Women's Rights, Peace, and Democracy: A Problematic Relationship

CRISTINA SÁNCHEZ MUÑOZ

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Summary

This paper analyses the reformulations of citizenship, positive peace and democracy of both contemporary feminist theory and the feminist movement. In doing so, it will explain the interrelationship between the feminist movement as a democratic movement and its proposals for reformulating concepts and ideas that make up what we can call the "grammar of politics". Following Seyla Benhabib, the "democratic iterations" that have been achieved in the framework of human rights will be presented, giving some examples at national and international levels. Finally, the changes and challenges in women's demands for rights in current scenarios will be analysed.

Keywords: Women's Rights, Transnational Feminism, Seyla Benhabib, Democratic Iterations, Positive Peace, Feminist Activism

In the 1960s, John Galtung defined *positive peace* as "the absence of structural violence, a positively defined condition (egalitarian distribution of power and resources)" (1969, p. 183), therefore, related to social justice. Following Galtung, we can then say that positive peace is necessarily linked to the recognition of rights and equal participation in decision-making. As it has been pointed out, from Spinoza to Martin Luther King or Albert Einstein, peace does not only mean the absence of war, but peace is interwoven with the recognition of rights. Being subjects of rights, in this sense, implies recognition and protection within a political structure. However, as Hannah Arendt explained in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), the right to have rights is – and remains – one of the most serious problems in our societies. Analysing the situation of refugees and stateless persons in the inter-war period, she coined a phrase that has subsequently served to point out situations of exclusion of rights: "The right of every individual to belong to humanity, which must be guaranteed by humanity itself" (1976, p. 298). This expression reveals

a demand for inclusion in citizenship and a denunciation against the social and political exclusion of subjects belonging to certain groups. Exclusion implies not only the lack of rights, but also the impossibility of being political subjects. From the time Arendt was denouncing this situation until today, the number of people without rights radically increased. Wars, displacements created by armed conflicts, but also climatic displacements, economic migrations, and the precariousness of working and living conditions expel thousands of people daily from due legal and political recognition, from access to basic goods (Sassen, 2014), suffering a structural violence and the impossibility of participation in the public sphere on equal terms.

In the case of women, it would not be an expulsion from a previous state of enjoyment of rights, but a lack of consideration of women as political subjects themselves that is rooted in the classical theory of citizenship, as Carole Pateman (1988), among others, pointed out. It is not by chance that, in 1995, the United Nations, at the Fifth International Conference on Women in Beijing, adopted as its motto: "Women's Rights are Human Rights". Therefore, the deficiency of women's rights at a global level[1] shows us something persistent, embedded in our democracies.

Consequently, given that the lack of rights, or the diminished enjoyment of rights, has been a constant for women, the demand for a positive peace – a peace linked to the development of human rights, equality, and democracy (Galtung, 1969) – is something that has always been present in the feminist movement, as well as in contemporary feminist theory. In this paper I will analyse the role that feminist movements play in the achievement and reformulation of democracy, citizenship rights, and peace. To this end, I will explain the interrelationship between the feminist movement[2] as a democratic movement and its proposals for reformulating concepts and ideas that form what we can call the "grammar of politics" (Fraser, 2008). Following Seyla Benhabib, I will talk about the "democratic iterations" (2004, p.

---

[1] See the *Gender Inequality Index* (GII) elaborated by the United Nations Development Programme (https://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii). This Index focuses on three areas: reproductive health, empowerment, and labour force participation. In Europe, see the *Gender Equality Index* created by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021). In 2021 the thematic focus of this index was women's access to health, especially during the pandemic. In 2020 it was digitalization at work, and in 2019 the gap in work-life balance was analysed.

[2] By "feminist movements" I refer here to movements demanding political, civil, and sexual rights from the Second Wave of Feminism (late 1960s) to the present day. Feminist activism is present in virtually all countries, although local agendas and priorities may vary. Strategies differ by varying shades of class, ethnicity, sexual identities, religion, and experience. But, as Ferre and Tripp point out, the demands that feminists raise are increasingly being articulated in transnational forums and with the support of international organizations (2006, pp. 7-9).

171) that have been achieved within the framework of human rights, giving some examples of this. I will end up raising the advances of a transnational feminism and the agenda for peace in the 21st century, its scope, and challenges.

1. Feminism and Democracy

I will begin by discussing the role of women's movements in the early twentieth century in the construction of peace, trying to trace continuities with the current moment. The first thing to note is that the expansion of democracy and the achievement of peace have always been on the horizon of women's movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, from the beginning of the 20th century, as well as in the civil rights movements of the 1970s in favour of participatory democracy, through the last two decades (Occupy Wall Street, Arabs Springs, M15 Movement in Spain or, very recently, the women's movement in Iran), there has been an active presence of feminist movements engaged with the deepening of democracy (Moghadam, 2015). This presence of women's and feminist movements in these very crucial moments for democracy[3] reveals something that Hannah Arendt pointed out about the voice expressed by popular councils: "We want to participate, we want to discuss, we want to make our voices heard and we want to have a chance to determine the political trajectory of our country" (1972, p. 232). Then, these women's voices show us, in many regions of the world, the demand for the extension of democracy, the extension of a *demos* that reveals itself as masculine and that has not incorporated women as political subjects, as full citizens (Abou-Habib, 2011). As Nancy Fraser has pointed out, we can say that these demands expose a three-dimensionality of justice: redistribution, recognition, and representation in terms of parity in decision-making places (Fraser, 2008) On this new scale of justice, women's demands are articulated and intertwined in demands for all kinds of rights: sexual and reproductive, political, civil, and economic ones. And, at the same time, these demands transcend the Westphalian frameworks of the nation state, being articulated, for example, as claims from the Global South (Roberts and Connell, 2016).

