

BOLETÍN N° 35

Red Feminista Latinoamericana y del Caribe contra la Violencia Doméstica y Sexual
(versión inglés)

EDITORIAL

IN WAR AND IN PEACE

Various forms of armed conflict have wrought drastic changes in the geographies and economies of countries where they have occurred, upsetting daily life, destroying homes and forcing the inhabitants into exile. Women make up the majority of the displaced and refugee populations that have fled armed violence in exiles marked by suffering, abandonment and sexual violence. In Latin America, the end of the conflagrations in Central America and the defeat of terrorism in Peru have given way to a period of pacification, often under agreements negotiated between governments and insurgent forces, as in El Salvador and Guatemala. This phase has been characterized by the massive return of the most affected populations and by the promise of social programs in the rhetoric of those in power. In Colombia, however, the situation is very different. There, one of the longest wars in the history of the American continent, which has cost thousands of lives, rages unceasingly, ruled by the codes and interests of guerrilla forces and drug traffickers.

This edition of the *Boletín* features a special report on feminist anti-violence movements, pacifist women's groups and human rights organizations that have taken a radical stance against war. In spite of their activism, the mainstream media continue to ignore their presence or minimize their voices in favor of sensationalist coverage in which only men are represented. This report is complemented by a selection of critical post-war reflections by women who were involved in guerrilla movements. We have also included information about the participation of women's groups and networks in recent peace processes and reconstruction programs, and about other initiatives taken by women's movements demanding social change.

Not Without Bodies

By Elena Grau Biosca

War and peace are phenomena unique to human society --two radically opposed situations, separated by respect or disregard for life in moments of conflict. War is a way of resolving conflicts by means of destruction and the forced submission of the other, known as the enemy. War is the ultimate expression of violence, because it normalizes the practice of killing as a way of dealing with confrontation.

Peace does not mean the absence of violence, however. In the world we live in, it means the containment of violence in legalized channels that legitimize some forms and punish others. A culture of peace includes all practices in human relations that foster diversity and its inherent conflicts without using violence. A culture of peace necessarily upholds human life in all its diverse conditions and desires. In all forms of war today, the deep roots of a symbolic order --the male patriarchal order that values power and domination over life—are more evident than ever.

The 1991 Gulf War introduced televised images of technological war --images of a war without fronts or battlefields, without people, without shattered or mutilated bodies, apparently without human suffering. The technological war waged by the men from the wealthy Northern and Western countries uses violence by threatening the enemy with infinite destruction while allowing them to appear before their own people with blood-free hands.

Now the image of war is primarily of displaced people—in the Balkans, Rwanda, Colombia, Chechnya—forced to leave their homes and villages, fleeing death and destruction. Wars that displace populations are most often the fruit of violence waged by men in poor countries, violence aimed at eradicating social life at its roots so that it cannot grow back or sustain the enemy. Their mission is to kill the human community by uprooting people, materially and emotionally, from their place of belonging.

Women are alienated from men's wars today because, in current militaristic patriarchal discourse, the human body is irrelevant. Women participate in conflicts; we experience competing interests; we are not strangers to confrontation, and we can kill. The difference lies in the fact that women know what it costs to cultivate human life, and this places us in a different situation in the world and in conflicts.

The daily practice of creating and recreating life is born of a knowledge of caretaking, language, and relationships with others that constitute a repository of resources for cultivating peace. Women's experience of living in a body capable of containing another body; the female task of sustaining the promise of birth; the daily sense of captivity, of living in a body susceptible to rape, together constitute a material way of thinking that cannot disregard the body. This way of thinking, born of the experience of the female body and of continually listening to other bodies, makes it impossible to abstract human life, and may serve as the basis of a proposal for peace.

THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

When the Andean Regional Office of *Consejería en Proyectos* (Project Consulting) opened in Lima, Peru in 1993, one of its priorities was to provide support and counseling for women displaced from areas that had been devastated by armed conflict. The office focused its attention on Huancavelica, a rural, Quechua-speaking area, considered the poorest in the country, where both Shining Path insurgents and the Peruvian Armed Forces sowed destruction and chaos for over a decade between 1980 and 1993.

In a report about the project, Regional Director Diana Avila wrote that it is erroneous to regard displaced women only as victims. In Peru, as well as in Mexico, Central America and Colombia, women who suffered violence and the insecurity of losing their homes often became leaders in the struggle to regain dignified living conditions. They learned to dialogue with others, make decisions and confront authorities in ways that would have been previously unthinkable. In general, however, when they returned to their homes, most women felt pressured to reassume their former roles.

Government programs were very limited and primarily oriented around rebuilding damaged infrastructure. The social effects of the trauma of war and abuses associated with the conflict were ignored, as were the need for emotional rehabilitation, the reconstruction of affective and trusting relationships within communities, and efforts to encourage the participation of those affected.

