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Disputed Meanings of Women's Liberation

Social Tensions and Symbolic Struggles During Angolan Independence

Fábio Baqueiro Figueiredo, 2022

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Fábio Baqueiro Figueiredo is a professor of African History at University for International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB), a federal Brazilian university created to foster Africa-Brazil academic exchanges. He is one of the editors of Afro-Asia, the older and most influential Brazilian academic journal specialized on African Studies and race relations. He is actively engaged in the ongoing institutionalization of African Studies in Brazil, both in the African History Workgroup of the Brazilian National History Association (GT-África/ANPUH), and in the Brazilian African Studies Association (ABEÁfrica). His research focuses on the relation of politics, intellectual and cultural production, and social identity in Angola, both during the nationalist struggle and after independence. In particular, he is interested in observing how formulations about nationhood, race, ethnicity, urban-rural spectrum, class, and gender – in nationalist propaganda, public education, government cultural policy, the press, scholarship, music, cinema, literature, comics – influence and are influenced by the political struggle to define the future of the nation in the making.

Figueiredo was an International Fellow at the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies from February 1 to July 31, 2021.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my colleagues at the Research Section Moralities at the Bayreuth Academy on Advanced African Studies, and at the Graduate Program of African Studies at Bahia Federal University for careful reading and commenting on the manuscript. I am greatly indebted to Maria Cristina Pinto and João Pedro Lourenço, who helped me find my ways in Luanda through this research, and also to Ermelinda Liberato and Margarida Paredes for sharing ideas and valuable insights.

This Working Paper is the outcome of research conducted within the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany´s Excellence Strategy – EXC 2052/1 – 390713894.

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Disputed Meanings of Women's Liberation

Social Tensions and Symbolic Struggles During Angolan Independence

Fábio Baqueiro Figueiredo

1 Introduction

The years around independence in Angola were marked by a proliferation of projects regarding the future society to be built after the demise of colonial rule. Not only have three different anti-colonial armed movements claimed legitimacy to govern, but also many ideological trends could be observed within and around the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the organization that ultimately secured control of the capital city by November 11, 1975, when the last Portuguese troops and civilian personnel withdrew. The black urban youth in Luanda wholeheartedly supported MPLA at first and were instrumental in expelling the rival National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) once the transitional government collapsed and skirmishes in Luanda streets prefigured the protracted civil war that ensued. However, very keen differences of perceptions

and perspectives about what independence should actually mean soon emerged between the urban youth and the MPLA historical leadership, with momentous consequences for the future of the newborn nation.

The MPLA cadres now in charge of their government found themselves amid a multifold crisis. The rival nationalist movements had been expelled from Luanda but still controlled much of the national territory; most of the whites occupying technical and managerial posts both within the State and private companies had left. In the countryside, cultivation, harvest, and outflow came to a halt; in the cities, factories and offices closed or faltered. The new rulers were left to reconcile a massive disruption of economic activity (and the sharp fall in state revenue it entailed) with the urge to deliver on their promises, such as dignified housing, sanitation, electric power supply, public transportation, health services, schools, and kindergartens. At the same time, they had to put up a national army to reclaim sovereignty over all Angolan provinces. In this context, a far-fetched discussion around unproductive uses of the body emerged in the public arena, encompassing alcohol and marijuana, dancing parties and electric guitars, platform shoes and bell-bottom pants, casual sex, and family responsibilities. The socialist-inspired "New Man" was boosted by government-aligned media as a role model for citizenship, fashioning a patriotic, unselfish, community-oriented hard worker that would follow suit with government instructions in all regards. Conversely, reprehensible behavior was embodied in the trope of the "kazucuteiro" — the alleged counter-revolutionary, petty-bourgeois saboteur, named after a satirical carnival performance, that mimicked colonists' ways.[1]

In previous research on Angolan intellectuals during guerrilla days, I have noticed how social categories mobilized to describe Angolan society, tell its history, and envision its future had both a descriptive and a normative component (F. B. Figueiredo 2012). That is to say, when Angolan intellectuals talked about race, or class, or ethnicity (the main contentious fields to the legitimacy disputes within the Nationalist circles), they were not just stating what these were and how they worked, but also what they should become, or how they should be superseded by the nation — as the inexorable result of history itself. To no surprise, a post-Enlightenment, evolutionist albeit intrinsically contradictory theory of modernization served as the underlying philosophy of history to these formulations (Chatterjee 1995; see also Mbembe 2001). More interesting for the goals of my current research is to perceive how this normative component of social categories articulates historical laws and moral injunctions, something that gains particular importance after independence, around the "New Man" and a host of associated social personae (the worker, the peasant, the student, and so on), all of which were defined by a set of moral qualities individuals

1 The "New Man" (or "New Human Being") has been part of mass politics in both rightwing and leftwing versions since the 1920s, especially in Europe (Fritzsche and Hellbeck 2009). While most scholars believe projects of the like were abandoned after World War II, recent research have shown that they persisted, in different forms, in places like Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East (Bromber and Krais 2018), in the context of decolonization, under the influence of transnational "moral Empires" such as the Scouts movement, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) or the Red Cross. Angolan "New Man" seems to have a different genealogy though, shared with other nationalist movements in Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. It can be traced back to Frantz Fanon (1963, 36) who understood the creation of a "new man" as the ultimate goal of African decolonization, and by Ernesto Che Guevara (1965), who used it to embody the human transformations which should result from, but at the same time were needed to enforce, the implementation of socialism in Cuba. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire also resorted to the "new man" (Freire 1987, 16–32) as the final term of a Hegelian oppressed-oppressor dialectics. The expression was first used by nationalists fighting Portuguese colonialism in 1970, in a speech by the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) leader Samora Machel (1973).

were expected to comply with if they wanted to qualify as legitimate actors in the making of independent Angola.

Coming from a discipline that has taken pains to distance itself from moral concerns in order to warrant its status as a social science rather than a form of literature, I must confess I do not approach the topic with a previous coherent theoretical framework on moralities or ethics. Engaging a bit in epistemological anarchism, but also drawing from canonical and counter-canonical critiques of "Western universals", I am taking moralities not as a discrete sphere of the human experience but as an analytical grid, one that concerns discourses and actions broadly related to the (social) valuation of (social) behavior, assuming that these discourses patrol the boundaries of social groups and help structure their internal arrangement. In this sense, looking at moralities *à la* Bourdieu, as a particular symbolic capital in the field of nation-building, may be productive. In order to do this, some particular features must be taken into account. First, the nation is an absolute field, in the sense that there is no "outside" for most of the agents, for obvious reasons. Second, the nation-in-the-making is constituted and intersected by every other social hierarchy that may function somewhat autonomously as fields of their own, but their intersection defines roles and categories of agents, assigning their places and credentials. Moves can be individual or collective, but the latter have more overarching effects, as they may either reinforce or challenge the criteria that simultaneously constitute the groups of agents and increase or decrease their collective moral capital, shifting the geometry of the field and in some cases creating new categories of agents or conversely making some of them irrelevant. Third, the State is not an external, neutral entity, though it may usually represent itself as such, in its claim to be the sole guardian and enforcer of the rules, in its capacity as the legitimate representative of the whole people. The State may be better conceived of as a topological space within the field, the only place from where certain special moves are possible. But it also assumes an identity as a player endowed with especial powers, especially when it engages in modernization projects that involve all-encompassing social engineering.

That was the case in Angola, where the newly independent State vowed to crush colonial-legacy hierarchies and bring about a nation of new, equal, decolonized men. In order to achieve this, it pushed to establish the social personae associated with the "New Man" semantic universe as the only category of agents admitted in the moral economy of nation-building. In the next pages, I will focus on one of the most relevant of these personae: "the Angolan woman." I will explore the changing and disputed meanings associated with the trope of "women's liberation" and the place attributed to women in public and domestic spaces, from the onset of the armed struggle up to the first years after independence. In doing so, I underline how different groups of women conceived their place in the building of the new nation, and fought for it, as well as how the State tried to "domesticate" the possibilities of women's activism as such, in symbolic as well as practical ways.

It should be stressed that concerns with gender relations, patterns, roles, and discourses in Angola have been expressed for a while now, in the work of female scholars. Breaking ground, Angolan sociologist Maria do Céu Carmo Reis (1987) called into question the representation of women in literature and nationalist discourse from the 1950s, that coded and delimited a set of symbolic functions and social spaces for women. Dutch historian Inge Brinkman (2003), dealing with witchcraft accusations in guerrilla-controlled zones in the 1970s, and, more consistently, United States historian Marissa Moorman (2008), investigating the creation of Angolan popular music

from the 1950s throughout the 1970s, brought gender to the center of their analysis. More recently, Portuguese anthropologist Margarida Paredes (2015) conducted extensive research on the participation of women in the military, both during the armed struggle (1961–1974) and the civil war (1974–2002).