Along with these pragmatic feminist interventions in the public sphere in favour of the extension of democracy, which span the history of feminism, from suffrage to our days, another characteristic that we can trace in feminist movements is their *internationalist* vocation. This internationalism is expressed, fundamentally, in international solidarity between women from different regions of the world – as has been shown, for example, in the United Nations Conferences on Women –

---

[3] Thus, for example, in the Arab Spring in Egypt, figures such as the Yemeni feminist Tawakul Karman (Nobel Peace Prize in 2011) or the activist Asmaa Mahfouz (one of the founders of the April 6 Youth Movement) played an important role in articulating the demands for women's rights (Alvi, 2015).

claiming rights for all women, and linked to this, the demand for world peace. Therefore, we can see a global sense of demands, which is clearly shown, very early, in the suffragist movement. In 1915 the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (WILPF) was founded by the suffragists Jane Addams, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, and Emily Green. However, their internationalist pacifism was close to what Galtung understands as "positive peace" (1969). Jane Addams, for example, criticized the movement's focus on war, rather than on other forms of violence and injustice linked to political and economic inequalities (Trifu, 2018, p. 33). Reaching the right to women's suffrage was one of the objectives of the League, but that suffrage was understood in a cosmopolitan way: it would allow women to make laws that would make it possible to consolidate peace in the international arena (Etchar, 2015). They expressed, to put it another way, an interest in political participation, in being part of the *res publica*, which will be repeated in other historical moments. Likewise, the Socialist International of Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai demanded economic and social rights beyond national borders. We could say, in current terms, that this internationalism presented an aspiration for a post-Westphalian justice, for a global justice for women.

This internationalism of the feminist movement finds its opponent in nationalist political discourses that link the traditional role of women with the very survival of the nation. Strong nationalistic discourses reinforce the idea of reproduction and maintenance of the nation with a traditional vision of women and maternity (Anthias and Yuval-Davies, 1989). Thus, for example, fascist Italy, authoritarian francoist Spain, or Nazi Germany linked the nation to traditional femininity – *Kirche*, *Küche*, *Kinder*[4] – far from the demands of women's rights. Contrary to internationalisms, which have facilitated the extension of women's rights from a cosmopolitan point of view, nationalisms have reinforced the traditionalist discourses of gender roles.

Women, though, found innumerable obstacles to get participation as citizens, and those obstacles came not only from the state, but also from the same theoretical framework – citizenship and democracy – in which they intended to fit. They were facing what Carole Pateman called the *Wollstonecraft dilemma*. According to this dilemma, the two paths that women have followed in their struggle for full citizenship are problematic: on the one hand it seeks to extend to women the rights of male citizens, accepting a citizenship based on masculine characteristics (independent, autonomous, disembodied *self*), and on the other hand it would argue that women "as women" have skills, interests and needs that require a different citizenship than men, defining themselves in a differentiated way compared to the male norm, but

---

[4] This motto, known as "the three K's", designated the traditional role of women in patriarchal society: church, kitchen, and children. It was used by Nazi propaganda to confine women to the sphere of domesticity.

that difference is precisely what excludes citizens. The dilemma, says Pateman, "is that the two paths to citizenship that women have taken are incompatible within the patriarchal state" (1989, p. 197).

To a great extent, the feminist theory in the twentieth century, especially feminist Critical Theory (Benhabib, Young, Fraser), questioned and answered the bases of liberal citizenship focusing on two fundamental axes of the same construction of the concept of citizenship: first, the notion of the *self* implicit in it, and second, the distinction between a public and a private sphere. In the classic social contract theories (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau), the *self* transcends the particularities and differences. It is characterized as an abstract self. In contemporary re-editions of contractualist theories (Rawls, Habermas), the veil of ignorance, the ideal situations of speech and other epistemological resources show us the autonomous *self par excellence*: independent, disembodied, and without a concrete narrative (Pateman, 1989). On the contrary, in the face of this abstract individualism, contemporary feminist theory has underlined the imposture of this supposedly abstract subject. Authors such as Seyla Benhabib, Carole Pateman or Iris Marion Young, among others, have highlighted the exclusions of this blueprint of the contemporary political subject, emphasizing the need to include, for example, bodies, affections, and needs. Seyla Benhabib (1992) expresses, in this sense, an "epistemological deficit" related to the conception of the self, underlying classical liberal theories of citizenship: an abstract, decontextualized, and disembodied subject. Putting a situated subject – the "concrete other" in her terms (*ibid.*, pp. 148-177) – on the plane of citizenship means, for example, including issues that affect concrete bodies, such as sexual violence or reproductive rights.

On the other hand, the traditional division between the public and the private also represents a major obstacle to women's full citizenship, as the public sphere is identified with rationality, impartiality, or independence, attributes and values traditionally associated with the male (Benhabib, 1992). Women represent "the disorder of the private", the threat to the supposed homogeneity of the public sphere (Pateman, 1989). Gender therefore draws a line in the concept of citizenship that establishes important dichotomies around the public-private distinction: autonomy and dependence, justice and solidarity, rights and care, in order to preserve the purity of the public sphere. "The personal is political", was the motto of the feminists of the Second Wave, criticizing the public-private separation and gender identification with that gap. Thus, for example, it is precisely this new political consideration of the private that, from the sixties to our days, has managed to remove the invisibility of the multiple forms of violence against women, to stop "naturalizing" them and to endow them with a political significance (Sánchez, 2021). In this manner, "domestic" violence or rape within marriage have come to be considered expressions

of patriarchal power that violate the autonomy of women and that should be a matter for justice (MacKinnon, 1991) Similarly, other issues traditionally understood as part of the household domain, such as the work of care, have also transferred their "private" meaning to be part of what has been called a "care economy", with monetary impact on public policies (Mahon and Robinson, 2012).

