Feminist international relations in the age of the war on terror: Ideologies, religions and conflict

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Feminist International Relations in the Age of the War on Terror

IDEOLOGIES, RELIGIONS AND CONFLICT

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Abstract ──────────────────────────────────

This article introduces this theme issue and examines how Feminist International Relations is responding to the war on terror. The articles address ideologies, religions and conflict and highlight the enduring problem of the absence of women's voices in the theory and practice of mainstream International Relations. I argue that the question of agency is central to the issue as a whole: women's agency or lack of it, to shape not only our own lives and destinies, but those of the wider societies to which we belong. I argue this is best interpreted through a 'transitional nexus' representing the twofold situation women and feminists confront when working for change. This involves not only the kinds of change women are working towards, but also the historically created patriarchal context affecting how such efforts are recognized, or more usually not recognized, because of the marginal status assigned to women and their diverse interests over a long history and across different societies of the world. We need to recognize that there is change 'for women' and change 'by women', the former too often denying women's agency, and the latter asserting it. The articles in this issue address how both characterize the war on terror.

─── **Keywords**

discourse, Feminist International Relations, hegemonic masculinities, inside/outside, orientalism, patriarchy, religion, transitional nexus, war on terror, warrior/maiden, women's agency

INTRODUCTION

It is both pertinent and interesting to focus on the state of the field of Feminist International Relations, broadly defined, in the context of the so-called

contemporary war on terror.[1] There are a number of reasons for this, many of which link to long-standing concerns in International Relations (IR) as well as feminist analysis more specifically. When the editors of *International Feminist Journal of Politics* published the call for papers that led to this theme issue, we[2] entitled it: 'Ideologies, Religions and Conflict: International Feminist Perspectives'. The pluralities indicated here were vital. We were hoping for a multiplicity of locations (of subject matter and authorship), methodologies and theoretical and analytical viewpoints. And we were hoping for useful and unexpected synergies across the various submissions. Such synergies serve two main purposes. First, they ensure that the issue represents more than just the sum of its individual parts, important and distinctive as these are. Second, the ways in which research findings connect or are in tension with one another should stimulate a particular kind of synthesis and critical thought that might otherwise not be possible. The main purpose of this opening article is to reflect on these two areas. So it represents less a summary of the main contributions of the featured articles, and more a discussion of key points they raise regarding current Feminist IR.

The articles that follow all consider 'ideologies, religions and conflict' in some way or another, although perhaps not always in the manner the editors might have expected in putting out the call for papers. How they address (or in certain regards do not explicitly address) the absence of women's voices is complex and worthy of close attention. This will therefore form a substantial part of this article. But to begin with, it is worth outlining the context for this issue – the current 'war on terror'. It has a specific historiography that is ongoing and open to continuing debate and contestation, one which links to well-established themes in IR, as the articles in the issue indicate. The iconographic dawning of it was 11 September 2001 when millions in the USA and around the world watched powerless as two aircraft ploughed into the Twin Towers in New York.[3] Subsequent bombing in Afghanistan by the USA was legitimized on the basis of the hunt for the terrorists of Al Qaeda and its leader Osama Bin Laden.[4] The 2003 Gulf war and its enduring aftermath have emphasized that far from changing the whole character of IR, the era of the war on terror is just as much a story of states and geopolitics, of hegemony, as it has ever been. Possibly more so as the unilateral superiority of the USA in the post-Cold War world has been graphically asserted.[5] The transatlantic alliance between the USA and the UK as part of this picture has brought powerful echoes of the landmark events of the twentieth century, World War I and II, testifying contrarily to the importance of history in what has frequently been claimed as 'a new era'.

