

November 2002

How Was It For You? The Oligarchic Structure of International Relations and Feminist Theory

Leonard A. Stone

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Stone, Leonard A. (2002). How Was It For You? The Oligarchic Structure of International Relations and Feminist Theory. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 4(1), 66-78.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol4/iss1/5>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.

HOW WAS IT FOR YOU? THE OLIGARCHIC STRUCTURE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND FEMINIST THEORY

By Leonard A Stone¹

Abstract

It is my purpose to show that radical humanist and feminist theorising have much to offer each other. Central to this article's thesis is the oligarchic structure of international relations; that is, a small, oligarchic clique of states exercising power in its own interests to the detriment of the overwhelming majority of the world's population. The core position and borders of radical humanist theorising are examined, along with an assessment of some of the major theoretical divergences between radical humanist and feminist theorising. Areas for theoretical alliance are also located which indicate the necessity of an inter-disciplinary approach that takes into account Third World liberation and the Green movement. A review of world government literature is noted, along with a review of contemporary examples of mainstream International Relations publications - which continue to avoid the feminist standpoint, or relegate feminism to a subsidiary position - and the faulty theoretical positions of Anthony Giddens and the pro-polyarchy perspective. The conclusion considers the benefits of cross-theoretical dialogue between feminist theory and radical humanist theory.

Key Words: Oligarchy, Humanism, Feminism.

Introduction

You may find that you believe in the theory of feminism, but you do not see yourself fitting into the branches of feminism... You can believe that women and men should be politically, economically and socially equal for your own reasons and hold your own ideas pertaining how you can make that happen. If that is the case, then generally you can consider yourself a feminist" - Feminism Theories Defined.¹

"Humanism believes in a far-reaching program that stands for the establishment throughout the world of democracy, peace, and a high standard of living on the foundations of a flourishing economic order, both national and international" - Humanism Defined.²

An emancipatory discourse on international politics, rather than a rationalising one, critically analyses the conservative stance of foundational International Relations (IR) theories such as realism (the politics of power) and international liberalism and in particular their lack of theoretical focus on the oligarchic structure of international relations. With regard to the global, anti-democratic nature of the prevailing system of international relations, emancipatory discourses such as feminism, Marxism and radical

humanism differ, for example, on the fundamental global strategy of how to replace the present (oligarchic) structure with a more democratic system; they differ over the fundamental democratic units that are to be set in place.

The proclivity of the world system of politics to incline towards oligarchy rather than democracy remains of paramount importance in the radical humanist perspective. In practice this means that a clique of states – The West (Britain, France, and the USA) along with China and Russia – “lord it over”, *politically*, the other 180 or so nation-states (recognised by the United Nations (UN)) which make up the formal world system of states.

However, realist texts strategically deploying the concepts of *sovereignty* (of the nation-state) and *anarchy* (epitomising the world system in which a world government is absent), on the contrary, argue from the point of view of the “inevitability” of the contemporary world system where a small grouping of states hold sway. Even a state’s external security is safeguarded by the anarchic nature of the world system of politics, as the realist argument runs, for it leaves the state with the liberty to defend its security either through its own resources or by becoming a member of a strategic alliance.³ This conservative and pro-status quo ideology of international relations runs counter to criticisms of the oligarchic structure of international relations which see a real potential for change; that is, for international democracy whereby all states and their populations are equal participants in a democratic world order.

The one-world liberal humanist call for the democratisation and empowerment of the UN - as a first step to toward democratisation (an emancipatory goal ultimately aiming for a federal, democratic world government) - lacks emancipatory potential if the unjust international world economic order is left largely in place. Such an international economic order leaves, for instance, one billion people living on less than 1\$ US a day: the cruel disposition of an international political and economic order functioning in the interests of a minority of powerful states.

A more radical humanist discourse critically examines the predatory global economic strategies of a small and closed oligarchy of a handful of militarily and economically powerful states and proposes a twin track remedy: democratisation of international relations at both the political and economic levels.

However, the theoretical cut-and-thrust of the radical humanist perspective is positioned at the level of the political. Theoretically robust critiques of the international *economic order* on the other hand are located more in the field of radical (under)development studies. Radical humanism nevertheless calls for a global redistribution of wealth citing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *Article 25*, which states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of individuals and their families, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.

