

Week 11: Worlding the “other”

Dunne text: J. Ann Tickner and Laura Sjoberg, “Feminism,” (ch. 10).

Cynthia Weber, Amy Lind, V. Spike Peterson, Laura Sjoberg, Lauren Wilcox, and Meghana Nayak, (2014) “The Forum: Queer International Relations,” *International Studies Review*. 16, 4: 596-623. (COURSEPACK)

Maryisa Zalewski (2007) “Do We Understand Each Other Yet? Troubling feminist encounters within International Relations,” *British Journal of Politics and IR*, 9(2), 2007: 302-312. (<https://www.academia.edu/4350873/>)

Feminist IR

- There are many feminisms in political discourse & IR (liberal, empirical, socialist, Marxist, postmodern feminism, feminist postmodernism, & standpoint feminism being the major brands)
- But strong dependence on pomo theory in much feminist theory can blur distinctions
- Feminist theories of all hues tend to agree that gender is the central category of analysis
- Treating gender as primary brings all existing IR theories into question
- Perhaps this is why mainstream (malestream?) IR often fails to maintain distinctions between feminisms?

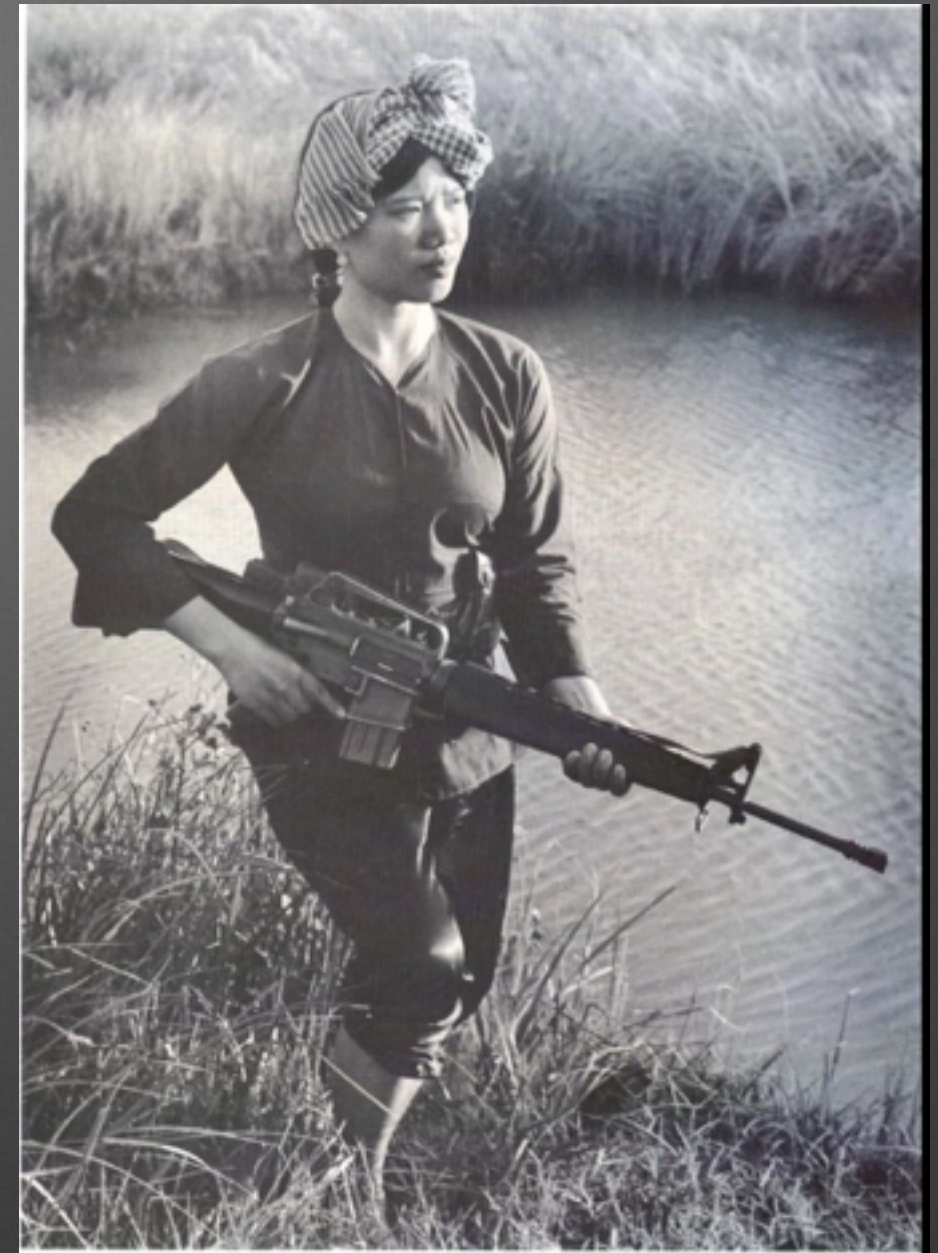
“Gender makes the world go round”

