

# Women \* Building \*

VOLUME III, NUMBER 2, SEPTEMBER 1982

## FROM THE EDITOR

In the last issue of WOMEN BUILDING Mimi said:

"... many contributions were sent in ... the amount of material was too much to publish everything ..."

For this issue I have to say: I got no contributions! Only two small articles Mimi sent to me, as she couldn't publish them in the last number. After some hesitations I solved the problem trying to put together Portuguese material.

In this issue you will find:

- a description of a Network of Women in Portugal -----p.2
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- Portuguese women addressed a message to Pope John Paul II -----p.8
- "Life status or life project?" by M.L. Pintasilgo -----p.9
- excerpts from "O SILÊNCIO", a Portuguese novel written by a woman -----p.11

Don't forget that the success of  
W O M E N B U I L D I N G  
depends on the effort of each of  
us sending material, giving  
suggestions, etc., etc.!

Fátima Grácio

## OUR NEXT ISSUE

EDITOR: Moya Merrick  
22 McHatton Street  
North Sydney, N.S.W. 2060  
AUSTRALIA

DEADLINE:  
December 15, 1982



# a network of Women

# in Portugal

To describe this reality we call the "Network of women" we must begin by pointing out some factors that have made the emergence of this women's movement possible. First of all, the revolution of the 25th of April 1974, with all its ideals, its search for social justice for everybody, its new ideas in the field of human relationships, its concern for those who had been up to then systematically silenced are significant. Women were undoubtedly among these. The 25th of April also made it possible to adopt a new Constitution giving men and women equal rights and opportunities, such as:

- elementary education compulsory for all
- no discrimination in access to jobs
- the concept of "head of the family" disappeared
- equal salary for equal work.

Then we have the fact that women are nowadays scattered through most sectors of social life and they are willing to respond to the responsibilities they have to face.

## How did it start?

Somebody had to bring the women together. That was the role played by Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo. She felt that it was important to arouse the political consciousness in women, and encourage them to give voice to their specific oppressions; she also felt that a liberating process with women leads them to the questioning of the society they live in. She then set up a meeting on the 15th October 1980. Women came from all over the country. I was among the invited and I met many women there I had never seen before besides some Grail women. And what for? The country was living a particular important moment of its political life, the elections for the presidency were coming near. How could women influence, in their particular way, in this political act? An immediate understanding among the women was evident and so was an immediate readiness for work. We left with the charge of passing on the word to other women about the need for a certain candidate to win. This passing on the word (such a characteristic way for women to communicate) enabled the appearing of a network of contacts

And "last but not least", the Grail's constant concern for women.

that covered the country from the north to the south.

Two months went by, the election was won and the next question was: what could be done with these hundreds of women who had been challenged? What could be done with this network of women that had gathered in such a short lapse of time? In the next months there were moments of mutual recognition, we talked about the concrete realities of the life of women, from the sharing of household duties to professional work or even to political questions.



Women from very different life conditions and situations, women engaged in varied social commitments were meeting. A mutual understanding was however felt and thence a need to build wider groups, to define together what we really wanted to do, as there was no definite idea about it at the beginning.

Thus the first national meeting happened on the 13th June 1981 and it was the coming together of women from all parts of the country.

On that day we gave expression to all our worries and the need we had to gather all our efforts.

The following subjects were discussed on that day:

- women source of life - what life?
- women and education
- man/woman, what relation?
- women and working conditions
- women and consumption
- women and the constitution
- the "time" and "the times" in the life of women

It became clear little by little that the "network was to be the voice of women, the action of women, women that change and bring change". The collective force of women was a reality and their aim clear:

- to profit by the dynamism of Portuguese women and to strengthen it in order to create valid alternatives of life in society.
- to try to give concrete answers to people around us
- to create a "space" where our truth could be said and announced to inscribe something new in history
- to change our everyday life by running it differently.

