

the Cold War and the havoc it inflicted on Central and Eastern Europe once when it ended has not been forgotten, nor have the consequences.

The expansion of the EU today is connected to increasing political stability and economic growth in its new and future members, which in turn lessens the incentive to migrate from these regions. For those who continue to migrate, the opening of legal channels lessens the chance that they will fall into the hands of traffickers and end up in the European sex market, sold into slavery and deprived of their human rights. Although it is not clear that EU membership itself is the sole cause of the downward trend in human trafficking from Central and Eastern Europe, it is undeniably an essential factor.

The expansion of the EU has been a positive development for Eastern and Central Europe, especially for those women and girls whom traffickers would have otherwise targeted. While it is not the sole explanation for the changes in sex trafficking patterns, nor has it eradicated trafficking entirely, it is an important factor which should be valued for the effect it has had on the lives of countless potential victims. Despite positive trends, Europe cannot become complacent in regards to trafficking. There are still unacceptable numbers of Eastern and Central European women and girls trafficked into the EU, and victims from Asian countries such as China, Uzbekistan, and Turkey are joining them. Domestic trafficking is increasing to make up for a shrinking supply of victims from traditional source markets. Traffickers are endlessly creative, and international actors must not forget that. In light of this, cooperation between actors is absolutely essential for effective anti-trafficking efforts. A state-centric approach on behalf of the EU cannot address all the facets of this incredibly complex global issue; a balanced approach by states, IGOs, NGOs, and civil society is absolutely necessary.

Degendering Disaster

An Examination of the Gender Differences in Today's Natural Disasters

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INTRODUCTION

As the world continues to globalize at a rapid pace, natural disasters have become an international issue. During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in particular, we have seen a shift in aid relief efforts from a national to an international affair. When studying natural disasters, areas that often complement the field include the social, political and psychological impacts on the affected society.¹ One largely disregarded area of natural disaster study is *gender*. The purpose of this paper is to explore and explain some of the issues that emerge after a natural disaster in relation to gender. The argument that will be made is that there is a divide that exists between men and women in post-disaster situations and that society's preconceived notions of gender roles can often further a woman's disadvantage. To provide evidence for this argument, the Indian Ocean Earthquake/Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina will be examined as case studies. Furthermore, the concepts of educating citizens, persuading international agencies to recognize gender as a dimension of aid relief and re-evaluating the roles of women in the rebuilding process, will be supported as means of constructing a more fair and equal post-disaster environment.

To explain the issues that emerge after a natural

¹ Valerie Nelson, Kate Meadows, Terry Cannon, John Morton, and Adrienne Martin, Uncertain predictions, invisible impacts, and the need to mainstream gender in climate change adaptations (*Gender & Development*. 10. no. 2, 2002), 54.

disaster in relation to gender, it is important to offer definitions of key terms. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines gender as “the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.”² The United Nations (UN) Department of Humanitarian Affairs defines a natural disaster as a “situation or event, which overwhelms local capacity, necessitating a request to national or international level for external assistance.”³ To explain the link between these two definitions in terms of gender roles, it is important to examine recent natural disasters and the resulting gendered impacts that have arisen. One event in recent history, with a highly gendered impact, was the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami.

THE 2004 INDIAN OCEAN EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI

On December 26, 2004, at 12:58 a.m., a massive undersea earthquake off the Indonesian coastline caused extensive damage and devastation that resulted in the death of over 230,000 people in 14 countries.⁴ Tsunami waves reached heights of 30 meters and resulted in an outpouring of US\$14 million dollars in humanitarian aid from the western world.⁵ After the tsunami and earthquake, many organizations looked at the effects on tourism, the environment and wildlife in the impacted region. Oxfam International was the first organization to specifically examine the tsunami's impact on gender.⁶ In their initial

report released in 2005, Oxfam's gendered findings were alarming and confirmed what many locals already knew. A local newspaper near the small coastal town of Lampu'uk reported similar findings in the weeks after the tsunami hit:

