

Awa Thiam

**Speak Out,  
Black Sisters**

Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa

*Translated by Dorothy S. Blair*

Pluto  Press

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First published 1986 by Pluto Press  
10 Bedford Road, London N6 5AA  
10 Bedford Road,  
New York, NY 101742, USA

© 1978 by Editions Denoël as  
*Les négresses*.

Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Black sisters, feminism and oppression

1. Africa 2. Women, Muslim –  
discrimination against Women –

La parole aux négresses. *English*  
HQ1170

02

Editions Denoël  
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Printed in Great Britain  
by Pluto Press Ltd, Worcester

## **Part 3: Feminism and Revolution**

While women from industrialized countries are focusing their attention on the problem of creating a typically female language, the daughters of Black Africa are still at the stage of seeking their own dignity, for the recognition of their own specificity as human beings. This specificity has always been refused them by White colonialists or neo-colonialists and by their own Black males. One only needs to glance briefly at history to realize this. Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the source of human merchandise, the 'black gold' of the time: slaves to be scattered all over America and the Caribbean.

It's not a matter of saying, 'Black sisters, look out! The struggle of women from industrialized countries is not our struggle', but simply of reminding ourselves – although some Black women are aware of this – that our own struggle, the Black women's struggle has not yet reached the same point as that of European women. Our primary, fundamental demands are not the same. Institutionalized polygamy flourishes in Black Africa; sexual mutilatory practices flourish, forced marriages, child brides . . . But, on the other hand, Black women have to combat the same scourges as their European sisters. Nevertheless, we must distinguish between two levels of exploitation and oppression of women: the first, where women who are oppressed and exploited do not understand the situation, and remain in thrall, as passive victims – this is the case with a good many Black women, whether traditionalists or not; the second, where exploitation and oppression are partially understood and give rise to theorizing, sometimes leading to movements for the liberation of women, as in the USA and Europe.

But it is essential to clarify certain issues. European feminists have often compared the exploitation of women to that of the

Black people of the USA or Africa. Thus, in the message sent by Kate Millett to the organizers of 'Ten Hours against Rape', held by the MLF (Mouvement pour la Libération des Femmes) at the Mutualité in Paris in June 1976, we read: 'Rape is to women what lynching is to Blacks.' As if it were possible to make the equation: women = Blacks (insofar as both are oppressed) therefore rape = lynching. This is a false argument. Let us compare comparable things. A textual equivalence between 'woman' and 'Black' cannot be justified. One can be of the female sex and of the Black race. If rape is to women what lynching is to Blacks, then what do we make of the rape of Black women by Black men? To get rid of the ambiguity inherent in Kate Millet's words, we must make it clear that she is referring to White women, which she does not do. In which case, the above equation still stands, but still cannot be justified. What, in all this, is the position of the Black woman? European feminists do not seem to know: they continue to satisfy themselves with the false comparison between the situation of Blacks and that of women – by which we must understand White women, even if they don't say so explicitly. Others tell us, 'Women are the Blacks of the human race'. Can they tell us then what or who are Black women? The Blacks of the Blacks of the human race?

You would think that Black women did not exist. In fact, they find themselves denied, in this way, by the very women who claim to be fighting for the liberation of all women.

What emerges from the interviews here is the extent of oppression, exploitation and frustration that is the lot of Black African women. With the exception of a middle-class minority (in this case, a few intellectuals), the Black African woman, be she town-dweller or villager, married, divorced or single, has a deplorable life.

During the colonial period the African woman suffered a double domination, a double enslavement. She was not only subjected to the colonial, but she was also subjected to the colonized African male. After this period, she faced ever greater problems: the aftermath of colonization (decolonization appearing only superficially); the tendency to acculturation. She is still under the yoke of males: father, brother, husband; she is the object of

sexual satisfaction on the part of the male and forms part of the proof of his prosperity. In a word, she is both an ornamental symbol and a maid-of-all-work.

Let us return to the colonial period. Surely the true status of Black African women was identical to that of the Afro-American or Caribbean woman in the days of slavery. She, like them had to comply with the sexual whims of her White master who, having appropriated her lands, had become omnipotent in her very home.

We are not concerned here with the problem of the liberation of Black women in terms of priorities, because two aspects of the Black African woman's struggle are closely linked: the struggle for effective economic and political independence and the struggle for the recognition of and respect for the rights and duties of men and women of all races.

