**From Unity to Divergence and Back Again: Security and Economy in Feminist International Relations**

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In Gender and International Security: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security, J. Ann Tickner (1992) identified three main dimensions to “achieving global security” – national security, economic security, and ecological security – conflict, economics, and the environment. Much of the work in feminist peace studies that inspired early feminist International Relations (IR) work (e.g., Reardon 1985; Brock-Utne 1989) and many of Tickner’s contemporaries (e.g., Peterson and Runyan 1991; Pettman 1996; Enloe 1989) also saw political economy and a feminist conception of security as intrinsically interlinked. Yet, as feminist IR research evolved in the early 21st century, more scholars were thinking either about political economy or about war and political violence, but not both.

This divergence was recognized and reified with the use of the terms “Feminist Security Studies” (FSS) and “Feminist Political Economy” or “Feminist Global Political Economy” (FPE). Both FSS and FPE went from being named to developing into vibrant research communities over the last decade (e.g., Sjoberg 2009a; Rai and Waylen 2013). While specialization led to a significant amount of intricate field research (e.g., MacKenzie 2009; Chin 2013) and deep theoretical conversations (Wibben 2010; Peterson 2003), the overlap that early feminists in IR saw between political economy and security has often (though not always) been lost in both FSS and FPE research. This brief essay contends that looking at the space where “security” and “political economy” questions intersect is one of the most fruitful directions for researchers in the field, and provides a value-added over the analysis that either “lens” would provide individually. The piece uses an example from my research on prostitution of male members of the US military to explore the utility of understanding the interlocked nature of security and political economy in feminist scholarship on global politics, politically, analytically, intellectually, and normatively. It concludes by arguing that a re-unification of FSS and FPE is a productive and intellectually essential direction.

***Naming FSS and Identifying its Losses***

I certainly was not the only one who started using the term FSS around a decade ago, but I can speak to my purposes for using it (which may differ from others’). In 2006, I proposed a special issue of *Security Studies* (Sjoberg 2009a) and a 2007 International Studies Association workshop on FSS. My use of the term had an explicitly outward-focused intent: there existed a subfield of IR called Security Studies, and an employer had asked me to write an essay evaluating feminist contributions to it. As I tried I realized that, though feminists had been writing important stuff about gender, war, and conflict for decades, it had not made the radar screen of Security Studies – so I used the term “Feminist Security Studies” with the explicit intent of convincing people in Security Studies that feminist work matters to their research. That mission has had some successes and failures, I think, but they seem to me to be secondary to the (at least for me) unintended consequences of naming FSS.

To me, there seemed to be a (hopefully-short-term) effect of a trend of research that self-identified as FSS, mine included, marginalizing feminist work on global political economy within the feminist IR community, insomuch as it exists. The work became, in my view, overrepresented in the field. I also felt that sense of overrepresentation looking at the proliferation of work on women’s violence within Feminist Security Studies, which was certainly for a while (and may still be) a significantly larger part of feminist research on security than it is of gender issues in lived experiences of security. While there are indicators that both of these trends are at least being tempered, I think it is important to evaluate how those consequences might have evolved.

In hindsight, I think the notion that the label FSS could possibly be purely outward-looking was short-sighted. Whatever successes it had in gaining traction in Security Studies were going to make participation in the never-intended “subfield” that appealing, and work that appeal inspired was, by definition, going to be impacted by the assumed intended audience of Security Studies, with its narrow definitions of security and assumptions about methodology. While I think (and hope) a lot of our work has either rejected this direction or walked the line well, there will always be trade-offs in such a project. While early feminist IR addressed militarism, political economy, and the environment as interrelated, much more recent work in FSS has either been more narrow or wielded a “security” lens to analyze those other issues.