This paper seeks to dialogue with the propositions of this small but fundamental bibliographical corpus, as it moves through a set of historical sources marked for its diversity as well as for its partiality. Due to their archival history and conditions of production, the sources used here tend to disproportionately convey MPLA and MPLA-affiliated Organization of Angolan Women (OMA) points of view, lending these entities a centrality they probably did not enjoy to such a great extent in the daily lives of most Angolan women — even for the ones living in Luanda, closer to the political center of the newborn country. This is the case for internal documents and public manifestations of both organizations, but also for the press, especially *Jornal de Angola*, which served as a regular newspaper but also as a sort of government mouthpiece, its news reporting being strictly aligned with the MPLA leadership political line. Yet, in the deaf counterpoint of official and unofficial voices, divergent stances and discourses can be inferred. It is by way of this counter-reading that I try to pinpoint the tensions and disputes I mention in the title, assuming the risk (inherent in the writing of all social history) that most of the collective experience that I seek to understand remains inexorably beyond reach from the sources that are available to us.

2 Women and Nationalism

In 1961, when the MPLA published its Major Program, provisions aimed explicitly at Angolan women were included in the chapter on Justice and Progress Social Policies. The independent nation was to be guided by “total equality of rights without distinction of sex on all levels — political, economic, social and cultural.” The authors believed it was important to insist that “women should have strictly the same rights as men.” They also proposed “State assistance to women during pregnancy and childhood,” and, here and there, the expression “without distinction of sex” appeared whenever rights to which all future citizens should be entitled were specified (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola 2008, vol. 1, p. 496). In the following year, the movement informed its militants not only of the need to “rapidly engage Angolan women” in the fields of “social and health assistance” and “schooling” but also of “political-military framing and participation in the governing bodies” and “political and technical training” (Lara 2006, vol. 2, p. 526–531). In the following year, the movement informed its militants not only of the need to “rapidly engage Angolan women” on the fields of “social and health assistance” and “schooling” but also of “political-military framing and participation in the governing bodies” and “political and technical training.” Shortly, the newly founded OMA would urge countrywomen to join to contribute “simultaneously to the struggle for Angola's independence and our liberation.” The latter would depend on the “establishment of a society in which Angolan women are in an equal position in the nation's life” and no longer “referred to the lower social scale” by colonialist oppression (Lara 2006, vol. 2, p. 536).[2]

2 A history of the OMA is yet to be written. Official accounts stress continuity from its creation in Leopoldville around 1962 up to current times. However, a more critical appraisal of the available sources suggests at least three very

The creation of "mass organizations" to foster support among women, students, and workers was a standard strategy of left-leaning political parties since the Bolshevik Revolution. However, it is possible to distinguish the outline of an autonomous agenda and an independent strategy from the first OMA documents, such as the organization chart and structuring principles, written in Brazzaville, in 1965. Traces of an internal debate whether the organization should remain independent or merge with MPLA are noticeable. While the affiliation was inevitable due to the characteristic segmentation of Angolan nationalism and to the overlapping sociability networks of OMA and MPLA founders, it was nevertheless justified in programmatic terms:

> OMA fights alongside MPLA because the victory of the Angolan woman's fight depends on fulfilling the principles enunciated in the MPLA program. MPLA is, in fact, the only Angolan organization that defends in its program the right of women to participate in the solution of the country's problems, in both the struggle for national independence and the struggle for the construction of Angola, in the full equality of rights with men (ATD d3182.OrgEstrtOMA.6510-11).

Established by women with mostly urban livingness and often with study and work experience in other countries, OMA soon realized the need to reach out to a different audience that continuously crossed the borders into both Congos to escape Portuguese brutal counterinsurgency measures. If the "women's liberation" trope was enough to communicate with women from the cities, a conscious effort was necessary to win the rural female public over to the cause. However, once those women joined the OMA, they would find "the most efficient means to liberate themselves and be useful to our country" (ATD d3182.OrgEstrtOMA.6510-11).

The OMA founders dreamed of reaching every small village throughout Angola. This responded to the urge to set up local networks to assist the guerrillas that MPLA intended to infiltrate in the interior. During a seminar held in October–November 1965, the participation of Vietnamese women in the anti-colonial war was presented as a case study, illustrating the tasks women were expected to assume in Angola:

> Young women took part in battles, joined the regular army the same as men, and did internal work, such as making sandals, looking for good water to drink, transporting and healing the wounded, growing and preparing food for the guerrillas, encouraging guerrillas who had personal difficulties. (…) When men left for the *maquis*, women took care of production for the guerrillas, the elderly, and children in the villages. They took care of the sick whom they helped with firewood, food, etc. (ATD d3372.ProgOMA.6510-11).

Vietnamese first aid teams, composed almost exclusively of women, were also evoked:

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different phases. The formal constitution in Léopoldville in 1962 seems to have been inconsequential. The first moves to organize beyond a small circle started in Brazzaville, in 1965; these came to a halt in the following year due to the death of some of its main articulators. The second phase follows a clean restart in Dar es Salaam, in the early 1970s, in touch with international women movements. It is only during the third phase, after its arrival at Luanda in 1975 and its subsequent implantation throughout Angola, that OMA assumes the features that would come to characterize it more lastingly.

> During aerial attacks, they risk their own lives to tend to wounded guerrillas and civilians and use every spare moment to transport ammunition to guerrillas. After the enemy planes are gone, they cook and wash the guerrillas' clothes (ATD d3372.ProgOMA.6510-11).

OMA's militants were supposed to engage in grassroots mobilization and enhance their fellow villagers' political consciousness. They were also urged to work in social assistance, visiting hospitals, nursing homes, and schools, and waging "war against flies." They should take care of "sewing, patching, washing and ironing" guerrillas' uniforms, dedicate themselves to crafts, making "baskets, mats, clay pots, lace, hats, etc.," beyond providing food: "crops, gardens, livestock, milk" (ATD d3372.ProgOMA.6510-11). Besides, the seminar featured conversations on the body, food, and house hygiene, first aid, childcare, and child health, attesting to a sanitary concern that would mark the organization's trajectory over the following decades (ATD d3373.DoctoHigieneCorp.651010-1107; d3374.HigAlimtr.6510-11; d3375.HigHabitacoes. 6510-11; d3376.PrimSocorros. 6510-11; d3377.SaudePuericult.6510-11; d3378.Puericultura. 6510-11).

These examples allow us to infer that the practical needs of OMA's adherence to MPLA ended up boosting an understanding of primary female roles as ones of care, help, and encouragement of men, who remained the symbolic agents of the (military) work of national liberation. Nonetheless, there seemed to be a quite keen awareness of the political weight an OMA could attain if it achieved the massive enrollment and territorial spread intended. Also, equitable occupation of spaces in the public arena was already conceived as a way to keep women's problems in the spotlight and ensure that they were taken into account in political decisions at various levels (ATD d3182.OrgEstrtOMA.6510-11).

MPLA did provide for the inclusion of women as a specific public in several areas of its activity, before and after the independence. Undoubtedly, the role of many women within the movement — and in particular those who had acquired new skills in technical or university training in socialist countries, and who "drove trucks, worked in logistics and telecommunications, transported hidden arms, fed and hid soldiers, worked as spies, and fought in the armed struggle" — strained the dominant conceptions about masculinity and femininity and "produced new gendered dynamics in the maquis" (Moorman 2016, pp. 193–194). Prime among them and essential for the development of later symbolic struggles, was Deolinda Rodrigues, one of OMA founders and the first woman to be appointed to MPLA's Steering Committee, in May 1962. Deolinda stood for involving women in combat actions and was part of the first group of women to receive military training. In January 1966, she was assigned to Convoy Kamy, setting Angola to an ill-fated supply mission, resulting in the arrest and subsequent death by firing squad of Deolinda and four other female guerrillas (Paredes 2015; Paredes 2019).

