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Feminist International Relations

Elisabeth Prügl, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies

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Feminist international relations is situated uneasily within a subfield of political science, on the one hand, and within an interdisciplinary literature on globalization, on the other. Emerging in the 1990s from a critique of the realist and rationalist IR canon, feminist IR research has diversified considerably, including different lines of theoretical and empirical inquiry and drawing on a range of methods. Different

emphases emerge in three fields – feminist security studies, feminist international political economy, and feminist work on international governance.

In a striking reversal, *feminist security studies* have emerged as the most visible research field in feminist IR during the past decade.[1] Addressed to the traditional core of IR scholarship, this literature is both theoretical and empirical. It continues the critique of core concepts that spawned feminist IR as a field in the early 1990s and broadens this critique to concepts such as offense/defense, just war, and power transition theory (Sjoberg 2006, 2010; Wilcox 2009). Moreover, it introduces into research on war and conflict considerations of the body, drawing on the theoretical work of Judith Butler (Wadley 2010; Wilcox 2010). This is an exciting new push to reformulate foundational concepts and themes that have been at the core of international relations as a masculinist knowledge enterprise.

A burst of empirical research has accompanied these theoretical developments. It describes patterns of sexual violence during war, seeks to make sense of women committing violence, and explores the reproduction of gender in postwar peacebuilding efforts (Leiby 2009; MacKenzie 2009; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). The adoption in the United Nations Security Council of a string of resolutions focusing on women, peace, and security has, in addition, generated research on gender constructions in these resolutions, and on successes and problems of implementation (Cohn 2008; Hudson 2009; Tryggestad 2009). Finally, during the past decade, a rich literature has emerged that uses quantitative methods to link women's treatment within states to the likelihood of these states to resolve conflicts in violent ways (Caprioli 2005; Caprioli and Boyer 2001; Melander 2005). Together, these studies and analyses make gender issues visible in security practices to an unprecedented degree. And in doing so, they largely sever the association of women with peace or with victimhood, employ sophisticated understandings of gender as productive of security practices, link these practices to patriarchal conduct outside war, and interpret security politics as a politics of gender.

1. A quick survey of the 2011 program of the International Studies Association (ISA) conference shows that feminist security studies account for almost half of the panels sponsored by the Feminist Theory and Gender Studies section. This is a stark reversal of the situation 10 years ago when — at the 2001 ISA conference — only three out of 24 FTGS panels focused on security, with the bulk dedicated to issues of political economy, human rights, and governance.

If feminist security studies speak to the core of international relations as a subfield of political science, then *feminist international political economy* (IPE) is situated within a more interdisciplinary realm that includes scholars from a range of the social sciences. Here as well, a critique of concepts continues to inspire research as IR scholars join feminist economists to emphasize the need to consider the reproductive economy. In addition, they theorize a "virtual economy" that captures the flow of symbols and information made possible with new information technologies (Peterson 2003; Youngs 2007). They also share with feminist economists an understanding of markets not as natural forces but, rather, as socially and politically instituted. Governments and the institutions of global governance make the rules for international economic exchange and thereby infuse gender into economic conduct (Rai and Waylen 2008; Waylen 2004). Rules emanating from the World Trade Organization, the European Union, and the World Bank, in addition, have constitutive force, empowering market actors along the lines of gender and restructuring intimate practices in situated contexts (Bedford 2009; Prügl 2008). Local gender regimes importantly direct these types of impacts (Caraway 2005). Drawing on Foucaultian methods, scholars also explore the way in which gendered economic knowledge produces boundaries and exclusions and the way in which gender mainstreaming is co-opted into neoliberal strategies (Çaglar 2009; Wöhl 2008). In making visible a complex terrain of governance that links international, regional, and local scales, this literature puts to rest any conception of markets as gender neutral. It also defines an expansive research agenda that approaches economic governance as a governance of gender.

Globalization and the feminization of international migration have opened up another research area for feminist IPE scholars. Researchers explore new international divisions of labor and transnational constructions of gender in global care chains, the international sex trade, and the globalization of domestic work (Agathangelou 2006; Marchand and Runyan 2010). They draw on insights from postcolonial studies, refusing the opposition between local and global, here and there, to map a new field of transnational gender politics (Chowdhry and Nair 2002; Ling 2002). They probe the work of migrant organizations, the political and economic impacts of remittances, and hegemonic constructions of femininity and masculinity in global business media (Hooper 2001; Kunz 2010; Schwenken 2010). This literature charts new loci of transnational politics and with them new sites of gender construction. Considerable scholarly creativity continues to go into making these

spaces visible, together with new conceptualizations of how to think about them.

Two distinctive themes emerge in feminist literature on *international governance*. The first concerns gender mainstreaming, or more broadly, the relationship between feminist strategizing and international organizations. Research on gender mainstreaming has found vast problems of implementation and co-optation (Daly 2005; Moser and Moser 2005), and increasingly assesses the power effects that are generated as feminism moves into the mainstream (Prügl 2009; Zalewski 2010). While the theoretical argument has been made, there remains considerable room for systematic comparative research that documents variations in the effects of gender mainstreaming. The creation of UN Women, the new UN entity tasked with advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women, invites renewed reflection on the relationship between gender mainstreaming and international organizations.

The second theme of feminist research in international governance focuses on women's human rights and the way in which these rights travel. Feminists have taken the lead in criticizing the static treatment of norms in IR scholarship. They have shown that women's rights are constantly negotiated in international contexts, such as in the committee overseeing the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. They have also drawn on literatures in legal anthropology to argue that international norms undergo processes of translation as activists, lawyers, or parliamentarians invoke them in diverse situations (Merry Engle 2006; Zwingel 2010, n.d.). These considerations refocus the discussions over whether human rights are Western, and whether women's rights are incompatible with religious prescriptions or traditions. They also question understandings of human rights as a purely legal construct to be implemented by states, approaching them instead as one package of international norms among many, negotiated and subject to various forms of power politics.

In sum, diverse and vibrant research programs continue to thrive in contemporary feminist international relations. They problematize foundational concepts in security and political economy, provide new insights into the link between war and gender, reconceptualize the global economy and show how it is governed, analyze feminist strategies in international organizations, and explore the way in which international gender norms travel. Some of this scholarship has been published in *Politics & Gender*, but not nearly enough. As an associate editor, I look forward to seeing an avalanche of submissions on these

issues, making *Politics & Gender* a must-read for scholars in the subfield of feminist international relations.

Elisabeth Prügl is Professor of International Relations at Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland: elisabeth.pruegl@graduateinstitute.ch

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