

August 2023

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Recommended Citation

Olimat, Muhamad S.; Antwi-Boateng, Osman; and Janardhan, Narayanappa (2023) "Special Issue Introduction: The Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on Global and Gender Affairs," *Journal of International Women's Studies*: Vol. 25: Iss. 6, Article 1.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol25/iss6/1>

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Special Issue Introduction: The Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on Global and Gender Affairs

By Muhamad S. Olimat,¹ Osman Antwi Boateng,² and Narayanappa Janardhan³

Introduction

The goal of this special issue is to explore the root causes of the Russia-Ukraine War and its socio-economic and political impact on Ukraine, the Russian Federation, and the international community. It draws special attention to the ways in which patriarchal and heteropatriarchal structures and ideologies, gender dynamics, politics and power relations infuse the topics under investigation. It focuses on how feminist and related theoretical perspectives and methodologies shape analyses of lived experiences of the war, textual and content analyses of media, political decision-making, the impact of global economic crises, mentalities of war, and the like. The special issue thus includes papers and works on a wide range of topics related to the war with linkages and heightened attention to themes revolving around gender, patriarchy, and multiple forms of feminism.

Background to the Conflict

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a surprise attack on Ukraine with the intention of toppling its government, installing a pliant government, and annexing some of its territory. Ukrainian politicians, including President Volodymyr Zelensky, were dismissive of American intelligence reports that warned of an imminent Russian attack in the early months of 2022. The world was in disbelief, pointing to the regression of traditional European powers to “classic” territorial warfare and annexation based on imperial claims. It came in stark contrast to international law, the United Nations principles, the Helsinki Accords of 1975, and the 1994 Ukraine denuclearization agreement. In fact, Russia as a signatory to the last agreement was one of two major security guarantors of Ukraine.

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Russia's bold step of warfare and annexation of the eastern part of Ukraine is shrouded in several claims. First, Moscow accused Kyiv of gross human rights violations, including genocide, in Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine. Such claims were not substantiated and the confrontation between Ukraine and the breakaway regions led to casualties on both sides. Secondly, Moscow accused Kiev of harboring "Nazi" nationalists who were aiming to wage a war against the Russian-speaking territories of Ukraine. This claim was also unsubstantiated given the fact that the percentage of right-wing-leaning political forces in Ukraine does not exceed 1% of the electorate. In leading democratic countries such as Germany, France, Sweden, the Netherlands, the U.S., Austria, and other Western countries, these political forces exceed 10% of the electorate.

Third, Russia accused Ukraine of violations of the Minsk Agreement between Kiev and the breakaway forces in Eastern Ukraine, an agreement which was brokered by Germany and France in 2014. Both sides exchanged fundamental disagreements on the implementation of that deal, thus escalating the crisis leading to thousands of casualties on both sides. Additionally, Russia held the West responsible for the removal of Ukraine's pro-Moscow president Victor Yanukovich, who fled the country in 2014 amid popular protests led by forces leaning toward the West. President Yanukovich had refused to support Ukraine's efforts to move closer to the European Union.

Though Moscow had unending justifications, the war was driven purely by realism and power politics. Moscow's aim is to limit the expansion of NATO near its borders. This goal entails weakening Ukraine, controlling its coastal waters, and installing a puppet government that relies on Russia. Meanwhile, Ukraine is defending its independence, territorial integrity, and identity as a state and as a member of the international community. The war is driven by the global balance-of-power considerations. Russian leaders have identified unipolarity as one of the main factors for the war. Russia's aim, strongly shared by China, centers on multipolarity and breaking the American and Western hegemony on international affairs.

The consequences of the war are felt in every corner of the globe, a fact attested to by the articles in this special issue.

The most shocking aspect of the war is the repeated statements made by senior Russian officials on the possibility of using nuclear weapons. Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev clearly stated that Russia will use its nuclear option should its territory be attacked. He even said that Ukraine may cease to exist. President Vladimir Putin invoked images of heroism from the Great War over Nazi Germany stating that Russia was "fighting for the motherland, for its future, so that no one forgets the lessons of World War II" (New York Times, 2022). Putin reminded his people and the armed forces that once again Russia is under the attack of "German tanks," a reference to the possibility of German-made tanks being supplied to Ukraine.

