

“We care about feminist notions of genuine security”

A Conversation with Margo Okazawa-Rey. By Katrin Meyer.

Margo Okazawa-Rey is Professor Emerita at San Francisco State University. Her research develops an understanding of security from an intersectional, transnational, and activist perspective. She examines the connections between militarism, economic globalization and the impacts on local and migrant women in East Asia, as well as the role of feminist research in activism, women’s empowerment and policy change. She was a founding member of the Combahee River Collective, which articulated a theory of intersectionality in the 1970s.

The following interview with Margo Okazawa-Rey took place on September 24, 2019 by video call.

***Katrin Meyer:** You have contributed with crucial analyses and texts to the Black feminist movements since the late 1970s, including your participation in the manifesto of the Combahee River Collective. For many years now, your intellectual and political work has been devoted to issues around security and militarization, mainly in Africa and Asia. How come? Why did this topic become so important for you?*

Margo Okazawa-Rey: That is an excellent question. The Combahee River Collective gave me a very important foundation for understanding the world around me. We first started getting together around 1975 and then the manifesto, as you call it, “The Combahee River Collective. A Black Feminist Statement” came out, I believe it was in 1978 or something like that.¹ But we’d been doing work before then and all of us in the Collective were doing various kinds of organizing. Some people were doing work around sterilization abuse of Puerto Rican women, for example. I was doing work around ending violence related to public school desegregation in Boston. We really understood the way that race, class, gender, nation, capitalism, and imperialism work together. We thought substantively about what is so popularly known as intersectionality, the term that was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, but the thinking was long before the published word. So my foundation is very much rooted in thinking intersectionally. Just as a matter of course. I am a sociologist by training and I am also an educator. All those ways of looking at the world that were so integral to our work as the Combahee River Collective were almost by nature and by training ‘who I am’ – and I am still like that.

This question of security has come up in different contexts. I start with an important turning point in my own intellectual-political development that real-