

Jungle Food: Revolutionaries in Lusophone Africa

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There had been a Portuguese presence in Africa since the late fifteenth century and despite losing out to Britain and France in the Scramble for Africa, by 1900 Portugal had retained five main colonies in Africa – the Cape Verde Islands, São Tomé and Príncipe, Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique. Whilst other colonial powers granted independence to most of their colonies in the 1960s Portugal hung on – their presence in Africa was an important part of Portuguese national identity under Salazar's nationalist 'New State'. In Guinea-Bissau/Cape Verde the PAIGC and in Mozambique FRELIMO were the dominant revolutionary movements. In Angola there were three main groups, the MPLA, the FNLA and UNITA. Here I shall focus on those guerrillas who fought the colonial power up to the 'Carnation Revolution' in Portugal in 1974 and which then quickly led to the granting of independence to all parts of 'Portuguese' Africa. The leaders of the three main groups were Eduardo Mondlane (FRELIMO) who had a PhD in sociology, Amílcar Cabral (PAIGC) an agronomist, and Agostinho Neto (MPLA), a poet. All had similar socialist ideals.

As we shall see, the role of food supplies and what fighters ate is an understudied, yet vital, part of successful revolutions. Where then best to look for accounts of the particular foods that were eaten by the guerrillas? Only occasional glimpses of the food that was eaten can be gleaned when studying many of the numerous historical accounts of the wars. Political scientists often focused on the organisational details of the armed groups and only occasionally on agricultural food production. For example, John Marcum's authoritative *The Angolan Revolution* does not mention food, even in a section entitled 'Inside Rebel Angola' (Marcum 1969). Some of the writers have also been accused of producing 'hagiographic' texts conveying an utopian view of the fighters and their leaders and may not be the most reliable of sources (for a detailed critique, see Dhada 1993, pp. 209-211). The best sources are the accounts given by journalists who travelled into the war zones although what the guests were given to eat was not necessarily the same fare as that given to the ordinary fighters. What other sources might there be? Would a novel by someone who had taken part in the liberation struggle or might a Television or film documentary of the period provide some further clues?

Conditions varied greatly from country to country and in the different war zones within the same country. In Angola, prior to 1974, the MPLA and the FNLA only occupied a small part of the territory. In Mozambique considerable areas were under the control of FRELIMO

whilst in Guinea – Bissau most of the country was occupied by the PAIGC. I will now look at each country in turn before reaching some general conclusions about what was eaten. A sense of what was consumed can only be established by collating occasional snippets from various accounts. As usual, only when the researcher applies a food-sensitive lens to the historical literature does the paucity of information on food become apparent.

Guinea-Bissau

By the end of the 1960s there were up to 20,000 combatants fighting the colonial forces in Guinea-Bissau. I will first review accounts of general food production during the war before focussing on evidence of what the guerrillas actually ate.

Food production in the liberated areas

Areas under PAIGC control in the northern front had, under colonial rule, been geared to growing peanuts and according to researcher Laura Bigman (1993, pp.31-32) this exhausted the soil and caused erosion. As a result of the colonial distortion of agricultural production if there was a drought, hunger inevitably followed. With instability and bombardment from the air many peanut and rice growers had left for neighbouring states and food had to be moved from the south of the country to avoid starvation. Basil Davidson's account of the war, *The Liberation of Guiné* (1969), barely mentions food even when he visits the guerrillas: his main interest is how Amílcar Cabral and his North Vietnamese advisors thought how best to wage a war of liberation in a country such as Guinea. How to mobilise the peasants is seen as the key. Davidson reports Cabral's plans for increasing production of rice and other foods such as cassava and potatoes (p.45). The PAIGC realised that self-sufficiency in rice production was essential and in 1965 Cabral announced a plan to raise production in the areas they controlled by twenty percent. The rice crop was often harvested at night to avoid air raid casualties (Cornwall 1973, p. 211). There was however a general shortage of food and there were endemic vitamin deficiencies because of the lack of vegetables which were needed to supplement the rice and palm oil diet. The villagers had to supply themselves and the fighters. Bigman does however quote a villager saying 'We have millet, corn, fonio, sorghum, and above all rice. There's enough to go round' (1993, p. 63). Galli and Jones (1987, p.68) confirm that the agricultural programme was a vital part of the struggle, and for example, the introduction of new strains of rice had considerable impact.