Feminist theory in IR studies share some theoretical borders with the radical humanist position; particularly on the entrenched distribution of power that excludes women and the working class from the public sphere. This feminist standpoint has a theoretical pedigree that can be traced to early modern proto-feminist theorising evident, for instance, in the writings of Mary Astell and especially in writings opposing the classical liberal position of Locke and Milton.⁴ In other words the appeal of freedom from domination has been, and is both a feminist and radical humanist preoccupation. At other

sites and locations of analysis, however, theoretical incongruence is in evidence. A most glaring example here is radical humanism's lack of attention to the gender system, which from the feminist standpoint always privileges the masculine over the feminine and which has the direct effect of enabling men always to occupy positions of social and political power (historically and cross-culturally) to the detriment of women. A broad theoretical dialogue between these two standpoints is thus required. The oligarchic structure of international relations forms an appropriate point of departure.

Radical Humanism and the Oligarchic Structure of International Relations

Jayantnuja Bandyopadhyaya typifies the radical humanist critique of the prevailing mode of international relations – i.e. a pro-democratic ideology of international relations.⁵ Humanist credentials of a secular character permeate this perspective, particularly its optimistic emphasis, in the last analysis, that human beings possess the power to solve political problems through reliance primarily upon reason and political will. It also encapsulates humanism's stress on freedom and progress (economic, political, cultural and ethical) of all humankind, irrespective of nation, ethnicity or religion. The use of democratic procedures including full freedom of expression and civil liberties throughout all areas of economic, political, and cultural life remains paramount in humanist discourse. Above all else, and most pertinent for this article, humanism believes in a far-reaching socio-political programme for the establishment of democracy on a global scale and a flourishing, sustainable economic order. Occupying the central plateau of radical humanist theory is its broad critique of mainstream contemporary IR theory.

The radicalism of this humanist standpoint, moreover, is positioned outside of liberal internationalism, which is critically viewed as being “blind” to imperialism and its own ethnocentrality. Occupying the commanding heights of the radical humanist position is the thesis that the contemporary international system is anti-democratic and oligarchic in structure, and has been so for the last two hundred years, since the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Bandyopadhyaya argues, “A small and closed oligarchy of militarily and economically powerful states informally governs the vast majority of states through its predatory global strategies in the name of state sovereignty and international anarchy. But in spite of their advocacy of democracy for all states at the national level, the governing oligarchy of the international system strongly opposes any proposals for international democracy”.⁶

In this view the prevailing international system of world politics is characterised by acute asymmetry (unequal and exploitative relations between core states (oligarchy) and the periphery states (rest), and is in reality shot through with gross political and economic injustice. This world system is overseen by a hegemonic and predatory oligarchy. In short, the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council (P5) function as a political oligarchy; along with an overlapping clique of states who control the world capitalist economy, the G7 (and not the now renamed G8 properly) grouping of developed states: Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States. Russia, with an economy merely the size of Holland, made up the G8 grouping officially in June 2002 for strategic rather than economic reasons.

Radical humanist theory positions itself opposite realism's fundamental a priori –i.e. the international system as fundamentally *anarchical*. Radical humanists posit the thesis

that “the [realist] paradigm of international anarchy is only an ideological camouflage for the rationalisation, legitimisation and perpetuation of this undemocratic and grossly unjust international system”.⁷ This idea of international anarchy, moreover, simply allows a form of justification for states to pursue selfish national interests to the detriment of international interests and especially developing states. And it is the idea of the sovereign independent state pursuing its own interests, which continues to dominate world politics.

Even non-state actors in international relations, including transnational corporations and nongovernmental organisations, for example, function across national frontiers *only* with the approval of the state, often as agents of the state. The UN itself, moreover, was conceived as a clearinghouse for the conflicting national interests of sovereign states, rather than a superstate global regulatory authority that would restrict state sovereignty in any manner.

