THE PRACTICE, AND PRAXIS, OF FEMINIST RESEARCH IN IR

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What happens when critical and feminist International Relations (IR) theorists go out into the world and actually talk to the people we 'study'? This chapter argues that while the most important contribution of feminist and critical theories of international relations has been to open up, as Steve Smith writes, "just what counts as the subject matter of international relations," there has been little corresponding analysis of the political and practical implications of conducting critically-informed research in IR. This chapter will proceed in three parts. The first will outline briefly the way in which critiques of the mainstream discipline of IR have resulted in a self-consciousness about how we ask questions in IR, about what gets included and what remains excluded. The second will provide a summary of some of the directions my own research is taking and some of the ways in which this reflection on the posing of questions has permitted me to ask feminist and critical questions about United Nations peacekeeping.

In the third section of the paper, I want to argue by using some of my own research experiences that critical and feminist IR theories have been almost completely silent on theorizing or thinking through the political implications of conducting research on so-called 'marginalized' communities. Part of this silence reflects the focus by critical theorists on the theoretical challenges that have been developed thus far, with considerably less work having been done on actual research. It is important to emphasize that the point here is not to lament, as Robert Keohane has done in the past and Alexander Wendt more recently, the absence of an identifiable 'research programme' in critical IR. Rather, the point is to take up an observation by Mark Neufeld when he writes that the "translation of the meta-theoretical gains of the restructuring process into advances in the analyses
of specific topics remains to be effected." That translation, it is argued here, needs to engage a series of problems, not least of which is acknowledging our embeddedness at all times in prevailing global power relations, and the extent to which even critically-informed and progressive research projects reproduce and conform to those power relations. This chapter seeks to explore some of the questions that arise in such circumstances and to argue that critical theorists must become more engaged in some of the political complexities of conducting critical and feminist research in IR if it is to remain committed to praxis; that is, if it is to remain committed to theorising and acting on the world in order to change it.

The Contributions

As has been noted, critical IR and feminist IR have focused on the ways questions get asked, how some issues in international relations are problematized while others are not. This has been accomplished, as Steve Smith notes, through what began as an epistemological critique and the observation that the 'subject' is implicated in, and not separable from, the 'object' of study. As Mark Neufeld writes, "it is because of the possibility of methodologically 'factoring out' the identities of the individual researcher that objective knowledge," politically neutral knowledge, was assumed to be possible at all. And so likewise, the rejection of positivism has meant a rejection of the notion that there can be such a thing as a politically neutral analysis of external reality. In other words, and following Bob Cox's classic 1981 observation, theory is always for some one and for some purpose.

Whereas mainstream theorists have always theorized in order to provide policy-relevant advice to state elites, critical and feminist IR theorists have been concerned with an engagement in the "lived injustices" or "lived suffering" of marginalized groups. Feminist IR and critical IR theory share the observation and commitment that we should be concerned with those individuals and
groups, and those processes of domination, made invisible by the mainstream's concern with states, power and anarchy. Those, as Cynthia Enloe writes, who are deeply affected by international politics but "aren't in a position to call the tune." To uncover the impact of international relations on those previously rendered invisible will give us, she notes, not only a richer and more accurate empirical sense of the world, but also some insight into the more theoretical question of how politics are made, not natural. This joins very neatly with critical IR's commitment to an emancipatory politics, because in observing as Enloe does that what is made can be re-made, there is the explicit recognition of the possibility, at least, for an emancipatory politics, a politics of change aimed at transforming relations of inequality and domination.

The Project

In my own work on peacekeeping, I begin with the argument that the image of peacekeeping as a benign, altruistic and morally superior form of military force which is so pervasive in multilateral and certain national contexts tells us more about about self-identification - about how the UN or certain 'contributor' peacekeeping countries seek to present themselves - than it does about what actually happens when peacekeeping missions are deployed to various countries around the world. Part of what I have done to try to illustrate this argument has been to go to Cambodia to ask women there about the impact of the peacekeeping mission (the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, or UNTAC), on their lives.