Initially a policy of collectivisation was tried, but as Mustafah Dhada (1993, p. 73) points out this was abandoned and resulted in ‘Cabral-led agronomists seeking more contextually specific solutions’.

It is difficult to decide how successful all this was – so many of the reports of individuals who visited the war zones look on Cabral and his fighters with great reverence. Dhada however concludes that Cabral’s efforts were unsuccessful as the soldiers did not help the growers in the fields and appeals to raise poultry failed because the chickens would then be consumed by “PAIGC personnel, patients in hospitals and, children in schools” (Dhada, 1993, p. 80). Unlike Dhada, Patrick Chabal thinks that “there is little doubt that the villagers in the liberated areas achieved notable results under the circumstances” (1983, p. 111) while Humbaraci and Muchnik report that by 1966 “large quantities of rice could be stockpiled” (1974, p. 142).

Eating in the bush

The journalist Barbara Cornwall visited in the 1960s when the armed struggle had begun. She first went to the ‘bureau’, the PAIGC headquarters in Conakry in the neighbouring Republic of Guinea. We soon learn that the guerrillas had a diet of ‘rice with red palm oil sauce, occasional canned meat, and sometimes game or chicken. There are mangoes and tiny lemons and wild fruit when in season, and even tea or coffee sweetened with gift sugar from abroad. But sometimes on a long march or mission far in the interior, there is nothing’ (Cornwall 1973, p. 125). Chicken was greatly appreciated. On their way to the front the militants were packed into a Russian jeep along with a number of hens, who at one stage, escape and fly into a mango tree (Cornwall 1973, p. 132). The food in the camps seems to have been quite varied and when Cornwall returns from a visit to an abandoned Portuguese fort, freshly grilled river fish, caught that evening is served with palm oil sauce by Antonio the cook (1973, p. 160). A gazelle that had been shot on the journey to the fort was presented to the cook for a future meal. On another occasion when she arrived at an inland camp she is offered rusks covered with processed cheese – a special treat for the PAIGC’s guest (p. 188). One dinner, after a breakfastless start to the day, consisted of wild boar, tea and sweet potatoes (p. 241). Volunteer carriers move the food around – ‘heavy loads of rice, fruit juice, canned meat for emergencies, cooking pots, and live hens ...’ (p. 172). Carmen Pereira, the chief political commissar on the southern front confirms that ‘[f]ood is supplied at villages along the way and I eat whatever the people can give me, the same as their own’ (p.193).

Another account by a visitor to the liberated areas is that by Stephanie Urdang who wrote that ‘[l]ife in the liberated zones was frugal, arduous, and danger filled ... there is nothing romantic about armed struggle ... it was only through mass participation of the peasant population that total victory was possible ... there is nothing romantic

about the continual hail of bombs, the scarcity of food ...’ (Urdang 1979, p. 49). She sets out on a similar journey to Cornwall, setting off from Conakry accompanied this time by her minder, Teodora. Urdang gives considerable details and despite the shortages of food in the liberated areas she is well looked after:

A gift of three fresh eggs from an elderly, wizened peasant woman ... a gift from a nearby village of a gourd of ripe mangoes and a chicken ... fresh oysters steamed just right by a responsavel who also saw to it that the eggs were soft boiled. ... But the most lavish display of generosity came from Teodora. At mealtimes she took delight in choosing the meatiest part of the chicken or stew and piling my plate high with food. ... Rice was the staple diet. Everything else was peripheral. ... The food was good. The average meal prepared when guests were present included a large bowl of vegetable soup, made from packages sent as a gift from the German Democratic Republic. At lunch and supper the main dish consisted of as much rice as Teodora could manoeuvre onto my plate, topped with a tasty stew of chicken, fish, or wild meat. Breakfast too was substantial: a rice porridge or rice-flour bread, called *cus-cus*, and a large mug of coffee with condensed milk (pp. 54-55).