The world's reaction to the war and the impact on global affairs ranges from taking sides and supporting the parties involved in the conflict, to condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to neutrality, and to strategic ambiguity. In an Emergency Session of the U.N. General Assembly, March 2, 2022, the U.S.-Ukraine coalition of countries condemned the Russian invasion stating that it is a clear aggression against a sovereign country that threatens the foundation of international security. The overwhelming majority of member states expressed their condemnation and outrage, and demanded an immediate halt to the Russian aggression. The session revealed Russia's isolation and lack of support even by some countries classified historically as belonging to its camp such as the Central Asian republics. The table below illustrates the voting pattern: 141 in favor of the U.S.-backed motion, 5 against, and 35 abstentions, including two key countries, China and India. The General Assembly's Resolution (GA RES 11-1) was

followed by a series of other resolutions throughout the year that condemned Russia's war. They demanded a halt to military aggression, war reparation, and suspension of Russia's membership from the UN Human Rights Council.

Table 1: UN General Assembly's Vote on March 2, 2022 Demanding Russia End its Offensive in Ukraine

In Favor	Abstained	Against
Afghanistan, Albania, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria	Algeria	Belarus
Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria	Burundi	DRPK-North Korea
Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Canada, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Comoros, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia	Central African Republic	Eritrea
Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Dominica, Dominican Republic	China	Russia
Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia	Republic of Congo	Syria
Fiji, Finland, France	Cuba	
Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Granada, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana	Guinea	
Haiti, Hungary	Honduras	
Jamaica, Japan, Jordan	India	
Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait	Kazakhstan	
Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Luxemburg	Kyrgyzstan	
Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar	Laos	
Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway	Mali	
Oman	Mongolia	
Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal	Mozambique	
Qatar	Namibia	
Republic of Korea (South Korea), Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda	Pakistan	
Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Spain, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland	South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan	
Timor-Leste, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Turkey	Tajikistan, Tanzania,	

	Thailand, Togo	
Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America	Uganda	
Vanuatu	Vietnam	
Yemen	Zimbabwe	
Zambia		

Source: Data provided by the UN General Assembly Archives, file:///C:/Users/EDA023/Downloads/A_RES_ES-11_1-EN.pdf

Food Security

A second important aspect of the war deals with global food security. Ukraine and Russia are major producers of wheat, cereals, and oils. Russia is also a major producer of fertilizers necessary for agriculture worldwide. The war came at a time when the world was barely recovering from the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. For three years, supply chains were disrupted like they were during World War II. In its assessment on the impact of the war globally, the UNCTAD stated that “Ukraine and Russia are global players in agri-food markets, representing 53% of global trade in sunflower oil and seeds and 27% in wheat” (UNCTAD, 2022). Table 2 illustrates the top 18 countries that rely on Russia and Ukraine in some of their agri-food imports.

Table 2: Agri-Food Imports from Ukraine and Russia

Country	From Russia (%)	From Ukraine (%)	Total (%)
Turkey	22	5	27
China	5.6	17.4	23
Egypt	15.1	7.5	22.6
India	3.2	9.8	13
Netherlands	0	8.9	8.9
Spain	0	6.0	6.0
Bangladesh	3.7	2.1	5.8
Pakistan	2.6	1.9	4.8
Germany	0	3.6	3.6
R. of Korea	0	3.1	3.1
Sudan	3.1	0	3.1
Italy	0	3.1	3.1
Vietnam	2.7	0	2.7
Azerbaijan	3.2	0	3.2
Tunisia	0	2.2	2.2
Morocco	0	1.9	1.9
Sudan	2.2	0	2.2
United Kingdom	0	2.3	2.3

Source: Data provided by UNCTAD (2022)

The war has had a devastating impact on wheat imports, especially in the Global South. Countries such as Indonesia, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and the Philippines rely heavily on wheat imports from both Russia and Ukraine. Egypt in particular was hit hard by the war to the extent that it began searching for alternative sources of wheat in India. Bilateral ties between India

and Egypt accelerated into a strategic partnership in record time, despite the two countries being partners since the early 1940s. The table below illustrates the top ranking countries in wheat imports in 2022.

