Women's International Thought:
Toward a Counter Archival Transformation of Global Power-Knowledge

International Review of Politics

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Conversations with sympathetic but slightly skeptical colleagues about the near total absence of women and people of color from the canonical literature associated with international relations (IR) often follow a certain, familiar pattern. Yes, these colleagues acknowledge, the important, foundational texts were written largely by white men. Yes, this unfortunate. Yes, gender, race, and class should be taken seriously when analyzing international politics. But, they say, the problem with faddish pedagogical movements that ask us to expand or "decolonize" the curriculum is this: when it comes to history, you can't change the past. Women and people of color just *weren't there* when the crucial ideas were forged. Adding them to survey courses thus requires amplifying the voices of people who were only marginally relevant while watering down the truly crucial concepts with which students must be familiar. From this perspective, expanding the IR canon is curricular violation, a revisionist act of historical wish fulfillment.

The problem with this historical/conceptual/political framing is that it isn't true. As Patricia Owens, Sarah C. Dunstan, Kimberly Hutchings, and Katharina Rietzler argue in the Introduction to this truly astonishing collection, women were not just present for some of the earliest discussions about what constituted the intellectual substance and political practice of international relations; they "helped to produce the very notion of international relations" in the first place. (p.2) Circumstances conspired to make this so. As a "relatively novel field," Owens notes in her Introduction to the first section, "research and teaching in IR allowed large numbers of middle- and upper-class women to break new ground within the institutionally racist and patriarchal setting of the university." It is not an accident, she continues, that both "the first African American woman to earn a graduate degree from Oxford and Harvard as well as Oxford's and Edinburgh's first women professors were IR scholars."(p.24). Women played crucial roles in setting up the institutional infrastructure of IR, founding and co-founding some of its earliest research centers and think tanks. And while a goodly number of women worked within these academic and institutional settings, others wrote about international politics from the adjacent worlds of "journalism, activism, social work, and teaching." (p.2) Wherever their location, however, throughout the early twentieth century and the long mid-century, women were engaged with major themes of the day; nationalism, colonial administration, war and peace, imperialism, international institutions and law, and global economic issues. They helped define and transform the discourse of international relations in Britain and North America and their contribution was "well known and influential in its time." (p.1)

And yet, despite these contributions and this public influence, the international thought of both historical women and people of color has been largely erased from surveys of the field. When women are included in anthologies today it is often either because of their historical work on gender (e.g. Virginia Woolf) or because of their involvement in the emergence of feminist IR in the 1980's (e.g. Cynthia Enloe). In some cases, this erasure took place in real time. Women writing about international politics in the inter-war period, for instance, were often blatantly ignored. Or, in the case of Gilbert Murray's flagrant appropriation of Florence Melian Stawell's ideas about the League of Nations, their work was simply stolen. (p.3)

By in large, however, the extrusion of both women and people of color from the historical memory of the field occurred during the post-war era as scholars (located primarily within the U.S. academy) began a process of specialization and professionalization aimed at legitimizing IR as a discrete field. They did this by confecting a post-war common sense about international power that entailed three, overlapping processes of erasure.

First, while the study of international relations had begun as a fundamentally interdisciplinary endeavor, drawing upon methods and insights "from History, Classics, Colonial Administration and Anthropology, Economics, Law, and Political Science," the post-war professionalization of the field – the transformation of international relations into International Relations – tended to revolve around a few major schools associated with a few major literatures.(p.5) Women, who tended to write about international relations from a multiplicity of perspectives and schools, both within and without of the academy, gradually disappeared from this increasingly narrow vision of the field. Moreover, as Owens notes, the new common sense about what counted as IR scholarship was grounded on "a conscious break away from historical approaches and a reorganization around a set of ideological "isms" and (all-male) eponymous 'Schools' founded by 'great white fathers.'"(p.35) Because a substantial percentage of historical women writing about international politics were "trained as historians engaged in often very practical and always empirically grounded research," their work was eased out of this new "grand theory" approach.(p.35)

