

## Feminist Solutions for Ending War

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# Introduction to Feminist Solutions for Ending War

*Megan MacKenzie and Nicole Wegner*

War is studied within a range of academic subfields and commented on by endless policy experts and analysts. What unifies much of this work is that it is grounded in an implicit assumption that war is inevitable and a permanent part of global relations. The goals of much of war studies seem to be to predict, quantify effects and costs, scrutinise and improve military strategy, and measure power gains and losses. We treat this approach to war as a problem with serious global implications. We argue that if the study of war does not question the utility of war, and is largely absent of any attention or commitment to limiting and ending war, then such work can, and does, entrench ideas of war and militarism as normal and acceptable parts of social and political life.

Our solution to this problem is to draw on experts from around the world to explore feminist solutions for ending war. What we offer in this book is hope in the form of tools for reconceptualising war and imagining a world without it. As we explain in greater detail below, the focus is on feminist solutions because, drawing on the work of bell hooks, we understand war to be a complex failure that is the product of an international system shaped by patriarchy, militarism, white supremacy and capitalism. As a result, feminist solutions that acknowledge and address this complexity are required.

This book started from a desire to face the complexity of war with a sense of hope and a vision that peace is possible. After teaching and researching war and security for over a decade, I (Megan) felt it was necessary to regroup and try different approaches to studying war in order to avoid overwhelming myself and my students. While teaching issues like rape in war, I would inevitably see students almost physically lean back as they became overwhelmed by the magnitude

of the issues and the seeming lack of any pathway forward. In 2018 I hosted a small workshop entitled *Feminist Solutions to Ending War* and organised a senior undergraduate unit with the same title. The intent of both was to centre feminist solutions in our analysis of war. There was a commitment not to be simplistic or delusional in the quest for solutions, but to keep the attention on solutions even while acknowledging the complexity of war. Students and scholars seemed to embrace this approach and the conversations that were generated in this class and at the initial workshop continued. In 2019 we (Nicole and Megan) began working together and we were united in our unabashed commitment to doing work and generating conversations aimed at ending war. This book is a product of that commitment.

This book is also a product of the context and time in which it was written. While we understand that global politics is never dull, the time during which we were writing and editing this volume was shaped by events that were repeatedly described as ‘unprecedented’ and historic. As the authors were completing their chapters, vast swaths of Australian land were ravaged by bushfires, producing toxic air in most major cities, displacing 18,000 Australians and killing nearly half a billion animals. The World Health Organization declared a global pandemic, as the SARS-COV-2 ‘coronavirus’ spread rapidly throughout the world, resulting in the deaths of nearly 2 million individuals (at the time of writing). The virus has laid bare global racism and inequality, the impacts of weak and underfunded social and health services, with black and marginalized communities at increased fatal risks from the virus.

While the virus spread rapidly across the world, in the United States, George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, was asphyxiated by four police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota, prompting national and international protests, many met by brutal militarised state security responses. Black Lives Matter and other anti-racist movements pointed to the legacy of police killing and brutality towards black men and women in the US and Canada, including the recent deaths of Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Breonna Taylor and Rodney Levi. Similar violent force in the past year was used against civilian protesters at anti-authoritarian rallies in Hong Kong, Algeria, Iraq, Bolivia, India, Nicaragua and Russia. Detailed claims of Australian soldiers killing

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Afghan civilians have surfaced. Military forces and militarised police forces have been used against civilians around the world and billions dedicated to military budgets, even as nations struggle to provide adequate medical resources to civilians in a global pandemic. Media images have shown nurses around the world wearing garbage bags as personal protection gowns and face masks they have reused or bought themselves while military and police forces show up to civilian protests with gas masks and shields.

As editors, we recognise that these events inevitably shaped why and how we wrote this book, and that we have experienced and witnessed them from a place of extreme privilege. We edited the book with a commitment to feminist politics and ethics. Given the global circumstances, we were aware that authors wrote their chapters while dealing with multiple pressures, including caring for and worrying about loved ones, home schooling children, and facing illness and unemployment. Feminist methods and ethics required us to acknowledge these circumstances and adjust our editorial practices, which included checking in with authors regularly, shifting deadlines, and offering different types of support to ensure that the chapters were not an additional burden during an already intense time. We tried to ensure that the process of writing this book, even in light of a pandemic, could be inspiring and supportive. In many of the conversations we had during this time, authors expressed a revived commitment to this book, and told us that in the current context, bold feminist solutions for ending war seem more important than ever. We agree.

Although this book was written at a time of intense global insecurity and uncertainty, it is grounded in hope. We seek to look boldly at the world and not simply critique what is, but propose what *could be*. This book aims to offer pathways forward to a more peaceful and equitable world. What we advance in this book are solutions (broadly conceived) for ending war and promoting sustainable peace. The purpose of the book is to inspire readers to consider the possibility of life without war and political violence, and to engage with a number of possible pathways to peace. It also asks readers to rethink what constitutes war and what peace is and how we can attain it.