I am concerned, for example, about the extent to which a whole series of questions about peacekeeping never get asked. Peacekeeping itself is never problematized in mainstream literatures, instead, peacekeeping is taken to be an unproblematic and obviously 'good' thing, and indeed as an important instrument in maintaining peace and order in the post-Cold War world. As Alan James
describes it, peacekeeping is "an enormously useful device." 13 For Steven Ratner, it is "a way of and process for securing important, shared values." 14 With considerable consistency, a similar picture is depicted in most mainstream accounts: the collapse of the political stalemate of Cold War politics has created new opportunities for the United Nations while at the same time new sources of conflict have emerged; through peacekeeping missions, the UN has been called in to address an ever-increasing number of these conflicts; while sometimes successful, a series of problems have emerged which must be addressed by academics and policymakers.

Those are problems of efficiencies, finances and control. They are, in short, technical problems and technical problems are answered by technical experts. In this way, not only are a whole series of questions not asked but so too are whole groups of people(s) never consulted when questions about peacekeeping are raised. It is not at all unusual within mainstream accounts of peacekeeping, for example, that evaluations of peacekeeping missions are published without the authors ever bothering to go to the country in which the peacekeeping mission was deployed to seek the opinion of the people who lived through the mission, to find out whether 'local' experience conforms, in any way, to 'expert' opinion. 15

Thus I went to Cambodia hoping to develop an analysis of the gendered nature of the peacekeeping mission. I also went to Cambodia with a sense, from writers such as Chandra Mohanty, Caren Kaplan and Aihwa Ong, 16 of the tendency of western feminists to homogenize and universalize the experiences of 'third world women', and in particular to portray them strictly as victims of various processes, whether that be imperialism, capitalism, or in my case, peacekeeping. As Mohanty writes: "...few studies have focused on women workers as subjects - as agents who make choices, have a critical perspective on their own situations, and think and organize collectively
against their oppressors." Thus I hoped also to learn, by going to Cambodia, of the ways in which women (and men) were involved in the UNTAC mission, whether acting 'in' or 'against' it.

The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) is cited by the UN and regarded by many mainstream observers as something of a success story for the UN. William Shawcross, speaking at the general assembly of the International NGO Forum on Cambodia called it an "international triumph" and UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has written that the "international community can take satisfaction from the peacekeeping operation it mounted and supported in Cambodia."

The success, achieved in an eighteen-month mission in Cambodia, included the reduction of violence, the repatriation of some 370,000 Khmer refugees, and the conduct of a relatively free and fair election in which some four million people, or 85 percent of Cambodia's registered voters participated. The UN claimed as well, again in the words of Boutros-Ghali, that the mission "boosted Cambodia's economy by raising funds internationally for economic rehabilitation and expansion throughout the country."

The UNTAC effort also achieved some important successes with regards to women within Cambodia. Most notably, the freedom of association which prevailed in many respects during UNTAC and the efforts of UNIFEM to incorporate women's issues into the general election resulted in public education and information campaigns in the print media and on radio and television. Additionally, a four-day National Women's Summit brought together Cambodian women from all sectors of society in order to identify and prioritize women's issues in order to lobby political parties contesting the election and then later the government itself. The Women's Summit has been credited with facilitating the emergence of an indigenous women's movement within Cambodia as
well as a number of indigenous women's NGOs, which in turn have been credited with a very effective lobby of the Cambodian government such that important equality rights provisions eventually made it into the new Cambodian constitution.24

Though UNTAC was considered a success in many respects, there are also some discussions of problems associated with the mission. For example, the UN failed to achieve a situation of political neutrality, as pledged in the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement, in part because the Khmer Rouge withdrew from the demobilisation and cantonment process and threatened throughout the mission to disrupt the election campaign.25 Likewise, the presence of UNTAC may have diminished, but did not stop political violence, which was aimed at both political party members and ethnic Vietnamese, resulting in a mass exodus of ethnic Vietnamese, many of whom were second and third - generation Cambodians.26

