Gender and humanitarian disasters

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Abstract

Gender, as a category of study, has become an indispensable analytical tool to reflection on humanitarian disasters. It does not only show its human and daily implications, (as opposed to “rational” and abstract causes, which are useless to help us understand what it is on stage during a disaster) but it also proves to be a useful guide to plan and implement public policies with population affected by armed conflicts. A portrait of daily life in refugee camps and in the return shows the affinity between the effects of humanitarian disasters and those erroneously called “natural disasters”, which are actually immersed in a failing process of development. Gender is a transversal tool that crosses both phenomena, revealing that poverty, religion, cultural beliefs, public policies and economical projects, among others, are essential elements to convey and cope with disasters.

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“A la niña se le pone su escobita o su brasita. No sé si nos lo inventamos o si nos lo dijeron. A los varones se les da el secreto del azadón o del machete porque pensamos que eso es lo que van a usar en su vida por ser hombres”1.

Disasters have always been considered as natural phenomena. It is only until recent times that disasters have begun to be thought as phenomena with a social origin, that is, they are immersed on the plot of human life and, therefore, their effects cannot be separated from the social structures on which we daily live. Implications of this perspective can only be perceived if we consider that human life is intertwined in a tissue of different orders: political, economical, religious, historical, just to mention some. Thus, we have before our eyes an object of study that lies on the center itself of our daily life and the processes of every society. Disasters, then, are ours. Not of nature.

Disasters are linked to development problems on which failures or omissions in public policies, non-sustainable projects, and the actions of politicians and leaders on a society, among other causes, may turn out on catastrophes of all kinds. Disasters known as “humanitarian” do not escape from this reflection. Wars and armed conflicts may seem to be different and step aside form the rest of what we know as “disasters”, but actually there is a long tradition considering these phenomena as humanitarian disasters, because of its phenomenology (since they are events given on a certain space and time) as well as for its devastatingly effects. We greet the insertion of humanitarian disasters on this new line of thought that links development issues with disasters, for it seems to us really promising. However, for effects of this article, we will have to solely mention this element, which we will recover on our conclusions, since our

1 “Little girl receive her little broom or her little stove of wood. I don't know if we made that up or if someone told us to. Little boys receive the secret of the hoe or of the machete because we think that that is what they will use in life because they are men”. Comment made during a workshop on land rights for returnee indigenous women, on La Lupita, a community of Guatemalan returnees at the South Cost of Guatemala.
attention is to be focused towards another element not less important: the relation of gender with humanitarian disasters.

The sum of these two analytical categories cannot be postponed. The situation of a refugee or displaced population because of armed conflicts is similar to the one experienced by the population who has suffered a flood or an earthquake, and thus, the attention needed to attend both population shows wide parallels. Gender has become a topic that has reached an important insertion in the work with affected population on disasters, but there is still the need to systematize the experience of those projects. The present article will try to show briefly the importance of the inclusion of the category of gender on the work with population in humanitarian disasters, especially during the experience of refugee. We shall see this form the eyes of those who have come back. From the eyes of those who have returned a place they call home.

**Gender and daily life during the refuge**

When thinking about our case, we can start by saying that throughout the history, women have been relegated and marginalized in every ambit of social, political and economical life. In an astounding statement, Janet Saltzman says: “We do not know of any case on which a stratification system of sex has placed men categorically on disadvantage in regard to women. Most societies do follow a pattern of inequality between the sexes, which may go from the extremes of equality to acute female disadvantage”2 (Saltzman, 1992:15). This fact has been attempted to be explained by certain “natural” characteristics conferring women, in the face of men, a certain status within their society3. In fact, the domination in the men-women relationship is explained on a biological frame within social structures clearly defined, such as sexual division of labor, on such a degree that even men and women tend to think on this relation as something “natural”. This situation includes the way on which human beings live their sexuality, but in such a way that the extent tend to manifest on the social level.