When the survivors of Lampu'uk had picked themselves up out of the mud of the tsunami, several appalling facts became clear. The first was that their town no longer existed. The second was that four out of five of its former inhabitants were dead. But it took a while to realise the strangest thing of all: that among those who made it to higher ground, or who kept their heads above the surging waters, so few were women.⁷

There have been several key arguments presented by scholars and NGOs to explain disproportionate death rate of women during the Indian Ocean Tsunami and Earthquake. One of the most compelling arguments is that by attempting to save their children, women hindered their chances of survival.⁸ As the wave hit, many women dispensed more energy trying to stay afloat as they attempted to save their own lives and the lives of their children.⁹ While this greatly impacted their survival rates, another important factor was the timing of the tsunami. On Sunday morning, when the wave hit, many women were taking care of their children and preparing breakfast at home as part of their traditional roles as mothers and caregivers. During this time most men were away at work, either inland working on farms or at sea fishing in small boats, which enabled them to survive the waves.¹⁰ Regardless, those men who were not away from home were more adequately equipped than women to survive through the

² World Health Organization, What do we mean by sex and gender? (Last modified 2011. Accessed November 03, 2011) <http://www.who.int>

³ UNDHA. Internationally agreed glossary of basic terms related to disaster management (*Geneva: The United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs*, 1992), 12.

⁴ R. Paris, F. Lavigne, P. Wassmer, and J. Sartohadi, Coastal sedimentation associated with the December 26, 2004 tsunami in Lhok Nga, west Banda Aceh (*Marine Geology*. 238. no. 1-4, 2007), 93.

⁵ Sisira Jayasuriya and Peter McCawley, *The Asian Tsunami: Aid and Reconstruction after a Disaster* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2010), 32.

⁶ Oxfam International, *The Tsunami's Impact on Women* (*Oxfam Briefing Note*; 2005), 6.

⁷ Oxfam International, 2005, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ WHO Press Release, Children are vulnerable because more women died in the Tsunami (*World Health Organization*, May 5, 2005), 1.

¹⁰ Oxfam International, 2005, 9.

education they had received based on their sex.¹¹ An example of this would be in Sri Lanka, where boys are taught to climb trees to gather fruit and learn to swim in case they choose a career as a fisherman.¹² Women are discouraged from learning these skills because they are expected to work within the household.¹³

Investigating the after effects of a disaster is another important dimension in examining gender and natural disasters. With disproportionate sex-based death rates in the Indian Ocean Tsunami and Earthquake, the remaining women have seen a drastic increase in their familial responsibilities at home. Some men have taken on the household chores and childcare responsibilities, but others have asked women in their extended family to take on an extra workload.¹⁴ With the additional burden of extended caregiver, living after the tsunami can be incredibly stressful for some women.¹⁵ Another issue women face is mobility. Before the tsunami, married women in Aceh, Indonesia often enjoyed a degree of personal, educational and religious freedoms.¹⁶ With the disproportionate number of women and men in Aceh communities after the tsunami, some municipalities have reverted back to more severe restrictions over widowed and unmarried women, limiting their overall mobility and freedom.¹⁷ Harassment, sexual abuse and domestic violence also became a problem post-disaster¹⁸. Organizations such as Asia Pacific Forum on Woman, Law and Development and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center

individually reported a large number of sexual harassment and violence cases against women in refugee camps.¹⁹ All of these organizations have openly stated they believe the cases they found are merely a fraction of the actual number.²⁰

HURRICANE KATRINA

Developing nations are not the only areas of the world that find themselves afflicted with issues of gender in natural disasters. Studies have shown that Hurricane Katrina also left women at a disadvantage. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the United States Gulf Coast as a category three hurricane.²¹ Carrying sustained winds of 111–130 mph (178–209 km/hr), the hurricane brought extraordinary destruction and widespread loss of life to the south-east United States.²² By August 31, 80 percent of the New Orleans region was underwater and damages from the storm were estimated to have exceeded US\$100 billion.²³ In 2012, agencies are still rebuilding parts of New Orleans. When the storm hit, thousands of New Orleans citizen moved to designated federal government safe houses to take shelter. One of the largest of these safe houses was the New Orleans Superdome. After the storm, horror stories circulated about the proceedings within the Superdome, the most horrifying of these stories are arguably those related to gender.

