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## REVIEW

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# OF THE BOOK: WOMEN AND WAR: POWER AND PROTECTION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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**O**n 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, which was the first of a series of resolutions on women, peace and security. In the resolution, the Council recognises that women and children are the group most adversely affected by armed conflict and stresses the importance of women's participation in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Accordingly, it urges Member States to protect women during and after conflicts and to promote greater participation of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building.

In 2010, ten years after adopting the Resolution, the work "*Women and War: Power and Protection in the 21st Century*" was published. The book examines the work carried out on women, peace and security in relation to two pillars of Resolution 1325: protection and participation of women.

To make up for the lack of data and empirical studies on the situation of women in armed conflicts and inadequate implementation of the measures proposed in UN Resolution 1325, Kathleen Kuehnast, Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Helga Hernes' aim with this book is to encourage more research into the issue and to get the stakeholders to move from words to action in order to engage women in the area of peace and security.

This is a must-read for anyone interested in the matter of international security and for people about to take part in peacekeeping operations, not to mention individuals involved in international politics. While the book is an easy read, it is also compelling. It includes brave statements, is highly analytical, with a rich and varied bibliography and, most interestingly, it abounds with proposals for action. While each chapter is a separate work in itself, together they constitute an encyclopaedic review of the international situation of women in conflict.

In the introductory chapter, the coordinators of the work - Kathleen Kuehnast, Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Helga Hernes – present the studies that have been carried out by the academic community on women in armed conflict. Firstly, they use interesting examples to explain the current situation of analytical work on the role of gender in international security, noting that minimal work has been carried out in this field. For years, studies and analyses on women and armed conflict have been questioning the exclusive and limiting view of women as mere passive victims. They also draw a distinction between their roles before, during and after the conflict and focus on social inequality in control over resources and involvement in decision-making. Some studies have pointed out that situations of conflict provide an opportunity to promote social changes that are conducive to building societies with a more equitable distribution of power.

In the coordinators' opinion, persistent marginalisation of gender issues in security and defence studies, despite the interesting theoretical advances, is due to the fact that many academics and politicians remain anchored to the traditional Westphalian concepts of security, that is to say, they see it in purely military terms and linked to relations between states, which is very far from contemporary conceptions which focus on the individual.

In the second section, they criticise the lack of empirical data available on the subject, stating that while non-governmental organisations have made an effort in this sense, in general, the material that does exist is not systematic. Each organisation has its own criteria when compiling statistics; some take into account the direct victims of the conflict, while others focus on the civilian population, etc. None, however, can provide a breakdown of victims by gender, although many studies point to the fact that more women than men die during and after the conflict. The authors point out that good data collection would indicate the number of casualties, the cause of death, age, gender and so on, data which would logically be a very valuable tool when prioritising intervention policies. This criticism and complaint on the lack of appropriate data for analysis is repeatedly raised throughout the book.

Finally, the authors briefly analyse the real situation of women during and after conflicts, affording special attention to their situation in refugee camps where the lack of protection mechanisms is more acute; peacekeeping operations, where peacekeeping troops have sometimes been accused of being the cause of persistent insecurity, and the reform of the security sector, which should also take account of gender issues.

Women's involvement in peacekeeping operations is clearly seen as positive, although there are no accurate data or comprehensive studies on the matter. Furthermore, their presence is still very small, as is the time they spend in these.

In the second chapter, Sanam Anderlini examines the impact of Resolution 1325 on international, national and local legal development in relation to women and armed conflict. Without a doubt, the analysis of the achievements and challenges encountered in the implementation of Resolution 1325 at the local and provincial level is the most interesting part.

Another interesting aspect of the analysis is the assessment of the background to the Resolution, such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (*CEDAW*) and the ad hoc tribunals for former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, which recognise sexual violence as a war crime and a crime against humanity. This has meant that crimes such as forced prostitution, sterilisation, forced pregnancies, sexual slavery and rape have ceased to be treated as mere crimes of honour. These changes were reflected in Resolutions 1820 and 1888 of the UN Security Council with the creation of the International Criminal Court and recognition of sexual violence as a threat to peace and security. The writer highlights the significant progress that has been made in the prevention and prosecution of these types of crimes, but also points to the gaps in these areas.

The area most neglected in the implementation of Resolution 1325 is the participation of women in peacekeeping processes. According to the author, these processes have led to situations with new forms of violence and insecurity.

Another important area that still requires considerable attention, according to the book, is an ending of the abusive behaviour of some members of the UN's peacekeeping forces. In this respect, as is the case with other issues analysed in the text, the author puts forward a set of measures that would help change this situation. This is perhaps the most valuable contribution of the book.

