

# GENDERING GLOBAL CONFLICT



*Toward a Feminist Theory of War*

LAURA SJOBERG

# Gender Lenses Look at War(s)

There are always fresh questions to ask about what it takes to wage wars—all about the efforts to manipulate disparate ideas about femininity, about the attempts to mobilize particular groups of women, about the pressures on certain women to remain loyal and silent. There are more efforts to control women and to squeeze standards for femininity and manliness into narrow molds than most war wagers will admit.... in the midst of warfare, the politics of marriage, the politics of femininities, the genderings of racial and ethnic identities, and the working of misogyny each continue.... every war takes place—is waged, is coped with, and is assessed—at a particular moment in ongoing gendered histories, national gendered histories, and international gendered history.

—CYNTHIA ENLOE, *NIMO'S WAR, EMMA'S WAR: MAKING FEMINIST SENSE OF THE IRAQ WAR*

Feminist theorists have worked for decades to “make feminist sense” of war and conflict specifically, and international relations more generally.<sup>1</sup> This work has shown that looking through gender lenses at wars and conflicts not only makes us rethink the gendered histories of war(s), but also consider the ‘gendered history’ of research about the making and fighting of wars.<sup>2</sup> This gendered history of research is especially important as we examine the “legitimizing function of masculinity discourses” within the theories of the causes and consequences of war(s).<sup>3</sup> Feminist approaches to theorizing war, then, see war as a gendered concept, a gendered event, a gendered logic, and a gendered performance.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter introduces the feminist approaches used to theorize war throughout the book. It begins with a discussion about what is “feminist” about this book’s feminist theorizing, particularly what gender lenses see that can be distinguished from and seen as contributing to the work of other approaches to the study of war. It then suggests that “feminisms” are diverse, rather than monolithic, and discusses some of the methodological, epistemological, and ontological differences that different feminisms bring to engagements with and critiques of war studies. After going over several strategies for dealing with those differences, the chapter suggests a dialectical hermeneutic approach to feminist war theorizing. It argues that a dialogical approach that values difference as the substance of theorizing rather than an obstacle to theorizing is productive. The chapter concludes by introducing feminist security studies<sup>5</sup> dialogically and presenting a method for moving from feminist theorizing of security to feminist theorizing of war and wars.

## WHAT IS “FEMINIST” ABOUT FEMINIST THEORIZING?

Perhaps the best place to start thinking about what is feminist about feminist war theorizing is to discuss some common misconceptions about feminist theorizing. One common misconception is that *gender* is synonymous with *women*, and that feminists are interested in promoting women at the expense of men. While some feminists study women, and some people who study women are feminists, they do not map one-to-one. Some feminist

scholars do not study women, and some work that studies women does so (sometimes explicitly) without feminisms' political commitments.<sup>6</sup> While feminist scholars are interested in gender equality or gender emancipation, they are (for the most part) not interested in subordinating men or trading women's interests for men's interests. Instead, feminist scholars are studying gender, masculinities and femininities, and looking for what genders and genderings show them about what global politics is and how it works. Another common misconception is that feminists are always thinking that gender is the primary and only explanation for phenomena in global politics. This is not true on two levels—first, feminist scholars are looking at gender to see where it leads; second, feminists often understand gender as power and are therefore looking at the ways that gendered power configures and is configured by events in global politics.

A third common misconception is that, while feminist theory is relevant to global politics, it is relevant to a narrow set of issues that particularly concern women (such as wartime rape) or things that women are (perceived to be) good at (like peace). While, certainly, it is easier to see gender in things that are traditionally understood to concern women, and feminisms are interested in those things, feminist scholarship is as attentive to war as it is to wartime rape, to weapons as to gendered language about them, and to violence as to peace. While feminisms have argued that the traditional concerns of international relations (IR) and the methods with which IR theorists study them are partial, short-sighted, and masculinist, feminist scholars do not ignore those concerns.

So, if feminist war theorizing is not narrowly focused on women, reverse-sexist, and limited to a particular set of marginalized issues, what is it? One of the major commonalities of feminist scholarship is a concern with gender, which Laura Shepherd describes as “a noun, a verb, and a logic that is product/productive of the performances of violences and security.”<sup>7</sup> As I discussed in the introduction, feminist work sees gender as an intersubjective social construct in global politics and therefore a necessary analytical category for the study of war (or any other phenomenon in global politics). Gender is a property held by and read onto people, states, and other actors and objects in global politics; gendering is a process between and among those actors; and gendered logics often govern global political interactions. Gender myths serve to naturalize a configuration of gender order particular to a given space and time, which is performed daily through bodily acts of obedience and transgression to those norms. Feminist approaches seek to identify, understand, and deconstruct operative gender hierarchies in global politics by looking through gender lenses at the ways the world works. For feminist war theorizing, this means understanding operative gender hierarchies in the symbolism, making, fighting, and experience of war(s).

