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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND POLITICS

A Feminist Call to Be Radical: Linking Women's Health and Planetary Health

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— Teresia Teaiwa (2013)

Reflecting on the two previous conversations in *Politics & Gender* (2015 and 2017) regarding the diverging paths in global political economy and security studies that feminist international relations (IR) scholars have taken, I am reminded of Teresia Teaiwa's poetry, which for me speaks about how crisis gives birth to the radical starting points of our feminist inquiries. We are all undoubtedly on the cusp of ever-intensifying forms of insecurities, and peoples who have least contributed to their creation and hastening are bearing the worst impacts. It is projected that by 2100, the compounded threats that humanity will face as a result of climate change will be in multitudes across five main human systems: health, water, food, economy, infrastructure, and security (Cramer et al. 2018; Mora et al. 2018, 106). The complex consequences of climate change demand an approach that encompasses the interaction effects of different risks and hazards. However, across natural and social sciences so far, the norm has been to

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focus on specific aspects of human life and to examine hazards–including conflict and violence — in isolation from one another. We then run the risk of misleading ourselves with partial, if not incorrect, assessments of the global processes surrounding climate change. In particular, we are yet to understand the multiscalar dynamics of environmental degradation and extreme weather as they are entangled with other crises such as armed conflicts, health pandemics, economic recessions, and resurgences of authoritarian leadership. Whether feminist or not, we simply cannot afford to think in "camps" instead of "bridges" given the nature of the multiple crises we as humanity are facing. As Anna M. Aganthangelou (2017, 741) points out, "[g]lobal politics are never just 'economic' or 'security' issues," so the kind of assumptions we hold and how these inform the questions we raise need to "attend to the highest stake of politics: existence."

Feminist IR scholarship can contribute to and even take the lead in advancing a transformative and interdisciplinary analysis of climate change and interlinked crises by starting from the everyday lives of women on the margins of global politics (Tickner 2015; see also Harding 1991; hooks 2000). The radical and transformative contribution of feminist perspectives to understanding global peace and security is that it allows for the unraveling of systems of oppression through the empirical analysis of how they entangle and make lives insecure. Then and now, what makes feminist scholarship particularly relevant to IR as a discipline and beyond, and for global security and development policy-making are that (1) it generates critiques based on system-level analysis that begins with the particularized lives of women from/in/through the margins, and that ultimately, (2) it aims to formulate radical visions for change focused not simply on building back in the aftermath of crisis but rather about *flourishing* — in leaps and bounds.

KNOWLEDGE FROM THE MARGINS

How, then, do we forge new and necessary analytical and empirical bridges within and beyond feminist IR scholarship? Enloe (2015) reminds us of investigations that "stretch" us and the difficult challenge of continuously shining a light on how the personal is political and international. At a time of even messier and more complex (re) structurings and with our very existence at stake, we need to start again and start over from/in/through the margins. I have found that once more

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the lives of "Third World" or global South women help widen the cast of our analytical nets. Feminist organizations such as the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Center for Women (ARROW 2014), the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD 2015), and Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) (Ortiz 2016; Sen and Grown 1987) are leading the way in helping us make sense of interlinked crises. In the 1980s, DAWN examined how militarization and violence are intersecting to exacerbate what they name "food-fuel-water" crises (Sen and Grown 1987). Their analysis traces the "systemic crises" that have enabled "reproduction failures": first, "the crises of food, water, and rural energy are linked together through environmental and demographic processes, themselves the result of short-sighted policies and existing power structures" (Sen and Grown 1987, 55); and second, that the experiences and interests of women and men in the margins are not always identical because of the enduring division of labor and resources (Sen and Grown 1987). When the global material and ideological root causes of these interlinked crises are left intact, this leads to reproduction failures in the provision of community or societal basic needs and manifests in harms to women's bodies which in the context of the global South are typically the only resource within women's immediate control. Yet, as DAWN points out, women's control over their own bodies are also often first targets of attack and are "made pawns in the struggle between the forces of 'tradition' and so-called 'modernity'" (Sen and Grown 1987, 76).

DAWN revisits these multiple crises, which have intensified, to characterize our current "fierce new world" (Ortiz 2016). Beginning with case studies in Latin America, DAWN demonstrates how feminist movements in the global South are able to map the interlinkages between sexual and reproductive rights, political economy and ecology of globalization, and political restructuring and social transformations (Ortiz 2016, 26). ARROW and APWLD both focus on the Asia-Pacific as a crisis-prone region where multiple forms of displacements caused by conflicts and disaster occur. They, too, are rendering visible how women's bodies, particularly sexual and reproductive health of indigenous and internally displaced peoples, help explain the state of planetary health. I draw on these analyses to sustain my own inquiry in (re)learning how the depletion of women's bodies serves as a barometer for the constellation of pressures — including militarism and extractive economies — that lead to the depletion of the environment. In the case of the Philippines, which is reportedly the deadliest country in Asia for

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environmental defenders, indigenous or *Lumad* leaders have long been fighting to protect their ancestral lands and communities against extractive industries (Global Witness 2017; UN General Assembly 2016). Indigenous peoples' collective identity is deeply intertwined with environmental conservation which renders their resistance simultaneously for their own survival and for the sustainability of lands and waters of which they are traditional custodians. The Lumad struggle is gendered, too. Lumad women through their social reproductive roles in their families and communities mitigate the immediate and long-term health impacts of mining and logging activities in distinct ways. Nourishing women's own bodies, for example, becomes a necessary act of resistance because they are also biological and cultural reproducers of their indigenous groups' traditional knowledge. Globally, this form of knowledge is increasingly recognized for enhancing scientific knowledge as applied in conservation and climate change response that can benefit humanity as a whole (Nakashima, Krupnik, and Rubis 2018; UN Human Rights Council 2017). Yet in the Philippines, the costs of sustaining this knowledge in the face of militarism and health barriers are met by impunity for violence against indigenous peoples.

FROM SURVIVAL TO FLOURISHING

Fighting for the human right to a healthy environment (UN General Assembly 2018) represents a feminist struggle. Framing women's health within the same lens as planetary health offers a strategic approach for ensuring that gender equality is at the heart of global responses to climate change and peace building. This means in practice that we must find the opportunity to rebuild not just human lives but *all* lives in the aftermath of conflicts and disasters. Importantly, as we navigate new politics and activisms in the Anthropocene, we must be careful not to short-change ourselves of the feminist notion of flourishing with mere survival (Di Chiro 2017; Mies and Shiva 2014). We cannot expect radical change from "resilience" approaches that push for women's economic participation under a promise of postcrisis economic recovery and growth while leaving inequalities in social reproduction intact (Elias 2016). Much like resource extraction, participation is ultimately folded within an economic model underpinned by depletion because it keeps hidden an array of interlinked costs and limits to women's participation (Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014; Tanyag 2018). Consequently, women

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are drawn into complicity in the degradation of their own health and well-being as well as of the environment because in the absence of alternative economic models, they are bound to exhaust both. Understanding women's bodies is therefore fundamental for "moving from extraction to renewal" and for acknowledging that we are all part of an ecosystem that has the "right to regenerate" (Klein 2014, 419).

In trying to understand contemporary issues of global peace and security, I do not believe that feminists go about calculating whether an issue is more or less global political economy or security studies; neither is such an approach increasingly a fruitful or pragmatic path to take at a time of intensified and interlinked crises. Rather, the question remains: From what margins are you looking out and in? What should we, as feminist scholars, write or read about the lives of people in the margins? Lastly, what vision for radical change do their lives compel us to make?

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