As somebody put it, the network appeared "as a sign that women feel the contradictions of society in a similar way. Out of this common sensibility, it is possible to establish a platform giving rise to specific modes of social and cultural change". Several decisions were taken in this meeting and among them I should like to stress the publishing of a regular magazine called "Rede e Nó(s)" (Network and Knots(us)) - a space open to all women to say the word that had not yet been said, a space for reflection about being a woman and also a place for the setting up of concrete actions. We also decided to organize regional meetings, to take place before December 81, in the 4 regions we had divided the country into. And... what was to be done in the different places depended on what the respective group of women was prepared to undertake. This was so because self-management is a

principle of our organization; this principle is based on the conviction that the only possible way of existing is to occupy the space which we have been assigned, to say the word which is ours, knowing that there are many others waiting for that word and that nobody comes after us to say what has been left unsaid, to organize what has not been organized.

Before continuing the story, I should like to give a few flashes of what was written in "Rede e Nó(s)" about what was discussed in some groups during the national meeting mentioned above.

Women and consumption - "...and so we drag on through our weeks, our days, our months. Wearing things, filling our houses with things - useless objects, from the most sophisticated gadgets to records, books...papers. We drag on our lives, our things. We fill our children with things, because we no longer know how to tell them that we love them.



Time and the times in the lives of women - "...women never stop being active with their fingers. Have we no right to think of ourselves for one moment? Are we ashamed of letting our hands fall on our laps and look around us? Aren't we entitled to dream, to leisure, to a stop?"

Man/woman, what relationship? - "we should like to say that in this hierarchical society men act as a specific group towards women and hold the power in their hands. This is a group that doesn't regard the woman as a companion, only respects the woman when she is accompanied by a man, that insists on courting her rudely, that judges by a criterion of submission. I should like to say that it is urgent for women to act as a group too, not to fight for a position of privilege but to stop with the privileges wherever they may be."

In November 1981, when the several meetings in the 4 zones we had divided the country in were taking place,

One year has already elapsed after the first national meeting; we can say we have gone through several stages:

- a first stage, in which we tried to make women sensitive to their problems by bringing together our mutual concerns;
- a second stage, which we called conscientization; the publishing of "Rede e Nós(s)" contributed to it along with several actions in the different stages;
- and last, the third stage, which ended in the second national meeting on the 10th of June 1982 and which was the important gathering of all the work done in the several sectors during the whole year. The theme of the meeting was "Women/education/sexuality/consumption."

And why? Because in all sectors these were the subjects constantly raised by women. Education as one of the areas where the women were more involved; sexuality, because it is still one of the great oppressions felt by women, and in more than one way; consumption because "the consumption activity has the woman as its agent and that activity is structured through the unity which is the family"; consumption also regarded as an attitude towards life, towards physical possessions, towards the services and towards our own wishes.

This meeting was a leap in the maturity of the network, a fastening of the ties among women, a re-statement of our collective force, as a transforming force in the society we live in. We feel that we are engaged in a unique process chiefly because women, besides wanting to solve their problems, want first of all to help create the story of humankind. More than 500 women are engaged in this process; some of them are Christian, some are not; this was a deliberate choice and a wager that women could be united beyond their creeds.

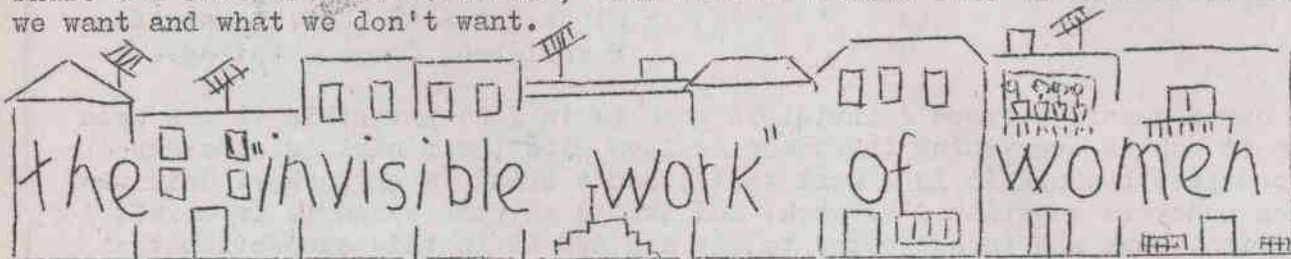
some political forces, feeling threatened by the network of women and using the public means of communication (newspaper and radio), decided to try to destroy the network, by insulting it in the most primitive and male chauvinistic way. This only made the network stronger, because it enabled us to come before the public and tell the truth, explain what we wanted and what we rejected. We used the means we had at our disposal.