Thinking about gender as gender hierarchy means understanding that being male or female is not a (or the) indicator of gender; instead, masculinities and femininities are genders and produce genderings. “Women” can be masculine, and “men” can be feminine; men or women can be masculinized or feminized.<sup>8</sup> Individuals can be gendered, but so can institutions, organizations, and even states. Gendering is about the distribution of power and regard based on *perceived association* with sex-based characteristics, rather than possession of certain sex organs a priori. In these understandings, gender is first,

fundamentally social; second, an expression of power; and third, an organizing principle for war specifically and politics and political thought generally.<sup>9</sup>

It is gender as an organizing principle that interests feminists in IR generally, and my feminist war theorizing specifically. As Marysia Zalewski explains, “the driving force of feminism is its attention to gender and not simply women... the concept, nature, and practice of gender are key.”<sup>10</sup> In this spirit, feminists in IR have argued that the power relations between gendered constructions and institutions significantly impact the ways in which global politics works. Feminist research often understands gender as a “feature of social and political life” that “profoundly shapes our place in, and view of, the world.”<sup>11</sup> Feminist scholars characterize gender as “necessary, conceptually, for understanding international relations; important in analyzing causes and predicting outcomes; and essential to thinking about solutions and promoting positive change.”<sup>12</sup>

If what makes feminist scholarly inquiry feminist is a concern with gender as an analytic category and gender emancipation as a political aim,<sup>13</sup> how does it relate to other scholarship? What falls outside the boundaries of feminist analysis, and how does feminist analysis relate to whatever falls outside it? I cannot speak as an authorial voice for feminisms on these issues but can outline my perspective, which is employed in the remainder of this book.<sup>14</sup>

In my view, it is important to distinguish gender and sex (even if the two are co-constituted or sociobiological)<sup>15</sup> and correspondingly, to distinguish between thinking about *what men do* and *what women do* and thinking about gendered social structures that select for and value gendered characteristics. Work that is interested in “the empirical realities of women in political life, national or international”<sup>16</sup> is work about women in politics, but may or may not be feminist work, depending on whether or not it analyzes gender as power, and whether or not its work is performed recognizing the normative problems with the current gender order.<sup>17</sup>

For example, work that takes account of sex in war studies often does not pay attention to gendered politics or reflect a normative interest in changing the gendered order. In my view, that work studies sex in global politics, but without a feminist perspective.<sup>18</sup> Some of that work is interested in how fertility rates, the percentage of women in elected legislative bodies, the percentage of women in the labor force, and other indicators of women’s equality influence states’ likelihood to start or participate in wars, arguing that “the inclusion of women as equal members of society will, therefore, result in fewer and less violent militarized interstate disputes.”<sup>19</sup> Other work asks whether men and women see, think about, and act differently in war.<sup>20</sup> This work often focuses on sex dynamics without regard to gender dynamics, and often does not question gendered assumptions about the goals, processes, and results of global politics generally and war specifically.<sup>21</sup>

So what is the difference between theorizing “sex and world peace”<sup>22</sup> and theorizing (gender and) war through feminist lenses? Scholars looking through gender lenses “ask what assumptions about gender (and race, class, nationality, and sexuality) are necessary to make particular statements, policies, and actions meaningful.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, gender is not a variable that can be measured as a “yes” or “no” (or male or female question) but a more complicated symbolic and cultural construction.<sup>24</sup> Treating gender as dichotomous and

predetermined, and without regard for gender hierarchy, “necessarily presuppose[s] that gender is not already constructed, which leads to problematic empirical results and theoretical conclusions.”<sup>25</sup>

In my view, as Brooke Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True argue, “what makes scholarship... feminist is the research question and the theoretical methodology and not the tool or particular method used.”<sup>26</sup> Feminist research questions explore the relationships among gender, genderings, power, and politics.<sup>27</sup> In answer to these research questions, feminist scholars find tools “for moving beyond the knowledge frameworks that construct international relations without attention to gender.”<sup>28</sup> These tools are means to “making the invisible visible, bringing women’s lives to the center, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, and understanding women as subjects rather than the objects of men.”<sup>29</sup> The feminist approaches I am interested in exploring, then, “transform knowledge in ways that go beyond adding women” to studying gender and pursuing gender emancipation.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, “gender hierarchy *is* a normative problem *and* the failure to recognize it presents an empirical problem” for those interested in how war works.<sup>31</sup> This understanding shapes how I see feminist analysis relating to prefeminist (or nonfeminist) scholarship. Rather than seeing scholarship (discussed in [chapter 1](#)) that omits gender analysis as “suspect” or valueless,<sup>32</sup> I argue that it is important but necessarily incomplete.<sup>33</sup> Looking at war without attention to gender hierarchy makes scholarship about war less accurate empirically and problematic normatively. This creates an incentive for feminist engagement of war studies, inspired by the idea that feminist work adds to war studies, which is valuable but (without feminist work) not as valuable as it could be. As such, feminist war theorizing starts “with a different perspective and lead to further rethinking... [to] distinguish ‘reality’ from the world as *men* know it,”<sup>34</sup> which is not to imply that *men as men* have some particular viewpoint, but instead that masculinities bring about a particularized (and often narrow) view of the world and way of analyzing it. I will discuss the strategic approach to engagement taken in this book later in this chapter, but find engagement necessary because “putting gender in” to war analyses produces “new insights, theoretical advances, and conceptual categories.”<sup>35</sup>

## DIVERSITY AMONG APPROACHES TO FEMINIST THEORIZING

At the same time, the ways that feminist scholars “put gender in” are by no means uniform, even limiting feminism to scholarship that takes note of and critiques not only sex but gender subordination. In the introduction, I noted that there is not one approach to feminist theorizing, but many, including feminist approaches that correspond with different paradigmatic approaches to IR.<sup>36</sup> While many feminist projects share a self-reflexivity about ideas and methods based on observations of gender inequalities not only in the “real world” of global politics but also in the communities that study that world and the methods they use to do so, there remain a number of unresolved ontological and epistemological gaps among feminist theorists potentially predisposed to theorizing wars. These questions are



complicated by the fact that multiple feminist approaches mean that feminist insights on global conflict can yield different and sometimes contradictory insights.<sup>37</sup>

This is because “it would be unrepresentative to characterize a ‘gendered experience’ as if there were something measurable that all men or all women shared in life experience.”<sup>38</sup> Consequently, not only are there several feminist *theoretical* approaches to war(s), there are several feminist *epistemologies* of the study of war(s).<sup>39</sup> The different approaches to gender and war bring up different substantive and research concerns, different methodological choices, different preferences about how to relate to the field as a whole, and even different understandings of the appropriate subjects and objects of war theorizing. Different feminisms have different interests—in power, in equality, in emancipation, in signification, in race and ethnicity, in geography, and in other issues—that focus their gender lenses in different directions.

