

INTRODUCTION

Redirecting security from feminism

ICIP

International Catalan Institute for Peace

The notion of “security” is very complex. It can be understood as public policy, as a personal sensation, as a product to be bought and sold or as an unattainable ideal. As policy, security has several levels: local and global, national and international; and is conveyed from different spheres: personal and communal, symbolic and material. Its provision in each area is mostly state-centric, and often responds to the geopolitical and economic interests of the time.

The deployment of security that has been most prevalent historically is the one linked to sovereignty, territorial integrity and public order. States assess risks in the face of internal and external threats and pursue their protection by increasing their own political dominance. Through frameworks that are largely reactive, punitive and characterized by social control and armed action, a synonymy is often forced between security and “national defense” or between security and “presence of police and military forces” in public life. Thus, its definition is usually belligerent.

The world is currently experiencing several crises simultaneously: a “humanitarian crisis” in relation to the management of migration, settlement and asylum policies; a “climate crisis” due to global warming caused by human activity; an “economic and public health crisis” arising from the COVID-19 pandemic; and government crises that, although constant, are fueling emotional and violent polarization. All these phenomena have serious direct consequences on the sustainability of life itself; in other words, they pose great challenges for the security of the planet as a whole. However, political action in the name of security is proving to be limited to prevent and manage them.

By way of example, global military spending rose to 1,917 billion dollars in 2019, according to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)¹. This represents the largest annual increase in the last decade. The development and acquisition of more weapons, the creation of new militarized security forces and the strengthening of military cooperation is practically a global trend. However, these investments prove inefficient when they do not address the root causes of conflicts or aim at their transformation. Paradoxically, they often reinforce the culture of violence they seek to reduce and ignore the key issue: caring for people. This inclination to serve power and not life is far removed from the deployment of a system to safeguard human security as the main priority and *raison d'état*.

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While each region, country and locality suffers from wars, violence and conflicts that deserve particular analysis, complexity is a common scenario that makes the contradictions, limitations and grievances of current security models more visible. However, we are seeing that opportunities often arise from the cracks that force us to delve deeper into the debate about the convenience of systemic change. In this regard, the fact that the concept of security has multiple angles facilitates its reinterpretation. While the current outlook is not very favorable to the deployment of models that put the needs of people and communities at the center, strong movements are emerging, such as feminism, which point out the weaknesses of current structures and standards with the aim of transforming them. That is why at ICIP we consider that, between oversimplification and idealism, there is room for new strategies and that now is the time to revitalize some of the hidden potentialities.

With this monograph in the Peace in Progress journal, we want to contribute to the definition of a security that is directly responsible for the management of human vulnerabilities. Our proposal is to learn about (and acknowledge) feminism's specific contributions to the field of security because we believe that they are essential to redirect the ambiguity of the term and reverse the limitations of current public security policies.

Thus, in the following pages, we highlight some of the challenges facing security from a feminist perspective. On the one hand, we refer to various determinants that simultaneously structure everyday life, define human vulnerability and shape (in)security: patriarchy and heteronormativity, racism and colonialism, militarism and imperialism, and capitalism and extractivism. On the other hand, we try to avoid a merely reactive plan. Beyond critical analysis, we express a proactive purposefulness that aims to reverse the imbalances and harm that these forces cause when they are fueled by acts of discrimination and relations of dominance-submission. In this way, in addition to identifying the weaknesses and gray areas of the current structures, we present proposals to overcome them.

In order to follow the theoretical thread of all the proposals presented here, one must bear in mind that in some articles security is conceived as a precondition for freedom and the real exercise of rights, while others interpret it as an ordinary personal or collective consequence of having guaranteed all rights – social, cultural, economic, civil and political. All these points of view, however, agree on one basic issue: the underlying problem is that the demand for new, pacifist security policies based on human rights has never been solid enough. This contrasts with the current threat that public security will expand at the expense of excluding many basic rights and even criminalizing human rights themselves. But those who read these lines may wonder: Why is ICIP, an institution working for peace, concerned about security? In 2020 we launched an action line that aims to bring together all alternative proposals, especially those that are feminist, because we believe it is important to find ways to end the binary divide between peace and security, making them non-antagonistic, transcending the gender binomial that considers peace to be feminine and security masculine, and that peace is expansive and security restrictive. We do not advocate a narrative replacement of peace for security, but the building of a security that assumes strategies of nonviolence and

has peace as its genuine aspiration. In short, we believe that the development of security with a feminist perspective entails the construction of pacifist initiatives and structures.

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On the other hand, we would like to point out that the elaboration of this monograph has highlighted two imminent strategic challenges: the need to articulate thoughts and actions based on a new security model, and the urgency to diversify voices – or listen to others. First of all, while in this issue we focus on the main contributions of feminism, we also want to help facilitate dialogue between various proposals and actors that outline common goals for change. There are diverse and complimentary currents and visions that, akin to pacifism and environmentalism, propose a security paradigm that is radically different from the hegemonic model. From diversity, we believe that it is essential to build a common advocacy space that brings us closer to the possibility of dialogue with the current structures and the shared objective of conceiving a new security model.