The one must not exclude the other. Ideally both struggles should be waged simultaneously. 'That doesn't seem possible,' would be the reply of sexists and racists. To which we shall retort: we are in Africa, with all that this entails (a colonial or neo-colonial society, patriarchy, feudalism). In Algeria, Guinea-Bissau and many other countries which have fought wars for national liberation, genuinely aiming to free their people, including women, we find that there has been no liberation for the latter. In Algeria, women still wear the veil and are confined to the traditional tasks of servant, childbearer and housekeeper. On top of these, she has the not inconsiderable role of preserving traditions and customs, which are either too rigid for change or have not yet been adapted to our times.

Women must certainly achieve total independence, but they will have to fight for it, they will have to wrest it from society. They will have to call men's bluff and prove their independence; they will have to reject the alienating influences which have cast a shadow over their lives in the past, and still do to this day.

They have not only to wage a class war but also a sex war. The American Shulamith Firestone has fully understood the complexity and diverse nature of women's struggles. 'We shall need a sexual revolution', she states, 'much larger than – inclusive of – a socialist one to truly eradicate all class systems.' (*The Dialectic of Sex. The Case for Feminist Revolution*, p.20)

*Black African Women*

In the former colonies, be they French, Belgian, or other, the situation of the Black woman today is the same as that of her sisters in Zimbabwe or Latin America. Like her Black brother, she suffers from the damaging aftermath of colonialism and the crimes of the colonials. But her sufferings are greater than those of men, for she is not only faced with White racism, the exploitation of her race by the colonial, but also the domination that men, Black as well as White, exercise over her, by virtue of the patriarchal system in which both live.

Because she is a colonized person, she is obliged to work for the colonial, just as the Black male is. She is exploited as a unit of production. What is more, she is the cheapest form of labour for the colonial, by virtue of both her colour and her sex. Badly paid by the colonial, she is also underpaid in comparison with men. Therefore she is exploited not only as a Black, but also because she is a woman. But which of these comes first? The fact of being Black, without regard to her sex, makes her the slave of the colonial who simply regards her as a beast of burden in the same way as her Black brother. But the difference between them is soon established. It is possible that it was present before the colonial arrived, but it is just as likely that he introduced it to the land that he 'confiscated', seeing that this arrangement characterizes his own society, where women are also undervalued.

Both colonial and patriarchal systems decree that the Black woman's work is worth less than that of the Black male. This is translated into concrete terms in the wage structure, in the importance attached to her, as well as in every other field. Her value as a commodity only goes up for the colonist when he sees her as an object of sexual satisfaction. (And how!)

It is as well to remember that the submissiveness of the Black female lies behind these communities of half-castes which developed in the colonies. As long as she – the female – is under the domination of the colonial – the male – her relationship to him will always be that of victim to victimizer. He is invested with the power to commit psychological and actual rape on the colonized group.

By virtue of her sexual role, the Black woman is sometimes

regarded by the White man as a woman. In other words, she is considered to be a woman without being essentially human. Difficult to conceive! We are not far from the old Catholic concept, according to which women have no souls.

Wherever the colonials have passed through they have left their mark, not only at the political level, but also economically and in society generally: the institution of colonial and neo-colonial régimes, the imposition of monocultures, as in Senegal, where the majority of agricultural land is given over to the cultivation of groundnuts, to the detriment of other food crops. This is an evil which Aimé Césaire denounces so eloquently when anyone speaks to him of the progress achieved by the colonial:

They talk to me of progress, of 'achievements', diseases cured, improved standards of living.

*I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out. (Discourse on Colonialism, p.21).*

In addition to this, we should remember the emergence of a half-caste population, however small. Raped by the colonial, or seduced thanks to some trickery, the Black woman is reduced to the degrading status of an object of pleasure. With her essence denied, what remains of her self? *There is nothing of her left*; or rather, she is reduced to the state of an instrument. In such a context can there be any love between the colonial and the colonized woman? Or can any human relationship be possible?

The object of this discussion is not to state whether this relationship is possible, but to expose the different forms of oppression and exploitation suffered by the Black woman at the hands of the male colonist. We have finally to consider the relationship of the Black woman to the Black male: if the latter is the slave of the colonist, she is the slave of a slave.

