# Review – Feminist Solutions for Ending War

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***Feminist Solutions for Ending War***
**Edited by Megan MacKenzie and Nicole Wegner**
**Pluto Press, 2021**

Reviewing *Feminist Solutions to Ending War*, edited by Megan MacKenzie and Nicole Wegner, is not an easy task in times of unprecedented crises and uncertainty shaped by the volume's key issue – war itself. As newspapers and social media are flooded with analyses of the fog, proceedings, and violent repercussions of the war against Ukraine, as attacks on Kurdish territories by Turkish troops almost go unnoticed publicly, the cynical academic may wonder: why bother reading this piece if everything is in a shambles anyway?

This review intends to delineate some of the many reasons to dive into this book. Its fourteen chapters, contributed by a great variety of scholars, contain feminist, queer and Indigenous perspectives on solving war, provide insight and reflection on its roots, and confront the reader with honest and inconvenient questions. It is a timely and unique addition to a growing body of feminist peace research (Baaz and Stern, 2018; Sachseder, 2022; Wibben et al., 2018) that expands on state-centric and military responses to war, one of the most meticulously studied subjects in international politics. The review is structured around three main reasons why it is worth your time to engage with this book.

**First, the presented solutions to war create space for conversation and discomfort**.

Megan MacKenzie and Nicole Wegner set a stage that presents the reader with core guiding concepts rooted in radical, intersectional and decolonial feminist thought. This stage lets different solutions and thus various feminist answers to ending war co-exist and speak to one another without devaluing or refuting the other. While each contribution stands on its own, the volume's composition builds bridges, progressively allowing for the chapters to form a complex patchwork that fosters conversations of care, compassion, and reflection within the reader.

However, this volume is no comfort zone to which one retreats from the brutal realities of a world at multiple tipping points. It keeps the reader on their toes. In the foreword, Swati Parashar outlines the necessity to remember that feminist analyses, based on different *feminisms,* often conflict and bring about moments of dissent. As such, Parashar argues, feminist practice must remain discomforting, as we collectively engage in debates on the structural origins of war, including capitalism, (neo)colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy as well as our positionalities therein.

This call for discomforting self-reflexivity as a precondition to solving war is found in a number of chapters. Heidi Hudson establishes that ending war and achieving holistic peace requires members of society to take collective responsibility for war and to create space for uncomfortable conversations about it. The chapter draws on African philosophies of Ubuntu/Ubuntu feminism and human security and walks the reader through the mediation and reconciliatory practices around *Inkundla/Lekgotla.* These southern African community-based mediation fora prioritize collective responsibility to resolve grief and pain caused by war. By making an ethics of care a precondition for sustainable peace, the chapter dismantles liberal underpinnings that permeate Western peacebuilding and security practices such as security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR).

With an anti-colonial analysis of international and Western interventions in crisis-affected regions, Yolande Bouka asks the reader to imagine Western foreign policy in which Brown and Black lives matter. The chapter is an uncompromising call for future foreign policies and its scholarship to move away from the colonial grounds they grew on. While the chapter touches upon elements of a feminist foreign policy (Achilleos-Sarll, 2018; Aggestam et al., 2018), it more so paints a vision of a decolonized world that is free of oppression and exploitation.

Roxani Krystalli's analysis of conversations with Columbian combatants as contributors to peace not only challenges a common understanding of guerillas as perpetrators of violence. It also demonstrates the particular methodological challenges that come with situations in which interlocutors and researchers become conscious of their respective positions in the everyday choreographies of fieldwork. Through detailed and rich descriptions, Krystalli invites the reader to, at times, uncomfortable conversations about conducting and becoming subjects of research, making the intricacies of doing fieldwork in conflict and war almost palpable (see also Schulz, 2020).

**Second, the presented solutions to war are deeply political in that they create visibility and awareness for everyday violence.**

By studying the 2019/20 Australian bushfires and their violent consequences for Indigenous communities, Jessica Russ-Smith unpacks Western misconceptions that construct war and peace as linear in development along a past-present-future continuum. The author conceptualizes the fires as condition of constant war, rooted in settler-colonialism, racism, and white supremacist patriarchy. Russ-Smith suggests following *Giyira* as solution to ending further pain and exploitation of the land and people suffering from war. This concept centers women's bodies and their wombs as embodiment of both past and future life as well as knowledge through which life and the country can thrive and live on.

Eda Gunaydin's contribution, arguably this volume's most radical solution to ending war, places causes for violence inflicted upon oppressed communities with the existence of the nation-state. By introducing *jineology*, a women- and ecology-centered concept of Kurdish women's liberation movements in Rojava,it problematizes the nation-state as an oppressive entity which persists by feeding on and producing nationalism and patriarchy. That way, it exposes Western and white feminism as operating within the confines of the nation-state and, thus, as complicit in upholding conditions of conflict. To overcome these, the chapter suggests establishing democratic confederalism, self-representation and self-governance in which women's knowledge decenters the nation-state as the only viable entity of military and economic power.

