

# Women and the Revolution in Portugal

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Symbols change in Portugal. The April 25, 1974, coup which eliminated a 48 year-old cruel, backward and authoritarian regime, had its symbol--a red carnation stemming from a gun--an expression of the intents of the young officers who staged the coup. The gun, symbol of violence and oppression, was to spread--instead of bullets--civil peace, democracy and, as expressed by the redness of the carnation, some kind of socialism was to be established in the new Portugal.

Since April 1974, Portugal has lived through many changes and crises. The first president under the new regime, General Antonio de Spínola, became more and more the symbol of a new right. He resigned in September 1974 and, since the unsuccessful and almost naive March 1975 coup, shares exile in Brazil with the last president under the old regime, Admiral Americo Thomaz. The young officers of the Movement of the Armed Forces have come into the foreground of the political stage, occupying the key positions in the new government. Meanwhile, deep social, political, economic and cultural mutations have wracked every sector of Portuguese society.

On April 23, 1975, the first free elections were held after long decades of enforced civil passivity. The symbols of the Movimento revived again: the electors, regardless of the party they chose, went to the polls with the red



carnation on their suits and dresses. As well, in the weeks before the elections another symbol appeared, this time a photo. A woman in her sixties is looking out from an open window, the fingers of her right hand at her mouth, her thoughts wandering and her face inscrutable. The Christian Science Monitor which published the photo captioned it: "From a Lisbon window: wondering what is going on." However it is not only she who is wondering what is going on and how to react to it. Also, and above all, the political figures of the country are wondering what the opinion of the women will be and how it will be expressed in elections. After all, as elsewhere, more than half (about 53%) of the population of Portugal is women.

Among the great question marks before the April elections for the Constituent Assembly was what the trend of the women's vote would be. Surveys and polls in Portugal are still in their adolescence; parties and private groups initiate them, but many people simply do not yet want to reply to questionnaires. The great mass of women, particularly in the villages, are very cautious in expressing their opinions and judgments on political issues. This is not surprising since in the years of Salazar's régime women and politics were clearly a dichotomous notion. A Portuguese variant of the German Kinder, Küche, Kirche had been developed and there was no place for women in the public life of the country. In the north of Portugal--the area of scattered villages and small holdings--women, even more than their husbands, were influenced by the Catholic Church which as an institution supported the now defunct regime, and, of course, advocated the political passivity of women. The old system regarded women's participation in politics not only as unnecessary but also as indecent, almost an insult to their womanhood, to their motherhood and their role as wife. Such a moral judgment was regarded as valid particularly for the daughters and wives of workers, peasants and those belonging to the low middle strata. As well the very high degree of illiteracy (about 40% in Portugal) combined with the pressure of State and Church to discourage women's in-

terest in public affairs.

After the coup, it was no easy task to make women speak out on political issues. The socialist-oriented Lisbon newspaper, Republica, at present the object of harsh political controversies, published "instant" interviews in the summer of 1974. Women frequently refused to answer, especially when in the presence of their husbands, or replied that politics was not women's business. And this occurred in Lisbon itself which is much more politically active than other parts of the country. In the north the Armed Forces conducted a campaign to "enlighten" the villages, encouraging the people to proceed with what they call "cultural dynamisation." Peter Niesewand in the Manchester Guardian has described activities in the small village of Cabana Maior, "a place of such grinding poverty that it sends out its labor--its young men and women go as migrant workers to France, West Germany and Belgium and mail money back to help their relatives to survive. Few return themselves."<sup>2</sup> The village is composed mostly of young mothers, children and old people. The young officers spoke about democracy, about the injustice of colonial wars, about no longer being sheep, but thinking and acting independently, listening to what the parties had to say. Lieutenant Tavares Pinheiro said: "You women, too, don't let your husband tell you how to vote. Make up your own mind." The writer of the article adds, "The women

sat silent and unmoving." But when another officer, Captain Freitas Oliveira, spoke about the Church everybody including the women came to life and took part in the discussion. The officer mentioned that the priest has to have wages but the people were not to be victims of extortion. One of the women replied: "The priest gives his mass for the dead without being paid. A few years ago it used to be 40 escudos you gave the priest and now it is 150 escudos because life has gone up." A man shouted: "The priest rides in a car and my father goes walking."

A few miles away from Cabana Maior is Arcos de Valdavoz where the electricity cables stop. The "cultural dynamisation" group invited the inhabitants to the cinema. In the evening "the old black-dressed women leave their gossiping grounds on the street corners." The military bands played, but the audience was slow in warming up. Then came the famous song, Grandola Vila Morena, the signal for the April 25 coup, which has become a kind of national song. "In every corner a friend," it says, "in every face equality." The effect of the song on the men and women of Arcos de Valdavoz is described by Peter Niesewand as follows: Suddenly the cinema went wild. Everyone sang and cheered and rose to their feet to shout slogans. The povo (the people) are with the MFA; they chanted. It was completely spontaneous. Watching

from the wings of the small stage the people's faces were alight with glee, and the sound which rocked the hall was pure national pride.

However jaded many might have become in Lisbon, out here the povo haven't heard the rumours or watched the manoeuvrings and the memory of the revolution is clear in their minds.

