

# *Gender Violence And Hegemonic Projects*

## INTRODUCTION

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### Abstract

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This essay introduces the Special Issue theme, gender violence and hegemonic projects. We discuss why re-thinking the relationship between gender violence and hegemonic projects is important for feminist theory and activism. Moving beyond the narrow, representational approach to 'violence against women', we argue that the hegemonic projects of the state are constituted through gender violence. Rather than an effect of power, gender violence is thus instrumental to the very operations and existence of hegemonic projects. We insert the contributing essays within this framework, elucidating their examination of three key issues: (1) how hegemonic discourses operate through gendered violence; (2) how dominant political institutions, ideas and discourses determine what 'counts' as gender violence; and (3) how responses to gender violence engage metanarratives about gender, race, class and nation/state, both resisting and sustaining hegemonic projects.

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### Keywords

hegemony, gender violence, power, the state

## INTRODUCTION

With this collection of essays, our goal is to push the boundaries of predominant conceptualizations of and research on gender violence. Building on the theoretical work of feminists who have examined gender as a 'site of violence' and exposed the gendered and racialized dynamics of state and international politics, foreign policy and conflict, we consider the ways that hegemonic projects of the state enact, produce and require gender violence. We do not treat gender violence as only an example or effect of domination but rather as

a critical theoretical category that constitutes and is constituted by power relationships. As such, we grapple with the core concepts of feminist international relations (IR) theories – hegemony, the state, power, violence and gender.

In our conversations about the Special Issue, we have been particularly concerned with challenging the common scholarly and activist practice of delimiting the concept of gender violence in terms of ‘violence against women’. We assert that such an approach, while progressive in certain contexts, not only (unintentionally) narrows the experiences and implications of gender violence but also has problematic consequences for feminist IR theories and for activism. It may lead to the failure to interrogate gender violence itself, specifically the ways in which gender and violence mutually constitute each other and are implicated in the constitution of hegemonic projects. Thus, we want to ensure that in our discussions of gender violence and hegemonic projects there is a place for questions about the very *naming* of certain acts as forms of gender violence, given our assertion that processes of naming and categorization are possibly intertwined with and/or enable modes of domination. Furthermore, we want to consider how categories of difference such as sexuality, gender, race and nationality are produced and/or reinscribed through practices (including the naming) of gender violence or in resistance to it. In keeping these kinds of considerations at the center of our interrogation of gender violence, we want also to expose the way in which advancing particular categories for political ends may unwittingly help to sustain hegemonic projects, including within the discipline of IR.

In connection with thinking about what gender violence is, we also consider whether the violence against women approach circumscribes our understandings of power. If we see this type of domination only as an effect of power, we may miss observing the ways that gender violence constitutes power. We want to theorize gender violence in an analytically different way, one involving a rethinking of the nature of power. Our aim is to break open the very category of gender violence and consider how the hegemonic projects of the state are in effect constituted through practices of gender violence. We can look at this dynamic from the context of the practices and discourses of, and possibly silences around, gender violence as well as the discourses and activism that challenge gender violence.

The ideas put forward in this introduction are meant as a point of departure for future work as well as providing a broad framework for the articles in the Special Issue. Specifically, the essays address the militarized conflict between British forces and Northern Ireland, Russia’s post-Soviet state-building and ensuing conflict in Chechnya, global capitalism and the European categorization of citizenship, US foreign policy and liberal feminist organizations and, finally, challenges to neoliberalism in Argentina. The articles focus on the following key issues: (1) how hegemonic discourses of neoliberalism, masculinity, feminism, citizenship, borders and the state operate through gendered violence; (2) how dominant political institutions, ideas and discourses

determine what 'counts' as gender violence; and (3) how responses to gender violence engage metanarratives about gender, race, class and nation/state, both resisting and sustaining hegemonic projects.

