

Women From Ovejas – Sucre, Colombia, Weavers Of Peace In Times Of Transition

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ABSTRACT

This article is made with the purpose of highlighting the women's role in the Municipality of Ovejas -Sucre- as agents of peacebuilding in transition times from the different scenarios where they participate to weave and narrate the paths to peace. It also shows the way how women's organizations were conformed to place them as a tool that has allowed them to combine efforts, develop capacities, knowledge and experiences to protect and promote life as well as to rebuild and strengthen the social connection damaged and weakened by war.

Keywords: Women, Peace, Times of Transition, Agents of Change

1. INTRODUCTION

Based on the project "Spinning Political Capacities for transitions in territories of the Social reconstruction Fabric program in Colombia Post-Conflict areas", a social characterization was carried out in 2019 in Ovejas - Sucre, Colombia and it was the setting for recognizing the work made by women in social cohesion, the struggle to claim the women rights and their communities, as well as social mobilization at the local and regional level. From this exercise, the lack of opportunities for development, employment, little investment in the field or none, guarantees that are not enough for the quality services provided in education, health, and recreation that place in a vulnerability social condition the municipality of Ovejas - Sucre.

The work carried out by women's organizations is outstanding, the evidence of improving the women living conditions from the vindication of the rights, the capacities strengthening to exercise leadership and solidarity as a means of peace construction.

This article begins with a conceptual reading that emphasizes how women are transformative agents based on their capacities and vulnerabilities for peacebuilding. Then an analysis is made from the experience of women, in this section, a recount is made of the women's organizations of the municipality of Ovejas and also how women contribute to peace from the capacity of being women that protect and become peacemakers in these times of transition.

2. WOMEN: SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AGENTS IN TIMES OF TRANSITION. A CONCEPTUAL READING

2.1 Peace and transition in Colombia

Peace as a discipline of study has been related in the United States and some European countries to the two world wars of the 20th century and to armed conflicts (López, 2011). From this, different approaches and reflections about the war begin and how to ensure that they do not repeat themselves again (Loaiza, 2015). For the sixties, with the research for peace emergence as a discipline, the first approaches were oriented to how to prevent war. In that matter, some researchers, and activists, and academics managed to expand the peace concept based on the understanding of the various conflictive contexts, relating it to justice and social construction, equality, and dialogue, managing to move towards open visions (López, 2011). In addition, there are different definitions proposed according to the contexts, the actors involved, and also the political interests, since peace became a desire of humanity throughout history (Loaiza, 2015).

The main objective of a peace process is to end an armed conflict through the use of negotiation instead of using military force, this process must become a negotiation where the country collective interests must prevail before any instance, the agreements must be based on the resolution by peaceful means and also the guarantee of the process is governed by the new regulations desing and laws that make this posible , in addition to the creation of political institutions that help to change and implement the agreed commitments.

After the internal armed conflict over than 50 years in Colombia, the government have worked tirelessly to achieve peace, that is why the rulers have committed to peace processes but that had not had positive results, however, In 2012, during the President Santos government , the dialogue process with the Revolucionary Armed Forces of Colombia - FARC, the oldest left-wing guerrilla began, and after several years of talks, the peace agreement was signed in 2016. Since the peace agreement signing, the construction

of that peace has become a challenge for the territories in Colombia. Illegal groups such as ELN, FARC dissidents, and organized criminal gangs have been carrying out an increase of violent actions from the end of the second semester of 2018 in addition to the change of government at the beginning of 2019. Another important aspect to mention is that the transition to peace is possible if there is a structural change in the affected regions by the conflict through social transformation that begins with the reintegration into social life of the ex-combatants in the territories, goes through reconciliation and ends in the social connection reconstruction among the communities with development, solidarity and coexistence.

2.2 Women between the dilemma, the vulnerability and the capacities

From a philosophical thought, it can be said that the concept of woman is related to words such as life, strength, courage, diversity, sensitivity, tenderness and sisterhood. The women interviewed in this work define women as "A fraternal being, being a woman is having a heart, it is thinking, it is feeling, because being a woman makes you a daughter, a sister, then a wife and ends up being a mother and grandmother."