On extreme cases, like armed conflicts, the dimensions of this situation increase its proportions. There is a certain division of war experiences, on which each gender faces and lives the armed conflict in a different way. Because of a gendered repartition of roles, society mandates the active participation of men in the front, in clashes between members of different groups or in the politics, just to mention the most acknowledged ambits; men are in some way the acknowledged actors on this social phenomena, and the way

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2 We must think that when Saltzman says “sexes” she means “genders”. The use of concepts is closely linked to the year on which the text was produced, since the category of “gender” and its use among social researchers corresponds more to the decade of the 90’s. Saltzman’s text was published on 1989 on the United States.

3 Gender perspective precisely deals with this problem “The term gender refers to a set of qualities and behaviors that a given society expects from a man or a woman. Gender behavior of a person has been considered to be affected by social or cultural expectations, which is based on the idea that some qualities, and therefore, some roles, are “natural” for women, whereas others are “natural” for women. These roles are learned, evolve throughout the time and vary widely among different cultures as well as within the same culture” (POPULI, 1995: 24).
in which men suffer war includes specific experiences, for instance, the fact that he will have to kill another human being. Women, on the other hand, generally face—in a majority on the statistics—different situations: problems by being civilians, displaced, rapes.

Of course, generalizations are always extreme. Women participation on current societies has soften generalizations, because more and more there is a trend to recognize that there are no essential or absolute differences between genders. And we cannot deny that the human experience of the effects of an armed conflict, the suffering it brings, is lived with the same intensity without making any difference of gender. For both genders, direct experiences of violence at home, natal towns and concentration camps are followed by a certain kind of indirect violence due to the lack of psychological and medical support (Zenica, 1996). All this becomes part of their daily life.

When talking about war, an event that moves every order established as normal in human societies, it is usual referring the calamities it brings: deaths, shared pain and sufferings. And yes, we cannot but acknowledge the communion of experiences shared on times of conflict. Beyond the particularities of every conflict on a given time, the horror, perhaps, is the only thing that is overtly understood when mentioning the word “war”.

However, a closer reading shall tell us that there are particular experiences depending on the historic context, on the particular conditions of the population immersed on such situation, on the resources available to deal with daily life brought by conflict. Because, that is correct, there is daily life at war time.

Agnes Heller defines daily life as the “gathering of activities characterizing the reproduction of singular human being, who also creates the possibility of social reproduction” (Heller, 1977:19). She is then referring to the person who is immersed on the history of a given society assuming a given place on labor social division, which is, assuming its function on society. Heller explains how each person has to learn how to “use” surrounding things and institutions, product of its time, of an historical process of which subjects must appropriate, including the systems of uses and the systems of expectations, “that is, subjects must keep themselves exactly in the necessary and possible way on a given time in the ambit of a given social level” (Heller, 1977: 21-22). It implies a minimal practice capacity, taught on the very same mechanisms of social reproduction, in order to be able to be on a given society, without the which there would be no possibility of survival; and, according to our authoress, the more dynamic and complex a society is, the more tested is the vital capacity of each person—and this, during the life time. Although, on the other side, such society will also offer more alternatives so anyone can appropriate of a “small world” for him or herself.

The history of daily life will have to do, then, with changes on concrete, material life of societies and the place occupied by subjects on this materiality. That is why we can include on the concept of daily life not only what occurs every day, but also events happening in an extra-ordinary way, like death or birth, since these also takes part on the particularities of—social—reproduction of a given
subject. It comprehends, then, diseases and, even, catastrophes, like war and, specifically, refuge.

The more immediate problems of refugees, which become daily matters, are a true calvary:

People are displaced by wars, political, religious or other kind of persecutions. Their flee can take them thousand of miles through battle fields, new continents and oceans, without official documents and with little money, their destiny decided by the caprice of someone – without scruples- devoted to the traffic of human beings, a border patrol or an immigration officer. And even, when apparently they are safe on a center or a camp, they still can suffer from bureaucratic harassment, jail, beatings or rapes (REFUGIADOS, 2000:14).

