



The Reshaping of Gender Relations in Wartorn Societies

Women's Movements in Guatemala and Nicaragua 1980-2010

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Abstract: The thesis revolves around the question of how the history of the Guatemalan and Nicaraguan women's movements influences their approach of women's empowerment, and evaluates alternative approaches to women's empowerment. These questions arise from several overlapping puzzles. How is it that in two countries with vocal women's and feminist movements, high levels of violence against women persist and few changes in gender norms are visible? If women's mobilisation during conflict has indeed benefited their post-war social activism, then how come women's organisations remain so dependent on international donors? And how come two countries which are similar in many respects, yielded such different women's movements? Underlying all these issues, is the question of how – dynamics related to – the armed conflict influenced the newly emerging women's movements, and what the impact of these dynamics is on the current women's movements. The first part of the thesis considers the role of three important factors related to the armed conflict: the influence of international actors and donors who entered both countries during the armed conflict and post-war reconstruction, the influence of women's revolutionary mobilisation, and the influence of political polarisation on the strategies of women's movements. In addition to this, the role of ethnicity is analysed for the Guatemalan context. The thesis outlines in detail how each of these factors - activated by the armed conflict - has over time influenced the development of the women's movement through mechanisms of individual and organisational learning, and through narrative construction and activation by those actors involved. This analysis challenges the commonsensical idea that women's revolutionary mobilisation has prompted a viable form of women's mobilisation in the post-conflict period. Specifically issues of fragmentation, identity formation, financial independence and one-sided goals are discussed. The second part of the thesis investigates alternative strategies to women's empowerment, such as a private approach - i.e. approaching women's empowerment from the point of view of corporeal and psychotherapeutic feminism. In what ways do organisations adopting a private approach provide new perspectives for the feminist movement? As they articulate new and different goals in the domain of empowerment, they challenge some fundamental ideas on which traditional feminist thinking has been based for a long time. These organisations, *Actoras de Cambio*, *Kaqla* Reshaping gender relations in wartorn societies Destrooper and *Q'anil* articulate the need for a different - complementary - conceptualisation of women's empowerment and offer practical means to realise this. They thereby also touch upon issues which have been discussed for a longer time within feminist movements, such as the need for a new language which better expresses women's

daily experiences of oppression. Juxtaposing the approach of mainstream Guatemalan and Nicaraguan feminist organisations with the work of three feminist organisations adopting a private approach, implies the recasting of the classic public-private divide. This has implications for the approach and priorities of the present day women's movement in both countries. It leads to the conclusion that there is much potential in both countries for a new form of feminism which uses women's personal lives and experience as a key resource to arrive at a more holistic form of empowerment. The thesis thus not only elucidates how armed conflict has influenced the priorities of women's organisations in Guatemala and Nicaragua, but also contributes to a reinterpretation of female activism and women's empowerment more generally.



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Bio: Tine Destrooper obtained her degree of Doctor in Social and Political Sciences at the European University Institute in Florence, where she specialized in the relationship between armed conflict, social movements and gender. Before she studied at University College London and the University of Brussels, where she did a Master in *Politics, Security and Integration* and a Bachelor in *European Politics*. Tine Destrooper has worked as an intern at the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, and has participated in a number of events and conferences in her field of expertise. She is also the author of several book chapters, articles and book reviews in peer-reviewed journals, such as *The impact of guerrilla participation on K'iche' women's collective*

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