Urdang was also given a tin of sardines (or some other fish) and was generally embarrassed at being given the special food, when she knew the militants had so little. She recalls ‘that one of the militants told me that on occasion they shot monkeys. They hated doing it, but it was at times necessary when they had no food at all. He remembered one monkey that when he saw their rifles put his arms in front of the eyes. He refused to shoot another monkey after that’ (Urdang, email, 2016). Urdang argues that it was the local women who provided the vast majority of rice and other foods for the guerrillas: the cooking was easy but the transport of rice was a problem.

G rard Chailand also visited the northern liberated zone and tells us of his first meal inside Guinea. Am lcar Cabral was there, on one of his few visits to the bush. ‘Plates and glasses had been set on a plastic tablecloth. We had chicken with rice and palm-cabbage oil. Am lcar reached into his bag and took out a bottle of Bacardi rum that Fidel Castro had given him at the Tricontinental Conference as a present for the fighting men’ (Chailand 1969, p. 31). The main kitchen was set up under a baobab tree and the guerrillas’ food was cooked over two fires which were extinguished if there was a possible air raid. The food consisted of mainly rice which was held in large pots or enamel pans (p. 32). A PAIGC village committee member tells of what food they grow: ‘millet, corn, fonio, sorghum, and above all rice. There’s enough to go round. Sometimes we have beef. We also hunt and fish, and we used to raise chickens’ (p. 41). At another base in the north

large tins of apricots and Maggi seasoning were available along with rice and manioc. We read again however that the lack of vegetables, and a diet based on rice and starches, led to a vitamin B deficiency amongst the villagers (p. 53).

Food aid from the GDR and Cuba

East Germany (GDR) played a small role in giving aid to socialist regimes and movements in Africa but it seems that the focus was on Mozambique and Angola (Howell 1994). In Guinea-Bissau aid was in the form of packet vegetable soup that was provided for the revolutionaries. The best known soup supplier of the GDR at that time was the VEB Nahrungsmittelwerke in Auerbach, Saxony which produced the popular Suppina packet soups. This seems to be one of the best remembered foods of the GDR and highly likely that this was what was the soup that was sent to Guinea-Bissau.

Cuba played a far greater role than other friendly states and became involved in the war in 1966 following an earlier visit by Che Guevara to Conakry where he had met the PAIGC leadership. The largest ship of Cuba's merchant navy, the *Uvero*, brought food, arms and medicine for the PAIGC (Gleijeses 1997, p. 47). However, one of the Cuban veterans told Gleijeses that '[w]e didn't bring any food with us because we expected to eat whatever the guerrillas ate. Once we got there we discovered that there was almost no food in the jungle; I lost 40 pounds in three months' (p.47). Later we are told that 'the Cuban ships that came to Conakry brought canned food, rice, sugar, beans, oil and coffee for the volunteers; moreover the MMCG (Cuban Military Mission in Guinée and Guinea-Bissau) had also some money to buy fresh food ... But when the food arrived it was never enough because the Cubans shared it with their PAIGC comrades' (p.72). One Cuban volunteer remembered 'I had a can of beef. I didn't want to share it. The PAIGC fighters near me were Moslems. I told them it was pork. "It doesn't matter," they said, "Allah doesn't see through these thick trees." I gave them the meat' (p. 72). Sometimes, as with the guerrillas, they only ate rice (p.73).