In the words of Pedro Joaquin Coldwell, who was General Coordinator of the Mexican Commission for the Aid to Refugees (COMAR, in Spanish) from 1996 to 1997, and Governor of the province of Quintana Roo from 1983 to 1989, refugees are part of the millions of people who

(...) have seen themselves forced to live away from their hometowns, victims of political, religious, racial conflicts or other historical circumstances and many times, also, they end up by being mere objects of destiny, innocent people suffering conflicts and wars that do not belong to them, but seriously affect their human rights.

Political refugees suffer from material losses, and we must add the deep loneliness, the feeling of loss produced by not having the comfort of the usual landscape, the close company of relatives, friends with whom they grew together, and, in general, that gathering of knowledge, traditions, uses and practices we know as history and culture.

A refugee is always dispossessed from all this that is the spiritual credential that each human has to face the world (Coldwell, 1999: 261).

The definition of refugee is complex. For many countries on Latin America there are three official definitions, taken from the sources of the Refugees Rights4, each one containing different implications5: A refugee, according to the definition form the 1951 Convention on the Statute of Refugees, approved on Geneva on July 28th 1951, in force since April 22nd 1954, and the 1967 Protocol on the Statute of Refugees, approved on New York on January 31st 1967, in force since October 4th on that same year, is the person who

“owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” (Galindo, 2000: 74).

On the definition from the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and

4 The sources are: a) the United Nations Chart, b) the 1951 Convention on the Statute of Refugees, c) the 1967 Protocol on the Statute of Refugees, d) the Statute from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for the Refugees, e) for many countries in Latin America, the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. (Galindo, 2000:71-73).

5 For a deep revision on such differences, see Galindo, 2000.
Government of the Organization of African Unity, on 10 September 1969, which is wider than the previous one, states that the term refugee shall apply also on:

“every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality” (Galindo, 2000: 74).

Finally, on the Declaration of Cartagena on Refugees, adopted in 1984 in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, at a colloquium entitled “Coloquio sobre la Protección Internacional de los Refugiados en América Central, México y Panamá: Problemas Jurídicos y Humanitarios”, we can see the influence of the previous definition, but adding another element:

The definition or concept of a refugee to be recommended for use in the region is one which, in addition to containing the elements of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, includes among refugees persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order (Galindo, 2000: 74).

Such definitions already show how complex is to think about the refugee category. In the face of these definitions, there are procedures to determine the condition of refugee, analyzing whether people do fulfill or not the mentioned motifs on the definition: for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

The question here is, when conscious of the gender perspective is that gender is not clearly mentioned as a motive for refuge, and, however, there is an unavoidable reality defying written word: women, next to children, represent the overwhelming majority on the refugees groups on almost all countries. In 1995, estimates of 23 million of refugees and 26 million of displaced people said that the 80 per cent were women and children (Berthiaume, 1995:5). On 2001, the United Nations High Commissioner (ACNUR), the international organism to protect those who are in situation of refuge (besides repatriated and displaced, who appear on special resolutions), emitted a document specifically referring the percentage of women under its protection: “On general terms, women are 50% of the population under the care of UNHCR. On the category of people over 60 years, the proportion of women is of 55%, which reflects their greater hope of life” (ACNUR, 2001:10). Until June 1st 2002, of the 19,783,100 people under the mandate protection of UNHCR, 12 million were people in the category of refugees. Of this number, the amount of women and little girls is again an important figure: “In most of the regions, women and little girls of all ages constitute from a 45% to a 55% of the refugee population” (ACNUR, 2002:12)

An important line that follows the adoption of the gender perspective on the work of the UNHCR is the attempt to attend refugee solicitudes on the basis of gender, which generally comprehend “acts of sexual violence, intra-familiar violence, forced contraception, female genital mutilation, punishment for transgressions of social uses, and homosexuality” (ACNUR). These solicitudes, mixing forms of persecution with motifs of persecution, appear also on a frame
on which persecution can be seen not only because of the sex of the victim, but because of the ideology of the aggressor. "The definition of refugee appearing on the 1952 Convention on the Statute of Refugees must be interpreted under this understanding –on a sensitive to gender approach- in the effect that it is rightfully understood." (ACNUR).