The situation of the Black woman in an African colonized state is not identical to that of her coloured sister in Latin America. The point where they differ is in their relationship to the Whites. In the African colony, the White man is an intruder, an invader;

although he is numerically in the minority, he is nevertheless in a position of strength. In Latin America, the Black woman has been transplanted, and here she is in the minority. She belongs to the slave race, imported from Black Africa and herded into the plantations as labour in the cultivation of cocoa and coffee. The Blacks of Latin America are not only outnumbered but also out-balanced in military strength. They are unarmed, therefore more effectively controlled by the Whites. And this makes the Black woman, belonging as she does to the most deprived social and racial group, the victim of a double oppression.

To sum up: she is exploited by virtue of her sex; her wages even undercut the low wage of the Latin American Black male. Moreover, outside her own community she has no contact with other social classes, unless she marries a White man or goes in for prostitution. In this respect, the situation of the Black women of Latin America is similar to that described by Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

How should the colonial or neo-colonial context in which the Black African woman lives affect our understanding of a feminist movement aiming to challenge her status in society? Challenging the status of women amounts to challenging the structures of an entire society when this society is patriarchal in nature. All the problems of society – political, cultural, economic – are inextricably linked to the problem of women. The problem of women belongs in a general context.

Where the European woman complains of being doubly oppressed, the Black woman of Africa suffers a threefold oppression: by virtue of her sex, she is dominated by man in a patriarchal society; by virtue of her class she is at the mercy of capitalist exploitation; by virtue of her race she suffers from the appropriation of her country by colonial or neo-colonial powers. Sexism, racism, class division; three plagues! In order to succeed, the Black African feminist movement must set its sights on eradicating these three plagues from society. In other words, the Black African women's struggle cannot find a place in any scheme which denies the specificity of women's problems and which only sees their solution in a struggle for national liberation, like that of Algeria. We cannot repeat often enough: Algerian women parti-

cipated in Algeria's struggle for national liberation. But Algerian women have not been liberated!

Who can guarantee that a war of liberation in a Black African country would in fact lead to the suppression of clitoridectomy, of infibulation? Black African women can – and must – no longer allow men to decide for them and to manipulate their lives.

No system of social life has ever, on any level, been able to function without the effective participation of women. They are relied on to bring up children and look after the home, and to perform all the attendant soul-destroying, thankless and repetitive tasks. As for the man, the job that he appropriates, earning the daily bread, is far and away more profitable than the woman's tasks. His place in the bosom of society is much more interesting. It gives him access to the world at large, the opportunity to develop his intellectual and physical faculties in a range of experiences.

The image of the woman as object is found in all societies at all levels. In industrialized societies, the immigrant – man or woman – is made aware of this state of affairs by observing both public and private life, notably the nuclear family.

According to phallogocratic logic the situation is quite natural, so the question whether all that is posited as 'feminine' really is so never arises. What is more normal in a society where the male reigns supreme? Whether they come from colonized countries or not, phallogocrats are all alike and exercise the same oppression over women. How can we put an end to such a situation?

Women are beginning to realize the need to fight against a system which denies women an authentic existence – that system which is patriarchal and phallogocratic. Traditionalism and revolution clash against each other: there is an endless succession of advances and retreats, of rebellions and repression, of short-lived victories and temporary setbacks.

Sometimes the workers triumph, but their triumph is brief. The real outcome of their struggles is less the immediate success than the growing solidarity of the workers. To struggle means to fight with resolution and faith in the certainty of victory, in the promise of future happiness for ourselves or for others; to fight with the firm conviction that positive success will ensue – whether

we live to see it or not. We must fight on.

Colonized or neo-colonized peoples are living in a dilemma: whether to revolt against a system which exploits them, or passively to accept slavery. Either way, the colonized people 'get it in the neck'. In the first place, the indigenous population suffers the intrusive, oppressive presence of the 'settlers' – a presence which they experience as aggression. These settlers subject them to a savage exploitation which is underlined by an attempt to dehumanize them. The circumstances of the indigenous people are inevitably affected: customs are disrupted, lives upset, social structures shattered. The colonized native may not and cannot behave as a free person; he or she must live and act according to the disposition of the settler. This state of affairs dehumanizes the inhabitants. Their liberty is alienated, they are reduced to the state of an instrument. The settler makes use of them, and when they no longer serve a useful purpose or when, in the colonial context, they become a nuisance, the settler disposes of them. This 'nuisance' may well indicate an attempt to stand up to the settler, a refusal to obey which unleashes the forces of repression. The rebel is truck down like a mad dog. That is not an infrequent occurrence: let us not forget Algeria, Vietnam – and it is still going on in South Africa.