This book does not rely on a single definition or ideal of feminism. Nor is feminism merely used to critique mainstream scholarship or accounts of war and political violence. In short, this is not a book promising peace if we just ‘add’ women. Instead, in each chapter the authors draw on their own expertise and experience to offer unique definitions and theorising of feminism and war, which shape their unique solution to ending war and political violence. These solutions include economic restructuring, arms abolition, centring Indigenous knowledge, memorialising war differently and incorporating the voices of diverse actors in seeking strategies for ending war. Ending war requires challenging complex structures, but the solutions found in this edition have risen to this challenge.

In addition to answering the overarching question, ‘How can we end war?’, some of the sub-questions that the book will address include: How might the stories we tell about war perpetuate or prevent it? What can we learn from feminist activism and feminist theory in order to prevent war and violence in the future? What are the obstacles to preventing war and violence and what signs exist that feminist work can remove or overcome these obstacles?

In this introduction, we do not present an extensive summary of each of the chapters. It would be difficult to provide a summary that would do justice to the richness of the chapters and we want to let the authors speak for themselves. In the remainder of the chapter, we outline the understanding of ‘feminism’, ‘ending’, ‘war’ and ‘solution’ that influenced our approach to editing this book. We also highlight the ways that contributing authors offer distinct understandings and theorisations of these same concepts. We encourage readers to engage with the diverse theories, definitions and solutions offered in the chapters that follow and consider the ways that the solutions might be complementary, overlapping and opposing.

#### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ‘FEMINIST’?

Feminists have long theorised the connections of gender and war, outlining how multiple relations of power are reproduced through war. They have also studied how the effects of war are intensely shaped by gender, race and class, with impacts that extend long into

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the so-called post-war periods. How individuals experience war, whether they might support or oppose war, and how they manage to survive and thrive in the 'post-war' period are shaped by gender, race, class and location. The contributors to this volume offer solutions that draw from a range of feminist, queer, Indigenous, and postcolonial theories. While we acknowledge and value the diverse understandings of feminism offered by the authors of this volume, it is important to clarify the approach to feminism that grounded our thinking in putting together the book.

We draw on bell hooks' definition of feminism, and her approach to addressing the connections between patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism and militarism. bell hooks describes feminism as 'a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression' (2014, 1). Throughout her work, she discusses 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' and uses the phrase 'to remind us continually of the interlocking systems of domination that define our reality' (1997, 7). For hooks, it is impossible and futile to study militarism in isolation from patriarchy, racism, and capitalism because they all 'function simultaneously' (1997, 7). This aligns with Carol P. Christ's work, which treats patriarchy as an 'integral system created at the intersection of the control of women, private property, and war – which sanctions and celebrates violence, conquest, rape, looting, exploitation of resources, and the taking of slaves' (Christ 2016, 216). Similarly Johan Galtung declared 'the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy' (cited in Combahee River Collective 1977). Rather than treating war as a confined political event that can be observed, predicted and studied in isolation, these approaches situate war within a complex system of patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism and militarism.

This understanding of feminism and the demand to consider these interlocking forms of oppression requires a departure from simplistic ideas that adding women to the study, practice, or analysis of war will necessarily lead to more peace. We do not believe that 'adding women and stirring' is sufficient to disrupt the interlocking systems of oppression and exploitation that perpetuate conflict and warfare across the globe. Women participate in, support, and benefit from war

and militarism in ways that some feminist peace scholarship does not acknowledge or account for. Assuming that electing more women, hiring more female soldiers, or generating a female-led foreign policy will lead to peace not only perpetuates a simplistic and binary understanding of women as inherently peaceful but also mystifies the ways that women contribute to current forms of war and militarism. Again, we draw on hooks, who disputes the assumption that women are agentless, and therefore inherently peaceful:

In keeping with sexist thinking, women are described as objects rather than subjects. We are depicted not as laborers and activists who, like men, make political choices, but as passive observers who have taken no responsibility for actively maintaining and perpetuating the current value system of our society which privileges violence and domination as the most effective tool of coercive control in human interaction, a society whose value systems advocate and promote war. (1995, 60)

We believe that feminist solutions for ending war must acknowledge the ways that women – particularly white women in positions of power – have benefited from war, imperialism and militarism.

Just as it is simplistic to assume that ‘adding more women’ will lead to peace, we do not assume that men are the sole source of war and militarism. While many acts of war and practices that perpetuate insecurity are led by men, we agree with hooks that ‘all men do not glory in war, that all men who fight in wars do not necessarily believe that wars are just, that men are not inherently capable of killing or that militarism is the only possible means of safety’ (hooks 1995, 59). Feminist solutions for ending war must consider the ways that war and militarism create conditions in which some men – particularly Brown and Black men – are treated as inherent threats and whose death and harm are all too often treated as inevitable if unfortunate ‘collateral damage’ to security operations.