UNHCR, thus, started to take measures on this matter. On the Conclusion No 39 (XXXVI) on 1985, entitled the Refugee Women and the International Protection, the Executive Committee “recognized that States, in the exercise of their sovereignty, were free to adopt the interpretation on which refugee women in search for asylum facing cruel or inhuman acts due to their transgression of social uses on the society they lived, were to be considered as ‘a particular social group” (Galindo, 2000:85). This is how gender as a motive of persecution may be used as a cause for the determination of the condition of refugee.

Besides the problems involved on the interpretation of laws in order to include gender as a motive for persecution (and, therefore, as part of the definition of refugee), there are also specific problems lived by men as well as women particularly referred to their gender condition. Gender perspective is useful, then, to place the different levels from which to read the situation of refugees.

In the case of men, a relation has been found between their gender condition and the exercise of intra-familiar violence or alcohol problems. Besides, they are closely involved of practices of violence (clashes, quarrels) that may put in danger the stability of the refugee population, forcing to increase the security measures on behalf of the UNHCR’ staff. In general, they are the ones who take part on the frequent threat incidents on refugee camps, which are not considered within the concept of “political violence”, defining “The attacks on which refugees and strengths from their same nation or from the reception states are involved on, inner violence in the countries of reception, war between states or ethnic conflicts between refugees” (“Se oyeron tambores de guerra…”, 2000: 14-15). Thus, domestic or criminal incidents perpetrated against or amongst refugees (which are not considered as part of “political violence”) are detected by UNHCR as an everlasting risk in refugee camps (“Se oyeron tambores de guerra…”, 2000: 14-15).

And even though men are also victims of the violence that appears to be inherent to their world, women also share that destiny. On a report presented by Jeff Crisp (“Se oyeron tambores de Guerra…”, 2000:14-15), by that time director of the Unity of Evaluation and Analysis of UNHCR, were exposed the problems of security to which, by the time of 2000, the more than 200 000 refugees from the two main camps from Kenya were victims of. One was in Kakuma, in the northwest part of the country, and the other in Dadaab, in the

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6 It is important here to take into account the ideology of those who apply the law. During the 4th Annual Regional Reunion of the Gender Team of the UNHCR, from October 23 to 25 of 2000, on Morelos, Mexico, was taken as an example for this case. That is, a country on which, in spite the will and the evolution on law matters, there are still “limitations originated on cultural aspects and on the strength of use”, impeding the full use of gender as a motive of persecution. On such reunion the case of a Chinese woman was discussed, since the protection in the face of domestic violence she lived on was refused.
Northeast. On that report we learn about a series of factors that, summed up, turned out to be the elements that made the staying on a camp a torment:

(...) millenary societies, whose uses and laws break under the weight of exile and the life in remote and overpopulated "cities"; violence as a daily way of life, including generalized sexual abuses, criminal attacks by so called "bandits" and the clashes between different ethnic groups of the same country, between refugees from different states or between refugees and inhabitants of the local place.

Of course, the situation itself on which refugees live only increases to an extreme the violence in which they are already involved in. This last element leads us to think, not without reason, that gender is not the only factor for violence. Indeed, this is not about saying that men are involved on violence just because they are men. Thus, UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies try to deal with these problems from different perspectives and actions, mainly through the combination of programs of protection, assistance, camp management, education and services for the community. They offer economic, material and technical support for the strengthening of local security forces, in and outside the camps (“Se oyeron tambores de Guerra…”, 2000:15). All these actions show the multiple origins of a complex problematic. And yet, it would be interesting to know how far gender social constructions are also determining the fact that men are more closely involved on this kind of conflicts. But this very same complexity cannot blind us towards another immediate reality: women seem to suffer the result of such an increase of violence.

