



Exploring the Possibility to Feminize Four Macro-level International Relations Theories

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Abstract. The traditional international relations theories such as realism, liberal institutionalism, world system theory, and Samuel Huntington's theory of civilizational conflicts are all positive approaches because they strive to establish scientific models of how the international relations operate. However, the consequent weakness or even the lack of normative approach in the study of international relations means that it would undermine the validity of study results without morally integrating marginal and vulnerable social groups, particularly women, into theoretical and empirical analysis. Therefore, this article will strive to explore the possibility to 'feminize' traditional international relations theories through adopting the feminist perspective in the critical theoretical analysis. The literature analysis is the main methodology of this article as two case studies of climate change and female terrorism would be used to reveal that women could exert their independent agency in the international agendas, thereby justifying the necessity of this research to feminize traditional theories of international relations and the argument that women are also important international actors except states, international organizations, multinational enterprises, and ideologies.

Keywords: International relations theories · Women · Environmental activism · Female Agency · Female Terrorism

1 Introduction

Traditional international theories seem to get trapped in the dilemma of 'hegemonic masculinity' as they all ignore women as the active actors in the international system albeit they are logically correct according to their positive models. For example, offensive realism denies completely the female perspective in its analysis by clinging to the state-centric view, as John Mearsheimer argued that the international relations are characterized by states pursuing hegemony because of anarchic ordering principle [1]. Also, Kenneth Waltz emphasized the state's irreplaceable role by rejecting the idea that NATO's relative autonomy and maintenance after the end of the Cold War could confirm the triumph of international organizations upheld by liberal institutionalists because he regarded it instead 'as a means of lengthening America's grip on the foreign and military policies of European states' [2]. However, the ignorance of feminist perspective could undermine the theoretical validity because the state-centric view must rely on the

masculin misunderstanding that states are principal and homogenous actors in the international system, thereby underestimating women's agency in both the domestic and the international arenas. This hegemonic masculinity embedded in the realism also inherently overlooks the victimization of women as a particularly vulnerable social group in the contemporary global crises such as climate change, poverty, and sexual violence. As a result, realist's positive study results that international relations is only characterized as the great power politics based on national power apparently lack the normative consideration of feminist perspective, which results in an incomplete analysis. In fact, many empirical studies such as the study of climate change and the female terrorism could point out that women play a vital role as the international actors in addition to the states in the international system. It is also normatively unacceptable to focus only on states interactions, therefore overlooking the domestic and international gender oppression as a structural force to drive women to the terrorist organizations as a means of improving gender status. As Mcvey et al. argued, the male dominance has been a patriarchal structure that delineate men as dominant and women as subordinated [3]. So, it is necessary to take this institutionalized sex difference into account when analyzing international relations, otherwise the theoretical validity could be undermined. To avoid the hegemonic masculinity embedded in the study of international relations, this article would use literature analysis to show how important the female perspective completes in the flaws of traditional international relations theories, and how women could be actors in the international affairs. This article used keyword searching as a means of doing research on the academic searching engines such as Google Scholar and the library of University of Melbourne. As a result, 16 academic sources would be within the analytical framework of this article.

2 Victims or Actors: Female Agency in the Case of Climate Change

Core arguments and perspectives of four macro-level international relations theories can be seen in Table 1.

Liberal institutionalists argue that the global governance based on the international cooperations facing the contemporary global crises such as the climate change could reduce the transaction costs and make the process of political decision-making more transparent [4]. In this regard, climate change seems to be a driving force to promote the international cooperations and the international competition imposed by the anarchy is meaningless. In contrast, some scholars still regard the global governance as an arena in which great power politics and zero-sum games are ubiquitous. For example, although the European Union guaranteed a 20% reduction in its green house gas emissions (compared with 1990 levels) and to obtain 20 percent renewables in the energy consumption mix, Miranda Schreurs argued that it is the best choice for EU to exert its soft power to maintain its declining global leadership [5]. However, both liberal institutionalists and realists inherently remove the women from their dimension of analysis, which undermines their theoretical validity because climate change not only is a positive touchstone to test international cooperation or great power politics, but also a gendered oppressive force that exposes women to greater vulnerability. For example, in Darfur, the low rainfall and recurrent droughts have exposed female vulnerability more severely to the

