

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Feminism: A Significant Role to Play in the Study of International Relations

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## Abstract

Feminist Theory began to gain attention in International Relations (IR) studies in the late 1980s, with women's rights no longer being ignored. Since then, more women have started to openly express their opinions on IR studies. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that Feminism has increased the role that it has to play in the study of IR in the 21st Century. In the first section of the article, there will be a brief explanation of the background and standpoint of Feminism. Then, it will explain the perspective of Feminist Theory from different approaches. In the next section, the role of feminist scholars in IR will be analyzed. Christine Sylvester and Cynthia Enloe are two obvious scholars who have had an influence on IR. Then, this article will analyze the standpoint of Feminism on war and peace issues. In the following section, the Iraq War will be taken into account as a case study. Then, this article will analyze this case through realist, liberal and feminist lenses - to compare the different standpoints of each theory. Moving to the next section, it will discuss why Feminism has not long played a significant role in the study of IR. Then, in the conclusion, it will sum up the feminist role in IR, to establish whether it has played a significant role or not.

**Keywords:** Realism, Liberalism, International Relations

## Introduction

Before the 1980s, there were many women's organizations in world relations. And the largest of all was the International Council of Women, that included forty-one countries at that time. Women became more active in the the League of Nations, as a result of Article 7, which stated that "All positions under or in connection with the League, including the Secretariat, shall be open equally to men and women" [1, p.233]. This article allowed women to have much greater participation in the organization. Nevertheless, women's role did not improve any further until the collapse of the League of Nations in 1946. In the 1960s, there was a mass movement – a rebirth of feminist activism [2]. In 1972, the 'Journal of Conflict Resolution' claimed to be the first published feminist English language journal of IR [3], with articles written by Berenice Carroll. In one article Carroll argued that IR scholars would gain more benefit if they rethought their ideas about power and began to revise womens' role in the structure of international society [3]. This article was ignored for fifteen years, but Carroll continued to do more research on her work. Later on, her work greatly influenced women's peace movements, and also encouraged women to play a greater roles in the IR sphere. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, feminist theories entered the IR sphere, with more concrete information. The standpoint of feminists, according to Harding was "to identify the element of women's voice insight, understanding of reality and through political struggle as

well as good feminist research transform these elements into a morally and scientifically preferable grounding for our interpretations and explanations of nature and social life” [as cited in 4, p.172].

In the study of International Relations (IR), there are many theories that are based on general perceptions. Two well-known examples are Realism and Liberalism. Both of these theories are the main actors in IR, but neither of them places much importance on the role of women and children, as both actors are primarily focused on the military and economic spheres - with no emphasis on social issues. However, Feminist Theory had managed to stage an official entry into the sphere of IR by the end of the late 1980s, with women’s rights no longer being ignored - and with many women openly expressing their opinions on IR issues. Feminist scholars further explained that in the past why there were the lack of feminist ideas in international relations. It was because the international politics elite was mostly for men. Hence, only men and not women were capable of dealing with the issues of international relations, foreign policy actors and decision-makers.

Within feminist theories, there are different approaches. Liberal Feminism believes in the achievement of women’s equality by the removal of obstacles to the same rights and opportunities as men. Critical Feminism, according to Whitworth [5], states that to understand gender, both men and women should examine their particular circumstances. Feminist Constructivism emphasizes gender, and how gender is shaped by global politics. Feminist Poststructuralism tries to disclose hierarchies through analyzing texts and their meaning, because their proponents see gender as a complex social construction. Postcolonial Feminism, according to Mohanty [6], emphasizes that women around the world exhibit significant differences, depending on their background. As a result, it was thought that Western feminists could not assume that all women had similar needs. This last approach seeks to correct the misperception that all women are essentially the same.

## **The Perspective of Feminist Theory From Different Approaches**

Christine Sylvester and Cynthia Enloe are the two feminist scholars most obviously influential in this field of study. In the book “Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era”, written by Christine Sylvester, the author established her subject expertise by linking International Relations Theory with Feminist Theory. Goldstein [7] stated that this book looked at three epistemologies. Firstly, she examined Feminist Empiricism, which used scientific methods to analyze women. Secondly, she emphasized the feminist standpoint, in which women have a unique perspective, and in which everything can be mediated through these perspectives. Thirdly, she examined Post-Modern Feminism, which treated gender as a social construct which could be deconstructed by teasing out the hidden assumptions.

