

WAR ECONOMY

Gendered Circuits of Violence and Capital

Edited by
Aida A. Hozic and Jacqui True

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Chapter 1

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Aida A. Hozic and Jacqui True

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TOWARDS A FEMINIST THEORY OF WAR ECONOMY

Aida A. Hozić and Jacqui True

We face an uncertain global context in which it is vital to understand the relationship between war and economic crises. New major wars have broken out, and conflict deaths are at their highest level since World War II. Sexual violence and gender-based targeting have become a crucial facet of 21st-century war fighting. They are manifest in explicit attacks on all aspects of social and sexual reproduction as well as bodies with the intent to oppress the enemy group (UN Security Council 2024).¹ Total global military expenditure reached \$2,443 billion in 2023, an increase of 6.8% in real terms from 2022. This was the steepest year-on-year increase since 2009.² The global political economy is increasingly becoming a *war economy* wherein economic growth, employment and political consensus depend on defence spending and military buildup.

The US military-industrial complex is alive and well stimulated by Russia's war in Ukraine, the Israel/Palestine conflict, deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region and in the latter context, and the de-risking of security-sensitive economic sectors. In Europe, calls for a pre-emptive war economy have come from the highest-ranking European Union (EU) politicians. The economies of Russia and Ukraine *de facto* operate as war economies with Russia's economy arguably resilient even in the face of wide-ranging sanctions (Fenton and Kolyandr 2025).³ Israel has been characterised as a techno-military marvel, exporting its defence and surveillance technologies to the rest of the world (Loewenstein 2023), while China has also expanded its range of dual-use technologies and bolstered defence research and innovation capacity. The development of autonomous weapons represents a qualitative departure and transcendence of the limits of previous wars (Bode and Huells 2018). Contemporary war zones and their targets are increasingly sites of experimentation and (machine) learning. Both Ukraine and Gaza have been described as laboratories of future warfare because of their reliance on new generations of

drones and AI targeting, respectively (Abraham 2023; Sukman 2024; Entous 2025; Frenkel and Odenheimer 2025). The weapons and algorithms they are generating now will make prospective wars even easier to fight as well as serve as a new source of economic growth and innovation (Shah and Kirchoff 2024).

Alongside these innovations in warmaking, we are witnessing the exodus of families from war zones and the destruction of social and health infrastructure. According to UNHCR (2024), there were 122.6 million displaced persons in the world in mid-2024, more than six times as many as in the early 1990s. Most of the displaced are women and children. The gendered distribution of harm is notable in Ukraine (Mathers 2020, this volume), in the targeting of hospitals and education institutions in Gaza (ni Aolain 2024) and in the wilful institutionalisation of “gender apartheid” in Afghanistan (True and Akbari 2024). The mass displacement and migration from the current and former war zones is funnelled into low-cost labour markets and global care chains (Hozic 2024a, 2024b), and various forms of lucrative gendered violence and exploitation including human trafficking and slavery (Caruana et al. 2020). These human processes are constitutive of the war economy.

Despite all this evidence of the connection between war and the economy, the reorientation of the global political economy around war has hardly been observed by scholars. Academic amnesia continues to hide the roots of capitalism in war finance (Sonenscher 2022). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, International Political Economy (IPE) and International Relations (IR) have not paid attention to shifts in economic production and social reproduction sectors to support war preparedness. Mona Ali (2023) has aptly called the reorientation of production and reproduction around war, “militarized adaptation.” Rather than analysing how war and the global economy are transforming one another, scholars have focused on conventional areas of research related to the war machine – industrial policy, green transition, technological change, and competition. Political economy analyses addressing the causes of violent conflict and insecurity, and international security analyses considering economic drivers and implications are still rare (True and Hozic 2020: 1195). Thus, IR and IPE disciplines continue to reinforce the outdated binary dichotomy between security and economic dynamics in their analysis of global politics (Kirschner 1998). Scholars of historical materialism have recognised the war economy as endogenous to capitalism, including its effects on the social reproduction usually associated with women’s unpaid or devalued labour (Bieler and Morton 2018). However, they tend to see Marx’s “hidden abode” as derivative of and subordinate to capitalist accumulation (Cammack and Gimenez 2024).

