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IN TIMES OF WAR
IN AN ALL MEN'S SHOW

by

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FEBRUARY 2000

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Abstract: This paper explores problems Angolan women face in the current context to place gender concerns at the center of policies. The discussion starts by presenting an overview of the transformation of gender relations in Angola. Second, it highlights the position of women from the main political party during the liberation struggle and post independence period. The main argument of the paper is that although to some degree women' involvement in the liberation struggle played a decisive role for women's emancipation during the post independence period, women have today been relegated to outcasts and victims as if their citizenry did not count. The paper concludes with pointers to the need of policies to readjust gender relations and the need for women to organise around peace issues.

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Length of article (including references): words 7,197

Angolan Women's Survival in Times of War in an All-Men's Show

By Henda Ducados

Our knowledge about Angolan women is scarce. Indeed, women's trajectory as soldiers, leaders, activists, survivors and victims of one of the most tragic conflict in the region warrant reflection. Angolan women's emancipation is still not a given despite their contribution to the liberation struggle and success to place gender issues in the policy process of the 1980's, suggesting that war has tended to be an "all-men's show", with political and military decisions merging to exclude broader concerns of development.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the various problems, Angolan women face in the conflict, such as the lack of effective mechanisms for the expression of their needs. The first part of this paper provides a theoretical framework on the transformation of gender relations in the current literature and in Angola. The second part gives an overview of women's participation in the liberation struggle, and their rewards in the post colonial period. The third part presents the obstacles women face in fighting for greater emancipation and ultimate disengagement from the state. Lastly, the paper presents how women see the war and attempts to analyse the gender transformation of gender relations in Angola. The paper concludes with pointers to the need to place gender concerns at the centre of policies, and the need for women to organise around peace issues.

The transformation of gender relations in the current literature

There is considerable literature on women and war, but interest in the gender dimension of conflict in development studies only arose in the 1990s (see El-Bushra, 1997 and 1998). Indeed, Byrne (1996:32) argues that 'the feminist analysis of militarisation, holds essentialist notions of gender and violence that equates women with peace, which views aggressiveness as inherently male, in contrast to women's 'nurturing' nature'. For example, Enloe (1990:63) describes 'the archetypal patriarchal institutions: the military is a male preserve, run by men and for men according to masculine ideas of male bonding, male privilege, and militarist values derived from definitions of masculinity'.

On this point, Byrne (1996:33) argues that 'the image of conflict as intrinsically male masks the ways in which women are affected by, and involved in conflict'. As such, Turshen and Twagiramariya (1998:10) use the example of South Africa to 'show that during apartheid regime, women were capable of perpetrating violence which enable us to see that women's views are not monolithic and that women do not only bear essential qualities such as kindness and compassion'.

Moreover, Byrne (1996:33) challenges the essentialist feminists' view 'by questioning the fixed notions of masculinity and femininity at a time, when gender identities and relations are in her opinion, as a result of conflict, in a considerable state of flux'. Indeed, apart from the interest among scholars in examining and analysing the gender dimension of conflict and its long-term impact, Baden (1997:1) stresses that 'a debate is under way in development organisations about how to integrate gender into emergency and humanitarian responses and in other responses to conflict situations'. Despite this, gender issues in practical terms have rendered women invisible or have reinforced gender-based stereotypes and power relations.

For example, Date-Bah (1996:7) argues that 'the interests of women ex-combatants are rarely prioritised in post-war situations, while male ex-combatants are often made the focus of post-

war reintegration, with other members of their households treated as dependants, thus reinforcing a 'male bread winner' model'. Indeed, the issue of rape has been also neglected in humanitarian responses.

Turshen and Twagiramariya (1998:11), on that point argue that 'conventions, like the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which protects women on a basis of equality with men, failed to address gendered violence and gender-related abuse, and to correct this oversight, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 1994, which includes recommendations that pertain to women situations of armed conflict'.

It seems that there are global commonalities in the way women and gender relations have been transformed in times of war and conflict (see Kuumba and Dosunmu, 1995). Evidences from many part of the world, show that women's roles during conflict have often been transformed to support guerrillas fighters and in some cases to win national struggles. But with victory, as argued by Peterson and Runyan (1993:133) 'the gender practical and strategic interests of women have been subordinated to masculinist priorities'. Indeed revolutionary struggles as described by Peterson and Runyan (1993:131) create 'new women' who 'transgress prescribed gender roles, but these women remain disadvantaged in terms of the gendered division of power and resources when the revolution is over'.

