

IN DEPTH

Depatriarchalise and embody security and peace in Mexico

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With the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security now nearly 19 years old, there is an inescapable need to broaden the traditional vision that we have inherited against militarism and war –even from feminist movements– and focus on those forms of violence that occur outside situations of war but whose effects on the civilian population are equally devastating in the short, medium and long term.

We can find a paradigmatic case of such situations of violence that are not considered to be war under common international law –“wars not formally waged between States”, in the words of the anthropologist Rita Laura Segato¹– in Mexico. This is a country where, according to Índice de Paz (Peace Index), in 2018 the homicide rate increased by 14%, with more than 27 deaths per 100,000 people (69.4% of these homicides were committed with a firearm) and where currently ten feminicides are committed each day, according to the data collected by the Map of Feminicides in Mexico created in 2016 by the geophysicist María Salguero. In a context of extreme violence, the rates of feminicide, sexual violence and sexist violence in general increase exponentially.

It is worth recalling here, as an example, a report by Amnesty International, International Action Network On Small Arms and Oxfam International in 2005 which analysed the effects of firearms on the lives of women. The report stated the following:

“Guns affect women’s lives when they are not directly in the firing line. Women become the main breadwinners and primary carers when male relatives are killed, injured or

disabled by gun violence. Women are displaced and forced to flee their homes for an uncertain future. Displaced women often face starvation and disease as they struggle to fend for their families. And women, like men, are caught in the crossfire, both in times of war and of peace”².

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Thus, in 2006, Felipe Calderón, candidate for the National Action Party (PAN), held the Mexican presidency following elections judged fraudulent by broad sectors of society. One of his campaign promises was to put a stop to violence and drug trafficking. As the spearhead of his strategy, he deployed more than 25,000 soldiers and federal police officers throughout the territory. Far from being the solution, this strategy of militarisation led to an unprecedented increase in violence that has claimed the lives of thousands of people, many of them civilians.

The journalist Marcela Turati wrote that the situation that Mexico went through over the last decade was characterised by “wholesale death”³. Meanwhile the writer from northern Mexico, Carlos Velázquez, quotes in his novel *El karma de vivir al norte* these words from David Simon, screenwriter and creator of the HBO series *The Wire*, which summarise very accurately the current situation in Mexico: “What the drugs themselves have not destroyed, the warfare against them has. And what once began, perhaps, as a battle against dangerous substances long ago transformed itself into a venal war on our underclass”⁴.

While all this was happening, the “narconation” and the “narco-state” were consolidating and normalising themselves as a fundamental part of the political practice and social evolution of Mexico. Narcoculture, as a material expression of the concept of *gore capitalism*⁵ coined by the philosopher Sayak Valencia, laid the foundations of a hypersexist, hyperconsumerist and hyperviolent system, a “capitalism

based on drug trafficking, on profiting from death and on the sexist construction of gender”⁶ intimately linked to two other fundamental concepts related to this topic: necropolitics, as a dystopian form of governance, and feminicide, as a materialisation of this, coercive language and performative and exemplary praxis exerted on the bodies of women to show us that our lives are not simply vulnerable and precarious, but also something expendable that can be objectified and dehumanised.

Thus through the spectacularisation and hyperrepresentation of violence, narcoculture filtered into all fields of knowledge and popular culture of Mexico as well as into the daily practices of the population, as a matrix of intelligibility of social reality and as the point of reference, the model and the possibility of rising socially, despite its having taken our freedom. Meanwhile, necropolitics –that is, the idea that “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die”⁷– took its place in Mexico’s presidential throne, pushing aside any public policy that dared to place life in the centre, at the same time as it demanded a monopoly of violence and “power over the individual body and over the body of the population”⁸ fighting with organised crime groups over the power to oppress.

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In this sense, Valencia⁹ explains that “life is no longer important in itself but rather for its market value as an object of monetary exchange. The result of this transformation is that what is valuable is the power to control decisions over the death of others” and that “this necropolitical practice is taking over Mexican state power by means of controlling its economy, given the dependence of this economy on the economy of

crime”.

Given the reality described so far, it is essential from a feminist perspective to ask ourselves how the combination of narcoculture, necropolitics and what Segato calls the “pedagogy of cruelty” constructs patriarchal societies that extrapolate the notions of conquest and plunder brought to us by the epistemologies of the south, to apply them to the bodies of all those “subaltern” subjects that fall outside the ideal of the white, bourgeois, western and heterosexual man, and especially to poor and racialised women.

The final expression of the “exclusion” of these bodies located on the frontier, beyond the margins of “acceptable normality”, we find in feminicide, understanding this not only as a state crime, by action and omission, that violates the human rights of women –as argued by various authors such as Marcela Lagarde, Rosa-Linda Fregoso, Celia Cheyenne Verite or Jane Caputi, among others– but as the ultimate consequence of inequality in gender relations and of male control over bodies and of the “social construction of these hate crimes, the culmination of gender violence against women, as well as the impunity that surrounds them”¹⁰.