# SOME EXTRACTS FROM MAPA WOMEN PREPARING the FUTURE

MAPA is a small publication of the Project of animation among rural women and young women in the north. (This project is the result of two earlier projects: - Project of social-cultural animation with women in rural areas (see Women Building I.2 May '80) and - Leadership training programs for young women in rural areas.) MAPA was started by some of the women who participated in the project.

Why the name MAPA? - Mulheres A Preparar o Amanhã (women preparing the future) First because we want to look at our lives as women thinking of the future we are preparing chiefly through the education of our children. Then the name MAPA (map) also reminds us of the map of Portugal. It reminds us of all the towns and villages all over the country, from the north to the south. It reminds us of the many women in these villages with whom we should like to share our interests and concerns, with whom we should like to talk about what we want and what we don't want.



In the new women groups this year ('82) we were confronted in our first meeting with our "invisible work". We saw images of women cleaning, cooking, washing, working in the fields, bringing up and looking after their children, shopping, etc.... We heard a woman's voice speaking to all of us. Let us now hear some of the statements we heard:

Behind the silence of these walls and balconies, whatever the social status they may reveal, there hides a work that became invisible as it was so often undervalued and despised... Invisible because of its apparent lack of responsibility. Invisible because it is unpaid.

How can we tell about all the tasks that keep us busy all day, one after the other in a permanently renewed succession?

Life begins within us women, it is shaped and transformed in us and we bring forth the fruit of our womb in a gesture of abandonment. Child that will be raised by us, looked after, brought up and open to the gratuitousness of being a man or a woman. Life that makes us sacrifice our needs and desires to all our families, that makes us forget that time also belongs to us.

How can we keep on silencing this work? What we do and what we are make up the basis of fundamental aspects of the social, cultural and economic life; we have in our hands an enormous potential to change society. It is also through our invisible work that we can transmit new values, new ideals of justice and fraternity and teach how to say no to oppression.



We have to believe that we are a force because we are so many and that the paths we are opening in our way are already building the future we want to be different for everybody.

## Women write to MAPA

How is our work regarded in the family and in the community we live?

"People aren't in the least sensitive about the invisible work of the women. It's a work which begins early in the morning and ends late in the night and you can't live without it. You clean and soon everything is dirty again and keep on doing the same all day. Sometimes you don't even have time to sit at the table for a meal or stop and think about your life. We never have a holiday and become slaves of our lives. Our nerves are racked, life has no sense because instead of living it we just function in it. In spite of this and such enormous sacrifices it is a work which is always regarded as worthless."

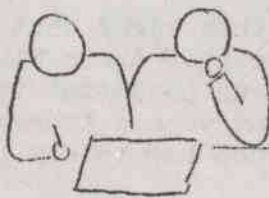
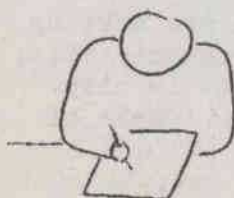
M. da Conceição, 33, housewife,  
2 children, Campo - Valongo.

"In our community, women's invisible work is in fact invisible to the eyes of most men as everything the women achieve with their work is considered second rate because it is a work that doesn't bring in any money. Only what gives money is considered as work, and that's why the woman is in a inferior position. Thus she is subjected to the man and it is this subjection that makes her work invisible."

M. Glória, 38, housewife, 6 children  
M. Manuela, 27, housewife, 2  
children, Lordelo - Paredes.

What life do we want for our children?

