

Feminist Foreign Policy and Security for Women

*Política exterior feminista
y seguridad para las mujeres*

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Abstract:

Here I analyse some of the factors that should be considered in the feminist foreign policy promoted by the Mexican government. If Mexico's international actions in favour of women's rights are to achieve the desired weight, it will be necessary to consider the demands expressed by organisations, scholars, and women who face the neglect of the international community. Only through a genuinely feminist foreign policy, will the Mexican state be able to work to correct grievances of the past and to grant us a life free of violence.

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Resumen:

Éste es un análisis sobre los factores que deberían incluirse en la política exterior feminista impulsada por el Gobierno mexicano. Para que las acciones internacionales de México por los derechos de las mujeres tengan la relevancia deseada, será necesario escuchar las demandas de colectivos, académicas y mujeres que enfrentan el olvido de la comunidad internacional. Sólo mediante una política exterior genuinamente feminista, el Estado mexicano podrá trabajar para enmendar los agravios del pasado y procurarnos una vida libre de violencia.

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Key Words:

Foreign policy, feminism, human security, Mexico, human rights.

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Palabras clave:

Política exterior, feminismo, seguridad humana, México, derechos humanos.

Feminist Foreign Policy and Security for Women

Leticia Bonifaz

This article will analyse how feminist foreign policy can be linked to the security demands present in the struggles for women's rights. It will include contributions from academia, which serve to understand the problem and take steps towards finding its solution.

The article is divided into three parts. The first contains a general approach to the issue, which includes the main demands of women on security issues; the second, a specific approach, which separates the manifestations of violence in the public and private spheres—with special attention to what has happened during the pandemic—; and the third, a brief review of the actions underway and the main measures to be promoted by feminist foreign policy.

General basis of the issue

Sweden, Norway, Canada, France and Mexico have foreign policies dedicated to advancing the demands of feminist movements. Mexico is the only Latin American state that expressly promotes this agenda, since September 2019, during the 74th session of the U.N. General Assembly, when Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard stated that Mexico was a “feminist” country and that its foreign policy would therefore also be “feminist”. From that moment on, the criteria and implications of the declaration began to be developed, and its many facets have been explored.

Foreign Minister Ebrard also spoke on that occasion of effective multilateralism, which can be understood as that which, through agreements, effectively ensures that commitments are fulfilled and that they are the trigger for specific public policies at the domestic level. International commitments should not only be a guide in the abstract, but should be translated into rules that, with concrete freedoms, rights and duties, advance on all issues that lead to the construction of an egalitarian society, as a clear and common objective.

It is necessary to know that, for a vast period of time, all norms were considered neutral and the differentiated impact was not seen for women—in general—nor for those who have found themselves in some category of special vulnerability—indigenous women, migrants, women with disabilities, girls and adolescents, transsexual women, older women, etc. Today's approach requires not only admitting the “non-neutrality” of the norm, but also the “intersectionalities” involved. Security demands appeared late on the agenda of multilateralism, but today they are an essential issue on all fronts.

What are the current demands both in terms of security at the street level and from civil society organisations that raise gender issues? What are many women's collectives looking for? What is pending on the security agenda? Throughout Latin America, we hear the cry “No more. Not one more missing woman”. They cry out about the very serious issue of femicides and the disappearances of women who are raped and whose whereabouts are unknown, or who are found dead with visible signs of violence before or after their death. There is also the issue of domestic violence, which has been exacerbated during the pandemic. On the agenda today is “No is No”, which implies respect for women's free choices, without any imposition of any act against their will. The feminist agenda includes demanding action to be taken against harassment and other forms of violent expression that do not take into account women's free choice, that objectify them and consider them as appropriable objects. The analysis of the issue of security can be separated into the public and private spheres. Women do not feel safe in either space, although there is a common denominator—in both there is undue interference with our bodies, our decisions and our freedoms. It is a question of appropriation, as if women were an object of free disposal to be assaulted, abused, mistreated, harassed, humiliated and belittled.