Second, the emerging common sense about theory and power politics didn't just reject historical and interdisciplinary approaches; it also rewrote its own history in a way that had explicit implications for women. In other words, the origins story told by Cold War theorists in the late 1940's and 50's re-imagined the historical emergence of IR as an inter-war phenomenon concerned almost exclusively with the problems of war and peace. As Cecilia Lynch has argued, transforming this origins story into a "twenty years crisis" (out of which the current field emerged in opposition) entailed a rejection of peace movement activism which was often dominated by women. The core bait and switch of this narrative re-framing insisted that, on the one hand, peace movement and collective security approaches were complicit with appeasement and thus responsible for the rise of the Nazis. On the other hand, these approaches were presented as weak, effeminate ways of imagining international relations that didn't adequately reflect Great Power politics. This double-edged rhetorical sword – complicity plus ineffectiveness – ultimately cut both ways, carving out a language for the emerging field of IR by contrasting peace and collective security with, in Lynch's words, "'proper' norms of conduct" for states, diplomats, and – most importantly – scholars of international politics.[1] That this contrast was articulated in explicitly gendered terms helps explain the literal "unthinkability," as the editors describe it, of "historical women's thought on international relations." (p.1)

Third, the post-war recasting of the IR origins story as an epic battle between feminine appeasement and manly power politics not only expurgated women activists from the emerging discourse, it also obscured the early field's *actual* preoccupation with racial geography, imperial rivalry, and colonial administration. (p.17) As Durstan argues in her excellent introduction to Section Three, as the field of international relations "moved away from studies of the mechanics of imperialism, so too did later histories of IR as an academic discipline tend to elide its origins in and focus on imperialism."(p.127) Robert Vitalis describes this elision as a "vast gulf" between "what appeared to

[1] Cecilia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell, 2007), 7.

matter in the professional study of international relations" in the 1930's and the "imaginary world that a Cold War cohort of realists would begin to conjure a decade or so later."[2] For Vitalis, the "the norm against noticing" race and imperialism in the early discipline obscures both the vestiges of racist and imperialist thinking in the field today *and* the work of historical Black scholars making critical connections between race, imperialism, and foreign policy. For the editors of *Women's International Thought,* the erasure of "colonial administration and race relations" in IR's disciplinary and intellectual histories obscures the work of women writers whose "intellectual contributions are inextricable from the preoccupation with empire."(p.127) As the diversity of readings in this volume suggests, women were writing both as supporters and critics of imperialism and supporters and critics of racial hierarchy. Excising imperialism from the disciplinary and intellectual history of international relations means obscuring the work of women like Margery Perham who treated empire "as an instrument of development necessitated by racial difference" as well as the work of scholars like Anna Julia Cooper whose groundbreaking work on the Haitian revolution identified racism as one of the structuring logics of global power politics in modernity. (p.133)

The bold response by the editors of *Women's International Thought* to this triumvirate of erasures is to drive a truck through them, overwhelming the reader with the sheer volume, breadth, quality, and diversity of work about international politics written by historical women, across a variety of disciplines and intellectual spheres, from the early twentieth-century through the late 1960's. The anthology is organized into thematic sections, each of which begins with a thoughtful, introductory essay authored by one or two of the editors. These essays do the difficult work of situating the authors historically, providing necessary biographical information, and developing the conceptually complex ideas of the section. Overall, the book focuses mainly on scholarship written by women in Britain and America, with significant and important exceptions made for the anti-colonial writings of Caribbean scholars like Jane Nardal and Suzanne Roussy Césaire who wrote primarily in French. Comprised of 104 selections by 92 different thinkers, covering topics of critical importance to international politics to this day, the anthology constitutes both the largest collection of women's international thought to date and "one of the largest anthologies of international thought ever compiled, if not the largest currently in print."(p.14) And yet, even excluding thinkers who did not fit into the spatial and temporal parameters of the book, argue the editors, "there were numerous other figures that could have been included."(p.14)

In sum, *Women's International Thought* amounts to no less than what Edward Said called a "counter-archive," an amassed organization of source material necessary to challenge dominant narratives based on formalized amnesia.[3] In the case of historical women and international thought, this "counter-archive" facilitates the process of, in Said's words, "recovering what has been left out" of the canon of international relations, "and then placing that missing actuality back in the center of things."[4]

Given its breadth, it is impossible, in a review essay this short, to even begin to do justice to the fascinating content of *Women's International Thought*. And yet, one of the blessings of engaging with a

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[2] Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell, 2016), 86.
[3] Said is most explicitly concerned with the notion of "counter-archive" in his crucial (and almost unpublishable) essay "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," *Social Text,* 1 (1979), 7-58.
[4] He discusses the idea of "recovery" most often in his writing on Palestine but also, as in this essay, in reference to "humanist" responses to global power politics. Edward Said, "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals," *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York; Columbia UP, 2003), 142.

