

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)

RAWA is a political/social organisation of Afghan women struggling for peace, freedom, democracy and women's rights in fundamentalism-blighted Afghanistan. Address: P.O. Box 374, Quetta, Pakistan
Tel: (92-300) 551-638
Fax: (1-760) 281-9855
E-mail: rawa@rawa.org or rawa@geocities.com
Website: <http://www.rawa.org/>

Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace, Kenya

Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace airs the concerns of women in war-torn areas through media. It mobilises and trains women community leaders in peace making, serves as a channel through which organisations give assistance to women peace groups. Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace monitors the peace process, economic policies, and women's development, health and reproductive rights. Its strategies include advocacy with government and media and assessment work in liberated areas and refugee camps. Address: c/o LPI, P.O. Box 21123, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: (254-2) 441-372
Fax: (254-2) 441-372

Women for Women

Women for Women is a not-for-profit humanitarian organisation dedicated to the educational, economic, and interpersonal support of women world-wide who are survivors of war and genocide, regardless of their religion or ethnicity. The organisation, originally called Women for Women in Bosnia, was founded in 1993 in response to the Serbian army's war strategy of rape camps, concentration camps and genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. With so many women brutalised and forced to flee their homes, Women for Women in Bosnia recognised that these survivors needed both emotional and financial support from other women around the world. In 1997, Women for Women expanded its services to Rwanda where women have survived yet another genocide. Address: 733 15th St., NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20005, USA
E-mail: infor@womenforwomen.org
Website: <http://www.womenforwomen.org/>

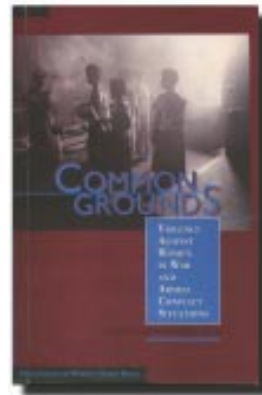
Reviews

SURVIVING WAR

COMMON GROUNDS: Violence Against Women in War and Armed Conflict Situations, edited by Indai Sajor, reviewed by Celeste Cinco

That women have been excluded in the history of war should not be contested. "Where are the women?" is a question often asked upon reading historical accounts where men played all the key roles, and women were unexplainably absent.

The book *Common Grounds: Violence Against Women in War and Armed Conflict Situations* answers in part where the women were and continue to be in the history of war: in comfort houses, in brothels, in mass graves, in military sex camps, in torture chambers, *in fear*. Women were not absent; they were silenced.



Until recently, women were silent about their tragic plight in war situations. Until recently, the definition of war crimes did not include violence against women. But after the Asian comfort women finally told their stories of abuse suffered under the Japanese Army during World War II and when the mass and systematic rape of women in the former Yugoslavia finally made international headlines, the world finally took notice of the unique terror women face during times of war and armed conflict. Now, women are gathering to gain justice for human rights violations committed against them, starting at redefining war crimes and wartime rape to include sexual slavery, forced impregnation, mass rape, the impact of chemical warfare, military sexual slavery, forced prostitution, and other gender-based atrocities done in the name of war.

Common Grounds is a direct result of the International Conference on Violence against Women in War and Armed Conflict Situations held in Tokyo, Japan from 30 October to 3 November 1997. The conference, attended by about 50 women and men from around the world, aimed to shed light on the experiences of women in war and their struggle to obtain justice for the atrocities committed against them during armed conflict. The conference was also held to ensure that the recommendations and resolutions of women would be included in the United Nation's report on state violence against women by UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women Radhika Coomaraswamy.

The book includes papers pushing for a redefinition of war crimes to include sexual and gender-based violations that reflect the actual experiences of women in war. In addition, a redefinition of wartime rape is being sought for it to be considered as a human rights violation and not just a violation of a woman's chastity.

Experiences of Women in War

Armed groups have systematically used rape against large numbers of women for various reasons, all of them appalling. The case of the comfort women, according to Yuki Tanaka, whose paper "Rape and War: the Japanese Experience" was part of *Common Grounds*, reflects the attitude of Japanese society towards women and "the exploitation of their (women's) sexuality by Japanese men." Brothels and "comfort houses" were set up as necessary military units, with abducted women forced to provide sex to the men of the Japanese Army. The comfort houses were established supposedly to boost the well-being of Japanese soldiers and to decrease the incidence of civilian rape and venereal disease. Comfort houses were an alternative to providing the Japanese Army's rank and file the same designated leave periods that Allied soldiers enjoyed and to non-military brothels that could have easily been infiltrated by spies.

Rape, forced prostitution and mass killings were not limited to Asian women. Tanaka's paper also recounts similar experiences endured by Australian and British nurses during the Japanese invasion of Banka Island in Indonesia.

Women have also been raped to instil fear of an enemy state or group. *Common Grounds* also explains how the rise of fundamentalism in many countries has resulted in the systematic and mass rape and execution of women. In Algeria, women have been mutilated and decapitated then paraded on the streets to terrorise the public, and to show other women the consequences of not adhering to fundamentalist beliefs. In Afghanistan, the Taliban, a very strong fundamentalist group, has massacred, beaten, raped and forced into *mutaa* marriages (temporary marriages)

women who were either relatives of enemy groups or were perceived as not upholding "true" Islamic beliefs. In Bangladesh, the Pakistani army has been reported to have raped and used Bangladeshi women as sex slaves. Women are forcibly impregnated to "taint" the lineage of the enemy tribe/group.

While rape and feminicide remain the most appalling of war crimes against women, there are other manifestations of violence against women in war and armed conflict situations. In her section of the book, Reiko Watanuki discusses the long-term and time-delayed effects of chemical warfare on women. During the Vietnam War, the United States Army used chemical weapons—defoliants that contained dioxin. Years after the war had ended, dioxin continued to affect the Vietnamese women's reproductive health with abnormal pregnancies and birth defects among their children.

Another type of violence women face during war is forced evictions. Leilani Farha discusses the impact of forced evictions on women's lives, highlighting the brutality of forced evictions in Turkey, Burma and the Occupied Territories in Palestine. These evictions, which displace women and their families, are violent and often result in the rape and massacre of women.

What Women are Doing

Women are lobbying at national and international levels for reparation and rehabilitation for gender-based war crimes, the most popular movement being that of the World War II comfort women. That the International Conference on Violence against Women in War and Armed Conflict Situations was held in Japan was especially significant because it stressed the support that the Japanese women's movement gives to the comfort women. This

is particularly significant since the comfort women have filed a case against the Japanese government, the progress of which is also discussed in the book.

Should the efforts of the women's movement gain victory, it would have implications on the work and conduct of War Crime Tribunals that have so far failed to fully address human rights violations against women during times of war. The contributors to and the editor of *Common Grounds* hope that these changes would be able to prevent violations against women from happening again.

Common Grounds gives an overview of women's experiences in war—both past and present. While it is good that women's war stories are finally out in the open, and that international government and non-government bodies are seeking to redress violations on women, it is disturbing how rape and other forms of gender-based violence are integral and intrinsic to warfare. "War is an inherently patriarchal activity, and rape is one of the most extreme expressions of the patriarchal drive toward masculine domination over the woman." Wars and armed conflicts are but another stage on which the same old story is told of men and women: men's power and control over women. The book stresses the need for women and women's groups to be vigilant in monitoring and reporting war crimes against women. A difficult enough task, since women in war are often silent and fearful of the consequences of telling their tales; more difficult still, when one considers that the task of documenting these experiences cannot prevent these crimes from happening again.

Celeste Cinco is the project associate for the Asian Women's Resource Exchange (AWORC).