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MAKING A BETTER WORLD: THE FEMININE TOUCH

ABSTRAKT

Moje refleksje koncentrują się na zagadnieniu wpływu kobiet na stosunki międzynarodowe i kształtu polityki światowej. Te zjawiska są analizowane zbyt rzadko w odniesieniu do roli kobiety, jeśli zaś już się tak dzieje, dotykana jest zaledwie wierzchnia powłoka tego zjawiska. Bez wątpienia stopień skomplikowania współczesnych trendów oraz tendencji długoterminowych jakie możemy obecnie obserwować w dziedzinie stosunków międzynarodowych wymaga rzetelnych badań w tym zakresie. Być może my same, kobiety zajmujące się nauką, nie jesteśmy świadome ogromnego wpływu jaki kobiecy „geniusz” wywiera na świat polityki międzynarodowej.

Poniższy artykuł jest próbą wyjścia na przeciw tak zdiagnozowanym potrzebom. W szczególności skupia się on na trzech pytaniach: Po pierwsze zastanawia się w jaki sposób relacyjna natura kobiety wpływa na świat stosunków międzynarodowych. Po drugie stara się zdiagnozować naturę i kierunek zmian zaindukowanych pod wpływem kobiet – zarówno na poziomie akademickich teorii, jak i w praktyce codziennej. Na koniec zaś, artykuł stara się znaleźć odpowiedź na pytanie jak w świetle powyższych ustaleń powinny wyglądać rekomendacje na przyszłość.

Słowa kluczowe: kobiety, stosunki międzynarodowe, zmiana paradygmatu, feminizm, równowaga płci

ABSTRACT

My reflections are focused on the issue of women's impact in the realm of international relations and world politics. These dimensions are discussed far too rarely in reference to the role of women and if so, majority of the analyses merely touches upon the surface of this phenomenon. Undeniably, the complexity of contemporary trends and long-term tendencies calls for more research in the area. Perhaps ourselves, the women of academia, we are not aware of the profound impingement of the feminine element on the world of international affairs.

In order to counter these tendencies, the paper ponders three questions in particular: The first one asks how the relational nature of a woman influences the realm of international relations. The second raises the issue of the nature and direction of an evolution observable in the realm of world politics both in theory and in practice. And finally, basing on obtained answers, I should like to question some possible recommendations for the future.

Keywords: women, international relations, paradigm shift, feminism, gender balance

All good papers should start with a great quote. Following this recipe let us begin by evoking the words that should be the motto of our reflections:

Thank you, women who work! You are present and active in every area of life —social, economic, cultural, artistic and political. In this way you make an indispensable contribution to the establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity. [John Paul II, 1995:2]

These words were written by St. John Paul II in 1995 and despite being 20 years old, they have not lost their prophetic nature and remain a potent call to action. Firstly, they point to the fact that the ‘feminine touch’ is not limited to the realm of family life and secondly, they indicate it as a crucial element of ‘making a better world’ or in pope’s words, world ‘more worthy of humanity’.

Thus, taking these words as my guiding light I shall focus my short reflections on the issue of women’s impact in the realm of international relations and world politics. These dimensions are discussed far too rarely in reference to the role of women and if so, majority of the analyses merely touches upon the surface of this phenomenon. Usually, it is only acknowledged that “*women have contributed to that history as much as men and, more often than not, they did so in much more difficult conditions*” [John Paul II, 1995: 3]. Such conclusion, while undeniably right, is not sufficient to comprehend complexity of this phenomenon. Perhaps ourselves, the women of academia, we are not aware of the profound impingement of the feminine element on the world of international affairs.

In order to counter these tendencies, I would like to invite us to ponder three questions in particular. The first one asks how the relational nature of a woman influences the realm of international relations (IR). The second raises the issue of the nature and direction of an evolution observable in the realm of world politics both in theory and in practice. And finally, basing on obtained answers, I should like to question some possible recommendations for the future.

