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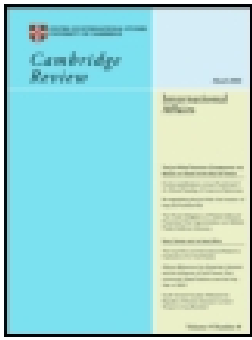
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## Forget(ting) feminism? Investigating relationality in international relations

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## Forget(ting) feminism? Investigating relationality in international relations

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**Abstract** *What kind of theoretical or methodological changes are needed to more effectively theorize global politics? This question is one increasingly posed, one reason being the ever burgeoning weight of violence on our global political landscapes. To investigate this, the central concept examined at the workshop from which this special section emanates was relationality. Motivated by feminist scholarship, my initial question was, 'Why did we not focus the whole workshop around feminist theory?' This question is posed alongside the clear knowledge that the workshop was not 'about' feminism and thus it might not seem rational to choose such a focus. Yet given the concept and practice of relationality was so deeply embedded in feminist work, I wondered how feminism could have been forgotten. In this article, I explore the idea of 'forgetting feminism' through a further question, namely, 'Is sexism (still) at work in international relations [IR]?' This involves a perusal of the work of sexual politics and sexism, IR's putative 'failure to love' and a personal, relational detour into the life, work and career of Lily Ling—corporeally suddenly absent but remaining a vital part of the work in which we are all engaged.*

### Introduction

*Global politics*—a landscape brimming with the failures, triumphs, joys and heartbreaks of humanity. We see so little of it, touch so little of it and understand so little of it in our scholarly endeavours as international relations (IR) academics. Yet we seem to want to say so much more, and most often to have what we say—our words on the page/screen—to be better, more useful and even more hopeful. *International relations*—a discipline riven with angst about its status, its role and its impact (Dunne et al 2013; Dyvik and Wilkinson 2017),<sup>1</sup> all this perhaps given the typical grandeur of its subject matter, but also because of the increasingly hyper-ambitious demands of it, not least in our academic institutions. Yet, despite the high political grandeur, we know that the global landscape is searingly dismembered by innumerable boundaries and divisions plunging countless issues and lives beneath the parapet of

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<sup>1</sup> See also <<https://www.bisa.ac.uk/index.php/research-articles/539-the-origins-of-international-relations>>.

governance attention and scholarly importance (Choi 2018; Minh-ha 2011). Who and what gets to the top of global political and scholarly agendas has become a regularly posed question in the discipline, at least within its critical sections. And answers to that question are plentiful, if far too quickly fading from overt view and interest.

I open with these observations because they are pertinent to our deliberations on relationality in this special section. Relationality was the focus of the workshop from which the papers in this section emanate, initially presented as one of IR's 'turns'. Our remit was to discuss how relationality, as a concept, a practice or a methodological tool, might have the potential to offer scholarly assistance to better analyse matters of global political importance. Where may we look to begin the work of investigating the scholarly benefits of relationality in IR? Though searching outside the discipline frequently delivers rich swathes of theorizing of great use to IR scholars, the more innovatively textured theoretical and methodological work done in IR in recent decades suggested to me that, in the first instance, IR may actually be the place to start. So this is where I looked, and my search did not take long.

Feminist scholarship on global politics is prolific. As an officially recorded set of knowledges, many decades worth of feminist analyses is easily available and accessible (see Shepherd 2015; Steans and Tepe-Belfrage 2016; see also the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*). Given my own involvement in and knowledge of this scholarship, I contemplated why the workshop was not entirely framed around feminist work given that feminist expertise in deploying relationality as a critical theoretical and methodological tool was plentiful, with abundant resultant empirical findings. And, as feminist scholarship is 'simply' IR scholarship, I wondered why feminism featured only marginally in our perusal of relationality at the workshop. Why was feminism so openly largely absent given its profound centrality to the matters under discussion?

I realize that my insistence that feminism should so patently be the central focus of our discussions may seem odd (actually will undoubtedly seem so, which is telling), given this was not a 'feminist' workshop<sup>2</sup>. Indeed this was not even a mainstream IR workshop, in fact non-Western IR was central, unusually in a Western 'IR' setting, though, significantly, IR's disciplinary structure remained central and the focus of attention. Importantly, however, we were, as I understood it, there to find better ways, more ethical ways, to theorize global violences, all of which dovetailed very well with feminist intellectual and political ethics. Even more specifically, we wanted to better expose the violating economies and philosophies of knowledge building that hegemonic sources insist on producing, and so to problematize how we theorize about violence in the global political sphere with and through the theories and concepts we 'have'.

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<sup>2</sup> Ann Towns made some prescient remarks at one of the opening plenary sessions at the European Studies Association Conference in September 2018 in regard to the ongoing problem with siphoning feminist work into 'only' feminist panels/events. See also <<https://www.e-ir.info/2019/02/15/gender-troubled-three-simple-steps-to-avoid-silencing-gender-in-ir/>>.

This work and political ethic is highly important to me and clearly also to my workshop colleagues; yet I remained perplexed, though for feminist and critical scholars working within the discipline, it is not unusual to feel perplexed at academic gatherings on IR (Zalewski 2006; Ahmed 2017; Åhäll, 2018). This 'felt' curiosity (Enloe 2004) matters a great deal and has produced a significant amount of work.<sup>3</sup> The 'something' that 'doesn't feel right' or 'doesn't make sense' or makes one feel uncomfortable becomes the place to start conceptually and affectively digging, and to start theorizing differently (Zalewski 2006). A key part of the work of feminist ethical, intellectual and political projects is to notice opportunities to demonstrate where feminist thought is 'missing', and to then investigate why and how this matters. This is central to the work I am doing in this article.