These are obviously very serious concerns, but there are also another series of issues which emerged throughout the UNTAC mission, and which are seldom discussed in UN documents or mainstream accounts of the mission. Though credited with helping to create the emergence of a fledgling women's movement as well as a number of women's NGOs, there were also a number of important negative consequences for women within Cambodia as a result of the UNTAC mission. These include the reported exponential increase in prostitution to serve UNTAC personnel, with the Cambodian Women's Development Association estimating that the number of prostitutes in Cambodia grew from about 6000 in 1992 to more than 25000 at the height of the mission.27 Some reports indicated that the majority of prostitutes were young Vietnamese women, though these estimates are more likely a result of anti-Vietnamese sentiment as any reflection of reality.28
While the presence of prostitutes was not new, and by many accounts frequenting prostitutes is a regular feature of many Cambodian men's behaviour, Cambodians were nonetheless alarmed by the dramatic increase in prostitution and noted that prior to UNTAC it was quite hidden in Cambodian society but became something which was very prevalent and open. The rise of child prostitution has also been linked in some NGO reports to the arrival of UNTAC. The widespread use of prostitutes was raised by the Khmer Rouge as part of their efforts to undermine the peace process when they accused peacekeepers of being too busy with prostitutes to check on the presence of Vietnamese soldiers. As Judy Ledgerwood wrote: "Some Cambodians were more inclined to believe Khmer Rouge propaganda that UNTAC was collaborating with the Vietnamese to colonize Cambodia when they saw UNTAC personnel taking Vietnamese 'wives'."

The influx of nearly 23,000 UN personnel and the dramatic rise in prostitution also appears to have resulted in a dramatic rise in cases of HIV and AIDS, with the WHO reporting that 75 percent of people giving blood in Phnom Penh were infected with HIV (though this is considered inflated by some observers) and another report indicating that 20 percent of soldiers in one French battalion tested positive when they finished their six month tour of duty. UNTAC's chief medical officer predicted that as many as six times more UN personnel would eventually die of AIDS contracted in Cambodia than had died as a result of hostile action.

As criticism toward UN personnel within Cambodia grew, a number of what Judy Ledgerwood describes as "telling" actions were announced. Peacekeepers were warned to be more discrete, for example by not parking their distinctive white vehicles outside massage parlours and in red light areas and by not frequenting brothels in uniform. A second response was to ship an additional 800,000 condoms to Cambodia.
In addition to prostitution, charges emerged also of sexual abuse and violence. Raoul Jennar reported that in 1993, "in the Preah Vihear hospital, there was for a time a majority of injured people who were young kids, the victims of sexual abuse by UN soldiers."37 A number of interviewees reported that there were frequent claims of rape and sexual assault brought to women's NGOs during the UNTAC period, but often many days or weeks after the rapes were alleged to have taken place such that the usual expectations surrounding evidence collection could not be carried out and therefore claims could not be substantiated to the satisfaction of UN officials.38

It is also a widely shared view among many Cambodian women and men that the phenomenon of 'false marriages' was widespread during the UNTAC period. Simply put, a UN soldier would marry a Cambodian woman, but only for the duration of his posting to Cambodia, at which point he would abandon her. Some women were reported to have been abandoned as far away as Bangkok, and left to their own devices to make their ways home. In addition to the emotional trauma of false marriages, they were enormously 'shameful' for women in a society, which as in most societies, has very strict norms about what is appropriate behaviour in 'good' women.39

In part as a response to the sexual harassment which prevailed during UNTAC, an open letter was delivered to the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative in Cambodia, Mr. Yasushi Akashi. In the letter, 165 Cambodian and expatriate women and men accused some UNTAC personnel of sexual harassment and assault, violence against women and against prostitutes and of being responsible for the dramatic rise of prostitution and HIV/AIDS.40 Mr. Akashi responded by saying that it was natural for hot-blooded young soldiers who had endured the rigours of the field to want to have a few beers and to chase "young beautiful beings of the opposite sex."41 After an
outraged response, Akashi pledged to assign a Community Relations officer to hear the complaints of the Cambodian community.\textsuperscript{42}

Finally, and in contrast to the claims by Boutros-Ghali about UNTAC contributions to economic development in Cambodia, the UNTAC mission has been blamed instead for economic dislocation. Grant Curtis reports that with skyrocketing inflation the price of a kilogram of high quality rice rose from 450 riels to a high of 3,000 riels, and settled eventually at some 1800 - 2000 riels; the price of fish and meat rose by 80 per cent; housing rental prices increased at least four times and UNTAC personnel often paid Phnom Penh-based rents at the provincial level, resulting in increases there also. UNTAC did contribute somewhat by hiring locals, but also drew most of the few trained or experienced Khmer away from Cambodian administrative structures and into UNTAC, and salary payments to local staff comprised less than one percent of total local expenditure. Finally, the riel was devalued by 70 percent during UNTAC.\textsuperscript{43} In situations of economic dislocation and inflation, the most vulnerable members of society become even more vulnerable still, and within Cambodia women comprise a large proportion of the vulnerable.