Recognising nonetheless that processes within the international system have become transnational and global during the last fifty years or so, the problematic of globalisation is skirted rather than defined in radical humanist theory. Despite this oversight the guiding thread of the radical humanist position, its principle aim, remains political equality. Political justice (emanating from global political equality) can be realised only when international organisations, and especially the UN, make qualitative progress in the direction of globally constraining powerful states. The UN furthermore would require major amendments to its Charter which has been rendered virtually impossible by the stubborn and adamant opposition of the P5 states and their strategic allies. Opposition, that is, to giving greater chances to the states and populations outside of the P5 and “G7”. None of the P5 states has proposed the democratic transference of security functions, wholly or partly, from the Security Council to the General Assembly, (the democratisation of UN decision making), or indeed a wider democratic and regulatory role for the UN. Notwithstanding this critical point, it is only by major reform of the UN that, as David Held notes, “cosmopolitan democracy” (international democratic governance) can be established.⁸

The radical humanist position occupies an ideological space shaped by emancipatory rhetoric. Significantly, and occupying the lowlands of radical humanist narrative are repeated conceptions of its own moral (political equality) and interventionist platform. Bandyopadhyaya again: “The virtually unlimited support extended to this oligarchic international system by those very states which proclaim democracy to be a universal principle of political organisation in human society is the most glaring paradox of international relations...The oligarchic international system brought into existence by the ruling classes of the militarily and economically powerful states does not, however, enjoy the support of all sections of world public opinion”.⁹ A problem for radical humanists is that their call for world government enjoys scant support from all sections of society.

The point here, nevertheless, is not to box-in radical humanist calls for a world government, to simply pigeonhole them as idealists or utopians. For this confrontation is played out in competing paradigms elsewhere and needs no further comment here. It is, more to the point radical humanism’s pokerfaced political critique of what are essentially prevailing power interactions positioned, lopsided and in favour of the West and found at the confluence of core (politically and economically powerful states) – periphery (the rest of the world’s populations) relationships. This poignant perspective, theoretically lacking

complexity, still manages to (re)present an alternative radical theory. Its alternative, radical strength lies in its normative critique of the unfair “balance” in international relations, rather than its utopian call for world government (not to be confused with “world society”).

The topography of radical humanist discourse is a shifting, fertile canvas and is marked by flexible theoretical borders. These borders are sharpened when it focuses on Third World liberation. The Marxist conception of the international class struggle can be and is theoretically extended and applied to the international struggle of the oppressed and exploited class of Third World states. However, as part of the struggle for political equality, radical humanism is less class-focussed than classical Marxism and is rather an inclusive political ideology centred basically on the liberation of the world’s marginalised, the majority who are women. This interventionist stance is what motors the radical humanist engine. But how does feminist theory sit with the conception of an oligarchic structure of international relations?

Feminist Theorising

Core feminist theorising in IR consists of a critique of male-centred thinking, an analysis of gender and an analysis of conditions for women in the world. Questions of identity, patriarchy and exclusion are central to the concerns of feminists. Feminist perspectives on international relations have provided a distinctive foci and agendas, in particular highlighting the extent to which masculinity has distorted conceptions of power and epistemology within the discipline. Moreover, and as Rebecca Grant notes, feminist theory has developed alongside IR theory since the end of the First World War and the successful movement for women’s suffrage in the UK and USA in particular.¹⁰ Particular aspects of feminist challenges to the authority of IR knowledge shed light on the construction of feminist theory. In terms of global scope both feminist and radical humanist theorising on IR paint a broad canvas. Wendy Brown expresses an instance of feminist theorising and the breadth of feminist thought by arguing that everything in the human world is a gendered construction.¹¹

Women’s political struggles against marginalisation and exclusion from status-quo public power impart a strong objectivity to knowing because women often have the most to gain from developing critical understanding (‘knowing from experience’) of exactly how the world which oppresses them is constructed, and how it might be reconstructed.¹²

The political struggle for women’s equality has by implication become part of the Third World liberation struggle given that the overwhelming majority of the world’s marginalised women are found in these states. Working class women are at the core of these populations. Political unity of the world’s oppressed, furthermore, is a political prerequisite for a world democratic government. Women, gays and lesbians, the working class and other marginalised groups require political unity, and indeed the political will to engage in a progressive global agenda in order wrest political control from the international oligarchy. Development seen as a human right and post-colonial sustainable development unites feminists and world government perspectives in the Third World, but there is a further accommodation that encourages a shared space, a core platform of understanding, between the feminist and world government perspective. In recent years gender-sensitive research into international development in the context of the “North-

South” divide demonstrated the importance of taking gender into account.¹³ This suits radical humanism’s traditional, (albeit theoretically underdeveloped) recognition of women as a global disadvantaged group, owning one percent of the world’s property and resources, while performing sixty percent of the labour and forming the majority of refugees, illiterate and poor persons. Both perspectives are supportive of collective activism, moreover, which creates alternative values that motivate broad community resistance and empowers people to take control over their everyday lives.¹⁴ Women’s regional networking is an essential element in this empowering project. However, differences remain, particularly with regard to gender-biased, critical non-feminist theories of world politics.