The term *feminicide* was coined by the Mexican Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos to describe the phenomenon of the deprivation of women's lives, differentiating it from homicide. The reason for this was mainly because different ways and reasons were identified for which women are deprived of their lives.¹ The landmark judgment of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of November 16, 2009—the Gonzalez *et al.* case, known as *Campo algodoner*—still speaks of “gender-related killings”.² There, it was determined that there had been violations of the rights to life, integrity and personal liberty, to the protection of honour and personal dignity enshrined in the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights and the Convention of Belém do Pará (Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women). The judgment specifically stated that “all de jure and de facto obstacles that impede the due investigation of the facts and the development of judicial proceedings should be removed”, and that “the investigation should include a gender perspective”. This point has led to a radical change in the entire system of administration of justice across all courts in Latin America, but unfortunately, this approach has not been sufficient to remove the structural issues that continue to impede not only access to justice for all women, but also the reduction of the margins of impunity. For this reason, the first demand of women's movements continues to be the fight against impunity and gender-based violence.

The gender perspective, according to the Inter-American Commission of Women of the OAS (CIM), is a strategy of analysis that includes three elements: the differentiated impact that the measures adopted have or may have on men and women; the opinion, experience and concerns of women at different points in the policy cycle; and the benefit that the measure

¹ See Dubravka Šimonović, *Las dos pandemias: violencia contra las mujeres en México en el contexto del covid-19*, Mexico, EQUIS Justicia para las Mujeres/Red Nacional de Refugios/Intersecta 2020, in <https://equis.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/informe-dospandemiasmexico.pdf> (date of access: August 2, 2021).

² Inter-American Court of Human Rights, “Caso González y otras (‘Campo algodoner’) vs. México. Sentenced November 16, 2009 (Preliminary objection, merits, reparations and damages)”, in https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_205_esp.pdf (date of access: August 2, 2021).

adopted brings in terms of reducing the inequality gap between men and women.³ For its part, the “intersectionality” approach refers to the importance of adopting differentiated measures, considering the particularities and diverse identities of women at risk. This entails taking into account the intersection of factors such as race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and gender identity—among other variables—that can accentuate the risk of violence and discrimination.

Specific basis of the issue

The private sector

For a long time, the private sector was considered outside of legal regulation and family conflicts. Regardless of their characteristics, conflicts had to be resolved by couples, which failed to take into account the prevailing gender asymmetries and inequalities, which often involve not only the subjugation of women, but also constant violence against them. In the domestic sphere, violence can occur between spouses, but also against the elderly, children and adolescents or women with disabilities, who are at risk in their own homes. U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres called, in April 2020, for an end to all forms of violence everywhere, from the battlefield to the home, and urged governments to address the shocking global spike in domestic violence through preventative measures and national response plans.⁴

At the national level, the COVID-19 Follow-up Survey, conducted by UN Women, revealed that anxiety levels during confinement have been higher

³ CIM, *COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts*, Washington D.C., OAS, 2020, p. [7], in <https://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID19-EN.pdf> (date of access: August 2, 2021).

⁴ UN, “Ante el aumento de la violencia doméstica por el coronavirus, Guterres llama a la paz en los hogares,” in Noticias ONU, April 20, 2020, in <https://news.un.org/es/story/2020/04/1472392> (date of access: August 2, 2021).

for women than for men.⁵ It also found that “social isolation and the health crisis create an enabling environment for women’s and girls’ increased risk of violence and increased intra-household tensions by 25 per cent globally”.⁶ According to a UN Women study, there has been physical, mental and emotional overload during the pandemic. Women have sought to safeguard their own health while generally taking care of household members. There is uncertainty, fear of contagion, work and economic stress because of loss of income, in addition to the risks of violence stemming from previous patterns, but also the wear and tear on the relationship due to prolonged confinement. This is aggravated in small households where even several families live together under the same roof. Precarious homes, confinement with abusers, overburdened care services, disrupted justice services and fragile economies have been a combination that has greatly harmed women and even marked setbacks in areas where great progress had been made.