The experiences of women during refuge have been a matter of several and important studies. For them, the road to exodus is filled with abuses, violence and extortion. Also (as in the daily life of a surviving woman of a disaster living on a shelter) daily life of women on refugee camps include their own forgetfulness of their needs in order to attend those who are under her care; sexual violence and exploitation; domestic violence and female mutilation; lack of trust on the male officers from international agencies and governments, resulting in the absence of women on decision making and even marginalization on the supply of food and water⁷; lack of sanitary protection, including contraception; the burden of raising the kids and perform domestic tasks; the need of education of those women who lack studies but have to be responsible for their families for the fist time; sick widows, single mothers and women abandoned by their husbands may also have to deal with specific problems that will make their transit on a refugee camp even more difficult than it already is… Young women (infants or teenagers) are condemned to leave school in order to help their mothers or grandmothers on the immense amount of work of

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⁷ “The repartition of food is an area of which clearly women should be in charge. They are always the ones who feed their families. They know better than anyone which are their needs. However, men are always in charge of repartition of food” (Piñeiro, 1995). For the UNHCR, the repartition of food is always a challenge, because at the beginning it is even almost impossible to even bring food to the camps. On a kurd camp, men were gathered to organize a system in which some leaders made the distribution. Later on, officers from UNHCR knew that women head of houses did not received anything. A member of UNHCR’ staff declared on that time: “Had that group stood out, in some way, visually or physically by different background or religious differences, ever since the beginning we would had made sure that they’d got food. But because they were women it didn’t occurred to us, it didn’t occurred to me” (Piñeiro, 1995)
domestic tasks. They spend most part of their days standing in line to receive food or water, or carrying wood for fire. They also raise their younger brothers when the mother has to leave in order to do another activity in the camp (Piñeiro, 1995).

In general, UNHCR implements an intelligent planning of the camp and a better safety for women. Poorly illuminated camps, latrines at dangerous distances and the lack of privacy tend to create hostile and tense relations for women. In Ivory Coast refugees ran risks on the woods because they couldn’t decide to use the latrines installed next to the men’s, right on the center of the camp. (Marshall, 1995:7). Aid is also an economic matter, because the resources given to construe a camp may not comprehend cement platforms to wash the clothes, instead than having women all day on the mud, which causes problems of hygiene and health (Marshall, 1995: 7).

Health is closely linked to daily life. Refugee camps may lack sanitary pads and underwear. We can add this to the gynecological problems where there are not too many spaces for hygiene. Menstruation is a good example on how women are affected by aid programs exclusively designed by men. Until 1995, UNHCR had very few operations comprehending the need of the supply for hygiene protection. Naturally, many refugee women use fabrics, just as they used to do on their natal communities. But in the camps, there is a lack of supply, not always they can wash them in private and the help from family is limited. In fact, “the participation of young women and women at school, training courses and other activities diminishes because those menstruating have nothing to protect themselves, and thus they could not run the risk of going too far away from home” (Marshall, 1995: 9). Women menstruate one week of every four. On extreme situations, a refugee woman who has strong cultural impositions and is in the position of depending of a piece of fabric, may be reluctant to leave her house during that time to get some food, wood or take her child to the clinic.

In fact, we can say that every stage of the refugee experience is a really difficult path. Refuge is not only the staying on a camp or on a foreign country: is the long walk, the staying on a territory for protection—which gives them their condition of refugees- and another element which is now a matter of increasing interests: the preparation for return. This one contains new challenges, because it will confront everything that was learned during the experience of refuge.

In general, since 1995 gender policies and programs have been increasingly implemented on refugee camps. This is the reason why we now know that another important element to consider is the very same agent of those policies. The introduction of the concept of Mainstreaming did a lot on this regard. Because depending on the way these are conceived, designed, administrated, executed and evaluated, the results can go from none to huge—in the positive and in the negative connotations. On refugee camps, gender policies have sometimes achieved positive results: “Guatemalan refugees in Mexico, Mozambique women in Malawi and Zimbabwe, Afghan women in Pakistan or the returnees in Cambodia have benefited of well elaborated plans and of a concerned assistance. In other operations, where the staff has been less motivated, we have achieved much less” (Piñeiro, 1995).
Mainstreaming goes with the assumption that not only women, but men from all involved spaces (including the agencies working with the population) should be aware of gender differences and inequalities. Policies, then, should be addressed, at all times, having in mind all the complexities of this process.

