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Book Review: Radical on the road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era. Judy Tzu-Chun Wu: Cornell University Press, New York: 2013, 346 pages.

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Radical on the road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era. Judy Tzu-Chun Wu: Cornell University Press, New York: 2013, 346 pages. Photographs, excerpts, notes and index included. $95 hardcover, $28.95 paperback. Review by Thuy T. Do, Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada.

By Thuy T. Do[1]

Global Politics: The Role of Personal and Intimate Relationships

The Vietnam War, the immoral and unjustified war, is over, but the hidden stories behind it remained unchanged. The war involved not only fighting between American and Vietnamese militaries but also the intervention of global powers. In my memories, as a little Vietnamese girl, the War was encapsulated in our victories and images of heroes learned through history classes, poems, movies, and music. Like many other young Vietnamese, I did not learn certain facts of the Vietnam war until I read "Radicals on the road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era" written by Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, published in 2013.

In her book, Judy Tzu-Chun Wu discusses internationalism, radical orientalism, and feminism by articulating both the international experiences of American antiwar activists during the American war in Vietnam and women attending the Indochinese Women's Conference (IWC) in Vancouver, Canada in 1971. In terms of internationalism, Wu points out that the "physical", "psychological", "intellectual", and "informative" journeys of American antiwar activists subsequently shaped the ideas of global communions, the Americans and allies, the West and the East (3). Wu introduces the concept of radical orientalism which she defines as the way in which American activists romanticized and identified Asian people while they "idealized their projection of decolonizing the Third World" (4). Through this concept, Wu explains that rather than view the East as passive like traditional orientalism, Asians actively shaped the way that Westerners understand Asia. According to Wu, radical orientalism is also characterized by how American antiwar activists "inverted and subverted previous hierarchies" (5). In other words, Wu states that American antiwar activists "idealized the East and denigrated the West" and together activists in the West and East collaborated to foster radical orientalism (5). In addition to introducing internationalism and radical orientalism, Wu examines the way in which international activists with different racial backgrounds and genders together and separately critiqued American policies in Asia. By focusing on antiwar movements by women, Wu introduces feminist based political activism. She describes how women activists traveled internationally and engaged in political dialogues in decolonizing Asia. They collaborated to create an "international movement based on global sense of sisterhood" (6). I argue that personal and intimate relationships play a significant role in global politics. In particular, I will reveal how intimate and personal partnerships, represented through the idea of global sisterhood, can be a meaningful mechanism in global politics. Therefore, I will also critically examine the significance of global sisterhood in empowering women for action and change.

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According to Wu, women all over the world may share similar experiences and therefore can "embrace common political goals" (6). Wu explains that historically, and especially early a second wave feminism, women in the West - particularly white and middle class - called for international sisterhood to promote their political engagement in advocating for peace and eradicating slavery and prostitution (6). Wu illustrates that the dichotomy of the "revolutionary hope" of the East and the "entrenched sexism" of the West that helped American women to "redefine their own identities and political goals" (7). In addition, she explains that the concept of gender is a bridge between nations and people with different backgrounds that can "facilitate and obstruct international political communities" (9). In war, women around the world have two roles mothers and warriors. Early (1997) points out that most women are flexible in becoming both a moral mother with a beautiful soul and a patriotic person who can fight in wars. This idea can also be found in a Vietnamese saying during the war "if the enemies come to the house, even the women must fight"[2]. In addition, women meet together sharing not only their political viewpoints, but also their families' lives; for men this same social interaction is not available, though it could emotionally strengthen their relationships (Swerdlow, 1993, 216). According to Wu, global sisterhood is often criticized in feminist thought as a model of "women's orientalism" and "feminist colonialism" (6). In other words, global sisterhood can be seen as an effort by Western women to look at non-Western women as victims of patriarchy in need of rescue by Western women (Wu, 6). Furthermore, Wu points out that international sisterhood can be criticized as it emphasizes "cultural, class, and racial hierarchies in the name of female universalism" (7). It is clearly understood that primary concerns of those criticisms are fundamentally based on the concepts of "women's orientalism", "feminist colonialism" and "female universalism" of the feminist politics of the IWC in Vancouver in 1971.

