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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND POLITICS

The State of Feminist Security Studies: A Conversation

Introduction

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A growing and evolving research program in "Feminist Security Studies" has been the subject of substantial debate in the field.[1] Feminists studying security have critiqued concepts traditionally employed in the study of security, used gender-based perspectives to uncover new empirical knowledge, looked at the roles that women and gender play in combat and combat resolution, and brought attention to new or neglected subjects of security. Most work in Feminist Security Studies shares an understanding of what counts as a security issue and to whom the concept of security should be applied; an understanding of the gendered nature of many of the values prized in the realm of international security; a recognition of gender playing a broad and diverse role in the theory and practice of security; and a critique of the idea that work in security studies that does not address gender is somehow gender neutral. Feminist work addressing security has pointed out gender's key role, conceptually, in understanding security; empirically, in seeing causes and predicting outcomes; normatively, in understanding what is good and bad about security practices; and prescriptively, in terms of looking to solve the world's most serious security problems.

While the subfield designation "Feminist Security Studies" has become a popular referent for much of this work, the question of what the label means still merits exploration. This Critical Perspectives section evolved out of a roundtable at the "Gender and Security: Theory and Practice" working group at the 2010 International Studies

1. The term was first used by Smith (1999), but has been used by feminists Sjoberg (2009, 2010), Shepherd (2009, 2010), Wibben (2010), and others, as well as in conference discussions and panel titles over the last four years or so, in the sense used here.

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Association meeting in New Orleans. The roundtable participants were asked to discuss the state of Feminist Security Studies, and given several guiding questions, including: What is Feminist Security Studies? What is the relationship between Feminist Security Studies and international relations or its security studies subfield (in the United States or abroad)? What is the relationship between theory and practice in Feminist Security Studies?

These questions are crucially important, we believe, both for understanding feminist approaches to security and for situating them within (feminist) IR and security studies. Feminist IR scholars have consistently been concerned with questions of war and peace (and particularly with antiwar and antimilitarist critiques).[2] But some feminists argue that feminist IR *critiqued* war(s) more than it studied war(s); that is, there were feminist peace studies and feminist critical engagements with "IR," but not feminist *war studies* or feminist *security studies*.[3] Still others wondered why feminists in IR remained tied to attempts to do work intelligible to, and therefore in part defined by, IR's mainstream(s).[4]

The different contributors to this forum address these different questions, and come to them from different perspectives. J. Ann Tickner discusses the process of building the Feminist Security Studies project, epistemologically, methodologically, and conceptually. Carol Cohn examines the reflexivity of methods in Feminist Security Studies and the importance of the question of positionality for feminist research. Valerie Hudson looks for an inclusive approach to Feminist Security Studies, particularly a Feminist Security Studies that is open to and embraces quantitative, positivist work. Annick T. R. Wibben, critical of this position, addresses the hard questions of Feminist Security Studies' borders, focusing on what is gained and lost by conversing with the "security" establishment. Lauren Wilcox pays attention to the subject of Feminist Security Studies, noting the importance of seeing embodiment in feminist approaches to security. And Laura Sjoberg grapples with what she sees as the essentially contested and dialectical nature of Feminist Security Studies.

2. E.g., Grant and Newland (1991); Peterson (1992); Tickner (1992).

3. E.g., Reardon (1985); Ruddick (1989); Sharoni (1997). Sjoberg first heard this question articulated at ISA 2004 in Montreal by Sylvester, giving the presentation that turned into Sylvester (2005).

4. E.g., Squires and Weldes (2007); Youngs (2004); Zalewski (2007).

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In these pieces, it is possible to see a number of different approaches. Some emphasize "Feminist Security" Studies; others emphasize Feminist "Security Studies." Some see a particular research ethos and methodology to Feminist Security Studies; others see it as an open community. Some see Feminist Security Studies as about women and men; others see it as about masculinities and femininities; and still others see it as about embodiment, performance, and other complicated constructions. What follows is a discussion about the contours of that debate, which we hope contributes to, engages, and inspires further conversation within and about Feminist Security Studies in (feminist) IR and security studies.

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Feminist Security Studies: Celebrating an Emerging Field

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As feminist international relations enters its third decade as a subdiscipline within IR, it is particularly fitting that we recognize and celebrate the stimulating and important new research that is being done in Feminist Security Studies. In the early days of feminist IR, feminists tended to stay away from security studies, at least as it is conventionally defined, a tendency that, fortunately, is no longer the case. The rich and varied research being done by contributors to this volume is evidence that the field has taken off and that its research agendas are flourishing.

First, I will briefly situate Feminist Security Studies in historical perspective and highlight the many different ways that feminists are investigating security issues; then, I will say something about the importance of efforts to connect scholars and practitioners. Finally, I will reflect on the potential (or lack thereof) for dialogue between feminist and mainstream security studies, which I define as research that does not recognize gender and which uses social scientific methodologies.

One of my earliest motivations for thinking about gender issues in international relations came during the 1980s when I began to notice a sense of disempowerment and disinterest that my female undergraduates often expressed when I discussed nuclear weapons and strategic issues in my introductory IR courses. This led me to my initial recognition (which came relatively late in my academic career) of the profoundly gendered nature of international politics, particularly issues of national security, where identities and policies associated with a militarized form of masculinity are so very evident and where women are usually absent. With some notable exceptions — the work of Enloe (1989, 1993, 2000) and Cohn (1987, 1993) come immediately to mind — much of the early

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