Although, I tend to argue that conflicts are in essence context-specific, the trend in gender transformation identified in the above discussion apply to the Angolan case. That is, if indeed, new relations between men and women have emerged during the national liberation struggle, why is it that these relations have not been maintained at independence? Angolan women have been in constant negotiation with mainstream political leadership to be heard and for their issues to be taken on board. One such example can be observed through the non-participation of Angolan women in negotiations in the different peace processes. While the lack of visibility of women in formal politics constitutes a major problem, on the other hand, women have quietly developed survival strategies to cope with their daily hardships. These strategies may be informal but they show the extent to which women's consciousness to search for solutions to end violence are in a sense influencing the re-adjusting of gender relations. The following sections will attempt to explore the causes for the phenomenom of the transformation of gender relations.

Gender issues in Angola

At independence in 1975 from the Portuguese, Angola had all the natural resources such as large reserves of oil, diamonds, fertile land and fisheries, to become one of the most prominent country in the African continent.

However, the war damaged Angola in virtually every way, with catastrophic effects on economic and social conditions. There are approximately 280,000 refugees in neighbouring countries (UNDP, 1997). There are currently 1,550,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in Angola (950,000) since December 1988 (UCAH, 1998). Most of these IDPs are women and children. There are an estimated 10 millions land mines planted in the Angolan soil. The dimension of the landmine crisis is immense as land mines exact a huge toll upon the civilian population. There are an estimated 70,000 amputees in Angola (UNDP, 1998). Women and children have been the major victims of landmines accidents. Landmines inhibit agricultural production and impede commerce and travel between urban and rural areas.

There are shrinking opportunities for women contributing to the development process. Although, there is a higher number of women in national decision-making positions, many do not have access or participation at local government level as a result of factors such as representation within the political parties' hierarchy. Women suffer from lack of training and formal education to compete in the labour market; majority engage in petty trading, within the informal sector, in often very precarious conditions.

Drastic changes are being felt in the household structure and in marriage relationships, i.e. the absence of men have increased the number of female-headed households, forcing women to take on additional roles and responsibilities to support their families.

Angola is amongst the 11 countries with the highest level of infant mortality, which, according to UNICEF, is close to 40% (UNDP, 1998).

The lack of access to safe drinking water is considered by UNICEF to be one of the aggravating problems of the overall health situation. 32% of the population have access to safe drinking water while adequate sanitation is accessible to only 16% of the total population (UCAH, 1998).

Even the most basic health services are absent in most areas of the country, leaving women and children in a highly vulnerable situation. Angola has experienced proportional increase of HIV/AIDS prevalence rates, between 1994 and 1997, of over 100% (UNDP, 1997). The Angola gender country profile revealed that 'risk factors, such as promiscuity and prostitution, are presently aggravated by movements of troops throughout the country and concentration of displaced people in Luanda and in and around the provincial capitals, where people live in extreme poverty' (Pehrsson, 1999:13). This goes without saying the increase phenomenon of prostitution due to poverty and rural-urban migration may not help reduce the spreading of the virus or other STDs. At present, social services in Angola have taken the longest to recuperate from over 30 years of war and neglect by the government.

Angola's level of illiteracy is approximately 75%; while 25% of the illiterate citizens are men and 75% is women. The enrolment rate for women at the primary education level is 35%, declining to 7% at the secondary level and 3% at post-secondary and 0.1% at the university level. While the Angolan government allocated 69% of its 1999 budget to the military and debt-servicing sectors, the Ministry of Education and Culture received 7%, although the actual budget disbursement in Angola is approximately 60% of the actual allocation.

Education for girls in Angola is an acute problem that translates into a decreased opportunity for women to participate in and contribute to the development process. The economic impact of gender inequality in education is reflected in the composition and types of activities in which women are engaged in the work force; the low level of education results in poor quality jobs that bring low remuneration. Although the Angolan government is a signatory to the Beijing Platform of Action, and Resolution on the Rights of the Child, there are no programs in place to overcome gender inequality in education.

The situation of women and children in IDPs camps is under researched. However, empirical evidence shows that they often comprise the most vulnerable group and are victims of sexual harassment. Female teenagers often engage in prostitution to escape poverty. Distribution of humanitarian aid often benefits males head of households to the detriment of female heads.

