

The Affiliation between Feminist Intellectual Paradigms in IPE and Post-positivism

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ABSTRACT: The development of feminist IPE theory has been profoundly influenced by new schools of thought that have emerged since the Second World War, and in turn has had an impact on the world's political economy. The critique of positivism in particular has led to an increased emphasis on post-positivist theory, and this paper argues that post-positivist ideas are consistent with the developmental lineage of feminist IPE and have guided feminist IPE. Feminist theory represents a new research path that has added a gender perspective to the field of IPE. Feminist theory has developed over the course of a complex and long process. In the sphere of IPE, feminist theory has addressed issues ranging from a critique of the absence of female perspectives on gender inequality in international relations to an attempt to bring gender issues into the global sphere more broadly. Whether from an intellectual paradigm or epistemological perspective, experience and integration have been longstanding themes in feminism. This article examines the intimate links between feminist IPE theory and post-positivist theory, analyses the content of feminism's existing paradigms and processes of knowledge construction, and explores the development, current status and limitations of feminist IPE theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term "International Political Economy" (IPE) appeared in the academic literature around the mid-1960s. IPE is an outgrowth of the discipline of international relations. Since the 1970s, as the world economy and the development problems of the Third World have gained academic attention. It has diversified to include the intersection of politics and economics. This is due to the constant movement of goods, services, money, people and ideas across borders [1]. The feminist perspective began gaining prominence within the field of IPE in the late 1980s in the midst of a major debate between positivist and post-positivist international relations theorists. Feminism was grouped together with constructivism, critical theory, historical sociology, postmodernism and neo-Gramscianism, all of which are labeled as post-positivist international relations theories [2]. Feminist international relations has developed primarily from the feminist perspectives that have been nurtured in international relations theory and other disciplines, asserting that social gender is a fundamental component of international relations and international relations theory [3].

This article asserts that post-positivism and feminist IPE theory are inevitable. In particular, there are parallels between the critical stance of some feminist paradigms of knowledge and the critique of positivism by post-positivist theory. The article makes a review and argument for the paradigm and concept of knowledge.

In regard to content, this article examines the development of feminist IPE and explores the

methodology of feminist theory within the sphere of IPE. Using post-positivist theory as a research paradigm, this article analyses neglected elements of feminist IPE and assesses their impact on the development of feminism. Finally, an attempt is made to summarise the limitations and future directions of feminist IPE development in relation to existing theoretical research and the current international situation.

2. THE TWO STAGES OF FEMINIST IPE

Feminist IPE is a new research path in international relations that generally follows two stages [4]:

The first stage critiques mainstream international relations theory, which only adds women's experiences to the framework of traditional international relations theory for study (Empiricism). In particular, it exposes how the masculinity hidden behind realism has created a gendered understanding of international relations [3]. Feminist scholar Enloe put a classic question "Where are the Women?" in 1989, undertakes a rethinking of hegemonic masculinity, seeking to find the role of women in the international arena. Feminist empiricism critiques the absence of women, who make up half of the population, at all levels of international relations, and advocates for the addition of women's experience to the existing body of research on international relations [5]. The second stage attempts to understand international relations from a gendered rather than a single-gender perspective and to construct a research methodology with its own

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characteristics. Ontologically, it replaces the state with the individual, constructing theories at the level of social structures and individual practices of daily life. Epistemologically it is a rejection of the subject/object dualism and claims of value neutrality espoused in positivism. Methodologically it is a pluralistic approach to research that is interdisciplinary in its gender perspective (Standpoint theory) ^[4]. It is clear from the development of the second stage that the study of feminism has become increasingly normative and in-depth, a fact exemplified by the growing recognition that gender is tied to class and racial identity (eg. postmodern, postcolonial perspectives). Sociologists' demands for feminist and gender studies perspectives in IPE have intensified in recent years because scholars in international development have become aware of the absence of gender. The 2010 special issue of *Signs-Women and International Political Economy* traces the relationship between feminism and the neoliberal crisis throughout their simultaneous development, highlighting the importance of gender in the analysis of international political economy. Sociologists argue that discursive and political struggles are already taking place, challenging the power relations entrenched in IPE^{[6][7]}.

