

P@X online bulletin

WOMEN & ARMED
VIOLENCES IN NON WAR
SCENARIOS

SUMMARY:

Editorial 1
José Manuel Pureza

P@X theory 2/5
Interview with Sarah Masters
“More guns mean more danger to women”
Rita Santos

P@x observatory 6/7

P@x highlight
“The invisible faces of violence
in Guinea-Bissau” 8
Silvia Roque

P@x studies
“War strategies against
women in non-war contexts 9/11
Tatiana Moura and Silvia Roque

“Colombia: peace and
reconciliation without
women” 12/14
*Ivan Dario Ramirez and Grazielle
Costa*

NEP's attic 15/19
Publications
Activities
Projects

P@X

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Editorial

Women are the invisible
faces of armed violence.

The simplification of
gender differences
regarding peace and
violences is nothing but a
strategy of power. To
assume that women are
naturally more pacifist than
men is to reproduce a
mere stereotype that
adjusts itself to the
construction of masculinity
and femininity as unique
codes, not heterogeneous,
and sustains the shaping of
submissive or aggressive
behaviours, depending on
the case. This essentialist
discourse turns pacifism
into a synonym of the
passivity, concerning the
acceptance of the *status
quo*. However, the reality,
whether feminine or
masculine, is full of
diversity. In this P@x
edition, we explore some of
the paths of this diversity
regarding the articulation
“women, armed violence
and peace”.

The experiences of the

guerrilla women confront
this stereotype. There are
few analytical tools to
approach the singularity of
that option. According to
many of those women, the
reason for this choice lies
on the need for social
affirmation and the seeking
of an alternative to the lack
of recognition and
autonomy to which they
have been destined in the
patriarchal “normality”. The
active involvement in
armed violence is often the
most direct way to strength
women fight for
emancipation, within those
contexts. Nevertheless,
this might not be the best
way to solve the problem
as the hierarchical
structure of guerrillas also
reproduce, in a great
extent, the common sexual
forms of domination (men
fight and women perform a
background and supportive
work).

The other side of this
relationship – the victims
and the survivors – is also

hostage of a narrow
common sense. That
common sense formats us
in order to acknowledge
the victims of war, but
never the victims of peace.
The dual thinking that
opposes war to peace isn't
able to admit that there is a
war system within peace
whose name is
“patriarchy”. As such, the
logic underlying reality is
not one of opposition (war
vs. peace) but of
continuum. The analysis of
the cultural violences that
crosscut either war or
peace is, therefore, an
important and unfulfilled
need. A long time ago, one
dared to state that “what is
personal is political”. This
courage is clearly lacking
in current peace analysis.
Its absence further hinders
us to understand that in
the depoliticalisation of peace,
the neglect of the personal
as an ingredient of peace
or war is central.

José Manuel Pureza

P@X theory

Interview with Sarah Masters, by Rita Santos

“More guns mean more danger to women”

The IANSA Women’s Network is one of the few international networks dedicated to the issues of gender and armed violence. It is part of its work to bring the perspectives of women into the field of arms control, emphasising the connections between women’s movements and human security practice. P@x interviewed Sarah Masters, IANSA Women’s Network’s coordinator, on the impacts of firearms in the lives of women and on IANSA’s recent international campaign “Disarm domestic violence!”

RS - Sarah, can you describe the role of IANSA Women’s Network?

SM- I think our main aim has been to bring women into the small arms world and small arms into the women’s world. In this regard, one important thing we do is facilitate participation of women in international meetings on small arms and in women’s events.

In fact, there is a lot of work around the world being done on violence against women, but the aspect of weapons is overlooked – maybe because it’s too technical, or because it’s just an instrument and not the fundamental cause of violence against women.

RS - What are the links between gender ideologies and small arms use/ownership?

SM – Guns are overwhelmingly owned and used by men, in both contexts of conflict and formal peace. This includes both state and non state actors and structures; people who possess guns for leisure pursuits; and others for reasons of self defence. Criminal activity is also a factor as this often leads to violence and further demand for weapons.

We can see, and research confirms, that men constitute the majority of perpetrators of gun violence. We know that this involves those in state and non state structures, and civilians with a range of reasons to justify why they need a gun. The fact that over 2/3 of guns are

in civilian hands gives some indication about the potential dangers to women and the wider communities they live in. Perpetrators of violence include those who are supposed to provide protection and security such as the police and armed forces, or non state armed groups. They can include work colleagues, or family members, intimate partners they know and love.

Yet, it is important to stress that only a small minority of men becomes involved in armed violence (Jütersonke, Oliver *et al.*, 2007). Needless to say, many men and boys have also become active in anti-armed violence campaigns, lobbying for example for sounder international small arms trade regulations and better legislation on firearms ownership and also joining campaigns to stop violence against women. Campaigns like the White Ribbon campaign, started by men in Canada to challenge men’s silent complicity in violence against women, are an example of this.

The relationship between women and guns is a complex one. Women are not only killed and injured by the use of guns, but also play other roles – sometimes as perpetrators of armed violence, sometimes encouraging the use of guns, and sometimes as activists for change.

