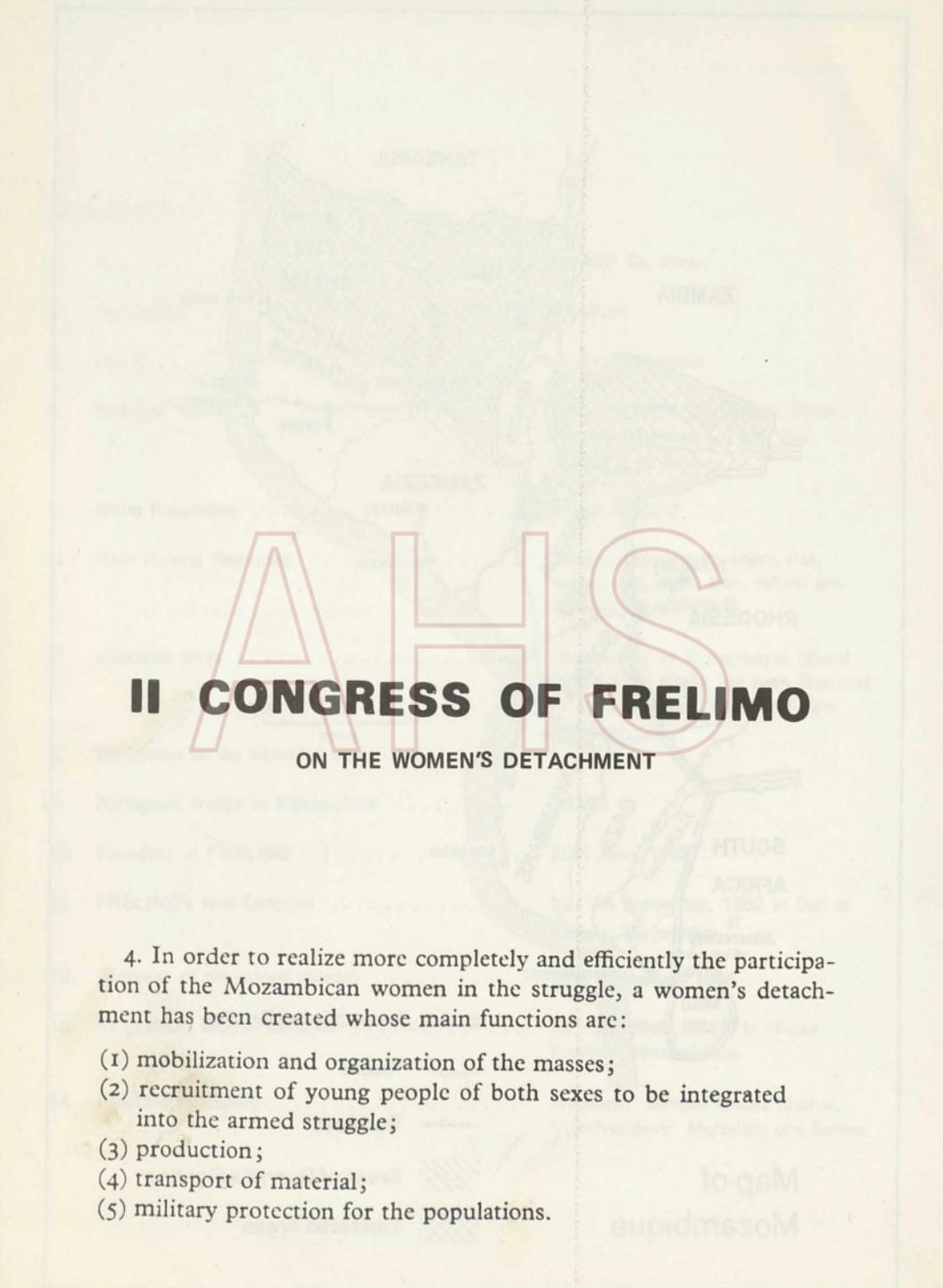


who have lost relatives in the war. This is extremely delicate work requiring a great deal of patience. We also run the FRELIMO orphanage, which not only cares for orphans, but also children separated from their parents due to the war. Some of our women are trained in first aid so that they can help the medical assistants in the health centres. Many of our women are also working in the Department of Education in their literacy campaigns and in the primary schools. Here again we have to overcome the outdated prejudices of fathers and husbands regarding the idea of education for women. But we are gradually winning the battle for they realise that a literate and educated woman can make a far more constructive contribution to the revolution than an ignorant one. We now have many girls in our schools, some of whom have female teachers, and some of these girls are already participating in literacy campaigns for the older people.