In simple terms, this 'war' has been framed as one in which the enemy is a loose network of shifting mobile cells of individuals and groupings (the terrorists) who cannot be regarded as an external threat as such in traditional state-centred IR fashion.[6] Suicide bombers on the London transit system in July 2005 were subsequently identified as resident members of the societies they attacked: 'enemies within', pursuing an agenda antithetical to the peaceful

principles of discursive democracy. Using global communications of Internet and mobile telephony, terrorist networks are, as it were, lifted out of the actual places and political cultures of residence and connected to anti-western, anti-democratic transnational movements of extremist orientation. It is not an overstatement to say that the world, including western governments and their peoples as well as scholars of IR, are still coming to grips with what this means for the way multicultural societies are governed and understood. The current age of terror represents in part a new age of reflexivity about what the (multicultural)[7] state is, and how, importantly, the civil liberties[8] so precious to liberal democracies can be enjoyed or to what extent it is acceptable to curtail them in the interests of security and the greater good.

THE 'TRANSITIONAL NEXUS'

In some respects the articles in this issue align with some of these general questions, but the extent to which they do not is perhaps equally interesting: the ways in which they touch on them only indirectly or obliquely, or at times seem to be quite distant from them. This is a good place to start, reflecting on the contributions of the issue to the broader debate about the war on terror. It is directly linked to the problem of the absence of women's and feminist voices as an enduring characteristic of IR theory and practice: one, which this journal was launched in 1999 specifically to help address. I would argue that the complex mix of messages in this issue usefully indicates two things: one, some of the bases for this enduring absence; and two, a range of ways in which women at all levels are struggling to counter it. I want to look in some detail in the rest of this article at these two areas because they help to elaborate what I see as a 'transitional nexus' that needs to be fully understood, if IR theory and practice are to move more effectively towards integrating women and their interests, instead of marginalizing, manipulating or silencing them. Why do I adopt the term 'transitional nexus'? I do so mainly to clarify a twofold purpose of feminist analysis that looks both back and forward.

Feminist analysis among other things seeks to explain critically why women's voices are absent in IR: to explain how the gendered history of IR has constantly worked primarily to foreground male voices and interests and quieten or ignore female ones. Especially in liberal feminist analysis, where mainstream (or malestream) liberal ideology features equality as a key tenet, this critique is seen as an important basis for political progress, in a straightforward way, moving from a world where men and women are unequal to one where they are equal or more equal. Debates even within liberal feminism make it clear that equality need not necessarily be built on sameness but can in some areas also allow for differences. This recognizes not only differences that may exist *between* women and men, but also, and

crucially, differences that may exist *among* women and men. Equality of opportunity is often emphasized as a way of making evident that 'choice' and 'possibility' are both important. People (men and women) will often want to make different life choices; what is important is equality of opportunity to do so and, where possible, equality of consequence (including of an economic nature). The opportunity has to be real, that is, achievable and sustainable. It cannot just be an abstract idea but has to take account of practical issues that gendered life patterns create. This includes the predominant burden of childcare and domestic labour on women, and the implications of childbirth and rearing for women's career structures, for example.[9]

Marxist and Gramscian feminist analysis places particular emphasis on the economic structures of gender inequality, and the degree to which patriarchal capitalism has skewed wealth, ownership and control heavily towards men, rather than women.[10] Debates persist within feminist scholarship about the relative importance of both economic and political factors of inequality, but both are recognized (alongside cultural and social ones) as fundamental to change for and by women,[11] and transition to societies where men and women are equal rather than unequal. I have used the framing 'for and by women' deliberately here, and it is the crux of not only my further elaboration of the 'transitional nexus', but also of its relevance to understanding the broad contributions of, and connections between the articles in this issue.

The question of agency is central: women's agency or lack of it to shape not only our own lives and destinies but those of the wider societies to which we belong. This is all too often a diminished gendered form of membership where the definition of us as women constrains how we are understood and framed as social actors. These constrained definitions, embedded historically and perpetuated through institutional structures and discourses, impact upon our own sense of self and capacity for action. I am going to discuss the various ways in which the articles that follow point to the complexity of women's agency in contemporary times. This includes the extent to which rearticulations of patriarchy work to reaffirm constrained definitions of women's agency even as they, on the surface, may be claiming recognition of and positive attitudes towards women. This theme threads through this issue and impresses on us the paradoxical qualities of the 'transitional nexus'. This nexus represents the twofold situation women and feminists confront when we are working for change. We are constantly dealing with the material and historically created gender conditions and preconceptions of the present as the prime context for statements and action towards change for greater gender equality in the future. Women's efforts in theory and practice towards transition always confront the context of patriarchal realities. These impact not only on the possibilities for change but also, vitally, on how our efforts are recognized, or more usually not recognized, because of the marginal status those patriarchal realities have assigned to women and women's diverse interests over a long history and across different societies of the world.

