

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

The search for a coherent and universal feminist  
theory of International Relations:  
a critical assessment.

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by

Fiona Judith Ritchie BA (hons), MA

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## Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>5-15</b>
Method.....	11-15
<b>Chapter One: Cynthia Enloe - Where are the Women? The Concept of Patriarchy in International Relations Theory.....</b>	<b>16-74</b>
Introduction.....	16-19
Early conceptions of patriarchy.....	19-23
Public and private spheres.....	24-28
Enloe's extension of patriarchy to the international.....	28-32
Enloe on the militarisation of society.....	32-40
Where are the women?.....	40-45
The concept of patriarchy in International Relations.....	45-66
The concept of 'Silence' in feminist theory.....	66-70
Reflections.....	70-74
<b>Chapter Two: Jean Bethke Elshtain - Sovereignty and Chastened Politics.....</b>	<b>75-128</b>
Introduction.....	75-77
The concept of sovereignty.....	78-88
St. Augustine and 'the self', 'human nature' and 'society' .....	88-96
St. Augustine and 'just war' .....	97-100
Just war in a modern age.....	100-112
Women and war.....	112-117
Elshtain and feminism.....	118-125

Reflections.....125-128

**Chapter Three: Christine Sylvester – Forming a ‘Conversation’ using Postmodern Feminist method in International Relations Theory.....129-170**

Introduction.....129-134

Sylvester and the argument for a Postmodern Feminist Theory.....134-145

Forming a ‘conversation’.....145-152

Chantal Mouffe: on the political.....152-163

Sylvester: utopian values or ‘mature’ Politics?.....163-166

Reflections.....166-170

**Chapter Four: Non-Western Feminism – An argument for contextual thinking in International Relations Theory.....171-227**

Introduction.....171-176

Islamic feminisms.....177-179

A defence of Islamic feminism.....180-183

The case against Islamic feminisms.....184-186

A defence of ‘Islamic feminism’ once again: the politics of piety.....187-191

Black and African feminisms.....191-200

Indian feminisms.....200-204

Indian feminism and the law.....205-209

Indian feminism and the caste system.....209-211

Indian feminism and religion.....211-213

Indian feminism and globalisation.....213-214

Indian feminisms in theory.....214-215

Overarching themes: A discussion on commonality.....	215-217
A defence of universal thinking.....	217-222
Reflections.....	222-227

**Chapter Five: Neo-Conservative Thought – A necessary background to the U.S female emancipation project in Afghanistan.....228-250**

Introduction.....	228-240
A defence of neo-conservatism.....	240-244
The case against neo-conservatism.....	244-249
Reflections.....	249-250

**Chapter Six: Caught in the Crossfire – women in Afghanistan.....251-289**

Introduction.....	251-255
Historical context.....	255-268
An opportunity lost? How the West lost its way.....	268-274
Afghan Women: A backlash?.....	275-285
Feminist International Relations Theory: what have we learned?.....	285-287
Reflections.....	287-289

**Chapter Seven: Reframing Feminism within International Relations Theory.....290-316**

Introduction.....	290-290
The incorporation of the autonomy of the political.....	291-293
Incorporating prudence and practical wisdom into feminist theorising about International Relations.....	294-302

Fiona Ritchie

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Incorporating greater sensitivity to diverse cultural and political contexts into  
feminist theorising about International Relations.....302-312

Incorporating the concept of 'Essential contestability' into feminist theorising  
about International Relations.....312-316

**Conclusion.....317-319**

**Bibliography.....320-368**

## Introduction

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This thesis has three interlocking aims. The first is to examine the extension in recent decades of feminist theory to International Relations. The second is to consider the challenge of some leading non-Western feminist thinkers to key assumptions about International Relations made by Western thinkers. The third objective is to consider the implications of feminist theory for political practice. This is achieved through an examination of the recent attempt by the United States to implement a female emancipation project based on Western universal values, in Afghanistan.

The thesis begins by critically assessing the contribution to the feminist project of developing a coherent theory of International Relations by scrutinising the work of three notable scholars: Cynthia Enloe, Jean Bethke Elshtain and Christine Sylvester. Attention is focused in particular on the implications of their thought for key issues such as the meaning of female 'emancipation', for the debate about universalist versus contextual interpretations of moral and political reasoning, and for the limits of political action as a means of promoting female emancipation. Before these issues are interrogated, however, the thesis begins by considering Cynthia Enloe's question, where are the women?

Having posed this question in *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist sense of International Politics*<sup>1</sup>, Enloe attempted an answer by highlighting just how intertwined the seemingly separate world of women is with international power politics. Taking examples from various colonial encounters, from locations such as military bases and instances of diplomatic life she demonstrated the impact that women have actually had on the political world. From militarised prostitution, to rural working women through to those women 'married' to diplomacy, Enloe locates a female presence throughout international politics. By showing that many seemingly personal and social aspects of contemporary politics are often indicators of how international politics works, she attempts to make good her claim that the roles women play often affect, albeit indirectly, the outcomes of political decisions and decision making.

Jean Bethke Elshtain shares Enloe's desire to bring women into a discussion of politics. She demands, however, a more comprehensive critique of the Western cultural tradition, especially as it relates to the politics of war. War is of course central to the study of International Relations and the relative weight placed on women in times of conflict. 'We in the west,' Elshtain argues, 'are the heirs of a tradition that assumes an affinity between women and peace, men and war'.<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the origins of traditional gender roles ascribed to women and men. In much debate about women and war, she examined in particular how far the roles of women might or might not have evolved during periods of war. Elshtain's great

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<sup>1</sup> C. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist sense of International Politics*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> J. Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (U.S.A.: Basic Books, 1987), 4.

claim is that despite the increased and ever evolving roles of women in war, the stories about women in and around war remained marginalised and ‘the history of war and indeed histories generally have been told in such a way that it is just that ‘his-story’’.<sup>3</sup> Before, and in the period since, Elshtain wrote *Women and War*<sup>4</sup> which was published in 1987, many accounts of women and war have demonstrated that in reality, women have been, and are, far more a part of war than so called ‘conventional’ histories might indicate. Elshtain wrote, ‘These tropes on the social identities of men and women, past and present, do not denote what men and women *really* are in times of war, but function instead to re-create and secure women’s location as non-combatants, men’s as warriors’.<sup>5</sup> In fact, women are and have been, part of every possible dimension of war, from camp follower to fighting on the frontlines. Women are, throughout any history of war, part of the fabric.

As a result, in *Women and War* Elshtain attaches a primary importance to the claim, created in the West, of ‘myths’ surrounding women as ‘beautiful souls’ and men as ‘just warriors’. These myths fostered, according to Elshtain, ‘identities that lock us inside the traditional, and dangerous, narratives of war and peace’,<sup>6</sup> despite the fact that men and women are ‘citizens who share...the faculty of action’.<sup>7</sup> She focused particularly on the Western creation of wartime perceptions of gender roles, which, although it seems exclusionary, actually provides an

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<sup>3</sup> C. Kennedy-Pipe, ‘Women and the Military’ *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (2002), 39.

<sup>4</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987).

<sup>5</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 258.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



excellent basis for the development of further, broader questions surrounding not only the creation of gender identity but also of universalist versus contextual thinking. In other words, what Elshtain is suggesting is that these myths served to universalise the experiences of both men and women in times of war although they did not, and do not, actually share the same experiences.

Vital to her conception about the politics of war, and the myths surrounding the roles men and women play in war, is Elshtain's extensive work on the fifth century Christian bishop later known as St. Augustine, to whose doctrine of the 'Just War Theory' she attaches central significance in the formation of the Western tradition of International Relations. That doctrine held that while Christians could not justify killing to protect themselves, they could engage in war to protect the lives of others. She extended her theories on just war in *Just War Against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World*.<sup>8</sup> In this book, Elshtain stresses the importance of an ethic of responsibility, and the need for sometimes responding to certain political events in a way in which we would not, given the choice, wish to. In the weeks after the attacks of September 11, 2001, Professor Elshtain was among a handful of scholars and religious leaders invited to meet with President George W. Bush to discuss a possible response. The notion of just war became central to the Bush administration's justification of the war in Iraq. That war was, or so it was claimed, in large part a humanitarian project to free the Iraqi people from a tyrant. In a speech addressing the United States military

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<sup>8</sup> J. Bethke Elshtain, *Just War Against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

academy at West Point, Bush referred explicitly to the duty held by America to spread liberal values to those in Iraq facing everyday violence and instability. He declared that, 'America has no empire to extend or utopia to establish. We wish for others only what we wish for ourselves - safety from violence, the rewards of liberty, and the hope for a better life'.<sup>9</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain endorsed that position and caused no small controversy in what seemed to be a departure from her usual views.

The examination of the work of Christine Sylvester also forms a critical section of the thesis. Christine Sylvester is best defined as a postmodern feminist. In particular, her work represents a radical deconstruction of any claim within International Relations by any group or gender to hold a privileged position over any others. Underlying her thinking is a view of the world as one of more or less effectively concealed power relations. After deconstructing these power relations, Sylvester aims to liberate 'others' by replacing the system of power with a system of International Relations based on what she calls 'conversation'.<sup>10</sup> Conversation, according to Sylvester, allows cooperation and a 'difference' tolerant International Relations to emerge in a world where there is no universal truth. By acknowledging 'others' Sylvester also hopes to ensure that feminism as a discipline can flourish rather than simply survive in International Relations theory. An

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<sup>9</sup> G. Bush, 'Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy at West Point' New York, June 1, 2002  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/06.01.02.html> (Accessed on May 6, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> C. Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

examination of Sylvester's concept of conversation in International Relations theory leads the thesis to ask whether conversation can in fact be realistically applied to international politics.

The second aim of the thesis is to consider the challenge of some leading non-Western feminist thinkers to key assumptions about International Relations as formulated by Western thinkers. The thesis asks in particular whether non-Western thinkers have succeeded in providing an alternative form of feminism more appropriate to an understanding of the international order found within their own cultures and societies. Despite the fact that non-Western feminism consists of many different strands of thought derived from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, traditions and nations, an exploration of the main themes found within it calls into question the validity of much non-Western feminist theorising. What non-Western feminist thinkers ultimately share, despite the diversity of their thought, is the historical experience of Western domination. As a result of this shared but obviously variable experience, many non-Western feminists are compelled to challenge Western colleagues by asking hard questions about the nature and sources of Western power, about the role of religion, and about the issue - already mentioned - of the relative validity of contextual and universal ideals in International Relations theorising.

The third and final aim of the thesis is to examine the implications of both Western and non-Western feminist theory for an assessment of recent attempts by the United States to utilise political power to implement a female emancipation project based on Western universal values in Afghanistan. In this final section,

central issues are raised about the limits of state power as a means of promoting female emancipation.

### Method

Three interrelated kinds of method are used in the thesis. The first is conceptual analysis, which is used to examine the work of feminist theorists in International Relations and, more generally, in assessing the overall strengths and weaknesses of feminist theories. Relating to this first method, it should be noted that although there is not a specific literature review chapter, the bulk of the thesis is a critical review of the relevant literature. As a result, the literature review is threaded throughout the thesis. The second kind of method is more historically oriented, involving in particular the collection and examination of materials such as reports by governmental and non-governmental organisations that are relevant to determining the impact of American policy aimed at the emancipation of women in Afghanistan. The third kind of method relates to the standpoint from which the thesis itself is written and concerns, in particular, how the place of gender in International Relations is approached. This third methodological issue raises concerns that require further comment.

Central to research on the place of gender in International Relations is recognition that gender can neither be isolated from, nor somehow placed 'above', other factors such as class and race which are also at work. The traditional, over-simplified story of men on the battlefield and women at home symbolising love, peace and domesticity has now been widely discredited. The experiences of both

women and men are complex, to say the least, since they may only partly be shaped by gender. Like male experience, female experience can be 'shaped by factors including their age, economic class, race, clan, tribe, caste, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, physical ability, culture, geographic location, state citizenship and national identity, and their positioning in both local and global economic processes'.<sup>11</sup> Given the multiplicity of relevant political considerations, it is necessary to consider more closely exactly how feminist and gender-related research questions should be approached.

Feminist research has evolved dramatically since it began to be included in the field of political science. In the 1970s, for example, research dealt mainly with the 'absence' of women in certain contexts or, to phrase it another way, the 'invisibility' of the female in most accounts in politics. In this respect, feminist literature at that time was relatively straightforward, since the main task was simply to find the women and focus on the inequalities that derived from male dominated structures. As Virginia Oleson points out, 'investigators critically examined contexts such as medicine and law, where there were few or no women'.<sup>12</sup> However, I am also keenly aware that, in practice, this task faced challenges and obstacles created by the overwhelming domination of the field of International Relations by male scholars.

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<sup>11</sup> C. Cohn (ed.), *Women and Wars* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 2.

<sup>12</sup> V. Oleson, 'Feminisms and Models of Qualitative Research' in N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (ed.) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research, Theories and Issues* (London: Sage, 1998), 302.

As the study of gender and women became more established, increasingly complex issues were tackled. Writers such as Kate Millet<sup>13</sup>, for example, questioned the division between 'sex' and 'gender' within society, arguing that since 'gender' identities (such as the traditional assignment of women to 'home life') were not 'given' but created, they could therefore be reshaped. When applied to the sphere of International Relations theory, this belief inspired Cynthia Enloe's book *Bananas Beaches and Bases*<sup>14</sup>, which itself inspired a whole new raft of literature on the place of women in the international order. Since then, questions surrounding the theme of gender, women and feminism have become still more intricate and specific and there is no consensus on the horizon about how the precise role of gender is to be determined.

In this situation, it was obviously desirable to avoid falling back on an approach that could be neatly categorised as liberal, radical or realist, which might have left the thesis open to the charge of ideological bias. In order to avoid that charge, the thesis adopts a policy of transparency and self-awareness that freely acknowledges the 'essential contestability' of every ethical position. It acknowledges, that is, that no standpoint is final, or is intrinsically privileged over another. In this respect, the thesis accords with Oleson's observation that 'the complexities and problems of women's lives, whatever the context, are sufficiently

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<sup>13</sup> K. Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases* (1989).

great [for] multiple approaches via qualitative research [to be] required',<sup>15</sup> in so far as this implicitly acknowledges the lack of finality of every method.

I should add that since I am not familiar with non-Western languages, the material used in the thesis on non-Western feminist thought has been confined to works either written or translated into English.

So the challenge in this thesis is to interrogate the project of extending feminist theory to the international order. As we go on to see this has confronted feminist authors with a dilemma which few have found palatable. The dilemma, it is suggested, is this: in so far as feminism aspires to offer a distinctively feminist theory of International Relations, it tends to privilege the female perspective in a way that fails to acknowledge the autonomy of the political relationship. The result, as the thesis argues, is that the feminist project remains a purely moralistic one. In so far as feminism attempts to incorporate an acknowledgement of the autonomy of the political standpoint, however, it fails to offer a distinctively feminist standpoint, since the political bond transcends that standpoint.

Although the identification of this dilemma seems at first sight to involve a negative assessment of feminist attempts to develop a coherent account of International Relations, a more positive result emerges in Chapter Seven. This chapter proposes several major revisions in feminist theorising about International Relations that would make it more viable, even though the theorising would lose any claim (as was just observed) to being distinctively feminist.

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<sup>15</sup> Oleson, 'Feminisms and Models of Qualitative Research' in Denzin and Lincoln (ed.) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research* (1998), 322.

If the revisions suggested in Chapter Seven are plausible, the ultimate outcome is that the feminist project is not to be wholly dismissed but is, rather, to be assessed in terms of the links it provides to contemporary debate amongst leading Western political philosophers about three major issues in political theory which will be outlined. In Hegelian language, feminist theory is not so much negated as transcended by relocating it in the wider framework of contemporary Western political thought, or so this thesis hopes to establish.



## Chapter One

# Cynthia Enloe: Where are the Women? The Concept of Patriarchy in International Relations Theory

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The aim of this chapter is to examine Cynthia Enloe's attempt to extend feminist theory to the international order through a revised concept of patriarchy, and in that way explain what she sees as a perceived absence of women from theorising about international politics.

Where, Enloe asks in *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, are the women? If, as Enloe allows, women are in fact to be found almost everywhere in daily life, then why are they notably absent in International Relations theory? It is in order to answer this question that Enloe turns to the concept of patriarchy in order to explain how the dominance of men over women has led to their exclusion from international politics, as well as to explore the ways in which we might eradicate this subordination. For this purpose, Enloe was able to draw on early conceptions of patriarchy developed during the 1960's and 1970's by writers such as Kate Millett and Juliet Mitchell. In order to understand Enloe's enterprise, it is necessary to begin by recalling these previous efforts to theorise the concept of patriarchy in the first section of this chapter.

Critics of the term 'patriarchy' argue that it is essentialist and a-historic. They argue that the term is insensitive to the needs and range of experiences of

women in different cultures, classes and ethnicities. Some Western feminist thinkers however, argue that the concept and theory of patriarchy is essential to capturing the pervasiveness of male power over women. They believe that the term allows for an overall and even universal view of the interconnectedness of different aspects of subordination across the globe.

What might be helpful here is to describe briefly the main ways in which feminists have perceived patriarchy. In what ways do they feel the privileging of the masculine and gender inequality has occurred? There are, it can be argued, four main feminist interpretations of patriarchy in the years previous to Enloe's work. These are: liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism and what may be termed dual-systems theory. Although each has individual ways of looking at gender inequality, the term patriarchy is seen as indispensable when discussing gender inequality in any setting.

Radical feminism is defined by its universal aspiration. Thus, the term patriarchy sums up the subordination of women everywhere. On this view, gender inequality simply consists in men as a group dominating women as a group. Those who hold this view believe that men are the main beneficiaries of the subordination of women. Critics of this strain of thought have suggested that the term essentialises 'women' as a single group whose members in reality do not share the same experience. Women have multiple identities and cultures which, universal thinking eliminates. In particular, theorising of this kind fails to acknowledge adequately the biological aspects of a woman's identity. It suggests that there is a separation between 'sex' and 'gender' and does not account for the

biological body in the analysis of female subordination. 'Gender' for such feminists is socially constructed, whereas 'sex' is the unavoidable and natural state of the body. It is the negative association of the feminine gender in international politics that they believe has resulted in the subordination of women. They believe that the key to overthrowing patriarchy is a reconstruction of gender, which will eliminate the inequalities between sexes.

Liberal feminists, such as Enloe, conceive women's subordination 'as the summation of numerous small-scale deprivations'.<sup>16</sup> They look to those aspects of everyday life that serve to strengthen the grip of patriarchy within society. They believe this occurs when women are denied equal rights to men in areas such as education and employment and the sexist attitudes that sustain patriarchy within these structures. Critics of liberal feminism suggest that the emphasis on the personal, everyday aspects of life fail to deal with the deep-rootedness of gender inequality. Others however, argue that it is the over-arching patriarchal social structures that connect women in their oppression.

Marxist feminism is one such example. This group derives gender inequality from capitalism. Its proponents maintain that patriarchy is not an independent system but that men's domination over women is 'a by-product of capital's domination over labour'.<sup>17</sup> Critics of Marxist feminism believe this view is too narrowly focused on capitalism as the cause of gender inequality. They believe that

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<sup>16</sup> S. Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

it reduces the subordination of women to capitalism without considering the multiple ways in which women may be marginalised.

Some critics of these types of feminism have taken aspects of the different groups' views and attempted to combine them in what may be termed a dual systems synthesis. Rather than focusing exclusively on either capitalism or patriarchy as independent social structures, dual systems theorists argue that the combination of systems creates a capitalist-patriarchal society that marginalises and trivialises women as a group. Critics of this type of feminist thought argue that it risks sustaining the separation of patriarchy as a concept from capitalism. By seeing the two as separate structures (locating capitalism in the economy and patriarchy in the unconscious), they fail to cover the full range of ways that patriarchy enters into society.

After this brief overview of the various ways in which feminist theorists believe patriarchy works in society, it will be useful to consider early conceptions of patriarchy within feminist thought since these are particularly important for understanding the work of Enloe, who based much of her theorising around the concept of patriarchy.

### Early conceptions of patriarchy

Kate Millett wrote *Sexual Politics* in 1977 at a time often referred to as 'second-wave' feminism. First wave feminism was characterised by a relatively limited concern with women's suffrage and the overcoming of legal inequalities of women in general. Second-wave feminism widened the feminist debate by

discussing issues to do with sexuality, family, the workplace and challenging the traditional roles of women in society, particularly in Western society. As Toril Moi suggests in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, during the 1960s and 1970s, 'for the first time since the women's vote was won, feminism again surfaced as an important political force in the Western world'.<sup>18</sup>

Millett argues that the oppression of women in society was as much due to ideological indoctrination as to an inequality stemming from economic issues. She argues that patriarchy operated in the social construction of women in the family. She believes that a politics of sexuality was present in all economic and social structures. Her fundamental argument is that women's subordination is derived from the social construction of femininity rather than from natural biological differences. She took inspiration for this view from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.<sup>19</sup> Beauvoir famously wrote, 'one is not born, but rather becomes, woman'.<sup>20</sup> Beauvoir argues that no biological, physical, or economic factors contributed to the identity that a female takes on in society. Instead, a woman's identity is representative of a particular historical time and place. As men are the dominant sex, women became the inessential 'other' to the man. Since women define themselves in relation to men, the man is absolute and patriarchal structures can be maintained.

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<sup>18</sup> T. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1985), 21.

<sup>19</sup> S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition, London: Vintage Books, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2011), 293.

Millett believes that the stability of patriarchal structures comes from the marginalisation of women in the public sphere. She writes, 'our social order, is the birthright priority whereby males rule females,'<sup>21</sup> and so women have no representation in political life. Millett argues that it was precisely because women as a group had no representation in political life that their oppression has continued. Millett wrote, 'an ideal politics might simply be conceived as the arrangement of human life on agreeable and rational principles from whence the entire notion of power *over* others should be banished.'<sup>22</sup> In other words, no gender should privilege the other.

For Millett, the concept of power is synonymous with sexual dominion. She sees the process of gaining power as one whereby the ruling sex (the male) seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex (the female). In order to overcome this, Millett examines different social and cultural contexts in order to understand the various ways in which women are oppressed. Linking women's oppression to other issues such as racism also helped Millett to recognise how strategies that contributed to keeping black people subordinate mirrored those invoked to keep women subordinate as well. Central to her analysis of these strategies is her claim that all cultural phenomena can be explained in terms of power politics.

In her examination of *Sexual Politics*, Toril Moi suggests that Millett's theory of patriarchal oppression is limited. This is because Millett carefully critiques those

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<sup>21</sup> K. Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1977), 25.

<sup>22</sup> Millett, *Sexual Politics* (1977), 24.

male writers like Freud who take for granted male sexual supremacy, but she fails to consider female writers who acknowledged the full pressure of patriarchy long before she did. Moi feels that without guidance on what women themselves actually say, arguments about the nature of patriarchy become too ambiguous and monolithic.

During the same period of second-wave feminism, socialist feminist Juliet Mitchell published *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*.<sup>23</sup> Mitchell utilises Freud's psychoanalytic work to help to explain the ways in which the unconscious contributes to our gender identity and women's oppression. She argues that Freud's work described a patriarchal society rather than any biological universals. Differing from Marxist feminism, Mitchell argues that patriarchy and capitalism are two very different but interlocking structures. As a result, she does not feel that overthrowing capitalism would end gender inequality.

Instead, Mitchell turns to psychoanalysis as a way of overthrowing the consequences of patriarchy. Freud's Oedipus complex, for example, which is understood as the repressed desire a child has to have sex with the parent of the opposite sex, explains for Mitchell the consequences that might occur as a result of the repressed unconscious. Patriarchy for Mitchell depends upon the exchange of women and the sexual taboos of the unconscious. She writes, 'the controlled

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<sup>23</sup> J. Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London: Allen Lane, 1974).

exchange of women that defines human culture is reproduced in the patriarchal ideology of every form of society'.<sup>24</sup>

Much of the feminist movement has identified Freud's work as the antithesis to their own since Freudian psychoanalysis assumes that women are inferior to men. For Mitchell, however, 'psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of one'.<sup>25</sup>

Many feminists, especially those who developed early conceptions of patriarchy, locate patriarchy in the social construction of femininity or gender by drawing a line between the biological sex of the body and the socially conceived gender of human beings. Mistrustful of those who suggested a woman's body meant she was predisposed to certain gender traits, they seek equality for women by fighting for the right to enter international politics under the patriarchal framework that already exists. They view women as capable of all the same activities as men and as therefore able to act in the same ways. Sex, for these writers, does not define gender. As a result of this point of view, many of these feminists attempt to overcome patriarchy by fighting for a woman's right to enter the public sphere, where previously women have been relegated to the private sphere.

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<sup>24</sup> Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), xv.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



### Public/Private sphere

Given that early conceptions of patriarchy emphasise the separation of the public from the private sphere, it will be useful to provide a brief discussion of that distinction. In 1814, Benjamin Constant published what was to become his most influential book. In *De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation*, he distinguishes between the 'private' and the 'public' spheres. 'Private existence' refers to the family, circle of personal friends, individual work, the consumption of goods and individual beliefs and preferences.<sup>26</sup> 'Public existence' is designated to action in the world of politics.<sup>27</sup> Constant believes that the private sphere as a result, has become the location for human values. As Geuss writes, 'understanding the split between private and public existence,' is, Constant believes 'a precondition for understanding politics in the modern world'.<sup>28</sup>

The private location of human values is not a negative notion in this sense. However, Constant's work, which compares how the attitudes between private and public existence have changed between ancient civilisations and modern societies, highlights, albeit indirectly, how modern Western society has been dominated by a liberalism that views the private sphere as consisting of activity that is not of significant importance or interest to the public sphere. As Raymond Geuss writes, 'its affects on others are of little importance'.<sup>29</sup> Under this assumption, the private

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<sup>26</sup> R. Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (2001), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (2001), 109.

sphere, often ascribed to women, is seen as unimportant to the ultimate running of society or political life.

Within ancient civilisation, Constant suggests that the individual was 'always sovereign in public affairs'.<sup>30</sup> As a result, all private actions were subject to 'severe public scrutiny and control'.<sup>31</sup> Under these circumstances, however, citizens were willing to constitute themselves 'slave[s] in all private relations'<sup>32</sup> and ultimately, 'slaves of the nation'.<sup>33</sup> This was because the price for not enjoying a private existence was acceptable so long as individuals could become fully active citizens and enjoy a public existence.

In contrast to this, modern liberalism allows people to have a 'good private life',<sup>34</sup> while also retaining (indirect) supervision over the political sphere. The indirect supervision means citizens have sacrificed a more significant public existence in order to obtain a sense of a free and good private existence. It could be argued, however, that liberalism in Western society, with its roots in Christian values, has developed this separation of spheres while still retaining influence over how its citizens act out their private existence.

Constant believes there are several main reasons why an expansion of the private sphere has occurred in modern society. First, the size of nations has grown considerably if we compare them to ancient civilisations. 'The size of a country,' he

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<sup>30</sup> B. Fontana, (ed.), *Constant: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 311.

<sup>31</sup> Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (2001), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Fontana, (ed.), *Constant* (1988), 311.

<sup>33</sup> Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (2001), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (2001), 3.

writes, 'causes a corresponding decrease of the political importance allotted to each individual.'<sup>35</sup> Even the most obscure republican of Sparta or Rome, he points out, 'had power'.<sup>36</sup> The same cannot be said of the individual citizens in the United Kingdom today for example. Instead, citizens today possess only indirect personal influence. An individual's personal influence today, Constant suggests, 'is an imperceptible part of the social will which impresses on the government its direction'.<sup>37</sup>

Second, Constant believes that the abolition of slavery deprived the population of the leisure time that actually allowed them to participate, given all of the everyday work was done by someone else. 'Without the slave population of Athens,' he writes, '20,000 Athenians could never have spent every day at the public square in discussions'.<sup>38</sup>

Third, Constant sees the expansion of the private sphere occurring as a result of the emergence of commerce. He believes the constant exercise of politics from individuals would, he writes, 'only cause trouble and fatigue to modern nations'.<sup>39</sup> Instead, individuals are preoccupied today with their enterprises, hopes for the future, and individual pleasures. In addition, commerce, according to Constant, 'inspires men in a vivid love of individual independence'.<sup>40</sup> Commerce

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<sup>35</sup> Fontana, (ed.), *Constant* (1988), 314.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Fontana, (ed.), *Constant* (1988), 315.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

supplies the needs and satisfies human desires. This does not mean however, that the distinction between public and private existence is a simple one.

If we understand that most human beings are influenced by the core values of the state, the distinction between private and public becomes less clear. Geuss argues that each of these categories is in fact a 'disordered jumble of different things'.<sup>41</sup> He believes there is no clear distinction between the two but rather a 'series of overlapping contrasts'.<sup>42</sup> Geuss actually believes that the distinction between private and public spheres should not hold the great significance it seems to in much academic literature. This is because there is no clear distinction to be made between the two. If, as he suggests, the spheres are mixed and overlap one another, each will influence the other. This is precisely Enloe's point. She believes that what has previously been ascribed to the private sphere has direct influence over what happens within the public sphere.

As previously mentioned, it is often assumed that activities within the 'private sphere' are of little interest to the general running of the state. It is this view that many feminists believe has contributed to the negative association of the feminine as located firmly in a sphere that has little influence over political life. However, if we assume, as Geuss might, that the distinction between the two is far less simple than first imagined, Enloe's supposition that the private often influences the public seems to make more sense. Early conceptions of patriarchy, as we have seen, clearly distinguished between public and private spheres. Enloe,

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<sup>41</sup> Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (2001), 109.

<sup>42</sup> Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (2001), 6.

on the other hand, has taken over the early conceptions of patriarchy that surround the idea of public and private existence and extended the concept of patriarchy to the international order.

### Enloe's extension of patriarchy to International Relations

How has Enloe extended early conceptions of patriarchy to International Relations? She describes patriarchy as 'the structural and ideological system that perpetuates the privileging of masculinity'.<sup>43</sup> She believes that most, if not all, social systems and institutions and whole cultures have become patriarchal. 'Families, town halls, militaries, banks and police departments are among those sites of ordinary life perhaps especially notorious for their inclination toward patriarchal values'.<sup>44</sup> Patriarchal systems, she argues, have marginalised the feminine by trivialising and even infantilising those values thought to be feminine. This is not to say that these patriarchal systems are made up purely of the masculine. She believes they have adapted to feminist issues by making the feminine seem secure and protected and therefore making women overlook their subordinate position.

For example, states that have privileged masculinity have also needed women's acceptance and complicity. Law firms need feminised secretaries and cleaners. Militaries need feminised military wives and prostitutes. 'Every person who is pressured or lured into playing a feminised role must do so in order to

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<sup>43</sup> C. Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (London: University of California Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

make the masculinised people seem to be the most wise, the most intellectual, the most rational'.<sup>45</sup> By taking women seriously, Enloe has been able to see patriarchy where it exists in all of these institutions. She writes, 'feminists have been able to see patriarchy when everyone else has only seen capitalism or militarism or racism or imperialism'.<sup>46</sup>

This is not to say that patriarchy is a fixed entity. On the contrary, Enloe believes that patriarchal structures are continually being modernised and adapted. She believes, however, that although patriarchy is only one of a number of issues, including capitalism, militarism and racism, it is one that should always remain central to the debate about the nature of the political and, in particular, the question of how far the workings of patriarchy cause events such as war.

Enloe has looked at patriarchy from the point of view of examining the concepts of feminine and masculine. She has, like many liberal feminists, separated the biological body, the sex of a human being, from a person's gender. It is masculine traits that hold the privilege. Understandings of patriarchy are far more complex than this however and there are many different viewpoints from which to look at patriarchy from. We will return to these alternative conceptions of patriarchy shortly.

Patriarchy for Enloe can be best examined through the concepts of militarisation and globalisation. She examines how the pervasive militarisation of societies across the globe has led to the entrenchment of patriarchy and the

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<sup>45</sup> Enloe, *The Curious Feminist* (2004), 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

privilege of masculinity over femininity. A section will follow shortly, on her concepts of both militarisation and globalisation, how she feels they are intrinsically linked and, linked to the oppression of women specifically.

Enloe's solution to problems in international politics, particularly the problem of overcoming patriarchy, focuses on the creation of activist sentiment amongst women. She seeks, in particular, to create voices for women in international politics where she has previously found silence to be a deafening sign of women's subordination. Her experience as a university teacher, for example, has taught her that 'there is nothing quite so deafening as the silence that can greet a teacher who has just asked a group of students an unexpected question'.<sup>47</sup> A section will follow on Enloe's concept of silence and her advocacy of activism as a breaking through it.

Writers not specifically located in the social sciences such as journalists, social historians and feminist activist groups have greatly influenced Enloe's thinking on feminism. Their influence, she feels, has helped her to develop a curiosity about women's issues by drawing more deeply upon women's experiences. For example, Barbara Smith, the American black lesbian feminist writer, helped her to link patriarchy with how racism also relies upon certain gender relations between men and women.

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<sup>47</sup> Enloe, *The Curious Feminist* (2004), 69.

Writers such as Hannah Arendt and Adrienne Rich also influenced Enloe's early work. Adrienne Rich's book *Of Woman Born*<sup>48</sup> introduced Enloe to the idea that culture and political institutions have 'split us off from ourselves'.<sup>49</sup> Rich saw the cultivation of motherhood defining the role of woman as an unreasonable demand to provide perfect, constant love. A shift in patriarchal systems, from one that revered and respected motherhood in early histories, meant that the image of motherhood now served as way to keep women in the private sphere. It is this type of thinking, that challenges social constructions of what women should be, and indeed are, that provide a parallel to the basis of Enloe's thinking. For Enloe, finding women does not simply involve looking at the private sphere though. She finds them there, yes, but blurs the line between the private sphere and the public sphere by suggesting the two are intrinsically linked.

The work of Hannah Arendt was introduced to Enloe at the start of her career. While Enloe went on to devise theories far different from Arendt's own, there are similarities that can be drawn. First, Arendt denies the existence of human nature or essence. Enloe, in her own work, believes that those rights traditionally assigned as 'natural rights' are socially constructed and do not represent what men and women really are. Second, the main source of Arendt's influence on Enloe is her sense of revolution. Enloe looked particularly to Arendt's journalistic work for the *New Yorker* in the 1960s, covering the trial of Adolf

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<sup>48</sup> A. Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhoods as Experience and Institution* (London: W. W. Norton, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> Rich, *Of Woman Born* (1986), 285.



Eichmann in Jerusalem. It was here that Arendt coined one of her most famous phrases, 'the banality of Evil.' At the time of Arendt's publication in the New Yorker, her views on Eichmann not as a mighty evil, but as a rather pathetic, ordinary man who simply followed orders and her suggestion that fewer Jewish people may have been killed if Jewish collaboration in the Warsaw Ghetto hadn't been so prevalent, caused great controversy. Arendt was an advocate of revolution and it was this, along with her journalistic insights that for Enloe took on a more action based style of international theorising that struck a chord.

Ultimately, Enloe finds that patriarchy has been constantly and consistently reinforced by a global politics of increasing militarisation of states. She advocates radical activism to ensure acknowledgement of women's multiple roles in global international relations. What she aims to do in her writing then, and as this chapter will point to in its concluding thoughts, is to encourage a revolt. She believes that men rely upon women to uphold the current patriarchal system. Once women realise this, the system may fall. The question then, is how convincing is this standpoint?

#### Enloe on the militarisation of society

According to Enloe, the dominance of militarisation within societies across an increasingly globalised world has led to the increased and sustained oppression of women. In *Globalisation and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link*,<sup>50</sup> she explores

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<sup>50</sup> C. Enloe, *Globalization and militarism: Feminists Make the Link* (Lanham, USA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

how these two potent contemporary trends often feed each other and have become increasingly to rely upon each other. Within a feminist framework, and asking specifically feminist questions, Enloe asks how and why both the globalisation of militarisation and the militarisation of globalisation has occurred and reveals what she believes the consequences are.

In her definition of globalisation, Enloe is keen to stress the notion that almost anything can be globalised. She writes, globalisation 'is the step-by-step process by which anything – a movie industry, vegetable production, law enforcement, banking, the nursing profession, higher education, an individual's own sense of identity, human rights, environmental activism, or a women's movement – becomes more interdependent and coordinated across national borders.'<sup>51</sup> Globalisation, according to Enloe, can happen to anything. It is not just a sprawl of capitalist business organisations and flows of technology, labour, and capital designed to enhance the profits of those businesses. The personal is political as well as global for Enloe.

For example, Enloe suggests that the rubber industry has been globalised almost from the very start of its production. During her time as a student in Malaysia she noticed rubber tappers working on the rubber trees outside of her apartment. She tells the story of how British scientists over a century ago took rubber trees from Brazil, cultivated them in England, and transplanted them in their then British ruled colony of Malaya. They then hired thousands of Indian migrant workers to tap the white fluid latex from the trees. Dunlop, as a result,

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<sup>51</sup> Enloe, *Globalization and militarism* (2007), 2.

became an international company producing rubber tires for the car industry. These tires are now essential to modern transportation across the globe.

Globalising trends such as this example have increased gradually to create a network of globalising trends on a massive scale. Enloe is also keen to point out that these trends can help us to see the massive inequality between those who have resources and those who don't. She writes, 'not everyone can afford jet travel; not everyone has easy access to the internet; not everyone has scientific laboratories or banking credit at their fingertips'.<sup>52</sup> According to Enloe, this serves to strengthen those structures which leave those 'without' in their current positions.

Enloe applies her definition of militarisation to those societies who seek to adopt militaristic values such as a belief in hierarchy, obedience and the use of force as a particularly effective political strategy. These societies see the world as a dangerous place and see militarisation as the solution. Again, she is keen to highlight that not all militarisation occurs within specifically military settings. She argues that almost anything can become militarised. She writes, 'most militarised people are civilians'.<sup>53</sup>

For example, a husband and wife's relationship may become militarised if the husband decides to enlist in his country's military. A woman can become militarised if she decides to accept a job upon finishing her engineering degree, to work for a large corporation that relies on defence contracts and expects its

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<sup>52</sup> Enloe, *Globalization and militarism* (2007), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Enloe, *Globalization and militarism* (2007), 4.

engineers to accept a culture of secrecy. A government's intelligence service can be militarised if intelligence gathering is done primarily by the country's department of defence. Ordinary civilians can become militarised when they begin to see the world as a dangerous place and military action is seen as necessary to addressing those concerns.

Enloe suggests that both globalisation and militarisation have come to depend on one another. Globalisation, she argues, depends on militarisation whenever militarised ideas about national security come to be seen as central to sustaining International Relationships. For example, an international corporation that builds its factories in a country whose government is quick to wield military force against employees that might protest for better working conditions is a globalised corporation whose workers directly face militarisation.

On the other hand, militarisation also depends on globalisation. For example, national and international sale of weapons show a large and complex system of arms sales across the globe. This is not to say that sale of weapons is kept within large companies and corporations selling and negotiating between militaries. Enloe points out that small weapons kill more people in day to day life than do the large weapon systems that make the news. In addition, she asks, 'where do the guns and ammunition that are causing death and dislocation among thousands of civilians in the Darfur region of Sudan come from?'<sup>54</sup>

Developing a specifically feminist framework to look at militarisation and globalisation has led Enloe to examine the relationships of women to these

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<sup>54</sup> Enloe, *Globalization and militarism* (2007), 7.

systems. She does not take for granted 'the relationship of women to families, to men, to companies, to movements, to institutions, to ideologies, to cultural expressions, to the state, and to globalising trends'.<sup>55</sup> She highlights that women have always been militarised. Women within the military have played the role of secretary, working in the personnel department, on the factory floor, and a handful even as engineers. This does not include those women who are married to defence contractors, male engineers, computer programmers and any of the other myriad of roles played in the military. Her argument here is that in order to track where militarisation travels, we need to remain interested in personal and local issues to see where it manifests itself.

Enloe examines the effects of globalisation on society further in *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War*. She suggests that the endings of wars are a time to rethink whether to continue an old regime or begin a new one. She argues that the Cold War specifically, 'depended on a deeply militarised understanding of identity and security'.<sup>56</sup> She argues that distinct notions about masculinity were sustained during this period and that this was sustained by both men and women in seemingly ordinary experiences. Militarism, she argues, could not thrive with simply men's willingness to 'earn their manhood credentials',<sup>57</sup> by becoming a soldier. It also relies upon women to accept particular assumptions about mothering and marriage. These situations, she argues, are

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<sup>55</sup> Enloe, *Globalization and militarism* (2007), 10.

<sup>56</sup> C. Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (London: University of California Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>57</sup> Enloe, *The Morning After* (1993), 253.

'crowded with gendered questions'.<sup>58</sup> These questions are about how masculinity and femininity can best serve national security.

Interpretations of what 'security' means can differ from various view points. Security could mean governments give priority to the military, which in turn tends to put mostly male national security elites in positions of authority. For Enloe however, security can also mean what it takes for men and women to feel secure in their own homes and neighbourhoods. This alternative interpretation of security might accord less authority to military experts and instead accord more authority with women's groups and activists who have been collecting data about women's daily lives for a long time. They have, for example, devised ways to prevent rape and domestic violence.<sup>59</sup>

Ann Tickner also addresses the issue of militarisation in society in her book *Gender in International Relations*. She argues that militarisation of society is directly linked to gender inequality. She believes that militarisation privileges masculine characteristics. Even those women who manage to enter the field of politics have given up their femininity upon entering. Tickner writes, 'for those who are the most successful are those who can best deny their femininity'.<sup>60</sup> This is because the qualities ascribed to masculinity are considered of utmost importance

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<sup>58</sup> Enloe, *The Morning After* (1993), 261.

<sup>59</sup> Enloe, *Globalization and militarism* (2007), 162.

<sup>60</sup> J. Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist perspectives on Achieving Global Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 141.

to international politics. 'We are socialised into believing that war and power politics are spheres of activity with which men have special affinity'.<sup>61</sup>

Tickner places the root of militarisation in the separation of public and private spheres. Women are located to the private sphere of motherhood and the home. Men are located in the public sphere in power politics. Tickner aims to reject this rigid separation of public and private sphere values. She aims instead, to look at alternative models of state behaviour, that honour both public and private sphere values and which are not constructed out of characteristics associated with 'hegemonic masculinity'.<sup>62</sup>

Tickner believes that the key to overcoming gender inequalities lies in the reinterpretation of the term 'security'. She does not see security as a militarised activity that relies upon hegemonic masculinity but as one that integrates both femininity and masculinity through mutual acceptance that interdependence is a central part of human behaviour.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, Enloe pays close attention to the experiences of ordinary men and women within the wider framework of international politics. In *The Morning After*, she begins by citing the example of a young Salvadoran woman names Esmeralda. Esmeralda spent many years as a guerrilla in the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. 'She pounded out tortillas and washed her boyfriend's clothes as well as wielding a gun'.<sup>64</sup> In the 'morning after' of a cold war fuelled civil war,

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<sup>61</sup> Tickner, *Gender in International Relations* (1992), 4.

<sup>62</sup> Tickner, *Gender in International Relations* (1992), 139.

<sup>63</sup> Tickner, *Gender in International Relations* (1992), 130.

<sup>64</sup> Enloe, *The Morning After* (1993), 1.

brought to peace by men in government under the eyes of men in Washington, Esmeralda was to hand back her gun and try to rebuild her life. The question Enloe poses is: what life does Esmeralda return to?

During the war, it was irresponsible of Esmeralda to get pregnant. After the war she was actively encouraged to devote her post war life to motherhood. However, many Salvadorian women were seeking more diverse opportunities for themselves. Enloe's point here is to stress the importance of post war reimagining of militarised culture. In this vision she takes care to examine the traditional militarised notions of masculinity and femininity during times of war, and how this might be radically changed in a post war environment.

Ultimately, Enloe's vision is one of complete demilitarisation of society. She advocates the application of diverse perspectives giving simultaneous attention to personal, local and national issues as well as global ones. She aims to redefine what the term 'security' might mean for ordinary people. She aims to redefine what it might mean to become a man in a demilitarised society.

In pursuit of these radical and ambitious aims, Enloe looks above all to the work of activists. She believes that by applying a specifically feminist agenda to international politics, different interpretations of what it means to make ordinary people feel secure will emerge. Enloe sees her work as a practical, pragmatic and action based endeavour. She believes radical activism will ensure the acknowledgement of women's vast roles in global International Relations.

Enloe argues that militarisation of society serves to entrench patriarchal structures, and globalisation serves to extend them. Her solution, it could be



argued, is ambitious to the point of developing an abstract utopian fantasy that would be far too unrealistic to adopt. However, what her work does provide us with is the picture of how women are central to global politics, and their myriad roles have a greater effect on decision making than might first appear if we look purely at male elites in power. Enloe believes it is vital to provide a feminist aspect to the examination of international politics because it provides a voice for women where previously there has been silence. Enloe believes that by locating women in everyday life she provides a vital gendered aspect to international politics. Where, she asks, are the women?

#### Where are the women?

Enloe locates women in international politics by connecting the personal, or private, sphere, which women have traditionally been allocated to, to the wider public and political sphere. For example, she writes, 'The personal is global, the global is gendered'.<sup>65</sup> This quote is taken from Cynthia Enloe's work, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* and points towards the idea that many seemingly personal aspects of everyday life are often indicators of how international politics presents itself. She suggests, 'One of the simplest and most disturbing feminist insights is that the personal is political'.<sup>66</sup>

Accepting that the political is personal can prompt us to investigate the politics of personal issues such as marriage, venereal disease and prostitution to

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<sup>65</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989), xi.

<sup>66</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989), 195.

name just a few, not as marginal issues but as matters central to state politics. For example, the European wife of a Canadian male Trapper for the London based Northwest Company in the early 1800s might be seen as inconsequential to the retelling of the general history of the British Empire in Canada. However, in 1806 the executives of the Northwest Company made a conscious decision to encourage their white, male, Canadian workers to import European wives for the sake of wider international goals. This decision, a strategy based on gender relationships and the movement of women as pawns in International Relations, altered the way Canada was integrated into the British Empire.<sup>67</sup>

These examples of how the personal affects the political cannot be examined or analysed without looking at both men and women, how gender roles and relationships work and how they can ultimately influence global politics. In an increasingly globalised and interconnected world personal issues should not, according to Enloe, be marginalised and politics should not be looked at purely within the constraints of sovereign states. Enloe looks to issues such as violence against women by trying to understand the wider systems such as the global trade of pornographic video, or how companies offering sex tours and mail-order brides conduct their businesses across national borders.

Enloe asks us to 'give up thinking that International Relations consists of peopleless states, abstract societies...and begin looking for the many people, places,

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<sup>67</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989), 14.

and activities of everyday international politics'.<sup>68</sup> In her own words, Enloe writes, 'if we employ only the conventional, ungendered compass to chart international politics, we are likely to end up mapping a landscape peopled only by men, mostly élite men'.<sup>69</sup> She goes on to suggest that if we look at roles women have always played such as chambermaids, airline stewardesses, prostitutes, plantation workers, diplomatic wives and so on, we can uncover crucial links between governments and the process of war making.

For example, a woman chooses to take a holiday in Jamaica. The weather is warm, it is cheap and it is safe for tourists. Enloe believes this woman is playing her part in the creation of international politics. She is helping to recover the economy of a country in debt. She is transforming the role of chambermaids into a major job category for Jamaican women. Enloe even goes on to suggest that if that woman is travelling with a white man, she may make some Jamaican men, 'seeing every day the privileges garnered by white men'<sup>70</sup>, feel humiliated which could develop into a flourished nationalist identity. These arguments are some of the most important to today's International Relations. As Enloe pointed out in her chapter *Gender makes the World go Round*, 'The woman tourist, the Jamaican chambermaid, Carmen Miranda, the American housewife, the British soldier and the Belize prostitute are all dancing an intricate international minuet'.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> C. Sylvester, *Feminist theory and International Relations in a postmodern era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>69</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases* (1989), 1.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases* (1989), 3.

Enloe does not just highlight women on the edge of political institutions, but also women who have 'slipped through the cracks'<sup>72</sup> and entered into the public sphere. Their very presence, Enloe believes, serves to highlight the overwhelming majority of men within these institutions which has led to the assumption by many that these women must have learned to 'think like a man'.<sup>73</sup> There is an assumption, for instance, that men are inherently prone to violence. It follows then, that under this assumption violence is bound to occur when men are in control of international politics. What does the appearance of women such as Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi tell us about the assumption that it is simply men who commit violence?

Enloe's response is that the assumption that women are not inherently violent is socially constructed. As she puts it, 'It's not a matter of her chromosomes or her menstrual cycle.'<sup>74</sup> Rather, it is a matter of social processes that have been created and sustained. More important to Enloe is that women such as Margaret Thatcher are not randomly selected. Instead, she believes they have been allowed into the political arena by men. Nevertheless, such women serve to 'break through our numbness',<sup>75</sup> by being noticed as the very few women in such positions. As was just said, however, Enloe maintains that women like this have only been allowed to enter public life after they have 'learned the lessons of masculinised political

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<sup>72</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases* (1989), 147.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases* (1989), 6.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

behaviour',<sup>76</sup> and are therefore not a threat to male political privilege. Instead, they may actually serve to entrench that privilege. For example, when Margaret Thatcher waged war in the Falklands in 1982, that conflict looked less 'man made' and more 'people made', and thus more legitimate. Patriarchy under these circumstances is harder to reverse.

Making sense of the variety of roles women play in international relations, and of the different experiences of women across the globe, is a central aim of Enloe's work. She takes seriously the historical context of political lives within different states. For example, in her introduction to *What Kind of Liberation* by Nadjie Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, she suggests that by looking at Iraqi women's long and intricate histories, their own theorising, organising and campaigning, we do not simply 'shrink' the complexity of the state to that of an American wartime experience. Instead, we can fully understand that rich history and context of Iraq. Placing women at centre stage can show us the ways in which these women have been exploited in the name of competing political agendas.