Like mainstream IR theories, the discourse of radical humanism overlooks the private sphere of the family household because it is submerged within the “domestic analogy” itself.¹⁵ Notwithstanding this “blind side”, a major theoretical fissure remains between feminist and radical humanist theorising on world politics.

From one feminist standpoint, the traditional generic units of analyses underpinning radical humanism’s analysis of world politics - nation-states in the context of an international system – are seen as gendered social constructions which take specifically masculine ways of being and knowing in the world as universal. A particular focus on the gendered agency of the state in IR exposes the *patriarchal logic* of the radical humanist approach, and in particular its conception of women’s agency which fails to recognise its diversity, which is absolutely essential to, but politically repressed in radical humanist discourse. Feminist standpoints on the state also generate a theoretical difference with radical humanism. Feminist theory in IR views sovereign relations with other states, as well as man’s relation to woman inside states, as defining the internal constitution of sovereign man and sovereign state. Masculinist domination is integral to and institutionalised within the state-system. Radical humanism has yet to seriously engage with these criticisms.

And yet obvious points of congruence remain evident as both theories oppose foundational “givens” in the field of IR – anarchy and sovereignty – and both search for models of human agency emanating from marginalised positions including women, the colonised, and people of colour’s resistance. Unlike radical humanists, however, a number of feminist scholars of IR¹⁶ continue to analyse the “gender-specificity” of the constitutive (socially constructed) concepts (power, rationality, security and sovereignty) that underpin the levels of analysis in IR and in realist theory in particular. Radical humanists on the other hand remain locked in non-gender analyses of anti-democratic, core (rich) – periphery (poor) power configurations.

Feminist theory opposes the gendered, oligarchic structure of international relations, and just as radical humanism uses key concepts such as “power” and “rationality” as building blocks of explanation for a theory of international relations, there is nothing inherent in the terms themselves which suggest, according to Ann Tickner, that feminist theory may not use them as building blocks.¹⁷ Both feminist theory and radical humanism IR theory simply reject their narrow and exclusionary meanings in mainstream IR theory and practice. But radical humanism’s radicalism ends abruptly here. With an *underdetermined* focus on women’s struggles and rights it belies a skewed theoretical stance. It needs to accommodate feminist theorising on gender systems, which is typically and surprisingly relegated to a sub-text within radical humanism’s grand narrative.

A poignant site of feminist theory, then, houses the critique of male-dominated scholarship in the field of IR, scholarship which in general does not include concrete subjectivity as a theoretical consideration, preferring instead abstract objectivity – a sexist academic trait. The stance of objectivity is exposed in feminist theorising as androcentric for claiming universal validity, when it is actually only congruent with elite male perspectives and masculine attributes.¹⁸

A second, orthodox feminist point for the radical humanist to bear in mind is that the act of theorising is itself a conscious practice inescapably implicated with power. To exclude women from, or to treat them as a periphery concern for the grand project of abstract theory has profound implications, especially for liberal ideology. Liberals, along with radical humanists and pluralists of all shades are implicated in this “grand neglect”. One liberal defence is that such theorising is in danger of being *overdetermined* by gender, as is feminist theory in general. As an essentially contested political-theoretical movement, feminism, as Ann Snitow eloquently states, “expresses the paradoxical tension between needing to speak and act as women *qua* woman, and needing an identity not overdetermined by our gender”.¹⁹ A glaring theoretical divergence is evident here. Taking the radical humanist position on the possibilities of overdetermination, sympathetic voices may be heard from postmodern feminism. Christine Sylvester, for example, has relinquished the pure feminist standpoint position that women’s experience can constitute the grounds for a more critical and universal theory of IR, in favour of multiple feminist standpoints as a theoretical point of departure.²⁰

Radical humanism has flexible theoretical borders and has the potential to accommodate the feminist standpoint. It is with postmodern feminism, however, where radical humanist theorising will attend the theoretical get-together. This entails intersubjective discursive conversations between feminist standpoints and liberals and radical humanists who are not theoretically “fixed”, but can shift from conceptually narrow positions and engage in learning processes of mutual transformation. Feminist theorising on the other hand needs a systematic theory of the oligarchic structure of international relations.

