**SSFS7 Lecture from Rebecca Johnson 17 July 2020**

(notes for organisers and interpreters, likely to be adapted as necessary)

**Title: Black Lives Matter: Feminist-AntiRacist Challenges to national security discourses**

Patriarchal discourses and policies on peace and security are framed nationally in terms of power projection, wars and weapons capabilities. By contrast, feminist research demonstrates that military-industrial economic systems have been and continue to be major drivers of regional and global insecurity, including environmental destruction, racist oppression and violence against women and children.

My title takes as a starting point the Black Lives Matter actions and analyses that have surged up around the world. At the outset I want to make clear that I do not intend to speak about Black Lives Matter, as such. That would not be appropriate for me to do, as I am a white European feminist.

What is appropriate, I hope, is for me to take a positive approach to the invitation from SSFS7 organisers to lecture on issues relating to security, defence, peace and disarmament by openly expressing my solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, and by incorporating anti-racism more fully in everything I do.

In accepting the invitation to give this lecture, I want to acknowledge not just the recent US events and police murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, which have been catalysts for the most recent protests.

I also want to recognise the long histories of brutality and killings that have been committed not only by police and defence services, but by governments and people in positions of power and authority who kill, injure and brutalise minoritised people all over the world – in the name of domestic and national security.

In the panel last Saturday on Ecological Justice through Social Transformation I mentioned thatthe Global South also exists within the North, for example, communities that are disproportionally affected by poverty, educational disadvantage, low pay and sexual, racial and/or ethnic discrimination.

A panellist from India responded by highlighting also the "global north within the Global South". I agree with him – and both need to be taken into account as we address these issues.

These communities are "minoritised" in different ways but exist in all our countries. Like a growing number of English-speaking progressives, I prefer to use "minoritised" as a verb rather than the more familiar word "minority". I don't know if this usage translates into other languages, but is used to draw attention to the fact that the problem is not about numbers within our societies, but about the disproportionate levels of disadvantage, vulnerability and violence that are experienced by some communities because of the dominant practices of patriarchal national security narratives and systems.

For example, women are minoritised by sexist, patriarchal systems as well as by certain dominant cultural beliefs and narratives shared and used by people given power through domestic and national security structures.

Femicide, genocide and ecocide are interconnected.

Black Lives Movement activists in the United States – and in the many places where BLM arguments and demands are being heard and acted on – clearly connect systemic inequality and police violence with the racist, imperialist legacies of white supremacy that have shaped our world today.

Whether we come from ancestors who colonised or were themselves subjected to colonisation, we all now live with national defence and security structures and policies that are shaped – in varying degrees – by:

* nation states which may or may not correspond with cultural, linguistic or geographical borders;
* nationalist and national identity narratives that identify "others" as problems and threats;
* military-industrial extractivism and exploitation in pursuit of growth-based capitalist and statist ideologies;
* production, trade and use of many kinds of inhumane weapons, from rubber bullets to tanks, bombers and nuclear weapons of mass destruction;
* state-sanctioned violence in national and international affairs, generally accompanied by patriarchal economic and social inequalities and violence perpetrated against minoritised people domestically.

The specifics of our governments' national security policies are different, so what I would like to do today is not deliver a lecture in the traditional way, but to take forward a conversation where we can share insights from our own experiences of national defence and security practices in the countries we know best, and think intersectionally about how we can develop solidarity and play roles that will enhance feminist, anti-racist resistance and help to change security policies and behaviour in our own countries and internationally.

After introducing some recent thinking about these issues, including a number of questions, I'd like to open up for others to comment, share ideas and ask questions that you feel are most relevant to you.

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African-American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' in 1989 to describe the ways in which Black women experience connecting forms and levels of discrimination and marginalisation based on their race and gender. Nowadays, the term is widely used to denote the interactions between a range of discriminations and oppressions, requiring multilayered strategies for building justice and equality.

Our environment and climate are at risk of irrevocable and existential destruction, while 13,000 nuclear weapons are in the hands of nine national leaders, some of whom treat nuclear threats as a virility test.