3. THE LINK BETWEEN FEMINIST IPE AND POST-POSITIVISM

Nick J Fox describes the post-positivist paradigm as primarily a critique and extension of positivism ^[8]. This critique has three main elements, each of which has its own relevance to feminist IPE theory. Firstly, post-positivist theorists argue that positivism ignores context (situation) and attempts to establish generalisations independent of context. In the social sciences, context is usually an integral part of the activity and therefore cannot be ignored, meaning that objective knowledge requires a complete cultural connection. The overarching theme of concern for the feminist knowledge paradigm is the separation of socially orthodox knowledge from female experience ^[9]. This separation is manifested both in the under-representation of women as subjects and objects of research, and in the neglect, distortion and exclusion of women's experiences from the premises and conclusions of IPE research. The feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith developed the concept of Bifurcated Consciousness to describe this separation. Smith argues that there is a false line between the world as perceived by women themselves and the world as described in official discourse. This line creates a serious disjuncture between the experiences women discover and feel in their own everyday lives and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of IPE available for examining this world of experience ^[10]. Smith's assessment rests on a fundamental assumption that males and females do not actually live in the same social world. Thus, male experiences and female experiences in social life are completely non-equivalent and irreplaceable. Existing social research treats men's experiences and positions as the natural representatives of universal knowledge, and women are systematically excluded from the whole body of knowledge and forced

into silence, reflecting the hegemonic ideological apparatus of masculinity that exists within the prevailing cultural and knowledge structures ^[11].

Susan Moller Okin presents a second criticism of positivism, noting that the social order that has emerged from the human senses relies heavily on subjective value judgements, and arguing that it is problematic to postulate a single truth about the nature of the social world ^[12]. Feminist sociologists argue that social orthodox knowledge and theory ignores and distorts women's experiences, replaces the universal world with the world as men see it, explains the foundations of social structures in terms of dominant discourses familiar to men, and makes social theory itself a basis for supporting gender domination and male hegemony. These sociologists further argue that social science is essentially a form of androcentrism, and that the basic procedures and methodological models promoted by social research form an alliance with patriarchal ^[11]. As these arguments were promulgated, post-positivism inspired feminist international relations scholars to try to measure the international order through a different lens.

The third post-positivist critique criticises positivist theorists for endeavouring to eliminate subjectivity from the growth of knowledge while denying researchers any role in reflexivity ^[13]. Post-positivist scholars recognise the role of the researcher as an interpreter of data and highlight the importance of reflexivity in research practice ^[14]. Arguably, the birth and purpose of feminism is that unequal thinking spawns a struggle for equal rights, causing men to rethink and society to rethink. In the same way, feminist IPE advocates for the discovery and recognition of women's roles in political and economic development by means of laws founded on empirical knowledge and reflection.

4. THE PROGRESS OF FEMINIST IPE

Feminist epistemology, as an emerging epistemology, adds a new way of researching IPE to the existing positivist and post-positivist epistemological debate in international relations. This new epistemology has revisited various aspects of the IPE debate and pushed it further, highlighting subjects long neglected by traditional international politics such as culture, ethics, identity politics and the individual.

The rise of feminist epistemology has provided opportunities for feminists to challenge the traditional assumption that "gender is meaningless" in IPE. Christine Sylvester, a leading American postmodern feminist researcher on international politics, states that, "The third argument is our argument, our moment, our space, our opportunity, the tree we climb, the queue we form" ^[14]. What feminists and some international political theorists are advocating is a cross-paradigm debate and dialogue ^[15]. Sandra Harding has put forward the most systematic and widely accepted account of feminist epistemology. Harding sees feminist epistemology as a defence strategy to justify feminist research, dividing feminist epistemology into three forms: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory and postmodern feminism

[16][11].

The inclusion of women within the framework of traditional international relations theory has been a major achievement of feminist empiricists [17]. It could be argued that consciousness-raising lies at the heart of the women's movement. This effort started when small groups of women in different contexts began to discuss, analyse and act together. The approach to consciousness-raising is fundamentally empirical; it provides a systematic model of inquiry that challenges passively accepted knowledge and authority, enabling women to learn from each other [18]. Whether they created caucuses within established organisations or made entirely new connections, women who became feminists began to see alternative benchmarks of knowledge and authority in the newfound community of women and the 'women's experience' [19].

Dorothy Smith and Patricia Hill Collins are proponents of another initiative of feminist empiricism. They endeavoured to discover the women who have already been active in international relations, along with the contributions they had made, their perspectives, status and role. Feminist standpoint theory does not simply refer to the political position and values of feminist studies, but instead has become a representative and influential school of feminist epistemology whose proponents include Dorothy Smith and Sandra Harding. In response to comments about her theory from her feminist peers in 1992, Smith said that her project was to create a sociology that began with the reality of women's experiences, a project that could be expressed in terms such as 'women's perspective', 'women's experience' and 'women's position' [10][11]. Furthermore, Smith believes that there is something special about the female position and tries to integrate it into the sociological approach to research. Examples of this include questioning the value neutrality of knowledge, rejecting the subject/object and emotional/rational dichotomies, viewing the world through a gendered lens, and focusing on the interests of marginalised and disadvantaged groups [20][4]. Such a sociology links people's experiences and contexts of action to accounts of social organisation and relations, using an analysis of feminine experiences to reveal the relations of social domination and forms of organisation that affect our lives. The knowledge thus gained differs from official, universalised, objectified narratives in that it is based on women's everyday experiences, specific, local, and from the standpoint of women's own bodies. In discussion of feminist research methods, Smith also emphasises that the purpose of starting from people's everyday lives is not to explain their behaviour, but to argue for the social organisation and power relations embodied in everyday life [20][11].

