

CHAPTER ONE

Gender Makes the World Go Round

Where Are the Women?

Perhaps you have never imagined what it would feel like if you were a woman fleeing your home with your young children, escaping a violent conflict between government troops and rebel soldiers, crossing a national border, pitching a tent in a muddy refugee camp, and then being treated by aid staff workers as though you and the children you are supporting were indistinguishable, “womenandchildren.”

Maybe, if any of your aunts or grandmothers have told you stories about having worked as domestic servants, you can more easily picture what your daily life would be like if you had left your home country to take a live-in job caring for someone else’s little children or their aging parents. You can almost imagine the emotions you would feel if you were to Skype across time zones to your own children every week, but you cannot be sure how you would react when your employer insisted upon taking possession of your passport.

It probably feels like a stretch to see yourself working in a disco outside a foreign military base. It is hard to think about



Figure 1. Egyptian women protesting sexual harassment hold up signs in Arabic and English, Cairo, 2013. Photo: OPantiSH.

how you would try to preserve some modicum of dignity for yourself in the narrow space left between the sexualized expectations of your foreign male soldier-clients and the demands of the local disco owner who takes most of your earnings.

While you might daydream about becoming a senior foreign policy expert in your country's diplomatic corps, you may deliberately shy away from thinking about whether you will be able to sustain a relationship with a partner while you pursue this ambition. You try not to think about whether your partner will be willing to cope with both diplomacy's social demands and the pressures you together will endure living in a proverbial media fishbowl.

If you keep up with the world news, you may be able to put yourself in the shoes of a women's rights activist in Cairo, but

how would you decide whether to paint your protest sign only in Arabic or to add an English translation of your political message just so that CNN and Reuters viewers around the world can see that your revolutionary agenda includes not only toppling the current oppressive regime but also pursuing specifically feminist goals?

As hard as this will be, it will take all of this imagining—and more—if you are going to make reliable sense of international politics. Stretching your imagination, though, will not be enough. Making feminist sense of international politics requires that you exercise genuine curiosity about each of these women’s lives—and the lives of women you have yet to think about. And that curiosity will have to fuel energetic detective work, careful digging into the complex experiences and ideas of domestic workers, hotel chambermaids, women’s rights activists, women diplomats, women married to diplomats, women who are the mistresses of male elites, women sewing-machine operators, women who have become sex workers, women soldiers, women forced to become refugees, and women working on agribusiness plantations.

That is, making useful sense—feminist sense—of international politics requires us to follow diverse women to places that are usually dismissed by conventional foreign affairs experts as merely “private,” “domestic,” “local,” or “trivial.” As we will discover, however, a disco can become an arena for international politics. So can someone else’s kitchen or your own closet.

And so can a secretary’s desk. Consider, for instance, women who work as secretaries in foreign affairs ministries. They are treated by most political commentators as if they were no more interesting than the standard-issue furniture. But women as secretaries have played interesting roles in international events as significant as the controversial Iran-Contra Affair, which

exposed the clandestine American military intervention in Nicaragua in the 1980s, and as the secret Israel-Palestine peace negotiations in Oslo in the 1990s. Who pays attention to women as clerical workers when, allegedly, it is elite men (and a handful of elite women) who determine the fates of nations? Feminist researchers do. They challenge the conventional presumption that paying attention to women as secretaries tells us nothing about the dynamics of high-level politics. Feminist-informed investigators pay attention to low-status secretarial women because they have learned that paying attention to (listening to, taking seriously the observations of) women in these scarcely noticed jobs can pull back the curtain on the political workings in lofty state affairs. Devoting attention to women who are government secretaries, for instance, exposes the far-reaching political consequences of feminized loyalty, feminized secrecy, feminized record-keeping, feminized routine, masculinized status, and masculinized control.¹

Thanks to innovative research by feminist-informed scholars, we know to look for secretaries throughout international politics. For instance, we recently have learned that in the 1920s and 1930s, some enterprising women—German, British, Dutch—pursued jobs in the newly launched League of Nations, the international organization founded in the wake of horrific World War I to remake interstate relations. These women were breaking new ground not only by becoming the first international civil servants but also by, as women, pursuing their own careers far from home. Working as secretaries and also as librarians, these women were the ones who ensured that the League of Nations documents would be produced and archived professionally. Because of these staff women's efforts, we now can launch our provocative reassessments of the League as a site not only for preventing war

but also for promoting international social justice. These women did not think of themselves as furniture.²

Some women, of course, have not been treated as furniture. Among those women who have become visible in the recent era's international political arena are Hillary Clinton, Mary Robinson, Angela Merkel, Christine Lagarde, Michelle Bachelet, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Shirin Ebadi.³ Each of these prominent women has her own gendered stories to tell (or, perhaps, to deliberately not tell). But a feminist-informed investigation makes it clear that there are far more women engaged in international politics than the conventional headlines imply. Millions of women are international actors, and most of them are not Shirin Ebadi or Hillary Clinton.

To make reliable sense of today's (and yesterday's) dynamic international politics calls both for acquiring new skills and for redirecting skills one already possesses. That is, making feminist sense of international politics necessitates gaining skills that feel quite new and redirecting skills that one has exercised before, but which one assumed could shed no light on wars, economic crises, global injustices, and elite negotiations. Investigating the workings of masculinities and femininities as they each shape complex international political life—that is, conducting a gender-curious investigation—will require a lively curiosity, genuine humility, a full tool kit, and candid reflection on potential misuses of those old and new research tools.⁴

Most of all, one has to become interested in the actual lives—and thoughts—of complicatedly diverse women. One need not necessarily admire every woman whose life one finds interesting. Feminist attentiveness to all sorts of women is not derived from hero worship. Some women, of course, will turn out to be insightful, innovative, and even courageous. Upon closer examination,

other women will prove to be complicit, intolerant, or self-serving. The motivation to take all women's lives seriously lies deeper than admiration. Asking "Where are the women?" is motivated by a determination to discover exactly how this world works. One's feminist-informed digging is fueled by a desire to reveal the ideas, relationships, and policies those (usually unequal) gendered workings rely upon.