The correspondent of Le Monde also visited the same area during the elections. One hundred kilometers north of Porto, near Cabana Maior, is a little hamlet of eighty inhabitants, Villela de Lajos. The soil is poor and there is no water or electricity; even the inn was closed --the owner had left for Montreal to build skyscrapers. Newspapers and radio are rare here. In front of the largest house in the settlement two women in black were playing with a child. Voting? They will go in the evening. For whom? A mute smile was the reply. They had the only television set which was operated by a small generator. But it broke down and 150 escudos (\$50) were needed in order to get it repaired. Thus there was very little chance to follow the electoral campaign. Of course they remember the visit of the military. Yes, they were here and they told them what is wrong, what has to be done, and above all, to vote for what their own heads say and not the heads of others. Yes, the

"others" are active also here. The reporter witnessed that, at noon when there was a break in the voting, the local priest came to an improvised picnic and told the people that the Church forbids Christians to vote for Marxist parties. And the Socialists? The priest answered in an uncertain way, "I was told that they changed their program, maybe it is thus possible . . . ." But the Socialist scrutineer was offended: "No, Father, the Socialist party is Marxist." With this reply the padre was somewhat relieved that he would not have to grant exemptions in a very dubious situation.<sup>3</sup>

In Lisbon, further south, there are women from every social class with strong opinions who are courageous enough to voice and to defend them. Their assessments of the Portuguese political situation are quite varied. The parties they preferred differ too, but the sense of "catching up," of filling the gap created by backwardness, of eliminating the lack of equality between men and women is striking.

Many invoke the issue of so-called "maturity." After 48 years without democracy how can Portuguese society and particularly women assess what is good and what is bad? Democracy is a game to be learned, exercised, practised. Women influenced by the right and right of centre frequently complained of the "anarchy" in Portugal, of the strikes, and other action in defiance of their concept of law and order. "We are not

mature enough for this sudden and complete freedom; we do not know what to do with it. We applaud the communist and we cheer the anti-communists. A good speaker, a good demagogue can succeed regardless of party affiliation." And from the left one can hear similar appraisals. The leaders of the military justify their resolution to stay at the helm for five more years, saying that the Portuguese people need a period of transition, of "civic experience," to be able to cope fully with democracy.

Of course it might be asked if this concept of "lack of maturity" (where do we have a fully mature public opinion?) is not a longing for and justification of some form of authoritarianism. But even the statements on "immaturity" reflect, in one sense the growing interest of Portuguese women in the problems of their country, their society, and their own role within it. They are stepping out of their isolation. And above all they are beginning to speak out. There was one issue on which all Portuguese were unanimous: under the former régime politics was not discussed. The instinct for self preservation prevented people from doing so--it was dangerous, forbidden, words might be overheard. The PIDE, the Portuguese security police, was too well organized and omnipresent. Since April 25, 1974, it has been different.

When we visited Portugal in the summer of 1974, every woman willingly spoke to

us of her opinions and her concerns: the high school teacher studying--even on the beach--documents connected with the establishment of a trade-union organization at her school, analyzing the benefits of the options now available; the two textile workers--very conscious that the new regime has to serve their interests--enumerating the improvements recently made in their social benefits. Other women were taking evening courses in the high school, studying French and a little English. Alert, calm, modest, they were looking with confidence at the present and future of their country. Two young girls, also of working class background, were observed singing in the bus through the outskirts of Lisbon, studying and practising together the "International" (both Communists and Socialists were spreading the words and tune of this long-forbidden revolutionary song). One woman, back from London with her young son, told us of her husband who had been almost always separated from his family, often arrested, tortured and was, as a result, unwell. Their marriage had broken up; after being jailed herself, she shared the fate of two million Portuguese who left their country to get jobs and better conditions. She left for England, works there in a food factory, remarried. But for her holidays she was back in Portugal visiting her relatives and watching with pride and an obvious feeling of pleasure the events and the changes. Meanwhile she remained faithful to her party, wearing its badge in Lisbon and in London. Another woman, a

publicity officer in a North American owned enterprise, came from a family of intellectuals, many of them active in opposition to the Salazar-Caetano régime--some of them also imprisoned. Intelligent, lively, well-read, not committed to any party, she expressed the feelings common to so many intellectuals--the shame for tolerating for so long a fascist regime and the pride in finally being able themselves, on their own, to get rid of it. And in summer 1974, pride was the prevailing sentiment: "We achieved this," was her favorite remark: "You see we can make it." The new willingness to speak out was indicated by demonstrators in front of the Government House, St. Bento, in July 1974, when nurses' aides came to present their claims and complaints, asking for more recognition and better salaries. In their white gowns, with their posters, chanting slogans, they were the expression of the dual nature of their concerns as conscious Portuguese citizens and conscious women.

Since there is no separate registration of women voters, conclusions about their voting preference are tentative but it appears that the women's vote followed the general pattern of voting (more than 90% of eligible voters went to the polls). The two main slogans of the left--and of the Movimento as well--democracy and socialism, seem to have had a genuine appeal among women voters. "Democracy and Socialism" were a double negation of Portuguese women's past, the

denial of the authoritarian system which constrained them to passivity and the repudiation of the injustice which they suffered both as citizens and as women. Thus socialism represented for Portuguese women their striving for an equitable, aware society, offering at least a prospect of equality.