In what follows, we explore the innovative ways the articles deal with each of these three issues. But first we explicate below the conceptual framework of 'gender violence and hegemonic projects' in more detail. Specifically, we outline the definitions of and relationship between gender violence and hegemonic projects. In this first section, we show how our theoretical framework builds upon but is distinct from two sets of literatures: (1) predominant conceptualizations/literatures of gender violence as 'violence against women'; and (2) feminist IR literature that addresses gender and violence but principally within the mainstream IR focus on war and conflict. Further, we draw most closely upon a third category of literature: feminist work, including post-colonial and critical race theories, that more explicitly examines the kinds of questions, such as the concurrent constitution of power and gender, we are proposing in this Special Issue.

## GENDER VIOLENCE AND HEGEMONIC PROJECTS

For the purposes of this project, we define gender violence as systematic, institutionalized and/or programmatic violence (sexual, physical, psychological) that operates through the constructs of gender and often at the intersection of sexuality, race and national identity. Gender violence comprises the acts and practices that systematically target a person, group or community in order to dictate what 'men' and 'women' are supposed to be and to discipline marginalized communities or any other perceived threats to dominant political structures and practices. In addition, we fundamentally conceive of 'gender violence' as a contested concept that may only represent *specific* practices and experiences. While certain behaviors or practices are commonly associated with gender violence (such as violence against some women) we do not claim that it is a 'ready' category. It is not a static or non-normative category particularly since *naming* certain experiences/practices as examples of gender violence may in fact delimit those experiences. We want to de-naturalize the category of gender violence to show how dominant representations are imbricated in national and global politics and exist at the intersections of racial, class and international politics.

Similarly, in the context of this Special Issue, we understand hegemonic projects as constituted through systematic power relationships that privilege certain ways of knowing, being and acting and that give voice to only certain people's experiences and agendas in the realm of families, communities and political entities. The processes, practices and discourses that demarcate a hegemonic project are not homogeneous, uncontested or settled. Because sociopolitical forces of actors participate in normalizing power relationships they can potentially pose different ways of knowing, being and acting that

could rupture and reshape those relationships. Thus, hegemonic projects are not free-floating monolithic phenomena but rather contextually specific and historically produced, defining the realm of political possibilities.

We situate our understanding of hegemony within the context of critical theorists such as Roxanne Doty (1996) and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001). As distinct from narrow (neo)realist understandings of hegemony as a preponderance of resources or Gramscian understandings of how the ruling class maintains its position of power, these critical theorists see hegemony as the discursive linkage of particular ideas (Doty 1996: 8):

The hegemonic dimension of global politics is inextricably linked to representational practices . . . Hegemony involves the very production of categories of identity and the society of which they are a part. Hegemonic practices . . . seek to create the fixedness of meaning that . . . is ultimately impossible.

For example, current hegemonic practices of neoliberalism and neocolonialism circumscribe what democracy and rights are supposed to look like in terms of their appropriate forms and definitions, the legitimate actions taken in the name of democracy and rights as well as the parameters of justice and political participation. In this way, hegemonic actors (political elites and privileged activists for example) deflect criticism by feigning neutrality or ubiquity and, as we argue, require and shape discourses and practices of gender violence. While there may be identifiable actors, this does not mean that domination is sufficiently challenged by 'cutting off the oppressor's head' because of how domination is imbricated in interpersonal, local, global, cultural, economic and social dynamics. As noted above, gender violence accomplishes certain things and fixes particular meanings and practices. Given that hegemonic projects also attempt to create a particular world of meaning and being, both gender violence and hegemonic projects can help each other 'succeed'.

Although it is not only the epistemic that generates hegemonic projects, we pay particular attention in this Special Issue to the hegemonic projects of 'the state'. We do not conceive of the state as an actor but rather as an idea or what Pierre Bourdieu (1994) calls a 'bureaucratic field' that wields symbolic power and centralizes power. It is possible that the principal hegemonic project of the modern world is the project of 'the state'. Our predominant focus on the state as a hegemonic project, then, is not to affirm state-centrism but to acknowledge that the state is still a central organizing political category of our lives. The politics of opposition, categories of identity and contemporary forms of domination work through the state in many ways. Our focus is on hegemonic projects – such as economic development (and its proxy neoliberalism), women's rights activism, nation-building and national security – that are implicitly executed in the name of 'the state'.