Personnel staffing of the Superdome during Hurricane Katrina included local police, local emergency staff, the Louisiana National Guard and the Federal Emergency Management

¹¹ Oxfam International, 2005, 9. ; World Bank, FAO, and IFAD, Gender and Agriculture SourceBook (Washington, D.C; The World Bank, 2009), 449.

¹² Oxfam International, 2005, 6. ; World Bank, *et al.* 2009, 449.

¹³ Oxfam International, 2005, 6. ; World Bank, *et al.* 2009, 450.

¹⁴ Oxfam International, 2005, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Ian Davis, Kala Peiris De Costa, Khurshid Alam, Madhavi Malagoda Ariyabandu, Mirir Bhatt, Rita Schneider, and Satchit Balsari. Gender Issues in Tsunami Recovery Planning (*Tsunami, Gender and Recovery*. 1. no.6 2005), 3.

¹⁹ Claudia Felten-Bierman, Gender and Natural Disaster: Sexualized violence and the tsunami (*Development*. 49. no. 3 2006), 82.

²⁰ Felten-Bierman, 2006, 83.

²¹ Jennifer Silva-Brown, Katie Cherry, Loren Marks, Erin Jackson, Julia Volaufova, Christina Lefante, and Michal Jazwinski. After Hurricane Katrina and Rita: Gender Differences in Health and Religiosity in Middle-Aged and Older Adults (*Health Care for Women International*. 31. no. 11 2010), 1000.

²² Silva-Brown, *et al.* 2010, 1001.

²³ National Climatic Data Center. U.S. Department of Commerce, Hurricane Katrina (Last modified December 29, 2005. Accessed November 07, 2011) <http://ncdc.noaa.gov/>.

Agency (FEMA), who offered security and medical services.²⁴ Residents of New Orleans intending to take shelter in the Superdome were recommended to bring a three day supply of food and water - which would later prove to be half of what was needed.²⁵ The issue with the original Superdome plan is that it assumed that the levees would hold. But as the levees fell late Monday afternoon, thousands of people who had ignored the call for evacuation looked to the Superdome for refuge.²⁶ Capacity was quickly overwhelmed and staffers were forced to turn refugees away. As time passed, the Superdome was reported by news agencies to resemble a "ghetto" with looting, gangs, and violence against women and children.²⁷

Unconfirmed reports of sexual abuse, harassment and rape began to surface as soon as one as a week after the hurricane hit.²⁸ Two of the most haunting news stories include two babies who had their throats slit inside the dome and a seven-year-old girl who was raped and murdered.²⁹ Rape is something that is not unusual in gender and natural disaster studies.³⁰ After a natural disaster, women are more likely to become victims of domestic and sexual violence.³¹ In developing nations women often avoid shelters out of fear of rape and sexual harassment.³² However, the presence of this gendered subordination in a westernized society shocked and appalled many within the United States and in the greater world community.

²⁴ Robert Congleton, The story of Katrina: New Orleans and the political economy of catastrophe (*Public Choice*, 127, no. 1 2006), 13.

²⁵ Congleton, 2006, 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁷ Gary Younge, Murder and rape - fact or fiction? (*The Guardian UK*, September 6, 2005), 1.

²⁸ Younge, 2005, 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Felten-Bierman, Claudia, 2006, 84. ; M. Hynes and B.L Cardozo, Sexual violence against refugee women (*Journal of Women's Health & Gender-Based Medicine* 9.no.8 2000), 820. ; Davis, *et al.* 2006, 8.