Ultimately, what Enloe is trying to achieve by locating women in these different surroundings is an understanding of how patriarchal ideas and practices link all sections of life, both in the public and private spheres. In this sense she still works from a universal rather than a contextual standpoint. Despite the fact that she recognises different women's experiences, she maintains that all women share a common experience to some extent because they are all subject to patriarchy. To what extent, it must now be asked, does the concept of patriarchy present a more

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<sup>76</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases* (1989), 6.

viable and realistic concept, after being extended by Enloe to the international order?

### The concept of patriarchy in International Relations

In recent years, structuralist and post-structuralist feminists, influenced mainly by French theorists, have presented an alternative view of patriarchy to the conceptions developed throughout the 1960s and 1970s by combining feminist with traditional structuralist ideas. Structuralism looks to aspects of human culture in terms of their relationship to larger over-arching structures. It is inspired by the belief that aspects of human life such as language cannot be understood except through their relationship with each other. If this is the case then feminist thinkers should be aware that the political can only be expressed in language and, if that language privileges masculine attributes then women are, as a result, marginalised.

By incorporating language, literature and psychoanalysis into their work, feminists of this kind have attempted to cultivate a voice for women that is created entirely by women themselves, rather than by men. They argue that patriarchy is expressed in language and that by deciphering how we might create a new language that makes space for women we might overcome gender inequality. Liberal and radical feminists have criticised this group for its tendency to look to the human body and biological sexual difference as the effective roots of womanhood.

Writers such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler are among the most prominent theorists to have developed this kind of post-structuralist feminist thinking. Although they reject the term 'feminist' as an appropriate way of defining themselves, their thinking gives great care and attention to the improvement of women's lives.

In contrast to earlier conceptions of patriarchy, post-structuralist writers such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva do not make such clear distinctions between sex and gender. Instead, they suggest the body is essential. Sexual difference, for these writers, is precisely the source of patriarchy. Expressed in language, descriptions of masculinity have become the dominant language of international politics. Ideas based on the assumptions that denote the logical nature of men and the emotional nature of women have led to the subordination of women as the less logical and less capable sex.

For Irigaray in particular, sexual difference is not something we can change, although we can change international politics to include the language of women and femininity. Both sexes deserve full representation and expression. The term 'equal' for Irigaray is a negative one which means women would have to become like men. It implies that women be included into the current patriarchal system. Instead, Irigaray envisions a world with two co-existing genealogies.

Psychoanalysis, in addition to language, has also played a role in post structuralist feminist conceptions of patriarchy in more recent years. Irigaray and Kristeva in particular have looked to the works of Freud and Lacan to help them

build an understanding of the workings of patriarchy. This has ultimately led them to ask the question, what is a woman?

First, we will consider the work of Luce Irigaray to examine this question. Irigaray has developed and expanded the concept of patriarchy in her work. She believes that women's underdeveloped condition, specifically in the Western world, stems from their submission to a culture whose history oppresses them. As a result she has developed a rejection of the history of Western culture and replaced it with a history of women's oppression. For Irigaray, only a celebration of women's sexual difference can escape conventional Western representations of women. This is not to say that she aims to replace the dominance of masculinity in society with a feminine one. If feminism's goal is, 'to reverse the existing order',<sup>77</sup> then history would repeat itself and 'return to phallograticism, where neither women's sex, their imaginary, nor their language can exist'.<sup>78</sup> Rather, she aims to forge a social status for women which demands recognition in their own right.

However, the aim of gaining 'recognition' involves women knowing exactly what they are. Traditional descriptions of woman are usually that they are emotional and as a result less capable of making logical decisions in political life. Irigaray argues that such descriptions are patronising and patriarchal in themselves. This leads to a vicious cycle of prescribing certain attributes to 'woman', and resulting in a language that is inherently patriarchal. If we are to reject traditional notions of what a 'woman' is, but also reject notions that women

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<sup>77</sup> L. Irigaray, *This Sex which is not one* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 33.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.



are the same as men, it still leaves the question of what a woman actually is unanswered.

Irigaray seeks the creation of language that is representative of women as well as men. She focuses on biological sexual difference as a determinant of what a woman is. She calls this 'natural sexual duality',<sup>79</sup> and uses this term as a basis for the development of her vision of a new language.

The definition of patriarchy for Irigaray is summed up as an 'exclusive respect for the genealogy of sons and fathers, and the competition between brothers'.<sup>80</sup> She feels that any attempt to consider maternal, and specifically female, genealogy has been absent in Western culture. As mentioned above, Irigaray is particularly critical of liberal feminism that aims for equality since 'equal', for Irigaray, tends to mean equal to men. She argues that, carried to its conclusion, Simone de Beauvoir's conception of female emancipation in terms of women gaining access to the world of men would mean the 'genocide of women'.<sup>81</sup> Ultimately, as we have seen, Irigaray goal is the co-existence of womankind with mankind. The creation and development of difference is the key to Irigaray's thought.

Irigaray adopts de Beauvoir's idea of woman as the 'other', but takes it much further. Beauvoir's 'other' is the 'other' of the same and so the necessary negative of the male subject. However, Irigaray's 'other' is a self-defined woman

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<sup>79</sup> A. Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 224.

<sup>80</sup> M. Whitford (ed), *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 23.

<sup>81</sup> Whitford (ed), *The Irigaray Reader* (1991), 23.

not satisfied with sameness but content only with recognition of her difference in social and symbolic representation. 'Each sex would then be "other" for the other sex'.<sup>82</sup>

As a result, Irigaray stresses the importance of acknowledging natural sexual differences between men and women. She opposes those critics who suggest that accepting sexual differences must be politically conservative. Instead she sees the acceptance of difference as a way to counteract the domination of one sex over the other. 'Irigaray sees sexual difference as a natural difference between the sexes, which should receive cultural and social expression'.<sup>83</sup> She supports political change and aspires to improve women's situation by re-evaluating the importance of natural differences between men and women. A respect of both genders, she argues, is to reverse Western culture's 'murder of the mother'.<sup>84</sup>

Irigaray has attempted to cultivate a theory that accepts sexual duality and difference. She examines the 'natural multiplicity'<sup>85</sup> within all human bodies that are never simply sex specific. Critics of this view have accused Irigaray of essentialism. Essentialism within feminism is the view that women and men are constituted of certain gender specific characteristics. By suggesting that certain pre-given and determinant qualities define the feminine, it looks close to reiterating the traditional view that women's characteristic predispose them to childbearing and the domestic, private sphere. If, as Irigaray suggests, it is

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<sup>82</sup> Whitford (ed), *The Irigaray Reader* (1991), 25.

<sup>83</sup> Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (2006), 1.

<sup>84</sup> Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (2006), 47.

<sup>85</sup> Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (2006), 1.

necessary to define a woman as a woman to counteract patriarchal oppression, the process of attempting to define 'woman' runs the risk of defining what a woman is within the parameters of the patriarchal framework that already exists and that these writers are trying to avoid. However, Irigaray is careful to state that she does not know what a woman is. This is, she argues, largely down to the silencing of women through patriarchy. She understands that the key to overthrowing patriarchy is knowing what a woman is, while also accepting that she herself does not know what a woman is.

Critics also accuse Irigaray of opposing feminist thought that dictates that women's liberation must abandon the belief that nature is fixed. They argue that by fixing nature, Irigaray is preventing women from emancipating themselves. However, Irigaray stresses that nature, while unavoidable, is a process of 'open ended growth'.<sup>86</sup> By stressing that human beings belong to nature, Irigaray can maintain that human beings have natures which need to grow and express themselves culturally. This expression should not be that of just men, but women as well. As Alison Stone writes in *Luce Irigaray and the philosophy of Sexual Difference*, 'the pursuit of our own flourishing as sexed beings must be based on recognition of our dependence on, and responsibilities to, the natural environment'.<sup>87</sup>

Ultimately, Irigaray argues that human beings have sexually specific characters. This enables her to criticise existing societies that are based on the

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<sup>86</sup> Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (2006), 2.

<sup>87</sup> Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (2006), 3.

dominance of male expression and the absence of female expression. She does acknowledge that notions of masculinity and femininity are socially constructed but is also keen to stress that biological differences are a factor in the characteristic differences between men and women. Irigaray never attempts to tell us what a woman is, but tries to create a vision of the world where each sex might be able to assume its own divisions and be allowed to govern their own mobility. There is, she argues, 'a need for sexuate rights, sexuate identity, and a sexuate culture characterised by two (sexuate) subjects'.<sup>88</sup> Sexual difference for Irigaray is the acknowledgement of these differences as the irreducible difference which 'inflects every aspect of our being'.<sup>89</sup>

Some critics have maintained that by reducing the social expression of the sexes to two, male and female, the world is limited to one in which inter-sexed people, for example, have no place. These critics include Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler who we will turn to shortly. However, the basis of Irigaray's argument is that these accounts of sexual difference in society will allow the process of self constitution to take place. It means allowing the diversity of differences to transform us. It means that however someone might self identify, they are represented. Her central problem though, is with the oppression of women, and so it is their representation that concerns her. She writes, 'female sexuality has always been conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters'.<sup>90</sup> The female

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<sup>88</sup> R. Jones, *Irigaray: Towards a Sexuate Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 4.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex which is not one* (1977), 23.

imaginary has been repressed and the woman is a commodity of the man. For some, the stress of sexual difference in Irigaray's work celebrates femininity. For others, she keeps women as the victim and incapable of independent action. What we do get from her work is the acknowledgment of the workings of patriarchy as pervasive in its wholesale adoption into Western culture.

Some have suggested that such a keen stress on the importance of sexual differences as the basis for characteristics of the sexes provides an a-historical account. It serves to ignore the cultural and historical aspects of people's lives that might serve to shape character. Again, Judith Butler, who we will turn to in a moment, believes gender is historically placed and is central to understanding the workings of patriarchy during any given time and place. However, Irigaray argues that history is essentially a history of patriarchy and that the basis on which to counteract patriarchy lies in sexual difference.

Irigaray also worked from within the field of psychoanalysis. Although highly critical of much of the work within the field, her own work in psychoanalysis helped her to develop views on history as a history of patriarchy. For example, Freud characterises the difference of the girl under male parameters. The unconscious fantasies and desires are male. In Freud's work the feminine is described as the other sex to that of the sex that holds a monopoly on value, the male sex. 'The little girl is nothing but a little boy; castration for the girl amounts to accepting the fact that she does not have a male organ'.<sup>91</sup> For Freud, the little girl

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<sup>91</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex which is not one* (1977), 69.

even comes to hate her mother because she also does not have that organ. This rejection of the mother, for Irigaray, amounts to a rejection of all women.

Instead, women as mothers are the unacknowledged foundation of the social order and by working on a woman to woman analysis of relationships we might be able to use sexual difference as a cultural possibility rather than the source of oppression. This is the creation of a woman who does not exist yet, 'but whose advent could shake the foundations of patriarchy'.<sup>92</sup> Irigaray argues that traditionally psychoanalysis has been patriarchal at its roots and by developing a revised psychoanalysis of women as human beings sexually different from males, we can create a politics of natural sexual duality. Sexual difference, she argues, is probably the 'issues in our time which could be our "salvation if we thought it through'.<sup>93</sup>

Women's subordination for Irigaray lies in sexuality, language, biology and culture. As a result, the cultivation of language is the key to a new political pathway charted in Irigaray's work. She believes that identity is assumed 'in language within a particular symbolic system known as patriarchy'.<sup>94</sup> Her work on the analysis of language is an attempt to make visible the deep emotional structures conveyed in political discourse. The patriarchal structure of language distributes the different roles given to men and women. She writes, 'we learn that the left and right sides of the brain are not the same in men as in women, but that,

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<sup>92</sup> Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader* (1991), 29.

<sup>93</sup> L. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), 5.

<sup>94</sup> Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader* (1991), 3.

nevertheless, the two sexes speak the same language'.<sup>95</sup> For Irigaray, what is needed is specific ethics applied to those in each individual culture, one that respects others, particularly the other sex.

In sum, Irigaray is aiming for an entirely new structure of the political where both sexes are represented. She criticises those movements which aim simply to shift the distribution of power to include women in the social structure as it currently stands. She argues that those movements are re-subjecting women to a phallographic order. For example, mastering biology through access to contraception and abortions simply modifies women's status rather than changing it altogether. She writes, 'in politics, some overtures have been made to the world of women',<sup>96</sup> but that these overtures have remained partial. Although some concessions have been made to women, by the men in power, 'no new values have been established'.<sup>97</sup>

Similarly, Julia Kristeva does not advocate women seeking power within the existing patriarchal framework and has criticised liberal feminism for not being radical enough. Kristeva, like Irigaray, sees language as a fundamental constraint to women because for her, women are viewed as the 'other' in relation to language. However, she does not believe women have a fixed identity. She feels it is absurd to ask what a woman is, as Irigaray does, because that only serves to essentialise women when in fact they have no fixed 'essence', but a multiple one.

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<sup>95</sup> L. Irigaray, *To speak is never neutral* (London: Continuum, 2002), 3.

<sup>96</sup> Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984), 6.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

Instead, Kristeva believes an entirely new discipline is needed to study the way patriarchy has imposed upon women. This discipline is called 'semiotics'. Semiotics is the study of cultural phenomena as communication. It is the study of meaning making in the theory of signs, symbols and language. For Kristeva, the task of semiotics is to construct a general theory on the basis of which 'all problems relating to language can be reformulated'.<sup>98</sup> For Kristeva, speaking is vital to political and national identity as well as to sexuality, culture and nature. Speaking, for Kristeva, is a 'strange-fold'<sup>99</sup> between them all. Kristeva believes that all inner drives are subsequently discharged into language.

Important to Kristeva is the term 'subjectivity' as opposed to 'self' to describe a human being who is aware of her own intentions and able to act autonomously in the world. The subject is profoundly shaped by culture, history, context, relationships and language. Therefore, the experience of subjectivity is not that of coming to awareness as a 'self', but of having an identity often in ways unbeknownst to the subject herself. Where the 'self' is fully aware of themselves and their identity, the 'subject' holds unconscious desires that are repressed. These repressions, according to Kristeva, are what shape human beings. For example, when a baby coos and babbles its sounds and gestures express something. However, the baby, 'does not grasp that an utterance can express something'.<sup>100</sup> The repressed use of language, such as the example above, is unavoidable for Kristeva. Kristeva believes that the importance of language better explains the use

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<sup>98</sup> J. Kristeva, *Essays in Semiotics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 57-58.

<sup>99</sup> N. McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

<sup>100</sup> McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (2004), 20.



of the term subjectivity. Kristeva does not see language as a tool used by selves, but instead argues that those who use the term 'subjectivity' more readily understand that 'language helps to produce subjects'.<sup>101</sup>

Like Irigaray, Kristeva stresses the importance of biological difference and drives, but notes that they can only be apprehended via our language. If language is a discharge of the subject's drives, then that language should not be purely based under male parameters. Where nature and the conscious are logical, and culture and the unconscious are emotional, what Kristeva aims to do is find a balance between the excesses of nature and the constraints of culture.<sup>102</sup> For Kristeva, nature cannot exist without culture. They are intertwined and working together. Nature, as a result, means women are different to men, and what culture should try to do is acknowledge these natural differences without one dominating the other.

Much of Kristeva's work stems from her analysis of Freud. In particular, she uses the principles of psycho-sexual analysis within Freud's work to underpin her inquiries into how women have become the oppressed sex. Critics have suggested that her acceptance of Freud's analysis commits her to accepting its universal patriarchal implications. However, this criticism is based on the strong sex/gender divide held by liberal feminists, according to whom gender is culturally constructed. Kristeva does not use this divide between sex and gender, because ultimately she believes that we cannot make a clear separation between bodies

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<sup>101</sup> McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (2004), 2.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

and culture, 'making it impossible to siphon off gender from sex'.<sup>103</sup> For Kristeva, the two are both always present.

Where early conceptions of patriarchy saw that differences were to be overcome, and not championed, Kristeva actively focuses on difference. She argues that the continued positioning of patriarchy in society is caused, in some part, by these movements need to overcome difference. Instead, she calls for a new ethical vision that both men and women can bring about. This vision is to bring together biology and culture in order to acknowledge sexual difference as a way of bettering women's situation.

Critics argue that inquiries such as Kristeva's into whether women have an 'essence', conjure up old sexist classifications of women as inferior to men. For example, Kristeva's view that women are linked necessarily with the maternal means she is powerless to change a male-driven political order. However, Kristeva is keen to stress that she never intends to ask what a woman is. Instead, she focuses on the multiplicity of human beings. Women's nature is not fixed, but multiple.

Hélène Cixous similarly shares both Irigaray's and Kristeva's stance on both sexual difference and the concept of patriarchal language as a pervasive marker of women's oppression. Working at the same time as Irigaray and Kristeva during the 1970s, Cixous developed a theory that she claimed was at once anti-theoretical and itself resistant to analysis. This theory focused on the language of femininity and

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<sup>103</sup> McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (2004), 80.

masculinity and is expressed in particular in a theory of what she calls 'patriarchal binary thought'.<sup>104</sup> Patriarchal binary thought is based on the idea that binary oppositions exist. For example, man and woman are in direct opposition to one another. The feminine or female side has always been the negative side. Women have been powerless, where men have always held the power. She calls this the 'struggle for supremacy',<sup>105</sup> in which she feels traditional feminist thinking has sought to gain victory over the man and become the 'victor' of the relationship.

Cixous believes feminism has traditionally demanded that women obtain power within the current patriarchal system. However, taking her ideas of difference from theorist Jacques Derrida, she attempts to explain how binary oppositions within language embody differences that currently imprison women, but through female writing, women can set themselves free of such restraints. Meaning, she explains, is a result of something's relation to another. Femininity for example, cannot exist without its opposite, masculinity, and vice versa. 'Each term,' she writes, 'only achieves significance through its structural relationship to the other'.<sup>106</sup>

For Cixous, it is the language of 'masculine' and 'feminine' that imprisons us. She places strong emphasis on getting rid of the language of masculinity and femininity. She even goes on to say that she would get rid of the terms male and female altogether. This will happen, according to Cixous, if we make use of Derrida's interpretation of difference. He takes the idea of the binary opposition even

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<sup>104</sup> Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), 104.

<sup>105</sup> Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), 105.

<sup>106</sup> Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), 106.

further. He goes on to say that difference is not only bound by these binary oppositions. Instead, it is achieved through the, 'free play of the signifiers'.<sup>107</sup> What he means by this is that although something can only be understood in relation to other things, it is not necessarily one thing, but a number of things working together. Other things enable us to determine the meaning of something. As a result, we can learn to see difference. For Derrida, 'signification is produced precisely through this kind of open ended play between the presence of one signifier and the absence of others'.<sup>108</sup> This 'free play', according to Cixous, 'breaks open' what she perceives as the 'prison house of patriarchal language'.<sup>109</sup>

The final point to be made concerning Cixous relates to her claim that getting rid of restrictive language allows human beings to become what they inherently are, viz. bisexual. What she means by bisexual is that the characters of all human beings are essentially mixed. She sees writing for example, as a bisexual activity that can abolish difference through looking at what is being written, rather than the sex of the person writing it. Cixous is anti-essentialist, anti-biologicistic and in a sense, utopian. She bases her ideas on the assumption that all women have the innate ability to free themselves from patriarchy, particularly through language. However, this vision is arguably too utopian and unrealistic. She assumes all women are in a position to act out her vision, without considering the realities that might prevent women from 'freeing' themselves. Her conception of patriarchy is based on the representation of language. It is certainly true that the language of the

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<sup>107</sup> Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), 105.

<sup>108</sup> Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), 106.

<sup>109</sup> Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), 107.

'feminine' has become the negative position, where the 'masculine' is seen as positive. However, by ridding ourselves of difference altogether, which is part of the vision held by Cixous, ignores reality.

The last person who will be considered in connection with poststructuralist feminist thought is Judith Butler, who has been critical of much contemporary feminist thought. For example, she believes many feminists, particularly liberal feminists such as Enloe, have made the mistake of attempting to categorise 'women' as a common group with universal characteristics. According to Butler this reinforces a binary view of gender in which human beings are divided into two clear cut groups, women and men. Butler believes that gender identity is far from being a 'stable, self-evident, or "natural"'<sup>110</sup> state. In this sense she is similar to Cixous who also works on the basis of sexuality as a flexible notion. Like Cixous, Butler believes in the interchangeability of sexuality and the bisexual nature of all human beings.

Butler's central theory, which is based on the fluid and flexible nature of gender identity, is one she calls 'performativity'. 'Performative acts' are the multitude of symbolic signs that represent gender within culture. 'Social agents,' she writes, 'constitute social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic signs'.<sup>111</sup> What she means by this is that gender is not a stable identity from which various acts are the result, but instead that gender is an identity which is continuously constituted through what she terms, 'a stylised repetition of

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<sup>110</sup> J. Butler, and S. Salih, (eds.), *The Judith Butler Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 6.

<sup>111</sup> J. Butler, 'Performative acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1988), 519.

acts'.<sup>112</sup> In other words, even the slightest gesture or movement contributes to the 'illusion of an abiding gendered self'.<sup>113</sup> She coins this idea, 'social temporality'.<sup>114</sup> What she means by 'social temporality' is that these socially constructed acts are specific to a historical place and time.

From this point of view, since gender is understood as being constructed and constituted through performative acts, then gender can also be capable of being constituted differently. Butler's conception of patriarchy, as a result, rests on the idea that gender identity is a 'performative accomplishment',<sup>115</sup> which is limited and constrained by social sanction and taboo. As a result, she is critical of feminists such as Enloe who frame patriarchy within a binary model of gender. She believes that by attempting to make the category of 'women' visible, as Enloe does, these feminists run the risk of 'rendering visible a category which may or may not be representative of the concrete lives of women'. In other words, they essentialise women under universal characteristics because they see it as necessary in order to subvert patriarchal language and create a sense of solidarity, but in doing so fail to work within the reality of the complex nature of women's lives in their own historical contexts.

Similarly, Butler is critical of political regimes that seek radically to transform the social situation of women, such as the emancipatory policy put in place for Afghan women at the start of the war in 2001, because they too fail to

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<sup>112</sup> Butler, 'Performative acts and Gender Constitution' (1988), 519.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Butler, 'Performative acts and Gender Constitution' (1988), 520.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

question whether the category of 'women' even exists, and if it does, whether the category is socially constructed in such a way that to be a woman is, by definition, 'to be in an oppressed situation'.<sup>116</sup> Butler believes that regardless of the pervasive character of patriarchy, it does not follow that a binary gender system is a given fact. For example, Butler notes that feminists like Enloe reject the idea that biology is destiny, but at the same time develop an account of patriarchal culture which assumes that masculine and feminine genders are inevitable.

Instead, Butler argues that we all put on a 'performance' indicative of socially constructed gender norms. Like Irigaray and Kristeva, she turns to the use of language as a part of the reasons 'men' continue to dominate 'women'. However, although she agrees with Irigaray and Kristeva in that language serves as a tool to construct gender identities and deny multiplicity of gender identities, she takes their ideas even further by criticising their commitment to the natural body. Where Kristeva and Irigaray look to the sexed body as a distinct source of sexual difference, but where one should not privilege the other, Butler leaves little room for a belief in sex as natural or self-evident. Butler does not hold an opposition to nature but rather an opposition to the 'invocation of nature as a way of setting necessary limits on gendered life'.<sup>117</sup>

Kristeva's theory of semiotics aims to subvert the patriarchal language that defines us as male or female and subordinates women as a group. Butler is critical of this theory because it still depends on the stability and reproduction of the idea

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<sup>116</sup> Butler, 'Performative acts and Gender Constitution' (1988), 523.

<sup>117</sup> I. Costera Meijer, and B. Prins, 'How Bodies Come to Matter: An Interview with Judith Butler' in *Signs*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1998), 277.

of a natural sexed body. This dependence on the stability of sexuality is, according to Butler, 'precisely the paternal law she seeks to displace'.<sup>118</sup> According to Butler, Kristeva effectively exposes the limits of universalising gender identity through language, but remains aware of the symbolic nature of the sexed body which sets limits on what can be considered 'woman'. Kristeva describes the maternal body as bearing a set of meanings that precede culture itself. Butler believes that Kristeva's naturalistic descriptions of the maternal body actually, 'reify motherhood and preclude an analysis of its cultural construction and variability'.<sup>119</sup>

Ultimately, where Kristeva acknowledges that she cannot answer the question of what a 'woman' is Butler believes feminist theorising should not even attempt to define women because of her belief in the flexible notion of gender identity and sexuality. 'The female body,' Butler suggests, that Kristeva seeks to express, is itself a 'construct produced by the very law it is supposed to undermine'.<sup>120</sup> Instead, Butler calls for a future where gender identity is open to an infinite amount of cultural possibilities. Butler does not agree with Kristeva and Irigaray that the primary difference between human beings is sexual difference.

However, Butler agrees with Irigaray to some extent. For example, they both agree on Irigaray's 'same and other' dialectic as a false binary system. The 'same and other' dialectic is, for both Butler and Irigaray, 'the illusion of a

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<sup>118</sup> J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), 108.

<sup>119</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990), 109.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*



symmetrical difference'.<sup>121</sup> Within this illusion, the 'other' and the same are both marked as masculine, but the 'other' is the negative of the masculine, 'with the result that the female sex is unrepresentable'.<sup>122</sup> According to Butler and Irigaray, the sex is not one. Butler takes this idea even further by suggesting that the sex is not one because sexual identity is not simply that the natural body is not one, but because gender is multiple is indefinable. Same and other does not simply take place through the axis of sexual difference for Butler as it does Irigaray.

The journals of Herculine provide Butler with an example of the point that sexual identity is flexible. Herculine was a French intersex person who was assigned the sex of female at birth, but then later reassigned as a male. Although Herculine never refers to her anatomy explicitly, s/he relates to he/r predicament in terms of a 'natural mistake',<sup>123</sup> or as Butler puts it, a 'metaphysical homelessness'.<sup>124</sup> Butler believes that Herculine provides an example of someone whose sexual identity is fluid, flexible and multiple. Herculine ultimately commits suicide among the humiliation she faces through her natural irregularity. Herculine believes that s/he 'soars above both sexes'.<sup>125</sup> Eventually, Herculine submits to the law and is recognised as a man because of her sexual orientation towards women. This is restrictive considering he/r own references to herself as neither male nor female. Herculine was forced to fit into the binary model of gender identity, but

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<sup>121</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990), 140.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990), 132.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990), 141.

Butler believes because she even existed as ambiguous shows the natural fluidity of gender identity.

Simone de Beauvoir in particular influenced Butler's thinking when she suggested that one is not born a woman, but becomes one. Beauvoir described gender as a historical situation rather than a natural fact. Here Butler agrees with her. However, Butler takes this idea even further once again, by suggesting that becoming a woman is the result of performative acts that serve to institutionalise gendered visions. Beauvoir is still suggesting that there is indeed a category of 'woman'. However, Butler argues that because gender is created and constructed socially, one cannot and should not attempt to say what a woman is. Embodiment manifests itself as a 'set of strategies',<sup>126</sup> or what Sartre would have called, 'a style of being'.<sup>127</sup> However, this style is never fully self-styled according to Butler because 'living styles have a history, and that history conditions and limits possibilities'.<sup>128</sup>

It could be argued that Butler's denial of sexual difference is unrealistic, because biological differences do exist. However, the key point to take from Butler is that gender identity is constructed rather than natural. Although she is radically different to Enloe's thought, there is a parallel here between the two because Enloe constantly reminds us that the negative association attached to the feminine is socially constructed. For Butler, language, gestures, symbols and performative acts constitute the continuation of a socially constructed patriarchal society.

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<sup>126</sup> Butler, 'Performative acts and Gender Constitution' (1988), 521.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

The variety of conceptions of what patriarchy is, and the solutions to overcome it, are complex and wide ranging. If these writers try to determine what a woman is, they can often get themselves caught in the patriarchal framework they try to avoid. However, what all of these writers agree on, is that a system of patriarchy is in place. Enloe in particular, bases her conclusions on the assumption that we are working within a patriarchal political structure. These writers also agree that to some extent, culturally cultivated conceptions of what a woman is have defined the position of oppression women find themselves in.

Culturally constructed ideas surrounding what constitutes the feminine and the masculine have often been assigned to what are known as the public and the private spheres. The next section will look more closely at the mode of silencing involved when women are relegated to the private sphere.

#### The concept of 'silence' in feminism

According to Enloe, 'one of the most potent mechanisms for political silencing is dichotomising "public" and "private"'.<sup>129</sup> Women are placed 'naturally' within the private sphere, which allows the privileging of masculinity in the public sphere.

Much feminist work on the subject of political silencing as a result of this view has encouraged women to speak publically wherever they can. For example, black feminist writer Audre Laude writes, 'What is most important must be

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<sup>129</sup> Enloe, *The Curious Feminist* (2004), 73.

spoken'.<sup>130</sup> Lorde argues that many women, particularly black women, retain a fear of becoming visible but maintained that remaining silent would not provide protection. She argues that black women in particular have always been highly visible in politics, while at the same time have been rendered invisible by the depersonalisation of racism. This can parallel much feminist thought. Women's issues have become more prevalent in recent decades, yet the voices of women have remained unheard.

Nathalie Handel writes, 'words are warriors',<sup>131</sup> and argues that women's words could create new works and new spaces for women in international politics. Enloe also encourages women to speak publically as she believes it challenges the authority of the gender policing that is happening in international politics. Overcoming silences then, is central to feminist enquiry. The question is why does the silence of women occur and why is it maintained?

Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin in *Listening to Silences*,<sup>132</sup> focus on what they coin 'unnatural silences'.<sup>133</sup> These silences are created as a result of the culturally socialised notions surrounding women and motherhood that serve to keep women in the private sphere. They suggest that these silences are 'those that result from "circumstances" of being born in the wrong class, race, or sex,

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<sup>130</sup> A. Lorde, 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action' in Ryan, Barbara (ed.), *Identity Politics in the Women's movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 81.

<sup>131</sup> N. Handal, 'Reflections on Sex, Silence and Feminism' in *The MIT Electric Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 5 (2005), 105.

<sup>132</sup> E. Hedges & S. Fisher Fishkin (eds.), *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>133</sup> Hedges & Fisher Fishkin (eds.), *Listening to Silences* (1994), 3.

being denied education, becoming numbed by economic struggle, muffled by censorship, or distracted or impeded by the demands of nurturing'.<sup>134</sup>

They present the notion that the consuming demands of marriage and motherhood serve to sustain the systematic exclusion of women from representation in the public sphere. Marge Piercy for example, in her poem *Unlearning to not Speak*,<sup>135</sup> written in 1973, tells the story of how women's relationship to motherhood has impeded her voice. She writes, 'they tell her she is womb-man, baby machine, mirror image, toy, earth mother, and penis poor'.<sup>136</sup>

The silencing of women, from this view point, stems from culturally socialised notions of what a woman is. As we have seen, however, Luce Irigaray notes that because we do not have a notion of what a woman is to counteract the traditional feminine attributes assigned to women, we need to look elsewhere to find out why women have been silenced. Irigaray argues that women do not have a voice of their own due to the patriarchal nature of language. The male centred nature of language, that is, serves to silence women. As mentioned earlier, Irigaray seeks the creation of a new language, created by women themselves, to work in conjunction with male language.

Similarly, Tillie Olsen in *Silences*,<sup>137</sup> examines the ways in which women are silenced in literature. She argues that by perpetuating the entrenched, centuries old notion of power politics and power realities as primarily a man's sphere and by

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<sup>134</sup> Hedges & Fisher Fishkin (eds.), *Listening to Silences* (1994), 3.

<sup>135</sup> M. Piercy, *Unlearning to Not Speak* (London: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986).

<sup>136</sup> Piercy, *Unlearning to Not Speak* (1986).

<sup>137</sup> T. Olsen, *Silences* (London: Virago, 1965).

continuing to use language that maintains male privilege, we are sustaining 'male rule; male ownership; our secondariness; our *exclusion*'.<sup>138</sup> She uses the example of the term 'man' as a 'generic term, defined as including, subsuming, woman, the entire human race'.<sup>139</sup>

Olsen also highlights that women, and particularly female literary writers, have helped to maintain women's silence. She argues that these women have accepted, or at least have never questioned, sexist notions of what women are capable of. These notions include the idea that the act of creative writing is not as inherently natural to woman as to a man and that women are 'naturally' mothers and so are necessarily distracted from other pursuits. She argues that most female writers have never questioned why their success depends on different parameters to those outlined for male writers. For example, often women are made to feel they must choose between creativity and achievement and, fulfilment of their natural destiny to become a mother.

Women's silence then, as argued above, stems from traditional notions that keep women within the private sphere. Socially constructed ideas surrounding what constitutes femininity have been seen as less valuable in terms of power politics, and have been silenced as a result. Enloe writes, 'silence has made us dumb'.<sup>140</sup> She believes that women have learned to talk 'boys talk'<sup>141</sup> which has led

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<sup>138</sup> Olsen, *Silences* (1965), 239-240.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989), 4.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

to further silencing of women by not asking feminist questions and simply learning to think like a man.

### Reflections

Enloe begins her work by asking the question, where are the women? In answer to this, she looks to those roles traditionally thought of as constituting the 'private sphere' and describes how those roles actively influence international politics. She writes, 'women are forever being acted upon; rarely are they seen to be actors'.<sup>142</sup> What Enloe finds however, is that women are everywhere. From chambermaids to diplomatic wives, all of these seemingly marginal roles often affect political decision making. By seeing the personal as political, and global, she finds women within politics. If, she argues, we don't take the roles women have played seriously, and we continue to act as though the manipulations of ideas about femininity and masculinity are not political, but merely cultural, we underestimate 'how much of our lives are indeed political'.<sup>143</sup>

For example, in the 1930s Hollywood turned the Brazilian singer Carmen Miranda into an American movie star. What Enloe sees when she looks at Carmen Miranda is a woman used as a pawn in Franklin Roosevelt's efforts to promote friendlier relations between the United States and Latin America. In turn, when United Fruit executives drew on Carmen Miranda's image for their logo on imported bananas, they were 'trying to construct a new, intimate relationship

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<sup>142</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989), 16.

<sup>143</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989), xiv.

between American housewives and a multinational plantation company'.<sup>144</sup> Carmen Miranda's image was used by American men to reshape international relations and global trade. 'Carmen Miranda alerts us to the fact that it would be a mistake to confine an investigation of regional politics or international agribusiness to male foreign-policy officials, male company executives and male plantation workers'.<sup>145</sup> Enloe believes that by omitting the images of women as, for example, consumers and plantation workers we fail to produce a complete political analysis. Accepting that the political is personal allows us to examine those 'private sphere' issues as central to matters of the state.

Enloe extends her relocation of women in international politics by a reinterpretation of patriarchy, which has served as a conceptual device for eliminating women from studies of the political. Patriarchy has, according to Enloe, marginalised women within the political and public sphere. Traditional conceptions of femininity as the emotional, peace-keeping sex, incapable of violence, have been socially constructed according to Enloe and do not represent what men and women actually are. A full analysis of the variety of roles played by women can highlight the ways in which women are both peace-keeper and violent actor in their own right. She writes, 'thinking about international politics is most meaningful when it derives from contact with diverse values'.<sup>146</sup> To explain why any country has the kind of politics it does, Enloe is curious about how public life is constructed out of the struggle to define masculinity and femininity.

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<sup>144</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989), 2.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989), 5.



Enloe points out that much feminist work has focused on the ways in which women are divided from men, on how to end sexism sustained by men, and on comparing their lives to those of men. As a result, she argues that international politics remains untouched by feminist thought. Instead Enloe looks at the ways women have influenced international politics by asking feminist questions based on what women are and where women are in political life.

Enloe extended her work on the pervasiveness of patriarchal structures by locating its ability to be sustained through militarisation of society in an increasingly globalised world. Enloe argues that almost all aspects of life have been militarised. From military wives, to the conception of 'security' that privileges military action as the most effective tool in maintaining the security of a nation, Enloe has highlighted, by asking feminist questions, how militarisation has led to the continuation of patriarchy in society. Militarisation privileges those aspects of human nature considered to be masculine. The power seeking, violence prone male is the key to national security in a militarised state. How then, does Enloe suggest we might begin to subvert values that privilege the male?

Enloe shows that women are vital to the workings of international politics. She suggests that men rely upon women to continue the current patriarchal system. She believes that once women become aware of men's reliance upon them to uphold patriarchal structures, they can 'revolt' and break those systems down. Without women upholding patriarchy, it might fall.

Although Enloe does not cite Hegel explicitly, this view can be examined through his theory of 'the process of recognition'. This process, he suggests, is a

fundamental aspect of human life and society. He suggests that a person cannot be a human being without recognition from another human being. He explains this in his chapter entitled, 'lordship and bondage' in *The Phenomenology of Mind*.<sup>147</sup> In this chapter, the 'lord' can only continue being a lord if the 'slave' recognises him as the lord. Brought to its conclusion, the slave will eventually realise that the lord relies upon him to maintain his status and will revolt against this. This would eventually result in a society where each recognised the other, but where neither relied upon the other to provide their status.

This is exactly the kind of vision Enloe applies to women in a patriarchal system. Enloe believes that through radical activism women can speak out, break their silence, and ensure the acknowledgement of women's role in global International Relations. This view is perhaps far too utopian. Her vision is one where the entire political system as it stands, will fall. However, if we are to work within the realities of political life, this kind of feminist voice could not be universally valid.

Enloe argues that 'the world is something that has been made; therefore it can be remade'.<sup>148</sup> This relies upon the view that the natures or 'essence' of men and women are not something that can be differentiated. The nature of men and women on this view is purely socially constructed, which serves to entrench patriarchy. She ignores those aspects of the human being that make us different.

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<sup>147</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949).

<sup>148</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989), 17.

As mentioned above, writers such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva argue that the natural, biological body (sexual difference), is central to the construction of patriarchy. We are different, and so we must create a language that allows both men and women equal expression of their differences. Accepting sexual differences for these writers, does not mean accepting patriarchy. They actually seek to improve women's situation by removing them entirely from the language dominated by men that continues to oppress women.

What Enloe does provide is a gendered theory of international politics which makes women visible in locations where they have previously been overlooked. What is problematic, however, is that her radical, action-based theory is devoid of any sense of limits. Jean Bethke Elshtain would describe this kind of thinking as 'unchastened'. For Elshtain, Enloe's theory of international politics sacrifices the limits inherent in a chastened conception of reality to an ideologically rooted vision. Without limits, Elshtain argues, one can never hope to present a theory of International Relations that can realistically be applied universally, with the inevitable compromises this demands. As a result, an examination of Elshtain's work will help to increase understanding of how feminist theory might move from purely ideological commitments to ideas in closer contact with reality based on a more 'mature' vision of responsible and limited international politics.

## Chapter Two

### Jean Bethke Elshtain – ‘Sovereignty and Chastened Politics’

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The aim of this chapter is to examine more closely Jean Bethke Elshtain’s political theory, and consider whether that theory is a distinctively feminist one that is universally valid. Elshtain focuses on a wide range of topics, including ‘the public/private dichotomy, the character and role of the history of political thought, the character, obligations and requirements of democratic politics; the intertwining of the ethical and the political in international politics, and the centrality of religion in people’s lives and political life’.<sup>1</sup> It is on her treatment of these themes in particular that the chapter will focus.

The chapter will consider first Elshtain’s conception of sovereignty since it is central to her work and provides the basis of much of her thinking. This is because for Elshtain the concept provides a boundary setting discourse in International Relations theory. The chapter will then consider, secondly, Elshtain’s work on the fifth century Christian bishop later known as St. Augustine, whose ideas play a fundamental role in much of her thinking. In particular, Augustine’s thought is central to her examination of the just war tradition, to which Augustine’s own contribution was the argument that although Christians could not

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<sup>1</sup> N. Rengger, ‘Review article. Just a war against terror? Jean Bethke Elshtain’s burden and American power’ *International Affairs*, Vol. 80 No. 1 (2004), 107.

justify killing to protect themselves, they could engage in war to protect the lives of others. Following on from this, the chapter will analyse Elshtain's own beliefs about the just war tradition, including what she believes a just war consists of and under what conditions a just war might be waged. The message she ultimately sends here is that 'the world in which we live is often a hard world, as well as sometimes a wonderful one'.<sup>2</sup> Her work on just war helped to consolidate her claim to be a theorist who eschews abstract, purely moralistic theorising in favour of remaining rooted within the realms of political reality. It is from her realisation that a purely moralistic stance cannot work in reality that her ideal of 'chastened' politics emerged.

'Chastened' is a term Elshtain employs throughout much of her work. Through the use of the term chastened, she seeks to combine a form of traditional realism reformulated in the light of her reading of Augustine's theology and politics with her commitment to what she considers to be a form of moral reasoning that takes into account the reality of political situations. Her goal, then, is a chastened and restrained concept of ethics which retains a commitment to universal morals. An examination of her work on patriotism in particular will help us to understand exactly what she meant by 'chastened', and how she thinks the term should be used in International Relations theory. What she has to say in this connection requires nothing less than a wholesale rethinking of established concepts of the self, the ethical and the political as they figure in much

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<sup>2</sup> Rengger, 'Just a war against terror? Jean Bethke Elshtain's burden and American power' (2004), 107-108.

International Relations theory. It is against this background that we can then turn to the specific topic of women.

Elshtain's *Women and War* served to debunk myths surrounding the traditional notions of what women and men are in times of war, which is that of men as warriors, women as peacemakers. This notion of women as ultimately peaceful and virtuous, one which she terms the 'beautiful soul', will be discussed in particular to highlight the ways in which traditional myths about women and peace have been reinforced and distorted perception of political reality. The chapter will end, as a result, with a discussion on Elshtain and feminism.

We know from much of Elshtain's work that she is critical of all encompassing universal ideals, but what does she propose instead? Does she provide a viable, distinctively feminist International Relations theory? Here, she found inspiration in particular in the work of Hannah Arendt, most notably to *The Human Condition*,<sup>3</sup> and attempted to incorporate Arendt's ideas about the importance of gender, but without the absolute feminisation of politics. Ultimately, this chapter argues that although Elshtain presents us with a political theory that might be universally valid, her theory is not a distinctively feminist one since it incorporates a theory of the limits of human nature in general, and of how these limits must be allowed to chasten the actions of all citizens, both male and female.

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<sup>3</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

### Elshtain and conceptions of sovereignty

Elshtain characterises sovereignty as an ‘aspiration’ that ‘serves as a goad to action; signifies accomplishment; defines an opposition between the state and its society; and encodes a legal construction, namely, formal sovereignty’.<sup>4</sup> She defines sovereignty as a ‘boundary setting discourse’,<sup>5</sup> but one that if left limitless, or unbound, leads to severe abuses of that sovereignty. To Elshtain, morals are dominated by conceptions of sovereignty. However, as she argues in *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self*,<sup>6</sup> if morals are dominated by a conception of self or state sovereignty, as opposed to one inherited from Christian ideals of a sovereign God who rules through reason and love, then this leads to an absence of limits to those morals. This would eventually lead to disaster, destruction and even nihilism.

This section will begin by examining Elshtain’s analysis of the ideas which have surrounded the modern Western concepts of the sovereign state and the self, particularly her interpretation of how ‘strong’ conceptions of ‘self sovereignty’ have emerged. Essentially, Elshtain attributes their emergence to a shift in the theological conceptions of God. These theological narratives are split between those who believe God rules by reason and love (As Elshtain does), and those who see God as a creature of power and will. If will to power prevails, and the idea of a sovereign self is modelled on a sovereign God who rules through will then, Elshtain argues, this would inevitably lead to a disastrous absolute egotism as the sense of

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<sup>4</sup> J. Bethke Elshtain, ‘Sovereign God, Sovereign State, Sovereign Self’ in *Notre Dame Law Review*, Vol. 66, No. 5 (1991), 1355.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

sovereign self. The result, summed up briefly, include; an absence of all morals, an absence of limits to power and will, the disembodiment or 'exincarnation' of selves, and therefore a perilous journey through experimenting with nature. Ultimately, Elshtain aims to present a 'limited' and 'chastened' version of self and state sovereignty. Without limits, and without the acknowledgement of our own limits within nature, disaster will follow. The problem for Elshtain is that the idea of state and self sovereignty as absolute and unbound, leads to the unleashing of evil by destroying those aspects of human nature that seek commonality, love and rule by reason.

The concept of self sovereignty is characterised as supreme and independent power over one's own actions. As Elshtain puts it, 'The sovereign self is the sole judge of his or her own good'.<sup>7</sup> The desire for such power arose, Elshtain argues when the conception of God as a God of reason and love, such as the one outlined by St. Augustine, was replaced by a God of power and will. This happened when sovereignty, instead of being associated with reason and truth, as it was for medieval thinkers, 'came unbound and migrated, becoming attached more and more to notions of the self'.<sup>8</sup> Here, Elshtain warns us of the unlimited sovereign self. She points instead to medieval thinkers who looked to rational, limited conceptions of the divine. Although Elshtain omits what was not good about medieval society, a society that was also capable of terrible injustices and evils, her point is that medieval thought was governed not by will, but by the vision of a

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<sup>7</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 182.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*



universe ruled by law created from morals inherited from God. Elshtain believes the sovereign self is cut off from these limits. Without limits, the sovereign self either aims for a utopian notion of perfection that cannot be achieved, or is subject to nihilism. St. Augustine believes that within earthly dominion, perfection could not be achieved, but that nihilism could also be prevented if we acknowledge our limits.

For example, according to Augustine, after the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden perfection was no longer an option for human beings. "They knew that in a fallen world, filled with imperfect human beings, we cannot achieve perfection in earthly dominion, in religious life, or in anything else, and that – even more important – we all have a responsibility to and for one another to serve and to love our neighbours".<sup>9</sup> We can avoid nihilism though if we acknowledge, 'the living incarnational realities of human life in common'.<sup>10</sup>

A fundamental 'incarnational reality' is accepting the limits of the body and is central to Elshtain's arguments surrounding the conception of sovereignty. She argues that, 'we lose history and morals through ideas of 'exincarnation'.<sup>11</sup> This leads to, Elshtain argues, human beings who are, 'insufficiently aware of human foibles, shortcomings and the unpredictability's of the world'.<sup>12</sup> Descartes, for example, made the claim that the extended parts of the self (the body, the limbs), are inessential to who the self really is. This disembodiment or 'exincarnation', of

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<sup>9</sup> J. Bethke Elshtain, *Just War Against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 51.

<sup>10</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 232.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 180.

ourselves puts nature in opposition to reason, separates passion and emotion from the body, and leads to a degradation of the meaningful aspects of life. In other words, nihilism. Elshtain provides an example of such degradation from the novel by Mary Shelley entitled *Frankenstein*.

The story is about how Dr. Frankenstein attempts to bring human life under the control of human will, and ultimately fails. The story is an example of how self sovereignty threatens to dehumanise us and how destruction is caused 'by the quest for knowledge and glory carried to excess'.<sup>13</sup> The sovereign self, according to Elshtain, leads to an excess of *superbia* and *curiositas* (That is human pride and curiosity). The story of Dr. Frankenstein demonstrates 'a run-amok *curiositas*, turned deadly as it recognises no limit, no constraint...we experiment with our natures at our peril'.<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that Elshtain does not approve of medical advances in general, as she writes, 'assisting us in being as whole in body and spirit as we can be, given what was given us at birth, we are helping to complete our nature, not alter it radically'.<sup>15</sup>

'Exincarnation' symbolises for Elshtain, those humans who are trying to be more purely spiritual than they can be. She believes it encourages an exaggerated notion of what can be achieved within a body that cannot separate itself from its soul or spirit.

Similarly, on a more philosophical level, the notion of disembodiment from Kant and Simone de Beauvoir rests on the idea that 'we can soar only if we are

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<sup>13</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 231.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

disembodied'.<sup>16</sup> For both the female body in particular shows signs of weakness and emotion and is therefore unable to form a strong moral centre in the sovereign self. In Kant's version of the sovereign self there are no allowances for human weakness; therefore a fully sovereign self would be male. For Simone de Beauvoir modern society 'sets up the male as a positive norm and 'woman' as the negative, the second sex, or 'other'.<sup>17</sup> Beauvoir's feminism believes that women's emancipation can only be achieved through liberation from biological differences. Beauvoir even characterises pregnancy in negative terms, describing the unborn child as 'a "tenant" who feeds parasitically upon his mother's existence'.<sup>18</sup>

One particular statement made by Beauvoir is particularly astonishing to Elshtain and demonstrates Beauvoir's need to hold the material body at arm's length. Beauvoir writes, 'A woman's "mammary glands," her breasts, may be "excised" at any time of life for they play "no role in women's individual economy"'.<sup>19</sup> Beauvoir's body, to her, 'imprisons her in her subjectivity, circumscribes her within the limits of her own nature'.<sup>20</sup> In this view then, 'The body must be repressed for it invites scorn, despair, inhibitions'.<sup>21</sup> This leads to disastrous consequences for Elshtain since it places us at odds with nature. For Elshtain, human biology, emotions, and weaknesses, are an intrinsic part of the

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<sup>16</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 232.

<sup>17</sup> M. Humm (ed.), *Feminisms: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 44.

<sup>18</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 187.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Humm (ed.), *Feminisms: A Reader* (1992), 47.

<sup>21</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 188.

limits of our existence. They are, in fact, 'the very fabric of the universe'.<sup>22</sup> From this perspective, the living body is an example of the realities of the world. If we think of our existence as, 'All words, no flesh; all spirit, no body', then this disembodied enterprise invites 'abstract schemas imposed upon the living within history'.<sup>23</sup>

Elshtain seeks support for her ideas in the work of St. Augustine, who acknowledges the limits of the body, and worked within these limits. For Augustine, God is a God who ruled by love and reason, and these morals should guide us as we try to limit the damage done by human beings to each other. They should appeal to the human nature that intrinsically loves. 'Reason and love are not severed as both are embodied in a person, and that person is love incarnate'.<sup>24</sup> This person is also capable of reason. 'The vision of God's power, justice, love, and mercy, that Christian thinkers attached the notion of the "good news" despite all the miseries in the world'.<sup>25</sup> This person is also male or female, as Augustine has no doubts about the unity and equality of each human being.