These issues of gender, violence and power have been dealt with to some extent in feminist IR scholarship on the issues of gender, violence and power. Whereas traditional IR theory often views power as an ability to

leverage material resources to get others to do what is not in their interests, feminists have exposed the gendered context of power thereby revealing more nuanced dimensions of hegemonic projects such as nationalism, militarism and globalization. The militarization of daily life when states promote military apparatuses as the solution for stability, security and development, the use of rape as a tool of war and the disproportionate effects of violence on particular women are three examples of a gendered conception of power (Enloe 2000; Jacobs, Jacobson and Marchbank 2000; Giles and Hyndman 2004). Feminist understandings of power have also exposed how gender is used to legitimize the operations of hegemonic projects. One example is the use of gendered conceptions of 'protecting family and nation' to promote military operations; another is the gender hierarchy that grounds, enables or cements the separation of public and private spheres (Peterson and Runyan 1998).

While the issue of gender violence is indeed more prominent now because of the growth of feminist IR theory, we want to push for a further examination of the constitutive role gender violence plays in hegemonic projects. The scholarship on gender violence in IR certainly shows how hegemonic projects, such as nationalism or war, are deeply gendered and thus result in violence against women. But, while this vantage point is critical and often gets at the construction of gender, this framework generally only sees gender violence as primarily an example of hegemonic projects – one effect of power through the register of gender, rather than as contested, productive and coterminous with power. If we, as feminist theorists, respond to the obsessive focus on war in the mainstream IR field by documenting power relationships in terms of 'Man' over 'Woman'/State over Citizen, we may inadvertently reaffirm understandings of violence as a 'tool' for particular goals of power.

We acknowledge that power itself is an understudied political concept, particularly regarding the multiple and layered forms that it takes. It would be easy to set up the realist, masculinist conceptualization of power as a 'straw-person' against which to posit the importance of feminist scholarship. However, we are pushing for feminist intervention in various discussions of power, whether it takes the form of compulsory control over others, indirect control via institutions and rules, structural 'constitution of social capacities and interests of actors in direct relation', particularly in terms of 'producing social positions of capital and labor', or 'the socially diffuse production of subjectivity in systems of meaning and signification' (Barnett and Duvall 2005: 3–4). Therefore, building on the work of feminist challenges to traditional IR views on power and of feminist scholarship on the gendered effects and production of various forms of power, we seek more nuanced understandings on this topic through the examination of the relationship between hegemony, gender and violence.

It is often the case that the very contours of what constitutes gender violence in feminist IR scholarship are drawn by the issue of 'violence against women'. Keck and Sikkink (1998) rightly explain how a transnational advocacy

network actively developed the 'violence against women' frame, coalescing several campaigns worldwide into a platform that gets at the politics of pain which disproportionately targets women. The approach has raised awareness, galvanized support, given rise to much professional and political activity and enabled women's groups to secure funding. But these political goals may have been secured at a certain cost. In the first place, the 'violence against women' approach relies on representational understandings of gender violence. In other words, the focus on violence against women also potentially ignores violence against men and against groups in ways that are gendered, raced and internationalized. For example, feminist IR scholars invoke the presumably disproportionate targeting of women during conflict in ways that emphasize particular gendered effects of conflict and the masculinized state; the general effect is the lack of due attention to what it means to 'make' gender through violence or to the way codes of masculinity negatively affect men.

Second, we also note that responses to gender violence, in many ways more so than any other political category, have sanctified racism, imperialism and Orientalism among feminists and critical theorists. For example, the obsession with 'Islamism' as the explanation *par excellence* for gender troubles around the world as well as the romanticization and infantilization of indigenous and/or marginalized women, belie feminist concerns about hierarchy (Nayak 2006; Shepherd 2006). Feminists participate in these problematic discussions about gender violence when we presume that the only reason a woman may die elsewhere is because of her (monolithically) oppressive culture in contrast to the choices and freedom of women in the West.