Living with the patriarchal legacies of rapacious colonialism, racism and military-industrial systems of genocide, exploitation and war, the whole world now faces interconnected annihilation-level threats to our survival, which include:

* climate destruction, with sea level rises, extreme weather and climate chaos;
* species extinction – of ourselves and all life on Earth;
* nuclear war, with "nuclear winter", mass famine, and radioactive pollution of our air, lands and seas;
* global health crises and rapidly spreading coronavirus pandemics, such as today's Covid-19…

**These four threats are high on the security assessments of governments as well as defence services and national and international policy-makers. So why are these governments lagging behind and failing to prepare, prioritise and urgently implement policies to prevent such real world risks from turning into humanitarian catastrophes?**

* Is it because of the structures of power and leadership that currently dominate the world?
* Is it because too many governmental leaders have vested interests in denying and minimising the climate emergency, and want to devote obscene amounts of national and international resources on militarism and deadly weapons?
* Is it because of leaders that equate security with their own political and economic ambitions and national military-industrial freedom of action, regardless of rights, security, survival and well-being of women, other nations, and minoritised communities within their national borders?
* **Is this because they don't think those lives matter as much as their own?**

The **current, dominating national security narratives and weaponry** came out of the US-Soviet Cold War, which arose from the 1939-1945 wars. These wars developed from the wreckage of previous wars, and track back to centuries of leaders that fought wars, expanded into other lands, subjugated, enslaved, colonised and impoverished the peoples they encountered and plundered their resources.

In previous eras, "deterrence" was viewed as a component of defence that could prevent violent conflict by signalling to potential aggressors that aggression and violence would not give them what they wanted. Deterrence strategies and tactics have been successfully employed for millennia by states and peoples who have wished to avoid the costs and consequences of aggression and violent conflict, rather than give in and fight.

Starting in the US, the general concept of deterrence was deliberately reframed from the 1950s onwards as a defence strategy based on possessing, deploying and threatening to use nuclear weapons. US and other military-industrial bureaucratic and academic (MIBA) establishments, likewise co-opted and mobilised the English language word "realist" to justify and sanitize security and defence policies based on weapons, power projection and war-fighting, including the capability to annihilate all life on Earth by using nuclear weapons.

When militarised states like the UK define and call their nuclear weapons "the deterrent" they are harnessing PR techniques to instil false consciousness. They want to shut out alternative ways of thinking about security, and reinforce policies and weapons that are not sensible or realistic in the real world and do not provide deterrence, defence or meaningful security.

If the tools (including language, structures and policies) we currently have limit what can be done, we have three choices:

* do our best with what we've got;
* adapt these tools to increase their effectiveness for tackling the challenges we face; or
* design new tools for transformative purposes.

And we have to make these choices while living in today's world, with all its patriarchal weapons, mindsets, and institutions of power, oppression and insecurity.

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Feminist and anti-racist activists have long pointed to the necessity to expose the power structures underlying discussions of "identity", and illuminate the ways in which the structures of oppression operate so that they can be more effectively addressed in all their forms.

Solidarity is action not just words, and requires that we look at the personal and political implications of who we are and where we come from, and use the resoures, privileges and power we have so that we enable rather than prevent others – so that all can become empowered, gain equal access to opportunities and resources, and be individually and mutually responsible and accountable.

Those are the basics we must work for, as we move forward together to build security and peace.

**Patriarchal policies on defence and security** are generally framed in terms of weapons and power. Often they cite "defending civilians" and "protecting women and children" as justifications for their military capabilities and arms racing.

**Feminists recognise war and militarism as the armed wings of patriarchy.**

Militarism and war are the primary patriarchal means to project fear, power and control over other peoples and enable the imposition of religious and economic belief systems, colonialism, capitalism and sexual violence.

Through arming and fetishising violence, militarism continues to drive and enable gendered systems of oppression and violence against women and children.

From the distant past and across most if not all cultures, militarism has been constructed and perpetuated to subdue and defeat everyone and everything that gets in the way of those in power.

It defends and spreads exploitative extraction and seizure of natural resources, land-grabs and myriad economic and religious practices that have enslaved people and destroyed billions of lives and homes. Patriarchy needs militarism to implement its wars against women, diversity, nature and Mother Earth.

From "scorched earth" practices to doctrines of "mutual assured destruction", militarism contributes massively to environmental and climate destruction, while continuing to weaponise technologies that project existential threats such as nuclear war into our future.

**Feminist, intersectional analyses expose how power, status and resources are distributed and manipulated. Who benefits? Who bears the burdens?**

As well as abuses of power through the military-industrial institutions of state and government, it is important also to pay attention to the narratives and actions of individual predators that operate in places of education, aid, and civil society peace and development organisations, where the vulnerable are often befriended and groomed before being abused. These are connected.