Elshtain does not simply apply Christian thought to her work. In a modern secular world in which God does not exist at all for some, she attempts to reformulate her thinking in a way that takes account of a post-theological age. For this purpose she turns to the work of Albert Camus, particularly *The Rebel*. Camus aims to extract a theory of limits from within a world of absolutes, and grounds for

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<sup>22</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 233.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

moderation from within the very experience of nihilism itself. For Camus, although we hold within us the ability to commit great evils, we must work to limit ourselves and not 'unleash them on the world'.<sup>26</sup> But what are the limits we must impose on ourselves? In response, Camus created a theory of rebellion as a means of finding not only limits within the self but also commonality with others. As Elshtain notes, 'When a person rebels, he identifies himself with others, according to Camus,'<sup>27</sup> 'For rebellion must respect the limit it discovers in itself – a limit where minds meet, and in meeting, begin to exist'.<sup>28</sup> But how plausible, one must ask, is Elshtain's belief that Camus succeeds in finding a concept of 'limits' within rebellion itself?

For Camus, there is a vital distinction between revolution and rebellion. He sees revolution as destructive because it is a form of absolute idealism – idealism, that is, that does not acknowledge any limits. Rebellion, by contrast, acknowledges limits. Does Camus in fact make a convincing distinction between the absolutist quest of the revolutionary, on the one hand, and the rebel's journey to the discovery of limits, on the other?

Terrorists, according to Camus, can be excused when they defend but do not try to justify violence in the name of rebellion. Although violence cannot be justified, it can be condoned in those who commit it if they fully acknowledge the tensions they create. If they struggle with the idea of what they are doing and doubt themselves, then they are excused.

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<sup>26</sup> A. Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), ix.

<sup>27</sup> A. Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 242.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

What Camus claims is that rebellion acknowledges limits. This becomes clear in his admiration for a fanatical young Russian terrorist called Kaliayev. Kaliayev was a member of a group called the Organisation for Combat, which was a part of the Socialist Revolutionary Party and is described by Camus as the Fastidious Assassins. Kaliayev murdered the Grand Duke Sergei at the beginning of the twentieth century. Camus thinks this murder was defensible because Kaliayev acknowledged the limits of the body. He was anguished by the conflict between such aspects of human nature as love and compassion, on the one hand, and the violence he was committing, on the other. Kaliayev placed supreme and painful good above himself and decided to commit violence anyway because the injustice of their lives outweighed that of the life he was taking.

Camus' Fastidious Assassins<sup>29</sup> took the lives of other human beings only after close examination of their own conscience. They did not attempt to justify what they did and this makes their actions defensible in the eyes of Camus. These assassins then killed themselves after they took a life which, in Camus' eyes, showed that they believed in the equal value of all human life. They did not appeal to abstract or absolute values to excuse their actions. Instead, they incorporated their ideals into their own death.

In Camus' eyes, the self-destructive nihilism of the Fastidious Assassins had positive moral value because he regards it as the discovery of ethical limits. For him, the assassins lived a paradox, 'combining in themselves respect for human life

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<sup>29</sup> Camus, *The Rebel* (1956), 164.

in general, and contempt for their own lives'.<sup>30</sup> To the assassins, a 'life is paid for by another life'<sup>31</sup> and violence is 'necessary and inexcusable'.<sup>32</sup> It could be argued, however, that far from creating a new set of positive values, the 'paradox' in which Camus maintains the Fastidious Assassins lived simply carries terrorism to a further extreme, and that matters are not helped in this respect by 'the courage with which they walk to the gallows, to escape from contradiction and to create the values they lack'.<sup>33</sup>

Rebellion, according to Camus, is an instrument for solidarity and love for all human life. They wish to save all human beings by sacrificing a few, including themselves. The Fastidious Assassins refused to justify their actions by appealing to an abstract and instead incorporated their ideal into their own death. However, the extreme version of moral purity, in secular form, of the Fastidious Assassins he admires, actually reproduces some of the destructive characteristics of the old Christian ideal of sainthood. In other words, his hostility towards absolutes of any kind does not produce the moderation he is trying to create because of the extreme version of rebellion he describes. The idea that two negatives create a positive is one that cannot be described as moderation.

Camus finds the key to political moderation in a concept of limits. For Elshtain, what he provides is a version of limited sovereignty, separate from God. It helps her to demonstrate that Christian values still permeate themselves throughout Western

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<sup>30</sup> Camus, *The Rebel* (1956), 168.

<sup>31</sup> Camus, *The Rebel* (1956), 169.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Camus, *The Rebel* (1956), 165.

society, even in a modern, secular world. That even without God as a guide, limits can still be set.

Self sovereignty abuses limits, leads to an absence of morals and history as the self separates itself from everything around it for its own will. Elshtain writes, 'being a mature member of society does not entail complete independence from everybody else but, instead, requires a willingness and ability to build and to sustain rich relationships with other people'.<sup>34</sup> An absence of history leads to an absence of limits for Elshtain because, 'the person before me sets a limit to my own projects'.<sup>35</sup>

For Elshtain, many historical tragedies stemmed from an unbound state sovereignty. For example, concentration camps 'flowed directly from a process of reason, a terrible rationalism played out'.<sup>36</sup> The non-sovereign self has access to the knowledge of these harsh realities and they can draw upon these experiences. 'We look to common sense, decency, dignity, to our sense of shame, our capacity for joy, our ability to recognise when our dignity is affronted, our ability to love, not just use others'.<sup>37</sup> The sovereign self, without all of these emotions and without acknowledging these limits of the human being cannot hope to limit these atrocities.

Elshtain hopes not to rid us of sovereignty, but to limit it and to chasten it. She writes, 'The self I have in mind seeks meaning and dignity and finds a measure

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<sup>34</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 229.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 232.

<sup>37</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 233.



in both. Not in total liberation from nature, nor in some utopian attunement and at oneness with nature, but rather, in growing to become a full person according to our human nature'.<sup>38</sup> For Elshtain, the human being has certain intrinsic attributions. As a result we should allow ourselves to be that self while also limiting what we are capable of within the limits of our moral guidance. A moral guidance that is outside of one's own self. She wrote, 'because that person is intrinsically social, because we are persons, not individuals; we must refrain from doing everything of which we are capable'.<sup>39</sup>

The articulation of limits is, according to Elshtain, intrinsic to notions of sovereignty. 'Whether limits God has freely imposed on himself, limits to earthly rule, or limits to human self-governance', limits are central to Elshtain's thought. Elshtain believes that while we cannot wish for a utopian world of total peace and disarmament, we can look to the limits set by God, by History, and by others to guide our moral consciousness.

#### Augustine and 'the self', 'human nature' and 'society'

Elshtain's analysis and interpretation of the works of St. Augustine, whose work includes a vast library of 117 books, stem from what she sees as an oversimplification of his works in the past. Categorized as a universalist and political realist, she argues that he is universal while also accepting of differences. He is a realist, while also advocating a restrained realism. What is important to

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<sup>38</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 229.

<sup>39</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 230.

Elshtain about Augustine is that under this more complex interpretation of his political thought he presents a view of Christian realism that is relevant to today's more secularised view of the world. Elshtain writes, 'Augustine's writings concern what are generally known as "universals," but yet, he wrote at times with the skill of a nuanced "particularist" and historicist. Given this towering enterprise, perhaps it is unsurprising that some attempts have been made to reduce Augustine to a manageable size'.<sup>40</sup>

Augustine was a devout Christian but was also aware of the limits of human nature after 'the fall' of humanity in the Garden of Eden. In this respect Augustine saw his writings as an evolution of early Christianity, not a deviation from it. Elshtain reflects that before the fall there was no need to mediate conflicting wills of human beings, as 'there was no perverse wilfulness'.<sup>41</sup> In human beings there is the innate ability to love but also to use those aspects of human nature that might be virtues such as perseverance, courage, intelligence and so on, in less than virtuous ways. This means then, that political life is necessary, but that it also should be aware of its limits and be restrained. 'Human finiteness is the grounding of any form of human life, including political life',<sup>42</sup> therefore, she continues, 'human beings must erect barriers to their worst tendencies even as they seek to realise their best'.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> J. Bethke Elshtain, 'Why Augustine? Why Now?' in *Catholic University Law Review*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2003), 283-284.

<sup>41</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 11.

<sup>42</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 5.

<sup>43</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 9.

While Immanuel Kant suggests we may have misunderstood the purpose of nature in assigning reason to good will,<sup>44</sup> Elshtain presents the Augustinian view that reason, under the basis of faith, drives the will to do good and to love. Elshtain is critical of Kantian thought that disembodies the sovereign self. If one chooses to disembody the self, then they are ignoring the shortcomings of human beings and the unpredictable nature of the world. This thought is too abstract for Elshtain as she believes the body limits us and we are limited by the situations that human beings find themselves in. Kant believes moral truths are not received from any divine source but instead from reason within the self. Elshtain believes that morals that are received this way universalise human morals in a way that is abstract from the realities of differences within the world and within human beings. To never act upon a principle that one would not want as a universal law is to ignore the realities of political life and law.

Augustine's notion of the self essentially emphasised human beings as inherently social beings who are defined by other human relationships. Despite being created in the image of God, humans are defined by other human beings and, 'We come to know ourselves through interactions with the world'.<sup>45</sup> As briefly outlined in chapter one, G. W. F. Hegel presents an idea of the self that can help us to understand this notion in his chapter entitled, 'lordship and Bondage' in his book *Phenomenology of Mind*. In this chapter he also maintains that to think of the

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<sup>44</sup> C. J. Friedrich, (ed.), *The Philosophy of Kant: Immanuel Kant's Moral and Political Writings* (New York: The Modern Library, 1949), 142.

<sup>45</sup> Bethke Elshtain, 'Why Augustine? Why Now?' (2003), 288.

self as a self-contained independent soul, is a misunderstanding of the self. He agrees that self identity is social.

In 'lordship and bondage', he describes the relationship between 'selves'. In it, he states that one first becomes aware that self identity is reliant upon someone else recognising them and, that other person must also give recognition within the limitedness of one's capabilities. He describes this relationship as a struggle for recognition. Even if one attains victory over another human being and becomes 'the lord', one must still rely on the 'slave' to recognise them as the lord. 'The master is the consciousness that exists for itself...but is mediated through another consciousness'.<sup>46</sup>

Hegel summarises by writing, 'self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only being acknowledged or "recognised"'.<sup>47</sup> He calls this 'the process of being recognised'<sup>48</sup>. In this view, purely moralistic stances such as that taken by Kant and also by much feminist thought, serve to ignore this struggle for recognition of the self. No one can opt out of this struggle and so everyone must work within the confines of the reality that it exists. In this respect, Elshtain agrees with Hegel because Hegel provides a more secularised version of the 'original sin' presented by Christian thought. The task is to attempt to contain the struggle within the political arena.

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<sup>46</sup> G. W. F., Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), 234.

<sup>47</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1949), 229.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

What this also does is cut across any gender lines. Women figure centrally in Augustine's work because he believes they have the same yearnings as men, but this does not suggest a specifically gendered approach, rather one that doesn't fail to mention women at all. What Hegel's theory fails to consider however, is the economic and material factors that might put certain people in a better position to gain victory in a struggle. Clearly, in many cases, men have an advantage over women in the struggle for victory over others. However, what it does achieve is the acknowledgement that this struggle does exist and that there is no way to act within realities of political life without the acknowledgement of the struggle unless one takes a purely moralistic stance, which removes that person from political life altogether.

In addition to being reliant on others for recognition of the self, Augustine also reverts to the idea that human minds cannot fully control will, 'the mind can never be transparent to itself as we are never wholly in control of our thoughts'.<sup>49</sup> He claims that bodies are essential to who we are and that we remain beings who love, yearn and grieve, and can never be purged of these emotions. In this he refers to the 'limits of our embodiment',<sup>50</sup> meaning that we are all limited by our own capabilities, body, thoughts and language. Therefore, this is how we must communicate.

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<sup>49</sup> Bethke Elshtain, 'Why Augustine? Why Now?' (2003), 285.

<sup>50</sup> St. Augustine, *Concerning The City of God against the Pagans* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1972).

Augustine uses language to help understand and acknowledge the differences inherent within human beings. In his work *The City of God*,<sup>51</sup> he even concludes that human beings would be happier with a dog for company than someone foreign to themselves purely because of the difficulties that present themselves if two people who speak different languages attempt to communicate.<sup>52</sup> He also concludes that one cannot opt out of being bound to language, or as Elshtain puts it, 'we cannot leap out of the world and attain an Archimedean point or devise a meta-language purged of earthly usage by fallible creatures'.<sup>53</sup>

Godlike wisdom is not attainable on this earth and so it follows that the limits of a human being are also bound by recognition and understanding from others. It is from recognition from others, and within the limits of our own embodiment, that we must assess political life. One must look at the unavoidable miseries such as death, famine, flood and so on, look at the ways man has compounded those torments, and then find a way to peace accepting of these circumstances. He based his thinking then, not on the state, but on all human action. According to Augustine, because human beings are limited, they are unable to obtain abstract truths.

It is this idea that Elshtain adopts within her own thinking. She believes any theory that works solely in the abstract cannot work within the realities of political life. Human beings must restrain or chasten those torments they have

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<sup>51</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* (1972).

<sup>52</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* (1972), 861.

<sup>53</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 4.

compounded in the lives of other human beings. The idea of the chastened human being is a theme that threads itself throughout Elshtain's work and her theories on politics. An example, to help us understand this idea further, can be taken from her idea of the chastened patriot.

Elshtain argues that patriotism has become synonymous with nationalism, which in turn leads to a discourse for cynicism. She finds that contemporary thought links patriotism to political ruthlessness and national chauvinism. Elshtain however, wants to reclaim patriotism. She sees patriotism as a virtue. She sees the patriot as sceptical about claims of the sovereign state, that they recognise others and differences and restrains fantasies of control over others. The chastened patriot is one who has no illusions, who recognises the limiting conditions internal to international politics, and who does not embrace utopian fantasies of world government or total disarmament.<sup>54</sup>

Elshtain argues that chastened patriotism evokes compassion and concern for country while also recognising the love and concern others have for their own country. They have learned from the past. Diversity and commonality are cherished. This creates a view of ourselves devoid of universalistic pretensions and sees others as neither angels nor devils. 'A civic life animated by chastened patriotism bears implication for our attitude towards centralised state power',<sup>55</sup> and therefore one can potentially 'chasten' or 'restrain' political powers through action. The idea of the 'chastened' citizen is one that cannot be described as

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<sup>54</sup> J. Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys: Essays in Feminism as Civic Discourse* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 178.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

distinctively feminist. As Elshtain herself writes, 'devirilising discourse, in favour not of feminisation but of politicisation, the chastened patriot constitutes men and women as citizens who share what Hannah Arendt calls "the faculty of action"'.<sup>56</sup> What the 'chastened' does is recognise limits and react to them. It neither ignores women nor invites a specifically feminist stance. She would have liked for us to explore alternative identities that help to steer us away from traditional narratives surrounding men and women without working in the abstract but working as action takers in political life.

What does Elshtain's work on Augustine tell us about her thinking generally? It tells us that she believes Christian realism provides a chastened version of realism that can work within the realities of political life today. Elshtain views these ideas of the limited self as vital to today's politics because it is precisely the limits of the human beings that should shape the way we conduct politics. Similarly, her work on Niebuhr reflects her attitude, and overall work, on human nature in connection with her critique of contemporary ethical and political thought. She aims also to reclaim human nature.

In recent decades ideas surrounding human nature have been connected with overly essentialist views that disregard any differences in human beings. Elshtain, however, believes that Christian realism, of the kind found in thinkers such as Niebuhr; provides a way of 'puncturing illusions'<sup>57</sup> that essentialise human

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<sup>56</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 258.

<sup>57</sup>J. Bethke Elshtain, 'Niebuhr's 'Nature of Man' and Christian Realism' in Harries, Richard and Platten Stephen (ed.), *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics* (Oxford Scholarship online, May 2010), 12.



nature with moral arguments while also embracing commonality. If the self is utterly dependent on God, or in other words, guided by moral reasoning, then the self is also free to be fully itself.<sup>58</sup> Niebuhr's move into a Christian understanding of human beings as torn creatures, tempted by pride and the lust to dominate, meant that he was, in part, 'driven by events in the 'real world'',<sup>59</sup> and that the essence of free self-determination meant that sometimes human nature dictated the wrongful use of this freedom. It was also important to Augustine to help us see that a lust for domination is at work in all human affairs as is dutiful concern for others.

In sum, Elshtain writes of Augustine, 'Augustine's way of working things through is an exemplary alternative to the abstract, rationalist castings of much contemporary political and moral thought'.<sup>60</sup> Human nature denotes that a pride in taking precedence over others is at work but so is compassion. 'He elides the distance between grand moral philosophy and ordinary moral reflection'.<sup>61</sup> Augustine preached the abilities of everyman and woman to be capable of moral reasoning, therefore restrain what their government is up to, and this is precisely the kind of action she would like to see us take today. Given the influence of Augustine on Elshtain's work, what did he have to tell us about one of her most notable theories, that of the just war tradition?

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<sup>58</sup> Bethke Elshtain, 'Niebuhr's 'Nature of Man' and Christian Realism' (2010), 4.

<sup>59</sup> Bethke Elshtain, 'Niebuhr's 'Nature of Man' and Christian Realism' (2010), 5.

<sup>60</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 129.

<sup>61</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 161.

### Augustine and 'just war'

Origins of just war theory can be traced from St. Augustine's fourth-century masterwork *The City of God*. Although Augustine never wrote a systematic treatise on war, he put into play the characteristic form of moral reasoning that enters into the just war tradition. Augustine sought to neither invite 'total relativism nor despairing withdrawal'.<sup>62</sup> He sought to limit the damage done rather than preach unobtainable goals of perfection. He did not work in the abstract but did subscribe to a chastened version of 'real politics' with which Elshtain agreed.

As we have seen above, 'love and justice are intertwined both on earth and in heaven; yet the world is filled with horrors, including war'.<sup>63</sup> Augustine then, justifies a certain sort of war with this 'call to love and peace'.<sup>64</sup> Augustine knows that questions concerning the ethics of power and its use or abuse are more exigent when it comes time to debate war and peace and so he outlined a basis under which war might be morally justified. The just war tradition of moral arguments affords criteria for determining whether a resort to force is justified. Just war thinking provides guidance as to how a war should be fought and offers a framework of deliberation, evaluation, criticism, and moral challenge, and one that reminds us of our moral natures.

Elshtain locates Augustine as 'the father of just war teaching'<sup>65</sup> and so it is here that our discussion of Elshtain's extensive work into just war thinking must

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<sup>62</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 158.

<sup>63</sup> Bethke Elshtain, 'Why Augustine? Why Now?' (2003), 295.

<sup>64</sup> Bethke Elshtain, 'Why Augustine? Why Now?' (2003), 296

<sup>65</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 122-129.

start. 'To understand politics, he insists, one must be attuned to what human beings love in common, what they fear, what they are subjected to, and what they can anticipate',<sup>66</sup> and just war can provide an alternative to realism, but one that is also grounded within reality. Augustine's requirements for war are as follows; war must be a last resort. War must be an act of redressing rights that have been violated, or in defence against unjust demands backed by the threat of force from another. War must be legally and openly declared by constituted governments. There must be reasonable prospect for victory, and therefore for peace. The means of war must be proportionate to the ends. Wars must be waged with clear distinctions made between combatants and non-combatants. The victorious nation must not require the utter and total humiliation of the other.<sup>67</sup>

These circumstances for war are most notably known as *Jus ad Bellum* (the circumstances which justify going to war), and *Jus in Bello* (what is allowed in fighting once war has been waged). Its aim is to constrain collective violence and chasten political action. Again, Elshtain assumes a version of the self as one 'attuned to moral reasoning and capable of it'.<sup>68</sup> The need for just war reflects what Augustine sees as political life being a series of conflicting pressures and the struggle between human beings, including the struggle for recognition that was mentioned above.

For Elshtain, Augustine provides a bridging of a gap between those who believe, as many Catholic bishops in his time did, that human beings should shun

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<sup>66</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 132.

<sup>67</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 150.

<sup>68</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 152.

violence altogether and do the right thing even when others have done them wrong, and those such as Machiavelli who adopt an 'anything goes' realist attitude to waging war. She indicates that the first forces one to withdraw from political life completely and adopt a moral standpoint away from the realities of politics. While this stance is possible perhaps, it does not prevent the events outside one's own personal control from happening and it does prevent one from taking any action at all. Leaders charged with the right to authority cannot withdraw from the world and thus can never be pacifists.

Alternatively, Machiavelli's *realpolitik* approach, which can be seen in his work *The Prince* and *The Discourses*,<sup>69</sup> argues that above all, the Prince 'must live with his subjects in such a way that no accident of good or evil fortune can deflect him from his course'.<sup>70</sup> He maintains that even after great evil or treachery from a prince, his subjects can actually live securely after the event and are able to defend themselves well from external enemies. He believes this arose 'from the cruelties being exploited well or badly',<sup>71</sup> especially in adverse times. *Realpolitik* represents traditional ethical concerns about when to resort to force, an issue on which Machiavelli claims that nothing should constrain the prince. Power is the main concern here, not justice. Elshtain believes this non-chastened approach to politics allows human nature to be left unchecked. What she believes Augustine offered is a

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<sup>69</sup> N. Machiavelli, *The Prince and The Discourses* (New York: The Modern Library, 1950).

<sup>70</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1950), 35.

<sup>71</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1950), 34.

way forward that limited the damage done without trying to obtain perfection or total disarmament.

An Augustinian realism, for Elshtain, resists sentimentalism and insists on ethical restraint. Augustinianism is sceptical about the exercise of power even as it recognises the inescapability of power. Augustinian realists are not crusaders but they do insist that 'we are called up to act in a mode of realistic hope with a hard-headed recognition of the limits to action'.<sup>72</sup>

Elshtain believes that the Western tradition of just war thinking provides an alternative to realist narratives and that, in the light of the just war tradition, violence must therefore 'justify itself before the court of nonviolence'.<sup>73</sup> Augustine, despite his reluctance to adopt just war thinking, nevertheless defended the possibility that a war may be just if it is waged in defence of a common good and to protect the innocent from certain destruction. The question at this stage is, how does the work of St. Augustine translate into the modern world?

### Just war in a modern age

Although just war theory originated in early Christian history it would eventually become secularised, though not stripped of ethical content. Elshtain does not see just war thinking simply as a weapon used by the powerful to justify wars. In her book *Power Trips and Other Journeys*<sup>74</sup> she begins to outline central

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<sup>72</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Just War against Terror* (2003), 70.

<sup>73</sup> J. Bethke Elshtain, 'Reflections on War and Political Discourse: Realism, Just War, and Feminism in a Nuclear Age' in *Political Theory*, Vol. 13, No. 1. (1985), 44.

<sup>74</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990).

premises of the just war tradition by separating it from the strategic *realpolitik* perspective and describing alternatives to just war that help her to outline the differences her own version of just war theory presents. Each of the positions she rejects, she argues, help to enrich her just war framework.

The first of these is pure war. This is a hard line realist posture that states, 'we've got the power, we are prepared to use force'.<sup>75</sup> Such thinkers do not use negotiation and, although limiting of this rule might be possible, it is not required if use of force is more effective. 'The only requirement is to look out for one's own strategic concerns'.<sup>76</sup> Within pure war the 'other' is always the enemy and war is the primary way that states have relations with one another. Here, she cites *The Causes of Wars*<sup>77</sup> by Michael Howard who argues that the contemporary realist must look at the political circumstances out of which conflict arises.<sup>78</sup> He developed a theory against pure war while also accepting a horizon of realist assumptions about war.

As a result, Elshtain argues that Howard moves the abstract realism of pure war in to the reality by looking at political context. She writes for example, 'war is inherent in the structure of the state...so long as the international community consists of sovereign states, war remains a possibility. We can mitigate, we can

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<sup>75</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 152.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> M. Howard, *The Causes of Wars* 2nd Edition (USA: Library of Congress Cataloguing, 1983).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

mute, we can and should negotiate'.<sup>79</sup> Elshtain then moves on to present pure war's total opposite, the ideal of pure peace.

Here she turns to Kant's essay *On Perpetual Peace*, in which he proclaims peace as an absolute good and a universally valid ideal of political order, thereby 'making the mere existence of otherness a flaw in the perfect scheme of things'.<sup>80</sup> This is too abstract for Elshtain, since 'as in pure war, difference itself is a block to the end of peace'.<sup>81</sup> She believes, 'we are here inside a moral universe of real but limited goods and exigencies. It has none of the grandeur of the universe of pure force, or the universe of Kant, a world of perfect harmony'.<sup>82</sup> Instead, Elshtain turns again to Christianity, arguing that 'although the pacifist and just war streams in Christianity parted historic company, they remain genealogically related. Both put violence on trial, placing the burden of proof on those who take up arms rather than on those who refuse'.<sup>83</sup>

Elshtain's just war theory attempts to reconcile war with moral thinking. 'Wars of aggression and aggrandisement are unacceptable because they violate not only the civic peace but the framework of justice'.<sup>84</sup> She points to just war as an alternative to traditional realism and so one that is not abstract. To pacifists the world is peace, to realists the world is power, and to just war thinkers, the world is justice. She points out that, 'The moral requirements for waging war have also

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<sup>79</sup> Howard, *The Causes of Wars* (1983), 154.

<sup>80</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 156

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 157.

<sup>83</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 123.

<sup>84</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Just War against Terror* (2003), 53.

remained essentially unchanged from the fourth century to the present'.<sup>85</sup> According to Elshtain, peace is a good, justice is a good, but neither is an absolute good and so, using those requirements for war that Augustine outlined, she places her argument between the two.

Just war theory acknowledges that taking any human life is wrong but that states have a duty to protect and defend their citizens, which sometimes requires the use of force and violence. This according to Elshtain, far from justifying war, prevents wars from happening except in extreme and limited circumstances, and encourages other methods of conflict resolution. How then, does Elshtain reconcile Augustine's ideas of just war thinking with an age in which nuclear weapons and the threat of mutually assured destruction play a part?

Essentially, Elshtain believes the basis for just war has remained unchanged. She emphasises instead the need to look contextually at different political events and at the context of various wars to know why they have occurred. This not only allows her to move into the modern world but also allows her to retain her stance of pluralistic tolerance and the acknowledgement of differences.

In *Just War against Terror*<sup>86</sup> Elshtain presents a convincing argument which sought to stress the importance of an ethic of responsibility and the need for sometimes responding to certain political events in a way in which we would not, given the choice, wish to respond. Nicholas Rengger, who has written extensively

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<sup>85</sup> Bethke Elshtain, 'Reflections on War and Political Discourse' (1985), 46.

<sup>86</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Just War against Terror* (2003).



on the just war tradition, describes Elshtain's passion and sums up her stance. He writes, 'what we need, are ways of acting in such a world that are compatible with our deepest ethical beliefs but can also stand with the reality of that world'.<sup>87</sup>

In *Just war against Terror* Elshtain attempts to establish whether the wars waged in response to the 9/11 attacks were just. She claims that Islamic fundamentalism cannot be stayed by reason and nothing the United States did would allay the concerns of the fundamentalists. Its commitment to such founding principles as democracy, freedom of speech and equality meant that whatever it did, the United States was ultimately condemned in their eyes. A change of policy would not end terrorist activities because 'we cannot repeal our commitment to person freedom'.<sup>88</sup> She believes ultimately that the war is just because the United States is not fighting to destroy others or conquer countries for its own strategic purposes but is instead defending its own ideals at their best. She believes, accordingly, that while 'many horrors and injustices can traffic under the cover of "peace"'<sup>89</sup> war can 'be an instrument of justice'.<sup>90</sup>

However, Rengger identifies what he considers to be a major flaw in Elshtain's argument that runs, he maintains, through chapters five to ten of *Just War against Terror*. This flaw relates to her conception of the United States and the response it should make to attacks. Elshtain considers criticisms of America's actions, suggesting they are much fuelled by jealousy or resentment. However,

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<sup>87</sup> N. Rengger, 'Just a war against terror?' (2003), 107-108.

<sup>88</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Just War against Terror* (2003), 5.

<sup>89</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Just War against Terror* (2003), 50.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

Rengger deems these debates pointless as a way of determining what constitutes the legitimate use force. As he quite rightly asks, 'why bother with the detritus of arguments that don't [even] address [this issue]?'<sup>91</sup>

In response, Elshtain would perhaps argue that those debates actually serve to provide a variety of perceptions not simply of the legitimate use of force. Her standpoint is made clear in, for example, Chapter Twelve, where she writes that 'there are many ways in which the international order can call states to account and restrain and discipline those states that are out of bounds...states in which there is a democratic deficit, so to speak, are states denuded of a flourishing civil society'.<sup>92</sup>

Rengger's own view of the just war tradition is outlined in *On the Just War tradition in the Twenty-First Century*<sup>93</sup> and is focused on the problems he feels are created by the theory particularly in the context of post September 11, 2001. He begins by aligning his own views with those of Michael Walzer, the author of arguably one of the foremost texts on just war theory entitled *Just and Unjust Wars*.<sup>94</sup> Rengger does this by proposing just war began 'not as a result of any academic interests but as a result of passionate involvement in a key debate'.<sup>95</sup> This implies that the theory was a product of key debates about global challenges and major military campaigns, starting with the First World War but particularly,

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<sup>91</sup> Rengger, 'Just a war against terror? (2003), 111.

<sup>92</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Just War against Terror* (2003), 161.

<sup>93</sup> N. Rengger, 'On the Just War Tradition in the Twenty-First Century' *International Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (2002).

<sup>94</sup> M. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>95</sup> Rengger, 'On the Just War Tradition in the Twenty-First Century' (2002), 355.

he argues, with the Vietnam War, 'of which Walzer was a key academic opponent'.<sup>96</sup>

Rengger talks about Western liberal views of the movement and their uneasy relationship with just war theory which they regard as granting much more acceptance to war than liberals want to. Elshtain sums up Walzer's stance as that of one who rejects pacifism because he locates the survival and freedom of political communities as the highest value. In this he insists that violence is always regrettable and devoutly to be avoided where possible. However, what Elshtain argues is that Walzer's failing in just war thinking is that he allows certain horrors that other just war thinkers like herself do not. For example, she cites an instance where Walzer views saturation bombing of German cities as acceptable, given the nature of the Nazi threat in which 'present threat and future danger fuse to override *jus in bello* rules'.<sup>97</sup> In this he concludes that our present circumstances are one of supreme emergency and that nuclear deterrence is criminal perhaps, but also unavoidable.

Elshtain finds this an inadequate response to modern warfare. She argues that those identified as non-combatants do not forfeit their rights simply because there is a war. She also feels that Walzer's practical morality is too abstract since the texture of historic experiences cannot be reduced to simple moral standards because they are specific to different states and countries and differ as between them. How then, can we define those who are combatants and non-combatants?

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<sup>96</sup> Rengger, 'On the Just War Tradition in the Twenty-First Century' (2002), 355.

<sup>97</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 155.

We turn briefly now to comment on just war's role in defining combatants and non-combatants and what is described as a code for warriors within a just war. Rengger describes just war's role in providing a code for those who fight in war writing, 'all those who see themselves as 'professional' warriors (however that is understood) both need and have a 'code of honour' and an understanding of why they fight and how they fight'.<sup>98</sup> This is an important point to remember when discussing the legitimacy of warriors. Perhaps Western thought has dictated that those who fight under these predefined guidelines are legitimate and those who fight under any other condition at all are illegitimate.

Shannon French's article, *Murderers not Warriors*,<sup>99</sup> and her more in depth work, *The code of the warrior: exploring warrior values past and present*,<sup>100</sup> for example, explores the distinction between what are considered moral, legitimate warriors and immoral, illegitimate murderers. She defines what makes a legitimate warrior (in the eyes of the Western world particularly) and under these guidelines it would be assumed that terrorists are therefore not legitimate warriors but the killers of innocents. However, she also highlights the nature of relationships between the attacked and those who attack and this seems to blur the lines of legitimacy somewhat. The moral difference between those who knowingly kill innocents and those who kill innocents by accident as a part of war appears at first

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<sup>98</sup> Rengger, 'On the Just War Tradition in the Twenty-First Century' (2002), 356.

<sup>99</sup> S. E. French, 'Murderers, Not Warriors: The Moral Distinction Between Terrorists and Legitimate Fighters in Asymmetric Conflicts' in James P. Sterba (ed.) *Terrorism and International Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>100</sup> S. E. French, 'The code of the warrior: exploring warrior values past and present' (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

to draw a thin line but French displays the importance of those lines in international politics and state responses to terrorism.

Ultimately those lines are important when the distinction between killing and murdering needs to be made. If a warrior is adhering to a specific warrior's code, then their killing can be justified. Her main argument seems to stress the need for a code amongst warriors in order to restrain them when they fight and that the code holds 'the warrior to a higher ethical standard than that required for an ordinary citizen'.<sup>101</sup> French opens her book with a chapter entitled, *Why Warriors Need a Code* and ends it on the question *The Warriors Code Today: Are Terrorists Warriors?* in which she reaches this conclusion; 'Both warriors and murderers take lives. Both cause pain and suffering. Both may even cause the death of innocents. But there is a moral difference between intentionally targeting civilians and causing civilian deaths'.<sup>102</sup> French's work is another example of how academic writers struggle to come to grips with the fine line between terrorist activity and legitimate fighting from within armed forces.

*Just and Unjust wars*,<sup>103</sup> edited by David Rodin and Henry Shue, addresses the issue of the use of legitimate and illegitimate force and again they begin by citing Walzer and his key beliefs on what makes a just or unjust war and what rights the soldiers who fight in those war have. Walzer believes in the moral equality of soldiers and that soldiers on both sides of a conflict have exactly the

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<sup>101</sup> French, 'The code of the warrior' (2003), 1.

<sup>102</sup> French, 'The code of the warrior' (2003), 235.

<sup>103</sup> D. Rodin and H. Shue (eds.) *Just and Unjust Warriors: The Moral and Legal Status of Soldiers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

same rights. These rights include the acceptability of killing any enemy combatant as a part of war, but also forbid acts that involve the killing of non-combatants, or civilians. This immediately would suggest that terrorist activity is clearly an illegitimate use of force. However, what Walzer also considers is the recognition of the terrorists (or soldiers) themselves under the influence of wider organisations. For example he writes 'what we conventionally call inhumanity is simply humanity under pressure'<sup>104</sup> and under these circumstances the fighters, under a 'shared sense of victimhood',<sup>105</sup> come to define an enemy and then act against it, and what Walzer is also clear to convey is that despite the rules, 'in times of war the law is silent'.<sup>106</sup>

This does not, however, alter the fact that traditionally it is seen as permissible to kill any enemy that poses a mortal threat to others, which arguably could not be said in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq when the United States went to war with them in 2001 and 2002 respectively. The attempt to define the terrorist actions of 9/11 as legally illegitimate on the ground that they had killed civilians will never be deemed by the international community to legitimate the subsequent use of force in those countries. Rightly or wrongly, it is the latter view which matters most to academics writers on the subject of just and unjust fighting.

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<sup>104</sup> Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (2006), 4.

<sup>105</sup> Rodin & Shue, *Just and Unjust Warriors* (2008), 2.

<sup>106</sup> Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (2006), 3.

However, Gregory Reichberg in *Just War and Regular War: Competing Paradigms*<sup>107</sup> invites us to think about the possibility that Walzer's central presupposition about what just war and just warriors entail is inaccurate. He presents us with evidence to suggest that the idea of equality of all soldiers was not always the case and, 'on this understanding, belligerent rights attached only to the party that possessed of a just cause'.<sup>108</sup> He places more importance on the distinction between wars themselves and the roots of just war theory. He believes that where a party firmly believes itself to have a just cause, 'it will employ whatever means necessary, no matter how extreme', to seek justice against their attackers. Where terrorist activity is involved, it could be argued that both sides feel they are the just and therefore able to use whatever means possible to exact justice. On the subject of warriors themselves, Elshtain refers back to the rules of just war. She neither adopts an anything goes attitude or a purely moral stance that backs away from the realities of an enemy that might just employ whatever means necessary. She is aware that 'even the wicked, when they go to war, do so to defend the peace of their own people',<sup>109</sup> and that if one is acting within the rules of *jus in bello*, then they are justified as a warrior, a chastened patriot.

Returning briefly now to Rengger, who also highlights the changing nature of just war theory we can see that his description of just war is as a theory based originally on defending oneself against an attack or retaking possessions unjustly

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<sup>107</sup> G. M. Reichberg, 'Just War and Regular War: Competing Paradigms' in David Rodin and Henry Shue (eds.) *Just and Unjust Warriors: The Moral and Legal Status of Soldiers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>108</sup> Reichberg, 'Just War and Regular War' (2008), 193.

<sup>109</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 160.

taken from you, to what is today considered just, retaliating after an attack. He also feels that a theory rooted so much in Western ideals, and even Christian faith, particularly in light of a growing sense of globalisation and states that are considered multicultural and multifaith cannot realistically be applied to international conflict today, especially considering the nature of modern technological warfare. Should anyone considering just war theory consider starting their thought process in terms of what they deem moral and just, from scratch?

Elshtain might say no. She believes that Christian realism can actually serve to chasten damaging political action by promoting tolerance of others where it is possible to do so. She finds her place in just war theory by highlighting its intricacies. Walzer requires humans to act as moral judges who weigh the consequences of their actions against the magnitude of others, catholic bishops once required humans to 'do the right thing', even when others have done wrong to someone. Machiavelli applies an 'anything goes' strategy, and Elshtain, using her interpretation of Augustine's work, falls between these two views. She wants to limit the damage done by humans to others by waging wars under certain limiting and chastened circumstances. In this she argues that she works within the reality of political life while also restraining it.

'Just war thinking, requires much more of us. It demands deep reflection by all of us on what our governments are up to, which, in turn presupposes a self of a certain kind, one attuned to moral reasoning, and capable of it, one strong enough to resist the lure of violence's seductive enthusiasm, one laced through with a



sense of responsibility and accountability – in other words, a morally formed civic character'.<sup>110</sup>

Elshtain's analysis of just war tells us little about how women in particular are a part of war. In this sense, her theory of just war is not distinctively feminist. However, Elshtain does devote considerable attention to women in much of her work. She particularly focuses on women in war and attempts to debunk many of the myths surrounding what men and women really are in times of grave emergency. What does Elshtain have to say about women specifically? Does this present a more distinctively feminist voice within her work?

### Women and war

'We in the West are the heirs of a tradition that assumes an affinity between women and peace, between men and war, a tradition that consists of culturally constructed and transmitted myths and memories'.<sup>111</sup> Here, in her book *Women and War*, Elshtain points to the tradition of perceptions about what men and women are in times of war. Not that this is what men and women really are in times of war, but that these are the identities prescribed to men and women respectively. She believes these simplistic views of what men and women are in times of war, and their reactions to war, also serves to simplify war itself as the absolute contrast to peace.

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<sup>110</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 158.

<sup>111</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 4.

As we have seen above, Elshtain does not believe war to be the absolute mirror image to peace but that in fact, if waged justly, can be the instrument used to achieve peace. Elshtain believes that women have traditionally been solidified into a culturally sanctioned vision of virtuous, nonviolent womanhood, that she calls 'beautiful souls'.<sup>112</sup> Elshtain's 'beautiful soul' is imagined as frugal, sacrificing, and at times, delicate. She took the term 'beautiful soul' from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here Hegel characterises the 'beautiful soul' as being defined by a mode of consciousness that allows him or her to protect purity by cultivating innocence about the historical course of the world and its harsh political realities and context.

While Hegel does not apply this term specifically to women, Elshtain draws similarities from the term penned by him and it is one which she feels is, 'continually being reconstructed by women and reinforced by men'.<sup>113</sup> Hegel's beautiful soul is someone who sees themselves as a moral genius of sorts. They decide what is right and good. He outlines the idea whereby, if these people were to take this stance to its conclusion, they would have to separate themselves from political life altogether. He calls this a 'self-centred powerlessness'.<sup>114</sup>

Since it regards any form of life or action in the world as a source of corruption, it retreats into itself and actively refuses to participate in the world. These people might create communities that live under these morals but they do

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<sup>112</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987).

<sup>113</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 4.

<sup>114</sup> F. C. Beiser, "'Morality' in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*" in K. Westphal (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 222.

this by also separating themselves from the ordinary political world. This conceived community would devote itself to the cultivation of moral purity and virtue. In it everyone is entirely honest with each other and sensitive to the needs of others. The characters in Rousseau's novel *Julie, or the new Héloïse* provide an example of what Hegel might be talking about.

In the novel the characters create a community which is entirely guided by morals. They attempt to seclude themselves from society by forming their own moral community where 'complete honesty and openness prevail'.<sup>115</sup> Ultimately their community fails for the same reasons Hegel outlines for why such communities or people, should they exist in the real world, would fail.

Hegel suggests that such communities rely on universals but, as in the novel, differences inevitably will arise from those within it about what is deemed right and good. Hegel goes on to explain his point further by describing a dispute between the 'beautiful soul' and common moral consciousness. The common moral consciousness stresses the necessity of acting in everyday life and the need to do our duty. It criticises the 'beautiful soul' for not fulfilling these duties and for 'opting out' of society. The 'beautiful soul' believes the common moral consciousness is simply surrendering to the corrupt demands of society. Hegel's beliefs fall between both those of the 'beautiful soul' and those of the common moral consciousness.

For example, he wrote, 'common moral consciousness is right to insist that we have to act in the world; but it fails to see that the motives for our actions are

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<sup>115</sup> Beiser, "Morality" in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit (2009), 223.

indeed often selfish'.<sup>116</sup> Duty is often not carried out for the sake of duty but rather for honour, power, and profit and so on. 'The beautiful soul is right to think that the motives for our ordinary actions are selfish; but it is blind to the need to act in the world.'<sup>117</sup> Hegel, like Elshtain, believes there is a possibility of life based on mutual respect of the equal rights of others in a world where there aren't any universals.

What Elshtain does point out in her description of the woman more specifically as the 'beautiful soul' is that women have not necessarily given themselves this label, but rather the stereotype has been reinforced (by women as well) to maintain their position there. Within the feminist tradition she pointed to two opposing stances on the ideas of women and war. First, she looks to those who reassert traditional notions of women and peace 'as a cultural basis for anti-militarist activism'.<sup>118</sup> She feels that these feminists ensure the continued triumph of traditional narratives about women and war that are unrealistic and abstract to the realities of what women are in times of war. Women have always been present in war, and in a myriad of ways. From camp followers to fighting on the front lines women in war cannot be reduced to such simple and abstract representations.

Second, she looks to those feminists who argue that the right to fight should be pursued. However, Elshtain argues that these women have overestimated the impact women warriors might have. History is full of stories of women who have reversed cultural expectations. These stories may have even helped to reassert traditional notions of war and masculinity. The story of Hannah Snell for example

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<sup>116</sup> Beiser, "Morality" in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit' (2009), 224.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 8.

describes how, 'a loving lower-class woman sets out in disguise to find her beloved, who was enlisted'.<sup>119</sup> This story actually portrays the girl as ultimately feminine despite the fact she went to fight. In addition, Snell was seen as strikingly abnormal which serves to highlight the perception that war was ultimately a masculine fate.

Another example will help to make this point further. A Russian woman named Nadezha Durova entered the Russian army in 1806 to escape an unhappy marriage. She was discovered but allowed to remain in the army. She soon became a mascot of sorts, 'after all, it is not every day that a young and vulnerable female of good family willingly risks her life for Tsar and country'.<sup>120</sup> It was common for Russian women to follow their men to war, left with the prospect of starvation if they remained. Again these women serve to highlight the abnormality of women and war, as well as provide examples of how economic reasons (the prospect of starvation) can be driving factors in military decision making, rather than any notions about whether women are capable of fighting in war or not. Elshtain believes that despite stories such as these, and many more that even include those of women now fighting on the front lines in Iraq and Afghanistan, these women have appeared to have little impact on the overall view of male and female experiences in war.

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<sup>119</sup> D. Dugaw, (ed.), *The Female Soldier; or The Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell (1750)* (California: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1989), vii.

<sup>120</sup>M. van Creveld, 'Less than We Can Be: Women and the Modern Military' *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (2000), 8.

Elshtain argues that the times have outstripped 'beautiful souls' and 'just warriors' alike. 'Beautiful souls' can no longer be protected by her virtuous 'private sphere', and her children are vulnerable in the face of nuclear realities.<sup>121</sup> She writes, 'when most of us look at modern war, we see collective devastation rather than individual honour'.<sup>122</sup> As the modern warrior fights in a context where, as mentioned previously, the lines of *jus in bello* are blurred and distinctions between combatants and non-combatants, just and unjust warriors become less clear, and as the vision of women protecting the homeland is no longer as strong as it once was because of the unscarred landscape those warriors return to (for example, they return to houses that are still intact), women too, yearn for a sense of civic action.

What this context means for Elshtain is that one should not speak of women specifically but instead create surroundings where human beings are people, not men or women. Women should neither be pushed to fight nor pushed to retreat from political life altogether as a 'beautiful soul' might, but instead be included in the more general politicisation of citizens who seek to restrain those actions taken by their governments. What does this view mean for Elshtain's feminist theorising? If, as she suggests, categories of men and women are unclear, and the roles they play are regardless of gender, does her theory remain distinctively feminist?

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<sup>121</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987), 8.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

### Elshtain and feminism

Elshtain's feminism is one situated firmly within arguments surrounding the ethical and moral practices of politics. Fiercely concerned with creating theory that stands within the realities of political life, she often begins by outlining why many universalist and absolutist feminist theories might stay that way, as theories on a page. She writes, 'if one begins with the complex and various social realities in which complex and various women find themselves, one sees quickly that there is no universal standpoint'.<sup>123</sup> She argues that instead, one would find contrasting perspectives of women defining themselves 'both with and against the reigning and ready-to-hand identities of their own era and social location'.<sup>124</sup>

Elshtain is critical of realist feminist organisations such as NOW (National Organisation of Women) for example. She believes that their 'brand of equal opportunity or integrationist feminism'<sup>125</sup> perpetuates the notion that the military is so central to social order that it is only when women gain access that they can hope to fulfil their hopes and actions. Neither is Elshtain a staunch pluralist feminist. Instead she subscribes to 'a politics of representation that takes place textually, yes, but not in a vacuum'.<sup>126</sup> She describes representational politics as one that is representative of the differences between various women and is not simply abstract thinking of what women really are in politics but also one that does

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<sup>123</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), xviii.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Bethke Elshtain, 'Reflections on War and Political Discourse' (1985), 43.

<sup>126</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), xviii.

not allow the constraints of political options to women that have been generated for women by political culture and history.

Elshtain believes, as a result, that she provides a feminist alternative to the liberal feminism that dominates the West. She writes, 'I stand in opposition to the hardened categories of current oppositional sides. Neither the quest for politically correct sexuality...nor uncritical acceptance of pornography as free speech and unfettered or even radical resistance to established norms'.<sup>127</sup> Elshtain believes that women are different from men, but equal to men.<sup>128</sup> Biological differences count to Elshtain. She writes about integrating this strand of feminism with a wider vision of social change within political life. Women are capable. Women are not simply downtrodden or demeaned.

The views held by organisations such as NOW, Elshtain believes, lead to a one dimensional vision of what women are and what they experience. In *Power Trips and other Journeys*,<sup>129</sup> Elshtain began by outlining three specific women; Jane Addams, Simone Weil and Eleanor Roosevelt. By concerning herself with particular persons she is 'drawn to narratives of individual lives that call up wider social, ethical and historical constraints and possibilities'.<sup>130</sup> She feels these women in particular are women with strong moral commitments but also as women who did not allow these moral commitments simply to make them withdraw from political life altogether. They appeared to have found the middle ground between 'beautiful

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<sup>127</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), xxi.

<sup>128</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 38.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), xxi.



soul' and the common moral consciousness that Hegel promotes. These are women who sought to act on behalf of others while also preventing themselves from becoming narrowly self-interested in the process. Elshtain is also keen to point out that this is not an easy position to take and highlights the specific struggles of these women.

Jane Addams was a philosopher, sociologist, activist, author and leader of the women's suffrage movement in America in a time that witnessed flappers, Rosie the riveters, sexual liberation and the feminine mystique. Elshtain emphasises that at first Addams might seem like a do-gooder, 'fired by the charitable impulses of a "lady" who wound up fashioning an over personalised approach to social problems'.<sup>131</sup> However, Elshtain believes this is a misunderstanding of Addams and her work. Deeply concerned with the concept of maternalism Addams called up, according to Elshtain, a need to articulate wider social meaning through individual depiction of the experiences of women. 'No social abstraction has authenticity, she argued, unless it is rooted in concrete human experience'.<sup>132</sup>

It is this aspect of Addams' thinking that can most relate to Elshtain's theories. Addams argued that the human ethic is embedded in the lives people live. To put it simply, her life reflected her time, and Elshtain reflects in particular on Addams' project Hull House, where women lived and conducted studies on subjects such as midwifery. Elshtain suggests that it created a 'life of humanitarian

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<sup>131</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 3.

<sup>132</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 7.

action to young women'.<sup>133</sup> Addams, for Elshtain, called up the stifling nature of the constraints on the lives of women, and presented us with the idea that human life, male or female, should be one lived with purpose, dignity, and honour. She, like Elshtain, acknowledged the difference of women to men but at the same time insisted that this does not mean they are not equal.

Eleanor Roosevelt, the longest serving First Lady in America from 1933 to 1945, entered into social life and action without, according to Elshtain, sacrificing her female identity. She seems at odds with the liberal feminism that dominates the West today because she was not an advocate of sexual liberation, nor did she believe that women were the same as men. Elshtain believes that by seeing the work of Roosevelt as one who enjoyed influence only because of her role as a wife to her husband, we 'downgrade her considerable contribution'.<sup>134</sup> We perpetuate the view that leaves women in the shadows of political life. Elshtain suggests instead that Roosevelt sought action through her own means. She not only angered those who felt ladies should conform to the traditional roles of women but also those who felt women could be the same as men because she still lived within the constraints of her early learning about life as a lady.