Ironically, it may be such limited understandings of gender violence that unintentionally keep the topic of gender on the sidelines of political science. If gender violence is just an effect of power and does not substantively contribute to how we understand the operations of power, then the issues that gender violence raises may be dismissed as 'women's issues' rather than instrumental to knowledge in political science. This dynamic also increases the ghettoization of feminist IR scholarship and scholars (cf. Weber 1994).<sup>1</sup> The current lacuna in IR scholarship on hegemony as well as on gender violence is not accidental but rather signals the production of knowledge in this field. Work on gender violence is not predominant in political science or the IR field precisely because it is conceived as 'just' violence against women. In other words, in order to further our understandings of violence, we must interrogate gender violence as constitutive of power, and to understand power, we must go beyond current understandings that see 'it' in terms of tools or phenomena that act on gender. And, as we do so, we simultaneously ask *why* the questions we examine in this Special Issue are left on the margins of scholarship.

Thus, we come to the following: why does our argument that gender violence is more than a case study of the effects of hegemony and, rather, is constitutive of hegemonic projects, matter? By re-orienting the relationship between gender violence and hegemonic projects we challenge the 'naturalness' of the category of gender violence and assert it as constitutive of the

productive forces of hegemonic projects. This framework provides a fresh and critical approach to understanding hegemonic projects and the construction of difference(s). We reference the work of postcolonial and critical race feminists who explain how neocolonial and neoimperial state formations are productive of and reliant upon gendered and racialized conceptualizations of citizens, immigrants and of 'us/them' dichotomies (McClintock 1995; Chatterjee and Jeganathan 2000; Stoler 2002). Postcolonial theory also explains how a fixation on violence 'over there' sidesteps how power works via international hierarchy (Chowdhry and Nair 2002). Similarly, we also believe that gender violence, rather than simply a result of war or culture, is vital and pivotal to the possibility of political violence and hegemony in the first place. Recent critical feminist engagements with international political economy (IPE) have also shown how the exploitation of women, and particularly women of color, is not simply an unintended consequence of global capitalism. Rather, the advancement of global capitalism under the dominant ideological rationale of neoliberalism *depends* on women's secondary gendered status and global class hierarchy (Mies 1998; Peterson 2003; Agathangelou 2004). Drawing on these important literatures, we seek with this Special Issue to push the connections between gender violence and hegemonic projects beyond the 'effects of power' view towards an understanding that places the constitutive function of gender violence at the forefront.

## GENDER VIOLENCE AND HEGEMONIC PROJECTS: LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

In the light of this elaboration of our theoretical framework, three broad themes are clearly evident in the contributors' explication of gender violence and hegemonic projects in the Special Issue. As discussed previously, these key issues include: (1) how hegemonic discourses operate through gendered violence; (2) the politics of naming gender violence; and (3) how counter-hegemonic responses to gender violence can both resist and sustain hegemonic projects.

### Gender Violence Makes Hegemony Possible

We want first to examine what the articles have to say about how hegemonic projects are made possible through practices of gendered violence. In other words, what can they tell us about the ways in which discourses and practices of the state rely upon gender violence in order to enact and wield power? Three pieces in particular highlight this relationship in interestingly different ways.

First, Maya Eichler shows the centrality of gender to the Russian state's policy of war and to citizens' responses. Both Yeltsin and Putin used the wars in Chechnya to advance a notion of a militarized, patriotic and strong

Russian state. Eichler argues that one can see the wars as a strategy of legitimation and that the association between war and state legitimacy is made possible through gendered constructions of militarized masculinity and patriotic motherhood. An economically and politically humiliated post-Soviet Russian state invoked a discourse of fear that validated repressive tactics, bombing campaigns and the coding of Chechens as Islamic terrorists. Eichler explains that '[t]he Russian leadership's use of war relied on the construction of, and association with, the idea of militarized, ordered, patriotic Russian masculinity and opposition, to the notion of a racialized, aggressive, anarchical, criminal Chechen masculinity' (p. 491). The violence of the war *allowed* Russia to continue on its path to resurrect itself despite a separatist movement that belied its self-proclaimed hegemonic power. This view of gendered violence as a key component of state and nation-building challenges the literature in post-Soviet studies.