However, the reality is different when there is a view considered from the social, economic, political, and human spheres. Women have been violated in different spaces they share in society, according to Martha Nussbaum (2002) "in much of the world, women do not have the support for the fundamental functions of human life." This situation should be noted that there is hardly a country that treats women as well or has better conditions for women than it does for men.

Vulnerability does not neutralize women's capacity for action, conversely, this drives to generate it. Because, in one way or another, these conditions are encouraging mobilization in the name of well-being or a better life. There are several studies that glimpse the agency processes from the vulnerability that generate transformations in living conditions, especially when it comes to women (Gandarias, 2019; Cota 2019; García, et al. 2018; Mahmood, 2019). The same condition made women act differently, thus allowing individual and collective action in the religious, political, legal, economic, and symbolic spheres.

To overcome their vulnerability condition, women have developed capacities that that have been relevant in the midst of the conflict and even after it, facing the new roles that they have had to assume after some violent event. Martha Nussbaum (2002) mentions that the capabilities perspective seeks a society in which individuals are treated as worthy of care, and in which each one occupies a position that allows them to live in a truly human way, where each person is a carrier of value, and of an end in itself, this society seriously

considers that we must have a resources distribution with opportunities for each person, and thinking that these are worthy of respect in their own right.

Based on the above, women have created conditions from their daily lives, they have been trained, organized and have become social activists who works to generate better living conditions for themselves, their families and their population in Ovejas municipality. They have managed to form grassroots organizations around a common feeling, such as the struggle for the vindication of rights as women, and also of the communities they represent after experiencing a violence episode of the armed conflict context. These women become in a key actor of incidence with the local and regional institutionality.

The women's organizations in Ovejas are initiatives that promote peace, reconciliation and socioeconomic development, through collective actions that works in generate changes inside the communities, efforts aim to provide solutions to existing problems based on transformative scenarios, but mainly their work consist in that they have the ability to recognize themselves, to read and to analyze problems from their context and power structures, in personal, family and collective development seeking for autonomy and control of their own lives in order to reduce the inequality gaps that exist between man and woman.

In addition, these organizations seek that woman can transform themselves internally and they can be capable to participate in the different spaces of social life, where they can make decisions that help improve living conditions and overcome the existing injustice and inequality in their territory, carrying out actions that allow them to understand and reflect on the problems that affect them to develop skills that transform their realities. (Britto, 2019).

3. TRANSFORMED WOMEN CONTRIBUTE TO PEACE IN TIMES OF TRANSITION. THE EXPERIENCE IN OVEJAS - SUCRE

This reflection is due to social characterization results carried out in the municipality of Ovejas within the framework of the Project Spinning political capacities for transitions in the territories and especially of some cases of women who are part of local-based organizations.

3.1 Women's organizations in Ovejas, Sucre. Context

Ovejas is a municipality that belongs to the Sucre department placed in the Montes de María region in Colombia, it is well known as the University of Gaita (Bagpipes) for its great cultural and ancestral tradition. It is characterized by its natural and ecological wealth, as well as its fertile lands for the different crops that grow in the region. However, due to its

strategic location, its population was a great victim of the strongest violence acts of the armed conflict in Colombia. This is how today, the great challenge to building peace for its habitants have been marked by the projection into the future, rethinking from the everyday, where the oral and cultural tradition that allows them to live fully, through the gaita (bagpipes). In terms of production, the avocado, rice and tobacco harvests are the economy engine for the families that support themselves day by day with the commercialization of the products. Despite the acts of violence of which they have been victims and who do not want to live again, the people are friendly and welcoming. This is how they have opted for collective action through organizations of local peace initiatives, which promote social and political development, the economy and culture, generating collective capacities that initiate structural changes for the municipality.

Many have been the contributions that international cooperation has made on behalf of different entities in the municipality so that the social fabric reconstruction can take place. This is how they have managed to get the social, community and popular organizations to be reborn and promote actions with a view to the communities rights enforceability in Ovejas and the subregions around them, and the defense of the territory, and the dialogue with the administrations and local entities (Méndez , 2017).