Early in 1976, French television offered us the shameful spectacle of a White South African family amusing themselves at the expense of a group of unarmed Blacks walking past carrying bundles on their heads. The White man shot at them, causing his wife and children to laugh hysterically. They laughed and laughed at this mock assassination of Blacks. They laughed till they cried at the sight of the victims of this cruel sport making off as fast as their legs could carry them. But we'll see who has the last laugh. An alternative strategy lies open to the colonized: while some are sunk in passive submission, others revolt. They take up arms, slave confronts master. The television programme to which we have just referred ended with the announcement of the death of the sadistic, murderous settler. He stepped on a landmine. History is rich in examples of similar violent retribution: Dien bien Phu, Algeria, and more recently, Guinea-Bissau, Vietnam, and Angola are outstanding examples.

### *Man, the enemy of woman?*

Some women tend to equate man with society and by inference see men as their principal enemy. We do not feel that, as far as Black Africa is concerned, men are the enemy. It is certainly true that in any patriarchal system institutions are set up by men, and this might reinforce the arguments given by 'sexist' feminists; but we should ask ourselves whether or not men are alienated as well. Doesn't the very fact of having devised a system of values which disadvantage women offer clear proof of men's alienation? The oppression to which he subjects women, and which he perceives as something quite natural, is justified according to an idea of 'complementarity'. In a patriarchal society, man himself is alienated, so he is not free either. The sex which oppresses the other is not a free sex. A society made up of non-alienated individuals would be an egalitarian society, in which there would be neither master nor slave, neither tyrant nor tyrannized, neither colonial nor colonized, neither chief nor subordinate.

Such a society does not exist. Up until now there have only been attempts to create it. It is now our task to do so. To succeed in this, sexism must be excluded from our praxis, from the praxis of every woman enlisted in the struggle.

### *A tribute to our mothers*

What can we say about customs, civilization, culture? How do we stand in respect of these? Is it our responsibility to ensure their survival? Or should we condemn them as decadent? There is no doubt that they are the defining characteristics of a race. But no culture is static, any more than a civilization is; so customs too must change for better or for worse.

Do Black Africans follow Europeans in considering their customs barbarous? How are they preserved? How were they established? A relationship exists between the myths and customs of Black Africa. Does this mean that they determine each other? It is difficult to find the answers to these questions owing to the paucity of unbiased documentation. Most of the available infor-



mation comes from colonials, who were often eager to document the different ethnic groups with whom they came into contact. We hear from ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, or simply civil servants. The last were not concerned with recording African customs objectively and indeed did not take the trouble to understand their real significance within the indigenous societies. Unbiased studies on Black Africa, written by Whites in the colonial period, are few and far between.

Colonial logic aimed at undermining the structure of traditional Black African societies and the destruction of the Black identity. Their civilization was, if not destroyed, at least seriously damaged by colonization. This is what Jean-Paul Sartre is referring to when he says,

The command goes out to relegate the inhabitants of the annexed territory to the level of the ape, to justify the settler in treating them like beasts of burden. Colonial violence not only aims to keep these subjected people at arm's length, but it also seeks to dehumanize them. No effort will be spared to break up their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs, to *destroy their cultures* [author's italics] without offering them our own; they will be stupefied by work. (*Situations V. Colonialism and neo-colonialism*)

However, some things have survived in spite of this, especially in ritual and cultural matters. The crimes committed by Europeans did not succeed in wiping out the entire Black African civilization, for certain typically African customs have survived. This was no accident, but the result of continual resistance to their erosion, as for example in the matter of initiation rites which have remained virtually unchanged for centuries in Black Africa, right up to the present day. What is the reason for this? Capitulation on the part of Black Africans features in practically every field during the colonial period. But it was women in particular who took it upon themselves to preserve certain customs. We should pay them tribute. It is because our mothers, our elders, had the charge of children that they were – and remain – responsible for training them, for transmitting certain myths and beliefs, and instilling in them a spirit of submission to customs. In refus-

ing to allow Black African civilization to be destroyed, our mothers were revolutionary. Yet some people describe this attitude as conservative. These women felt the need to preserve something that was precious to them – their cultural heritage. They became aware of something urgent that needed to be done; something had to be saved – that something which was indispensable to the preservation of the Black African as such: the Black African civilization. This was their aim, and in this they succeeded by dint of insisting on maintaining ancestral practices. Although they did not challenge their state of bondage to men, we nevertheless pay tribute to these women.