Sylvester began to play a greater role in the International Relations arena, after she realized that IR Theories were ill-conceived from the feminist viewpoint. She labelled this misconception as ‘gender-blind’, because IR theories tried to set women outside the boundaries of IR debate, and issues about women were kept silent. She stated [8, p.211] “Women are always of another place. Our absence is required, must be invented, to enable the encoding of International Relations as masculine territory”. Sylvester is one of the feminist scholars who has done most to achieve global recognition of what she has said. Her work was of good quality, and it really sent a message to IR theorists to re-consider how women thought.

Cynthia Enloe is another feminist who has had a great influence on IR. She wrote the book called *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*. Enloe [9] took the analysis of women as actors in world politics a step further. She also urged the World to stop excluding women from international affairs, as Sylvester had done previously (see above). This book allowed the reader a greater understanding of international politics from the feminist viewpoint. Enloe also wrote many other books about Feminism in International Relations, and all of them became important feminist studies sources on IR.

## **The Standpoint of Feminism on War and Peace Issues**

Realism focuses on state security and power. Liberalism focuses on domestic actors, with power not being the principle goal of this theory - as is the case with Realism, in which the state seeks to maximize its power. It is claimed that Realism has been present in world international politics for nearly 2,500 years. By comparison, Liberalism was established by German philosopher Immanuel Kant in 1795.

Feminist perspectives do not focus on the state as the dominant actor. Feminism emphasizes social issues instead of power-seeking by the state. As a result, when there is a focus on war and peace issues, this has usually led automatically to male social constructions. In this case, gender is an important factor, because men are characterized as active agents, rational and aggressive. In contrast, women are characterized as passive victims, emotional and peaceful. These characteristics, according to Feminist Theory, mean that war or conflict is far more likely to happen with men, rather than with women.

According to Regan and Paskeviciute [10], hierarchical power structures can be claimed to be at the heart of feminist critiques within International Relations. When women have more opportunities to play a greater role in politics, it will be harder for men to make the decision to go to war. War is an evil, from the feminist viewpoint, because women and children always suffer in wartime. If there is a way to avoid war, feminists will not hesitate

to find it. Moreover, Ruddick [as cited in 4] stated that women are less prone to war because they learn special lessons from their mothers' behavior. In studies of male and female attitudes towards the use of force against Iraq in the Gulf War between 1980 and 1988, Gallagher, Hart & Teeter [as cited in 10] found evidence which supported the view that women were less likely to condone force against Iraq. This was because women were thought to be more caring, empathetic and cooperative than men. The use of force was not considered the solution to conflict, in the feminist way of thinking.

There is strong empirical evidence about women's attitude to war and peace issues. If there is a military dispute between two states in which the majority of people in the political arena are women, this will normally result in the leaders of both states trying to find a solution that creates the lowest possible level of violence; as a form of mutual compromise. In the 1980s, many women campaigned for peace, to ensure the removal of nuclear weapons of war from Greenham Common [11] in the UK. Enloe [12] stated that one of the most distinguishing aspects of militaries is that they are almost exclusively male.

Although there were some females serving in militaries, this was no guarantee that militaries could be trusted by the states in which they were based. As a result, militaries could usually be claimed as male territories. Nevertheless, not all men are eager to go to war, but they sometimes have no other choice. It is often considered a man's duty to perform military service. Overall, women can generally claim to be less war-prone than men.

International Relations theories also place importance on war and peace issues. Realism focuses on the state maximizing its power with little concern that such power-seeking might cause war. In contrast, Liberalism focuses on the state building democratic peace among nations. However, none of these theories really consider how women's lives might be affected; but only emphasize the masculine point of view, and focus on the importance of the state's sovereignty.

Feminism made the first attempt in IR to reveal its feminine point of view about war and peace. In the study of war and peace issues in the IR sphere, Feminism can thus claim to have played a significant role in the study of IR. Feminism analyzed these issues through the eyes of women who were also an integral part of society.

Therefore, it is important for IR scholars to perceive the voice of the feminine side - not only from the masculine side. Below, a case study is made of the Iraq War, seen through the lenses of three IR theories: Realism, Liberalism and Feminism will be taken into account in this analysis. This will indicate the differences in each theory, and recognize the feminist role in IR, as a means to improve the IR field, so that it might become more efficient in its perceptions.