In addition, From an economic point of view, the international cooperation has been one of the sources that has supported and helped to generate, and establish collective community and individual capacities in local initiatives in the Colombian territories, but beyond from the technical point of view the territorial processes promoted today begin to sprout the fruits given by social interventions.

Nowadays, there are around 60 local different initiatives in Ovejas -Sucre. These are represented in a social, productive, community, from women and victims organizations, which are related to the State in conjunction with the municipal government and the international cooperation, all this in order to develop processes or actions that allow seeking the common good and and providing a response to the problems of the municipality.

It is important to highlight within this large number of organizations that have been identified, there are 8 women who works on organizationsthat its job is on the prevention of violence against women, productive projects and access to justice, the women identity as subjects of law and in the strengthening of their social and political empowerment. One of these organizations is called the NarrarparaVivir Corporation. It is an Association of black and indigenous and displaced peasant women from the township of Canutal, Its work is highlighted in the municipality. Another one is the Agricultural Association of Victims of La Peña, Producer Association of Villa del Carmen - Women's Ecumenical Network - REMPAZ, Association of Displaced Women Producers of Tolima, Association of United Rural Women of San Francisco, Association of Inclusive Women of the Corregimiento of

San Rafael - AMINSA and the Association of Victims of Chengue. It is also necessary to mention that the role of women is highlighted as the legal representative of 70% of the organizations that from the productive and social aspects are working for the development of their communities.

3.2 Solidarity threads. A women contribution in times of transition

One of the factors that characterize women is their sense of sisterhood and solidarity, which is even more evident when they go through an act of violence. From this perspective, the women's work and struggle to help improve the living conditions of themselves, their families, and other women who are within their organization or community are framed.

This is how it is evident, particularly in Ovejas, seeing women after experiencing a violent event had to assume new roles, going from housewife to household head, from mother to leader and/or legal representative of an organization where they must assume the function of supporting the family, making decisions and also getting involved in public life. In addition, they became the benchmark for entrepreneurship, struggle, and courage for their families, for other women, and for their communities. Also, women had to adapt themselves to the context or to new life situations, which means being ready for the circumstances that allowed them to increase their capacity of mobilizing groups or social sectors to promote cessation of violence. This is why based on solidarity, the women's organizations of Ovejas meet in spaces to commemorate dates related to an act of violence and to do political advocacy with the state's institutions or local government, where they not only participate in the accompaniment of the event but as well they lead the mobilization and in some occasions, they get involved appropriating the mandates of laws that promote gender equity or others laws that benefit the communities, in order to give answers within the organizations and communities they belong. On the other hand, They are developing an exhaustive work from the will to find the truth, justice, and reparation that identifies them with other women with whom they build a symbolic universe to claim their rights (Ibarra, 2007).

Now, for many of these women being victims of the armed conflict represented an opportunity to have active participation in social and political matters, where collective interests are above private ones, that is, they learned to organize the communities and to work for them, with the purpose of claiming their rights, calling for the end of the conflict in their communities and the country, standing in solidarity with other women to denounce human rights violations, demanding guarantees for the reconstruction of the social fabric, claiming compensation for the loss of family members, displacement forced or sexual violence. These are some of the requests for which women have gone from being passive victims to being active agents of social transformations (Vilellas, 2010).

3.3 Violence and protection against children: the pendulum crossroads during conflict and peacebuilding

In which the levels of violence in women's lives have been emphasized, the armed conflict impacts have several scenarios. One of them is called private violence, it is found at home. Within the family is the first place where a high level of violent acts has been found, which are beginning to gain visibility and these events are known by the generic name of domestic violence. Intrafamily or private violence is less recognized as such since it has become naturalized and this type of behavior is considered as something routine and of normal occurrence within couple relationships and between fathers and mothers and their sons and daughters (Villareal and Ríos, 2006).