2. Democratic Iterations. Some Examples

The interrelationship between feminist theory's critical revision of the theory of citizenship and democracy, as we have just discussed, and the activism of the feminist movements in their struggle for rights (from suffragism to the current demands of fourth-wave feminism) has expanded the very idea of citizenship and rights. In terms of Seyla Benhabib, we could say that this long and continuous activity over time has produced what she calls "democratic iterations": The discursive processes in which universal membership rights are renegotiated (2004, pp. 171-212). Benhabib takes the term "iteration" from Derrida, who used it in the field of philosophy of language to indicate, as she presents, that "in the process of repeating a term or a concept, we never simply reproduce the original first use: each repetition is a form of variation. Each iteration transforms the meaning by adding things that enrich it. Reiteration is the reappropriation of the 'origin'; it is at the same time its dissolution as 'the original' and its preservation through its continuous deployment. Every act of iteration involves making sense of an authoritative original in a new and different context" (*ibid*., p. 179). These "processes of democratic iteration" are defined as "complex processes of public argument, deliberation, and learning through which universalist rights claims are contested and contextualized, invoked and revoked, throughout legal and political institutions as well as in the public sphere of liberal democracies" (*ibid*.). In this sense "democratic iterations are moral and political dialogues in which global principles and norms are reappropriated and reiterated by constituencies of all sizes, in a series of interlocking conversations and interactions" (*ibid*., p. 113).

In the field of political practice, these democratic iterations would imply reconfigurations and reformulations of democracy as well as of citizenship rights. Compared to a static and cohesive view of collective identity as a requirement for citizenship, these practices provide us with a dynamic vision of it, which is permanently being constructed, negotiated and/or contested by those subjects which still do not form part of the *demos* but in an incomplete way, as in the case of women. As Benhabib says, in this case it is the "rights of the others" (2004) which bring about self-reflective transformations in democracies today, and it is in the political and legal debate which ultimately affirms what those "rights of others" are that the identity of "we the people" is defined and negotiated. In this way, Benhabib places all

the emphasis and weight on the political action of the agents involved, highlighting the importance of active political participation and of the role citizens play in establishing and defining rights. Insofar as democratic iterations transform citizenship, they are an example of what some authors, such as Frank Michelman, have called "jurisgenerative" politics (1988, p. 1506), that is, a politics based on iterative acts through which a democratic people that considers itself subject to certain constitutional laws and principles reappropriates and reinterprets those laws and principles, and incorporates them into democratic will-forming processes through argument, contestation, and revision.

Democratic iterations show us how the meanings of rights and identities are transformed when they are claimed by subjects who were previously not expected to be bearers of those rights. Feminist claims are a clear example of this. But, at the same time, iterations do not merely open political processes and practices of discursive reflection; they are also performative with respect to gender identity roles. They reveal the changes in gender roles, making evident new constructions or reconstructions of the same (distortions in the dominant meanings). Thus, for example, the renegotiations that took place in 2007 in Spain among the gay and lesbian activists, finally brought about a change in the laws to allow same-sex marriage. This change made evident in the public sphere the expressive and performative moment of political action, of the exhibition of the self, articulated, in this case, in the context of gender and sexuality, and managed to put into practice a jurisgenerative politics such as the one described above. Democratic iterations, in this way, are complex processes of interrelations among courts, social movements, and the public sphere. They involve reformulating and fostering democratic discursive practices, as well as intensifying the public sphere. In this sense, democratic iterations introduce into the public sphere the voices of the excluded, against the discursive hegemony and the interpretations of rights of the dominant groups.

The democratic iterations produced by feminist movements can be observed both in national contexts as well as in international legislation. First, as an example of national democratic iteration, I will set the example of Spain in the achievement of women's rights. During the Franco regime, women were considered by law to be minors, subject to the authorization of their husband to work and to have a bank account. After his death in 1975, a transition process was opened and culminated in the 1980s with the constitutional recognition of gender equality. The advances in the young Spanish democracy were achieved thanks to the interaction of several political actors in the public arena: the academic feminism that had achieved important positions in political institutions, giving rise to what has been called "institutionalized feminism" (Bustelo and Ortbals, 2007), that played a key role in the development of public equality policies; the feminist movement that urged with

street demonstrations the need for legislative changes, such as a new divorce law; the left parties,[5] with an ideology in favor of real equality, and finally, a key actor: the European Union, which – with its policy of equality between men and women – affirmed and consolidated the creation of state's agencies responsible for ensuring and institutionalizing equality and taking care that there would be no setbacks (Folguera, 2007). All these actors, jointly, undertook those public deliberations of democratic iteration, of reconfiguration of new rights, in which feminist movements and feminists within the left-wing government played an important role. The result, especially since 2000, with the victory of the Socialist Party, has been the approval of important laws[6] related to gender equality and gender violence that can be considered pioneers in the European context.

Secondly, at the international level, democratic iterations have also left us important changes and redefinitions in terms of women's rights. I will highlight one, related to the iterations of international understanding of the meaning of war and peace: the consideration of sexual violence against women in armed conflicts as political violence and its inclusion in the category of "genocide" and "crimes against humanity".

Violence against women in wars and genocides has been considered marginal, if not silenced.[7] It was not until the 1990s, with the wars in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, that important and decisive changes took place for the legal recognition of massive sexual violence as a crime (Copelon, 2000). The nineties were, in that sense, not only a decade of relevant responses and legal changes, but we must also highlight how those changes, those iterations, were driven by a feminist activism, by important mobilizations of feminist organizations fighting for women's rights (Friedman, 2003). The Vienna Human Rights Conference of 1993, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development of 1994, and, finally, the Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 allowed the emergence of a transnational feminist movement that could put women's rights on the agenda of human rights and transform the traditional androcentric legal frameworks for the interpretation of human rights (Moghadam, 2015).

