**The Invisible Structures of Anarchy: Gender, Orders, and Global Politics**

**Introduction**

Anarchy has been one of the dominant conceptual frameworks in (and boundaries) of theorizing International Relations (IR) since Kenneth Waltz (1959, 233) described the international system as anarchical. Waltz suggested that structural anarchy among states in global politics led to a system of self-help (1979: 91, 104) and the recurrence of war through the absence of exogenous authority (1959: 227). Yet, many have criticized the story of structural anarchy causing constant conflict – from a liberal perspective interested in cooperation (Keohane and Martin, 1995), from a constructivist perspective suggesting that there’s nothing fundamental about anarchy that cause self-help and conflict (Wendt, 1992: 394), and methodologically, suggesting that anarchy is a weak concept and weak explanation for interstate behavior (Suganami, 1996: 201).

Still, as scholars have recently noted (e.g., Bially Mattern and Zarakol 2016), the idea that the international system is anarchical has become a common starting point for theorizing global politics – such that those who question it largely question its implications, rather than the concept or the accuracy of its application to global politics. The stark dichotomy between the characterization of the international system as an anarchy and the characterization of the international system as a hierarchy leaves much to be desired. These two opposites – anarchy and hierarchy – are themselves empty concepts. Looking at these concepts in their simplest form – if anarchy is the absence of central authority, and hierarchy is a power structure – then this article argues that the more interesting theoretical questions concern the hierarchies that exist *within* anarchies, and the areas of anarchy within hierarchy.

I argue, then, that the description of the international system as an anarchy is not incorrect, but frequently undertheorized (see, e.g., Prichard, 2010). I contend that the undertheorization of the concept of anarchy in IR is rooted in Waltz’s original discussion of the concept. Waltz (1979: 89) observed that “in looking for international structure, one is brought face to face with the invisible, an uncomfortable position to be in.” It is his inability to *see* international structure that leads Waltz to believe that structure does not exist – that the international area is not only an anarchy, but an anarchy in the simplest sense – where the lack of exogenous authority is not just *a* feature of the international political system, but *the* salient feature.

This article recognizes the international system as anarchical but looks to theorize its contours – to see the invisible structures that are overlaid within international anarchy, and then to consider what those structures mean for theorizing anarchy itself. It uses as an example the various (invisible) ways that gender orders global political relations to suggest that anarchy in the international arena is a place of multiple *orders* rather than of disorder. It therefore begins by theorizing anarchy *with* orders in global politics, rather than anarchy as necessarily substantively lacking orders. It then argues that gender *orders* global politics in various ways.

It concludes with a framework for theorizing order within anarchy in global politics.

**Theorizing Anarchy with Orders**

If Waltzian anarchy presumes that there is no structure within anarchy *because* no structure is *visible* in global politics, my goal is to understand the *invisible* ordering principles that populate anarchy, and then, in turn, to understand anarchy with order over a simplistic, empty version of anarchy that is often the cornerstone of analysis of global politics. Before I explore that argument, though, I want to make sure to distinguish that the argument that there are orders within anarchy is conceptually distinguishable from the argument that there can be cooperation and institution-building in anarchical situations (e.g., Jervis, 1978; Axelrod and Keohane, 1985; Oye, 1986). The argument that there can be cooperation and institution-building under anarchy implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) agrees with Waltz’s characterization of international anarchy as a situation without authority or rules. These institutionalists’ difference with structural realists is in what they anticipate actors’ behavior to be like in the situation where there is no authority or rules – structural realists (e.g., Mearsheimer 1995) expect actors to always seek relative gains and only make institutions where they are epiphenomenal, where institutionalists expect actors to cooperate when cooperation produces absolute gains for both actors (e.g., Axelrod and Keohane, 1985).

My argument is different. I do not disagree that the international arena is anarchical – as Waltz noted, there are no formal or visible structures organizing a hierarchy among states, and even the loose governmental structures that create some hierarchies either among states (e.g., the G8) or between states and other actors (e.g., the UN) have weak claims to the authority to organize – perhaps even weaker than the weakest state governments. While the structural realist conception of anarchy in the international arena is, in a shallow sense, an accurate observation, I argue that its accuracy is limited by the undertheorized nature of the concept of anarchy in the picture of global politics that it presents. This two-dimensional notion of what anarchy is plagues both realist arguments that the international arena is dominated by self-help and institutionalist analyses of the cooperation that does exist.