Return has a lot to do with what I’ve just mentioned, because it functions like a thermometer to evaluate gender programs and policies. This is the reason why return has become a terribly important part of the work during the refuge, because this means not only an evaluation of a given program, which is the less important thing, but the way in which daily life of the former refugee population will be from that moment on.

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I want to make a halt at this point on my paper on this regard. When evaluating the work done with fragile and vulnerable populations, I think we have to ask ourselves, mainly those of us who are interested on the themes of disaster management and gender, is about the “how”, “what is it we want to achieve”, “why is it we want it”, “how much, of all we want, is reasonably achievable”, “how much of it is an ideal, a prejudice, how much can be true”, “which should be the starting point”, “how can we measure what we have already done”. I am really concerned about these questions because the points of reference and evaluation when thinking about what I’ve called on my paper “daily life” become blurred. Much of these questions –perhaps all of them- will require of us more time of the one we have.

I am here interested on subjectivities and daily experiences. I want to think that the kind of evaluation we’ll do in the future, along with those tools we have already made use of, will include the voices of those we care about, of those who are the “objects” of our interest, “objects” of programs, workshops, plans, policies. But actually, subjects are what we are interested in. When thinking about disasters including gender, development, mainstreaming, and all these categories of thought, it is only to remember all of us the human side of a process that has been presented as something natural, rational, determined, unmovable, cold, logical, unidirectional, and so on. Instead of presenting a statistical or even descriptive evaluation of the UNHCR’s plans, programs and policies of gender, on the final part of my paper, I will present some narrative texts by Guatemalan returnees who were on the exile of refuge –some of them 10 years- on refugee camps in Mexico. They were the subjects of the work implemented not only by several international organisms, but also of NGO’s and the national government in Mexico. They are indigenous women and most of them did not know how to read and write before their experiences in exile. Now they know the term “gender”, the Geneva Conventions regarding women’s rights and some of them use computers during their work defending their rights to land access and many more...

The individual process of a woman is reflected on the series of poems that Pantaleona has written. She was 28 years old at the time I met her, on 2002.
She works on Mama Maquin\(^8\) and besides her work on the organization had a 1 year old child at that time. During the refuge she lived in two provinces of Mexico: Chiapas and Campeche, and returned to Guatemala on the first collective return. The following is the first poem she wrote of the four poems she has written\(^9\):

\begin{verbatim}
O Guatemala tierra de Quetzal tienes mucha riquesa por tu cultura tu
O costumbre tus trajes brian como las estrellas eres famosa por tu tradición
O Guatemala de colores que eres multilingue pluricultural\(^{10}\)
\end{verbatim}

As we can see, this first poem of a returnee woman to her country after a devastatingly conflict—which lasted more than 30 years- refers to her country, whose value she judges in terms of its culture and traditions. The poem also vindicates another important element directly concerning the returnee population: ethnic diversity. The second poem written the same day gives a twist:

\begin{verbatim}
O Guatemala tierra de Quetzal donde los pájaros cantan y las Marimbas suenan
O mujer eres vella por el color de tu traje eres como las estrellas
O Guatemala tierra del Quetzal eres beyas por tus colores y Tus mujeres\(^{11}\)
\end{verbatim}

Whereas the first poem was a singing for the subject of the sentence Guatemala, on this poem we have two subjects of sentences: Guatemala and woman. Both are in equal level of importance and beauty on the first two sentences. But the last line closes with a different meaning: Guatemala obtains its beauty from the women inhabiting it. Not a “woman” but “women”. Those who are different and at the same time know of their origins again mentioned on the reference to the typical dresses and customs. This content clearly states the elements signing the life of a Guatemalan refugee woman, who also assumes her ethnic condition as well as her gender condition.

The following two were written years later, on 2002. After a long process of integration to her country and her work with gender, the questions appearing on her poems lie on issues that are determinants in any human identity: gender, the belonging to a group with history (refuge, return), culture, ethnic belonging.

Quien Soy:

\begin{verbatim}
Quien soy me pregunte cuando los hombres nos decian a caso las mujeres
de Mama Maquin quieren mandarnos ha ora
\end{verbatim}

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\(^8\) Madre Tierra, Mamá Maquín and Ixmucané are the three main women organization of Guatemalan returnee women on the entire country. The three of them were created during the refuge in Mexico and they still work in Guatemala.