RS - What are the cultural elements that support these gendered behaviours?

SM - The perception that a gun provides some measure of protection can be found in many different social contexts and is not confined to situations of armed conflict.

Men carry guns as part of their perceived and constructed role as “protectors” of women; the argument used by gun lobbyists is that they need guns to protect their families from armed intruders or attackers.

Women’s attitudes can sometimes contribute to the powerful cultural conditioning that equates masculinity with owning and using a

P@X theory

gun and regards gun abuse by men as acceptable. Additionally, sometimes women overtly encourage their men to fight, and, more subtly, support the attitudes and stereotypes promoting gun culture.

Women and girls also actively participate in many of the world's conflicts, either willingly, through coercion, economic pressure, or because they have been abducted and forced to serve. For some women and girls in armed groups having a gun is seen as a way of protecting themselves and acquiring greater status.

It is important to note that women, as well as male former combatants and former gang members are among the people who can act most powerfully for change in challenging the links between violent expressions of masculinity and the gun culture.

We need to consider the experiences and value systems of men, women, boys and girls within their own communities, in order to develop successful strategies to tackle and challenge these perceptions.

RS - Can you detail the types of impacts of armed violence in the lives of women?

SM - Whatever the context – conflict or peace - or immediate cause of the violence, the presence of guns invariably has the same effect: more guns mean more danger for women. Violence against women in the family and community, and violence against women as a result of state repression or armed conflict, are part of the same continuum.

Guns are extremely effective killing machines. You are twelve times more likely to die if you're shot than if you are attacked with an alternative method. They also kill at a distance, which makes it hard for people to intervene. And handguns in particular are lightweight and concealable. But death is not the only impact, there are many other ways in which women are affected. For example, gunshot can lead to devastating injury and disability, not to mention trauma and its related consequences. From Latin America and the Caribbean to sub-Saharan Africa, South and South East Asia, research has shown how scarce household

resources are being devoted to the treatment and care of the victims of violence.

Also, a weapon, whether legal or illegal, can be used to kill, threaten or intimidate an intimate partner, either in peacetime or wartime.

Guns also affect women's lives when they are not directly in the firing line. We know that in many countries, women become the main breadwinners and primary carers when male relatives are killed, injured or disabled by gun violence.

Alongside with these, small arms dissemination and misuse impact women and societies in general in numerous ways, ranging from displacement, undermining development and employment, eroding democracy and human rights, and legitimising the use of force at all levels.

RS - The Women's Network has recently launched the international advocacy campaign "Disarm domestic violence!". What are the objectives and ambitions of this campaign?

SM - The disarmament community must begin to address one of the most serious aspects of small arms proliferation - the deaths and injuries caused by guns in the home. For example, in France and South Africa, one in three women killed by their husbands is shot; in the USA this rises to two in three.

To date, most of the research available on what increases the risk of a woman being killed in the home has been conducted in countries of the global North. These studies have found that access to a gun can increase the risk of death by up to five times. Another has compared female homicide rates with gun ownership levels in 25 high-income countries, and found that where firearms are more available, more women are killed.

Despite the emphasis among law enforcement on illegal small arms and crime, legal firearms are the primary weapons used in domestic homicides in many countries.

P@X theory

A gun in the home is much more likely to be used to intimidate or physically injure family members than be used against an outside intruder. It is also important to consider the misuse of guns by the security sector, including police officers and soldiers when off-duty.

The phenomenon also affects those in post-conflict contexts, when guns circulate in the community, and post-conflict stress, limited economic prospects and a reduction in basic services combine to exacerbate the problem of domestic violence. I am thinking of Colombia, where guns from the 'post-conflict' areas are ending up fuelling crime and domestic violence in Medellin.

Still, most countries have no mention of domestic violence in their gun laws, and no mention of guns in their domestic violence laws either, even though that combination is very, very dangerous in a household. So, one of the main goals of this campaign is to ensure that anyone with a history of domestic abuse is denied access to a firearm, and has their license revoked.

Other goals include the development of an international network of advocates for women's rights, who are committed to ending armed domestic violence; provide support to organisations in the development of common strategies, strengthen their advocacy, build capacity and solidarity, including the sharing of 'good practice' in policy development, media engagement, fundraising and campaign promotion; and lobby at the international level to ensure that the governments fulfill their international commitments to prevent violence against women.

RS - Why the focus on laws?

SM - Domestic violence and firearms laws have been harmonized in Australia, Canada, South Africa, and Trinidad and Tobago, with provisions to separate perpetrators of

domestic violence from guns. In this way, each country's domestic violence laws include references to firearms possession, and firearms legislation refers to domestic violence.

Several countries that have reformed their domestic gun laws over the past decade have begun to see the benefits, especially for women. Between 1995, when Canada tightened its gun laws, and 2003, the overall gun murder rate dropped by 15%, while the gun homicide rate for women dropped by 40%. For the five years after the gun laws in Australia were overhauled in 1996, the average gun murder rate was 45% lower than it had been before the reforms. Again, the effect was more pronounced for female victims, with a drop of 57%.

RS - Can you give examples of the activism of organisations affiliated with IANSA women in this domain?