Currently, within radical humanist theorising there is much theoretical analysis to be done on the gender-specific dimensions of international democratisation and global economic restructuring in a radically interdependent post-Cold War world. For feminist theorising the ongoing challenge is to engage in meaningful research that brings people’s lives and struggles back into the field of IR. This is being achieved in part by forging a different relation to global “Western values” through the particularities of identity and place. The marginalised are the overriding concern of both feminism and radical humanism. This is their shared departure point, as is the emancipatory primacy of moving world politics away from the sovereignty of states to the sovereignty of global progressive political movements. It is however at this point that radical humanism may have to swallow the bitter pill of reality. For world government may follow from such a progressive global process, but in a foreseeable future dominated by the state it surely will not.

International Relations: how is it for you?

Both feminist theorising on IR and writings on the oligarchic structure of international relations share a further, exploited position: under representation in contemporary IR literature. Governance, for example, is an academic growth industry and offers an important organisational focus for inter-disciplinary work. And yet feminist theorising and theories on the oligarchic structure of IR are underrepresented. Take a state-of-the-art contemporary work, *Debating Governance: authority, steering and democracy* (2000), edited by Jon Pierre. This collection includes Paul Hirst, who gives a magisterial review of the nature, scope and significance of governance. Other theorists such as Guy Peters, Rod Rhodes, Gerry Stoker and Andrew Gamble join him. Not a single focus on the oligarchic structure of international relations is present; and there is a notable absence of feminist theorising. The issue of the state in IR is similarly dominated by paradigms that are marked by an absence of emancipatory themes. Naom Chomsky's recent work on US militarism, economic imperialism, and American-led globalisation – *Rogue states: the rule of force in world affairs* (2000) - suffers the same fate; as does both John M. Hobson's contemporary work, *The state and International Relations* (2000), and in the specialised field of international co-operation for democratisation Peter Burnel's (editor) contemporary writing, *Democracy Assistance: international co-operation for democratisation* (2001).

Rather than positing the question to radical humanist theorists that appears in the title of this article, "how was it for you?" it is, rather, more pertinent by inverting the tense of the question to read: "how is it for you?" The answer, as far as analyses of the oligarchic structure of international relations is concerned, is "not so good". Although analyses of the oligarchic structure of international relations are present in sections of idealist theoretical posturing, such posturing is nevertheless teeming with a priori idealist world government pointers. This liberal, world government ideological standpoint has a 20th century pedigree in mainstream publications and is particularly strong in the early 1940s and early 1960s. These works include W. B. Curry, *The Case for a Federal Union* (1941), Alan D. Russett, *Strengthening of the Framework of Peace* (1950), C. H. Mangone, *The Idea and Practice of World Government* (1951), J. A. Borgese, *Foundations of the World Republic* (1952), Frederick L. Shuman, *The Commonwealth of Man: An Inquiry into Power Politics and World Government* (1954), George Liska, *International Equilibrium: A Theoretical Essay on the Politics and Organization of Society* (1957), and Grenville Clark and Louis B. Sohn's elaborate and sophisticated work, *World Peace Through World Law* (1958, 1960).

A section of scholars and intellectuals belonging to the Green political movement now carry the world government torch, including William Ophuls, Robert Goodwin and Robya Eckersley. These Green theorists advocate the creation of a global regulatory authority for the efficient and just management of the global ecosystem.²¹