About the place of women in the liberation struggle, it is noteworthy how OMA's narrative about its own history, written some years after independence (and regardless of its empirical fidelity), is construed around an articulation of two distinct scopes of female experience:

> OMA started to develop a large mobilization campaign (...) to engage women in the tasks of health and education organs within the movement (...). Thus, nursing

> assistants were trained, education was provided for many Angolan children not allowed in Congolese schools, and political courses were promoted, which helped enhance our militants' skills.
>
> (…) With the development of the national liberation struggle, Angolan women began to operate as guerrillas, arms in hand, thus contributing to the country's independence (Organização da Mulher Angolana 1978).

This articulated tension between roles traditionally conceived as male and female was a constant during the guerrilla war. Aside from the noticeable number of women fighting in the woods, sent for university schooling abroad, or in charge of political positions, the female work within MPLA during the liberation struggle was predominantly linked to social services and logistic support. Women served as nurses, rescuers, or teachers and worked the fields that supported the militants and refugees in the borders where the movement had its main bases. In this sense, the formal equality championed in the official documents provided some leeway for women within the nationalist organization. Still, it was not enough to craft new gender roles in Angolan society's microcosm unfolding in Congo-Brazzaville, Zambia, or in the Eastern Front bush — spaces where the sexual division of labor previously in force was, to a great extent, maintained (Paredes 2015, p. 209; see also: Reis 1987).

In a more intimate level of experience, the MPLA military hierarchy sought to preside over sexual intercourse and marriages between guerrillas and between guerrillas and civilians, at least in the Eastern Front. Some reports seem to indicate a degree of interference over sexual and affection practices of the rural populations living in the zones controlled by the movement, such as the repression of arranged marriages and material retribution to a family in exchange for sexual favors provided by one of its single women. That did not stop some male military commanders from requesting such favors from their female subordinates, with no other retribution than the purported honor of having been picked (Paredes 2015, pp. 209–210). In other cases, commanders sought to advise their male underlings on the accepted ways to relate to women in villages. They tried to repress polygamy or out-of-wedlock sexual intercourse in a bid to "shape male sexuality and craft a new masculinity that (…) was sexually disciplined, monogamous, educated, politically conscious, and obedient to movement authority" (Moorman 2016, p. 196).

In regions under its control, the MPLA sought to posit itself as the only legitimate authority to sanction marriage — and by extension, sex and family formation.[3] Unions between guerrillas, often physically removed from their kinship networks, granted the movement's bureaucracy the perfect opportunity to replace the customary social mediation and exercise statehood. Moreover, these marriages represented national unity in the making, especially when crossing regional, ethnic, or religious lines. On the contrary, the unions of male soldiers to civilian women were celebrated to the detriment of other men, specifically the bride's older male relatives. These men were forced to relinquish their authority to negotiate weddings, and their material and symbolic

3 At least one intervention in a case of domestic violence has been recorded, also in the Eastern Front. In June 1970, a male cadre was formally reprimanded by MPLA's Steering Committee for "committing physical violence against his wife", something that was "absolutely forbidden by the Combatants' Disciplinary Regulations and contrary to revolutionary ethics" (ATD d5190.OrdemServiCarreira.700601).

compensation usually required to yield one of the women in their family. That contributed to the emergence of conflicts between different forms of masculinity in the maquis. However, it did not challenge the male prominence in seeking, initiating, formalizing, and regulating sexual relationships (Moorman 2016, pp. 193–197). Part of these conflicts, especially concerning the control over women and their sexual and affective choices, took the form of witchcraft and treason accusations (Brinkman 2003, pp. 321–322).

The OMA was being rebuilt around the same time after some inactive years. Counting on the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) support, a seminar was held in the Eastern Front in 1971 (Organização da Mulher Angolana 1978). Soon after, the organization opened a representation at Dar es Salaam. The OMA began to send delegates to international African and Afro-Asian solidarity meetings and launched a quarterly newsletter, in French and English, to publicize its actions and garner international support. The flagship project was the construction of a Deolinda Rodrigues Center, dedicated to female staff training to be later sent to work in the areas controlled by the MPLA in the countryside. Besides these outward-looking activities, a second seminar held in 1972 discussed the organization's goals. Among such, unsurprisingly, were the "involvement of women in the armed struggle for national liberation" and the "cultural and social education of women." The novelty was the topic "Angolan women from tradition to revolution" heading the list (Organização da Mulher Angolana 1972).

It is true that since 1965 the OMA had already dealt with issues that would later be encompassed by the semantic universe of "tradition," such as polygamy or exclusive female responsibility for agricultural work. The oppression felt by Angolan women was, at that early stage, understood in intertwined keys: in their condition as exploited workers and their situation of discriminated (black) women. However, one can observe an explicit discursive subordination of gender and race to class discrimination. The demoting of women was shaped by the evolutionary succession of historical phases characteristic of the vulgar Marxism in vogue back then: primitive society, slavery, colonialism, and capitalism — all were held responsible to some extent. The term "traditional" was associated with the "primitive society," remitted to the past immemorial, but also considered to be still in place, to a given extent, in some regions of rural Angola. In the urban milieu, deemed more "contemporary," occupational discrimination and wage differences in the labor market were seen as a result of structural inequalities in schooling and professional qualification between men and women, exacerbated by colonial exploitation's unfair conditions. It follows that this inequality would be easily overcome with the fulfillment of the MPLA's nationalist program and that women's real enemy was the mentality of each historical stage — not men. While it was still necessary for women themselves to look after their inclusion, external obstacles would no longer be present once independence was achieved (ATD d3369.EvolHistMulher.6510-11; d3370.EvolHistMulher.6510-11; d3371.PapelMulher. 6510-11).

In the half-decade that followed these first formulations, sexuality control and conjugal mores, linked to social reproduction and women's role in it, started gaining practical and symbolic relevance for the liberation struggle. Such topics eventually became crucial to a broader public debate on national culture construction based on the local, peasant, and popular cultures (seen as "tradition"). Thus, within MPLA-related nationalist discourse, "women liberation" progressively

had its semantic outlines delimited by a contrasting relationship with two other nuclei of meaning: "colonization" and "tradition."

Inge Brinkman describes a formal MPLA discourse depicting tradition as the "'the old world', oppressive for women, and filled with dictatorial chiefs installed by colonialism, as well as 'foolish witchdoctors' with ineffective magic". The sources that support this claim were all produced between 1969 and 1972, notably a 1970 discourse by MPLA leader Agostinho Neto, defining the nationalist task in Angola as to "free and modernize our people by a dual revolution — against their traditional structures which can no longer serve them, and against colonial rule" (Brinkman 2003, p. 307). It may well be the case that these sources mark "tradition's" inflection from a fundamentally positive to a negative value. The nativist imagination from the 1940s and 1950s concerning the primordial sources of culture and identity lost its traction, as "tradition" was now experienced as rural livelihoods that the MPLA leadership struggled to cope with over the 1960s. In the meantime, the movement was also dealing with the arrival of a flock of military, technical, and university cadres trained abroad, mostly in socialist countries, imbued with a universalist modernizing eagerness often conveyed by the adjective "progressive." Conflicts arose from the differences between who peasant Angolans should be and who they actually were, being later repackaged by an understanding of tradition as the venue for "superstition" and "obscurantism."[4]

These developments shaped a particular approach to gender and women's liberation that found its way into official discourses built jointly by men and women who shared very similar cosmopolitan backgrounds, characterized by an inside–outside–inside movement. However different the departing points and initiatory pathways abroad might be (Luanda, Benguela, Huambo, or the Northern rural zones, and then Lisbon, Paris, London, Frankfurt, Washington, or Prague, Moscow, Peking, Havana, or even Algiers, Rabat, Cairo, Conakry), the arrival was always at the Eastern bush and its rural societies. These called for new reflections on nation-building, and the necessary social and cultural engineering — including gender patterns. However, deep down in the woods or working beyond the borders, these women and men had no clue of the momentous changes that were taking place in the Angolan capital, where another kind of cosmopolitanism was gaining ground, along with new trends in social relations in general, and gender roles in particular (Moorman 2016, p. 187).

