

Peace and demilitarisation

War and armed conflict are a form of organised violence that we must endeavour to better understand and conceptualise. Not all conflicts are the same: there are colonial conflicts (England in India, East Africa and the Middle East, etc.; France in Algeria, Kanaky and West Africa, etc.); occupation conflicts (Israel in Palestine, etc.); religious fundamentalist conflicts (between different creeds or different currents within the same creed), and other kinds of conflicts. Many conflicts are justified to the rest of the world as ethnic conflicts between tribes or groups within a country or region, while the true economic reasons behind them are concealed. In reality, many conflicts are rooted in capitalism and have been provoked to control natural resources (oil in Iraq, coltan in the African Great Lakes region, uranium in Niger, gold in Mali) and boost the arms industry, private militias and national security companies.

Contemporary conflicts are funded through plunder, extortion, hostage-taking, 'taxes' on humanitarian aid, drugs, oil and minerals. In the age of globalisation, war, conflict and militarisation are expressions of violence that have been naturalised within the patriarchal and capitalist systems, as well as tools used by these systems to maintain their domination. Moreover, militarisation highlights the division of roles within the patriarchy: the concept of masculinity is associated with violence and weapons, suggesting that women need to be protected by men and the armed forces.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are the main weapon used to displace and control populations. Attacks on women are symbolically significant, as they represent an attack on the 'carriers of culture and civilisation'. Acts of sexual violence against women also serve to reinforce the traditional belief in male superiority.

The military contributes to training young men to take a dominant position in society in a variety of ways. The army can be considered one of the most patriarchal institutions in any society and it reveals the broader inequalities shaping relationships between men and women through its power hierarchy, worship and dominance of a 'boss', obedience, physical violence, absence of critical thinking, closed circle of 'boys', etc.

Terrorist and armed groups recruit men and very young boys to join wars and conflicts, training them to kill, rape and steal. This model of masculinity associated with power and aggression is becoming more prevalent among young people, who are also victims of sexual abuse and kidnapping by armed groups.

The lives of the girls and boys who are caught up in armed conflict are made very difficult due to their vulnerability. Whereas girls are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and



abuse, boys are at risk of violence when they are recruited by extremist groups and criminal gangs. Large numbers of refugees and internally displaced people flee from war zones after being forcefully displaced, with women and girls the majority among them.

Women's bodies: a battleground for soldiers

Women have always suffered from war, experiencing psychological, social, economic and physical harm. Mass rapes of women have played a central part in warfare. Women and their bodies are considered spoils of war, a tradeable currency to entertain soldiers and a battleground, where their bodies are viewed as enemy territory. In all these cases, women are objectified and considered the property of men.

Rape is used as a way to humiliate, shame and demoralise the enemy, as military propaganda, as part of a policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide, as an instrument of political terrorism or as a symbol of victory. The consequences of this brutal act are not solely physical and psychological. Raped women are often isolated, marginalised and cast out by their communities, taking the blame for the extreme violence inflicted on them. For many women, the only options are silence (if this is even possible), rejection or exile.

In the context of war and armed conflict, women and girls are often victims of sexual violence and are forced to enter prostitution. They also suffer unwanted pregnancies and high levels of sexually transmitted diseases. Violence pursues them into refugee camps, where they are forced into sexual slavery, sometimes even by peacekeeping forces, who rape or prostitute them.

During armed conflicts, the number of civilian victims is far higher than military victims and the majority are women and children. Prostitution rises systematically around military bases or camps, with the establishment of 'official' brothels to entertain soldiers. In many cases, these are women who have been raped and banished from their communities and are subsequently trafficked or forced into prostitution.

The responsibility for sustaining everyday life, looking after children, finding and preparing food, etc. falls on women. In conflict situations, these tasks become far more difficult and dangerous. When conflict ends, women find themselves with fewer family members and are required to care for children, elderly people and the sick. If their husbands survive, they are often left with serious physical or psychological damage due to the horrors of war, placing an additional care burden on women.

Domestic violence increases during and after armed conflict. Men who have suffered or been exposed to violence during childhood and/or as a result of war and men who suffer



from post-traumatic stress disorder and mental health issues are more violent towards their partners.

Our vision

Our feminist vision links war to the patriarchy and capitalism, calls for demilitarisation and promotes a culture of peace that goes beyond a mere absence of war. We fight for the rights of women in conflict zones and for an end to the use of rape and slavery as tools of war and we rise up against the impunity of aggressors, states and armed groups. Our actions against war and militarisation call for women to be included in peace negotiations, advocate civil disobedience in response to aggression, seek to build transnational networks and reject imperialism.

For an active vision of peace to become a reality, we must fight for the full, active recognition of women's rights, for equal participation of women in peace processes, for the eradication of poverty, violence and exclusion, for the promotion of solidarity and for an education that does not promote violence or sexist behaviours.

Lasting peace can only be achieved by deconstructing and transforming relationships between men and women. This process is not only influenced by race, class and sexuality, but also by the construction of gender that shapes women's lives. The way in which society understands gender has a considerable impact on perceptions of women in wars, on the roles assigned to them and on the severity of the consequences that they face for challenging traditional gender norms.

In our fight against militarisation, we demand:

- Reductions in military spending on purchasing arms, setting up military bases and maintaining armed forces and associated infrastructure through public budget cuts, as well as an end to incentives for arms manufacturing and trading.
- The immediate abandonment of agreements with foreign military bases and the withdrawal of troops from countries where conflict has ceased or where military agreements have ended.
- An end to the criminalisation of social movements, poverty and migration, which is justified through states' ideological manipulation of the fight against terrorism and national security concerns to legitimise the use of war and to control women, communities, land and natural resources.
- Punishment for the perpetrators of violence against women in conflict situations (armies, paramilitary forces, guerilla groups, UN Blue Helmets).
- The demilitarisation of society, demobilisation of armed groups and elimination of weapons in post-conflict situations, which are vital in order to build peaceful societies.



- The inclusion of women in decision-making at the highest level, both in politics and within the community. The lack of women's representation in peace processes is an obstacle to conflict resolution and lasting peace.
- Transitional justice for truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition after periods of conflict and war and for the serious human rights violations against women and communities committed during armed conflict. Transitional justice encompasses a range of processes and mechanisms implemented by a society in an attempt to address large-scale abuses committed in the past, with a view to delivering justice and permitting reconciliation.

And we are committed to:

- Condemning the role of the arms industry in spreading conflict, as well as in expanding militarisation and manipulating government policy-making.
- Condemning the governments and transnational companies that profit economically from conflicts on their own and other territories.
- Developing a broad grassroots feminist popular education process to empower our activists and other women to help break the codes of silence surrounding sexual violence and other forms of violence in conflict zones.
- Raising awareness of the reality of countries and regions in conflict, including 'forgotten' conflicts around the world, and of the extreme violence suffered by women in these situations, activating solidarity networks to take urgent action to support people trapped in conflict zones.
- Condemning the presence of UN 'peacekeeping' forces in conflict situations based on the accounts of women survivors, due to their apathy and inefficacy in bringing peace and their impunity when they perpetrate violence against women in refugee camps.
- Rethinking demilitarisation through a gender lens to combat the impacts of war and conflict. Critical analysis and concrete action are needed to promote lasting peace from the perspective of women and grassroots feminism.
- Continuing to condemn colonial genocides carried out as part of imperialist wars. In these exceptional times, imperialism is concentrating its forces to seize sovereign territories, such as Palestine and Western Sahara.
- Advocating popular and grassroots feminist resistance as a way to bring about change and counter militarism and war. We are committed to building anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist societies as a sustainable path towards a peaceful world.