Members of the IANSA Women's Network are active in many areas, from grassroots actions, to campaigning, to policy development and research. Some are involved in the development of gun laws, whilst others are working to strengthen existing laws in their country. Some have particularly good relationships with the police or judiciary and use these contacts to raise awareness of the issue of gun violence against women. Some of those in conflict or post conflict settings are using UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in their work on disarmament. Others are planning an international campaign about armed domestic violence. So you see, we have a wide range of skills, contacts, knowledge and priorities which complement each other, and strengthen the network.

For example, in Brazil, Viva Rio, has done some work on attitudes, challenging the link between guns and masculinity and making use of the power that women do have in many situations. The campaign by Viva Rio in Brazil 'Choose her [the gun] or me', led during the campaign for the 2003 Referendum on Small Arms, was aimed at boyfriends and partners,

P@X theory

using the fact that 'gun' is a feminine noun in Portuguese, as part of their strategy.

In Uruguay there is a campaign based on the slogan, 'If you have a gun, you have a problem', which highlights the danger that a gun in the home creates for everyone who lives there. In many societies women do have a very large degree of power in the domestic sphere of the home, so some campaigns appeal to those women with a message along the lines of 'clean up your house, you wouldn't keep poison in your house, so don't let guns be kept there.'

But there are other examples. After the civil war in Sierra Leone, women called for and led violence free elections. The Women in Peace and Security Network recognized the need for gun free elections, to reduce the intimidation of voters and create a more democratic process. The prevention of gun violence was one element of this. In preparation for this they sensitized their communities for disarmament initiatives, and organized subsequent community disarmament programmes.

Women's Network members in India include the women of Manipur. Manipur has over 30 armed groups vying for territory and power, in addition to the presence of the Indian armed forces. The Manipuri Women Gun Survivors Network was created in 2006 to provide advice, solidarity and support to women affected by gun violence.

RS - What are, in your opinion, the challenges of addressing the issue of armed domestic violence that lie ahead?

SM - Violence against women is rooted in pervasive discrimination which denies women equality with men. It occurs in a variety of contexts and cuts across borders, religions and class. This is not because violence against women is natural or inevitable, but because it has been condoned and tolerated

as part of historical or cultural practices for so long.

In fact, in some contexts, there is a widely held view that violence against women, including wife beating, is acceptable and in some instances as justifiable. So, justification for violence is deeply rooted in the notion of traditional gendered roles of women and men. View that as intimate partner violence usually occurs within the domestic domain, it is therefore regarded as a 'private matter', best addressed within existing family structures.

P@x observatory

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P@x builders

Coalición Centroamericana para la Prevención de la Violencia Juvenil (El Salvador)

<http://www.ccpvj.org/>

An interdisciplinary initiative, made up of Centro American NGO, whose main objectives are the promotion of programmes and policies of prevention of violence that affects youth; the coordination of governmental and non-governmental efforts in this field; the development of inclusive and integral public policies of youth violence prevention; and the promotion of respect for human rights in the region.

Children and Youth in Organised Armed Violence (Brazil)

<http://www.coav.org.br>

COAV, established in 2003, aims at identifying the existence of children involved in armed groups in regions not at war, through the conduction and dissemination of an international research on the topic on eleven countries and the sharing of proposals and best practices on this field.

Quetzalcoatl – Ideas y Acciones para la Paz (El Salvador)

<http://www.fundacionquetzalcoatl.org>

Non-governmental organisation set up in 1999 as an educational project in the field of health aimed at the country's prisional population. Currently, the organisation works also with youth at risk, organising workshops on topics such as masculinities construction; conflict transformation; sexuality, among others.

Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres (Colombia)

www.rutapacifica.org.co

Feminist and pacifist movement whose mission is to strengthen the feminist standpoint of pacifism, non violence and civilian resistances as well as to promote the inclusion of political and social proposals of Colombian women. Besides organising protests against violence committed against women in the country and participating in the international Women In Black movement, Ruta Pacífica also publishes newsletters, research and thematic publications.

IANSA Women's Network

www.iansa.org/women

The IANSA (International Action Network Against Small Arms) Women's Network, the first international network dedicated to the articulations between gender, small arms and armed violence, supports organisations working on women and violence prevention to combat gun violence in their communities and support the global campaign to reduce the proliferation and misuse of small arms.

Observatory on Gender and Armed Violence (OGAV) (Portugal)

www.ces.uc.pt/ogiva

OGAV intends to develop studies, analyses and policy recommendations on femininities, masculinities (in)security in armed violence contexts. Its main objectives are to consolidate this field of analysis in Portugal and to establish a platform of articulation for research and programmes in this domain in Europe, Portuguese speaking African countries and Latin America.

Small Arms Survey (Switzerland)

www.smallarmssurvey.org

The Small Arms Survey is the principal source of public information on all aspects of small arms and light weapons (SALW). It serves to monitor national and international (governmental and non-governmental) initiatives, and acts as a clearing house for the dissemination of best practices in the field. It contains a Weapons ID portal and a database on the international implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW.