Eichler proves that post-Soviet transformation is a gendered process – and one that is not 'simply a process of re-masculinization and the concomitant re-domestication of women' (p. 503). Most importantly for this Special Issue, her analysis details the link between hegemonic projects and gendered and racialized violence through the example of the failure of Russia's leadership to draw on those connections. Because the Russian leadership was unsuccessful in fully convincing the public of the necessity of war, the essay also addresses the fact that 'the state' is a fragile and contested field and thus uses violence to normalize its power.

Kartik Varada Raj draws upon implicit forms of violence, some of which are rarely cast within the framework of 'gender violence' but which we would argue are clearly implicated in the structural forms of gendered and racialized violence experienced by migrants, immigrants and refugees due to the state's hegemonic project of producing borders (cf. Campbell 1992).<sup>2</sup> As such, this essay is important in challenging readers to think through feminist theory in radical ways and to re-examine the usual understandings of violence. Raj uses the site of the Sangatte refugee detention center and the *sans-papiers* [without papers] movement in Europe to develop an analysis of how 'the border' and the people who inhabit it 'constitute paradoxically the very conditions of possibility for any hegemonic state order' (p. 514). Raj engages Marxist and feminist theories with the intended goal of advancing understandings of borders as places of violence that produce hegemonic projects as well as what he believes is the radical subjectivity of the bodies who inhabit borders.

Borders require violence 'both delicately structural and brutally overt' (p. 514) against liminal political figures, such as refugees-in-transit, thus enabling the production of the state and the circulation of global capital. While refugees seem to be a threat to state-making, the violent marking of non-citizen and non-place is what allows the state to define its literal and figurative borders. The kind of violence Raj highlights includes the symbolic instances of self-inflicted violence, such as that of Azad-Hasan, a young Kurd who sewed his lips together in response to the conditions in Sangatte.



Clearly pushing the boundaries of how we understand the various practices of violence that operate within hegemony, Raj asserts (p. 522):

... this kind of delicate structural violence – some of it inflicted by self-harm – along with the daily brute violence of the authorities and other players, such as people-smugglers and xenophobic thugs, all form part of a pattern of a racialized violence emanating from the hysteric reaction of the state and capital to disobedient new subjects.

Gender violence, as conceived above, does not always translate directly into an empirically recognizable set of behaviors and practices. Rather, as Raj shows, hegemonic projects racialize bodies in ways that reveal masculinist anxiety and the gendered violence of hegemony itself.

While Raj focuses on a European example, his work offers more of a theoretical contemplation on borders and subjectivity than a singular case study of European border politics. As such, we see his piece in conversation with the work of European, South Asian and Latina/Chicana ‘border theorists’ who articulate and politicize from a feminist perspective the ‘place’ of the border that women of color often inhabit.<sup>3</sup> While coming from very different theoretical and political sensibilities, these scholars expose borders in their ability to discipline and categorize bodies but also in their radical potential as a ‘transitional space’ for new forms of consciousness and the decolonization of history and identity (Pérez 1999).

Both Raj and Theresa O’Keefe want to push the boundaries of how scholarship treats different forms of violence as they constitute hegemonic projects. In terms of understanding violence, activist-scholars including Andrea Smith and Dorothy Roberts have interrogated the relationship between violence, gender and race (Roberts 1997; Smith 2002). Through her work with INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, Smith provocatively argues that gender violence within Native/indigenous communities should not be thought of or addressed outside of the history of genocide and the hegemonic projects of US imperialism and racism. Without naturalizing or isolating ‘violence against women’, Smith shows how various forms of violence – whether interpersonal such as domestic violence or national such as the forced sterilization of Native/indigenous women – are in different ways constitutive of the hegemonic projects of the state.