Some of those differences are just that—differences. Some of them, however, are not only differences but contradictions and critiques. For example, postcolonial feminisms have critiqued liberal feminisms’ rights-based approach to thinking about women’s needs and gender equality.<sup>40</sup> Poststructuralist feminisms have questioned constructivist feminisms’ (perceived) shallow notion of the role of gender in social and political life.<sup>41</sup> Positivist feminisms have looked to provide data about gender subordination, while postpositivist feminisms have seen narrative, biography, and other discursive methodologies as more useful.<sup>42</sup> Feminist security studies scholars have given primacy to the security arena, while feminist global political economy (GPE) scholars have given primacy to the economic arena.<sup>43</sup> Some feminists see knowledge as objective, some see it as perspectival, some see it as experiential, whereas others question the ability to know.<sup>44</sup>

This diversity is significant and often constitutes not only difference but insights that can be seen to conflict with one another. Other examples abound. Some feminists have advocated pornography as sex-liberating, and others have condemned it as a key source of sex subordination.<sup>45</sup> Some feminists have argued that human trafficking can only be prevented by legalizing prostitution, and others have argued that trafficking can only be stopped by enforcing laws against prostitution.<sup>46</sup> Some feminists have supported American military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, while others have argued that those interventions instrumentalized and oppressed women.<sup>47</sup> Some feminists have argued that capitalism is a path to gender emancipation, while others have argued that it is at the root of gender subordination.<sup>48</sup> While some differences among feminisms can be reconciled fairly easily by thinking about feminisms with different research interests going in different directions, others (especially those that appear directly contradictory) may need to be dealt with in thinking about “a” feminist theoretical approach to war theorizing.

## STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH DIVERSITY AMONG FEMINIST APPROACHES

Feminist scholars have used different strategies for dealing with this diversity (and sometime disagreement) among feminist approaches. Some scholars see feminism as a coherent whole.<sup>49</sup> Many of those scholars see the two sides of a number of key feminist

debates as solvable, with one approach being correct and the other incorrect, identifying a single, “true” feminist position on a given issue. To these scholars, feminists who disagree are seen as having taken an incorrect position based on the (singular or reconcilable) goals of feminisms.

Instead of explicitly delineating right and wrong positions, some scholars start their work with something like “feminists see...,” implying without explicitly claiming that feminisms have uncontroversial agreement on whatever is the predicate of the sentence. While this work does not explicitly endorse a singular notion of feminism, it implies that feminisms, despite their differences, do not disagree on the most important substantive issues.

Others group feminist approaches in service of their theoretical or political interest to downplay or ignore the differences between feminisms. Feminisms then become differentiated by their approaches, whereby one feminism has one perspective and another feminism has another, and the irreconcilability of those positions is irrelevant because the groups or political interests of different feminisms become the unit of analysis.

By contrast, other feminist scholars explicitly deal with potential areas of difference or conflict, looking to either reconcile, navigate, or map potential conflicts. One way of dealing with differences among feminisms is to use a strategy of coexistence, contending, for example, that “multiple feminisms can coexist and contribute to critique and reformulation of research and policy without being considered as a single theory in universal agreement.”<sup>50</sup> In this perspective, feminists’ disagreements are broad, but the subject of their critique is often singular. Feminisms do not need to agree on the alternative to agree on the critique (usually of gender subordination). In this view, multiple feminist angles aim at the same goal, and the differences among feminisms are less important than their commonalities, such that feminism is a “momentum concept” in which “if feminism is to be coherently defined,... it needs to be conceived as one river with numerous currents rather than as a series of rivers.”<sup>51</sup>

Others, rather than encouraging coexistence while maintaining difference, look to bridge the divides and reconcile the differences, arguing that feminism *as one* is stronger than feminism *as an aggregate*.<sup>52</sup> Some of this reconciliation is intellectual, looking to compare feminist perspectives, weigh their advantages and disadvantages, and solve the arguments among feminisms through logical reasoning. Other reconciliation attempts look for emotional rather than intellectual or logical paths, “using emotional identification as a bridge for diversity and conflict.”<sup>53</sup> Rejecting the masculinism often identified with rational argumentation or Cartesian reason, these feminists look to find *identification* or solidarity rather than agreement across feminisms’ differences.

Yet another strategy understands diversity and difference as having additive value, whereby “diverse women ask diverse questions, such as how racial inequality, cultural discrimination, economic subordination, ‘North-South’ relations, and gendering of political actors relate to gender subordination.”<sup>54</sup> From this perspective, “strong” or “dynamic” objectivity is built from different perspectives being compiled, with emphasis on views from the margins of global social and political organization.<sup>55</sup> In this view, different feminisms are distinct pieces of a puzzle, but fit together to be more than a sum of their parts.

Other feminist scholars contend that a particular approach to feminist analysis is more

politically appropriate than others. Though, unlike the strategy mentioned above, these scholars do not go so far as to declare that there is a single, “correct” feminism, these feminists talk about preferring particular approaches for their political or instrumental value or even their normative contributions. For example, some postcolonial feminists have argued that American academic feminism essentializes women from the “third world” and constitutes “‘feminism’ as another form of ‘imperialism.’”<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, feminists interested in mainstreaming gender in IR have suggested that more radical feminist approaches to IR are net harmful because they are discipline-alienating in their methodological or epistemological choices.