P@X highlight

The invisible faces of violence in Guinea-Bissau

By its social acceptance and normalisation, gender-based violence, namely violence against women is a scarcely addressed topic in Guinea-Bissau. The absence of data, however, does not stop us from analysing some evidences of the phenomenon of intra familiar violence in the Guinean society:

- It is estimated that 51,5% of women accept being beaten by their husband for different motives (MICS, 2008).
- Around 50% of women and girls are victims of female genital mutilation FGM) (MICS, 2008).
- According to several accounts, forced marriage persists in the country, affecting young girls with ages of 12.
- The economic degradation of the last decade has led to the transformation of the social roles in the urban settings. The fact that women have been more entrepreneur at the informal economy level has given them greater access to power (responsibility in assets and management, investment in the education of children and grandsons, among others) but also suggests that they become more vulnerable to domestic violence, which tends to rise as a way to compensate the men's power loss.

Violence normalisation and acceptance has also led to its invisibility in terms of combat and prevention strategies. Its legitimisation, which derives from cultural arguments and the absence of policies and institutions dedicated to the prevention, minimisation and combat of gender-based violence, further hinders the transformation of this reality.

The project "Invisible Faces", a partnership between the NGO IMVF and NEP/CES, co-funded by the Portuguese Agency for Development Support (IPAD), has sought to provide food for thought on violence analysis and response, through capacity-building of some youth associations in Guinea-Bissau.

Giving faces to violence

During February and March 2009 several activities were promoted by Guinean youth organisations in Bissau, in order to discuss topics such as domestic violence, dating violence and sexual abuse and exploitation of children and youth.

These youth organisations were selected through a contest launched in the end of 2008 by the NGO IMVF and NEP/CES. From the 27 received applications, five were selected as the best projects of gender-based violence prevention.

The initiatives included radio debates, theatre forum and other cultural activities in the neighbourhoods of Bissau, as well as the organisation of a training course on women's rights with youths and conflict resolution agents in the neighbourhoods.

In 7th and 8th February, Sílvia Roque (NEP/CES) and Graciete Brandão organised a training course on "Gender and violences", aimed at the participating associations.

Participating associations

- The cultural group *Netos do Bandim*: established in 2000, it is a cultural group of children and youth whose main goals are to promote creativity and to communicate through art and culture.

- The Youth of the Women's Association of the Belém Neighbourhood: created in 2002, its main aim is to create a culture of solidarity, cooperation and associativism between women in the neighbourhood.

- The Youth Association Against AIDS and Juvenile Delinquency: set up in 2003, its chief objective is to fight HIV/AIDS and delinquency among the Guinean youth.

- Daucam Productions: founded in 2005, its main goal is to promote artistic, musical and literary development in the country as cultural assets and citizenship resources.

- Club Agenda XXI in Guinea-Bissau: established in 2003, its aim is to promote sustainable development, bringing together ecological balance and social justice in Guinea-Bissau.

Sílvia Roque, NEP/CES

War strategies against women in non-war contexts

Strategies of enemy control and threat and terror production based on the construction of dominant masculinities and subaltern femininities and masculinities have been widely analysed in war contexts. Systematic sexual crimes, forced displacement and manipulation or perversion of the perceptions of male and female roles with confrontation war aims are widely known examples. Nevertheless, these strategies, usually described as war strategies, can also be found in “non war” scenarios. In order to design and implement more effective policies and programmes of violence prevention and response policies, it is imperative to take these contexts into account and analyse them.

Newest wars, old strategies

By using the expression “non war”, we intend to underline the superficiality of the division between peacetime violence and wartime violence. “Non war contexts” refers to scenarios where most violent acts are perpetrated by civilians, gangs or other armed groups, or by State forces against an enemy which is not recognised nor seen as legitimate. These scenarios can coexist in a country formally at peace, in a city where there isn't a declared war but where the statistics of victims of armed violence often surpass those of traditional wars.

These contexts, which we dare to label *newest wars* (Moura, 2005) are particularly prevalent in the Latin American region. In many Latin American countries, formal and institutional peace has not translated into the reduction of violence, but rather into a “democratisation of violence” (Rodgers, 2003). The case of El Salvador is a good example of this. In fact, during the peace period more deaths were registered, compared to the war period. Like in other countries in the aftermath of war, El Salvador witnessed a rise of social violence and armed criminality (CDHES, 2005).

This type of violence, which emerged in the 80s and 90s, resulted from a mix of several factors and has paradoxical faces. This new violent phenomena correspond to the

dissemination of armed violence at an increasingly micro sphere, whose main scenarios are the peripheral areas of great urban centres of countries formally at peace. Despite manifested at a micro/local sphere, these wars are a worldly phenomenon, both by its global dissemination and ubiquity as well as its dependency and articulation to contexts of war and post-war.

Thus, these can be considered as phased explosions, product of the accumulation of several decades of structural and political violence and subsequent militarisation, marginalisation and social exclusion and, in some cases, of prolonged wars, which international drug and small arms trafficking has accentuated and fed into.