3 Women and Late Colonialism

The Portuguese responded to the challenge posed by the 1961 uprisings with a double move: military repression and economic development (Bender 2013, pp. 281–347; Pélissier and Wheeler 2011, pp. 327–336; Bittencourt 2008, vol. 1, pp. 52–58). The main legislative change was

4 Far from being anomalous, generalizing historicist interpretations that assumed the subordination of women instead of examining their social, economic and political roles have long marked African and Africanist historiography. "Tradition" could be rendered in two opposite ways in these writings: as a golden era of complementary, harmonious gender roles, or as the ground zero of utter oppression (Zeleza 1997). In Angola, as we will see, "tradition" gained a marked ambivalence as the former rendering subsisted, related to a domestic universe, under the general public dominance of the latter.

the end of statutory discrimination between "citizens," "natives," and "assimilated." Although the social and racial distinctions that loosely corresponded to these categories kept orienting daily social interactions and administrative practice, a range of new opportunities opened for the majority of the Angolan population. Another significant by-product of the metropolitan response was the increase in formal schooling, reinforcing a trend that started in the 1950s when three new lyceums (one of them female-only) and two professional schools were added to the two lyceums already functioning. Before the end of 1961, a plan to open official elementary schools in the countryside was unveiled. It served as a trial balloon for a reform approved in 1964, which instituted free, compulsory elementary schooling in all Portuguese colonial territories. Also, in 1963 the University General Studies (later University of Luanda) opened its first classes (Liberato 2014, pp. 1010–1013; Neto 2014, pp. 173–174; L. Figueiredo 2011; see also Messiant 1989; MPLA-PT 1978).

While these measures intended to disseminate ideals of "Portugality," their practical effects included a boom in enrollment and a change in classroom demographics. Even though the number of vacancies remained remarkably short of demand, and the percentage of black students declined as education levels rose, in time, these changes resulted in increased participation of the urban non-white population in a vigorously expanding, although not entirely stable, formal labor market. In Luanda, the existence of a female-only lyceum indicates that young women gradually took part in the available clerk positions throughout the 1960s and in the early 1970s.

The extent of the transformations experienced over this timespan can be inferred from the employment patterns of the non-white population, especially males. Although job stability remained uncommon throughout the period, in the 1950s, most men worked as servants, dockers, and railroad porters, in the less qualified functions of commerce, or as artisans and apprentices. At the beginning of the 1970s, a sample survey in *musseques* (peripheral neighborhoods with precarious urbanization, home to the mostly black most impoverished strata) found only 10% of the heads of families unemployed. Most had jobs in the private sector (with lower wages and a higher risk of dismissal than in the public sector). There was also an increase of tailors, mechanics, barbers, carpenters, and watchmakers, who had their own workshops and often hired helpers. Women, at both points of the temporal range, worked mostly as washerwomen and greengrocers (Moorman 2008, pp. 34–36; Messiant 1989, pp. 132–141). However, in 1968 Portuguese sociologist Ilídio do Amaral found that although almost 80% of employed women in Luanda did work in "personal and other services" or in "commercial activities," about 7% were in the public sector, and a similar number found jobs in the factories installed on the outskirts of the city. Moreover, among women employed in commerce (almost one-quarter of the total) and alongside the probable majority of greengrocers, a small portion could be working in offices or stores in consolidated central neighborhoods (Amaral 2015).[5] The insertion in the labor market was, on

5 Ilídio do Amaral (2015 [1968], p. 94) gives around 27,000 women and 81,500 men as the economically active population in Luanda, an approximate ratio of 1:3. His data refers to the whole population, irrespective of race. Other data presented in this paragraph refer either to *musseque* households or to people considered not civilized or not white. *Musseque* residents and non-white population are overlapping but otherwise very different cohorts — 75% of Luanda residents in 1960 were black or mixed-race, but only one third lived in *musseques* in 1964 (Amaral 2015, pp. 82, 85–91). In any case, taken as rough estimates, these numbers suffice to support the point made here concerning occupation patterns.

the other hand, mediated by a set of social prejudices that affected the least able to appropriate the codes of conduct required by employers, and low schooling remained one of the biggest obstacles to the aspirations of the majority of citizens (Moorman 2008, pp. 35–36; Amaral 2015, pp. 91–96).

In themselves, the aspirations were important, and the marginal improvement of living conditions verified in the last years of colonialism induced intense and creative outcomes. Unequally distributed as the economic surpluses were, *musseque* residents "developed common desires about how to spend their free time and escape the poor material conditions that continued to characterize their neighborhoods," which moved them closer to an idea of "Angolanness" and away from the colonial state (Moorman 2008, p. 90). The emergence of a vibrant cultural scene around semba throughout the 1960s gave the residents of Luanda's peripheries a certain degree of "cultural sovereignty" that allowed them to imagine a future nation (Moorman 2008, p. 80).[6]

That put into place another kind of cosmopolitanism, mixing up musical influences from rural Angola with influxes of the global boom of Atlantic black culture, filtered through Congolese radio stations. Electric instruments and Afro-American musical hues combined with certain ways of dressing and hairstyles inaugurated new definitions of leisure that encompassed consumption patterns, the collective enjoyment of free time beyond the extended family, as well as non-productive uses of the body (some public, others not so much), in a context where work, in one way or another, was synonymous with colonial exploitation. There was certainly room to defy dominant gender roles in this frenzied ambiance, even though the ensembles were mostly male. The attendance at nightclubs represented an ambivalent space for women, implying both freedom and risk (Moorman 2008, pp. 81–109).

Angolan musician David Zé captured an aspect of this ambivalence in an early-1970s great hit, in which he admonishes a recalcitrant mother:

Eye u manji	You mother
Wa vualele o monanga	Who gave birth to this child
O muimbo koka paleye	This music is for you
Mona muxisa kubata	You leave the child back home
Weza mukina kizomba kye	Come dance your kizomba
Mukuvutuka kumakwake	Only go back when the sun rises
Amba kweza je conjunto	Now that her band has arrived
Kumwiva:	She says:
"chê, ninguém me aguenta!	"hey, no one can stand me!
Meu namorado é do conjunto"	My boyfriend is in the band"
Mona kubata yudila hanji	The child is crying back home

6 According to Moorman (2008, pp. 7–10), the word *semba* can refer both to the musical rhythm and to the broader movement that gave birth to a characteristically Angolan popular music. Its origin dates back to a nativist impulse that emerged in Luanda in the second half of the 1940s, and had its first major expression in the Ngola Ritmos ensemble (see also: Ole 1978).

Mweneze udinanza:	Then she boasts:
"Meu namorado é um artista,	"My boyfriend is an artist
Terça está no Kudissanga,	On Tuesday he's at Kudissanga,
Sábado é no Desportivo	On Saturday he's at Desportivo
E no domingo	And on Sunday,
vamos dar o show"	we're gonna give the show"
Maka ma Sofia	Trouble with Sofia
O moma maka	Look at that trouble
man Bernardo	with Bernardo
Mona muxisa kubata	You leave the child back home
Uia ukina kizomba kye	Go dance your kizomba[7]

Though moralizing, at first sight, the singing performance and the sensual dancing musical arrangement point in another direction. The lyrics portray (from a male viewpoint) a social type observed in nightclubs — the "band girlfriend," as stated in the song title — as a woman who does not fit into the role of a "mother." The reference to one only child suggests youth. Since the child-rearing responsibilities she refuses to assume would not fall on the father, but rather on other women in her extended family, there is no way to state whether she lives with him. She is likely not engaged, as she gets involved in altercations suggesting an aggressive role in the competitive dating pool that marked Luanda nightlife. Moorman notes that having many girlfriends was a significant measure of a musician's notoriety. Apparently, it was commonplace to invite more than one girlfriend to a show, inducing disputes that were seen (by men) not as an inconvenience but rather as part of an agitated, vibrant, and probably somewhat subversive scene (Moorman 2008, pp. 98–99). There is no reason to think that this kind of relationship was private to musicians, which points to a broader spread of weakly regulated relationships, not necessarily exclusive, with varying duration and intensity.

The emergence of laxer patterns of sexuality in the environment surrounding the Angolan music scene might be met with reservations in other social ambiances. For women, evading parental oversight and intermittently suspending social expectations over the exercise of their affections and sexuality could be one of the main reasons to join the *kizomba*. However, for their older relatives, nightclubs' attendance jeopardized the family social capital in a market of matrimonial alliances guided by stricter gender patterns. Sexually proactive female behaviors were patently inadequate to the most valued models of a wife-to-be. Risks involved the association of nightclubs with prostitution or even the complication of early pregnancy (Moorman 2008, pp. 101–108). The relative value of this capital fluctuated according to race and income — we can assume that matrimonial alliances were not readily available as an upward social strategy for newly-arrived

7 David Zé, ca.1972 (available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVnFrfjeTlA). Lyrics are in Kimbundu, with interspersed Portuguese phrases. I am indebted to my colleagues and students at UNILAB who helped to transcribe and translate the song — remaining inaccuracies are my responsibility only. *Kizomba* was not the name, then, of a particular musical rhythm, but simply the Kimbundu word for "playing", "dancing" or "merriment", with a generic sense of "fun". *Kudissanga Kwamakamba* ("meeting with friends", in Kimbundu) and *União Desportivo de São Paulo* (São Paulo Sports Union) were two of the nightclubs where *semba* ensembles used to play.

rural families and highly relevant for long-established mixed-race and black "assimilated" households. An out-of-wedlock pregnancy did not necessarily prevent, as David Zé showed, intense and continued participation in *kizomba*.