The Socialist Party (which received 38% of the votes cast) was the great beneficiary of this appeal. The party, led by Mario Soares, was successful in projecting to women and men the image of a political force which would tie together the two components of the slogan, which would demonstrate that there is no genuine socialism without democracy and no real democracy without socialist content. (What will happen with democracy and socialism in Portugal, under pressure from both inside and outside the country, is another question, but to the voters, the image was still pure and shiny.) The press in the West celebrated the victory of the Socialists and the relatively poor showing of the Communists (with 13% of the votes) as a victory for moderation. To some extent this is true but it should not be overlooked that the Socialists not only opposed the authoritarianism of the Communists but also, in some respects and in some areas, Socialist policies were more "leftist" than those of the Communists. Of course, votes go to the same party for different reasons. In Sabugo, a hillside village an hour's bus ride from Lisbon, 383 votes from the

699 cast were for the Socialists. Maria Olidia Joaquim, the owner of the local cafe (her husband has a grocery shop in Lisbon), voted for the Socialists because she felt they had a program better adapted to the problems of Portuguese society. Her employee Maria did the same because socialism--she heard--is a good thing for the country and for the workers. Illiterate, she responded to the symbols, voting for "the party of the clenched fist."<sup>4</sup>

## II

The social condition of Portugal's female population provided a basis for their preference for socialism. Salazar wanted to perpetuate a "patriarchal" society, with as little industry as possible, to discourage the unfolding of the forces of "social unrest." But modern times knocked at the gates of Portuguese society as elsewhere. The protracted colonial war itself acted as a modernizing factor, demanding as it did an infrastructure of industry, transportation and services. More than 200,000 Portuguese were in the army; another two million emigrated (some 150,000 to Canada) and this necessitated an increase of women within the labour force. Foreign industry also came to Portugal--from Exxon to Mitsubishi, from General Motors to Otis. The labour force was "cheap and docile," says Mark Gayn <sup>5</sup> and, of course, European markets were close, thus investment was profitable. Small factories and workshops

appeared even in the rural regions, many operating with women labourers. For example, Applied Magnetics, an American firm, employed mainly women (about 600) to make electronic components. The factory was shut down in the summer of 1974, when the minimum wage and employers' contribution to social services was raised. A number of other foreign companies also discontinued their Portuguese operations: e.g., Otis, Hertz.

Under Marcello Caetano, Salazar's successor, society began to change rapidly. The Champalimauds, the Melos and a few other families became the heads of industrial empires in steel, cement, pharmaceuticals, cotton and textiles. The contribution of industry to the Gross Internal Product in 1970 was 44% (industrial workers comprise about 10% of the population and about one-third of those actively employed.) The industrial and financial elite combined with the old elite, the landlords, to form the top of the Portuguese social pyramid. In the rural regions the disparities are striking: four of the largest landholders own 235,000 acres of land, equal with the acreage owned by 50,400 small farmers; or to put it another way, one percent of the landowners hold 60% of the land while 60% of all farmers own less than 20% of the land. The well known Portuguese journalist, Antonio de Figueiredo, described the contrast in 1961:

Socially and technologically Portugal has no uniform age. While jet propulsion planes land at

Lisbon, and Lisbon hotels and rich houses have all the comforts and gadgets of modern civilization, in the Northern district of Tras dos Montes the rural population still lives in a mediaeval style, bartering its commodities, and in isolated centres, hardly participating in a money economy.<sup>6</sup>

The Roman type of ox cart and primitive methods of cultivation are still found on Portuguese farms. The country's consumption of electricity is--with the exception of Turkey and Albania--the lowest in Europe. In 1970 it was 648 kwh per person and per annum (in Canada it was 8580 kwh--13 times more).

In addition to the top elite a large middle class began to develop. Industrialization and urbanization, the development of tourism with its services, the spread of a public and private bureaucracy, protracted colonial war which caused further impoverishment but also created nouveaux riches and brought many people to the ranks of the "better-off"--all contributed to the emergence of a large Portuguese middle class with its own needs and demands.

Despite such changes, the average annual income of the Portuguese in 1970 was only \$610 per capita. In comparison, in Greece it was about \$900 and in Spain \$890 in the same year. The workers were "under-housed, under-clothed, under-fed and under-educated,"<sup>7</sup> with poor social-security and assistance benefits. With-

in this highly stratified society women represent an under-privileged stratum in a country with an under-privileged majority.

The Portuguese economist-statistician, Blasco Hugo Fernandes, has written about the general low level of workers' and farmers' incomes and that of women in particular:

. . . both in industry and agriculture . . . the Portuguese woman is generally in a position of inequality and economic inferiority in comparison to men. In this respect it is worth noting what happens in different districts of our country where adult women are paid on the average for work in the agricultural sector wages which are inferior to those of boys less than 15 years old.<sup>8</sup>

In 1971, in the district of Lisbon, the average adult male wage was 103.3 escudos--the adult woman's only 50 escudos. In Porto (the second largest city of Portugal) men earned 75 escudos, women 53.3; in Setubal (an industrial zone near Lisbon) men earned 70 escudos, women 40; and in Evora, men got 66.3 escudos, and women 36.3. In industry in general men received 40% more than women.<sup>9</sup>

Antonio de Figueiredo makes this observation:

It is a cruel world which exploits women and children. The latter

are often hidden from the authorities since compulsory primary education was introduced, because their going to school would have short term disadvantages and long term dangers. On the one hand, school attendance would deprive the family of a labourer in the fields, and, on the other, education could mean the loss of a son through emigration to towns of foreign countries.<sup>10</sup>

A government which spent 42% of its budget for military and security purposes had little money to spend for social, health and cultural needs directly related to the improvement of the condition of women. For example, in Portugal in the 1960s, 60% of births took place without the aid of either a doctor or a midwife. Of 102 countries, Portugal ranked among the worst (88th) with respect to infant mortality. Other significant data reveal that only 19.6% of all dwellings in Portugal have bathrooms, 42.5% electricity, and only 35% of Lisbon homes are serviced by garbage collection.

