Article

The Ethics of Care in Disaster Contexts from a Gender and Intersectional Perspective

Rosario González-Arias [1], María Aránzazu Fernández-Rodríguez [1,*] and Ana Gabriela Fernández-Saavedra [2]

1 Instituto Universitario en Género y Diversidad, Universidad de Oviedo, 33011 Oviedo, Spain; gonzalezrosario@uniovi.es
2 Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Montevideo 11600, Uruguay; agfernandez@flacso.edu.uy
* Correspondence: fernandezrodaranzazu@uniovi.es

Abstract: Feminist reflections on the sexual division of labour have given rise to a body of knowledge on the ethics of care from different disciplines, including philosophy, in which outstanding contributions to the topic have been formulated. This approach is applicable to the analysis of any phenomenon and particularly that of disasters. As various investigations have highlighted, the consequences on the population throughout all of a disaster's phases (prevention, emergency, and reconstruction) require an analysis of differentiated vulnerabilities based on gender and other identity categories, such as social class, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual identity, etc. The interrelation between all these variables gives rise to differentiated impacts that cannot be ignored in catastrophic contexts, where survival and sustaining life are at stake, so care becomes a central issue. Research on the topic has also identified that, along with the analysis of social vulnerability, we must consider the capacity for agency, both individual and collective, where care is once again of vital importance. Considering the gender approach and its multiple intersections is thus a fundamental theoretical-practical proposal for the study of disasters from philosophy, as it implies an unavoidable epistemic, ontological, and ethical reflection in the face of risk reduction.

Keywords: sexual division of labor; ethics of care; vulnerability; capacities; risk management

1. Introduction to the Theme: Understanding Disasters from the Complexity of the Social

"*Because social power is only born out of acting together, from an us*" [1] (p. 181)

The study of disasters is a field of knowledge that has grown considerably in recent decades and has contributed to increasing the complexity of our knowledge of these phenomena. The principal paradigm shift has been in coming to understand them beyond their physical, natural elements and instead contemplating them as socio-environmental phenomena. On incorporating this new dimension, the dynamic processes that accompany such phenomena have been added as a central element in terms of their analysis. With respect to this issue, the study of gender relations throughout the full cycle of a disaster has become a key element in expanding what is known about them from the perspective of complexity. If social structure determines how such disasters are dealt with and how they impact the population affected, within this node, it is clear that gender relations and their multiple intersections play an essential part. As a category of analysis, gender provides the perspective necessary to identify the distinct experiences of women, men, and non-binary people in a disaster context. Identifying the weight this cultural tie has in the extreme lived experiences that accompany a disaster allows the untangling of the multiple consequences that it unleashes and gaining a better understanding of its full significance. This is not only related to the subjective perceptions of the individuals and groups affected by the disaster in terms of social diversity; it also focuses on tangible aspects, the materiality of the disaster's impacts, and its differential effects on the whole of the population.

Taking this idea as the starting point, in the current work, we reflect on the principal element around which gender differences are constituted in the face of a catastrophe: the sexual division of labour, of spaces, and of time. This relates to the areas of action within which caring tasks are what mark the limits, often very clearly delineated, though sometimes rather more blurred, with respect to masculinized and feminized roles in heterosexual and not heterosexual relations. Disasters afford an opportunity to think in terms of the role that these social expectations play at the point of delimiting agendas, spheres, and activities, something which is an important part of the when, where, and how of being social. On the one hand, for the community affected, the catastrophic event represents a moment of complete crisis, one that systematically affects numerous areas of both individual lives and the life of the collective. Depending on the magnitude of the event, its impacts are multidimensional and have direct or indirect repercussions for all of the population. However, it is significant that even in this new scenario, the mandates of gender roles continue to be maintained and reproduced in terms of caring responsibilities, making it pertinent to continue to reflect on their persistence in crisis contexts [2,3]. As will be argued in the following sections, what went before coexists simultaneously with a porosity and leak-points in terms of the norms of gender, opening up opportunities for transitions towards models of more equitable relations [3,4]. The collectivization of the caring responsibilities that women undertake through all the phases of a disaster represent an example of agency that allows the study of women's circumstances to be expanded to incorporate their capacities and not simply their vulnerabilities. Placing value on this dimension is strategic and vital—in all meanings of the word—when life is turned upside down.