However, these criticisms are traditional versions that are not always applied in concepts of global sisterhood. For example, Wu argues that by traveling, meeting together in addition to prioritizing Vietnamese women's experiences of war and conflict, a target of global solidarity was built (even it was a bit fragile as we see at IWC). The mainstream of global sisterhood is women in the West and the East collaborating with equal power and shared interests. Indeed, Wu points out that "maternal peace activists, second-wave feminists, and women of colour all developed profound political connections with Southeast Asian women" (217). Instead of seeing Third World women as passive individuals, peer activists embraced global sisterhood, which considered Vietnamese women and women in the global South as international political partners. In addition, global sisterhood is not based rigidly on the concepts of "female universalism", but rather women's oppressions are transmitted and debated globally among women with different backgrounds (Wu, 2013, 217, 218). Furthermore, Wu argues that "feminist colonialism" is the old version of the women liberation approach of the New Left, which was different from the one that applied in global sisterhood (231). The rationale for decolonization mainstreaming in global sisterhood is for women around the world to gather to discuss their strategies to overcome "male imposed boundaries between us- territorial, national, imperialist, or ideological barriers" (Wu, 2013, 231). Global sisterhood can be seen as an intersectional approach which breaks the borders that separate women around the world into two groups: elite women called the women in the West and the oppressed women the so called the "Third World Women" who are non-white North Americans and women in the global South. According to Anzaldua (2012), a "border is set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge" (Anzadua, 2012, 25). This definition of the border, therefore, explains

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[2] "Giặc đến nhà, đàn bà cũng đánh"

that border lines separate women around the world not only geographically, but also "psychologically, sexually, and spiritually" (Anzaldua, 2012, 25). A criticism here is that whether a woman is educated or not, rich or poor, if she comes from developing countries, or she is coulour living in developed world she will be called "Third World Woman". For example, in this book, "Third World Women" is exclusively racially marginalized women from North America who saw themselves as connected to Third World Women in decolonizing countries. It is a hierarchical term which immediately separates women into two distinguished groups forever. It can be seen that global sisterhood is a constructing bridge that equally connects women worldwide, so it is unnecessary to differentiate whether they are Western or "Third World Women". In contrast, the term "Third World Women" could be a "psychological, sexual, and spiritual" borderline, which unintentionally separate women. Global sisterhood can also be seen as a motivation to see women around the world as sisters in a global family. The assumption is that global sisterhood fosters a sister-based love, such that women help each other in building their lives and places like sisters in a biological family. Although, parents in some families may have preferences for certain children, the parents have never distinguished their children by name nor treated them differently. The term "Third World Women", therefore, should be eliminated in global sisterhood.

Another insight from global sisterhood is that it can be seen as a self-empowering approach that encourages women to first know themselves and then to make allies with others. According to Lorde (1984), women must "recognize differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each other's differences to enrich our visions and our joint struggles" (Lorde, 1984,122). Global sisterhood can be a mechanism to gather collective social differences for action and change since it is a safe space in which women are free from their social status. Furthermore, Lorde states that in a society of "systematized oppression", it is involuntary to formulate a group of women to feel "surplus" and to "occupy the place of dehumanized inferior" (114). Global sisterhood, therefore, can be a secure space where women can empower themselves through discovering the differences of other women. In addition, Lorde points out that "it is easier to deal with the external manifestations of racism and sexism than it is to deal with the results of those distortions internalized within our consciousness of ourselves and one another" (146). She essentially recognizes that the scopes of global sisterhood are to raise consciousness among women by providing opportunities for women to investigate the diversities of women internationally. Global sisterhood is, accordingly, a powerful mechanism to raise awareness among women and within women.