Social attitudes toward women were as oppressive as other aspects of Portuguese society. Annie Cohen writing on Portuguese machismo reported that a married woman could not obtain a passport without the permission of her husband; that he could forbid his wife to work "outside" or could "withdraw" her from her work. In accordance with the Concordat signed by Salazar, the state



did not dissolve marriages solemnized in the Church, only those performed outside the Church. But even in civil marriages, the husband had grounds for divorce if the wife used contraceptive devices without his permission or if his wife was seen in a car with another man. And, as in Sicily, the husband who killed the unfaithful wife and her lover, caught in flagrante, could expect to avoid punishment.<sup>11</sup> The over-protected wife was in many respects a "minor" in the family.

Abortion was not only forbidden but strictly punished. (Of course that did not mean that there were no abortions --only that they were risky, expensive and sometimes performed in inhuman conditions.) Prostitution was also prohibited; the new régime wants to liquidate it because, in the past in spite of the interdiction, it was, according to The New York Times, one of the most flourishing activities in Lisbon and tolerated by the pillars of society:

Women have noted that the same middle-class and upper-class men who oppose abortion and divorce are the mainstays of prostitution.<sup>12</sup>

Machismo is present among workers as well. The new regime has decreed equal pay for equal work, but, of course, there is need for time and supervision to implement this policy everywhere. Cohen cited the case of a beer factory in Via Longa, where the male workers demanded wage increases to maintain

their "status of superiority" towards their female co-workers.

### III

There are many people--men and women--who consider that the abolition of sexism in Portuguese society is a sine qua non of the country's social progress. Socialism alone will not create the conditions of equality required to lift the burden of oppression from the shoulders of Portugal's women. Indeed, one of the best indicators of the progressiveness of a society is its willingness and determination to cope with the task of making women an equal, active and responsible component in all sectors of social life. In Portugal there are now many women who reflect a growing awareness. They come from different generations and social strata. The influx of women into the labour force in the last few years, as clerks, workers, teachers, medical personnel, has strengthened their consciousness and, in many cases, their militancy with respect to their rôle in society. Many of them are better educated than ever before; there are more girls than boys in the high schools and there is about an equal percentage in the universities.

Polarization among women is a characteristic fact of Portuguese social life today. Some are as advanced as women in other societies in their goals and struggles; others regard with coolness, fear, and even hostility, many of the

successes women in Europe and North America have already achieved. One point is clear, however, women are highly visible in Portugal today.

Members of the old generation of "feminists," or outstanding female activists of different Portuguese parties, are still present or have returned to their homeland since April 25. On July 4, 1974, at the first public meeting of the Socialist Party in Lisbon, the party leaders, including Mario Soares, greeted and embraced with affection the writer Maria Lamas, who acknowledged with pleasure and a smile the applause of the crowd. In many ways, Maria, 81, with her silverish hair, was the embodiment of the socialist fighters, their peregrination, their exile and now their reunion in a new Portugal.

At Communist Party meetings and at the first freely-held Congress in October 1974, a portrait of a woman with strong, determined features adorned posters. Her name is Caterina Eufemia and many streets and buildings in Portugal today bear her name. Twenty-one years ago, a young, pregnant peasant woman, a party organizer in Alemtejo, was killed by Salazar's national guard while leading a demonstration of farm labourers. Her life and struggle are projected as a symbol of the dedication of the party to the anti-fascist struggle and the suffering of its members under the Salazar regime, a symbol also of its ties with women and farm workers.

There also is Elina Guimaraes, 70 years old, petite, with lively eyes and an expressive face. We interviewed her in July 1974. She is among the few "who saw democracy in Portugal" herself: she and her husband were both students in the pre-Salazar era. Both studied law; the husband, Adelino da Palma Carlos, led his class in the Faculty of Law and she was number two. And so she remained number two in her life, in the shadow of her husband who became a well-known lawyer, later a professor and dean of the Faculty of Law in Lisbon and from May 15, 1974, for two months, premier of the country, heading the first democratic government after 48 years. Elina, mother of two sons, did not practice law in her own right with the exception of pleading cases in the juvenile court for a period of time. However, she worked with her husband, "not as a secretary but as a collaborator, as a member of the team."<sup>13</sup> She considers particularly important the role of women in the legal profession. Legal advisers are as important as medical ones, she claims, especially in cases dealing with maternity problems. She pointed out that in France (in general, she told us, women in France have made the most progress), feminist lawyers go to the factories for consultation on the spot with women who work there.

She has to her credit about 100 articles, which were published in French and Portuguese journals and newspapers, and two books, one dealing with the

problems of crime and guilt, the other The Law Under Which We Live (1937).

Thus she has been an active writer both as a feminist and as an expert on the law.