Moving beyond an understanding of war as ‘man made’ and solvable by ‘more women’ opens space for the types of complex and hopeful solutions to ending war we seek. If war is understood as a practice embedded in patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism

and militarism, complex solutions are required to end war. It first requires that we rethink the inevitability and utility of war as well as the ways that war is an extension of the everyday forms of violence that have become acceptable and normalised in society. hooks makes clear how her approach to feminism requires radical rethinking and radical solutions to ending war and militarism: 'to fight militarism we must resist the socialisation and brainwashing in our children that teaches passive acceptance of violence in daily life, that teaches us we can eliminate violence with violence ...' (1995, 63). In addition, resisting war is not simply about condemning military operations. It requires that we take a close look at our own complicity in global practices that perpetuate the strong hold of militarism, capitalism, and colonialism. For example, white bourgeois women in the United States often benefit from imperialist conquest as consumers of widely available cheap commercial goods. Ending militarism requires examining our consumption patterns and then actively working towards wealth redistribution. Cynthia Enloe's (2004) examination of the militarisation of sneakers and the processes that lead to 'cheap labour' in many global factories reminds us that capitalism, imperialism, and militarism work in tandem, even outside spaces we consider to be 'war zones'. Women who oppose militarism must be willing to withdraw all support for war, 'knowing full well that such withdrawal necessarily begins with a transformation in our psyches, one that changes our passive acceptance of violence as a means of social control into active resistance' (hooks 1995, 63-4).

While reading this book, we encourage readers to consider the various ways that feminism is defined and theorised in this book. For example, in chapter 3, scholar and activist Sarai Aharoni maps both the power and perils of feminist peace activism. Aharoni distinguishes between 'women's politics' and 'feminist politics', explaining that there is no inherent 'peaceful' nature of women that motivates them to organise, but that lived realities have certainly influenced women's desire to seek alternative politics focused on peace. Aharoni shows that disagreements and failures can be productive and highlights ways that women peace organisers can create meaningful space for self-care and solidarity in their challenging work. In chapter 2, Heidi Hudson bridges a feminist ethics of care with African Ubuntu-inspired

feminisms to advocate taking collective responsibility for war. Rather than essentialising gendered roles or simplifying Ubuntu philosophy, Hudson demonstrates how mutual responsibility is a practice for all genders in creating conditions for peace and for ending conflict.

For some authors, the value or role of feminism is questioned in their solutions to end war. For example, in chapter 1 Jess Russ-Smith opens with an Indigenous vision of war and peace as a Wiradyuri woman. She challenges settler futurity and the idea that colonial dominance is inevitable. Russ-Smith centres Indigenous knowledge as a cosmology, not a 'tool' or 'lens' for Western feminists to engage with superficially. Eda Gunaydin offers another challenge to Western feminism in chapter 5, where she explores jineological theory and practices implemented by Kurdish women's liberation movements in her chapter. Gunaydin argues that Kurdish women articulate a feminism that is radically different from Western feminisms, particularly in the emphasis on anarchist and anti-capitalist ideals. In chapter 6, Cai Wilkinson acknowledges the tensions between queer and feminist theory and praxis, and offers a queer analysis of security practices. Drawing on examples and powerful testimonials, Wilkinson shows the ways that queer visions of security trouble the assumption of 'peaceful' and 'secure' everyday spaces such as border crossings, public bathrooms, and bedrooms.

#### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'WAR'?

Just as the chapters do not offer a unified definition of feminism, they also do not offer a singular conception of what constitutes 'war' or peace. As editors, we aim to identify common-sense ideas about war that persist in many Western societies, including that war is an inevitable, temporal, necessary political act. We ask readers to consider the politics of such mythologised ideas. We reject commonly held ideas about war, including the concept of war as politics by other means. We dispute that war is necessary, brave, useful. We reject the notion that war is always a final resort, after all other political options have been exhausted. In creating our own definition of war, we draw on Carolyn Nordstrom's (2004) approach to war as a complex and expansive political process, and her concept of 'vanishing points'. She

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defines vanishing points as ‘the points where the normative (what should be) intersects with reality (what actually is)’. She goes on to argue that research on war:

should illuminate both sides of this intersection: the ideals we hold as a society and the unfolding realities as people live them, regardless of how they might contradict our stated laws and values. In point of fact, research may uphold a division that considers only the normative, as if it were reality. That which contradicts normative ideals is ignored, and becomes invisible to formal analysis. (Nordstrom 2004, 163)

Vanishing points can be re-illuminated when we explore myths about war. These myths can be disrupted by using more complex definitions of war and violence, by speaking to different people with varied experiences about war, and by asking different questions about war.