---

[5] Basically, the Socialist Party (PSOE), when it first came to power, in the post-Franco democracy, in 1985.

[6] In 2004, the Constitutional Act 1/2004 of 28 December, on Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence, was approved, and in 2007, the parliament passed the Law of Equality Act, or "Gender Equality Act".

[7] As it happened, for example, with the massive rapes against the women of Berlin by the Russian troops in 1945, or the "comfort women" in Korea (women forced to be sexual slaves by the Imperial Japanese Army in territories occupied by Japan during World War II). At the Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials, the question of sexual violence did not have a specific mention.

The International Criminal Tribunals of Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR) made important interpretations, introducing for the first time war rape as a case of genocide and crime against humanity, showing the gender of genocides and wars. However, as Rondha Copelon rightly points out (2000, p. 217), the element that managed to put sexual violence at the center of the political and legal debate was not the atrocity of violence against women, but insofar as it was used as a weapon of war, that is, when it became visible as an instrument to achieve ethnic cleansing. It was this linkage of sexual violence with ethnic cleansing – with ethnic genocide – that finally made visible a reality that had been present in many other wars.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) continued the work of the ICTR and the ICTY to introduce sexual violence in the most reprehensible crimes, constituting an undeniable and important advance in the classification of these, in the task to "name" what happens to women because they are women. Feminist organizations, such as *The Women's Caucus for Gender Justice*, came together to lobby at that decisive moment, in the United Nations Conferences of the nineties (Friedman, 2003). Feminist activism, therefore, succeeded in having the term "gender" incorporated for the first time in an international legal document.

All these democratic iterations at the international level led to sexual violence finally being considered a threat to international peace and security. It was no longer a collateral or marginal issue in the conflicts, but, as had been seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Rwanda, it occupied a strategic central place that compromised the achievement of peace. Therefore, ending massive sexual violence is a fundamental objective to reach world peace. In this sense, the resolutions of the United Nations (from Resolution 1325 in 2000 until Resolution 2467 in 2019)[8] recognize this problem as crucial for the international peace and security agenda (Tickner, 2018). A redefinition of peace under a gender perspective is necessary not only for the recognizing of women's rights, but also for the understanding of the dynamics of wars and the role that women's bodies play in them as a battlefield (Segato, 2014).

The two examples of democratic iterations considered here show us the interaction between civil society (in these cases, the women's movement), the public sphere, and the extension of rights. Through participation in the public sphere, rights are reinterpreted and expanded. But at the same time as they are expanded, they are re-signified, incorporating interpretations and meanings that were not originally contemplated. These iterations, therefore, deepen democracy from below, from argumentation and deliberation in the public sphere, where the subjects involved deploy their demands.

---

[8] Other United Nations Resolutions about sexual violence in conflicts are RSC 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2331 (2016).

3. Women and Peace

Connected to this, one of the important reformulations of feminist theory and activism, especially since the 1980s, has concerned women's relationship to peace. The feminist debates on the relationship between feminism, peace and women's peace activism and scholarship have focused, to a great extent, on whether women are more peaceful than men (Confortini, 2012). Peace has traditionally been associated with women, in what I propose to call *women's peaceful essentialism* or *essentialist female pacifism*. Accordingly, there is a whole conceptualization of the political relevance of women as "natural" peace advocates. And equally, sometimes, the inclusion of women in citizenship has also been based on that role of "peacemakers" in politics and the public sphere. Therefore, there are several issues to be analysed regarding women's relationship with peace: firstly, the theoretical constructions of this "feminine pacifism" related with an essentialist nature, secondly, the practical consequences of this, and, finally, the incorporation of women into the international peace and security agenda.

The essentialist construction of the female identity has operated in most cases as an argument against the admission of these into full citizenship. Thus, for example, Rousseau, in the *Discourse on Inequality*, prescribes to women: "Therefore always be what you are, the chaste guardians of morals and the gentle bonds of peace, and continue at every opportunity to assert the rights of the Heart and of Nature on behalf of duty and virtue" (1997, p. 122). As we can see, Rousseau relegated women to the private sphere, to the role of being the moral guardians of the community and peace. But if this kind of attribution has played fundamentally against the inclusion of women in the political space (Sánchez, 2001), it is also paradoxical to find the opposite result: it is precisely this essentialism, linked to a morality, that, in some cases, provided the foundation and justification for the inclusion of women as citizens. But we would have to say that, in these cases, women do not participate as citizens on an equal basis with men, that is, under the appeal to a moral universalism, but as *women*, as natural bearers of a morality that leads to a "moral excellence" in contrast with a "corrupt" morality of men. This type of argument was used by some of the suffragist movement leaders in the United States in the 19th century (Kraditor, 1965). Although the appeal to ethical universalism and the principles of justice was the main argument of feminism in its demands for citizenship, both American and European, along with this, another type of argument was taking place: the one that praises and demands the ethical values traditionally associated with women (care, love, responsibility for others) as something positive and beneficial for society as a whole (*ibid*., p. 53). These values, in turn, are identified with motherhood, so the "good mothers", the guardians of the home, and the quintessential caregivers, would now be "good mother-citizens", guardians of the

public. There is therefore a mystification of motherhood, which would, in some cases, provide the gateway to the suffrage[9] and the enjoyment of certain rights by women (Koven and Michael, 1993).