In Guatemala, the 1999 report by the Commission for Historic Clarification led women's organizations to mobilize to demand compliance with the Peace Accords. Some thought that the report created conditions for healing the suffering of thousands of women, particularly widows who felt for the first time that there had been public recognition that their husbands, partners, or children died as victims of the war and not because they had been "asking for trouble."

At present, however, the human rights situation has regressed under a reign of terror provoked by paramilitary groups operating with impunity that have sent death threats to human rights activists and several journalists. In June, the National Women Journalists Network denounced such threats against 11 people, including two of its members, Rosita Bolaños and Marielos Monzón.

This atmosphere of impunity was also recently denounced by Hina Jilani, the U.N. Secretary General's Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders.

A Women's Agenda that was produced collectively in 1999 initiated a period of activism and monitoring of women's demands under the umbrella of the Peace Accords. Women organized meetings and campaigns, and issued statements calling attention to the needs of broad sectors of women, especially indigenous women, who were personally affected by the war. A workshop on the Social Audit was also held recently for representatives of the women's sector of the Civil Society Assembly. The Social Audit is aimed at verifying compliance with the Peace Accords and evaluating the government's political will to undertake actions that respond to women's needs and interests. For it to be effective, however, women need to organize and become familiar with institutions and the ways they function, the place of government officials within them, and the law.

El Salvador

Closing the Parenthesis

By Clara Murguialday and Norma Vásquez

Peace processes rarely take women into account. Their emotional suffering is ignored in the reconstruction programs of countries destroyed by war, because there are always more urgent problems to be resolved. Peace accords tend to ignore the participation and the needs of women, as well as changes in gender relations.

Plans for reinserting combatants of both genders into civilian life are primarily designed to serve the men, who are given priority access to land transfer programs, scholarships and housing. Although Truth Commissions acknowledge rape as a grave violation of women's human rights, no mechanisms are set up to provide victims with economic and social reparations, nor are resources provided to help displaced women, or women who collaborated with the guerrillas, become reintegrated in society, even when most of the survivors of armed conflicts are women with children that they must raise alone.

After years of war, most of the people affected only want the violence to end and to have a "normal" life. But, do they really want to return to "normality" as it was before? Most men probably do want to return to the situation they knew before the conflict. Exhausted from combat, they hope to find a home where nothing has changed because, after all, they weren't fighting to change anything about that arrangement.

Women also long for a normality that allows them to live in peace, unthreatened, able to think about the future, but they are more likely to expect that some of the changes they experienced during the war be part of the normality to which they return.

These diverse and almost always conflicting expectations about what it means to "get back to normal" produce tensions in gender relationships during the post-war period that are often aggravated by a culture of militarism, the effects of extreme trauma, an abundance of light weapons in the hands of the population, and the return to communities of "heroic combatants" who are the most inclined to impose their will by force rather than negotiate. After a few years have passed, it becomes evident that many women have had to give up their aspirations of change, having discovered that the "normality" that their loved ones wanted meant that they resume their domestic, subordinate roles. At the same time, increases in gender violence, the number of households headed by women, and paternal irresponsibility during the post-war period are part of the price women pay when the programs for "returning to normality" fail to consider new tensions in the relationships between women and men.

Absence is the concept that best expresses the way in which women participate in post-war reconstruction processes:

- The physical absence of women at the peace negotiation tables and other spaces for decision-making about how and when to end the war;
- The literal and symbolic absence of women's specific demands in formal peace accords;
- The absence of recognition of women's contributions to struggles for human rights and peace;
- The absence of women's denunciations or the abuses committed against them in truth commission reports;
- The absence of women's organizations in designing reconstruction policies;
- The invisibility of women's daily efforts toward family and social reconciliation;
- ...and always, the pertinent absence of a gender analysis in evaluations of the social impact of wars and reconstruction processes.

Women's movements offer new hope for post-war reconstruction in Central America. They can meet the challenge of reconstructing the historical memory of the war from the women's perspective, revealing the invisible suffering of those who apparently never carried out great acts of heroism. At the same time, they provide ideal spaces for reflecting on the parenthetical experiences of women during the conflicts and converting these into arguments in favor of women's personal and collective growth.

Nevertheless, women's organizations cannot be expected to heal the wounds of war without support, including funding, from those who continue to emphasize the importance of women's role in reconstruction and building peace. Furthermore, building a positive peace that precludes future armed conflicts requires that social agents and institutions acquire the political will to question gender inequality—and other forms of social inequality—as well as the unpeaceful attitudes associated with masculinity.