For example, a British woman decides to cancel her plans for a winter holiday in Egypt. She thinks Egypt is "exotic," the warm weather would be welcome, and cruising down the Nile sounds exciting; but she is nervous about political upheaval in the wake of the overthrow of Egypt's previous regime. So instead she books her winter vacation in Jamaica. In making her tourism plans, she is playing her part in creating the current international political system. She is further deepening Egypt's financial debt while helping a Caribbean government earn badly needed foreign currency. And no matter which country she chooses for her personal pleasure, she is transforming "chambermaid" into a major globalized job category.

Or consider an American elementary school teacher who designs a lesson plan to feature the Native American "princess" Pocahontas. Many of the children will have watched the Disney animated movie. Now, the teacher hopes, she can show children how this seventeenth-century Native American woman saved the Englishman John Smith from execution at Jamestown, Virginia, later converted to Christianity, married an English planter, and helped clear the way for the English colonization of America. (The teacher might also include in her lesson plan the fact that Pocahontas's 1614 marriage to John Rolfe was the first recorded interracial marriage in what was to become the United States.) Her young students might come away from their teacher's well-

intentioned lesson having absorbed the myth that local women are easily charmed by their own people's foreign occupiers.

The lives of Hollywood actresses can take on new international import when viewed through a feminist analytical lens. For example, in the 1930s, Hollywood moguls turned the innovative Brazilian singer Carmen Miranda into an American movie star. Then they put Miranda to work bolstering President Franklin Roosevelt's efforts to promote friendlier relations between the United States and Latin America. Soon after, an international banana company made her image into their logo, creating a new, intimate relationship between American housewives and a multinational plantation company. Today, however, Carmen Miranda has become an archetype of a certain over-the-top Latinized femininity. Men and women dress up with fantastic fruit-adorned hats and put their Carmen Miranda look-alike images up on YouTube and their Facebook pages.

Or consider the implications of a gendered encounter between a foreign male soldier and an impoverished, local woman today: an American—or Australian or Canadian or Ugandan—male soldier on an international peacekeeping or humanitarian mission responds to his comrades' homophobic innuendos by finally going along with them to a local brothel in order to prove that he is "one of the boys." Though he may think of himself as simply bolstering his own manly credentials, his attempts to compensate for his insecure masculine identity help shape power relations between his country's military and the society it is supposed to be protecting. He is also reinforcing one of the crucial bulwarks of today's militarized international political relations: heterosexualized masculinity.

The woman tourist and the chambermaid; the schoolteacher and her students; the film star, her studio owners, the banana

company executives, the American housewife, and contemporary YouTube enthusiasts; the male soldier, the brothel owner, and the woman working as a prostitute—all are dancing an intricate international minuet. Those who look closely at the gendered causes and the gendered consequences of that minuet are conducting a feminist investigation of today’s international political system.

These “dancers,” however, are not in a position to call the tune. Yet even a woman who is victimized is not mindless. It is crucial to this feminist-informed investigation into unequal international relations that we not create a false (and lazy) dichotomy between the allegedly “mindless victim” and the allegedly “empowered actor.” Women who are pushed to the far margin of any power system continue to assess and strategize even with the minimal resources they have available; sometimes they move beyond private strategizing to collective organizing. Nonetheless, acknowledging the severely restricted agency exercised by women pushed to the margins is not to deny that some international actors wield a lot more influence and garner far more rewards than do others. Thus, to investigate the gendered workings of international politics we will have to make power visible—power in all its myriad forms. This exploration can be uncomfortable.

WHERE DOES POWER OPERATE?

To do a gender investigation fueled by a *feminist* curiosity requires asking not only about the meanings of masculinity and femininity but also about how those meanings determine where women are and what they think about being there. Conducting a feminist gender analysis requires investigating *power*: what forms

does power take? Who wields it? How are some gendered wieldings of power camouflaged so they do not even look like power?

A feminist gender analysis calls for continuing to ask even more questions about the genderings of power: Who gains what from wielding a particular form of gender-infused power? What do challenges to those wieldings of that form of power look like? When do those challenges succeed? When are they stymied?

Most of us, understandably, would prefer to think that the appeal of a company's marketing logo is cultural, not political. We would like to imagine that going on holiday to Jamaica rather than Egypt is merely a social, even aesthetic, matter, not a political choice. Many women and men would also prefer to think of sexual relationships as existing in the intimate realm of personal desire and attraction, immune to political manipulation. Yet corporate executives choose certain logos over others to appeal to consumers' stereotypes of racialized femininities. Government officials market their women's alleged beauty or their deferential service in order to earn needed tourism revenues. To foster certain bases of "social order," elected legislators craft particular laws to punish certain sexual attractions while rewarding others. Power, taste, attraction, and desire are not mutually exclusive.

If one fails to pay close attention to women—all sorts of women—one will miss who wields power and for what ends. That is one of the core lessons of feminist international investigation.