The Angolan Government's policy and practice have done little to alleviate some of the critical impediment towards achieving gender equity. For instance, the Ministry for Women's Affairs has been insufficiently funded and inadequately staffed to function efficiently. Women's

issues have not been given top priorities and no efforts have gone into addressing deepening problems like the impact of the conflict and issues such as the psychological trauma of rape and other conflict related abuses.

Prior to elaborating on the causes for the transformation of gender relations in Angola, it seems necessary to provide background information on the position of women in the pre-independence period. In turn, this background should provide a ground for our understanding on the actual gender relations in Angola.

OMA and women's role in the liberation struggle

The struggle for independence in Angola was characterised by the involvement of three distinct parties with different political ideologies and external alliances but fighting for the same objective: the freedom of Angola and of its people from the Portuguese colonial power. Another common pattern is that all three parties had, and still have a women's wing and/or organisation attached to their leadership. It is important to note from the onset that this paper is only looking at the women's organisation of the main political power the MPLA, due to the lack of reliable and updated data on the others.

The Organisation of Angolan Women (OMA) is the women's wing of the Popular Movement for the Independence of Angola (MPLA), the main liberation movement and political power to date. OMA was born in 1962, just one year after the beginning of the organised armed struggle by the MPLA against the Portuguese colonial power. Women's involvement in the struggle for independence responded to the ideals of the MPLA to fight for the 'equality of all Angolans, regardless of ethnicity, religion, regional origin and sex' (OMA, 1984:13).

OMA's participation in the struggle was very active since the beginning, and responded to the MPLA's efforts in organising the people of Angola in support of the struggle. Women were involved in the military alongside men in the military bases and among the population. Women were easily mobilised and trained to become fighters, nurses and political educators. 'OMA participated in the food production for the guerrilla army, organised literacy campaigns and basic health care, and carried arms and food over long distance' (Akesson, 1992:20).

OMA's role was also crucial in backing up the guerrilla forces, from outside Angola. For instance, 'OMA's base in Tanzania wrote radio programmes which were broadcast to Angola, prepared publications for distribution abroad including an OMA bulletin produced in Portuguese and English, and generally worked to make the Angolan people's struggle known throughout the world and to mobilise international humanitarian aid for the people in the liberated areas, particularly the women and children' (OMA, 1984:15). Holmes describes women's involvement and participation in the struggle as being 'a testing ground where all who took part were called upon to make their utmost effort and develop their talents and abilities' (in OMA, 1984:16). OMA's leadership in the pre and post-independence period were educated women who had strong link with the mainstream political leadership of the MPLA through families ties or through marriage.

OMA's role and efforts to promote women's emancipation

At independence, OMA had gained enough popularity to have delegates in every provinces. OMA's supporters, although the leadership remained educated, were ordinary women from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, of whom the majority have been trained as activists. Their activities involved political activism and community work such as organising literacy campaigns as an extension to the MPLA's efforts to mobilize people on all front .

It is said that OMA had approximately 1.8 million registered members in 1983. Although OMA was the only women's organisation that covered the whole country, it must not be forgotten as argued by Pehrsson et al (1999:13) that 'it was organised as a wing of the ruling party, with its leading cadres on the public administration wage list'. This detail shows the degree of financial independence of OMA's staff towards the party started since the beginning.

At independence, the political rewards to women have not been commensurate with their contribution to the liberation struggle. Women were not invited to occupy official positions in government. There were only 10 percent of women within the party in the end of the 1980's.

However, the 1980's can be characterised as the glorious years for OMA. Indeed, during those years OMA's effort in promoting women's emancipation has been very active and played a decisive role not only as a mass organisation but as well as a policy driven organisation dedicated to unite and fight for women's legal status and economic rights to be integrated in mainstream policies. Akesson (1992:21) gives 'the examples of the elaboration of the Family Law, the institution of family planning, the supplying of legal assistance to women and the open discussion of issues considered 'taboo', such as abortion and customary law'. Indeed, these issues were taken on board by the MPLA and integrated in the Angolan institution, due to OMA's activism. Although OMA played an effective role for these reforms to take place, the reality is, that in practise the majority of women are still fighting for their rights to be respected. A good example of this phenomenon is the issue of inheritance and child support that are still being neglected although the constitution favours women . Indeed, machismo is prevailing in the Angolan society which is rooted in African traditional values and latino machismo inherited by the Portuguese.