In most countries in the world, but more so in our region, there has been no attention to mental health, no emergency telephone lines were activated, with specific attention to the elderly, the disabled, girls and adolescents, or women who were already in a circle or spiral of abuse. In addition, digital violence was added to pre-existing violence. The increased use of the internet has led to an increase in this type of aggression. According to UN Women, less than 40 per cent of women who have suffered violence have reported these crimes or sought help.⁷ Interestingly, it is not only women in rural areas and urban peripheries who suffer violence; there is also violence against working women who generate their own income. There has been an attempt to find a correlation between women’s greater presence in the public sphere and more violence in the domestic sphere, but there are issues of rivalry, competition, a sense of displacement and a failure to relinquish ancestral privileges; many men continue to reproduce

⁵ UN Women, “El impacto del covid-19 en la salud de las mujeres”, in <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20mexico/documentos/publicaciones/2020/julio%202020/impacto%20covid%20en%20la%20salud%20de%20las%20mujeres.pdf> (date of access: August 2, 2021).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. [4].

⁷ UN Women, “How COVID-19 Impacts Women and Girls”, May 19, 2020, in <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explainer/covid19/en/index.html> (date of access: August 2, 2021).

patterns based on hierarchy and domination.⁸ The difficulty lies in everything that has to be dismantled. A long and ongoing task that has been years in the making.

The public sector

In the public sphere, it is essential to consider women who suffer violence on the streets, on the roads, in squares, at work, during migration, in spaces of popular representation, etc.—and also women who fight for peace and security, women human rights defenders, those who search for disappeared persons, those who care for migrants, those who have taken up the defence of land and water as a banner, those who demand respect for the free development of their personality because of their sexual orientation and gender identity, those who have been in the front line with regards to COVID-19, those who aspire to public office, etc. Just as the private sphere was reserved for women for centuries, the public was considered a sphere belonging to men, so there are those who still feel discomfort or anger at the increased presence of women and feel displaced and obliged to renounce ancestral privileges. This makes them feel “entitled” to harass, dispose of or exclude women, who are perceived as intruders.

It is not only about individual security, but it is also about peace and collective security. The push for the peace agenda has been supported by women who have sought, through international commitments, to lay the foundations for lasting peace. And we need not think only of the great world wars that gave rise to the major instruments leading to the League of Nations and later

⁸ See, for example, Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, *Los cautiverios de las mujeres: madres, esposas, monjas, putas, presas y locas*, Mexico, Siglo XXI 2015; Marta Lamas, *Cuerpo, sexo y política*, Mexico, Océano, 2014; Francesca Gargallo, *Ideas feministas latinoamericanas*, Mexico, Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, 2016; Rita Laura Segato, *Las estructuras elementales de la violencia. Ensayos sobre género, entre la antropología, el psicoanálisis y los derechos humanos*, Buenos Aires, Universidad de Quilmes, 2003; Alejandra Ciriza, “Construir genealogías feministas desde el sur: encrucijadas y tensiones”, in *Millcayac-Revista Digital de Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2015, pp. 83-104; María Lugones, “Colonialidad y género”, in *Tabula Rasa*, no. 9, July-December 2008, pp. 73-101; Amelia Varcárcel, *Feminismo en el mundo global*, Madrid, Cátedra (Colección Feminismos), 2014. It would seem that, at a theoretical level, the issue has been clarified and there are guidelines in these writings for action and for the implementation of suitable public policies that do not leave all the force in punitivism.

to the United Nations. We need to think of the *guerrillas* in Central America, the Peace Accords in Colombia and the exits from the dictatorships that existed in the south of the continent prior to the democratic transitions.