Considering the political situation that both Indigenous communities in Australia and Kurdish women are confronted with, the chapters convey two relevant interrelated points: epistemologically, they substantially broaden the spectrum on which war operates, by asking what defines war and how it is experienced in the everyday. That way, the chapters encourage readers to listen to Indigenous knowledges as a solution to ending war. At the same time, politically, this encouragement acts as a warning not to exploit these knowledges. The chapters painfully elucidate that sharing such protected concepts as well as the conscious decision not to can and needs to be a political act of resistance to capitalist, settler-colonialist and patriarchal brutalities that sustain war.

Sertan Saral complements these epistemological and political reflections by unveiling how capital, gender, race and ableism interact to shape the politics of memorializing wars. The author cogently depicts how following the money pays out to grasp the extent to which global private corporations finance war memorials in Washington, D.C., USA, and Canberra, Australia. By tracing the (in)visibilities of participants and victims of war, including Indigenous communities, Saral carefully outlines how the networks of power, which private corporate actors operate on, navigate whose bodies are seen, heard, and remembered. As feminist solution to invisibility, the chapter suggests powerful ecofeminist performances and practices of resistance that challenge state and corporate authority and counter-narrate the realities of war.

Thomas Gregory's chapter speaks to Seral's work as it opens room for reflection on the fine line between counting

civilian casualties to make visible the violent impact of war, and the room these faceless numbers give hegemonic actors to downplay and paint a sterile picture of the effects of war. Gregory's suggestion to move away from sheer numbers to the everyday stories of the bodies becomes a complex and humane way of bringing an end to wars that are justified by and build on invisibility.

In their respective chapters, Cai Wilkinson and Ray Acheson discuss expressions of violence as part of everyday global regimes of insecurity. Both chapters complement each other in that they call for a deconstruction of the patriarchal and settler-colonial norm that lets insecurities of LGBTIQ* and Indigenous peoples persist without being questioned. All of these chapters make evident that gendered and racialized bodies who do not comply with the heteropatriarchal norm are considered either invisible or uncountable collateral, and thus do not matter on the continuum of war and violence. Countering this narrative, these contributions envision a shift in scholarly focus towards caring for the everyday of pain and grief to end war.

**Finally, the presented solutions to war create hope.**

The volume carries the reader to a place reflected in its cover: the painting of a person scribbling "hope" on debris. In its entirety, the volume transports a firm belief that finding feminist solutions to war is possible.

In their respective contributions, Sarai B. Aharoni and Laura J. Shepherd achieve this by reminding us of the sometimes fragile but enormous political potential and necessity to care for and listen to feminist organizing and activism for peace. Both emphasize feminist organizing and solidarity as one of the most meaningful long-term responses to violence and war. Central to these chapters are the trials and tribulations feminist activists underwent in negotiating their way to achieving implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Both scholars reiterate the feminist principle "agreeing to disagree" as a tool to solving war, and place painful, yet constructive conversations about conflict, violence, and resolution at the heart of their contributions.

Keina Yoshida as well as Carol Cohn and Claire Duncanson demonstrate how a transformation to feminist economies of care and the protection of nature can serve as powerful systemic solutions to ending war over resources. Thus, understanding the limits and rights of nature must come with embracing and valuing the knowledge of those whose lives depend on access to these resources that are extracted.

Shweta Singh and Diksha Poddar's chapter stands out in that it paints a picture of a less violent future through pedagogies of peace. By placing hope with youth and provoking reflections about the necessity of deconstructing (militarized) masculinities (Agarwal, 2022), the potential of peace education in one of the most militarized regions in the world, Kashmir, becomes a radical feminist future vision of conflict resolution.

Overall, this volume reminds us that we ought to approach the topic of war with great care. Readers who have the privilege of living in relative (!) peace need to remember at all times that the contexts the authors invite us and propose solutions to shape the lived realities of millions of people. While at times the volume's contents evoke a range of emotions that are difficult to process, including frustration, sadness and anger, the richness in explanation and depth of analysis make this work an indispensable read. It is a much-needed intervention in these trying times.

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## About the author:

Madita Standke-Erdmann is a feminist researcher and activist. She previously worked a for the research project GBV-MIG at the University of Vienna. Her research interests revolve around feminist and postcolonial interventions in international politics, EU migration and border security politics, as well as colonial legacies in German foreign policy. She is a board member of the German Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) as well as the German Association for Peace and Conflict Studies (AFK). She holds an MSc International Relations Theory from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).