Power operates across borders. Think about the power dynamics of marriage. Whose marriage to whom is recognized by which governments for which purposes? To answer this multifaceted question, one has to pay attention to power. One has to investigate who has the power to rule that a male citizen can marry a woman or a man of another country and thereby confer

his own citizenship status on his new spouse, whereas a woman who marries a person from another country cannot. Those with access to political power use that power to control marriage because marital relationships between people of the same or opposite sex affect transnational immigrations and access to the privileges of state-bestowed citizenship. Marriage is political. Marriage is international.

The politics of marriage can become even more intensely international as a result of gendered pressures from outside: colonial rule, new international norms of human rights, transnational religious evangelizing, and membership in new interstate unions whose standards have to be met. A family's wedding album rarely shows what power was wielded nationally or internationally and by whom in that ceremony. One has to dig deeper, even when the digging makes one uneasy.

One of the most important intellectual benefits that comes from paying serious attention to where women are in today's international politics—and investigating how they got *there* and what they *think* about being there—is that it exposes *how much more political power is operating than most non-gender-curious commentators would have us believe*.

This assertion—that many commentators underestimate power—may seem odd, since so many gender-*in*curious commentators appear to project an aura of power themselves, as if their having insights into the alleged realities of power bestows on them a mantle of power. Yet it is these same expert commentators who gravely underestimate both the amount and the kinds of power it has taken to create and to perpetuate the international political system we all are living in today. It is not incidental that the majority of the people invited to serve as expert foreign affairs commentators are male. For instance, one study

revealed that, although white men constitute only 31 percent of today's total U.S. population, they made up 62 percent of all the expert guests on the three most influential American evening cable news channels.⁵

The flaw at the core of these mainstream, seemingly “sophisticated” commentaries is how much they take for granted, how much they treat as inevitable, and thus how much about the workings of power they fail to question—that is, how many types of power, and how many wieldings and wielders of power, they miss.

Too often gender incurious commentators attribute women's roles in international affairs to tradition, cultural preferences, and timeless norms, as if each of these existed outside the realms where power is wielded, as if they were beyond the reach of decisions and efforts to enforce those decisions. What sacrifices a woman as a mother should make, what priorities a woman as a wife should embrace, what sexualized approaches in public a woman should consider innocent or flattering, what victim identity a refugee woman should adopt, what boundaries in friendships with other women a woman should police, what dutiful-daughter model a girl should admire—in reality, all of these are shaped by the exercise of power by people who believe that their own local and international interests depend on women and girls internalizing these particular feminized expectations. If women internalize these expectations, they will not see the politics behind them. Political commentators who do not question these internalizations will accept the camouflaged operations of power as if there were no power at work at all. That is dangerous.

Women's collective resistance to any one of these feminized expectations can realign both local and international systems of power. As we will see, even stymied or only partially successful

resistance by women can expose both who wields power to sustain the gendered status quo and what those power-wielders fear they will lose if women's resistance succeeds. This is why every suffrage movement in every country—the United States, Britain, Brazil, Mexico, China, Egypt, Kuwait—has raised such intense political alarm. Today, likewise, every effort by immigrant domestic workers to unionize—and every attempt by women garment and electronics workers to go out on strike, every move by women banana workers to be heard inside a male-led labor union, every campaign by an “out” lesbian to gain elective office, every demand by women married to soldiers and diplomats to pursue their own careers—not only has the potential to upset the gendered norms and roles on which the current global system has come to rely but also exposes where power operates to sustain the gendered status quo, as well as who benefits from that current gendered status quo.

Thus, if one is interested in gaining a reliable sense of national and international politics, one should be curious about all sorts of women's resistance, whether or not that resistance succeeds.

As one learns to look at the world through gender-curious feminist eyes, one learns to ask whether anything that passes for natural, inevitable, inherent, traditional, or biological has been *made*. One asks how all sorts of things have been made—the receding glacier, the low-cost sweatshirt, the heavily weaponized police force, the masculinized peace negotiation, the romantic marriage, the all-male Joint Chiefs of Staff. Asking how something has been made implies that it has been made by someone with a certain kind of power. Suddenly there are clues to trace; there is blame, credit, and responsibility to apportion, not just at the start but at each point along the way.

That is, a feminist, gender-curious approach to international politics offers a lot more topics to investigate because it makes visible the full workings of myriad forms of power.

WHO TAKES SERIOUSLY THE IDEAS OF
TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISTS?

Despite the remarkable activist engagement that has generated today's multistranded transnational women's movement, many journalists (and the editors who assign their stories), foreign-policy experts, and policy decision makers remain oddly confident in their dismissal of feminist ideas.

Among the most loosely organized, social-media-energized, recent transnational women's movements have been Girl Rising, Slut Walks, Femen, and Vagina Monologues, with its accompanying V Day. Each tends to be fluid and not to depend on paid staffs or brick-and-mortar headquarters. The activists in each adapt their actions and messages to suit local needs and conditions. The organizations' distinguishing features are Internet savvy, feminist creativity, and convention-defying public performance.⁶

Simultaneously, a host of more explicitly organized transnational feminist groups and networks challenge the conventional workings of international politics today. Here is an admittedly incomplete list:

- Women Living Under Muslim Laws
- International Network of Women in Black
- Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights
- International Women's Health Coalition
- Our Bodies Ourselves Global Network
- Equality Now



Figure 2. Anna Hutsol, cofounder of the topless direct-action feminist group Femen, and her mother in their Ukrainian home village, 2013, prior to physical attacks aimed at Hutsol and other Femen activists. Photo: Dmitry Kostyukov/The New York Times/Redux.