To unpack these introductory remarks and to peruse the idea of 'forgetting feminism' which inspires this article, I work with five main sections. In the first section I reflect on what I refer to as an 'old snapshot' of feminist work on relationality. My aim in this section is not to offer restrictive definitions or a condensed literature review, but rather to begin my feminist search with a temporally retrieved story about feminist relational theorizing. To conduct my overall analysis in the article, I work with an eclectic range of contemporary and classical critical feminist theory with an additional focus on theories of affect and emotion. I explain more about this framework in the concluding part of this introduction. In section two I offer further illustrations of the work of relationality within feminism, picking up on some of the thinking trails left in section one. In the third section I open up more on the question I raise in relation to the idea of 'forgetting feminism', namely, 'Is sexism (still) at work in IR?' This is not an easy or palatable question, but the sexual politics of academic knowledge production, not least in IR, remains inadequately engaged. In the theoretical, creatively disjointed and affective spirit of the kinds of feminism I work with here, section four will be a personal if too brief a detour into the life, work and career of Lily Ling. I will end with some concluding comments on the central questions I raise in this introduction and throughout the article.

### *Theoretical framework*

To help do the work of demonstrating where feminist thought is 'missing', and to explain why and how this matters, I draw on the methodological and metaphorical work of critical, feminist and postcolonial scholars including Anna Aganangelou and LHM Ling (2004, 2010), Sara Ahmed (2006, 2015), Sarah Franklin (2015) and Raluca Sorenau and David Hudson (2008). I further combine this with my own eclectic methodological style (Zalewski 2006; 2013; 2019). The latter is largely inspired by a wide range of critical feminist and deconstructionist techniques and ways of thinking (see Zalewski 2005; Irigaray 1985; Minh-ha 1991). More recently, this has been further enriched by scholarship on affect, aesthetics and emotion (see Åhäll and Gregory 2015; Bleiker

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<sup>3</sup> Far too large to adequately reference here. For one of the latest 'generic' publications in the field, readers might look to *The Routledge handbook on gender and security* edited by Caron E Gentry, Laura J Shepherd and Laura Sjoberg (2018) for some sources. See also the other references in this article.

2018; Gregg and Seigworth 2010). This oeuvre of work further provokes us to 'think and act differently', which for Roland Bleiker (2017, 262), means to 'stretch the boundaries of language'. I understand this to imply stretching and ultimately rupturing and changing the stories persistently told about global politics, which include the stories we tell about how we frame our theories and methodologies. This work also invites us to work more closely with scholarship that posits theory as 'performative' rather than 'explicatory' or 'applicatory' (Berlant 2001; Brown 2001, 2005; Butler 1990, 2009; Sedgwick 2004). I expand on this approach further in section three. I now move to begin reflecting on feminist work on relationality.

*Feminism and relationality: 'A snapshot in the attic' (of IR).*

A key feminist insight is that we are all in relations of interdependence. (Longino 1993, 111)

A speciously simple but breathtakingly ground-breaking concept that drenches feminist archives is that 'the personal is political',<sup>4</sup> and by extension the 'personal is international'; a palindrome as Cynthia Enloe (1989, 195) classically affirmed in *Bananas, beaches and bases*. Indecorously often discarded as a mere slogan, the idea, materiality and methodological potentialities of 'the personal is political' give us our first clue about feminist scholarship on relationality. To start thinking about this, I pick up and metaphorically dust off one of those 'old feminist snapshots' in the 'attic of IR', namely an early essay written by J Ann Tickner first published in the journal *Millennium* in 1988. This has since become something of a 'classic' in feminist IR and reprinted many times. Having opened her essay by asserting that 'international politics is a man's world' and that few women specialize 'in the academic discipline of international relations', Tickner (1991, 27) takes on a key mainstream (Realist) figure within traditional IR theory, Hans Morgenthau.<sup>5</sup> Her central aim was to expose the intensely masculinized character of his influential (certainly then and for many decades prior) six principles of political realism.<sup>6</sup>

Morgenthau's principles were, Tickner argued, manifestly partial given they worked only with and through a privileged and starkly masculinized lens on the world. Masculinized values<sup>7</sup> of objectivity, rationality and being 'unemotional'<sup>8</sup> in the political realm, as well as of clear lines between 'morality

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<sup>4</sup> Originally credited to an article titled 'The personal is political' by Carol Hanisch in 1969. See <<http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> Morgenthau remains a key figure in the development of IR theory and is still regularly taught as part of the foundational 'canon' of IR theory.

<sup>6</sup> See *Politics amongst nations: the struggle for power and peace* (Morgenthau 1973).

<sup>7</sup> There is a vast literature illustrating how 'masculinity' has become and becomes associated with hegemonic values, attributes, ideas, thinking patterns, behaviours and lives. See, for example, Seidler (1989), Segal (1997), hooks (2003), Zalewski and Parpart (1998/2019), Berger et al (1995), Elshain (1987), Middleton (1992) and Ling (2000).

<sup>8</sup> Though of course this does not, in practice or even in Morgenthauian theory, transpire as 'unemotional'-only that the right (white, masculine-tinged) kind of emotion will suffice. The October 2018 Brett Kavanaugh and Christine Blasey Ford Senate Judiciary hearings in the US affords some hefty testament to this. See <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/sep/27/kavanaugh-ford-testimony-latest-what-will-they-say-senate-hearing>> and <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56tNjkzqdZ0>>.

and politics', were swiftly unearthed as central to Morgenthau's influential principles. This 'amoral' stance enabled the making and taking of 'hard decisions' in the political realm. Decisions to go to war, drop bombs or impose sanctions which will inevitably harm civilians come to mind as only the most obvious. Power, also one of the key ongoing concerns in IR, was presented by Morgenthau as 'power over' with 'control' as a welcome consequence, this perhaps still regarded as crucial to impose order on a chaotic and conflictual world (Tickner 1991, 30). Re-reading Tickner's essay in 2019, the idea of such a dismembered political realm, ostensibly keeping out emotion and human 'messiness', reads, somewhat uncomfortably, as something of a 'safe place', even a homely one for Morgenthau at that time. However, my mind is drawn to more contemporary times, as one might say exactly the same of Donald Trump in the United States, Russia's Vladimir Putin and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. 'Hard decisions' (reached through the structural rejection of [feminized?] morality and ethics) can still make one seem very 'manly'.

