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Book Review: Global Perspectives on War, Gender and Health: The Sociology and Anthropology of Suffering

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Global Perspectives on War, Gender and Health: The Sociology and Anthropology of Suffering, 2010. Hannah Bradby and Gillian Lewando Hundt (eds).
Surrey: England: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 157 pp. \$99.95
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Reviewed by Zitha Mokomane¹

This thoughtful and interesting edited volume—the impetus of which was the life and work of Meg Stacey who was the first female professor at the University of Warwick and whose name is most strongly associated with pioneering the development of the sociology of health and illness—analyses the nexus between the suffering caused by the intentional violence of war and the unintentional suffering engendered by modern medicinal processes. As its introductory section states, the authors of the book's chapters provide a range of conceptual tools and theoretical frameworks in their research on gendering suffering, including reconceptualising war trauma, testimony and narrative; *résistance* as a counter narrative; the reality and complexity of global social movements in relation to feminist antimilitarism; the repressive implication of the representation of domestic violence; and an inspirational vision of how to move towards a more 'peaceful life' through the politics of care.

In Chapter 1 Cynthia Cockburn analyses the key tenets of woman's organised resistance to militarism, militarisation and war. She uses her notes from 18 months of travel across the USA, the UK (what she calls war delivering countries) and in war afflicted countries across Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific and Asia to reveal the incoherence in the women's antiwar movement around the world. A critique of the individualised concept of trauma is offered by Srila Roy in Chapter 2 who, in essence, argues for a better understanding of the linkages between personal and public trauma. In Chapter 3 Linda Mckie and Chris Yuill use the conflict in Northern Ireland as a case study to illustrate how violence arises from a complex interaction of individual and social factors related to the political, socio-cultural, and economic environments within which the domination of women is often very evident. To this end they strongly advocate for gender to be mainstreamed into any analysis of violence, conflict and war.

Drawing in the experience of women war survivors in Uganda, Helen Liebling-Kalifani calls, in Chapter 4, for a better understanding of linkages between personal and public trauma, and the need to increase the social, legal and political empowerment of women war survivors. She argues that in doing so, the involvement of the women survivors is of critical importance.

An analysis of specific incidences of violence against women in Sahwari refugee camps by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh in Chapter 5 demonstrates the extent to which sexual violence can be mobilised or concealed by political institutions to various ends, such as to receive political and humanitarian support.

In Chapter 6 Rubina Jasani uses the experiences of her PhD fieldwork in India to illuminate the moral and ethical dilemma posed for researchers doing work in conflict settings, while in Chapter 7 Astier Almedon, Evelyn Brensinger and Gordon Adam,

¹ Human Sciences Research Council.

establish the definition of resilience and show how it can and should be applied to the building and development of healthy states.

In the concluding chapter Parita Mukta argues for the “necessity of staying close to the ground of the messy realities of the experiences of political workings, economic ups and downs, social Sunderings and ideological jostlings while keeping a steady gaze on the things that matter: lie and the continuity of life” (pg: 147).

The main strength of this book lies in its use of international empirical research, as well as narratives by survivors of war and violence. . One of the most notable issues that could have been included is a whole section on the views of those in war delivering countries. Nonetheless, this is an impressive book with an accessible writing style and organisation that will make it a valuable theoretical and empirical source not only for sociologists, but also for others across the social sciences