Another group of people concerned with Angolan youth's moral shortcomings was that of the Portuguese colonial authorities. In a lengthy confidential report written in February 1974, Portuguese officials analyzed (with a great deal of perplexity, but not without some sociological sense) the threats to the perpetuation of Portuguese sovereignty represented by a "state of mind of non-conformity and consequent opposition, on the part of the youth, to the world and mentality of adults." Although blaming external influences conveyed by the press and the movies, the authors did point out endogenous reasons, and leading among them the "crisis experienced by the institution of family, especially its inability to frame young people from adolescence." Other converging factors were the spread of hedonistic consumption habits, a fragile moral and civic formation, the widening gap between the Catholic Church and the people, and the covert nationalist propaganda (ANTT SCCIA 006, book 188). This report seems to indicate that the rules governing gender relations, especially concerning sex, marriage, and family arrangements (and therefore social reproduction), were getting loose at large, beyond *semba*'s immediate ecosystem.

The report stated that "external influences" impacted more powerfully on the more educated and more affluent urban strata, among which whites were vastly over-represented. It is not by chance that the white youth and university students were highlighted as two specific groups to be closely supervised. Younger white women had benefited greatly from the new educational opportunities. They probably enjoyed a greater chance to be hired for jobs in schools, bureaus, and offices — although, in the wealthier families, this was not a necessity and could even be seen as a little bit degrading. It is impossible to know precisely how this particular group of women experienced this relative slackening of gender patterns. More likely, the accumulated racial, educational, and financial capital lent some of them a greater leeway regarding their fruition of free time, affections, and sexual choices, even exempting them from the obligation of marriage. Others could have undergone a far tighter control from their parents or have had their moves restrained by their lack of familiarity with the *musseques* and the Angolan culture nurtured there.

In any case, two months upon the completion of the report, the perspectives of regaining the youth for the Portuguese colonial project faded under loads of carnations in Lisbon streets. The demise of the dictatorship in Portugal inaugurated an extremely hectic period in Angola, full of uncertainty and violence, but also of hope, euphoria, and fresh possibilities. Luanda's urban youth, which enthusiastically took sides with the MPLA, could finally be reunited with the movement's cadres, who arrived from the bush after ten, eleven, or more years of exile. Convergences and divergences of this encounter shaped a revolutionary phase that lasted from April 1974 to May 1977, when everything seemed to be hanging by a thread. At the same time, every transformation seemed possible and for today. In this whirlwind of history, "women's liberation" jumped to the center of public debate.

4 Women and Revolution

After the Carnation Revolution, an array of social and political groupings in Luanda set in motion mobilization and negotiation strategies to boost their agendas and help shape the territory's political future. Complete independence under a majority government was not guaranteed at first. Still, it was secured by an agreement, in the form of a transitional government, involving the Portuguese military and the three major liberation movements. With the government's subsequent implosion and an open war between nationalist organizations, the MPLA ensured control of Luanda (and almost nothing else) on the date stipulated for independence, proclaiming a People's Republic of Angola that progressively achieved international recognition (MacQueen 1998, pp. 91–127, 195–246; Pinto 2001, pp. 65–83; Tali 2001, vol. 2, pp. 101–147; Bittencourt 2008, vol. 2, pp. 153–272; Gleijeses 2002, pp. 230–327; Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola 2008, vol. 2, pp. 143–254).

Throughout this period, Luanda's urban youth actively engaged in the political process, acting almost always on behalf of MPLA, but often without any coordination or even contact with its leadership. The main fields of activity were around schools and *musseques*, and were articulated with unionization efforts of seaport dockers, truck drivers and railroad porters. The student movement and the teachers' unions gained prominence due to their intense and creative opposition to the UNITA-appointed transitional minister of education. Student strikes paralyzed the school year demanding immediate reform of curricula and exams, freedom of speech, and democratization of school management. Also, adult literacy initiatives began to sprout in factories on the outskirts of the city. In the *musseques*, residents had to organize themselves to contain the possibility of massacres staged by white militias, such as those that had occurred in 1961. Indeed, in June 1974, the murder of a white taxi driver was followed by armed raids on *musseques* that left an estimated 200 dead. Students living in peripheral neighborhoods, who were already the majority in both mixed-gender lyceums and especially in professional schools, often served as liaisons between these two universes. When the official MPLA delegation finally made it to Luanda, they found the city taken over by “People's Power”: a self-managed melting pot structured by a web of revolutionary cells that was progressively taking charge of the daily matters in neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces, acting on the movement's behalf but not necessarily according to its guidance (L. Figueiredo 2011; Tali 2001, vol. 2, pp. 45–95).

Young women in Luanda found themselves within a space where social pressures for compliance with previously hegemonic gender roles could be promptly dismissed in revolutionary wording so that their participation in public space met much less resistance.[8] The female-only lyceum played a catalytic role in this process, both in practical and symbolic terms. Although most of its 2,000 students came from the highest social strata, it was occupied in July 1974 and started to serve as a headquarters for the whole Luanda student movement — including the students of professional schools, of significantly more popular attendance (L. Figueiredo 2011, pp. 28–32).

8 Literature related to the global sexual revolution in course — especially Wilhelm Reich's writings, which conceived sexual repression as a capitalist control device and portrayed the free enjoyment of sexual pleasure as an instrument of class emancipation — circulated among students (L. Figueiredo 2011, 82–83), though it is impossible to ascertain how widely.

Like many other urban landmarks, the lyceum was rechristened at the initiative of the students themselves. A Portuguese queen gave way to an African one, Nzinga Mbandi — an undeniable Angolan national heroine, who, probably not by chance, did not fit into a pattern of subordinate femininity linked to family and the condition of wife and mother.

As a topic of debate, women emerged in the Luanda press even before independence. The United Nations had proclaimed 1975 as the International Women's Year. From 19 June to 2 July, 133 delegations drew up an action program in Mexico City to eliminate discrimination against women and promote their social advancement. In October, *Diário de Luanda* echoed a United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) white paper, which addressed the particular conditions of women on the continent and intended to guide governments in implementing a set of suggested policies. Under the provocative title "African women accumulate economic tasks and social functions," the article stressed that most economic activities in Africa depended on women's labor, yet that was not acknowledged "by a society where men make the law." The lack of government policies aimed at women throughout the continent was noted, and the overlapping of economic and social tasks, particularly the exclusive female responsibility for raising children, in the context of large families. The newspaper defended all African states' need to commit to a minimum set of measures, such as "maternity leave, job protection, creation of daycare centers, eliminating discrimination in employment against young and fertile women, and health services aimed especially at women and children" (*Diário de Luanda*, 1 October 1975, p. 16).

Once in government, MPLA acted twofold: revamping family law and boosting OMA branches' inauguration throughout the territory under its control. As for the former, changes started soon. In the Provisional Government Fundamental Law, enacted in June 1975, some clauses equaled the rights of "legitimate and illegitimate children," established the state's duty to protect both "the family" and "the single mother," in addition to specifying absolute equality of rights between men and women "in the fields of private, political, economic and social life," adding that "for equal work, women are entitled to the same payment as men" (Angola 1975a, articles 28–29). Interestingly enough, the Constitutional Law of the People's Republic of Angola, in force since 11 November 1975, lacked specific provisions on women's rights. Exceptions were the prohibition of discrimination of "color, race, ethnicity, sex, place of birth, religion, education level, social condition or income," and the entitlement of all citizens to "assistance in childhood, motherhood, disability, old age and any incapability for work" (Angola 1975b, articles 18, 27). Yet, a bit later, divorce for religious marriages became legal, and the civil registry was revamped, depriving the Catholic Church of the notary powers it had enjoyed so far (Angola. Conselho da Revolução 1976; Angola. Conselho da Revolução 1977). The statute provided full equal rights between legitimate and natural children, banning the record and disclosure of the quality of legitimate and illegitimate child, and suppressing the designations "father unknown" or "mother unknown." Paternity and maternity declarations could be made together or separately, regardless of the parents' marital status. The child's name could be formed with up to two forenames and up to two surnames belonging to the family of the mother, father, or both.