From the viewpoint of the '70's, Elina Guimaraes is a conservative feminist. Her husband, who is also basically conservative, sees himself like the older generation of the French Radical Party, in the middle of the political spectrum, anti-fascist and anti-communist, strongly secular and individualistic, at times strictly conservative in perceiving events and personalities, sometimes surprisingly open and perceptive in comprehending them. Elina's views are similar but her judgments on the political situation are more cautious and less categorical; she lacks the political experience of her husband. It is not surprising that she looks at the woman problem as mainly a legal one and not as a social and psychological-behaviorial issue. However, she does not forget the political aspects of the question. An anti-fascist, she considers fascism as anti-feminist, as antipathetic by its nature to women's struggle for equal rights. In the early summer of 1974, the Pro-Divorce Movement was being organized to make divorce possible for those married in the Church. Guimaraes was for divorce, saying that there is a crying need for it. She explained that civil marriage had existed for a century in Portugal and divorce for such

marriages had been introduced in 1910. It was only logical that if the State performed marriages it could also grant divorces, regardless of where the marriage was solemnized. Yet, she was cautious on the issue. According to her, to allow divorce was to defend the family because it would encourage more women to marry. Many were now reluctant to do so because of the divorce problem (the great majority of Portuguese women still want to get married in the Church). But, because she favoured marriage as an institution, she did not support the Pro-Divorce Movement which also aimed at erasing any difference between legitimate and illegitimate children. The situation for illegitimate children must be improved and important steps had been taken in this direction as early as 1973. However, people get married to have legitimate children. Why marry if there is no difference between legitimate and illegitimate births, she argued?

She was optimistic that the Church, after April 25, could be more cautious and would not create too many impediments to the legal extension of divorce. She was right. In February 1975, the Vatican and Portugal signed an accord revising the Concordat of 1940 and "permitting Roman Catholics who married in the Church to seek divorces in Portuguese state courts."<sup>14</sup> The Portuguese government underlined the point that "the old system contradicted the

concept of the equality of citizens in the face of the law."<sup>15</sup>

In the name of equal rights for women, Guimaraes' first priority was to change the Civil Code of the Salazar regime. The pre-Salazar Code had been very revolutionary but the present one was regressive. Article 1674, for example, states that the husband is the head of the family, he represents it and he has the right to make decisions in all matters pertaining to conjugal life. The Code provides a detailed description of what particular areas are covered by this right. Guimaraes could not accept such a concept, especially the idea that the control of the children should be completely in the hands of the father even when the child is unborn. She was against abortion but supported the right of the wife to use contraceptives on her own decision. Even before April 25 there were plans, she mentioned, to establish a birth control clinic in Lisbon but they had not materialized.

She spoke with enthusiasm about the history of women's rights in Portugal and about when and how women acquired voting rights. In the late 1960s a two-month maternity leave was legislated and laws were passed so that women could not be dismissed without cause during pregnancy or during the year after the birth of the child. In this case, she herself was not satisfied with a legal explanation only, commenting that the government had to introduce maternity

leave because of the massive emigration of men, because of industrialization and the resulting demand for female labour.

One of the main purposes of the book she wrote in 1937 was to criticize man-made law and male-established legal discrimination against women. Laws formulated by men, she felt, will always have some anti-women bias or at least will neglect the needs and strivings of women.

She was cautiously optimistic about the future of her country. She had welcomed the April 25 coup. During our visit, she jumped up from her chair to play Grandola Vila Morena, the song which had signaled the revolution. Also she took pleasure in being discovered again. The first visitors and interviewers were from abroad, an American reporter and then us. But soon a Lisbon newspaper, Diario Popular,<sup>16</sup> published a long interview with photos under the title: "An example of the struggle for the dignity of women in Portugal."

Nostalgia can be detected in her words. She feels that she was born a generation too early. Now her opinions would find a much more fertile soil than in the thirties. It is not so much that she yearns to pursue a professional career. She is a wife and a homemaker, firmly established in her solid, patrician, suburban home near the palace of Belem, a home which seems to be her castle.

Moreover, she has no liking nor understanding for the women "radicals." She used the same pejorative epithets for them as the male conservatives do; they are "prostitutes" for her. Yet she regrets that she could not have written her works and struggled for legal changes in a period which held greater prospects for achieving lasting reforms.

A woman who is participating more directly in recent events is Maria de Lurdes Pintassilgo. After being Under-Secretary of State for Social Security in Palma Carlo's government, she became in July 1974, the first woman minister in Portugal, as the Minister of Social Affairs in the first cabinet presided over by Vasco Goncalves. Her career had already been quite unusual for a Portuguese woman. An industrial engineer, she worked with the Council of Energy and also served as Director of the Centre of Documentation in the Department of Research and Planning of CUFA. As such she had represented Portugal at an OECD seminar on the organization of scientific research. She has also been employed in the Political and Administrative subsection of the Corporative Chamber (1969-74), has been a member of the Portuguese delegation to the United Nations in 1971-72, and finally, from 1973, chaired the Social Policies Commission concerning Women. Thus she was the specialist, the expert, the administrator and the diplomat. Caetano had attracted many of these into the government sphere (most of them men)

in an attempt to demonstrate that he was willing and able to modernize and to bring about change within the system.