Still, scholars who have recognized the limited nature of this understanding of anarchy have reacted to it in two ways, both of which I contend have important weaknesses. The first reaction is to reject the utility of the concept of anarchy – to argue that it is useless to think of the international arena as an anarchy when the use of the term does not really shed any light onto how politics works at the international arena. Constructivist scholars have argued that anarchy does not tell us a lot about *how* politics works (e.g., Suganami, 1996). Liberal scholars have argued that interdependence is as salient as, if not more salient than, the vague contribution of the idea of anarchy, so the concept of anarchy is overused in disciplinary analysis (e.g., Milner, 1991). These approaches suggest that theorization of anarchy might lack productivity, given its conceptual narrowness and the utility of other explanatory factors. The second reaction is to treat anarchy as a shell condition for actor agency in global politics. Liberal institutionalists do this to some extent (e.g., Keohane and Martin, 1995), arguing that actors can create pockets of cooperation. But the main source of this reaction is in Wendtian constructivism, where “anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt, 1992). According to Wendt, both the realist understanding of anarchy as a situation of self-help and the liberal understanding of the possibility of cooperation for absolute gains *could* be true of anarchy – it is actors’ behaviors that populate the blank slate of anarchy into whatever system of interaction it becomes. I call the first approach moving focus away from anarchy, and the second approach moving towards an agent-centered notion of the impacts of anarchy. Both, I think, are problematic. Alex Prichard (forthcoming: 3) suggests that there is more to it – that the ways that scholars use the idea of anarchy in IR depends on the motivation of their approach. He argues that anarchy is used in four ways in IR: by those who extol anarchy’s virtues (e.g., Waltz, 1979), those who look to tame anarchy (e.g., Axelrod and Keohane, 1985; Bull, 1977), those who look to transcend it (e.g., Buzan, Jones, and Little, 1993; Rosenberg, 2013), and, more recently, those who look to rethink its virtues (e.g., Prichard, 2013; Booth, 1991) (Prichard, forthcoming, 3). If those who suggest that the substance of anarchy is null *and therefore so is cooperation* are in the first group, those who suggest that the substance of anarchy is null *but cooperation is still possible* are in the second group, and those who suggest that it is time to get beyond anarchy are in the third group, those who think about what anarchy *might be* are in the fourth group.

With Prichard’s fourth group, I am interested in presenting a more complicated understanding of anarchy. But, unlike Prichard’s fourth group, my intent is not to rethink the virtues of anarchy – it is not to look at the normative properties of anarchy as a situation directly. Instead, it is to find a thicker description of the situation of anarchy specifically in the global political arena. In critiquing the work of those *across* Prichard’s groups, I look for a fifth purpose and direction: understanding what the *substance* of anarchy is in global politics.

This framing, then, is not, with Prichard (forthcoming) looking to rethink the virtues of anarchy but instead looking to rethink the *substantive content* of the particular anarchy that is the international arena. If, as I argue, international anarchy is *formally* the lack of government but *substantively* an infinitely complex constellation of orders and ordering rules, then it follows that the study of anarchy is the study of those orders, how those orders function within anarchy, and how anarchy functions with those orders. My interest in that substance is in the ordering work that gender does.

**Thinking About the Substance of Anarchy**

I am not the first to express interest in this question, either implicitly or explicitly. Almost thirty years ago, Nicholas Onuf and Frank Klink (1989: 149) made an argument that the dominant interpretation of anarchy in IR is problematic: “first, it conflates formal and substantive definitions of anarchy … second, it conflates Hobbes’ opposition between the war ‘of every man, against every man’ and the commonwealth ‘…united in one person.’” Onuf and Klink (1989: 150) go on to suggest that this shallow notion of anarchy causes blindness to states of rule in global politics, and lay out three Weberian ideal-types of states of rule: hierarchy, hegemony, and heteronomy (“the complex of relations …constituting a distinct and persistent pattern of rule and privilege”). The authors go on to argue that, in looking at international anarchy, it is important to reclaim a paradigm of rule – understanding anarchy not as an empty vessel without governance but as populated by directive-rules, instruction-rules, and commitment-rules (Onuf and Klink, 1989: 158).