Maternalist arguments have had a great influence on the theorization of women's link to peace, from the point of view of essentialism and the "naturalization" of women as "born peace advocates".[10] This maternalism has also had an important impact on political activism, in public demonstrations by mothers who demand attention from the state just as mothers caring for their children, fathers or relatives, as is the case of Mothers against Arms (EEUU), or The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (Argentina). In the 80s, the maternalist argument reappears in the debate on citizenship – as *maternal thinking* – by authors such as Sara Ruddick, Jean Bethke Elshtain or Virginia Held. The maternalists theorists were inspired by and found theoretical reinforcement for their theses in the psychoanalytic theories of motherhood by Nancy Chodorow and in the proposal of an ethics of care by Carol Gilligan. Their purpose was to present maternalism as a normative perspective that should be taken into consideration in the public sphere, but already detached now from its essentialist foundation. The values associated with motherhood, especially care, were the product of gender-differentiated socialization, and could then be assumed by both women and men (Lister, 1997).

What these maternalist theorists ultimately highlighted was the importance of placing care for others at the center of politics, not as a "private" value, but as a public one, thus extending democracy and citizenship as a "caring democracy", that is, as a democracy that takes responsibility for the care of the life of all citizens above other economic considerations or individual responsibilities (Tronto, 2013). In this sense, maternalism, now based on an ethic of non-essentialist care, would support a policy for peace, an "anti-war feminism" and "anti-militarism-feminism" (Ruddick, 1989). This feminist pacifism, in turn, would broaden its sights – from the end of the 20th century onwards – towards ecology, leading to an *ecofeminism*. Pacifism, ecology, and feminism, therefore, were united in a theoretical alliance – not exempt of problems, but very fruitful in authors and activists like Vandana Shiva or Petra Kelly. Violence, in this sense, was no longer only a violence that manifested itself in the domination of women, but also extended to the environment. Thus, peace, as the United Nations and other international organizations have subsequently proclaimed, is not peace if it does not incorporate women.

---

[9] This would be the case with the granting of the right to vote in Wyoming (1869), Utah (1870), Colorado (1893) and Idaho (1869), in the belief that the new voters would help raise the moral standard of politics (Evans, 1977, p. 214).

[10] Although other pioneers of pacifist feminism, as Bertha Von Suttner, Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch or Virginia Woolf, would not maintain pacifist arguments, but universalist ones.

Although some authors have exposed the risks of associating women with peace, in terms of reinforcing gender stereotypes (Yuval-Davies, 1997; Tickner, 1992), it is true that the socialization of women in roles contrary to violence is part of the lived experience of many women (Cockburn, 2007), and this experience has made possible the organized opposition to wars and the active resistance of women as political agents, beyond the traditional role of passive victims. In this sense, the political involvement of women, organized collectively in conflict or post-conflict scenarios, has meant the construction of new political subjects that put forward new demands and agendas, many of them woven around a politicization of care and demands for social rights, in terms of a positive peace. These interventions have led to important social transformations in their communities with respect to traditional gender roles and, in particular, to the inclusion of women in political decision-making.

On the other hand, the relevance of women as peacemakers, as has been shown in different negotiation contexts,[11] has not been exempt from a return to the discourse of "women's moral excellence", with essentialist overtones, presenting women as "better negotiators" (Forcey, 1991). However, the situation is more complex, and has to do with social constructions and gender stereotypes. Since the socially predominant values are identified with the masculine (competitiveness, aggression, authority, courage, etc.), and these are also the ones that predominate in conflicts, with a very notable identification between war, militarization, and masculinity (Cohn and Enloe, 2003), it seems reasonable to propose a change of values in order to end precisely what produces them. That women are the carriers *par excellence* of these other values and virtues (conciliation, care, affection) must be taken with caution: the mystification of women as mothers can reinforce gender roles and point out those women who do not fit this profile as "bad women" – "bad mothers" – who deviate from the assigned roles. On the other hand, the presence of female fighters, or women who engage in different types of violence, from suicide bombers to female soldiers in Abu Ghraib, breaks this stereotype of a peaceful femininity, and they are often presented as "monstrous anomalies" (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007). The inclusion of women in peace negotiations by appealing to this "natural propensity" of women for peace, is thus reinforcing the role of women as "repairers", but subsequently excluding them from full participation in post-conflict public, political and economic life (Enloe, 2002, p. 23).

What is relevant is to include the gender perspective in the negotiation tables, to create feminist projects for the reconstruction of communities after the conflict, to include women as negotiators, not from essentialist arguments, but because they are also affected by the war, because they constitute half of the population, and their voices, like those of men, must be heard, and their priorities must be addressed,

---

[11] See, for example, peace processes in Guatemala, Sri Lanka or Burundi (Cohn, 2013).

which may set different agendas than usual. In other words, because a peace cannot continue to be built solely from the perspective of men, that is, an androcentric peace that neglects the needs of women. On the contrary, women should be considered not only passive victims, but real political actors with rights. Likewise, it should also be considered that women are not incorporated into gender-neutral peace processes, but that peace processes are as gendered as war, and this means, in many cases, that it is difficult to break the stereotypes assigned to women in relation to peace.

4. Towards a Transnational Feminism

We began these pages by highlighting the internationalist character of the feminist movement at the beginning of the 20th century. From this internationalism, since the nineties, the so-called "Transnational Feminism" (Ferree and Tripp, 2006) has been derived. With the adjective "transnational", we refer to a methodological crossing of national borders. It is common to distinguish, in recent feminist literature, between an *internationalist* feminism (of a historical nature, corresponding to the suffragism of the First Wave of the early 20th century), and a *global* feminism, which would highlight the shared patriarchal experience of women and the creation of a shared solidarity (Ferree and Tripp, 2006; Valcárcel, 2013).