## The Iraq War Through Realist, Liberal and Feminist Lenses

Since the Cold War ended, democratization has spread strongly across the globe - with many states adapting the ideology as their main political regime. Since that time, war has yet to take place between liberal democratic states. The Iraq War was an exception because it was not a war between liberal democratic states, but one waged against an illiberal state. The Iraq War took place at the beginning of our current 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which in itself seems a good reason why this article has taken it as a case study because Iraq war was a 1st formal big war of this new century. Moreover, the Iraq War was with an Islamic state, in which there was a lack of women's rights. Hence, this article would like to begin by analyzing the Iraq War through a Realism lens. After the Cold War ended, the World turned to a unipolar system, with the US becoming a hegemonic country. To some US eyes, all treaties and agreements were obstacles to their country gaining ground in its national interests; hence it was not necessary for the US to consider paying attention to these. During President Clinton's office, he launched the unilateralism policy, and this policy was continued by President Bush. When Bush was elected, his administrative manner was also hubristic. The obvious example would be the decision to declare war on Iraq, without taking the opinion of the UN into consideration. The majority of people within the Bush administration, the President included, could claim to be on the side of Realism; for instance, Vice President Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and Condoleezza Rice. The first action of the US was to create sanctions against Saddam's government, because the US claimed that Iraq was lacking in the field of human rights. Then, the US blamed Saddam for acquiring WMDs. This became a big excuse to invade Iraq. The Bush administration had already made the decision to fight against Saddam. They also believed that without Saddam, the US would be able to play a greater role in the Middle-East.

Moreover, the Iraq War would remain a good example to rogue states that wanted to challenge US power – for them to reconsider their actions against that country. Realists [13] believe that a very powerful country can maintain their status quo by giving greater importance to the relations between military and economic spheres. Moreover, Realists believe that the state needs to be certain that other states will not shift the balance of power against them. In this case the US invaded Iraq because President Bush wanted to demolish the so-called 'Axis of Evil' - to guarantee that Iraq could not strike back in a way that might decrease US power in the future. On March 18th, 2008, it will be five years since the US invasion, but the situation there does not seem to be getting any better – in spite of Saddam's death in December 2006. President Bush and his team made a big mistake in invading Iraq. The US President's popularity decreased dramatically after he could not prove that Iraq had acquired WMDs. The US spent a lot of their budget in the military sphere during the Iraq War, and now that is having a big effect on the American economy.

To analyze the Realism viewpoint, this crisis happened because Bush wanted to maximize US power, worldwide. According to Mearsheimer [13], states should look for opportunities to gain more power because that is the best way to ensure their own survival.

Now the Iraq War will be analyzed through the lens of Liberalism. Generally, Liberalism focuses on economic interdependence, international cooperation and democratic peace. The Liberalism standpoint was that in the US, after the 911 tragedy, national security became the major issue of the state. Military power was greatly increased. But from a liberalist perspective, economic issues were also involved in the Iraq War. Iraqi oil and its other natural resources were attractive to the major powers. In the modern world, oil is the mechanism to run the world economy and the US still relies on Middle-Eastern countries for its oil supplies; and the situation between the US and these countries is always unstable. It would be preferable that the US had more of its own domestic oil reserves. This reasoning became the hidden agenda of the US, from the liberalist standpoint. Moreover, peace-seeking is normally considered one of the principle goals of Liberalism. Liberals [14] generally believe that democracies never wage war against each other. But Iraq is a non-democratic state, and so it does not really conform to this model. To democratize Iraq was a major reason given by the US for declaring war against Iraq.

After analyzing the Iraq War through both Realism and Liberalism lenses, this article will now analyze it through another important lens - which is Feminism. Feminists do not think of war as a way to increase state power - as do Realists. Feminists do not look at war as a way to increase economic benefits. They also do not pay attention to the country's regime. Rather, feminists pay heavy attention to the effects of war on vulnerable citizens in the affected societies. No IR theory was previously able to explain the suffering of these people from war. Such theories mostly emphasized the benefits of state and individual interests that accrued from victory in a war. From the feminist perspective, the Iraq War, and its preceding sanctions, led to the malnourishment of women and children. When women started to become malnourished, the 'Domino Effect' passed that problem on to their children - and especially their infants - who depended on their mother's health. During wartime, women lose their jobs; they cannot earn money to buy the four basic necessities for a living. They are also often the victims of war rape; but none of the previous IR theories have really expressed these problems to the World. As mentioned earlier, females generally prefer peace, and are more likely to seek compromise than males. Above all, feminists want to raise gender securities issues to be on the global politics agenda, and they want to use gender as a category of analysis. And so feminists have intentionally widened the IR debate to a much wider perspective.

Furthermore, feminists often examine cases of International Relations at the micro-level, unlike other more general IR outlooks. Without feminism, the study of IR would be confined to the masculine viewpoint, and thus could not perceive the entire world of international relations. Below, this article will examine why Feminism did not previously have a significant role to play in the study of International Relations.