Both Roosevelt and Addams embody a feminist alternative and 'neither Addams nor Roosevelt wanted the new woman to be an updated version of the old man'.<sup>135</sup> According to Elshtain 'both were empowered by a generous spirit, idealist but not cloying, that looked to a future in which each of us could dream individual

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<sup>133</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 9.

<sup>134</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 25.

<sup>135</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 41.

dreams, but the greatest dream of all remained the dream of democracy'.<sup>136</sup> These women were 'progressive reformers first, feminists second'.<sup>137</sup> The use of ethics and morals guided these women but they did not separate themselves from their own lives in doing so.

Finally, Elshtain looks to Simone Weil, a French philosopher and political activist. In Elshtain's chapter, *The vexation of Weil*, she describes Weil as a radical who called for the destruction of the past. A contradiction in terms Weil both, 'condemned human collectives as a Great Beast yet yearned for a working class movement from below'.<sup>138</sup> Weil rejected all modes of analysis that looked to the state, critical of both Marxist and communist theory, and Western Capitalist societies. Weil saw both as putting all citizens at the disposal of bureaucratic leaders and a threat to individual liberty and values. She believed that this 'erodes human dignity no matter who owns the productive forces'.<sup>139</sup> This is not to say Weil was against authority but she did dream of an order that was perfectly democratic and self-administering. In other words, a society that would conform to the demands of reason. Here Elshtain agrees with Weil. For Elshtain, a society that creates collective identity bleaches out differences and individuality, but a society without community cannot hope to make change through actions made individually.

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<sup>136</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 41.

<sup>137</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 38.

<sup>138</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 13.

<sup>139</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 14.

Weil's views diverge from those of Elshtain on the nature of body and spirit, however. Weil separated the divine and the body, whereas Elshtain believes that we are 'never not our bodies'.<sup>140</sup> Elshtain writes, 'Weil's project of human dignity is better served by a theory that enables us to see the divine in the human, the spiritual in the material'.<sup>141</sup> What Elshtain does believe Weil gave us is a reminder that human beings are vulnerable and that they can be destroyed. By acting as a community with individual dreams a situation is created whereby one becomes less vulnerable.

All of these women provide examples of feminism in their own times and historical context, but also as feminisms that call upon wider social issues that transcend time and can be brought into our own. 'These women, though vastly different in many respects, nevertheless shared an experience of conflict by chafing against, yet shoring up societal and moral norms, by making public what was private via ethical conviction'.<sup>142</sup>

Elshtain's opposition is directed at those who tell the story of woman simply as victim, since she believes that women are not without resources and can establish their political authority in complex social situations. 'We contemporary women are the heirs of centuries of women's stories and strengths, all the many narratives of perseverance and survival, of determination to go on through tragedies and defeats'.<sup>143</sup> As a child, Elshtain recounts, she saw her grandmothers,

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<sup>140</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 23.

<sup>141</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 22.

<sup>142</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), xix.

<sup>143</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 135.

aunts and mother 'drive a tractor, load cattle for market, organise a charity drive, manage the household finances, kill a rattlesnake, and start a small business'.<sup>144</sup>

This proves women are capable.

However, Elshtain also acknowledges that these women didn't run countries or wage wars. What she sees instead is that every society differentiates between the male and the female. This does not necessarily mean, however, that women have no power at all, as some would have it. To many contemporary feminists, women gaining power rests on the entering the male dominated sphere of political life, often in the sense of giving women the right to fight. To other contemporary feminists, women gaining power means creating a society modelled on female principles that would serve to destroy the current male dominated forms of social and political order. The central feature of engendered power for Elshtain involves creating the means to evaluate and constrain current institutions through moral and ethical ideals. Precisely because this ideal applies to both men and women, however, it could be argued that Elshtain's engendered vision of power is not distinctively feminist.

Similarly, Hannah Arendt saw herself first and foremost as a citizen and political philosopher, and did not define herself purely by gender. In *The Human Condition*,<sup>145</sup> she designates three fundamental activities as the basic conditions under which life has been given to man. These are 'labor, work and action'.<sup>146</sup> These, then, constitute the condition under which we live and so under which we

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<sup>144</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), 135.

<sup>145</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1998).

<sup>146</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1998), 7.

must act. Here Arendt links these capabilities to natality, in which 'the faculty of action is ontologically rooted'.<sup>147</sup> This suggests that all human beings are born, are vulnerable, and are capable of action because they are born from men and women. She concludes by suggesting that action 'has become an experience for the privileged few',<sup>148</sup> and it is this that Elshtain seeks to reverse.

### Reflections

Essentially, Elshtain presents us with a theory of International Relations that engenders feminist politics but is not a distinctively feminist theory. By exploring alternative identities of what men and women are in times of war, for example, she debunks the myths of traditional narratives of women and war and of peace and war through her analysis of the 'just warrior' and 'beautiful soul', but does not seek specifically to feminise politics. She aims to politicise all citizens, citizens who all share the faculty of action, and that action then serves to chasten and limit the state.

Elshtain is critical of highly universal standpoints, but also of purely Realist standpoints. She is highly concerned with the use of ethics and morals in politics but without taking them away from the realities of political life. As we have seen, her work on Augustine helped her to take a middle ground between the two by limiting the damage humans do to each other by conducting politics in a limited, chastened, pluralistic way. The chastened patriot for example, helped us to

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<sup>147</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1998), 247.

<sup>148</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1998), 324.

understand the importance she placed on recognising others and their differences while also restraining fantasies of either total control over others or total disarmament. All encompassing standpoints serve to eliminate differences and take place in a purely abstract setting. Elshtain argues that universalism crushes differences. She writes, 'a world of many nations, each with its own particular marks of self-identity, reminds us that we are not alone and that we cannot and ought not make the world one by cruelly obliterating diverse ways of life'.<sup>149</sup> Differences do exist, as do commonalities. Universalism, according to Elshtain, is the line we should not cross.

Religion, in the sense of Western Christianity, plays a central role in Elshtain's thinking as the basis for modern reason and morality. The complete separation of religion would mean stripping all religious symbols from public life. She writes, 'turmoil over how transcendent God's earthly embodiment (human beings) transformed earthly rule and governance is one of the most striking features of Western History'.<sup>150</sup> The human ability to reason, according to Elshtain, affords us a distinctive moral power in that 'we can act from the law we discern'.<sup>151</sup> She does note that this also means that God's sovereign powers are limited by what He himself created. Since the theory of the state has been transmitted from concepts of theology, she argues, we cannot fully separate religion and state. The struggle between secular thinking and faith, in short, should not, and cannot, be ended. In this struggle, God is still needed as the mediator.

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<sup>149</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 238.

<sup>150</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 29.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

Elshtain is careful to outline what she considers to be the limits of human capabilities, the limits of the body and of language and so on. As we have seen, she takes this thinking from Augustine, whose ideas of the sovereign self and of not being able to achieve perfection, and applies it to the here and now. She writes, 'Even if one does not care about God, the Augustinian self offers a powerful corrective to any vision of self as at one-ness'.<sup>152</sup> The Augustinian mode of thinking allows us to see our limits. For example, in his work entitled *The Confessions*, Augustine writes about a man who has come to question himself. The man struggles with the immediacy of his own desire and if he should follow them it essentially leaves the other with 'no authentic space within which to emerge'.<sup>153</sup>

Augustine then, beginning with the fragility and dependence of infancy, claimed that we take this vulnerability with us throughout our lives. As a result, one is guided by these emotions and dependent on others for recognition. One cannot opt out of social life and so assessments of the human condition that make and 'insufficient account of our vulnerability, our embodiment',<sup>154</sup> should be rejected. These limits constitute the basis for political life, both in doing good and committing sin. Human beings are imperfect and so must be aware of 'the fragility, morality, and necessary limitedness of all our political efforts'.<sup>155</sup> In this, human beings share a commonality. 'No, we are not the same. But we do share a capacity

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<sup>152</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 161.

<sup>153</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 162.

<sup>154</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 163.

<sup>155</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (1990), xvii.



for identification with the idea of a plural political body'.<sup>156</sup> Elshtain's beliefs stem directly from what she interprets within the work of St. Augustine.

For example, she writes, 'What we find in Augustine is certain universal claims about human dignity and value – we are all God's children – but this recognition can only be specified and realised concretely, in and through speech and fellowship and loving and serving one another'.<sup>157</sup> In other words, commonality not totality should be adopted in political life and that political life should be driven by those essential motives of human beings which is mainly, to love. She concludes, 'love may not be all we need, but without it we are naught but husks or wilful "spirits" rushing onward into the abyss'.<sup>158</sup>

Elshtain's story is one of limiting, constraining, and chastening political actions, through moral thinking. She writes, 'those who separate politics from morals must fail to understand both'.<sup>159</sup> In this, all human beings are capable of chastening politics, regardless of gender.

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<sup>156</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 238.

<sup>157</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 239.

<sup>158</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 245.

<sup>159</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 138-139.

## Chapter Three

### Christine Sylvester - Forming a 'conversation': Postmodern Feminist method in International Relations

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Christine Sylvester's work is defined by her postmodern feminist method and may best be described as a radical deconstruction of any claim within International Relations to hold a privileged position over any others. This deconstruction, according to Sylvester, serves to expose the nature of power relations that claim any kind of neutrality. Underlying this thinking is a view of the world as a world of power relations. As a result, Sylvester aims to liberate 'others' (i.e. those who are not "men" in positions of power), by forming what she coins a 'conversation'.<sup>1</sup>

Conversation, according to Sylvester, allows cooperation and difference tolerant International Relations to emerge in a pluralist world in which there are no universal truths. By acknowledging 'others' Sylvester asks whether feminism in particular can flourish rather than simply survive in International Relations theory. Sylvester is explicitly defending a pluralist standpoint and postmodernism is the most radical form of pluralist thinking. This chapter examines Sylvester's theory of conversation as a potential basis for empathetic cooperation in

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<sup>1</sup> C. Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

International Relations and asks whether this theory can be universally applied to International Relations theory.

Postmodern feminism can be described as a current debate about feminism that places its focus on the deconstruction of political assumptions and the acceptance and acknowledgement of difference and multiple identities. Previously, the task of feminism had centred around projects that focused on outlining where women are in international politics and how the women question could, and should, be woven into current texts and political practices. Cynthia Enloe, as we have seen, helped us to identify the 'hidden roles'<sup>2</sup> of women in International Relations. Enloe's focus is placed on those personal aspects of life that affect International Relations and politics globally rather than any direct influence by women on a global stage. For example, she uses the example of diplomats' wives and banana workers and chambermaids as all helping to weave the path of international politics, 'the personal,' she writes, 'is global'.<sup>3</sup> Sylvester suggests that works such as those by Enloe are helpful for making women visible in International Relations but does not produce any real change in the practice of politics. 'Women are,' she suggests, 'inlined instead of outlined'.<sup>4</sup> What Sylvester means by this is that these kinds of projects 'inline' women into both historical and current political practices and texts rather than outlining any meaningful way of creating a political arena where women are included on their own terms.

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<sup>2</sup> C. Sylvester, 'Feminism and International Relations: Or Encounters with Wolves in the Woods' in *Statsvetenskaplig I Tidskrift* Vol. 100, No. 1 (1997), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases* (1989).

<sup>4</sup> Sylvester, 'Encounters with Wolves in the Woods' (1997), 14.

More generally, postmodern feminism is part of what Sylvester considers to be a third debate in both International Relations theory and feminism more specifically. Feminism's first debate centred on the examination of the traditional roles of women, particularly in the household, and whether they were 'natural', as has been previously considered. The second debate can be considered to be the project of highlighting the hidden roles of women as well as debates looking at whether women were as capable as men within areas such as the armed forces. Much of these debates also began to take on an international angle like that in Enloe's work mentioned previously. Sylvester also cited Jean Bethke Elshtain's text *Women and war*<sup>5</sup> as an instance of this project. Sylvester suggests that Elshtain 'inlined' women in the masculine arena of war. For Sylvester, now that this vital work has been done, a project was necessary to create a different space for women that does not simply allow them access to a patriarchal system, but to flourish on their own terms.

The third and current debate focused on difference. Writers such as Luce Irigaray<sup>6</sup> and Julia Kristeva<sup>7</sup> for example have identified sexual difference as key to the creation of a pluralist, difference tolerant International Relations that allows women to construct female specific politics as opposed to simply integrating women into a political system that privileges the masculine. In contrast to earlier

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<sup>5</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (1987).

<sup>6</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex which is not one* (1977).

<sup>7</sup> Kristeva, *Essays in Semiotics* (1971).

conceptions of patriarchy post-structuralist writers such as Irigaray and Kristeva suggest the body is essential.

Sexual difference for these writers is the very source of patriarchy. In linguistic form, descriptions of masculinity have become the dominant language of International Relations. Ideas contrasting the logical nature of men with the emotional nature of women have led to the subordination of women as the less logical and less capable sex. As a result, for Irigaray in particular, sexual difference is not something we can change. We can however, transform international politics to include the language of women and femininity.

Both sexes, in short, deserve full representation and expression. 'Equal' for Irigaray means women would have to become like men. Instead she envisions a world with two co-existing genealogies. Within her own work, Sylvester does not utilise language or psychoanalysis as a source of patriarchy (although she may believe they contribute to the subordination of women) as Kristeva and Irigaray do in order to deconstruct gender relations. She is however, hyper aware of differences and plurality. These differences are not just between women and men, but also between states. It is from this thinking that her theory of conversation developed. In other words, differences are both natural (as in the body), and constructed (as in state politics). However differences manifest themselves, though, they are still differences that cannot be ignored if we are to develop an International Relations theory within the 'reality' of political life.

The problem however, is that Sylvester's theory of conversation presupposes that this conversation would lead to a consensus between those

involved; but why would this necessarily be the outcome? Chantal Mouffe's work, in which she has developed a theory she labels 'agonistics' in her books *On the Political*<sup>8</sup> and *Agonistics*,<sup>9</sup> suggests that this assumption is overly optimistic and is based on a failure to recognise the 'political' element at the heart of social existence. This political element, for Mouffe, consists of inescapable conflict, which of course limits the relevance of the 'conversational' image.

Mouffe accepts plural identities but believes, as a result, conflict is inevitable. However, conflict, she insists is not necessarily negative in this context. Mouffe believes that clashes of plural identities, if acknowledged, can inspire deeper mutual respect and a more genuinely democratic kind of politics. Using the work of Mouffe, this chapter will also attempt to address the challenges of the 'utopian' element within Sylvester's work. What is meant by the 'utopian' aspect of Sylvester's work is the insinuation that through conversation consensus between differences will necessarily follow.

The previous chapter outlined Elshtain's theory of chastened or limited politics. This resulted in a description, and a claim, of how politics based in reality rather than the abstract leads to mature and responsible political thinking. Through the examination of Elshtain, questions surrounding the limits of Sylvester's theory arise. Sylvester focuses on conversation as an example of maturity in political thinking in its acceptance and tolerance of others and differences. This chapter examines how Sylvester suggests conversation might

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<sup>8</sup> C. Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> C. Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013).

begin and whether this type of thinking can be described as 'mature' within the parameters of Elshtain's work. Ultimately, what Sylvester fails to acknowledge is that even if her ideal of 'conversational politics' is achieved, this does not account for the 'immature' actors which inhabit international politics.

### Sylvester and the argument for Postmodern Feminist Theory

Sylvester's book *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era*<sup>10</sup> evaluates the major debates developed within the discipline of International Relations using contemporary feminist theories to indicate how those debates (realist versus idealist, scientific versus traditional and modernist versus postmodernist), might have affected our understanding of International Relations had they been considered within the three debates in the first instance. She highlights the stark absence of feminist theorising within International Relations and challenges ways of political theorising by examining the specific examples of the Greenham Common Women's Peace camp in the United Kingdom and the negotiation by Zimbabwean women to secure funding for their local produce cooperatives.

The final chapter of the book outlines eight main arguments to support the development of her conversational and empathetic cooperation theory as a course for International Relations. Sylvester prefaces the list of points by presenting an argument that feminist theorising is necessary to International Relations theory.

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<sup>10</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994).

Throughout the book she argues that the discipline of International Relations is still, despite over forty years of feminist activities and theorising, 'sorely bereft of gender awareness.'<sup>11</sup> She calls this 'feminist homelessness,' because of the continued exclusion of women in world politics. As Simone de Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex*, 'the world is defined without reference to her'.<sup>12</sup>

Sylvester believes that the task of feminisms that have been 'rendered homeless',<sup>13</sup> is to continue to consider the perspectives of those who have been previously excluded, to provide an overarching theoretical framework for emancipation, and to move through recurrent 'barriers of gendered nostalgias'<sup>14</sup> such as those that confine women to the household. Here she cites Andrew Linklater's article, *The Question of the next stage in International Relations Theory*, pointing in particular to his argument that it is necessary to commit to a project of human equality through an open dialogue. She observes, however, that Linklater makes no specific reference to feminist writers, thereby illustrating Sylvester's argument about feminist homelessness. Her point is that by deferring feminist research 'to some future time',<sup>15</sup> works such as Linklater's actually serve to uphold the current world of men.

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<sup>11</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 209.

<sup>12</sup> de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2011), 371.

<sup>13</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 210.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 211.



Sylvester's second argument, given that women are so clearly absent from International Relations, is that gender seems to 'cut to the quick'<sup>16</sup> of the field. Her target here is the negative opinion that feminism merely destabilises men as the holders of power, whereas feminism is in fact a project to extend the field of International Relations. Despite assurances by feminists that gender analysis brings the possibility of greater justice for everyone, it is too often viewed as a mechanism by which there is a loss of power, control and dominance by the voices currently at the helm of the debates within International Relations.

As a result, Sylvester believes women are temporarily permitted to enter the field of world politics when it serves to support current structures. For example, 'Rosie Riveters can temporarily enter IR through employment in war industries',<sup>17</sup> but these women must return home once the men have finished fighting. After this, the business of politics can resume with women in 'another place.'<sup>18</sup> 'Our absence' Sylvester argues, 'is required...to enable the encoding of International Relations as masculine territory'.<sup>19</sup>

Sylvester's second point ends with an addition to the already multiple reassurances of other feminists that feminism aims to share the space being occupied by men. What feminism wants, according to Sylvester, is to be included, recognised and reassigned from its current homelessness.

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<sup>16</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 211.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

The third point is, as a result, an examination of the ways in which 'difference tolerant'<sup>20</sup> International Relations might be achieved. Difference tolerant International Relations and empathetic cooperation is signified by mutual recognition of multiple identities and selves. It does not assume that one gender owns the relationship. The battle for recognition is the project to be undertaken by feminists so that they may be included on their own terms.

Liberal feminism has been a process of including women in international relations by integrating women into International Relations literature. It has served to point out the many ways women have affected International Relations that may have previously been overlooked. For example, Cynthia Enloe argues that women are integral to world politics, particularly through their support roles and yet are politically denied entry on their own terms. This standpoint, while necessary to the development of historical context for women and their influence over global politics still accepts, or at least uses, masculinity as the baseline of the field of International Relations. Sylvester argues that by 'valorising' home spaces, feminism can 'never be free of the master's logic'.<sup>21</sup>

Sylvester does believe, nevertheless, that the work of liberal feminism can unsettle the traditional discourse by identifying it as a site of diversity through integration. However, for Sylvester the project of integration must also acknowledge the possibility that it might still promote business as usual even if it achieves some disruption. What is meant by 'business as usual' is the entrenched

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<sup>20</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 212.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

patriarchal system where men dominate women. In other words, the gender roles assigned to both men and women, to masculinity and femininity still apply, even when women are included. This is because they are not being included on their own terms.

The attempts of other feminisms to generate a space of care and responsibility, Sylvester suggests, are vital to the inclusion of diversity within International Relations. She points out that this may be difficult given the dominance of masculine language and standpoints but that it is still necessary. She refers particularly to postmodern feminism as a way of 'exposing the smokescreens'<sup>22</sup> of female emancipation through integration. Women are not truly emancipated if they are simply integrated into masculine assumptions within International Relations. Ultimately Sylvester argues that the merits of postmodern feminism are such that the appreciation and deconstruction of multiple identities lead to an 'empathetic – critical gaze'.<sup>23</sup>

For example, if we accept 'mobile subjectivity' (i.e. taking on the point of view of alternative identities) and multiple identities, then the questions asked in International Relations research can be rephrased. Rather than asking how we might study states through feminist theorising, we can ask how these multiple and shifting identities affect interpretations of political authority and the study of states.

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<sup>22</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 213.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

The fourth point in Sylvester's theory returns to the theme of homelessness. She refers to two types of feminist homelessness. First is the marginalisation and division of the proper field of the female from International Relations. Second is the development of empathetic cooperation with difference without any fixed identity. Instead, one 'moves back and forth among multiple subjectivities'<sup>24</sup> during the task of exposing exclusion. In other words, where feminisms reject rigid gender roles, they actually embrace a kind of homelessness though refusing to be assigned to a single identity.

Sylvester's conception of homelessness is that traditional methods of theorising International Relations need not undergo a complete conversion to feminist thinking in order to participate in the conversation. At the same time, she does not believe that women must renounce their own gender, but simply that they should be included as women on their own terms and not be assigned to homes with fixed identities not of their own choosing. What Sylvester suggests is the need to acknowledge and accept those who do not distance themselves from their identities and even gain inspiration from experiences based on gender identity. In other words, where notions of femininity are embraced it does not automatically mean that terms associated with femininity are negative. At the same time, however, Sylvester argues that we must also not 'revel in gender

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<sup>24</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 214.

homes',<sup>25</sup> because identity is mobile and ever changing. Her problem with the 'home' is that it is inflexible where gender is flexible.

Sylvester's fifth point is that postmodern theorising that encourages difference as well as multiple identities enables us to recognise and listen to others. This is the 'empathetic cooperation' discussed within her work. For example, this kind of recognition and cooperation allows feminisms to become aware that gender is not simply a universal problem. Similarly, it might make the 'realist man' aware of the ways in which his theory might be readjusted or rewritten in light of 'others' stories and experiences.

Sylvester's sixth point makes clear that she does not advocate a 'gentleness or caring in the relationships.'<sup>26</sup> What she does believe, however, is that both conflictual and cooperative relationships are connected and 'difficult to disentangle'.<sup>27</sup> What she means by this is that recognition and cooperation lead to a certain amount of mutual respect for others. However, despite this respect, conflict is sometimes inevitable as a result of the lived realities and experiences of different people. It could be argued here that she is unclear about whether relationships between differences are necessarily conflictual. Essentially, it could be argued that she is attempting to reconcile two very different stances regarding the relationships between differences and different states. These agendas could be seen as incompatible. However, the point she attempts to make in this sixth

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<sup>25</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 214.

<sup>26</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 216.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

argument is that these relationships are often more complex than simply cooperative or conflictual. Sometimes, she believes, one relationship can be, on occasion, both.

Leading on from this, Sylvester's seventh point is that this kind of empathetic cooperation leads to the deconstruction of our identities. She calls this 'homesteading'.<sup>28</sup> What homesteading achieves is a grounding of feminist thinking in all strands of International Relations, which provides multiple ways of analysing the same questions. This is not to say that feminism becomes synonymous with nostalgic interpretations of political events, but rather that it disturbs and unsettles traditional narratives and universal viewpoints.

Two examples in her book about the Greenham Common women's peace camp and women collaborators in Zimbabwe who negotiated funding for their local cooperatives provide illustrations of the kind of homesteading Sylvester has in mind. The Greenham Common women's peace camp was established to protest against the decision to allow ninety-six nuclear Cruise missiles to be sited at RAF Greenham Common in Berkshire, England. The camp was set up in September 1981 after the Welsh group, *Women for Life on Earth*, arrived at Greenham after ten days of walking. The aim was to put pressure on the British government in the hope of inspiring a parliamentary debate about the deployment of Cruise missiles on British soil. When both the press and the British government sidelined the protests the protestors began to deploy more dramatic tactics such as chaining

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<sup>28</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 216.

themselves to the fences of the RAF site. These women were essentially fighting against traditional assumptions about International Relations characteristic of realist thinking about defence.

Sylvester believes these women provided an example of feminist homelessness. She writes that the politics of Greenham Common provided 'lessons on the sterile assumptions the field often makes about who is involved in decision making'.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps more importantly for Sylvester, Greenham Common provided a real world example of homesteading in the varied actions and practices of the women who lived there. 'In most cases, there was no party line to follow or general will to rehearse'.<sup>30</sup> Instead different interpretations of political life were developed there and there was 'a politics of recognition,' at the camp. They did not 'otherise'<sup>31</sup> the men behind the fence for example. Instead they unsettled and disturbed the politics of security without either renouncing their identity as women or isolating themselves by excluding others. In addition, they did not explicitly exclude men from joining their movement. Indeed, there were a handful of men that joined the camp. The movement was overwhelmingly driven by, and participated in, by women which became part of the identity of the movement, but they did not exclude men.

Sylvester's second illustration relates to the concerns of women co-operators in Harare, Zimbabwe. These concerns were of a different kind to those of

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<sup>29</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 185.

<sup>30</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 217.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

the women at Greenham. Instead of military and security matters they were instead concerned with 'paying their children's school fees, with lazy husbands drinking away the household income, with prices for their crops'.<sup>32</sup> As a result of President Mugabe's desire to change the capitalist economy inherited from colonists after independence in 1980, Zimbabwe put in place a strategy for integrating women into economic life. Women who prior to independence 'were legal minors for life,'<sup>33</sup> were now incorporated into the production of household clothes, food and services. This provided a different space for women in the political life of Zimbabwe.

With only initial government funding to cover start up costs of production sites, the women who ran them began to think about ways to secure funding for their life line. They appealed to the European Economic Community for support. This story provides for Sylvester an example of bringing to the centre of International Relations local and domestic issues that are often overlooked or hidden.

The women of Zimbabwe are an example of homesteading in that they embraced the identity of their gender with the strategy of helping families regardless of gender. They are 'homeless in the texts of Western business success',<sup>34</sup> but homesteading cooperation empowers them and wins sympathy

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<sup>32</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 197.

<sup>33</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 198.

<sup>34</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 217.



from their European donors. Interactions in this case take place between those not on an equal level in terms of economic status or influence. The women, that is, 'cooperate, but not within the context of International Relations understood anarchy'.<sup>35</sup>

These examples, when combined with her seven previous points, lead Sylvester to the conclusion that there are no universal truths. She argues that by accepting this, we can begin a conversation which is inclusive of multiple identities and recognises others. Feminism in particular challenges traditional authorities in ways which can open up opportunities for conversation.

Ultimately, Sylvester proposes 'difference tolerant' International Relations, putting the emphasis on 'Relations' first, rather than on 'International', in order to establish connections and conversation. For Sylvester, the emphasis on 'relations' denotes the importance and primacy of the relationship between states, as opposed to placing a primary focus on the states themselves. Her view does not confer privilege on one sex over the other. Rather, it illustrates the struggle for recognition that feminist theorists face. Sylvester questions gender relations for their 'interlocking constraints' and considers a 'more encompassing'<sup>36</sup> range of authority patterns than has previously been contemplated in International Relations. She argues in favour of creating a conversation that does not render women homeless or on the outside, but includes them in places of their own

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<sup>35</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 218.

<sup>36</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 221.

choosing. But how, precisely, can we 'homestead' women without applying rigid gender identities? How, in this connection, does Sylvester suggest 'conversation' should begin?

### Forming a Conversation

Forming a conversation begins with the assumption that there is not only no universal truth but that there are also multiple and plural identities within International Relations. Acceptance of the plural nature of international politics is the starting point for conversation within Sylvester's work. In order to examine the ways in which a conversation might begin, she first examines what she believes to be the three main debates to have dominated International Relations research up to now. These are: the realist versus idealist debate, the scientific versus traditional debate and the current debate about creating empathetic cooperation within the field. This third debate will take place, she envisions, as a conversation between plural identities within a postmodern feminist mode of thinking. This is interesting because she accepts, to some extent at least, ideas from the realist 'masculine' debates, but re-frames them within the feminist mode of thought.

In the previous two debates discussed by Sylvester, her general thought is that both debates have not only failed to develop empathetic cooperation and conversation, but have also effectively excluded feminist thinking within them. She has suggested that there has been an assumption of female autonomy that has run throughout previous debates. This has resulted in the exclusion of feminist thinking which is, she argues, a mistake if we are to create a conversation in

International Relations that is respectful of others and allows their experiences to create a full picture of how world politics works and the types of questions that may legitimately be asked within International Relations. Previous debates among International Relations theorists have avoided asking questions surrounding why theories are based on the presuppositions that they are. Feminist theorising encourages us to ask 'why?' They ask why the discipline is constructed the way it is and challenge current authorities. This allows a deeper more rounded process of mutual recognition and cooperation. It restructures the ways in which International Relations might be constructed and makes way for multiple possibilities and invites reflection. For Sylvester, 'it keeps the conversation going'.<sup>37</sup>

The first debate, which Sylvester understands to be the realist versus idealist debate in International Relations, is based on an argument over how far the international is a recreated place of nature beyond the social contract of the nation state. Sylvester believes, as a result, that this debate reads as a dialogue rather than a conversation because of the nature of two clearly defined positions in opposition to one another. For realists, the international arena is a struggle for dominance over others. For idealists the international arena is a liberal national realm only on a larger scale.

The work of some realist thinkers aims to demonstrate that International Relations rests on suspicion and often opposition between different nation states

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<sup>37</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 218.

and different types of states. This is not to say that realist thinkers do not have any sense of commonality. Although they often believe International Relations are based upon conflictual relationships, this does not mean that states are unable to cooperate or communicate their needs effectively. What is perhaps more important for the realist is the need to balance conflict through diplomacy. The point is not to deny that conflict is inevitable but only that occasionally interstate relationships can lack empathy or understanding of 'others' identities and methods, which can lead to war between states.

On the other side of the debate, idealists in general believe that one type of nation should be taken as the exemplar of domestic cooperation which should be projected outward to a single, universal international liberal arena. What this means is that they have developed a notion of shared values applicable to all types of nation state. Sylvester writes, 'these national communities could hatch an international social contract that would maintain official differences and yet collectively secure one another's existence around a shared foundation of democratic practices'.<sup>38</sup>

What these debates have in common is that the international arena emerged as a 'by-product of nostalgia'<sup>39</sup> for a certain type of invented state. Sylvester argues that this type of thinking encourages and produces nationalism among different types of states as a way of warding off universal ideals and

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<sup>38</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 223.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

'standard[s] of collective action'<sup>40</sup> that do not apply to them. Sylvester believes this actually endangers the nation state both as a concept and in reality. As a result, women searching for protection within the state are at risk of losing any sense of security within it, especially as they are excluded from consideration within these debates.

Sylvester does acknowledge that women are involved in the debate, however. For example, often both realist and idealist authors are careful to include 'others' in their descriptions of the international order which encourages some diversity. William Connolly, for example, in his article *Democracy and Territoriality*<sup>41</sup> identifies both realist and idealist statements within classical texts on democracy that actually rely upon 'feminine strategies to produce the superiority of masculine equivalences'.<sup>42</sup> The point is that women are present within the debates. However, what Sylvester claims is that these voices are muted and often left 'outside' the 'real' debates within International Relations. The debates are instances of how those studying the 'other' ignore the voices of women themselves.

The nation state as the starting point was the assumption made within the first debate. The international, as a result, was a space where national agendas could be exported and explored outside its boundaries. Ultimately, Sylvester believes the starting point of this debate is where its mistakes lie, in that it

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<sup>40</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 223.

<sup>41</sup> W. Connolly, 'Democracy and Territoriality' in *Millennium* Vol. 20 No.3 (1991).

<sup>42</sup> Connolly, 'Democracy and Territoriality' (1991), 486.

assumes male parameters as the basis for International Relations. Sylvester aims to create space for the possibility that these parameters are not necessarily 'natural' in a world where plurality is the essence.

The second debate is characterised by developments within the field of science. A debate developed between those who embraced science as the touchstone to international order, and those who sought more traditional analysis. Essentially it was between those who either asserted or denied the national/international divide through scientific means.

Feminist theorising has often been against imposing scientific rationality in International Relations. For example, as we have seen, early conceptions of patriarchy from writers such as Kate Millett, explicitly deny that biology necessarily means that gender identity is a fixed notion. This was because the science of the body in particular served to keep 'women' within the more traditional roles. Gender was related to biological sex and as a result the language of feminine aspects of human nature such as 'caring' and 'emotional' were kept within the private sphere, while masculine notions of assertiveness were seen as more suitable to positions of authority. Traditionalists too were against the use of science as tool to construct notions about international politics. This was because 'science' was seen as a mechanical and distant practice that bypassed the nuances of human personality and communication.

Feminist voices were once again present within the debate. However, International Relations research continued to exclude the work of feminists. Women were once again used as tools to demonstrate the roles of women. Women

were certainly not included on their own terms (although given we don't actually know what a woman is as a result of their exclusion, we are equally unsure of what 'their own terms' would actually be), and interpretations of the position of women written by women were silenced in the debates of International Relations.

As a result, this debate still 'misses the gender point'.<sup>43</sup> More women are visible here, but they are still anomalies in a world full of male voices. For example, Jackie Kennedy in the white house was a symbol of the politically involved woman while also presenting herself as the perfect first lady.

Yet another failing of the debate, according to Sylvester, is that the starting point for International Relations is once again the concept of the nation state. These states are not necessarily combined in the international as a unitary entity as they had been for realism and idealism, but nonetheless they do not account for the multiple identities within those states. As a result, 'the second debate, no less than the first, is about "men" conducting relations with other "men"'.<sup>44</sup>

Against the backdrop of the first and second debates, the third debate asks why International Relations has been constructed in the ways it has previously. This involves feminists 'homesteading' the debate so that they are included, and included on their own terms. This begins with women being centrally located within the field. Sylvester views this debate as somewhat of a struggle for recognition. Feminists and their questions must be recognised along with every other myriad kind of identities within International Relations.

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<sup>43</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 225.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

What this means for Sylvester is the 'freeing' of the field from refusal to acknowledge lessons that can be learned from Third World female cooperatives and First World all female peace camps. The guidelines set out by Sylvester illustrate a process of creating empathetic cooperation by postmodern feminist method. Sylvester does not specify how the resulting conversation might end, or how it would be pursued, but simply insists that it must begin. The key for Sylvester is in the 'repetitive feminist insistence that we be included on our own terms'.<sup>45</sup>

Ultimately, Sylvester seeks a more encompassing range of patterns within International Relations. She aims to use post feminist method to destabilise what she characterises as false certainties about identity. Instead she seeks to replace these assumed certainties with questions and exploration. This is a theory accepting of multi-standpoints. It is a theory that rejects the necessity to pin down an 'essence' of human nature and a fixed identity. It recognises others as equal. No one standpoint holds the authority or privilege over another. It is accepting and positively affirming of diversity and plurality.

Sylvester believes this will be possible through the cultivation of an ongoing conversation that accepts and acknowledges the plural nature of the international arenas and the multiplicity and ever changing nature of identity. She believes that rule governed procedures constrain conversation. She writes, 'the field is about the myriad positions that groups assume toward one another across the many

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<sup>45</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 226.



boundaries and identities that defy field – invented parameters.’<sup>46</sup> Sylvester suggests that politics can be a tool for relationships and cooperation within a context where ‘mutual recognition and respectful negotiation’<sup>47</sup> guide the process. These relations can, according to Sylvester, ‘bring forth politics’.<sup>48</sup> The questions that follow draw on the work of Chantal Mouffe in order to ask how feasible or realistic Sylvester’s vision of international politics is.

#### Chantal Mouffe: on the political

Like Sylvester, Chantal Mouffe believes that there is no universal truth within International Relations. For Mouffe, the world is a place of multiplicity and plurality and ‘others’, or opponents, should be considered not as an enemy to be destroyed, but as opponents whose existence should be considered legitimate and as a result tolerated in their own right and ‘otherness.’

Sylvester’s vision of International Relations as conversation assumes that a consensus of some kind may possibly be reached between different identities. Mouffe, however, believes that such an optimistic vision ignores the true nature of international politics in which clashes between plural identities are inevitable, and in which ultimately ‘an organic unity can never be attained’.<sup>49</sup>

Mouffe does not shy away from the idea that inherent in social relations are inevitabilities of violence and hostility. Instead, she suggests we might diffuse them

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<sup>46</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 219.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> C. Mouffe, (ed), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (London: Verso, 1992), 5.

through a radical project of reconstructing democracy and renaming it 'plural democracy'. In *Return of the Political*,<sup>50</sup> she begins by outlining why she believes the West's conception of democracy has begun to fail and as a result, politics has been destabilised. Based on the West's insistence on universal values in the past, democracy was a project that depended on a political 'other' which had to be destroyed. Mouffe suggests that conception of democracy previously depended upon the existence of communism in particular as the 'other', or as an antithesis to liberal democratic values. Since the fall of communism, however, Mouffe believes that the sense of a universal liberal democratic mission has waned, even attributing the increase in far right radical movements in Europe to a crisis of political identity within the West.

Mouffe's theory of a pluralistic democratic order provides an alternative path for democracy which allows it to hold its own values while accepting the values of others whilst also accepting that antagonisms may arise because of these differences. Mouffe's project of radical and plural democracy, in other words, incorporates conflict and antagonism into the political. The starting point for Mouffe, in contrast to Sylvester, is to recognise and not deny antagonisms and differences in society and political life.

This is not to say that the meaning of antagonism is necessarily negative. Conflict, which arises from the inevitable clash of plural identities, can, in Mouffe's view, inspire deeper mutual respect and a more genuinely democratic kind of

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<sup>50</sup> C. Mouffe, *Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993).

politics. Mouffe calls this view the 'agonal' view of politics, the root of her term being the Greek 'agon'. This refers to conflict of the essentially positive kind found among contestants in the Olympic Games for example.

Mouffe believes that by extending and deepening a democratic revolution to include an acceptance of plural identities we may avoid or diffuse certain negativities found between the relations of different identities. She believes liberalism in particular needs to be taken to task because its rationalist and individualist nature makes it unable to acknowledge antagonisms and the impossibility of reconciliation through reason. Previously liberal democracy has been a project to reach one universal solution but eliminating plural values. She writes, 'I take issue with the conception of politics that informs a great deal of democratic thinking today. This conception can be characterised as rationalist, universalist and individualistic'.<sup>51</sup> What she aims to suggest here are that liberal democracy has previously held shortcomings in its inability, or blindness, to the specificity of the political. Instead, Mouffe aims to strengthen liberal democracy by introducing a more radical approach that identifies the conflictual nature of the political.

Mouffe believes that the dominance of a discourse of 'rights' has made it possible to highlight inequality as 'anti-natural'. John Rawls in particular, in *A Theory of Justice*,<sup>52</sup> combines a strong defence of individual liberty with a strong commitment to equality. As a result, he believes that 'Justice is the first virtue of

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<sup>51</sup> Mouffe, *Return of the Political* (1993), 2.

<sup>52</sup> J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

social institutions'.<sup>53</sup> Justice, for Rawls, is the ultimate basis on which societies should rest. What this achieves is the mutual advantage of those involved, but one that is also inevitably marked by a conflict of identities and interests. Justice can serve to deny the sense that any loss of freedom for individuals can be made right by a greater good shared by others. 'It does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many.'<sup>54</sup> As a result, differences of identity are tolerated and accepted. Rawls writes, 'Truth and justice are uncompromising'.<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, Michael Walzer aims to create a politics that allows people to be as equal as is possible. The use of Walzer here is interesting because he believes, like Mouffe, that Rawls' theory of justice is overly optimistic and instead suggests we aim for a complex equality of citizenship that acknowledges the inevitable inequalities that come with international politics and the clashes of identity that occur when politics takes place on an international level.

In contrast, many feminist theorists have traditionally opposed these ideas surrounding citizenship because ultimately they argue that modern citizenship has been constructed on the negation of feminine values. Values that are considered feminine, such as care, love and recognition of others, have placed women firmly within the private sphere. Many of these feminists have claimed that motherhood and maternal thinking should provide a new model for a type of politics and citizenship.

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<sup>53</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1973), 3.

<sup>54</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1973), 4.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Feminist theorist Mary Dietz<sup>56</sup> however, rejects these feminist claims and criticises the maternalist bias within feminist politics. Instead, Dietz argues that democratic politics is linked specifically to the public sphere. She does agree with those feminist theories that suggest that the private and public spheres have been used as a tool to maintain women's subordination, but does not agree that this necessarily means we should reject the distinction altogether. Instead, Dietz believes that new ways of understanding the public and private spheres distinctions, such as that made by Hannah Arendt, is necessary. Arendt suggests that the practice of citizenship is linked to the public sphere. However, the identity of someone as a citizen should not depend on one's ethnic, religious or racial identity. Gender then, would also be irrelevant in this case, even if a public and private sphere distinction is still made.

Sexual difference under these guidelines become irrelevant and a 'non-gendered' conception of citizenship emerges. Mouffe, however, believes that for pluralistic democracy to work, a non-essentialist framework is required, which 'implies there is no fixed identity corresponding to men and men or women and women'.<sup>57</sup> The current democratic system excludes women and has placed differences within the private sphere. Therefore, a particular system of plural democracy is the key for Mouffe, to allowing differences of identity to be present within political life. Like Sylvester, Mouffe believes that if we accept the plural

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<sup>56</sup> M. Dietz, 'Context is All: Feminism and Theories of Citizenship' in Chantal Mouffe, (ed.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (London: Verso, 1992).

<sup>57</sup> Mouffe, (ed.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy* (1992), 10.

nature of identity we might preclude any possibility of reaching any consensus on what is considered the 'essence' of human nature.

Mouffe believes the current system of democracy in the West stems from a euphoria created during the 1990's after the fall of communism, 'where the final victory of liberal democracy'<sup>58</sup> was considered imminent. Universal values have become central to liberal democracy and ideas from theorists such as Kant have been adopted. Mouffe believes that such universal thinking, from theorists such as Kant, does not allow for 'rational disagreement'.<sup>59</sup> In Mouffe's view, this type of thinking is incompatible with the deeply pluralistic character of the world and the irreducible conflict of values. Even within liberalism itself there is a wealth of plural identities and social struggles which includes the many extensions of feminism and this, in Mouffe's view, means that even liberalism itself cannot be universalised. 'It is not in our power', she writes, 'to eliminate conflicts and escape our human condition', but, she continues, 'it is in our power to create the practices, discourses and institutions that would allow those conflicts to take an agonistic form'.<sup>60</sup>

In support of this point of view, Mouffe turns to the work of Carl Schmitt in order to develop her theory of plural democracy and 'agonistics'. Schmitt is a controversial theorist within Western liberal thought because of his links with Nazi Germany. For Schmitt, the Nazi regime represented the acceptance of clashes between plural identities. The Nazi regime abolished humanitarian neutrality and

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<sup>58</sup> C. Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 119.

<sup>59</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political* (2005), 122.

<sup>60</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political* (2005), 130.

understood the incapacity to distinguish between 'enemies and friends, ethnic comrades and strangers'.<sup>61</sup> Clearly, the extreme nature of the Nazi regime did not allow for difference and plurality and cannot be excised as a result. However, Mouffe suggests that the need to consider his criticism of liberal democracy demonstrates a warning of the dangers of complacency that a 'triumphant liberalism entails'.<sup>62</sup> The broader themes within his work assist Mouffe to argue the pitfalls of current liberal democratic values.

Mouffe focuses particularly on Schmitt's 'friend-enemy' concept. This concept insists upon the ineradicable dimension of conflictuality within international politics. Schmitt believes that liberal democratic capitalism has imposed itself as the only rational solution to organising modern societies within an international order. As a result of this view, the legitimacy of liberal democracy can only be put into question by 'unreasonable elements'.<sup>63</sup> For Schmitt, this belief does not eradicate the friend-enemy relationship between plural identities and to deny antagonisms does not make them disappear. When conflicts do erupt, under liberal democratic values, the 'other' is simply seen as irrational. If however, as Schmitt suggests, we accept the necessity of conflict as the 'crucial category of politics',<sup>64</sup> then a plural democracy can be put in place to both identify possible adversaries, while also accepting them as legitimate.

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<sup>61</sup> R. Cristi, (ed.), *Carl Schmitt and Authoritarian Liberalism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 210.

<sup>62</sup> C. Mouffe, (ed.), *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 1999), 2.

<sup>63</sup> Mouffe, (ed.), *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (1999), 3.

<sup>64</sup> Mouffe, (ed.), *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (1999), 3.

Under Schmitt's theory, however, the intrinsically conflictual nature of politics must be understood as presupposing two sides in complete opposition, with no common ground. Liberalism and democracy embody this conflict for Schmitt, who sees no possibility of accommodating the pluralism they sanction. Unlike Schmitt, Mouffe believes liberal democracy can be combined with pluralist antagonisms while also reducing those antagonisms through mutual respect. The concept of 'adversary' is missing from Schmitt's work, which only considers 'enemies' that must directly clash and stand in irreconcilable opposition to one another. In this sense, Mouffe is working both with and against Schmitt. It is through an exploration of Schmitt's work that Mouffe believes we can gain a better understanding of the deficiencies within the current dominant liberal framework.

Mouffe is however, careful to acknowledge the limits of pluralism. She writes that the agonistic approach does not 'pretend to encompass all differences,' or to 'overcome all forms of exclusions'.<sup>65</sup> However, she does suggest that some exclusion only occurs when they challenge the institutions constitutive of the current democratic political order.<sup>66</sup> As a result of these limits, the pluralism advocated by Mouffe 'requires discriminating between demands which are to be accepted as part of the agonistic debate and those which are to be excluded'.<sup>67</sup> For example, a democratic society cannot treat those challenging its basic values as legitimate. 'Some demands are excluded,' Mouffe writes, 'not because they are

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<sup>65</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political* (2005), 120.

<sup>66</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political* (2005), 121.

<sup>67</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political* (2005), 120.



declared to be 'evil', but because they challenge the institutions constitutive of the democratic political association'.<sup>68</sup>

Mouffe's position here reveals similarities with that of John Rawls, despite the fact that she is critical of his optimistic theorising. Rawls' distinction between 'simple', and 'reasonable' pluralism is similar to Mouffe's attempt to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate demands. In contrast to Rawls however, where Rawls believes this discrimination between demands should be grounded in moral ethics, Mouffe believes that the differentiation is necessarily a political decision. Under this view, the political decision can remain open to contestation at any point. For Mouffe, what this means is that allegiance to democratic values does not automatically rest on the belief that liberal democratic values embody a superior mode of rational thinking. She does not present liberal democracy as the model which would be chosen by every rational individual or society. After all, it is not her aim that we reach one rational solution. She writes, 'the political cannot be restricted to a certain type of institution',<sup>69</sup> such as that of liberal democracy.

In addition, Mouffe also makes clear that she does not reject liberalism completely. Instead she believes that a liberalism acknowledging antagonisms as well as an understanding of the nature of social life as instituted politically through hegemonic structures is necessary. For Mouffe, liberalism must abandon their

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<sup>68</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political* (2005), 121.

<sup>69</sup> Mouffe, *Return of the Political* (1993), 3.

ideological and utopian approach and instead aim for a system that although does not form a consensus, does achieve 'conflictual consensus'.<sup>70</sup>

Conflictual consensus is achieved, according to Mouffe, as a result of plural democratic values that understand it is not within anyone's power to eliminate conflict, but that a discourse can be created by which conflict takes on a positive agonistic form. In order to radicalise the idea of pluralism so as to make it a vehicle for a deeper democratic revolution, Mouffe suggests that we must break with 'rationalism, individualism and universalism'.<sup>71</sup> Only then will we be able to acknowledge the multiplicity of forms of subordination that exist in social relations. Mouffe is essentially attempting to provide a framework for the articulation of difference through democratic struggles about issues such as gender, race and class.

Mouffe acknowledges the complexity of the political by refusing to completely reject either universal or individualist values. Instead she points to the necessarily plural nature of these values. According to Mouffe, the aim of reaching one rational solution is a crucial mistake within liberal democracy. If liberal democracy accepts legitimate enemies, she believes we might, more easily at least, develop an understanding of it as an enterprise that can never be fully achieved.

Here, the difference between 'agonism' and 'antagonism' is central to Mouffe's thinking. 'Agonism' suggests the more positive form of acknowledging adversaries, while 'antagonism' represents the negative Christian view Schmitt

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<sup>70</sup> Mouffe (ed.), *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (1999), 4

<sup>71</sup> Mouffe (ed.), *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (1999), 7.

presents of two enemies in complete opposition to one another. Mouffe writes, 'By creating conditions possible for conflict to take the form of confrontations among adversaries (agonism), it attempts to avoid a frontal struggle between enemies (antagonism)'.<sup>72</sup>

Ultimately for Mouffe, 'the search of a consensus without exclusion',<sup>73</sup> must be abandoned. Instead, radical plural democracy 'requires acknowledging the political in its antagonistic dimension and abandoning the dream of a reconciled world that would have overcome power, sovereignty and hegemony'.<sup>74</sup> For Mouffe, 'the illusion of consensus and unanimity'<sup>75</sup> is fatal to democracy because it can never be fully achieved. Such a project denies the intrinsic violence and hostility inevitable in international politics, and sees it only as something to be eliminated. The premise of a liberal democratic view that sees human sociability as essentially moved by empathy and inner goodness is, according to Mouffe, fundamentally flawed. As a result the current democratic system is in grave danger if it wishes to survive.

It is this optimistic view that also results in Mouffe's central disagreement with Sylvester. Mouffe believes that any theory that grounds itself on an excessively utopian or idealised view can be too easily held up to criticism. Instead of attempting to reconcile all conflicting interests, as Sylvester does, the task for democracy for Mouffe is to 'envisage the creation of a vibrant "agonistic" public

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<sup>72</sup> Mouffe (ed.), *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (1999), 4

<sup>73</sup> Mouffe, *Agonistics* (London: Verso, 2013), xi.

<sup>74</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political* (2005), 130.