Postmodernist theorists argue that there is no such thing as 'factual truth'. In their view, women's experiences or narratives do not merely reflect the fact of women's oppression; rather, 'narratives' themselves are seen as forces that construct relations of power and oppression. Connell argues that discourse and narrative embody the gender order, and that the field of discourse becomes the site where relations of domination and subjugation - the establishment of hegemony and

resistance to it - operate [21].

There is no doubt that women do not have a voice because they are excluded from the linguistic system that regulates power. When a society develops a set of descriptive language for a particular dimension, it indicates that this dimension is considered important by that society [22]. Thus, feminist scholars have seen that labour with emotion is the essence of women's lived experience, yet no appropriate linguistic symbols have been developed to express it.

5. FEMINIST INTELLECTUAL PARADIGMS

5.1. Women's Perspectives

Compared to other social sciences, the gender perspective in international political economy has been the slowest to arrive, mainly because the presupposition of the state as the main actor in mainstream international relations theory has obscured the gendered aspects of it, and because the field is considered gender-neutral, hiding the gender differences and discrimination that still exist in international relations [23]. Post-positivism has influenced feminist theory to advocate multiple perspectives on the world. Feminist epistemology promotes the use of a gender perspective in analytical observation, making up for the lack of a gender perspective in previous studies. In many issues, a gender perspective in research can reveal an unopened side of things.

Another point of focus of the study of women's experiences described above is that many of the prominent female political figures and national leaders on the international stage today did not come from a politically relevant background. Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel has a PhD in physics; former British Prime Minister and "Iron Lady" Margaret Thatcher specialised in chemistry; and Iceland gave birth to the world's first elected female president, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, who has devoted herself to literature and theatre. Not having majored in politics or law was somehow an advantage for each of these women, allowing them to examine and understand politics from a different perspective and giving the international political economy a sharp stimulus. Women are concerned about health, environmental protection, women's issues, education, gender equality, etc. They are dissatisfied with the status quo, and from their own observations and experiences, they are able to make an impact. They do so not just by focusing on economic growth, but by wanting to create a more equal and diverse national and international environment, enriching the perspectives and results of their research, and demonstrating through their own actions that gender is worthy of attention in IPE.

5.2. Feminist Epistemology

Post-positivist epistemology asserts that the cognitive subject cannot be completely separated from the object, and therefore social science research cannot dispense with the subjectivity of the researcher; "theory always serves a certain person and a certain goal" [24][25]. Post-positivist

epistemology has raised objections to the scientific, rational stance of positivist epistemology, creating serious challenges for the positivist conception of international relations. Feminism introduces the element of gender within the post-positivist framework as a central category of knowledge construction and pays much attention to subjective values, micro experiences and the researcher's own ability to enter the situation [26]. Feminist epistemology thus challenges positivist epistemology in two aspects. Firstly, it questions the objectivity and universality of international relations as claimed by positivism. Secondly, it criticises the dualistic structure of 'patriarchal' epistemology [23]. For feminists, the dualistic structure is the basis for hierarchical, patriarchal domination. It divides knowledge into rational and emotional, and treats reason as the only way to acquire truthful knowledge. By defining women in terms of 'irrationality', it denies them the ability to acquire true knowledge of international relations. It is the exclusion of women from the cognitive subject that leads to the narrow and incomplete theory of international relations developed by mainstream epistemology [13].

Feminist epistemology argues that cognition cannot be separated from subjectivity and socio-historicity. In international relations, 'masculine' is equated with 'scientific', and men as the dominant group restrict and exclude the perspectives of women as a marginalised group; such knowledge cannot be universal and objective. In other words, the seemingly scientific and objective knowledge of international relations conceals male power and dominance. Feminist epistemology thus emphasises the replacement of the binary structure of traditional epistemology with a relationship of equality, either by assuming that women have the same rationality as men or by assuming that feminine characteristics are superior in value to masculine characteristics [31]. These two perceptions of the value of the sexes have led feminism to develop two epistemologies on international political economy: empiricism and standpoint theory (mentioned above). Feminist standpoint theory emphasises the perception of the world from the perspective of vulnerable groups and values the interests of the marginalised and disadvantaged. This claim has served as a wake-up call to all fields of study in societies dominated by Western discourse, and has prompted powerful groups in the mainstream to listen to the voices of disadvantaged and marginalised groups and to reflect both on the world ignored by the dominant discourse, and on the prejudice and discrimination exercised by powerful groups against those they subjugate [11].