In Argentina, the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have been a worldwide example of perseverance in the search for, and sometimes the happy reunion of, disappeared relatives. In Mexico, there are the women employers caring for migrants in Veracruz, but there is also the *Solecito* collective, which searches for people disappeared at the hands of the Mexican state itself, or the searching mothers of Sonora, who are a response to the omissions and negligence of the state in the disappearances of people. Elsewhere in Latin America, there is the National Association of Relatives of the Abducted, Detained and Disappeared in Peru, the Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared in Honduras, the Women Walking for Justice and Truth in Colombia, just to mention a few organisations. Most of the members of the search groups are women who are very committed to the cause of searching the bowels of the earth for the people they once had in their own hearts.

UN Women has attempted to measure women's participation in achieving peace. The data reflects that, as of 2019, 26% of signed peace agreements include gender provisions. Women's representation in major peace processes from 1992 to 2018 was 3% of mediating staff, 4% of signatory or testimonial staff, and 13% of negotiating staff. There is a direct relationship between pacifism and feminism. According to Carmen Magallón Portolés:

The feminist movement deployed, from the very beginning, strategies of non-violence that were novel at the time and it is said that Gandhi learnt a lot from the strategies and forms of action of the British suffragettes. Those who chained themselves to fences, interrupted political events to question the leaders or stood in front of horses to hinder their passage. Non-violence as a means of social transformation has always been very present in feminism, and although some feminists have supported the entry of women into armies and armed groups, non-violent methods have predominated in feminism.⁹

⁹ Carmen Magallón Portolés, *Contar el mundo. Una mirada sobre las relaciones internacionales desde la vida de las mujeres*, Madrid, Horas y horas (Cuadernos Inacabados, 64), 2012, p. 88.

According to this author:

Non-violent strategies have borne fruit, for feminism is a social movement that has carried out one of the triumphant revolutions of the last 50 years. And it has done so by non-violent means. Without using violence, although with many casualties of their own, there is the alarming number of victims of gender-based violence; mostly by using their freedom, women have managed to change their status in many societies and in doing so to change society as well. This is a clear example of the power of non-violence.¹⁰

She goes on to say:

Women's participation in international decision-making is part of the right to equality in the public sphere as a terrain to be conquered that was not neglected by feminism. Among the key issues in international politics is how tensions and conflicts between countries are dealt with, how global threats are identified and dealt with, such as what I have elsewhere named and [in] metaphorical terms: how to decide on war and peace.¹¹

According to Magallón:

What I am arguing for is that there is an identifiable line in the history of organised women's thought and action, opposed to war and violence. And that this line of intervention in the international arena involved a part of feminism, internationalist feminism. And although not all feminism is pacifist, the option and leadership deployed by so many women's organisations in favour of peace in the 20th century is full of pacifist initiatives led by women, their alliances to influence

¹⁰ *Idem.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

the international power structure and the advances in this sense, constitute a legacy and make up a historical tradition within feminism.¹²

Is there a reason why women have played this role? Magallón Portolés concludes that:

Women organise to support those who suffer violence in countries other than their own: armed conflicts, sexual aggression, lack of freedom and human rights. In their diversity, women working for peace share the attempt to delegitimise the logic that puts the lives of human beings at stake, in order to pursue other ideological material interests of power, sovereignty or others: working for peace is neither more nor less natural for men and women.¹³

How could women's participation come about if they were relegated? This is the paradox of which the author speaks:

The political marginalisation of women offers them greater possibilities and spaces to build peace, as they are perceived as outside the influence of the most polarised actors in the conflict, they reject violence and get involved because of the need to provide for the needs of the family, perhaps it is this strangeness, this gaze from outside the established power structures, which unleashes different creative approaches, and the different life experience places them in a different reality, in another paradigm. There are issues that may have gone unnoticed by the hegemonic gaze, alternative visions for dealing with coexistence and public affairs, new issues emerge, other concerns, etc.¹⁴

And goes on to say:

¹² *Idem.*

¹³ *Idem.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

The possibility of women's participation in peace negotiations depends on the power structure of the country. If a gender perspective in the analysis and resolution of armed conflicts starts from the recognition that women are affected in a specific way that is different from the way in which men are affected, it is this difference that is at the basis of their ability to have a voice in peace processes.¹⁵