These various strategies for dealing with the differences among feminisms, I contend, are individually and collectively insufficient.<sup>57</sup> Universalist feminist narratives are in my view in denial of feminisms’ real and serious differences, and statements that collectivize feminisms that are at odds are often universalist wolves in sheep’s clothing. I find categories limiting, but think that approaches that value their contributions as additive also gloss over the discomfort of conflict. While some disagreements can be reconciled intellectually or emotionally, others cannot. Thinking of unity or ending conflict as a priority for feminisms seems potentially at odds with or at least a distraction from goals associated with ending gender subordination, which may require disunity or conflict. While there are political and intellectual reasons to prefer certain feminist approaches over others, those are themselves subjective and may narrow out some of feminisms’ disagreements but not all of them.

These problems are compounded when one realizes each of these strategies can be critiqued by the others. Seeing feminisms as multiple without a particular theoretical understanding of that multiplicity risks perceptions of incoherence and seeing feminisms as unified ignores valuable diversity. Among feminist approaches, urging solidarity, ignoring differences, asserting superiority, bridging conflicts, or valuing diversity for diversity’s sake are important tools, but not tools that produce synthesis or a sufficient justification for not seeking synthesis.<sup>58</sup>

Yet the question of feminisms’ diversity is key, because it is implicated in how war is understood, what it means to know about war, and the methods that we use to study war through gender lenses. I argue that there is another way to approach the question of difference in feminisms—to see the difference, disagreement, conflict, and argument as *the substance of feminisms* rather than as a substantive problem for feminisms. Such an approach, which I identify as dialogical, is detailed in the remainder of this chapter as a way to approach feminisms’ differences and as a method for feminist war theorizing.

## A DIALOGICAL APPROACH TO FEMINIST ANALYSIS

A dialogical approach to feminisms’ differences looks at them in a new light. Such a perspective sees the substance of feminist analysis not in synthesis or in the additive value of diversity, but in the conflict among feminist approaches and the journey that produces it. Following Hayward Alker and Thomas Biersteker, I argue that “it is the sharing, the



interpretation, and the principled opposition of these often antagonistic approaches... that truly constitute the global inter-discipline of International Relations.”<sup>59</sup> A dialogical approach sees the substance of feminist analysis in its differences, seeing feminist war theorizing as not a result, but a process, and a journey of observation, critique, reformulation, and reflexivity.

Alker saw dialogue as not just the process of IR but its substance, and argued that “there are truths reachable and shareable by a consensually oriented version of the argumentation process.”<sup>60</sup> He suggested a questioning, contingent, open approach to argument,<sup>61</sup> one in which there are differences *about* substance, but the difference also *is* the substance. He explains:

What classical political argumentation can do best, if grounded in a cooperative, uncoerced, moral-political, truth-seeking orientation and used skillfully to ask the right questions—those that critically probe the more fundamental justifications—is to suggest the key determinants of sociopolitical identities, actions, policies, or relationships, and constructively criticize such contingently variable and valuable human things.<sup>62</sup>

I argue that Alker’s approach to engaging difference *as substance* can help to navigate the difficult task of theorizing war(s) through feminist lenses. Feminist war theorizing, then, might be seen as a dialectical hermeneutic. While many of the strategies I outlined for dealing with differences among feminists characterize the differences, conflicts, or arguments among feminist theories as a means to the end of determining what *a* feminist theory of war(s) might be, a dialectical-hermeneutic view would find the substance and identity/ies of feminist (war) theorizing in those differences rather than in their resolution. In Alker’s terms, focusing on narrative scripts and their underlying plots and associated transformational grammars not only helps reconstitute international relations within the dialectical-hermeneutic tradition as a reconstructive but fallible science of human possibilities.<sup>63</sup>

In this understanding, feminist war theorizing is realist and liberal, rationalist and constructivist, mainstream<sup>64</sup> and critical, Western and postcolonial, structuralist and poststructuralist, positivist and postpositivist, monist and dualist.<sup>65</sup> It looks for gendered power relations, for women’s experiences and lives, for the influence of gender as an idea, for the salience of discourses of gender, and for the intersections of gender, race, class, and imperialism. It is interested in meanings and experiences, causes and constitution, consequences and deontological considerations. Those strands of feminist theorizing bridge conflicts, value diversity for diversity’s sake, urge solidarity, assert superiority, compete, and ignore differences. It is the sharing, the interpretation, and the principled opposition of antagonistic approaches that *make* feminist theorizing of war (even though they might appear to inhibit it). Seen holistically, “it is a fundamentally and deeply relational journey, full of conflict.”<sup>66</sup>

In this view, it is unnecessary to solve or discard the differences among feminist

theories, because feminist inquiry is constituted by both contestability and actual contestation. It is not the sum of different strands of feminist theorizing or the victor in a competition between approaches, but “the narrative generated from their engagements, arguments, disagreements, and compromises.”<sup>67</sup> Rather than selecting a particular feminist approach, the feminist theorizing about war in this book treats feminisms as plural, finding their substance in the process of theorizing, in the contributions of various different approaches, and in argumentation among those approaches.

Seeing feminist war theorizing as dialectical-hermeneutic changes both the justification for engaging in research and the process of doing research.<sup>68</sup> Such an approach sees the goal of feminist war theorizing as asking questions and raising problems rather than attempting to solve them; as exchanging ideas rather than seeking absolute truths; as drawing attention to a field of inquiry rather than exploring every detail; and as provoking discussion rather than making conclusive statements.