The sex of violences: continuums, spirals and identities

In newest wars, the main protagonists (direct victims and agents) are young males, mostly those from disenfranchised backgrounds. In fact, despite the transformations on war concepts and practices, its gendered nature seems to prevail: all wars and armed conflicts rely on the construction of identities, structures and power mechanisms that lie at the centre of the patriarchal system, which some feminist label as war system (Reardon, 1985).

In order to ensure its perpetuation, this system requires the construction of a certain type of masculinity (hegemonic, dominant and violent). In turn, in order to become dominant and socially accepted, this type of masculinity requires silenced, invisible and hence marginalised masculinities and femininities that are its antithesis, negation and counterpoint.

The transversality of identity manipulation in both war and peacetimes aims at legitimising certain types of violence and approximation of war and peacetime violent strategies, converging or diverging according to its adaptation to different contexts. In light of this, (physical and psychological) violence strategies used by armed groups (*maras* and *pandillas*, *facções*, *cartéis*) rely necessarily on the control of masculinities and femininities, in order to attain objectives and war conducts

P@X studies

more or less proximate to those of armies and war parties.

Armed violence has specific impacts on men and women's lives in war times and in violent peace contexts. However, as women haven't been considered the main risk group (the one who kills and dies the most), today's mechanisms are insufficient to understand the complex involvement of women in armed violence and the impacts of violence on their lives. Therefore, predominantly, women are considered as victims and addressed accordingly, while men tend to be perceived (and addressed) as perpetrators. In war times, women tend to be perceived as armed and sexual violence victims; whereas in peace times, they are analysed almost exclusively as victims of domestic violence.

This kind of approach has led to separate policy responses, ones addressing the public sphere, concerning almost exclusively men – for eg., public safety policies and disarmament initiatives - and others focused on the private sphere, targeting mostly women (issues related to domestic violence), as if these two worlds were not connected. Besides that, studies on armed violence tend to be associated with analyses developed on marginalization, ethnic ghettoization and poverty/social inequalities (Wacquant, 2008), and not necessarily with the production of a spiral of violence transmitted within a society through the construction of femininities and masculinities, whether violent or non-violent. However, we believe that the violence continuums experienced by women and girls (and also by some boys), in war and in peace contexts, are more than a mere sectarian construction and emerge as a synthesis of the main social ingredients of violence itself and its cultural basis.

Invisible Masculinities and Femininities

The analysis of Gary Baker (2005) revealed that the elements which build up the dominant conceptions of masculinities within social and economic inequality contexts all over the world, are related with goods, money, respect and women. Nevertheless, the specific means each protagonist is willing to use (and are available to him) draw the line between adopting a violent masculinity or different kinds of masculinities. This association between the dominant sense of masculinity and the

possession of guns makes some male teenagers, trying to get an important position within rigidly hierarchical societies, resort to armed violence as a way of obtaining social status and power, and showing their hegemony.

However, there is little debate about the construction of the femininity(ies) within armed violence contexts, concretely, urban armed violence or "newest wars". On one hand, we know that certain versions of masculinity (dominants and violent) depend on the construction of its own denial or opposition – vulnerable and passive femininities. On the other hand, there seems to be a rise as well as a growing standardisation of the expectations and frustrations of women and girls within those contexts.

As such, to go beyond the hypervisibility of armed violence rises as an urgent issue. On one hand, we have to consider and analyze the newest femininities, whether emergent or latent, and understand in which way and through which practices they are constructed. In other words, it is important to complexify the simple analysis that usually opposes vulnerable femininity to dominant masculinity, and understand the kind of relations which come out of these identity constructions: opposition, imitation, rejection, dependency, autonomy, subsidiary...

On the other hand, it is important to challenge the stigmatised gaze over periphery. In Rio de Janeiro and in El Salvador, this gaze seems to suggest that the total or the majority of the youth belonging to poor communities are violent, potentially violent or are involved in armed groups.

However, in reality, just a small minority (little more than 1%) enroll in activities related with drug trafficking or adopt violent behaviours. Other masculinities, which do not identify themselves with this violent masculine model and are often interrupted at a very early age by the armed violence spiral that particularly affects male teenagers belonging to poor communities (as a result of police actions or shootings between rival groups), must be acknowledged and included in public policies and programs aimed at preventing and solving this violence.

Finally, we have to understand that the involvement of women in armed groups, whether in a Rio de Janeiro or El Salvador, doesn't necessarily represent a rupture with traditional femininities.

Despite the existence of a room for identity negotiation generated by the power guns give to their owners, one of our preliminary findings was that the entrance of women in war contexts as well as the positions and roles given them are based on their ability to perform roles traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity pattern. In case this does not happen, their roles are merely related to tasks that support the maintenance of masculine dominated areas, whether regarding private domain (as girlfriends or wives of the elements of the armed group), or activities to which they dedicate themselves (e.g. drug and money shipment).

Conclusion

Whether in war, post-war or formal peace contexts, firearms dissemination contributes significantly to greater levels of lethality violence as well as to the dissimulation of the indirect impacts of armed violence. Up till now, violence aimed at civilian population isn't regarded as a main reference/indicator of insecurity levels. Instead, deaths in combat are taken as the main indicator. Thus, other types of violence, micro, daily and more silent are neglected, which further contributes to the perpetuation and accumulation of armed violence spirals at the global level. In these cases, we can include different means of control and of sexual violence with impacts that are spread over economic, psycho-social and political domains and make the daily violence as a routine without scandal.