Thus, the dearth of literature on the oligarchic structure of international relations runs in obvious parallel with the absence of feminist theorising on the oligarchic structure of international relations. Even contemporary standard textbooks on feminism, for example Jane Freedman's book, *Feminism* (2001) omit reference to the oligarchic structure of international relations, and yet at the same time call for "non-essentialising and "non-exclusionary" ways of theorising.²² Feminist inroads into the globalisation debate on the other hand have made good progress and need no further comment here, except to say that predominantly mainstream male writings on globalisation continue to side step the

feminist concerns. This absence, or “abstention” marks out and weakens contemporary works on globalisation such as Roger Burbach’s book, *Globalisation and Postmodern Politics: from Zapatistas to high-tech robber barons* (2001), and Justin Rosenberg’s analytically pedantic book, *The Follies of Globalisation Theory* (2001). Marked by their absence of feminist theorising/analysis of the oligarchic structure of international relations, mainstream contemporary works on aspects of IR continue, therefore, to be plagued by theoretical naivety. Publications on Human Rights and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOS) – e.g. Claude E. Welch’s (editor) contemporary study, *NGOS and Human Rights* (2001) – in the main lack a serious feminist focus/international relations as a structured oligarchy perspective. Even mainstream studies on environmental security are lacking in this theoretical scope – e.g. Jon Barnett’s first, contemporary work, *The Meaning of Environmental Security: ecological politics and policy in the new security era* (2001). Contemporary IR discourse, in the final analysis, is in need of feminist theorising on the oligarchic structure of international relations. In this theoretical endeavour feminist discourse on the condition of women need not shift its emphasis on women’s equality; unlike radical humanism which needs to reevaluate its subsidiary approach to woman’s rights and to (re)postulate feminist standpoints in its endeavour to make an alliance with feminism(s). In so doing the answer for radical humanism to the question posed above - “how is it for you” - then becomes one, at the least, of “It’s more complex, but theoretically more liberating when in alliance with feminism”. In other words, “it’s good for me”.

Theoretical Standpoints

From one aspect, the emancipatory appeal of radical humanist and feminist discourse is centred on the concept of *interest*. These two ideologies of emancipation speak with one voice when it comes to the exploitation of the world’s marginalised people and against world politics system lopsided in favour of global corporate interests and the developed states (West) in general. The championing of the interests of the dispossessed - the ideology of empowerment - unites both theoretical positions at their broadest: a “theoretical affinity”. In the context of globalisation, moreover, the suspicion for both stances is that texts in the liberal mould remain essentially just that: male/liberal theoretical perspectives which indeed offer theoretical complexity, but little in the way of progressive feminist/anti-oligarchic substance and clarity.

Various liberal theoretical schemes have recently gained currency and are even presented with a radical alternative appeal, but hardly offer clarity and pragmatism. Anthony Giddens’ theoretical schema, for instance, whereby “emancipatory politics” (concerned with material values) are separated and from “life politics”, including the demands of feminism and the politics of environmentalism (post-materialist values), lacks both theoretical rigour and offers us a “politics of bewilderment”. Identity formation, so crucial in feminist theorising, and offered as a supplementary part of Giddens’ notion of “life politics”, naively, crudely and inexplicitly excludes economy. This is the direct result of Giddens’ theoretical strategy of deploying culture as an exclusive category – i.e. in his second tier demarcation of what constitutes life politics. We can add to this brief critique the fact that Giddens has postulated the concept of the self (“auto-telic-self”) as a shifty restatement of the Kantian principle of the autonomy of representations that determine the will. A liberal conception of the self no less, whereby

we are informed that “ethics of autonomy” guides the self-directing person capable of external agency and internal reformation.²³

Giddens’ liberal and muddled conception of the self can hardly lend itself to the plight of the marginalised in the Third World – the overwhelming majority of the global population suffering gross economic deprivation. Their interests (built around emancipation) are simply not addressed or redressed in a theoretical manner: and they are, if Giddens needs reminding, encased, to a significant degree, within the iron cage of economy.

The main point to note here is that Giddens theorising needs feminising and the promotion of the economy to a sustainable theoretical position. However, although theoretical dialogue is possible with Giddens, the notion of a system of international relations based on the promotion of polyarchy as a viable alternative to oligarchic rule remains out on a theoretical limb. It does not adequately address the condition of women in world politics.

