

7-7-2022

Book Review: *Armed Conflict, Women and Climate Change*

Shelly Clay-Robison
George Mason University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/gsp>

Recommended Citation

Clay-Robison, Shelly (2022) "Book Review: *Armed Conflict, Women and Climate Change*," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*: Vol. 16: Iss. 1: 137–139.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.16.1.1896>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol16/iss1/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

Book Review: *Armed Conflict, Women and Climate Change*

Erratum

An updated version has been uploaded on July 13, 2022 to reflect the correct name of the author.

Book Review: *Armed Conflict, Women and Climate Change*

Shelly Clay-Robison
George Mason University
Fairfax, Virginia, U.S.A.

Armed Conflict, Women and Climate Change
Jody M. Prescott
New York, Routledge, 2019
268 pages; Price: \$46.95 Paperback

Reviewed by Shelly Clay-Robison
Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution, George Mason University

Jody M. Prescott joins a burgeoning body of literature seeking to analyze how military organizations operationalize a Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, and how climate change impacts both military missions and the lives of civilians living in conflict zones. In *Armed Conflict, Women and Climate Change*, Prescott investigates concepts of sex and gender in armed conflict, the link between climate change and armed conflict, and argues that military organizations should use the lenses of both overlapping issues when planning their missions, particularly when considering civilian harm and protection.

The book's intended audience includes those studying and researching international relations, development and security, sustainability issues, gender studies, and international law. I also recommend that students and scholars of military doctrine, and, in particular, The United States Army Training and Doctrine Command and others responsible for writing doctrine, as well as scholars of international humanitarian law and war studies, consider the concepts and issues Prescott discusses. Prescott, a lecturer teaching environmental law at the University of Vermont, recognizes the relationship between realistic, relevant training and doctrine, and has seen the need for it first-hand through his experience as a military attorney in the U.S. Army for twenty-five years. Working internationally in operational, training, and educational settings in the military, Prescott had the opportunity to see how necessary recognizing the links between armed conflict, the experiences of women and girls, and climate change is to mission success, and how those links can be operationally significant.

The main goal of the book is to argue for military doctrine that incorporates a gender perspective, with a focus on the lives of women and girl civilians, while also taking into consideration the impact of climate change in conflict situations. Prescott argues that when gender analyses are conducted properly by military organizations, they should look at how host nations distribute power between women and men, how different genders contribute to operational security, and how a gender mix can be used to engage with actors on the ground. He also recognizes that unless these analyses consider the relationship between women and climate change, they will miss critical information that provides a clearer picture of the operational environment. Consequently, if these analyses are conducted and incorporated, he contends that they will lead to more effective missions and ostensibly peace and stability in the region.

It has been more than two decades since the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325, which affirms the role of women in violence prevention and in building peace and calls on parties to conflict to take special measures in preventing gender-based violence during conflict. With UNSCR 1325 in mind, the book's nine chapters are divided into three sections with the first three chapters in section one discussing the intersection of armed conflict, women, and climate change. Chapter 1 focuses on armed conflict and gender through the lens of UNSCR 1325. Using short case studies as examples, this chapter calls for a gendered

analysis in conflict situations if the goals are peace and human security. Chapter 2 moves to address gender and climate change and how they impact military operations, while emphasizing that unless these issues are considered and discussed specifically in doctrine and strategy, important resources may be allocated elsewhere. Chapter 3 examines the relationship between climate change and armed conflict and makes a case for why military organizations should consider their own impact on environmental degradation, and how climate change adds complexity to conflict situations, which is particularly hard on women and girls.

Prescott recognizes that doctrine influences norms within the military, thus the second set of chapters centers around a comparative analysis of documents, training, and strategies used by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Kingdom (U.K.), the United States (U.S.), and Australia, and their relationships to a gender perspective and climate change. While Prescott recognizes that NATO's strategic-level documents have progressed over time with regards to gender and recognition of climate change and will likely influence member states and their norms, there is still uneven progress. When it comes to doctrine and non-kinetic operations, or those that do not require security, and also in kinetic doctrine, there is little consideration of gender. Australia, however, is praised as embracing the goals of UNSCR 1325 and embedding gender considerations into review criteria of new doctrine. The chapters focused on the U.K. and the U.S. note that while some gender considerations have been made in civilian protection operations, hierarchically across the structures there is much need for shifting norms related to gender and to considering how gender is relevant to a mission. The size and complexity of these organizations should be taken into consideration, and Prescott points to where doctrine and strategy can continue to improve in this area.

The final chapters consider gender and international humanitarian law (IHL) and the ways that IHL reinforces traditional ideas of gender. These ideas are based in "male-normative" concepts that inherently see women and girls as victims, and while IHL provides protection to women, these patriarchal notions are steeped in inequality. Prescott ends by outlining pragmatic ways military organizations can incorporate gender considerations and the effects of climate change into doctrine and strategy. He warns that not doing so risks not only the mission, but also their political leaders and civil societies.

The book's cover image is a striking stock photo taken in rural India and depicts three women in bright pink and red clothing with four girl children at their feet. The women stand at what is presumably a well, set in a stark and sandy landscape and they look to be drawing water up in metal cisterns by hand. Due to its nature as a stock photograph, it is unclear whether the women gave consent for their image to be used as representative of the effects of climate change and armed conflict. For those readers who use this book in a classroom setting, the cover image provides an excellent topic for group discussions on these issues. When using stock photographs of people in violent conflict situations, particularly those in the Global South, it creates a visualization for the reader of who the victims of conflict and climate change are and what they look like. This can reinforce a problematic Global North worldview, which does not always include local perspectives and considerations of the conflict situation. While it was likely not the intention of the author or photographer, an image like this can also reinforce colonial stereotypes of people in the Global South, imagining them as constant victims in need to saving. This type of thought exercise would also benefit military personnel and students of war. How do we visualize and conceive of civilians in conflict areas, and how might those conceptions perpetuate violence?

While Prescott warns against drawing hasty conclusions regarding how military organizations approach an issue based on its doctrine alone, he uses case studies illustrating where doctrine and strategy have effectively used gender considerations and also where they need to be better incorporated. He is also critical of military institutions themselves when it comes to normative approaches to gender and to the low percentages of women on active duty. While this book digs down into why militaries do not consistently use gender and climate change as lenses when writing doctrine and developing strategy, he uses the case studies to show how norms and values can change. While it is not within the book's objectives, a critical

feminist analysis of strategy and doctrine is the next step needed to enhance the literature base and influence doctrine and operations. Readers would also benefit from a discussion on the intersection of the three complex, but very intertwined main themes that can go beyond “mission success.”

At the risk of being cynical, it is a tall order to hope that militaries will effectively write and incorporate gender-mainstreaming into their doctrines and procedures. Their roots lie in hierarchical, patriarchal paradigms that are still present in organizational norms and values and these will be difficult to dismantle and reimagine. However, if Prescott’s work is any indication of shifting worldviews and different conceptions of operational success, there is much to hope and work for. Recognizing the increased harm women and girls face during armed conflict and under the stresses from climate change, connecting high level doctrine with lower-level operations and actions on the ground, and promoting the goals of UNSCR 1325, are critical and necessary steps in writing better and more holistic military doctrine and strategy.