Woman and international relations

It is not without a reason that I started with a quote from John Paul II. It is he who conceptualised new feminism, based on a deep understanding of woman’s dignity [Glendon, 1997; Gawkowska, 2008]. According to John Paul II [1988], inherent dignity shapes the nature of every woman, and informs their actions. This nature is ‘relational’ and by this we should understand the desire to love and be loved. In “*Mulieris dignitatem*” (30) John Paul II formulated these ideas in the following way: “A woman's dignity is closely connected with the love which she receives by the very reason of her femininity; it is likewise connected with the love which she gives in return.” Aneta Gawkowska [2008] wrote that when a woman acts upon her own nature and in accordance with it, she offers certain relational sensitivity to the world. At the same time she enhances the relational elements in her milieu, in proximate environment, and in people who surround her. If we agree to this elegantly explained argument, there is no basis to assume that these precepts should only be applied to the personal or professional sphere of human relations. Indeed, it is only natural that they are extended onto all the dimensions and circumstances that await the manifestation of that ‘genius’ which, according to John Paul II, belongs solely to women. Therefore, one should also look at the realm of international relations through the lenses

of the relational nature of women. Indeed, even the common semantic core indicates how indispensable women are in this sphere.

When we look at history it becomes obvious that women rarely occupied positions of power in the polity. Majority of women were neither visible nor active in international politics. The highest pinnacle of political struggle, i.e. war, through centuries have represented the highest aspirations of the male members of societies. Until today the provision of national security in most states continues to be the almost exclusive province of the male. To the contrary, “women’s work traditionally include life-shaping responsibilities of caring labour: giving birth to and caring for children, protecting and sustaining ill, frail or other dependents, maintaining households, and fostering and protecting kin, village, and neighbourhood relations” [Cohn and Ruddick, 2004: 460]. J. Anne Tickner [in Mingst and Snyder, 2008: 118] observed that women have been “defined as those whom the state and its men are protecting” but with a little real influence on the means or dimensions of such protection. Consequently, while masculinity was celebrated, femininity has been marginalised in the discourse of international politics and it has been argued that such polarisation was caused by the fact that women have always rather been preoccupied with child rearing rather than warfare.

Such perception of women in international realm is also rooted in the fact that reproductive activities require an environment that can provide for the survival of infants and behaviour that is interactive and nurturing. Thus, a gendered narrative of international affairs led to imagery where men were associated with war and competition, women we symbols of peace and reconciliation. The images of masculine militarism could be juxtaposed with feminine drive to actively oppose war and replace military conflicts with practices of nonviolent contest and reconciliation. While this paper is far from suggesting that no woman ever supported, underwrote or participated in “politics by other means”, to use von Clausewitz’s definition of war, it suggests that by their nature women are agents of peace and cooperation in international relations, inspiring, initiating and effectuating several changes both theoretical (if we conceive IR as an academic discipline) and practical (if we understand international relations as daily praxis).

The feminine touch

Firstly let us examine contributions of women scholars to the field of IR understood as an academic discipline and then investigate how the female ‘genius’ enriched international relations in the sphere of daily praxis.

On the theoretical level, women academics have highlighted the partial representation of IR and world politics that excludes experiences of women. This animadversion gave rise to the whole new branch of IR feminist theory introducing a gendered perspective to the field. Novelty of such analyses included deconstruction of some the fundamental ideas in International Relations as well as widening and deepening its understanding due to introduction of peace and conflict studies, racial politics, politics of sexuality, non-traditional security, and gender politics.

Ramifications of this evolution are perhaps the most visible when we look at the concept of ‘security’. Traditionally security has been understood in reference to the state as the main object of analysis, and in terms of freedom from violence. Tickner [1992: 124] emphasizes that “women’s definitions of security are multilevel and multidimensional”. The new refined understanding of security proposes to depart from the state-centrist approach that is too narrow and increasingly less relevant at a time when major wars are declining and threats to political, economic, social, and environmental dimensions are gaining prominence. Most importantly, the

normative component of femalescholarship has a strong focus on a transformative element that aims at reducing global inequality and injustice pertaining to both men and women. The perspectives offered by female scholars constitute an essential and a novel departure point to examine the existing power relations both within and outside the discipline. Furthermore, they also provide alternative viewpoints as opposed to the traditional discourse.