Film and television

A short film about Cabral's leadership shows a group of guerrillas eating rice with fingers, from what appear to be aluminium bowls. A section then follows where a hunter kills an antelope, a large joint is roasted, and finally a militant is seen sitting down by a tree eating from another plate piled high with rice and meat. This is a propaganda film focussing on Cabral's success but the other sources confirm that on occasions, when game has been killed, the fighters in the jungle have a feast (Filme da GUINÉ BISSAU). In an Italian television documentary the reporters reported from the Northern war zone between the 2nd and 15th February 1966. Most of the film shows the guerrillas marching through various forests or focussing on their faces, but, just near the end, after the return from a successful operation, there are some

guerrillas shown sharing a large bowl of rice (Labanta Negro 1966). The guerrillas of Guinea-Bissau survived mainly on a diet mainly of rice and palm oil sauce, the staple diet of the local people.

Angola

The MPLA established various liberated areas during the 1960s but did not have the success that the PAIGC was to have in Guinea. By 1974/5 the MPLA was in great difficulty but it was only with the help of the Cubans and Russians that they were to eventually defeat their rivals at home and also the South Africans who invaded to stop the spread of 'communism' (See George 2004).

Don Barnett with the MPLA

As elsewhere, despite a considerable literature on liberation struggle the sources of information on the food eaten by the guerrillas are sparse. However, journalist Don Barnett and his photographer Roy Harvey do provide considerable evidence. Chapter Two of their book consists of an interview held in Dar es Salaam with Commander Spartacus Monimambu who was recovering there after an operation to remove a bullet from his head. He had been Commander in the Eastern Front from 1966 to 1968. He explains how the people's stores (armazéns do povo) work: '[t]hey pay in Portuguese currency or with products. People bring fish, meat, rice, potatoes, honey – anything they happen to have – and exchange it for clothes, salt, soap, etc. ... The food and other products they pay with are then used as part of the rations of the guerrillas. ... We have built a rice-husking factory, but we are still waiting for the machines to process it' (Barnett and Harvey 1972, p. 22). Monimambu confirms that 'agricultural production in the semiliberated areas is increasing ... people collectively cultivate what we call "people's plantations" ... the important crops grown are rice, cassava, potatoes, millet and maize.' When asked whether the guerrilla forces get food from these collective units Monimambu replies '[y]es, of course. ... The women do everything' (p.19). Interestingly he reported that the guerrillas also grow their own tomatoes, onions, cabbages, etc. ... 'We do this because we need the vitamins very much' (p. 18). Because of the Portuguese bombings the cassava has to be camouflaged by planting the patches on the periphery of the forest (p. 41).

Don Barnett visited the guerrillas in the Eastern part of Angola in 1966 at the invitation of Agostinho Neto whom he had met in Dar es Salaam. An assorted group of guerrillas and students headed for 'Hanoi II' base, which is a journey of some 175 miles from the Zambian border and takes fourteen days on foot. Food on the march was scarce and consisted of rice, noodles, cassava and coffee (p.49). As in Guinea-Bissau the villagers had to rush for cover when they heard the Portuguese planes and helicopters. One morning the group only have coffee for breakfast and then some roasted cassava (mwanza) at 6.00pm (p. 51). Barnett

found the lack of food and water a real problem as he conducted interviews in the camp as he remembered various delicacies – ‘peanut butter, oranges, chocolate, milk’. He then adds ‘[a] few weeks of semi starvation in the bush may teach more about imperialism than a library full of books ...’ (p.59). We know also that the guerrillas collected honey when they could and Kufa, Chefo do Grupo, tells of finding some ‘root bees’ near the River Zambesi. They were hungry though having eaten nothing for five days. Later they crossed a cassava field and dug up some of the tubers for a meal (pp. 226-227). Another guerrilla, Paulo Candonga recounted how his group were warmly welcomed by the villagers in Ndombe, and given sweet potatoes, milk and funji made from cassava meal (p. 175).

Did the guerrillas eat the same food as their leaders? Commander Setta Likambula tells Barnett how the command posts originally had two kitchens, one for the leaders and one for the guerrillas. Although it was the same food, the leaders sometimes had more. The guerrillas however still thought that the leaders were getting better food and it was decided in 1969 that there would only be one kitchen in the camps so that ‘everyone eats from the same pots’ (p. 280).