- International Action Network on Small Arms Women's Network
- Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice
- International Domestic Workers Network
- International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security
- Women in Conflict Zones Network

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was founded a century ago by transnational feminist peace

activists in the midst of World War I.⁷ Many groups on this partial list, by contrast, have been created in the years since the 1990s. New transnational networks and coalitions are on the brink of being launched today. Each network has its own gendered international political history.

Their feminist activists do not always agree. Their members debate each other over what is causing what, which goal should be prioritized, which international power-holder should be the focus of protests or lobbying. They debate with each other over which compromises can be swallowed and which cannot. But the activists working in these organized groups also have come to share much in common: each is headed by women leaders; each, simultaneously, fosters autonomy among its grassroots activists; each urges women to take part in not only local but also international politics; each builds alliances with other all-women groups and with mixed men's and women's networks; each depends on donors, interns, and volunteers; each monitors trends and decisions in a particular arena of international politics; each posts data and analyses on its own website, usually in several languages; each uses its own gender-conscious investigations and analyses as a basis for crafting strategic campaigns to challenge both the oppression women experience and the practices that privilege certain men and certain masculinities; each aims its political campaigns not only at governments but also at the media, international agencies, and corporations.⁸

Why do most of us not hear the names of these organizations regularly on the nightly news or on the main Internet news sites? Editors, mainstream experts, and some academic scholars employ several strategies to dismiss the analytical (that is, explanatory) value of these groups' insights and impacts. One common rationale for ignoring the work of these transnational

feminist networks is to dismiss them as representing only a “special interest.” By contrast, the international expert is, so he (occasionally she) claims, interested in “the Big Picture.” That is, the common assumption is that one-half of the world’s population is equivalent to, say, logging companies or soccer clubs; thus, the thinking goes, their actions do not shed light on the world but simply are intended to advance their own limited self-interests.

A second rationale for not taking seriously the ideas and actions of these contemporary globalized women’s advocacy groups—ideas and actions that should be thoughtfully weighed, not automatically accepted—is that the arenas of politics that these feminist activists do expose are presumably merely domestic or private, as opposed to, for instance, the allegedly “significant” public arenas of military security or government debt. In other words, the conventional failure to take seriously the thinking behind transnational women’s advocacy is itself rooted in unrealistically narrow understandings of “security,” “stability,” “crisis,” and “development.” All four concepts are of utmost concern to those worried about the international Big Picture. Each of these four concerns—security, stability, crisis, and development—is routinely imagined to be divorced from (unaffected by) women’s unpaid and underpaid labor, women’s rights within marriage, the denial of girls’ education, women’s reproductive health, and sexualized and other forms of male violence against women, as well as the masculinization of militaries, police forces, and political parties. The conventional Big Picture, it would appear, is being painted on a shrunken canvas.

Third, these feminist transnational groups’ analyses and actions can be ignored—their reports never cited, their staff members never invited to speak as experts, their leaders or activists never turned to for interviews—on the questionable

grounds that their campaigns are lost causes. Behind this justification is the notion that challenging entrenched masculinized privileges and practices in today's international affairs is hopeless, therefore naive, therefore not worthy of serious attention. Further underpinning this final argument are the stunningly ahistorical assertions that (a) any advancements that women have gained have come not as a result of women's political theorizing and organizing but because women have been given these advancements by enlightened men in power, and (b) we collectively have "always" understood such useful political concepts as "reproductive rights," "sexual harassment," "systematic wartime rape," and "the glass ceiling." This latter assertion overlooks the fact that each of these revelatory concepts was hammered out and offered to the rest of us by particular activists at particular moments in recent political history.

All three of these spoken or unspoken rationales, and the assumptions they rely upon, are themselves integral to how international politics operates today. All three assertions that deny the significance and analytical value of transnational feminist organizing *are* the very stuff of international politics.

The very rarity of professional international political commentators taking seriously either women's experiences of international politics or women's gender analyses of international politics is, therefore, itself a political phenomenon that needs to be taken seriously. What so many non-feminist-informed international commentators *ignore* has been explored by the burgeoning academic field of gender and international relations. That is, paying close attention to—and explaining the causes and consequences of—what is so frequently ignored can be fruitful indeed.⁹

At the same time, we can be more curious about who does not pay attention to women's experiences—of war, marriage,

trade, travel, revolution, and plantation and factory work. Who reaps rewards when women's experiences of these international affairs are treated as if they were inconsequential, mere "human interest" stories? That is, one becomes an international political investigator when one seeks to figure out who is rewarded if they treat women's experiences and women's gender analyses as if either were mere embellishments, almost entertainment, as if neither sheds meaningful light on the causes of the unfolding global events. Rewards are political.

Consider one common journalistic trivializing device: using a photograph or a bit of video footage of women to illustrate a news story—women shown grieving seems especially alluring to editors—but then interviewing only men for the main content of the journalistic account. Most coverage of international affairs is crafted with the presumption that only men—diverse men, rival men—have anything useful to say about what we all are trying to make sense of. Feminists routinely count how many men and how many women are interviewed in any political news story. A ratio of six to one or seven to zero is common.¹⁰

Since 2000, new social media have been used by many women, especially young women, to break through the masculinity-privileging walls of mainstream, established media. Women have become skilled bloggers, users of Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, and Facebook. In addition, some feminist journalists have created alternative, independent international outlets, most prominent being the online international news service Women's eNews, which commissions local women journalists to cover stories about women's politics that the bigger media companies ignore.¹¹

These recent media innovations are not the first time that women have tried to fashion alternative media in order to make



Figure 3. Mary Phillips, a Scottish suffragette, selling the British suffragist newspaper *The Vote*, 1907. Photo: Museum of London.

visible women's political issues, women's critical analyses, and women's political activism. Suffragists in the early 1900s set up their own printing presses and publishing houses to put out independent broadsides, pamphlets, and newspapers to let their fellow citizens know why women campaigners were demanding voting rights for women on the same terms as for men.