³¹ Davis, *et al.* 2006, 9 ; Oxfam International, 2005, 4.

³² Davis, *et al.* 2006, 8. ; Hynes, *et al.* 2000, 820. ; UN Press Release, UN calls for empowering women to address tsunami's gender-specific needs (*UN News Centre*, January 15, 2005).

Although the New Orleans police have found no substantiated evidence of rape or murder in the Superdome, the reports effectively caused a global realization that gender disparity after a natural disaster can exist even in one of the world's most developed countries.³³

DISASTER CASUALTY RATES

The above case studies are specific examples of the effects of a natural disaster on gender. The Indian Ocean Tsunami and Earthquake and Hurricane Katrina provide an idea of how gender inequality can be intertwined with natural disasters in both developing and westernized civilizations, yet there is a bigger picture that needs recognitions. A 2007 study on the gendered nature of natural disasters found that in 141 countries the "gender differences in deaths from natural disasters are directly linked to women's economic and social rights."³⁴ Thus, the study indicates that in nations where women find themselves at a disadvantage in the absence of a natural disaster, post-disaster they become even more vulnerable. An example used by the 2007 study to illustrate the social vulnerability of women states that in developing nations where gender inequality exists "both women and girls suffer more from shortages of food and economic resources."³⁵ They argue that that the reason for this disparity is the cultural norm that encourages immediate service for the males.³⁶ This approach to post-disaster aid inevitably leads to a high casualty rates in women.

Casualty rates and death tolls are a common method organizations and governments use to pinpoint the gender differences that exist after a natural disaster.³⁷ Studies indicate that women and children are 14 times more likely to die than

³³ Younge, 2005, 1.

³⁴ Eric Neumeyer and Thomas Plümper, The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy, 1981-2002 (*Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 97, no. 3 2007), 553.

³⁵ Neumeyer, *et al.* 2007, 554.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Neumeyer, *et al.* 2007, 551.

men during a disaster.³⁸ In the 1991 Bangladesh cyclone disasters, which resulted in the deaths of 140,000 Bangladesh citizens, 90 percent of victims were women.³⁹ When the figures for the Indonesian tsunami and earthquake were released, it indicated not only that more women died than men, it also indicated that in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, male survivors outnumber female survivors by four to one.⁴⁰ This trend is not just something that is exclusive to developing countries. In the western world, more women died than men during the 2003 European heat wave.⁴¹ Even with Katrina in the United States, studies indicate that African-American women faced the greatest post-hurricane challenges of survival.⁴² These outstanding trends not only point out a divide between men and women in natural disasters, they speak to an inherent need for aid relief programs to recognize that a problem exists.

LONG TERM GENDERED EFFECTS OF A NATURAL DISASTER

Although casualty numbers show a division between men and women immediately after a natural disaster, it is also important to recognize some of the long term effects that are felt, particularly in developing countries. After a natural disaster, men and women play different roles in rebuilding their nation and, in developing countries, will often play an important role in the home. After a disaster, household work increases substantially as restoration begins and familial life changes drastically.⁴³ Many families find themselves in difficult situations and often force their daughters, rather than boys, to drop out of school to help with additional chores.⁴⁴ This, in turn, hinders their prospects for an

educated future and has lifelong impacts on the daughter's.

Often, after a natural disaster, the economy and job markets suffer for an extended period of time.⁴⁵ This has a detrimental impact on women in both the developing and developed worlds because there are more women involved in the informal sector and in small enterprises.⁴⁶ With lack of capital and limited access to credit information after a disaster, this sector is typically the most impacted industrially and sees a drastic increase in unemployment.⁴⁷ Another major industry that is negatively impacted is agriculture. Sufficient food supply is a necessary part of every working country, but some scholars have argued that the nutritional status that exists before a natural disaster determines how a society manages the effects of natural disasters.⁴⁸ An example of this idea is illustrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, where women have a large workload (particularly after a natural disaster) but also have a lower intake of calories than men because the cultural norm is for men to receive more food.⁴⁹ In nations where these norms exist, women suffer much greater nutritional deficiencies for longer periods of time as the agricultural industry recovers.⁵⁰