Table 4: World's Top 30 Wheat-Importing Countries in 2022

Rank	Country	Imports (1,000 MT)	Rank	Country	Imports (1,000 MT)
1	Indonesia	11,200	16	Viet Nam	4,100
2	Egypt	11,000	17	Yemen	3,700
3	Turkey	10,250	18	Uzbekistan	3,500
4	China	9,500	19	Iraq	3,500
5	Algeria	8,400	20	Afghanistan	3,400
6	Morocco	7,500	21	United States	3,266
7	Bangladesh	7,000	22	Saudi Arabia	3,000
8	Nigeria	6,500	23	Thailand	2,700
9	Philippines	6,200	24	Pakistan	2,500
10	Brazil	6,200	25	Colombia	2,300
11	Iran	6,000	26	Kenya	2,200
12	Japan	5,700	27	Peru	2,100
13	EU-27	5,500	28	Syria	2,000
14	Mexico	5,000	29	UK	2,000
15	Korea, ROK	4,200	30	Malaysia	1,925

Source: Data provided by Indexmundi based on the US Department of Agriculture.
<https://www.indexmundi.com/agriculture/?commodity=wheat&graph=imports>

Energy Security

A third dimension of the war deals with energy security in Europe. Russia and European countries established partnerships and interdependence based on oil and natural gas. This approach of interdependence was charted by German former chancellor Angela Merkel. The escalation of the war in Ukraine caused a gradual decline of Russian oil and gas exports to Europe. While Germany was very reluctant to support the escalation of the conflict with Russia in the months leading up to the war due to its heavy reliance on Russian gas and oil, Moscow provided no incentives for Berlin to resist American pressure. On the contrary Russia contributed to the consolidation of the European-American front in its opposition to its invasion of Ukraine.

The war forced Europe to develop its own sources of energy and search for alternative suppliers, primarily in Africa and the Middle East. In their frantic search for alternative sources of energy, European countries established partnerships with Nigeria to export its gas and oil via Morocco into southern Europe. The West Africa-North Africa-Europe pipeline projects demonstrate the new alliances being consolidated around energy because of the war. Middle Eastern producers have also increased their exports to Europe, in addition to exploiting the newly discovered oil and gas field in the East Mediterranean region, a new frontier for energy.

Several other countries like China and India set aside political considerations for economic benefits and increased their energy imports from Russia, which considerably negated sanctions.

The table below illustrates the comparative prices of oil over the past three years and during the Ukraine War.

Table 3: Monthly Oil Prices (2019-2022)

	2022 (\$ per barrel)	2021 (\$ per barrel)	2020 (\$ per barrel)	2019 (\$ per barrel)
January	83.22	52.00	57.52	51.38
February	91.64	59.04	50.54	54.95
March	108.50	62.33	29.21	58.15
April	101.78	61.72	16.55	63.86
May	109.55	65.17	28.56	60.83
June	114.84	71.38	38.31	54.66
July	101.62	72.49	40.71	57.35
August	93.63	67.73	42.34	54.81
September	84.26	71.65	39.63	56.95
October	87.55	81.48	39.40	53.96
November	84.37	79.15	40.94	57.03
December	76.44	71.71	47.02	59.88

*Source: Data provided by the United States Energy Information Administration,
<https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/hist/LeafHandler.ashx?n=PET&s=RWTC&f=M>*

Impact on Women

A fourth dimension of the war is its impact on women and children as refugees dispersed across the world. The UNHCR reported the figures of Ukrainian refugees across Europe at nearly eight million, the overwhelming majority of them women and children. Since February 24, 2022, about 17.5 million people crossed the Ukrainian border, while about 9.5 million people crossed back into Ukraine (UNHCR, n.d.). Similarly, over 10 million Ukrainians were displaced internally (UNHCR, n.d.). The first anniversary of the war brings no solace to war victims, many women and children among them. It only indicates that the impact of the conflict may endure for decades to come.

Impact on Education

A fifth factor of the Ukraine War, partially related to the impact on women, is the effect on the education sector, especially among youth. Because of the country's affordability, Ukrainian universities are a major destination for students from developing countries seeking to specialize in medicine and engineering. Reports indicate that there were over 80,000 foreign students studying in the country prior to the war—18,000 Indians, 8,000 Moroccans, 3,500 Egyptians, and thousands more from other African, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries. It has also affected several thousands of Ukrainian students and professionals in schools and universities, which has had a devastating impact on their families.

Articles in the Issue

Muhamad Olimat's article, "The Russia-Ukraine War: Geopolitical and Gendered Impact on the Greater Middle East" provides a comprehensive overview of the consequences of war on the Levant, the Arab Gulf Region, North Africa, and Central Asia. It delves into security affairs, economic imperatives, and socio-cultural and political affairs of this vast region, whose geostrategic location has made it vulnerable throughout history to political, security, economic, and cultural developments occurring on the global scene.