Women have suffered a series of human rights violations and they have had to resist them. This resistance is also based on recognizing one another as equals, solidarity, mutual support, and organization. Add to this situation, either in silence or in self-protection, women have had to seek support for their families, and for their sons and daughters who are their reason about to concern and motivation to fight and continue living.

One of the factors little mentioned in the studies is related to the prevention and protection strategies of their sons and daughters. With the aim to avoid the damage they could receive from the conflict. Women invented thousands of ways to avoid or elude the persecution of the children of armed actors and these women were willing to move from their own house, where they lost everything, to protect them from recruitment or the dangers of violence (Sanchez, 2016).

Despite all these events, women are betting on the construction of peace from different aspects, one of them has been the way in which they have empowered themselves and have ceased to be passive victims to become agents of change or transformation. Women are managing to carry out different tasks in different peace scenarios where they are committing themselves to mobilizations, strengthening and consolidating their own organizations and other ones, participating in local and national spaces, and demanding participation in public positions in order to promote their rights, leadership, and inclusion in the development of opportunities for their communities.

3.4 Transformed women contribute to peace in times of transition

In Colombia, there are varied studies on the collective action of women who resist and insist on the construction of peace (Juárez, et al. 2017; Sánchez, 2015; Sánchez-Blake, 2016), which include symbolic, performative, citizen- communicative, memory, narrative, among others.

The armed conflict has led women to assume new roles. They leave behind their role as victims aside to become being more active as to participation in the conflict, they perform as a confrontation active member in organizations ranks outside of the law, or they can be as a combatant as well in the political sphere. On the other hand, despite the fact that women have been active members of claim processes and social struggles, they begin to become more visible in the course of the conflict. Women become spokespersons or promoters of peace from their closest social circles, be it their home, their neighborhood, or community. In turn, women have become empowered by recognizing themselves as subjects of rights, which is why they begin to exercise lobbying activities and work in previously unknown spaces, such as politics in favor of social justice and peacebuilding (Barros and Rojas, 2015).

Given the contextual conditions such as the high rate of the rural population, In the Montes de Maria there is a high rate of unsatisfied basic needs, poverty, discrimination, exclusion, and labor exploitation. Women's work points into the management and execution of productive projects (economic) and also the social-communal, legal agency, memory narratives, among other expressions that place them in a valid and important political status, even in a vulnerable situation. This is how women have become political subjects because they have been educated and trained to exercise social and political roles and they have opted to join grassroots social organizations to improve their conditions and overcome their state of vulnerability and inequity.

It is important to consider that these local women's initiatives are generating reflections and practices to reconstitute the social fabric for the country, although they are not recognized. Their opinions and experiences are framed by the struggle of their identity: surviving or avoiding domestic violence are their common goals that, although they have an individual specificity, undoubtedly have an impact on the rest of society (Villareal and Ríos, 2006).

The commitment of these women to transform themselves into political subjects and overcome the dichotomy between citizen-victim was essential to understand their responsibility to the female victim's political action, who work hard to transform realities, achieve justice and equality in the different scenarios. These actions lead us to the construction of a stable and lasting peace for the territories. It is for this reason that the women's organizations in Ovejas, and especially those studied in this article, have worked hard for social cohesion, the stability of the internal family unit and in the community, the recovery of trust in the institutions, the promotion of the socio-political and economic activities of women, the recovery of autonomy and identity from political parties, other social movements and institutions seeking to promote women's political and civic participation.

CONCLUSIONS

The women in the municipality of Ovejas, Colombia, are building peace from three special aspects: the first one is from their status as women, highlighting their ability to be fraternal and in solidarity with other women and with their community. The women strengthened their capacities after experiencing a violent event, consolidated organizational processes, and some became social subjects of rights and others transformed subjects of society. A second aspect is related to the ability to protect, especially their sons and daughters, where they created prevention and protection strategies for them, in order to avoid recruitment or the dangers of violence. Finally, there is a women's ability to become peacebuilding agents, where leadership both at home, in their community, and organizations is a key factor to influence the different spaces. In addition, women have managed to create scenarios with different entities to establish common agendas that allow their rights to be recognized.

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