Despite limited practical consequences, these legislative changes were significant symbolically, especially for mixed-race families in Luanda. The justifications presented along the laws spoke of "moral mystification and injustice," as well as "vexatious situations between citizens of the same country" and "major social problems." Indeed, the image of a settler grabbing a black female body for his enjoyment, through raw brutality or imbalance of economic capacity, was repeatedly used

in literary works as a metonym for colonial oppression. It is also noteworthy that, since the 1940s, scholarship in Angola linked poverty, delinquency, prostitution, and general immorality in *musseques* with the offspring of informal unions of Portuguese men and African women, excluded from inheritance and devoid of upward mobility opportunities because of their illegitimate status (Moorman 2008, pp. 48–51). Regardless of these representations' sociological accuracy, the changes in family law were probably felt by an important part of Luanda society's middle strata as a significant reckoning with hypocritical colonial morality standards.

The structuring of the OMA had, on its part, a much more comprehensive, profound, and lasting impact. Having been taken to accept People's Power as a constitutive principle of the new order, the MPLA leadership saw the OMA as instrumental in its efforts to constrain the revolutionary enthusiasm that inspired it, alongside with its juvenile mass organization, the MPLA Youth (JMPLA), and a range of new grassroots organs — such as neighborhood commissions, the place action committees and the Organization of Popular Self-Defense (ODP) — which sought to better organize, supervise and, whenever possible, control the small groups, cells and spontaneous self-managed initiatives that had bloomed over the wrecks of the colonial order. Thus, as the first OMA Regional Seminar in Luanda was being prepared, chairwoman Luísa Inglês took to the press and introduced a tension that would dominate much of the subsequent debate:

> Misinterpretations of women's liberation, the petty-bourgeois conception that the OMA is for the less educated strata, and even the counter-revolutionary propaganda that certain individuals launch in our midst, are some of the reasons why many comrades abandon the Organization of Angolan Women. It turns out that most of the women in the city do not participate in the struggle, in the Revolution, interpreting their own emancipation in their own way, forgetting that the liberation of women involves destroying the exploitation system (*Diário de Luanda*, 4 December 1975, p. 15).

Organized at the end of that same month, the seminar brought into Luanda that corpus of representations that had been developed in the maquis, based on an evolutionist conception of history according to which a succession of phases, from primitive communism to colonialism, had generated in Angola a three-layered class division: the white bourgeoisie, the black bourgeoisie, and the exploited (peasants and workers), as well as an oppressive sexual division of labor (*Diário de Luanda*, 27 December 1975, pp. 3, 5; see also 29 December 1975, p. 7). Such rationale supported the thesis, later repeated until exhaustion, that many women — especially urban young women — were either misled about the meaning of women's liberation or opportunistically using the concept to justify licentious behavior and a petty-bourgeois way of life.

The OMA leadership, mostly Protestant and conformed by the rural guerrilla daily life of the Eastern Front, distrusted urban women due to the belief that those women had not engaged in the struggle (and "struggle," in this context, had a strong military component, which overstressed discipline and ethics of ordeal). In the face of that, to get a chance to have their voices properly heard, women living in the cities had to claim very particular credentials, as illustrated by this editorial in *Diário de Luanda*:

> while on the fronts, many Angolan women suffered the harshness and hardships of war directly, in the cities, other women were repressed because of family ties with patriots devoted to the national cause. Nor should it be forgotten that many women, whose husbands were in hiding or in colonial jails, had to take over as head of their respective households (so many times quite numerous) and its maintenance — these Angolan women are owed, in fact, as warm a tribute as all the others whose part in the liberation struggle was more direct (*Diário de Luanda*, 29 December 1975, p. 3).

Necessary as it was to underline their capacity as wives and mothers of the male protagonists of liberation to ascertain their legitimacy as interlocutors, Luanda women nevertheless did get to convey their demands and proposals, which found their way into the seminars' final resolutions. While, before the meeting, Luísa Inglês posited OMA in the vanguard of the fight against "superstition" and "witchcraft" (that is, popular "traditional" healing practices in conflict with "progressive" hygienist worries), the final document pointed to another set of concerns. The focus was on double shifts imposed upon women and the sexual division of housework, singled out as the main obstacle to their engagement in national reconstruction. They proposed a working group where experts should join OMA and government deputies to create a collectivization project for domestic tasks, which should involve the establishment of "public, collective laundries," "common dining halls," "daycare centers, and other collective benefits." These should be matched by measures of "enlightenment and education," as these efforts would be to no avail unless "conjugal cooperation" was addressed. Men should commit to "watching and tending to children" and take part in "some of the household chores, considered as a woman's exclusive domain" (*Diário de Luanda*, 29 December 1975, p. 14).

Very few mentions of women, their organization efforts, or women's liberation could be read in the Luanda press throughout the following year.[9] In 1973, the OMA had proposed to commemorate every 2 March as the Angolan Women's Day to honor the imprisonment of Deolinda Rodrigues and her sisters in arms. Still, there is no record of specific celebrations or public statements around the date in 1976, except for some commemorative posters (Organização da Mulher Angolana 1973; Associação Tchiweka de Documentação 2017, p. 65). The year was fully employed in planning the first practical measures that could signal an effective change in Angolans' living conditions. With military threats still very much alive, a sharp disruption of economic activity, on the verge of a severe shortage crisis, and amid a turbulent political environment in the capital — involving both elections for the People's Power local councils and the repression of political trends that threatened to escape any control — the new rulers were reasonably busy.

1977, on the contrary, attested to a discursive explosion about women's liberation. In February, *Jornal de Angola* announced the inauguration of two daycare centers, with a capacity for 250 children in total, built through a partnership between the State Secretariat for Social Affairs and OMA. Albeit short, the article stamped two associated cores of meaning that would later become commonplace: the female engagement in the "tasks of production" and the "nurturing of the new

9 *Diário de Luanda* was closed in December 1975, leaving *Jornal de Angola* as Luanda's only daily newspaper. Control by the MPLA increased after the writer Fernando da Costa Andrade (Ndunduma) was appointed director, in early 1976.

man" (*Jornal de Angola*, 11 February 1977, p. 1). The newspaper returned to the subject two weeks later and insisted on the importance of daycare centers for creating the "New Man" and as "one of the stages of women liberation." Leaving the "total inactivity" they lived in when they dedicated themselves "only to domestic work," "due to the number of children that they usually have," women could give, at last, "their valid contribution (…) for the construction of Socialism" (*Jornal de Angola*, 22 February 1977, p. 3).

Beyond the bombast conferred by the ceremonial use of capital letters, this statement signaled an unambiguous push-back concerning the conclusions of the OMA regional seminar held just over a year before. Housework was no longer considered proper work, and the women-only responsibility for child-rearing and housekeeping was taken for granted and associated with inactivity. The poor sensitivity of this piece to the reality of women in Luanda can be better assessed in the interviews collected to accompany the article and published along with two issues (*Jornal de Angola*, 22 February 1977, p. 3; 23 February 1977, p. 3). Reporters talked to two fathers and eight mothers. Among the women, one was 19, another 20, and the rest were between 24 and 37 years old. Only one was not formally employed. Five of them worked in offices or the civil service, another in a hotel, and the last one was part of the long-established fishing community on the Island of Luanda. Frustrating current representations, only the latter had many children — nine, compared to one, two, or three in the other cases. In their turn, both men were older (40 and 60 years old) and had large families (six and eight children). These figures suggest that a sharp decrease in birth rate matched female participation in the formal labor market.