From a feminist perspective, there is an acute crisis of social reproduction exacerbated by rising geopolitical tensions previously related to the global financial crisis and now to globalised conflict and war preparedness (see also Hozic & True 2016).⁴ The crisis is rooted in women’s bodies and work and is not simply an epiphenomenon of capitalism’s perpetual crises. Social reproduction refers to the work in the family-household, market and state that is essential to maintaining and reproducing life (including biological reproduction, care work, and the

reproduction of communities and culture) (see Rai et al. 2013). The post-pandemic global political economic environment together with the wars in Ukraine and Gaza has led to volatility and uncertainty in global supply chains producing a cost-of-living crisis in many high-income countries. The remedies – the high interest rates, which have increased loan servicing, as well as the sanctions and war-induced food crises – have had a major impact on the global South. Their compound effect has aggravated the crisis of social reproduction, which manifests itself not only in diminishing growth (Baccaro et al. 2022) but also in declining birth and marriage rates, ageing populations and extreme labour shortages in the care sector across the world.⁵ This situation has given rise to extremist politics – advocating pro-natalist, anti-gender equality policies restricting women’s reproductive rights to shore up economic growth and future taxpayers, and anti-immigration and foreign aid policies as a response to domestic housing and other social infrastructure shortages (see Kuhar & Paternotte 2017).

Feminist political economists view the tensions between capitalist accumulation and social reproduction as co-constitutive, threatening the very ability of the world to sustain itself (Le Baron and Roberts, 2010). They observe how austerity policies and violent attacks on social reproduction and available infrastructure for social reproduction depend on location in the global political economy and have disproportionate effects on women and minoritised groups (Mezzadri et al. 2022; Hozic and True 2017). Moreover, they argue that these attacks have led to the depletion of social reproduction in many contexts referring to the harm caused when the outflow of resources for care work and maintaining life “exceeds the inflow of resources available to those engaged in it.” Such depletion is not simply a consequence of crisis but as Shirin Rai (2024) argues, it can be anticipatory, produced and aggravated by expectations of multiple, prospective environmental challenges and “man-made” disasters.

Feminist scholars of social reproduction are aware that a resolution to the crisis demands more extreme forms of state responses, such as incarceration (Le Baron and Roberts, 2010). However, they have not thus far analysed the war economy and role of state-led violence in the destruction – and regeneration – of the capacity for the social reproduction of life. Recent scholarly efforts to pluralise social reproduction only mention war and conflict in passing (Mezzadri et al. 2025). To address these gaps, this volume centres the role of war economies and peripheral wars in contemporary capitalism, both building on and expanding social reproduction theory.

In this chapter, we theorise the war economy from a feminist perspective, connecting scholarship on global political economy and social reproduction of life (Elias and Rai 2019) with that on war and gendered violence (True 2012). First, we explore conventional typologies of “war economy” and how the concept has evolved across various contexts and scholarly literatures. Second, we advance a theoretical framework for investigating and explicating the war economy as a manifestation of temporal, spatial, and scalar gendered circuits of violence and capital

in and outside recognised “war/conflict zones” (True and Hozic 2020). We explain why we highlight circuits of violence and capital and illustrate the analytical utility of the theory through its application to contemporary situations where conflict and crises of social reproduction collide. We stress the interconnected nature of war economies within and across global regions and situations of militarisation, conflict, and negative peace. Third, extending our theoretical argument, we propose that feminist methodologies are essential for studying the war economy and its widespread circuits, providing some examples from the following chapters. Finally, we outline the structure of the volume and its contribution to scholarship that seeks to understand as well as support social change in the world.

