Feminist Theorizing in the International Relations Discipline

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Abstract
The discipline of International Relations has been a science for almost a century and has undergone considerable development and dynamism as a field of knowledge. In the aftermath of the First World War, traditional idealistic trends prevailed. Still, after the end of the Second World War, the theory of realism dominated the analysis of international relations, international politics, and its laws and mechanisms. With the inter-paradigm debate of the 1980s, a broad spectrum of theories of international relations emerged, the most significant of which are critical theories including feminism. Feminist theory has since become central to the debates about global phenomena among those who work in International Relations as a field. The paper attempts to explore whether feminist theory has been able to provide a model for the analysis and interpretation of global phenomena allowing it to occupy a place among the theories of International Relations.

Keywords: Feminism, Gender, International Relations, International Relations Theory

Introduction: Epistemological Diversity in International Relations Theory
International Relations emerged as a distinct academic discipline nearly a hundred years ago at the close of the First World War, allowing it to become a venue for primary theoretical debates (Burchill & Linklater, 2013) about epistemological hypotheses. The different theories provided a wide range of explanations for why and how global phenomena occurred, reflecting that they have very different assumptions (Smith, 2013).

Like all the social sciences, the International Relations discipline has deep divisions on many issues, which are discussed within contending theories. These debates have played a substantial role in forming the discipline (Kurki & Wight, 2013). The first debate in the discipline took place after the First World War between the idealists and the realists and expanded beyond the Second World War. These developments set the stage for establishing the Woodrow Wilson Chair in International Policy at the University of Wales at Aberystwyth (Burchill & Linklater, 2013). During that time, affected by the major wars, the field of International Relations concentrated its studies on analyzing why the Second World War occurred and how conditions of peace were to be achieved (Smith, 2013). Therefore, the main goal of the emerging discipline was to produce a body of knowledge that could be used to enhance peace (Kurki & Wight, 2013).

Key texts within the discipline began to appear by the end of the 1930s. The Twenty Years' Crisis of E. H. Carr's (1939) and Hans Morgenthau's Politics among Nations (1948) have been considered foundational in the field of International Relations. The principal

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contribution of Carr and Morgenthau was to develop a framework of analysis that extracted the substance of international politics from various global events (Burchill & Linklater, 2013). The International Relations discipline during this period was concerned with analyzing the reasons for war and the terms of peace. We can add the great book of Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, which was first published in 1942, as a pioneer and foundational text.

The second debate emerged in the 1960s between traditionalists and modernists. The third debate, which specialists called the inter-paradigm debate, ran in the 1970s and 1980s and concentrated its arguments on disagreements among the realist, pluralist, and Marxist perspectives on the best method to comprehend and clarify international processes. The fourth debate focused on how the discipline should be defined (Kurki & Wight, 2013).

Since the inter-paradigm debate of the 1980s, the field of International Relations has been in a state of flux, which we can call a theoretical revolution. The current diversity of theories in the field has freed International Relations scholarship from "the intellectual cage in which it is imprisoned by traditional postwar realism" [sic] (Whitworth, 1997). International Relations theory, then, became far more pluralist than it was before. This variety of available theories resulted in additional questions and answers related to issues, causes, actors, and consequences of global events. War and peace were not the only issues of concern anymore, nor the only controversial ones. Various issues have sparked the interest of International Relations scholars, researchers, and students (Smith, 2013), especially gender issues related to inequalities in power relations and social structures, which are embodied distinctly in one of these new approaches, Feminist International Relations. Feminists raised the question of what a feminist perspective applied to world politics would reveal and how different it would be to traditional perspectives of the discipline (True, 2013).

**The Theoretical Construction of Feminism**

The mid-1980s witnessed the entry of the feminist approach to the International Relations field within the work of development politics and peace research. Nevertheless, by the late-1980s, about the same time as the third debate, the liberal feminist first wave was vigorously posing the query related to the position of women in world politics (Smith & Owens, 2008).

Feminism, like other terms and concepts, has a history. The French philosopher and social theorist Charles Fourier (1772-1837) is credited with first using the term "Féminisme" in the first half of 1830s. The English translation, Feminism, later appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1852 (Goldstein, 1982; Offen, 1987). In the late 1880s Hubertine Auclert introduced the term in her newspaper *La Citoyenne* to criticize the domination of men and to claim what was promised by the French Revolution—women's emancipation and women's rights. Karen Offen, a historian of feminism, has argued that the term feminism, since its first appearance in English in Britain and then in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, has been given numerous significances and definitions. In addition, the term applies to diverse uses and has influenced innumerable movements (Badran, 2009).

