Reading and thinking with Sjoberg’s and Tickner’s *Feminism in International Relations* (Routledge, 2012)

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Thanks for the opportunity to be on this roundtable.

**I want to make three points. One is pedagogical and perhaps quasi-cultural; the other two are related to moments in this book and what it’s doing: moments that I found particularly interesting.**

- **On the pedagogical/cultural front**, the opening chapter of the book confirms what I’ve been feeling for a long time in my teaching: that the challenge of teaching and thinking feminist IR has shifted in recent years. We have a large and highly able field of theorists doing very interesting work. Part of the act of courage that defined feminist IR in its early years was that it was fighting along two fronts at once: as a habitus – to use Bourdieu’s term – that was both academically and culturally marginalized. Persistent inequalities in the discipline and the culture remain; but this marginality has diminished, or at least become more porous, over time. This is something to celebrate (albeit with some caution); it’s also something that has made me think about how best to teach this material.

Let me explain why. When I started to think about how to bring feminist IR’s themes and methods into my teaching – first at Colgate, later at the University of Alabama – I was really worried about how to do it. I didn’t want to apologize for teaching it. I didn’t want to place my students in the role of ignorant, unreconstructed chauvinists. Most of all, I didn’t want to assume that the struggles of my generation would be theirs; or that I would even know what theirs were or what they should be. And I didn’t want to ‘tack on’ feminism as an ‘-ism’ after realism, liberalism and constructivism as some sort of ‘other approach’. What I wanted to do was make feminist tools and modes of thinking self-evidently **interesting and relevant**: as method; as a set of epistemological questions; as a mode of reflexivity; as an entrée to ontological questions about gender and the fluidity of human identity and relations more broadly; as a toolkit for the struggles they might be trying to enunciate. I wanted to shift the fight from defending feminism to showing what it can do, what conversations it opens up.

I did this by using some of Laura’s work and some of Cynthia Enloe’s: *how do women appear in world politics? How have they appeared? How has that changed over time? What do those changes tell us – in intellectual, social or political terms? What does the struggle to ‘appear’ tell us about exclusion more broadly and generally?*

From Laura, I borrowed a discussion about Pvt. Jessica Lynch, and married it to similar discussions in Enloe about Fawn Hall, Carmen Miranda and Steve Canyon. I
grafted other images onto this as well: of PFLP fighter Leila Khaled from the 1970s; of Leonid Brezhnev leering at Jill St. John; more recently (I haven’t had a chance to use this one yet, but I’m eager to) of Henry Kissinger ostensibly ‘posing in the buff’. I’ve uploaded some of these images in a PowerPoint: you’ll find slides based on those I have used in class there.

Take Khaled’s image, in battledress and keffiyah – usually a man’s headdress and a symbol of popular Palestinian nationalism since the revolts of the 1930s. It is difficult to pin down. She holds her AK-47 in a way that could be seen as phallic. But her eyes are downcast, her expression demure, perhaps even sad, and she wears what appears to be a wedding ring – made of a grenade pin and a bullet. Perhaps this is modesty pulling against erotic desire: a ‘pinup’ for a politically radical, but morally conservative, popular liberation struggle.

Another possible reading: perhaps she is cradling the rifle like the figure of Mary in a “Madonna and child” portrait. In that case, Khaled’s expression might be understood as anticipatory grief: the Madonna’s painful understanding that what she has borne and nursed faces a long, painful, sacrificial death. That she persists in her burden enjoins us to continue in ours.

There are other possible readings, of course. The point is first that the image’s inability to be identical with any single meaning gives it, and Khaled, a polymorphous form of political power. It opens up ways to do political work, and Khaled has used that opening to work in a variety of different ways.

Other objectifications have worked differently. Consider a famous photograph of the actress Jill St. John standing near Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev. Brezhnev’s sidelong glance and smile were understood to reveal his fondness for sexual and material pleasure. For some observers, this suggested that he represented a departure from the Spartan self-abnegation of an earlier, more revolutionary, generation of Soviet leaders. Perhaps this fellow was one with whom Americans – particularly, Americans like Henry Kissinger (who, it was rumored, was romantically involved with St. John) – could deal. Kissinger was cultivating his own image of sexual prowess in this era; and his body, too, (or at least a doctored-up representation of it) would become a fetishized object.¹

My students certainly do sense that a kind of interventionist politics informs these aesthetic presentations. I wouldn’t want them not to see that. But there’s no apology needed or asked for here. They already know these issues are in play, even if that knowledge is not consciously present. So these interrogations are, I think,

able to insert themselves into conversation; *they are self-evidently very interesting.* Like Max Weber’s pickaxes, they loosen the hard soil of thinking.