The contributions in this issue affirm that patriarchal contexts are multi-layered and dynamic, involving broad social frameworks of ideological politics and religion, structures such as state and family, forces including political representation and economic wealth and influence (or lack of them). In order to understand the context of women's agency, the comprehensiveness of the constraints on it, and the processes by which these are enacted and felt, it is necessary to look across such areas. What this issue clearly signals is that it is insufficient to look at one or the other of them, albeit that their relative importance will vary across specific times, places and situations. These articles prompt us to think about how different sets of constraining or oppressive forces are reinforcing one another, across different times, places and situations, as well as more specifically within them. In this regard, I would view this issue as a contribution to gender and globalization studies, which seek to investigate patterns and work for change within individual societies or local settings, but also to connect them at the global level, including to draw out comparisons and similarities across different localities.

Let us look further at the idea of change 'for women' before moving on to that of change 'by women'. The first draws attention to activities or statements directed to the recognition and addressing of women's conditions and disadvantaged status. In male-dominated societies it is not surprising that the most powerful or influential statements of this kind will be produced in a masculinist context. To explain this straightforwardly, it is one where, to a significant degree, and this qualification is vital, male subjectivities dominate in defining political, economic, social and cultural institutional realities. Female subjectivities are inherently subjugated in this context along with their interests and realities. To put it crudely, masculinist oppositional structures of domination position men as subjects and women as objects. This can only sensibly be regarded as a generalized statement about the gendered nature of social hierarchies. It is indicative of broad power structures and is, of course, disrupted at times by specific processes, situations and individual positionings, which complicate or challenge it. One of the lessons of this issue, however, is that this broad gender critique remains paramount as a way of interrogating contemporary IR. Also, collectively these articles demonstrate how masculinist objectification of women features a hierarchy with international politics at the top: the political realm where objectification of women is at its most extreme and multi-layered.

It is a commonplace statement in Feminist IR that women, while continuing to be under-represented in national political structures and positions of power, are even less in evidence in the processes of state-to-state international politics. While men predominantly speak and exert influence 'for women' within national political settings, they almost exclusively do in international settings. It is essential to clarify this point in a couple ways. First, when I say that men are speaking for women, I do not mean that they are necessarily addressing or

acting in women's interests. Because women and their interests are marginalized by the objectification processes already discussed, they do not surface fully where male subjectivities and interests dominate. Women's (objectified) interests become, as it were, subsumed into male interests so men can claim to be speaking 'for women' without it being problematic in masculinist settings that they are not actually addressing, in any deep way, women or women's specific interests. Second, while international politics is the most masculinized of political environments in both theory and practice, the increasing number of women who do take part in it (notable examples being the former UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher and current US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice) are still operating in a patriarchally created sphere shaped over a long history primarily by male values and identities. As Laura J. Shepherd argues in her article in this issue 'Veiled References: Constructions of Gender in the Bush Administration Discourse on the Attacks on Afghanistan Post-9/11':

> The representations of femininity that became dominant were . . . hollow. Condoleezza Rice, for example, was given 'face-time' on most major TV networks, but through close association with the masculinized Figure of Authority was rendered un-feminine . . . This reinforced the notion that 'women' in positions of power must surrender their femininity.