Chapters three and four, written by Elisabeth Jean Wood and Inger Skjelsbæk respectively, focus on the difficulty of protecting women during situations of war. The former, in keeping with her line of research in recent years, analyses the different forms and severity of sexual violence in armed conflicts. Wood states that studies on this delicate subject only focus on one end of the spectrum: cases in which sexual violence is appalling, but they do not take account of other cases where there are very few incidences of this type of violence. The most obvious conclusion is therefore overlooked: if sexual violence does not take place in all conflicts, this demonstrates that it is not inevitable. It would be interesting to analyse the conditions present in situations where armed groups do not commit acts of sexual violence.

An assessment of variations in the internal dynamics of armed groups would help make the policies implemented to eradicate these practices more effective, remove the stigmatisation of the victim and encourage them to report the perpetrators.

Inger Skjelsboek analyses experiences during the war in former Yugoslavia. What happened in Bosnia and Kosovo should be regarded as an enlightening example of the start of international commitment to combating serious sexual crimes which had thus far been silenced and therefore tolerated. Valuable lessons can be learned from this experience and new matters and questions have been raised for researchers which require a more in-depth analysis of the area: combating stigmatisation and sexual violence against men, for example. This chapter is a very enriching read for two reasons: it raises new questions on issues that are normally over generalised and draws on a comprehensive and varied bibliography.

The analysis of the war in Bosnia is particularly interesting. The author draws our attention to a number of points in this conflict: firstly, the fact that rape was not only committed by Serbs; the existence of “rape camps” where sexual violence was committed as part of an ethnic cleansing plan, and the international community’s classification of these rapes and atrocities as weapons of war before putting an end to the impunity enjoyed up to then with the creation of an international ad hoc tribunal. For the first time in history, it was explicitly recognised that sexual violence had taken place during an armed conflict, and the testimonies and statements taken during the court hearings provide a good starting point for the study of the victims and perpetrators of sexual violence, given that the latter group has so far been overlooked in analyses, despite this being essential, in the author’s opinion. For example, the fact that the perpetrators are primarily uniformed men should prompt an analysis of military and paramilitary organisations and groups, in addition to the different forms and ideologies these take. Defining sexual violence as “a weapon of war” should not prevent the study of the many situations and power relations at play in the context of sexual violence.

Skjelsboek has pointed out that it was perhaps the fact that the conflict took place on European soil that prompted the West to identify with the victims and give more significance and credibility to these atrocities than to conflicts that were taking place in more distant lands. When the Kosovo War broke out some years later, international organisations and NGOs were better prepared to provide medical and psychosocial care to the victims of rape, but their work was hindered by the fiercely traditional Albanian culture, which discouraged the victims from reporting the crimes and giving testimonies. Determined to not “fail” this time, the author states that the media and organisations tended towards sensationalism, depriving victims of their dignity and privacy, and also exaggerating the attention that should be afforded to these atrocities which were in no way comparable with the conflict and gender patterns experienced in Bosnia and Rwanda.

In chapter five, Tilman Brück and Marc Vothknecht focus on the economic situation of women following conflict and look at the most appropriate tools to promote their empowerment. Understanding that every conflict is unique, the authors are nevertheless able to identify common patterns, thanks to the small amount of

quantitative data available on the situation of women in societies affected by war and the differences between these and men and women in societies not affected by war. Depending on the starting point for gender equality issues, the unique features of each conflict and the different circumstances affecting women in situations of conflict (confinement to their homes, having to take refuge in displaced persons or refugee camps or fighting), conflict and post conflict situations can provide an opportunity to accelerate the empowerment of women, leave them in the same situation or even exacerbate their situation. In any event, conflict defines constraints, employment options and may have benefits, such as a change in gender conceptions. The authors point out that in most cases war has a negative impact on women, who have to deal with an escalation of violence and crime, the rules imposed by a male-dominated society and the collapse of social services.

This situation tends to persist during the post-conflict period, which is why the actors involved in reconstruction efforts should take account of the different needs and situations of men and women, as the transition represents an opportunity to eliminate gender inequality and reform traditional institutions to make room for women in all social and political spheres.

In the last chapter of the book, Donald Steinberg discusses the roadmap that should be followed for successful implementation of Resolution 1325, as well as the goals for the next decade. While the Resolution has marked a turning point in improving the situation of women and the protection of human rights, it still has a long way to go in many areas. The author appeals for a move from words to action. Very few countries have implemented action plans or even developed measures to promote the participation of women in, for instance, senior positions in peacekeeping operations, where the UN is still far off target. It is interesting how this organisation criticises itself in UN documents which in some cases tend to perpetuate stereotypes, such as women are more pacific than men, or places women in the same category as minors by continuously associating women with children.

Although this is a very complete work, a chapter devoted exclusively to the low participation of women in negotiations and peace processes would have been desirable. An analysis of the processes in which women have been involved, their potential impact on peace agreements, matters concerning sexual violence and its prosecution and redress would be a good way to complete the proposed roadmap. In any event, this very complete work with outstanding analyses and the input of leading researchers is a recommended read.