The political and socio-economic changes of the 1990's since the multi-party system has almost put an end to OMA's active involvement for women's emancipation. On the political front, women's formal participation in government began at the time of the first multi-party elections in 1992, in which women were given four portfolios. Today, women hold 15% of government posts between ministers and vice-ministers. It is important to note that the majority of these women were drawn from OMA. Although, this number may be a source of envy when compared with other African countries, women are still invisible in local politics and their involvement in politics outside party lines is not encouraged. In others words, the MPLA feels that they have complied with their duty by having given women four portfolios and nominated 9% of women to be members of parliament.

In practice, this kind of reasoning seems to suggest that the MPLA do not have strong stance on gender issues. Pehrsson et al (1999:13) argue that 'OMA was instrumental in the creation of the State Secretariat for Women's Affairs, which was transformed into the present Ministry for Family Affairs and the Advancement of Women (MINFAMU)'.

Although, the majority of Angolan women see the creation of the Ministry as a real conquest for gaining political space, I will argue that its agenda has somewhat separated women's

issues from mainstream politics and segregated even more women's issues from the government mainstream agenda, as the Ministry is still not taken seriously. This is reflected in the budget allocation that is one of the lowest and the under staffing of cadres.

Another OMA's limitation is financial. OMA is severely limited by their financial dependency to the MPLA. OMA is being viewed by the international community as a party organisation, which reduces drastically their chances to tap into external sources of finances. OMA's Congress of 1991 decided that the organisation would become a 'national non-party association with patriotic and social aims, open to all women regardless of religious or political conviction' (Akesson, 1992:21).

In practice, this did not really happen. OMA is still the women's wing of the MPLA and does not have the means nor freedom to break away from the party. It also appears that the MPLA is not at all interested for OMA to become independent. This suggest that the MPLA has a patriarchal structure in which women have little power for negotiation.

One of the strategy that some members have used, is to create their own non-governmental organisations and/or professional organisations as a means to function independently from the party.

On the overall, OMA's supporters have decreased drastically and its leadership is suffering from lack of motivation as the organisation has been having difficulties to provide adequate working conditions for its staff. The disillusionment of OMA's supporters is strongly linked with the crisis the country is going through. Political times have changed and mass mobilization is no longer mandatory and is no longer viewed as a priority, especially since the majority of women are going through times of hardships and bare survival.

The visibility of OMA is still high at local level through its support centres for legal advice for women and men. At national level, although the majority of women ministers and MPLA deputies are drawn from OMA, its advocacy role is nearly invisible. Pehrsson et al (1999:13) argue that 'today OMA suffers from the same limitations as many other women's organisations in a Marxist-dominated one-party environment in the sense that its analysis of women's needs and rights has been conditioned by the party line'. Indeed, the legacy of the Marxist system is still very present and has in some sense created an atmosphere of fear of contesting the party lines at the detriment of the constituency.

OMA is still highly respected by the MPLA but although the many discontentment that OMA's leadership is having towards the party, there has never been open conflict. Indeed, the loyalty to the party lines has greatly impeded OMA in using its role as a mediator with government to include women for example in the peace process negotiation, as Angolan women have been systematically excluded from all the peace process negotiations as if their citizenry did not count.

This suggests that OMA's role has been reduced to responding to non-threatening issues rooted in the family context. Pehrsson et al (1999:14) argues that 'OMA agenda has been set mainly by urban, educated women with Western values, with the result that a huge majority of its supporters have had little to gain from its activities'.

Younger women are not involved in OMA's activities and well educated middle class women view OMA's activities as something belonging to the generation of their mothers. OMA does not really have the means to go to the people, women in need of free legal advices usually go to OMA, rather than the contrary.

OMA and women's organisations have not come together pro-actively to unite against the patriarchal attitudes of government in dealing with gender issues, mainly because of the lack of an organised platform to do so.

Women's informal efforts to end violence

The heterogeneity of Angolan women is portrayed in the ways women use their survival strategies to face their reality and the emergency situation. Indeed, Angola has become a country of contrast and wide disparities, that can be observed at all levels of society.

The diversity of means women use to survive, suggest that Angola is a country of many islands in which people cohabit ignoring in some cases this fact. The reality of an urban women differ greatly from the reality of a rural women. Indeed, war is mainly taking place in the interior of the country, therefore resources for survival are very much depending on the context. As such, women use of social capital and survival strategies for example, greatly depend on what their close environment may offer.