Tickner also detailed how the implicit evisceration of 'the feminine' (in all its interlaced cultural constructions (see for example Irigaray 1985; 1993; de Beauvoir 1949; Moi 1999; Riley 1988; Elam 1994; Tuana 1992; Zimbalist Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Lorde 1984; Hooks 2003) was integral to the construction of Morgenthau's masculinely framed 'six principles'. In response, Tickner offered alternative ways of thinking, feeling, being and acting, drawing on some important foundational work in the feminist scholarly archive. For example in regard to national security, Tickner suggested that a wider range of threats to the security of populations might be more feared than military invasion, such as the threat to life and health from poverty and starvation, or environmental exploitation and the litany of diseases. Thinking about military, economic and environmental security in more interdependent (relational) ways suggested to Tickner the need for new methods of conflict resolution, invoking Sara Ruddick's (1989) work on 'maternal thinking', which offered a treatise on the preservation of life philosophically drawing on the epistemologies of (some) maternal practices. Tickner (1991, 37) ended her essay with six new feminist principles, which she described as important to add to Morgenthau's: 'adding a feminist perspective to the epistemology of international relations is a stage through which we must pass if we are to think about constructing an ungendered or human science of international politics which is sensitive to, but goes beyond, both masculine and feminine perspectives'.<sup>9</sup>

With hindsight, Tickner can be read as offering some latently profound suggestions upon which to launch a serious rethinking of some of IR's central (then and now) concerns, including security, cooperation, violence, militarization, war and peace. And, of course, it is very much the case that a great number of feminist scholars within IR have since continued the work of noticing the many ways in which the evisceration of the 'feminine' is necessary to foreground the 'masculine'. Here we might momentarily recall Carol Cohn's (1993) discussion of 'femininity as a pre-emptive deterrent to thought' in the context of nuclear technology and warfare, or Kimberly Hutchings' (2008) analysis of 'masculinity as a cognitive shortcut' persistently working, in almost illegible

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<sup>9</sup> Which for Tickner implies the need for equal representation in the discipline.

ways, to legitimize hegemonic discourses. These are just two of thousands of examples I might mention.

Despite my allusions to the latent profundity of this work, three decades later Tickner's article might read as overly simplistic, certainly superseded or really extended and deepened by the wealth of feminist, critical and postcolonial scholarship produced since then. But I chose to have us momentarily recall this particular 'feminist snapshot in IR's attic' here, in part because it is such a foundational essay in the feminist scholarly archive in IR, not least in that it regularly turns up one as of the main pieces (perhaps sometimes the only one) of feminist work in/on IR in more mainstream courses.<sup>10</sup> But, even more importantly for this discussion, I retrieve Tickner's essay because it so clearly indicates a treasure trove of theoretical and methodological work on relationality that feminist scholars have done and continue to do. Perhaps this work is not as profound as I am insinuating. Perhaps something else is at work which buries this profundity.

But where or what is the relationality I am investigating here? In my reading of her essay, Tickner starts from a moment of recognizing a fundamentally related presence and absence. Presence in regard to the clear and comfortably accepted (by gendered default) primacy of (white) men at the centre of attention, and of the undoubted political necessity and value of masculinely associated thinking and practices. Absence in regard to women, though not simply or only the dearth of female scholars and students (subjects) in her discipline, which was very stark in 1988, but also the equally stark absence of feminine objects of knowledge and ways of knowing.<sup>11</sup> Though a stark absence, it is paradoxically difficult to notice, as it is *only* the construction of feminist theory with its methodological and epistemological tools and techniques that makes this noticing legibly accessible and recordable. This is significant. The centuries-old evisceration or overt ignoring of the thinking methods and behavioural practices associated with women and the feminine (which includes feminist theory)<sup>12</sup> is a gendered lacuna. which is perhaps conventionally read as a simplistic contribution of Tickner's essay; that women have been traditionally 'left out' and that men have been the recognized 'makers' and repositories of important knowledge. Perhaps things have changed. But the work of sexual difference goes much deeper and is more insistent than this simple hope of change (in time) implies. Sexual difference in all its cultural manifestations, resistances and re-creations has undoubtedly (and this is well documented in the literature) produced vastly differing approaches to the 'realities of the world', though, conversely, this gendered or rather feminist observation may seem tame in IR in 2019. Perhaps these epistemological and methodological acknowledgements seem outdated three decades on. Perhaps not. I still think something very serious is amiss here and so I move to unpack the points I am making further and offer more illustrations of the work of relationality within feminism.

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<sup>10</sup> The 'week on feminism in IR' is still a regular occurrence. See <<https://duckofminerva.com/2010/12/feminist-ir-101-post-4-common-myths.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> To refer to the 'feminine' does not imply essentialism. There is a profusion of literature on this, see for example Fuss (1989) and Elam (1994).

<sup>12</sup> See Zalewski and Runyan (2013).



## Relationality and sexual difference

Theory is dependent on an opposition to women and all that is symbolised by the feminine and women's bodies. (Pateman 1986, 3)

Core to the critical work of feminist theory is the disruption of conventional thinking patterns. The reasons for this are simple if serious given the myriad violent consequences delivered via the sexist and racist biases of hegemonic thought. Thus the work of feminist theory has in large part been directed as throwing the legitimacy of conventional claims, arguments and assumptions into question. This, at the very least, radically exposes the illusory neutrality of both the conventionally authoritative producers of knowledge and the status of knowledge-producing institutions. By self-consciously demonstrating the non-neutrality of the subjects, objects and products of mainstream knowledge, feminist theorizing makes 'othered' producers of knowledge and subsequent knowledge visible (Gatens 1986).

At least that was the idea.