Due to our interest in a science that is transformative and emancipatory, the theoretical approach employed here includes a reflection on its application in emergency contexts which seeks, in an Aristotelian sense, a new topos with respect to the ethics of care throughout the complete cycle of a disaster.

2. Far More Than a Natural Phenomenon: The Performativity of Caring Tasks from the Perspective of Gender and Intersectionality

"*Invisibility is an unnatural disaster*" [5] (p. 47)

One of the principal contributions made by feminist studies is the creation of theoretical frameworks from within which to understand the sexual division of work and spaces. Employing a gender perspective has made it possible to identify the social distribution of productive and reproductive tasks; the former, taking place in the public sphere, are identified with the masculine role, while the latter take place in the private sphere traditionally assigned to the feminine role. This differentiation has led to the invisibility of caring tasks, necessary for bringing up children and adolescents and caring for people with dependency needs within the family and community environment: by being restricted to the domestic space, they lack social projection and recognition and are considered secondary to paid work. This happens despite such tasks being essential in supporting life in all its dimensions, including productive activities, since without the care of those involved, such activities would be unviable [6]. In turn, although they involve no economic remuneration, care tasks result in such a large workload for women that it often limits their possibilities of employment or generating higher incomes[1], which partly explains the horizontal, vertical, and salary gaps that women face in the workplace compared to men. The feminization of care therefore brings with it the feminization of poverty. Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in the public sphere results in their absence in decision-making spaces, that is, those on which community and political representation rests. As such, the gendered division of tasks and spaces also leads to differences in the way women manage time due to the difficulties inherent to reconciling the double and triple agendas that they have to juggle as producers, reproducers, and citizens: employment, care, and social participation. In relation to this idea, Ángeles Durán [8]—in an analogy with the concept of the proletariat—developed the concept of the "cuidatoriado", literally,

"careworketariat", understanding it as a new social class whose members, unlike those of the proletariat, lack rights because their invisibility means society as a whole is unaware of the work, which thus goes unrecognized. In this sense, then, the social mothering practices assigned to women involve gender oppression, which leads to their social exclusion. In the words of anthropologist Marcela Lagarde [9], the mother–wife binomial to which women are reduced represents one form of women's bondage.

This sexual division of labour and its implications have direct consequences in the aftermath of a catastrophic event since care tasks increase and caring is a strategic element in terms of the survival of the affected population [10]. An increasing quantity of research has demonstrated the various areas where this dimension of gender results in differences throughout all phases of the disaster: preparation prior to the disaster, the emergency, and in the subsequent recovery period.

As far as prevention is concerned, it has been found that women and other feminized people do not participate to the same extent as men in pre-emergency processes (such as evacuation training or information on early warning systems) and that this lower participation may be related to exclusion and social barriers determined by gender in relation to care [11]. Women's lack of preparation for a disaster has a direct impact on the next phase as it has a direct bearing on their chances of survival when dealing with the emergency itself. As revealed in a number of studies, women have a higher risk of dying compared to men [12,13], one possible explanatory factor being that in the caregiving role, women may be involved in behavior that puts their own life at risk in order to save others. Finally, gender gaps have also been identified in the post-disaster phase with respect to the recovery of the pre-disaster livelihood, including recovering land and access to property. The difficulties experienced by women are directly related to their involvement in care tasks, not only due to the time women have to dedicate to such tasks but also indirectly in terms of the difficulties of reconciling productive and reproductive work (double agenda), making community participation (triple agenda) in decision making and reconstruction management difficult. In this sense, several authors have pointed to the problem of women experiencing work overload during reconstruction processes due to the fact that, in addition to participating in such activities, women do not renounce tasks that guarantee the survival of their families as well as taking care of the home [14].

Given all of the above, it is clear that throughout the entire disaster cycle, women are impacted to a greater extent than men due to discrimination and the social construction of their vulnerability. This places them in a worse condition to deal with the catastrophic effect, both physically and materially as well as in terms of social participation. But, at the same time, in the post-disaster scenario, women's vulnerability is further increased by the greater impacts, placing them in an even more precarious position, if that is possible [15]. Within this feedback loop, care is once again at the center since the disaster's impact on people's physical and mental health increases the number of dependent people needing care (the injured or sick), considerably increasing the workload of women. To the above, it must be added that women are charged with feeding the family, a task which is made extremely difficult because of the scarcity of water and food in the context of the emergency. Proof of this is the fact that those who are usually in charge of food management in emergency shelters following a disaster are women. It can be said that the food security of the family and the community is left in the hands of women, to the detriment of their own economic autonomy [10].