Nevertheless, feminist thought and philosophy, in general, were products of the 18th century when Mary Wollstonecraft inaugurated the age of women with her revolutionary and provisional efforts. By issuing *Vindication of the Rights of Men* in 1790, Wollstonecraft became a leading entrant in the contemporary political debate because of her advanced political analysis and social environment. In this work, she mostly relied on natural rights terminology to make her political case. Two years later, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published. Wollstonecraft discussed that women are not naturally inferior to men but appear to be because they lack education. Both men and women, she continued, should be treated as rational beings. The allegation of Wollstonecraft, based on the assumption that the inferiority conventionally attributed to women is the outcome of poor education, is neither novel nor argumentative. What
is novel is the recognition that if convictions about women should be understood as the result of spurious hypotheses and weak education, women themselves remain ignorant of their true nature, hidden beneath layers of acculturation (Ferguson, 1992; Wilcox, 2009).

It is possible to trace the beginning of the first wave of feminism to the issue of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Theoretically, feminist theory, as with many theories, reflects a broad spectrum of views that give us various reasons for women's subordination (Tickner, 2014). It aspires to theorize an intellectual and cultural ignorance of women's intellectual, cultural, and political experiences at the local, national, and international levels. Regardless of the diversity of feminist trends and approaches, most feminist debates revolve around the concept of gender, which has become the central concept of feminism in general.

At the beginning of the emergence of the social sciences at the end of the 19th century, differences in biological sex were broadly taken for granted. These fields reflected the degree to which gender differences were not contested nor even noticed among male-dominated scholarly communities. Social scientists in the 1920s and 1930s considered gender as a personal characteristic, and confined their ideas about gender to the study of character traits and sex roles. Sex roles was a term that was developed as a way of characterizing the socially appropriate functions performed by men and women. Social scientists backed the notion that men and women have specific characteristics that make them well-suited to the performance of specific social roles (Steans, 2013).

Feminists, however, view gender differently, as an ideological and socially structured difference between men and women instead of an inherent biological distinction. For feminists, gender constitutes and is formed by power relations, inequalities, and social structures and has significant implications for the experiences of both men and women (Steans, 1998).

Feminism took shape as a new field in the 1960s when women academics began to organize inside disciplines such as Political Science. In 1969, the American Political Science Association established the women's caucus. The field expanded in the 1970s and 1980s, and the International Political Science Association created a Study Group on Sex Roles and Politics in 1976. In 1986, the Standing Group on Women and Politics developed within the European Consortium for Political Research. Also, academic studies on gender flourished in the 1980s and 1990s, and departments of Gender Studies were founded. This new field has adopted a form of knowledge-building called Emancipatory Knowledge. Feminism is meaningfully devoted to achieving equality for women, improving their lives, and seeking ways to end their subordination, which exist in all societies to varying degrees. Therefore, varieties of feminisms have emerged and adapted to fit the needs of women in diverse contexts (Badran, 2009; Celis et al., 2013; Tickner, 2014).

Although feminism has emerged within disciplinary contexts in the academy, it also has advantages as an interdisciplinary lens. Feminism is prone to reproduce disciplinary frontiers and distinct methodological obligations. On the other hand, women's studies and feminist theorizing have always defied the usual academic boundaries imposed by disciplinary narrowness (Peterson, 2004).

The possibility of gender analysis and feminist approaches, seen in this light, were beneficial in diverse fields which welcomed these insights. However, gender analysis has substantially taken no notice of the principal or classical essence of the disciplines of the social sciences and, more specifically, in the field of International Relations. Feminists argue that International Relations' conventional epistemologies exclude the likelihood that women can be sources of knowledge (Fernández & Valdés, 2016; Nicolás, 2005).
The Feminist Approach to International Relations Theory

Since emerging as an academic discipline in 1919, International Relations theorizing, the approaches of methodologies, and political concern have concentrated on creating dynamic knowledge concerning the international domain. Meanwhile, a few theories such as realism dominated as the chosen approach to theorizing. Other theoretical approaches began to acquire some momentum in the 1980s. Indeed, the end of the Cold War shaped a distinctly epistemological and intellectual moment. There was an explosion of approaches and critical theories in International Relations, including feminist theory (Brecher & Harvey, 2002). Feminist contributions, as Monike Nicolás (2005) argues, are some of the most crucial renewal sources of international relations theory today.

Feminist theorists state that paradigms such as realism, neo-realism, and liberal institutionalism offer a partial view rooted in unacknowledged political assumptions, which do not narrate the whole story of international politics. In this point of view, feminist critiques can be grouped with post-positivist critiques of the conventional approaches to studying international relations (Peterson, 2004).