Identifying the relational and productive work of constructed sexual difference, and how this infiltrates everyday thinking as well as authoritative forms of theorizing, feminist theorizing had and has the potential to be radically disruptive. In the context of IR, I would say this disruption has not happened. Let's look again at the philosophical implications embryonic in Tickner's essay and in particular some of the work she drew on to facilitate her discussion. This is important in the context of investigating how feminism keeps becoming 'forgotten' (if this is what is happening), especially in IR (recall the workshop on 'relationality' was IR-facing). Feminist thought has been present for centuries of course, though within what has become recognized as the scholarly archive, classic temporal and canonical markers typically trace a typology from Mary Wollstonecraft's (1792) *Vindication of the rights of woman* to Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) *The second sex* and then perhaps to Betty Friedan's (1963) *The feminine mystique*. Reams of feminist scholarship then appeared in the latter half of the twentieth century and have continued apace in the twenty-first century. In the context of academia, this burgeoning documentation is clearly recognisable given that much of it has been published conventionally in journals or books and some has seemingly filtered through to public reports, policies and legislation. Though I may appear to be labouring over simple points, my intention is to demonstrate very clearly that feminist scholarship is available, abundant and accessible—at least to the more privileged scholars in the Global North (see Zalewski 2019).

And Tickner very clearly mined the available feminist theoretical work for her 1988 essay. To expose the gender of Morgenthau's six principles, she explicitly drew on the genre of what may be described as 'cultural feminism', though perhaps within IR this work is more identifiable as falling within the frameworks of 'theories of care'. Important writers included Evelyn Fox Keller (1988), Ruddick (1989), Joan Tronto (1989) and Carol Gilligan (1982). Temporally<sup>13</sup> placed in the Westernized archive of feminist theory in the 1980s (more or less), this kind of scholarship also worked closely with many of the

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<sup>13</sup> Though a problematic thing to do given the temptation to enter into temporally dismissive readings. See Hemmings (2011) and McBean (2016).

concepts, political passions, commitments and thinking practices of what we can call 'radical' and 'standpoint' feminism,<sup>14</sup> certainly epistemologically, methodologically and ontologically. These are all hugely insightful though large and often sprawling bodies of thought which I can only skim the conceptual surface of here. But profound pivotal conceptual work was done including on: difference, sexual politics, women's/'others' (different) lives/values and, crucially, the *relationalities* involved in constituting, forming and honing the worlds we inhabit—personally, politically, emotionally, institutionally, locally and internationally. This archive of work was and remains radically destabilizing work given that it laid painfully bare the ways women's/'othered' lives and suffering were so very hard to see, indeed almost impossible to see at least any more than fleetingly through traditional political and theoretical frames.

Arguably, this kind of feminist work was mined more vibrantly in the academic discipline of law in that time period (certainly in comparison with IR). Mary Becker's 1999 article in the *University of Chicago Legal Forum* journal is good example of ways in which the trails, potentials and implications of sexual difference were more brazenly illustrated than perhaps Tickner imagined she could articulate in 1988. In her article 'Patriarchy and inequality: towards a substantive feminism', Becker specifically uses the term 'relational feminism' (as an aspect of 'cultural feminism') to explain the conundrum of feminism's apparent failure in the field of law. Drawing on legal scholar Robin West's work with cultural/relational feminism, Becker (1999, 40) describes this form of work as 'a feminism with non-patriarchal values'. The crucial argument is that in legal contexts women's suffering—and pleasure—was regularly dismissed or trivialized by the legal system (Becker 1999, 41).<sup>15</sup> For West and Becker, a patriarchal society is male centred and male identified and thus men's needs tend to 'naturally' dominate political (and other) agendas. A woman-centred focus would inevitably threaten patriarchy because it places at the centre of activity and thought women's needs that are grossly inconsistent with patriarchy's androcentrism. Both Becker's and West's work very robustly indicated heavy trails of the potent work of sexual politics and one might say outright sexism. Becker and West's work also very robustly indicated trails of violating and violent relationality.

These are heavy and provocative feminist assertions to make in a more measured theoretical decade. Are they contemporarily unnecessary or inappropriate? Perhaps the currently increasing attention to patriarchy and misogyny would suggest not (Enloe 2017; Manne 2018), although reading this kind of strongly worded feminist work in 2019 may invoke rafts of criticism from both the mainstream and critical strands of a discipline like IR. For more mainstream scholars, the boldness of the language indicating the more overtly violent work of sexual difference may be prohibitive. For many feminist and postcolonial scholars, putative attachment to essentialism or an imagined capitulation to an 'all powerful patriarchy' and 'feminized victimhood' may

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<sup>14</sup> There is a vast literature on these forms of feminism. A very brief selection to help readers includes: Bell and Klein (1996); Jaggar (1983); Harding and Hintikka (1983).

<sup>15</sup> For recent work on this in the field of law see <<https://www.scotsman.com/news/crime/insight-feminists-rebalance-the-scales-of-justice-in-scotland-1-4912321>>.

also be too much to theoretically and politically bear. Yet I think this would be both to misplace and to underestimate the insights of this work, or perhaps these are not the main points to give close attention. Indeed I would say that more important when rethinking/re-reading this kind of work, work that appears to belong to a discarded past of feminism, is to reach for the trails that may offer some contemporary insight rather than those that will not. There may be more on offer here to support thinking about the gendered, sexed and raced tribulations on the current global political landscape than might be given credit for.

So I again raise a question about the putative contemporary absence of these kinds of feminist insights in IR. Are they simply forgotten, discarded, mislaid or perhaps uncared for? In contemporary IR one may sense tendencies to move a little too swiftly, theoretically speaking, away from too explicit attention to patriarchy and ideologies of male preference. A sense of distancing from such 'uber-feminism'. Perhaps one reason for distancing is that there is something of an encroachment of a kind of 'distasteful feminized creep' - this creeping edge of femininity can easily and speedily bury the epistemological and temporal value of relational work within the canon of IR's performatively muscular thinking, perhaps especially given the levels of care necessary. Moreover, this work's overt outing of sexism and misogyny perhaps indicates how the erosion of hegemonic forms of knowledge-making and being—white colonialism, misogyny, to name just two aspects—continues to elude. I turn now to clarifying these connections further and to open up more about the concept and work of sexism.