In addition, it is not only that women die more or become poorer to a greater extent than men as a result of a catastrophe. As previous research has shown, new problems associated with disasters come into being. For example, it has been demonstrated that the risk of women experiencing various forms of gender violence also increases after a catastrophic event [16]. Responding to these new dangers that threaten women, there has been talk of the double disaster that women suffer from [17] in reference to their likelihood of re-victimization. Far from what one might expect a priori, a disaster that disrupts everything does not in fact change the male dynamics over women. It does not open up an

opportunity for the cessation of violence against women; on the contrary, such violence is perpetuated and reproduced in the new scenario [18].

In relation to the ethics of care, we consider it appropriate to note that gender violence—understood here as the ultimate expression of the male exercise of power over women—represents the complete opposite of caring. As such, then, gender roles are also projected onto the dimension of disasters through the contrast of the two totally opposing activities of aggression (masculinized) and caring for others (femininized). In line with Butler's critical perspective, the proposal of no violence represents the ethical position that equates with a commitment to equality, including on gender terms. In this author's own words, in a context of equality, the ethos of no violence implies the critique of individualistic anthropocentrism [19] (p. 76).

Lastly, we wish to highlight that the social sciences have been pointing to the need to round out the gender perspective using the intersectional approach based on the theoretical notions initially formulated by hooks [20]. This author was the pioneer in understanding gender, race, and class as interconnected systems, and her approach was later conceptualized by Crenshaw [21], who coined the term "intersectionality" to refer to the multiple risks that such intertwined oppressions generate. This notion of the "matrix of domination" on which the intersection of oppressions rests [22] allows us to understand how the different systems of domination interact with each other and produce social inequalities.

In the case of disasters, the differentiation of vulnerabilities is particularly visible when one examines the specific impact of the disaster on the different groups that the affected population comprises [23]. This occurs because, as reports evaluating the effects on the ground have shown, disasters impact people in a discriminatory manner, in accordance with the same categories under which societies discriminate against people [24,25]. By considering the experiences of LGTBIQ+ groups, some authors have also reflected on the differentiated impacts of a disaster on the basis of sexual diversity [26]. Despite the introduction of a theoretical conceptualization of this dimension, some studies state that disaster risk management policies continue to be born out of heteronormative conceptions, meaning that access to services is made difficult for the LGTBIQ+ population and that such individuals are more likely to suffer violence against them [27]. Other research has demonstrated how gender intersects with ethnicity, particularly in populations where there is greater ethnic diversity [28,29]. Yet, other studies have addressed other differentiated dimensions of the impact of disasters, such as in terms of disability [30] and age [31].

3. Not Only Victims: Maintaining Life When the World Falls Apart

"the heart (. . .) imprints its movement on all the universe and every one of its creatures or beings, without forgiving a single one. A thought whose act is life; the life" [32] (p. 87)

As a counterpoint to what was said above, disaster contexts do serve as a point of inflection in that they provide the conditions that foster the possibility of social change. As a result of a disruptive event such as a disaster, the established order is altered and transformed. After the catastrophic event there comes a period when individual and collective life is resumed, and it is at that point that gender relations may give way to social transformation. In such a change, caring plays a fundamental role because it bridges the space of the intimate and of the private, and as such, it evidences another aspect of the performativity of gender and caring: by projecting their actions beyond the domestic sphere, the adaptive potential of women and their agency is highlighted. In this sense, philosopher María Lugones [33] developed the concept of the "private interactions of resistance" that women carry out in order to tackle various systems of oppression, from a decolonial feminism interpretation. Under this conceptualization, we can understand the disaster as another system of oppression that women resist.

Gender differences in disaster situations are even evident in the types of objects that men and women rescue from their homes, with women seeking out items to cover the basic needs of the group, thereby being an extension of their caring responsibilities when it is time to leave the home [3]. In line with this role of protector, women are also active

in the search for a roof to put over the heads of the family, and this is carried out through collective initiatives to find a new place to settle [4], which may even result in women seizing land [34]. What is more, as a consequence of the destruction of the home by the disaster, caring tasks then have to be undertaken in public spaces, thus rendering them visible [35].