This means feminist war theorizing can have divergent (and sometimes incommensurable) goals.<sup>69</sup> The outline of the conflicts and contestations both among feminists and between feminists and war studies in this book is not an outline of problems that need to be solved or divides that need to be crossed, healed, or closed. Instead, those debates, along with how they are handled and addressed, constitute a feminist theory of war.<sup>70</sup> It is in this spirit that this book and the feminist war theorizing contained therein is (not only multi-method but) multi-epistemological.<sup>71</sup>

Operating within a positivist epistemological framework, what do gender lenses tell us about war studies? Critiquing a positivist epistemological framework, what do gender lenses tell us about war studies? What does reading gender through both positivist and anti-positivist lenses tell us about what war is, what causes it, and what its consequences are? What do feminisms tell us about different paradigmatic approaches to the study of war? What do different sorts of feminism have to offer? What can we learn from their similarities? From discussions among them? Or from their differences? How might that interact with existing mainstream and critical war theorizing? These are the sort of questions that viewing feminisms’ differences dialectically might inspire for feminist war theorizing. The next section talks about setting up feminist war theorizing as a dialogue between multiple feminisms and war studies, seeing the substance in the processes and debates.

## DIALOGUING WITH THE WAR STUDIES

It is true that feminist work that might be relevant to war theorizing has often been neglected by nonfeminist war theorists. But it is also true that feminisms, while they have provided important insights about the nature, causes, and consequences of war(s) through early feminist work in IR and the developing subfield of feminist security studies, have rarely addressed the “war question”<sup>72</sup> or the “war puzzle”<sup>73</sup> in the limited terms it is conceived of in traditional war studies and IR directly. This may be because of the difficult and complex nature of such an engagement and/or the fraught politics of studying war on those terms, which has been (in my opinion, correctly) critiqued by feminist scholars as being partial,

gendered, biased, epistemologically narrow, and empirically incomplete.<sup>74</sup>

Still, as I argue above, as incomplete as it is, (genderless) war theorizing should be engaged through gender lenses, which should evaluate the war puzzle (or perhaps more aptly, war puzzles), through gendered lenses without losing the epistemological, ontological, and political uniqueness of the contributions of feminist scholarship. Some recent feminist work on war is doing just that in a variety of interesting ways. For example, Christine Sylvester's recent work has been developing a sensory/experiential approach to the war question in (feminist) IR.<sup>75</sup> Cynthia Enloe's recent book on the Iraq War told stories of gender and both macropolitics and micropolitics through narratives about eight women's lives affected in radically different ways by the conflict.<sup>76</sup>

Still, feminist scholars often keep critical distance between their work and study of war "proper,"<sup>77</sup> particularly as understood in the mainstream of war studies/security studies.<sup>78</sup> Some feminists do so because they are concerned with the intellectual and political risks of such engagement. As Sarah Brown warned:

The danger in attempts to reconcile international relations and feminism is two-fold. Most immediately, the danger lies in the uncritical acceptance by feminists of objects, methods, and concepts which presuppose the subordination of women. More abstrusely, it lies in the uncritical acceptance of the very possibility of "gender equality."<sup>79</sup>

In other words, there are dangers in engaging a field which has the logic of masculinity as a foundational assumption. I agree with Brown that such a danger does exist, no matter how critically engagement is approached. As Marysia Zalewski notes, "while 'moving' feminism transforms it, holding it still or secured by the demands of an established discipline to whom 'we' are to make ourselves understood by only invites critical atrophy."<sup>80</sup> That said, I argue that feminist work can only be transformative of war studies if it convinces war studies to transform. That it is, by definition, a project that requires engagement. This is especially true if Kimberly Hutchings is right that "a key reason for the ongoing invisibility of women and gender" in war studies has to do with the "legitimizing function" of gendered discourses.<sup>81</sup>

As such, I take the position that it is necessary to critically engage both war and war theorizing through gender lenses. Still, the relationship between feminist work and the mainstream of the "discipline" of IR remains a rough spot in the development of feminist theorizing of war and wars.<sup>82</sup> This is because, as J. Ann Tickner describes, there is a "chilly reception" for feminist theorizing, where the mainstream is "asking feminists to do more of the moving" and "give epistemological positions which they believe are better suited to uncovering oppressive gender hierarchies" or risk obscurity.<sup>83</sup> As a result, "all too often, [the mainstream's] claims of gender neutrality mask deeply embedded masculinist assumptions which can naturalize or hide gender differences and gender inequalities."<sup>84</sup> This means that feminist attempts to engage are often greeted with either silence or criticism.<sup>85</sup>

The difficulties with engagement do not only come from the mainstream, but also from some feminist scholars who remain unconvinced that engagement is worthwhile. Some

feminist scholars, though they see gender as a crucial analytical category in global politics, choose to write for a feminist audience rather than do the laborious and often unrewarding work of attempting to speak to the discipline as a whole. For some of these scholars, this makes sense because they believe that the mainstream of war studies will never have an interest in making feminist sense of war and conflict, so transformative effort is wasted energy.<sup>86</sup> For others like Sarah Brown, a lack of interest in engaging the mainstream of the discipline comes from a concern with losing the ontological and epistemological uniqueness of feminist scholarship in order to be accepted by or curry favor with the mainstream of the discipline, especially but not only because of a sense that such a mission is likely to fail.<sup>87</sup> As a result, while some feminist scholars look to engage the mainstream of the discipline, others are “now actively reconstructing IR without reference to what the ‘mainstream’ asserts rightly belongs inside the discipline. In so doing they are showing that it is more effective to refuse to engage in disciplinary navel-gazing inspired by positivist epistemological angst.”<sup>88</sup> This approach argues that feminism is freer, better scholarship when it does not get bogged down in the (often irrelevant) politics of disciplinary boundaries.<sup>89</sup>