In Onuf’s (1998: 59) account of constructivism, “social rules . . . make the process by which people and society constitute each other continuous and reciprocal.” Rules, then “give agents choices” and agents in turn “act in society to achieve goals” (Onuf, 1998: 60). Stable patterns of rules “give society a structure” which constitutes “a condition of rule” which is “a stable pattern of relations”, “a condition in which some agents use rules to exercise control and obtain advantage” (Onuf, 1998: 62, 63). In this view, rules and agents are co-constitutive, and rules yield a state of rule (Onuf, 1998: 64, 74). In this context, “rule is something that happens to agents when they follow rules or when they suffer the consequences of not following rules” (Onuf, 1998: 75). Some scholars (e.g., Prugl, 1999; Frederking, 2003) have explicitly characterized the international arena as a place where rules constitute states of rule even in the absence of institutional governance, while many others (e.g., Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Barkin and Cronin, 1994) have subsequently studied the role of norms in global politics. Some of this work has situated these norms and rules within anarchy, while some of it has either ignored or rejected the baseline understanding of anarchical international structure.

In this article, I look to build on Onuf’s understanding that anarchy is much more than an empty, rule-less vacuum by moving beyond his speech-act understanding of rules and rule in global politics (e.g., Onuf, 1988). In my view, Onuf’s (seriously undervalued) contribution to theorizing anarchy in global politics is the argument that, contra Waltz, the invisibility of structure in global politics – the observation that led Waltz to determine that the international arena *is indeed anarchical* – does not mean that no structure exists. While Waltz is right that *formal* anarchy is clearly present in the international arena (there is no formal authority or government capable of either legitimately or practically claiming global governance), he is wrong to read the *substance* of anarchy as a simple absence of rules or rule. Within the formal anarchical structure of global politics, there are a number of ordering principles – often invisible, often unwritten – that constrain the identities and behaviors of actors as well as the processes of interaction between them.

Which is not to deny that the international arena is substantively anarchical. Onuf and Klink (1989: 150) make the argument that international relations are “formally but not substantively anarchical.”[[1]](#footnote-1) They suggest that “durable and accepted asymmetries in international relations” constitute evidence *against* substantive anarchy (Onuf and Klink, 1989: 167). But as those who have borrowed from anarchism to think about global politics (e.g., Prichard, 2013) have pointed out, there are many (both actual and imaginable) substantive accounts of anarchy that do not rely on imputing the emptiness of international *formal* anarchy to its substance. A number of theorists have explicitly painted different pictures of substantive anarchy: as a world where interactions among actors are social (e.g., Bull, 1977), as a ‘community of communities’ (e.g., Booth, 1991), as a site of emancipatory potential (Prichard, 2014), as freedom (Frost, 2008), and as a template for the ordering of state governments (e.g., Spruyt, 1994). I contend that theorists have also *implicitly* painted different pictures of the substance of anarchy, while not framing their discussion in terms of what substantive anarchy looks like. These scholars have framed substantive anarchy as a set of rules enforcing a state of rule (e.g., Onuf, 1988), as gender-hierarchical (e.g., Sjoberg, 2012), as constituted by reification and recognition (e.g., Butler, 1993), and in a number of other ways.

So, at the end of the day, Waltz (1979) and Onuf and Klink (1989) make a similar assumption about *substantive* anarchy in global politics – that, to exist, it must mirror *formal* anarchy, where the absence of explicit structure and clearly ordered hierarchy means that there is *no* authority. Yet, I would argue, a significant amount of other scholarship about global politics makes a different argument: that, while there are no set-in-stone, unchanging or unchangeable formal hierarchies or orders in global politics, there are many, many ordering principles, fluctuating hierarchies, rules and states of rule, valorizations and devalorizations. Those ordering principles do not just arise one day and disappear the next; they are frequently not easily changed; and they are frequently well-known even by a wide variety of actors with diverse backgrounds. The international arena remains substantively anarchical despite the presence of these multiple ordering principles because there is no one metric to choose between them, and no one constellation of ordering principles which establishes clear and lasting control over how international politics works. But that substantive anarchy is a constellation of and a competition between various rules, norms, hierarchies, and ordering principles, rather than a world devoid of any of those features. In the remainder of this piece, I intend to argue that gender order is a substantive feature of anarchy in global politics.