This repercussion allows women to collectivize an activity that is often carried out in an individual and invisible manner: community space provides women with the opportunity to engage in new experiences which strengthen their social role, thus, in some cases, permitting women to undergo processes of empowerment [36]. The group environment facilitates the participation of women, meaning that they are provided with the opportunity to have a voice with which to lay out their needs in terms of their caring responsibilities and the maintenance of life. Specifically, in relation to the concept of "*cuidatoriado*/careworketariat" mentioned above, Durán [8] defends the importance of care as a transformative agent and the need to liberate it from its invisibility. To achieve this public recognition of caring, it is essential to move from the individual to the collective level through social articulation. She warns that women take on caring tasks for moral and affective reasons, and that this complicates their capacity to seek a vindication of their role. However, it must be acknowledged that affect (emotions and feelings that complement rationality) also occupies a central place in public life because of its potential to guide action, as has been demonstrated within the theoretical approaches to the affective turn [37]. One example of putting affect into action through collective undertakings specifically relates to public policies aimed at achieving gender equality [38]. The possibility of incorporating this emotional turn in the study of disasters would help with our understanding of what an important task that caring for others represents in the context of humanitarian emergencies, not only in order to save lives, but also to trigger emancipatory processes for women that will facilitate the move to more equitable and egalitarian relations through networking.

In this sense, as some researchers have shown, female leadership processes in disaster situations have a direct impact on reducing the vulnerability of women, as well as in promoting their individual recovery [39] alongside that of the affected community [14]. Works such as these point to the fact that gender differences in relation to the people's motivations, expectations, values, and perspectives of the world have an influence on the participation of men and women in disaster risk management. Among the elements that account for these differences, it has been noted that women show greater social skills and participate more in collaborative activities than men, in addition to showing a stronger attachment to place [40]. These feminine characteristics may be directly linked to the performance of the care tasks habitually undertaken by women, and as such, some researchers have noted that the importance of female participation in the management of such risks does not involve women becoming overworked, rather that it may also lead to changes in gender responsibilities within the home [41].

4. The Centrality of Caring as an Ethical Framework in the Face of Disasters

> "*the others, which is one of the thousands of names of love (...) love also called herd immunity*" [42] (p. 10)

The philosopher María Zambrano employs a metaphor that equates the heart to "the home of life" [32] (p. 99). Using this as a starting point, we can conceive of the home as a symbolic space where, as a result of care, life pulsates. Understood in this way, the domestic environment is resignified as a privileged space that ties us to life, where we care for others and are cared for. It is worth remembering that as humans, we are interdependent, and this condition makes us vulnerable. In certain ways, our vulnerability makes us all equal. It is on this basis that the Ubuntu idea of mutual assistance (I am because we are) takes on importance, being understood as a philosophy of and for life that encompasses an ethical postulation against social inequalities [43]. It could be said that caring forms part of the action (political and ethical) taken towards equality.

In relation to ethics and women's inequality, Amorós [44] proposes that an ethics committed to feminist hypotheses should create the conditions for collective wellbeing, and that this should include everyone in the world. According to this philosopher, in order to achieve this objective, it is necessary to deconstruct the assumed universality attributed to other philosophical ethics despite them being complicit in systems of oppression (on the basis of gender, class, etc.). Understood in this way, in the words of Lindemann, feminist ethics are not simply a branch of ethics, but rather "a way of doing ethics" [45] (p. 4) since, as Norlock states, its objective is to show how gender operates within our moral beliefs and practices. Specifically, "feminist ethicists aim to understand, criticize, and correct: (1) the binary view of gender, (2) the privilege historically available to men, and/or (3) the ways that views about gender maintain oppressive social orders or practices that harm others, especially girls and women who historically have been subordinated, along gendered dimensions including sexuality and gender-identity" [46]. Along the same lines, Haraway [47] questioned the binary dichotomies of western tradition on the basis of an epistemic break with essentialism in order to make way for complex constructivism. From these new postulations, analyzing the social world implies projecting a specific viewpoint, which is always situated, to represent an interpretative action. This epistemic transition facilitated the multiplication of perspectives, and therefore the inclusion of diversity, not just gender as was indicated above, but also taking into account philosophical reflections pertaining to intersectionality as an ethical proposal [48].