The first phase of the development of feminism in IPE was characterized by enlightened consciousness, and the second phase by the rise to strength (mentioned above). As critique of positivism intensified, post-positivism challenged the authority of the mainstream and drew thought and attention to marginalisation. Post-positivist theorists argue for an emphasis on what is often forgotten, ignored or marginalised in order to make sense of things. In 1989, Cynthia Enloe published *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: A Feminist Understanding of International Relations*. In this book, Enloe studies women who had

been neglected by traditional international relations, such as the wives of diplomats, women on military bases and in tourist areas in third world countries, and Latin American actresses in Hollywood. The analysis of these women's lives reveals the ways in which women's activities in international relations are consistently neglected, and highlights the extent to which international relations are influenced by gender. This is exemplified by the 'masculinisation' of plantations in third world countries; it is claimed that plantations are a male industry, when in fact women make up the majority of plantation workers. A small number of male workers are supported by women doing the entire domestic output at home. However, women do not receive equal pay, and their contributions are ignored. Enloe relates that while women's representative rebel and voice their discontent, many of the workers, even fellow women, refusing to participate in the movement for their rights because they accept the idea that the plantation is a male industry [5]. The analysis of gender-related issues in IPE from a gender perspective and the elucidation of issues that mainstream international relations theory cannot successfully explain from a gender perspective represent major contributions of feminist standpoint theory to international relations theory.

The strength of empiricism lies in its affirmation of the possibility for women and women's issues to be included in the study and construction of international relations, and for women's experiences to be used as a basis for understanding the world. The strength of standpoint theory lies in its emphasis on the revolutionary changes that feminism can bring to the construction of international relations knowledge. Standpoint theory demonstrates the need to create a new epistemological position by establishing women's subjectivity at the theoretical and practical levels in order to achieve more equitable, just and harmonious international relations. In this sense, empiricism and standpoint theory seek to construct an inclusive approach to feminist analysis. This approach does not substitute the promotion of one gender for the other, but rather seeks to ensure the objectivity and comprehensiveness of knowledge in the sphere of international relations by conducting research through the lens of both genders.

5.3. The right to a voice

Feminism attempts to construct a new epistemology in a constant state of development. In the real world, where language limits the capacity to know, it is necessary to construct new linguistic contexts. If this exercise is not undertaken, in the real world of gender power, women will still not be free from processes of deprivation, discrimination and objectification. The first step towards empowering women should take place at the level of language, and this change is already happening. In China, for example, there was no Chinese translation of the term 'domestic violence' before the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. In fact, the absence of a word for domestic violence does not mean that women are not assaulted by men within Chinese families. The traditional Chinese concept of marriage was that women had to do

whatever their husbands wanted, and as a result, domestic violence was seen as a normal internal family matter.

Although women are physically and emotionally damaged, people are socialised not to see this as a problem. Even 10 years ago, it was said that domestic violence was almost non-existent in China. But following the World Conference on Women in China, the term "domestic violence" began to be used openly in Chinese discourse, with the new Marriage Law including opposition to domestic violence in its provisions. The All-China Women's Federation has released data collected from surveys which shows that on average, a woman is beaten by her husband every 7.4 seconds in China. This means that in China, about 30% of women in 270 million families have suffered domestic violence. Furthermore, 157,000 women commit suicide each year, 60% of whom do so because of domestic violence [27]. In a study by the Chinese Women's Institute, domestic violence is divided into physical violence, mental violence, sexual violence, and economic control, based on the type of violation of the victim's rights [27]. It is thus evident that the revelation of objective facts is constantly valued along with the emergence of discourse.

6.CONCLUSION

This paper examines the post-positivist context in which feminist IPE emerged, with the aim of contributing to the development of feminist IPE. A multifaceted view of international issues and the role of reflection in research were well illustrated and analyzed in this review.

Empiricism and standpoint theory are essential to feminist perceptions of international relations. They provide the basis for a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of international relations. In addition, both theories seek to clarify the rights and obligations of women as well as the value of women. Thus, there is a need to integrate empiricism and standpoint theory. The study of international relations cannot be based solely on a holistic view of humanity but must also be inclusive of the perspectives of women. This allows the experiences and perspectives of both genders to emerge in a realistic way. Highlighting the value of feminist epistemology in empirical research and re-examining the core concepts of international political economy can further expand the influence of feminist theory both in academic discourses and in the construction of international relations.

The future feminist IPE should take a feminist stance to guide empiricism combining both standpoint theory and empiricism. A new feminist conception of international political economy should go beyond the superficial issue of the role of women in international relations and critically analyze the mainstream international relations research.

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