Thus apart from its strictly military functions the women's detachment has important political duties on two levels. At one level it is charged with the mobilisation and education of the people, to increase the effectiveness of their participation by developing their political understanding of the war. This we do for everyone, irrespective of sex, although we have a unique opportunity to reach our own sex that is denied our male comrades. Once this has been achieved, we work at the next level of encouraging even more active participation by inviting people to follow our example, to leave their homes and train as fighters, nurses, teachers, etc. In this way the size of the women's detachment has increased considerably since that first experimental group and the point has now been reached where some of those first recruits have gained enough experience and knowledge so that they can become political and military trainers for their own detachment, and also assist their male colleagues in the bases to instruct elements of the population.

At the last meeting of the Central Committee in April, 1969, it was decided that the Mozambican Women's League (LIFEMO) should be completely fused with the women's detachment and we are still in the process of integrating into the army all the activities formerly carried on by LIFEMO. During its existence LIFEMO did some useful work but with the development of the struggle, the demands of the war inevitably required that all its efforts be concentrated inside Mozambique and hence be conducted by the women's detachment in the interior.

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II CONGRESS OF FRELIMO

ON THE WOMEN'S DETACHMENT

4. In order to realize more completely and efficiently the participation of the Mozambican women in the struggle, a women's detachment has been created whose main functions are:

- (1) mobilization and organization of the masses;
- (2) recruitment of young people of both sexes to be integrated into the armed struggle;
- (3) production;
- (4) transport of material;
- (5) military protection for the populations.

MOZAMBIQUE

1. Area 784.000 Sq. Kms.
2. Population 8 million
3. Capital Lourenço Marques
4. Principal Towns Beira, Nampula, Quelimane, Porto Amelia, Inhambane, Tete, Vila Cabral, Joao Belo.
5. White Population About 200,000
6. Main Natural Resources Cotton, Cashew-nuts, copra, rice, maize, sisal, sugar, iron, natural gas, oil (not yet exploited).
7. Liberated areas One quarter of Mozambique (about 200,000 Sq. Kms.) has been liberated in Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Tete Provinces.
8. Population of the liberated areas 1 million.
9. Portuguese troops in Mozambique 70,000
10. Founding of FRELIMO 25th June, 1962.
11. FRELIMO's first Congress 23 - 28 September, 1962 in Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika.
12. Outbreak of the armed struggle 25th September, 1964
13. FRELIMO's second Congress 20 - 25th July, 1968, in Niassa Province, Mozambique.
14. FRELIMO's leaders President: Samora Moisés Machel.
Vice-President: Marcelino dos Santos.



MARIA NJANJE, Student : The Woman's Role

When I was 17 years old my parents forced me to marry. This is the custom here – women marry very young. I would prefer to study rather than to marry, but as I did not see any possibility of being able to continue studying, and as tradition is very strong, I married. I have a son. When FRELIMO arrived, my husband joined the guerrillas. He is a FRELIMO fighter. I showed a willingness to study and so FRELIMO placed me in a school. Before that I was in a FRELIMO base – as I had the first class, I taught the comrades at the base how to read and write. In my class I had 141 students. Then after that I studied second class and at the end of last year I was transferred to here, to the Pilot School where I am studying third class.

I am very happy to have come to FRELIMO. First of all because I can study – that was always my dream. With the colonialists only those who have money can study. Here everybody who wants to study is allowed to do so. Another difference I notice is that the Portuguese teachers were not interested in explaining to anyone who did not understand something; while here our teachers make every effort to ensure that we understand everything. The Portuguese troops, when they arrive in a village, steal chickens, pigs, cattle, from the people. The guerrillas never take anything from the people. When the Portuguese soldiers find girls on the roads they violate them. In FRELIMO we women are very much respected – and this impresses our sisters who come from the enemy zone, as I did. We are accustomed to something quite different. Under the colonialists, when a man in uniform appeared, it usually meant ill-treatment. We are so surprised at first when we see the guerrillas treating us as sisters, not as objects of pleasure.

The problem of participation of women in our education programmes is serious in this province. We must change the traditions which force us to marry when we are very young. I myself am engaged in a campaign aimed at the families in this region to explain to them the need to change this custom: it is harmful to us and to the Revolution.