counter-archive this expansive and diverse is that one can, effectively, choose one's own adventure story, using both the collected works and editorial essays as springboards for making a variety of different interventions in the field, something I predict scholars will be doing for many years to come. For my part, I am particularly fascinated in a critical question to which the editors circle back in their individual essays. What have been the implications, they ask, "of the expropriation and erasure of women's international thought"? Further, what does "its recovery, reconstruction, and analysis… mean for intellectual and disciplinary history and international theory"? (p.21)

In the remainder of this essay, I place these questions back in the center of things by thinking specifically about the spatial limitations of the discipline and the possibilities for imagining the world otherwise enabled by some of the work in this anthology. I argue that these contributions spark thinking that exceeds "contemporary debates about IR's nature and purpose" and asks us to reconsider the conceptual binding of Political Science more broadly as a discipline. (p.5). Inspired by Said and Merze Tate – whose revelatory writings appears three times in this anthology – I think more about the transitional work that "geopolitical" projections of power and knowledge have played in framing and formalizing the contemporary study of politics. (p.50)

In their introductory essay, the editors specifically address that framing and formalizing in the context of disciplinary canons, noting that canons are created "to establish and legitimize new academic disciplines" thus settling "central questions and providing for their pedagogical reproduction." "Heavily influenced by Political Theory's canon," they continue, "the proliferation of works seeking to establish the legitimacy of disciplinary IR from the 1950s focused on a number of all-male 'Fathers' of international thought."(p.5) Insofar as the field of IR looked to thinkers like Hobbes and Machiavelli to make the past "become what it always was," this statement is obviously true.[5] But it underplays two other developments at work in the process of canon construction: the extent to which Political Theory's canon is itself a post-war creation, and the retreat of the rest of the field from any active engagement with politics taking place outside or between sovereign states.

As John Gunnell, Duncan Bell, and others have argued, the formation of the political theory canon as it is taught in universities in Britain and North America is largely the product of a post-war process of consolidation that took place alongside, and in the service of, the concretion of Political Science as a discrete academic field. Scholars invested in this project, according to Gunnell, tended to construe the intellectual practice of political theorizing as primarily engaged with particular thinkers asking particular questions, over time, what Gunnell calls "a plot containing distinct points of beginning, transformation, and, even, end."[6] Meanwhile, post-war IR scholars were not only borrowing from this emerging canon, they were also differentiating between the study of international politics and the study of everything else, including Political Theory. By 1960, the distinction between the two fields was so obvious to Martin Wight that he breezily insisted it "requires no explanation."[7] Over the years, Political Theory and IR have ossified in their self-understandings and turned their backs on each other, occupying what Bell describes as "parallel

[5] Slavo Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London; Verso, 1989), 60.

[6] John Gunnell, "Dislocated Rhetoric: The Anomaly of Political Theory," *The Journal of Politics*, 68.4 (2006), 777. See also, Duncan Bell, "What Is Liberalism?," *Political Theory*, *42*.6 (2014), 682–715.

[7] Martin Wight, "Why Is There No International Theory?" *International Relations*, 2.1 (1960), 35.

universes" with markedly different literatures and understandings of the very same terms (e.g. "liberalism," "idealism," and "realism").[8]

The upshot of this intense field and canon formation is that today, we continue to occupy a discipline (Political Science) transected by boundaries: between Political Theory and IR, between "inside" and "outside" the state, between languages proper to their spheres. In mainstream IR this has meant naturalizing a world of sovereign states despite the historical dominance of empires.[9] In mainstream Political Theory, it has meant obsessing over notions of "the political" that require, in Chantal Mouffe's words, "a moment of closure."[10] Throughout the post-war era, the field has been continually bound and rebounded, the space of both inquiry and politics constrained by what G.D.H. Coles once called the "ringed fence" approach; fenced in states and fenced in knowledge.[11] Thus, the intellectual cartography of our field both limits interdisciplinary possibilities for critique and imagination while actively reinforcing an imperial global order with post-imperial characteristics or, as John Ikenberry once called it, "a hierarchical order with liberal characteristics."[12]