The general rosy picture of the MPLA presented by Barnett needs to be viewed with a little scepticism. We know that there was a real shortage of food in Eastern Angola in the 1960s. The Portuguese told locals not to give food to the guerrillas and informed the villagers ‘if they get nothing to eat, they will die or be forced to return to Zambia’ (p. 151). There were serious splits within the party which later led to armed clashes. Malyn Newitt also points out that that ‘the MPLA commanders implemented a policy of terror in order to cow the local population ... There were numerous executions ...’ (Newitt 2007, p. 83). Inge Brinkman later interviewed witnesses who confirm that many trials and executions took place (Brinkman 2003, p. 310).

In his detailed examination of the history and revolt in Angola Basil Davidson tells of his travel into Angola from the East along with the MPLA group of saboteurs led by Commander Paganini. The first food mentioned is a can of forest honey that is handed around (Davidson 1975, p. 21). He visits a kimbo, a village protected by the guerrillas and the visitors are given some chicken and some masangwe – pounded millet (p. 27). This masangwe seems to be part of the staple diet in this part of Eastern Angola and is not something that we hear of elsewhere.

Pierre Pascal Rossi with the FNLA

In 1968, the journalist Pierre Pascal Rossi entered Angola with his colleague Enrique, but not with MPLA guerrillas but with the rival FNLA, in an area to the East of the capital Luanda. This group was not supported by the members of the Soviet Block but by the West and China as well as General Mobutu in neighbouring Zaire. As with other guests of the liberation movements the food that is given to Rossi is inevitably more varied than what is eaten

by the guerrillas but we can gather from their accounts what they eat, and how little this is. As usual the journey began at the crack of dawn and a long march beckoned. The first food they have on the march was a cold sausage along with some manioc bread – they call it kouanga. Rossi had great difficulty swallowing this ‘very nasty’ food (Rossi, 1969, pp. 155-156). Later they have a tin of sardines and ... in the morning some corned beef. One of the guerrillas, Mario, who was carrying a bazooka opened a tin of sardines with his teeth (p.60). Later, they have a real meal: rice, sardines, tea and condensed milk (p.162). Rossi is delighted when the cook tells him there is some soup and recalls that this is one of the best moments of the march and after a cold night they roast some peanuts in the embers of a fire (p. 168). Another night the guerrillas find oranges in an abandoned plantation and the soldiers manage to kill a buffalo and they eat the grilled meat with some pili-pili made with very hot chili pepper (p. 174). Because of the scarcity of food, Rossi and Enrique lost nine kilograms in weight and had hallucinations and Rossi has an irresistible longing for some slices of bread and butter (p. 191). Their mood improved when they come across another abandoned orange orchard and some avocados. Grilled palm-nuts (dende) are added to another frugal meal, and these, we are told, are very good and nourishing because they contain oil and sugar (p. 198).

Rossi and Enrique have a favourite topic of conversation – gastronomy (p.273). At one stage their march was delayed as there was a need to make some garri – manioc flour which preserves well and can be eaten without any preparation (p. 266). Despite the hunger and thirst the group ate some meals with enthusiasm such as a breakfast of ‘vegetable soup, buffalo meat and fried bananas. Delicious’ (p. 269). Then another meal of great pots of rice and fofou brought by some women and a fabulous breakfast of wild boar, fried bananas and a fruit salad (p.266). On another occasion on the return journey to the Congo, they found more oranges which they mixed with garri (manioc flour) and this makes a delicious paste which Rossi suggests, with a bit of imagination, has the taste of patisserie (p. 280). Generally food was always short so that on the march back, when short of meat, they were given grilled big yellow caterpillars. This account stresses the extreme hunger and thirst suffered during the long marches and then the staple food of the area, manioc, and the occasional glut of fish or meat.

