

Chapter 4

Creating disaster risk and constructing gendered vulnerability

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This chapter explores the landscape of disaster risk and vulnerability through a feminist lens. It takes as its starting point that the current development model creates disasters and that disasters are to be expected as ‘normal’ outcomes of the economic growth focussed neo-liberal era. Disasters reflect and intensify rather than disrupt this normality, leading not to abnormal but rather ‘super-normal’ experiences of everyday realities. For women, this may include experience of super-normal patriarchal relations, often at the hands of the those charged with protecting them. The chapter highlights how at the same time the field of gender and development has helped create a specific gendered vulnerability to disaster. Although women's intrinsic vulnerability is largely a myth, patriarchal structures that shape social relations bring into being feminised vulnerabilities. The same structures shape what are acceptable feminine characteristics, creating women as the ‘virtuous-victims’ of disaster. Justifying their policies as built on a morally driven response to women’s vulnerability, policy makers rely on women’s socially constructed virtuous nature, their ‘natural’ altruism, to efficiently deliverer resources and services to others. The chapter argues in policy terms ‘doing gender’ has become something done to women to achieve other development and disaster-related aims.

Introduction

The economic growth focus of the ‘modernisation’ development discourse and related policy and practice has not only harmed the planet and people but also created many of the ‘disasters’ policy makers then seek to mitigate. In the modernization discourse economic growth was originally viewed as being ‘gender neutral’ and this meant women were largely excluded from the development narrative (Jaquette 1982). While current development policy and practice includes women, they are targeted as ‘deliverers’ rather than beneficiaries of projects, highlighting women’s inclusion can be as problematic as their exclusion (Bradshaw 2014). Taking as its starting point that the development model creates disasters, this chapter explores the extent to which development also creates a specific gendered vulnerability to disaster.

Early conceptualisations of disasters constructed them as the same as the ‘natural’ hazard that caused them (Cardona 2004) and this focus on the ‘natural’ often rendered them ‘neutral’ in gender terms (Fordham 1998). The shift to a vulnerability focussed disaster discourse recognised that differences and inequalities between people largely determine the outcomes

of a hazard event. Within this, gender roles and relations are important in understanding the differential impacts of hazards (Blaikie et al. 1994). While the notion of vulnerability sought to reflect diversity of experience, there were problems with how it came to be applied by policy makers, who often use it to construct whole countries, regions, and groups of people as ‘vulnerable’. This conceptualisation allows other countries and actors to intervene, justifying their actions in the name of ‘development’ and in the post-disaster context as ‘humanitarianism’ (Bankoff 2001). Longer term post-disaster interventions are constructed as positive, aiming to ‘build back better’ the physical and social infrastructure and through this reduce vulnerability (FEMA 2000).

Within the vulnerability discourse women were initially constructed as victims of disaster. While the recent shift to notions of disaster ‘resilience’ has seen women and girls re-created as a ‘resource’ for disaster risk reduction (Bradshaw et al. 2020) societal norms still construct women as a specific group in need of help in times of crisis. Positioning Southern women’s experiences and interests against a heterosexual, White, middle-class, Western women reference point (Mohanty 2003) means in the Global South women are often pictured as ‘poor, pregnant and powerless’ (Win 2009) with post-disaster bringing a ‘window of opportunity’ to address women’s vulnerability (Byrne and Baden 1995). This chapter begins by examining the basis for assuming women's vulnerability. From the outset it should be noted the focus of the chapter is on women as a group and as they relate to men, but this is not because we see gender as a binary nor because we understand women to be a homogenous group. It is because, as the chapter will discuss, the existing evidence base for policy interventions and the dominant policy discourse is binary, and focussed on women. It pays little attention to intersectionality or differences between women, and instead assumes commonalities exist among women, including an assumed shared vulnerability.