Narayanappa Janardhan's analysis, "Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Women's Contrarian Views on the Russia-Ukraine War," provides a non-Western view of the war. It argues that the conflict is not as black and white as it is made out to be. He highlights some contrarian interpretations from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, and the reasons for the same, along with contrarian women's perspectives on how underplaying the plight of war-affected women in the Middle East, compared to underscoring the plight of Ukrainian women, is tantamount to hypocrisy. Janardhan is critical of the absence of both Ukrainian and Russian women in peace negotiations, which he attributes to a case of patriarchal dominance and neglect. Citing feminist voices, he is critical of Western countries and NATO's response to the conflict for neglecting the peace and security concerns of women from the war zones. He highlights the characterization of NATO as an institution of "international hegemonic masculinity" despite the organization's assertion that gender equality is an integral part of all NATO policies, programs, and projects. He situates these contrarian opinions more in pragmatic economic, political, and security domains and less in ideological moorings.

In "Feminist Foreign Policy and the War in Ukraine: Hollow Framework or Rallying Force?" Sara Chehab examines if the reactions of Sweden, France, Canada, and Mexico, which pursue a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), were in line with their FFP commitments or whether those were sidelined during these challenging times. She argues that while there is no evidence of a common feminist response to the war, a clear framework that marries Feminist Foreign Policy with conflicts is important for the future of this brand of foreign policy.

In their article "The Impact of Sanctions against Russia on Central Eurasia: A New Great Game through a Feminist Lens," Viktoria Akchurina and Anna Dolidze examine the unintended impacts of the sanctions on these two regions given their integration into the extended Russian economic space. They argue that the sanctions against Russia represent both a trap and an opportunity for the so-called small states in Central Asia and South Caucasus, subjecting them to the patterns of the world hierarchies on one hand and providing the space for maneuver, on the other. This article relies on the ontology of feminist security studies by focusing on the marginal actors of the Great Game, discovering that resilience is another form of soft power in today's international relations.

The research of Maha Bashri and Prospera Tadam highlights the double standards of the Western media and foreign policy elites in highlighting the war-time plight of Ukrainian women and welcoming them as refugees in Western countries while largely ignoring their Middle Eastern and Afghan counterparts. They attribute this biased posture to the Western media framing and discourse about women refugees which otherizes non-Western refugees. Bashri and Tadam argue that the Western media and their foreign policy elites portray Ukrainian refugees as easier to assimilate into Western societies due to cultural and religious affinity and being highly educated. In contrast, media commentators and foreign policy elites in Western countries often portray Middle Eastern/Arab and Afghan women refugees as potential security risks and cultural, religious, and educational misfits. They warn that such biased media framing and discourse has negative implications for women refugees from the Global South because it negatively impacts the humanitarian assistance they receive, if any, and hampers their acceptance by Western countries as refugees.

Ayo Oyeleye and Shujun Jiang observed patriarchal tendencies in the international media coverage of women in the war which fits into the existing narrative whereby the scope of violence of the war is depicted via the harm and suffering of women without capturing their voices or giving them any form of media representation. Women suffering is portrayed as symbolic of the carnage

of war, with women often portrayed as hapless victims of war. They argue that the over-representation of women as hapless victims of war narrows readers' understanding of the diverse experiences of women during war and is counterproductive.

In spite of such stereotypical coverage, Suaad Al Orami and Osman Antwi-Boateng argue that although patriarchy initiated the war and continues to negatively impact women throughout the war, Ukrainian women are demonstrating agency in the face of adversity and challenging the existing stereotypes on the role of women during war. They argue that in addition to the so-called traditional roles that women play during war such as nurses and heads of households, Ukrainian women have shattered the glass ceiling. They are serving as fighters in the frontlines, serving as military commentators in the media, and building international coalitions against the war via diplomatic initiatives. As a result of their demonstrated agency, Al Orami and Antwi-Boateng argue that Ukrainian women need to be involved in humanitarian assistance programs, negotiations to end the war, and any post-war reconstruction initiatives.