My classroom authority as a professor seems to be enough here to start the ball rolling: ‘I have chosen these things for you, because I think that once you learn to read them, they will be of interest to you.’ And most of them follow me.

I want to add quickly that I can speak only to my own experience here. I teach in a conservative southern state. I have a certain classroom presence and bearing; what Bourdieu called a very particular ‘bodily hexis’: I’m a Jewish, northern, white male. That bearing brings with it some privilege: it conveys a degree of academic authority that does not need to be earned (even if it can be squandered). As Nick Onuf said in this room last night, there are a many, many different ways that gender and racial privilege can redound to a scholar’s advantage, and I must foreground this as honestly as I can. But this is my experience, and I wanted to share it.

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**Learning from Sjoberg and Tickner.** Two points here, and if I don’t have time for them both I’ll post these comments and the images I want to discuss on my webpage.

1. **Notes toward a critical-reflexive quant: Peet and Sjoberg.** In grad school I wrote a bad paper called ‘notes to a critical quant’, in which I began with Ivan Bloch’s massive study of the costs of modern, industrialized war. Bloch measured and discussed a bewildering variety of statistics: from the muzzle velocity and rates of fire of what were then new automatic rifles and recoilless artillery to smokeless powder, the role of rail in provisioning and mobilizing armies, the size of those armies, and so on.

   His conclusion, published well before World War One, was that war was essentially unwinnable: that it would drive soldiers deeper and deeper into entrenched fortifications; that offensive mobility would be paralyzed, and whole generations of young men would be consumed in artillery duels; it would bankrupt states, forcing them to cut back on the social welfare programs through which their political legitimacy was purchased, resulting in mass upheaval. The liberal-nationalist nation-state mode of political organization in Europe would, sooner or later, destroy itself. It needed to change.²

   This was a quant that did not merely seek after or explain the immediate relations among things. There was that. But there was also an attempt to question the order of things; to read and interpret material realities in light of moral and emancipatory human ends. The data told a story, but it also attempted to undo the political order that produced that story. Perhaps

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² *The Future of War in its Technical, Economic and Political Relations.* (Boston: Ginn, 1899).
something like the ‘systems analysis’ of the 1950s and 1960s, the math did particular discursive work: it was a way to assert civilian control over a military dominated by generals and admirals.

In short, Bloch’s work offered us all three nodes of what I have elsewhere called the hermeneutic sphere: explanation, interpretation, and critique.3 If we could build quant that way, I said in my bad paper of some years back, I’d be in. I’d learn to count past 25; I’d do chi-square tests.

Peet’s and Sjoberg’s essay captures something of what I had wished I could write. Violence against women, for them, becomes a kind of proxy variable for violence against noncombatants more generally – in a way that builds on speculative work of folks like Helen Kinsella – while also inviting us to speculate on how war has changed in broader historical-sociological ‘post-Kaldorian’ terms.

But they do more. They point out that gender disaggregated data is hard to come by, inviting us to question why such data doesn’t exist. Why does this matter? Hannah Arendt famously argues that politics is the space of appearance; but also, that the social has essentially consumed the political (Hannah Pitkin calls this the ‘attack of the blob’).

In a provocative passage in the Human Condition, Arendt also points out that the disconcerting thing for many critics of behaviorism is how right it often is; how well it captures and encapsulates us. Thinking with Arendt, one might say this: in a world of administered behavior, to be counted as a data-point may be all that remains of ‘appearing’ politically.4

To point out that data is not counted, then, is to suggest that the things not being counted are not worth counting, or else that those things are invisible. Well, who’s invisible and why? Who’s not being counted, and why? In short, Peet and Sjoberg have made me think a lot about what data can do.

2. Reconsidering Masculinities: Thinking with Eichler and Enloe. I found the discussion of these Russian men, and how they narrated their experiences, very interesting. Like Enloe and Eichler, I find myself sometimes put off by discussions of masculinity that wish to reduce it to something ahistorical or flatly uniform, as "singular, as static, or as

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4 "The unfortunate truth about behaviorism and the validity of its ‘laws’ is that the more people there are, the more likely they are to behave and the less likely to tolerate non-behavior. Statistically, this will be shown in the leveling out of fluctuation. In reality, deeds will have less and less chance to stem the tide of behavior, and events will more and more lose their significance, that is, their capacity to illuminate historical time.” The Human Condition (Chicago, 1989), p. 43.
decontextualized.” (141) Part of my work is beginning to congeal around a rethinking of masculinity.