Colombia

WRITING TO SAVE HER LIFE

In 2000, María Eugenia Vásquez, a former member of the 19th of April Movement in Colombia, known as the M-19, published a memoir titled *Escrito para no morir* ("Written so as not to die"). The following are extracts of a conversation between the author and the sociologist Soraya Hoyos.

The M-19 was an insurgent group active in Colombia from the 1960s into the 1990s. I took part in all kinds of political-military activities; I led mass organizing work as well as urban and rural armed actions. I lived clandestinely, and I spent time in jail. I was a member of the national leadership. For more than 18 years I thought that it was the only possible way to change the country.

What about love? What did it mean then?

Love just helped me live, but it was secondary because my life was centered around the revolution. The greatest contradictions that women in the guerrilla movement face have to do with motherhood. For most women, it means deciding not to become mothers, because their political commitment won't allow it, but this fills women with guilt, because we bear the cultural burden of thinking of ourselves as fundamentally and essentially mothers.

When the women return to civilian life, they ask themselves if motherhood might be a project that can give them new motivation. When the Peace Accords were signed, many compañeras decided to have children and start a family, because they hadn't done it before. In many cases,

however, they had children and they continued to feel unfulfilled, because they were missing something else. They were missing the essence, the meaning of life.

Most of the women who already had children had to rebuild their war-torn families alone, usually because they were widowed or because their husbands found new wives for new times. Double mourning: they lost the collective and their partner at a time of confusion and adversity.

The women in the guerrilla movement went into the mountains to fight alongside the men for a more just society. To perform successfully and survive in that eminently masculine world, they underwent an adaptation process that altered the reference points of their very identities and enabled them to compete with men and be judged according to essentially masculine qualities: courage, audacity, toughness, the ability to command, strong will and daring.

That fusion of man and woman that women fighters must embody raises questions about the binary logic that only perceives the opposition of two adversary worlds in the division between the sexes. Perhaps the curiosity about the life of women guerrilla fighters has less to do with a frank interest in learning about those women's lives than with the irresistible attraction surrounding the entrance of women into the masculine world of war—an inverse penetration, perhaps?

Most of the commanders were women. Gaining the men's respect wasn't easy; they tended to underestimate women's political and military capacity. We had to constantly demonstrate that we could do anything that we demanded of them and more. We were known for being tough and authoritarian, but that was a way of imposing our authority over the men.

Military training prepared us for combat and toughened our will. It accustomed us to withstand psychological pressure and develop tactical skills in the field. It strengthened our fighting morale with ideological arguments. We knew exactly why we were fighting, and why we were using weapons as means to political ends. But nobody told us what to do with our feelings of shock and pain when we confronted the destruction we caused. Nobody told us that the war machine breaks down the soul; that sometimes it is better to die than to survive such a heavy burden.

Why did you leave the movement? What led to the crisis?

The M-19 started out building a new way of engaging in politics that I liked. It seemed freer, and I felt that we were communicating with the people and interpreting the feelings of many Colombians who hadn't been taken into account. As that communication broke down under a military dynamic that put more and more emphasis on actions that killed a lot of people, as the uniform began to feel like a straitjacket, then the politics went to hell. The crisis was the result of finding my place in structures that were becoming more and more militarized, because although I accepted it and got involved, and took part in military operations, there came a time when I wasn't comfortable with it any more. When it became too painful for me, I decided to get out. Giving up armed struggle wasn't a problem; the problem was that the country and the society to which men and women like me returned weren't very different from the ones that had motivated us to take up arms.

Who was responsible for the militarization of the M-19? Did it change because certain leaders were more in favor of military rather than political action?

No, it was simply the dynamics of war. Men and women become more and more involved in the dynamics of war until it devours or it crushes us.

María Eugenia left the movement one year before the disarmament of the M-19. Twelve years have passed since then, and violence is now even more widespread in Colombia.

Colombia

WOMEN MARCH AGAINST WAR

One hundred forty women's organizations called for a National Anti-War March on July 25, 2002, the first event of its kind bringing women together from around the country. This initiative is the result of a recently formed Women's Movement Against the War, which was organized to take action on two fronts: the demilitarization of civilian life, and a negotiated political solution to the armed conflict in Colombia.

One of the groups leading the Movement, the *Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres* (Women's Way of Peace), is a feminist organization that has been raising awareness about the severe conditions under which women are living in the conflict zones since 1995. The organization has also articulated the links between sexist violence and the war in Colombia.

For Women's Lives, Not One Death More Campaign

ESTHER CHAVEZ CANO AND CIMAC

By Sonia del Valle

In April 2002 the María Lavalle Urbina Prize was awarded to Esther Chávez Cano, renowned activist and founder of Casa Amiga en Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and to CIMAC, the Women's Multimedia News, Information and Communication Agency, in recognition of their tireless efforts to resolve the murder and disappearance of 279 women in Ciudad Juárez since 1993. The Mexican Women's Alliance has presented the award for the last six years to women or institutions in Mexico have made outstanding contributions to science, art, technology or the defense of women's human rights during the preceding year.