## BLACK WOMAN

The Black woman is not simply

## COLOUR

The Black woman is not simply

## FLESH

The Black woman is not simply

## MOTHER

The Black woman is not simply

## LOVER

The Black woman is not simply

## MUSE

The Black woman is not simply . . .

Praised in song as lover, loving-flesh,  
praised in song as mother, 'mother-protection'  
praised in song as colour, 'colour-affirmation'  
the songs about the Black woman

do not say

who is

the Black woman.

These songs say little

of her afflictions,  
pain or pleasure,  
heartbreaks, hopes,

. . . her LIFE

The Black woman

'That thing lives'

The Black woman,  
 Woman, 'that thing' lives woman  
 'That thing' lives that thing  
 with battles  
     setbacks  
     victories

Woman, Black woman, Productive force, Matrix, Fighter.  
 'That thing' is  
 The Black woman is

*Negro-African women, women of the Third World, women of the industrialized countries, the same fight!*

The emancipation of women must go hand in hand with men's relinquishing of a feudal and bourgeois way of thinking. As for women themselves, they would be wrong to wait for government and party directives to bring them freedom; they would do better to count on no-one but themselves and to fight. (Ho Chi Minh)

Women, there is a common denominator in your lives: phallocratic violence. It is this violence which makes you think that you don't amount to anything on your own, without the other, the one who has got 'something between his legs', the one with the phallus. It is this violence which tries by every possible means to make you play second fiddle. It is this violence of expression which sometimes robs you of your self-possession, only to bring you face to face with your true self, however debilitated and battered by male phallocratic behaviour: your noble, dignified, true self that men seek to alienate or destroy. This insidious, misogynous violence can, like a monster, present itself in different disguises. It can take on a deceptive appearance to beguile you, to throw dust in your eyes; then may come your violent awakening, or you may be harassed or even murdered in your blind, charmed sleep. This violence is the daily lot of all oppressed women throughout the world, whatever they may do. Illiterate or intellectual, none of them escape. It is not a metaphysical violence; it is real and concrete. It can be not only brutal but also subtle. However, this

male violence remains, as distinct from revolutionary violence, the violence of a system of slavery, which desires the domination of the other, the woman. In this sense, it can be considered a form of terrorism.

Whatever form it may take, this violence results in the destruction of the human being. It has a name: phallocratic fascism. As such it must be totally eliminated from every society, from every social class.

Nevertheless, many people have doubts about the common nature of the struggles waged by Black African women, women of the Third World and women from Europe. How could these struggles be identical, in view of the different industrial development, different material and cultural conditions?

What are the specific problems faced by European women? In spite of the level of development reached by their societies, they still feel oppressed and exploited by men. Is this oppression of European women identical to that of the workers? We maintain that there is no common measure between the exploitation of the worker and that suffered by women.

Let us explain. The working woman suffers from the same oppression and exploitation by the capitalist system as the male worker, but to a greater degree since the woman's work is often under-rated. Irrespective of this, the woman, compared with the man - her husband, partner, brother or father - suffers from another form of exploitation which stems from her subjection to the patriarchal system.

How do the problems faced by women in Black Africa compare, and how have women there responded to them? In particular, what is their position regarding feminist movements?

Black African women, whether feminist or not, have participated in the national struggles waged on their own soil, thus proving themselves well aware of the problems faced by their countries and their societies. At the present time, we see an increase in the number of women involved in the liberation movements of their countries. Even if Black women were not the instigators of these struggles (and that still remains to be proved), whenever it has been a question of fighting to free their countries from a colonial or neo-colonial yoke, they have hastened to throw in their lot with the

men. Then and only then do we see any sort of equality between men and women. They fight together, literally bearing arms for a common ideal: the liberation of their country. On the field of battle, women run the same risks as men. Whether they belong to an underground resistance movement or not, the colonial perceives them as a target just as much as he does the man. Such a situation puts them on an equal footing: mother fighting side by side with father; girl with boy. The man is forced to recognize the equal status of woman. It is no longer a question of asking whether she is not too weak or too stupid to know how to pull a trigger or throw a hand grenade at the right moment, or hide something or other in the right place. A woman is just as capable of assimilating the techniques of guerrilla warfare as a man. Tasks on the battlefield are shared without distinction according to sex.