Promoters of polyarchy define the concept as a system in which a small group actually rules, and mass participation in decision-making is confined to leadership choice carefully managed by competing elites. For the radical humanist position, and, in short, the polyarchic concept of democracy, is an effective arrangement for legitimating and sustaining *inequalities* within and between nations (deepening them in a global economy) far more effectively than authoritarian solutions.²⁴

A Gramscian notion of hegemony is appropriate at this point: one class (or fraction of a class) exercises leadership over the other classes by gaining their *active consent* through ideological values. However, applying the concept of hegemony to international relations is not to imply the domination of one state, but rather to suggest the domination of world politics by the leadership of a transnational dominating elite, an oligarchy that functions to sustain a core of powerful states. Thus, the contemporary world system is characterised by unequal relations between a core of powerful states and its periphery of much poorer states and by a relation of *hegemony* of one over the other. This Marxist contention of power relationships of sits comfortably with radical humanism. This said there is one crucial element missing in this analysis of the structure of contemporary international relations – i.e. *patriarchy*. The global patriarchal order underpins structural inequalities and analysis necessitates the deconstruction of the multiple oppressions, including gender, sustaining the structural and direct violence of the global political-economic system. Radical humanist theorising needs to be alert to this equation in the context of reconstructed theoretical practices which display solidarity with feminism.

Both sets of theorising can form an alliance politically in the face of the increased fragmentation of labour and identities, the increased mobility of capital and the continuing plight the of world’s marginalised people. Radical humanism needs to note from the outset the persistent inequality of women compared with men with reference to a global view of the diverse geo-political and economic conditions that have gender-differentiated causes and consequences.

Conclusion

This article has analysed the topographical terrain of radical humanist theory and in particular its theorising on the oligarchic structure of international relations. It has noted that theoretically privileged conceptions of IR lead to theoretical incongruence and

divergence between the feminist and radical humanist standpoints. However, considerations that take into account the flexibility of radical humanism's theoretical borders, along with the advent of postmodern feminism indicate the potential both for theoretical leeway and the construction of a feminist critique of the oligarchic structure of world politics. Both emancipatory theories need to negotiate a shared political space. They need not "copulate". Inter-paradigm debate and inter-disciplinary activity is required which also take into account Third World liberation and the Green standpoint. This will be a most significant and pertinent theoretical process and one that in its intentions renders world politics susceptible to humankind collectively.

An absence of dialogue between radical humanism and feminist IR renders both guilty of the charge of theoretical neglect. The promise for both is that such a dialogue will generate theoretical complexity, while further illuminating the obstacles to political power currently faced by the world's marginalised. Emancipatory ideologies need to be in dialogue with each other and the substance of dialogue between these two emancipatory ideologies will inevitably have to revolve around, for example, the promotion of woman's equality, democracy at both the state and international level, progressive global movements, especially those emphasising a new global economic order, and rationalisation of the existing security and developmental functions of the UN.

Spike Peterson notes that the IR discipline continues to avoid conversing with feminist approaches.²⁵ Within these pages, however, a tentative, broad theoretical dialogue has taken place between two sets of theorising. Feminist theorising quite clearly is in need of an effective theoretical posture on the oligarchic structure of world politics and where it stands with regard to calls for world government. Radical humanism however has the greater of the theoretical challenges.

Paradigms of the oligarchic structure of international relations, including the radical humanist standpoint, need to include the condition of women and gender systems as significant focus points. They need to render the hidden masculine gender of IR theory and practice visible, and demonstrate the difference that theorising on women's inequality makes to the process of understanding world politics. Only then will analyses of the oligarchic structure of international relations offer viable theoretical clarity, balance and a truly alternative and radical understanding of world politics -- an understanding askance of the socialist left and divorced from the liberal position. A theoretical understanding that is particular to both feminist and radical humanist theorising, and which defies conventional definitions such as a "global third way".²⁶

In pragmatic terms, and as noted earlier, both perspectives are supportive of collective activism which is intended to create alternative values that motivate broad community resistance and empowers people to take control over their everyday lives. Women's regional networking was cited as an essential element in this empowering project. Grassroots activism in favour of the democratisation of world politics remains an essential pragmatic point. The struggle against global exploitation is 'personal', and involves us all as individuals and as members of our local communities and indeed the global community. One piece-meal way forward is to continue to focus on the strategic goal of attaining further intergovernmental documents on universal human rights, including the social right to development, education, medical care and employment; security against war and environmental disasters. Levels of action or resistance, then, take place on the local and international levels.