Speaking for myself, I do what I can to assure that my children, in their future, feel free and fulfilled. But it is very different to bring them up, because if we show them the correct path, they can see a different one through their friends and on tv, which only shows commercials and other programs to entertain the people and prevent them from thinking about life seriously. However I'll do anything I can to make my children feel happier. I can imagine that the life of my children will be different tomorrow because it already is different today. But if there is no stopping this, if there is no help, if people do not come together in the work of teaching our children to stand up to it and to say what they really want, I very much doubt that their future may be different from the life we have now."



we women a force to change life



In spite of the many differences among women (education, work, money, marital status, children, etc...) life tells us that we have many things in common:

- the responsibility for the "invisible work": upbringing and care of our children, cooking, cleaning, responsibility for the family's health, etc.
- our exploitation as women
- the possibility of being a force that tries to change life.

Either we want it or not, we, women are a force in society. Either a force that favours immutability, that let things be as they have always been, or a force that is going to contribute to the transformation of this society into another, a more free and just society of tomorrow.

We believe in the creative transforming force of women. Women who don't want to be shut up in their capacity as mothers, but women who can create life at all levels of our existence and who are determined to change life for the better.

The upbringing of our children is one of the fields in which we can best exert our influence.

Who is responsible for the upbringing of the children in the family? Mostly the women. Men are more often absent (work, club, sport, meetings) and they haven't (yet) got accustomed to looking after their children. It is important to change this situation. We women are overburdened with work and never have time for ourselves.

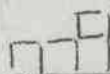
Men don't know what they miss by rejecting all the activities that have to do with "home life" (caring, bringing up, looking after), with the "women world". The so-called "women world" is still ruled by other values, different from the "outside world", the "world of men", where competition prevails. In the "world of the women" it is still possible to live more solidarity, more co-operation, chiefly when women have flexible hours. It is important that men can experiment with these values so absent in the world of their jobs.

It is important that we can profit from the situation of being responsible for the upbringing of our children. How can we do it?

By trying to pass on to them ideas and values that can change the mentalities and prepare a better future for all of us. A better future for us women too, as we are often considered "inferior beings", "less competent", "second-class citizens".

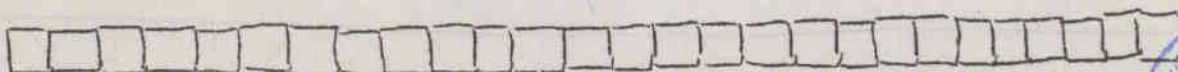
Women

who claim to be church



On the occasion of Pope John Paul II's visit to Portugal, about three hundred women, mostly leaders or former leaders of catholic organizations addressed the following message to him:

1. We are women who have grown up and lived in the Faith of a liberating Christ. We are women who claim to be Church: the Church as the place of communion among all those that are faithful to the good news brought by the Gospels; the Church as the prophetic announcement of a New Land in justice and fraternity.  
We are women who live in the rhythm of the world of our time: women convinced of the unique and irreplaceable contribution they can bring to the most varied sectors of social life; women aware of the situations of discrimination and silence they are usually relegated to; women who are looking for justice and truth and who feel this search clashes with the values and rules of a culture of the past.
2. To Your Holiness Pope John Paul II, who comes to Portugal as a Pilgrim in prayer to Mary - woman among women - we want to express our apprehension when we see the way the ecclesiastical authorities disregard the multiple problems that affect everyday life of women of today; problems concerning sexuality, the family, work, participation in public life, the humanization of all sectors of life in society, problems that have to do with our condition as free and responsible human beings and with our search for a life of dignity to be lived by all men and women.
3. We beg Your Holiness to listen to the pains, difficulties and concerns of so many women who suffer deep dramas in their lives caused by the conflict between their conscience and certain precepts of the Church's morals.  
We beg Your Holiness for the pastoral principles of the Church to be rooted in truth and in concrete life.  
We beg Your Holiness to listen to the words of the women recognizing that they are called to take an active responsible part in the pastoral decisions that affect them.  
We address Your Holiness John Paul II, Pilgrim of Peace and Pastor of the Universal Church, in the spirit of communion with the renewed Church, attentive to the signs of the times and acknowledging the Church as a place of hope for all men and women of good-will.