Food and fiction

What might we learn about guerrilla food from a novel? Pepetela, one of the best-known Angolan authors writes in his novel *Mayombe* about some MPLA guerrillas in the jungle in Cabinda – a detached part of Angola north of the Congo River. He had fought there in the 1960s and his fictional account is likely to reflect what was actually eaten there. As they hide in the *Mayombe* jungle they eat rice and corned beef, and for breakfast gruel (*matete*) (Pepetela

1983, pp. 1, 8). Later, after a very wet night when all the guerrillas were shivering they are forced to drink milk as the food was soaked and the manioc (garri?) broke up. 'All that remained was rice and tinned stuff, and little of that' (p.34) (For a further examination of food in literature in Angola see Cusack 2006, Cusack 2010). With the evidence provided by Barnett, Chaliand, Cornwall, Rossi and Urdang the need for a search for what had been eaten amongst any fictional accounts is not essential.

Mozambique

The armed struggle began in September 1964 when FRELIMO soldiers attacked the Portuguese in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. They employed typical guerrilla tactics of ambushes, sabotage and hit and run attacks and then disappeared into the forests. By 1968 about twenty to twenty-five per cent of the country was under rebel control. Under its leader, Eduardo Mondlane, FRELIMO realized the importance of integrating the peasants into the struggle and one military command bulletin emphasized '[t]he people are to the guerrillas as water to fish' (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, pp. 86). As we have seen, this focus on 'the people' is one of the key reasons why these revolts were eventually successful.

Under the Portuguese, a cash crop economy had used forced labour, and in the liberated zones these plantations had to be replaced with the production of staple foods. FRELIMO experimented with cooperative systems after a 'black' elite began emerging in the north of the country and who, for example, had employed people to work on their cashew plantations. The army also worked alongside local people cultivating some plots but it is clear that most of the food was provided by the locals. As in Guinea-Bissau and Angola, the party set up 'people's shops' where goods could be bartered as access to most of the Portuguese and Asian-run shops was no longer possible. David Birmingham argues that life in the liberated zones soon became very hard as the guerrillas did not have the motorised transport of the Portuguese (Birmingham 1992, p.54).

Humbaraci and Muchnik (1974) summarise the food production situation as follows: '(t)he liberated zones of Mozambique now produce maize, corn, manioc, haricot beans, potatoes and rice for local consumption ... Agricultural production is organised on three levels – in military camps, where the soldiers cultivate the land according to their needs; in the "national camps" which exist in each district where the land is cultivated on a rota by men from the villages and the produce is sent directly to FRELIMO, which redistributes it to the people; and finally in "people's camps", where the inhabitants decide what they will produce according to their tastes, their needs, and the facilities available. This form of production has yet to fulfil the needs of liberated areas. However, each year would seem to bring an improvement' (1974, pp. 152-153). The authors are clearly enthusiastic supporters of

the left-wing guerrilla groups so their picture of food production here is probably somewhat idealised.

Archdeacon John Paul worked as a missionary at Messumba on Lake Nyasa and recorded his life there during the war. He provided just a very few glimpses of the food available then. FRELIMO militants seemed to appreciate the educational work done at the mission so he was in contact with both the guerrillas and the Portuguese. For example, John Paul learned that some local 'colonial' farmers had come to an agreement with the local guerrillas to drop a sack or two of potatoes at pre-arranged locations (Paul 1975, p.163). This type of cross-combatants arrangement is not discussed elsewhere in any of the war zones, but it is possible that other such deals emerged elsewhere.

Barbara Cornwall in the bush

The journalist Barbara Cornwall gives an account of how she accompanied a group of guerrillas, across the border into Cabo Delgado province. The guerrillas carried with them canned meat and packets of instant tea and coffee and stacks of packaged biscuits. These were however supposed to be treats for the journalist to protect her from the shock of life in the bush. A constant companion on this trip, Diolinda Simango, produced tea and sugar which they drank in tin cups as the platoon prepared to move off. As in the other war zones in Lusophone Africa occasional imported food were welcome: Cornwall has a cup of Carnation Instant Breakfast on one occasion while the guerrillas were offered packets of Deer, North Korean cigarettes (Cornwall 1973, pp 88, 75).