Assuming women's vulnerability

While ‘gender’ is the terminology used in mainstream policy discourse, a focus on differences based on sex or biology remains dominant, and the focus on women as a category for actions and analysis continues. Biological differences between men and women that underpin notions such as the ‘sexual division of labour’ have been demonstrated to have less to do with biology than with socially constructed notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. However, the notion that hormonal and physiological characteristics render women

‘weaker’ than men remains a strong social narrative. Carpenter (2005) when discussing the constructed vulnerability of women in the context of conflict, notes that at least since the Middle Ages the discourse of women as the weaker sex has dominated. This supposed physiological ‘weakness’ is implicit in the Geneva Convention when suggesting that women shall be ‘treated with all consideration due to their sex’ (Gardam and Jervis 2001, 95), while the 1973 Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Armed Conflict states explicitly that ‘women and children . . . are the most vulnerable members of the population’. As with conflict, a disaster is a violent act, and as women are assumed to be the ‘weaker sex’ so they are assumed to be more impacted, with the UN suggesting ‘women always tend to suffer most from the impact of disasters’ (UN/ADPC 2010, 8).

Of course, not all women are weaker than all men, and many women are stronger and quicker than their male counterparts (especially younger women compared to elderly men). However, images of women used by NGOs and others post-disaster to raise money, often reinforce the idea of women as hapless, crying victims. Women are often pictured as unable to properly care for children due to the ‘disaster’, yet paradoxically also presented as the means to bring positive change if only their ‘natural’ mothering skills could be realised. Thus, a specific normative woman is created and visibilised at the expense of actual women who are diverse in their identities and experiences. In the dominant discourse, biology is constructed as ahistorical, unchanging, and unchallengeable when in fact, feminist and queer scholarship has demonstrated that the concept ‘sex’ is just as constructed as gender (Butler 1990). This socially constructed homogenised view of women as weak is justified through a biology that is based on women’s childbearing and ‘related’ childrearing roles. Societies that see the main value and role of women as mothers will often subconsciously when thinking of women think of them as pregnant, and when not pregnant encumbered by children. Heavily pregnant women or a woman with a small child to carry may indeed be slower and less able to respond to a fast-moving and sudden onset hazardous event (the stereotypical notion of ‘disaster’). The unconscious image of all women as mothers or potential mothers helps explain how all women are then constructed as ‘vulnerable’. When women are too young to be mothers they are seen to be ‘children’ and when seniors, are seen as weak and frail, and rendered vulnerable by their old age. At all life stages, women are continually and artificially seen to be ‘naturally’ weaker and thus their vulnerability is assumed.

Even when the discourse is more nuanced and women's vulnerability is linked to economic, social, and political characteristics and inequalities, there is still an issue with the assumptions being made about women and men. This includes a lack of gender data and evidence to even support the notion there is a feminised impact of disaster. The 'evidence' base includes vague suggestions such as more women than men died during the 2003 European heatwave (Pirard et al. 2005); specific claims such as of the 140,000 people who died in Bangladesh cyclones 90% were women (Ikeda, 1995); to the now infamous 'women, boys and girls are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster' (attributed to Peterson cited in WUNRN 2007). The most robust evidence for a 'feminised disaster mortality' lies with analysis by Neumayer and Plümper (2007) which actually concludes that in situations of greater inequality, there is greater chance that more women will die. Thus, it is not sex or biology that determines a feminised outcome, but gender inequality.