Unsurprisingly, the construction of knowledge about international relations and the construction of knowledge about imperial order bear some historically grounded, rhetorical similarities. Imperialism and IR both entail spatial projections of knowledge about the world, the construction of "imaginative geographies" that distinguish between peoples and states and between zones of power and exclusion.[13] Imperialism reconfigured topography and culture by transforming already populated landscapes into, in Said's words, "an empty space" which then (as in the case of settler colonial states) could be filled with European narratives.[14] IR reconfigures intellectual topography and culture by excising both the history of imperialism and all other accountings of global politics from its historical narrative about the world. Imperialism and IR thus both produce a scholarly commonsense that reinforces the material and political distinctions between rulers and ruled – or, "developed and developing," "liberal and illiberal" – on a global scale while limiting the intellectual horizon through which we imagine world politics.

For Said, the project of producing a "counter-archive" – of placing missing actualities back in the center of things – is essential to both challenging dominant narratives about the world and envisioning global and local politics differently. Many of the contributions by historical women collected in this anthology similarly press us to think differently about the spatial limitations and possibilities of global and local politics. Merze Tate's critical reflections on the role of "geography," for instance, interrogates the idea of "geopolitics" not from the usual reactionary or hyper theoretical reading of the term but, instead, from the "point of view of leadership in applied geopolitics." (p.51). In other words, for Tate, understanding the world required a historical engagement with the way the globe had been historically divided by powerful actors, from Monroe

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[8] Duncan Bell, "Political Realism and International Relations," *Philosophy Compass,* 12 (2017), 12.
[9] See David Armitage on reconfiguring of imperialism history into a history of sovereign states, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013),
[10] Chantal Mouffe, "Carl Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence,* X.1 (1997), 25.
[11] Cole, G.D.H. 1916. "The Nature of the State in View of Its External Relations," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 16: 310.
[12] John Ikenberry, "The Future of the Liberal World Order: Internationalism After America," *Foreign Affairs,* 90.3 (2011), 61.
[13] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York; Vintage, 1979), 54.
[14]Edward Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place," *Critical Inquiry,* 26.2 (2000), 188.

to Disraeli, Rhodes to Mussolini, Theodor Roosevelt to Hitler. The linkage of these names continues to be a rarity in a discipline which assiduously eschews its historical connections to a racial and imperial configuration of the world but, for Tate, that linkage was essential to the project of "teaching international relations" in 1947. (p.49) Tate's vision for a peaceful, post-imperial world thus required a shift in orientation toward the borders of that striated, racialized world, toward Black and brown people, the "downtrodden races of the outer ring." Chiding IR thinkers of the day for their "completely inadequate approaches to the problems of a global peace," Tate demanded a reassessment of these borders. "The day of vast empire is past," she insisted in 1943. "The day of equal peoples is at hand." (p.326)

But Tate's "geopolitical thinking" is only one, counter-vision in this counter-archive that presses critique and political imagination beyond the "ringed fence." Jane Nardal's 1928, "*Internationalisme noir,*" explores the emergence of Black internationalism in the context of – and "not at all opposed" to – attempts at "lowering of the barriers that exist between countries." (p.201) Rosa Luxemburg's 1913 evisceration of imperialism and global capitalism puts forward a "geographical," highly spatialized understanding of capitalism in its final stage that lambasts the "harmony of interests," (prefiguring Lenin and later Carr) and brilliantly exposes the false distinction within liberal theory between a cordoned off understanding of "peaceful competition," capitalism's "shows of force," and the language of "foreign policy." (p.429). Nancy Cunard's insistence in 1942 on a "*real* British 'Commonwealth"' which extended fully, equal, democratic rights to all citizens regardless of race imagines a different, more just, form of international organization arising from the ruins of the imperial state. (p.218). And, in its broad thinking about the difference between republics, unified states, and federations, Pauli Murray's, *The Constitution and Government of Ghana* (1961) sets out bold line of inquiry for theorizing and imagining post-imperial, constitutional ideas. (p.291)

In sum, *Women's International Thought* is a counter-archival gift not just to the academic study of IR but to scholars of politics everywhere who want to critique and imagine politics beyond the "ringed fence." Placing these wildly interdisciplinary and conceptually diverse texts back into the center of things encourages all of us to question the geographic and analytical common sense of our home subdisciplines and, in the words of Owens, Dunstan, Hutchings, and Rietzler, to "deepen and expand understandings of what international thinking was, is, and could be." (p.22)