My work is as susceptible to this critique as anyone else’s, if not more so (e.g., Sjoberg 2009b). My research has often not done a good job approximating the relationship between FSS and FPE that reflection suggests would be ideal, in part because I have always felt more comfortable in the realm of security (as traditionally understood) than researching and theorizing political economy. Still, writing a book about the different areas of feminist theorizing of wars (Sjoberg 2013), I found political economy always and everywhere relevant – to individual experiences of war, to conflict-related migration, to the funding of war and conflict, to the social dynamics of joining militaries, to the constitution of military action. In fact, some of the most interesting and underexplored intersections between war practice and feminist theorizing are the places where questions of political economy would dominate the analysis – like analyzing the gendered nature of military logistics practices, understanding the long-term effects of conflicts on populations in conflict zones, and understanding the gendered health impacts of war, to name a few examples. A narrowly-framed FSS-focused research approach might miss many of these dimensions – which I think is the loss for FSS research involved in its divergence from FPE research.

***Thinking About FSS and FPE in Male Military Prostitution***

I have just started a research project on male members of the US military who prostitute themselves to near-based populations. I initially became interested in the question of where male military prostitutes are while reading Aaron Belkin’s (2012) book on homoeroticism underpinning the straight, hegemonic masculinity of the US military next to Katharine Moon’s (1997) book on base camp prostitution. I wondered – are there base camps for male prostitutes? I found a positive answer to that, but found myself more interested in having discovered the male members of the military who prostitute themselves. I was interested for Belkin’s reasons of understanding military masculinities and their relationship to sexualities, but also because I was interested in what “straight” soldiers prostituting themselves to men meant for the social construction of heterosexuality. I started thinking about it as both securitized (what does this mean for the sex of security?) and as an artifact of queer history (Berurbe 2010). That said, my approach largely ignored political economy dynamics – not least that prostitution is, by definition, a practice where money changes hands. The more research I do, however, the more I find a politics of the monetization of sex mapped onto the politics of performed masculinities – where particular sorts of men performing particular sorts of sex acts command a financial premium, while others are financially undervalued because of their assumed desire for the sex act. The exchange of money can also act as a ‘pass’ to deny desire. In that way, the constitution of securitized masculinity (which I am interested in) cannot be separated from the power-laden political economies of prostitution – since “straight” male prostitutes provide only certain services, and command a premium, especially if they are selling themselves as soldiers.

This brings up a number of other questions that I previously had not considered: what are the monetary significations of idealized militarized masculinities, inside of prostitution and outside of it? A number of male soldiers who prostitute themselves say they do it ‘for the money’ – what are the political-economic pressures on their lives that make that (or the perception of it) true? From where is the money that goes into male military prostitution being diverted? Where is it being spent? Does the economic well-being of the location where soldier prostitution occurs dictate the volume of that prostitution or the price that it brings? In situations where soldiers do not do it ‘for the money’ – what is the signification of money changing hands (particularly for military masculinities) rather than not? To what degree is male military prostitution performed involuntarily or with limited agency? Do the pressures to which that involuntariness respond lie largely in the financial or social arenas? Is there utility to comparing soldier prostitution with soldier consumption of prostitute services? If so, what is that utility? What roles do economic inequality and commerce dynamics have in the constitution of idealized military masculinity through sexuality? These are, of course, a rough cut, both conceptually and terminologically – but even that very rough cut seems to suggest that research in FSS that takes political economy seriously is likely to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied, important clues into the empirical dynamics of the subject matter, and an overall higher quality analysis.

***Reunifying FSS and FPE***

To achieve this higher quality analysis and start recovering the losses associated with the divergence of FSS and FPE, ideally, conceptual and empirical feminist research would recognize, like early IR feminist research did, that there is no separation between “security” and “political economy,” as security is intimately bound up in political economy, and political economy is bound up in security. That is not to say that they are the same thing, but that they are a continuum without clear or defined boundaries. Any “security” question has political economy implications, and needs political economy analysis to be fully understood. Any “political economy” question has security implications, and may benefit from security analysis. At the same time, while there is very little risk of doing economic analysis on issues traditionally considered security, there is, as we have witnessed, a fair amount of risk to securitizing political economy issues (Duffield 2001). In some sense, then, the trend of treating security issues as primary not only needs to be equalized, but, I think, politically and intellectually, reversed. This would, I think, make both FSS and FPE research richer, and be a step towards dissolving categories that I think may have served their purpose.

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