# life status or life Project ?

Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo

1. The woman, like the man, is defined in society not only through the way she is related to herself but also through the expression of her relation to others and the world. Hitherto, in the societies we have known, family relationships have been the basis for the wider social body and they are primary in the definition of the situation of women. Women are thus traditionally described as "married, single, widowed, divorced".

In a civilization, in which man is the norm and the axis of all relationships, the way the woman's status is determined tends to subordinate her situation to her concrete relationships with man. It is certain that the effort for equalization between man and woman has represented, at various levels, a significant advance in the cause of women -- and this effort can be seen at a world level in the measures unanimously approved by the UNO, concerning a minimum age for marriage and the need of the woman's consent, the protection of widows and divorced women in what concerns the support of the family, etc., but it is also certain that such an effort perpetuates the conviction that the woman is primarily defined through her sexual relationship with the man. To show the negative effects of this concept, it would be necessary to define man through the situation that connects him with the woman: single, married, widower, divorced, and make the demands and conditions for the accomplishment of any other activity depend on this definition...

Nowadays it is widely recognized that many women have burst out of the narrow pattern in which they were squeezed by their relation with men by refusing their only social definition as "Mrs...". But it is also true that women, as well as men, are subjected to a pattern of influences, in which easy copying becomes the rule, and therefore the autonomy women are looking for is not a reality but only seems to be there.

Thus, if it is certain that the claims "un lit à soi" or "a room of her own" are legitimate cries of entire lives submitted to a promiscuity which violates the intimacy and mystery of existence, so it is also true that the new behaviours women have been claiming do not always introduce alternative modes capable of structuring new relationships in society. How often have we watched what was a unique cry of freedom and authenticity sink into the most repetitive monotony.

2. Woman's role in the society, in the family, in the church is often referred to. But there is no specific role of the woman that forces her to attitudes which are her own.

A person's role in society is the relative position he or she claims in human groupings, in communities. Thus, what is called role, always corresponds to the expectancy of the others, to the affective investment of the others and therefore, undoubtedly to the balances of power within the communities.

Motherhood is said to be a woman's role in society. But nowadays motherhood, with all its consequences, implies a life span of 12 to 15 years -- less time than it takes to pass an "A" level or take a college degree. During this time, the role of the mother is, no doubt, fundamental, but it tends to fade in other phases and other living conditions. In this context, it can't be accepted that the "role of women" is exclusively or predominantly referred to in terms of motherhood or "support" of the family, especially in what concerns the nuclear family. The family doesn't only concern the woman, nor is the woman defined only through the family.

Likewise, the several functions that women accomplish cannot be channelled towards one or the other sector of social life. The "function" has to do with the whole of the tasks defined in relation to a definite work to accomplish. It has to do chiefly with the relation to the world in its immediate way of interaction with the objects, the ideas, the institutions, through the work.

The life of the women is characterized through a great multiplicity of tasks. Such functions do not derive necessarily from the marital status and even less from the fact of being a woman. They are ultimately in reference to the cultural frame in which the social "roles" are inserted and they change with the times and the places, according to the economy inherent to each work. That's why the "functions" associated with maternity rather differ from one culture to another and from one time to another.

3. The concept of "vocation" has strong traditions in the Christian economy and in the ideology of the Church. It is important to analyse it now in the light of the experience and the reflection of the women of our time.

If a vocation is "call" (we would call it a challenge nowadays!) in which many "voices" come from daily life experience, the longings felt and reflected as "signs" of God, only the woman that claims her condition of woman in her relation to the others and the world, will be in condition to answer this appeal.

The vocation expresses the aim and the meaning, the range and the depth of a life. Life which is inscribed in a project -- basis for all choices, compass for all decisions, horizon of all paths. It's this project that makes all the rest meaningful. It builds a "system" out of all the varied components of the life of a woman: relationships, activities, roles and functions.

Thus, the marital status of a woman is not equivalent to her vocation. It can only be considered as vocation if it is a part of a project. Nowadays many women break the relationship that has sustained their marriages. They do it because they thought one day that married life was a project in itself. They forget that the vocation is far from being defined only at the level of sexual economy. They chiefly forget that sexuality doesn't only find satisfaction in an intensive affective life; it also finds satisfaction in the specific and personal relation to one's work, to money, authority, violence or power... sexuality articulates with all the other aspects of a life project.