Class is as well a crucial issue in the analysis of the Angolan armed conflict. Poorer and rural based women are the first to whom their sons are taken away, as well as they are the first who suffer from the direct impact of the conflicts, since the war is mainly taking place in the interior of the country. For instance, victims of the conflict such as women with disabilities are in a very vulnerable situation as they are at the mercy for survival of their next of kin and humanitarian aid if and when available. This group has been forgotten by policy makers and is not enough targeted by NGOs.

Despite the rural/urban divide, there exist a cultural divide between the Mulattoes women and Black women. The Mulattoes have predominantly western values and have generally a higher access to education than Black women. Mulattoes women's aspirations are very much inspired from the Brazilian and/or Portuguese model of life style in which these women follow religiously. These disparities can be observed in the following example.

An ordinary Angolan Black woman who lives in the peri-urban area of Luanda (musseques) starts her day at 5 am. Her typical day involves the preparation of daily domestic chores such as fetching water, cleaning the house and preparing the rest of the chores for older female children to finish. She may prepare breakfast if food is available. By 6 am she may be off to the market place or warehouses to purchase what her capital enables her to or to bargain for in-kind credit that is if she has enough social capital. Whatever she can get from her social or financial capital is then sold at retail at the market place. Her buying and selling pattern involves little bargaining as price fluctuates according to daily inflation. Income is then generated by having increasing numbers of retail levels where each lower level sells in smaller quantities with a small mark-up (see Ducados, 1994). She may sit on the floor and have her merchandises in front of her on a card box. Her day is characterised by walking to the market place and/or warehouse or struggling to go on public and/or informal transportation if she has enough capital, bargaining her way out of police harassment, and wait for customers to guarantee a meal for her family.

While waiting for customers, women talk, share their stories with each other and often engage in informal rotating credit and saving schemes. What women have to do to guarantee bare survival in an environment of poverty and oppression is pragmatic and may be described as an act of defiance.

On the other hand, a typical middle or high class urban Mulattoes Angolan women have their dreams. One of them is to have their white weddings. On Fridays and Saturdays, one may see weddings cortege in front of the statue of the war heroines, where women have their pictures taken. Urban Black women want their white weedings as well for the exact same reasons that the Mulattoes women. It goes without saying that women recognise and remember their heroism in warfare, but in their everyday reality they embody a social system of their own construction that feeds the majority of urban Angolans. Their reality is construed in the making of families and increasing incomes to make ends meets regardless of the means. In some cases, it is reflected in the acceptance of forming second household and/or being involved in prostitution.

An ex-active supporter of OMA is now the leader of the Women's Association of the Roque Santeiro market which is the biggest market place in Luanda. Maria was given this position by the local administration due to her past involvement with OMA. Her typical day involves selling beers at the market place while providing information to the Association's members when requested. The market is so big that Maria is having lots of difficulty to mobilise a greater number of women's traders. Her association is solely functioning with members quotas and is severely limited by lack of support to do more. Maria has expressed bitterness regarding what she was and what she has become.

She looks at her past involvement with OMA as good as it enabled her to be trained as a literacy campaign activist but she feels that she has been left down by the MPLA and has now become an economic victim of the socio-economic crisis despite her once strong affiliation with OMA.

Moreover, at the level of associations and individuals, informal efforts by women to end violence have taken many different forms. These can be seen throughout the country mostly at family and community levels. It is important to note that those that have been carried out at the level of associations have been confronted to financial problems and were reduced to very micro interventions and those that could have had an impact on a national level have been conveniently it seems sabotaged by government and died quietly.

A research conducted by the Christian Children Fund in 1996 showed evidence in which rural families developed strategies to protect their girls children from rape and violence. These were; 'marry their girls at a younger age than normal to have a man to bear responsibilities and protect them; breast-feed for longer period of time in the hope that soldiers will not be interested in them; and have girl children carry out their domestic activities such as fetching water and collecting firewood in groups as a way to decrease the vulnerability of being attacked alone' (CCF, 1996).

At the level of association, a group of women organise themselves and created an Association for Peace and Reconciliation in 1994, called Roots for Peace. Their aim was to support active participation of women as free individuals and partners for development, in the establishment of a democratic and peaceful country.