Table 1. Analysis of Four Traditional Theories of International Relations

Theories	Theoretical arguments
Realism	Nations are primary international actors and analysis of relative power changes is the main theoretical focus.
Liberal institutionalism	International cooperation based on the positive-sums and rational decision-making could achieve the intentional peace. International organizations and institutions are main actors.
World systems theory	3: World System Theory: This is the branch of critical international relations theory that focus mainly on global economic inequality resulted from capitalist mode of production. Nations are inevitably the primary actors in this theoretical perspective.
The clash of civilizations	4: The Clash of Civilizations: Different civilizations tend to be conflictual with each other in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Confucian, Islamic, and Christian civilizations are likely to struggle for the dominant place in the new era. Different civilizations are therefore the new abstract actors in the 21st century.

sexual and gender based violence because of their female family responsibility to walk far to collect water [6]. Additionally, climate change related displacement and migration makes the privacy impossible, thereby providing fertile ground for incidents of sexual violence such as harassments and rapes [6]. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that women are inherently more vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change because their social identities result in the process of ‘double victimization’, meaning that they not only suffer from the scarcity of basic sustenances because of climate change, but also are exposed to sexual oppressions rampant during and after the natural disasters. Therefore, it is risky to disregard women as the important subjects of analysis because the consequent hegemonic masculinity without feminist perspective would make the results less convincing. In other words, the battled discourse per se between realism and liberal institutionalism is flawed because of its excessive obsession with the positive analysis on the international competition and the international cooperation, which could weaken the normative validity of the results by ignoring the feminist perspective.

Admittedly, the positive functionality of international organizations enshrined by liberal institutionalists could contribute to improving women rights, but the real participation of women in many international negotiations is very limited because states are usually the represents of international cooperations. Humanitarian aids during and after natural disasters or international conflicts often appeal to the ‘human rights’, rather than diverting particular attention to women as a social group. In other words, the international cooperation is fundamentally not aware of the women’s agency. This can explain why eco-feminism such as Navyanda movement aimed to simultaneously promote biodiversity conservation and organic farming organized by women farmers as a way of woman empowerment [6]. Therefore, liberal institutionalism underestimates the role of women both in the form of particular vulnerability resulted from climate change, and active facilitation in the international institutions. In sum, women are not only the

passive objects, they can also exert their influence on the international agendas as international actors, so the traditional view that international actors only compose of states, international organizations and multinational enterprises is outmoded.

3 Systematic Oppression as a Structural Force to Make Women React

On the other hand, critical scholars often appeal to the possibility that the role of states has been weakened because of the power of market-based international actors such as multinational enterprises, particularly in the face of globalization. As Susan Strange argued that “the progressive integration of the world economy, through international production, has shifted the balance of power away from states toward world markets” [2]. While world systems theory supplemented the comments about the consequent global inequality, as Wallerstein pointed out that the global market would divide the international economic system into the ‘periphery’ and the ‘core’, and the global capitals would be transferred from the developing countries to the developed industrialized states, thereby creating a hierarchy tying states into a system of unequal exchange maintained by their differential power capacities [7]. However, both Strange and Wallerstein failed to take the gender oppression into account when they analyzed the power of market or its consequent inequalities.

In fact, the gender oppression could be reinforced through the representations of female terrorists constructed by the contemporary social media as one of the primary products of modern virtual economy. For example, journalists attributed the reason why the female terrorist Ayat Akhras committed to self-bombing suicide to her promiscuity and failed relationships, teasing her as the ‘Palestinian Bride’ [8]. Also, the media coverage of the other female terrorist Hanin Zoubi focused more on her motivations of participating in terrorist organizations as ‘failing her feminine roles as a wife and a mother [9]. In this regard, the social media has the power of discourse to deprive female terrorists’ agency, replacing it by the masculine construction of sexuality and gender roles in the coverage. Consequently, the social media intentionally created an essentialist social construction of female terrorists in which they are depicted as inherently vulnerable and passively non-violent object without any agency. Therefore, it is risky not to admit that the gender oppressions could be reinforced by the global market, and realist’s argument that states are only actors in the anarchic international system is also flawed because social media as a market force could embed sexuality into the international system, which is based on the highly gendered hierarchy. So it also can be inferred that the basic assumption of realism that the international system is anarchic is doubtful because it also seems to be hierarchical from the perspective of feminism. The subjects of analysis should not only be states.