At the grassroots level, small farmers, human rights workers, environment groups, aid agencies, trade unionists, minority parties, the landless, networks of fair traders, radical intellectuals, spiritual groups, coalitions of anti-globalisers and women's groups, for example, need to coordinate further their protests. These alternative voices can be labelled a 'people's forum', or Rainbow politics. However, whichever label we use, nothing short of the displacement of the oligarchic structure will suffice if global justice is to be achieved. Essentially the UN needs democratising, finally, and participating states of the UN outside of the oligarchy need to pool their political resources in calling for radical progressive change in the political structure of the UN, rather than hanging onto the coattails of one or other members of the oligarchy.

Notes

¹. Feminism Theories Defined, *Feminist Utopia*, (<http://www.amazoncastle.com/feminism/ecocult.shtml>).

². Humanism Defined, Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism*, Humanism Study Group, 1997 (http://www.humanists.org/hum_lamont.htm).

³. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Relations*, (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Webley, 1979), pp. 111-114.

⁴. Mary Astell, *Mary Astell, Political Writings*, p.74.

⁵. See Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *World Government for International Democracy*, (Howrah: Manuscript India, 2002).

⁶. Ibid., p. 7.

⁷. Ibid., p. 9.

⁸. David Held, (1995) *Democracy and World Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), particularly chapter 12.

⁹. Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *World Government for International Democracy*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁰. Rebecca Grant, "The Quagmire of Gender and International Security" in V. S. Peterson, (ed.) *Gendered States*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992).

¹¹. Wendy Brown, *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory*, (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988), p. 25.

¹². See S. Harding, "Strong Objectivity", (*Social Research*, Summer, 1994).

¹³. See Gita Sen and Caren Grown, *Development Crises and Alternative Visions: Third Worlds Women's Perspectives*, (New York: Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), 1986); N. Kabeer, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*, (London: Verso, 1994); R. L. Blumberg, *Women, Development, and the Wealth of Nations: Making the Case for the Gender Variable*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).

- ¹⁴. Gita. Sen and Caren Grown, *Development Crises and Alternative Visions: Third Worlds Women's Perspectives*; p. 76; see also S. Sharoni, "Middle-East Politics Through Feminist Lenses: Toward Theorizing International Relations from Women's Struggles", (*Alternatives*, 18, 1993).
- ¹⁵. See Christine Sylvester, "Empathetic Co-operation: A Feminist Method for IR", (*Millennium*, 23: 2, 1994).
- ¹⁶. See S. Burchill and A. Linklater *et al* (1996) *Theories of International Relations*, New York: St. Martin's Press, Chapter 8.
- ¹⁷. See Ann Tickner, "On the Fringes of the World Economy: A Feminist Perspective" in C. Murphy and R. Tooze (eds), *The New International Political Economy*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991).
- ¹⁸. See E. A. Grosz, "The Intervention of Feminist Knowledges" in B. Cane, E. A. Grosz and de M. Lepervanche (eds), *Crossing Boundaries: Feminisms and the Critique of Knowledges*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988).
- ¹⁹. Ann Snitnow, "A Gender Diary" in A. Harris and Y. King (eds), *Rocking the Ship of the State: Towards a Feminist Peace Politics*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), p. 38.
- ²⁰. Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 2.
- ²¹. William Ophuls, *Ecology and the Effects of Security*, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 1977); Robert Goodwin, *Green Political Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Robya Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Towards an Ecocentric Approach*, (New York: New York State University Press, 1992). See also Oran Young, (ed.) *Global Governance: Drawing Insights from Environmental Experience*, (London: MIT Press, 1998).
- ²². Jane Freedman, *Feminism*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001).
- ²³. See Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*, (London: Polity Press, 1994); *Modernity and Self Identity*, (London: Polity Press, 1991).
- ²⁴. William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention and Hegemony*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 170.
- ²⁵. V. S. Peterson, "Transgressing Boundaries: Theories of Gender, Knowledge and International Relations", (*Millennium*, 21:2, 1992), pp. 183-206.
- ²⁶. See Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way* (London: Polity Press, 1998); Anthony Giddens (ed.), *The Global Third Way Debate*, (London: Polity Press, 2001).

ⁱ Visiting Faculty Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Faculty of Arts, Jadavpur University. Kolkata 700 032, India. Email: la_stone99@yahoo.com