\(^9\) The following two poems were written in Guatemala almost at her arrival during the closing of a workshop for returnee women.

\(^{10}\) Original syntax. O Guatemala land of Quetzal you are extremely rich because of your culture your/ O custom your suits shine like stars you are famous because of your tradition/ O colorful Guatemala you are multilingual pluricultural

\(^{11}\) O Guatemala land of Quetzal where birds sing and/ Marimbas sound/ O woman you are beautiful for the color of your traditional dress you are like stars/ O Guatemala land of Quetzal you are beautiful for your colors and women
Quien soy. Me pregunte cuando adverti que soy importante en la Sociedad por ser mujer tengo que luchar para que mivos se escuche

Quien soy. Me pregunte
Para que mi espacio se respeten y mis derechos sean reconocidos y que En la sociedad ayga un cambio y una equidad entre hombres y mujeres
En la sociedad

On this poem, questions on identity are made to her social group. If women change her behavior, are they still women? On this question we can see a fragment of conflict between the genders, because men are asking if women are trying to change power relations. However, in spite that difficulty, the first answer that seems to appear to the question “Who am I” is “a woman”, which sets for her a path only for being a woman: she has to speak and make sure her voice is listened. This with the aim of identifying herself with a bigger group, her society, that may contain both men and women the same. What seems clear is that men and women do not live themselves the same, and that is why she sets an answer in the terms of “being” and “doing” so that she can change herself and the group that mandates her places and functions, denying her the possibility of conceiving herself by herself. When she manages to answer, she is already thinking about all those who are just like her.

The following poem, the last one of the same authoress, may well be the last one of a poetic system with circular structure if the four poems are thought as a whole. The first poems begin as a singing to Guatemala, the re-encountered country. A woman is already part of that country and it is precisely her presence one of the elements beautifying Guatemala (appearing on a female personification). The second poem equals Guatemala and the woman. The third poem, a question regarding her subjectivity, and the things implied if what she suspects is true: that being a woman means a responsibility which extends from her as a singular subject to her entire society. This reflection, finally, leads to the fourth poem, on whose answer we find not only a woman’s condition, but the task that now she will have in order that she can share her knowledge to other women; women addressed on a “You” who take part on a direct dialogue with her since they are the addressees of the text while being “a” female reader.

O Mujer
O Mujer cuando tu luchas lucha por
las demas por que nosotras las mujeres
bamos por el mismo camino.
Cuando nos asende menos, cuando nos huimayan,
Cuando se burlan de nosotras
Cuando no nos valoran por ser mujer

12 Who am I/ Who am I wondered when men said is it that now you women/ from Mama Maquin want to rule / Who am I. I wondered when I learned that I’m important in/ Society because am a woman I have to fight so that my voice is heard/ / Who am I. I wondered/ So that my space are respected and my rights acknowledged and that/ In society there be a change and equality among men and women/ In society. Compare this poem with another one that follows, written by another Guatemalan woman. This poem has a clear influence of it. However, these texts show a process of personal subjectivity, giving place to an entire new work.
O Mujer cuando: Tu aprendas algo inparte a las demás por que el Saber no espara uno mismo sino para compartir a las demás

O Mujer cuando: tu tienes tu cultura haste balar y balortarte por que nosotros las mujeres valemos mucho en la vida

O Mujer cuando: Tu pones tu traje de colores virian de colores como las estrellas y el Resplandor del sol

The following poem seems have been the origin of the reflections of the previous authoress, but since this new one refers an experience of refuge, not of return, speaks us about a different reality. The previous ones talk about reconstruction, of something that is worth to change because there is still a future. In the poem that follows, the loss of the country mingles the value of individuality with the belonging of a group which, even if in bad times, can stand on its own.

¿Quién soy?
¿Quién soy? Me pregunté al observar la lejanía de mi país y comprender que quizás nunca volvería

¿Quién soy? Me pregunté cuando los hombres nos decían: ¿acaso las mujeres de Mama Maquin quieren mandarnos ahora?