MEASURING DISASTER VULNERABILITY

Thus far, it has been argued that the preconceived societal notions built into different cultures can be a major impediment after a natural disaster. However, it is important to reflect on what these preconceived societal notions are and how they impact citizens along gendered lines. Scholars argue that women experience multiple

³⁸ Lorena Aguilar, *Climate Change and Disaster Mitigation (Conference for the International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2004)*, <http://www.iucnworldconservationcongress.org> (accessed November 04, 2011).

³⁹ Aguilar, 2004, 4.

⁴⁰ Davis, *et al.* 2006, 6.

⁴¹ Aguilar, 2004, 4.

⁴² Silva-Brown, *et al.* 2010, 999.

⁴³ Davis, *et al.* 2006, 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Davis, *et al.* 2006, 4.

⁴⁶ Nelson, *et al.* 2002, 553.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Terry Cannon. Gender and climate hazards in Bangladesh (*Gender & Development*, 10, no. 2 2002), 45.

⁴⁹ The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Gender and Nutrition* (Last modified July, 2001. Accessed November 10, 2011) <http://www.fao.org>

⁵⁰ Cannon, 2002, 46.

vulnerabilities after disasters that require special attention because of their socially constructed roles.⁵¹ These roles frequently include the roles of mother, caregiver, household keeper and wife, among others.⁵² In some developing countries, these roles are seen as inferior or subordinate to men and leave many women unable to access important resources.⁵³ These resources include access to “social networks, transportation, information, skills (including literacy), control over land and other economic resources, personal mobility, secure housing and employment, freedom from violence and control over decision-making.”⁵⁴ These resources are essential in ensuring disaster preparedness, mitigation and rehabilitation.⁵⁵ Without freedom to use these resources women cannot have the adequate (or equal) survival skills that are needed to cope with a post-disaster environment.

A specific example where socially constructed roles have led to a high female casualty rates is Bangladesh. In the 1991 Bangladesh cyclones, excessive female death is credited to an adherence to “gender-specific roles and restrictions on women’s spatial mobility imposed by the norm of *pardah*”⁵⁶. In Bengali, the word ‘*pardah*’ represents ‘the curtain’ that separates the worlds of men and women.⁵⁷ For those that adhere to *pardah*, there is a strict belief that women should not leave the home without a male-relative, regardless of national emergencies. Multiple studies have blamed *pardah* as an important factor in producing the high female casualty rate after the storm.⁵⁸

⁵¹ GenSalud, Gender and Natural Disasters (Pan American Health Organization Regional Office of the WHO, 2002).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Keiko Ikeda, Gender Differences in Human Loss and Vulnerability in Natural Disasters: A Case Study from Bangladesh (*Indian Journal of Gender Studies*. 171. no. 2 1995), 174.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁵⁸ Ikeda, 1995, 181.

A more recent example of societal notions limiting women is the 2010 Haiti earthquake. In a newsletter released by the non-governmental organization *InterAction* two months following the earthquake, the humanitarian workers cite critical gender issues as serious obstacles to the aid process.⁵⁹ These obstacles included “unequal access by women, and especially female-headed households, to humanitarian aid and supplies due to power inequalities exacerbated by the earthquake.”⁶⁰ In order to eliminate the gender inequalities that are present after a natural disaster, it has been recommended that governments and international agencies focus on three variables before the disaster: education, adaptation and recognition.⁶¹

Proper education plays a large role post-disaster to ensure there are little or no gender inequalities. This education can be given to three core groups: women, men and aid workers. It is important to create programs for women to gain general knowledge about natural disaster action plans before the disaster strikes, so they can better prepare themselves in case of emergency. Additionally, it is important to educate men and aid relief workers on the inequalities that exist so that the difference is minimized when a disaster happens.⁶² An example of effective education on hurricane disaster action plans is the case of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Six months before the category five hurricane hit much of Central America and the Western Caribbean, a disaster agency had given a “gender-sensitive community education on early warning systems and hazard management” in the town of La Masica, Honduras.⁶³ After the session had taken place, the women of La Masica created an early hurricane warning monitoring system

⁵⁹ Peter Chang, Jeannie Harvey, Julie Montgomery, and Heather Powell. Gender Response for the Haiti Earthquake (*Interaction Newsletter*, March 2010), 1.