### Sexism/'forgetting'

A key question I posed in my introduction about feminism's absence from our discussions about relationality as a resource for thinking and acting was this: 'Is sexism at work here?' It may seem that 'sexism' is too simple a word, or too political, or too individual, or even too 'dated', yet words like 'sexism' and 'racism' in the judgement of Audre Lorde (1984, 152) are better thought of as 'grown-up words'. I understand this to mean they are serious political and theoretical words that expose hitherto invisible violence, and thus deserve our consistent attention. Also, as we know from the extensive chronicles of theorizing about social justice, discrimination and oppression, naming things can be very powerful and indeed necessary (see Frye 1983). Sara Ahmed (2015) clarifies that there is a name available to help fathom the everyday gendered injustices that seem to slip out of analytic grasp way too quickly, akin to forgetting, and this is 'sexism'.

To understand the work of sexism, the work of feminist theory is essential. Essential too is some theoretical understanding of the philosophical and epistemological embeddedness of the ideologies of patriarchy and misogyny in authoritative discourses and practices with all the associated reliance on the relational hierarchies of sexual difference. This feminist scholarship is abundant, as I have mentioned; some of it is referenced in this article, and readers are invited to peruse it further. But, to offer a contemporary definition, 'sexism should be understood primarily as the "justificatory" branch of a patriarchal order which ... has the function of *rationalizing* and *justifying* patriarchal social

relations' (Manne 2018, 79). Such relations are inevitably (given patriarchy) reliant on ideologies of sexual difference which inevitably (given patriarchy) favour hegemonic gender configurations exhibiting preference for men over women, and masculinized thought/theory over feminized thought/theory. I will offer some examples momentarily, but before that I want to say something about the links between sexual difference, sexual politics and sexism.

The way I understand sexual difference in this article, and in my work more generally, relates to the philosophical and emotional structuring work of sexual difference. Moreover, I wholly understand sexual difference to be located in the realm of the cultural and imagined, and not the essential or biological, or indeed any foundational core, though this constructed work of sexual difference continues to have violently serious material effects. The work of sexual politics and sexism moves us more overtly into the performative of the everyday. Sexual politics informs us of the hierarchies that suture, nurture and support sexual difference; it often paradoxically and always intersectionally, 'gender is never alone' (Roof 2016). Sexism is, in some ways, a less nuanced but a more powerfully hierarchical manifestation of sexual politics in traditionally gendered ways, functioning as a means of reproducing ordinary institutional practices. As Sara Ahmed argues, 'to name something as sexist is not only to modify a relation by modifying our understanding of that relation; it is also to insist that further modification is required' (Ahmed 2015). And, importantly, to insist that further modification is required. In its everydayness, the work of sexism in something like an academic institution (and elsewhere) most often shows up in actions that belittle, ignore, dismiss, insult or 'forget' work, actions and people associated with the 'feminine'. This can transpire in many ways: everyday conversations, exclusionary practices, undermining contributions, harassment—the list is a long one. Crucial to the work of it, and its persistence, is that the feminist research that illustrates what sexism is is also regularly ignored, dismissed or undermined (Hawkesworth 2006). A vicious circle indeed.

### *The 'elevator incident'*

Two women walk into a crowded elevator at a large academic conference ...

This is not the first line of a joke. Rather, it is the beginning of a troubling ordeal that sheds light on everyday sexism in academia as well as the growing backlash against decades of feminist and social justice activism, which predate the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. (Sharoni 2018, 143)

This is how Simona Sharoni opens her discussion of what she describes as 'the elevator incident'. It happened at the International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention in San Francisco in 2018. Sharoni was one of only two women and some eight or nine men in the crowded elevator and she offered to press the floor buttons. 'Ladies lingerie!' shouted a male voice from the back, and, as Sharoni recalls, the men but not the women laughed. Sharoni made a formal complaint, a formal apology was demanded from the man by the organization (ISA), the man refused and an international media 'storm' ensued. The details are too many to include here (see Sharoni 2018), but I

include it as an opening incident to impart a flavour of the ease with which sexism occurs (as defined by feminist experts), and the backlash that ensues if it is called out, and perhaps also to alert us to the wider and deeper trails of sexual difference that a seemingly 'trivial' incident may connect to.

*The 'Ford/Kavanaugh incident'*

In the autumn of 2018, the United States and also perhaps a large part of the media-attentive Global North was gripped by the hearings at the US Judicial Senate about complaints made by Professor Christine Blasey Ford about a 'historical' sexual assault on her by Judge Brett Kavanaugh when she was 15 and he was 17. The hearings occurred within the context of Kavanaugh's nomination for the US Supreme Court by President Trump. Ford's testimony was widely heralded as being compelling and believable, whereas Kavanaugh offered a highly emotional<sup>16</sup> and angry display peppered with insulting senators and offering staccato often juvenile answers. He has since been appointed to the Supreme Court. In the many subsequent media reports and online discussions the language of 'care' appeared with some frequency. The 'not caring' that the accusation may well be true, and the 'not caring' about the sexual assault on Ford when she was 15; or at least it didn't seem to 'matter' in the context of being appointed to the US Supreme Court.<sup>17</sup> The relational hierarchical ordering of care and indeed emotion in this example bears feminist noticing.

*The 'ship isn't a "she" incident'*

I tuned into live BBC radio news a few mornings ago and found myself listening to a discussion about stopping referring to ships as 'she'. It seems this was part of a museum project and the curators deemed it sexist to include feminine pronouns. The discussion between the curator and the radio presenter was standard fare, but it transpired that a Navy admiral had been listening and was so incensed he rang the BBC to complain. Perhaps even more interestingly, the usually tightly time-scheduled programme found a few minutes at the end to speak to the admiral on the phone. A very white and English male sounding voice vociferously explained that it was just very silly to stop calling ships 'her' or 'she'. 'We've been doing this for centuries!' he exclaimed. The programme ended on something of a jolly note. Feminist theory will conjure a very different story linking to many trails of violent hierarchies embedded in the legacies of sexual difference. Too historically serious to be trivial or silly, but knowledge of feminist theory (and acceptance of its authority) is necessary to know that.