Maria de Lurdes Pintassilgo in her mid-forties is a strong and active Catholic, a member of the International Catholic Movement, and the GRAAL, and a former national president of Pax Romana. Calm, serious, cordial and convinced in her opinions, she is confident of her ability to handle her office. Her responses to our questions were cautious, often diplomatic, but firm. Politically she is and wants to be independent--strongly committed to the new system but not closely aligned to any political party; her particular concern is, above all, social justice. One of the main needs in this area, she feels, is better children's care, more and better nurseries, kindergartens and orphanages. Yet she avoided discussing the problem of birth control or the need for better information on birth control as a means of alleviating problems in this area.

Her position on the problem of divorce was a prudent one. In principle, civil law should not force people to accept the proscriptions of the Church. However, the government should not force this issue but rather wait to determine the popular attitude concerning divorce.

She argued that participation in finding solutions to social problems is the best political schooling for women. Making them more aware socially would

make them more conscious politically. Women must participate first in voluntary work but simultaneously pressure the government to enlarge the framework for their participation. The shift into new professional areas where women had not been active previously would also strengthen their social activity. She mentioned that 50% of the medical students in 1974 were women.

In her well-polished English she offered comments on the Portuguese political situation. In some respects her opinions were close to those of the young military. She liked and respected them and mentioned that in recent years many progressive young people joined the army because they looked at it as a potential tool of change, an instrument for crushing the old regime. As a member of the second government of the post-April 25 era, she recognized that their task would be more difficult than that of the former one--this was the opinion of the leaders of the Movimento as well. She pointed out that the young officers had taken power reluctantly and that they would have preferred, according to their own confession, to remain in the background, to act as a powerful pressure group instead of being responsible directly for governing. But they had to replace those ministers who had failed; the Palma Carlos government had suffered from an inherent contradiction; the existence of that government was above all the result of the success of the Movimento but the government had

had no real contact--and some of its members did not want such a contact--with the Movimento. The split was not between military and non-military but between revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries. Thus she put her finger on the main issue in the Portuguese political situation of the past year--the delicate balance between the military and the parties which has been threatened so many times. Without this balance there is little hope for a democratic, orderly political evolution in Portugal. She hoped that the cooperation of the members of the democratic parties and the young military would endure and that the military finally would withdraw from the political arena when their presence was no longer necessary.

Maria de Lurdes Pintassilgo is no longer a member of the government and the lack of comment in the international press as to why she was dropped from the cabinet is perhaps significant. During our interview she said that she had not been appointed to the cabinet because she was a woman. (The present government is all male.) In many ways she represented more herself as an independent individual than any group whose representation was considered so essential. She remains an interesting and basically progressive personality of the Portuguese scene.

#### IV

Maria Teresa Horta is well known all over the world and, in her own country, even notorious. One of the "Three Marias," with Maria Isabel Barreno and Maria Velho da Costa, she wrote a famous book 17 which put her in the vanguard of modern international feminist thinking and struggle.

Paradoxically, in Portugal where the rate of illiteracy is so high, certain books have acted as potent ferments of change. Such was General Spínola's Portugal and the Future 18 which convinced so many people that military victory was not possible in Portugal's protracted colonial war. Equally potent, the New Portuguese Letters of the three

Marias, has acted--it is a best-seller in Portugal--as a social shock, a hard knock at the long-locked door of Portuguese society. Earlier its publication would not have been possible, but in recent years Premier Caetano loosened the censoring screw over publishing. He is reported to have said, with reference to the publication of certain books with an obvious revolutionary content, that it would calm down some of the intellectuals who were in any case already lost. Others would not read them. However, New Portuguese Letters--although published originally in only 1380 copies--was a "political event in Portugal," according to Jane Kramer in her rather patronising review in The New York Times.<sup>19</sup> But it was



more than that: it became an international political event when the Portuguese authorities arrested the three Marias, confiscated the book and put its authors on trial for "outrage to public decency" and "abuse of the freedom of the press."

Mary Lydon Fonesca, a free-lance writer in Lisbon, has recorded some significant details about these events: "When the police began to investigate the case, they assigned an agent who was specially trained in prostitution cases. He wanted to know who had written what: 'I know only one of you ladies did the pornographic parts and I want to know which one.'"<sup>20</sup> They were set free on bail. The trial itself lasted from July 1973 to May 1974. The judge was changed and his replacement with instinctive foresight postponed the sentencing until May 1974. Then, of course, they were acquitted in triumph, their book declared to be of literary value and women demonstrators shouted the slogan: "Women, United, Shall Never Be Defeated."

During the trial period the Marias felt all the might--and their opponents as well--of international solidarity. Women's groups and writers in many countries protested. In Portugal itself 200 writers signed a petition backing them. The American PEN Club, British writers, French intellectuals, speakers on the CBC, writers for Time, Le Nouvel Observateur, all expressed

their concern. All spoke and wrote sympathetically about them.<sup>21</sup> And now the book has been translated into many languages, read in many countries, distributed by solid, "establishment" publishers such as Doubleday in the United States, Le Seuil in France.

In the summer of 1974, Maria Teresa Horta spoke to us in her home in Lisbon. Even before New Portuguese Letters she was a well known poet, journalist, and literary editor of a Lisbon daily. She had published nine volumes of verses, among them a book of erotic poetry, Minha Senhora de Mim (Milady of Me) which had produced a considerable echo. She is considered the enfant terrible of Portuguese women writers, the most radical of them. Neal Ascherson, in The New York Review of Books, calls her the "gaudiest personality"<sup>22</sup> among the three Marias and Time magazine the "more emotional."