¿Quién soy Me pregunté cuando advertí que soy importante en la sociedad, pero que por ser mujer tengo que luchar para que mi voz se escuche, mi espacio se respete y mis derechos sean reconocidos.

These poems have told us something about a situation that speaks not only about personal lives or individual questionings, but about the way in which refugee women went through their process of reflection and transformation on a confuse and even hostile surrounding. The mark of UNHCR’s policies and programs is evident on those vindications of identities and rights, but we also hear about the new difficulties now that there is no way back on that. Guatemalan inhabitants do resent the presence of returnees, because they are reminders of social inequalities, so they are now living a difficult time. But this is so because returnees have also their own processes, and they are now much

13 O Woman/ O Woman when you fight fight for/ other women be cause we women/ go through the same path./ When theydimi nish us, when they humiliait us,/ When they make fun of us/ When they do not value us because we are woman// O Woman when: You learn something teach to the/ rest because Knowledge is notfor one self/ but to be shared to other woman//O Woman when: you have your culture show you are worthy/ and value you because we women worth/ a lot on this life//O Woman when: You wear your colorful suit/they shines like stars and the/Sunshine.
more than only a few policies that were applied on them some years ago. Now they need a continued effort to respond to the new transformations set by the same agents on each community: women and men.

During refuge, Guatemalan women had the opportunity to organize themselves protected by UNHCR. Some speculate that during their staying at refugee camps, men only used their organizations to “take the picture”. Now on Guatemala, women’s organizations are little recognized and their role in the past is forgotten. Guatemalan returnee women’s struggle is now to find protection under international agencies and NGO’s so that they can still decide on their future.

I shall end with another poem, this time from a Guatemalan poet. This is a man addressing another man about what concerns them both as members of the same gender and as human beings.

¿Qué vas a hacer,
hombre de guerra,
cuando hayas matado al último hombre de paz,
a la última mujer de paz,
al último niño de la paz?
¿enseñarás a tus balas a cantar?
¿le harás el amor a tus bayonetas?
¿sembrarás bosques de pendones y estandartes
de los que colgarán granadas y misiles a modo de frutos
que sacien tu hambre?
¿calmarás tu sed en los ríos de sangre de tus víctimas?
¿Qué vas a hacer hombre de guerra
cuando hayas reventado al sol con tus bombas?
¿iluminarás la noche eterna con tus explosiones?
¿Qué vas a hacer,
pobre diablo,
infeliz,
desventurado hombre de guerra
cuando hayas acabado con todos
y no te quede nadie más a quién enfrentar
sino a vos mismo?

Alejandro Arriaza 14

I wanted to show that there is a close relation between what I call “daily life” on this paper and the main issues of development and policies. The link between those experiences lived by populations with disaster risks, during the emergency or after the disaster and the ones lived by the population during conflicts is clear. As I have signaled, every day on camp is an en-gendered day. For men as well as for women, this is so. I want to insist on the fact that we

14 What will you do/ war man,/ when you have killed the last man of peace,/ the last woman of peace,/ the last child of peace?/ will you teach your bullets to sing?/ will you make love to your bayonets?/ will you sow woods of pennons and standards/from which will hang grenades and missiles like fruits/ to calm your hunger?/ will you calm your thirst on the rivers of blood from your victims?/ what will you do war man/ when you have made the sun burst with your bombs?/ will you light the eternal night with your explosions?/ What will you do,/ poor devil,/ pathetic/ unhappy war man/ when you have killed them all/ and have no one else to confront/ but you?
have to learn to find gender problems on men as well as we insist in find them for women. On this paper I cannot extend myself on this, but it is a fact that the work with gender policies works better if men are included on the actions and programs.

The category of gender helps us to realize that subjectivity lies beyond any other human trace. On this way, comprehensible disaster risk management – understood as a holistic perspective to deal with events that overcome everyday life is more than just a series of recommendations during given phases. It is actually a process for life, since it acknowledges the most important thing of human lives: history processes and consequences but, most importantly, changes.

**Sources of Consult**