That there is a feminised disaster mortality is supported by evidence from the Indian Ocean Tsunamis. However, women's greater vulnerability lay not with their biological 'weakness', but with gendered social codes of conduct that restrict women's bodies and movement, putting them at greater risk than men. In Sri Lanka, gendered vulnerability came from girls not being taught to swim and being told it is not 'proper' for them to climb trees, and from women's saris which wrapped restrictively around their bodies and were a hindrance when there was a need to run fast (Oxfam 2005). Across the globe many women remain in their homes in the face of hazards, such as rising rivers as cultural practices mean they cannot leave home without male agreement or accompaniment (Ariyabandu 2009). In many parts of the world, fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons restrict the mobility of 'their' daughters, wives, sisters, and mothers keeping them 'off the streets' and out of public places, and confining them to the 'safe' space of the home and away from (other) violent men (Chant and McIlwaine 2016). Despite (other) men being constructed as the threat to women, it is women's mobility and bodies that are restricted under patriarchal social relations (on patriarchy see Patil 2013; Walby 1989, 1990). Control comes from policing women's bodies and sexualities, with violence, and the threat of violence, being one of the main ways in which men's authority is exercised and maintained. Where women 'defy' restrictive gender codes, any experience of violence is constructed as their own fault thereby serving to confirm that women need protecting and their actions restricting. Governance regimes and legal systems, education, and religion further institutionalise gendered power imbalances in

intimate personal relationships. Patriarchal structures exist at every level of society, and households may be as much sites of oppression as of solidarity for many women (Chant 2007). The household itself can create gendered ‘vulnerability’ and be a site of differential risk (Bradshaw 2013). The vulnerabilities household relations create are also male vulnerabilities, in as much as societal expectations of men to protect and provide for the family may place them in risky situations (Bradshaw et al. 2017b). Although gendered risk is socially constructed, and thus who will be most at risk can vary, policy makers still work on the basis that women are more ‘vulnerable’ than men.

Policy makers might promote the ‘women as vulnerable’ discourse because the alternative – that socially constructed roles determine vulnerability – may be more difficult to put into practice. The discourse fits with societal norms and the use of selective qualitative evidence over quantitative data seems to be acceptable when it supports the dominant policy discourse. The selective use of data by policy makers is also apparent in conflict contexts as Carpenter (2005, 319) notes the narrative of women and children being more likely than men to be the direct targets of attack remains dominant, despite existing data highlighting that civilian men and older boys are most likely to be directly killed in war or civil strife (Jones 2000; Goldstein 2001). The continued focus on women and children as ‘victims’ she suggests is in part explained by the social acceptability of this focus, and the socially accepted understanding of women and children’s inherent vulnerability.

Since vulnerability is not inherent, and women and children are not necessarily more vulnerable, moving away from the ‘natural’ discourse to the economic and social discourse demands new assumptions are made to maintain the myth of their greater vulnerability. Although ‘the poor’ are not always vulnerable as income does not always protect from a hazard event when social networks and local knowledge may be the best protection, in a world where progress is measured by wealth, and development is determined by economic growth, poverty has often become a short-hand for vulnerability. The assumption that poverty determines vulnerability is compounded in gender terms by the assumption that women are poorer than men. It follows then that women are more vulnerable than men due to their greater poverty. While the so-called feminisation of poverty has been contested (Chant 2008a, 2008b) the assumption of women’s poverty and by association the assumption of women’s vulnerability, still underpins the policy focus on women.

Including women by assumption

The field of gender and disasters, perhaps rather mistakenly, has looked to gender and development for lessons to learn and a path to follow (Bradshaw 2014). Sparked by research in the 1970s that argued that male-led and male-centric development practices harmed women (Boserup 1970), development practitioners looked to address this by ‘adding women in’ to the existing development approach, rather than question that approach. While this has been critiqued, and other, more nuanced approaches developed, the ‘women in development’ approach remains dominant in institutional practices (see Kabeer 1994 for discussion of the evolution of gender and development thinking). The acceptance of the need to include women in development was illustrated by women having a ‘goal of their own’ in the 2000 Millennium Development Goals, and women are now not just included in development, but central to the development process (Cornwall and Rivas 2015). Gender critiques then no longer focus on women’s exclusion and the need to include women, but rather how women are included and why (Prügl 2017). We might also ask ‘by whom’? Roberts (2012) notes governments and corporations, as well as many gender activists and development actors, aim to promote women’s equality within a neo-liberal model of development that is inherently inequitable and exploitative. Rather than challenging existing power relations, such gender champions are ‘walking the halls of corporate and state power’ and appear to have ‘gone to bed with capitalism’ (Prügl 2015, 614). More generally, feminist scholarship has problematised power relations between women for some time, particularly black and postcolonial feminists (Yuval-Davis 2006, 1197; Jayawardene 1995; Crenshaw 1989; Mohanty 1988). Multiple positionings of gender, race, class, sexualities, disabilities among others mean that some women are likely to be more impacted by unequal gendered power relations than others. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term ‘Intersectionality’ to visibilise this issue, which originally referred to the unique experience black women faced as a result of ‘dual oppressions’ that could not be explained by either race or gender discrimination on their own. Since its inception the term has been broadened to include other characteristics and intersectionality offers a way of understanding women’s oppression as existing in its endless variety, yet monotonous similarity (Rubin 1975).