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Tatiana Moura and Silvia Roque, NEP/CES

Colombia: peace and reconciliation without women

P@X studies

The history of women's involvement in armed violence in Colombia has been written by the hands of those who held weapons, resisted to them or suffered from its impacts. These are histories narrated by women who refused and still refuse today to follow the social roles ascribed to them in the dominant discourses of the Colombian political history.

Particularly during the 70s, 80s and 90s, some women have joined guerrilla groups believing that the in depth social transformations that they were struggling for would also bring about changes in the private domain.

In the revolutionary discourse, women were described as doubly exploited: at work (like men) and in the family (by men). As such, it was expected that they would become doubly revolutionary. The nature of this exploitation lied in economic relations. The revolutionary discourse presumed that social liberation and access to power would solve subordination and domination relations in both family and society, seen as subsidiary. In this context, some women perceived the armed struggle – and its underlying struggle for values and structure transformation - as a way to break loose from femininity stereotypes. Hence, one of the common expectations of women who voluntarily joined the guerrilla in the 70s and 80s is the ambition “to build a dream: a different world” (Velasco, 2005: 26).

Women like María Eugenia Vasquez narrate their experiences in the armed group M-19. Taking stock of conflicts and disenchantment, women realised the distinctiveness of being a women and taking part in the armed struggle, thus contributing to a more complex take on the political avenues for transformation of the social exclusion patterns in Colombia. In her own words,

“one of the justifications for the reconstruction of my identity was the recognition of gendered differences, which were noticeable to me in my behaviour both in the military structures and affective relations” (Vásquez, 2006: 356-357).

In this context, abandoning the armed struggle represented an important opportunity to rethink the political possibilities of women in the Colombian context. Renouncing armed violence, a political and emotional process, became a factor which favoured the pursuit of a feminine identity alongside with positive differentiation. In some cases, reflections within the group contributed to the decision of disarmament and militancy for peace and gender equity, surpassing the private domains.

Existing research on women who demobilised collectively during the 1990s underlines the politicisation of this process, from the moment they enter the movement to its abandonment.

“All women we interviewed were politically aware, although the majority has distanced herself from the formal mechanisms of political participation. Nonetheless, taking part in the armed insurgency constituted an opportunity to participate in the country's transformation processes and that had a particular meaning to their experience: the possibility of participating actively in collective projects aimed at improving society” (Londoño; Nieto, 2006: 195).

A distinct process takes place with female participation in individual demobilisation programmes currently in course. The first distinction relates to the type of demobilisation. In the case of individual processes, the person demobilised is isolated from the collective political context of the group, having to assume individually the responsibilities in the process. In this case, those who demobilise can only choose from adhering (or not) to the programme, thereby accepting its rules. Subjectivity is absorbed by the unilateral objectivity of the proponent of the demobilisation process, in the Colombian case, the State. Conversely, in collective processes, even though there aren't differentiated actions tailored according to gender specificities, there is a greater power balance resulting from

P@X studies

negotiation and shared responsibility within the group.

The second main difference relates to the transformations in the dynamic of the conflict, which has become less ideological and more focused on military strategy. The third and more perverse element stems from the continuous destruction of economic, social, cultural and political possibilities in part of the Colombian territory as a result of armed confrontation. In view of the impossibility of developing survival strategies independent from the conflict, many women are encouraged to seek armed groups as a refuge or self defense instrument.

“There are cases of women who join [armed groups] because they want to survive, whilst others go after someone they like, a boyfriend. That was not my case. Others join the guerrilla because they no longer stand what is going on in their villages. That was my case.” (Carmen Lucía, 2007).

It is evident, in this excerpt, that the ideological component is not determinant to the involvement of women in the armed struggle. Female participation in paramilitary groups confirms this trend. Young females, in particular, tend to join groups for emotional reasons (passion and status seeking) rather than for ideological purposes. In many cases, they justify their involvement with the advancing of “gender equity”, while in fact their aim seems to be imitating and measuring up to traditional male roles.

In other cases, as documented by women groups and human rights movements, women are used as war weapons or as sexual objects. The pervasiveness and continuity of violence leads to the shrinking of survival expectations (physical, economic and communitarian). In this context, rather than a means of obtaining political transformation, the guerrilla becomes a way to escape an unbearable reality.

“The reasons invoked for the participation in armed groups indicate that ideological motivations are less important, specially when compared to the pursuit of minimal conditions for economic survival (...), escape from intra-familiar conflicts and resentment towards any of the armed groups (...)” (Londoño; Nieto, 2006: 117).