The Nairobi Conference in 1985, Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Vienna in 1993, Cairo in 1994, and, finally, Beijing in 1995, have been decisive in the creation of a transnational framework, in which various NGOs and activists have initiated, not without tensions and difficulties, the discussion and development of common political agendas, from the local to the global (Moghadam, 2015). These transnational feminist networks would be characterized by intercultural dialogue when it comes to addressing the differentiated gender impacts of globalization, wars, and peace on women's lives. Thus, issues such as trafficking of women, violence against women, human development from a gender perspective, sexual and reproductive rights, feminized global poverty or the implementation of women, peace, and security agenda, are an unavoidable part of the transnational feminist agenda (*ibid.*). Globalization, and its effects on the lives of women, has resituated the framework of the discussion in the feminist transnational movement in at least three directions: first, transferring the activism of the democratic iterations from the national to the transnational level: second, provoking an analysis of gender inequalities in response to global structural injustices, and, finally, enabling the construction of a transnational feminist solidarity that would go beyond national identity policies. However, as Moghadam points out, international is not the same as transnational, since the latter involves consciously crossing national borders and overcoming nationalist orientations (Moghadam, 2000), or, in other words, being aware that the causes of gender injustices, and the possible solutions, are no longer found at the national level, but at the transnational one.

In accordance with the first effect, and following Nancy Fraser in this respect, globalization has changed the grammar of the discussion about injustices, surpassing the framework of the nation-state (Fraser, 2008). In contemporary feminist theory, gender injustices are also raised from a transnational framework, in response to global structural injustices. The transnational connections of the global economy and its impact on development and on women have been manifested, for example, in the growing feminization of migrations (Benhabib and Resnik, 2009).[12] More than half of the migrants, at present, are women who initiate independent migratory projects within the circuits of alternative family survival economies for obtaining income. It is a feminized migration not only because they are women, but also because their work would be in feminized jobs, like prostitution, care-related and domestic employment. This has caused what is known as "global care chains", where the care work is transferred from the global South to the households in the "developed" North, creating a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring (Yeates, 2005). This second effect of globalization in terms of gender – gender inequalities produced by global structural injustices – needs a different account of responsibility facing global inequalities. For Iris Marion Young, social processes produce *structural injustices* because in that process, "the choices of some are unjustly hindered and they suffer the threat of deprivation, while others obtain significant benefits" (2011, p. 52). Hence, it is the participation of many in that process, not just one individual, seeking a benefit, and the vulnerable situation of others that is significant. The point is that, as Young already remarked, these structures of inequality and injustice are globally interconnected and therefore, for example, and in response to gender inequality, the work of domestic migrants, with low wages and without decent working conditions, benefits employers, creating a vulnerability marked by gender. If injustices, therefore, are no longer national but transcend borders, then, as transnational feminism proposes, the responses must also be global (Jaggar, 2014).

Finally, and in the third place, transnational feminism also raises the question of transnational solidarity as a normative principle of action. Ann Ferguson puts it clearly: Which solidarity is possible between transnational feminist coalitions that does not fall into past essentialisms or common interests falsely constructed (Ferguson, 2009)? Undoubtedly, the rejection of much of Western feminism by other feminisms, precisely claiming the imposition of local perspectives as universal, is too recent in the contemporary feminist debate to reprint a new version of it. Ferguson maintains a concept of "political solidarity" (*ibid*., p. 170) which implies that a group has an ethical and political project that unites them, fighting against oppression and injustice, defining themselves against those who maintain unjust privi-

---

[12] https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/global-feminization-migration-past-present-and-future

leges. Solidarity would thus appear as the inescapable part of a common feminist project that articulates the universal and the contextual, constantly challenging the temptations of falsely universal designations.

The agenda of this transnational feminism is thus an explicitly global agenda, but also a multidimensional one, which would include unresolved agendas – reproductive rights, violence, political and economic parity – but also new issues such as sustainable development, ecofeminism, precariousness and vulnerability in the workplace, or the global North-South interrelationship. In terms analysed by Nancy Fraser, it would be a matter of re-framing the scales of justice, at the local, global, and transnational levels, taking into account that to the traditional questions of justice – redistribution and recognition – it is now necessary to add representation, that is, parity in representation in public deliberation.

5. New Challenges

In addition to these agendas, where would now be the democratic iterations from the feminist movements? As we have seen in the last year's manifestations of March 8 worldwide, among other demonstrations as the "metoo" movement, sexual violence against women continues to be a problem of global reach. In this sense, we can say that peace in women's lives has not yet been achieved, and therefore remains a fundamental objective to reach. From sexual harassment in workplaces and in the streets, to sexual violence by partners or by strangers, violence against women has increased.[13] Most Latin American national legislations have adopted the term "femicide" to designate the violent death of a woman committed by a man, regardless of whether it is committed in the public or private sphere and whether or not there is or has been any relationship between aggressor and victim[14] (Fregoso and Bejarano, 2010). For the transnational feminism, the right to a life free of violence is a priority, which conditions other important rights, such as freedom of movement. In the scenario of armed conflicts, sexual violence against women and girls has increased, and has been referred to as a "pandemic" by the UN Secretary-General.[15] The UN reports warn of changes in the instrumentalization of sexual violence in armed conflict and "emerging concerns". Thus, the report S/2018/250 of 23 March

---

[13] In the first macro survey at the European level by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), carried out in 2014, the data revealed that about 12% of respondents indicated that they had experienced some form of adult sexual assault or incident before the age of 15, equivalent to 21 million women in the EU. http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/vaw-survey-main-results

[14] https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/femicide-or-feminicide

[15] S/2022/272, 29 March 2022. Report of the United Nations Secretary-General. *Conflict-related sexual violence*.