Among the most influential women in the academia one should mention works by scholars like J. Ann Tickner [1988: 429-440], Cynthia Enloe [1990], Mary Kaldor [1997, 1999], Jean Bethke Elshtain [1993], V. Peterson Spike [1992], and Carol Cohn [1987], to name a few who expanded the scope and quality of conceptual debates in international relations. A re-examination of concepts such as sovereignty, power, security, violence, anarchy, economic development, and violence constitutes the core challenge, as well as the primary contribution, of women scholars within the discipline. In this regard, Helen Milner's work on anarchy [1991], Hannah Arendt's re-conceptualisation of power, Marysia Zalewski's and Jane Parpart's [1997] examination of how masculinities are implicated in international relations theories and practices, and Anuradha Chenoy's [2010] approach to the issue of militarism are few of the various contributions which have left a huge impression on the field. Numerous female scholars, for instance Elise Boulding, helped to establish and expand Peace Studies, a sisterly academic discipline founded in the post-1945 milieu. Also in security studies and terrorism studies the conventional wisdom has been complimented by insightful contributions of women scholars now recognized as canonical writers in the field. Suffice to mention texts by Martha Crenshaw [1981], Louise Richardson [2007] or Jessica Stern [2004].

When women scholars engage with traditional issues in international relations like war and peace, instead of affirming the conventional logic through which these problems are addressed, they strive to innovate on the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological tools through which one can understand these matters. Hence, re-conceptualization of certain major debates and challenging the foundational claims of IR (or, at least, their ontological revision) has been the most natural and important response to widen and deepen the scope of the discipline. This is illustrated by an advent of normative theories (liberalism, idealism, critical approaches) that purport to eliminate violence from the world rather than to analyse it. It is more frequent to find a female scholar attempting to elucidate the way the world ought to be instead of explaining the ways and modes of international relations.

Women scholars have remained at the margins of the discipline, a trend which has started undergoing a reversal only recently; especially among young academics female voices are numerous and pronounced. However, as noted by Daniel Maliniak [2008: 123], "women are still second-class citizens within the IR profession" with only two female academics, Martha Fennimore and J. Ann Tickner, present on the list of 25 scholars who have made the maximum impact in the field.

At the same time, while the feminine touch is delicate and quite recent, its impact is incontrovertible and can be called a paradigm shift. Over last five seven decades, the changes that occurred in the international realm were numerous and complex. It would be a folly to ascribe this evolution entirely to the relational nature of women. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the increasing presence of the feminine 'genius' contributed greatly to three main developments in international relations: the shift from war to peace as the state of nature; widening of the international system, and deepening our understanding of what comprises the international realm.

Relational international relations

Given the fact that the first chair in IR was established at the University of Aberystwyth only in the year 1919, it is still considered as a young academic discipline. Simultaneously, it is a discipline of paramount importance because it was founded with the one aim: to prevent war from ever happening again. Yet, from the Greeks as portrayed by the Thucydides to Niccolò Machiavelli, from Thomas Hobbes to Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz, the international relations were nearly exclusively a realm inspired by the experiences of armed conflicts. Indeed, many thinkers and practitioners throughout the ages agreed that war is a 'state of nature' in the international realm.

The world of international relations was traditionally portrayed as consisting of unitary, self-interested actors, i.e. states, pursuing a strategy of gaining power for dealing with other states under anarchy, that is the absence of any ultimate power and authority over them. With no higher structure of power, states were supposed to be structurally insecure which rendered military strength the most vital kind of power. In a result, power was understood to be the key to the international political system [Waltz, 1979].