The staple diet of the villagers and guerrillas was mealie – corn pounded to a pulp and boiled in water. It was served in a large communal bowl and rolled on the fingertips into small balls (Cornwall 1973, p. 43). At one of the meals in addition to the traditional mealie there was roast wild pig, chicken and a large bowl of unidentified meat along with a large platter of rice (pp.45-46). FRELIMO had a special section of trained hunters who fish, look for wild game and were part of the guerrilla unit. There were unrelenting attempts to stuff Cornwall with food so she could survive the long marches. Sometimes an enormous omelette was presented – they had gone to great lengths to find food that would suit a foreigner in the bush while the men were often left with just mealie and rice (p.46). She also greatly admired the cook who seemed always able to provide 'adequate and appetizing food with admirable consistency'. All the pots and pans were scoured with sand and washed in a bucket with laundry soap. Dish towels were washed and dried on some bushes so that 'we never had stomach trouble from meals in camp' (p.69). Other foods are eaten: fish, bush rats, bananas and fruit that grows near riverbanks (p. 73).

The centrality of food supplies to the guerrillas is illustrated by FRELIMO's wish to show their food cultivations to Cornwall, who was the first female journalist to travel in the liberated part of Mozambique.

The plantations consist of maize, cassava and she sees tiny green rice shoots. Indeed Cornwall is shown by the commander, Mijingo, 'every seedling within a two-mile radius' (p. 69). Cornwall's account therefore gives us a clear view as to what the guerrillas were eating in this Northern zone at an early stage of the revolt: it was corn ground as mealie that was the staple diet of the guerrillas.

Ask a guerrilla?

Mussagy Jeichande was a guerrilla in the liberation war in Mozambique and was interviewed recently by Claire Bertaud in Maputo (for the full interview see appendix). Mussagy confirmed that the guerrillas were often hungry especially when the Portuguese destroyed the crops. They also had to be careful that any river water they drunk had not been poisoned. Leaders and guerrillas shared the food which was mainly maize with some vegetables, including rarely cabbage, not a food mentioned elsewhere. In the bigger camps there was a separate provision of food for the leaders and the ordinary guerrillas – but it was all the practically the same, mainly maize. They also ate wild fruit of different sorts depending on what war zone, including massalas (or maboques, green monkey oranges). They also had bush meat when they were able to hunt for it. However, when they reached a village they ate what the local people were growing at that time of year (Bertaud, email 12/03/2016). In some villages there was pork.

When asked what food was imported he mentioned food from the West – Italy and the Netherlands – and from the Soviet Union. China sent cans and beans. The cans were heavy and were just taken when going to the front line whilst at the base they ate what was provided by the local people.

This one interview chimes well with what has been gathered from the extensive perusal of the existing literature on the wars of liberation.

Conclusions

For the guerrillas to survive, they were dependent on the food provided by the local people: food was not peripheral to revolutionary success but an essential component. There is a considerable quantity of books and articles on the wars of liberation in the former 'Portuguese' Africa. Most of these say little about what was eaten by the guerrillas. However, it is possible to get a reasonably clear idea of what the guerrillas ate from the reports mainly by a few journalists and reporters who travelled with the fighters into the war zones. As in much literature there is a sharp division between those texts that mention food and those which make no mention at all.

Attempts by the soldiers at growing their own food contributed little to feeding the guerrillas. Whether Cabral's knowledge of agronomy helped in the outcome of the war in Guinea-Bissau is not clear but an intelligent approach to farming and what to grow must have had some

positive results. The guests in the bush were sometimes provided with special food as given the impression to the outside world of a well-organized insurrection had distinct propaganda advantages. Some food, the tinned sardines and East German soup was provided from the friendly nations but this made a significant but not a crucial contribution. Imported canned food, despite being heavy, may have been important in some front lines as it allowed the guerrillas to be highly mobile.