2018[16] points out some of these changes or trends that can be observed in current armed conflicts. The use of sexual violence by armed groups as a tool for massive displacement, for the expulsion of population groups from their territories; the instrumentalization of women as "fungible currency" in the war economy, through kidnapping, extortion and rape where women are sold from one group to another, within what we could call a "political economy of sexual violence" (Sánchez, 2021); the existence of prolonged and entrenched conflicts that lead on the other hand to increased repression or curtailment of the rights of women and girls within their own group, in the name of their protection and, finally, the persistence of impunity for crimes of sexual violence.

The right to have rights therefore remains part of an inconclusive citizenship of women in many parts of the world. This lack of rights shows us the democratic deficits in apparently democratic contexts. These deficits, in turn, compromise the development of countries and the maintenance of peace, and this is how the United Nations understood it when it launched Agenda 2030 and the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In them, gender equality is central, which refers to structural inequalities. The SDGs propose a structural transformation that can be analysed as an opportunity for gender equality, by mainstreaming all the Goals. Goal 5 is dedicated to "achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls", stating that "gender equality is a fundamental human right, and the necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world". Therefore, it is the lever that allows the activation and development of the other Goals. Without gender equality, for example, it would not be possible to achieve Goal 10 ("Reducing inequalities"), Goal 1 ("Ending poverty"), Goal 3 ("Health and well-being"), or Goal 16 ("Peace, justice and strong institutions"). Although if we look at the targets to be achieved in the seventeen Goals, they all mention gender equality as a factor in achieving these targets, either through explicit or implicit mention, or because there are targets that create the conditions for gender equality.[17]

Along with Goal 5 on gender equality, one of the most complex SDGs is Goal 16 ("Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions"). There are many agendas involved in it: peace and security, anti-corruption, transparency, and national governance, strengthening the rule of law and global governance. It is a novelty that the connection between the peace and security agenda and human rights, and specifically women's rights, is highlighted. However, the difficulties of including women in the public sphere and in the peace processes, which we have seen in the previous pages, make it difficult to achieve truly egalitarian societies. Especially because a

---

[16] S/2018/250. United Nations, Security Council. *Report of the Secretary General on conflict-related sexual violence*. https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/s/2018/250

[17] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/

peace agenda for women requires profound structural changes, not only a "negative peace", as the absence of violence, but a "positive peace", as we maintained through these pages. Without constant monitoring of possible progress, with real accountability, no significant changes will be possible. And, in turn, these changes must be respectful of women as political actors and rights holders. It is essential, in this regard, that transnational feminist networks be involved in and monitor the alliances and resources (Goal 17). Since the references to how aid will be delivered, how the alliances will be coordinated, who the actors will be and under what responsibility are not clearly determined, civil society monitoring becomes indispensable. In this sense, the weaknesses of the SDGs have put feminist organizations on alert, especially regarding the lack of accountability mechanisms for their compliance (Esquivel, 2016).

However, despite these precautions, it is precisely the transversal nature of the Goals, and – above all – the very mainstreaming of Goal 5, that can enable significant and novel progress to be made on the gender equality agenda. The unavoidable connection between rights and peace, as we have seen in the development of feminist activism, from suffragism to our days, shows us the need to rethink not only peace and rights, but the very political grammar of our democracies.

6. Conclusion

Throughout these pages we have analysed both the theoretical and pragmatic interventions of the feminist movement in deepening and extending citizenship and democracy. Democratic iterations enable not only the extension of rights, but also the strengthening of democracy. Current political scenarios, with escalating armed conflicts, the spread of violence, and the loss of women's rights in some parts of the world, make it necessary to insist on the "right to have rights" as a constitutive part of democracy. As we have seen, these theoretical and pragmatic interventions have highlighted the profound relationship between feminism and democracy. In 1983, the feminist theorist Carole Pateman expressed, ironically, that a feminist would not address the relationship between feminism and democracy because for feminists, democracy has never existed (Pateman, 1983, p. 204). However, Pateman adds, feminism has something important to say to theorists of democracy about the very foundations of democracy and, as a theory, it represents an important challenge and critique to these theories. In that sense, we can conclude that democracy needs the feminist theory and practices that set these democratic iterations in motion. In the same way that there is no peace without women, there is no democracy without women, as contemporary feminist theory has shown.

REFERENCES

Abou-Habib, L. (2011) 'The "right to have rights": active citizenship and gendered social entitlements in Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine', *Gender & Development*, 19, 3. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2011.625633

Alvi, H. (2015) 'Women's Rights Movements in the Arab Spring: Major Victories or Failures for Human Rights?', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16, 3. https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol16/iss3/19

Anthias, F. and Yuval-Davies, N. (1989) *Woman-Nation-State*. London: Palgrave.

Arendt, H. (1972) *Crises of the Republic*. New York: Brace & Company.

Arendt, H. (1976) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt & Brace.

Benhabib, S. (1992) *Situating the Self. Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. New York: Routledge.

Benhabib, S. (2004) *The Rights of Others*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Benhabib, S. and Resnik, J. (eds.) (2009) *Migrations and Mobilities: Citizenship, Borders, and Gender*. New York: New York University Press.

Bustelo, M. and Ortbals, C. (2007) 'The Evolution of Spanish State Feminism. A fragmented Landscape' in Outshoorn, J. and Kantola, J. (eds.) *Changing State Feminism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 201-223. DOI: 10.1057/9780230591424_11

Cockburn, C. (2007) *From where we stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis.* London: Zed Books.

Cohn, C. (ed.) (2013) *Women and Wars*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cohn, C. and Enloe, C. (2003) 'A conversation with Cinthia Enloe: Feminists look at Masculinity and Men who Wage War', *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(4), pp. 1187-1207. https://doi.org/10.1086/368326

Confortini, C. (2012) 'What is Feminist Peace?' in Confortini, C. *Intelligent Compassion: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Feminist Peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-18. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199845231.003.0001

Copelon, R. (2000) 'Gender Crimes as War Crimes: Integrating Crimes against Women into International Criminal Law', *McGill Law Journal*, 46, pp. 217-240.