The Marias, as Teresa Horta's apartment reflected, are middle-class, in their thirties, convent-trained, married, mothers of sons. Maria Theresa is herself slim, rather delicate with a pleasant look and, contrary to the impressions created by the press, soft-spoken and restrained. Sometimes tense but a good speaker and a good listener, she was open to dialogue. In Portugal she is by no means an outsider. She could be seen at the restaurants or cafes where the political elite meet. She is usually, but not always, found



among those with leftist sympathies.

Since she believes strongly in militant feminism, her road is separated now from that of Maria Velho da Costa who has been called "the third Maria," because her priority has shifted to the "Third World" to which she considers Portugal belongs, and to the economic liberation of men and women. For Maria Teresa, women in Portugal have to fight against both types of oppression, that imposed by the political and economic system and that of men. She favours and foresees an interim period of political separation or perhaps of political autonomy--in aims and methods--for women while they battle their oppressors. Afterwards men and women will meet on an equal basis and integrate their struggle. But the period of "separation" will likely last for some time and, in her opinion, little progress can be made in the framework of a capitalist society. She was emphatic that women must refuse to cooperate with the capitalist system. Of course Maria Teresa agreed that the situation of women was better since April 25. Meetings, demonstrations, freer expression, formation of pressure groups, all became possible. Before that time she had been a feminist "in chamber," that is, privately. Sheltered till her marriage (in the Church), unhappily matched, she adjusted herself to a union of convenience. But Maria Teresa had said "no" to all this since her childhood, no to her father and to her husband, who both wanted to make

her a subservient being. Because of her experiences she favours the abolition of marriage as an institution. And, as a corollary, she regards change in the home as the most fundamental need for the advance of women. She views as a political priority the needs of the 2,000,000 housewives of Portugal (of 3,000,000 adult women): they must be approached, spoken to, organized. She mentioned a very successful meeting of housewives where thousands participated and where the idea and the wish emerged for the creation of a union.

One of the first photos circulated after April 25 was that of a demonstration of a group of women led by Maria Teresa asking the new military authorities to assign them the headquarters formerly held by one of the fascist organizations. Parties and other groups were allotted space but not women--at least not at that time. Yes, there were women in the democratic parties but Maria Teresa was quite displeased with the "women-sections" of the parties: these were really peripheral in determining the policy; they were auxiliary groups rather than active decision-makers. As elsewhere, women found themselves making coffee, typing, preparing festivities and so on. In fact although previously politically active she was not now in any party.\*

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\*She had previously been active with the MDP-CDE, an opposition group which

She had the most respect for the Communist Party--it had been the most determined force in fighting fascism. However, she objected to its severe discipline, the lack of autonomy of the mass organization it controlled (The Democratic Movement of Women) and, above all, to its rigid system of moral values and principles, which are not all "revolutionary." She told us about outstanding Portuguese poets, writers and singers who were denied party membership or, in exceptional cases, admitted only with utmost difficulty because of their "deviant" (homosexual) behaviour.

The atmosphere in Portugal was still not receptive to a frank discussion of feminist aims. To publicly debate abortion was quite an act of radicalism and even for a radical feminist it was virtually impossible to raise the issue of the rights of lesbian women. Maria Teresa was worried: how will women vote? Would there be in Portugal a re-

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functioned in the Caetano period. It contained communists, socialists and left-oriented Catholics. After April 25, it survived as a mass movement but became a formal party before the elections. It gained 4.12% of the votes, well below the expectations of its leaders. The Socialists have asked many times for its dissolution, arguing that it is a "fellow-traveller" of the Communist Party.

play of the Chilean experience with women defeating the very régime which began to open avenues of progress for them? The parties, even the left-wing ones, say: "Do not shock women, do not provoke a backlash, choose the gradual approach." But is that not again an excuse to hold women back and hazardous not only for women but for the parties as well?\*

As for the book, the authors do not hint at the parts written by each of them.<sup>23</sup> Maria Teresa was pleased that Doubleday was publishing the book, but angry that the publisher was insisting that the book be reduced to a certain number of pages. There was no political or moral reason involved, only and strictly an editorial one, they asserted, but Maria Teresa suspected some kind of censorship. The book was not cut, but Doubleday held out with respect to the title. In English it is called The Three Marias and New Portuguese Letters is the subtitle.<sup>24</sup>

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\* The Central Committee of the Portuguese Communist Party, elected in November 1974, had 21 men and 2 women on it; the central organ of the PPD in the summer of 1974, almost exclusively lawyers, had no women on it; the Socialist Party in the early summer of 1974 spoke of about 10,000 active male members and only 200 active women. The proportion has improved somewhat since.