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<sup>16</sup> Recall the comment in relation to emotion and Morgenthau in footnote 8.

<sup>17</sup> <<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/10/2/17923574/brett-kavanaugh-ford-hearing-lies-republicans>>.

*The 'Oxford University incident'*

Oxford University in the United Kingdom (UK) recently announced that its philosophy department is to 'feminize' its curriculum by requesting that 40 per cent of the authors on course outlines should be female. The word 'feminize' has been read as pejorative by feminists and non-feminists alike.<sup>18</sup> French Revolutionary feminists were constantly decried as monstrous for the 'very act of acting politically', just as nineteenth- and twentieth-century bids for female suffrage were 'reviled as unnatural' (Brown 2015, 99). In the contemporary halls of elite education, 'being like a woman' still seems to be associated with 'the feminine', which remains abhorrent, perhaps still monstrous.<sup>19</sup>

*The 'relational turn' incident'*

I mentioned at the beginning of this article that the workshop on relationality was initially framed around the idea of the 'relational turn in IR'. Was feminist theory part of this relational turn? Though that couldn't be 'right', as the relational turn dates back to about 1999, whereas feminist theorizing in IR is typically dated back to at least 1987. Moreover, if a primary intellectual, textual and pedagogical frame of feminist work involved 'the relational', did IR need this new 'turn'? I was very curious about what we might call persistent institutionally engineered 'forgetting' of the powerful and significant work of feminist theorizing. I am not referring here to the commonplace idea of feminism being on 'the margins'; this somewhat tired debate tends to just lead us right down the 'wrong' (institutionally engineered) path, not least given its repositioning of mainstream IR (including the critical mainstream) as the pivot around which 'othered' forms of theorizing must circulate.

Perhaps these examples seem too random, too few, too unconnected. Yet these are instances that feminist scholars would describe as performatively sexist practices. Recall that part of the theoretical work that I am doing here deploys an eclectic and relationally inspired methodology, most often with the intention of looking for connections and meanings between people, things, ideas or actions that conventionally appear unconnected, or at least in methodologically significant ways (see Zalewski 2006, 2013).

I want to turn back to the question of IR's sexism and bring in Sorenanu and Hudson's sense of the discipline of IR's 'failure to love'. Their suggestion that disciplines have 'hidden emotional economies' (Sorenanu and Hudson 2008, 125) becomes apparent in IR in the politics of what they call 'disciplinary emotion'. Here Sorenanu and Hudson notice and document the 'less recordable forms of trace' of feminist scholarship, perhaps gesturing towards IR's 'forgetfulness' tendencies. Intrigued by the persistent twin laments around feminist IR's 'marginality' (see Tickner 2016; Zalewski 2016b) and the 'missing [feminist] revolution', Sorenanu and Hudson surmise that there has *not* been a 'deep re-writing of the androcentric grammar of the field', and, as I indicated

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<sup>18</sup> <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2018/03/14/oxford-university-set-feminise-curriculum-requesting-inclusion/>>.

<sup>19</sup> Think of the idea of 'feminized creep' referred to earlier.

earlier, this is what many feminist scholars want. Sorenanu and Hudson question the reasons for this thwarting. Their investigation led them to focus on citational practices in IR, describing their work as offering a 'double engagement with the cultural turn ... as part of a critical sociology of thinking' (Sorenanu and Hudson 2008, 12). Re-routing disciplinary attention in a creative move and focusing on 'culture', they make the eminently reasonable suggestion that 'academic culture' should be taken seriously, specifically 'that culture's way of thinking and reasoning' (Sorenanu and Hudson 2008, 127). Their ultimate claim is that in androcentric IR, when faced with feminist and postcolonial work, there has been a 'failure to love', perhaps meaning simply a failure to pay serious professional and theoretical attention. This bears a heavy responsibility for leaving so many of these rich traces of feminist work disciplinarily out of reach. Meant more than metaphorically, the 'failure to love' 'makes it possible to read spaces of intellectual mobilization as cases of love, such as citations, who/what is remembered/re-called/re-invoked, and spaces of disengagement or forgetfulness or as cases of failure to love' (Sorenanu and Hudson 2008, 133). Left as an unstated question is whether this 'forgetting' is epistemologically or politically benign, or 'unintended'.

To add to the theoretical texture of Sorenanu and Hudson's work, we might weave in the work of Agantheangelou and Ling and in particular their metaphorical and methodological positioning of IR as a 'familial house'. As they articulate it:

The House of IR exhibits a ... politics of exclusion and violence. It clearly identifies who's 'in', who's 'out', and who's precariously 'on the border'. It also stratifies who's 'upstairs' and who's 'downstairs'. (Agantheangelou and Ling 2004)

Their familial framing is methodologically and affectively fascinating, and clearly one inspired by relationally inspired thinking not least in that it transgresses a variety of borders—theoretical, epistemological, methodological and political—to produce their analysis. Moreover, it tells a compelling story about how very traditional formulations of power, hierarchy and privilege, especially gendered and colonial ones, insistently weave their way into the construction and production of knowledge in the discipline (Agantheangelou and Ling 2004, 21). And it once again reminds us of the profundity of the knowledge that the 'personal is political'. It also inspired me to reimagine Tickner's early feminist IR essay as an 'old snapshot' in the attic of IR, with all the inferences of half-forgotten/remembered lives, people and indeed techniques and technologies of knowledge (re)production, especially now that 'dusty old photos' are becoming relics of an increasingly distant technological past.