Women then are not a homogenous group and it is as vital to understand the differences between women as it is to know the commonalities of inequalities. Yet what do we actually

know? Knowledge of gender as a lived reality is largely missing from official discourse but even the most basic level of knowledge of gendered difference, in income, for example, is also often lacking or its evidence base questionable. Women's inclusion in development is often justified on the grounds of women's relative income poverty. The focus on women and income poverty began with the famous claim from the Beijing conference in 1995 that '70% of the world's poor are women and it is rising'. This assertion gave rise to the notion of a (global) 'feminisation of poverty', a notion popularised in part through research by UN agencies (Medeiros and Costa 2008). Relentless repetition in academic publications, policy and programme documents, and social media has constructed this feminised poverty as 'fact'. For example, as late as 2016 the Deputy Director of UN Women suggested that sustainable development is not possible if the 'feminisation of poverty' continues (Puri 2016). Yet in 2015 UN Women's own report on the 'Progress of the World's Women' stated, albeit in a footnote, that 'the much cited "factoid" that 70% of the world's poor are women is now widely regarded as improbable' (UN Women 2015, 307, 92n) and noted in a box on poverty that 'it is unknown how many of those living in poverty are women and girls' (UN Women 2015, 45, Box 1.4).

Fifty years since Boserup suggested that development harmed women and over twenty years since poverty was constructed as feminised, we still do not have a nuanced understanding of women's relative deprivation, and the only thing we can say with certainty is 'we don't know' (Bradshaw et al. 2017a, 2019). But why don't we know more about the situation and position of different women? It may be true that 70% of the world's poor are women, equally it could be entirely false and the only way to know is to fill the gender data gap. This begs the question why have we been relying on unreliable statistics for so long? It may be because it is too difficult to know, as we need to interview men and women separately inside a diverse range of households. While timely and costly, such studies are beginning to be undertaken proving this can be done on a large scale (see Wisor et al. 2014). It could be argued it is because there is no political will to fill the gender data gap, pointing to the World Bank, UN and national governments as not prioritising gender enough to want to find out. However, it might also be argued that mainstream policy makers don't actually want to know more about gender issues, as they already know all that they want to know. Gendered data might unsettle their assumptions about women, and women in the Global South in particular. Global South

women are useful to policy makers, and they are useful because of their assumed poverty, and vulnerability, not despite this.

Feminising policy

One question to address seems to be why is women's assumed poverty and vulnerability so useful for policy makers? In Cecile Jackson (1996) wrote an article with the title 'Rescuing Gender from the Poverty Trap'. Her argument was that the idea that poverty has a 'female face' meant that any development policy and projects around poverty could be said to be doing work to improve the situation of women (as women are 'poorer') and so doing poverty was 'doing gender'. On the other hand, early gender projects often took the form of adding women into education and employment, both a means to improve economically so these projects were also 'doing poverty'. Poverty and gender had then become inexorably linked and 'gender' had become something done to women to achieve other aims.