I am concerned that ignoring the mainstream of the discipline is a luxury that feminist inquiry just does not have, both because there is a serious power inequity between mainstream IR and feminist work<sup>90</sup> and because there is intellectual and policy value in the engagement. I have previously suggested that the engagement strategy is promising for the productivity of mainstream–feminist conversations, and have held J. Ann Tickner’s work up as an example of a good engagement strategy:

Tickner, while maintaining that feminist insights should fundamentally transform the ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations of IR, consistently engages mainstream scholars’ ideas about the factors that make global politics. In her work, Tickner painstakingly demonstrates how IR scholars would benefit from incorporating a feminist perspective in their research and teaching, in terms of issues of import to them, including increased explanatory leverage and more nuanced conceptual operationalization.<sup>91</sup>

A critical engagement that includes critique and rethought could serve to unsettle the discipline’s substantive and methodological boundaries.<sup>92</sup> The goals of this rethought include: “to point out the exclusions and biases of ‘mainstream’ IR[/war theorizing],... to make women as visible as social, economic, and political subjects in international politics,... to analyze how gender inequalities were embedded in day-to-day practices of international relations, and... to empower women as subjects of knowledge.”<sup>93</sup>

There are valid arguments that such engagement approaches are risky, and the question of what feminism gives up by talking to the mainstream is an important one. In addition to these issues, questions of how such conversations would occur given the risks are often explored more by trial-and-error than they are by careful theoretical planning and analysis. This may be because of the (personal and intellectual) stakes in engaging with war studies.<sup>94</sup> It may also have to do with the diversity of feminisms addressing the question.



On top of these issues, there also remain specific difficulties inherent in producing what the subtitle of this book promises: feminist theorizing about war. Those difficulties include (but are not limited to): the difficulties of conversations between (largely positivist and largely masculinist) war studies and critical feminist (often postpositivist) theorizing; the multiple feminist perspectives (with some incommensurable elements) that might be incorporated into feminist theorizing about war; the question of how one knows (if one knows) about the meaning, causes, and consequences of war(s); the (intellectual and material) breadth and depth of scholarly material on both “sides” of the divide; and the inaccessibility (either real or contrived) of one discourse to another.<sup>95</sup> This situation seems to amount to an intellectual catch-22, in which embracing engagement with the mainstream seems to risk feminisms’ intellectual and political integrity, while failing to engage seems to risk feminisms’ political mission within the discipline. Feminist scholars debate whether or not traditional war theorizing and feminist approaches can truly engage, and what the cost is.<sup>96</sup>

I argue that a dialectical-hermeneutic approach to engagements *between* feminisms and war studies similar to the one I have adopted for dealing with differences *among* feminisms is called for in this situation. Such an approach sees feminist war studies as in war studies and marginal to it, in security studies and outside of it, engaged in the methodologies of disciplinary inquiry and critical of their potentially insidious implications. Feminisms relate to the mainstream of the discipline by mimicking war theorizing’s theories and methods, confronting and hoping to transform war studies, ignoring either the power or the existence of mainstream war studies, and constructive engagement. Tensions in the relationships between feminist scholarship and work that would study war as if gender were irrelevant to it are as central to the relationship between gender and war theorizing as the commonalities and agreements between the two might be. They make up its substance.

Seeing the relationship between feminist war theorizing and war theorizing more generally as a dialectical hermeneutic suggests interesting questions for feminist war theorizing. Assuming that structural realists are right about the primacy of the international system in causing war(s), what does feminist theorizing tell us about that system? What do feminist critiques of privileging the system level tell us about war? What do reading feminist insights about structure next to feminist critiques of structure tell us about war(s)? Assuming dyadic-level theorists are correct about the primacy of the interstate relations in causing war(s), what can gender lenses tell us about how states relate and their paths to war? What can feminist critiques tell us about privileging interstate relations when thinking about war(s)? How does looking at feminist evaluations of interstate relations next to feminist critiques of statist approaches to war tell us about war(s)? What about comparing these juxtapositions with system-level ones? Substate-level ones? The multi-epistemological framework in this book pairs discussions of particular approaches to war *on their terms* with critical engagements of the terms of the debate(s) on the meanings, causes, and consequences of war(s).



# THEORIZING

A long tradition of feminist theorizing about gender and security (and an even longer tradition of the presence of gendered tropes in security discourses) can serve as the foundation for such an engagement. Much early work on gender and security emphasized women as war's "others," peaceful themselves and often objecting to the war or conflict.<sup>97</sup> For example, women's peace movements have been a consistent feature of European politics since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>98</sup> These movements, looking for links between womanhood, motherhood, and peace, remain an important feature in contemporary global politics, both in terms of general global presences (such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom [WILPF])<sup>99</sup> and in particular conflict situations.<sup>100</sup>

A significant body of work (by both scholars and practitioners) addressing the warrants for, strategies of, and successes of women's peace movements is an important strand of feminist theorizing about security. If "feminism is the belief that women are of equal social and human value with men, and that the differences between men and women, whether biologically or culturally derived, do not and should not constitute grounds for discrimination against women,"<sup>101</sup> work on women's peace movements falls easily within a feminist analysis of war, broadly defined.<sup>102</sup>