Feminist international relations theory endeavors to draw attention to women’s experiences, ideas, and activities. It includes concepts such as gender and gender identities and evaluates social structures related to gender at all levels. Cynthia Enloe (1989) suggests that it is possible to acquire a more realistic understanding of how international politics functions if we consider women's experiences in global politics.

Feminist International Relations has a dual goal: to find space for gender where it exists in international relations and to move beyond gendered ideas into collaborative scholarship. In this context, feminist international relations theory participates in the major theoretical debates in the field and introduces new zones of analysis. Furthermore, it defies every traditional category of international relations theory on several levels (Narain, 2014).

Feminist scholars of International Relations discuss the exclusion of women from international politics and international relations in theory and practice. They state that gender has always existed in international relations, but the male-centered perspective of International Relations theory neglected it. In light of this, feminism calls for highlighting the gender construction of international relations, where men and women are essential actors in global phenomena (Fernández & Valdés, 2016). Therefore, feminists see there is a need to identify the still unspecified relations between power and gender construction in international relations. In this sense, feminist international relations theory is a political obligation to understand the world from the perspective of the socially subjugated (Brown, 1998).

Feminist theorists focus less on sex as an empirical variable and more on gender (as a systematic analytical category) and its ideological effects. Therefore, they propose a different definition of gender as a set of socially and culturally constructed characteristics that vary across time and place. As these characteristics are social and not biological constructions, feminists argue that gender significance lies in how we think and act. In this regard, feminists explore the adoption of certain characteristics by women in varying positions of power that are otherwise socially and culturally designated for men. Such behavior is necessary for women and men to succeed in the challenging world of international policymaking (Peterson, 2004; Tickner, 2014). Gender identities, which are produced socially and politically, are imbued with power and define distributions of power that influence the place of women in world politics, and gender identities perpetuate assumptions about who should do what and why (Smith, 2018).

Due to their fear of being co-opted, feminists resist integration into larger bodies of thought within the International Relations discipline. They do so by trying, in their various orientations, to illustrate the role of gender in the theory and practice of International Relations. Additionally, they distinguish women’s role in international politics, investigate how structures
Feminists acknowledge that a single feminist theory with a singular voice does not exist. The feminist analysis of international relations has evolved on a variety of fronts, and it has a distinct discourse made up of many competing theories. As with many theories, feminist theory reflects a wide range of perspectives that study and examine how gender affects the theory and practice of international relations (Peterson, 2004; Ruiz, 2013; Whitworth, 1997). While liberal feminism points out women's roles and works towards their inclusion in and access to public and political life (Steans, 1998), feminist standpoint theory focuses on the knowledge of women produced from a marginalized perspective that can provide different perceptions about world politics (Brown, 1994). Feminist standpoint theorists noted that gender biases and distortions were either accepted or unnoticed in the International Relations discipline, which poses a challenge to International Relations scholars to question the normative foundations of their theories (Tickner, 1997).

V. Spike Peterson (2004) asserts that international relations feminist theorizing has unique, powerful, and transformative implications. It does not just add to international relations theory but subverts it and rewrites it, as feminist scholars engage in reconstructing theory and expanding meta-theoretical inquiry. While conventional fields like realism and liberalism have ignored gender as a category of analysis, feminist theory has developed new approaches that suggest there are alternative ways to interpret the International Relations framework. Subsequently, feminist epistemologies contributed to the perception of gender in international relations theory and developed it. Notwithstanding the epistemological contributions of feminism, there is a need to understand that the problematic relationship between International Relations and feminism or gender theories is due more to practical resistance than to theoretical incompatibility (Fernández & Valdés, 2016).

There has been considerable resistance to bringing studies of women and gender to the traditional academic field of International Relations, which often asserts an irreconcilable partition between theory and praxis (Whitworth, 1997, 2001). Conventional International Relations scholars have dismissed feminist theory and refused to engage with feminist arguments. They doubt whether feminism contributes to International Relations and question if feminist analysis fits the study of international relations in a conventional sense (Buskie, 2013).

Faced with such dismissal and aiming to engage with International Relations as an academic discipline, feminists have debated many of the issues focal to International Relations scholars (Whitworth, 1997). By analyzing key texts in International Relations, noteworthy ideas about the gendered nature of traditional international relations theory and knowledge emerged. These efforts introduced new definitions of central concepts in international relations such as state, war, power, and security.