**Gender and Order in Global Politics**

Gender is one of the ordering principles that exists within the anarchical structure of the international arena.[[2]](#footnote-2) I argue here, as feminist work has before, that gender hierarchy is a key influence on how global politics works (e.g., Tickner, 2001; Enloe, 2010) and a key part of the structure of the international system (e.g., Sjoberg, 2013; 2012). I am using the word ‘gender’ here to refer to expectations that come from associations with maleness and femaleness, masculinities and femininities. In Laura Shepherd’s (2010) words, gender is a noun, a verb, and a logic – a noun like male or female, a verb associating people or organizations with masculinities and femininities, and a logic ordering social and political life. These labels, associations, and orders are largely discursive, where “gender symbolism describes the way in which masculine/feminine are assigned to various dichotomies that organize Western thought” such that “both men and women tend to place a higher value on the term which is associated with masculinity” (Wilcox, 2009). Traits, people, organizations, and states that are associated with masculinities tend to occupy a privileged position white those associated with femininities are subordinated.

This does not mean that all men have advantages and all women have disadvantages; it does not mean that all people, organizations, or states associated with masculinities are male or all people, organizations, or states associated with femininities are female. Instead, women can be *masculinist –* they can privilege things associated with masculinity over things associated with femininity. Correspondingly, men, organizations, and states can be *feminized* – they can be devalued by associating them with characteristics perceived as feminine. Feminization devalorizes, ideologically and materially, and normalizes the exploitation of feminized practices, institutions, and persons (Peterson, 2010). It is because of the prevalence of these gendered symbols and significations that feminists have talked about both genders and gender hierarchies as constant features of sociopolitical life.

While the existence of gender and gender hierarchies is often characterized as (in various capacities) universal in feminist theorizing, the *genders* in those hierarchiesdiffer. If “gender” is the existence of a set of characteristics associated with (perceived) sex that form a social structure, *a gender* is *a particular* set of social characteristics associated with particular (perceived) sexes in a particular sociopolitical context. Each person lives gender in a different culture, body, language, and identity. Therefore, there is not one gendered experience of global politics, but many. Masculinities and femininities change over time, and differ by location and cultural context as well as race and social class. In terms familiar to IR, perhaps, gender and of hierarchies between genders always exist, but the content of those genders varies through a political process of gendered competition.

I argue that there are three important types of gender-related hierarchical structures in global politics: gender hierarchies, gendered hierarchies, gendered hierarchy. Confusing language aside, these are meant to signify three different, but related, forms of order in global politics. Gender hierarchies are hierarchies based on direct association with gender-based characteristics, traits, or expectations. Gendered hierarchies are hierarches primarily based on something other than gender but presented and framed in gender terms. Gendered hierarchy is the role gender plays in the existence of hierarchical relations in global politics. I will briefly discuss each in turn.

*Gender Hierarchies*

Gender has been talked about as authoritative (e.g., Shepherd, 2008) and as changing (e.g., Enloe, 2010) in the feminist IR literature. Work using both of those approaches has often focused on uncovering the gender hierarchies that make women invisible in conventionally told histories not only of global politics but of the field of IR (Tickner, 2001: 5). Both approaches are deployed here, arguing that there is a constant presence of gender hierarchy in the international system, and that genders along that hierarchy are sticky but fungible. Like other feminist research on gender, this research serves two purposes: the feminist political purpose of identifying and redressing gender injustice, and the intellectual purpose of knowing as much as we can about what we study. Feminists have argued that, when scholars ignore women or gender in their IR analysis, they are not just reifying gender hierarchy, but giving themselves an incomplete picture of events in and the constitution of global politics. Gender “matters” in global politics in a number of ways, feminists argue, including but not limited to the tendency of the gendering of nationalist and ethnic identities to exacerbate conflict; the links between masculinity, virility, and violence in militarized cultures; the ways that feminization maps onto racial, ethnic, and class conflicts; and the distribution of socioeconomic benefits on the basis of gender (Tickner, 2001: 6-7).