Defining war economy

There are varying definitions of “war economy.” Simply put, it is defined as all economic activity occurring during war or any situation where an entire society is organised for war with all its socio-economic goals and activity subordinated to fighting war. The term has existed since the 1930s and was prevalent during the Cold War. At this time, “military Keynesianism” became a “colossal balancer,” the preferred solution to the inherent instability of private investment (Barker 2022). Discussion of the war economy declined in the period of anticipated post-Cold War peace dividend but resurfaced in face of the 9/11 attacks in the United States. In the aftermath of 9/11, James K. Galbraith (2001, 2004) argued that the deleterious economic impact of the terror attacks and the security response on the US economy made the situation akin to a wartime economy.⁶ As the global “War on Terror” expanded, there were occasional references to the United States as a permanent war economy (Duncan and Coyne 2013), a concept originally developed by Edward Sard in the 1940s (van der Linden 2018). Another major uptick in mentions of “war economy” occurred in 2015 with the civil war in Syria and the rise of Islamic State, and then again starting in 2020, prompted by Russia and its military buildup. Parallels with a war economy were also observed during the COVID-19 pandemic when states used emergency “war powers” to procure protective gear, secure lockdowns and maintain essential workers (Gibson-Fall 2021). In the last several years, political leaders from France to Egypt and Argentina have been discussing the war economy to address the post-pandemic economic crisis and security threats by advocating for greater defence investment. Alex de Waal (2025) has linked the resurgence of contending war economies, especially in BRICS countries, to the return of famines. Europe’s plans for Ukraine’s recovery are linked to the idea that the country should be armed to its teeth and turned into a “steel porcupine” (Economist 2025), a metaphor that seems to capture the aspirations of most global leaders concerned about rising global instability.

Scholars commonly distinguish between two types of war economy: State-led war economies often associated with great powers and anti-state or non-state “warzones” frequently located in the periphery where states are either re-made

or destroyed. The first type of a war economy is a state-driven top-down project that subordinates economic activity – especially in manufacturing, research and development – to military needs. Usually conceived as government-supported production for military defence/victory, today's calls for revitalising war economies mostly look to the precursors of the World War II military buildup or the development of the military-industrial complex during the Cold War. Both examples are closely related to the already mentioned “military Keynesianism” since state expenditure on defence sector could also stimulate demand. Conceptually, there are some affinities between analyses of state-led war economy and critical analyses of the role of the state in capitalism (Babić 2023; Alami and Dixon 2024), including its increasingly coercive and repressive practices associated with authoritarian neoliberalism (Bruff and Tansel 2020) and carceral state (Le Baron and Robinson 2010).

The second type of “war economy” or “warzone economy” associates it with the criminal and illegal practices of non-state armed actors in times of war when lawlessness and disorder prevail (Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Turkmani 2018: 54). The wars in the 1990s – especially in the former Yugoslavia and in central Africa – generated major academic and policy debates about “new wars” and their economic models (Kaldor 1999, 2013). These peripheral war economies can encompass the extractive, coercive strategies of non-state armed groups, and the coping strategies of civilians. Civilians too may use violence since it often becomes an entrenched way of allocating and distributing resources during war.

Critics of war economy note its propensity to create distortions in the marketplace. Through its economically parasitic output, the war economy generates inflationary pressures (Melman 1972). It diverts resources from other uses that could improve the general standard of living (Duncan and Coyne 2013). By contrast, supporters of a war economy highlight its positive economic externalities. They include employment guarantees, state investment and subsidies, and stabilisation of production via assured domestic demand. In principle, states aim to avoid trading off between guns and butter seeking instead to bolster economic activity via the use of their military power (Poast 2019). “Bidenomics,” the US turn towards industrial policy and infrastructure building under President Josph Biden (2020–2024), took a decisive turn towards war economy once it ran into political roadblocks, especially on social spending (Elrod 2024; Tooze 2024). Even in peripheral conflicts, researchers have noted that a war economy can create opportunities for profit-making via illicit activities but also stimulate development of novel coping strategies by different local actors (Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Turkmani 2018).

Departing from either type of war economy, it is important to highlight that gender relations have always been deeply and causally implicated in the evolution and entrenchment of war economies. Historically, state-led war economies were closely related to protectionism and mercantilism, and pro-natalist family policies (Federici 2012; Feinberg 2006). Any discussion of guns vs (or and) butter cannot but have consequences for expenditures on services that crucially

affect women's roles and demands for their (unpaid) labour. Wars and war economy redistribute resources, sometimes drawing women into the labour force in greater numbers. Not surprisingly, contemporary media commentaries on emerging war economies in Europe and the United States allude to the return of Rosie the Riveter (Roussi, Politico 2023). And yet gender is hardly ever explicitly mentioned in discussions about the transformation of national and global economies to prepare for or sustain war.