Traditional international relations theories have evolved around a research agenda, situating questions about states and the state system as the central focus. Realists have mainly been concerned with state security in the international arena and neglected security inside the state. To some extent, these theories treat the state as the best mechanism for ensuring the security of the individual. By contrast, the feminist approach emphasizes the importance of social relations and individual experiences rather than state behavior. People, places, authorities, and activities outside the scope of traditional International Relations are all within the focus of feminism. Feminist critiques of conventional conceptions of the state's identity and power have led to a re-evaluation of the meaning of security. They point out that the state's
pursuit of security and deterring or coercing other states through military force are, in one way or another, reasons for insecurity (Buskie, 2013).
As far as feminists are concerned, the conventional understanding of international relations is an incomplete picture painted from the perspective of men. These perceptions have significant ramifications for how war and other essential ideas in international relations are generally understood. Feminist analysis suggests that war's origins and consequences may be viewed in a new light, focusing on the human costs of militarism and oppression rather than interstate conflict (Steans, 1998; Tickner, 1997).

Brief Chronicle of Feminist Engagement in IRT

Social sciences have created theories to define the problems in its domain and explore the different ways to examine and deal with those problems. Although feminism developed from other academic disciplines in the last fifty years (Smith, 2013), feminism entered the field of international relations theory more than 30 years ago, and thus 70 years after the beginning of International Relations as an academic discipline. For the academic field of International Relations, the decade of the 1980s effectively opened with two primary texts: Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (1977) and Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979).

Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Relations* was one of the revolutionary works produced at the time, which opened up all of International Relations to radical deviations from the general tone of the Bull and Waltz publications. Enloe’s work demonstrated that by focusing on women and gender, International Relations could more clearly illustrate the extent to which power goes into the constitution of international politics, more effectively than conventional theories could comprehend. It remains a core text in the study of feminist international politics to this day (Sylvester, 2004).

Two years earlier, Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Women and War* (1987) was published. Likewise, in 1988, Tickner reformulated Hans Morgenthau's principles of political realism from a feminist perspective. From then on, feminist texts increased over time, all directly examining the issue of women and gender in the study of international relations and its practice.

As Christine Sylvester (2004) argues, the conjunction of International Relations' theoretical weakness and the potential new world order in the 1980s paved the way for theoretical and empirical intrusion by a new set of scholars. Among them were feminists, who took center stage with conferences and workshops for mainstream International Relations audiences around the world. They established the Feminist and Gender Studies section of the International Studies Association and the Gender and International Relations Group at the British International Studies Association. These developments worked to place feminist scholars and their work in institutionally recognized positions. Books and articles then increased, and mainstream International Relations teaching programs began to include some feminist or gender courses.

Early formulations of feminist scholarship in international relations included developing theoretical typologies, specifically liberal, Socialist Marxist, radical and postmodern. That was accompanied by more philosophically inspired analyses with empiricist, standpoint, and post-structural labels (Zalewski, 1993).

Conclusion

Since the emergence of International Relations as a field independent of Political Science, many theories and approaches have appeared to understand and interpret international reality and present a clear vision of the interactions and influences that occur within it. In the 1980s, feminism was considered a new intellectual trend at the International Relations theory
level, occupying a distinguished position among the alternative theoretical approaches to international relations.

This paper examined the participation of Feminist International Relations Theory (FIRT) in International Relations Theory (IRT). Feminism worked to liberate the theorizing process from the male-centric hegemony of the dominant trend by undermining the philosophical, epistemological, and methodological foundations on which it was based, as well as restructuring the theory of international relations and the theorizing process based on the concept of gender. Relying on the concept of gender, feminists presented a unique and valuable analytical tool, which demonstrated how many of the basic concepts (such as the state, sovereignty, power, or rationality) on which the prevailing theories such as realism were built on, reflected the masculine values and characteristics which made them provide fragmented, biased, and incomplete knowledge. Feminism has introduced a new paradigm for the interpretation of international politics and, by introducing gender into the process of theorizing international relations and critique thereof, has put under scrutiny the decision-making process, the position of women in it, and what women can accomplish in this field. Thus, it can be included in the category of behavioral theories.

Feminism has contributed on the ontological and epistemological levels. Ontologically, it introduced a new actor in international relations, women. Epistemologically, it presented alternatives by reformulating new hypotheses for international relations, primarily through its criticism of classic realism, reconsidering it to be a gendered theory that depends on power, unlike feminism which adopts a neutral view of international relations and a cooperative formula instead of a conflictual one.

However, feminism could not reach the primary goal of theorizing in International Relations—to find a general and comprehensive theory. Instead, it presented different ideas that tried to draw attention to women and their role in politics or the public sphere.

References