- Cynthia Eloe (1989) *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Relations*
- captures essence of feminist IR as a critical evaluation of the subject from a gendered perspective
- mainstream IR has tended to assume that gender is neither a relevant or constitutive aspect of IR
- feminist IRs have struggled against considerable disciplinary resistance
- Tickner: “there is something about this field [international relations] that renders it particularly inhospitable and unattractive to women,” *Gender in International Relations*, 1992
- but resistance to taking gender seriously has been bound up in resistance to taking any critical theory seriously



Where are the women? (Pettman 1996)

- again, multiple feminisms in IR
- united only in making gender (& its connection to power inequalities) a central category of analysis
- disagreements below this high level of generality reveal the futility of over-simplification
- e.g. it is not possible to simply “add women and stir” (not for all feminisms at least)
- element of truth for some liberal feminists who (like Enloe) point out women’s roles and work towards their inclusion in public life while remaining skeptical of essential differences between men & women
- e.g. when women participate in IR do they act in the same ways as men?
- women in the military (note: women are still barred from virtually all military combat units worldwide, though guerilla-type forces more often include women)
- similarly empiricist or post-positivist feminists (e.g Tickner) seek to add women/gender relations to the subject matter of IR, BUT also think scientific methods can be improved in light of feminist demonstrations of sex bias in currently accepted methods



Overall, feminist IR more than merely supplementary

- this is because most of this scholarship challenges the epistemological and ontological foundations of mainstream IR
- while some scholarship seeks to work within existing theories most feminist IR is not additive (bringing in something that's "missing") but transformative (post positivist or post structuralist)
- mainstream theories marginalize issues & actors that fall outside its ontologically given categories: "state," "anarchy," "autarky," "insider/outsider," "individualism," etc.
- but *gender* does *not* automatically limit itself to women
- much scholarship ignores, downplays, or transcends biological differences to focus on how femininity & masculinity are socially constructed categories
- shifts focus away from states (*man-made*) and traditional IR (also *man-made*) toward other issues & actors

What feminist IR is *not*

Is this a *guy* thing?



To His Mistress Going to Bed

.... Licence my roving hands, and let them go,
Before, behind, between, above, below.
O my America! my new-found-land,
My kingdom, safeliest when with one man mann'd,
My Mine of precious stones, My Empirie,
How blest am I in this discovering thee!
To enter in these bonds, is to be free;
Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be.....
John Donne (1633)

- for the most part, yes
- objective & universal explanations (especially as regards state behaviour) are constructed by men, out of their experiences & their behaviours
- observation is presented as value-neutral but in reality skewed
- gender impacts observation; knowledge is not “discovered” in the world “out there” so much as projected from a world “in here”
- indeed, the notion of objective detachment is itself presented as a male way of seeing the world
- does realism/neorealism/neoliberalism depict international behaviour or male behaviour?

so, what does the subject matter of feminist IR look like?

- war, poverty, rape, domestic abuse, honour killings, female circumcision, refugee crises, human trafficking, child brides
- also values “feminine” attributes like compassion, compromise, empathy, forgiveness, etc.
- because sexism does not occur in a vacuum some of this scholarship has expanded to include race, homophobia, colonialism, classism (what some call a “matrix of domination”)

But are there really separate (and single) male or female identities?

- depends on the sort of feminism
- standpoint feminism (e.g. Christine Sylvester)
- not all feminisms believe the “impersonal, competitive, combative male” vs. the “connected, empathetic woman” dichotomy works (merely perpetuates its own stereotypes)
- this could set feminists up for easy dismissal as idealists
- it also essentializes/generalizes differences *between* men & women
- it also sets up privileged vantage points (typically white, middle class women whose values are not necessarily transposable to all women)
- e.g. does knowledge of female oppression in Canada = knowledge of female oppression in EPZs of the developing world?
- is there a single female identity? is this any more a bias free universal category than that of “malestream IR”?
- postmodern feminisms (with emphasis on personal narratives, identity, experience of marginalization, rejection of privileged hierarchy and epistemic vantage points less vulnerable than Standpoint feminism here)

- Much feminism rooted in developmental psychology
- emphasis on autonomy, separateness, conflict, & war a gendered (not innately human) attribute that women do not share
- Females socialized in context of relationships rather than in opposition to them



Postmodernism and Feminism in IR

- All but empirical feminists reject idea of a detached and objective observer
- Majority of feminist scholarship therefore anti-positivistic
- Rational actor models really male models (Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*)
- This is NOT a postmodern claim but can easily become one (e.g. if there is no *single* female identity, is feminist theory fated to be postmodern?)
- Most feminist IR theory moves in a pomo direction

“the knowing mind of traditional epistemology is axiomatically a male mind,”

Steve Smith

Problems

- Does this sort of “standpoint” feminism simply add one gender stereotype to another?
- Is a privileged foundation for knowledge the same for *all* women?
- If there is no *single* female identity, is feminism theory fated to be postmodern?
- How can women be placed at the centre of an approach that decentres everything?