Reinforcing this idea, although in the 1970s, Michel Foucault explained in his essay *Discipline and punish: birth of the prison* that “the body is invested with relations of power and domination”¹¹. In the case of women, these power relations are built on “a logic of the domination of bodies by force and by sexualised and gender based violence”¹².

“ To challenge the notion of security based on arms and violence and move on to a true culture of peace, it will be necessary to depatriarchalise these concepts and their associated practices ”

Therefore, if we think about the feminist strategies to be followed to address the challenges we face in terms of security and peacebuilding in Mexico, we must demand not only the inclusion of women’s experience in the face of conflict and violence around

their bodies, but a rethinking of the very concept of security as a whole, putting life and the ethics of care at the centre, from the peripheries and the frontiers, from non-hegemonic feminisms; also touching on dimensions such as language or visibility, so as to deconstruct the collective image built around the patriarchal concept of security, which is founded on a colonial, western and violent logic.

But to challenge that notion of security, strongly based on arms and violence and on new forms of permanent parastatal warfare, and thus to move from an imminent process of pacification to a true culture of peace, it will be necessary to depatriarchalise these very concepts and their associated practices since, as Segato argues, “the pedagogy of masculinity is what makes war possible and no true peace is possible without a gender peace”¹³.

To do this we must aim to construct new subjectivities that take advantage of the potential of collective action and of the community spirit, politicising the caring “for all bodies in their diversity”¹⁴ as a tool of resistance, understanding it not as a traditionally feminised activity, but as a necessarily human ethic that, as Irene Comins-Mingol affirms, is “a source for overcoming adversity, of resilience, not only through the strength of ties and the commitment to the daily activities necessary for the sustainability of life”¹⁵, but through participation in collective activity where pain and experience are socialised and narrated, thus inevitably leading to their being recognised, and where we can resignify ourselves as agents of social transformation.

In this sense, the collective work *Cuidado, comunidad y común. Experiencias cooperativas en el sostenimiento de la vida* (“Care, community and the commons. Cooperative experiences in maintaining life”) includes the following:

“The attack on our sisters who today defend their territories highlights the crucial role they play in placing human and natural reproduction at the centre, revealing that the logic of extraction is not limited to the exploitation of work but also includes expulsion and annihilation. As Olga Araujo explains, the recovery of knowledge and memories for healing and reparation brings up a set of female experiences and methodologies against war, violence and displacement”¹⁶.

“ The feminist strategy, then, is to mainstream a culture of peace and a feminist education that allow us to decolonise knowledge and minds and to reinvent power ”

Within this recovery of knowledge we find Lorena Cabnal's idea of *acuerpamiento*, which she describes as “the personal and collective action of our indignant bodies in the face of the injustices of other bodies. Self-mobilisation to obtain the political energy to resist and act against the multiple oppressions of patriarchy, colonialism, racism and capitalism. This *acuerpamiento* generates emotional and spiritual energies and breaks through the impositions of time and boundaries. It provides us with closeness and collective indignation but also revitalisation and new energy, so as to recover our happiness without losing our indignation”¹⁷.

Undoubtedly, the task is overwhelming, but it's what has to be done. To the peacemaking philosophy left to us by our beloved teacher Vicent Martínez Guzmán and to the practices of denunciation and dialogue carried out for decades by anti-militarist women's groups such as Women in Black, Code Pink or the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), among many other pacifist feminist movements, now it is urgent to incorporate the dismantling of the patriarchal system and its alliance with neoliberalism, on the basis of the *acuerpamiento* of the suffering and the vulnerability of others and, particularly, of other women.

Only in this way can g-local processes and policies be initiated so as to tackle the devastating effects that the new wars are having on women; effects that in Mexico, the perfect laboratory of gore capitalism, are shown up in what Segato calls “the pillage against the feminine” and which, in turn, manifests itself “both in unprecedented forms of bodily destruction, and in the forms of trafficking and commercialisation of what these bodies can offer, to their utmost extent”¹⁸.

The feminist strategy, then, is to mainstream a culture of peace and a feminist education that allow us, paraphrasing Boaventura de Sousa Santos, to decolonise knowledge and minds and to reinvent power, generating a counterhegemonic culture that allows us to glimpse an idea of security connected with life and caring and not with the permanent fear of their potential destruction.

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2. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL et al. (2005). *The impact of guns on women's lives*. Oxford: Control Arms, p2. Available at: https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/guns_0.pdf
3. TURATI, Marcela (2011). *Fuego Cruzado*. México DF: Grijalbo, p29.
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5. Here is a brief explanation of Sayak Valencia's concept of gore capitalism (2010): "We take the term gore from a cinematographic genre that refers to brutal, extreme violence. Thus, with gore capitalism we refer to the explicit and unjustified shedding of blood (as a price to pay by a Third World that insists on following the increasingly demanding logic of capitalism), to the massive levels of evisceration and dismembering, often involving organised crime, the binary division of gender and the predatory uses of bodies, all this by means of the most explicit violence as a tool of *necroempowerment*."

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17. Definition contained in the SUDS website: suds.cat/experiencies/857-2/

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