Drawing from Nordstrom and hooks, we define war as a complex failure shaped by patriarchy, militarism, capitalism and white supremacy. War is a complex failure because war rarely achieves the political outcome for which it was declared, and the effects of war are unbounded and endlessly destructive. War is a complex failure because, rather than a calculated last resort, war is often hasty and reactionary. War is a career choice, a multi-billion-dollar industry, and a never-ending series of policies. War is a complex failure of human ethical and moral commitments to each other. War is a complex failure to create political solutions that would enhance the capacity for humans and animal species not only to thrive and survive, but also to live in a safe environment that is protected and respected. War is a complex failure situated within, and a product of, a patriarchal, white supremacist, capitalist and militarist system. Any solution to war must acknowledge and address this complexity.

In addition to naming war as a complex failure and rejecting key myths of war, we reject the idea of the unknowability of war. We reject the assumption that civilians must commit unrestricted support for war and soldiers in exchange for their presumed ignorance of the pain of war. It may be true that most Western citizens do not know the details of the activities done in their name in wars and occupation

overseas, but civilians in war zones *know* war, they experience it and have knowledge about war that matters. When war is treated as a political operation led by militaries, soldier experiences are fetishised and presumed to be the primary means to know and understand war. Furthermore, the public understands soldier experiences to be 'off limits' and private, largely as a result of gendered norms. 'Good soldiers' are constituted as stoic hyper-masculine heroes who should keep their stories and trauma deep within. At the same time, civilian experiences of war and insecurity are often cast as 'anecdotes' or context to war, rather than constituting a valid account of war.

We reject the idea that individual experiences of war are simply anecdotes to be superseded by data on civilian casualties, military budgets, and statistics. Stories and context matter. Solutions to war must account for these stories in order to address the complexity of war, and to acknowledge the experience of war. Such solutions will be radically different from current military strategies, which prioritise vague and technocratic plans of coercive credibility, balance of power, strategic defence, and mutually assured destruction. These strategies sustain war; they are not solutions and ways to peace.

We encourage readers to consider the implications of treating war as a complex failure. We also encourage readers to map the varying and complex definitions of war offered in this text. In chapter 7, Ray Acheson reminds us of the ever-present war that centres around the production of nuclear weapons and the metaphorical and physical violence associated with nuclear bombs and the nuclear industry. Nuclear war is not only the exchange of missiles but also a conflict over whose opinions, knowledges and experiences are credible in discussing the bomb. Acheson explains that current patriarchal, capitalist, militarist and colonialist systems are sustained in discourse on nuclear weapons. In chapter 1, Jess Russ-Smith focuses on 'war on Country', or the long-standing political project to colonise and erase Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing and being. Her conceptualisation of war breaks open traditional notions of war as combat between two uniformed institutions and helps us to recognise the ways that Indigenous lives have been subject to martial control. War, for Indigenous peoples, is ongoing and relentless. For many

Indigenous communities, the ongoing forms of everyday violence on people and country constitute war. In chapter 8, Yolande Bouka also considers war and intervention as extensions of colonial and imperial violence. Drawing on Black Feminist and anti-colonial thought, she asks readers to ‘reimagine the world as one where Black and Brown people’s lives matter’, and argues that considering the experiences of Black and Brown people – particularly women – would fundamentally challenge global justifications for war and intervention.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ‘ENDING’?

Feminists have long been critical of the temporality of wars and the assumption that peace ‘happens’ when formal war fighting stops. Ending wars, understood as complex failures, requires thinking outside the ‘official’ delineations of fighting and considering the ways that war and violence seep into the everyday. Ending war asks that we consider what is left in the rubble of violent practices and how to move forward from the ashes. In chapter 9, Sertan Saral considers the ways that the ends of wars have been memorialised and how these memorials serve to romanticise the war period while simultaneously erasing colonial violence on the lands in which the memorials are built. In chapter 10, Roxani Krystalli considers experiences of former female combatants in Colombia and the challenges they face in times of ‘peace’. For many of her interlocutors, war was not a traumatic black-box experience, but provided opportunities for friendship, meaning and authority. She considers the effects of ‘ending’ war on these women and their identity.

Imagining a world without war creates space for considering radically different ways of organising society. Rather than strategising about the cessation of formal wars, in chapter 11 Keina Yoshida proposes living in harmony with nature as a solution for peace. Yoshida suggests that the destruction of nature is a root cause and catalyst of many wars; therefore, to end war we must end the ecological domination and destruction of nature and reconceptualise our relationship to land, forests, rivers and oceans. In chapter 12, Carol Cohn and Claire Duncanson challenge the sustainability of ending war without adequate economic planning for peace. Cohn