Then, in the 1980s and 1990s, scores of new magazines, publishing houses, archives, and bookstores were established by feminists in India, Mexico, Britain, the United States, Canada, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, Australia, South Africa, Japan, South Korea, Sweden, Pakistan, and Turkey

in order to provide media outlets for literally thousands of women who were writing feminist-informed histories, novels, poetry, memoirs, political theory, health guides, investigatory journalism, and cinema reviews. Other women started women's radio programs and documentary film distribution companies. Many of the women involved in these media politics were aware of women in other countries doing the same; they read and distributed each other's publications, visited each other's bookstores, and traded encouragement and practical advice across national boundaries.¹²

As influential as these past and present local and international feminist media innovations were—and still are—in offering alternative information and perspectives, they did not and still do not have sufficient resources (for instance, for news bureaus in Beijing, Cairo, Nairobi, London, Tokyo, and Rio de Janeiro). Nor can they match the cultural and political influence wielded by large well-capitalized or state-sponsored media companies—textbook publishers, network and cable television companies, national radio stations and newspapers, Internet companies, and major film studios. These large media companies have become deliberately international in their aspirations. They are not monolithic, but together they can determine what is considered “international,” what is defined as “political,” what is deemed “significant,” and who is anointed an “expert.”¹³

Thus it is important to investigate, despite their differences, these influential media companies' common dismissal of unorganized and organized women as insignificant and to weigh carefully the risks that such dismissals carry. Each dismissal hobbles us when we try to explain why international politics takes the path it does.

WHAT WE MISS: TWO BRIEF CASE STUDIES

First case: the transatlantic antislavery movement. Despite the emergence of feminist historians, it is easy to portray the transatlantic antislavery movement of the early and mid-1800s as an all-male movement. The slave trade—and the profitable exports of cotton, tobacco, and sugar that the slave trade enabled—was a globalized business. Challenging that trade would drastically alter the international politics of the time. That is accepted. But it is the American male antislavery activists Frederick Douglass, John Brown, and William Lloyd Garrison, and their British ally the abolitionist William Wilberforce, who continue to be publicly celebrated. Thanks only to the work of African American feminist historians have the political contributions of abolitionist Sojourner Truth been recognized.¹⁴ Overlooked by all but feminist historians have been the lesser-known British and American women antislavery activists, women who created mass movements in the early and mid-1800s. Not only did they strategize and campaign (e.g., British antislavery women provided the backbone for the sugar boycott and introduced mass petitioning), but these women activists, black and white, also overcame their lack of voting rights, their exclusion from the halls of governments, and the obstacles to travel and communication (letters from London took more than two weeks to reach Boston's antislavery hub) to create an effective transatlantic alliance, one of the world's first transnational women's movements.¹⁵

What do we miss if today we persist in portraying this important early international political movement as an all-male affair? First, we grossly underestimate how much racialized gendered power it took for proslavery advocates to sustain the slave trade and systems of slave labor for as long as they did. If those with

vested interests in maintaining slavery had faced only male opponents, without the energy, political innovations, and knowledge of domestic consumption that women abolitionists contributed, they might have been able to sustain the exploitive racist system longer or at lower political cost.

Second, if we continue to ignore the distinct ideas and actions of the British and American women abolitionists, we will underestimate the internal tensions that marked the transatlantic anti-slavery movement itself: to sustain their movement over decades and in the face of formidable opposition, male and female anti-slavery activists not only had to reconcile their differing ideas about race, property, freedom, and the meaning of humanity, but they also had to work out among themselves their contentious differences over femininity, masculinity, respectability, and marriage (e.g., was marriage itself, in its then-current form, as some women abolitionists came to believe, just a more polite form of slavery?).¹⁶

Finally, if we persist in taking seriously only the male anti-slavery campaigners in the international movement to abolish the slave trade and slave labor, then we are bound to miss one of the most significant consequences of that political movement: the mobilization in the late 1800s and early 1900s of campaigns to end the political systems of male-only suffrage. The suffrage movement, despite its contradictions and shortcomings, became one of the world's most radically democratizing movements. And it was globalized.¹⁷

Yet investigations of the international gender politics of both abolitionism and women's suffrage campaigning are virtually absent from most university courses purporting to train students in the skills they will need to make reliable sense of democratization, political mobilization, and international politics.

Second case: the international Arms Trade Treaty. It took eight years. Money had to be raised. Gender-disaggregated data had to be collected. Women had to be interviewed. Interviews had to be translated. Consciousnesses had to be raised. Meetings had to be organized. Visas and plane tickets to New York had to be obtained. Different priorities and understandings had to be aired and reconciled. Alliances had to be forged, then tended and reformed.¹⁸ But on April 2, 2013, by a majority vote (154 in favor, 3 against, 23 abstaining), member states of the United Nations General Assembly adopted the world's first-ever international Arms Trade Treaty. For the first time, governments and companies exporting small arms—rifles, pistols, grenade launchers, and the parts and ammunition for these weapons—would be bound by international law to explicitly assess whether those arms would be used in the importing country for purposes that violated international human rights. This was new.