How do you tell if a gender hierarchy exists, then? Joan Acker introduced a framework for understanding if and how organizations are gendered, because she was concerned, “in spite of the feminist recognition that hierarchical organizations are an important location of male dominance, most feminist writing about organizations assume that the organizational structure is gender neutral …. posing the argument as structure *or* gender” (1990: 139). This approach, Acker (1990: 143) notes, “implicitly posits gender as standing outside of structure” even while critiquing gender bias in organizational processes. I am suggesting that *both* gender bias in organizational practice in global politics *and* the organization of global politics itself is gendered.

A gendered structure, in Acker’s (1990: 146-147) terms, then, distributes capabilities (defined as advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, and meaning and identity) among units on the basis of a unit’s place in a gender hierarchy that orders the organization. Gender is a key part of international structure if advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through masculinities and femininities. If units in the international have their interactions, competitions, and relationships are governed and ordered by perceived associations with gender-based characteristics, the international system can be said to be gender-hierarchical. In this understanding, gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Instead, in a gender hierarchical international structure, “units” have their labor, allowed behaviors, locations in physical space, and power distributed on the basis of perceived gender characteristics. This occurs within a system of constructed symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce, and sometimes contest these gendered divisions. Units interact, then, on the basis of these distinctions and symbols. These processes help produce gendered components of state and national identity, like notions of honor, shame, chivalry, and protection. Gender is implicated in creating and conceptualizing political processes social relations between units, and is a constitutive element of the international system.

Following that analysis, I argue that the international system can be understood as a gendered organization. Gender is a key part of international structure if advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through masculinities and femininities. If units in the international have their interactions, competitions, and relationships are governed and ordered by perceived associations with gender-based characteristics, the international system can be said to be gender-hierarchical. In this understanding, gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Instead, in a gender hierarchical international structure, “units” have their labor, allowed behaviors, locations in physical space, and power distributed on the basis of perceived gender characteristics. This occurs within a system of constructed symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce, and sometimes contest these gendered divisions. States interact, then, on the basis of these distinctions and symbols. These processes help produce gendered components of state and national identity, like notions of honor, shame, chivalry, and protection (e.g., Young 2003). Gender is implicated in creating and conceptualizing political processes social relations between actors in global politics (e.g., Hooper 2001), and is a constitutive element of the international system (e.g., Sjoberg 2012).

The argument that gender is a constitutive element of the international system is an argument that assumptions about gender are embedded in the ordering principles of the international system. This is consonant with feminist observations of global politics, which have characterized the global political arena as a “patriarchal structure of privilege and control” (Enloe 1993, 70). Others see the global political arena a place where “the structure of political communities has assumed gendered forms” (Steans 2003, 43), and ordered by “gender relations [which] structure social power” (Pettman 1996, 43). These observations are rooted in feminist work which shows gender operating in how political leaders are chosen (Tickner 1992), how state governments work (Peterson 1992), how militaries function (Enloe 1989), and how economic benefit is distributed (Pettman 1996). States have been shown their relative military prowess, judged and asserted their relative power, and demonstrated and adjusted their relative economic status through gendered competition using gendered language (e.g., Cohn 1987). The gender hierarchy in the world “out there” can be read as replicated in the “commonsense ground” or traditional theorizing in IR, which feminist theorists (e.g., Tickner 1988) have characterized as partial at best and unrepresentative at worst because it often analyzes the perspectives and lives of only a small, elite, male portion of the global population.