Violence against women and children is embedded in the racism, sexism, colonialist-capitalist expansionism, destruction and warmongering policies that are the causes, drivers and consequences of militarism and war.

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That makes our work difficult, but not impossible. I have spent years working at the interface between grassroots feminist activism and disarmament 'think tank' work incorporating treaty-making and the 'women, peace, security' and gender agendas, most recently to get the multilaterally negotiated, universally applicable Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW, a.k.a Nuclear Ban Treaty), building on the feminist-humanitarian principles and strategies that have come to the forefront of disarmament strategies since achieving the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty and 2008 Cluster Munitions Convention.

These feminist-humanitarian security instruments put the spotlight not on the technical, military and political value attached to inhumane weapons, but on the security needs and interests of people who have been harmed and all that would be hurt and destroyed if the weapons continue to be produced, deployed and used.

This was made clear in the Treaty's preamble, prohibitions and provisions. Paragraph 4 of the TPNW's preamble, for example, states:

"*Cognizant* that the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons cannot be adequately addressed, transcend national borders, pose grave implications for human survival, the environment, socioeconomic development, the global economy, food security and the health of current and future generations, and have a disproportionate impact on women and girls, including as a result of ionizing radiation…"

As noted by Setsuko Thurlow, who survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima when she was 13 years old, this Treaty means that ‘**No longer shall their abstract theories mask the genocidal reality of their practices**.’

We know these histories, so what are we going to do?

* **First, What does security mean to you?** It would be great if you would write a few sentences or words on these questions in the chat or if you would like to speak let the moderator know.
* **Who – in the context of your own country and experience – are the lives that are minoritised, marginalised and treated as if they "don't matter"?** How is this done? Do you accept, challenge or resist? Why and how?

* **Whose lives have been treated as if they didn't matter in your country's national security policies?**

Reflecting on this, yesterday was the 75th anniversary of the first nuclear weapons test, code-named "Trinity" and carried out in Alamagordo, New Mexico on 16 July 1945.

I'm of the generation where strontium 90 was found in children's baby teeth due to atmospheric nuclear testing.

**Nuclear testing** and the production, deployment and use of nuclear weapons illustrate why today's "Black Lives Matter" demands are fundamental to how we need to transform security and disarmament objectives, behaviour and institutions in order to prevent the twin threats of nuclear and climate extinction.

The governments that conducted nuclear testing chose to do so in areas where they considered that the people who would be most harmed didn't really matter. So the United States, UK, France, Russia, China, India, Pakistan and North Korea tested nuclear weapons in places occupied by First Nation and Aboriginal peoples, Pacific islanders, Algerians, Kazakhs and Nenets from Novaya Zemlya, Uighurs in Xinjiang Province, people living near Rajasthan in India, Balochistan in Pakistan, and Pungye-ri (Mount Mantap, North Korea). Israel is widely recognised to have nuclear weapons and may have collaborated with the Apartheid regime in South Africa on a nuclear test in the South Atlantic in 1979, but this has not been confirmed.

I'm also thinking about women raped in all known wars – often as a matter of policy and strategy.

* **In your country's national and security narratives and policies, what and who are state-controlled weapons aimed at and why?** (Who are the people and/or nations identified as threats, and why?)

In the UK, for example, progressives ask the government "who are nuclear weapons for?" This question asks not only who are they targeted at, but also who benefits from nuclear policies and possession?

"Who are they for?" is a question we need to ask about all kinds of weapons and institutions of surveillance and control?

* **Ask also, what responsibilities am I willing to take to change security policies that use violent means against civilians because of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation or other aspects of their humanity and beliefs?**
* **Recognising the disproportionate impacts of Global north national security policies and militarism on the Global South and on women and minoritised communities in many of our countries, what do you want to change and what strategies would you prioritise to make these changes in your own countries?**
* **How can we individually and collectively tackle security challenges we face and do more to build genuine security and peace in the world?**
* **Can we move beyond national security beliefs and systems? Can we transcend nation states, national borders and tribalism?** Can we imagine and construct sustainable economies, cooperative institutions and post-patriarchal social relations in time to survive the global threats that are the highest priority challenges we face? Can we find better ways to relate globally, share resources and transcend the stranglehold of military-industrial growth, competition and consumption?