Feminist perspectives on war economy

Feminist approaches capture a broader phenomenon of “war” than the two dominant definitions, although they have rarely engaged with the concept of war economy directly despite its significant – and varied – gendered effects. A notable exception is V. Spike Peterson (2008, 2016) whose taxonomy of coping, combat, and criminal/informal economies has informed several chapters in this volume. Similarly, Cynthia Enloe, in her multiple works, has always insisted on conceptualising war as encompassing social and economic activity outside of – as well as during – conflict, highlighting militarisation as an everyday social process fuelling war (Enloe 1990, 2000).

These feminist conceptualisations provide an entry point for a gendered analysis of the war economy. Material and ideological preparations for war are marked by the quest for “hard” rather than human security. They tend to reinforce gender hierarchies by promoting militarised masculinities, leading to the erasure of women and devaluation of any activities considered “feminine” (Peterson 2008). Gendered divisions of labour and social reproduction sustain and mobilise fighters in civil conflicts (Davies and True 2024; Hedstrom 2017). And as feminist political scientists have observed, war can be a rupture and catalyst for expanding women's rights and political agency due to “changes in the political elite and dominant economic interests” (Tripp 2023: 926; Hughes 2009). In the African continent, Aili Tripp (2015) argues that women's political representation worldwide has expanded more rapidly after conflict, crisis and revolution, especially after decolonial wars of independence. As a result, in some contexts women have been empowered by war and the war economy.⁷ But contingency has always played a role in women's improved representation, which has not usually endured.

In this volume, we centre the war economy as the turn to and/or acceptance of war to address political and economic crises. Our innovation is basic – we theorise war + economy to expose how war production and gendered circulation of violence are increasingly viewed as solutions to stagnant economic and population growth. But we also highlight how crises of social reproduction, especially in the world's largest economies, drive the current push towards the development and entrenchment of state-led and/or state-sanctioned war economies.

There is no doubt that the quest for economic domination is driving war and conflict in many contexts worldwide. Finance capital scrambles for resources

through “shock doctrine” military intervention and rebuilding of former war zones. As we have seen in previous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is a massive benefit to private capital including defence contractors from war activity.⁸ Yet, from a feminist perspective, we also observe that the years of austerity politics and the shock of the COVID pandemic, have brought the global care economies – and their providers – to the breaking point (Mezzadri, 2022; Tanyag, 2025). Deeply unequal and gendered care labour tends to depend on women and immigrants (Hozic and True 2017; Dowling 2021). Peripheral wars and climate change-related disasters have been washing refugees up on the shores of the world’s wealthiest economies, creating a reserve labour army while feeding anti-immigrant sentiments. Combined, demographic decline and dependence on migrant labour and care feed grievances that are fanned by anti-gender and anti-immigration populist movements. These political dynamics strengthen conservative and far-right political forces, which revolve around the “great replacement theory.” They inadvertently weaken the social reproduction model, which has for decades been reliant on surplus population displaced by wars fought elsewhere.

We recognise that the war economy has many guises and may look different in diverse contexts at different levels of “preparedness.” It differs in countries that fight wars at a distance and those that are currently war zones, compared with others that are in a constant state of “readiness.” It includes activities supporting war in other continents such as “proxy wars” as well as the “war on drugs” in the context of US foreign policy and the deployment of militaries domestically for public order/security as in cases in Latin America, and, under Trump administration, in the US. Feminist analysis aims to connect these sites theoretically and empirically, eschewing the methodological nationalism that persists in IR and IPE (Hozic and True 2016). It shows how combat and coping, formal and shadow economies are part of the same war economy (Peterson 2008, 2016; Nordstrom 2004). These frontline economies involve labour supporting the war effort. While men are often most of the fighters, the context of war and violence intensifies the depletion of women’s lives as they labour to meet the needs of their households and communities (Rai et al. 2019). Such depletion heightens women’s vulnerability to gender-based violence in conflict situations and erodes their coping capacities. For example, in Russia’s war in Ukraine, “continued shelling fosters an environment of emotional exhaustion, prolonged stress and displacement,” all of which contribute to increased gender-based violence (UNFPA 2025). War economy as a concept brings together all these varying types of war activity not only production through arms and the defence industry but also through people, care economy, peacekeeping and humanitarian industry, energy sector, and so on (Jennings 2014).