Additionally, although Wallerstein pointed out that the globalization could severely deteriorates the global economic inequalities via establishing an exploitative production relationships, he failed to adopt a feminist perspective and to explain how the consequent poverty and worsened living standards in ‘periphery countries’ could result in more female participation in the violence such as terrorist organizations. As David Shinn argued, while the firm causal relationship between poverty and terrorism is hard to be

established, the destitution and the extreme scarcity of basic subsistences often worsen the socio-economic environment where marginalized individuals find it attractive to join the terrorist organizations as a weapon to struggle for justice [10]. In fact, women and children are the poorest demographic group who are more susceptible to the exposure of terrorist indoctrination because women are less likely to receive better education and traditional female roles as family carers always impose double burdens on them in the job market, thereby limiting their access to higher incomes and living standards, particularly in the developing countries. Guy Standing also regarded women as a primary source of contemporary precarious labor, since 2008 financial crisis many jobs are feminized, meaning women are forced to accept more temporary and casual jobs [11]. Therefore, it is necessary to ‘feminize’ world systems theory because women would suffer more from the global economic inequalities because of their gender identities. Also, the research done in Pakistan showed that the ethnicity fragmentation and the poverty, and unemployment are the main causes of local terrorism, which is perceived by all women of local communities including Sunni, Shia, Hindu, and Christian [12]. This demonstrates that women always face various factors of oppression except gender identities, and in this case the factor is marginal ethnicity. Therefore, the fundamental oppression and inequality is the result of intersectionality, rather than the single gender factor. World systems theory failed to identify both the gender oppression embodied in the global economic inequality and the compounding oppressive effects of intersectionality.

4 The Voluntary Participation as a Means of Exerting Agency Indicates that the Ideological or Civilizational Approach is Flawed

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the theory of ‘clash of civilizations’ proposed by Samuel Huntington predicted that the international order in the 21st century is characterized as international conflicts divided between fault lines of different civilizations, rather than traditional great power politics held by realism. As he pointed out that “the Confucian-Islamic connection has emerged to challenge Western interests, values, and power” [13]. This could explain why many scholars attributed the female participation in the terrorist organizations like ISIS to the ideological factor such as jihadist indoctrination [14]. However, this argument exaggerates the influence of ideology or religion, but the the agency of women is underestimated or even completely ignored. In fact, the terrorist organization per se is symbolically characterized by the highly masculinity, domination, and power, so the participation for women is an opportunity to seize to emancipate from the male patriarchy in the ‘normal society’. For example, terrorist organizations as a highly asculine mechanism could force women to defeminize themselves and to abandon their womanhood altogether through acting on extreme violence. Matusitz and Berisha also argued that female terrorists are actually a collectivity who fights not against the political enemies, but against the patriarchal structure that imposes the ‘societal Stockholm syndrome’ on women as a means of gender subordination [15]. In Sri Lanka, women in Tamil Tiger Organization demonstrate that the gender insecurity in their state such as harassment by the security force and anti-Catholic discrimination

in employment is their motivation to participate in the terrorism attacks [16]. Therefore, it is naive to conclude that the international relations would be characterized as civilizational conflicts in the future without admitting that women could also exert their agency in the international system. Similarly, it is also easy to infer from the analysis of female terrorists that the international system and domestic society are both based on hegemonic masculinity as a machine of gender oppression, thereby spreading the international terrorism and domestic terrorism. Unfortunately, all other traditional theories such as realism, liberal institutionalism, and world systems theory also do not take the female agency into account. The mainstream interpretation of terrorism still focus on the ideological, religious, and civilizational conflicts. The lack of women's voices and analysis of their actions in many international relations theories is fundamentally flawed.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the state-centric view, ignorance of female agency and gender inequality, and the overestimation of ideological or civilizational conflicts all contribute to the hegemonic masculinity embedded in the international relations theories. The normative study in international relations requires the integration of women as an indispensable subject of analysis. If IR theories still lack the feminist perspective, the fundamental flaws resulted from this hegemonic masculinity would undermine the theoretical validity as a result. Therefore, to feminize international relations theories is necessary. It is also recommended that the research in the future could focus on how intersectionality could contribute to the implementation of the more inclusive theoretical critics in the field of international relations because many other social dimensional such as race and class in addition to gender also have potential to normatively complete the current international relations studies.

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