Buried in its thirteen pages of formal diplomatic language was a transnational feminist success: article 7, paragraph 4. It reads, “The exporting State Party, in making this assessment [of the potential ‘negative consequences’ of permitting the export of small arms], shall take into account the risk of the conventional arms covered under Article 2 (1) of the items covered under Article 3 or Article 4 being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children.”¹⁹

Eight years and multinational attentiveness and transnational lobbying by scores of women produced this crucial phrase: *gender-based violence*. And not only that. The hotly contested phrase—*gender-based violence*—was placed here, in this section of the Arms Trade Treaty that made it binding (not simply advisory) on the ATT's government signatories.

Including “gender-based violence” as a criterion for government officials when they assessed the legality of exporting any small arms from their own countries’ gun manufacturers was a criterion strenuously resisted by certain influential organizations and by officials from powerful governments.

The alliance that developed the reasoning for “gender-based violence” as an assessment criterion was feminist-led and transnational. At its core were three organizations: the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), especially its international staffs in Geneva and in New York, across the street from the UN; the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), Women’s Network; and Global Action to Prevent War and Armed Conflict. Together, these three organizations had activist affiliates around the world. While their combined lobbying to persuade governments’ UN delegates to support the inclusion of the words *gender-based violence* in the ATT and to “make it binding” is a story yet to be fully told in all its twists and turns, a crucial part of that story was these activists listening to women, asking where women are in today’s international politics of guns.

Most of the non-feminist-informed activists who pushed for the Arms Trade Treaty focused their attention on export figures, import figures, patterns of armed conflict, and gun-exporting governments’ and their weapons manufacturers’ complicity in enabling those damaging armed conflicts. It was their analyses, too, that informed most mainstream news coverage. What the women of IANSA, WILPF, and Global Action did was distinct: they looked deeper into armed conflicts to chart the gendered dynamics of guns, both gun violence’s causes and its consequences. IANSA’s women activists in Mali, Congo, Brazil, the Philippines, and other countries that had experienced years of

violence played a crucial role. They asked, “Where are the women?” And “Where are the guns?” They interviewed women about where guns were in their own daily lives. They revealed how politicized conflict became gendered conflict. They exposed the causal connections between group armed violence and violence perpetrated inside homes and families. And they demonstrated how those guns when not even fired could infuse relationships between women and men with fear and intimidation. Listening to women’s diverse experiences of living with guns in their communities and their homes, they painted a Big Picture: the massive international exports of guns sustained gender-based violence as a pillar of international and national patriarchy.

The Vatican was a crucial player in the UN Arms Trade Treaty negotiations. The Vatican has “observer status” at the UN (as does the Palestinian delegation). This status gives the Vatican’s delegates access to crucial discussions among voting state delegations, where its opinions and interpretations often carry significant weight. In each UN treaty negotiation process, the state participants decide whether or not observers will be allowed to cast votes on the final proposed document. In the Arms Trade Treaty process, observers were not allowed to vote. But throughout the multistage negotiations, the Vatican’s delegates were omnipresent and influential. Its delegates helped to create what feminists called the “unholy alliance” between the UN delegates of the Vatican, Russia, Syria, and Iran. The Vatican led the resistance to including the phrase *gender-based violence* in the Arms Trade Treaty. Over the years, the Vatican’s delegates have treated social constructions of male and female as anathema. Thus no “gender.” They pressed, instead, for the more patriarchal phrase *violence against women and children*. Furthermore, the Vatican pushed to have *violence against women and*

children inserted only in the treaty's opening preamble. That is, they were comfortable with including *violence against women and children* in the final treaty as a motivating reason for creating this new interstate agreement, but were opposed to it being made a binding criterion that governments would be obligated to use when they assessed their own gun exports.

The Vatican was not alone. By itself, its role is never decisive. Numbers of governments and lobbying groups were willing to allow the conventional phrase *violence against women and children* to be inserted and to have it listed merely as one reason among many for limiting the international trade in small arms. What they did not accept was the insertion of the more politically salient analytical phrase *gender-based violence*, or for that to become a formal criterion imposed on governments when they assessed the legality of exporting weaponry.

Ideas matter. Words matter. Placement matters. The strategists of WILPF and IANSA's Women's Network and Global Action, women such as Ray Acheson and Maria Butler, went from state delegation to state delegation to explain why neither the phrase *violence against women and children* nor its placement solely in the nonbinding preamble were sufficient—that is, why neither matched the realities of women's lives. Eventually, more than one hundred state delegations publicly backed the inclusion of the term *gender-based violence* and its placement in the section that would make it a binding criterion in each exporting government's assessment process. The UN delegates of Iceland and Lichtenstein, though representing small countries, were especially helpful in supporting WILPF's and IANSA's feminist campaigners.

The wide governmental support that the feminists ultimately gained was the outcome of scores of women activists spending hours explaining, first, that “women and children”

should not be lumped together and treated as mere victims. Second, feminist activists working the corridors of the UN explained to delegates that when violence is described as “gendered” it makes the workings of masculinities and the politics of misogyny visible in the international politics of gun exporting. Third, they explained to scores of delegates that, to be meaningful, the treaty had to legally obligate exporting governments to explicitly determine whether any small arms were likely to be used in the importing country to perpetrate widespread gender-based violence.

The intricately crafted final version of the Arms Trade Treaty was passed by the General Assembly on April 2, 2013 (with the delegates of Syria, Iran, and North Korea casting the three “no” votes). Its passage was the result of many actors, many efforts, many forms of analysis. But if one does not ask, “Where were the women?” one will miss who tried to dilute the ATT and why. If one ignores the thinking and the activism of the WILPF and IANSA women, one also will miss the innovative feminist thinking that causally linked international gun political economies to the political economies of sexualized wartime violence, domestic violence, and the processes of intimidation that severely limit women’s economic and political participation. Moreover, one will miss the feminist-informed listening, data collection, analysis, and strategizing that transformed a groundbreaking international agreement between governments into an instrument for furthering women’s rights.