Secondly, the predominance of Anglo-Saxon literature in feminist security theory poses a major constraint. A feminist approach to security must support the diversity of existing methodologies and ensure a leading role for the people and groups most knowledgeable and affected by violence, so as not to perpetuate the hegemonic narrative that determines their exclusion. Everyone should be able to be a subject with the possibility of agency. With the aim of approaching a contextual and disciplinary diversity, this issue includes the collaboration of eight women with outstanding careers.

The monograph begins with an article by researcher Nora Miralles that provides an overview of the political notion of security since the late twentieth century. The author

reflects on views that are critical of the predominant model and points out the main aspects that feminism has contributed to the understanding and management of security. In addition, she identifies some of the key questions that will guide the focus of the subsequent articles: Who decides what is a threat to our existence? Based on what? And, above all, how do we deal with it?

In the next article, Marissa Conway raises the question of how we can ensure national security that goes beyond the optimization of power as a goal and militarism and deterrence as a means. In response, she presents the “ethics of care” as a framework for examining the dynamics of power that exist between people, communities and states, and how a Feminist Foreign Policy can become a structure for reversing them.

For her part, Ana Velasco provides a critical reflection on the recent twentieth anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, created through the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The researcher raises the question of why the agenda has not led to a paradigm shift in how security is understood and obtained and whether there is still room for improvement. She points out how violence as a field of study and security as political management have historically been impervious to the importance of gender analysis. Gender – understood as one of the structural elements that categorizes and organizes human relations hierarchically – can bring us closer to understanding the causes and consequences of violence. Thus, Swati Parashar explains in her article how a genderized analysis of war allows us to understand and question the roles socially assigned to men and women and to investigate the current relationship between masculinity and militarism.

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Next, Carme Colomina explains how Europe has militarized its politics. The journalist highlights how security policies are being expanded against people, and how state powers act – in the name of security – against individuals who question them. How then can we deal with the imposition of political agendas based on the proliferation of fear, the curtailment of rights and the stigmatization of otherness? Is the interconnected nature of current revolts perhaps an opportunity to redefine security from a perspective of care and protection?

To transform current security policy, Pinar Bilgin underlines the pending challenge of Eurocentrism and the analysis of the colonial footprint, especially entrenched in the capitalist economic system. Her contribution revolves around what she calls “postcolonial thinking” and argues for the need and duty to adopt policies of responsibility and commitment based on European self-reflection. She argues that this perspective will permit an understanding of Europe’s current complicity in the cause and perpetuation of violent conflicts around the world and will facilitate the identification of possible solutions.

Finally, in the last article, Shamim Meer and the WoMin African Alliance illustrate the relationship between colonial land exploitation and communal insecurity. From an ecofeminist point of view, they show how women and nature bear the greatest costs of the economic system, characterized by extractivism. For this reason, they believe that only peaceful and sustainable economic policies can guarantee security.

As a complement to the main articles, the journal includes an interview with renowned feminist philosopher Judith Butler. Critical of power structures, in this interview she reflects on the limits and opportunities of the concepts of security, freedom and nonviolence, and on the growing vulnerability that is apparent during the current global pandemic.

Lastly, this monograph includes a series of recommendations of books, papers, projects and references to online seminars that aim to increase knowledge and contribute to the debate on feminist security.

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From all these issues that we set forth, we can deduce that rethinking security from a feminist perspective presents an important theoretical and practical challenge. From the outset, feminism today has many connotations in the collective imagination, many of which are a distortion of its most basic achievements. While there has been much progress in recent years in terms of equality between women and men and the promotion of sexual and reproductive rights, socially, the contributions that feminism can make to transform social problems and injustices remain quite unknown. Stereotypes of women's demands often result in narratives of victimhood and paternalism. Many of the spaces in which they participate are eminently consultative or parallel and have no guarantee of influence in decision-making. There has been no substantial change in focus, since symbolic structures of integration, and not of inclusion, have been added. It is necessary to overcome a transcendence of the essentialism of certain categories, such as that of woman, and to support new methods of reflection and advocacy, in the pattern of an inverted pyramid. This monograph also aims to be a tool for reflection in this respect.

For all the reasons mentioned above, we now present a theoretical-practical document that leads to numerous road maps. They all point to security as a value. We defend not only its objective dimension –physical and psychological– conditioned by various dynamics of violence, but also its perceptive dimension. We understand that from a feminist perspective, the ideal of security should recognize the existence of an innate vulnerability and a constructed vulnerability. On the one hand, we are inevitably vulnerable because we are interdependent. This implies that, as individuals, we must believe in the potential of shared security models: less antagonistic, more cooperative

and intercommunal, where support and accompaniment networks and mutual care relationships make interdependence a virtue. But on the other hand, we must distinguish between those vulnerabilities that, due to relationships or situations of unequal power, create privileges and cause helplessness. This is where people and groups have a degree of vulnerability that changes with the context. From this we can infer that people are vulnerablized (or are in a situation of vulnerability) rather than vulnerable, and therefore it is the responsibility and duty of the state to assume a goal of social justice that transforms them through a redistribution of socioeconomic resources. We advocate for security policies and budgets that serve the wellbeing of people, and not the other way around.

1. SIPRI military expenditure database.

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