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This cruel domination has naturally adversely affected the life of the Mozambican woman. To be brutally frank, she is often more despised than a barnyard animal and is only considered useful as a producer of children, to stay at home where she is the slave of her husband. Since our peasant economy is at a subsistence level, much of the labour of the fields is her responsibility – to first clear the bush, and then to tend the crop under the burning sun or heavy rain, sometimes with hunger in her body. In the end, the fruits of her labour must often go at a low price to the Portuguese concession company which holds the rights over the land. If her husband works at home, the wage he earns is often too little to keep food in the house. But when her husband goes to the mines of South Africa or Rhodesia, she must also find the money to pay the taxes. Too often the tax is heavier than can be paid, and this woman, wife and mother, is arrested and sent to 'xibalo' (forced labour) until she has worked out the payment of the tax for her husband. When the husband is arrested for forced labour, either on the company plantation or sent to the mines, they may be separated for years. It is a common sight to see women walking along the roads, selling wood, food, or some small produce, to support the children. And sometimes she has no alternative but to sell her own body as well. The Portuguese 'colon' sees the African woman as a instrument to satisfy his own personal interest. Prostitution has been encouraged and legalized. A woman is issued an official document to legitimize her status of prostitution. Women do not seek this status, but the empty stomach of one's family can be the mother of desperation.

In the field of education, the tremendous sacrifices of a family to send a child to school is often expended on the male children, so that only a handful of the women in our country can read and write – and remember, the total literacy rate of our people is only 2 per cent! These attitudes towards the women in our society and the deprivation of education for our girls has been a major weapon in the hands of the Portuguese colonial government, for when the women are ignorant and powerless, the nation is weak.

Excerpt from the Message to the
World Congress of Women, 1969

Rita Mulumbua, woman militant from Niassa: In our units there are people from every region; I am with Ajuas, Nyanjas, Makondes, and people from Zambézia. I believe this is good; before we did not think of ourselves as a single nation; FRELIMO has shown us that we are one people. We have united to destroy Portuguese colonialism and imperialism.

The struggle has transformed us. FRELIMO gave me the chance to study. The colonialists didn't want us to study, while now I am in this detachment we train in the morning and in the afternoon I go to school to learn reading and writing. The Portuguese didn't want us to study, because if we did we would understand, we would know things. For this reason FRELIMO wants us to study so that we should know, and in knowing we understand better, we fight better and will serve our country better. (F.I.)

AHS

Natacha Deolinda, woman militant from Manica and Sofala: When I went into the army, FRELIMO put me through a course on youth organization and also gave me my military training. Then I went to work in Cabo Delgado province. Our detachment held meetings everywhere explaining the politics of our party, the reasons for the struggle and also the role of the Mozambican woman in the revolution.

The Mozambican woman participates in all revolutionary activities; she helps the combatants, she has an important role in production, she grows crops, she also has military training and fights, she joins the militias which protect the people and the fields. (F.I.)



Above : An orphanage in the Province of Nyassa.

Below : Carrying water and ammunnition to a military base.



When FRELIMO was formed, the leaders were immediately preoccupied with the mobilization and organization of the people. The Mozambican women played an active role in the clandestine organization in all regions of the country. Before the armed struggle began, many women had left the country with their husbands, their children, brothers and friends in order to join FRELIMO to fight for national independence. We were the women of Mozambique with a new role to play, one which won our total devotion and demanded the entire strength of our minds, our bodies and our spirit. We women are a part of this struggle, standing beside our men, ready to give our lives to the heavy tasks that lie before us.

What are those tasks?

In time of war, the political and revolutionary level of the people must be high enough to overcome the many obstacles which they face – the spirit of sacrifices – the spirit of our struggle. It is this mobilization and politicization of the people which is her first duty. The masses must gain knowledge of the reality of the struggle, to know FRELIMO, its objectives in the struggle for liberation, to know why we are fighting, against whom we are fighting, and the perspectives for a free Mozambique.

She faces another important task; that is to produce food not only for her family but for our guerrilla fighters as well. Yet it is not only to produce the food. She must often carry food and heavy caskets of ammunition over great distances and difficult countryside, walking for many days or even weeks, sometimes encountering ambushes of the enemy. Her body is as strong as her spirit.

Third, she cares for the special victims of war: our hearts hold close those children who are orphans or who have been separated from their parents – the lost children. They are growing up in our orphanage in the liberated area. Even with little food, few medicines and scarce clothing, we live with them during the war while preparing their lives for the day of peace.

She participates in the health services in first aid units and must comfort the families of victims the war has claimed.

She carries her weapons, and when necessary fights in combat units.

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