Paralleling Waltz’s understanding that anarchy can be seen manifested in the function of units (states) in the international arena, in the distribution of relative capacities among those units, and in the execution of political processes, Sjoberg (2012) argued that gender is a constitutive factor in what states do, important in the distribution of states’ relative capacities, and formative of political processes among states. In substantiating the claim that gender is a constitutive factor in what states do, Sjoberg (2012) builds on previous feminist empirical work around the world[[3]](#footnote-3) to suggest that states define their identities in gendered ways, where gender and national identity are inextricably linked, as “all nationalisms are gendered” (McClintock, 1993) and women are often the essence and symbols of the reproduction of state and/or national identity (e.g., Yuval-Davis, 1997). Hegemonic masculinities are among the influences that constitute nationalisms as gendered, where there is an ideal-typical notion of masculinity that both states and the men in them are expected to live up to, creating a relationship between militarism, masculinity, and full citizenship (Connell, 1995; Young, 2003). For the influence of gender on distribution of capacity in the international arena, Sjoberg (2012) builds on the feminist argument that “the structural and ideological system that perpetuates the privileging of masculinist” in international relations is “a principle cause for so many of the world’s processes [such as] empire-building, globalization, modernization” (Enloe, 2004: 4, 6). Differences between dominant gender presentations and subordinated gender presentations play a role in hierarchies in the international arena, where it can be commonplace “to infantilize, ignore, trivialize, or even actively cast scorn on what is thought to be feminized” (Enloe, 2004: 5). What is thought to be feminized is not just women, but also states and other political actors. Feminist research has shown that association with gender-based characteristics has been used as a marker of relative power in many policy discourses in diverse places around the world (e.g., Banerjee, 2012; Agathangelou, 2002; Zalewski, 1995; Eichler, 2012; Weber, 1999). In support of the argument that gender matters in shaping political processes, Sjoberg (2012) discusses feminist work on a number of different processes in global politics, including diplomacy (Enloe, 2000), interstate jurisprudence (Charlesworth, Chinkin, and Wright 1991), international institutions (Moser and Moser, 2005), interstate competition (Peterson and Runyan, 2010), and militarization (Alexander, 2010). Feminist work on militarization, for example, has shown that gender norms are used to shape the will to fight, to sharpen training, to build group solidarity, and to condition responses to battlefield injury (e.g., Alexander, 2010; Enloe, 1993; 2000; Eichler, 2012; Goldstein, 2001; Sjoberg and Peet, 2011).

While this section is not the place to definitively explore the nature, direction, and contour of the influence of gender on the how the international system works, this short outline of existing evidence that suggests that gender itself is an ordering principle in global politics, both influencing the identity of actors and organizing them along hierarchies within anarchy. Feminist research provides significant evidence that gender hierarchies are prevalent in global politics, and matter in not only the results but also the constitution of interstate interactions. It provides a mandate to consider gender hierarchy as an important part of the ways that we think about hierarchy in global politics. One can see these gender hierarchies manifest in a number of the everyday (violent) features of global politics – places where women are being held unequal to men at the local, state, and global levels. From rape culture to human trafficking, unpaid care labor to gender-based violence, nowhere in the world are women socially, economically, or politically held equal to men. That is hierarchy based on gender – gender hierarchy in global politics.

*Gendered Hierarchies*

As I mentioned above, however, there are two other functions that gender has in positionality, control, power, and process in global politics. The first of those two is what I call gendered hierarchies. The gender-hierarchical statement ‘you run like a girl’ *is* based explicitly on sex-based associations – it is normally being used, when it is used, to shame a boy or man who is a poor runner by association with women and femininity, where it is assumed that women are, as a class, poorer runners than men. Still, while the insult is explicitly based on sex categorizations, it is not *only about* sex categorizations – it is also aimed at the suggestion that those who run well are superior to those who do not run well. While there are a lot of ways in which this example is trivial, for the purposes of this analysis, it can serve as an example of the path from (and the difference among) gender hierarchies and gendered hierarchies.

Gendered hierarchies are hierarchies that are not primarily *about* gender but that are nonetheless expressed in gendered terms, or organized along gendered assumptions or traits. The mechanism for this positioning is *feminization*, which is used to devalorize those people and actors associated with femininities. Peterson (2010) explains that “not only subjects like women and marginalized men can be feminized, but also concepts, desires, tastes, styles, and ways of knowing …[this feminization has] the effect of reducing the legitimacy, status, and value [of the feminized object]. Importantly [in Peterson’s terms] “this devalorization is simultaneously ideological *and* material – that is discursive, cultural, structural, and economic. It normalizes the marginalization, subordination, and exploitation of feminized practices and persons …which comes to be a taken-for-granted ‘given’ of social life.” It is not, then, the *fact* (if there were such a thing) of either femaleness or femininity that is the axis for discrimination in feminization, but the *association with* the feminine. Gendered power then makes that association a stratification.[[4]](#footnote-4)