Much of IR scholarship views recent wars as isolated events that the international community has benevolently sought to contain and resolve. It does not examine these conflict-resolution efforts as part of an economy sustained by persistent wars. Ironically, building the international legal scaffolding to safeguard civilians has humanised wars while also making them more acceptable and

more lucrative for some (Moyn 2021). These wars have also become the terrain for various protections of civilians and normative policy agendas, such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Such agendas seek to ensure the inclusivity of protection, while falling short of challenging war production in the world's major powers and providing alternatives to arms exporting.

While not simply an agenda in service of great powers or interventions, WPS is a contested and evolving result of a bargain between states, both liberal and global South states, and feminist movements. However, its often top-down implementation has tended to address the humanitarian consequences of wars, but not their root causes (Meger 2016). WPS has also failed in its strategy to advance women's participation in peace processes to expedite war endings (Akbari and True 2024; Olivius et al. 2022). Efforts to build protections for women and address gendered insecurities are increasingly ineffective as we see, for instance, in the upward trend in sexualised violence perpetrated against civilians in the face of 15 years of international efforts to prohibit its use as a 'weapon of war'.⁹ Moreover, when it comes to economic recovery after wars, women are frequently not deemed essential to be included, compensated or resourced for their peacebuilding efforts (Duque et al. 2023; Davies and True 2022).

In the next part, we introduce the framework of gendered circuits of violence and capital to further develop our feminist approach to war economy, examining how it operates in diverse settings, both in war zones and zones of apparent peace and stability.

The framework of gendered circuits

The framework of gendered circuits draws on feminist political economy and security studies analysis to make visible the gendered connections between economic change and wars that are neglected in conventional approaches to conflicts and post-conflict recovery. As we argued in the previous section, there is literally no mention of gender in discussions about the state-driven war economies although women may be mentioned in peripheral war economies but usually only as victims of the criminalised networks that run them rather than as potential builders of sustainable peace (Chinkin and Kaldor, 2013). Gendered circuits of violence highlight the dynamic relation between plural locales through the violent circulation of people and capital. Historically, as mentioned above, peripheral wars produced surplus populations who filled the ranks of the much-needed care workers and contributed to the population growth in stagnant "First World" economies. That model is now reaching its political limits and is being replaced by state-led war economies. By focusing on the feminised and racialised bodies that move because of displacement from conflict and gendered violence and circuits of capital investment, we can demonstrate complex interconnections between these different models of war economies.

Gendered circuits capture three dimensions of the patterns of violence, highlighted by feminist analysis: First, the circuit that connects different types of violence including physical, economic, psychological and discursive or symbolic violence that may co-occur and compound each other, especially in situations of armed conflict and war production. Second, the circuit of violence across temporalities – from the precursors of war in everyday, normalised violence to the outbreak of war, and in transitions from conflict to peace and beyond. Third, the circuits of capital across territories at war or not – from households, factories and supply chains to borderlands to war zones.

The first and second circuits are often referred to in feminist conflict and sociological studies as a “continuum of violence.” Such a continuum of sexual and gender-based violence has been found to exist across the life course of women and girls as well as before, during and after conflict (Kelly 1987; Cockburn 2004). With the circuits concept, we aim to incorporate these observations of continuities in the patterns of violence. However, we also seek a framework that analyses how different experiences of violence are materially connected through the social relations of production and reproduction or along global supply and care chains that connect high-, middle- and low-income countries and regions, and fragile, conflict-affected and stable, prosperous settings.

Our approach to gendered circuits cuts across and dynamically relates the two types of war economy: both powerful and/or strong states invested in defence and extractivism, and fragile states dependent on the production stimulated by war and illicit trade. With the circuits concept, we seek to break down binary understandings of war and peace, conflict and post-conflict, global North and South to investigate how the violence of armed conflict and war are enabled by the violence of structural inequality embedded in movements of arms/weapons, capital, technology, and people through both migration and humanitarianism.