Similarly, O’Keefe articulates menstruation as a critical issue regarding gender violence. O’Keefe draws out the specific ways that hegemonic masculinity is intimately connected with social beliefs and attitudes towards women’s ability to menstruate. Her essay explains how the British state and its special forces in the North of Ireland used republican women’s menstruation as a means to humiliate and abuse women and their families during ‘fact-finding’ missions (unexpected raids on domestic spaces) and then later within prisons. The fear and shame that both British and Irish societies hold towards the ‘dirty’ act of menstruation was interwoven in the tactics used to

punish the political opposition presented by republican women. O'Keefe details the various ways (including strip-searches requiring women to expose blood soaked sanitary napkins) in which the British state relied upon gender violence in order to control and punish republican sectarianism.

More than just a simple tool, O'Keefe claims exploiting shame and insults based on social norms regarding menstruation was instrumental to the operations and logic of the British state's response to republican assertions for independence. As she asserts (p. 546):

To make women remove their sanitary pads when visiting political prisoners served as another way to humiliate and punish the republican community. As much as women's bodies offer an enticing target of state-sponsored sectarianism and punishment, women's ability to menstruate in fact heightens the value of such punishment.

The practices of humiliation – as a means of exerting state power – were not possible without the *fact* of menstruation and the differences and meanings denoted by that fact. Furthermore, the use of social stigmas around menstruation by British forces was successful in making difference seem 'natural'. In effect, the urgent need to use gender violence in order to *be*, is demonstrated powerfully in O'Keefe's work.

### Naming Gender Violence

We want next to examine what the articles have to tell us about the processes that determine what gets to 'count' as gender violence. There is no essential definition of what constitutes gender violence outside of the socio-political and legal discourses that give a *name* to it. Similarly, feminists have challenged the narrowing of the concept of reproductive rights to an exclusive focus on the legal right to abortion. Some have argued that the process of naming certain issues and concerns with the label 'reproductive rights' is tied to only particular women's (namely, middle-class Anglo women) bodies, health and rights, and has marginalized and silenced the experiences of many other women (Silliman *et al.* 2004). The limited understanding of reproductive rights *as* the right to choose in the US, for example, has precluded a reconceptualization of reproductive rights through the lens of intersectionality. Unless we incorporate a comprehension of the history of the forced sterilization of Native/indigenous and immigrant women, the testing of contraception on poor women of color, or the battle for reproductive health-care for all women, articulations of 'reproductive rights' will be incomplete. And this is not only the case in the US but relevant on an international scale regarding funding agencies and transnational advocacy groups. In advancing 'reproductive rights' from a narrow perspective, feminist activists may unwittingly perpetuate forms of domination. In a similar way, we are pushing for careful attention to the categorization of gender violence as crucial to interrogating its consequences as well as resistance to it.

Equally as important as the politics behind the emergence of categories, is the fact that the voices given to the experiences of gender violence can continue to be entangled in hegemonic projects. It is necessary to examine specifically what constitutes and who controls the usage of the concept of gender violence. The policy, activist and scholarly debate surrounding female genital surgeries is a recent example of the politics of representation in relation to categories of gender violence (Grewal and Kaplan 1996; Gunning 1998). The ideas and voices that ultimately represent and often homogenize those experiences, while ignoring others (such as sexual reassignment surgeries), are important for understanding why and how representation occurs and why these attendant social, ethical and political practices persist. Ann Russo's essay interrogates a clear example of the pernicious effects of wielding the category of gender violence for the cause of freedom and women's rights. By inciting the spectacle of the Taliban regime's treatment of women, the Bush administration was able to tap into a kind of mythic concern for 'women's rights' in Afghanistan. Oblivious to the underlying politics feeding US foreign policy towards Afghan women, the Feminist Majority Campaign's program to 'Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan' quickly aligned with and reinforced the Orientalist discourses of the US government and media. In this way, the category of gender violence knowingly and unknowingly was used in, and became crucial to, constructing a de-politicized and ahistorical context that US troops and feminists must 'save' and 'liberate'.