Actors such as the World Bank came to understand that when women and girls have systematically lower access to education and health this translates into 'less than optimal' levels of labour market participation and entrepreneurship (World Bank 2001; WBGDG 2003). Saying women are 'poor' gives a justification for targeting women with resources, resources that are not aimed at addressing women's poverty, but rather poverty more generally, and in particular, because of the assumption that all women are or will be mothers, that of children. At the same time, it constructs inequality as a 'women's issue' rather than conceptualising it within a patriarchal and capitalist system that is essentially hierarchical and exploitative. In practical terms this is perhaps not surprising as addressing gender inequality through addressing 'women's' poverty is doable, and acceptable for development actors while addressing structural inequalities of power is not.

The feminisation of poverty discourse translated into a feminisation of poverty alleviation. Women are targeted by policies and projects not for being 'poorer' but for being mothers, and their 'naturally' more caring nature means when income and resources enter the household via women the wellbeing of those in the household improves. The socially constructed 'good' behaviour of women is in contrast to the 'irresponsible' behaviour of men which sees men withhold income for their own personal use as they act out the social constructions around what it means to be a man, and how men perform masculinity (Bradshaw et al. 2017b). In practical terms, these social conventions mean, for example, that

reduced child mortality risks associated with increases in household income are almost 20 times as large if the income is in the hands of the mother rather than the father (WBGDG 2003). Giving resources to women then is an efficient use of resources. In the disaster context we can see this same logic and women are targeted as virtuous-victims post-event (Bradshaw 2013), the targeting of women justified through their vulnerability making them the ‘victims’ of events, but also because they are ‘virtuous’, using resources to reduce the vulnerability of others.

However, just ‘giving’ resources to people, even virtuous women, goes somewhat against the logic of actors such as the World Bank and so cash transfers often come with conditions. These conditions are explicitly focussed on children – increasing their health and education – and the responsibility to meet them explicitly that of women – as the ‘beneficiaries’ of the cash. There are added burdens in time spent ‘walking and waiting’ (Cookson 2016) as well as attending clinics and workshops and/or the opportunity cost of money lost from engagement in income generation activities (Bradshaw 2008). This has led to the suggestion that dealing with poverty is ‘arguably as onerous and exploitative as suffering poverty’ and as involvement in such programmes has become less negotiable over time there has been a ‘feminisation of responsibility and/or obligation’ (Chant 2007, 2008b, 2016).

This ‘feminisation of responsibility’ is not confined to poverty alleviation programmes but is also clearly seen in post-disaster relief and reconstruction projects. Women have become a target for reconstruction projects in recent years, but not necessarily to promote equality or for strategic gains, but because of efficiency in practical terms (Bradshaw and Linneker 2009). An in-depth study of four communities in Nicaragua impacted by hurricane Mitch (Bradshaw 2002) suggested that while half the women interviewed perceived that they participated most in the projects for reconstruction, only a quarter felt that it is women who benefit from this ‘participation’. The majority stated that it was the family that benefited from their participation in reconstruction. Such perceptions were supported by interviews with representatives from a number of NGO organisations that targeted resources at women, including ‘non-traditional’ resources such as giving women collective ownership of cows. For example, when asked how men had reacted to this focus on women one representative commented that there had not been any major problems since ‘the women have their cows and the men are drinking the milk...’. Thus while portrayed as a project focussed on women

and promoting gender equality, in fact the outcome might bring more work for women, and greater benefits to men.

Far from challenging women's stereotypical roles, reconstruction initiatives may then reinforce these, making response to disasters another element of women's caring role, and increasingly disaster risk reduction is also being seen to be better undertaken by women. The notion that women are 'closer to nature' through their birth-giving role is also exploited and mainstream gender debates in development continue to construct the 'Global South Woman' to be even closer to her biology (Koffman and Gill 2013; Wilson 2015). This supposed natural affinity with nature means increasingly caring for the planet is constructed as a woman's responsibility. All this expands what women as mothers 'should' do as part of 'their' role to include poverty alleviation, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation.