The Argument

The ways in which critical and feminist approaches to international relations have opened up "what counts" in IR permitted me to ask a series of questions about peacekeeping that are rarely posed within the mainstream literature.\textsuperscript{44} Talking to women and men, to activists, and to people who lived through the UNTAC mission means we can untangle and challenge depictions of peacekeeping as a straightforward "success" by shifting our gaze and reflecting upon the lived experience of people in Cambodia during UNTAC.
This kind of analysis has a series of implications. For one, it permits activists and progressive academics in both 'contributor' and 'host' countries to resist the almost homogeneous depictions of peacekeeping as a self-evidently positive military activity. It allows us to challenge what has become through peacekeeping the re-assertion of militaries and militarism in only slightly altered guise. It seeks to make visible the enormously complex circuits of power which are entailed in any security mission, whether it is an invasion or peacekeeping deployment, and reminds us that the politics of peacekeeping concerns as much thinking through the politics of gender, race and class relations as it does UN finances, the implementation of peace treaties or chains of command.

While there are, then, important insights to be gained by this kind of research, actually "conducting" the research to make these claims led me to reflect upon the extent to which we have not begun to problematize doing research in a way that is consistent with political, ethical and theoretical commitments to which we lay claim by being "critical" or "feminist" International Relations scholars. What do we do as researchers in countries such as Cambodia? What is the worst-case scenario?45 We parachute in to a very poor country and we are probably carrying around our waist or otherwise hidden in pockets distributed throughout our clothing (because we are afraid) four or five times as much money as the average local person makes in a year. We live cheaply, but we can still afford the best of what is available, and so live well. Having lived cheaply, we receive the added benefit of praise from our university's financial administrators when we return home because of our economic efficiencies. We ask people for their time and their stories which we take away (we steal them), write up in a language 'we' (but not necessarily 'they') understand, in a manner that serves 'our' (but not necessarily 'their') research interests and political agendas. After we write up their
stories, we become famous, or at the very least get tenure, promotion, more money, a book contract, and so on.

Whereas some anthropologists and sociologists (especially but not exclusively feminist anthropologists and sociologists) have begun to debate the political and ethical implications of conducting research in such situations, there is relatively little such debate or concern raised within IR. There is, for one, far less of a tradition of 'fieldwork' (itself a contentious term) in IR, and to the extent that there is, this has usually entailed interviews with elite decision-makers. This lack of debate is true of mainstream IR, but also of critical and feminist work. While this does not mean that the dilemmas of conducting research go entirely unremarked, for example Cynthia Enloe notes the importance of the women we research speaking for themselves, and Simona Sharoni problematizes the political and ethical dilemmas of being both an insider and outsider in her own work on women in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; but, there is little in the way of a sustained discussion of the various ways to acknowledge and to negotiate some of the dilemmas of actually doing this.

In some cases the debates in anthropology and sociology suggest that because of the numerous concerns and issues surrounding fieldwork, anthropologists and sociologists should "study up", i.e. reject the discipline-defining practice of conducting research on the "primitive" or "exotic" 'other' and instead study those who have power rather than those who have relatively less power. But this provides no solution to the feminist or critical IR researcher, because to the extent to which we have studied people in IR at all, we have generally "studied up" - whether it has been presidents, secretaries of defence, chief executive officers or venture capitalists. This response is thus not very helpful in a discipline which is only just beginning to discover that there are marginalized groups
and peoples in the world who are as much a part of world politics as, for example, the President of the United States or the chief executive officer of a multinational corporation.