This stratification manifests in the use of feminization to devalorize people and/or actors in hierarchical inter-state, inter-race, inter-religion, inter-class, inter-nationality, or other relations. Masculinization (as valorization) and feminization (as devalorization) are often used to signify positions of dominance and subordination within hierarchies that are not largely (or at least are not nominally) based on sex, gender, or sexuality. Gendered hierarchy works by fear, humiliation, and degradation on the basis of sex- and gender-based labeling. In Mary Hawkesworth’s (2003) terms, those who are produced as feminine as seen as weak, violable, silenced, docile, humiliated, and craven. This feminization takes place in hierarchies across class, across race and ethnicity, and across national borders. Hawkesworth (2006) suggests that it holds across colonial and postcolonial relationships, where the solution to the existential situation of the disempowered, feminized other is invariably a masculine assertion of power for which the appropriate feminine response is gratitude. Feminization, then, is a mechanism of gendered power used to subordinate enemies, firm up hierarchies, and communicate messages of dominance and superiority – even when those hierarchies are not fundamentally *about* gender.

This is *not* to make the argument that gender is prior to other factors, languages, or discourses on which hierarchical relations are shaped or structured. Quite the opposite – my point in distinguishing gender*ed* hierarchies from gender hierarchies is to suggest that, in many hierarchies, the conflict, discrimination, or segregation is primarily about something *other than* gender. Gender-based language and associations used to describe and reinforce hierarchies that are about other things can be found across global politics. Examples of such gender expressions could be genocidal rape (a gendered instantiation of an ethnic conflict [Buss, 2009]), gendered layoff patterns in economic crisis (a gendered instantiation of a class conflict [Hozic and True, 2016]), or gendered patterns of the legal enforcement of religious laws (a gendered instantiation of a social or religious conflict). Such analysis suggests that hierarchies in global politics can be gendered processes, instantiated and enforced on associations with sexes and genders to distribute *both* valorization and devalorization *and* the relative position, relative power, and relative capability that come with those relative positions along hierarchies.

*Gendered Hierarchy*

When I suggest that hierarchy in the international arena is a gendered institution, I mean more than that gender plays a role in the constitution and performance of particular hierarchical relationships. Instead, I mean that hierarchy in global politics *works on gendered logics.*  This is the third way in which gender matters in hierarchies in global politics – hierarchy *as* gendered. In other words, materialized hierarchies among people and states in global politics *exist*, but they do not exist and are not readable without “a specific modality of power as a discourse” – gendered power (Butler 1993, 139).

When I argue that even hierarchies which are neither gender-based nor explicitly framed in gender terminology are still gendered, it might be appropriate to ask whether I am claiming that all hierarchies are gendered and all gender relations hierarchical. I am, but not by homologizing that gender = hierarchy = gender. Instead, this suggests that the gendered institutionalization of hierarchies in the international arena comes from gender being a hierarchical social relation and hierarchies being gendered institutions too. The argument that gender is a hierarchical social relation is made above – I contend that gender is difference derived from inequality enforced by gendered power relations. This section puts forth the argument that hierarchy is a gendered institution. Part of the argument that hierarchy is a gendered institution can be found in the suggestion that most hierarchies that are constructed on other axes contain genderings of the representation of stratification in those hierarchies, as discussed in the section above. Gender is then present as both part of the stratification in other hierarchies (in the cases of conflict sexual violence, or comparing one group’s gender relations to another’s). In other words, gender is *in* most hierarchies in global politics.

Still, the argument that hierarchy in global politics is a gendered institution cannot be reduced to or fully substantiated by the fact that gender matters in the formation and duration of particular hierarchical relationships. Instead, it is an argument that the reiteration, recognition, and reification of hierarchies in the international arena relies on gendered power and gendered logics. A missing link in the account of the need for hierarchies – the need for dominance/subordination in global politics – is the valorization of a particular sort of masculinity in the construction of the ideal-type of the state and the construction of the ideal-type of the leader. The masculinity which is valorized is one which suggests that masculine honor comes from the ability to (actually or potentially) provide protection (or a guarantee thereof) to one’s feminized others while sending a clear message to one’s (potential) opponents that their attempts to interfere in such provision of (presumed) protection (e.g., Peterson 1977; Young 2003). This creates a gendered logic not only of states, but of families and other groups in the international arena (see, e.g., Peterson 1992; 2014). This gendered logic can be understood to play a role not only, as discussed above, in the structure and expression of hierarchies in global politics, but in their existence. It is for this reason I call hierarchies in the international political arena gendered institutions.