The interviews demonstrate that the new daycare centers were pretty much welcomed but insufficient. While all parents expressed the desire to enroll their children in the new institutions, two of them had already recurred to private daycare centers (which charged expensive and rising tuition fees). Two others had been waiting for vacancies for over a year. Some revealed a daily life in which children were left alone at home, the older children took care of the younger, improvised arrangements were made within the extended family, or other unemployed women were hired to look after children during working hours. The shadow of shortages loomed large in the figure of lines to buy food, in which almost all interviewees claimed to spend a good part of their days. The rising cost of living was another worry. Prices were fixed in consumer cooperatives organized in neighborhoods, but due to its increasingly empty shelves, people had to resort to a parallel market, that became all the more ubiquitous the more authorities denounced it as work of "middlewomen" and "imperialist agents infiltrated among our comrade workers" (*Jornal de Angola*, 2 March 1977, p. 3).[10]

The interval from 25 February to 31 March, when both Angolan and International Women's Day were celebrated, served as an opportunity for the OMA and MPLA to reassert their agency in directing the symbolical contents of nation-building concerning the disputed trope of women's liberation. The OMA espoused a close association between emancipation and work in the frame

10 It is noteworthy that, while the street reporting was likely conducted by a woman (taking from a gendered deictic in one of the interviewees' transcribed statements), the newsroom was exclusively male. 15 men were listed as editors, plus two collaborators, the director, and his assistant — making up 19 male journalists. The name of one sole woman appears as part of the Union Board (*Jornal de Angola*, 22 February 1977, p. 8). I could not establish whether the newspaper had other female workers or the name of the person who did the interviews.

of "National Reconstruction." A series of "days of struggle" was scheduled, in which "in keeping with the watchword: Production, Production, Production, Angolan women will work an extra hour." Decisively abandoning the debate on double shifts and child-rearing responsibilities, OMA stated that "the voluntary work (…) in which all Angolan women should consciously take part" was that at state farms, as well as literacy and sanitary education campaigns (*Jornal de Angola*, 24 February 1977, p. 3). OMA considered that International Women's Day celebrations should have different contents depending on if one lived in "countries whose people are still engaged in a life-or-death struggle against extreme poverty and obscurantism," or in "countries where the nefarious grip of the capital has already been abolished," where "women live and feel free as any other fellow citizen." In Angola, "where the time of emancipation has already arrived for the whole people," and where there were no longer statutory differences between men and women, the latter would strive "with the greatest revolutionary enthusiasm" in the realms of formally paid labor, on which the state depended so much to make true the promises of independence. Thus, under the watchword "Unity. Unity. Unity", urban young women's particular claims were pushed into a swamp of counter-revolutionary trends and suspicions of factionalism (*Jornal de Angola*, 27 February 1977, p. 7). Gender relations then came to be subsumed into an undifferentiated collective of workers, as in this message by the Angolan Workers National Union (UNTA): "we who live side by side, in the same factory and the same office, men and women, we who feel every day the quiet joy of building a Homeland of Workers" (*Jornal de Angola*, 2 March 1977, p. 1). Blaming capitalism and colonial rule for gender imbalances in the formal labor market, where women "occupy the lowest paid most humiliating jobs" and "are more easily subject to unemployment and social neglect," the message excused men from any responsibility that should be bared instead by an exploitative social system, where men "get used to brutality and humiliation towards women and see it as normal, or do not even realize it" (*Jornal de Angola*, 2 March 1977, p. 2).

At the rally held to celebrate Angolan Women's Day, it would be President Agostinho Neto's turn to affirm, in front of the usual crowd that followed his pronouncements:

> In the history of all our People's struggle, against centuries-old colonialism and the invaders, the puppets, the traitors of all shades, (…) the woman was always at the side of her companion, against the common enemy.
>
> And if the names of Deolinda, Irene, Teresa, Engrácia, Lucrécia, Carlota and so many others are today a symbol of courage, determination, love for life and for their People, they are also the symbol of the Angolan Woman, our mother, our wife, our daughter, our sister, our companion of all time in suffering, in the struggle, in victory.[11]
>
> Integrated with the OMA, disciplined in structures, guided by our MPLA, it is much easier for the Angolan Woman to realize that, from Cabinda to Cunene, the same

11 Engrácia dos Santos, Irene Cohen, Lucrécia Paim and Teresa Afonso were the other women in Convoy Kamy seized by UPA on 2 March 1966, along with Deolinda Rodrigues. Carlota was the war name of a young military woman photographed in October 1975 by the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski near Benguela, who died just a few hours later in a UNITA counterattack on the village of Balombo (Paredes 2019; Paredes 2015, 124–126).

> desire unites her with all her compatriots, men, and women, in her Country (*Jornal de Angola*, 3 March 1977, p. 1).

It is hard to exaggerate the amount of symbolic capital Agostinho Neto was imbued throughout those early years of independence. With the force of law, his speech not only ascribed a mere supporting role to women who participated in winning independence but also made female citizenship dependent on family and marital relationships maintained with the men who were publicly represented as the protagonists of emancipation. Moreover, as a metonym of the nation in the making, Agostinho Neto implied that the legitimate place of enunciation of this future was fundamentally masculine, enacting an appropriation of the "Angolan Woman" using the reiteration of the possessive adjective "our" in the face of the successive domestic roles that, through this rhetorical operation, were authorized to women, ultimately delimiting their space of social agency, and imposing onto this being that inexplicably seemed to have her own perspectives, needs, and demands, constant intellectual supervision — the need to be integrated, disciplined and oriented, to be Angolan.

It is significant that, on the same occasion, the speech of the first lady, Eugénia Neto, pointed to the issue of domestic work, recognizing the odds of being "wife and revolutionary at the same time." According to her, "husbands shout the watchwords, but when it comes to their wife, they react in the sense of possession and do not like to come home and not find their wife, or even divide, harmoniously and humanly, the duties of the home." Yet, far from defending the inclusion of these issues in state planning, as called for in the UNECA white paper and the conclusions of the 1975 OMA regional seminar, Eugénia Neto demanded adherence to the ethics of ordeal which underpinned the conceptions of struggle in the maquis. Accepting "the inherent sacrifices" meant "accepting Revolution," and that would make women feel "connected to the struggle of our People," sensing as theirs "the greatest problems of our Country" (*Jornal de Angola*, 3 March 1977, p. 7). Once again, it is a future uttered in the masculine, since women's problems had a lower ontological statute — neither were they people nor were their problems among the greatest in the country.

5 New Man's Wife?

The government did not relent on its discursive assault on the meaning of women's liberation during the whole commemorative period. At the same time, OMA endeavored to spread its presence throughout the territory. Inaugurations of "OMA houses" in the most diverse neighborhoods of Luanda and provincial capitals were systematically reported, as much as pleas for women's mobilization in initiatives bolstered by the organization, such as the National Literacy Campaign. Gradually, the OMA consolidated itself as the only way for female participation in the public space, acquiring, on the other hand, more constituency, in line with its original expectations already expressed back in the first guerrilla days. These developments were matched by the elevation of a particular narrative about women's part in the liberation struggle, revolving around Deolinda Rodrigues and her comrades' martyrdoms. This fostered the ordeal ethics mentioned above and sought to tame into a more manageable set of representations the contradictory and many-sided historical character Deolinda was.

It is in this context that the former "comrades" will become the "moms" of the OMA and that the guerrillas of the Convoy Kamy honored with a monument in downtown Luanda in 1986 will be dressed in "traditional" attires and not with the camouflaged military uniforms they effectively used (Paredes 2015, p. 72; Paredes 2019; Paredes 2010). As a matter of fact, Deolinda's iconography started to morph well before this monument, closer to the period covered by this research. In 1979, an OMA postcard portrayed Deolinda covered in "traditional" headscarf and cloth, without weapons or any other allusion to military equipment (Associação Tchiweka de Documentação 2017, p. 106). With unassigned authorship, the drawing seems to be based on photographs taken in the Methodist mission she attended as a teenager. The operation here was not as much of falsification as of selection: of all possible Deolindas (guerrilla combatant, party board member, anti-racist activist, intersectional feminist *avant la lettre*), the choice fell on a figure that could be more easily integrated into a domestic realm, where "tradition" acquired, once again, a positive sign. Margarida Paredes argues that the notion of "family" moved into the MPLA symbolic universe from the Methodist community in which many of its leaders had been trained, reinforcing paternalistic, gerontocratic, and authoritarian trends that concurred to a patent conservatism in customs, justified by a moralizing reading of the domestic aspects of African tradition (Paredes 2010).

Furthermore, in singling out Deolinda (as a metonym for Irene, Engrácia, Teresa, and Lucrécia, and ultimately for all MPLA guerrilla women), this narrative also conveyed false exceptionalism of women in combat actions (Moorman 2016, pp. 199–200). And, while this reshaping of the "Angolan Woman" did no justice to the living experience of many women who had been in the maquis, hindering the very enunciation of their perspectives and practical demands, it was even more complicated for young Luanda women who had tracked an entirely different path towards liberation.