Being good, naturally

While women are targeted post-event to deliver goods and services to others in the name of 'gender equality', they are also increasingly targeted prior-event in activities linked to environmental protection and climate change mitigation. Discussion of the 'feminisation' (Chant 2008b; Bradshaw 2010) or 'motherisation' (Molyneux 2006) of policy response, or an 'ecomaternalism' (Arora-Jonsson 2011) is not new within gender and environmental literature. The Women Environment and Development (WED) approach emerged in the 1990s and has at its base notions of 'ecofeminism' which tended to promote the 'women as closer to nature' discourse, prioritising biology as the explanatory factor for women's supposed natural affinity with nature, an approach critiqued as not only presenting women as a homogenous group but also as essentialising women (Leach 2007). Actors such as the World Bank were able to use this discourse to suggest a 'win-win' approach to environment and gender (see Jackson 1998) that saw women constructed as 'chief victim-and caretaker' (Resurreccion 2012) appropriating women's unpaid labour in activities to protect the environment.

Later approaches more clearly recognised the sexual (or better stated gendered) division of labour as influencing the supposed closeness of women to nature and the impact of wider social and political processes, in that often 'closeness' comes not naturally but through

necessity, for example from knowledge gained through having to farm the most marginal lands. Yet biology still tends to dominate the ‘mother earth’ discourse and it is interesting that while the climate change discourse is very ‘masculinised’, framed in scientific language, and developed within a securitised agenda, the solution to the problem is often presented as lying with women’s ‘natural’ affinity to nature (see Alston and Whittenbury 2013; Cela et al. 2013; Dankelman 2010). As such, care needs to be taken that we do not construct all women as ‘naturally’ more caring of the environment and thus suggest they are the ones that should be charged with its protection (MacGregor 2010). Saying women are ‘vulnerable’ to hazards because they are poor and because they are women (and because they are in the Global South), and at the same time highlighting how they are ‘naturally’ closer to nature means they can be the target of projects to reduce their (constructed) vulnerability, but that really aim to address wider environmental concerns. Women have been constructed as the protectors of the environment and are now being constructed as those who can mitigate the outcomes of environmental hazards and reduce disaster risk. Yet paradoxically they are also constructed as the ones needing protection during and after disaster.

Protecting the protectors

In the gender vulnerability discourse women are constructed as vulnerable because they are women and as women they need protecting. It almost ‘goes without saying’ they are vulnerable from their biology, and it is this ‘biology’ that makes them vulnerable in another way, or rather it is ‘biological’ attraction that makes them vulnerable. In this parallel biological discourse women are in danger – the danger here is not disaster, but men and men’s ‘biological urges’ which are also often constructed as something ‘natural’ and ‘uncontrollable’. The notion that men ‘out there’ are waiting to harm women if they leave the ‘safety’ of the home is a common discourse used to control women’s mobility and justify men accompanying women when they do leave the home. If women are constructed as needing to be protected in everyday life or ‘normal’ times, when ‘normality’ is disrupted there is an even greater (constructed) need to protect women. This protectionist discourse in conflict situations sees actions such as UN resolutions presented as safeguarding women and children yet using the safety and protection of women as justification for (violent) intervention (Otto 2016).

It is important when considering violence to move away from focusing on individual men or groups of men as ‘the problem’ and instead focus on the structures and systems that utilise violence to allow men to dominate, or the notion of patriarchy. It is important also to move away from simplistic understandings of patriarchy as male control over women and to focus on the related ideologies of masculinities and femininities it produces. Hierarchical male-male relations of inequality are equally as important as male-female relations, as patriarchy may be defined as a set of social relations between men which, although hierarchical, establishes an interdependence and solidarity between them which allows them to dominate women (Hartmann 1981, 14). On a day-to-day basis, these hierarchies exist along class, age, and race lines, among others, and may be intensified in ‘non-normal’ contexts. In conflict contexts, Henry and Highgate (2013) have used the notion of ‘clean masculinity’ to highlight how some men (the brave and selfless peacekeepers) are positioned hierarchically in relation to ‘native’ (read: violent) masculinity and this sets White men as the saviours of ‘Black and Brown women.’ Equally female ‘saviours’ may oppress (other) women. Western ‘feminists’ in ‘going to bed with capitalism’ (Prügl 2015) may also reaffirm the ‘patriarchal bargain’ (Kandiyoti 1988) where female-female hierarchal relations help to maintain patriarchal systems. Systems that reward women for policing and enforcing patriarchal power, troubling the already problematic notion of a sisterhood between women (Henry 2012).