⁶⁰ Chang, *et al.* 2010, 1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶² Ariana Araujo, Andrea Quesada-Aguilar, Lorena Aguilar, and Rebecca Pearl. Gender Equality and Adaption (*Womens’ Environment & Development Organization*, 2007), 2.

⁶³ Aguilar, 2004, 3.

in their community. When Hurricane Mitch made landfall in Honduras, the town was able to evacuate effectively and quickly. After the hurricane passed, La Masica reported no deaths in their community. The town credited their main factor of success to the education and monitoring skills the town's women had gained from the disaster agency sessions.⁶⁴

Scholars do not view education as the only important factor in eliminating post-disaster gender inequalities; adaptation is another key aspect. The first step in adaptation is ensuring that governments and international organizations include gender as a dimension in their disaster strategy planning.⁶⁵ The UNFCC is in the process of developing the *International Adaptation Fund*, including gender as an aspect in this fund would be large step towards an equal post-disaster future.⁶⁶ The second step in adaptation is making sure that natural disaster survival and management strategies have a fundamental understanding of women's special needs and requirements.⁶⁷ One way to improve this would be including more women in the development and policy-making processes for natural disaster relief.⁶⁸

The last aspect in eliminating post-disaster gender inequalities is encouraging natural disaster strategists to recognize the societal role of women themselves and ensure governments recognize them as a vital tool in the rebuilding process. The International Labour Office (ILO) believes "women's local community knowledge, strong social networks, key roles in families, and active work roles make them resourceful actors in crises, yet they are rarely recognized by 'front-line' responders".⁶⁹ Using women in the

rebuilding scheme is something occasionally disregarded by developing nations; additionally, it is something humanitarian relief efforts must acknowledge in order for governments to use every available resource in the rebuilding process.

CONCLUSION

When looking at natural disasters, gender is not something typically thought of as a top priority issue.⁷⁰ The impact of natural disasters on gender is often neglected by both individuals and policy-makers because of the 'gender-blindness' that can hold back development thinking.⁷¹ Search and rescue, food, clean water, and clothes are typically the first issues thought of when offering humanitarian aid relief, not gender.⁷² However, when the delivery of daily life necessities is hindered because of societal roles, there is an issue that must be addressed. Gender must be added to the post-disaster aid relief agenda.

To conclude, much work is to be done in the future by scholars, theorists, international agencies, national governments and the global community in order to ensure that gender is recognized as a legitimate problem in humanitarian relief. Most of all, in order to eradicate these predetermined societal notions about women, it is important to ensure that citizens are educated, international bodies adapt and that the important roles of women in the rebuilding process are recognized by both agencies and citizens. The field of natural disaster and gender studies is simply in the beginnings of its development period. However, with further research and a further global awareness that a problem exists, the situation for women in post-disaster situations is guaranteed to improve.

⁶⁴ Aguilar, 2004, 3.

⁶⁵ Araujo, et al. 2007, 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Eugenia Date-Bah, Crisis Women and other Gender Concerns (*Recovery and Reconstruction Department ILO*. no. 7 2002), 23.

⁷⁰ Elaine Enarson, Gender Issues in Natural Disasters: Talking Points and Research Needs (*ILO InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction Workshop*, May 3-5, 2000, Geneva), 1.

⁷¹ Nelson, et al. 2002, 54.

⁷² Enarson, 2000, 1.