In this context, the politicisation of female experiences is possible but less probable. Choosing to abandon traditional values associated to femininity, such as passivity and vulnerability, because one does not feel represented in those is different, in our opinion, from having them expropriated by a continued violent context. Thus, the elaboration of the frustration of women’s experiences in armed groups from the expectations of challenging and re-constructing female roles is not evident. This process of critical reflection becomes even harder when programmes implemented at the national and regional levels fail to recognise the specificity of former combatants. These programmes have further distanced Colombians (male and female) from a more critical and inclusive peace proposal, one that does not reproduce violence as inevitable means to achieve “peace”:

“When we arrived to Medellín, the military started to investigate us because we were *guerrilleros* (my husband, my two brothers-in-law and myself). They jailed my husband and proposed that we participated in the demobilisation process. They pressured us to give informations. They told us they would suspend the accusation process and give us money. So, we decided to participate. We had to choose between staying in the programme or going to prison.” (Carmen Lucía, 2007).

P@X studies

In this context, where the Peace and Reconciliation programme becomes a strategy to obtain information about the “enemy”, “peace” serves the interests of war. It does not represent a choice for non-violence, peaceful coexistence and reconciliation. In the absence of an independent process, that includes the positive consolidation of gender differences, it is not possible to achieve a peaceful and reconciled society. To achieve this kind of society it is imperative that women are able to elaborate on their experiences, proposing transformations not only in the fields of war and politics, but also in all cultural domains.

Notes:

[1] Interview with Carmen Lucía (fictional name), former FARC combatant, participant of the Peace and Reconciliation programme, a programme of collective (paramilitary) and individual demobilisation in the city of Medellín.

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Ivan Darío Ramirez and Grazielle Costa

Ivan Ramirez is coordinator of the Observatory on Children in Armed Conflict and Organised Armed Violence, Corporación Paz y Democracia (Colombia). Grazielle Costa holds a PhD in International Relations and her research interests include gender, war and peace, with special focus in Colombia.

NEP's attic

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Freire, Maria Raquel; Ferreira-Pereira, Laura C. (2009), “International Relations in Portugal: The State of the Field and Beyond”, *Global Society*, Vol. 23, No.1, 79-96.

Freire, Maria Raquel; Mendes, Carmen (2009), “Realpolitik Dynamics and Image Construction in the Russia-China Relationship: Forging a Strategic Partnership?”, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, No.2.

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Nascimento, Daniela, Lopes, Paula, Freire, Maria Raquel (2008), “The securitization of environmental policies: grasping the nexus? The Darfur case”, *The Bologna Center Journal of International Affairs*, 93-106.

JULY

José Manuel Pureza presented the communication “**Human Security: on the border between In and Out**“, panel *International Security: Key Concepts, Alternative Views*, ISA-ABRI Joint International Meeting: Diversity and Inequality in World Politics, Rio de Janeiro, 22-24 July.

Maria Raquel Freire and **Paula Duarte Lopes** presented the communication “**Peacekeeping operations: keeping whose peace?**“, panel *Foreign Policy Instruments: Sanctions, Peacekeeping and Neutrality*, ISA-ABRI Joint International Meeting: Diversity and Inequality in World Politics, Rio de Janeiro, 22-24 July.

Teresa Cravo presented the communication “**Political Transitions in African Countries - From Socialism to Liberal Democracy**“, ISA-ABRI Joint International Meeting: Diversity and Inequality in World Politics, Rio de Janeiro, 22-24 July.

Tatiana Moura presented the communication “**Invisibilities in war and peace**“, panel *Rethinking Gender, Peace and Conflict*, ISA-ABRI Joint International Meeting: Diversity and Inequality in World Politics, Rio de Janeiro, 22-24 July.

Rita Santos presented the communication “**UNSCR 1325 in countries formally at peace**“, panel *Critically Examining UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security*, ISA-ABRI Joint International Meeting: Diversity and Inequality in World Politics, Rio de Janeiro, 22-24 July.

During June and July, **NEP/OGAV** (Observatory on Gender and Armed Violence) participated in the international campaign of the IANSA (International Action Network on Small Arms) Women’s Network on **armed domestic violence**. This participation included the collection of information on the Portuguese reality through the conduction of interviews with experts on public security, health and NGO specialised in victims support as well as the conduction of perception surveys on firearms and domestic violence in foster centres.

JUNE

NEP/OGAV premiered the documentary “**Luto como Mãe**” [“Right to Mourn”], by Luís Carlos Nascimento, Theatre Cerca S. Bernardo, Coimbra, 29 June.

Maria Raquel Freire presented the communication “**Foreign Policy in Transition: The Case of the Russian Federation**“, Summer Course Óbidos ’09, *A Revolução Europeia 20 Anos Depois*, Portuguese Institute of International Relations (IPRI), Museu Municipal de Óbidos, 20 June.

Jacqueline Adams presented the communication “**Art in the Struggle against Repressive Regimes**“, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, 2 June.

MAY

Teresa Cravo presented the communication “**Analysing Guinea-Bissau’s Political Transitions Since Independence**“, Department of Politics and International Studies 2nd PhD Annual Conference, Cambridge University, 28 May.

APRIL

Silvia Roque participated at the Roundtable “**The link between Security and Development: Contributions for a National Strategy**”, organised by IEEI, with a communication on Guinea-Bissau, IDN, 30 April.

Maria Raquel Freire presented the communication “**The EU as a global actor: the Neighbourhood Policy in a multilateral perspective**”, School of Technology and Management of Lamego (ESTGL), Viseu, 27 April.