Documenting and analysing gendered circuits exposes the global reliance on war not only through state-led military-industrial complexes or the financialisation of military endeavours but through processes of social reproduction, and on (women’s) bodies that labour. The multi-scalar war economy depends on circuits of physical and structural violence linking the centres and margins of the global political economy. The destruction of non-capitalist societies through war, for example, provides new territory for capitalist expansion and investment. The war economy drains resources from social reproduction of life and labour through targeted cuts to education, health, and care sectors and informal household economies with the aim of expanding markets for efficiency and capital gain.

Mediated by sanctions, militarisation, geopolitical pressures, and aspirations, war economies anchor and amplify existing austerity policies as well as measures aimed at subordinating women to traditional family values, household work, and motherhood. Pro-natalist politics also lurk in the background of re-nationalised growth models and militarised techno-fantasies (Slobodian, 2024). In former and contemporary war zones such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liberia and Guatemala,

and Ukraine and Gaza, war economies extend backwards and forwards in time, with control over resources, material and institutional, enabling violent masculinities and extreme forms of population governance and/or extermination.

By following the bodies that labour in the sites of global capitalism's expansion, in this volume, we seek to expose the gendered dynamics of these circuits of violence and capital that prime societies for conflict (Hozic 2021). We can see, for example, how circuits of violence are manifest through the growth and diffusion of this security industry worldwide. Mostly male soldiers trained for warfighting who morph into peacebuilders in fragile settings and then become part of the massive, growing private security industry (Kruck and Schneider 2017). Similarly, logistics networks and civilian workers who sustain daily operations of overseas military interventions link the geopolitical manoeuvres of great powers to the intimate politics of transnational households (Chua et al. 2018; Moore 2019; Khalili 2021). Gendered structural inequality is produced and reinforced through these circuits of capital and labour across zones of war and relative peace.

We argue that the upshot of the war economy is the continual generation of new forms of feminised poverty during and after war. Feminised poverty is pervasive in Ukraine because of Russia's invasion, in Taliban-led Afghanistan after the withdrawal of Western powers and the institutionalisation of gender apartheid, and in Myanmar and Gaza, where widespread military bombing of hospitals and education institutions has disproportionately harmed women and children, to name just a few examples. In the next part, we suggest that studying state-led or peripheral war economy in myriad contexts requires feminist methodologies.

Feminist methodologies for studying the war economy

Feminist ways of knowing have foresight and criticality when it comes to violence, conflict, and war. In many conflict-affected settings, we notice the ability of women to literally see the wars coming since they are often responsible for everyday survival in families and communities. Women are hyper-alert to events on the ground and pick up signals through neighbourhoods and community networks that others (including those in power) ignore. Early warning signs are virtually built into feminist perspectives on war and security (Enloe 2000). Ontologically, we seek to break down boundaries between war and peace. We aim to demonstrate how gendered violence is a pattern and a lived experience across different economies, conflict zones, and through time. Such an approach to building knowledge contrasts with the usual presentation of economic and/or contemporary wars as discrete events, caused by site-specific vulnerabilities and institutional weaknesses within or between states (Sylvester 2013; Clift et al. 2025). Moreover, feminist political economy analysis aims to reveal the "invisible" aspects of contemporary capitalism including its dependence on perpetual crises and wars. While this perspective may be shared with scholars influenced by theories of uneven and combined development (Bieler and Morton 2018), feminist political economy is less

wedded to the state as an object of analysis. We emphasise the cascading nature of wars and crises in the post-Cold War period by demonstrating their interconnectedness through weapon, technology, and people flows.

This volume includes feminist perspectives on war economy, adopting different methodological approaches. The chapters are case studies, which rely on ethnographic, qualitative research and/or interpretive methods, but all are guided by the key principles of feminist methodology to make the invisible visible and to highlight gendered and racialised structures that perpetuate violence across time and space. The chapters eschew methodological nationalism in studying war economy. They emphasise instead its relational and intersectional aspects, which connect war + economy and zones of war and peace: This feminist analysis interrogates the subordination of social reproduction to war production in myriad contexts and its deleterious effects on people of different age, gender, ethnic and racial backgrounds, employment, and socio-economic status.