But what is the position as soon as the war is over, the victory obtained? This is a logical, legitimate question to ask, since the world has seen the end of several wars of liberation in recent years. Once these wars are over, 'things return to normal'. In other words, men resume their former occupations, and so do women. The latter have not managed to eliminate certain contradictions inherent in the patriarchal society to which they belong, nor to rise above them. They have not yet succeeded in getting rid of customs which have no strategic value (tattooing, wearing the veil, etc.). We must refute the claim that the preservation of those customs today is our way of resisting the ever-increasing power of neo-colonialism or imperialism.

### *Guinea*

Guinea obtained its independence in 1958, as a consequence of its rejection of de Gaulle's proposed new constitution. A socialist republic was immediately declared. This choice was to have important repercussions for the Guinean masses, imposing gigantic pressures on them. But what happened to the Guinean woman? Where does she now stand in the new order?

We get the impression that, in its daily life – as was reflected in the collective interview reported in an earlier chapter – Guinea is in a state of evolution, while still bearing the deep imprint of its

cultural past. Ancestral values die hard. And in certain places and some circles they hold sway. However, it must be emphasized that Guinea is one of the countries that included the integration of women in its political programme. It is one of the first States to promote a policy of integration *and* emancipation of women.

When it was necessary to oppose the reactionary forces which sought to keep Guinea under colonial domination, the women of Guinea armed themselves and took their place in the forefront of the fight against the enemy. We can quote the example of the heroic M'Balía Camara who was assassinated on 9 February 1955, disembowelled while she was carrying the child of the colonials' puppet of that period, David Sylla. The date of her death is celebrated as the National Day of Guinean Women. Guinea also has the highest rate of female participation in government of any African state. By way of comparison, in 1977 Algeria had eight women deputies out of a total of 261; while in Guinea 22 of its 72 deputies were women. Similarly, a woman, Mme Mafory Bangoura, who had never attended a French school, was appointed Minister for Social Affairs and leader of the women's section of the PDG (Parti Démocratique de Guinée). It is also noteworthy that Guinea's representative at the United Nations is a woman. Women are to be found in every sector of public life. They are engineers, pharmaceutical chemists, secondary and university teachers, regional governors, heads of ministerial cabinets, directors of business concerns. This shows concern for women's progress – but it's not the only sign of this concern.

A genuine desire for change is perceptible among the people of Guinea. This is why we must try to understand (though not to justify or excuse) some of the fundamental consequences of this desire. Change, if it does not come about as a result of long-term reforms, is of necessity sudden and brutal; it is change through revolution. We must recognize this before evaluating what is being and has been achieved by the present Guinean régime.

There has been a great deal of talk of 'fabricated' plots and assassinations in Guinea. Some people claim that it has a dictatorial régime. Not being in a position to judge it objectively, we do not intend to indict the internal politics of the country. We must however admit that the condition of women there is far superior

to that of any other African state.

The first president of the Republic of Guinea, Ahmed Sékou Touré, seemed to give priority to the task of raising the consciousness of the masses and giving them an education relevant to their needs and social structures, before worrying about other problems. He must have been among those who say, 'He who forms youth is master of the future'.

What is more, having rejected colonization and all forms of imperialism, Guinea was increasingly cut off from industrialized countries, although relations have recently been re-established. Is Guinea a progressive country? Its motto seems to be, 'Dignity in poverty rather than slavery with opulence'. But is it blinkered to look only at the positive aspects of this country? In spite of claiming to be progressive, is it not in many respects archaic? We are thinking primarily of the continued practice of excision, to which 85 per cent of our Guinean sisters are subjected. To quote the following statistics from P. Hanry's *Erotisme africaine* (pp.47-8):

84 per cent of the girls are excised, with only 8 per cent stating that they are not. Only a very small percentage of women protest against their fate: 12 per cent deplore their own excision and 35 per cent declare that they do not intend to have their daughters excised. This last figure, higher than the preceding one, certainly implies a protest, but we must compare it with the 44 per cent who will have their daughters excised and the 21 per cent who have no opinion at present but who risk giving way to the call of tradition when the time arises.

Are we saying then, that various political considerations and analyses have deliberately disregarded women's problems? Or were those responsible unaware of their existence? An objective historical analysis would show these practices up for what they are — an attack on women themselves — and not disguise them, or support them on the pretext that they form a part of the traditional cultural past, which is to be held sacred.

Polygamy, too, is among the conditions which restrict the lives of Guinean women — although the country is ahead of other West African states on this count; a struggle against it has been under way since 1968. Indeed on 16 February 1974 Sékou Touré declared, 'We must create a hatred of polygamy among the rising generation'.

## **Conclusion: What Suggestions Should We Make to Our Black Sisters?**