

Postcolonial Theories as Critique and Challenge to 'First World-ism'

Written by Anna M. Agathangelou and Heather M. Turcotte

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The works of critical, feminist and postcolonial theorists have shifted the orientation of IR scholarship to consider the different configurations and effects of international politics when attentive to various objects, subjects and power relations circulating within critical geographies (Sylvester 1994; Walker 1993; Chowdhry and Nair 2002). These interventions heed the exclusions of canonical IR theories and teachings and question its role in shaping global places, scales, networks and spatial relations.

We argue that the critiques of postcolonial feminists and critical feminisms have contributed epistemic, knowledge frameworks, and material insights into hegemonic power relations, and in particular global violence. More specifically, such theorizations have raised questions about the 'geopolitical' in order to transform IR's contentious emphasis on geographical and territorial realms of power. Mainstream IR constructions of global violence are explained through static constructions of geography that territorialize where violence is and who are the victims, perpetrators and protectors...Such discourses often elide the power relationships and structures of inequality that make rights claims possible through the regulation of national and international 'citizenship.'

Unequal migration patterns of people and labor, often forced, from Second-Third World countries to the First World and from rural areas to urban, a proliferation of borderland territories, an increased number of export free trade zones and refugee camps within and between states have redrawn static boundaries worldwide. Territories marked as the Global North and Global South are built upon histories of struggle and contestation and geographies of segregation. In other words, the mobility of bodies (people and knowledge) troubles perceived geographical immobility. We are arguing that homogeneous and static constructions of geography that contain known subjects and objects of study rely on histories of segregation to reconstruct anew the world (Agathangelou *forthcoming*). Such histories represent gender, race, sexuality, religion and nation as separate moments and entities, which we argue, amongst others (i.e., Grewal 2005), propagate violent inequalities through the knowledge claims of global power and forms of justice. What are the ways First World discourses of women's rights as human rights necessitate the violence and victimization of Others within the Global South? How does geography inform and become informed by international relations and frameworks of justice? Why is geography a crucial concern for feminist theorizations, methods, pedagogies and praxes of global and gender politics?

The frameworks of geopolitics within the mainstreams of IR, including feminist IR, rely on geographical separations of land, people and knowledge. This process of *geopolitical segregation* is presented as naturalized, even when violence is foundational to its consolidation (Agathangelou 2004, *forthcoming*; Turcotte 2008). This geographical segregation, though foundational to the remaking and reshaping of spatial relations such as global (im)mobility, restriction to accessing resources and justice becomes visible when read through aboriginal, postcolonial and feminist lenses which usually enable us to inquiry into the convergences of segregation and also disruptions that are made possible through the many struggles of marginalized people. More concretely, these theorizations have opened the space for us to engage with First World Feminisms and the different projects they articulate to see how such feminisms move across, create possibilities and even collude in creating spaces of violence, such as sustaining the projects of segregation... we articulate a feminism that draws on historical insights of spatio-temporal relations and reconfigures geography beyond its epistemic and material cartographic role to social relations that disrupt dominant

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geopolitical asymmetries of power.

We take geopolitics as a critical geography of multiple engagements of time, space and place within various sites of world politics, including relations of knowledge production. By pushing the theoretical realms of geopolitics into unconventional sites, such as IR and feminist knowledge production, we engage and critique the knowledge terrains of the personal and systemic within international relations. We also find it necessary to interrogate our presumptions and assumptions of the 'international' and 'feminist' and their power consolidations to examine how and why geopolitics rely upon the theoretical and material segregations of people's lives, land, bodies and knowledge to maintain structures of power (see also, Agathangelou 2004, *forthcoming*; Turcotte 2008). We engage with comparative (Montenegro 1997) and relational (Shohat 2002) feminisms to offer a theorization of *feminisms of critical geographies*[1] that accounts for feminist socio-economic and political locations and positions on intertwined axes of power (e.g., race, nationality, class, sexuality, gender, see Crenshaw 1995). Configuring feminism and feminist lives in a variety of diverse political, social, economic and geographic contexts encourages a questioning of what it means to be accountable to "theories of the flesh" (Anzaldúa 1987; Moraga and Anzaldúa 2001) without disembodiment nor containing it in cordoned off territories of legitimacy; it is an accounting for the disjunctures and connections in dreams and struggles shared across the locations and positions of power that provide the basis for solidarity and praxis without reification.

We are suggesting that the analytical frames of global power within IR generally, and feminist IR more specifically, require theoretical articulations that embody accountable political interventions in world politics on multiple scales. Such analyses can provide a deeper understanding of problems in our everyday lives within the multiple communities we inhabit, and they can bring our communities in closer proximity to one another to address global inequality. Because power is always circulating within the material and epistemic realms of IR, we address the major logics and intelligibilities within formulations of IR knowledge to argue that processes of geopolitical segregation are constitutive of these formulations. In other words, IR as a coherent field of study, discipline and practice imagines and produces itself through geopolitical segregation. We connect these segregations explicitly by engaging with the ways we, as IR and/or feminist scholars, are conditioned to reproduce global politics and geopolitical sites as if they are separated moments and relations without historical specificities nor connections to the field, its development and its contemporary practices. Our articulation of feminisms of critical geographies works to: (1) describe the critique of First World Feminism(s)[2] and the contingent challenges and disruptions made possible by postcolonial feminists; (2) highlight the contributions of feminisms' various theoretical approaches that could allow us to construct an integrated and relational vision of transnational feminisms and feminist social relations (Mohanty 1991a; Shohat 2002; Kuokkanen 2008); (3) conceptualize varied possibilities for consolidating an open-ended feminist framework attentive to the geopolitical contexts in which feminisms emerge, struggle and engage; and (4) imagine possible solidarities-praxis for emancipatory, feminist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist international relations.

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[1] Hyndam (2004) argues for feminist geopolitics. We differ from her conceptualization in the sense that Hyndman focuses on 'geopolitics becom[ing] a more gendered and racialized project, one that is epistemologically situated and embodied in its conception of security' (2004). We argue that the international is already geographically gendered, racialized, classed, nationalized and sexualized and instead unpack the epistemologies and processes through

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which the international becomes formed and consolidated this way to highlight the investments/interests of such processes (See also Agathangelou, forthcoming).

[2] First World Feminism(s) is not a unified project even when several feminists within it assume and articulate a universal set of epistemological assumptions such as (i.e., West, free, secular, white) against which everything else is measured and described.