(p. 24)

RACE AND GENDER AND 'INSIDE/OUTSIDE'

Feminists critically interrogate this patriarchal sphere through its warrior/maiden model.[12] This positions men as actual and symbolic active national heroes who defend actual and symbolic passive women (and children). Following the masculinist oppositional structure already referred to, men are the subjects and women are the objects. A cursory study of international history illustrates the depth of historical purchase of the warrior/maiden masculinist model, and while its potential to be disrupted grows as increasing numbers of women across the world take part in different forms of combat and political violence, its purchase is still sufficiently strong, actually and symbolically, to be taken seriously in contemporary analysis of political and military structures and processes. When we are dealing with international politics and state-to-state relations, especially in times of conflict, we have to take into account, in addition, the 'inside/outside'[13] dynamic. This sites people within and without states differently, the state boundary and citizenship categorizations being definitive for processes of national identification and belonging, allowing for the sense of insiders (full citizens) and outsiders (foreign nationals) and relative insiders or outsiders (those with partial citizenship or seeking it such as those asking for asylum). In gendered understandings, furthermore, women and men are generally positioned differently as insiders or outsiders because of the objectification of women in masculinist politics. Women tend in the

main to be less powerful and more vulnerable whatever their status in this context.[14] Their visibility is problematic because of the ways in which masculinist politics contains them largely as objects within it.

So what are we dealing with when the US administration is speaking 'for women' of another state? This is a major characteristic of the war on terror, whether we are thinking about post-9/11 Afghanistan or the Iraq war and its continuing aftermath. The articles by Shepherd and Meghana Nayak ('Orientalism and "Saving" US State Identity After 9/11') explore this terrain. They examine how the othering (objectification) processes raised above apply, and highlight the dual influence of gendered and racialized approaches. Shepherd focuses on how the Bush administration spoke 'for women' both of its own state, but particularly of Afghanistan post-9/11, as part of a gendered discourse based on opposing masculinity and femininity in terms of the active (male) hero subject versus the passive (female) object, along the lines of the warrior/maiden binary. Racialized designations along 'inside/outside' (culturally imperialist) lines posit hierarchies of masculinity and femininity, asserting the superiority of US masculinity and victim status of Afghan women. Nayak builds explicitly on Edward Said's well-known theory of orientalism to argue for the intersectional role of race and gender in 'US state identity making'. In the orientalist framing, white western identity and culture is posited against (and over) its eastern other. A string of oppositions such as civilized/uncivilized, rational/irrational, developed/undeveloped reinforce this discourse asserting western superiority. Nayak considers how such discourses are based on a sense of the west as prior and defining, including, importantly of the identity of the other. They claim for the west the position of knower as a way of asserting power and posit an ontological fixity in its identity that masks the actual insecurities underpinning it.

> While the production of state identity is an ongoing constant production, the US state must act as if a predestined, static, always already enlightened 'America' exists ontologically prior to any event. As such, 9/11 supposedly threatened US state identity, as if it has not always been tenuous and socially constructed, and prompted an attempt to use the post-traumatic space to resurrect a stronger, more defiant United States.
>
> (p. 44)

In drawing these general themes out of the detailed analyses presented by Nayak and Shepherd, I wish to highlight three inter-related processes they touch on. They illustrate how in international politics women (and children) are discursively and practically objectified as beneficiaries and victims. This realm of politics is articulated as primarily enacted by men within a historically entrenched masculinist (and racialized) frame. Harking back to my earlier distinction, international politics, especially in conflict situations, is largely framed as enacted for women rather than by women. Women's agency is removed from the picture via overlays of gendered and racialized

processes. It is worth pausing here to elaborate on what is happening with women's agency in this state of affairs. Of course women are engaging in all kinds of civil (and military) forms of work and caring, political and community activities. But these diverse contributions are effaced by the continual positioning of women as objects rather than subjects of international politics in masculinist terms.

The second inter-related process concerns the influence of the 'inside/ outside' perspective in state-to-state relations, particularly in times of conflict, where the distinctions between the insiders and the foreign or enemy others (outsiders whether they are inside or not) appear as of paramount importance. Third, the orientalist west/east binary adds a pernicious dimension to this whereby hierarchies of masculinity and femininity are asserted along racialized and culturally imperialist lines (west over east). Shepherd and Nayak show, among other things, that all three of these areas need to be taken into consideration when critically assessing the objectification of women in Iraq and Afghanistan in the statements of the Bush administration. This objectification denies women's agency in complex and multi-layered ways. These contributions help us to think through, in an applied way, the nature of that complexity and its various layers and how they are manifested and interconnect with one another. Nayak makes the point that orientalism 'in effect reflects insecurity about the Other becoming an actor rather than object in the international hierarchy' (p. 45), in other words the potential agency of the other is always at stake (as a threat) in orientalist framings. This point applies equally to gendered oppositional framings where through women's designation as the passive other their potential agency is positioned as a threat to masculine subjectivity.