Using Africa as a case study, Osman Antwi-Boateng and Mohammed Al Nuaimi demonstrate that although the Russia-Ukraine War is far away from the continent, Africa is not impervious to the ramifications of the conflict in this highly globalized world. Using world systems theory, they argue that Africa falls within the realm of the periphery in international affairs while agent-provocateurs such as Russia and the West occupy the dominant core of international affairs, around which all other countries revolve. Consequently, Africa, led by its patriarchal leadership via the African Union (AU), has struggled to abide by its continental charter principles of noninterference and remains committed to its tradition of nonalignment in international affairs. The authors argue that although Africa as a continent, by virtue of occupying the periphery of world politics, and particularly African women have been marginalized in the decisions leading to and conducting the war, they have nevertheless been negatively impacted by the war. Lacking agency in world affairs, the continent has responded to the war in a disjointed way without considering the voices and input of African women, who are increasingly bearing the brunt of the global impact of the war. Politically, the war has resulted in further marginalization of the continent and its women due to the continent's lack of agency. Economically, the conflict has led to rising energy costs, inflation, and food insecurity, which disproportionately affects African women. Socially, the conflict has disrupted the academic life of African students in Ukraine, with female students particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence. Antwi-Boateng and Al Nuaimi argue that for Africa to be impactful on the international stage, the patriarchal decision-making structure of the African Union would have to be reformed to include more female voices from the continent in recognition of the heavy toll that past and present patriarchal decisions have had upon women.

Muhammed Musa and Ahmed Mansoori, in their examination of selected newspaper reportage of Arab Gulf countries, discover that the media is socially constructing the reality about the conflict by shaping the perception of the crisis among the largely Arabic-speaking Gulf audience. They also argue that media framing of the conflict can have foreign policy implications for the newspapers' respective countries. The dominant social construct about the war among the media is that the war has global ramifications with regards to humanitarian and economic consequences. The economic implications are depicted via the impact of the war on trade and energy related commodities, a mainstay of the regional economies. In addition, the coverage of the war has been split between support and sympathy for Ukraine as "victims" and support for Russia standing up to Western "bullies." In the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, the mass media shape understanding of the conflict and therefore shape the circumstances in which policy-making takes

place. The research also looked at the inclusion and exclusion of women in news about the conflict and confirms the trend of male dominance in areas of hard news that war reporting falls into.

Carlos González-Villa and Branislav Radeljić examine the impact of the Russian intervention in Ukraine on NATO's expansionist and operational approaches. The authors note that NATO has been justifying its existence through geographic expansion and executing out-of-area operations since the mid-1990s. However, the growing contradictions between its members' interests, changes in US administrations, and the transformation of the international system towards multipolarity are forcing NATO to make a definitive choice. The authors argue that the war in Ukraine marks the end of this dynamic, putting NATO in the dilemma of either limiting its operations for the defense of its members or completing pending enlargement processes and endangering international peace and security. The article also highlights the impact of the war on gender equality. NATO and Western countries have pushed gender issues off the agenda. The global crisis generated by the war has disproportionately affected women and girls in developing countries, given the increase in the price of food and energy. Gender equality issues have been largely absent from discussions on the Ukraine crisis. However, the authors suggest that different development agendas in the new multipolar world will be more likely to address this situation, albeit gradually. Overall, the article provides a historical analysis of NATO's enlargement and operational approaches, noting how these activities have enabled the alliance to weather successive internal crises. The authors suggest that the war in Ukraine marks a turning point for NATO and highlights the importance of addressing gender equality issues in conflicts.

Fakir Al Gharaibeh, Ifzal Ahmad, and Rima Malkawi examine the effect of the Russia-Ukraine War on education, which has displaced hundreds of thousands of local and international students, teachers, and educators at Ukrainian universities, schools, and other academic institutions, therefore causing an international crisis in the sector.

Ahmed Rashad, Muhamad Olimat, and Mona El-Sholkamy examine the impact of the war on commodity prices. Energy and food prices have skyrocketed over the last year causing inflation and hardships to families around the world. On the other hand, the hike in worldwide fuel prices delivered positive fiscal balances to oil-rich countries, particularly those in the Gulf. The article determines the drivers of inflation in the region through a case study of Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates.

Finally, while many of the arguments are contrarian, such reactions and analyses do not condone Russia's belligerence but reflect a growing multipolar global order where strategic ambivalence on global affairs is a new tool to promote strategic autonomy as well as often-ignored human security, particularly that of women.

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