Outline of the volume

In this book, we aim to develop and advocate for feminist perspectives on war economies. The volume is thematically organised around circuits of violence – their different types, their protracted time horizon, and their spatially expansive reach. The case studies connect to the wider global political economy in line with the concept of gendered circuits, which captures the patterns of individual, structural, and political violence as well as the transnational and temporal continuities of violence in the war economy. Parts I–III of the book are structured as follows:

I Gendered circuits: Continuums

The first part of the volume explores continuums of individual, structural, and political violence. The case studies in this part show how different types of violence and geopolitical tensions and pressures co-occur and compound each other in war economy settings. In the opening chapter, Chapter 2, Anna Stavrianakis makes the case for increased scholarly attention to arms trade as a key node in global circuits of violence and vector of global war economies. By connecting the economy of war preparation to violence in war zones and asymmetries in the global arms trade, she seeks to make connections between violence within and between societies as well as the connections between economic and physical violence. In Chapter 3, Daniela Philipson Garcia addresses the case of Mexico, where militarisation drives criminal wars, also known as the “war on drugs,” and at the same time intensifies human rights violations, gendered inequalities, and gendered violence. Her chapter shows the continuum of inter-personal, structural and state violence and how war economy policies dismantle social infrastructure, further exacerbating the violence against women and marginalised Indigenous communities including widespread femicide and disappearances of women. In Chapter 4, Asma Abdi analyses the way Iranian

state pursues war and militarisation – under the label of “resistance economy” – as solutions to overlapping political, economic, and geopolitical crises induced by the US sanctions. The chapter bridges temporally and spatially different forms of gendered violence that occur in the shadow of mutually reinforcing regimes of international sanctions and the Iranian state’s war economy. Abdi highlights how reproductive economies bolster a patriarchal gendered division of labour. As a result, Abdi argues that matters of social reproduction, such as the age of marriage, women’s productive and reproductive roles, and biological reproduction, have emerged as key sites of the state’s coercion.

2 *Gendered circuits: Temporalities*

The second part of this book is focused on circuits of violence as they travel through time, across different temporalities before, during, and after wars. The case studies in this part show the continuity between precursors of war in everyday, normalised violence enabled by the war economy to the outbreak of war – and vice versa – as gendered violence persists in transitions to and from war and peace and beyond. Thus, in Chapter 5, Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic, Denisa Kostovicova, and Marsha Henry analyse the epidemic of gender-based violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where decades after the war’s end, the entrenched war economy still finds its outlet. Their chapter challenges the distinctions often made between war and post-war economies, highlighting instead the ongoing re-ordering of economy and society through violent extraction and control over resources, which then perpetuates gendered circuits of violence and manifests itself in femicide. In Chapter 6, Jenny Mathers investigates Ukraine and the contradictions inherent to the war effort, considering Russia’s invasion and demands of international donors to privatise the economy and relinquish control to foreign interests. By drawing on insights from feminist security studies and feminist political economy, Mathers explores how these contradictory pressures undermine the state’s support for the very women’s health and community workers upon whom the state relies in its continued war effort. In Chapter 7, Iratxe Perea Ozerin explores the long shadow of the Global Financial Crisis and austerity politics in Southern Europe and the ways that austerity is being securitised through militarisation, defence spending and emerging war economies. In Chapter 8, Carol Cohn and Claire Duncanson question the role of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in post-war settings. The IFIs, as Cohn and Duncanson demonstrate, stimulate recovery of economy rather than recovery of societies after wars, frequently anchoring that recovery in extractivism of local resources and thus exacerbating the crisis of social reproduction. An alternative approach to economic recovery, one that would privilege care – and the infrastructure that supports it – could much more effectively rebuild lives damaged by war and create conditions for sustainable peace.

3 *Gendered circuits: Movements*

The third part of this book explores the violence and capital movements across territories from households to borderlands to conflict zones. The chapters

