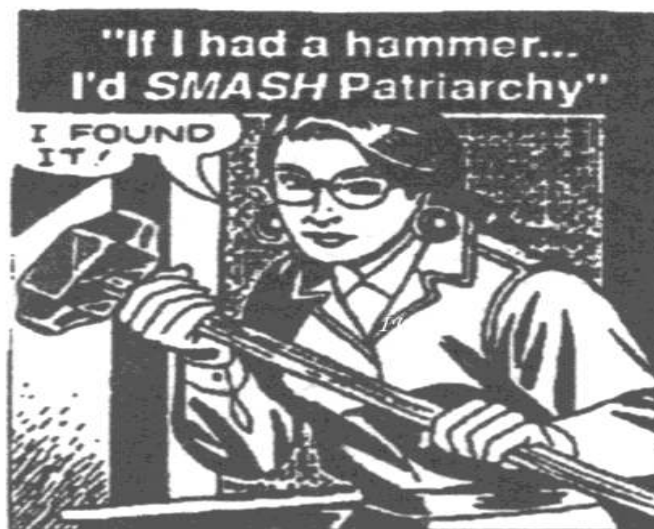


IR Online: Semester 1

Theory 1

Unit 8: Reflectivist Approaches: Feminism

Internet Research on Feminist Account and Summary of Argument



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This essay aims to summarise a feminist argument presented in *Left-Turn*. With the aid of international relations (IR) literature, key arguments will be drawn from the text, discussing issues of women and war. IR feminist theories tend to deal with different ontological and epistemological approaches, separating their stance from traditional objective IR approaches. So how relevant is a feminist approach when dealing with international politics?

According to an author of *Left-Turn*, the imperialism and militarisation of the US have negative effects on women in Iraq and the US. The argument is structured into four key areas; unpaid labour, sex-trade, detained women, and reproductive injustice. All are infused by patriarchy, capitalist exploitation, and white supremacy of the West. Hence US patriotism and imperialism is something feminists need to challenge.¹

When basic infrastructures are destroyed via war or economic down-turns, women are mostly affected.² Due to 'traditional gender-roles' unpaid labour increases; a woman's workload becomes greater in both occupied and aggressor-land. In-turn struggling to cope with house-care, childcare, healthcare, and so on. Patriarchal structures,³ feminists argue is the only way to comprehend female "economic insecurities."⁴

Sexual commodification is fuelled by unjust gender-relations and economic adversity. Hussein's fall,⁵ and the US attacks on civilian areas resulted in increases of Iraqi women and displaced teens going into prostitution.⁶ Enloe argues that sexual antics in the military is central to foreign intervention.⁷ Examples are found in accounts of accused UN peacekeeping soldiers sexually assaulting women.⁸ These comments support the authors view in *Left-Turn*, revealing military leaders playing an indirect role in the management of the sex-trade. Imperialism incites the oppression of women, as US soldiers allow trafficking and sexual-violence to happen in their disregard for the occupation in Iraq.⁹

1 *Left Turn*, 2007

2 It is noted that 70% of the worlds starving or near starving are women. This is induced by imperialism which broadens the "gender-gap in poverty" - Also in the US poor women and single mothers are amongst the first to get hit by economic cuts, losing their jobs. (*Left Turn*, 2007)

3 Race, class, ethnicity (Tickner, 1997, p.627)

4 Tickner, 1997, pp.627-628

5 April-November 2003

6 Documented by the United Nations Fund for Women, in: *Left Turn*, 2007

7 Enloe, 1989, 2000 in: True, 2005, p.220

8 Tickner, 1997, 627

9 *Left Turn*, 2007

The discussion of female detainees being tortured¹⁰ causes controversy. According to Iraqi MP Mohamed al Dainey¹¹ there were 65 documented cases of rape in 2006. Also the US imprisoned females for bargaining tactics.¹² However victims are undermined in US press, rather discussing the aggressors regret. A connection between violence in the occupied-land and a continuation of this; domestic violence, back in the aggressor-land becomes apparent. Military practices; training of extreme masculinity, pertaining to Western, sovereign, objectivity, which is structured on patriotism, can be viewed as logically reasoning.¹³

War budget priorities result in the reduction of reproductive healthcare-systems, dis-enabling women to have control over their reproductive rights. The 2003 war in Iraq saw decreases in healthcare services, leading to an increase in uncertified abortions. So although the US use feminist 'ideologies'; to liberate women, its actions and repercussions can be viewed as contrary. The US pertain to self-interests, resulting in US and Iraqi women contending with elite imperialism.¹⁴

IR feminists pertain to social-constructivist approaches, adopting gender to discuss issues.¹⁵ Their epistemology; critical view, offers alternative conceptions of power. In doing so, feminists attempt to de-construct the power-politics of positivist realism, and focus on individuals and communities as a starting point.¹⁶ Empirical research, and discussion above depict gender related issues as central to studies within IR. However accepting this can undermine traditional approaches due to the gender sensitive stance¹⁷. Perhaps feminists need to adopt a more empirical approach to their critical stance, and for traditional IR theorists to broaden their application of gender sensitive approaches. Overall expanded insights, understanding, and explanation in dealing with IR issues.¹⁸

10 In the Abu Ghraib debacle.

11 Reported by a UK Guardian reporter, in: Left Turn, 2007

12 A Red Cross report (May 2004) revealed that 43,000 Iraqis were imprisoned, and that 70-90% were a mistake, in: Left Turn

13 Left Turn, 2007; True, 2005, p.222

14 Left Turn, 2007

15 Tickner, 1997, p.615

16 True, 2005, p.215; Tickner, 1997, p.624

17 How gender related issues can answer the complexities IR faces with such issues as states behaviours.

18 Tickner, 1997, p. 612

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