The Arms Trade Treaty’s gendered politics had taken years to create, but in April 2013 those gendered politics had just begun. To become operational, the ATT would have to be ratified by individual governments. In each country there would be multiple bases for support and for rejection of the treaty. Who in each

country would balk at making “gender-based violence” a binding criterion? Who would argue that its inclusion was one of the positive strengths of the ATT? Charting each of these ratifying debates, country by country, will shine a light on the genderings of the international political economies of rifles, pistols, and grenade launchers. Then there will be still further chapters in the gendered ATT story: in those countries that ratify the ATT (that is, which sign on to its binding obligations), who will officials turn to for expert advice when they have to assess whether the guns they are about to export will be used to inflict widespread gender-based violence? The women of IANSA?²⁰

WHERE ARE THE MEN?

Most of the time we scarcely notice that many governments still look like men’s clubs, with the occasional woman allowed in the door. We see a photo of members of Russia’s cabinet, Wall Street’s inner circle, the Chinese Politboro, or Europe’s central bankers, and it is easy to miss the fact that all the people in these photographs are men. One of the most useful functions that the British prime minister Margaret Thatcher served during the 1980s was to break through our gender numbness. Thatcher herself was not an advocate for women, but when she stood at a 1987 meeting in Venice alongside France’s Mitterand, Japan’s Nakasone, the United States’ Reagan, and the other heads of government, we suddenly noticed that everyone else was male. Twenty-five years later, Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, provided a similar gender-consciousness-raising function when she stood for a photograph with the other heads of government in the Group of Eight, the world’s economic powers. One woman in a photo makes it harder for us to ignore that the men are *men*.



Figure 4. Group of Seven summit meeting, including Margaret Thatcher, Venice, 1987. Photo: Daniel Simon/Frank Spooner Pictures, London.

Once we start looking at men as men, we are more likely to become curious about masculinities—what it means to be manly—and about the contests over diverse, unequally ranked sorts of masculinity.

It is widely asserted today that we live in a “dangerous world.” It was commonly stated during the four decades of the Cold War, when the threats posed by nuclear weapons were used by both the United States and the Soviet Union to raise the stakes of international rivalries. The notion that we live in a dangerous world gained new saliency after the attacks on New York’s towering World Trade Center in September 2001. Since 2001, countless American politicians have based their calls for rolling back citizens’ privacy rights, curtailing due process legal protections, giving surveillance agencies free rein, equipping local police



Figure 5. Leaders of the Group of Eight industrialized nations, including Angela Merkel, joined by European Commission and European conflict officials, summit meeting, Northern Ireland, 2013. Photo: Matt Cardy/Getty Images News.

forces with heavier weaponry, casting new immigrants as potential threats, launching weaponized drones, and turning a blind eye toward the antidemocratic actions of U.S. international allies by justifying each move as a contributor to the “war on terror.”

Among its many questionable consequences, the absorption of the idea that we live in a dangerous world serves to reinforce the primacy of particular forms of masculinity while subordinating most women and femininity itself. Men living in a dangerous world are commonly imagined to be the natural protectors. Women living in a dangerous world allegedly are those who need protection. Those relegated to the category of the protected are commonly thought to be safe “at home” and, thus, incapable of realistically assessing the dangers “out there.”

Notions of masculinity are not identical across generations or across cultural boundaries. That is why one needs to explore the workings and rankings of masculinities in particular places at particular times—and then track them over generations.²¹ Comparison may reveal striking similarities but also expose significant differences. A masculinized rivalry is one in which diverse masculinities are unequally ranked and contested: there is a contest over which expression of manliness is deemed most “modern,” which most “rational,” which the “toughest,” which the “softest,” which the “weaker.” In such rivalries, women are marginalized unless (withstanding ridicule as “unfeminine”) they can convincingly cloak themselves in a particular masculinized style of speech and action. Thus a common British assessment of Britain’s first and only woman prime minister: “Margaret Thatcher was the toughest man in the room.”

While political contests over masculinity marginalize all but a very few women, such contests always put femininity into play. In a patriarchal society—a society whose relationships and inequalities are shaped by the privileging of particular masculinities and by women’s subordination to and dependence on men—anything that is feminized can be disparaged. Consequently, rival men are prone to try to tar each other with the allegedly damning brush of femininity. The intent is to rob the opposing man of his purchase on such allegedly manly attributes as strength, courage, and rationality.²² This masculinized wielding of femininity happens not only on the playground and in local elections but also in international nuclear politics.²³

Furthermore, this femininity-wielding masculinized contest between men shapes not only the international politics of war and national security but also the international politics of domestic servants, sex workers, wives, women factory workers,

and women plantation workers. This contest determines what is considered mere “women’s work” and thus unfit for any manly man. What presumptions about a manly man’s access to any woman’s sexuality fuels sexual harassment of women on and off the job?

In conventional commentaries, men who wield influence in international politics are analyzed in terms of their national, ethnic, and racial identities; their positions in organizations; their class origins; their paid work; and sometimes their sexual preferences. Rarely, though, are men analyzed as *men*, people who have been taught, since childhood, how to be manly, how not to be a “girl,” how to size up the trustworthiness or competence of other men by assessing their manliness. If international commentators do find masculinity interesting, it is typically when they try to make sense of “great men”—Napoleon Bonaparte, Abraham Lincoln, Mao Zedong, Nelson Mandela—not when they seek to understand the actions of male factory owners, male midlevel officials, male banana workers, or male tourists. It is a lack of feminist curiosity that makes comfortably invisible such men’s efforts to be seen by other men as masculine in doing their jobs, exercising influence, nurturing alliances, or seeking relief from stress. In so doing, such a lack of feminist curiosity also makes dangerously invisible these men’s attempts (sometimes thwarted) to use diverse women in their daily pursuits of precarious masculine status.

