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Book Review

Gentry, Caron E., Laura J. Shepherd, and Laura Sjoberg, eds. 2019. *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security.* Routledge, 440 pp. £ 190 (Hardback)

Gender equality represents one of the primary predictors of peace and an important global sustainable development goal. Simultaneously, it can be used to legitimise waging war and foreign interventions. Mainstream IR scholarship seldom takes gender into account, although there is a body of evidence suggesting that gender is of the core security aspects, especially through answering what counts as security and whose security matters. As Laura Sjoberg notices, gender was absent from key periodicals in Security Studies, such as the journal *Security Studies* which started publishing the terms women and gender only around the mid-2000s.[1] This handbook uses feminist lenses to advance comprehensive analysis in security studies and to scrutinise and inform policies serving social justice. To that end, this volume will be useful to students, scholars and practitioners in the field, curious to dig beneath the mainstream IR and uncover how gendered power relations work in the complex context of security and global politics.

The handbook acknowledges substantial feminist work in International Relations (IR) and Security Studies (SS), which enables theorising inclusive of invisible and disregarded, but crucial gender factors. It features a diversity of thought through the work of internationally recognised Feminist Security Studies (FSS) scholars, with unifying frame in critical theory and human security premises. This edited volume contains 34 chapters organised in four thematic sections, focused on: (1) theoretical, conceptual and methodological gendered approaches to security, (2) gendered insecurities in global politics, (3) gendered practices of security and (4) gendered security institutions. The volume represents a well-researched guide to FSS, which was established a couple of decades ago, even though feminist interventions in IR began much earlier. Editors and authors in the volume treat FSS as a subfield of Security Studies.

Methodologically, this volume encompasses a variety of approaches frequently used by feminists, such as narrativisation, discourse analysis and ethnography. These approaches are showcased in the first section of the book, which provides the basis for framing the upcoming sections by analysing assumptions about gender and putting them in the context of global politics. For example, Wibben and Mehta point out in the fourth chapter, that "narrative writing offers a means of inserting the researcher and her subjectivities into the research" (p. 51), which, as a feminist practice, invites academics to blur boundaries of disciplines, question their partialities and ways in which they were trained to think and write. Through narrativisation, meanings of security can be expanded and previously silenced voices heard. Wibben and Mehta also argue for the necessity of feminist narrative analysis, in events such as 9/11 or the Maoist movement in India. Although not without difficulties or ethical dilemmas, such methodology can be revealing and it can address bigger questions about power in the disciplines of IR, SS and Gender Studies (p. 54).

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[1] Sjoberg 2016.

The first section of the book critically introduces feminist security concepts to challenge the theoretical framework of mainstream IR/SS focused on state security and sovereignty. Authors emphasise a human-centred approach which serves as a starting point for introducing gendered agency and stakes into global politics. FSS puts focus on lived experiences and personal feelings of safety. It connects security with economic and social rights, as well as issues of structural violence and justice. Therefore, hierarchies and power relations (re)produced through practices and institutions beyond the traditional IR scope are being questioned, with awareness of individuals' bodily existence. In this section, the necessity of deconstruction of dichotomies such as 'Beautiful Soul' and 'Just Warrior'. This myth, first described by Jean Elshtain in 1987, speaks of socialisation practice that is labelled as a 'natural' order of things, in which weak and vulnerable women – creators of life, are to be protected by men as life-takers, obligated to be courageous heroes. Sjoberg argues that on the basis of such myth, states may commit political violence claiming their purpose is to protect women and children, when in reality increases security risks for women (p. 60).

Interestingly, the authors offer examples of how this myth is consciously accepted by feminists. Leigh and Weber (Chapter 7) argue that mothers of veterans and serving soldiers in the US embrace the 'Beautiful Soul' role, but in ways that subvert the tropes to feminist political ends (p. 87). Runyan and Zalewski (Chapter 9) remind us that women's violence in FCC somewhat challenges the myth, as well (p. 109). This reminder refers not only to the fact that armed women have participated in guerilla and nationalist movements (p. 134), but also that feminists have been 'Just Warriors' in the liberation struggle from sexual and gender-based violence (p. 110). The myth may also be attributed to 'peaceful' feminisms and to 'epistemic violence' it created in relation to overturning conventional knowledge bases (p. 107). In relation to the mainstream discipline, this handbook continues this endeavour.

The widespread fallacy of women being seen as inherently peaceful, and in contrast to men disposed to create insecurity, is an important point of departure in theorising war, terrorism, violent extremism, radicalisation, and even genocide. Welland (Chapter 11) explains that the discourse of "vulnerable Afghan women and brave US men does not denote what men and women *really* were during the war," as it omits that these women actually fought for their rights for decades, but at the same time the myth enabled militarised response to their suffering (p. 131). An unexpected link is made by Masters (Chapter 18) in reflecting tech-warfare and drones as militarised masculine constructs.

Feminist work allows us to scrutinise tech-warfare as bodyless, as drones discourse tends to disavow ‘fleshy bodies’, leading to the impression of ‘war that is not war’. What Masters suggests is that, as previously women in comparison to man, a fleshy body is positioned here as *feminised* in relation to technology, and drones as ‘Just Warriors’ in relation to human soldiers (p. 209). Thus, an eye-opening example underlines that gender is far from obsolete in militarised human–machine interfaces discourse. The volume offers a powerful warning that gender must be thought in relation to insecurities IR is concerned with to avoid the ‘deadliest of politics.’