Both Shepherd and Nayak further our critical understanding of how women and children come to be used primarily as discursive political pawns (objects) in the hegemonic efforts of the USA to legitimize its aggression. Put simply, they help us to see the bases on which the warrior/maiden card is pulled out in such circumstances, wherein it is a dual assertion of the machismos of the hegemon. As these critiques show, this duality involves assertions of racialized male over male and male over female power. The fusing of gendered and racialized framings allows at one and the same time for the assertion of US (western) hegemonic masculinity over Afghan and Iraqi (eastern) masculinities by displacing the latter and positioning US males as the hero warriors to Afghan and Iraqi women. Gender and postcolonial debates focus on the extent to which 'feminization' is a tool of masculinized structures used against men as well as women to assert and maintain hierarchy.[15] The oriental male is feminized to indicate inferiority in western masculinist ideology. In this process, as in other male-to-male assertions of hierarchy, it is clear that masculinity and femininity, as designations, operate on a sliding scale whereby the lower down the male hierarchy, the more feminized the depiction. Gender and orientalist analysis sheds light on how the Bush administration positions itself as a legitimate enforcer of what is basically an ideological position.

Nayak and Shepherd both explore the theme of 'infantilization'. In discussing statements by Laura Bush, Shepherd argues that the 'running together' of women and children 'infantilizes the women of Afghanistan, denying them both adulthood and agency, affording them only pity and a certain voyeuristic attraction' (p. 20). Shepherd continues:

> Simultaneously, the perpetrators of gender apartheid in Afghanistan are dehumanized through their association with (animal) 'brutality', although not disempowered, as their visions of the world they seek to create, as represented in Afghanistan, are threatening enough to those who accept a 'common humanity' to require action. There are complex and problematic gendered mechanisms at work here, which I believe are central to gaining an understanding of how it became thinkable, doable and to an extent inevitable that the USA would bomb Afghanistan as punishment for crimes that had been attributed to Al Qaida.
>
> (p. 20)

MASCULINIST MEDIATION OF LINKAGES AMONG WOMEN

The objectification of women discussed earlier also highlights another area that attracts too little focus in IR: linkages among women. The result of the extent to which masculinist structures constrain, displace or ignore women's agency by claiming to speak and act 'for' women, impacts not only on women as individuals but also on the collective potential of women. bell hooks[16] has pointed to the profound problem of women's lives being mediated by men and the extent to which this affects women's own identities and sense of agency, including in relation to one another. I would see this issue of the journal as offering evidence for why this problem is worthy of more attention in IR. When US hegemonic masculinity purports to be speaking and acting 'for' Afghan or Iraqi women, it is doing so on the basis of a gendered hierarchy that has already been asserted over US women. In other words when US masculinity is asserted over Afghan women, depicting them as maidens in need of rescue, outside the USA, it is based on an established and given gender hierarchy within the USA. What I am arguing here is that when western women hear their governments engage in such warrior speak about eastern women, embedded within it are gendered assumptions about western women's inferior social status. The substantially empty gestured promises made to Afghan and Iraqi women in western political discourses of recent times should give us plenty of pause for thought about how masculinist IR mediates women's experience and associations across the world with very real results. If the current fate of Afghan and Iraqi women has been to end up more as the objects of rhetorical device than the beneficiaries of real political commitment, this is at least partly a reflection of hegemonic masculinity's view of women in general, those 'inside' as well as 'outside'. What is at stake here is the struggle

for real and meaningful political subjectivity and agency of women, including, importantly, in relation to one another.