To summarize then, in Guinea-Bissau it was rice and palm-oil that was the daily diet of the guerrillas. In Angola manioc/cassava and its products were the staples. In Mozambique locally grown maize was all important. It was the people who fed the guerrillas and enabled the revolutions to eventually succeed.

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Acronyms

FNLA – Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola.
 FRELIMO – Frente de Libertação de Moçambique.
 MMCG – Misión Militar Cubana en Guinea y Guinea-Bissau
 MPLA – Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola.
 PAIGC – Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde.
 UNITA – União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola.

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Film

Filme da GUINÉ BISSAU / Amílcar Cabral O Pai Da Nação Guineense (2014) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkvNHKV2Ptk> (see 7.50, 12.50 mins from start)

Labanta Negro, (1966), Un documentario REIAC, Piero Nelli and Marina Piperno, Rome. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYwgTYSy6ac>

Interview: What did the guerrillas eat?

Mussagy Jeichande, interviewed by Claire Bertaud with questions by author. Interview conducted on 17 April 2016 at about 11:30 at Cafe Solar in Maputo .

What war zone did you fight in?

In the northern part, Cabo Delgado province.
Were the guerrillas often hungry?

Sometimes – during the period where Portuguese attacked the village people, they used to burn with napalm their houses, crops, so didn't have food supply from the population. The guerrillas lived essentially thanks to the support of the village people so if crops burnt, they couldn't eat properly. In the bush, we ate wild fruit from time to time and what we were able to hunt.

In the bush, did the leaders have different have different food from that given to the ordinary guerrillas?

Usually, we would share the food. The base was maize and leaves (cassava, bean leaves, in some areas cabbage – very rarely as only where there was enough water) here maybe a misunderstanding when asking questions so became two questions with two answers by Mussagy (note by CB)

In any base camp, was the food provided to the leaders and to the guerrillas?

In some bases. The main role of guerrillas was to fight. When it was necessary to protect a certain village considered strategic – some guerrillas would help the population produce food – they were called the militias and were older men and mostly women who had received military training (guerrillas weren't professional fighters) who would protect villages and go to the field to help produce. They were interlinked with the population. The food which wasn't provided was honey and meat and salt. People went to Tanzania and sold ginger and cashew nuts, buying things like powdered milk (for nurseries) batteries, medicine for health centres, school material. By the population, the food provided would be most usually maize and vegetables.

In any base camp, was the food provided to the leaders and to the guerrillas supplied by different kitchens?

In big camps (100-200 people) there would be a different kitchen, not because of elitism (for those of a higher rank) but for the fact that sometimes food had to be prepared quickly when there was a meeting for example.

When a unit was small, it wasn't necessary and there was usually just one. Food in any case was practically the same. If it was maize, it was maize for everybody – sometimes there was just maize. In some villages, there would be pork.

In the bases, there would be no animals – animals meant noise, if you had a rooster for example, you would make noise and risk being spotted.

Also if you had a big base, it was easier to be spotted.

Do you think the people in the bush had very different staple diets in the different provinces of Mozambique?

Yes, depending on what was produced. If close to a river, there would be access to fish. Fruit in Niassa was different to fruit in Cabo Delgado and in Tete. You depended on what nature offered you where you and your base were.

Were you ever given tins of fish or other imported food? Where did any food aid come from?

From China, western countries like Italy especially, the Netherlands, the Soviet Union. China sent cans, beans. When in movement, we carried cans (when on the front line – searching for new spaces, moving ahead) when at the base you would eat what was produced in the area. Cans were heavy to carry – you would only take them if you were going to the front line as you didn't know what you would find.

They (the guerrillas) seemed to know of good water supplies?

You went to rivers – but some water was poisoned. The main sources of water were rivers, and lakes. The population would tell you. And signs (floating fish...). In new areas, where there would be no population, you had to be careful because if they knew, they might poison the water. So they moved in small groups, in the evenings and at night (as the Portuguese had no air support at this time of day, they wouldn't go out searching for the guerrillas).