The second section questions what counts as (in)security. What FCC contributions are showcasing, in evoking the myth of protection of women in this book, is that the myth “enables justifying of gender hierarchies, unequal citizenship, and aggressive international politics” (p. 273). Traditional SS and IR often cannot, or does not strive to explain thoroughly all the different experiences of women and men. To that end FCC is offering additional angles. One proposed by Innes and Steele (Chapter 13), could be a focus on everyday violence that looks to individuals “embedded in circumstances, identities, and relationships that deviate from the white, propertied and hetero-male” (p. 154). If insecurities are thought of as “an effect of ‘avoidable’ suffering, or more expansively, of vulnerabilities that could, in theory, be avoided or prevented” (p. 172), then issues related to political economy (Chapter 16), poverty, interpersonal violence or migration (chapter 17) must be tackled, too. For instance, Spike Peterson points out in Chapter 17 that economic devalorisation of people and nations, i.e. devaluation of ‘women’s work’ and of feminised ‘others’ such as migrants, ‘unskilled’ workers and racially stigmatised, is too often unacknowledged (p. 179).

The six chapters of the third section are grouped under the marker of gendered practices, covering feminist care ethics and theories of an embodiment as security practice, regulation of sexuality as a political practice, and politics of representation. Authors explore a number of these practices in relation to the state. For example, Duriesmith (Chapter 23) focuses on the politics of representation by examining the politics of state-led commemorations of war and collective trauma, arguing they are gender-blind. Cecilia Åse’s chapter (24) links the myth of protection with women’s bodies, constructed as personifications of national territory, vulnerable to degradation and humiliation by the opponent. In deconstructing this narrative, she concludes that providing protection is what ultimately justifies the liberal state and that feminist analyses question both the legitimacy and acceptability of state sovereignty and international politics (p. 274). As the successful protection of its citizens is a prerequisite of state sovereignty, dismantling the gendered protection myth and allowing differing perspectives on it, impacts the sovereignty of liberal state and its legitimacy (p. 281). This is an important insight of FSS that could attract more attention from other IR/SS scholars.

The last thematic section of the handbook will be of particular interest to practitioners, as it deals with security institutions. Is it possible that two decades after revolutionary UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which marked the beginning of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, we still just 'add women to security institutions and stir'? The myth of protection again comes in handy in pursuing an answer, as it seems to be reproduced in this agenda. George and co-authors (Chapter 27) notice that over twenty years since its founding resolution, the WPS agenda did not yet manage to effectively transform the state and old gendered power relations. Namely, part of criticism towards the UN and by proxy regional and national actors, comes from overemphasising its protection aspect. Authors argue that within peace and security governance architecture WPS is conceptualised in a way that positions women as victims of violence rather than agents of change (p. 314). Other downsides include equalising gender with women, and consequently lack of attention given to men and boys. Subject to echoes of similar warnings is WPS' 'younger sister' – Youth, Peace and Security agenda, inaugurated with resolution 2250 in 2015, that regrettably was not discussed in this book. For example, UN Women-sponsored commentary to 2250 warns that a "reference to young women in policies should not be limited to their protection or addressing discrimination. It should also emphasise the positive and transformative role young women can play in building sustainable peace".[2] Failing to do so risks the myth of protection being strengthened in relation to youth – towards young women as victims, but also toward young men who should be protected from falling in or becoming security risks.

The last section also examines how gender mainstreaming as a strategy of integrating gender implications in all policies, on all levels, did not yet rise to the task in either peacekeeping (Chapter 29), peace agreements (Chapter 28) or Security Sector Reform (Chapter 31). Instead, gender balancing as a way to increase women's representation, seems to be somewhat more acceptable. While gender reform in international and regional security institutions took off in the last couple of decades, it is noted that mechanisms such as gender focal points or gender advisers often stay isolated in their expertise, while gender mainstreaming is co-opted by existing unchanged systems and claims to equality deradicalised (p. 375). Gender mainstreaming continues to be so far the best strategy to break out of patriarchal matrices and work toward gender equality in security institutions. Insightful overview of its failures and obstacles this handbook documents may serve in pursuing more comprehensive security, as well as towards substantial application in localities where the application started only recently, such as Montenegro (2017), Albania (2018) and Bulgaria (2020). The entire section demonstrates interlinks between scholarship and political, development and peacebuilding practice, contrasting feminist security study with security institutions and their (sometimes co-optive) *modi operandi*.

The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security is a valuable resource, mostly written in accessible language that draws from both theory and practice. This volume brings gender from the peripheries of IR inquiry to the centre of the explanatory framework. It prompts us to expand reasoning on subjectivity and usual processes of knowledge production; to look for underlying causes of insecurities and become aware of deeply engraved gendered aspects in places we might not expect to find them, including due to our own situatedness as inquirers; and to appreciate the diversity of feminisms applied in SS. It is a collection of conceptual interventions that offer explanations for security failures, but is also a magnifier of overlooked intersections with political economy, heterosexism, and class oppression. The volume draws on a variety of examples ranging from India, Serbia, Russia, the US and Uganda, to Cuba, Australia and Japan in evidencing the universality of gendered power dynamics. The handbook convincingly promotes the usage of methodologies cherished by feminists, thus widening research options for academics and practitioners alike. The book makes a strong case for a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to security, which was concisely expressed in Ronni Alexander's conclusion of the second chapter – "true peace is only possible for one if it is also possible for all" (p. 33).

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[2] UN Women 2018.

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