<sup>75</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political* (2005), 5

sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted'.<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, the project of reaching a consensus, according to Mouffe, leads to more dramatic and devastating conflicts emerging in the backlash of 'others' who are excluded from international politics as they fight for their right to recognition. The agonistic, as opposed to the antagonistic approach, can provide conflicts with a legitimate form of expression. Mouffe believes that agonistics, far from undermining the democratic project, acknowledging the ineradicability of conflict in social life, is actually the necessary condition for understanding the challenge liberal democracy faces.

#### Sylvester: utopian values or 'mature' politics?

The examination of Chantal Mouffe's theory of 'agonistics' in International Relations points to one way in which Sylvester's theory of conversation is idealistic and utopian. Raymond Geuss, it may be noticed, provides a further criticism of Sylvester's attempt to make conversation the basis of the international political order. His form of realism deserves consideration here because his concept of the political, and in particular of the appropriate way to theorise it, is in some respects more subtle than Mouffe's.

In *Philosophy and Real Politics*<sup>77</sup> Geuss argues that a politics that wishes to avoid the charge of sacrificing realism to moralism must not begin from concern about how people ought to act in an ideal situation, regardless of whether that situation is identified by conversation or by some other method. Instead, politics

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<sup>76</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political* (2005), 3.

<sup>77</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (2008).

should begin by concentrating on 'real motivation'.<sup>78</sup> Geuss' criticism of Sylvester would presumably be that although her theory of conversation might bring about 'real motivation' based on acceptance of plurality, this ideal outcome is not the appropriate foundation for political action. A realist, according to Geuss, must initially focus on what human beings acting within the context of existing political institutions actually say and do, and must then respond to the actual outcome of actions, rather than responding only to whatever ideal outcomes a political theorist may hope for. In Geuss' own words, the study of politics is 'primarily the study of actions and only secondarily of beliefs that may be in one way or another connected to action.'<sup>79</sup>

In addition, Geuss would criticise Sylvester's failure to appreciate that politics is a craft that is continuously developing, rather than the rationalist project of applying a specific theory of politics to the international order. There is, he maintains, no one theory that can be universally applied in all contexts. Instead, the skill is partly to choose which models or theories to use in certain specific contexts, partly to acknowledge in what ways they are limited, and partly to develop and 'craft' them appropriately in the light of those limitations. This is what Geuss calls 'political Judgement'.<sup>80</sup>

A vital part of the skill demanded by political judgement, Geuss maintains, is the need for a flexible response when the consequences of a theory turn out to entirely different from those expected. His point, in short, is that there is no single

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<sup>78</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (2008), 9.

<sup>79</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (2008), 11.

<sup>80</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (2008), 101.

style of theorising about politics of the kind Sylvester's commitment to pluralism and conversation presupposes, and none which can replace the need for skill (or practical wisdom) in the interpretation of whatever theories are advanced.

The general position of Geuss may be summarised as a sustained hostility to any 'ethics first' approach to politics. What he objects to is the assumption made by this approach that we must begin by creating an 'ideal theory based on a view of how the human ought to be.'<sup>81</sup> Kant is arguably the most influential theorist of this approach, embodying as his work does the assumption that politics should apply theories embodying universal values to actions. Although Sylvester rejects Kant's monological conception of rationality in favour of a 'conversational' one that makes greater allowance for plurality, her view of political theory echoes Kant's rationalist project. Geuss, in contrast, advocates a political philosophy based on the opposite of such an 'ethics first' approach, which ignores both the complexity of political motivation and the actual outcomes of political action. Accordingly, the 'ethics first' approach adopted by theorists reflects, for Geuss, a moralistic standpoint that 'has little to tell us about real politics'.<sup>82</sup>

Sylvester, it might be said, could reply that her values are necessarily ideal and utopian because, as she points out, the conversation she advocates has not yet begun. What theorists such as Chantal Mouffe and Raymond Geuss suggest, however, is that Sylvester's theory is intrinsically flawed by its inability either to take account of the inescapable place of conflict in political reality or of the kind of

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<sup>81</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (2008), 6.

<sup>82</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (2008), 101.

contextual knowledge and practical skill required to respond appropriately to the political world.

### Reflections

As we have seen through an examination of her theorising, Sylvester attempts to deconstruct identity power relations between political actors by using a post modern feminist method. Previously, understanding the nature of politics has come from theories that place male parameters as the basis for political thinking. This is outlined in her analysis of what she considers to be the three main debates to have dominated International Relations theory. These are the realist versus idealist debate, the scientific versus traditionalist debate and the current third debate of modernist versus postmodernist theorising. Ultimately, she argues that these debates have failed to significantly include feminist theorising within its debates which has led to disastrous effects for those left on the 'outside' of International Relations.

Sylvester considers these 'outsiders' to be 'homeless' within the International Relations theoretical debates. What Sylvester aims to do is to homestead the current debate in International Relations theory by incorporating feminist questions as central to the field. She writes, 'there are many topics in the conventional field of International Relations that need to be held up to feminist critique and homesteading'.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 209.

Sylvester has developed a theory of empathetic cooperation between all strands of International Relations theory, to include all differences, outsiders and plural identities. She believes an ongoing conversation inclusive of all identities is the ultimate level of maturity in political theory. For Sylvester, conversation provides a starting point to attempt a level of maturity previously unseen in International Relations. The reason for this is based in its acceptance and tolerance of all differences, as well as its acknowledgement that identity is plural and ever changing.

She does this by deconstructing the identity politics that dominates International Relations theory using a postmodern feminist method. Ultimately she argues that an understanding of, and inclusion of feminist method is necessary if we are to understand why something is constructed the way it is, rather than accepting something the way it currently operates.

An example of how this might work is her suggestion that we focus on relations first, and the international second as opposed to the current method of placing the international before relations. 'Relations International' puts the emphasis directly on to varieties of connection and relationships. Politics in this sense crosses 'lines, fences, wires, walls, imaginations, sound bites, politics, and immigration and customs guardhouses of the world.'<sup>84</sup> In other words, relations 'brings forth politics' because they bring about a context of mutual respect, recognition and negotiation.

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<sup>84</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 219.



Some of these connections have already been made: the interdependence of the subjects of war and political regimes, for example. However, some have yet to be made. This is because subjects such as gender have been previously disconnected from the field. Sylvester believes that unless we start with relations and question how certain subjects work together and in connection with one another, we are likely only to, at best, integrate “women” into the conversation without actually studying the ways in which they are related. She writes, ‘we are likely to put the cart before the horse by looking, first and foremost, for the international and then for the relations’.<sup>85</sup>

Moving to relations international allows us to begin a conversation and discover new interpretations of the already familiar acts of politics. For example, Sylvester believes that the realist interpretation of anarchy derives from technological and political limitations to communication that has hindered relations international thus far. Without the means to communicate, and talk effectively we often miss the fundamental plural nature of ‘civilisation’. Sylvester suggests that it is this ‘wild state of nature recreated nostalgically “out there” as the realm of war,’ that has led to this misunderstanding. Even when conversation has occurred, for example as Sylvester suggests it did within the international conferences visible across Europe, ‘it was subjected by realists to the

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<sup>85</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 219.

presupposition of anarchic order and called the “balance of power” rather than the “discussion of power”.<sup>86</sup>

By introducing more effective ways of communicating between different modes of thinking we can begin to accept that there is no intrinsic privilege to be enjoyed in political relations. It cannot be assumed, for example, that one gender is entitled to dominate the relationship. Instead, every relationship is acknowledged to consist of interlocking qualities and constraints.

Essentially Sylvester suggests that a struggle for recognition take place. This struggle has been reiterated by many in the past. Once the dominant group understand that they need ‘others’ to maintain their current position, then those outsiders can essentially be ‘free’ of their previous homelessness. ‘Whether we call inclusion emancipation or merely the politics of mutual recognition...is a matter of dispute’,<sup>87</sup> but either way it is necessary if a more encompassing form of international relations is to take place. Ultimately, what Sylvester is suggesting is a ‘different, difference tolerant International Relations whose theories embed a range of metiza consciousness and owlsh sweeps of vision’.<sup>88</sup>

However, Sylvester fails to acknowledge two important points. First, she does not acknowledge that conversation may not necessarily lead to a consensus among the parties involved. Second, although she believes conversation to be the ultimate maturity in her vision of relations international, she does not

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<sup>86</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 221.

<sup>87</sup> Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (1994), 212.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

acknowledge that in reality, in real politics, we are often dealing with immature actors who do not necessarily want to reach a consensus through a conversation that is inclusive for all.

It could be argued that in this sense Sylvester's theory is too idealistic, with no basis in the reality of political action. This is not to say, however, that her theory is worthless. On the contrary, what is valuable is her emphasis on the need to recognise those previously seen as 'other' to the dominant Western thinking in theories of International Relations.

Sylvester develops her ideal of conversation by indicating the ways in which it might start. However, she does not provide any examples of what this conversation would look like in reality. In order to develop her ideas about conversation further the following chapter will consider how 'political outsiders' may be involved in the conversation. A discussion of non-Western feminisms will provide examples of how those considered to be 'homeless' within current International Relations theory might be incorporated into the conversation. Does this carve out a path for future conversation that could potentially be applied universally, and more coherently, to International Relations theory?

## Chapter Four

# Non-Western Feminisms - An argument for contextual thinking in International Relations theory

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Non-Western feminisms consist of many different strands of thought reflecting the various standpoints of nations, cultures, traditions and strands of thought. However, common ground can be established as writers who reject a Western centric viewpoint. Issues such as, for example, the importance of the role of family and group identity (as opposed to more individualistic thinking seen in much Western feminism), are one example of how non-Western viewpoints cannot simply be brought under the umbrella of current Western feminist theorising. Further understanding can be developed through the lens of an anti-universalist standpoint which implies specific contexts, cultures and histories.

This is not to say that all non-Western feminist thinking must be conducted by a non-Western author. Indeed, Martha Nussbaum, to whom we will return later, is a key example of a Western philosopher who engages in developing theories that do not assume specifically Western forms of identities (despite the fact she defends some universal values).

In addition, many other Western feminists have begun to acknowledge the pluralistic nature of feminism and sense of self. The concept of a universal struggle developed by Western feminism is now reacting to the backlash from pluralist

thinkers by incorporating the concept of multiple identities into their work. Christine Sylvester's concept of conversation, as examined in the previous chapter, is one example of this.

What will be helpful is to attempt to understand and identify non-Western thinking in terms of the various strands of thought within. For the purposes of this chapter, four main strands of non-Western thought will be outlined.

The first strand is modernism. Modernist writers are enthusiastic about Western modernity and the values they represent. They feel that modernity offers freedoms previously closed to them. Often they believe that modernity releases individual creativity and progress, which, in turn creates further theorising from non-Western writers about their own identity and liberties. Modernity also represents thinking that provides economic, technological and political progress.

Ultimately they argue that more traditional ways of life are 'static, oppressive, poor, ridden with superstition and mindless conformity to established customs and practices.'<sup>1</sup> These writers want a radical break from the past and to embrace Western ideologies such as democracy. For example, Prominent Indonesian thinker Soetan Sjahrir (who became the first prime minister of the revolutionary Republic of Indonesia in 1945), believed strongly in democratic values and nationalism, which promoted freedoms for the individual. He had nationalist aims with the ultimate goal of allowing the people to 'develop

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<sup>1</sup> B. Parekh, 'Non-Western Political Thought' in Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 554.

themselves and their talents in freedom, without any obstacle or hindrance'.<sup>2</sup> He believed in laying down 'a moral basis for politics and culture'.<sup>3</sup>

The second category is syncretism. Syncretic thinkers adopt a 'best of both worlds' attitude which enables them to 'reap the benefits of Western modernity'<sup>4</sup> without jettisoning much of their traditional way of life. Critics of this approach have suggested that as culturally conditioned writers, they are unable to freely choose the good and bad points of both cultures in order to create a superior society.

However, many Indian thinkers for example, have emerged as syncretists as India adopted many Western values such as democracy, while also maintaining a strong cultural identity. They believe they have created balance between ancient traditions and wisdom and modern enterprise.<sup>5</sup>

The third category is critical traditionalism. These thinkers are neither universalists nor traditionalists. They think contextually, believing that humans are shaped deeply by their society and culture, which creates different forms of self-understanding. This is not to say that they are entirely uncritical of aspects within different cultures, but that they aim to protect those aspects that make up identity and the individual nature of their own culture.

Many famous thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Bal Gangadhar Tilak are critical traditionalists. Tagore, for example, was deeply

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<sup>2</sup> H. R. Anwar, *Sutan Sjahrir: True Democrat, Fighter for Humanity, 1909-1966* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2010), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Anwar, *Sutan Sjahrir* (2010), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Parekh, 'Non-Western Political Thought' (2003), 561.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

committed to his Indianness and was an advocate of cultural diversity and isolation.<sup>6</sup> His position was a dual one, 'creating a non-extreme and non-exclusive version of both traditionalism and modernism'.<sup>7</sup> He promoted nationalism by supporting its 'emphasis on self-respect but rejecting patriotism'.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately these thinkers believe that 'both national dignity and political realism require that political institutions should be based on national culture'.<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, we come to the category of religious fundamentalism. Groups such as al-Qaeda have in recent years made visible the thought of those who believe in waging war against modernists. Islamic fundamentalism specifically has emerged in recent decades. These groups cannot make sense of many of the beliefs of democracy. This is because these beliefs 'attribute sovereignty to the people when in fact it belongs to Allah'.<sup>10</sup> Elections cannot transmit people's authority, as people do not have this authority in the first place.

Although these categories have provided a solid basis for classifying political thinkers, they ignore the complexities involved. For example, thinkers within each category often disagree on certain aspects of the general description outlined above. For instance, Tagore and Gandhi disagreed heavily on the subject of nationalism. Tagore was critical of Gandhi's non-cooperation movement and strong patriotism for example, believing nationalism should have an emphasis on

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<sup>6</sup> K Dutta, & A. Robinson (ed), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xx.

<sup>7</sup> Dutta, & Robinson (ed), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (1997), xxi.

<sup>8</sup> Dutta, & Robinson (ed), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (1997), xx.

<sup>9</sup> Parekh, 'Non-Western Political Thought' (2003), 565.

<sup>10</sup> Parekh, 'Non-Western Political Thought' (2003), 572.

preserving culture and maintaining self-respect without rejecting humanity and the violence that often comes with acts of patriotism. However, with this in mind, we can use the overall categories to place thinkers before examining them more closely.

Using these four main strands of thought as guidance, this chapter will examine more closely three examples of non-Western feminism: Islamic feminism, Black and African Feminism and Indian feminism. The traditional oppressive elements of non-Western cultures, including their religious origins, raise a central question to non-Western feminism; can there ever be such a thing as a 'non-Western feminism'?

By examining the role of religion in Islamic feminism, the chapter will begin by attempting to provide some possible answers to this question. Second, an examination of Black and African feminism asks whether there can be such a thing as non-Western feminism, and how might this be incorporated into current International Relations theory given the dominance of Western thinking? Third, an analysis of Indian feminism, or more specifically, Hindu feminism, provides an examination through which we might further understand how non-Western feminism can be defined through its broad themes and commonalities. Clearly the thesis cannot hope to detail all of the various strands of non-Western feminisms. However, by providing three examples we can illustrate some of the overall themes that thread through all strands of non-Western feminisms.

It should also be noted again here, as in the introduction, that much non-Western writing is not written in English and therefore a concession to this must



be made. However, the increasing amount of work being translated into English is gradually helping to provide a fuller picture of non-Western political thought and it is this that will be examined.

In addition, some of the work examined comes from less academic sources. This is not to say it is less valuable, merely that the approach is different from that of many abstract Western theorists. Non-Western feminisms like this tend to be more practical in their approach with the aim of implementing direct action. Many even believe that abstract theorising is often characterised by an 'inability to motivate action'.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, while no less valuable, the difference must be noted when comparing it to that of any theorists who engage in more rigorous academic writing.

Given this, we can use various examples of non-Western feminism to ask, what are the overarching themes that can be found within their writing? The first commonality can be described as an overall tendency toward pluralist thinking. The second challenges ideas surrounding the social construction of identity. The third is an emphasis on the concept of family and group identity within non-Western thought. What do these themes have to tell us about non-Western feminism compared to Western thinking? Can non-Western voices help International Relations theorists to form a conversation in which empathetic cooperation is central?

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<sup>11</sup> K. Dotson, 'Black Feminist Me: Answering the Question 'Who Do I Think I Am'' in *Diogenes* Vol. 59, No. 82 (2013), 88.

### Islamic feminisms

The very intelligibility of the concept of 'Islamic feminism' has been hotly debated given that many question whether there can be such a thing as feminism framed in Islamic terms. At best, they maintain, 'the activities and goals of "Islamic feminism" are circumscribed and compromised'.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that they simply adapt to the cards that have been dealt to them. We must begin then, by consolidating whether Islamic feminist narratives present a viable framework for feminist theory or are simply compromised discourses. Similarly, we must ask whether men and women who work within the confines of an Islamic society, but who also seek the improvement of the status of women can reasonably be described as constituting feminist thought. Listening to Islamic women, to consider whether they can be seen as contributing to feminism or not, is, as a result, vital for an understanding of women and gender issues in the contemporary Islamic world.

Therefore we must also ask, what do they say? Two issues are central within much Islamic political thought in the twentieth century: One is the relationship between religion and politics because this is often the role of Islamic culture in modern society.<sup>13</sup> Like much of non-Western thought, the treatment of Islamic issues began mainly in the nineteenth century in the context of Muslim nations' encounters with the West and their attempts to reconcile Islam with

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<sup>12</sup> V. M. Moghadam, 'Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate' in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2002), 1142.

<sup>13</sup> S. Ismail, 'Islamic Political Thought' in Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 579.

modernity in a period of decolonisation and the rise of Islamic movements that challenged the hegemony of Western models of the nation state.

Much Islamic feminist thought also tackled issues relating to this. The veil for example, became a particularly contested issue about which a debate still wages today. The choice of donning a veil according to Camilla Fawzi El-Solh and Judy Mabro in *Muslim Women's Choices*,<sup>14</sup> is one that allows women to assert their cultural authenticity, and is a symbol of national liberation. They argue that veiled women are speaking out to reappraise and reinterpret traditional spaces, and that women can redefine their status while also maintaining their cultural identity.

Others, such as Fatima Mernissi, however, believe that the use of 'sacred texts as a political weapon',<sup>15</sup> signals a return to a past where women are oppressed by the men who interpret those texts. All instances of this stem from within sacred texts, including the wearing of a veil, and are a representation of this.

As the debate surrounding the veil demonstrates, Islamic feminism is often seen to be fighting two different sets of pressures. First, that of the internal patriarchal system and second, that of the external forces seen to threaten cultural boundaries and beliefs. The 'woman question' (in Islamic societies) emerged as a hotly contested ideological issue, where women were used to symbolise either the

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<sup>14</sup> C. Fawzi El-Solh, & J. Mabro, (eds.), *Muslim Women's Choices: Religious Belief and Social Reality* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> F. Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 24.

'progressive aspirations of a secularist elite or a hankering for cultural authenticity expressed in Islamic terms'.<sup>16</sup>

Islamic feminism formed in reaction to this struggle. Like Western feminisms, feminism in Muslim nations also began with questions about personal freedoms.<sup>17</sup> For example, they have challenged the patriarchal interpretations of Sharia law which defined women as symbols of cultural authenticity and carriers of religious tradition. They have challenged traditional restrictions placed on them because of their gender, surrounding their rights to work for example, as well as 'the legitimacy of the views of those who until now have spoken in the name of Islam'.<sup>18</sup> The spectrum of Islamic feminism spans from deeply held 'traditional' values based on the Qur'an to equal rights for women within a religious framework that allows free interpretation of religious texts.

Considering this spectrum, in the following section we ask: can men and women who work within the confines of an Islamic society, but who also seek the improvement of the status of women, be described as constituting a form of feminism?

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<sup>16</sup> D. Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 3.

<sup>17</sup> A. Newson-Horst (ed.), *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi: A Reader* (London: Zed Books, 2010), 313-314.

<sup>18</sup> Z. Mir-Hosseini, 'Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2006), 644.

### A defence of Islamic feminism

As noted by Valentine Moghadam, the issues of gender and feminism have become trickier since feminism widened its agenda from the national to the international. This has resulted in many non-Western thinkers arguing that there is a need 'for a more cross-cultural understanding of feminism and the global women's movement'.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, Moghadam notes that Islamic feminists, whilst still working within a religious framework, also work within a framework that is not completely at odds with Western thinking. Many Islamic feminists actually feel they have 'entered into a common ground'<sup>20</sup> with Western feminists by attempting to challenge traditional thought at all. She goes on to explain, 'Islamic feminists have come to insist that gender discrimination has a social rather than a natural (or divine) basis'.<sup>21</sup> This thinking is unlike the traditional boundaries they have come to know and live with, ones that based gender roles on religion rather than changing social factors.

There are however, many reasons Muslim women may find it difficult to adopt a specifically Western model of feminism. This creates a need for an Islamic model of feminism that doesn't necessarily mean they cannot contribute to feminism as a movement. For example, Muslim women do not necessarily perceive

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<sup>19</sup> V. Moghadam, 'Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate' in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2002), 1140.

<sup>20</sup> Moghadam, 'Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents' *Signs*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2002), 1144.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

family ties as a hindrance to women's liberation, as many Western feminists do. Also, there is a resentment of the West's identification of "the problem" of Muslim women as a religious one, and issues such as wages have not necessarily functioned as a liberating force in the same way as Western feminists have identified them.<sup>22</sup> These conditions have meant that a need for a distinctively Islamic feminism has opened up. What are the issues specific to Islamic feminism?

One of the most important issues Islamic feminists have raised is the issue of *jitehad* (independent reasoning and religious interpretation). This challenges foundations of Islamic law that accepted deference to the authority of supreme jurisprudence (mainly Sharia law). Official discourse often promoted domesticity and motherhood by guarding the sanctity of marriage (i.e. access to healthcare during pregnancy, laws in place surrounding domestic violence). However, the return of Sharia law, for example, would mean men are given a free pass with divorce, polygamy and domestic violence.

In addition, religious interpretation allows Islamic feminists to defend their rights within traditional roles. Some Western feminists may deny that motherhood is necessarily and always the 'best' role for women, but Islamic feminists often want to defend motherhood as virtuous while also asserting their rights as women. Islamic feminism has to some extent, arisen from a failure of Islamic states to deliver on its promises to honour and defend its women. This contrasts with Western feminism, which first emerged from a desire to escape social restrictions

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<sup>22</sup> F. El-Solh, & J. Mabro, (eds.), *Muslim Women's Choices: Religious Belief and Social Reality* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

rising from being confined within the 'traditional' and 'personal' sphere, and thereby excluded from political life.

For example, Iman Hashim rejects the idea that feminist thought is 'delivered' to Muslim countries and doesn't regard religion as simply another source of women's subordination. Any attempt by feminists to change the position of Muslim women from a position which totally rejects Islam results in the 'accusation of cultural imperialism or neo-imperialism'.<sup>23</sup> The Qur'an, according to Hashim, provides rights for women that can be drawn upon to improve women's circumstances. The problem is that there is a gap between what the Qur'an says and what is actually practiced in reality.<sup>24</sup> Hashim writes, 'Much of the women's movement in the West has focused not only on bringing gender inequalities to light, but on formalising issues in legislation. Yet here in Islam, we as women have rights which are stated in a source considered to be divine, and consequently much harder to refute, but which we do not draw upon'.<sup>25</sup>

Sally Armstrong writes from a Western perspective but is a strong advocate of the right to religious interpretation. In *Veiled Threat*<sup>26</sup> she points out that women in Afghanistan believe in the ultimate authority of the Qur'an and so Islamic feminists must work within that framework. She notes that when the Taliban in Kabul began to exert control, the women of Afghanistan had no choice

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<sup>23</sup> I. Hashim, 'Reconciling Islam and feminism', *Gender & Development*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1999), 8.

<sup>24</sup> Hashim, 'Reconciling Islam and feminism' (1999), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> S. Armstrong, *Veiled Threat: The Hidden Power of the Women of Afghanistan* (London: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002).

but to bow to the political tyranny they introduced because it came in the form of a message from God. Put simply, 'when it comes to religion, interpretation is everything'.<sup>27</sup>

The right to independent interpretation of the Qur'an has helped to break down a divide between secular and religious thought. From modernist thinkers, to those who are more traditional, many use religion to reconcile feminist thought with their beliefs. They use their religion to provide sources of female liberation while also subscribing to the idea that women have a right to live a dignified life where they make their own choices. 'A strong identification of cultural authenticity has meant Islamic feminists either deny Islamic practices are oppressive, or that oppressive practices used are not necessarily Islamic'.<sup>28</sup>

By thinking in a contextual way, these feminists argue that they have created opportunities for ordinary Muslim women in everyday life. Women have long been used as an indicator of cultural authenticity and carriers of a traditional way of life that many seek to hold on to. As mentioned above, by using Islam as the source of their legitimacy these feminist voices are challenging the hegemony of patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an, and the legitimacy of the views of those who have previously spoken in the name of Islam.

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<sup>27</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat* (2002), 61.

<sup>28</sup> C. Bulbeck, *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 79.



A case against 'Islamic feminism'

There are writers who are both feminist and Muslim but who also do not identify themselves specifically as 'Islamic feminists'. This is because they separate their religious beliefs from political life. It is the term 'Islamic feminism' itself that is contested. Such thinkers advocate modernity and the adoption of universal values. Secular thinkers such as these include, Nawal El Saadawi<sup>29</sup> Fatima Mernissi<sup>30</sup> and, Haideh Moghissi.<sup>31</sup> Non-Muslim feminists, speaking out about Islamic feminism, such as Marilyn French<sup>32</sup> and Susan Moller Okin<sup>33</sup> also argue that all religion is 'instrumental in making patriarchy universal'.<sup>34</sup>

French in particular for example, advocates reinterpretation of religious texts to ensure cultural authenticity but separates it from public political life, wanting instead for women to make their own individual choices about what they believe under the universal values practiced by government. Similarly, Moghissi believes that Islamic feminism serves to obscure the fact that in countries such as Iran and Afghanistan, Islam is not a matter of personal spiritual choice but rather a legal and political system.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Newson-Horst (ed.), *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi* (2010).

<sup>30</sup> Mernissi, *Women and Islam* (1991).

<sup>31</sup> H. Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> M. French, *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in The World: Volume I* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2007), 296.

<sup>33</sup> S. Moller Okin, 'Inequalities Between the Sexes in Different Cultural Contexts' in Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (eds.), *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> French, *From Eve To Dawn* (2007), 296.

<sup>35</sup> Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism* (2002).

For example, Moghissi complains about exaggerated reports of improvements made to the lives of Islamic women. This is a common complaint of secular thinkers when examining Islamic feminism. They argue that any gains made are not substantial enough to constitute complete emancipation of Muslim women. A central point for these writers is that the term 'Islamic feminist' has been used in "inaccurate" and "irresponsible" ways.

Almost all Islamic and politically active women are designated 'Islamic feminist', Moghissi asserts, even though their activities might not fit the broadest definition of feminism.<sup>36</sup> Moghissi fails to define the term 'feminism' herself, which weakens her argument. However, writing from a Muslim female perspective adds depth to the range of ideas stemming from Islamic nations. Ultimately, she believes that political rule is incompatible with cultural pluralism that is the prerequisite of the right to individual choice.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, Saadawi similarly aims to separate religion and state. She argues that legal changes alone, even those that might come with a reinterpretation of the Qur'an, will not alter the reality of women's lives. This is because often the reality of everyday life doesn't match the law. This is particularly the case for uneducated women who find themselves in rural areas 'far from the urban centre where law is made'.<sup>38</sup> This is not to say that Saadawi is critical of Islam, but that she is critical of the way all religion is used within society.

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<sup>36</sup> Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism* (2002).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Newson-Horst (ed.), *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi* (2010), 318.

This point of view represents a more universal approach than Saadawi's. She believes the struggle is universal therefore, so is the solution. She writes, 'the oppression of women and poor classes constitutes an integral part of the capitalist patriarchal system preponderant in most of the world'.<sup>39</sup> Many feminists, including Muslim feminist writers, argue that the emphasis and praise placed on Islamic women activists obscures the contributions made by secularist thinkers and activists 'in the face of continued Islamist repression'.<sup>40</sup> They argue that attempts to reinterpret Islamic texts are futile 'given the strength of conservative, orthodox, traditional, and fundamentalist interpretations, laws, and institutions'.<sup>41</sup>

As a result, most secular thinkers believe the term Islamic feminism is a contradiction in terms. They do not attempt to fit feminism in with Islamic religion, believing that certain rights cannot be aligned with Islam. 'We Muslim women can walk into the modern world with pride, knowing that the quest for dignity, democracy and human rights, for full participation in the political and social affairs of our country, stems from no imported Western values, but is a true part of the Muslim tradition'.<sup>42</sup> Given that religion is central to the concept of 'Islamic feminism', how do Muslim feminists begin to reconcile religious law with feminism?

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<sup>39</sup> Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism* (2002), 140.

<sup>40</sup> Moghadam, 'Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents' (2002), 1149.

<sup>41</sup> Moghadam, 'Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents' (2002), 1150.

<sup>42</sup> Mernissi, *Women and Islam* (1991), viii.

In defence of 'Islamic feminism' once again: the politics of piety

The politics of piety can best be described as the task of finding out whether issues of historical and cultural specificity should inform the analysis and politics of a project. Saba Mahmood in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*<sup>43</sup> attempts to do just this in terms of religion and feminism. Due to the historically contentious relationship between Islam and the West, the particular subject of feminism and religion in this context for Mahmood, has been a vexing one.

Mahmood does acknowledge attempts made by Western feminists to integrate issues of sexual, racial, class and national difference, but her main problem lies in a lack of any meaningful work on the specific subject of religious difference in feminism. She believes that the rise in anti-Islamic sentiment after the attacks on 9/11 has led to a reaffirmation of a status of 'agents of a dangerous irrationality'<sup>44</sup> for those who practice Islam. One of the most common reactions from feminists in particular, is the supposition that Muslim women are 'pawns in a grand patriarchal plan',<sup>45</sup> who, if freed from their bondage, would naturally express their abhorrence for traditional Islamic practices.

Even those who remain sceptical about this view still, according to Mahmood, continue to frame the issue of Islamic feminism in terms of a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand Islamic feminists are seen to assert

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<sup>43</sup> S. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (2012), 1.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

their presence, when on the other hand they enter political life through the very arenas that have historically secured their subordination. This contradiction begs the question of why these women would support a movement that does not acknowledge their own interests, particularly when more emancipatory possibilities have been made available to them.

To help provide an answer to this question, Mahmood examines the recent surge of all female Mosque movements in Muslim countries, particularly Egypt. Religious lessons based on the Qur'an has been part of the 'Islamic awakening'<sup>46</sup> in countries such as Egypt since the 1970s. The Islamic awakening refers to the activities of state-oriented political groups that have developed a religious ethos. It has seen an increase in attendance at mosques (men and women) and an increase in displays of religious sociability such as wearing the veil, production on literature and media, intellectual comment from Islamic point of view. Mahmood refers to this as the 'Islamisation of the sociocultural landscape'.<sup>47</sup>

Women's groups have been integral to this revival. Women organised weekly religious lessons in their local Mosques. These meetings emerged in response to a perception that religious knowledge as a means of organising daily conduct had become marginalised under modern structures of secular governance; In other words, 'Westernisation'. The increased number of women deciding to don the veil for example, is seen as a visible resistance to Western hegemony. The veil,

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<sup>46</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (2012).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

according to Lila Abu-Lughod, has become 'the quintessential sign of Muslim resistance and cultural authenticity'.<sup>48</sup>

Mahmood does not believe such commitment to Islam is an abandonment of politics, simply that the mosque movement occupies an uncomfortable place in feminist scholarship because they pursue practices and ideals embedded within a tradition that has historically accorded women to a subordinate status. The movement cannot be read as simply a reinscription of traditional roles since it has reconfigured the gender practices of Islam and the social institution of mosques. Put simply, the mosque movement 'provided the necessary conditions for both their subordination and their agency.'<sup>49</sup> Whatever the outcome of these meetings, they have been able to define values and ways of living on their own terms.

The movement could be seen as either reinforcing or undermining structures of male dominance. For Mahmood though, where traditional interpretations have ignored the projects, discourses and desires of these women, the mosque movement focused on them. In addition many see the increased numbers of women wearing the veil as simply ways to avoid sexual harassment, or for ease and cost. These women have reinterpreted the Qur'an to better their situation. As a result, examination of these forms of feminism must include not just education, unveiling, political rights and domesticity, but also 're-veiling and reinterpreting Islamic law'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> L. Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 14.

<sup>49</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women* (1998), 154.

<sup>50</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women* (1998), 25.

What Mahmood is ultimately trying to say as she examines the mosque movement is that assumptions should not be made about these women that form a barrier to an exploration of their movements. In other words, Western feminism has sought to look for examples of resistance in women in non-Western society. What Mahmood argues is that they should acknowledge difference in forms of personhood, knowledge and experience. What these women are actually doing, according to Mahmood, is using the 'instruments of their oppression as a means to assert their value'.<sup>51</sup>

One may choose to justify such movements or not, but a more complex conversation about it is necessary. For example, the problem too often seen within accounts of Western feminism is the assumption of the universality of the desire to be free from subordination. This allows feminists to act out a diagnosis and prescription style of theorising, when in fact the subject is far more complex than that allows.

To expand, Mahmood suggests there can be a 'positive' and 'negative' notion of freedom. Positive freedom can be understood as the capacity for self-government. Negative freedom can be understood as the absence of limits or restraints on a person's actions. Even if an action is considered illiberal, it can still be tolerated if a freely consenting individual undertakes it. For Mahmood, in order for someone to be considered free, 'an account is required of the process by which the person acquired her desire for slavery'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (2012), 7.

<sup>52</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (2012), 12.

Self-realisation and autonomy cannot be coupled in this view. Some argue that this standpoint challenged the 'natural' desires of women, and re-establishes their subordinate position. However, Mahmood believes this actually provides an a-historical account that assumes the certainty of a human essence where it may not exist.

What Mahmood is suggesting is an exploration of non-liberal movements not based on Western assumptions and universalities. This may still bring some to the same conclusion, but it does not automatically assume that by studying difference their positions will automatically be vindicated. Ultimately, Mahmood aims to redress the inability of dominant feminist theory to envision forms of human flourishing 'outside the bounds of liberal progressive imaginary'.<sup>53</sup>

We have seen from those writing within the Muslim religion that they strongly advocate culturally specific feminisms. Do other feminisms advocate this even when not writing from a strictly religious background? An examination of black and African feminism may help to answer this question given the majority are more secular in their thinking and often even write from within a Western setting.

### Black and African feminisms

The defining issues of black feminism are three fold. First is the issue of racism, which most black feminists see as synonymous with sexism within their cultures. Second is the development of a pluralist standpoint against what they see

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<sup>53</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (2012), 155.



as the dominance of universal ideals within Western feminism. Third is a focus on activism within the feminist movement, which places more emphasis on non-academic forms of feminism such as art, poetry and novel writing. If there were a fourth feature of black feminism it would be the issue of economic struggles within Sub-Saharan African countries specifically.

Black feminism can broadly be described as taking issue with white Western forms of feminisms that have tended to ignore the issue of race and difference leading to essentialist thinking, and developed the concept of a struggle universally applicable to all women. The reason for their criticisms of this approach stems ultimately from the fact that black feminism has a different relationship to dominating social policies than white feminists do. For example, a black woman's family and labour market experience might shape her economic inequality but also provide a source of collective support. Joyce Ladner, a black feminist thinker prominent during the 1970s argues that black girls have an autonomous image of womanhood that sees reproduction and child rearing as positive rather than negative.<sup>54</sup> Their oppression and subordination in this instance is actually their source of strength rather than their victimhood. This is at odds with dominant Western feminist thought.

Western feminism tends to be individualistic, often focusing on the 'unnatural' nature of family dynamics. Black feminism however, often sees the family as a support system that defines their identity. Simply put, 'the slave and his

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<sup>54</sup> Humm, (ed.), *Feminisms* (1992), 124.

master do not view and respond to the world in the same way'.<sup>55</sup> As a result, Western ideals often fail to adequately address black understandings of issues such as family and sexuality. A shared history of struggles in the everyday experiences of black women creates a community, which is ultimately a 'source of strength'.<sup>56</sup>

As a result of the importance of everyday experience, the voices of ordinary black women's voices are essential to black feminism. The importance of literature and art, although less academic, provide black feminism with the knowledge of real experiences of real women. Feminists such as Audre Lorde<sup>57</sup> and Barbara Christian<sup>58</sup> for example, represent a large group of 'anti-theorists', in non-Western feminist thought. They argue that movements such as feminism 'came *not* from the declarations of the new Western philosophers but from these groups' reflections on their own lives'.<sup>59</sup>

As a result, poetry and novel writing from black activists have become central to the movement as people who laid down thoughts on their own lives and identity. These sources are seen as demonstrating the beginnings of thoughts consequently discussed in Western academia. They argue that Western feminism has dominated the academic field. Christian suggests it has done this 'through force and then through language' even as, she continues, 'it claims many of the ideas that

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<sup>55</sup> J. Ladner, 'Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman' in M. Humm, (ed.), *Feminisms* (1992), 127.

<sup>56</sup> Humm, (ed.), *Feminisms* (1992), 122-123.

<sup>57</sup> A. Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (California: crossing Press, 1984).

<sup>58</sup> B. Christian, 'The Race for Theory' in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1988).

<sup>59</sup> Christian, 'The Race for Theory' (1988), 70.

we, its “Historical” other, have know and spoken about for so long’.<sup>60</sup> Alice Walker for example, during the 1960’s and 70s, believed the key to self generated identity for black women lay specifically in the everyday and particularly the everyday use of art, dance and music. Walker believed that political thinking and spiritual transformation were intertwined. As a result of her break with dominant feminism, she described herself as a ‘womanist’. She wrote, ‘womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender’.<sup>61</sup> In other words, she believed in a feminist movement that looked to other sources of feminism, and not just the Western feminism that dominates International Relations theory.

Audre Lorde, as an ‘anti-theorist’, argues that poetry is ‘illumination’ because ‘it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are – until the poem- nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt’.<sup>62</sup> Lorde argues that the importance of this kind of work lay in the fact that a problem to be solved should be looked at not solely from one’s own perspective, but from multiple perspectives. Writers like Lorde are suspicious of theorising because it often rests on a view of philosophy as a Western activity that ‘mystifies language and often oversimplifies a complex world’.<sup>63</sup>

It is perhaps because of their focus on action that many Western feminists have dismissed these forms of art in favour of more academic and often abstract thinking. Even those such as Cynthia Enloe who imagine a radical revolution of

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<sup>60</sup> Christian, ‘The Race for Theory’ (1988), 70.

<sup>61</sup> Humm, (ed.), *Feminisms* (1992), 141.

<sup>62</sup> Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (1984), 36.

<sup>63</sup> Dotson, ‘Black Feminist Me: Answering the Question ‘Who Do I Think I Am’ (2013), 85.

feminist activism, do so at the risk of developing theory that is too utopian in its vision, and as a result, too abstract considering the realities of political life.

It is the absence of black voices in the dominant Western feminisms that has led black feminists to link racism and sexism. For many black feminists, the two cannot be separated. Race, class and gender are interlocking systems of oppression for these writers. As Maggie Humm writes, 'racism haunts sexism'.<sup>64</sup>

Bell Hooks pays particular attention to this issue in *Ain't I a Woman?*<sup>65</sup> In fact, she argues that a lack of black feminist voices actually stem from the 'harsher, more brutal reality of racism'.<sup>66</sup> Hooks believes as a result the struggle to end racism and the struggle to end sexism were 'naturally intertwined'<sup>67</sup> for black women. This highlights, not the universal struggle that Western feminism promotes, but a struggle specific to the plight of black women.

Angela Davies, another prominent advocate of the linkage between racism and sexism also believes that black women suffer a 'double jeopardy'<sup>68</sup> of sexism and racism combined. She draws from black women's experiences of slavery, suggesting that rape in particular was used as a weapon of domination, repression, extinguishing resistance and demoralising black men. She focuses on the ways black women have resisted this double oppression through activism and solidarity

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<sup>64</sup> Humm, (ed.), *Feminisms* (1992), 122.

<sup>65</sup> B. Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1982).

<sup>66</sup> Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* (1982), 1.

<sup>67</sup> Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* (1982), 13.

<sup>68</sup> Humm, (ed.), *Feminisms* (1992), 128.

in group identity. She believes that black women's empowerment must come from activism.

The Combahee River collective is one example of the type of activism present within black feminism. They were a black feminist group, founded in 1974 explicitly to contest the power of white feminists to speak for a universal woman. They were a socialist feminist group who looked to Marxist theories against capitalism. It was Western capitalism combined with white feminism that they believed was the source of their oppression. Their activism involved a creation of their own identity to benefit a collective community of black women. They believed a radical socialist and feminist movement was the key to their liberation. For these women, the personal was also the political. By looking at the 'multilayered texture of black women's lives'<sup>69</sup> they sought to introduce the concept of multiple identities rather than universal 'woman'.

The concepts of difference, of contextual thinking and of plural identities are themes that thread themselves throughout black feminist thought. The Afro-American lesbian poet Audre Lorde has become a prominent figure within black feminism. She advocates difference without hierarchy. In other words she believes that one over another should hold no privilege. She believes that while all women shared a need to survive, cultural differences meant multiple ways of acting out that survival. She writes, 'the oppression of women knows no ethnic nor radical boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those differences'.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Humm, (ed.), *Feminisms* (1992), 133.

<sup>70</sup> A. Lorde, 'An open Letter to Mary Daly' in Humm, (ed.), *Feminisms* (1992), 139.

There is a strong conviction that International Relations theory should acknowledge difference, multiple identities and contextual thinking given the various experiences, history and cultures of women.

Despite the pluralist nature of black feminist thought Bell Hooks, as one of the most notable black feminists, attempts to reconcile the differences between universal and plural thinking. She believes in an inclusive feminist theory that pursued universal sisterhood, but a sisterhood that recognised their own differences. Hooks introduces the theory of 'intersectionality' to her work. Intersectionality is the idea that class, race, and sex are used in conjunction to oppress, and that a universal cultural framework of power existed that oppressed women in particular.<sup>71</sup> Hooks believes that in order to achieve this, the silence of black women created by both patriarchy and white liberal feminism, must be broken.

Speaking about the marginalisation of the voices of black women in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Centre*<sup>72</sup> she writes, 'to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body',<sup>73</sup> suggesting that although black women play a role in the picture of International Relations and feminism, they had previously been ignored. She aims to extend the feminist conversation from mainly Western feminist discourse arguing that white women who dominate feminist discourse have little understanding of white supremacy as a racial politics, of the

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<sup>71</sup> B. Hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984), xvi.

psychological impact of class and 'of their political status within racist, sexist, capitalist state'.<sup>74</sup>

Hooks also aims to rid non-Western feminist theory of a culture of anti-intellectual stigma. Critics of her work claim Hooks' work itself isn't academic in style. However, her aim is to unite the two. Her work is vital to the visibility of non-Western feminist theory, and she aims for representation of all difference in feminism as well as the importance of decolonisation as an act of confrontation to a hegemonic system of thought.<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, Hooks believes all women must find common ground in order for a meeting of differences to take place.

The writers mentioned thus far have all come from African American backgrounds. However, do the issues of black feminism alter if placed specifically in a non-Western setting? According to many African writers of feminism, the concerns of black women change when looking at the specific context of sub-Saharan African countries. For example, Christine Obbo suggests that economic autonomy becomes a much more prominent concern in this context.<sup>76</sup>

Gender hierarchy and female subordination are prominent features of many traditional African countries. African feminism differs vastly from Western feminism simply because of the origins of such gender hierarchy in the dynamics of

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<sup>74</sup> Hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984), 4.

<sup>75</sup> B. Hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992).

<sup>76</sup> C. Obbo, Christine, *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence* (London: Zed, 1980).

different societies.<sup>77</sup> According to Patricia Hill Collins, 'the power of self-identification' is essential for African women given such stark difference. The role of mothers in Sub-Saharan African countries are powerful mechanisms of political action rather than a hindrance to it. For these writers, white critics must be 'attentive and respectful of the cultural and historical contexts',<sup>78</sup> of African women.

Ultimately, the issues for black feminism are solved through direct and radical action. They tackle a problem specific because of their position as people subject to both racism and sexism. Traditionally, as Barbara Smith writes, 'racism is what happens to black men,' and 'sexism is what happens to white women.'<sup>79</sup> Black feminists as subjects to both want to enter International Relations on their own terms. They feel that discussion on both has previously ignored black women and through direct and radical activism this could be changed.

Our final examination will be of Indian feminism, or rather more specifically, Hindu feminism. Often Indian feminism is seen as more secular than other forms of non-Western feminism. However, the Hindu religion actually plays an important role in creating and defining new gender roles for women. In contrast with Islamic feminism, secular rather than religious law is in place. Can it be

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<sup>77</sup> G. Mikell, Gwendolyn (ed.), *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

<sup>78</sup> E. Abel & B. Christian & H. Moglen, (eds.), *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>79</sup> B. Smith, *The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1998) xi.



argued that Indian feminisms are more secular or religious in their thinking given their fundamental groundings in religion?

### Indian feminisms

As with other feminisms, the diversity of Indian feminism is such that the focus here will be on the general themes found within the movement, particularly within those feminist groups who also identify as being part of the Hindu religion. Contemporary Indian feminism, despite its diversity, can be summarised by its main concerns. These main concerns are considerations of caste, attitudes towards different communities, the role of religion, economic concerns, and the consequences of increased globalisation on India's women. Within these considerations there is one overriding issue at the centre of Indian feminism. This concern is based on the high level of violence against women in all parts of the country due to various traditions and structures in place. As a result, in an effort to change systematic violence against women, the most prominent arena for Indian feminism has been the area of law. We will return to the impact Indian feminism has had on the law in a moment, but first it is necessary to summarise how Indian feminism is specific to India as opposed to it being understood as a more general area of non-Western feminist thought.

For Hindu political thinkers the universe is an 'ordered whole governed by fixed laws'.<sup>80</sup> What this means for Hindu a thinker is that society replicates the

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<sup>80</sup> B. Parekh, 'Some reflections on the Hindu Tradition of Political Thought' in Pantham, & Deursch, (eds.), *Political Thought in India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1986), 19.

order of the universe, held together by something known as *dharma*. *Dharma* represents the notion that society does not consist of individuals, but rather a 'community of communities'.<sup>81</sup> The notion of *Dharma* is central to Hindu belief, and therefore central to the standpoint of Hindu feminists in India. The caste system for example, is central to Hindu political thought and the notion of *dharma* because each caste represents those engaged in certain functions within the societal hierarchy. In other words, a person's *dharma* characterises their function and place within society, and that place is fixed. An individual's *dharma* then is dictated by the caste of his or her birth. For a Hindu, the caste one is born into is not accidental but linked to their actions in a previous life. A person cannot change their position, but instead can hope to be born into different circumstances in the next life.

Such a view is vastly different from Western thinking, which is focused on the individual. Birth is accidental for those in the West, and one can strive to change their position in society. Given the Hindu belief in *dharma*, in what ways does the centrality of the notion *dharma* affect political thinking in India, particularly among feminist thinkers? For Hindu feminist thinkers, *dharma* is the basis of personal and social life. Violation of *dharma* shakes the society to its very foundations and constitutes a mortal threat to its existence'.<sup>82</sup> Every Hindu must

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<sup>81</sup> Parekh, 'Some reflections on the Hindu Tradition of Political Thought' (1986), 20.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

adhere to his or her *dharma*. It is even considered 'better to die doing one's *dharma*'<sup>83</sup> than to attempt to change one's position within society.

A society where everyone conducts his or her own *dharma* is considered an ideal one in Hindu political thought. In such a society there would be no disorder. Put to its extreme, this would mean there would be no need for government at all. It is within these parameters that Hindu feminist thinkers work. Although it has been argued that the caste system serves to underscore patriarchy and entrench systematic oppression of women, some Hindu feminists believe the caste system can be used to maintain social order in more positive ways. For example, they look to the Hindu religion for images of female strength. What *dharma* allows Hindu feminists to do is become accepting of differences. In fact, they base ideals of society on the inherent differences between people, including the differences between castes. Each person has their own *dharma*, but conducts their role for the community as a whole.

Where Hinduism provides a basis for ideology within Indian feminism, social conduct is central. This why they believe the law is source of limiting any misconduct. It means that those in positions of higher influence of power are unable to, or at least restrained to some extent by law, from abusing that power. Hindu feminists seek to preserve traditional social structures by drawing from the positive aspects of their religion. This allows them to accept the specific cultural context of Indian society, while also protecting women within it.

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<sup>83</sup> Parekh, 'Some reflections on the Hindu Tradition of Political Thought' (1986), 20.

Indian Feminisms are however, arguably more secular than Islamic feminisms. For example, they mainly challenge family, social structures and values that serve to subordinate and oppress women in their society. It is because of this, that Indian feminism is often accused of simply adopting a Western version of feminism. However, while women in India were indeed influenced by Western feminist debates, they adapted them to national and local concerns and contexts. Their focus is on Indian specific issues, particularly the entrenched social traditions that seem to sustain systematic violence against women. These include the issues of rape, domestic violence, pornography, trafficking, prostitution, child marriage, sexual harassment in public and the work place, dowry killings, selective sex practices that include female infanticide, and current marriage and divorce laws.

In addition, like many other non-Western feminists, Indian feminists are critical of Western feminist theorising. India saw feminists movements emerge from the early twentieth century, with a strong resurgence in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, in 1974 several women's groups were established in India. These include, *The Progressive Organisation of Women*, In Hyderabad, and *The League of Women Soldiers for Equality*, set up in Aurangabad as an anti-caste feminist movement.<sup>84</sup> These movements argue that religious texts are used to continue traditions that serve to subordinate and oppress women. They attempt to bring what is considered to be part of the private sphere, into the public. Their aim is to

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<sup>84</sup> R. Kumar, 'Contemporary Indian Feminism' in *Feminist Review*, No. 33 (1989).