This conclusion appears to me to be very relevant because, effectively, there are breaks and roles that can only be explained by the intrusion that comes with a different perspective, with other skills and with alternatives that are the product of a different position and vision. According to Magallón Portolés, this is important in diplomatic tasks: "There is no evidence that women are better negotiators, that they communicate better or are more open to dialogue than men; but there are practical cases in which it was seen that women found it easier to reach an agreement".¹⁶ An important academic study on women and peace was included in the compilation of essays on the complexity of peace, *Pax Orbis*,¹⁷ which specifically discusses the role of feminism in building a culture of peace and against gender-based violence.¹⁸

Feminist foreign policy actions

How can the causes of violence be addressed, if not through its expressions and effects in individual nations and at the regional and universal levels? How can the adoption of feminist foreign policy as a commitment by more countries, especially in the global south, have an impact? How to set the strategy and push it forward?

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁷ Francisco A. Muñoz & Beatriz Molina Rueda (eds.), *Pax Orbis. Complejidad y conflictividad de la paz*, Granada, Universidad de Granada, 2009.

¹⁸ María Elena Díez Jorge & María Dolores Mirón Pérez, "Paz y género. Debates y coincidencias sobre un binomio imperfecto", in F. A. Muñoz y B. Molina Rueda (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 97-126.

Contributing to the dismantling of the patriarchal model

At the heart of it all is—as has been said in academic works—the inequality derived from the patriarchal model that has not yet been dismantled. The androcentric model left women out, or at best relegated them to a background role, and thus led to an unjust and unbalanced social organisation. Equality in the home, equality in public life, greater well-being, participation in private and public decision-making will have an impact on security and non-violence. An urgent and decisive transformation of cultural patterns is required. This is the only way to rectify historical inequalities and build a resilient world. It is essential to continue with the empowerment of women, adolescents, girls, older women, women with disabilities, in the countryside and in the city, as well as at work and in public spaces. The patriarchal model is present all over the world. Each country has its own peculiarities, but we must also consider transnational phenomena such as migration, drug trafficking, etcetera.

Increased resources for public policies in the area of security and prioritisation of equality-related programmes

Although the route is mapped out for various methods to improve women's safety, the main problems for states have been: scarce resources and limited response capacity. The infrastructure of shelters or refuges for female victims of violence and their families has capacity, sanitary and budgetary limitations. Feminist foreign policy must prioritise the issue so that the allocation of sufficient resources can promote the commitments made and those that are being implemented in our region. Due to the effects of the pandemic, it will be essential to postpone some of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and promote them in the region. We must continue to insist on the results of Beijing+25 and what was recently said at the Generation Equality Forum. It is essential to maintain the Montevideo Strategy for the implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sus-

tainable Development,¹⁹ as well as the Mechanism for the Advancement of Women (MAW). It is urgent to take into account the effective fulfilment of the different Regional Agreements on women. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), as technical secretariat of the regional conference, made a systematic review of what has been agreed during the almost 40 years of the regional gender agenda, taking into consideration the socio-economic context and the Sustainable Development Goals. The different contributions of government authorities, members of civil society organisations and the bodies and agencies of the United Nations System were gathered.

Promoting women's leadership for security

For the design and implementation of feminist foreign policy on security, with inclusion, women are part of the solution. There is an urgent need to harness women's potential to stop conflicts at the local level. Alejandra Mora, Executive Secretary of the CIM, recently spoke about women's leadership in times of crisis. Few women have made decisions on how to improve women's own security with effective and appropriate responses.