BEYOND THE GLOBAL VICTIM

Some men and women active in campaigns to influence their country’s foreign policy—on the right, as well as the left—have called on women to become more educated about international

issues, to learn more about “what’s going on in the world.” Women are told, “You have to take more interest in international affairs because it affects how you live.” The gist of the argument is that women need to devote precious time and energy to learning about events outside their own country because, as women, they are the *objects* of those events. For instance, a woman working for a software company in Ireland is told she should learn more about the European Union because what the EU commissioners decide in Brussels is going to help determine her wages and maybe even the hazards she faces on the job. An American woman similarly will be encouraged to learn about the ongoing fighting in Syria because political contests in the Middle East will affect her children’s chances of a safe future.

There are two things striking about this conventional line of argument. First, those who are trying to persuade women to “become informed” are not inviting women to reinterpret international politics by drawing on their own experiences as women. If the explanations of how the EU and Middle East politics work do not already include any concepts of femininity, masculinity, or patriarchy, they are unlikely to do so after more women start listening to the recognized gender-incurious international experts. Because these persuaders are not curious about what paying close attention to women’s complex experiences could contribute to an understanding of international politics, many women, especially those whose energies are already stretched to the limit, may be understandably wary of spending precious time reading about fighting in Syria or decisions made in Brussels.

When the common women-need-to-learn-more-about-foreign-affairs approach is articulated by gender-incurious activists (women or men), women are usually portrayed as the objects,

even victims, of the international political system. Women should learn about capitalist globalization, or the Middle East's Arab Spring, or the workings of the United Nations, or climate change because each has an impact on them. In this worldview, women are forever being acted *upon*. They are the victims of garment factory disasters; they are the targets of sexual assaults in wartime; they are the trafficked, the low paid, the objectified. Rarely are women seen as the explainers or the reshapers of the world. Rarely are they made visible as *thinkers* and *actors*.

If women are asked to join an international campaign—for peace, for refugees, against war, for religious evangelism, against hunger—but are not allowed to define the problem and its causes, it looks to many locally engaged women like abstract do-gooding with minimal connection to the battles they are waging for a decent life in their households and in their own communities.

A lot of books about international politics leave their readers with a sense that “it’s all so complex, decided by people who don’t know or care that I exist.” The spread of capitalist economics, even in countries whose officials call themselves socialists, can feel as inevitable as the tides (which, we are learning, are actually not inevitable). Governments’ capacities to wound people, to destroy environments and dreams, are constantly expanding through their uses of science and bureaucracy. International relationships fostered by these governments and their allies use our labor and our imaginations, but it seems beyond our reach to alter them. These relationships seem to have created a world that can turn tacos and sushi into bland fast foods, destroy rain forests, melt arctic ice, globalize pornography, and socialize men from dozens of cultures into a common new culture of high-risk banking. One closes most books on “international security” or “international political economy” with a sigh.

They purport to explain how it works, but they offer knowledge that makes one feel as though it is more rewarding to concentrate on problems closer to home.

Most important, many of these analyses of international affairs leave one with the impression that “home” has little to do with international politics. When home is imagined to be a feminized place—a place where womanly women and feminine girls should feel most comfortable, and where manly men and real boys should stop in now and then for refueling—then this consequence of many mainstream explanations can send the roots of masculinized international politics down even more deeply.

There is an alternative incentive for delving into international politics. That is, seeing oneself in it, not just being acted upon by it. To do this, however, requires remapping the boundaries of the “international” and the “political”: it requires seeing how one’s own family dynamics, consumer behaviors, travel choices, relationships with others, and ways of thinking about the world actually help shape that world. We are not just acted upon; we are actors. Though, even recognizing that one is not part of any elite, acknowledging oneself as an international actor can be unnerving. One discovers that one is often complicit in creating the very world that one finds so dismaying.

The world is something that has been—and is being—made every day. And ideas about and practices of both femininity and masculinity, combined with attempts to control women, are central to that world-making. So are challenges to those conventions and resistance to those attempts. It is not always easy to see those attempts and, thus, to resist them. Policy makers may find it more “manly” (even if some of the policy makers themselves now are women) to think of themselves as dealing in guns and

money, rather than in notions of femininity, marriage, and sexuality. So they—and most of their critics as well—try to hide and deny their reliance on women as feminized workers, as respectable and loyal wives, as “civilizing influences,” as sex objects, as obedient daughters, as unpaid farmers, as coffee-serving campaigners, and as spending consumers and tourists. If we can expose their dependence on feminizing women, we can show that this world is also dependent on artificial notions of masculinity.

As a result, this seemingly overwhelming world system may begin to look more fragile and open to radical change than we have been led to imagine.

Thus this book is only a beginning. It draws on the theoretical and organizational work of women in Britain in the 1890s, Algeria in the 1950s, the Philippines in the 1980s, Chile in the 1990s, and Egypt in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Most of the conclusions here are tentative. What readers themselves write in the margins of these pages as they test the descriptions and explanations against their own experiences of the internationalized politics of femininity and masculinity will be at least as valuable in creating a different world as what appears here in deceptively solid print.