They also aimed to provide women at the grassroots level with tools and strategies to confront structures of armed conflicts and its effects. However, its activities died as quickly as they started as the association did not have the political clout and its leadership could not access government backing to grow.

Another striking example took place in 1995 when representatives of all political parties, church groups, professional associations, non-governmental associations and civil society

were invited by the Lutheran World Federation to travel to South Africa to attend a conference to contribute to the peace and reconciliation process. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a common platform and resolutions to be presented to both presidents of the two main political parties. The meeting was not supported by the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The president of the MPLA who is the president of Angola appointed a delegate to receive the delegates of the conference and to discuss the resolutions. The president of UNITA, Jonas Savimbi received the delegates in UNITA headquarters. But the meeting had no follow-up whatsoever, the resolutions were kept in the drawers of both presidents and were not given the necessary political exposure to be discussed or act upon.

These example does not suggest that informal independent organisations do not have hope for survival if they are not backed by government. It suggests that government had at the time fail to collaborate on civil society matter, because the initiative had not come from them first. However, times are changing and the following example illustrates that civil society is starting to organise informally with their own means against the war.

As such, at the beginning of 1999, a group of independent women gathered in front of local government in Cabinda to show their discontentment and refusal to let their sons be drafted to go to war. Although the basis of the demonstration was clearly based on the fact that Cabinda women did not relate to the war going on in the rest of the territory, it showed the spontaneity and awareness of a group of independent women in exercising their democratic rights against the war.

The above suggests that although times are changing, disengagement from the state on any type of issues is still viewed suspiciously by government as civil society in Angola is growing with difficulties but will probably succeed in creating its own mechanisms to become a watchdog.

How women see the war

Angola has been almost at war for over 30 years. The struggle for liberation against the Portuguese colonial power was followed right after independence by civil wars. On two occasions, the war was broken: first, during a two-year period [1990-1992] for the preparation of the first multi-party elections and the second time was for a period of four years [1994-1998] during the preparation for the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol; countrywide fighting has been incessant between the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola UNITA and the Government of the Republic of Angola.

The war is not by any means viewed by Angolan women as being the 'necessary evil' to bring to the fore political ideology, but men's inability to find common ground to end the conflict at the expense of the population. Indeed, Angola has gone through different types of wars. The national liberation struggle was seen as important to free Angolan people from the colonial power.

The civil war right after independence was a guerrilla war. As such, it was a war of conquest of territory in which both armies attacked strategic points and retaliated on an irregular basis. Although, the war during this period was the longest and was marked by very critical and difficult moments in some part of the country mainly because of the involvement of external alliances such as the South African on one side and the Cubans on the other side, it was by no means as destructive as the post election war. Indeed, the 1992-94 period was probably the most difficult period for the Angolan people. The post election war has been marked by intense massive bombings and the displacements of millions of refugees and internally

displaced people. The current period which can be characterised as the post-Lusaka failed protocol since 1998 is having as well tremendous impact of people, as mentioned in the second section of the paper.

Thus, the current attitudes of Angolan women towards the thirty years conflict is unanimous, and the women's perspectives on the war has changed. Indeed, the consequences of the war has affected the population indiscriminately of their origin and political affiliation and to a great extent distorted families and family values.

The transformation of gender relations in the current context

The disintregation of families can be seen in the increasing number of female-heads of households, widows, orphans, separated family members, disabled , the increased phenomena of teenage prostitution and the increase level of illiteracy and child mortality.

The distortion of family values is seen by some women to have brought certain advantages. Women have been forced to take on additional roles and in some cases to provide for their families in the absence of men. Some women have realised the value of an education and felt the necessity to get further training. Emancipation and empowerment are often quoted as being some of the gains of the conflict and the transformation of gender roles and relations.

The 'male bread winner' ideology is no longer supported, especially for some urban based de facto female-headed households.

This goes without saying that women's new economic opportunities is starting to pose a serious cultural challenge and strain of men's income-earning capabilities. Pehrsson et al (1999:17) show evidences of 'an increase of violence against women and children due to the instability of unions and the less frequent support from (extended) family networks in the urban setting'.

One must note that the majority of women living in the rural areas or in the internally displaced camps certainly do not see any gains with the war. These women are the ones who are faced with the greatest vulnerability for having their sons and husbands taken to join the soldiers and they do not have mechanisms to have a role in ending the conflict. Rural based women who have lived in situation of forced sequestration when their villages or municipalities were under attack, witnessed a greater solidarity between them and their male comrades. For instance, the example of the sharing of division of labour is often given to show how men in time of common hardships had no problem in sharing division of labour and carrying domestic activities along with women.