Russo's work explicitly engages with a number of feminists who have examined what gets named as gender oppression and how the category of gender is marshaled to protect Western feminists' power (Mohanty 1986; Narayan 1997). In the case of Afghanistan, we particularly draw attention to the argument of Valentine Moghadam (2002) that Afghan women only received international solidarity and support for their work fighting for rights at the end of the Cold War, despite the fact that they had been active for the entire twentieth century. In congruence with US foreign policy and the dictates of Cold War ideology, international feminists did not 'discover' Afghan women (and as objects, never as subjects) until 1996, during the Taliban era. These feminists based their activism on misunderstandings and ignorance about the context and history of Afghanistan. Specifically, they have perpetuated and reified rather than challenged and critiqued the categories of 'Woman' and 'Other'.

Russo and the others illustrate a deep awareness of the empowerment potential *and* dangers inherent in the politics of framing and naming, but Amy Risley's essay most directly analyzes why and how social actors politicize violence. Her work shows how there is nothing 'natural' to the recognition of gender violence. In the context of Argentina, Risley argues that class-based interpretations of violence often eclipse gendered understandings – a phenomenon she calls a 'gender gap'. She explains that 'prevailing discourses within civil society have linked violence to two hegemonic projects that disproportionately affect Argentina's popular classes' (p. 584). Social movement actors rely on the frames of police brutality and the structural violence of neoliberal economics

to politicize forms of violence in their country. The ensuing interrogation of counter-hegemonic resistance, if the hegemonic project is perceived to be an oppressive state apparatus and economic system, reveals that gender violence is not self-evident as an important mobilizing force for activists even when there is a history of feminist activity, as there is in Latin America.

Although the term gender violence itself reveals a history of concerted activism to enumerate such violations, Risley's piece illustrates our assertion that gender is not to be acted upon but rather serves as a site for the articulation of power. Risley more directly connects gender violence with particular practices that are regularly understood in transnational activist circles as 'violence against women', but she is careful not to conflate 'gender' and 'woman'. Instead, she asks why activists would neglect how hegemonic actors 'make' gender by disproportionately attacking women and/or marginalized communities in ways that discipline sexual difference.

Risley's essay also exhibits why it is important to theorize the category of gender violence in relationship to local and transnational lenses. As she explains, while there has been a gendering of international and regional discourses on violence, in the specific context of Argentina it is clear that 'domestic actors are not merely passive recipients of "foreign" ideas or importers of pre-packaged discourses from abroad' (p. 585). For example, activists have drawn clear parallels between past forms of violence (such as police brutality during the Pinochet regime) and present forms of violence (such as the marginalization of the poor in 'neoliberal Argentina' [p. 590]). This suggests that indigenous ideas and experiences can diverge from the predominant framing strategies of transnational and international actors. In this way, context matters for understanding why and how violence gets politicized. At the same time, Risley addresses the potential negative implications of 'under-gendering' discourses on violence in Argentina. For example, what precludes activists from adopting a more synthetic approach to understanding violence that takes class and gender seriously? One possible implication of 'under-gendering' violence is that activists could inadvertently perpetuate the process of 'privatizing' social relations that critics of neoliberalism have tried to combat. The private-public dichotomy that may inhibit the recognition of gendered understandings of violence vis-à-vis police brutality and neoliberalism in Argentina ultimately is integral to the hegemonic projects of police brutality and neoliberalism. As such, by deflecting or resisting gender, activists may perpetuate some of the operations of those hegemonic projects. This dynamic exposes the contested and political nature of framing devices or political categories.