This endeavor of deconstructing hegemonic knowledge occurs in parallel with the philosophical development of the ethics of care, setting out from the proposal previously formulated by another philosopher, Carol Gilligan [49] and later by Nel Noddings [50]. Care ethics is, therefore, a young discipline of ethics and political theory, emerging within feminism just four decades ago [51]. Gilligan developed her theories on the ethics of care as a counterpoint to the ethics of justice, emphasizing how important care tasks were. It should be remembered that thirty years earlier, another philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir [52], theorized the way in which social structures determine women's secondary position as compared to men, since, as a result of them taking on family caring responsibilities, women are relegated to the private sphere with its associated loss of social, political, and economic status. Gilligan's theories contributed to the re-evaluation of the role played by caregiving and women's role as caregiver, and while the essentialist focus underlying her theory seems, today, to be outdated, we should still rescue one important element on which to reflect: the potential that the collective and social dimension of care involves. The above evidences the important contributions of philosophical literature around care as an ethical concept and critical proposal against the biases of neo-Kantian ethics [51]. Specifically, feminist political philosophy has highlighted the androcentric approach of the dominant theoretical tradition, "created by, for and about men" [53] (p. 118). The theoretical framework on care contributes to integrating women into said theoretical development by highlighting a dimension that is traditionally feminized and relegated to the background, despite being essential for individual and collective survival [54,55]. The ethics of care—meant as the satisfaction of the needs of others within personal relationships—allows us to understand that as political subjects, we are (inter)dependent and, therefore, our agency is always relational and shared, not individual, as was understood by the theoretical tradition with its individualistic androcentric bias [55]. Feminist political philosophers such as Nussbaum [56] have questioned the way in which Western philosophy has ignored the role of care and emotion in political life because they are associated with women, despite the obvious importance of both dimensions for the polis. Because, as this same author proposes from her capabilities approach [57], a theory based on social and political cooperation contributes to the search for social justice [58]. All of these proposals highlight that care is more essential than rights and duties for political life, since without care, most rights are useless [54]. As a conclusion to the above, and as has been developed from political philosophy, the idea about care is closely linked to that of inclusive citizenship, which redefines the metaphor of the social contract [59].

We concur with De Miguel [60] on the idea that the gender perspective can be considered an epistemic reflection, because it involves changing the way in which we perceive reality; it also encompasses an ontological reflection, since it obliges us to change the way in which we conceive of the subject, although it does also entail an ethical reflection because it assumes a change in the way people act. It is in relation to this latter idea that care emerges as an ethical guide that cuts across various ways of thinking and intervening in any context, and especially when lives are at risk. In view of the reflections above, it can be seen that the theoretical development of feminist proposals in relation to the ethics of care is of particular relevance in emergency situations such as a disaster.

5. A Brief Final Reflection

Extending the study of disasters from an interdisciplinary approach to encompass more areas allows us to deepen our knowledge about a phenomenon that humans are increasingly challenged by, with human actions themselves being one of the reasons for this increase (for example, through climate change). It would appear that continuing to reflect on our position towards the environment (physical and social) is imperative in view of the fact that our very survival is compromised. A central element that needs to be incorporated into this debate is that of care, a conceptualization around which a significant paradigm shift has taken place in recent decades. As we have shown in this work, the discursive turn facilitated by a new narrative around caring has been fed by important contributions from philosophy committed to equality and feminist ethics: the home as a symbolic space where care is provided and received is given a new meaning and, in consequence, acquires a different status. Furthermore, these reflections, which are limited to the private sphere, extend to the public one by promoting a review of the concept of citizenship: repositioning care as a support for life facilitates full and inclusive citizenship.

It could be said that the ethics of care has facilitated the incorporation of a gender and intersectional perspective into risk analysis and intervention. However, there is a paucity of philosophical reflection on the ethics of care in the particular contexts of disasters, and this article precisely addresses this reflection. The transition from a focus on women's vulnerability to focusing on their capacity for agency through the task of providing care has helped to understand that women involved in disasters are not passive subjects who simply suffer the consequences of a course of events, in Penelope's way, but rather, because of the care they provide, they are taking action, more similar to Antigone. Therefore, in relation to catastrophes, caring opens a window of opportunity to rethink the social expectations of women and other feminized people and understand that women are also agents of change at the same time as they are caring for others. As we have seen, the practical implications of these contributions can help to address the management of risk from a new ethical perspective, taking into account the ethics of caring throughout the disaster cycle (mitigation and response, as well as recovery).

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Notes

[1] According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), in 2018, there were 647 million full-time unpaid caregivers worldwide, with 606 million of them being women [7].

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