The articles by Nayak and Shepherd help us to understand what is happening when women are being spoken 'for' in the context of hegemonic international politics. They are critical, individual and expansive studies focusing on the rhetoric of the politics and its deeply ingrained gendered and racialized characteristics. With regard to my 'transitional nexus', they examine the current context of IR, in other words the kinds of discursive and institutional structures impacting on women. They are strong examples in the connections they draw between race and gender of the function of Feminist IR in critical analysis of the war on terror. In some ways, these articles make quite bleak reading, but in others they provide critical tools for thinking about the constraints confronting women in working for change towards greater equality. They signal the dynamic quality of gendered and racialized systems of oppression, how they continually adapt to changed circumstances and reassert themselves. They prompt us to think about identity issues. How do women develop their agency in international politics as individuals, and in relation to one another, across state boundaries, when these politics are dominated by entrenched masculinist and racialized discourses and practices consistently identifying women as passive objects and orientalized victims?

WOMEN'S VOICES AND AGENCY

The remaining three articles in this issue – 'Armed Masculinity, Hindu Nationalism and Female Political Participation in India: Heroic Mothers, Chaste Wives and Celibate Warriors' by Sikata Banerjee; 'Bringing Nations In: Some Methodological and Conceptual Issues in Connecting Feminisms with Nationhood and Nationalisms' by Jill Vickers; and 'Voices of Afghan Women: Human Rights and Economic Development' by Huma Ahmed-Ghosh – focus on women's own agency more directly, in terms of diverse influences affecting their identities and possibilities. This is partly a methodological issue. All three authors concentrate their research specifically on women. Banerjee considers a range of identity issues of Hindu womanhood as it is constrained by 'two dominant models of masculine Hinduism – Hindu soldier and warrior monk' (p. 63) outlining tensions involved in the potential for 'constructing a feminist nationalism' (p. 63). This is a case study of masculine and feminine identity formation in the specific context of the Indian nation with historical reach. It combines archival and personal interview data as well as fieldwork experience. Vickers offers an internationally oriented assessment of issues related to women's movements, feminism and nationalism, including comparative discussion of 'Finland (marginal "western"), Canada (settler "western"), and the Philippines (modernizing anti-colonial nation-making and post-colonial nation-state)' (p. 96). Ahmed-Ghosh undertakes a qualitative analysis of interviews with three

Afghan women activists focusing on global/local linkages and tensions associated with 'a perceived "human rights" international agenda, and women's needs in their own cultural setting' (p. 111). As a case study it is notable in its explicit concentration on individual women's voices and perspectives and their illustration of broader issues. In contrasting ways these three articles are mainly looking at what actions and discourses are being engaged in 'by' women rather than 'for' women.

Banerjee considers the influence of ideas of female virtue and the ideal of the Hindu family in limiting access to the multiplicity of women's lives. As with the articles by Shepherd and Nayak, her article touches on questions of hegemonic masculinities, but in this case the British colonial version, and its feminization of the colonial other and struggles against this, as part of the dynamic of masculine Hinduism and its positioning of women as chaste and familial. 'Although, in many ways, women's roles are empowering in Hindu nationalism, in the end they remain incomplete' (p. 69). Because of an emphasis on modesty and chastity, the image of the celibate warrior is powerful for women activist identities, and women are not imagined as active sexual beings: 'feminine power is only acceptable if chastity and virtue remain important norms' (p. 71). Banerjee explains how women identify with a 'multi-faceted interpretation of Hindu womanhood ... based on folklore, historic icons and mythology reinforcing a sense of comfort and belonging in a hostile world by drawing on the strengths of everyday life' (p. 78). A problem for feminist organizations offering alternatives is that this interpretation of Hindu womanhood offers 'empowerment without the accompanying loneliness accruing to feminist critics who stand on the margins of the nation and family and in the process provide an alluring form of nationalism to women who want to belong' (p. 79).