To return to my question—is sexism at work? This is a straightforward feminist question, I think, though not one directed at the workshop organizers, but rather one asked of a disciplinary culture. A fairly simple range of questions may be asked, especially of a discipline so conventionally still heavily masculinized in its methodology, its politics, its empirical concerns and its personnel. Simple questions such as: (i) Have the legacies of overt adherence to traditional sexist discriminations been fully overcome? (ii) Is there any contemporary evidence of discrimination? (iii) Has the disciplinarily recognized and well-documented scholarly work produced by feminist scholars been

effectively heeded? If I were pushed to provide speedy answers, mine would be (i) no, (ii) yes and (iii) no. Of course evidence must be offered for these responses, though a problem at the heart of the investigative work of this article (re)emerges here. This is that feminist evidence, or rather the kinds of feminist evidence<sup>20</sup> that indicate that the discipline of IR is performatively sexist, is hard to ‘hear’ at least to the extent of properly achieving a ‘re-writing of the androcentric grammar of the field’ (Sorenau and Hudson 2008; also see Hawkesworth 2006). To be sure, the discipline appears full of work on gender, feminism, sex and sexuality; one may count up the range of publications, workshops and conferences, not least the feminist/gender presence at the annual International Studies Association Convention, where the Feminist Theory and Gender Studies section is the second largest, featuring some 40 panels in 2019. Yet questions about the ongoing work of sexual politics not least through performative cultures of sexism are too rarely professionally asked, though such questions are not an uncommon part of everyday conversations amongst colleagues in person, on social media, in blog posts and in academic articles (Sharoni 2018; Marysia Zalewski 2016a). Though none of this implies that feminism is marginal. Indeed feminist work is part of ‘a ring of creativity, where the emotional energies of several disciplines converge ... which provides a reversed image of who is “in trouble” in IR’ (Sorenau and Hudson 2008, 150).

At this juncture I want to turn to more fully face the personal, not least because there is a very ‘messy relationship between individuals and institutions’ (Ahmed 2015, 12). And in the theoretical, affective and relational spirit of the kinds of feminism I am working with here, I shall move to a personal if too brief a detour into the life, work and career of Lily Ling.

## Tea and IR

The personal brings theory back to life. (Ahmed 2015, 10)

I began the revisions of this paper just a few days after the shocking news came through about Lily Ling; that she had died on 1 October 2018. I had been delighted to find out that Lily was going to be part of the workshop on relationality, and even more delighted when I realized she was going to be presenting a play she had written—*On relations and relationality: conversations with an old friend*. We were chatting on the morning of the first day and Lily was musing about how to present her play. I, being something of a closet thespian (and also knowing Lily would say yes), suggested that we perform part of the play. She did (effusively) say yes! We spent a good few hours in her bedroom at the hotel we were staying in rehearsing her play, drinking tea and having a hilarious time doing it. And we presented part of her play along with more tea and biscuits on the second afternoon of the workshop.

I take the opportunity in this academic article to write about my interaction with Lily at the workshop and her play, the tea and the laughing. I take the time and the scholarly public space for a number of reasons, not least that the

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<sup>20</sup> <<https://www.e-ir.info/2019/03/08/international-womens-day-interviews/>>.



harshness and uber-masculinized cut-throat environment of contemporary academia are in dire need of the kind of intellectual and personal warmth Lily exuded. So I take the space here first to mourn the loss of Lily—a brilliant scholar, a beautifully creative mind and a kind and compassionate soul—and also to share with readers a glimpse of her dazzling presence in the field of critical, feminist and postcolonial IR (and so much more besides).<sup>21</sup> But, and relatedly-relationally, I also take the space here because Lily, her work, her conduct as a scholar and her position(ing) in the field painfully well illustrate some of the power and work of relational activity in disciplinary cultures in producing particular worlds and working to keep others out. I will clarify what I mean as I go along, but first I want say a little more about Lily’s play and her presence at the workshop.

We decided to present Act III—‘Tea & Biscuits’ (Figure 1)—with Lily taking the part of ‘herself’ (a female professor of East Asian background) and me taking the part of Rao ‘the old friend’ (a male professor of South Asian background). The scene opens with Rao in paroxysms of laughter following Lily’s suggestion of a link between spices and democracy. ‘What on earth do spices have in common with democracy?!’ The chatting continues with Lily patiently offering conversational nuggets nudging Rao to think more broadly about world politics, very purposefully using feminized spaces of domesticity such as the kitchen in opposition to the conventionally grandeur and importance of international politics. In her play this is the palace. The discussion begins to exasperate Rao, who asks for tea ‘and biscuits too!’ Rao takes his tea with several biscuits. Asides in the play here include—‘he sips teas in the Asian way, with a loud, long slurp. I find it manly and reassuring. Reminds me of my father.’ Lily decides ‘*better not*’ about the biscuits. Gendered norms and expectations always do some work, even in the midst of resistance or refusal. More eating, drinking and conversing follow ...

An unusual performance at an IR academic event, more so in that it was presented without ‘explanation’ per se, simply offered as a perplexing intellectual and affective gift. In its written form the play’s complexities and nuances are more evident. A play within a play, within a ‘worlding’ genre of methodology, it has footnotes and references, conversations, asides and jokes. Though Rao is frequently exasperated by ‘Lily’s insistence that the kitchen, eating, drinking, sensuality and relationships, the settings, the scenes, the language, the positionings all performatively reveal so much about the workings of the world of international politics. The play also compellingly illustrates, or rather hints at, how much labour—and care—is required to learn to pay serious and impactful attention to places, people, theories and things that we don’t think matter, or perhaps have ‘forgotten’ that they matter.

Lily’s play is emblematic of her overall oeuvre; it is a beautiful example of how the field works when faced with the ‘other of thought’—in her play feminist, critical and postcolonial. One can feel the gender-work of the words, the actions, the scenes in her play, the asides not ‘spoken’ (out loud), the sexed work of humour and the gendered/colonial diplomatic skills of persuasion. *On Relations and Relationality: Conversations with an Old Friend* is a powerful

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<sup>21</sup> See <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2018/10/05/lily-ling-a-life-of-courage-and-compassion/> <https://www.ifjglobal.org/in-memoriam/>.