## **Feminism's Role in the Study of International Relations**

The feminist role in International Relations has proliferated in the last decade. Nevertheless, there are still many remaining boundaries between feminists and mainstream IR scholars. There has been little constructive engagement between both groupings [15]. There have been misunderstandings between the two groups about the methodologies used by feminists. Keohane [as cited in 16] stated that IR scholars will understand only if feminists renounce their ideology and commit themselves to the basic methodology of social science. This is because feminism perspectives are based on ontology and epistemology; and those are not the usual methodologies with which IR scholars operate. Moreover, feminists and IR scholars often talk about very different worlds, and analyze cases with very different methods. Feminist scholars argued that the theoretical foundations of International Relations are based on traditional malefemale dichotomies. Feminist contributions to international relations are not just about adding women to the study of international politics, they are deeper. During the late 1980's in the third debate "feminist scholars contested the exclusionary state-centric and positivist nature of the discipline primarily at the metatheoretical level" [19]. Many of those feminist contributions sought to deconstruct and subvert realism, one of the dominant power politics explanation for post-war international relations [18]. These new theoretical and epistemological challenges to international relations opened the space for critical scholarship, in where "they begged the question of what a feminist perspective of world politics would look like substantively and how different would be" [19].

IR scholars did not previously agree with the feminist theories on gender and peace. Feminists believed that women are more peaceful than men - and that the World would be less violent if the majority of leaders were women. IR scholars disagreed with the feminists because there were some many examples of women politicians who had acted like men; for instance, Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi. As a result, IR scholars believed that feminists could not assume that women are more peaceful than men. According to Tickner [18], women leaders in western states are more likely to oppose the use of force in international actions and are seem to be more supportive of humanitarian interventions. Therefore, a feminist perspective on International Relations would create a more realistic understanding of how it works. It would help to achieve those missing pieces that are not considered in

the international policy and decision-making, such as the issue in human security. The value for a feminist perspective on International Relations could introduce a humanitarian and more sensitive vision that can help to have a better understanding of how the world actually works. Nevertheless, IR scholars accused feminists of being wrong, because they only used epistemological methods - and this created outcomes that did not have enough potential to be trusted. IR scholars believed that Feminists needed to use their own IR methodologies to achieve accurate outcomes.

According to Tickner [17], there had been many times when IR scholars questioned feminists who could not provide a brief overview of their theory. He believed this was because feminists faced communication difficulties with IR scholars. Feminists did not feel familiar with the methodologies that had been used by IR scholars in the past. Thus, Feminism was sometimes not counted as a vital part of the IR sphere. Robert Keohane devised many of the arguments against Feminist Theory. Keohane often opposed the feminist viewpoint, but he was also willing, at times, to listen to feminist critiques. However, he was often quick to deny these critiques if he found that they went against the research methods to which he was committed [as cited in 3]. According to Keohane, IR scholars sometimes operated with closed minds; and would often disagree immediately with ideas which were different from their own. And so he thought that feminist theories, that were currently unacceptable, might be acceptable in future. Thus, he thought that it cannot be said that feminists do not have a role to play in the study of IR. In support of this statement, the Constructivist Theory (which appeared in the IR sphere in the late 1980s) stated that IR studies shared ontological grounds with feminism – and thus provided a unique window of opportunity for understanding [16]. Moreover, many feminist works, including Enloe: 1989, Tickner: 1992, Peterson: 1992a, Sylvester: 1994 and Whitworth: 1994 [as cited in 16] also helped to create the standpoint for the feminists in the IR sphere. Therefore, feminism can claim to have a significant role to play in the study of International Relations.

## Conclusion

From the late 1980s on, Feminism began to make its formal appearance in the field of IR. From that time on, feminists started to play a greater role in the study of IR. Nowadays, many universities have opened feminist courses for IR students. Although there are still many critiques that say that feminist methodology is very different from IR methodology, there has been no real reason to confine Feminism outside the boundaries of IR. Feminist methodology is based on ontology and epistemology, and is thus different from IR methodology - this is nevertheless the way that Feminist Theory works. Feminists tend to examine cases from the micro-level, whereas IR theories tend to examine everything from the macro-level.

Furthermore, Sylvester and Enloe - both feminist scholars - started to play a greater role in IR by publishing books that carried a clear standpoint for their opinions. Feminists did not focus on state power, as their main principles concerned gender issues. They tried to raise gender security issues to be an integral part of global politics. Feminism also looked at war in a different way. When talking about war, feminists did not look at power - but rather they focused on social issues that affected vulnerable citizens in their societies.

Above all else, Feminism can increase the potential importance of the study of IR. In the past, IR critique only operated with a masculine perspective, but this changed with the entry of Feminism into IR. It opened IR to a wider picture of the world with a more feminine perspective. And this gave IR a greater potential to influence global affairs, because the world consists of both men AND women. Hence, it is necessary to look at the World from both perspectives.

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