'reappropriate traditionally accepted and restricted women's spaces'.<sup>85</sup> Within this movement, there is a focus both on criticising mainstream cultural texts by drawing upon Western feminisms, while also highlighting traditional sources of women's strength from within Indian tradition.

Despite several decades of Indian (and other non-Western feminist movements) feminist theorising many white Western feminist theory still fails to recognise women and their relations to specific social processes and societal context and history. They believe, as most non-Western feminisms do, that it is vital to remember the differences between women that emerge from, 'power relations structured by race, nationality and ethnicity, as well as by economic difference'.<sup>86</sup> Within Indian feminism is the primacy of the view that it is vital to understand context, history and difference. Irene Gedalof believes that even where Western feminisms are careful not to impose their views in a non-Western context, it still leaves, 'the cross cultural theoretical conversation unspoken'.<sup>87</sup>

Given that Indian feminisms work with India specific issues, this section will consider what those issues are, and the ways in which they have attempted to tackle the problems. The first and most prominent feature of Indian feminism is their concern with the law.

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<sup>85</sup> R. Kumar, 'Contemporary Indian Feminism' in *Feminist Review*, No. 33 (1989), 25.

<sup>86</sup> I. Gedalof, *Against Purity: Rethinking Identity with Indian and Western Feminisms* (London: Routledge, 1999), 4.

<sup>87</sup> Gedalof, *Against Purity* (1999), 5.

### Indian feminism and the law

Indian feminists have impacted Indian law in three main areas. Their focus has been on first, exposing the workings of patriarchal controls over women, such as marriage and divorce laws for example. Second, they have focused on women's situations within the home, looking at instances of domestic violence, which include dowry killings for example. Third, they have campaigned against violence in more public spaces, such as rape and sexual harassment in the work place. As a movement, Indian feminism has placed special focus on challenging the hegemonic notions of the Indian family. It is the challenge posed to Indian traditions that has caused them to often be accused of becoming 'Westernised'. However, they argue that the right to be free from the dangers of violence is universal, and that the problems of issues such as domestic violence are particularly pertinent within the context of India.

Many Indian feminists argue that campaigns against violence against women are in-depth, and that they have a 'sophisticated understanding of the nature of Indian society'.<sup>88</sup> For example, a focus of dowry related murders are very specific to India. The role of the mother-in-law as perpetrators of violence is not one often seen within Western feminism concerns. Indian feminists believe that an examination of how law constructs and legitimises social hierarchies and differences between women recognises law as the source of women's subordination. Laws relating to marriage, divorce, inheritance, succession and

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<sup>88</sup> G. Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms: Law, Patriarchies and Violence in India* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 6.

guardianship for example, have proven to preserve a system based on male dominance and control over female sexuality. They also argue that the judiciary and the police often underscore these patriarchal values. While feminist attitudes to law in India are varied, they are united in that they contain an 'implicit or explicit critique of patriarchy'.<sup>89</sup>

Debates within Indian feminism have seen law play a central role in their ambition to change women's situations. They believe that the law represents a 'systematic and systematised'<sup>90</sup> aggression against women which are naturalised through difference forms of violence. They have seen some success. Changes in the law have been among the most tangible results of the campaigns of Indian feminist movements. For example, since 1980 amendments have been made to rape laws (1983), the inclusion of a domestic violence clause in the Indian criminal code (1983), the law on sexual harassment in the workplace (2003), and, in 2005, The Domestic Violence Act was passed that extended the right to matrimonial property to women experiencing domestic violence.<sup>91</sup>

However, despite these changes within the law, the lives of Indian women appear not to have benefitted from them. As Geetanjali Gangoli suggests, 'while women theoretically enjoy a number of legal rights, in practice these are denied to them'.<sup>92</sup> Most Indian women have limited participation in decisions about their own lives. For example, one in five women across India have experienced violence

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<sup>89</sup> Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 8.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 9.

<sup>92</sup> Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 2.

from their husbands or members of their family from the age of fifteen.<sup>93</sup> This is because, despite the law, entrenched Indian tradition dictates that a man has the right to beat his wife if she does not fulfil accepted gender roles within a marriage. In addition, it is noted that the poorer the women, the less access she has to rights, particularly in areas of rural India that are far from the major cities.

What this means, for some at least, is that focus placed by Indian feminists on changing the law is often futile. Many doubt the transformative capabilities of the law. Some even suggest that the language of rights are 'alienating and individualistic',<sup>94</sup> and is ill suited to the context of India, particularly as attitudes towards family are vastly different from those in the West who support the ideals of universal rights. However, although many are critical of the emphasis placed on changing the law, they also feel there may not be a viable alternative. This is why a focus on the law in India has remained a prominent feature of Indian feminist movements.

The use of law in Indian feminism can be summarised through both its critics and its supporters. Critics have suggested the focus on law has led to ignorance regarding interconnected problems such as caste and poverty. They also suggest that the movement as a whole focuses on the Hindu religion as its ideological basis and therefore does not account for other communities present within India, such as Muslims and Christians. One of the most prevalent criticisms however, is that the language of human rights is seen as universal rather than

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<sup>93</sup>Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 2.

<sup>94</sup>Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 9.



contextual in nature, which fails to consider the cultural, social and historical culture of India specifically. Susan Seymour argues that gender roles in India, compared to those in the West, are based upon profoundly different cultural assumptions. She also suggests that most women are happy with their roles because women represent the honour of the family. Each nation has, she argues, 'a very different historical trajectory and set of cultural assumptions and values'.<sup>95</sup> In the case of India specifically she writes, 'familial, not individual goals are primary'.<sup>96</sup>

On the other hand, some argue that legal changes made within Indian law represent a visible and concrete step towards equality for women. They suggest that the issue of violence is a universal one. Some believe that the utilisation of the Hindu religion within feminist movements in India helps to spread the kind of values they support. For example, the image of the Mother Goddess is seen as a symbol of the strength of Indian women. Hindu Goddesses for example, 'are never fully domesticated or constrained by male gods'.<sup>97</sup> Many Indian feminists actually share an understanding that the female body plays an important symbolic role in national identities.<sup>98</sup> What they argue, is that women should not be subject to violence because religious tradition actually presents women as a symbol of strength and one who is at the centre of family dynamics. Similar to Islamic feminism, this issue is about interpreting religious texts to benefit women. They

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<sup>95</sup> S. Seymour, *Women, Family, and Child Care in India: A World in Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 30.

<sup>96</sup> Seymour, *Women, Family, and Child Care in India* (1999), 6.

<sup>97</sup> Gedalof, *Against Purity* (1999), 38-39.

<sup>98</sup> Gedalof, *Against Purity* (1999), 37.

argue that entrenched traditions that promote violence against women are not actually Indian at all, but rather social constructs that should be destroyed.

The Caste system in India is a visible sign of the influence of Hinduism in India. Despite the fact it is a Hindu practice, most communities in India are affected by it, even those in tribal communities considered to be outside the Caste system. What does Indian feminist have to say about how the Caste system affects women? In what ways has the feminist movement represented Caste?

#### Indian feminism and the caste system

There are four main Castes within the traditional caste system in India. There are the *Brahmins*, who are the ideologically dominant caste and have predominantly controlled ritual and scholarly pursuits. There are the *Kshatriyas*, the warrior Caste. The *Vaishyas* are the trading caste, and the *Sudras*, who are the agricultural and labouring Caste. There is also a fifth Caste previously known as *Varna*, or *Untouchables*. This fifth caste was, and still is to some extent, treated as a 'polluting caste.' In post independent India they renames themselves *Dalit*, which relates to the oppression they have suffered rather than the 'pollution' previously ascribed to them.<sup>99</sup> In addition to this there are tribes in different parts of the country that are considered to be outside the caste system.

The caste system described above has been the source of discussion within much Indian feminist thinking. Although much Indian feminism is based on

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<sup>99</sup> All information on the Caste system is taken from; Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 10.

activism rather than feminist theory, caste-based discrimination has remained central to much of the work done by Indian feminist groups. This is because despite the fact that caste based discrimination is prohibited in the Indian constitution, evidence suggests that, like much of the law, practice is very different to theory. The *dalit* and tribal communities in India continue to suffer inequalities and sustained poverty. They even experience periodic violence at the hands of 'upper castes'.<sup>100</sup> The link has been made between caste relations and gender exploitation. Women within lower castes suffer the highest level of inequalities and violence against them.

As a result, there are feminist organisations within India that specifically aim to deal with the issue of caste based inequalities. This is because the inequalities that face both Indian women and different castes stem from the same ideals and traditional structures in place. There have been some criticisms of the feminist movement from within *dalit* because they are, in the main, made up of educated, upper caste Hindu women. This is similar to much of the criticism against White Western feminism as representing all 'women'. *Dalit* believe that most Indian feminist organisations see them as having 'experience but not intelligence'.<sup>101</sup> Women within *dalit* have formed their own feminist organisations such as *The All Indian Dalit Women's forum*, set up in 1994, and *The National Federation of Dalit women*, and *Dalit Solidarity*, both founded in 1995. Such groups deal with the interconnectedness of caste and gender oppression, exploitation and

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<sup>100</sup> Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 10.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

suffering. They have, like other Indian feminists, focused on sexual violence. However, they believe that gendered forms of humiliation actually lead to the perpetuation of upper caste dominance.

What groups such as these believe is that caste 'fractures'<sup>102</sup> gender identity when women only represent women's interests from upper castes. The implications of caste-based violence are such that lower caste women face the worst cases of violence and oppression. It is important to note here, that caste analysis has 'played in some feminist visions of justice'.<sup>103</sup> The caste system is seen as playing a central role in gender inequality throughout India. This is specific to India as a context, and the universal nature language of rights presented by some Indian feminism does not take account of this specifically Indian social structure. In addition, other religious communities within India hold a similar view of Indian feminisms, in that they mainly represent the Hindu religion.

#### Indian feminism and religion

Much Indian feminism is based upon the Hindu religion. Many Indian feminists however, are critical of the role of religion and its impact on women's lives. Feminists in India argue that Hindu fundamentalism in particular reflects the 'crisis of both modernisation and democracy'.<sup>104</sup> Some Indian feminists therefore, have examined the nature of religion and its impact on the lives of women. They believe that religion, and particularly the Hindu religion, has served to underscore

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<sup>102</sup>Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 10.

<sup>103</sup>Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 11.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

patriarchy in India by 'projecting and promoting 'traditional' views of women as mothers and wives'. For example, the tradition of controlling women's appearance through impositions of dress codes serves to entrench tradition in a way that is detrimental to women's freedoms.

Such traditions have been used in India to inflict violence as a tool to oppress those 'outside' the national image. For example, women's bodies are traditionally seen as a symbol of community and family honour. In the partition (of India and Pakistan) riots women from different religions, mainly Muslim women, were actively targeted through sexual assault. This resulted in a loss of honour for those communities. Sexual assault against women has been used as a weapon. It is believed that the entrenched notions of family, and in particular motherhood, based on religious foundations, have been the cause of much of the suffering faced by Indian women.

In addition, Muslim communities in particular have experience structural discrimination throughout India. This has led to Muslim communities, and more profoundly Muslim women, becoming economically, educationally and socially marginalised. The specific implications for women within these communities has led to further criticisms of Indian feminism as predominantly Hindu, and using Hindu symbolism as the basis for their thinking. Gangoli argues that by 'collapsing'<sup>105</sup> 'Hindu' with 'Indian', women from within different religions of communities have felt isolated from the cause. For example, many Muslim women

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<sup>105</sup> Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 12.

find it difficult to approach the police with cases of domestic violence given the entrenched discrimination they face.

It can be suggested then, that while Indian feminism is often perceived as more secular than other non-Western feminisms, particularly compared to Islamic feminism, the influence of religion in India is such that it still plays a prominent role within the feminist movement. Given its roots in Hinduism, Indian feminism represents a very different kind of feminism to that of Western feminism and, like other non-Western feminisms, is placed in a specific context.

#### Indian feminism and globalisation

The impact of globalisation has been central to the feminist debate in India. From the early 1990s there was an increased reliance on the global market economy in India. On the one hand, some have suggested that these changes have rewarded India with a more efficient system of governance. On the other hand, critics have suggested that the main beneficiaries of the liberalisation of the economy have been the middle classes. The loss of resources for lower classes has led to repercussions for working class and tribal women in particular. Liberalisation of the economy has been analysed as leading directly to a 'loss of livelihood, traditional resource bases, forced displacement and increased poverty'<sup>106</sup> for women in India.

Some Indian feminists argue that economic changes in India have led to increased hardships for working class and lower caste women both economically

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<sup>106</sup> Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 12.

and socially. For example, multinational corporations exploit female labour in sweatshops. In addition, these multinational corporations have, according to many Indian feminists, introduced universal, and more specifically, 'Western', images through advertisement. This, they believe, has contributed to the 'increased commodification of women's bodies.'<sup>107</sup> Consumerism has as a result, become central to the debate concerning the lives of women within Indian feminism. Again, while they are often accused of becoming 'Westernised', and secular in their thinking, they are conscious of the negative impact increased 'Westernised' globalisation has on women within India.

#### Indian feminism in theory

Although Indian feminism can be seen as a practical, activist based movement there are, as we have seen, three main theoretical issues that form the basis of Indian feminist thinking. These are: the role of the Caste system, the role of religion and the role of increased globalisation. Each of these is seen as representing the ways in which patriarchy is underscored, and violence against women is perpetuated. Indian feminism, as a result of these three issues, is based on a respect for 'difference and differences'.<sup>108</sup>

As we have seen, there are a variety of different viewpoints within Indian feminism. For example, some see the influence of Western feminist as a positive, while others reject it. Some perceive the increased liberalisation of the market

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<sup>107</sup> Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms* (2007), 13.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

economy as a positive, while others see it as having a negative impact on the lives of Indian women. Despite these differences however, Indian feminisms are united in several ways. First, they all place focus on the issue of violence against women. Second, they have all approached the law as a viable method of attempting to change traditional and systematic violent practices against women. Third, they are conscious that the situations of the lives of Indian women are as a result of 'India specific' issues. What this emphasises once again, is the need for a contextual lens when considering feminism in International Relations theory.

#### Overarching themes: a discussion on commonality

What lessons can the examples of Islamic feminism, black and African feminism and Indian feminism teach us about the overall themes found within non-Western feminism? The first and most obvious lesson is that they all represent modes of thinking that do not stem from the dominant Western viewpoint. Often they also have a shared history of struggle, colonisation, marginalisation within academia and different, more positive attitudes towards family and group identity. Colonisation for example, highlights the tendency to abstract thinking in Western International Relations. They often cite non-Western actors as 'other' while ignoring their shared history.

The lack of consideration from Western thinkers of historical, contextual and cultural influences on political life has led non-Western feminists to stress the importance of a more plural standpoint. Their case against universal thinking is based on their difference of outlook to that of a Western viewpoint. They identify



differently to the world and therefore acknowledge difference. Many Muslim women for example, believe that God has given them the most noble of task in raising their creatures.<sup>109</sup>

This does not mean they allow themselves to remain subordinate to men, but rather they see their roles as women differently to that of many Western feminists. They do not necessarily believe that oppression based on sex applies in the same way everywhere. Central to this are ideas based upon a universal human 'essence'. Many non-Western feminists believe in the multi faceted nature of identity, therefore a shared 'essence' does not exist. Instead they ask what alliances can be made that accept difference and recognise the complex layers of human nature.

In addition, many non-Western feminists struggle with what they see as a contradiction in Western feminism. This is the conflict between ideas of universal identity in bodily difference, on the one hand, and what is unique to individuals, on the other. Non-Western feminism often sees difference of identity as essential to feminist theorising, while also acknowledging group identity as a source of strength.

This is not to say that they see Western feminism submitting to their viewpoint, or vice versa, but rather work in coalition and conversation with one another.<sup>110</sup> The central point of non-Western feminism is to open the field of

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<sup>109</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women* (1998), 251-2.

<sup>110</sup> Bulbeck, *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms* (1998), 221.

feminism to multiple voices based on differences of history, context and ways of seeing the world.

### A defence of universal thinking

Given the strong emphasis within non-Western thinking on a pluralist standpoint, should universal ideals be dismissed entirely? Prominent and prolific philosopher Martha Nussbaum thinks not. In her work, Nussbaum is careful to recognise difference and plurality while also defending universal ideas about what constitutes a good life.

Nussbaum developed a theory known as the 'capabilities' approach in order to defend this position. Within this theory, she created a large and open-ended list of capabilities and universal values necessary for humans to live a dignified life. These include the right to access to medical care, food, shelter, clean water and so on.

Louise Derksen summarises Nussbaum's work writing, 'at the root of these capabilities is the Aristotelian notion that all people should be able to live a good life and the Kantian notion of the fundamental dignity of human beings'.<sup>111</sup> Where pluralism and universalism have previously been seen as irreconcilable, Nussbaum introduced the idea that a focus on traditional aspects of other cultures is vital to humans being able to lead a good life based on informed choices made about their

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<sup>111</sup> L. Derksen, 'Martha Nussbaum: Feminism Between Universalism and Pluralism' in *The University of Western Ontario Journal*, London, Ontario, Canada, June 2010, 1.

culture having first been introduced to ideas of individual dignity through universal capabilities and values.

Nussbaum argues that capabilities are goals rather than necessary values that should have a bearing on real life and practice. They should be capabilities implemented within the context of the cultures in which they are introduced. For example, there should be education available to all, but an education, which reflects the traditions in which it takes place. Critics might suggest that informed choices though education on capabilities may still lead to people 'choosing' something that has become inherent in a society, such as oppressive patriarchy, simply because it has become affiliated with their culture. However, Nussbaum argues that we should not ignore that fact that people's choices differ, and that respect for people requires respecting the areas of freedom around them within which they make these choices. Some choices, she suggests, 'will be personal and idiosyncratic,' but many will also involve 'cultural or religious or ethnic or political identities'.<sup>112</sup>

Nussbaum maintains a respect for choice. Another difficulty with this is that freedom of religion still relies on state power, and therefore it can be difficult to know when freedom of religion should be applied and when it should be overridden by the state. Nussbaum maintains that providing people are able to live a good life, making their own choices, it will be clear when universal capabilities should apply to overrule religious freedom. For example, she notes that the

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<sup>112</sup> M. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 107.

mandatory provision of certain forms of life-saving medical treatment, would slight the conscientious choice of Jehovah's Witnesses not to accept transfusions, and that, 'problems of this type are avoided by making capability, and not functioning, the appropriate political goal'.<sup>113</sup>

It could be argued that this stance is too intrusive and biased in the direction of a certain set of cultural values. Again, Nussbaum stresses the importance of a certain level of abstract thought in her work, emphasising that the list is open ended and can therefore accommodate a variety of different capabilities. In this way, the list aims to ensure that the 'job of government is understood to be that of raising all citizens above the threshold on all capabilities'.<sup>114</sup>

Ultimately, Nussbaum argues, 'It is difficult to object to recommending something to everyone as a good idea, backed by good arguments, once it becomes clear that state sovereignty, grounded in the consent of the people, is a very important part of the whole package'.<sup>115</sup>

Nussbaum's respect for difference stems from her view that human beings are not born 'kings, or nobles',<sup>116</sup> or even male or female. Her acceptance of difference is actually found in her method of seeking 'sameness' among human beings. She believes that human beings are all born equal, and differences are consequently made depending on the time, place and context. At the same time

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<sup>113</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (2011), 109.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (2011), 112

<sup>116</sup> M. Nussbaum & J. Glover (eds.), *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 62.

however, she believes in a human 'essence,' that cannot be changed through culture. She believes that a submission to plural thinking entirely often allows for oppression to continue under the guise of acceptance of cultural differences. For example, women in India are often taught that menstruating is unclean and are suspicious of its abilities to 'spoil' things it comes into contact with. Even to the extent that food may become inedible if touched by a menstruating woman. Adhering to cultural traditions such as this is harmful rather than helpful to the plural cause.

Nussbaum's universal thinking does not necessarily mean she is 'utopian' in her viewpoint. In fact, she is careful to express the importance of the everyday. In her analysis of *Ulysses* by James Joyce she highlights his willingness to embrace the flaws and imperfections inherent in human beings. She believes he 'closes the gap'<sup>117</sup> between writers who construct life as above the ordinary by not acknowledging everyday aspects of life.

From this, she has constructed notions of ordinary human emotions as central to political judgement. Love in particular, is hope for Nussbaum. Love is guidance for social justice and provides the basis for politics that addresses the needs of other groups and nations<sup>118</sup> while still acknowledging the inherent characteristics of all human beings.

What Nussbaum believes then, is that all humans should have equal access to those things that create a 'good life'. However, she believes all women have

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<sup>117</sup> M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 682.

<sup>118</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought* (2001), 713.

'unequal capabilities',<sup>119</sup> The capabilities are objects of overlapping consensus among people who otherwise have very different comprehensive conceptions of the good.<sup>120</sup> There are, according to Nussbaum, certain universal norms that should be central to underpinning constitutional guarantees in all nations. Simply because a woman might challenge the traditional source of oppression does not automatically mean they become Westernised. Instead they make choices from within their cultures but based on access to universal capabilities. A woman does not have to abandon a 'traditional' life but she should live it with certain economic and political opportunities in place.

Ultimately, Nussbaum claims that a universal conception of human capability provides guidance to political life. In this sense she believes theories of social justice, unlike those of many non-Western feminists, should be abstract to some degree. Theories should have a theoretical power that enables them to 'reach beyond the political conflicts of their time'.<sup>121</sup> This, in conjunction with a reflection of the world's actual problems, such as women's inequality, is the key to attentive thinking of feminist theory in Nussbaum's mind.

However, Nussbaum's attempt to reconcile a universalist stance with a pluralist commitment is problematic. This is partly because universalism of any kind leaves unresolved the politically contestable issues created by the need to interpret its practical implications in specific contexts, and partly because the

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<sup>119</sup> M. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>120</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (2000), 5.

<sup>121</sup> M. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

universal nature of her theory means that it is about human rights in general, rather than offering a distinctively feminist perspective. In short, Nussbaum's defence of universal thinking fails to respond adequately to the case for a more contextually rooted ethics made by, amongst others, many non-Western feminists.

### Reflections

The history of political thought has often been viewed as a Western arena, the term being associated with geographical and politico-economic hegemony. However, the emergence of non-Western political thought has extended the field of international politics and served to make parts of the world often seen as the 'other' of the 'West', visible. This strengthens the argument often made by non-Western thinkers to identify themselves from their own experiences, rather than from the perspective of Western philosophers.

Despite the 'anti-universalising climate'<sup>122</sup> that emerged from the second wave feminism through the extension of feminism to an international arena, feminist International Relations theory still largely ignores the voices of non-Western thinkers. Bulbeck suggests that acknowledgement of difference is still made up of stereotypes surrounding an 'exotic other'.<sup>123</sup> For example, narratives exist about the strong black matriarch who is also subject to domestic violence; the veiled Iranian woman who also took up a gun to fight for her country; the passive

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<sup>122</sup> S. Moller Okin, 'Inequalities Between the Sexes in Different Cultural Contexts' in Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (eds.), *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 44.

<sup>123</sup> Bulbeck, *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms* (1998).

mail order bride who is nevertheless a scheming gold digger.<sup>124</sup>

These stereotypes are contradictory, acknowledging their agency and oppression in the same sentence. Bulbeck argues that these narratives are integral to Western feminism's construction of the 'other' and themselves, without revealing the complexity and truth of these women's real experiences. If, as Bulbeck suggests, we focus on other forms of feminisms, and do not rely purely on Western feminist depictions of 'other' women, the field of International Relations theory can become more balanced and, as a result, more indicative of real experience.

What these women do share, is a 'profoundly significant Historical experience',<sup>125</sup> that of being dominated and colonised by the West. As a result of this shared history non-Western writers have been compelled to ask many of the same questions surrounding the sources of Western power, the nature of modernity as introduced to them by the West and what they should do about preserving their cultures and traditions. Post-colonial, for many non-Western writers, is not yet 'post' because of the dominance of Western thinking that still exists. Accepting others does not mean submission by one to the other, but rather an acceptance of the reality of difference.<sup>126</sup> Bulbeck believes knowledge of others is the key to ridding ourselves of a sense of a unitary 'woman' that does not exist. She believes Western thinkers must not simply see the traditional other as backward or oppressed, but instead examine the multiple and complex reasons

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<sup>124</sup> Bulbeck, *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms* (1998).

<sup>125</sup> Parekh, 'Non-Western Political thought' (2003), 554.

<sup>126</sup> Bulbeck, *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms* (1998), 221.



why women may be in the position they are in.

Given the insistence of all non-Western writers on acknowledging difference, do they all share a universal non-Western theory? Naturally the answer here is no. For example, both universal and contextual thinkers emerge within non-Western thinkers. Fatima Mernissi<sup>127</sup> and Nawal El Saadawi<sup>128</sup>, both prominent and prolific Muslim theorists, are universalist and secular thinkers, separating religion and politics. They believe that '*Identity* is a dangerous word, like *religion*, because it divides people according to nationality, religion, class, race, colour, gender and other false distinctions imposed on us from when we are born'.<sup>129</sup>

On the other hand, writers such as Ziba Mir-Hosseini,<sup>130</sup> Elie Kedourie<sup>131</sup> and Deniz Kandiyoti<sup>132</sup> to name just a few, think in a more contextual way arguing that universal thinkers fail to see the complexity of modern International Relations and the multitude of factors that affect women's status in diverse cultural nations.

Nussbaum, as we have seen, attempts to reconcile the two. She bridges the gap between pluralist and universal thinkers. To some extent, Bell Hooks attempts a similar bridging of the two. Hooks for example, believes that all women share a universal struggle, but that individual voices and experiences exist within this struggle. Often the term 'feminism' is a contested one, particularly from a universal

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<sup>127</sup> Mernissi, *Women and Islam* (1991).

<sup>128</sup> Newson-Horst (ed.), *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi* (2010).

<sup>129</sup> Newson-Horst (ed.), *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi* (2010), 155.

<sup>130</sup> Mir-Hosseini, 'Muslim Women's Quest for Equality' (2006).

<sup>131</sup> E. Kedourie, *Islam in the Modern World* (London: Mansell, 1980).

<sup>132</sup> Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam and the State* (1991).

standpoint. Often universal thinkers believe that feminism rooted in religion and tradition serves to maintain oppression. Even the present and historical literature is full feminists who would have a hard time finding common ground. What has been suggested however is that there is no single way of looking at feminism.

As seen above, common ground can be found in the fact that all agree there is a struggle to be fought. It can be argued that thinkers such as Nussbaum provide a convincing argument for some universal values, but that the voices of women themselves, coming from a variety of different backgrounds and cultures, have a right to be listened to. They have a right to the opportunity to engage in deliberation that can lead to the recognition of unmet needs. It must be clear that both the 'West' and 'non-West' cannot fully understand international politics without examining the other. Their histories are intertwined even if their views are divided. As Kandiyoti writes, 'By imposing Western social categories on to the social experience of non-Western societies, there has been a failure to recognise that the social construction of gender is subject to a complexity of factors affecting women's status in diverse cultural areas'.<sup>133</sup> There may be a universal problem, but many argue convincingly for a contextual solution. Shirley Ardener sums this up;

It seemed helpful to be reminded that we tend to think of the category of 'women' as some kind of universal. Yet we should not be allowed to forget that our own cultural model of women, and the adventures of the beings that realise that model, are very special example from a wider category called 'women', which has

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<sup>133</sup> Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam and the State* (1991), 2.

many other possible realisations.<sup>134</sup>

In the previous chapter an examination of Christine Sylvester's conversation theory took place. The development of her theory didn't actually attempt to show what this conversation might look like. The aim of this chapter was to explore the marginalised voices of non-Western feminists. In particular, the aim was to examine the nature of non-Western feminism as a contested term. What has become clear is that there are multiple voices and multiple identities within International Relations. This should be acknowledged even if one does not feel those voices are directly contributing to feminism. If the dominant voice of Western feminism, accepts the 'others' right to self-identification, a conversation inclusive of all voices may occur. This does not mean one should submit to the other, nor that one view should hold a privileged position over the other. If, as Sylvester suggests, we deny the existence of a distinct human 'essence', we can begin to engage in empathetic co-operation with others.

To conclude, non-Western feminists have much to offer. They provide us with voices of their own experiences and reality. Attempts to create a universal and often utopian vision of womanhood have led to a backlash from those who have been silenced by the dominance of such theories in International Relations. Reality dictates that differences do exist. Simply because women share a struggle does not mean they experience this struggle in the same ways, or that the solution can be a universally applicable one. Instead, conversation between multiple voices

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<sup>134</sup> S. Ardener, Shirley, *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), vii.

Fiona Ritchie

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and identities should take place within the reality of political life. Conversation may not naturally lead to a consensus about what is good or right. However, differences can exist within this model which is, according to Sylvester, the first step in developing a theory of feminist International Relations that may be universally applied.

## Chapter Five

### Neo-Conservative Thought: A necessary background

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The invasion of Afghanistan by the United States and its allies, and its consequences for Afghan women, can be discerned through an examination of the neo-conservative thought that dominated American foreign policy and the Bush administration, particularly after the 9/11 attacks in September 2001. Robert Kagan and William Kristol developed the neo-conservative thought that became central to justifications of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As American policy analysts and commentators they founded the New American Century Project (NACP) in the early 1990s, a think tank that promoted American global leadership. The central belief of the project was that American leadership served not just American interests, but also benefited the world through spreading liberal democratic values.

The goals of the NACP were seen as a 'moral imperative'<sup>135</sup> if America was to succeed in carrying out its role as global protector. They aimed to increase defence spending significantly in order to carry out their global responsibilities, to strengthen ties to democratic allies and to challenge regimes hostile to American interests and values to promote the cause of political and economic freedom

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<sup>135</sup> T. West, 'Leo Strauss and American Foreign Policy' in *The Claremont Review of Books* (2008), 1.

abroad and to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to their security, prosperity, and principles.

Those who write in favour of neo-conservative thought advocate the assertive promotion of democracy and American values around the world, particularly through means of military force. American power was to be used to reorder the world. The neo-conservatives peaked in influence during the presidency of George W. Bush when they played the central role in promoting and planning the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001, and then Iraq in 2003. How did neo-conservative thought rise to such high levels of prominence in American policy? What did this mean for the places in which it attempted to implement these policies? How did America come to see themselves as the 'benevolent hegemon'<sup>136</sup> primarily responsible for preserving and extending the international order?

The ideas of the political philosopher Leo Strauss have become synonymous with neo-conservative thought and American domestic and foreign policy. This is despite the fact that Strauss himself was never directly involved in policy making in the White House. A number of his students however, went on to become prominent within the White House and as a result, so did some of Strauss's ideas. Similarities of Strauss's philosophy and American neo-conservative policy stem from a number of his core ideas. First, is Strauss's Manichean idea that good and evil are always present. Some liken this to Carl Schmitt's friend/foe theory whereby states are always friend or foe in their relation to other states. President

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<sup>136</sup> West, 'Leo Strauss and American Foreign Policy' (2008), 1.

Bush and his administration based much of their rhetoric on this principle. For example, in his now famous 'axis of evil speech' in 2002 he said, 'I know we can overcome evil with greater good...History has called American and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedoms fight'.<sup>137</sup>

Dualistic moralism was indicative of American political rhetoric in the years surrounding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. There was a strong emphasis on good versus evil, humanity versus the blood thirsty and the free world versus forces of darkness.<sup>138</sup> President Bush used the word evil five times in his first statement after the 9/11 attacks for example. Douglas Kellner believes the construction of an 'evil other'<sup>139</sup> was developed immediately after 9/11 to justify a war on terror and set the stage for a doctrine of pre-emptive and preventative war. He calls this 'extremist rhetoric'.<sup>140</sup>

Kellner believes this kind of rhetoric merits the term 'extremism' because a discourse of 'evil' is, he writes, 'totalising and absolutistic, allowing no ambiguities or contradictions'.<sup>141</sup> Based on this, Kellner actually believes the war on terror resulted in a 'clash of fundamentalisms',<sup>142</sup> in which both states deployed

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<sup>137</sup> G. Bush, 'State of the Union' <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.29.02.html>, Washington DC, January 2002.

<sup>138</sup> D. Kellner, 'Bushspeak and the politics of Lying: Presidential Rhetoric in the "War on Terror"' in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol. 37, No. 4 (2007), 624.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Kellner, 'Bushspeak and the politics of Lying' (2007), 625.

<sup>141</sup> Kellner, 'Bushspeak and the politics of Lying' (2007), 628.

<sup>142</sup> Kellner, 'Bushspeak and the politics of Lying' (2007), 629.

Manichean discourses used to, 'whip up hatred of the Other'<sup>143</sup> and, to incite violence and war.

The rhetoric of good and evil was used to emphasise the universal nature of American values which Americans regard as 'self-evident truths'.<sup>144</sup> Natural right and universal truths were facing a new opponent in fundamentalist Islam, and the September 11 attacks presented an opportunity for neo-conservatives to enact their beliefs. This was again in evidence in Bush's State of the Union address in 2002, in which he repeatedly referred to concepts of freedom and liberty. For example, he said 'America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity'.<sup>145</sup>

This new strand of conservatism was a reaction to what neo-conservatives considered the decline of liberal democracy. Strauss himself believes that liberal democracy had abandoned the classical meaning of the good life and good society. He believes, 'the design of politics is rooted in human freedom'.<sup>146</sup> As a result, Strauss developed a theory based on classical political philosophy which he believes was related directly to political life and everyday experience. He believes in particular that the 'way of the philosopher is Socrates'<sup>147</sup> in that philosophers pursue wisdom and the good. He contrasts the 'way of the philosopher' with the

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<sup>143</sup> Kellner, 'Bushspeak and the politics of Lying' (2007), 629.

<sup>144</sup> N. Xenos, *Cloaked in Virtue: Unveiling Leo Strauss and the Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge, 2008), 127.

<sup>145</sup> Bush, 'State of the Union' (2002).

<sup>146</sup> K. Deutsch & J. Murley, *Leo Strauss, the Straussians and the American Regime* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 51.

<sup>147</sup> N. Xenos, 'Leo Strauss and the Rhetoric of the War on Terror'

<http://www.adelinotorres.com/filosofia/Leo%20Strauss.pdf> (accessed on 14 February 2015).



'way of the world', which is represented by Thrasymachus who maintains that justice is the interest of the stronger.<sup>148</sup>

Strauss believed in a contemporary crisis of liberalism. As a result, he emphasised a need to infuse American foreign policy with a moral language – a need which he believed had intensified after 9/11. Like the Bush administration, Strauss denied the possibility of resolution through peaceful means, which would eliminate 'the struggle that is at the core of the political'.<sup>149</sup>

In addition, Strauss's philosophy of deception and lying in politics finds an echo in many of the actions of the Bush administration. He believes that strategic truths sometimes need to be defended by a 'bodyguard of lies'.<sup>150</sup> What Strauss means by this was that inter-state relations are actually characterised by deceit and deception. For Strauss, lies are useful in politics. In fact, 'perpetual deception'<sup>151</sup> is necessary in politics for Strauss. This is particularly true of lies between the rulers and the ruled. Strauss believes that those best fit to rule are those who realise there is no morality in politics and that the general public are not equipped to handle real truths.

The Bush administration pursued such a politics repeatedly throughout their campaigns in both Afghanistan and Iraq. John Mearsheimer in *Why Leaders*

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<sup>148</sup> Xenos, 'Leo Strauss and the Rhetoric of the War on Terror' (2015).

<sup>149</sup> Xenos, 'Leo Strauss and the Rhetoric of the War on Terror' (2015), 11.

<sup>150</sup> J. Mason, 'Leo Strauss and the Noble Lie: The Neo-Cons at War' in *Logos* Vol. 3 No. 2 (2004), 1.

<sup>151</sup> J. Lobe, 'Leo Strauss' Philosophy of Deception' in <http://www.alternet.org/story/15935/> (2003) (Accessed on: February 12, 2015).

*Lie*<sup>152</sup> develops an account of lying, spinning and concealment from within the Bush administration before the war in Iraq. He believes they conducted a campaign of 'fear mongering'. Fear mongering involves a government who see a threat emerging, but cannot make the public see the threat without a deception campaign. For example, secretary of state Dean Acheson, who worried that the American people might not appreciate the threat of the Soviet Union in the late 1940s, argued that it was necessary to exaggerate the truth to make people understand the threat.

Fear mongering is an exaggeration and inflation of a threat, but in the solid belief that the threat is real, which is held to justify deception. For example, the Bush administration did believe that Saddam Hussein was a dangerous threat. However, they understood that there was not much enthusiasm for invading Iraq, particularly after the invasion of Afghanistan. Among the lies was the so called 'bulletproof evidence'<sup>153</sup> that Saddam Hussein was closely linked to Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda. In fact, the Administration had no such evidence.

In addition, the Administration claimed that Iraq was in possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Again, they had no solid evidence for this. They claimed that Saddam was acquiring the equipment needed to develop WMD. Aluminium tubes were procured by Saddam, however there was wide disagreement about what the ultimate purpose of the equipment was. The

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<sup>152</sup> J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics* (London: Duckworth Overlook, 2011).

<sup>153</sup> Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie* (2011), 50.

Department of Energy, the agency with the greatest technical expertise on the topic, actually believed they were for artillery rockets.

Lies such as these are central to Strauss' own philosophy. The link between the Bush administration and Strauss in this case seems evident. Ultimately, Mearsheimer argues that leaders lie because those who lead believe the average person cannot comprehend matters such as these. Leaders who lie, according to Mearsheimer, do it because, 'they think they can get away with it'.<sup>154</sup> This illustrates the neoconservative belief in the broader public's inability to handle truth. Kristol, a great reader of Strauss' work, wrote that 'there are different kinds of truth for different kinds of people...the notion that there should be one set of truths available to everyone is a modern democratic fallacy'.<sup>155</sup>

It is easy to decipher why links between modern American foreign policy and the philosophy of Leo Strauss have been made. However, the influence of Strauss on American foreign policy appears to have been somewhat exaggerated if a deeper examination of Strauss' work is conducted. The idea of a unified and universal world under American leadership is actually in total opposition to the view of Strauss. He believes that the ideal of a universal state is a delusion, and that each nation should conduct its own foreign policy with the primary goal of securing its own needs. For Strauss, the foreign policy of any sensible nation is never devoted to the good of other nations. Instead, self preservation and survival are the primary tasks.

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<sup>154</sup> Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie* (2011).

<sup>155</sup> Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie* (2011), 63-64.

The only exception is when the good of another nation accidentally happens to benefit one's own nation.<sup>156</sup> The foreign policy of Strauss and the classics seeks neither hegemony over other nations nor benevolence towards them unless, accidentally, one or the other is a means to survival. The classical Straussian approach is one of ruthless selfishness for an elevated end: the noble and good life of the citizens.

In contrast, American neo-conservative policy centres on the principle that America has a moral obligation, 'not only to make the world safe for democracy but to make the world democratic'.<sup>157</sup> One must conclude then, as West does, that the neo-conservative approach as articulated by Kristol and Kagan is only partly comparable to that of Strauss.

In addition to Strauss, Francis Fukuyama is also linked to American neo-conservative thinking, particularly given his work, *The End of History and the Last Man*.<sup>158</sup> The 'end of History' is not meant to suggest the end of the occurrence of political and historical events but rather the end of History as a single coherent evolutionary process. Fukuyama ultimately suggests that liberal democracy has emerged as the final point of ideological evolution and form of human government, in the sense that a general consensus has emerged about liberal democracy as the only legitimate form of government. Liberal democracy, that is, has conquered hereditary monarchy, fascism and communism. Despite criticisms of liberal democracy, Fukuyama puts its problems down to individual states' incomplete

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<sup>156</sup> West, 'Leo Strauss and American Foreign Policy' (2008).

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992).

implementation of the values of liberty and equality. Any flaws in liberal democracy in this view are not due to the principles themselves, but to the implementation of those principles by individual political actors.

In essence, Fukuyama believes that liberal democracy is free of fundamental contradictions. This is not to say, however, that liberal democracy is free of injustice, but rather that there will be 'no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled'.<sup>159</sup> Both Hegel and Marx develop the idea that the evolution of human societies is not open ended. It is from their ideas that Fukuyama comes to the conclusion that the 'end of History' has arrived. Hegel and Marx believe the end of History will occur when mankind had achieved a form of society that 'satisfied its deepest and most fundamental longings'.<sup>160</sup>

This does not mean that all societies would come to the same conclusion about the longings of their people. Hegel for example believes the end of history will be the liberal state, while Marx believes it will be communist society. As Fukuyama suggests, however, once these longings have been acknowledged and satisfied, there would be 'an end of History', even if that meant different things as a result.

For Fukuyama in particular, liberal democracy remains the only coherent political aspiration that 'spans different regions, cultures around the globe'.<sup>161</sup> There are two main reasons for this conclusion. The first is the spreading of a 'free

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<sup>159</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), xii.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), xiii.

market' in the economic policies within different states. The second is the struggle for recognition inherent in human behaviour.

According to Hegel, human beings are like animals in that they have natural needs such as food, drink and shelter. However, humans differ fundamentally from animals in their desire to be 'recognised' by other humans. 'In particular,' writes Fukuyama, 'he wants to be recognised as a *human being* with a certain worth or dignity.'<sup>162</sup> This worth, as outlined by Hegel, is related fundamentally to his or her willingness to risk his own life in a struggle for prestige and recognition. Essentially this means, 'staking their life in a mortal battle'.<sup>163</sup>

Fukuyama believes that the desire for recognition is fundamental to the human character. Reason, in turn, is a second characteristic that enables a human to calculate the best way to get that recognition. Hegel best described this struggle in his description of the 'Lordship and bondage' relationship. The basic division of human society in this case is into masters and slaves, or those who are recognised or not recognised. The point Fukuyama ultimately makes as a result of his examination of the work of Hegel, is that the principles of democracy have essentially overcome the master/slave relationship by transforming the former slaves into their own masters. The relationship is then replaced by one of universal recognition where 'every citizen recognises the dignity and humanity of every other citizen'.<sup>164</sup> As a result, Fukuyama argues that 'no other arrangement of

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<sup>162</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), xvi.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), xviii.

human social institutions is better able to satisfy this longing, and hence, no further progressive Historical change is possible'.<sup>165</sup>

In addition, the acceptance of recognition as a founding principle restrains market-oriented states from becoming authoritarian. For Fukuyama, The social changes that accompany industrialisation, education, higher standards of living and equality, liberate the demand for recognition. Citizens can, under these circumstances, actively demand that democratic processes are put in place.

The increasing modernisation of economies around the world has ultimately meant that most states have come to resemble one another. To modernise they must unify nationally by means of a centralised state and also introduce an economically rational organisation of society. 'Such societies', argues Fukuyama, 'have become increasingly linked with one another through global markets and the spread of universal consumer culture'.<sup>166</sup> These economic transformations have directly led to the acknowledgement of the fundamental desires of human beings. Liberal democracy seems to satisfy both economic rationality and human desire.

The sense that human needs are in some way universal, or that all human beings share an essence, is comparable to the neo-conservative belief expressed in much American policy-making. In *After the Neocons*,<sup>167</sup> Fukuyama outlines the four main points that have summed up neo-conservative thought in American policy

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<sup>165</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), xviii.

<sup>166</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), xv.

<sup>167</sup> F. Fukuyama, *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads* (London: Profile Books, 2006).

since the 1940s. These are first, a concern with democracy and human rights, second, the idea that American power must be used for moral purposes, third, a scepticism about the ability of international law and institutions to solve security problems and fourth, disillusionment with liberalism's overly ambitious social engineering.

Fukuyama believes that the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq was a 'high-risk, high-reward strategy'<sup>168</sup> indicative of the neo-conservative idea of America as a benevolent hegemon acting in the interest of the global public good. He believes that although the Iraq war 'exposed the limits of benevolent hegemony,' sometimes even benevolent hegemons 'have to act ruthlessly'.<sup>169</sup> This is not to say that Fukuyama is not critical of the strategies adopted by the Bush administration. In fact, he believes American policy in the early 2000s lacked prudence and rationality. This is because he believes that countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan are likely to revert to former behaviours once the international community loses interest or moves on to the next crisis. Certainly we have seen in Iraq that America's deposing of Saddam Hussein did not immediately result in a peaceful, centralised, democratic state. Fukuyama believes America lacked the 'art of state building'<sup>170</sup> that is a necessary component of national power, equal to military force as a maintenance strategy of world order.

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<sup>168</sup> Fukuyama, *After the Neocons* (2006), 66.

<sup>169</sup> Fukuyama, *After the Neocons* (2006), 113.

<sup>170</sup> F. Fukuyama, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile, 2005), 164.



While Fukuyama regards liberal democracy as the most legitimate form of government, its legitimacy is 'conditioned on performance'.<sup>171</sup> For this, he suggests that a balance must be achieved between strong state action when necessary and the individual freedoms that are the basis of democratic legitimacy. The failure of the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq is due, Fukuyama believes, to a lack of political prudence. Certain institutions survive because they meet needs that are in some sense universal. However, while neo-conservative values promise to meet such needs, the lack of prudent politics undermines the sense of legitimacy they might have gained globally had American policy shown prudence and restraint.

#### A defence of neo-conservatism

Given the type of criticism Fukuyama presents, how do neo-conservative thinkers defend their position? In the wake of the Cold War in the 1990s, neo-conservative thought as outlined by Robert Kagan and William Kristol promulgated the idea that America had ultimately assumed an unprecedented position of power and influence in the world. Military might coupled with capitalism had presented America with the opportunity to assume the role of

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<sup>171</sup> F. Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2011), 482.

'protector' on a global scale. A humble view of America's power in this case 'will not suffice'.<sup>172</sup>

According to Kristol and Kagan, the 1990s represented a 'squandered opportunity'<sup>173</sup> of American power under the leadership of President Clinton. The dictatorships of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Slobodan Milošević in Serbia and the totalitarian regime in North Korea, for example, were sources of crisis not properly addressed. For Kagan and Kristol, the continuing survival of such regimes constituted a 'great failure in American foreign policy'.<sup>174</sup> Rather than seek to unseat dangerous dictatorships, Clinton instead began reducing the military budget in America. Kagan and Kristol believe that such a strategy meant that America, rather than confronting the moral challenge presented to it, instead attempted to 'do business with [its enemies] in pursuit of the illusion of 'stability''.<sup>175</sup> This era, for neo-conservatives, was a 'fleeting opportunity that was recklessly wasted'.<sup>176</sup>

For neo-conservative thinkers everything depended on what America decided to do next. This meant securing the national interest while also accepting the broader responsibility of global leader. Neo-conservatives believed it had fallen to the United States to create both a 'vital international economy, and an

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<sup>172</sup> W. Kristol & R. Kagan, 'National Interest and Global Responsibility' in I. Stelzer, (ed.), *Neo Conservatism* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), 61.

<sup>173</sup> Kristol & Kagan, 'National Interest and Global Responsibility' (2004), 59.

<sup>174</sup> Kristol & Kagan, 'National Interest and Global Responsibility' (2004), 58.

<sup>175</sup> Kristol & Kagan, 'National Interest and Global Responsibility' (2004), 59.

<sup>176</sup> Kristol & Kagan, 'National Interest and Global Responsibility' (2004), 61.

'international moral order'<sup>177</sup> that would together spread American political and economic principles for the greater good of the world.

The only way to ensure national security is to deter aggression in other parts of the world. This does not mean, however, that neo-conservatives believe America should 'root out evil'<sup>178</sup> wherever it appears. In fact, they are committed to a policy of using sound reasoning and prudence. Despite the fact that Fukuyama believes America failed to do this in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, neo-conservatives, on the contrary, believe America did exactly that. They argue that an appreciation of values and principles held by America is precisely the reason the United States will occasionally have to intervene elsewhere, even when they cannot prove that a vital national interest is at stake.

The question for neo-conservatives, as a result, is not whether the United States should intervene 'everywhere or nowhere'.<sup>179</sup> Instead, the question should be when they should 'lean forward, as it were, or sit back'.<sup>180</sup> Neo-conservatism seeks transformation rather than coexistence and acceptance. Neo-conservatives believe this is realistic because America has emerged as a moral power with great influence in a post cold war era that has become more 'just' as a result. The foundations of neo-conservatism are built on the belief that America has a fundamental global responsibility. Honour and greatness are understood as worthy goals.

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<sup>177</sup> Kristol & Kagan, 'National Interest and Global Responsibility' (2004), 62.

<sup>178</sup> Kristol & Kagan, 'National Interest and Global Responsibility' (2004), 64.

<sup>179</sup> Kristol & Kagan, 'National Interest and Global Responsibility' (2004), 65.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

In *Neo-Conservatism: Why We Need It*,<sup>181</sup> Douglas Murray describes how neo-conservatism was born in a climate where liberalism was believed to be undermining society and attacking American values. As Kristol famously remarked, a neo-conservative thinker is 'a liberal who has been mugged by reality'.<sup>182</sup> Murray believes that liberalism was the ultimate threat to American values, and that neo-conservatism as an alternative is 'practical, humane and truly liberal'.<sup>183</sup> In his description of life 'beyond liberalism', Murray essentially believes that it is man's 'capacity for justice' that makes democracy a possibility, but it is a 'tendency to injustice'<sup>184</sup> that makes it necessary.

Where liberal thinkers blame evil on external sources such as poverty, misfortune of upbringing and so on, neoconservatives believe evil is inherent in human beings. Critics might suggest this view is too pessimistic. However, Murray argues that neo-conservatism recognises 'the limits of our ambition, and aims for the achievement of that which can be achieved'.<sup>185</sup> In other words, neo-conservative thinkers believe they are dealing in the politics of reality since they clearly recognise the limits of state action.

What Kristol and Kagan provide for Murray is the securing of human values in a capitalist state. This serves to limit the domination of capitalism as a destructive force. In sum, Murray writes, neo-conservatism demonstrates that the

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<sup>181</sup> D. Murray, *Neoconservatism: Why we need it* (London: Social Affairs Unit, 2005).

