



Women, Culture and International Relations

Vivienne Jabri and Eleanor O’Gorman (eds.)

Lynne Rienner, Boulder, Colorado and London, 1999, viii+213pp.

Hardback, ISBN: 1-55587-701-X.

The radical and challenging character of this excellent collection is somewhat belied by its title. There is very little left of the categories ‘women’ and ‘culture’ after p. 10. Rather bravely the editors say that the use of these terms ‘highlights the difficulties that have emerged within feminist IR’ (p. 9), but with that they are giving the common reader (of titles) rather a lot of credit. Feminists and IR: Surfing the Second Wave is my suggested alternative.

The editors identify the ‘first wave’ with reclaiming women’s voices and uncovering gender biases and exclusions, and the ‘second wave’ with post-positivist critiques that question universalisms, interrogate knowledge claims, and grapple with difference, inclusion, ‘otherness’ and subjectivity. Philosophically, this project is developed with very clear-minded discussions of the nature of moral judgement in normative theory, and empirically it engages with post-colonial issues in the discourses and disciplines of anti-imperialist struggles and western-sponsored programmes of ‘development’. The authors of the various chapters thus track the engagement of feminism with making overt the plurality of women’s voices, and the multiple varieties of difference (class, ‘race’, ethnicity, religion, etc., otherwise represented by ‘culture’) in and through which these are expressed. The defining concepts of ‘IR’ get a mention as a triad on p. 1: realism, liberalism and structuralism. After that, those who practice ‘normal science’ and represent it as IR are going to be lost in space, and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that there are two ‘IRs’. The chapters in the volume derive from a panel at the 1996 ISA meeting, and there is perhaps the tantalizing thought that the two worlds might collide there, given a favourable conjunction in space and time.

There are appealing contrasts of style in the volume. I particularly benefited from the clear, careful way that Kimberly Hutchings (‘Feminism, Universalism, and the Ethics of International Politics’) and Vivienne Jabri (‘Explorations of Difference in Normative International Relations’) lay out the issues involved in constructing normative claims, once the grounds for inclusive judgements have been deconstructed in two ways: the supposed qualification of the speaker/theorist to act as moral authority, and the supposed uniformities amongst the recipients/objects of the normative message, even allowing for purported inclusions of ‘difference’ and ‘other voices’ in the accounts. Hutchings argues for a move from moral epistemology to moral phenomenology, and Jabri outlines an aesthetic ethicality based on multiple textual



selves. Two chapters that adopt a more eyewitness and story-telling style are Eleanor O’Gorman (‘Writing Women’s Wars: Foucauldian Strategies of Engagement’) and Sarah C. White (‘Gender and Development: Working with Difference’). O’Gorman draws on her own research on women and war in Zimbabwe, and White on her experiences in the politics of development in Bangladesh, giving the reader a real download of vivid and memorable images. Other readers may prefer chapters that critique a specific theorist or debate: Nalini Persram on Gayatri Spivak, or Nicholas Higgins on Richard Rorty and Nancy Fraser. Perhaps the light under the bushel is Stephen Chan’s final chapter, which points out that for most of the world there is no IR, feminist or otherwise.

Where there is discourse, there are silences. Where there is inclusion, there are exclusions. Though there are two IRs in two worlds, they do not collide, and I miss the sense of genuine conflict. Why not go on the attack? It might have been interesting to commission a chapter on ‘Women, Culture and IR’ from a malestream theorist, challenging him to say *something* on the subject. Even if, from the feminist IR perspective, it were naive and uninformed, at least it would be *out there*, and with at least some subjective investment it is just possible that our malestream theorist would have learned *something* (or Socratically, learned that he did not know as much as he thought he did). There is also a possible world in which contributors could be commissioned to work on masculinities within a feminist frame, and could bring the deconstructive projects mentioned on p. 15, footnote 8 into post-positivist IR. This did not happen, and such persons are possibly not to be found as yet, but I did not have the sense that there was much will to turn the ‘gender lens’ in this direction, other than an exculpatory ‘notice’. Understandably no one panel, and no single volume, can do everything, but there is an issue of engagement with the ‘other’ here, namely which ‘others’ to choose, and what the engagement should look like. This is a valuable, informative, and forward-looking volume for feminist IR, but there is not much blood on the floor.

Dr Terrell Carver
Professor, Department of Politics, University of Bristol.