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Angolans believe in money, not love

Published on : 6 May 2011 - 2:31pm | By [Lula Ahrens](#) (Photo: [RNW/Lula Ahrens](#))

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'Love doesn't feed you' is a popular saying in Angola. According to insiders, money and tradition define sexual relationships in all layers of society.

By [Lula Ahrens](#), [Luanda](#)

On a hot Sunday, single mother Lilian (27) watches her little boy play around a swimming pool. They are at her father's private holiday park on an island near the capital, Luanda. Lilian's relationship with her child's father ended because he had an affair and married "the other one". She got together with her ex while he was in yet another relationship.

Dancing naked

"Ninety percent of Angolan men are unfaithful," Lilian says. "I know husbands who have more than ten girlfriends." In 2007, one third of Angolan households were headed by women. "Even though there are so many of us, single moms are discriminated. That includes me."

Lilian claims that Angolan women stimulate the men's behavior. "The way women dance in discos is very, very sexual. Even their words are. So people get inspired. When women are drunk, they take off their clothes."

"Hey! Come here!," she shouts laughingly. "Show us how to dance. Do kambwa!" A 5-year-old boy and 4-year-old girl shyly walk up to us. Eventually the boy gets on all fours, throwing his right and left feet up in the air in turns while his hands rest on the floor. "That's how women dance, wearing only a string. When men see that, they think: Wow!"

Marrying several women

Lilan and Maria (31) say there are less men than women in the country because large numbers of them were killed during Angola's civil war (1975 - 2005). "They have more women at their disposal, which explains their sexual behaviour." But according to UN figures, there are only three percent more women than men in Angola.

Polygamy widely accepted

During a symposium at the Fundação Antonio Augustinho Neto (FAAN) in Luanda earlier this year, Professor Fátima Viegas said the widespread infidelity in Angola is "traditionally linked to social status and power, because only those who had the capacity to sustain a large family could [in the past, ed.] generally marry more than one wife".

Although Angolan law condemns polygamy, the practice is widely accepted. It is common for cultural reasons, and many women accept to live in polygamous relationships because of the shortage of men of marriageable age following the civil war. (Sources: Social Institutions & Gender Index (SIGI) and numerous other books and reports)

HIV and marriage

Angola has a relatively low HIV rate of around two percent as a result of its isolation during the 27-year-lasting civil war. It is on the rise however.

The average Angolan woman marries at the age of 19 and has 5.8 children.

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Several interviewees add that in certain provinces, men traditionally marry several women in return for goods or animals. William, who recently told his girlfriend Maria that he has a fiancée, puts it this way: "Ever since the official monogamy law, the cow has been replaced by money, the extra wives by mistresses."

Money, sex and poverty

Single mum Juliana (28) sees persistent poverty as a key cause. Two thirds of Angolans live on less than two dollar per day. After the civil war, oil-rich Angola became the world's fastest growing economy, enriching only a tiny section of the population.

"There is a small group of rich men who use their money to seduce women," Juliana says. Wives keep their mouths shut for financial reasons." Lilian adds that "many rich, old men 'buy' young girls with gifts or travels." Less wealthy men often make the same choices. Married driver Alberto, for instance, always has girlfriends on the side. One of them is the mother of his fourth child.

Lilian's father is both rich and powerful. "Many women want to marry him. He has twelve kids with five different mothers. Many guys want to marry me, too, because they would get a great job, a house, a perfect car and the mistress of their choice."

Sex in the workplace

Financially independent women like Lilian and Juliana aren't forced to accept infidelity. But according to Lilian, many women make sexual sacrifices to reach that independence. "You can get a good job if you have a big person behind you. If you don't, you often have to sleep with your potential employer to be hired," she says.

"I know a very big boss who sleeps with virtually all his female employees. If they refuse, they are fired. Female students even sleep with their teachers to get a good grade."

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Three types of men

Although unfaithful Angolan women are seen as 'prostitutes', all interviewees say wives also have affairs. According to Lilian, "more than 70 percent".


"There is even a saying in Angola that a woman must have three kinds of men. The oldest is rich, the middle one the man of her dreams, and the third is her lover."

"In fact, many guys tell their girlfriend to get an older husband and take all of his money. Angolans don't believe in love anymore. They just marry to reach a certain status."


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