The notions of protecting women, or better stated, the policing of women’s mobility and bodies are central to maintaining patriarchal systems, and violence and the threat of violence is the justification and means to do so. For example, post-Haiti earthquake, the World Food Programme allocated family food vouchers solely to women at distribution points recognising that access to food can change power relations and was seen as a means to protect women from violence (cited in Uwantege Hart 2011). However, by ‘banning’ men from entering the distribution points, the surrounding areas became risky with reports of women being robbed and even coerced into sex for extra coupons by the male military escorts who were meant to protect them. De Alwis’ (2016) post-post tsunami research suggests that such pathologisation of men as violent, particularly where the discourse is ethnicised and linked to the so-called ‘inescapable’ legacies of violent conflict, has had devastating impacts on surviving men. If men see themselves as having ‘failed’ in their socially constructed role as protector, and if living off aid having ‘failed’ in their socially constructed role as provider, with this ‘failure’ reinforced by relief actions that target women

with resources, then there is potential for amplifying and intensifying patriarchal attitudes and actions, including violence (Bradshaw 2013). Men may compensate for their loss of ability to fulfil socially-prescribed roles of protector and provider by (re)asserting authority and power through Gender Based Violence, both male-on-male as well as Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG), and in its most extreme form through the rising number of cases of femicide – the violent and deliberate killing of women on grounds of their gender – across the globe (Bradshaw et al. 2019b). However, while VAWG is now assumed post-disaster, it is constructed as abnormal and disaster-associated rather than an intensification of ‘normal’ everyday reality and rather than measured and monitored over time, it is assumed to increase (Bradshaw and Fordham 2013). This leads to interventions to protect women against violence in the specific context of disaster. As conflict research has highlighted this may lead to an overemphasis on violence that can only be understood by security specialists, rather than as a social reality (Richards 2005). It also constructs violence as something to be addressed by security specialists.

In the global south, ‘protection’ of women in conflict or disaster traditionally has come in the form of heroic Western military personnel and male relief workers, who fly into dangerous places to save vulnerable women (Razack 2004). In the contemporary conflict context, the majority of those keeping the peace in the Global South are now peacekeeping forces drawn from the Global South, with an increasing number of women peacekeepers in these missions (Henry 2012). However, post-disaster, Western governments continue to send military and Western aid workers to ‘help’ in relief and recovery efforts. Interventions are justified as protection, and such heroic actions demand gratitude. What gains access to aid in crisis are feminine not masculine characteristics, showing weakness gains access to resources, showing gratitude is the correct response once access is gained, as gender intersects with a highly racialised set of relations embedded in colonial gratitude (Henry and Highgate 2013; Razack 2004; Zisk-Marten 2004). Women must enhance their victim status to enable their access to aid, what Hilhorst et al. (2018, 58) conceptualise as a ‘strategic essentialism’ or what Utas (2005) labels as ‘victimcy’. While the original patriarchal bargain with male (partner or relative) as protector and provider is disrupted at times of disaster and more generally and slowly by perceived feminised ‘gains’, women are encouraged to enter into new patriarchal bargains with new protectors and providers, with what Hilhorst (2016) suggests is a

complementary enactment of ‘ignorancy’ by aid workers who play along with this representation of women as victims in order to secure the continued provision of aid.

