

Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict
by Janie L. Leatherman

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The silenced voices of victims of sexual violence, regardless of context, represent an issue that must be continually challenged. This should be done in such a way as to make voices and experiences heard without fear or threat of stigmatisation, in order to begin to tackle the social issues and relations of power at work. This, however, is unfortunately not the reality for those who suffer the experience of sexual violence, particularly in conflict situations in countries of the global South. This issue is explored by Janie L. Leatherman in *Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict*, which offers a detailed and contextual analysis of the issue of sexual violence in conflict, whilst highlighting the suppression of the voices of those who are victimized. The text can be commended in particular for drawing attention to the micro level processes and outcomes of contemporary conflicts which are impacted upon by overarching structures of neoliberal globalization, global capitalism and hegemonic masculinities and patriarchy.

A concise and in-depth background and context to sexual violence is provided in chapter one which is well placed and a wonderful introduction to the issues the text will discuss. Issues such as consent, globalization and the taboo nature of sexual violence are highlighted and the chapter also makes the crucial assertion that ‘sexual violence does not occur in isolation’ (p.3), but is shaped by pre-existing socio-economic relationships and institutions. The text may be commended for the outstanding amount of background and context provided throughout. This is done through the use of case studies, drawing on examples such as the assaults carried out by the FDLR in the Eastern Congo, which aids in highlighting the harrowing reality and prevalence of sexual violence in times of conflict. Leatherman also draws from a wide range of sources which are evidenced in the substantial notes section at the end of the book, and also provides useful readings that may be referred to for further study.

The second chapter describes the changing nature of warfare, namely the threat to civilians and lack of civilian support for rebel groups in new wars. What this chapter lacks however is a deeper analysis of women's place in warfare and the notion of 'civilian' when applied to the lives of women in conflict and how this may be challenged theoretically and empirically.

An analysis of the deep rooted structural inequalities that are pre-existing and thus exacerbated in times of conflict are explored in chapter three, highlighting the gendered nature of sexual violence that makes women and girls disproportionately vulnerable. The author makes reference to the work of Michel Foucault (p.66), yet Foucault's theory is not sufficiently developed. A greater engagement with Foucault's work on techniques of domination that discipline and control women's bodies in various ways, and how this links to neoliberal strategies of governance, as discussed by Rose (1999), may have been useful. This may be said with particular reference to the idea of how victims of sexual violence in conflict are constructed as silenced subjects. The fourth chapter provides an insightful discussion on the notion of space and how this may also be considered gendered at times of conflict, when safe spaces cease to exist due to the pervasive, all-encompassing nature of sexual violence. This chapter may have benefited from a greater focus on traditional ideas of space with regards to the gendered separation of public/private, as the masculine public ultimately invades the feminine private sphere. This may have presented an opportunity to link the transformation of capitalist relations at the local level to the macro structures of global capitalism.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is presented in chapter five, which is used as a framework in order to explain the occurrence of sexual violence during times of conflict whilst providing a structural analysis. This chapter may have been better placed at the beginning of the text due to the emphasis on this argument. Engagement with theoretical work on masculinities such as that of Whitehead (2002), or more specifically, the concept of hegemonic masculinity and its relation to globalization as discussed by Connell (1995, 1998), may have been beneficial. Such engagement would allow the author to weave the concept throughout subsequent chapters, then present in a developed argument regarding the political economy of war. This chapter also provides a discussion of the global economy. However, greater links between hegemonic masculinity and economic globalization could have been

developed by discussing the ways in which this relationship disproportionately disadvantages women, as found in the work of Acker (2007).

Leatherman concludes with a discussion of the complexities involved in 'disciplining and punishing in a global economy' (p.148), highlighting that there is yet to be a solution to ending the silenced voices of victims of sexual violence in conflict. Attention is drawn to the difficulty of the application of universal human rights, and in particular, the international agencies and laws that attempt to implement effective punishment and safeguard victims of sexual violence. It is highlighted that such policies and resolutions have the tendency to present women and girls as passive victims who lack agency. Yet, unfortunately, Leatherman herself may also be criticized for presenting women in this way by failing to adequately discuss those women who are not victims and may be perpetrators themselves: thus silencing their voices. Accounts of their experiences are necessary in order to depict the newly created subjectivities in modern warfare during an era of neoliberal globalization, and how this may transform or reproduce gender regimes.

Overall, Leatherman's work may be useful in presenting the complex reality of sexual violence in armed conflict, as highlighted throughout the text with reference to detailed examples and case studies. However, Leatherman fails to adequately link this work to wider theoretical debates or sufficiently account for the negative impacts of global neoliberalism. This may have heightened understandings and given greater strength and sophistication to the arguments presented, whilst making a more novel contribution.

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