Consequently, the question of power and violence has been dominating international relations in the past. Already in 416 B.C. Thucydides succinctly summed up this regularity in the famous Melian Dialogue whereby the strong Athenian forces were explaining to the weak Melians that 'the might makes right'. Athenians claimed that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" [Thucydides, V: 89]. This situation did not result from ill will or unnecessary cruelty on the part of the Athenians, but rather it was happening "by a necessary law of ... nature". Athenians claim that "it is not as if we were the first to make this law, or to act upon it when made: we found it existing before us, and shall leave it to exist for ever after us; all we do is to make use of it, knowing that you and everybody else, having the same power as we have, would do the same as we do" [Thucydides, V: 105]. When Hobbes described the state of nature as chaos and violence rendering man's life "nasty, brutish and short", he verbalised an idea that was believed to be true and embedded in the very fibre of the human soul. But human nature as diagnosed by Hobbes does not subscribe to the feminine 'relational' genius; rather it reflects the conflictual masculine side of humanity.

Nonetheless, for centuries the realm of international relations was a world where violence and fear were at the foundation of security and stability, and the relatively short intervals of peace were an exception to the rule of war. With time, the claim of inherently conflictual human nature was challenged and then refuted. This marked a point of departure from the realist thinking that rivalry, conflict and insecurity make the true cooperation impossible or at least rare. Transnational organisations have been created to safeguard international peace whereas effective international law and permanently binding treaties that have been implemented. Rich liberalist tradition appeared, promoting multilateral institutions plus related arrangements of such as networks of rules and patterns of accepted behaviour commonly referred to as the international regimes.

These developments allowed for broadening the realm of international relations. While states and societies retain significant autonomy and sovereignty, numerous non-state actors like governmental and non-governmental international organisations, multinational corporations, transnational humanitarian agencies, and the plethora of grass-root social movements are signs of

emerging and consolidating international civil society. Growing interdependence also enhances the relational, as opposed to the conflictual, dimension of world affairs.

In the past national and international agendas were preoccupied with security issues, war and peace, nuclear deterrence, summit diplomacy, arms control and proliferations, coercion and alliance politics, whereas low politics, encompassing everything that was not related to war was considered as second or third category issues. Starting in the late 1980s, and certainly after the end of the Cold War, the distinction between high and low politics began to disintegrate and non-traditional issues were given salience. The new forms of transnational management mentioned above called global attention to issues like women's rights, environmental protection, transnational crime, social and economic injustice and weaved them into the fabric of international affairs. This shift helped to initiate the responses of international community to these transnational problems and challenges. Particularly the issues of deep and enduring inequalities in the global distribution of wealth and economic powers, and the environmental constraints exacerbating the effects of human activity on the ecosystem gained prominence among theorists and practitioners of IR.

In addition to including new spheres, outside of military power, into the realm of international relations, our understanding of the system increased also vertically. This development was partially built on a recognition that peace is not a simple absence of war, as Spinoza proposed, partially however it was structurally determined. This is so because the globalised world is a multipolar entity with no dominant power state and therefore it enhances pluralistic security community where members are sovereign and do not fear each other [Adler and Barnett, 1998].

Contemporary notion of security recognizes it as interdependent, in other words, relational. Redefinition of the concepts of international system and security were vital for challenging the assumption that someone's security is necessarily built on insecurity of the others. What is more, the human-centric approach, arguing that humans not states are and should be the referent objects of international relations, begin to replace the traditional state-centric theories. This shows how application of the relational nature of woman onto the international level allows us for achieving shared self-definitions and creating internalised norms that enable people from different countries to know each other better and thus respond more effectively to common concerns.

Conclusions and recommendations

One can argue that the feminine touch helped to close the gender gap between the conflictual and the cooperative behaviour, between the coercive domination and the interdependence seeking partnership, between the drive for hegemony and the idea of collective security embedded in international law and organisations. Indeed, when we look at the realm of international relations we need to concede that this feminine 'genius' was for a long time a missing variable. This bases on a premise that when a woman acts upon her own nature and in accordance with it, she enhances the relational elements in her milieu, in proximate environment and in people who surround her. Therefore, one should also look at the progress in the realm of international relations through the lenses of the relational nature of women.

While this paper is far from suggesting that all the developments in international relations were directly caused by women, it proposes to link some of the recent changes with the feminine

‘genius’ active both theoretical (if we conceive IR as an academic discipline) and practical (if we understand international relations as daily praxis).