There is a strong recognition of women's agency in this analysis and in-depth exploration of the historical and class and caste contexts within which choices are or can be made: 'the woman underlying Hindutva female activism is Hindu, middle class, middle to upper caste and fairly well educated' (p. 76). Also the strong linkages between 'belonging' to nation and family are mapped out, as well as the multidimensional characteristics of the model of Hindu womanhood as historically and materially relevant to those senses of belonging. These contrast with the outsider and marginalized status opposing feminist interpretations offer to these women. Vickers' internationally oriented discussion unpacks women's agency, focusing as it does on 'women's diverse involvements in national projects' (p. 84). It combines theory and substantive research by testing hypotheses from feminist literature on nationalism, and, with reference to 'a project of mapping women's diverse and changing gender/nation experiences based on case studies from thirty countries', aims to avoid 'over-generalization based on insufficient empirical evidence' (p. 86). I will draw out here just one comparative illustration from the wide-ranging findings across the three countries compared – Finland, Canada and the Philippines. In Finland, women became 'active citizens before male-dominance was

established in public institutions' (p. 97); in Canada, 'they did not get in on the ground floor in political institutions, which remain male-dominated' (p. 98); in the Philippines, while they also did not get in on the ground floor in political institutions 'they pressed for reform arguing that pre-colonial political arrangements were egalitarian' (p. 100). Both Banerjee and Vickers prompt us to think in much more depth about the differentiated relationship of women and women's movements to nationalist projects. These articles also challenge us to think in more context-based and nuanced ways about feminism. As Vickers concludes: 'To understand the variable relationships between nation and gender, we must develop feminist understandings of concepts like nation-hood and nation building, taking them beyond their meaning in the modernist, "western" paradigm, just as we must expand our understanding of feminism' (p. 103).

Ahmed-Ghosh as part of her detailed assessment of the qualitative evidence from three in-depth and other interviews as well as observations, places emphasis on the relationship between economic and political factors. In examining human rights questions in a local context, the author concentrates on how women perceive the bases of their potential for agency (rights). This women-centred evidence is an interesting contrast to the simplifications of the rhetoric of the Bush administration analysed by Shepherd and Nayak. In that rhetoric speaking 'for' women, the complexities of their life-situations and how those might actually be improved in concrete terms are completely missing in the depiction of women as passive victims and objects. In Ahmed-Ghosh's article these complexities are absolutely to the fore with the explanation that while women interviewed saw democracy and women's involvement in it as a guarantee of human rights, that involvement was understood to be dependent on 'economic empowerment and social and physical security' (p. 111) with literacy being part of this overall picture. We gain some awareness here of the larger society-wide changes that are necessary to enable change 'by women'. As one of the interviewees says: 'Education is the only way women can become aware of their rights. Even though they do not have the power to change much, education can help them to become economically independent' (p. 116). The article also presents reactions by women to the threatened imposition of US hegemonic notions of human rights. The women interviewed said 'that while they were keen to have rights, they wanted those rights within the "framework of Islam" and not as a cultural imposition from the West' (p. 122). Conclusions reached include that 'dialogue between religious and secular advocates of human rights' (p. 124) is needed, and economic empowerment should be prioritized over a demand for human rights.

CONCLUSIONS

This issue offers varied and interconnected discussions of topics across the 'transitional nexus'. The articles' coverage ranges from critical analysis of

the hegemonic masculinist discourses, that in speaking 'for women' largely objectify and depict women as passive victims, through to the voices of women themselves expressing their agency and the complexity of their economic, social and political needs in working towards change 'by women'. In ways far too numerous and detailed to be captured in this introductory article, the contributions featured here illustrate that examination of historically created contexts and the constraints they represent are as important as research that brings in the varied nature of women's experiences, agency and desires. In other words, we need studies that explain how women have been and continue to be marginalized, othered and silenced, as well as those that counter that marginalization, othering and silencing by making women present in diverse ways. One core theme in the issue in this respect is the intersectionality of gender and race and the orientalist characteristics of the war on terror.

I hope I have shown in this discussion the major benefits of attempting to read across these articles as well as delving into their individual depths. I have, of course, only suggested some of the linking themes, and other readers are bound to see more. I have tried also to point to the variety of methodologies as this is relevant to thinking about the nature and meanings of the different kinds of evidence presented. In closing I am moved to comment on one perhaps too obvious point about the issue – its strong attention to states, nations and nationalism. It may be provocative of me to suggest that this is an indication of the central role of feminist analysis in revisioning the whole study of IR whether in relation to the war on terror or more widely. I would certainly argue that it is evidence of feminism's purchase on the main concerns of the discipline albeit, naturally, from its own distinctive perspectives.