My interests lie in Israeli-Palestinian politics. In that vein, I’ve begun to read think more critically about the project of creating a ‘new Zionist man’. Max Nordau, one of Herzl’s close confidants, famously called for a muskeljudentum – for cultivating a generation of ‘muscle-Jews’ or a ‘Jewry of muscle’. Athletics, work and military service played key roles in this; so did nutrition, liberal education, youth movements and camping groups. These ‘new’ Jews were contrasted to older, femminized ones: who preferred study to work; argumentation and speculation to action; who ostensibly idealized weakness and passivity. I’ve posted some images contrasting these notions of manhood in my PowerPoint.5

The back-story to this is project is complicated, but in brief: the theological challenge Zionism posed to traditional politically quietist Rabbinic Judaism lay in its desire to wrest control of Jewish history away from gentiles – even if the loss of control over that history had traditionally been understood as divine punishment. That is, traditional Judaism saw the Diaspora as a period of penitence from which only God could release His people; that would happen when God, in His own good time, chose to send a Messiah.

For its part, Zionism marshaled a variety of arguments – historical, materialist, pragmatic, and cultural – to suggest that it was time for Jews to redeem themselves, to become their own messiah. Emil Fackenheim referred to this as “the Jewish return into history.”6 But the project of ‘historical return’ could only work if there were Jewish men and women strong enough to wrestle that history back and hold onto it. Hence the need to ‘unqueer’ and ‘re-masculinize’ male Jewish bodies. A parallel story will emerge in Palestinian nationalism in the 1970s; consider the image of the father in Ghassan Kanafani’s novella Return to Haifa.7

This is tied in historical time to modern nationalism, with its affinities to a certain paradigm for the production of military and economic power: industrial war, the levee en masse, and the rise of the factory. The need to enforce a certain kind of heteronormativity can be understood as tied to a particular mode of producing political power. In short, the appearance of the forms of masculinity that are now reified – against which Eichler and Enloe are warning us – have a particular materialist (and in IR terms, realist) genealogy.

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5 In the following discussion, I am drawing primarily on insights from Daniel Boyarin: Unheroic Conduct. (California, 1996).
6 Emil Fackenheim: The Jewish Return into History. (Schocken, 1980).
7 For this story see the anthology Palestine’s Children. (Lynne Rienner, 2000). Kanafani and Leila Khaled, incidentally, were comrades-in-arms.
We don’t make war in quite the same way any more, and economic production has changed as well. The state’s retreat – however partial and ambivalent – from enforcing a particular kind of masculinity is, perhaps, partly enfolded in that shift. Accordingly, we should expect many new forms of masculinity to emerge.

For critical theorists and Talmud scholars Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, this earlier, queerer form of Jewish masculinity is pregnant with political and critical possibility – of a sort that speaks to the work Eichler and Enloe are doing. If the heteronormative male is an extension of a certain form of state power, then this ‘queered’ man represents what Boyarin and Boyarin call a **power of diaspora**. “The tenacity that is valorized by [such] texts is the tenacity that enables continued...existence, not the tenacity of defending sovereignty unto death.” (*Powers*, p. 202) It opens up “a positive resource in the necessary rethinking of models of polity in the current erosion and questioning of the modern state-system and ideal;” an “alternative ground for the intricate and always contentious linkage between cultural identity and political organization.” (*Powers*, p. 5, 10)

Laura and Ann talk in the book a great deal about home and homelessness; about feminist IR theory as a home for certain kind of thinking and for certain thinkers. Diaspora is of course is about homelessness. If one were tempted to wonder what all of this might have to do with either IR or feminism, let me leave you with this brief, but suggestive, anecdote: Hans Morgenthau had a fencing scar. He got it as a member of a German-nationalist dueling society devoted to “German Patriotism...the German Reich, and Honor!”9 Christoph Frei, his biographer, points out that such societies played an important role in the self-construction of German-Jewish men: in establishing their German, and their masculine, *bona fides*. Painful bodily self-mutilation was their path to finding a home, a place, and a voice.

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