At the same time, a distinct tradition, feminist security studies (FSS), has recently become interested in thinking in depth not only about the relationships between women and security but about gender/genderings and security issues.<sup>103</sup> Rather than "add women and stir,"<sup>104</sup> FSS works on "analysis of *masculinities* and *femininities* in security situations, and how those gender-associated values and characteristics influence (and are influenced by) people understood as men and women, rather than in the study of the (assumed) differences between men and women."<sup>105</sup>

Although this sort of thinking about the relationship between security and gender differs from traditional understandings of women and peace as linked, it does have its roots in some early feminist theorizing. Theorists from Mary Wollstonecraft<sup>106</sup> and Virginia Woolf<sup>107</sup> to feminist philosophers of science<sup>108</sup> and feminist economists<sup>109</sup> have reflected on the nature of gender, the nature of war, and their intersections. In the 1980s, feminist scholars began to explicitly consider the links between gender subordination and war. For example, Betty Reardon characterized the global political arena as functioning as a "war system" dominated by the links between sex and violence.<sup>110</sup> It was Reardon's understanding that stopping violence and stopping gender subordination were necessarily interdependent.

Sara Ruddick also related gender subordination and war, albeit from a different perspective. She understood motherhood as a role that imbued women as an interest in peace in order to protect their children from violence.<sup>111</sup> Brigit Brock-Utne argued that women had an intrinsic interest in peace, but distinguished negative peace (the lack of war) and positive peace (security and freedom from want and need), and saw women's interest as being in the latter.<sup>112</sup> Other feminists, building on Brock-Utne's argument, suggest the idea that "war" and "peace" can be viewed dichotomously is unrepresentative of human experience. Jean Elshtain argued that the war/peace dichotomy is as gender subordinating as the public/private dichotomy, in that it hides the risks to women in the "in between" or

“peace” times.<sup>113</sup>

These reflections spurred a significant amount of feminist work on the relationship between gender, nation, and violence. For example, in the late 1980s, Nira Yuval-Davis explained that “a proper understanding of either [gender or nation] cannot afford to ignore the ways that they are informed and constructed by each other.”<sup>114</sup> Cynthia Enloe then linked the gendering of war and militarism to society-wide gendered dynamics, demonstrating that militaries depend on the “cheap, often unpaid” labor of women to do recruiting work, logistical work, sexual service, and morale maintenance.<sup>115</sup>

Enloe saw the “ideology of militarism” as gendered, and argued for a strategy of looking for and at women to understand militarism.<sup>116</sup> She contends that “by looking at women we can reveal, not only the spreading institutional encroachment of the military, but also the processes by which that spread becomes publicly legitimized.”<sup>117</sup> She sees this as key because we take militarism for granted “without an investigation of how militarism feeds on masculinist values to sustain it,”<sup>118</sup> especially inasmuch as “militaries need women—but they need women to behave *as the gender ‘women.’*”<sup>119</sup>

Accordingly, much of the scholarship that looks at security from a feminist perspective has focused on understanding how gendered states produce and are produced by gendered militarisms. For example, in 1992, V. Spike Peterson edited *Gendered States*, which focused on “reframing traditional constructs—states, sovereignty, political identity, security”<sup>120</sup> in order to reveal “the role that gendered divisions of labor and power play in the definition and maintenance of the state and its functions.”<sup>121</sup> Recognizing that “national security and military might are preeminently masculine activities and have long been dominated by male actors,” feminist scholars seek “new understandings of security in the face of systemic gendered violence (war, rape, domestic violence)” in order to bring attention to “the security issue of the relationship between sexual and international violence.”<sup>122</sup> This work looks both to broaden the referent of “security” as well as ideas about what makes that referent “secure.”<sup>123</sup> In that sense, feminisms share goals with the critical approaches to security discussed in [chapter 1](#).<sup>124</sup> Yet feminisms also intervene in the discourses of critical approaches to security to highlight the roles of gender tropes, gender significations, gender dynamics, and gendered power invisible in but crucial to even critical security stories.

An example is the recognition that secure states contain (and produce) insecure women. This is not incidental but structural, since “the more a government is preoccupied with what it calls national security, the less likely its women are to have the physical safety necessary for sharing their theorizing about the nation and their security within it.”<sup>125</sup> It is also not only about women but about gender, where “it is not possible to separate ideas about gender relations from explanations of war, peace, violence, and security.”<sup>126</sup> Those observations led Cynthia Enloe to recognize that “‘national security’ is gendered”<sup>127</sup> and “further entrenching the masculinization of international politics.”<sup>128</sup>

It is these foundations on which scholarship self-identified as FSS builds.<sup>129</sup> This research program has analyzed, critiqued, and reformulated traditional concepts and theories in security studies. As I have described before:

Research in Feminist Security Studies reformulates mainstream approaches to traditional security issues, foregrounds the roles of women and gender in conflict and conflict resolution, and reveals the blindness of security studies to issues that taking gender seriously shows as relevant to thinking about security....<sup>130</sup>

This research has revealed gender bias in dominant conceptualizations of core concepts such as the state, violence, war, peace, and even security itself, and encouraged redefinition of those concepts in gender-emancipatory ways.<sup>131</sup> Accordingly, feminist work has looked to rethink the gendered functioning of the state,<sup>132</sup> violence,<sup>133</sup> war,<sup>134</sup> and peace<sup>135</sup> with the aim of applying new insights to specific security issues. It has applied gendered analysis of security to the crisis in Bosnia,<sup>136</sup> African peacekeeping operations,<sup>137</sup> civil–military relations in South Korea,<sup>138</sup> and the wars in Iraq.<sup>139</sup> Feminists interested in security have also studied specific tools of war and coercive diplomacy, including small arms and light weapons,<sup>140</sup> weapons of mass destruction,<sup>141</sup> nuclear proliferation,<sup>142</sup> military technological advances,<sup>143</sup> and economic sanctions.<sup>144</sup> They have identified gender-based language and assumptions at the foundations of debates about nuclear strategy,<sup>145</sup> the noncombatant immunity principle,<sup>146</sup> peacekeeping,<sup>147</sup> and various aspects of militarization and soldiering.<sup>148</sup> In addition to critiquing concepts traditionally employed in the study of security, “gender-based perspectives have also uncovered new empirical knowledge about sexual violence in war, and gendered participation in armed conflict.”<sup>149</sup>