Enloe, C. (2002) 'Demilitarization – Or More of the Same? Feminist Questions to Ask in the Post-war Moment' in Cockburn, C. and Dubravka, Z. (eds.) *The Post War Moment: Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 22-33.

Esquivel, V. (2016) 'Power and the Sustainable Development Goals: A Feminist Analysis', *Gender & Development*, 24(1), pp. 9-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2016.1153318

Etchar, L. (2015) 'Demilitarizing the Global. Women's Peace Movements and Transnational Networks' in Baksh, R. and Harcourt, W. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 702-722.

Evans, R. (1977) *The Feminists. Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia 1840-1920*. New York: Routledge.

Ferguson, A. (2009) 'Feminist Paradigms of Solidarity and Justice', *Philosophical Topics*, 37(2), pp. 161-177. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43154562

Ferree, M. and Tripp, A. M. (eds.) (2006) *Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights*. New York: New York University Press.

Folguera, P. (ed.) (2007) *El feminismo en España: Dos siglos de Historia*. Madrid: Fundación Pablo Iglesias.

Forcey, L. R. (1991) 'Women as Peacemakers. Contested Terrain for Feminist Peace Studies', *Peace and Change*, 16(4), pp. 331-354. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.1991.tb00674.x

Fraser, N. (2008) *Scales of Justice*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Fregoso, R. L. and Bejarano, C. (eds.) (2010) *Terrorizing Women. Feminicide in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Friedman, E. J. (2003) 'Gendering the Agenda: The impact of the Transnational Women's Rights Movement at the UN Conferences of the 1990's'. *Women Studies International Forum*, 26(4), pp. 313-331. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(03)00077-3

Galtung, J. (1969) 'Violence, peace, and peace research', *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), pp. 167-191. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F002234336900600301

Jaggar, A. (2000) 'Globalizing feminist ethics' in Narayan, U. and Harding, S. (eds.) *Decentering the center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1-24.

Jaggar, A. (2014) '"Are My Hands Clean?" Responsibility for Global Gender Disparities' in Meyers, D. (ed.) *Poverty, Agency, and Human Rights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 170-194.

Koven, S. and Michael, S. (eds.) (1993) *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*. New York: Routledge.

Kraditor, A. S. (1965) *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Lister, R. (1997) *Citizenship. Feminist Perspectives*. London: Palgrave.

MacKinnon, C. (1991) *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Mahon, R. and Robinson, F. (eds.) (2012) *Feminist Ethics and Social Policy: Towards a New Global Political Economy of Care*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Michelman, F. (1988) 'Law's Republic', *Yale Law Journal*, 97(8), pp. 1493-1537. https://doi.org/10.2307/796539

Moghadam, V. M. (2000) 'Transnational Feminist Networks: Collective Action in an Era of Globalization', *International Sociology*, 15(1), pp. 57-85. https://doi.org/10.117 7%2F0268580900015001004

Moghadam, V. M. (2015) 'Transnational Feminist Activism and Movement Building' in Baksh, R. and Harcourt, W. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 53-81.

Pateman, C. (1983) 'Feminism and Democracy' in Graeme Duncan (ed.) *Democratic Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 201-217.

Pateman, C. (1988) *The Sexual Contract*. Standford: Standford University Press.

Pateman, C. (1989) *The Disorder of Women. Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Roberts, C. and Connell, R. (2016) 'Feminist theory and the Global South', *Feminist Theory*, 17(2), pp. 135-140. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1464700116645874

Rousseau, J. J. (1997) *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ruddick, S. (1989) *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Sánchez, C. (2001) 'Genealogía de la vindicación' in Beltrán, E. and Maquieira, V. (eds.) *Feminismos. Debates teóricos contemporáneos*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, pp. 17-74.

Sánchez, C. (2021) 'Lo personal es violento (y político). Aproximaciones teóricas a las violencias contra las mujeres' in Sánchez, C. (ed.) *Violencias de género: Entre la guerra y la paz*, Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, pp. 27-62.

Sassen, S. (2014) *Expulsions. Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Segato, R. (2014) *Las nuevas formas de la guerra y el cuerpo de las mujeres*. México: Ed. Pez en el árbol.

Sjoberg, L. and Gentry, C. E. (eds.) (2007) *Mothers, Monsters, Whores. Women's Violence in Global Politics*. London: Zed Books.

Tickner, J. A. (1992) *Gender in international relations: Feminist perspectives on achieving global security. New directions in world politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tickner, J. A. (2018) 'Peace and Security from a Feminist Perspective' in Davies, S. E. and True, J. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security*. Nueva York: Oxford University Press, pp. 15-25.

Trifu, L. A. (2018) 'Reflexiones sobre la paz positiva. Un diálogo con la paz imperfecta', *Revista de Paz y Conflictos*, 11(1), pp. 29-59. https://doi.org/10.30827/revpaz.v11i1.5602

Tronto, J. (2013) *Caring Democracy. Markets, Equality and Justice*. New York: New York University Press.

Valcárcel, A. (2013) *Feminismo en un mundo global.* Valencia: Cátedra.

Walby, S. (2002) 'Feminism in a global era', *Economy and Society*, 31(4), pp. 533-557. https://doi.org/10.1080/0308514022000020670

Yeates, N. (2005) 'Global Care Chains. A Critical Introduction', *Global Migration Perspectives*, 44, pp. 1-20.

Young, I. M. (2011) *Responsibility for Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Yuval-Davies, N. (1997) *Gender & nation. Politics and culture*. London: Sage.

Cristina Sánchez Muñoz, Full Professor of Philosophy of Law at the Autonomous University of Madrid. *E-mail*: cris.sanchez@uam.es