Maria Raquel Freire presented the communication “**The English School: the Middle way?**”, Lusíada University, Porto, 23 April.

Daniela Nascimento presented the communication “**The evolution of 1948 Human Rights up till today**”, Conference “Direitos Adquiridos? Direitos Humanos em Portugal”, organised by the European Law Students’ Association, School of Law, University of Porto, 21 April.

Teresa Cravo presented the communication “**Analysing the Struggle for Emancipation in Guinea-Bissau**”, Intrastate Conflict Program Fellows Seminar, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 10 April.

Katia Cardoso and **Silvia Roque** organised a meeting with the consultants of the project “**Trajectories of violence containment and dissemination: a comparative study on Bissau and Praia**”, Ana Leão, Lorenzo Bordonaro and Ulrich Schiefer, ISCTE, 8 April.

Teresa Cravo presented the communication “**Political Transitions in African Countries - The Case of Guinea-Bissau**”, 67th Annual Convention, Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA), Chicago, 2-5 April.

Daniela Nascimento presented the communication “**Contemporary Trends on Peace and Conflict**”, Course on Human Rights and Democracy, School of Law, University of Coimbra, 4 April.

Daniela Nascimento presented the communication “**The Dilemmas of Humanitarian Action**”, Course on Human Rights and Democracy, School of Law, University of Coimbra, 4 April.

Sarah Masters, **Tatiana Moura** and **Rita Santos** presented the communication “**Masculinities and firearms**”, International Symposium *Engaging men and boys for gender equality*, Promundo Institute, Rio de Janeiro, 1 April.

MARCH

Maria Raquel Freire presented the communication “**Assymetries and Power games in Central Asia: (In)securities (de)construction**”, Encontros da Arrábida 2009, *Portugal, a Europa e a Ásia no Século XXI*, IPRI and Fundação Oriente, 26 March.

Maria Raquel Freire presented the communication “**The ‘New’ Russia**”, Seminar “O Papel da União Europeia no Mundo e o Diálogo Intercultural”, Portuguese Institute of International Relations (IPRI), with the support of the European Commission and the Centre Jacques Delors, School of Economics, Coimbra, 18 March.

FEBRUARY

Maria Raquel Freire and **Paula Duarte Lopes** coordinated the Advanced Training Course on **Global Terrorism**, Centre for Social Studies, Coimbra, POTI, 27-28 February.

Maria Raquel Freire presented the communication “**Southern Caucasus: Conflicts and (In)security**”, Institute of High Military Studies (IESM), Lisbon, 27 February.

Maria Raquel Freire presented the communication “**Different Sides of Deterrence: Threat Perception and Image Building in Russia**”, 50th Annual Convention, International Studies Association (ISA), New York, 15-18 February.

Maria Raquel Freire presented the communication “**Russian Politics towards Central Asia: Supporting, Balancing, Coercing or Imposing?**”, 50th Annual Convention, International Studies Association (ISA), New York, 15-18 February.

Maria Raquel Freire and **Paula Duarte Lopes** presented the communication “**Peacekeeping Operations: Keeping Whose Peace?**”, 50th Annual Convention, International Studies Association (ISA), New York, 15-18 February.

Teresa Cravo presented the communication “**Hegemonic Legacies in Post-Colonial Africa - The Case of Guinea-Bissau**”, 50th Annual Convention, International Studies Association (ISA), New York, 15-18 February.

Teresa Cravo presented the communication “**The Illusion of Change: Analyzing the Struggle for Emancipation in Postcolonial Africa**”, International Security Program Fellows Seminar, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 12 February.

Silvia Roque organised the training session on “**Gender and Violence**”, aimed at youth associations in Bissau, included in the project “Invisible Faces”, Bissau, 7-8 February.

NEP/CES organised the panel I on “**War and Peace: Violences, Memories and Collective Identities**”, X Luso-Afro Congress of Social Sciences, University of Minho, Braga, 4-7 February:

Bárbara Soares (CESeC): “**Can I identify myself? The discourse of violence and the social role of victims**”;

José Manuel Pureza: “**The turbulence of borderlands: stereotypes, representations and real violences**”;

Katia Cardoso: “**The new faces of violence in Cape Verde**”;

Tatiana Moura and **Silvia Roque**: “**Women and armed violences. War strategies against women in non-war contexts. The cases of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and San Salvador (El Salvador)**”

Daniela Nascimento presented the communication “**South-South cooperation: the Chinese presence in Africa**” (co-authored by Carmen Amado Mendes), X Luso-Afro Congress of Social Sciences, University of Minho, Braga, 5 February.

NEP's PROJECTS

NEP/CES joins of the COST Action IS0805 on “**New Challenges of Peacekeeping and the European Union’s Role in Multilateral Crisis Management**”. Its main goal is to bring together European researchers and experts to share knowledge and experiences and to contribute to the elaboration of an EU common policy on Multilateral Peace Operations.

NEP/CES is part of the EU-funded project “**Early Warning: analysis to action**”, a 36 months research project led by a consortium of eleven European civil society organizations, headed by International Alert.

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