*Gender Hierarchies, Gendered Hierarchies, and Gendered Hierarchy Ordering Global Politics*

Feminist political theorists have long argued that all systems of political thought and political interaction have conceptions of gender, and “the conceptions of gender that are implicit and explicit in these systems are not accidental, but necessary” and “are also constitutive” (Frazer 1998, 54). While various feminist theorists have found the enduring nature of gender hierarchy in different sources, such as reproductive capacity (see Scott 1987), language (Tannen 2001), performance (Butler 1990), sexuality (MacKinnon 1989), human nature and/or psychology (see Hirschmann 1989), human social organization (Brown 1995), and evolution (Gailey 1987), feminist theorizing has emphasized that, though genders and their relationships change over time, place, and culture, gender hierarchies can be found across all of those variations. As such, feminist theorists have argued that “issues of gender are clearly central to any understanding of the political,” interpretively, empirically, and/or genealogically (Squires 2000; Brown 1988).

It is possible to see hierarchy through gender lenses in three distinct but not mutually exclusive ways: gender hierarchies in global politics (that is, hierarchies structured around gender), gendered hierarchies in global politics (that is, hierarchies structured around some other factor expressed and reified in gender terms), gendered hierarchy in global politics (gender as a logic of hierarchy and gendered logics of hierarchies). Evaluating these three ways that gender can and does matter to hierarchy in global politics can provide a significant amount of information about the forces that order global politics. Gender plays a role *directly* in ordering global politics through gender hierarchies, as well as an indirect role both through gendered hierarchies and the gendered nature of hierarchy in global politics.

**Anarchy with Orders, and (Gendered) Order within Anarchy**

If international anarchy is characterized by lack of either formal institutional authority or informal absolute order, that anarchy does not necessarily have to be (and is not in practice) a particular, thin sort of anarchy devoid not only of governments but also of order. This piece has made a case for seeing the substance of international anarchy as including ordering principles *and* orders, without those adding up to *an* ordering principle or group of principles and *an* order.

I have argued that gender is one of the ordering principles that exists within substantive anarchy in the international arena. While gender does not dictate or control all of the ways in which actors in the international arena are constituted, ordered, rewarded, or afforded interaction, it does matter in how actors are identified, how they function, how resources are distributed among them, and the political processes that are available to them to use. Gender is not the only ordering principle in the international arena, nor does it come to precede other ordering principles. Still, an account of international anarchy that leaves out the gender hierarchies *within* that anarchy is to provide a less full and less useful characterization of the international arena than one that includes the role that gender plays in structuring social and political life. On the other hand, an account of gender hierarchy in global politics that does not account both for the formal and substantive anarchical structure of the global political arena risks leaving out both the incomplete control of gender orders in global politics and the vulnerability of material, social, and discursive gender orders to change and challenge.

Instead, understanding international anarchy as containing orders (among them gender hierarchy) has several distinct advantages. First, it accounts for the orders that exist within anarchy with more comprehensiveness and more complexity than a view that treats those orders as either fully agent-centered or individual instances of cooperation. Second, it acknowledges international anarchy *and* that the anarchical structure of the international arena matters *without* considering it the primary or only explanatory factor in how global politics works. Third, it moves beyond the oversimple anarchy/hierarchy dichotomy that has often hindered more complicated theorizations of anarchy in IR theory. Fourth, it allows for the exploration of various forms of hierarchies which are layered within the international arena and the ordering principles which underlie them. Fifth, it suggests that anarchy (like justice, security, or power), is a theoretical construct for scholars to analyze, understand, and deconstruct, rather than a Waltzian null-set. Finally, a more complicated understanding of (international) anarchy may provide a path forward to more complicated understandings of (order in) the workings of global politics.

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1. Where, to them, “substantively anarchical” refers to a Waltzian notion of self-help (Onuf and Klink, 1989: 167, citing Waltz, 1979: 111-14). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Previous feminist thinking (e.g., Sjoberg [2012]) has argued that the existence of gender hierarchy in global politics is evidence that the global political arena is not anarchical. This piece looks to rethink that, thinking about the substance of anarchy in global politics. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. e.g., Korea (Moon, 1997), Malaysia (Chin, 1998), the US (Niva, 1998), Canada (Bannerji, 2000), and South Africa (Meintjes 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See, e.g., different discussions in Kirby (2013), or Allen (2000) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)