<sup>182</sup> Murray, *Neoconservatism* (2005), 45.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Murray, *Neoconservatism* (2005), 46.

<sup>185</sup> Murray, *Neoconservatism* (2005), 47.

'right ideology had fought and won'.<sup>186</sup> This is despite the fact that the term 'neo-conservative' became an insult, particularly after the wars waged in Afghanistan and Iraq. Murray believes that by acting on Fukuyama's principle of 'the end of History', America represented human progress, dignity, free speech, equal rights and religious tolerance. Such beliefs are non-negotiable for supporters of neo-conservative thought since they represent the basic satisfaction of human needs.

The neo-conservative interpretation of American power has faced much criticism. However, in defence of this interpretation Robert Kagan argues that to the extent that America does believe in power, it also believes that it must be a means of 'advancing the principles of a liberal civilisation and a liberal world order.'<sup>187</sup> The steadfast neo-conservative belief in the correctness of their own moral reasoning appears to be their biggest asset. Neo-conservatives believe in the perfectibility of the world, on the one hand, but balance what might otherwise be dismissed as a utopian and unrealistic standpoint by the recognition that there are limits to state power, on the other.

#### The case against neo-conservatism

In his address to the United Nations in 2004, President Bush said, 'When it comes to the desire for liberty and justice, there is no clash of civilizations'.<sup>188</sup> This

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<sup>186</sup> Murray, *Neoconservatism* (2005), 92.

<sup>187</sup> R. Kagan, *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003), 41.

<sup>188</sup> G. Bush, 'Address to the United Nations' New York, September 21, 2004 <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.21.04.html> (Accessed on February 20, 2015).

directly contradicts the ideas of Samuel P. Huntington in his famous work, *The Clash of Civilisations and the remaking of World Order*.<sup>189</sup> With Asian civilisations expanding their power, Islam asserting its authority and the West reaffirming the values of its own cultures, according to Huntington, a process of modernisation that is distinct from Westernisation is occurring. This has produced neither a universal civilisation nor the Westernisation of non-Western states. He believes efforts made by Western powers to transform other societies have ultimately been unsuccessful. The West's universalist pretensions, as a result, have brought conflict rather than a peaceful world order based on a single set of universal values.

For Huntington, the survival of the West depends not on neo-conservative ideals surrounding the spreading of universal values, but on 'acceptance and cooperation'<sup>190</sup> to maintain the 'multi-civilisational'<sup>191</sup> character of global politics. Huntington acknowledges that sometimes, civilisational boundaries overlap, and are not clear cut. Civilisations can both resemble and differ from one another in varying degrees. However, he argues that civilisations are nonetheless meaningful entities and that 'while the lines between them are seldom sharp, they are real'.<sup>192</sup>

The key for Huntington is that different civilisations should not aim to transform one another in their own image, but should instead learn to live side by side. The alternative, he writes, is 'misunderstanding, tension, clash and

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<sup>189</sup> S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Touchstone, 1997).

<sup>190</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations* (1997), 21.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations* (1997), 43.

catastrophe'.<sup>193</sup> Understanding and cooperation are central to Huntington's view. He believes that attempting to transform other societies brings 'clashes of civilisations' that are ultimately the 'greatest threat to world peace'.<sup>194</sup>

In the course of his criticism of neo-conservative policies, Huntington suggests that the assumption that universal values espoused by the United States benefit the world as a whole fails accurately to reflect the nature of the real world in which people are committed to their own cultures, traditions, identities and institutions. As a result, he believes that 'America cannot become the world and still be America' and that, in turn, 'other peoples cannot become American and still be themselves'.<sup>195</sup> For example, the Christian religion that dominates American culture tends to lead Americans to see the world in terms of good and evil to a much greater extent than other cultures do. The result is that a clash occurs when American power is used to apply such a simplistic viewpoint on a global scale.

Ultimately, Huntington's criticism of neo-conservative American politics may be summarised as the failure to bridge a gap between the political ideals that inspire American politics, on the one hand, and the political reality that actually confronts America, on the other. Reality, Huntington writes, 'falls so far short of its ideals'<sup>196</sup> that American moralism leads the United States to destroy the freest institutions on earth. In other words, the belief that it is America's duty to

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<sup>193</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations* (1997), 321.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> S. Huntington, *Who are we? America's Great Debate* (London: Free Press, 2004), 369.

<sup>196</sup> S. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), 262.

transform other societies has the look and feel of imperialist expansion rather than the project of 'freeing' other societies.

Similarly, Patricia Owens warns of the dangers of American moralism. She believes that lying has become endemic to the practice of war, as became particularly evident during the war in Iraq. In her article, *Beyond Strauss, Lies and the War in Iraq*, Owens poses her critique of neo-conservatism through the ideas of Hannah Arendt. She begins by suggesting that neo-conservatism 'poses a powerful challenge to IR theory'<sup>197</sup> because of the view that realism is too risk-averse and impedes recognition of America as a power occupying the moral high ground. For neo-conservatives, realists have 'underestimated the wealth of moral righteousness'<sup>198</sup> that is necessary to sustaining American power gained since the Cold War.

Neo-conservatives speak of power *and* morality, of interests *and* values. For example, they embrace military action under the banner of moral reasoning. Neo-conservatives do share with realism the view that the world is essentially a dangerous place. However, for them the world is not divided into competing states with different values. Instead, 'the human condition is defined as a struggle between good and evil'.<sup>199</sup>

Owens argues that the classical realist critique of neo-conservatism is too pessimistic and cynical. Classical realists believe the ambition of moralism is

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<sup>197</sup> P. Owens, 'Beyond Strauss, Lies, and the War in Iraq: Hannah Arendt's Critique of neo-conservatism' in *Review of International Studies* Vol. 33, No. 2 (2007), 266.

<sup>198</sup> Owens, 'Beyond Strauss, Lies, and the War in Iraq' (2007), 265.

<sup>199</sup> Owens, 'Beyond Strauss, Lies, and the War in Iraq (2007), 266.



doomed to failure. Instead, Owens turns to the work of Hannah Arendt. The war in Iraq, she believes, demonstrates the truth of Arendt's view that 'all data that does not fit is denied or ignored'.<sup>200</sup> Arendt's work, according to Owens, suggests that the fatal flaw of neo-conservative ideology is its failure to understand the place of philosophy in the public realm. It fails, that is, to understand 'the relationship between political thought and practice, ideas and action'.<sup>201</sup> This relationship, for Arendt, involves the basic philosophical principles that underlie political decisions. For example, the idea of the perfectible nature of human beings is central to neo-conservative thinking. For Arendt, such an ideology serves to 'disarm politics'.<sup>202</sup> In other words, the strong neo-conservative bent towards an arrogantly moralistic view of power is dangerous precisely because it is so 'ideologically mandated'.<sup>203</sup> Whereas for Irving Kristol politics without an ideological underpinning is a disarmed politics, for Arendt it is the other way around.

Ultimately, Arendt believes that political action, and not philosophy, allows things to be viewed as they are, and then perhaps imagined as they might be. Arendt admitted that there will always be an inevitable clash between politics and factual truth. She admits that lying will always be regarded as justifiable in emergencies. However, she argues that the clash is 'made even worse by the ideological assumptions of neoconservative thought'.<sup>204</sup> An 'excess of moral

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<sup>200</sup> Owens, 'Beyond Strauss, Lies, and the War in Iraq (2007), 268.

<sup>201</sup> Owens, 'Beyond Strauss, Lies, and the War in Iraq (2007), 269.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Owens, 'Beyond Strauss, Lies, and the War in Iraq (2007), 282.

clarity',<sup>205</sup> for Owens, leads to foreign policy that depends on lying or denial of political facts. The outcome of Arendt's criticism of neo-conservative thought holds important implications for the place of ideas and ideology in political judgements and action.

The argument made by Arendt is that 'ideological thinking ruins all relationship with reality'.<sup>206</sup> In other words, she believes that ideology cannot substitute for reality. As Owens points out, the ideological thinker can, 'remove his mind from it (reality) but not his body'.<sup>207</sup> The War in Iraq is a prime example for Owens because it demonstrates that perhaps neo-conservatives are 'experts at selling war,' but they seem 'less adept at winning them'.<sup>208</sup>

### Reflections

Supporters of neo-conservative ideals argue that they reflect an action-based philosophy with the ability to adapt to different situations. They argue that they are resilient, influential, and morally good and that its strong philosophical roots give neo-conservative thought credence and credibility. Critics of neo-conservative thought suggest that neo-conservatism, at its roots, is based on a misunderstanding of the world. Universal values do not and cannot be applied everywhere. They believe America is using its power for imperialistic rather than moral reasons. In addition, the politics of lying has become synonymous with neo-

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<sup>205</sup> Owens, 'Beyond Strauss, Lies, and the War in Iraq (2007), 282.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Owens, 'Beyond Strauss, Lies, and the War in Iraq (2007), 283.

conservative thinking. Ultimately, critics suggest that transformation of other societies through military might is imperialistic, unrealistic and is blind to those who might view the world in a completely different way.

Whatever the case, the war waged in Afghanistan in 2001 was based on neo-conservative ideals dominant within American foreign policy at the time. It is against this background of neo-conservative thinking that we must understand the war in Afghanistan. We cannot fully understand the decision to go to war in Afghanistan without understanding the basic principles and ideas that shaped American foreign policy at that time. In particular, the women of Afghanistan were emphasised in the American rhetoric of the war. President Bush specifically spoke about an emancipation policy to be put in place for Afghan women. He references women specifically, and the brutalities they faced under the Taliban regime, several times. For example, he stated, 'Afghanistan's people have been brutalized -- many are starving and many have fled. Women are not allowed to attend school'.<sup>209</sup>

What were the results of this project? What, in particular, does feminist theory have to tell us about the emancipation project in Afghanistan? The next chapter will examine the recent war in Afghanistan as an illustration of the kind of problems evident when attempting not only to develop but also to apply a coherent and distinctively feminist theory of International Relations.

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<sup>209</sup> G. Bush, 'Address to the Nation' Washington, DC September 20, 2001 <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.20.01.html> (Accessed on February 24, 2015).

## Chapter Six

# Caught in the Crossfire: Women in Afghanistan

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The focus of this chapter will be on one particular and recent case, where the language of emancipation – and to some extent at least real efforts to achieve it – have been prominent. This is the campaign by the United States and its allies to secure greater rights for women in Afghanistan. Of course, in times of war or supreme emergency, a specific focus on the rights of women might be thought to be secondary. However, the recent (and in some contexts current) war in ‘Afghanistan would appear to constitute an exception to this rule’ at least according to declaratory policy and rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> At the start of the war, President Bush specifically highlighted the plight of Afghan women as part of the reasoning and justification for war. For example, in his address to the nation shortly after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 he spoke about the brutalisation of Afghan women that are starving, have fled their homes in fear and, ‘women are not allowed to attend school’.<sup>2</sup> This rhetoric from the United States and its allies has continued throughout the conflict. For example, in the United Kingdom, the House of Commons defence committee compiled a report between 2010 and 2012 that

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<sup>1</sup> D. Kandiyoti, ‘Old Dilemmas or New Challenges? The Politics of Gender and Reconstruction in Afghanistan’ *Development and Change*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2007), 169.

<sup>2</sup> G. Bush, ‘Address to the Nation’ Washington, DC September 20, 2001 <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.20.01.html> (Accessed on February 24, 2015).

specifically mentioned women throughout. The report cited women as a key component to achieving stability in Afghanistan. It reads, 'If Afghanistan is to become a stable and even partially functioning society, it is vital that women are involved in the process and feel they have a stake in it'.<sup>3</sup> These pronouncements, stemming from the Bush administration at the start of the conflict seemed to place women and their emancipation at the heart of an effort to modernise the country through war and then through reconstruction.<sup>4</sup>

One starting point, apart from the demands of a quick response to the attacks on September 11, was the considerable evidence pointing to the plight of women across Afghanistan. In February 1995, the Taliban took control of nine of Afghanistan's thirty provinces and became the dominant group. Ahmed Rashid, in his book, *Taliban*<sup>5</sup> writes about his interview with former head of the religious police for the Taliban, Maulvi Qalamuddin. He explains how the name of his interviewee alone spread fear across Kabul and 'he had just issued new regulations which banned women from wearing high heels, making a noise with their shoes while they walked or wearing make-up'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Operations in Afghanistan: Fourth Report of Session 2010-12' [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk), <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmdfence/554/55402.htm> July 6, 2011 (Accessed on 1 August 2011).

<sup>4</sup> L. Marso, 'Feminism and the Complications of Freeing the Women of Afghanistan and Iraq' in M. Ferguson & L. Marso (eds.), *W Stands for Women: How the George W. Bush Presidency Shaped a New Politics of Gender* (London: Duke University Press, 2007) p.221-222.

<sup>5</sup> A. Rashid, *Taliban* (London: Yale Nota Bene, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Rashid, *Taliban* (2001), 105.

Restrictions placed on women by the Taliban affected everyday freedoms. Women were not allowed to ride on a bicycle or motorbike, they were not allowed to speak to any man who was not a close relative, they weren't permitted to speak, and definitely not laugh loud enough for a stranger to hear. All windows in homes were painted so that outsiders could not look in at the women inside. This list seemed endless. It continued, for instance, to state that music was banned completely, as were movies and television. Adulterers were stoned. Those with non-Islamic names were forced to change them to Islamic ones. Haircuts, clothing and general aspects of appearance were also regimented.

These strict restrictions on everyday freedoms were soon highlighted in the immediate responses to 9/11. Terrorist organisations and their affiliation with governing bodies were flagged up as a global threat and, if not dealt with, would continue to abuse human rights on a wider and continuously growing scale. It was seen as the West's duty to intervene in Afghanistan, and this is exactly what America and its allies did.

This chapter aims to provide first, an exploration of the ways in which Afghanistan's history and culture have affected the outcomes of the recent war. This is especially given what is considered by many academic thinkers to be a fundamental misunderstanding of Afghanistan's culture and historical context on the behalf of American politics. Second, it will argue that American policies concerning women in Afghanistan have ultimately led to a backlash in the treatment of its women. Third, it will consider the literature surrounding the ways in which American ultimately failed in Afghanistan. This will provide an argument

in defence of more contextual thinking in international foreign policy. In particular, a focus on a strategy developed by Abdul Haq will provide an example of one of the many lost opportunities American policy makers failed to see in the lead up, and during the war. Haq was a Pashtun mujahedeen commander. He fought against the USSR during the Soviet-Afghan War and later went on to use his influence gained during the conflict to introduce a strategy for abolishing the Taliban. He was executed by the Taliban in October 2001 while trying to establish an uprising against the Taliban in the wake of the September 11th attacks. Haq provides a useful example to argue that America may have lost an opportunity for achieving longer lasting successes in Afghanistan by ignoring his plan and not pursuing alternative strategies.

Finally, this chapter will consider these events in terms of feminist international theory, in order to assess whether it can provide a more rounded theory of International Relations. In particular, it will consider whether the theories presented by Enloe, Elshtain, Sylvester and some non-Western theorists provide a viable theory of International Relations. It will ultimately suggest that universal values, which form the basic assumptions on which both Enloe and Elshtain work, fail to comprehend and fully understand different contexts in foreign cultures. Looking at whether feminist theories have so far provided a viable alternative to International Relations theory does not however, necessarily mean a distinctively feminist theory should be applied. This is because the fundamental issues concerning universal rights and pluralist thinking cut across gender lines. What is important in terms of this chapter, however, is the idea that if

we are to work within the confines of the reality of political situations, it is vital to understand different cultures, traditions, institutions and contexts, especially as these concern different women.

The particular focus on Afghanistan's women at the start of the war in 2001 provides an illustration of how a distinctively feminist International Relations theory could be applied. This chapter argues that a universally applicable political theory in such cases cannot be distinctively feminist as the problems that occur ultimately cut across gender lines.

#### Historical context

Afghanistan borders fourteen countries and has a vast and varied environment which includes hot summers and cruel, cold winters, mountains and plains, rural and urban areas, as well as numerous tribal and cultural differences that often extend across borders. The Hindu Kush rises above the plains and valleys of Afghanistan and these mountains have 'looked down upon peaceful farmers and wandering pastoralists, upon the armies of Alexander the Great and Chingiz-Khan, upon traders and pilgrims.'<sup>7</sup> In recent years Afghanistan has seen its military history come full circle when American fighter planes flew into action on either side of the Hindu Kush. Afghanistan's status has developed from being a coveted prize of empires past, to buffer state, to Soviet invasion, to civil war, to terrorist network hideout.

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<sup>7</sup> W. Willem, *The Afghans* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 1.



Afghanistan's history and culture have shaped the country we see today. Despite centuries of invasion, and a central position in Asia, that has made it a 'melting pot' of cultural influences, Afghanistan has remained its own country. It has been argued that in large part, the failures of the recent war in Afghanistan have been due to a fundamental misunderstanding of its rich culture and history. This is particularly relevant in connection with the United States' emancipatory policy aimed at Afghan women, which has misunderstood the varied nature of Afghanistan's tribal system, as well as the entrenched traditional values within the context of Afghanistan. More generally, invaders have failed to appreciate three sources of their set-backs, viz: the history of rule in Afghanistan, the history of intervention, and the importance of ethnic and tribal diversity. Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, for example, believe the recent war in Iraq has seen a surprising level of what they call 'historical illiteracy'.<sup>8</sup> They highlight the recent war in Iraq as 'only the latest in a long line of foreign military interventions,'<sup>9</sup> none of which, they argue, have been successful. Afghanistan has often been a 'buffer state' between Soviet and British empires, and so the country has seen multiple interventions from the two countries. The first Soviet intervention came in 1929. The second Soviet invasion took place between 1979 and 1989 and eventually led to the civil war that saw the Taliban gain control over the majority of Afghanistan. The British have invaded on three separate occasions. The first Anglo-Afghan war occurred

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<sup>8</sup> T. Bird & A. Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

between 1838 and 1842, the second between 1878 and 1880 and the third ended in 1919 when Afghanistan was officially declared an independent state.

Each of these invasions has shaped Afghanistan's history. The legacy of their failures in the region alone provides Afghanistan with a reputation for a severely challenging environment for outside intervention. What Bird and Marshall believe these interventions show is Afghanistan's, 'long political economic record of profound ungovernability'.<sup>10</sup> They believe these interventions demonstrate the extent of the challenge of shaping the will of the Afghan people.

In addition, it is important to remember that Afghanistan has no previous history of central government because of the nature of its disparate provinces and ethnic divisions. The closest Afghanistan came to becoming a centralised state before the recent invasion by the United States into Afghanistan was under Amir Abdur Rahman who, from 1881, took it as his personal mission to reunite and modernise Afghanistan and entrench the power of the royal family of which he was part.

Afghanistan had originally been founded under the Durrani dynasty, but after the death of its founder, civil war and outside intervention made it extremely difficult to maintain that rule. Amir Abdur Rahman, also known as 'iron Amir' undertook his mission through military reform and brutal repression. Those who resisted him were subject to violent punishments. His regime was totalitarian and an extreme example of violent social engineering. Despite his efforts, there were severe limitations to his modernisation project. This was largely because the

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<sup>10</sup> Bird & Marshall, *Afghanistan* (2011), 11.

country remained poor. In addition, although he allowed roads to be built, he banned external train lines from crossing into his territory. It was not until the 1960s when the USSR expanded the roads in Afghanistan, that the Central and Northern parts of the country were connected by the Salang road tunnel.

The borders of Afghanistan were finalised by the British towards the end of 'iron Amir's' rule. It is often suggested that these borders served to weaken an already challenged central government. In fact, the establishment of the Durand line, which cut the Pashtun tribes in half over state lines between what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan, has directly contributed to Afghanistan's problems after September 2001. It has come to dominate Afghan relations with Pakistan, which remains a central factor in the current intervention.

Understanding the tribal nature of Afghanistan's people is vital to understanding the nation as a whole. The Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group, but even they are sub-divided into around sixty major tribes. This is further sub-divided down to village level. The tribal divisions do not just tell us about the different kinds of people in Afghanistan, but also about Afghanistan's traditional economy. For example, in a strategy called *quam*, local communities and families loan each other money to create businesses. The marrying off of daughters to strategic allies for example, was a formal business agreement. *Quam* involves networks of informal clusters of people that provide a social security net for many Afghan people.

The history of Afghanistan's tribes is also vital to understanding internal power shifts, economies and the limitations of central government when dealing

with such diversity. In sum, economic weakness, similar to the developmental problems common to other aid dependent states, a long history of failed economic modernisation, low life expectancy and high infant mortality, a history of intervention, the harsh terrain and its strategic placement as a transport corridor all contribute to the complex web of Afghanistan's history and culture that the United States failed to consider in any real depth when invading in 2001.

The Soviet intervention in 1979 could perhaps have provided many lessons to the United States in the context of its invasion into Afghanistan. In a conflict that would eventually lead to the Taliban taking control in Afghanistan, there are several similarities that can be drawn from the Soviet war. The main similarity, (although it is one that is often mistaken), is that both were wars of counter insurgency. However, the two were also projects of social engineering, undertaken with a particular focus on women as a tool of social transformation. In addition, there was an unanticipated difficulty of overcoming what was perceived as a weak opposition, and third, there was and has been the unexpected length and cost of both wars.

One of the main aims of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, as mentioned above, was to effect a social transformation. This meant providing land, food for the hungry and free education for all. Perhaps most striking for the purposes of this thesis is that for the first time in Afghanistan's history, women were to be given the right to education. The Soviet Union put in place an ambitious project to ensure women owned their own bodies. This meant they could, in theory, marry who they liked and were free to move around whenever and

wherever they liked. The Communists, according to Roderic Braithwaite in *Afghansty*,<sup>11</sup> knew such radical ideas would not necessarily be welcomed by the conservative people of Afghanistan but they attempted it anyway. The Soviet leadership expected resistance, but were prepared to act ruthlessly to 'push it down'.<sup>12</sup>

Gregory Massell in, *The Surrogate Proletariat*<sup>13</sup> argues that the use of women within the strategy of the Soviet invasion has long been a tool used to incite social change. In Afghanistan, honour plays a central role in the traditional culture of its people, and as Gilles Dorrnsoro points out, 'the honour of the people of Afghanistan consists in the honour of its women'.<sup>14</sup> With women at the heart of Afghanistan's culture, it is easy to see why the Soviet Union utilised women in an attempt to transform Afghan society.

History has often seen women used to induce revolution and social transformation. Women are often regarded as the oppressed in traditional and undeveloped societies and therefore seen as an obstacle to the determined and resolute revolutionary policies coming from more modern and developed societies. An earlier example is that of USSR policy in central Asia. Gregory Massell ascribes just this notion as the background of Soviet policy in Central Asia throughout the

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<sup>11</sup> R. Braithwaite, *Afghansty: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-89* (London: Profile Books, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Braithwaite, *Afghansty* (2011), 6.

<sup>13</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and the Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> G. Dorrnsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

1920s. He argues that the Soviet approach rested on the belief that the key to undermining traditional social order was in 'the destruction of traditional family structures and that the breakdown of the kinship system itself could most speedily be achieved through the mobilisation of its women'.<sup>15</sup>

Massell believes, as a result, that the Soviet war in Afghanistan partially involved confrontation with revolutionary men, but also involved the transformation of the lives of Afghan women as a key strategy. He suggests that the strategy implemented by the Soviet Union was based on two assumptions. The first is that the key to undermining the traditional social order was 'the destruction of traditional family structures'.<sup>16</sup> The second assumption was that the breakdown of family structures could be most effectively achieved 'through the mobilisation of [Afghan] women'.<sup>17</sup>

This approach explicitly stipulated that in Muslim societies women could be assumed to be 'the lowest of the low'.<sup>18</sup> As a rule, it could be assumed that women were almost entirely 'segregated, exploited, degraded, and constrained'.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately Massell believes that Muslim women 'came to constitute, in Soviet political imagination, a structural weak point in the traditional order'.<sup>20</sup> In effect,

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<sup>15</sup> Dorransoro, *Revolution Unending* (2005).

<sup>16</sup> Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat* (1974), xxii.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat* (1974), xxiii.

women became a surrogate proletariat where 'no proletariat in the real Marxist sense existed'.<sup>21</sup>

The United States' invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 can be seen as implementing a similar strategy. However, the social transformation of the lives of women has been essential to both approaches. Again we might consider the basic assumptions made about all Muslim women to involve a fundamental misunderstanding of Islam. The diversity of culture within Afghanistan as briefly highlighted here can tell us that not all Muslim communities work in the same ways. Ahmed Rashid in *Taliban*,<sup>22</sup> is keen to emphasise the importance of cultural diversity in Afghanistan between both tribes and provinces. For example, he describes how the Pashtuns in the East were formerly proud to send their girls to school but how many of the villages in the South were far more conservative and girls there rarely received an education.

With the strategy of a social transformation of the lives of Afghan women in place, the Soviet leadership believed it would not take long for a complete social transformation of the entire society to be achieved. With this goal in mind, in 1979 Soviet forces installed a new leader after killing King Hafizullah Amin. Revolution had meant the countryside was beyond control, but with the installation of one hundred thousand Soviet forces the process of integrating the country into the Soviet bloc gathered momentum. Opinion was divided about the prospect of Soviet success at the time. Some critics felt the Soviet army would fail and that armed

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<sup>21</sup> Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat* (1974), xxiii.

<sup>22</sup> Rashid, *Taliban* (2001).

Afghans could overcome their invaders in a way similar to that by which they had wiped out British expeditionary forces in 1842. The Soviet leadership, however, felt the Soviet Union would succeed in defeating the rebels as in Central Asia in the 1920's, when the Basmachis were overcome by the Red Army.

However, resistance from within Afghanistan did not falter. Despite the perceived weakness of opposition from Afghans (they were poorly armed, deeply divided into competing groups and had no formal style of opposing the Soviet Union), the Soviet Union was never able to achieve the goals of social transformation and stability. This appears, so far, to be the case once again for American policy in Afghanistan. Despite deposing the Taliban and introducing an interim central government led by Hamid Karzai, insurgencies from opposition forces did not cease. Indeed, they are still continuing today.

This also means, for both the Soviet Union during the 1980s and the United States today, that the wars were far longer and far more costly than anticipated. As the war became increasingly costly for the USSR, the government decided to withdraw in 1986. It was the first step in the abandonment of an empire that had become too expensive to keep. In addition, the increasing number of 'pointless' deaths of Soviet troops had created a hostile public opinion. Again, similarities can be drawn with the recent war in Afghanistan. Despite the fact that Washington has ultimately not succeeded in gaining stability in Afghanistan, there has been a strong rhetoric of withdrawal and reduction of troops.

After the Soviet army retreated, a divided Afghanistan erupted into civil war. In 1994 the Taliban began to alter the political balance in Afghanistan,



supported in part by the population and in part by substantial assistance from Pakistan. The Taliban conquered the southern region of Afghanistan over just a few months. The capture of Herat in 1995 and Kabul in 1996 marked the point when the Taliban were considered to have taken control of Afghanistan. They completed their conquest of the North during the summer of 1998. As a result, they controlled ninety per cent of the Afghan population. In addition, al-Qaeda founded a base there supported by the Taliban.

It is now widely known that the Taliban made use of Islamic rhetoric to bring Afghanistan under its control by introducing strict edicts that restricted the lives of the people in a profound way, particularly the lives of its women. It is, in part at least, because of these grave human rights violations that Afghanistan became a catalyst for what Amalendu Misra calls 'the last great ideological war of the twentieth century'.<sup>23</sup>

Misra believes that there are a number of reasons, aside from strict Islamic beliefs, that the Taliban decided to place particular focus on the lives of Afghan women as a tool for reordering Afghanistan. She argues that although Taliban pronouncements and rules were 'couched in Islamic rhetoric',<sup>24</sup> Taliban reasoning did not consist simply of religious beliefs. Instead, the Taliban believed they could utilise religious rhetoric to achieve their goals of recruiting and keeping fighters for their cause, which was to bring Afghanistan back to a more traditional society, and ultimately establish the right to non-negotiable values they felt were at risk

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<sup>23</sup> A. Misra, *Afghanistan: The Labyrinth of Violence* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Misra, *Afghanistan* (2004), 73-74.

from Westernisation. The role of women played a central part in achieving these goals. The question here is, why was so much focus placed on women by the Taliban?

'It is an established truth,' Misra writes, 'that Afghanistan is a "man's country"'.<sup>25</sup> The idea of male superiority has both tribal and religious origins. The Taliban utilised both religion and the promotion of pre-modern tribal tradition and culture to gain control over Afghanistan and its people. The coercive measures undertaken by the Taliban, which reduced women to such a point that they were no longer even considered citizens, were to some extent designed to tap into Afghan perceptions about their own culture and reinforce a tribal patriarchal order. In addition, the Qur'an provided religious reasoning for their severe injunctions, particularly those placed on women, given it explicitly presents an image of a male dominated society where women play a secondary role.

The Taliban continued to direct many of their edicts towards women throughout their time in control. They were particularly cruel to women in the main cities. This is because rural and tribal women 'conformed to the pre-modern moral order'.<sup>26</sup> Since the Taliban felt that Afghanistan's traditional values were under attack by modernity, strict codes for women were 'reinvented in harsher terms'<sup>27</sup> to preserve the values they felt were under attack from the West. For example, the concept of honour is particularly central to Afghan culture. At the centre of the image of honour are Afghan women, and so from this perspective

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<sup>25</sup> Misra, *Afghanistan* (2004), 72.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

they believed they were protecting women's honour from the international community. Given that the honour of Afghanistan is often viewed as the honour of its women, there is clearly a fundamental difference, as Misra writes, between Western notions of the right to a feminine identity negotiable on women's own terms and the Islamic view of feminine identity as 'non-negotiable'.<sup>28</sup>

Misra adds that the Taliban's interpretation of the role of women has both a 'psychological and a historical explanation'.<sup>29</sup> This does not just include interpretation of religious texts but also the more general aim of using the image of women to bring the people of Afghanistan at large under Taliban control and focus the men on fighting for the Taliban cause. Military success for the Taliban is based on a sense of male brotherhood, as working to protect their women. 'Gender puritanism,' Misra suggests, 'was one way of keeping the fighters strictly focused on their goal of military success'.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Melanie Hoewer notes that 'many nationalisms use naturalized images: men as warriors and women as reproducers of the national collective,'<sup>31</sup> and this is what the Taliban aimed to do in Afghanistan.

In addition, the image of traditional Afghan women was utilised to combat modernity. This tactic was particularly successful in rural areas and with those who had grown up in refugee camps without any of the luxuries of the modern world. Indoctrination into radical Islam has been greatly facilitated by the

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<sup>28</sup> Misra, *Afghanistan* (2004), 73.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> M. Hoewer, 'reframing Nationalisms and Addressing gender-based Violence in Societies in Transition' in *Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2015), 221.

psychological and emotional scars incurred by many Taliban fighters during their time as refugees, which has produced a 'deep-seated contempt for a normal lifestyle associated with an urban peaceful existence amidst modernity'.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Yukitoshi Matsumoto suggests that such negativity towards modernity belies 'a deep and growing frustration with the lack of progress.'<sup>33</sup> The failed promise of development, he argues, has as a result contributed to growing contempt towards modernity.

This disdain for modernity also helped to win over those within rural communities who had previously been considered outcasts by those enjoying a modern existence. For example, the Persian speaking urban elites who dominated the major cities were Pashtun. Throughout Afghanistan's recent history these urban elites showed disdain towards the rural masses. During the communist era, the elites even went so far as to 'direct [their] energy to persecuting the rural majority'.<sup>34</sup>

As a result, it is easy to see why the Taliban, who used tribal practices to consolidate their position, came to power. The image of women was central to their vision because the traditional Afghan woman symbolised the kind of community they wanted to build. They then used the Qur'an to justify their actions within a country that has deep seated religious beliefs.

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<sup>32</sup> Misra, *Afghanistan* (2004), 74.

<sup>33</sup> Y. Matsumoto, 'Young Afghans in 'transition': towards Afghanistan, exit or violence?' in *Conflict, Security & development*, Vol. 11, No.5 (2011), 569.

<sup>34</sup> Misra, *Afghanistan* (2004), 74.

Ultimately, given the brief history of conflict in Afghanistan above, it can be argued that the United States failed to learn the lessons taught by Afghanistan's history as well as by the mistakes of their predecessors. It is often argued by many feminist International Relations theorists that context is the key to international cooperation. A fundamental misunderstanding of Afghanistan's history and culture on the part of the United States and its allies, then, can be blamed for many of the failures in the recent war. The question at this point is whether the United States could have made use of alternative strategies to help achieve its goals.

#### A lost opportunity? How the West lost its way

The collapse of the Taliban was initially seen as inaugurating a new era for Afghanistan. The virtues of tolerance, peace, individuality, respect and justice were to be retrieved from the Afghanistan the Taliban had attempted to eradicate. From this point of view, the achievement of lasting peace and stabilisation of Afghanistan's internal relations was contingent upon the revitalisation of Afghan society with the help of the United States and its allies. International assistance would be needed to provide help with re-educating girls after Taliban rule, with the rebuilding of infrastructure, with the promotion of a healthy legal system as well as with providing the help refugees needed to return home.

However, what has now become widely accepted is that the failure of the United States in Afghanistan from the very start of the war has contributed to the continued struggle in Afghanistan today. This failure, and its continuing impact on Afghanistan we see today, has several aspects. They include the absence of an

internal solution (i.e. the external introduction of Afghan national forces), a focus on military security at the expense of governance, the introduction of Hamid Karzai as leader of Afghanistan, attempts to centralise a predominantly tribal society, relations with Pakistan and the decision to include warlords as a central bargaining tool for central government.

The introduction of the Afghan National Forces represents a shift in America's strategy in Afghanistan. America moved away from an emphasis on protecting the population and instead, 'to strengthening and advising the Afghan forces so they can fight their own war'.<sup>35</sup> Bing West argues that one of the fundamental failures of this strategy lies in the failure to incorporate Pashtuns, who make up the majority of Afghans, into the force. He also believes the strategy is an external, Western solution attempting to be imposed upon a traditional society and is therefore ill suited to the context and culture of Afghanistan.

The focus placed on military strategy and security has also been viewed by many as a substitute for genuine governance. The placing of Hamid Karzai as leader of the Afghan Government, for example, represents one of the many disillusionments the Afghan people have concerning the United States' invasion. Karzai, for example, was seen as 'chosen' by the United States as a 'puppet' by which to pursue America's own interests. Similarly, there was intense opposition to attempts made by the United States to centralise a tribal nation, as well as to

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<sup>35</sup> B. West, *The Wrong War: Grit, Strategy, and the Way out of Afghanistan* (New York: Random House, 2012), xxiii.

United States' attempts to include local warlords in the negotiations about the creation of a central government.

Yury Bosin and Mark Peceny in *Winning with the Warlords*<sup>36</sup> point out that the United States achieved its initial victory over the Taliban by 'striking bargains with local warlords throughout Afghanistan'.<sup>37</sup> It was agreed that in return for their support of the Karzai government, the United States would not disrupt the control of the warlords over local districts. Bosin and Peceny argue that this strategy fuelled political fragmentation and corruption and actually reduced the power of central government. As a result of cooperation with the Northern Alliance of warlords, 'Afghanistan will continue to be left with a corrupt, incapable, and illegitimate political order and underdeveloped economy'.<sup>38</sup>

Strategies such as these eventually led the United States to pursue a more limited and pragmatic engagement, aimed at 'expediting a hasty exit'.<sup>39</sup> Abdul Haq foresaw all of these issues and devised an alternative plan at the very early stages of the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. His plan provided an example of the alternative ways in which the United States and its allies could have approached the war in Afghanistan. What was Haq's plan and how might it have changed the course of the recent war?

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<sup>36</sup> Y. Bosin & M. Peceny, 'Winning with Warlords in Afghanistan' in *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol. 22, No. 4 (2011).

<sup>37</sup> Bosin & Peceny, 'Winning with Warlords in Afghanistan' (2011), 604.

<sup>38</sup> Bosin & Peceny, 'Winning with Warlords in Afghanistan' (2011), 616.

<sup>39</sup> J. Goodhand, & M. Sedra, 'Rethinking Liberal Peacebuilding, Statebuilding and Transition in Afghanistan: An Introduction' in *Central Asian Survey* Vol. 32, No. 3 (2013), 239.

Abdul Haq was arguably the most significant Pashtun commander to fight the Soviet regime during the 1980s. During the 1990s he developed a plan to defeat the Taliban. He realised that most members of the Taliban were not in fact extremists, but had simply become 'fed up' with fighting the mujahedeen and saw the Taliban as a stabilising force. His plan was based on cross tribal agreements. Where the United States aimed to rid Afghanistan of the top Taliban commanders, Haq aimed to work from the bottom up by persuading the 'moderates' who had become members of the Taliban to join the other side.

Haq wanted to engage the men embedded in the Taliban regime at the very bottom. He aimed to create trust of 'the other side' and recognised that the key to overthrowing the Taliban regime was to unify the various groups within Afghanistan. In addition, Haq wanted to bring back the ex-King Zahir Shah as a symbolic figurehead to unify the country and uphold ideas of nationhood and history in line with the inherent conservatism of the Afghan people.

Haq had warned that a violent bombing campaign would be counterproductive. He argued that it would only serve to entrench people within the Taliban against what would be perceived as 'Western might' imposing Western values on their country. He believed such an aggressive campaign would produce this result overnight, leading moderates who could have been persuaded to scatter. Others would perhaps become even more extreme, leading them to fight with the Taliban against 'infidel foreigners'.<sup>40</sup> Haq argued, finally, that the strategy of the

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<sup>40</sup> L. Morgan Edwards, 'How the West Lost its opportunity for reconciliation in Afghanistan' in *Asian Affairs* Vol. XLIII, No. III (2012), 444.



United States would increase the power of warlords and lead to a takeover of Kabul by the Northern Alliance.

Haq gained an increasing amount of support within Afghanistan, and even in the White House (particularly that of the Ritchie brothers who campaigned to put Haq's plan in place). But his advice was ultimately ignored and during the 2002 emergency Loya Jirga made a deal with the Northern Alliance and relied heavily on the unstable support of Pakistan. Haq was eventually killed by members of the Taliban and his plan all but forgotten. Lucy Morgan Edwards in *the Afghan Solution*<sup>41</sup> suggests that Abdul Haq ultimately had the potential to provide, 'the most pragmatic and least costly means of stabilising the situation'.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the fact that Haq's plan was not implemented by the United States, Edwards believes it is a plan that can still have a great effect on stabilising Afghanistan. When President Obama took over the Oval office in 2009 he did attempt to persuade the Taliban into negotiations. However, he did this at the same time as he introduced a 'surge' of military troops into the country. This, according to Edwards, demonstrated 'incomprehension about the nature of Afghan notions of honour and pride.'<sup>43</sup> This 'surge' was widely perceived in Afghanistan as a continuation of the United States use of military might. The need to focus on an internal, contextualised solution was, and is, still being ignored.

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<sup>41</sup> Morgan Edwards, 'How the West Lost its opportunity for reconciliation in Afghanistan' (2012).

<sup>42</sup> Morgan Edwards, 'How the West Lost its opportunity for reconciliation in Afghanistan' (2012). 300.

<sup>43</sup> Morgan Edwards, 'How the West Lost its opportunity for reconciliation in Afghanistan' (2012). 301.

Haq's plan not only demonstrates an alternative strategy for keeping the Taliban from ruling Afghanistan but also provides insight into the broader theme of the vital standpoint of contextual thinking in International Relations. Contextual thinking can be seen in much feminist thinking in International Relations, particularly among non-Western feminists. Lina Abirafeh, for example, believes one of the central failures of American strategy in Afghanistan is on the excessive emphasis on women. She argues that contextualised analysis of gender relations contributes to greater relevance in gender focused interventions and that gender initiatives that fail to engage men are unlikely to achieve gender equality. The particular focus on women in Afghanistan, she believes, had led to a neglect of Afghan men, and therefore to an increase in violence against women.<sup>44</sup> In the case of Afghanistan in particular, Abirafeh writes that 'men argued repeatedly that women were prioritised through international influence'.<sup>45</sup> Women who were interviewed on the subject, as Abirafeh notes, were also inclined to agree that men had been neglected.

Abirafeh argues that women's preference for their own traditional structure was largely ignored by members of the international community in its engagement with Afghanistan. As a result, she argues that this actually fuelled the perception that gender was a negative word that denotes women's power over men. Men perceived a challenge to their institutionalised patriarchy. As a result, there has been a resurgence of violence against women in Afghanistan. For example,

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<sup>44</sup> L. Abirafeh, 'An Opportunity Lost? Engaging Men in Gendered Intervention: Voices from Afghanistan' in *Journal of Peace Building and Development* Vol. 3, No. 3 (2007).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

according to a report by *Global Rights* in 2008, 87.2 percent of Afghan women experienced at least one form of domestic violence; including physical, sexual, or psychological violence.<sup>46</sup>

If the United States and its allies had taken Afghanistan's history into account more carefully, they might have seen that the role of both men and women throughout the country's history is one of co-existence and a collective sense of identity.<sup>47</sup> Such a view actually cuts across gender lines and creates a group identity regardless of gender. Ultimately, Abirafeh argues that 'gender equality is destined to fail unless men's lives are bettered along with women's lives'.<sup>48</sup> She goes on to argue that the intervention strategy attempted to change the way Afghan men think – and failed. This has caused a backlash against women. Hence, she writes, 'They have led one woman to a comfortable life and have led thousands of them to disaster'.<sup>49</sup>

If, as Abirafeh suggests, a backlash has occurred against the women in Afghanistan as a direct result of the emancipatory policy put in place by the United States at the start of the war, what does this backlash look like? What were the promises made to the women of Afghanistan at the start of the war, and what have been the results of those promises? What can feminist International Relations theory tell us about such strategies used in war?

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<sup>46</sup> D. Nijhowne & L. Oates, 'Living with Violence: A National Report on Domestic Abuse in Afghanistan' in *Global Rights* (2008).

<sup>47</sup> Abirafeh, 'An Opportunity Lost?' (2007), 83.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Abirafeh, 'An Opportunity Lost?' (2007), 84.

### Afghan women: A backlash?

The emancipatory policy put in place at the start of the war in Afghanistan has been maintained, at least in rhetoric, throughout the conflict. In 2009 for example, despite the fact that America supported President Karzai's plan to 'open the door' to Taliban militants and engage with them in discussion, the United States Secretary of State at the time, Hilary Clinton, made it clear that those discussions came with certain conditions. These conditions explicitly stated that a respect for the rights of Afghan women must be maintained. With Afghan civilian deaths at an all time high,<sup>50</sup> and Afghanistan currently ranked as the one hundred and forty-sixth worst place to be a mother in the world,<sup>51</sup> has the invasion in Afghanistan made any gains for women's rights, or as Abirafeh suggests, has it ultimately caused a backlash?

Afghanistan was promised by the United States, its allies and the United Nations international community, that reconstruction would involve creating a centralised, democratised political system, an economy whereby the people of Afghanistan could feed themselves, and significant change for individuals' lives. Women were made specific promises, including the right to education, work, and access to a vastly improved and readily available healthcare system, including antenatal support and maternity hospitals. Promises were made to all citizens

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<sup>50</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, *'Afghanistan Annual Report 2014 Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: February 2015'* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Ihsanullah Mahjoor and Associated Press 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Save the Children, *State of the Worlds Mothers, 2014: Saving Mothers and Children in Humanitarian Crisis*, [http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/SOWM\\_2014.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/SOWM_2014.PDF) (Accessed on March 4, 2015).

within Afghanistan. As an ICG (International Crisis Group) briefing on Afghanistan outlined, promises made by the United Nations at the start of the conflict included promises to create a system of registration that involved a database of locations and skills of all people, accompanied by vocational training for all those engaged in the building trade in particular in order to create jobs and rebuild cities and towns since 'core infrastructure – roads, airports, power, hospitals, schools, irrigation and water supply have been destroyed on a massive scale'.<sup>52</sup>

There is some evidence that the lives of women within Afghan society have improved after the removal of the Taliban from power. A report on operations in Afghanistan provided by the House of Commons defence committee in the United Kingdom highlighted attainments in both the political sphere and in issues of health. From 2010, for example, it was estimated that 5.7 million children have been attending school on a regular basis and that 2.1 million of those were female. A quarter of the seats in the national assembly are held by women (sixty eight of two hundred and forty-nine seats are reserved for women in the lower house and twenty-three out of two hundred and three in the upper house). This even includes one woman who won an unreserved seat in the lower house in 2010. A quarter of all births are now supervised by skilled midwives or birth attendants, which is up thirteen per cent compared to 2005 and compared to almost no supervised births under the Taliban regime.<sup>53</sup> In fact, over six hundred midwives in 2007 alone were

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<sup>52</sup> CARE International in Afghanistan, 'Rebuilding Afghanistan: A Little Less Talk, A Lot More Action' *CARE* (2002).

<sup>53</sup> All figures in paragraph are from the following: House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Operations in Afghanistan' [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk),

trained and deployed to every area of Afghanistan.<sup>54</sup> Health care has seen signs of progress in Afghanistan for the population as a whole. For instance, eighty three per cent of all people in Afghanistan, as of 2008, actually had access to medical facilities. This is compared to eight percent in 2001, and nine per cent in 2004. Seventy six percent of children under the age of five have been immunised against disease and over four thousand medical facilities have been opened since 2004.<sup>55</sup>

Various projects were established with the specific aim of targeting women's needs and basic human rights. For example, the World Bank instigated a project to train exiled Afghan women in Peshwar as teachers of Afghani girls who did not receive formal education.<sup>56</sup> Levels of literacy have risen, as has access to drinking water and life expectancy has even risen slightly by one year for women and two for men.

Rosmarie Skaine summarised ten major achievements in Afghanistan for the year 2007. These include: extensive roads that link different parts of the country, with over four thousand kilometres completed; agricultural output has risen with grain production up twenty four per cent and livestock income up two hundred million dollars; sixty thousand ex-combatants have given up weapons; domestic revenue is up two hundred and sixty million dollars; healthcare has

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<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmdfence/554/55402.htm> 6 July 2011 (Accessed on 1 August 2011), 6.

<sup>54</sup> R. Skaine, *Women of Afghanistan in the Post-Taliban Era: How lives have Changed and Where They Stand Today* (London: McFarland and Company, 2008), 20.

<sup>55</sup> Skaine, *Women of Afghanistan in the Post-Taliban Era* (2008), 20.

<sup>56</sup> E. Zuckerman & M. Greenberg, 'The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: An Analytical Framework for Policymakers' *Gender and Development*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2004), 2.

reached seven million people in total; older people have caught up on years of lost education, as well as a boom in education as a whole; and some five million refugees have returned home.<sup>57</sup> Ten per cent of Afghans own a mobile phone, compared to two per one thousand people in 2001.<sup>58</sup>

However, Skaine argues that 'Afghan women and girls continue to suffer extremely low social, economic, and political status.'<sup>59</sup> Despite the rise in the percentage of girls attending school regularly, that percentage is still only forty six per cent, well behind the average of eighty-three per cent for the rest of South Asia.<sup>60</sup> The rise in life expectancy, as recorded in 2010, is still at a low of forty-five years for women in Afghanistan.<sup>61</sup> Also, although the levels of birth attendants has risen, as has access to antenatal support, the maternal mortality rate in Afghanistan in general is still the highest in the world. On average, one woman in thirty will die from pregnancy related causes, and the lifetime risk of maternal death is one in eleven and the percentage of births attended by a skilled professional is just fourteen per cent. The World Mothers Index 2011 from the Save the Children organisation also suggests that at the current rate of pregnancy related complications, it is probable that in the future every mother in Afghanistan

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<sup>57</sup> Skaine, *Women of Afghanistan in the Post-Taliban Era* (2008), 20.

<sup>58</sup> Skaine, *Women of Afghanistan in the Post-Taliban Era* (2008), 22.

<sup>59</sup> Skaine, *Women of Afghanistan in the Post-Taliban Era* (2008), 23.

<sup>60</sup> Save The Children, *State of the World's Mothers, 2011*, [http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/SOWM2011\\_FULL\\_REPORT.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/SOWM2011_FULL_REPORT.PDF) (May 2011), 34.

<sup>61</sup> I. Livingston & M. O'Hanlon, 'Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-9/11 Afghanistan' *Brookings*, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/Programs/FP/afghanistan%20index/index.pdf> 31 July 2011 (Accessed on 1 August 2011), 34.

is likely to suffer the loss of a child. The report ranks Afghanistan at the bottom of the index, making it the worst place to be a mother for that year.<sup>62</sup>

Elaheh Rostami-Povey sums up the effect of the war on women as follows: 'with the US led invasion came poverty, rural-to-urban migration, uprooting, crime, drug addiction, unemployment, alien culture; all these factors leading to the breakdown of their social relations as their basic safety net'.<sup>63</sup> The safety net of a husband or male relative is vital in Afghan culture, particularly in rural areas. Traditional Afghan culture dictates that women have the autonomy to make individual choices with regards to decisions made within the home, but that they must be represented by a husband or male relative in any official disputes. Ironically, the death of men as a result of the war has in many cases left them 'without resources'.<sup>64</sup> Evidence of Afghan men who have died as a direct result of the conflict is extremely difficult to come by, although we do know there have been many casualties within the Afghan army, police service and insurgents. With worsening poverty (as of 2006 it was estimated twelve million women were living in abject poverty<sup>65</sup>), one third of Afghans survive on less than one dollar a day and another third earn only slightly more.

This set of circumstances has not only meant that the women of Afghanistan have become increasingly insecure within their own surroundings but has also meant that they have become, according to Sima Wali, 'increasingly unwilling to

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<sup>62</sup> Livingston & O'Hanlon, 'Afghanistan Index' (2011), 34.

<sup>63</sup> Livingston & O'Hanlon, 'Afghanistan Index' (2011), 75.

<sup>64</sup> Kandiyoti, 'Old Dilemmas or New Challenges?' (2007), 188.