In the academia we have witnessed a boom of peace studies, conflict resolution studies, but also feminist theories which had introduced a gendered perspective to the field and influenced the way international policy is thought and written about. Most importantly, the normative component of femalescholarship has a strong focus on a transformative element that aims at reducing global inequality and injustice. This has exacerbated widening and deepening its understanding of international relations also due to path-breaking conceptual, theoretical, and methodological tools applied by female scholars through which one can re-conceptualise its fundamental problems.

In the sphere of practice it can be argued that the increasing presence of the feminine ‘genius’ contributed greatly to three main developments in international relations: the shift from war to peace as the state of nature; widening of the international system, and deepening our understanding of what comprises the international realm.

Firstly, opening up the international arena to women resulted with a world where peace is a norm and conflict is a deviation and anomaly which should be avoided at all cost. Secondly, once the claim of inherently conflictual human nature was challenged and then refuted, international relations became more relational horizontally as well as vertically. The realm of international affairs widened to encompass also spheres outside political and military issues. Numerous non-state actors like governmental and non-governmental international organisations, multinational corporations, transnational humanitarian agencies and the plethora of grass-root social movements have increasing role in the international system. Simultaneously, the dawn of new framework, underpinned by international law and treaties rather by brute force, means also the advance of new practices: peacebuilding missions, peacekeeping missions, rule of law, human rights – all of this, so familiar and obvious for us is in fact an evolution in world affairs, or a revolution in the way of approaching them. Finally, the departure from the times of war with intermittent intervals of peace to the reality of world peace with intervals of conflict, and a resignation from treating the state as a referent object enabled the shift from hegemony to pluralist security community. The concept of security communities hinges on the idea that it is necessary to combine efforts in order to strengthen security by acting together. Such approach also fostered the evolution towards the human security concept. This is the relational female ‘genius’ transcending international realm; it should be further strengthened and enhanced around the globe.

The voices in international relations are still overwhelmingly male because the traditional analytical frameworks and approaches are still prevalent. While the conceptual frameworks favoured by women tend to be more focused on conflict resolution, peace studies, sustainable development and gendered perspectives, they do not constitute the academic mainstream. Jill Steans reminds us that “International Relations has been described as crudely patriarchal discourse”. It is even more true remark when it comes to practice. The question of woman having an important place in the international landscape of world politics has been neglected. While there were numerous women who spoke and acted since the early years of twentieth century for a more secure and sustainable world order from Jane Addams and Eleanor Roosevelt to Shirin Ebadi and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, they are still too few. Whereas movements like Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom founded in 1915 in order to protest against World

War I are of paramount importance, we need more female politicians, female leaders, and activists in the international realm. Their role is pivotal when it comes to integration of all the elements which can be nurtured and enriched only by the feminine 'genius' and infused into various spheres of international relations like peacekeeping, management of refugees, post-conflict disarmament and reintegration or protection for non-combatants in times of armed conflicts.

Yet, the signs of increasing importance of gender sensitivity on all fronts of world affairs should also serve as a reminder that feminisation of IR could be as dangerous as marginalisation of the feminine. Gender balance in the international realm is the desired ideal we should strive for. Again, we need to invoke Gawkowska's admonition that the leading characteristic of new feminism is its anthropological and practical complementarity. Everything that renders the idea of female 'genius' important, can be translated into practice only through cooperation and in relational reciprocity; never through antagonising the genders. In all the areas discussed above, a greater presence of women in the international realm will prove most valuable when working in unison with the male counterpart, for it will help to mitigate the contradictions present when the world is organized solely according to the criteria of conflict, competition and domination.

For this reason while this paper calls for more women in the international realm, it does not recommend complete feminisation. This is where I distance myself from those strands of feminist thought that strive to denigrate and marginalise the masculine elements in IR as if trying to compensate the decades of marginalisation that women had suffered before. Relational nature of women and their ability to nurture peace and foster reconciliation is not meant to perpetuate the discord but, to the contrary, underline all the shortages which only women can answer to. It is not to say that the world has become a rosy place. To the contrary, but what has been achieved could not have been achieved without women.

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