However, a full discussion of global sisterhood lies beyond other roles and forms of women, but motherhood and housewives subsequently create exclusions and conflicts among women. Wu argues that "conception of ideal versus deficient forms of manhood and womanhood, normative versus deviant sexuality, and recognized versus illegitimate forms of family mark certain people, desires, behaviors, and relationships as acceptable while designating others as outside the pale" (9). The conflict among the groups of women attending the International Women Conference (IWC) in 1971, in Vancouver, Canada is a significant example of the exclusion that existed in this misconception. It demonstrated conflicts of interest and revealed that some of the facts are excluded with respect to the goal of the conference, which was to end the war and to find a North American audience for the Vietnamese women. Although the IWC aimed to demonstrate the diversity of women around the World gathering at the conference to foster "female internationalism" (Wu, 2013,195), nevertheless, in reality, the IWC organizers merely promoted through statement "the political responsibilities of motherhood" (Wu, 2013, 197). This political viewpoint excluded some of women's liberation activists' concepts relating to the assertion that

women's roles are more than motherhood and housewives. According to female liberation activists, women's liberation should involve gender equality in terms of political power, employment opportunities, housework, and reproduction roles as well as sexual objectification and gender-based violence eradication (Wu, 2013, 204).

Global sisterhood aims to be a safe and equal space for all women which means women are free from social status and background. Global sisterhood is also an inclusive approach which means women are all included in the space. It is, therefore, inadequate to take into account only motherhood and housewives as women shared primary responsibilities for global politics. Friedan (1963) points out in her book "The Feminine Mystique" that if "women who "adjust" as housewives, who grow up waiting to be "just a housewife," are in as much danger as the millions who walked to own death in the concentration camps…they are suffering a slow death of mind and spirit" (Friedan, 1963, 367-369). This idea can be explained that the roles of women are not only being housewives which, according to Friedan (1963), subsequently kills the women's human identity by confining them in their homes and stealing their freedoms. In another word, the housewife's role destroys women's "capacity for self-determination" or dehumanizes the women (Friedan, 1963, 367). Being "just housewives" makes women have "no hope for recognition" and limited by "the needs of others" (Friedan, 1963, 368). Therefore, it is necessary for global sisterhood to widening its concentration to include other aspects of women rather than housewife roles.

In addition, according to Firestone (1970) women should be free from childbearing and child rearing (11). She argues that "the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of control of reproduction: not only the full restoration to women of ownership of their own bodies, but also their (temporary) seizure of control of human fertility – the new population biology as well as the social institution of child bearing and child – rearing" (Firestone, 1970, 11). She explains that materialism controls women's bodies, so to liberate women and eliminate gender-based discrimination, it is compulsory to free the women from child rearing and childbearing. Global sisterhood, therefore, fails to liberate women if it mainly focused on women's motherhood. Thus, it consequently fails to foster global politics while stakeholders, women, are racialized and discriminated in their own space.

In view all of that has been mentioned so far, one may suppose that global sisterhood is important to foster global politics, but itself needs to be reconsidered as the primary focus on women. Wu considers that global sisterhood could usefully supplement and extend the mission and visions of global politics dominated by men. One advantage of global sisterhood in global politics is that it avoids the problems of violence as Wu stated in her book "war in the blood of men: inversely, peace was believed to be in the blood of women" (Wu, 2013, 197). In other words, in this tension of essentialism, women are peaceful relative to military, which is political. The second advantage of personal and intimate partnerships in global politics is that it promotes the space for discussing social differences, thereby leading to political actions and changes.

Wu concludes that the synthesis of global sisterhood was done according to the procedure of breaking the border that separates women around the world into different groups. As a result, global sisterhood helps to connect women and enhance the diversities necessary in global politics. The world and the people living in it are diverse, so it is important to respect differences in global politics. Global politics needs a peace-based environment that is reshaped by personal and intimate relationships or global sisterhood. For the purpose of intimate partnerships, global sisterhood is tasked to reconsider its concentration on women's roles. From this perspective, global sisterhood is asked to pay close attention to the diversities of women characters whenever they are mothers,

housewives, or other gender-based roles. Prior to elevating global politics, it is obligatory to advance the concepts of women using the values of global sisterhood.

Global sisterhood is an intersectional approach to connect women worldwide, to raise awareness among women and within women, and to promote the space for discussing social differences that subsequently direct to political actions and changes. Further, global sisterhood creates an inclusive space for all women, so the concertation of global sisterhood on women's roles is far beyond motherhood and housewives.

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