So what can be done? Debates in anthropology have looked to empowering research subjects; participatory research; breaking down positivism's distinction between subject and object, co-authorships with the researcher/researched, and so on. But such responses have also been subject to critiques, with many asking how effective they are. Some writers such as Judith Stacey have observed that the breakdown of the distinction between researcher and researched and the pursuit of more empathetic research techniques could, in some ways, be even more exploitative, such as when a feminist researcher becomes 'friends' with the women she is researching. Under such circumstances, she notes, the friend/research subject may reveal far more than they would have otherwise; far more than they may 'want' to reveal, as a result of the greater intimacy that has been established.

Some researchers offer to 'give back' to local women's organizations, providing time, skills and services to pay back for the time and effort those researched have give up and taken away from their own work. But there is some consensus that such contributions are ultimately transitory, and no matter what a researcher contributes to the researched, the researcher still has enormous power, not least of which is 'to leave', to go home. The same concern is raised around co-authorships, which while giving voice to the researched, does not address the problems of inequality in terms of mobility; nor do they usually address the problem of the researcher's power to determine the purpose of the research in the first place and the "reception" of that research once it has been published and distributed. It is, after all, the researcher who gives voice, has the power to give or take away, and remains the centre of power and the project.
Some researchers have devoted energies, in both their research and writing, to try to locate themselves, to acknowledge the researcher as a positioned subject just as much as the researched, in order to avoid the problems of assuming the researcher has a stable, fixed and unproblematic identity while the researched does not. But again, cautions are noted, and Daphne Patai has observed that paying respect to difference without actually changing the research ends up sounding empty and apologist.\textsuperscript{52}

This account of the various dilemmas posed by conducting research is by no means exhaustive, and is intended only to highlight a number of the concerns and the ways in which they are being debated by feminist anthropologists and sociologists. Because of the depth and seeming intractibility of the dilemmas posed, some have suggested that the appropriate recourse is not to engage in such research at all, to withdraw because it is so deeply problematic. If conducting research - even apparently 'progressive' research - always reproduces an us/them, researcher/researched dichotomy, is the only, or appropriate, response a nihilist one? Margery Wolf notes that such a response is as politically irresponsible as not thinking through these questions at all, for it leaves all research to the non-feminist and non-critical researchers who have gone before and who will continue to conduct their work, uninformed by any sense of the importance of an emancipatory politics and largely unconcerned by the relations of power and domination in which they are involved through their research activities.\textsuperscript{53}

Suggesting that we withdraw from conducting research because it is problematic also reveals a great deal about what we, as critical or feminist IR scholars, "expect" from the research enterprise. It suggests that we expect to feel comfortable, are on a "quest for rapport and unconditional acceptance,"\textsuperscript{54} and presume that feminist or critically-informed research exists somehow above or
beyond the lived material reality in which we find ourselves. It suggests a response which in the end refuses to take seriously the words by Daphne Patai with which this chapter opened: "Self-reflexivity does not change reality. It does not redistribute income, gain political rights for the powerless, create housing for the homeless, or improve health." And it deprives us of the most important insight which can be gained from conducting critical or feminist research in IR - we are as implicated in prevailing relations of power and domination as our mainstream predecessors, and because we view ourselves as oppositional and critical, we are in many ways less prepared to view ourselves in those terms than are they.

This means making more complicated the circuits of power with which we are engaged, and including in that our own practices as researchers (and writers) as much as our particular subject matters. It means seeing these as integrally related, and politicizing and historicizing, as Caren Kaplan writes, "the relations of exchange that govern literacy, the production and marketing of texts, the politics of editing and distribution, and so on." More important still, it means again in Kaplan's words, turning the terms of inquiry "from desiring, inviting and granting space to others to becoming accountable for one's own investments in cultural metaphors and values." Accountability will never mean that we can rest comfortably with our role as researchers and writers, but it can mean extending our critical concerns beyond the questions we ask to include the politics of how we ask - and answer - them.

Conclusions

The argument in this chapter has been that critical and feminist IR scholars, while they have opened up what counts as the study of international relations, have not begun to think carefully about the politics of conducting research on groups of people with relatively less power and privileges than
ourselves. We have noted how the subject is implicated in the object of study, but only as we begin to give substance to those kinds of claims have we come face to face with the material lived reality of what that means. The debates and suggestions by feminist anthropologists and sociologists suggest some practical ways of thinking through these dilemmas, but it is important to underline the extent to which these responses will always remain, at best, partial. Indeed, they must. The invisibilities and silences of which we accuse mainstream theorists will too quickly become our own if we do not soon engage in a sustained discussion of the practical, and political, implications confronting us in the conduct of critical and feminist research in IR.