The concept of vocation is devoid of meaning if it is reduced to sexuality and to life status. The vocation is an appeal which is inscribed in the immediate future, but which unfolds in time because the future is its horizon. The fidelity it is bound to, doesn't therefore emanate from a "life status" chosen in the past but from the force with which the subjective and objective accomplishment of a life project is searched. In Christian terms, the accomplishment of this project is usually called mission.



T E O L I N D A G E R S ã O

Lisboa, 1981

Now that she had left and the house was in order, quiet, in harmony - it is her presence then which disturbs the deep stability of things, and when she was far away he would find again his former security, the quiet repetition of things already known - the light on the sheet of paper, the open book, the words in regular lines, the effort of order opening a way towards an intelligible universe - that Order where for her there was no integration, there could never be an integration into that Order - and was she,, therefore, not intelligible?

.....

Because somehow she always escaped, she never coincided with the image that he had formed of the world and of her - purely violence she had told him, he would always impose violence on her - but it was a necessary violence, *Udia*, because we have nowhere to live but this universe, and she must accept that, finally - the tension between them was between moving and unmoving things, between Order and a disorder against which he kept obscurely defending himself?

.....

From the beginning a growing tension, because also she put violence upon him, suddenly she was so close that he would fall into her magnetic area, into her zone of tension, and if she would make another step, a single step, he would become suddenly vulnerable and he wouldn't know any more where to stand on firm ground.

Because then everything would have to be questioned - and how to muster the courage to refuse the alibis, to go on with nothing to lean on, in a world that had lost its points of reference

then he put behind him a barricade of objects and he kept writing, in his small space of provisional security, but she would always end up invading even that minute space, as if for her frontiers didn't exist,

and there where she passed she destroyed, denying each thing she touched, slowly she was pushing him towards a space that became tinier and tinier, until finally there would not be any place left to take refuge, and then she would draw him with her to a solitude, the depth of which he could just suspect and before which, at the last moment, he would always draw back?



The last step, to descend interiorly the last step, to get free from everything and also from himself, to leave all things behind and to have nothing else to take with him - that was then, the point of rupture where she was trying to pull him, the trial of fire after which, and only after, it would be possible to start in another way? She was always going deeper within herself, every time deeper, and she required from him that same effort, and that is why she attacked him, destroying his security - his disguise, the mask of a winner, fear of looking at himself in a mirror, all naked, he went close enough to the surface of the mirror lacking courage to look inwards and break the image, break the mirror, and stay before a black space, a dark window, where every gesture of defense is useless, to that point was she pushing him, but that was an undeclared challenge, and he was never going to give in,

a crazy intruder suddenly appeared with a live coal, deciding to put fire into his life, she had opened the windows and the wind had come in, had blown out the sheets of paper, and had spread disorder everywhere, where to find now the peace to write, he stood close to the window that she had left open, the wind blew stronger and one of the glasses fell against the lamp that toppled over on to the desk on top of a vase of flowers, the light went out, and he heard in the dark the noise of objects breaking, he swang round, the sheets of paper wet, the water all over the books, the window rattling,

## Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

he quickly turned on the light hanging from the ceiling at the switch by the door - he knew it - he turned it on

in the darkness he would immediately lose the north and would not be able to locate any points of reference... And where to find, then, that universe of the things already known?

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### FINANCES - - - - - AN APPEAL

As everybody already knows: after consultation with the Network's Contact Persons, we decided to centralise finances at the Tiltenberg. Ton Brouwer of the Tiltenberg staff, agreed to do the book-keeping of our Network till the next I.G.A.

From each country we expect a contribution of U.S. \$ 5.- per member per year. From that money editors will be paid their expenses for printing and sending W.B. Individual members continue to send their \$ 5.- to the contact person of their country. The contact-person will be requested to send the money to the Tiltenberg upon receipt of the accounts.

So please send your annual dues to your national contact person. And if you can contribute more than \$ 5.-, we would be grateful. Third world members cannot send any money outside their country.