CIMAC was honored for its 14-years of gender-oriented journalism, for inclusively and pluralistically documenting the diverse realities of the lives of Mexican women, as well as their demands, proposals, and points of view.

Esther Chávez Cano has dedicated the last nine years of her life to gathering information about the tragedy of the women murdered in Ciudad Juárez. According to a member of the Feminist Millennium, "Without her and her perseverance, we would know very little about the murders of these women. She has been fundamental to making the murders known, because she is personally concerned that they be solved." Esther has traveled abroad to denounce the violence against women in Ciudad Juárez, attended funerals, shouted at public officials, demonstrated in the streets, written letters and editorials, spoken out on radio and television, organized press conferences, participated in forums and seminars on violence against women, and met with legislators, government officials, district attorneys, lawyers, U.N. Special Rapporteurs, and the Interamerican Human Rights Commission. In addition, she founded Casa Amiga, a crisis center set up to provide services for survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

From the Beijing Platform for Action

Women in power and decision-making

142(b). Integrate a gender perspective in the resolution of armed or other conflicts and foreign occupation and aim for gender balance when nominating or promoting candidates for judicial and

other positions in all relevant international bodies, such as the United Nations International Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda and the International Court of Justice, as well as in other bodies related to the peaceful settlement of disputes;

142(a). Take action to promote equal participation of women and equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace activities at all levels, particularly at the decision-making level, including in the United Nations Secretariat with due regard to equitable geographical distribution in accordance with Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations;

144(c). Strengthen the role of women and ensure equal representation of women at all decision-making levels in national and international institutions which may make or influence policy with regard to matters related to peace-keeping, preventive diplomacy and related activities and in all stages of peace mediation and negotiations, taking note of the specific recommendations of the Secretary-General in his strategic plan of action for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (1995-2000) (A/49/587, sect. IV).

190(j). Aim at gender balance in the lists of national candidates nominated for election or appointment to United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and other autonomous organizations of the United Nations system, particularly for posts at the senior level.

First Ever Criminal Sentences for Mass Rape

On February 23, 2001, three Serbian soldiers became the first men ever found guilty of rape as a crime against humanity. They were sentenced by Judge Florence Mumba of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to prison terms ranging from 12 to 28 years for their participation in the ethnic cleansing campaign against the Muslim population in Foca, Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992 and 1993. According to the victims, the soldiers picked women and girls from the concentration camps and took them to "rape camps or houses," where they were forced to clean, cook and have sex with one or more of the men. An estimated 20,000 women were subjected to similar experiences throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina.

CHRONOLOGY

1982

SPAIN. May 24th is declared International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament.

1993

The U.N. Ad-Hoc Tribunals for war crimes committed in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia agree to try and sentence those accused of raping and murdering women.

1995

COLOMBIA. Women's organizations join together as the *Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres* (Women's Way of Peace).

1996

COLOMBIA. 2,000 activists attend the first National Assembly of Women Against the War.

1997

The Women's Caucus for Gender Justice in the International Criminal Court is created.

1999

GUATEMALA. The Commission for Historic Clarification releases its report on the 36 years of

civil war during which some 200,000 perished or disappeared. One out of four victims was a woman.

NICARAGUA. North American writer and activist Margaret Randall publishes *Sandino's Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua*, a book of interviews with women who were active in the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) but later left the movement in disillusion.

2000

The U.N. Security Council makes a commitment to integrate women into negotiation and conflict resolution processes.

2001

ISRAEL. The European Parliament grants the Andrei Sajarov Prize to Women in Black for their peace efforts.

COLOMBIA. UNIFEM awards the *Organización Feminina Popular* a prize for courage in recognition of 29 years defending the women of the Magdalena Medio region, despite threats from paramilitary groups.

2002

PARAGUAY. A women's peace group announces its opposition to the draft, which next year will begin to include women.

GUATEMALA. The Archbishop's Human Rights Office pays homage to 40 women victims of the civil war for their struggle "for life, dignity, justice and hope."

COLOMBIA. Women's organizations issue a proclamation during the National Peace and Homeland Congress calling for "armed actors to respect international humanitarian law and not involve the unarmed civilian population in confrontations and hostilities."

On International Women's Day, the International Red Cross calls attention to the situation of women in armed conflicts.

World Refugees' Day is dedicated to women, who make up 51 percent of the world's refugee population.

COLOMBIA. Colombian Women Against the War organize a national anti-war demonstration.