End Notes

1. The author is grateful to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for financial assistance received in support of this project.


5. I am grateful to Liz Philipose for this formulation.

7. Neufeld, p. 33. See also Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski, "Introduction," in International Theory: Positivism and Beyond, p. 6 and .


18. The next several pages are drawn from my "Gender, Race and Peacekeeping," pp. 177-181.

19. Cited from R.M. Jennar, 'UNTAC: "International Triumph" in Cambodia?", Security Dialogue, Vol. 25(2) 1994, p. 145. See also Judy L. Ledgerwood, 'UN Peacekeeping Missions: The Lessons from Cambodia,' Analysis from the East-West Center No. 11, (Honolulu: East-West Center, March 1994); Heininger, Peacekeeping in Transition, pp. 1-8. Peter Utting also notes the way in which 'world opinion has been quick to label the United Nations operation in Cambodia `a success!', and contrasts that view with the research presented in his volume on the social consequences of UNTAC. See Peter Utting, 'Introduction: Linking Peace and Rehabilitation in Cambodia,' in Utting Between Hope and Insecurity, p. 3 and passim.


24. Interviews, Phnom Penh, March/April, 1996. Another way in which UNTAC was cited as having contributed in a positive way to women's lives concerned domestic violence: the Project Against
Domestic Violence in Phnom Penh reported that in a context where few cases of domestic violence are ever reported to authorities and fewer still are prosecuted, one provincial judge described the only criminal case of domestic violence she had ever presided over as one in which UNTAC officers had brought in a man caught beating his wife in a marketplace, (Cathy Zimmerman, Sar Samen and Men Savorn, 'Plates in a Basket Will Rattle: Domestic Violence in Cambodia,' (Phnom Penh: Asia Foundation, 1994), p. 140 fn. 99 and pp. 137-142.


28. Jon Swain, 'UN losing battle for Cambodia in the brothels of Phnom Penh,' Sunday Times, December 27, 1992; Asian Recorder, May 21 - 27, 1993, 23144. Indeed, the Cambodian Women's Development Association indicated in 1994 that the majority of prostitutes working in the Toul Kork area of Phnom Penh were likely Cambodian, (Cambodian Women's Development Association, "Prostitution Survey Results," 1994), and interviewees in Phnom Penh indicated to the
author that the ethnic origin of prostitutes in Cambodia has always varied, depending on the location of the brothels.

29. Interviews, Phnom Penh, March/April, 1996.


31. Swain, 'UN losing battle for Cambodia in the brothels of Phnom Penh.'


33. Swain, "UN losing battle for Cambodia in the brothels of Phnom Penh," and Asian Recorder, February 5 - 11, 1993, 22903. Most observers note that while UNTAC was not responsible for bringing HIV and AIDS to Cambodia, it did contribute to its spread.

34. Katrina Peach, 'HIV threatens to claim UNTAC's highest casualties,' Phnom Penh Post, October 22 - November 4, 1993, p. 4.


40. 'An Open Letter to Yasushi Akashi,' Phnom Penh Post, October 11, 1992, p. 2; 'Allegations of sexual harassment hit U.N.

41. Sara Colm, 'U.N. Agrees to Address Sexual Harassment Issue,' Phnom Penh Post, October 11, 1992, p. 1; Swain, 'UN losing battle for Cambodia in the brothels of Phnom Penh.'


44. It is worth noting that while the mainstream literature might ignore these kinds of questions, the account described here comes as little surprise to local activists, NGOs, etc.

45. Though this account reflects in part my own experiences, thinking through these experiences and trying to organize them has been much inspired by Diane L. Wolf, "Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork," which covers these issues in far more detail than I do here.


51. Though her observation is made in a different context, I take this point from Kaplan, "The Politics of Location," p. 142.

52. cf Wolf, "Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork," p. 35.


54. Though she uses this to refer to research on travel, not the research process itself, I have borrowed this from Kaplan, "The Politics of Location," p. 150.