The book is patterned on a well-known work: Letters of a Portuguese Nun by Sister Mariana, originally written in French in the seventeenth century by a Portuguese nun to her French soldier-lover who abandoned her. (They may have been a literary fraud and are generally attributed to the French author and diplomat Gabriel Joseph de LaVergne, Vicomte de Guilleragues.) In this old frame there is a completely new painting, picturing through letters, verses, meditations and invocations, the frustrations and strivings of Portuguese women. As Maria Teresa Horta says, the book has one great theme: the liberation of women, a claim of their right to be "different and separated." It is direct, straightforward and outspoken, sometimes it shocks because it wants to shock. Sometimes it shouts, but one has to shout when silence goes unheeded. It covers the whole spectrum of the tribulations of Portuguese women. For example, there is a letter from a woman, Maria Ana, to her husband Antonio, an emigrant residing for twelve years in Kitimat, BC.<sup>25</sup> Maria Ana is illiterate and a cousin writes the letter for her. Her husband wants to come home, but not until he is rich, "filthy rich." But what good will that do to his wife, who feels as if she "were wearing widow's weeds because I'll be thirty-eight this year and I bore you three children before you went away and raised them and they're all grown up. . . ." She wants him back and writes to him with

kind care, how to behave "in those huge forests," and not to "drink" any more than he had to to keep warm in those "snowdrifts" and she finishes her letter: "From your wife, who is yours till death do us part."

The book is a confession, even a program as the authors say, ". . . playing clever games with your pen, but never frivolous ones."<sup>26</sup> The style is often poetic:

We are females. . .

Firmly resolved  
never to be a prey  
or an object  
abjectly surrendering

or deliberately giving off  
the odor of dry wood  
calling ourselves glass  
stone  
travelled across

as we journey towards ourselves  
borne by a barque  
or by the wind

A far-ranging  
shared circling round and round  
this path we follow  
to find sustenance

to sink firm foundations  
for the dreamed-of anchorage

where we now remain  
separated from others  
and yet so close.<sup>27</sup>

In the conclusion of her article, Annie Cohen refers to the pessimism of some feminists about the situation of women in Portugal.<sup>28</sup> It is true that women are still victims after April 25, but pessimism is not the only possible conclusion. April 25 has opened new vistas for the women of Portugal. The political atmosphere, the structural changes in industry, banking and those which are to come in agriculture, the pluralism of political life (at least up to now), the thirst of different people and groups to formulate and to utter their political opinions have pushed many women into active or more active social life. The intensity of participation, the forms it takes may vary, but the fact remains. Admittedly, the political parties do not show enough comprehension of the problem of women and the military, who are increasingly powerful, do not lack machismo. But, on the other hand, new participatory forms are developing such as worker commissions, different types of neighbourhood commissions, both in the towns and in the countryside. Also, recent changes present new challenges. Sometimes estates or factories are abandoned and have to be taken over by the workers; thus women alongside men are often literally forced to participate and to make decisions about important social problems. For example, after the minimum wages were raised, the director of a confection enterprise (Sogantal) abandoned the factory whose workers were chiefly women. Yet they

continued its activity, produced, managed, administered the factory and organized the sale of its products. There are a number of such examples, some successful, some less so, which in any case reflect the increased activity of women in every domain; and greater participation is the road towards maturity.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. The Christian Science Monitor, May 2, 1975.
2. The Manchester Guardian Weekly, February 15, 1975.
3. Le Monde, April 28, 1975.
4. The Christian Science Monitor, May 1, 1975.
5. The Toronto Daily Star, June 10, 1975.
6. Portugal and its Empire: The Truth (London, 1961), p. 53.
7. Ibid., p. 55.
8. Portugal através de alguns numeros (Lisbon, 1973), p. 38 (our translation).
9. Ibid., p. 32.
10. Cited by Antonio de Figueiredo in The Manchester Guardian Weekly, May 3, 1975. Figueiredo also notes that the wages were so low that both men and women had to be forced by the gendarmes to work on the large estates of the Alentejo in the south.
11. "Un mois au Portugal," Les Temps Modernes, no. 339 (October, 1974), pp. 133-139.
12. The New York Times, May 19, 1974.
13. Diario Popular, July 13, 1974.
14. The New York Times, February 16, 1975.
15. Ministry of Mass Communication, Portugal: Freedom: Year One (Lisbon, 1975), n.p.
16. July 13, 1974.
17. Novas Cartas Portuguesas (Lisbon, 1972).
18. António de Spínola, Portugal e o Futuro (Lisbon, 1974).
19. The New York Times, February 2, 1975.
20. "The Case of The Three Marias," Ms, III, 7 (January, 1975).
21. For example, see Time, July 23, 1973, pp. 49-50, and Claude Servan-Schreiber, "Les trois pêcheresses du Portugal," Le Nouvel Observateur, No. 46 (October 22, 1973), p. 49.
22. The New York Review of Books, March 20, 1975.
23. There is a lot of speculation--not always obviously well-intentioned--about their roles in writing the book. Jane Kramer, in her review (The New York Times, February 2, 1975), assumes that the best of the book is written by Maria Velho da Costa and another Maria is "responsible for the dreadful monologues of maids and peasant women and the quotes from Ti-Grace Atkinson." On the other hand, Claude Servan-Schreiber stresses that the book was accepted for publication in Portugal because Maria Teresa Horta was already a well-known established poet and writer ("Les trois pêcheresses du Portugal").
24. Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta, Maria Velho da Costa, The Three Marias: New Portuguese Letters, tr. Helen R. Lane (New York, 1975).
25. Ibid., pp. 150-153.
26. Ibid., p. 22.
27. Ibid., pp. 50-51.
28. "Un mois au Portugal," Les Temps Modernes, No. 339 (October, 1974), p. 139.