<sup>65</sup> S. Wali, 'Afghan Women: Recovering, Rebuilding' *Ethics and International Affairs*, Vol. 16, No.2 (2006), 15.



emerge from their shroud like coverings, alleging a lack of security, rampant rape, ethnic witch hunting campaigns against the Pashtun tribe, generalised violence, and widespread abuse'.<sup>66</sup> Arguably, the halfway approach between military and humanitarian intervention rests on 'incompatible agendas'<sup>67</sup> and has left the women no better off and, in many cases, even worse off. 'The intervention was conducted not to promote security or stability in Afghanistan, but to ensure Afghanistan could no longer be a source of insecurity for the United States'.<sup>68</sup>

To this extent, the quality of life for Afghan women post Taliban has undoubtedly improved. However, Malou Innocent argues that advances in women's welfare have not translated into women's equality before the law. In other words, even if their quality of life has improved, it has not led to emancipation in Western terms. Innocent argues that regressive forces such as the Northern Alliance, who continue to hold a great amount of power in Afghanistan, have served to 'relegate women to a subservient position within society'.<sup>69</sup> Traditional society in Afghanistan still favours men. This, he believes, stems from the cultural superiority assumed by the United States when it appointed itself as liberator. The United States, that is, has taken it upon itself to ensure that universal values continue to be spread around the globe. Innocent suggests that this denies

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<sup>66</sup> Wali, 'Afghan Women' (2006), 17-18.

<sup>67</sup> F. Ayub & S. Kouvo, 'Righting the course? Humanitarian Intervention, the War on Terror and the Future of Afghanistan' *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No.4 (2008), 647.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> M. Innocent, 'Should American Liberate Afghanistan's Women?' in *Survival* Vol. 53, No. 5 (2011), 32.

difference. In the process of attempting to change a 'single variable in social life',<sup>70</sup> the United States have overlooked the interplay of broader societal forces that keep Afghan women subjugated.

What seems to stem from this analysis of the emancipatory policy in Afghanistan is that its failure lies in the application of universal values. Many academic thinkers feel that women's emancipation in Afghanistan can only come from Afghan women themselves, from within their own context and culture. So should we conclude that the perils of 'emancipation' are too great to be attempted? That seems to be an erroneous conclusion. The problem in the Afghan case, along with many other such cases, is not that emancipation is impossible but that it cannot be 'given' or imposed.

As John Stuart Mill pointed out in his celebrated essay *A Few Words on Non-Intervention*<sup>71</sup> (1859), freedom can only really be won by those who wish to assert it: it cannot be given to them by anyone else. Women in Afghanistan can only emancipate themselves; the 'West' (or indeed any other group) cannot do it for them. Does this mean that those (in the West and elsewhere) who wish to help this process along can do nothing? By no means, but we must be careful *what* we do. As the Afghan example shows only too well, the path to emancipation can easily become a road to hell, paved with good intentions but ultimately disastrous.

So what should we do? Here I am going to draw on the work of Martha Nussbaum, one of the most significant and powerful advocates of women's rights

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<sup>70</sup> Innocent, 'Should American Liberate Afghanistan's Women?' (2011), 33.

<sup>71</sup> Mill, John Stuart, 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention' in G. Himmelfarb, *The Spirit of the Age: Victorian Essays* (USA: Yale University Press, 2007).

in recent decades. Nussbaum (along with the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen) is well known amongst contemporary philosophers for having developed an approach to global issues known as the 'capabilities approach'. Drawing on her earlier work in classical philosophy, Nussbaum suggests that the best way to see human beings is as animals with certain clear biological and psychological needs but animals that have a purpose to function as well as one can. That is our 'end' or 'telos' (Greek for end in the sense of purpose). To fulfil this end, Nussbaum argues, we need to see ourselves as having certain basic capabilities.<sup>72</sup>

Nussbaum has developed and refined this list over time, but it is essential to see what its overall purpose is and what it implies. She does not see it as the ultimate or final conception of the good life, but rather as a list of capabilities necessary for having any sense of the good life. One example must suffice. Take the issue of female genital cutting. This, for Nussbaum is a paradigm case of the denial of a capability necessary for the achievement of good human functioning. Among the possible good lives any human being can live, is one marked by shared sexual intimacy and mutually satisfying sexual pleasure. However, female genital cutting deprives those who have undergone that procedure of that possibility and is therefore 'wrong'. Note that Nussbaum is insistent that she is not advocating that all have to live a life in which mutually satisfying sexual relations play a part. A woman could, perfectly properly, opt for a life of celibacy and live a perfectly good human life – the point is that female genital cutting removes the capacity of

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<sup>72</sup> Nussbaum, 'Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings' in Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (eds.), *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 66.

exercising a different choice and that is why it is wrong. It is a denial of the capability.

How might we understand this in the current context? Working with Nussbaum's basic model we might say that the kinds of things that stand in the way of women's rights in Afghanistan (and indeed in many other places) are a denial of their capabilities. Bearing in mind our earlier comments, we (in the West or elsewhere) cannot and should not 'emancipate them' in the manner of many of the policies pursued since 2001. But we can and we should seek to ensure that those capabilities are not denied. This does not mean imposing anything – rather it would mean (as Nussbaum thinks it does in the context of female genital cutting) educational policies that help local women understand what is at stake, possible micro-credit arrangements that allow poor women to have an income of their own, not dependent on their husband or on the local community and other local or regional initiatives and it might mean providing support for constitution making and enforcement, but that would be secondary to ground up support.

In this context, well-intentioned Westerners would have to follow the grain of local communities in order to avoid being automatically seen as 'outsiders'. Skaine highlights the importance of cultural context when looking at how the women of Afghanistan might truly be emancipated and their future prospects in light of their relative silence. She also highlights the unacceptable nature of the Taliban regime. She writes, 'The Taliban's conservative views of Holy scriptures led to stricter interpretations of what contributed socially acceptable female

behaviour'<sup>73</sup> calling them 'grave violations'.<sup>74</sup> The fact that Taliban edicts dictated that women were not allowed free mobility, were prohibited from employment, education and medical care are obviously violations of basic human rights. However, she emphasises that Afghan culture is not something the women of Afghanistan want to be rid of altogether, and that even within the country the vast differences between rural and urban areas, including those between rural tribal areas, make Afghanistan what it is. Accordingly, she concludes, to work with these realities, rather than against them, might produce the best results. In her own words:

We must listen to the voices and see the images of Afghan men and women, leaders and citizens, and proceed to help Afghanistan based on their ideas and their culture. We should keep foremost in mind that the country has endured nearly twenty-five years of conflict, and that it can advance more should security be in place. Within a safe country, its government and other institutions can flourish. With improvements in this context, Afghan women and men will experience better lives.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, a book entitled *The Aftermath*, edited by Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshen, highlights the importance of social context suggesting it is:

Crucial for understanding identity, gender identity and the way in which massive social conflict impacts on the experiences of what it is to be a man or woman...men and women are agents who reflect on the world and act accordingly, but their social

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<sup>73</sup> Skaine, *Women of Afghanistan in the Post-Taliban Era* (2008), 7.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Skaine, *Women of Afghanistan in the Post-Taliban Era* (2008), 154.

worlds frame their actions. If social context mediates the experiences of repressive social forces, then responses in the aftermath – reconstruction, reconciliation and healing – must also be firmly located in context.<sup>76</sup>

### Feminist International Relations theory: what have we learned?

What can the previous chapters, which analysed specific feminist thinkers, tell us in the light of what we have learned from Afghanistan? If we begin by turning to Cynthia Enloe we can immediately see a broad theme emerge in favour of universal values. Much feminist work can in fact be divided into proponents and opponents of universal thinking in International Relations theory. Enloe defends a universalist framework in which we can locate women, including women in Afghanistan. As we have seen, however, such a theory cannot provide a foundation for tackling concrete issues surrounding women. In particular, her call for a dramatic revolution with universal values at its heart is utopian. This revolution, based on encouraging female activism, aims to overthrow what she considers an entrenched patriarchal system, but in reality it fails to acknowledge the complexity of political life when major cultural differences exist.

Perhaps Elshtain provides a more reality based theory of International Relations then? Elshtain's work consciously and carefully attempts to base itself within the reality of political life. For example, Elshtain played an important role in advising President Bush and the White House in the lead up to the war in

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<sup>76</sup> S. Meintjes, A. Pillay & M. Turshen (eds.), *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation* (London: Zed Books, 2001), 60.

Afghanistan. Her theory of just war helped to provide a basis on which to wage war with Afghanistan and can be directly related to the justifications given for the war by the United States government, including the need to intervene on humanitarian grounds.

Much of Elshtain's theorising focuses on the idea of pragmatic and chastened politics. She advocated the goal of spreading universal values (despite the fact that she recognises differences) across the globe, and helped to justify the war in Afghanistan. It can be argued, however, that the war in Afghanistan was not an example of chastened politics since the intervention was primarily focused on a military mission intended to serve America's national interest, and to impose Western values globally.

Elshtain's theory of chastened politics, then, still clings to universal (and Christian) values. Christine Sylvester, in contrast, acknowledges unavoidable difference and plurality. From this standpoint, Sylvester develops a theory of conversation which accepts difference as the basis of International Relations. What is problematic is her assumption that conversation leads to consensus. If we take Huntington's *The Clash of Civilisations* into account, for example, it is necessary to acknowledge severe limits on how much conversation can take place in a world where states are in continuous conflict with one another. In addition, Sylvester's theory does not appear to be distinctively feminist, given that conversation between differences does not privilege one gender over another. In fact, the theory cuts directly across gender lines.

Given that the feminist theories mentioned briefly above came from Western thinkers, it was necessary to discuss what non-Western feminists are writing about. Many feminists provide a strong argument for contextual thinking. Indeed, many of the failures in Afghanistan were due to a misunderstanding of the context, culture and history of the country. In the case of Afghanistan in particular, many argue that while women should be 'emancipated', the term does not necessarily have to be understood in strictly Western terms.

Ultimately, what these feminist thinkers tell us is that if theories are to be based in political reality, they cannot be distinctively feminist, although they do of course include issues important to women. Writers such as Enloe, for example, who seek to provide us with a distinctively feminist framework, are ultimately too utopian for the reality of International Relations.

### Reflections

Analysis of the war in Afghanistan has revealed a large group of non-Western women 'caught in the crossfire' between the imposed, putatively universal values of the West and the traditional culture of their own society. In this crossfire, women in Afghanistan have been used both as symbols of tradition and as vehicles for radical social change.

What we have also seen is that gender equality must necessarily be grounded in local contexts, given the reality of the political situation. That differences do exist, and that we must acknowledge them, seems to be the lesson to be learned. The strategy in Afghanistan, however, has so far not represented a



strategy of engaging with people in their own context. Instead, the aim has been complete social transformation based on universal Western values. This has unsurprisingly resulted in resistance from the people of Afghanistan.

Ultimately, this strategy has led to a backlash against the women in Afghanistan. A move from within Afghanistan to strengthen and reassert conservative and traditional values has arguably seen the lives of many Afghan women worsen as a result. Increased violence against women is one example of this. In addition, the values which the United States and its allies have attempted to 'confer' on the Afghan people have enhanced the ability of patriarchy to 'adapt' to the imposition of such values. Although patriarchal structures have conceded women's rights on paper, the reality appears to be very different.

If we take into account feminist International Relations theory, we see that culture, history and contextual thinking are the key to working within the confines of political reality. This requires, as Elshtain suggests, the adoption of what she terms a chastened politics on the part of the West: a theory, that is, which acknowledges differences and works with them. Securing women's rights does not necessarily mean abandoning Western belief in universal values, but it does mean taking into account the fundamental values of others.

What this suggests is that we ultimately live in a plural world, where differences cannot be denied. As we have seen, there is a need to avoid a specifically gendered perspective if aiming to develop a coherent and universally applicable International relations theory. What Elshtain's theory does is invite equality without privileging either gender. If a feminist International Relations

Fiona Ritchie

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theory is to be universally applied, it must acknowledge difference and political reality, even if that means the theory is no longer distinctively a feminist one.

## Chapter Seven

# Reframing Feminism within International Relations Theory

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Although the bulk of this thesis has been critical of the feminist project of developing a coherent theory of International Relations, this is not to suggest that every version of that project is entirely disastrous or wholly unsuccessful. Instead, the thesis suggests that the various versions of the project outlined within previous chapters could be reframed in a way that provides a more adequate account of political reality while also permitting the advocacy of feminist issues. With this in mind, this chapter proposes the incorporation into feminist theorising of four interlocking concerns. The first is the incorporation of an acknowledgement of the autonomy of the political relationship. The second is the incorporation of the concepts of prudence and practical wisdom in order to permit a politically responsible view of the conduct of international policy. The third is the incorporation, inspired in particular by non-Western feminism, of greater sensitivity to cultural and political context, allied to a rejection of the universalist mode of theorising commonly favoured by Western feminism. The fourth is the incorporation of the concept of 'essential contestability', which acknowledges the conditional nature of every position in the political arena, including the feminist one, since it rejects the possibility of any absolute, intrinsically privileged standpoint. Each of these topics must now be considered in more detail.

### The incorporation of the autonomy of the political

An acknowledgement of the autonomy of the political relationship, as we have seen, is partially made by Elshtain who notes for example, that conflict between differences (usually states), is inevitable. However, Elshtain also wishes to place certain moral limitations on international politics in order to prevent war except as a very last resort. We saw this in the examination of her theory of just war. The result is a somewhat confused concept of the political in so far as Elshtain's ultimate perspective remains a moralistic one. A more coherent standpoint, it is suggested, may be achieved by turning to the work of Raymond Geuss and Claude Lefort.

Geuss believes that if we examine how people and states really act, as opposed to how they ought to act, we can better understand political life and arrive at more appropriate kinds of political action. For instance, Geuss examines the ways in which an 'ethics first' approach to political theory can inhibit understanding of politics precisely because an ethics first method examines the way people ought to behave rather than how they actually behave. He believes that a strong Kantian notion of highly moralised universal applied ethics is dangerous. This is because, he suggests, they are open to interpretation and, as a result, too ambiguous. 'An attempt to think seriously about the relation between politics and ethics,' he writes, 'must remain cognitively sensitive'<sup>77</sup> to the fact that peoples beliefs, values, desires and moral conceptions can be vastly different. Indeed, he goes even further to suggest that often these beliefs and conceptions

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<sup>77</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (2008), 3.

are, 'almost certain to be indeterminate and inconsistent'.<sup>78</sup> What he means by this is that often notions of a moral nature are subject to change.

Lefort offers a different perspective based on the same premise of exercising extreme caution with moralistic viewpoints. He has a deep sympathy for radical political thought but differed from other contemporary French radical intellectuals in rejecting the Stalinist despotism in Soviet Russia. In 1943 Lefort joined the French Trotskyist Party (PCI), in the hope of promoting a non-totalitarian form of Marxism. He rapidly became disillusioned with Trotskyism, however, and established a new independent group of his own, which expressed his views in the new journal *Socialism or Barbarism*.

Before long, however, Lefort became disillusioned with his own group when he found the authoritarian tendency towards centralism emerging within that group as well. The result was a critique of left radical thought that centred on what he believed was socialism's inability to comprehend the irreducible reality of power and conflict. He believes, in other words, that socialism, no matter how idealistic its inspiration might be, tended in practice to nurture totalitarianism because it systematically repressed the concept of the political.<sup>79</sup> In this respect, according to Lefort, socialism was not unique, since much liberal theory displayed the very same defect. What, Lefort asks, is the origin of this defect? His answer is that it arose because progressive thought in both its socialist and its liberal guises tends to see the political order as a purely instrumental device for securing person

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<sup>78</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (2008), 3.

<sup>79</sup> N. O'Sullivan, *European Political Thought since 1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 79.

and property. In other words, progressive thought denied the autonomy of the political by 'circumscrib[ing] the sphere of reality within the limits of the econom[ic]'.<sup>80</sup>

This defect, Lefort maintains, can only be remedied by incorporating into political theory a concept of the 'symbolic'. By the symbolic he means that the political can only be understood in terms of how citizens themselves interpret their institutions, values and purposes. In other words, for Lefort the private perspective constitutes a necessary symbolic aspect of the political. The totalitarian tendency of the left, he argues, arose because it dismissed the personal views of dissenting citizens as merely a form of a 'false consciousness'. In other words, the left believe the private or symbolic sphere of a person's life can be ousted from the public, political sphere, instead of forming its very basis. When this occurs, a potentially coercive standpoint necessarily replaces a political one. Despite his rehabilitation of the symbolic basis of the political, however, Noël O'Sullivan argues that Lefort's quest for moderation was ultimately at odds with his determination not to sacrifice 'the radical dream of a world free from domination' which had inspired him from the beginning.<sup>81</sup> What is primarily relevant at present, however, is Lefort's acknowledgement of the autonomy of the political order and his recognition that any forms of political theory, including feminist forms, which fail to incorporate this are doomed to have an authoritarian outcome.

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<sup>80</sup> O'Sullivan, *European Political Thought since 1945* (2004), 79.

<sup>81</sup> O'Sullivan, *European Political Thought since 1945* (2004), 80.

Incorporating prudence and practical wisdom into feminist theorising about International Relations.

Although prudence was regarded as the fundamental political virtue in ancient political theory, it is now thought of primarily as a private virtue which can be equated with cautious self interest. It may even be questioned whether prudence is a virtue at all, since the dominance of moralism has made any regard for self interest synonymous with selfishness, and therefore ethically unrespectable. In opposition to this dominant view, Douglas Den Uyl has argued that whether prudence is now seen as a private virtue or not, we should restore the ancient regard for prudence as a political virtue precisely because people are inherently self interested. Descriptions of how people actually behave, as opposed to how they ought to behave, are vital to understanding and responding appropriately to many political events take place.

Given that prudence was 'the predominant virtue of antiquity',<sup>82</sup> Den Uyl observes, does it have a role to play in the modern world where moral issues have become central to political thinking? Den Uyl begins his work, *The virtue of Prudence*,<sup>83</sup> by providing a brief history of prudence as a virtue. Prior to the modern era, which Den Uyl suggests began around the sixteenth or seventeenth century, there were four cardinal virtues. These were: practical wisdom or prudence, justice, courage, and temperance.<sup>84</sup> Whereas justice and courage still

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<sup>82</sup> O'Sullivan, *European Political Thought since 1945* (2004), 6.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> O'Sullivan, *European Political Thought since 1945* (2004), 1.

remain virtues today, prudence and temperance have declined. Prudence, Den Uyl argues, has come to be seen as the least virtuous of the four.

Den Uyl believes this is due to the perception of prudence, already remarked on above, as an inherently selfish principle. For example, a prudent person according to this assumption would almost exclusively strive to maximise his or her own personal satisfaction by any course of action that would help them to achieve their goals. This would mean that any attempt to help anyone else would be seen as an action only taken because it gives the person helping others the most personal gain. It could be argued, then, that any instances of non-self interested action are rare, and thus not useful as general explanations of human action. From this point of view, recent concern with developing international human rights laws, for example, can be seen as an attempt at rendering the prudence inherent in all people compatible with moral action. Den Uyl's own view of the role prudence can play in the modern world, however, is different.

According to Den Uyl, the most important function of prudence is to help us to come to terms with the plural nature of political life without losing a sense of the moral good. Prudence can do this because it encourages an understanding that 'the rules we live by or the circumstances we find ourselves in'<sup>85</sup> are peculiarly our own, and not universal. Putting the same thing in different terms, Den Uyl argues that the principal implication of prudence for ethical theory is that it allows us to

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<sup>85</sup> D. Den Uyl, *The Virtue of Prudence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 268.



'step outside'<sup>86</sup> our present framework of moralisation in political theory, and instead see what is really there.

Den Uyl's appeal for a restoration of the ancient respect for prudence as a political virtue is complemented by the earlier call of Max Weber for 'an ethic of responsibility',<sup>87</sup> which is perhaps the best known theory of practical wisdom in modern political thought. For Weber, an ethic of responsibility is the most adequate moral framework for those taking up the vocation of politics since it represented rational social action. Weber believes in the plural nature of politics, and ethical action therefore must be taken within the context of struggle and difference. He believes that no honest observer of the empirical world could deny the 'centrality and pervasiveness of conflict'.<sup>88</sup> Even peace was far from being the absence of conflict, but rather nothing more than a change in the form of the conflict.

As a result of the acceptance of conflict as a central part of political life, Weber held a view of the world that sees human life as 'fundamentally, pervasively, and permanently characterised by the conflicts of value pluralism'.<sup>89</sup> In such a world, values and morals are insufficient to guide us, despite the fact that people cannot become, 'ethical personalities'<sup>90</sup> without devotion to values. An ethic of

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<sup>86</sup> Den Uyl, *The Virtue of Prudence* (1991), 11.

<sup>87</sup> H. Gerth, & C. Wright Mills, (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970).

<sup>88</sup> B. Starr, 'The Structure of Max Weber's Ethic of Responsibility' in *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1999), 418.

<sup>89</sup> Starr, 'The Structure of Max Weber's Ethic of Responsibility' (1999), 430.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

responsibility is, for Weber, an answer to the problem of squaring reality with morality.

It was never Weber's intention to abolish morals but instead to challenge pure morality. A person's moral convictions are simply the first step to becoming a moral person. However, Weber argues that those convictions must then consider those morals in context. This means keeping reality in sight. He argues that theorists must see the world as it really is, as opposed to how they might wish it was. By taking responsibility for accepting reality, one cannot presuppose the world to be the way it ought to be, or how one imagines it should be. Practicing an ethic of responsibility means seeing the failures of human beings as they really are. Weber does not assume the goodness or perfectibility of human beings, and it is under this context, that he applies moral thinking.

For Weber, the state is based on the use of force. Morals however, can then serve to limit that use of force. Political actors and political theorists must accept, Weber argues, the responsibility for the consequences of political ethical action. The use of force is vital for Weber, as a political authority. Where a state does not know the use of force, he argues, the very concept of the state would be eliminated and anarchy would prevail.<sup>91</sup> Of course, use of force is not the only means of the state, but it is a means specific to the state. What morals provide, are principles that maintain and accept the reality of the autonomy of the political. Ultimately, for Weber, utopian visions fail to accept the world as it really is, while those without

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<sup>91</sup> Gerth, & Wright Mills, (eds.), *From Max Weber* (1970), 78.

moral conviction accept the world as it really is but fail to display ethical considerations in their actions.

Weber's views stem from his own personal experiences, particularly those within his family situation. For example, two of his mother's sisters were married to professors, with whom Weber enjoyed intellectual exchanges. In addition, his family were 'prone to mystical and religious experiences'<sup>92</sup> and Weber came to appreciate and sympathise with their differing values. This contributed to his view that one must go 'beyond ethical absolutism'.<sup>93</sup> He believes that the question should not be, Who is morally wrong and who is morally right? but rather, How can one resolve the conflict with the least damage to those concerned? As a result, Weber developed a pragmatic viewpoint, with a focus on the consequences of various decisions rather than on the insistence of one's own ideas of moral sincerity.

As we have seen from examples earlier in the thesis, works by Chantal Mouffe and Jean Bethke Elshtain argue in favour of practical wisdom within International Relations theory. Mouffe's theory of 'agonistics' provides one such example. While her work may support radical ideals, she maintains the importance of remaining within the realm of reality, which means acknowledging that conflict and difference are an inevitable part of life. Similarly, Elshtain strongly defends pluralism. 'Even as selves are irreducible,' she writes, 'so are cultures'.<sup>94</sup> In other words, in a world with many different nations, each with their own marks of self-

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<sup>92</sup> Gerth, & Wright Mills, (eds.), *From Max Weber* (1970), 9.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 238.

identity, we cannot and, 'ought not make the world one by cruelly obliterating diverse ways of life'.<sup>95</sup> Elshtain continues by stating that, 'one of the most insidious aspects of communist "universalism" was precisely its need to crush difference'.<sup>96</sup>

However, Elshtain is critical of some extreme interpretations of realist standpoints. For example, her critique of Hobbes' *Leviathan* consists of her criticism of the view that differences can never have commonalities. Hobbes writes that there is, 'no possibility of true commonalities and solidarities'<sup>97</sup> and, there never can be. However, Elshtain argues that one can actually reconcile differences through basic moral and universal values. She writes, 'there is considerable warrant for a transcultural or universal account of a basic morality'.<sup>98</sup> She believes that without this belief, the world is simply an 'arbitrary imposition of one group of folks on another folks'.<sup>99</sup>

In a similar vein, Elshtain also criticises some feminist theorising. She criticises in particular forms of feminism which assume that if patriarchal privilege is overthrown this would automatically mean that men would be 'healed'.<sup>100</sup> This position assumes that human beings can be changed and perfected. As we have seen, Elshtain strongly believes in the imperfect nature of human beings. Instead, she attempts to reconcile the reality of difference and conflict within political life with morals that can be applied universally. For example, her advocacy of just war

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<sup>95</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 238.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 109.

<sup>98</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 110.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 217.

theory, taken from her reading of St. Augustine, works in precisely this way. She believes that every state has the right to sovereignty, but that it must be limited. Just war theory as an example serves to limit and restrain the use of force by states on other states. 'Sovereignty', she writes, 'must be bound'.<sup>101</sup>

What just war also means for Elshtain is that although difference and plurality must be accepted as a political reality, as must the inevitability of waging war, in certain extreme times of emergency, universal values can be implemented to punish those who violate the basic human needs of its citizens. Does this mean that prudence and practical wisdom can be put aside in times of grave moral emergency? Elshtain argues that in the case of genocide, for example, the decision not to act is unavoidable. Genocide for Elshtain provides one example of emergency that requires intervention, and that intervention under these circumstances is just. However, even in such extreme cases, prudence and practical wisdom can still be practiced.

For example, on June 25<sup>th</sup> 1942, the newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph* in the United Kingdom was the first to report the mass killing of the Jewish population at Auschwitz. This is three years before the liberation of Auschwitz happened. The information about the genocide was supplied by Szmul Zygielbojm, a member of the Polish government in exile at the time. He made it his mission to inform the world about the holocaust. Arriving in London in 1942, he used his contacts in the Polish government to gather eyewitness accounts from Auschwitz. This

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<sup>101</sup> Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty, God, State, and Self* (2008), 124.

information was then smuggled to the United Kingdom on microfilm hidden inside a key. The newspaper reported that gas chambers were being used from November 1941, and that averages of one thousand Jews were being gassed daily.<sup>102</sup> In some cases, Jewish people were deported to unknown destinations and killed in the woods. In Vilna, for example, fifty thousand Jewish people were murdered in November of 1941 alone.<sup>103</sup>

The total number slaughtered in Vilna by the end of the war was three hundred thousand. One example reports of fifteen thousand men, women and children being shot in a period over three days and nights.<sup>104</sup> The British government however, decided not to act on the news. Zygielbojm was dismayed by the British government's reaction, having encountered, 'indifference, disbelief or suspicion'.<sup>105</sup> His wife and son were, at the time, living as prisoners in the Warsaw Ghetto. Both died during the razing of the Warsaw ghetto in 1943. Zygielbojm took his own life shortly afterwards. Why then, did the British government make the decision not to take any action at the news of the camps?

In 1943, a conference, known as the Bermuda conference, took place. The task of the conference was initially to discuss how to save the Jews from the gas chambers. However, 'Britain and America ruled out the possibility of taking in

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<sup>102</sup> D. Blair, 'Holocaust Memorial Day: Telegraph revealed Nazi Gas Chambers Three years before liberation of Auschwitz' in *The Telegraph*, 26 January 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/11370972/Holocaust-Memorial-Day-Telegraph-revealed-Nazi-gas-chambers-three-years-before-liberation-of-Auschwitz.html>.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Blair, 'Telegraph revealed Nazi Gas Chambers Three years before liberation of Auschwitz' (2015).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Jewish refugees from Nazism'.<sup>106</sup> They decided that if Hitler agreed to give up millions of Jewish refugees, it would force ships away from the war effort. It was decided that best way to help the Jewish people was to win the war. The British and Americans believed that 'the best way of saving the Jews was to win the war and liberate Europe as quickly as possible'.<sup>107</sup> As a result, they resisted any action that distracted from the overriding task of winning the war. Ultimately, they feared that the plan of asking Hitler to hand over Jewish refugees would be too successful.

Such a strategy demonstrates how even in times of extreme moral emergency, practical wisdom and prudence can still take place. The possibility that taking on millions of Jewish refugees would cause a huge shipping problem led them to avoid taking action. It was a thought out plan with practical considerations at its centre. The conclusion here, then, is that since the moralisation of politics leads to an irresponsible disregard for the complexities of political reality, prudence and practical wisdom as a result, cannot be ignored.

Incorporating greater sensitivity to diverse cultural and political contexts into feminist theorising about International Relations.

If much Western feminist theorising about politics has favoured a universalistic moral perspective insensitive to contextual differences, the same cannot be said of the non-Western feminists considered in the second part of the

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<sup>106</sup> D. Blair, 'The Bermuda Conference that Failed to save the Jews' in *The Sunday Telegraph*, 31 January, 2015, [www.telgraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/poland/11381920/the-bermuda-conference-that-failed-to-save-the-jews.html](http://www.telgraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/poland/11381920/the-bermuda-conference-that-failed-to-save-the-jews.html).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

thesis. On the contrary, they lend considerable support to the conclusion of this thesis that a coherent form of feminism must incorporate a regard for prudence and practical wisdom sensitive to context and hostile to rationalist universalism.

Although different strands of thought can be found among non-Western thinkers, their work points, in the first instance, to the need to accept the plural nature of political life. They have been impelled to this conclusion by, in particular, their concern to establish an identity of their own by escaping from the universalist categories of Western feminism. To this end, they have rejected the assumption that political thought of every kind is a peculiarly Western preserve and have sought instead to make those parts of the world often considered 'other' by Western thinkers visible in their own right.

The second part of the thesis expanded the analysis of non-Western feminism by considering the difficulties faced by the emancipatory policy put in place by the Bush regime for women in Afghanistan at the start of the war in 2001. The case of Afghanistan provided a practical example of what Western feminist theory might mean when actually applied in politics. Beginning from Elshtain's ideas about just war and universal morals, the thesis concluded that importing Western concepts of female emancipation into Afghanistan, not only led to a backlash which adversely affected Afghanistan's women, but also reinforced the patriarchal structure of Afghan society it was intended to break down. The result, in short, was a significant worsening of the lives of women in Afghanistan.

This outcome reinforced misgivings expressed in the thesis about the utopian character of Cynthia Enloe's thought. Conversely, it increased sympathy



for the work of Jean Bethke Elshtain and Christine Sylvester, in so far as their approach involved greater sympathy for the pluralistic nature of International Relations. This sympathy was qualified, however, by the fact that Elshtain in particular continues to assume the superiority of universal moral values to which she is committed, despite her call for a 'chastened' politics. Although Sylvester goes further towards accepting pluralism in International Relations, her theory of conversation exaggerates, as has been seen, the degree of consensus which conversation can realistically be expected to produce.

It is not only the limitations of the Western conception of female emancipation, however, that are illuminated by non-Western feminism. No less interesting are the problems exposed in the related Western ideal of humanitarian intervention that was used to justify the Afghan liberation project.

The subject of humanitarian intervention in relation to the recent war in Afghanistan generates, as described by Fatima Ayub and Sari Kouvo, an 'uneasy analysis.'<sup>108</sup> This is because the primary mission in Afghanistan was a military and never a humanitarian one. In the case of Afghanistan, humanitarian intervention was undertaken alongside a military mission to oust the Taliban and root out members of al-Qaeda thought to have sought a safe haven in the country. The conclusion arrived at within this thesis is that such interventions have incompatible agendas, given the destructive nature of war and the secondary consideration given to humanitarian efforts.

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<sup>108</sup> Ayub & Kouvo, 'Righting the course?' (2008), 641.

The war in Afghanistan was a United States led military mission conceived as an act of self defence that also utilised humanitarian justifications for waging war. As a result despite the considerable amount of rhetoric focusing on Afghan women, they were ultimately used as symbol of social transformation to serve military ambitions. In Afghanistan, there was never a clear strategy for long term stabilisation, state building or development. It was, as Ayub and Kouvo put it, 'counter-terrorism not humanitarianism'.<sup>109</sup>

What light, if any, does the war in Afghanistan shed on the claims made on behalf of military-based humanitarian intervention? In order to answer this, it is helpful to begin by considering how the concept of humanitarian intervention has developed within the international community in recent years. The shift in power relations since the end of the Cold War has particular relevance to the recent war in Afghanistan because it ultimately led to a need to justify the war in some humanitarian sense. In the aftermath of the Cold War in the 1990s changing power relations meant that Western states, led by the United States occupied a hegemonic position in global political order. America interpreted this power as responsibility. As a result the notion of humanitarian intervention has received more attention. A sense of responsibility to other nations has developed a sense that military intervention is morally acceptable in exceptional cases of human rights violations. Often this is perceived as a representation of power and projection of American

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<sup>109</sup> Ayub & Kouvo, 'Righting the course?' (2008), 641.

power in particular to maintain their hegemony and spread universal values via neo-conservative policy making.

The dilemma of what to do about strangers who are 'subjected to appalling cruelty by their governments' has remained with us, however, 'throughout the post-1945 world'.<sup>110</sup> Nicholas Wheeler in *Saving Strangers* asks how far states have come to recognise humanitarian intervention as a legitimate exception to the rules of sovereignty, non-intervention and non-use of force that dominated pre-1945. He believes it is important to distinguish between power that is based on relations of domination and force, and power that is legitimate because it is predicated on shared norms.<sup>111</sup> For example, apartheid in South Africa did not reflect the majority view held by its citizens. In this case, the power used was illegitimate. Since then, there has been increased debate about the legitimacy of using military force on humanitarian grounds.

Changing norms have resulted in new international norms that have often been used to defend actions that may be considered moral, but not necessarily legal. Such norms have come both to constrain and enable actors. Wheeler argues that the concepts of pluralism and universalism have both limited the possibilities of international society. He believes pluralism limits these possibilities on the basis of non-negotiable non-intervention and that universalism limits them because states can justify almost any action by exploiting the indeterminate rules of international community.

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<sup>110</sup> N. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>111</sup> Wheeler, *Saving Strangers* (2000), 2.

Even where universal ideals prevail, actors are still restrained by the norms that define them. For example, the invasion in Afghanistan, although ultimately conducted with military motives, still had to be justified by American leaders in terms not just of military aims, but humanitarian ones since the dominant viewpoint among international actors has increasingly been that humanitarian intervention is sometimes 'morally justifiable in exceptional cases'.<sup>112</sup>

The end of the Cold war, as mentioned above, opened the way for increased optimism about the potential scope for the United Nations and the wider international community to secure peace and promote human rights across the globe. In the years between the end of the Cold war and the beginning of the War on Terror in the early 2000s, the international community were repeatedly called upon to address situations of grave human rights violations. It was in this climate that the war in Afghanistan in 2001 was waged. It became necessary for America to justify the war in Afghanistan in humanitarian terms not just to gain allies and support from within the international community, but to adhere to the norms that had developed over the previous couple of decades. But does this mean that the war in Afghanistan should be treated as a humanitarian mission?

Ayub and Kouvo argue that the civil war in Afghanistan in the 1990s, before the Taliban took control in 1995, constituted a humanitarian crisis. However, it was only when intervention served American national interest that war was waged. In fact, they argue that the failure of the international community to

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<sup>112</sup> Wheeler, *Saving Strangers* (2000), 294.

intervene during the civil war, directly led to the Taliban taking control in Afghanistan because they were seen as the most viable stabilising force. The Taliban became closely linked with al-Qaeda who had the capabilities to harm their enemies. After the attacks of 9/11, the United Nations Security Council accepted the United States war in Afghanistan as one of self-defence.

The need to address the conditions and legality of humanitarian intervention, however, has been evident since the end of the cold war. As a result, America developed what Ayub and Kouvo call a 'twin rhetoric'.<sup>113</sup> Despite the fact that the United States led war in Afghanistan was not a humanitarian mission, American policy makers came to 'embrace the language and rhetoric of a humanitarian cause'.<sup>114</sup> Such rhetoric was not difficult to evoke due to the grave violations of human rights in Afghanistan under the Taliban. Ultimately, Ayub and Kouvo believe 'the tensions between the real grounds for intervention and the alternative justifications for it have come to haunt the stabilisation and state building process in Afghanistan'.<sup>115</sup>

Ayub and Kouvo believe that the agendas mentioned above are incompatible and have ultimately led to a worsening of the lives of Afghan people. A major obstacle to reconstruction, for example, was the politicisation of aid. There is little doubt that Afghanistan has been the beneficiary of large amounts of aid.

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<sup>113</sup> Ayub & Kouvo, 'Righting the course? (2008), 645.

<sup>114</sup> Ayub & Kouvo, 'Righting the course? (2008), 647.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

Financially, pledges of up to \$5.25 billion<sup>116</sup> between 2002-2006 (with \$1.8 billion pledged for 2002<sup>117</sup>) were made from countries across the globe at the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan held in Tokyo in 2002. We are familiar with the problem of promises made by international donors but not kept. In this case, the amount pledged was not given in full. The most intractable issue, however, was how to ensure that reconstruction aid reached the people intended and did not end up 'in the hands of criminals, corrupt politicians or the Taliban itself'.<sup>118</sup>

The United States claims that only a little over one per cent of American aid is dissipated, but that still amounts to some \$360 million<sup>119</sup> annually diverted from its goal. Accordingly, it also means more money must be spent on private security forces protecting those trying to reach areas of Afghanistan with vital aid. As a report from the United States House of Representatives in 2010 called *Warlord Inc.*,<sup>120</sup> suggests, 'the number of incidents involving trucks on the road, including ambushes, IEDs, and kidnappings, has risen sharply...Trucking convoys have become favourite targets of the Taliban and other insurgents, who frequently stop

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<sup>116</sup> CARE International in Afghanistan, 'Rebuilding Afghanistan: A Little Less Talk, A Lot More Action' *CARE* (2002), 2.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Editorial Board, *STL Today*, 'In Afghanistan, A \$360 million rip-off isn't so bad' [http://www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/columns/the-platform/article\\_274bf007-dbb2-5edd-8c28-4baaba41a4b3.html#.TIS0n4bWVZc.twitter](http://www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/columns/the-platform/article_274bf007-dbb2-5edd-8c28-4baaba41a4b3.html#.TIS0n4bWVZc.twitter) August 24, 2011 (Accessed on August 24, 2011).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, *Warlord, Inc.: Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan*, <http://publicintelligence.info/WarlordInc.pdf> (June, 2010).

convoys to demand money, set the trucks on fire and kill or kidnap the drivers'.<sup>121</sup> Millions of dollars for contractors and building infrastructure have actually fuelled and sustained the conflict between the various factions in the country.

In addition, many Afghan people have become 'entrenched in war economies',<sup>122</sup> such as the cultivation of opium and drug trafficking. War also inevitably leads to the displacement of peoples. Refugee camps can be found across Afghanistan, mainly in the South-Eastern areas of Afghanistan surrounding Kabul. There are also camps in Pakistan, where ninety six per cent of Afghanistan's refugees dwell and also in Iran. According to one report, in 2001, nine hundred thousand people were internally displaced; two million people lived in Pakistan and 1.5 million in Iran with around thirty thousand people living in places such as India, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.<sup>123</sup>

This has in turn led to a rise in sex trafficking and a resurgence of the sex trade. 'Disarmed' men have taken to using rape as their new weapon of choice in refugee camps.<sup>124</sup> Rape and unprotected sex within refugee camps have resulted in unsafe abortions and account for some twenty-five to fifty per cent of maternal deaths among maternal deaths. If we look at the countries within which the refugee camps are located, such as Pakistan and Iran, these states have some of the

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<sup>121</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, *Warlord, Inc* (2010), 14.

<sup>122</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, *Warlord, Inc* (2010), 648.

<sup>123</sup> M. Emery & H. Ruiz, 'Decent into Disaster? Afghan Refugees' in *Middle East Report*, No.221 (2001), 16.

<sup>124</sup> E. Rostami-Povey, *Afghan Women: Identity and Invasion* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

most restrictive laws on abortion in the world thus ensuring that women are highly unlikely to have access to safe abortions.

Between June 2009 and September 2010, more than one hundred and twenty thousand Afghans fled from their homes as a result of the violent conflicts. Rates of refugee returns have significantly declined since 2008 precisely because of the security situation in Afghanistan. Within the country itself, prolonged intervention by Western military forces has led to both heightened nationalist and fundamentalist sentiment.

The Taliban have not been completely defeated, which means further direct insurgent attacks, increasing numbers of suicide attacks and the widespread use of IEDs (improvised explosive devices). All of these affect the civilian population and, disproportionately, women

Given the examples above, Ayub and Kouvo believe that strategy in Afghanistan, and the failures within the reconstruction efforts have led to suspicion of the Western agenda within non-Western states. Despite efforts to stabilise Afghanistan, and transfer rule of government over to the Afghan people, the counter-terrorism mission is still being conducted on Afghan soil. This only serves to destabilise and 'put back' the mission of reconstruction.

As we have seen, much focus was placed on rectifying human rights violations in Afghanistan. In particular, women are often placed at the centre of these debates about who needs saving. Despite this, little consideration has previously been given in the broader literature to feminist thought on humanitarian intervention. Much of this literature places attention on the need for



contextual thinking in international relations. The universal values that surround the current framework of humanitarian intervention often mean that Western states such as America, aiming to spread universal values, can justify almost any action. This is not to say that feminist thinking would automatically reject the causes supported by defenders of humanitarian intervention, but rather that intervention would be more properly defended in such cases on contextual grounds than by appeals to a universal vision.

As we have seen, the increasing acceptance of humanitarian intervention as a legitimate reason for use of force directly impacted on the ability of America to wage war in Afghanistan. The project of moralising politics, then, is based on theorising that is abstract, and encourages a politics without limits. It is a utopian vision that does not take into account the plural nature of the political emphasised in particular by non-Western feminist theory. Their implicit and explicit critique of humanitarian intervention reinforces, in particular, the earlier argument for the incorporation of a sense of prudence and practical wisdom into International Relations theory in all its forms, whether feminist or otherwise.

Incorporating the concept of 'essential contestability' into feminist theorising about International Relations.

Christine Sylvester's postmodern feminist method of theorising points to the need to highlight the necessity of acknowledging that no political position possesses intrinsic privilege over any other. In this respect her thought echoes the theme of essential contestability developed by William Connolly in *The Terms of*

*Political Discourse*.<sup>125</sup> For Connolly, what is crucial is that although many may agree on a concept, they may nevertheless disagree on how evidence in support of it is interpreted. Feminism is one such example. Western feminist International Relations theory, which is a relatively new and rapidly evolving school of thought, represents a group of people dissatisfied with the traditional invisibility of women within the discipline. However, while general dissatisfaction amongst feminist thinkers exists as a whole, it does not result in universal agreement surrounding female specific issues on an international level. Evidence of such disagreement has been found among all of the chapters in this thesis.

Connolly points to the example of the concept of democracy. Democracy is an achievement valued by most, particularly in the Western world. However, the criteria for its application are what are contested. Arguments about its proper use present fundamental issues about which reasoned argument is possible, but, Connolly writes, 'a full and definitive resolution is often unlikely'.<sup>126</sup> For some, the criterion for democracy concerns the power of citizens to choose their governments through elections. For others, this is less important than the equality of opportunity for all citizens in attaining positions of political leadership.<sup>127</sup> Connolly continues to state that for some both of these criteria are insignificant if, 'the continuous participation of citizens at various levels of political life is not attained'.<sup>128</sup> Even the terms used to describe democracy, such as 'power', 'equality'

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<sup>125</sup> W. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

<sup>126</sup> Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (1993), 10.

<sup>127</sup> Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (1993), 10-11.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

and 'political', expose further disagreements among those contesting the concept of democracy.

Given these conditions, what is necessary for Connolly, as also for Sylvester, is mutual awareness among adversaries that even their shared concepts are subject to essential contestability. Connolly calls this 'the internal complexity and contestability of politics'.<sup>129</sup> What Connolly attempts to show us, is that 'contestants' must realise that 'in many contexts no single use can be advanced that must be accepted by all reasonable persons'.<sup>130</sup> Like Sylvester, he believes that if the realisation that 'opposing uses might not be exclusively self-serving'<sup>131</sup> comes about, but that each has defensible reasons for their view point, then it will promote 'a measure of tolerance and receptivity to reconsideration of received views'.<sup>132</sup> Under these circumstance, Connolly believes that politics as a discipline would be enhanced. His conclusions, he argues, 'flow from the assumption that rationality, fragile as it is, is helped, not hindered, by heightened awareness of the nature and import of our differences'.<sup>133</sup>

Similarly, Glen Newey supports a theory of essential contestability. He suggests simply that all viewpoints can be contested given the multitude of opinions within International Relations theory. For Newey, essential contestability identifies the presence of dispute and helps to explain political disagreement. However, although essentially contested concepts are widely agreed upon they are

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<sup>129</sup> Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (1993), 13.

<sup>130</sup> Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (1993), 40.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (1993), 41.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

not necessarily the answer to the realisation of a theory in practice. He argues that essential contestability sets out to provide a theoretical account of a political phenomenon, but as a result, 'turns away from the world of politics,' and instead moves towards an, 'explanatorily redundant ideal theory'.<sup>134</sup>

Instead Newey believes that there is a need for 'real world' explanations of why a particular interpretation of a concept is dominant. He suggests that if judgements about, for example, the extension of justice, are evaded due to the complexity of opinions that surround it, we fail to examine why, in the real world, certain positions are privileged over others. What Newey's argument highlights is the essential contestability of the term 'essential contestability' itself. In other words, conclusions about the contested nature of a political theory are in themselves contestable. In short, no standpoint can be final.

I will end by considering a vital objection to the emphasis placed by the thesis on the fundamental role of prudence and practical wisdom in theorising the political at both municipal and international contexts. Specifically, this is the objection made, for example, by Chris Brown<sup>135</sup> who points out that the nature of prudence is itself just as contestable as any other political concept. In response, it is not necessary to abandon the concept of prudence but only to recall Aristotle's point, that prudence is not in effect a supra-political magic wand with which to resolve conflicts but is itself something that can only be arrived at within the

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<sup>134</sup> Newey, *After Politics* (2001), 36.

<sup>135</sup> C. Brown, 'The 'Practice Turn', Phronesis and Classical Realism: Towards a Phronetic International Political Theory?' in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2012).

framework of political debate, and can therefore never rise above the ability of the participants in that debate to draw upon their experience in an appropriately reflective way. In addition, there is an important literature on the tragic element in the human condition, which prudence can never transcend.

My thesis, then, does not claim to provide a definitive feminist theory of International Relations to set against the defective feminist ones I have explored, but is instead content to have shown why any feminism is incoherent that ignores the autonomy of the political by confining its perspective to moralising political theory; or ignores the need to incorporate a regard for political prudence and practical wisdom; or seeks a universalist perspective insensitive to variations of cultural and political context; or strives to occupy an absolute moral vantage point which has no place for the essential contestability of all political concepts. On the other hand, the thesis acknowledges that any version of feminism which seeks to make good these deficiencies is doomed to pay a price that will be unacceptable to more extreme feminists. This, it is recalled, is that it must fail to offer a uniquely feminist perspective since by incorporating the four themes discussed above, it inevitably moves to a vantage point that transcends issues of gender and, more generally, moralistic perspective which refuse to take account of the complexities of the political order. This is not, I would like to repeat, to deny that feminist issues may no longer be defended, but only to emphasise that they must be defended within a concept of the political order that provides no theoretically privileged moral position for feminist (or of course any other) philosophers.

## Conclusion

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The general aim of the thesis, it will be recalled, was to examine some of the most important and influential attempts made by feminist thinkers during the past three decades to extend feminist theorising to the sphere of International Relations. Looking back at the thesis as a whole, two main conclusions may be drawn. The first is the need for the major revisions suggested in the last chapter to be made in feminist attempts to theorise International Relations if feminist theory is to achieve greater viability. If those revisions are plausible, then the possibility of a coherent, universally valid version of feminism, it has been suggested, must be dismissed. The second conclusion is that this does not mean, however, that the feminist project must be wholly dismissed but that it must, rather, be relocated in the wider framework of contemporary debate about three major issues in political theory.

In the first place, it has been suggested that Christine Sylvester's postmodern approach to feminism is especially illuminating in that it links feminist theorising about International Relations to a wider contemporary debate about what has been termed the 'essential contestability' of all political concepts. The result is to deny to feminist theory any intrinsically privileged position in the political arena. Putting the same thing slightly differently, since every political standpoint is conditional, none can make good the claim to the absolute vantage

point all ideologies have tended to claim, including more extreme versions of feminism.

The second conclusion also relocates feminist theorising about International Relations within a wider contemporary debate, which is about the difficulties created by the moralisation of politics. Although this moralisation is characteristic of certain kinds of feminist theory, it is in no sense peculiar to them. When feminist theorising is linked to the wider contemporary debate about the autonomy of the political relationship, it benefits not only from increased sensitivity to the need to make a clearer distinction between a moral and a political standpoint but also from greater awareness of the difficulties involved in constructing a public realm capable of accommodating modern pluralism of all kinds, including gender.

A third conclusion, which is closely connected to the second, is that attempts like Elshtain's to incorporate the autonomy of the political perspective into feminist theorising about International Relations, along with prudence and practical wisdom, link feminism to a wider contemporary debate about the kind of rationality involved in political reasoning. In particular, it connects the work of Elshtain to contemporary debate about the limitations of the abstract universal concept of rationality characteristic of neo-Kantian thinkers like Rawls.

When feminist theorising is relocated within these broader contemporary debates, it may be repeated, the outcome will inevitably disappoint more extreme feminists since it means the end of a uniquely feminist perspective. I have emphasised, however, that this does not mean that distinctively feminist issues

Fiona Ritchie

200605652

may no longer be defended, but only that their defence must be conducted within the confines of a concept of the political that provides no theoretically privileged moral positions, rather than from some putative external vantage point that claims to be morally absolute.



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