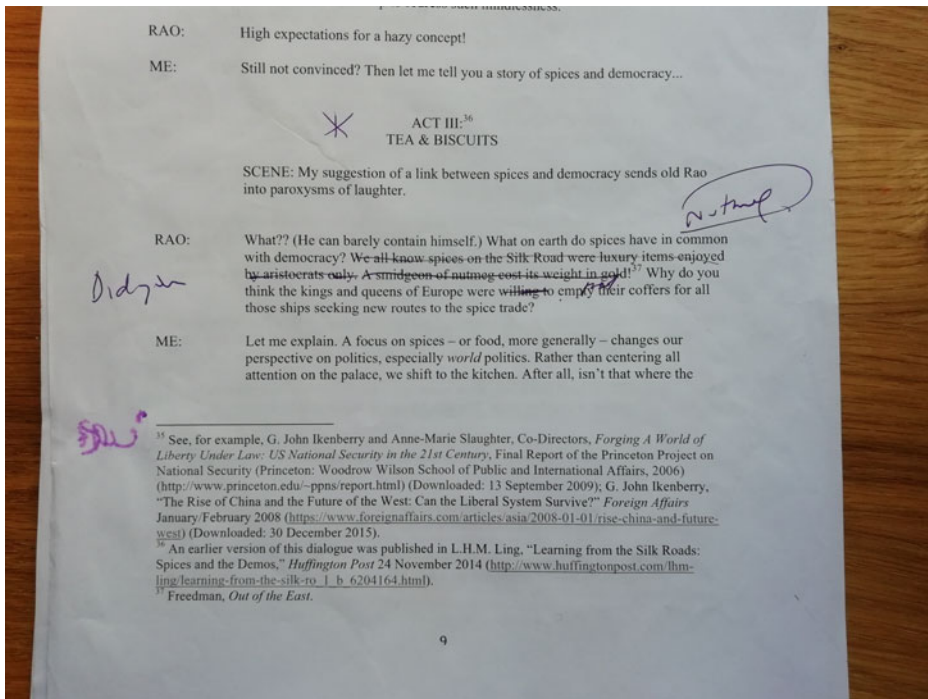


FIGURE 1. Some of the 'worked over' script used in our rehearsal.

intimation of relational practices in a relational setting. It also offers us an affective and phenomenological picture of 'IR' in action—though one might say 'inaction', given the seemingly intoxicating pull back to the centre so commonplace in the discipline. Perhaps a failure to love.

I first met Lily over two decades ago—we were both junior scholars. Lily had recently been through the tenure process in her (US) institution—and had been denied tenure. I, as a UK scholar, knew little about the US tenure process and was appalled to hear her story. But it was such a learning moment for me. I recall it still, learning about the distinct and individually felt, though also collectively experienced, challenges that working in a white, Western, masculinized institution produces for someone who started out as a Chinese international student, a woman, a creative soul. 'From the outside, it looked like she just enjoyed being this way, light-hearted, giddy, a ray of sunshine, but this way of being and moving around the field allows a glimpse into the feminist postcolonial intellect she had crafted for herself. A relentlessly laborious way of being in the world.'<sup>22</sup>

Lily went on to be very successful, a full professor, an ISA eminent scholar, with a prolific publication record and much in demand to give talks around the world. All of course at a gendered/raced cost.

The tenure process torments *everyone*. Institutional pressures to interject oneself socially, intellectually, and professionally are all-pervasive. Anglo-European males must submit to

<sup>22</sup> Shine Choi's words (personal communication). See also <<https://www.ifjglobal.org/in-memoriam/>>

tenure's scripted politics as much as anyone else. The difference lies, as this paper shows, in the *additional* scripts and roles that apply to faculty of color. (Agathangelou and Ling 2010, 370)

And yet the tangled and obstacle-laded institutional path she had to continually push through, for her, for others, offers a solid glimpse into the current workings of an institution and discipline so fearful of the changes that the work of the 'othered' implies.

### **Concluding comments**

Has feminism been forgotten (in IR)? Is sexism (still) at work in IR?

Perhaps my retrospective expectation that the workshop should have been structured primarily around the work of feminist theory seems unreasonable, or unfair, even 'too much'. To be clear, my questions are not directed at the workshop organizers per se; I have, rather, used this instance as a platform from which to peruse deeper questions about the perennial 'forgetting' of feminism in IR.<sup>23</sup> Or rather to offer a reminder that feminism has as much, or more, to say about the central issues, concepts and theories of IR as any of its mainstream or 'alternative' approaches. A bold claim perhaps, though my claim is not that feminism 'has the truth', and certainly not that feminism is infallible. And it is most definitely not to say that feminist scholars all agree. But it makes eminent sense to pay serious attention to the vast corpus of knowledge claims that have been so deeply buried by sexual difference. Feminist IR is simply IR scholarship after all—ways of telling stories about global politics drawing on the perennially discarded.

In the face of traditional knowledge-making practices, whether in philosophy, in science or in disciplines like IR, feminist scholars have had to practically invent new and more appropriate ways of knowing the world. These new ways have been less invention out of whole cloth than the revival or re-evaluation of alternative or suppressed traditions. (Longino 1993)

So, my claim is that feminist thought turns up, paradoxically, as recurrently 'missing', though it is the everyday gendered stealth through which this is made manifest which is really intriguing—one reason for my retrieval of the word/work of 'sexism'. Though I offer only a brief perusal of some of the ways sexism works, I think it is important to raise the word more clearly to the theoretical surface, especially when, as the pressure to radically modify the shape of disciplines seems less urgent, disciplines too readily 'spring back' into that old (white male) shape (Ahmed 2015, 6; Foster et al 2013). Thus feminist scholarship is less 'forgotten' and more (re)positioned as having nothing significant to say about matters other than women or gender (as if this wasn't radical), and feminist theoretical, epistemological and political insights are (re)positioned on the sidelines of mainstream and critical theoretical significance. After some three decades, it is probably time to start remembering not

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<sup>23</sup> Like Sharoni's (2018), my arguments are about disciplinary incompetence and unwillingness.

to 'forget' and to make more ethical decisions about 'where to turn' in our endeavours to better theorize the global violences we say we care so much about.

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