in this part highlight how various spaces of social reproduction in different settings are drawn into the same global circuits of violence. Daniela Lai, in Chapter 9, revisits Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the neglect of gendered justice continues to produce insecurities in households and across the region. The gendered circuits of violence produced by neoliberal economic reforms and still connected to wartime political economy are now extended into the post-pandemic crisis of care and livelihoods, compounded by ecological and geopolitical crises. In Chapter 10, Elliott Dolan-Evans simultaneously confronts the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. Deploying everyday feminist political economy analysis, Dolan-Evans focuses on energy as a resource that is being fought over in wars but also as a resource used to manage (and extinguish) entire populations. Finally, in Chapter 11, Elisabeth Prügl, Raksha Gopal, and Luisa Lupo re-conceptualise the relationship between social reproduction and violence in the context of the emerging war economies. By analysing the multiple meanings of gendered circuits of violence, they follow the flows and movements of violence through different arteries, focusing more specifically on those of global capitalism, transnational biopolitics and colonial epistemes of mastery. They conclude by arguing that social reproduction is a powerful lens for “identifying and interpreting often ambivalent experiences of people living in war economies.” Their chapter enables us to acknowledge that the war economy involves “both life-making and reproducing violence.”

Conclusion

The feminist conceptualisation of the war economy as a product of economic and security crises is unique. In this chapter that frames the volume on war economy, we argue that gendered circuits of violence and capital are organising principles of the contemporary global political economy. War and conflict are no longer in abeyance but are increasing globally. Feminist political economy analysis, focusing on gendered circuits, dispels the hope that conflict can be contained in the periphery of the global political economy. Feminist analysis in this chapter and this volume addresses the world’s current predicament, connecting increasing conflicts, disruptions to supply chains, trade, and sustainable economies and their harmful impacts on everyday life and human security within and across regions. Countries depend on migrant workers for care and life support, while global trade and production networks depend on the unfettered circulation of bodies that labour and do not just supply parts. Ending war and breaking down gendered circuits of violence and capital therefore does not mean stopping the flow of bodies but rather ensuring their safety and dignity everywhere.

Alternatives to the current war economy-primed international order are vital. Demilitarising economies will be essential for delivering economic and social justice for the world’s peoples, especially for women. Austerity and pro-natalist policies associated with the turn to war economy have been shown to negatively

impact women's economic livelihoods while attacking their human rights to bodily integrity, to employment, to freedom of speech and association, among others. Throughout the 'developing world', changes in consumption patterns in the global North and disruptions in global supply chains have deepened existing gender inequalities. In the 'developed world' Women are no longer willing to become unpaid family workers or housewives despite the far-right "trad wives" trend. Probably the most significant trend over the last half-century is the political and economic empowerment of women. Demographic decline in some parts of the world is a reproductive strike by women who refuse to be mothers and reject marriage and the subservience that it often comes with. Although women are not a homogeneous group, they are among the most educated worldwide and have entered most professions and institutions holding power across regions and countries, including the military. To promote recovery from war and the prevention of future conflict, societies must harness both women's and men's human capacities. Yet economic policies around the world typically privilege marketisation and privatisation of natural resources, physical infrastructure and foreign investment opportunities that overall benefit men's jobs, incomes, and assets more than women's. Countries need to invest in wellbeing economies that prioritise the replenishment of social, health, and care infrastructure and education to support inclusive, gender-equal, and knowledge-based economies that can integrate immigrants, displaced people, and war veterans.

Notes

- 1 In 2024, the UN Secretary-General's Security Council report showed a 50% increase in the use of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence (CRSV) by conflict parties.
- 2 <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2024/global-military-spending-surges-amid-war-rising-tensions-and-insecurity>
- 3 Both Russia and Ukraine have been secretive in reporting of their losses, and the impact of the war on Russian economy is very difficult to estimate. Some analysis indicates that economic downturn is quite severe. See Cooper (2025).
- 4 With important exceptions, Abrahamsen & Williams 2007; Blanchard et al. 1999; Homolar 2010.
- 5 McKinsey (2025) published an exceptionally alarming demographic report, predicting that populations in some major economies will fall 20–50% by 2100.
- 6 The events of 9/11 had a negative impact on economic sectors related to travel and leisure and led to a decline in consumer spending at the same time as defence/security spending increased.
- 7 For instance, in the communist Soviet Union, which suffered massive losses of men during World War II, women continued to be included in the post-war recovery and Cold War economy (see Alexievich 2018).
- 8 The Cost of War Project (2023), which started with Iraq war and then continued with Afghanistan war, counted the cost of war to the American public, but not its benefit to the American private sector.
- 9 The UN Secretary-General's report to the UN Security Council (2024) report showed a 50% increase in the use of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence by conflict parties.

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