A good example may be found in an article published on 3 March 1977, in *Jornal de Angola*. In the upper half of its central pages, a featured frame was printed to denounce the "misconceptions" on women's liberation:

> It is often thought that women's liberation means "the man and the woman do the housekeeping together." Other compatriots think on their turn that the emancipated woman is "the woman [who] resembles the man," in habits, in dressing, and in assimilating his vices (*Jornal de Angola*, 3 March 1977, p. 4).

Thus, both the demands for an equitable re-division of housework and child-rearing, as well as certain types of non-productive uses of the body, associated with those new forms of leisure and consumption that had emerged in the peripheries of Luanda in the late colonial years, were outright pronounced unacceptable. In addition to repeating the litany that the enemy of women was not men and that Angolan women could only seek their emancipation integrated with a mass organization, the article insisted:

> There are compatriots — women — who say they "have no time to think about this liberation stuff." Others say that housework duties prevent women from engaging in political and social activities, that the combination of both tasks impairs their

> condition as mother and wife. All this cannot be an obstacle to women's participation in political life and activities alongside housekeeping. (…)
>
> "Women are not just fit to be at home." It is clear that some women who make such a statement intentionally find an excuse to get away from their homes. (…) Consequently, they start to dress in a more or less bold way; they are led to attend the so-called men-only places and absorb men's negative qualities. This is a liberal way — which distorts the contents of true liberation — and which always manifests itself in cities (*Jornal de Angola*, 3 March 1977, p. 5).

This rhetorical opposition between an urban ambiance, tainted by a myriad of liberal and petty-bourgeois vices that must be uprooted at any cost, and a rural space idealized as the matrix of national culture, as much as of resistance to colonial oppression, was not exclusive to Angolan history, though it ultimately carried especially tragic meanings to the peripheral youth in Luanda.[12] By that time, when the MPLA leadership was parting ways with the group of cadres surrounding the Minister of Interior Administration Nito Alves (who had based his meteoric rise on party hierarchy precisely on the support of the cosmopolitan youth in the *musseques*), some ways of dressing, hair styling, and behaving in public came to compose a negatively stereotyped portrait in cartoons and official statements of diverse kinds. Besides, these images pushed into the realm of "profligacy" more erratic or unregulated affective and sexual behaviors, as well as the very possibility of women to move freely in specific public spaces. If men already had their vices and attended unsavory places, that should not warrant letting women do the same. The "band girlfriend" hardly fitted the expectations of austerity, discipline, and work commitment required to prove irreproachable Angolanness. Women were asked to engage in the various initiatives that comprised the economic recovery effort and, simultaneously, to accept with revolutionary forbearance the fact that housekeeping and child-rearing would remain under their primary responsibility, in a scenario in which shortages were becoming a chronic issue.

Maria do Céu Carmo Reis proposed through four categories an interesting typology of female characters brought to life by the anti-colonial literary discourse from the 1950s: the "founding woman," builder of the creole society where the first autonomic and nativist impulses emerged, omnipresent and omniscient as a founding myth of nationality; the "nurturing woman", in both biological and cultural senses, invoked to stand for the "organic safety of the social group" and associated with networks of acquaintances and social influence, organizer of domestic rituals and commercial strategies; the "conspiring woman", active in forming alliances and mutual assistance

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12 Something of the like was happening at the same time in Mozambique, for example. The speech was given by President Samora Machel on 4 March 1977, celebrating the Mozambican Women's Day, was fully printed in *Jornal de Angola*. Machel made a long analysis on the situation of women in traditional society, during colonialism and the liberation war — dissociating, in the last two phases, the situation in the countryside and in the city. The themes and the structure of its semantic organization are very similar to the official discourses circulating in Angola, with the advantage of being exemplarily formulated. For example, Machel considered "fashion" to be a vector "of penetration of the moral and aesthetic values of the colonialist bourgeoisie and a factor of depersonalization", "especially directed at women". In defining the proper orientation for the Organization of Mozambican Women, Machel charged against young women in the cities, especially those who had formal jobs in offices, attributing to them a "petty-bourgeois radicalism" which allegedly had "as a fundamental objective to conquer the social liberalism and the sexual profligacy that characterize a man in developed capitalist society" (*Jornal de Angola*, 7 March 1977, pp. 4–5).

schemes, endowed with strategic capacity in affective life and incantatory powers; and finally the "indefinable woman", always portrayed as a negative film, "to the extent she is seen as a subject that desires, and in her relation to the public space", in virginity check rituals, in eulogies of conjugal fidelity, and in her exclusion of the city's affairs. The outbreak of armed struggle entailed the need for a more explicit discourse on women, adding new meanings to each of the categories above without modifying their general lines. Thus, upon the "nurturing woman" was bestowed the responsibility for tending to combatants; upon the "founding woman," the duty to forge the "new man"; while within OMA, to the "conspiring woman" was ascribed the struggle for social change, which conferred on her a superior quality. Yet, the "undefinable woman" remained just like that: in her capacity as a subsidiary component of "the people," her condition as a woman was always devoid (Reis 1987).

In fact, as subjects with their own perspectives, problems, and agendas, women in Luanda vanished from the press soon after 8 March 1977, at the same time as the institutionalization of OMA gained pace. In the face of perceived internal and external threats (respectively Nito Alves' challenge to the MPLA leadership and the purported plans of invasion by Mobutu's Congo), this institutionalization was matched by the choking of public debate. The II OMA National Meeting, held in May that same year, just before the regime closure, praised the inauguration of headquarters in all provinces and the creation of an information flow system, and set as an immediate goal the framing of women in defense and security organizations, as well as their engagement in the "Battle for Literacy" (*Jornal de Angola*, 15 May 1977; 16 May 1977). Up to March 1978, OMA-related articles in the press focused only on literacy and sanitary education efforts or pledges of allegiance to the MPLA (*Jornal de Angola*, 10 July 1977; 6 January 1978; 21 January 1978; 16 February 1978). There was only one exception: a small text that called for the building of daycare centers since Angola needed "specialized" and "semi-specialized" female workers. The text also urged women to commit to motherhood to increase the country's population, as the low figures allegedly encumbered development (*Jornal de Angola*, 25 May 1977, p. 3).

In 1978, the Angolan and the International Women's Day were celebrated with more pomp and in more places throughout Angola, but seem to have put in discussion an expressively smaller number of topics. Speeches, motions, and newspaper articles revolved around the need to follow "the example of Deolinda Rodrigues," used, among other things, to criticize the claim for a "mechanical equality" between men and women — that is, both "doing exactly the same tasks, dividing even the housekeeping" — and the "misconception" that "the liberated woman is only the one who drinks, smokes, or wears pants and miniskirts," or either the one who "piles up diplomas" in seek of economic, social and cultural rise (*Jornal de Angola*, 5 March 1978, p. 3; see also 1–9 March 1978). Thus, the woman subject to her own will, in whatever scope of experience — from affections and sex and family arrangements to formal education, not to mention the labor market and political participation — remained undefinable.

In their plethora of social trajectories, Angolan women built after independence a history beyond the narrow subordinate representations uttered by government officials. In that sense, they kept establishing shared social meanings in the face of the many challenges that the following decades imposed, nurturing — though not precisely what they were expected to nurture — and conspiring, in and out of the endorsed structures, in defense of their own goals and from their own

perspectives. The “new man” was never forged, but new men and women forged themselves and in relation to each other under the contexts they faced, and, more often than not, far beyond the reach of the sources available for professional historians. As both Marissa Moorman and Margarida Paredes argue, a narrative of contained freedom and return to prior mores does not accurately describe women's living experience in Angola. As always, they remain defying gender roles in public and private spaces and claiming themselves their own voices.

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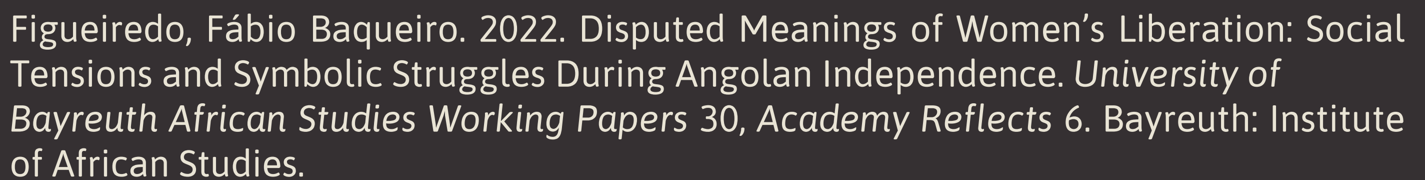
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https://doi.org/10.15495/EPub_UBT_00005986

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