Revelations of sexual abuse and assault among (White, Western) aid workers highlight that women may actually need protecting from their ‘protectors’ (Highgate 2007, 2004). For example, despite reports emerging since at least 2008 that aid workers were sexually exploiting disaster survivors, it was not until almost 10 years later with the emergence of a sub-tag of #MeToo that this came to mainstream attention. At the centre of this scandal was Oxfam’s Haiti response revealed by the now award-winning whistle-blower, Helen Evans. The results saw a number of ‘humanitarian’ NGOs issue statements and policies as public outcry sparked by #AidToo called for aid funding to be cut. Yet even when accepting there is a problem the discourse of aid organisations is still that the problem is with ‘some men’, and that we should not let the actions of the few cloud the good work of the many. This institutional response to allegations of gross misconduct sees the responsibility of rights abuses relocated ‘away from national politics, international duty-bearers, and from the agencies as proxy authorities, towards individual men as violators of women’s rights’ (Hilhorst and Jansen 2012, 901). In contrast, when these aid organisations move in to intervene post-disaster in other countries they take the actions of the few and suggest they are indicative of the many, further justifying their interventions and actions. If disasters intensify already destabilised male roles through playing on a feminised vulnerability, targeting women with resources and intervening to ‘protect’ them, the result may be a ‘patriarchal pushback’ in the form of individual and collective violence in response to perceived, if not real, advances for women and girls (Bradshaw et al. 2019b). The actions of protection in themselves may then be constructing the need to protect.

In her analysis of the violence witnessed in the post-2011 ‘Arab Spring’ in North Africa and the Middle East, Kandiyoti (2013) questions whether (re)-assertions of male power should be seen as ‘patriarchy in action’ or ‘patriarchy in crisis’, as the ‘resurgence of traditionalism’ with an intensification of (traditional) expressions of masculinity, or as a new form of asserting patriarchal control. Exaggerated and violent expressions of masculinity can be read as ‘abnormal’ or as an intensification of the ‘normal’, what Bradshaw et al. (2017b) have referred to as ‘supernormal patriarchy’. This notion, developed in relation to the extractive industries in the Global South, highlights that the (hierarchical) relationships (of inter-

dependency) formed in the context of ‘danger’ are not ‘abnormal’ but an intensified ‘normal’. Just as the impact of disasters often produce only a ‘more acute, more extreme’ form of the daily suffering (Cannon 1994) and given disasters reveal ‘existing national, regional and global power structures, as well as power relations within intimate relations’ (Enarson and Morrow 1998) then the violence and vulnerability associated with disasters should not be read as ab-normal but as super-normal.

Concluding thoughts: on the natural and the normal

Disasters and related constructs such as gendered risk and vulnerability are not natural but are to be expected as ‘normal’ outcomes of the economic growth model of the neo-liberal era. Disasters reflect and intensify rather than disrupt this normality, leading not to ab-normal but rather super-normal experiences of everyday realities. Constructing women as ‘naturally’ vulnerable in the everyday negates the need to recognise that vulnerability is constructed, and instead allows policy makers to be seen to address women’s vulnerability via addressing ‘their’ needs related to biological sex, as mothers. The resilience discourse while seemingly constructing women as ‘non-vulnerable’ still plays on women’s ‘natural’ attributes, and constructs them as a resource, an efficient deliverer of services to others, playing again on women’s mothering role.

The non-natural gendered discourse is confined to ‘non-normal’ contexts such as post-disaster, when power structures are revealed and played out in the public. In order to explain the violence and inequalities revealed they are constructed as the ‘outcomes’ of disasters, and so high levels of violence against women are constructed as abnormal and disaster related rather than a revealed or intensified normality. At the same time this allows (some) men to protect (other) women from this assumed new or ‘non-normal’ violence. As male-male hierarchical relations are part of existing patriarchal structures, these acts of ‘protection’ may promote ‘patriarchal-pushback’ which construct the need to protect, not only reinforcing the woman-as-vulnerable discourse, but creating women’s vulnerability.

Women then are not naturally vulnerable to disasters, nor are disasters natural, but the discourse and practice of development creates disasters, and while development constructs women as vulnerable, disaster or rather disaster response, creates women’s vulnerability.

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