The participation of women experts and women's organisations will provide an independent, specialised and multiplying voice for gender in crisis mitigation and recovery policies at all levels. Africa's experience with Ebola was that women's groups, through the use of their networks, amplified the message of social disengagement in communities and played a major role in the response to the crisis.²⁰

In addition, it is important to take into account the relevant role played in the current pandemic by world leaders such as Jacinda Ardern in New

¹⁹ ECLAC, *Estrategia de Montevideo para la Implementación de la Agenda Regional de Género en el Marco del Desarrollo Sostenible hacia 2030*, Santiago, ECLAC, 2017, in https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/41011/1/S1700035_es.pdf (date of access: August 2, 2021).

²⁰ CIM, *op. cit.*, [p. 8].

Zealand, Angela Merkel in Germany, Mette Frederiksen in Denmark, Sanna Marin in Finland, Katrín Jakobsdóttir in Iceland, Erna Solberg in Norway and Tsai Ing-wen in Taiwan. It is essential to further promote women's leadership in social and political organisations. Synergy with civil society is indispensable to continue building a safe and secure environment in the public and private spheres.

Insist on disaggregated data, indicators, ongoing monitoring and evaluation

To recognise a problem is to have it well measured. For this reason, it is necessary to insist—as ECLAC has stated—on the importance of data disaggregated by sex, age, racial and ethnic origin, socio-economic level and area of residence in order to improve diagnoses to reflect the diversity of women's situations in security matters. There is an urgent need to review national statistical systems and give them a gender focus, improve the coverage, quality and periodicity of socio-demographic and economic statistics through surveys, censuses and administrative records. Develop and strengthen instruments to measure gender inequalities, such as surveys on violence against women and the use of public spaces, and design and incorporate indicators into public management information systems to measure the degree of commitment to security issues.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region in the world where for four decades and without interruption, States have been meeting to debate and make political commitments to eradicate discrimination against women and girls and gender inequality, and to move towards guaranteeing the full exercise of the autonomy and human rights of women and girls.²¹

It is essential to continue to do so.

²¹ ECLAC, *op. cit.* p. 7.

Systematic and comprehensive interpretation of the various conventions and treaties, and coordinated work on gender and security issues

It must be made clear that not only the commitments derived from specific treaties and conventions related to women's rights, such as CEDAW and Belém do Pará, but also those of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols, which aim to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, as well as the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants, must be seen from a gender perspective, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ILO conventions—in particular 169, 183 and 189—the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Intolerance, the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights, international conferences on financing for development, the Conference on Housing and Sustainable Human Development of Older Persons, among others, all seen from a gender perspective.

Advancing the regional gender agenda

The regional gender agenda, according to ECLAC, is an agenda open to the future that dynamically incorporates the new commitments assumed by the member states, while being progressive in nature; it is cumulative, as each document recognises the political and programmatic value of the previous ones, and complements them by taking into account the new regional and global socio-economic and political scenarios. The common objective is to guarantee the right to a life free from all forms of violence and discrimination: violence against women in its different manifestations—private, public, symbolic, institutional, cybernetic, economic, obstetric, political; in situations of conflict, natural disasters, harassment at work, sexual harassment and stalking, sexual abuse and exploitation, smuggling of migrants and trafficking in women—; rape, femicide, forced marriages, and so on. It is about achieving a just and equal society. There is already a common agenda that can be promoted through regional and sub-regional cooperation based on the commitment to feminist foreign policy.

*Promoting urgent action during the pandemic
and in post-pandemic scenarios*

If before the pandemic the challenges were enormous, after the pandemic and with the threat of setbacks, it will be necessary to work simultaneously on many fronts, to turn what this health crisis starkly revealed in homes and public spaces into an opportunity for change. In general terms, it is a matter of adding and multiplying actions to achieve immediate results.

The importance of building an egalitarian society in which the whole world benefits has not been fully understood. Isolated efforts can be useful, but, more than ever, international commitments are key to reaching the status of full equality, assuming, as we said before, that norms are not neutral and that it is essential to read them from a feminist perspective. Encouragement from the international sphere is fundamental for the construction of a policy that implies leaving no woman behind and leaving no woman out. It is a question of guaranteeing conditions of security and a life free of violence for all.