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## Book Review: Women, Insecurity, and Violence in a Post-9/11 World

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## **Women, Insecurity, and Violence in a Post-9/11 World.<sup>1</sup>**

Reviewed by Lindsey Bressler<sup>2</sup>

Amidst a discussion of women's lack of agency in the framing of global governance, author Bronwyn Winter turns to a renowned English writer for elucidation. Virginia Woolf once wrote that "in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world (85)." In this vein, "Women, Insecurity, and Violence in a Post-9/11 World" explores the notion that nation-states have conclusively failed to account for women's needs under the guise of promoting international peace and security. While Winter introduces her book with the simple question of how 9/11 has affected the state of women over the past 16 years, her chapters interrogate the root causes of how women have been left behind. On one hand, the "West" has left behind women because it relegates them to helper or peacemaker status. On the other hand, the Islamic world has left behind women as women's socioeconomic indicators have continued to suffer and lag. Through country case studies, theoretical examination, and field work, Winter has attempted to paint as wide a picture as possible of how women have been transformed by the world's response to 9/11. Winter's success in this effort is mixed. While Winter excels at describing international relationships on a macro level, her connections suffer in more local instances. Therein lies the challenge of much of feminist scholarship. Winter herself is stumped by some of the inherent paradoxes in the issues she brings forward.

Winter's chapters include a range of research methods and topics in order to address the question of how the world was shaken by 9/11 and where women's places laid in the aftermath. Winter describes a world of post-9/11ism, in which she delineates three elements: a Huntington-esque clash of civilizations between the West and the Muslim world, the co-optation of feminist issues for the justification of increased militarism in the name of security efforts, and the renewed mix of religion and politics. These three elements make up Winter's modern worldview and permeate the rest of the book, which is loosely organized around these three ideas. In the first chapter, Winter gives the uninitiated reader a crash course in International Relations 101. She defines the nation state, points to Wallerstein's theories of center, periphery, and semi-periphery countries, and talks about the changing economic relationships between global actors. From this starting point, Winter uses cases studies of four very different areas – Djibouti, Turkey, the Tri-Border Area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, and China – in order to discuss how security efforts have played out in a post 9/11 context. Although this chapter is unique in terms of its many short country case studies, Winter goes on in further chapters to expand her geographic coverage of other individual countries. Here is the first instance in which Winter's argument fails to make solid conclusions because the connections are simply too weak. Discussing US military bases in Djibouti, and then pivoting to the plight of the Uyghur ethnic minority in China, and then attempting to draw out dubious links of Islamist terrorist activity in Latin America leaves the reader

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<sup>1</sup> Reviewed book citation: Winter, B. (2017). *Women, Insecurity, and Violence in a Post-9/11 World*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

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cold in finding a common thread. This is Winter at her feeblest: attempting to capture nearly every post 9/11 reality while failing to draw a common conclusion.

Winter's weakness in discussing individual countries is remediated somewhat by her deep understanding of how transnational feminism exists, and where women lose their ability to advocate for their concerns within a global political framework. Chapter 2, which like Chapter 1, begins with a theoretical introductory background of sovereignty and international cooperation, takes the provocative perspective of how order inherently causes some disorder, and how in order to develop unity, countries and peoples must undergo some level of brutality. This is the chapter in which Winter discusses Woolf's "no country" axiom, which she provides additional context for in her exploration of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. The doctrine has engendered varying responses from different civil actors; some believe that R2P has helped the international community respond more effectively to gross humanitarian misdemeanors, while others take issue with the doctrine's failure to provide true sociopolitical change, a common criticism of global governance in itself alone.

In addition, Winter notes how the doctrine complicates women's roles in peacemaking in Chapter 3. Here is where Winter's perspective truly shines. According to Winter, global discussions of security have portrayed women as under greater duress than ever as a result of an increase in perceived threats from the Muslim world. Instead of turning global conversations to the main issues related to their marginalization, such as lack of education, young age of marriage, and domestic violence, women have been pushed aside and portrayed as victims or peacemakers only. Winter meaningfully shares statistics of how the baseline for Afghani and Iraqi women has not improved much since 9/11. Security, in Winter's view, is a highly vague concept that gets layered on top of many unrelated fields to form things such as food security, environmental security, and economic security. Moreover, a major failing of the security conversation these days is that ongoing feminist causes are not inherently altered or more worthy within a post-9/11 context. Winter poignantly discusses the logical flaws of viewing rape or domestic violence as somehow more legitimate and more terrible within the context of war or terrorism. Essentially, women's lives have not changed for the better since 9/11, which is an unfortunate perpetuating reality. Chapter 6 moves away from the discussion of women in security conversations in order to turn towards the Western cognitive dissonance between the Christian religious right and the Islamist world. Chapter 6 also succeeds in telling a global story, in which religious dominance is increasing steadily, and in which the Arab Spring has not lived up to its false promise of "democratic legitimacy."

Perhaps Winter's greatest stretch of imagination is found in her examination of the linkages between the Subic rape case in the Philippines with the plight of African Americans suffering after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Her discussion in Chapter 4 goes into detail about how the Philippines has been transformed and harmed by globalization, and how a prosecuted rape of a Filipino soldier reflected US military prowess. Winter describes the thought-provoking economic history of the US-Philippines relationship, with the Philippines being one of the largest beneficiaries of non-food aid. At the tail end of this chapter, Winter attempts to bring in Crenshaw's fundamental theories of intersectionality, and states that women of color in the US suffer in the same way that Filipina sex workers do. Winter claims at the onset of this chapter that she is evading the simultaneity fallacy, but it seems that there are better, deeper parallels that could have been delineated with either example.

Winter draws upon her own experiences at transnational feminist conferences in Chapter 5. Through stories from both anti-occupation activists in Jerusalem and a global network of women

in South Korea, Winter asserts that female activists are too apologetic for lesbians and do not include lesbians enough within the discourse. These descriptions, based on mostly personal anecdotal evidence, lack connections to a broader theme. In Chapter 7, which Winter admitted was a last-minute inclusion, Winter tries to tie her previous discussions of the ills of anti-immigrant racism as well as Islamist terrorism to the outcomes of the multiple attacks in Paris over the spectrum of 2015. Winter herself admits that the November 13 terrorist attack is no 9/11. Although its affects will likely be profound, Winter's book was written too close to the event in order to draw a rounded conclusion.

Readers may find themselves taking issue with some dubious claims made throughout the book. Namely, the claims are that women's rights are not ensconced within a sustainable development framework and that transgender issues erode other feminist successes. In Winter's discussion of sustainable development's three main principles, she overemphasizes some calls for fertility reduction and states that sustainable development has no place for feminist aims. However, throughout the text, Winter often references women's economic instability. Moreover, Winter nods to a presumption that male and transgender voices dominate the LGBTI international persecution conversation. This position is inconsistent with the evidence. It is widely known that those who express a transgender identity are routinely harassed, face more legal discrimination, and commit suicide at much higher rates than their cisgendered peers. Claims like these are to the detriment of Winter's interesting examination of where women's status lies after 9/11 has transformed the world.

Where Winter thrives is in her descriptions of big picture, overarching narratives. She is at its truest sense, a transnational feminist after all, writing as an Australian woman, yet intimately familiar with stories around the world. The text is particularly successful when she questions the relationship between the US military industrial complex, the false promises of security doctrine on an international scale, and the chimera of a "post-secular" world. However, upon looking closer at the individual examples that Winter chooses to employ, one unified thesis fails to emerge.