This growing subfield of FSS is not unified by any given ontological, epistemological, or methodological orientation. It has been focused primarily on “a broad understanding of what counts as a security issue,”<sup>150</sup> “an understanding of the gendered nature of the values prized in the realm of international security,”<sup>151</sup> and gender’s “broad and diverse role” in the theory and practice of international security, where gender subordination is “epistemologically constitutive for the theory and practice of security.”<sup>152</sup> This work has a lot to contribute to theorizing war(s) from a feminist perspective, including substantial engagement with the causes, practices, and experiences of war and wars.<sup>153</sup> At the same time, the commitments of FSS to a broad understanding of security mean that, while FSS can be a foundation for feminist war theorizing, the two are not (and should not be) synonymous. The concluding section of this chapter talks about building a path from FSS to feminist war theorizing, and, in so doing, lays out this book’s approach to engaging war studies.

## FROM FEMINIST SECURITY STUDIES TO FEMINIST WAR THEORIZING

Thinking about feminist war theorizing inspires the distinction between important feminist critiques of the narrow subject matter and object of traditional security studies<sup>154</sup> and the need for feminists to study the traditional content of security studies (war and militarism) “straight up.”<sup>155</sup> As I mentioned in the introduction, looking at war through gendered lenses suggests that using gender as an analytic category is essential to defining, analyzing, and explaining war in causal and constitutive terms. It sees war as productive of and reflective

of gender norms in global politics. Theorizing war from a feminist perspective, then, is a significant task.

In my view, seeing gender as a crucial part of war and war studies means characterizing it as both constitutive of and a causal factor in the making and fighting of war(s).<sup>156</sup> In other words, this book does not make the case that gender is useful in rethinking some (constitutive) war narratives and war theories and not other (causal) ones. Instead, it argues that gender analysis is transformative of war theorizing. Some feminists argue that the exclusion of gender concerns from a particular policy decision is a *causal factor* in its failure,<sup>157</sup> or, as this book does, that gender hierarchy is a key *causal factor* in war-making and war-fighting. On the other hand, Birgit Locher and Elisabeth Prugl hold up Cynthia Enloe's work on gender and militarism as an example of constitutive feminist argumentation.<sup>158</sup> According to them, Enloe "claims that relationships between governments depend on the construction and reconstruction of gender and that such relations produce certain notions of femininity and masculinity. Gender in her work emerges as constitutive of international relations and vice versa."<sup>159</sup> Rather than privilege one or the other, this book pays attention to both, arguing that feminist causal claims and feminist constitutive claims combine to give us an idea about how feminism(s) might revision, retheorize, and potentially recreate war(s) and war studies.

Using these tools, feminist theorizing of war needs to account for, and provide evidence for, the claim that "gender matters in what we study, why we study, and how we study global politics."<sup>160</sup> This claim has a number of elements—it suggests that, to know what a feminist theory of war might be, we have to not only rethink the theoretical suppositions of war studies, but its epistemologies, methodologies, and methods. Epistemologically, feminist political theorizing suggests that "whatever knowledge may ostensibly be about, it is always in part about the relationships between the knower and the known."<sup>161</sup> If the relationship between the knower and the known is a central feature of knowledge, then (all) knowledge-building is a political enterprise, and feminist knowledge-building is explicitly engaged a feminist politics of ending gender subordination.<sup>162</sup>

These epistemological understandings have methodological implications for feminist work theorizing war and/or wars, because feminist theorizing of war is/will be looking not only to understand the war-making and war-fighting but also to highlight its injustices, and to change those injustices. For this reason, feminists have led the way in introducing and applying "hermeneutic, historically contingent, sociological, or ethnically based" and "ethnographic, narrative, or cross-cultural methodologies."<sup>163</sup> Even given these methodological innovations, though, it is substance, not methodological commitments, that produces the contents of feminist research journeys in global politics generally and war studies specifically.<sup>164</sup>

The feminist war theorizing in this book grapples with the challenges involved in such a project as a part of a dialogical-theoretical journey. It confronts questions about differences among feminisms, deals with tensions in the relationships between feminist scholarship and non-feminist war theorizing, and suggests an approach to theorizing war from a feminist perspective that might be able to navigate those fault lines. It journeys through exploration, critique, engagement, argument, reconstruction, and reformulation, exploring wars as

gendered and gender as fundamental to war(s).

Particularly, using feminist analyses in dialogue, the remainder of this book explores the ways lived experiences of war are fundamentally (although not exclusively) shaped by gender—gendered roles, gendered personality traits, gendered posturing, gendered hierarchies, gendered divisions of labor, and gendered distributions of resources. Gender as a noun, as a verb, and as a performance is constitutive of people's lives before, during, and after wars, and the stories told of those wars. Taking note of the ways that gender(s) and war(s) interact leads one to see war as not only gendered, but as fundamentally more complex, multifaceted, and multilevel than traditionally understood. These understandings of what war is and how it works are different at a very basic level than those in mainstream theoretical approaches, and shape feminisms' engagements with that mainstream in the coming chapters that address the causes, practices, and experiences of war(s).