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Notes

1   See the range of essays debating 'terror and the future of global order' in Booth and Dunne (2002). Fred Halliday is one of the most trenchant critics of the contemporary hegemonic order. See, for example, Halliday (2005).
2   I was one of the co-editors of *International Feminist Journal of Politics* from its launch in 1999 through to 2005. Between 2003 and 2005 I acted as lead co-editor.
3   On '9/11' as it has become known see, for example, Halliday (2002) and the series of commentaries in the forum in *International Feminist Journal of Politics* (2002).

4 For considerations of questions of legitimacy and bombing in the war on terror see, for example, Buzan (2002). See also the detailed critical commentary by Arundhati Roy (2001) at the time.

5 As Eric Hobsbawm (2005) has summarized:

> Only the enormous military-technological power of the US is well beyond challenge. It makes the US today the only power capable of effective military intervention at short notice in any part on the world, and it has twice demonstrated its capacity to win small wars with great rapidity. And yet, as the Iraq war shows, even this unparalleled capacity to destroy is not enough to impose effective control on a resistant country, and even less on the globe. Nevertheless, US dominance is real and the disintegration of the USSR has made it global.

6 See, for example, James Der Derian's (2002) discussion of 'network wars'. See also Der Derian (2001 and 2003).

7 Following the London bombings on 7 July 2005 one commentator (Hewitt 2005) made the following point:

> Despite all the criticisms of multiculturalism that have been made, the starting point of our thinking, post-7/7, cannot be culture. It was not a surfeit of culture that set the bombers on their deadly mission . . . It is the lack of a sense of human community, of connectedness to others, that allows callousness to enter in on such a scale.

Bikhu Parekh is one of the most interesting and authoritative analysts of multiculturalism (see Parekh 2000). Just as this article was going to press the Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality in the UK Trevor Phillips (2005) made a keynote speech entitled 'After 7/7: Sleepwalking to Segregation' in which he commented:

> Even in the desperate adversity of the days that followed the London atrocities, the fact of our multi-ethnicity and our ease with it stood out. Those who died came from myriad backgrounds. Likewise, those who rescued the survivors and reassured the city. It became clear that the people who planted, or wanted to plant, bombs, stood alone, without the comfort of any community that would support their actions.

8 Web searches turn up many sources, including NGO and weblogs, on civil liberties issues post-9/11 in the USA and UK. Access to the text of the US Patriot Act 2001 can be gained via the Department of Justice website (http://www.lifeandliberty.-gov). Information on the UK's anti-terrorism legislation can be accessed via the Home Office website (http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk). On new anti-terror laws being proposed in the UK as this article was being completed in September 2005 and general issues of civil liberties see also, for example, the website of Liberty (http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk).

9 There is a wealth of feminist literature that covers the broad themes related to gender inequality raised here. Kramarae and Spender (2000) is an excellent resource for looking across these areas in detail. The UNDP *Human Development Report* published annually is one of the best sources for updated information on specific areas of gender inequality (see http://www.undp.org). See also Enloe (2004) and Youngs (2004a, 2004b).

10 Bakker and Gill (2003) features a wide-ranging theoretical and substantive collection of essays related to these areas. See also on 'integrating reproductive, productive and virtual economies' Peterson (2003).

11 Lourdes Benería (2003: ix) argues that 'women's issues cannot be isolated and separated from the socioeconomic and cultural contexts in which they are immersed'.

12 This area has been widely explored by feminists. See, for example, Elshtain (1995) and Pettman (1996: ch. 5). On war and gender see also Goldstein (2001).

13 This framing is most closely identified with the critical work of Rob Walker on political theory and international relations (see Walker 1993). See also Youngs (1999).

14 See the clear discussion of related issues in Pettman (1996: ch. 1).

15 For explicit analysis of east/west issues in IR in this regard see Ling (2001).

16 I continue to be struck by hooks' (2000: 43; see also hooks 1982) analysis of the challenge of political solidarity for women.

> Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men. We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are 'natural' enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must unlearn them if we are to build a sustained feminist movement. We must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning and value of Sisterhood.

Acknowledgement

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