The fate of the majority of rural based Angolan women is illustrated in the following case-study by (Pehrsson et al, 1999:18).

'This story is told by an internally displaced woman from Malange, a province in the North of Angola, that has had the greatest number of IDP's as a result of the war.

Sebastiana is a 32 years old woman and a mother of a 9 years old boy. She knows what war is about because she had to find her way out from Malange through the mined bush, and had to do it carrying one of her child (two years old) on her back. Now She lives in a small hut in Luanda with her child and a female friend. Sells fish for her living. Sebastiana sits in front of

her hut from early morning till sunset. The little money she gets per day (about \$ 1/day) turns every day into a complete fight for survival.

She wants every person passing by to know her sad story, she wants to be heard: when the war resumed after elections in 1992, she never thought life would be so miserable; she was a primary school teacher and the head of the family. Her husband was a soldier and died in 1990. She had to take care of the kids (then three kids - one girl and two boys).

One day the girl became sick. Sebastiana had no money to take her to the hospital and had no food to feed her, after four days the girl died. She cried a lot, she was sad but she said to herself "I still have these two and have to fight for them". Life became much harder and she had to find ways to feed the boys. So she decided to go to look for food for the kids. She was carrying the baby on her back and the four year old boy was walking. Suddenly they heard guns.

The war had started again "Oh God not again". She had nowhere to run. For sometime kept herself very quiet hold her boys very close to her. When she realised her elder boy had also been killed. Go back to where she had come from would be a serious risk. Carrying the baby on her back, she buried the body in a very shallow hole and kept on walking. She walked for days breast feeding the baby and eating anything that she could find. As she kept walking, she step on something strange. She was close to a police control post. A loud noise followed her step and she lost consciousness. She had stepped on a land mine. Sebastiana was taken to the hospital where she remained for a week with no treatment. Her leg got infected and had to be amputated. According to her, she was very lucky because the baby suffered only minor injuries and people from the near village took care of him.

After a long struggle she was taken to Luanda. The trip took one week. Now in Luanda since 1994 she managed to get a plastic prosthesis. Today, Sebastiana wishes the war to end as soon as possible because she has had enough of sufferings'.

Concluding comments

Women's role to end the conflict in Angola is a complex issue. The Angolan civil society is by far the weakest in the Southern Africa region, because of war, poverty and social disruption. However, there are numerous signs that civil society organisations may become the answer to the conflict. It seems that the general discontentment is increasing and people's actions are becoming more pro-active. Despite the heterogeneity of Angolan women as a groups, I tend to argue that there is hope for collective actions for women to organise upon peace issues.

Angolan women's role and gender relations in the thirty years of conflict is multi-faceted. On one hand, women turned heroines during the liberation struggle which strongly suggest that nationalist struggles are gendered as they involve manipulation of gender identities, symbols and gendered divisions of power, labour, and resources. On the other hand, Angolan women have been excluded from peace negotiations process and seemed to have been relegated to passive agents and victims of the process, as if the war was an "all-men's show".

It seems that Angolan men have declared that the war is their business only. Indeed, the male-dominated urban, Angolan elite is devoid of purpose beyond the illegitimate rape of the country's natural and human resources. They have no legitimate political constituency and they have presented no visible manifesto or viable strategy. For them, their reality is no way out of a very short-term situation. They live at the periphery of Angolan society -separated from ordinary Angolans by language, security guards, air-conditioning, and dual nationality.

This suggest that while the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of Angola affects the people of Angola as a whole, the context is favourable to a process of continuing marginalisation and exclusion of women.

This will continue if not enough is being done internally to place gender concerns at the centre of policies and programmes aiming at the reconstruction of Angola. As policies and programs tend to overlook women's needs that are in some cases invisible such as the psychological trauma of rape and other conflict related abuse, there is a need to examine conflict from a gender and development perspective in order to address the needs of men and women while translating a gender analysis of post-conflict situation into policy and practise (see Byrne, 1995:57) This in turn could enhance a fairer participation of women in all spheres of society while attempting to re-adjust gender relations.

The international community should tap on women's informal resources and capacity to organise to provide Angolan women with stronger mechanisms to form a coalition around peace, so that real development of the country can be made a priority.

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