### Counter Hegemonic Resistance

Finally, we turn to the ways in which the articles show, in very different and surprising respects, how resistance can remake the relationship between

gender, violence and hegemony. When resistance to violence is the lynchpin of political actors' existence, movement or agenda, it is all the more crucial to interrogate what is at stake for those actors. Raj and Eichler demonstrate that hegemonic projects are always fragile despite (because of?) their intimate relationship with violence, thus opening space for a resistance to hegemony through the resistance to violence. Thus, echoing feminist theorists who have cautioned against treating patriarchy as an overarching, monolithically oppressive, unified edifice, we note that the recognition of hegemony's gender violence is simultaneously a recognition of hegemony's fractures and weaknesses (cf. Heberle 1996). At the same time, however, as just outlined, Risley highlights how resistance can foreclose issues, such as gender violence, that are actually at the heart of hegemonic projects, thereby compelling us to question why certain topics are not politicized. But Russo's work interrogates a much more insidious and deceptive element of resistance: the cooptation of gender violence for the purposes of legitimizing one's own hegemonic position.

As noted above, the Feminist Majority Campaign, according to Russo, has failed in its resistance to the gender violence Afghani women suffer because it has failed to understand and resist US hegemonic power vis-à-vis Afghanistan, the US role in supporting the main perpetrators of the violence and historical evidence of US implicit and explicit endorsement of gender violence (here and around the world) in the service of hegemony. Russo's piece leaves the reader with a difficult question: does the Feminist Majority Campaign exhibit such problematic politics because it is unaware of, or because it benefits from, US hegemony? On the one hand, Russo notes that Orientalist discourses are so deeply ingrained as a part of US state identity that many US feminists can invoke freedom and democracy for women 'elsewhere' without the least bit of ironic self reflection. Indeed, the '[Feminist Majority] Campaign is produced in and through the discourses of contemporary US imperialism' (p. 561). On the other hand, the obsession with the *burqa*, rather than with the severe effects of drought, oil plunderers, the Cold War or the US war machine and foreign policy, indicates an unwillingness (not just inability) to understand the context of Afghani life. Indeed, as Russo seems to suggest, it is easier, less complicated and more politically expedient for the Feminist Majority to sidestep an interrogation of the war on terror or the history of US imperialistic violence in favour of packaging the entire situation as an issue of the 'right to choose' one's dress and of inexplicable, barbaric, Islamic fundamentalist persecution.

Importantly, Russo's work pulls together recent scholarship (including Agathangelou and Ling 2004; Butler 2004; Shepherd 2006; Nayak 2006) that examines how hegemonic actors deflect and distort criticism by explicitly invoking concern about gender violence. Thus, those who address gender violence in the same way as the hegemonic actor, are actually supporting and endorsing the hegemonic project even if they are resisting gender violence itself. Resistance movements and organizations, without careful and thorough

interrogation of power, often leave undisturbed those power relations even as they attempt to address gender violence. In effect, resistance becomes about saving one's own antagonistic relation to the Other.

Raj, O'Keefe and Eichler offer insight into the transformative potential of resistance. They illustrate that resistance should politicize how power works rather than conceive of oppression as merely the dominant *acting upon* and affecting the dominated. Further, just as hegemony does not simply act upon gender, as outlined above, resistance does not simply act upon the powerful. Rather, the very interaction between various actors participating in or affected by hegemonic projects changes the dynamics of the power relationship itself.

From the 'non-place' of the border, Raj sees the radical potential for collective counter-hegemonic action. While 'the border', a liminal and constantly changing place or space, is critical to state power, for the bodies that inhabit that space it may also be a *position* from which to counter the state and capital's authority. Drawing closely from feminist theory, the essay carefully develops a view of political subjectivity that wields 'the border' to the potential advantage of those who are forced to embody them. Looking specifically at the *sans-papiers* movement, Raj asserts that (p. 527):

... those on the borders, who are forced into the paradoxical position of *being* borders can make demands precisely for citizenship or belonging (*appartenance*), but they can do so in a subversive manner that is fully aware that the citizenship and rights discourses deployed by the capitalist state only serve to re-subordinate those already categorized as 'the border'.

This vision of 'the border' challenges contemporary Marxist thinking for its romanticization of the migrant and provides a more nuanced view of 'the border' as paradoxical – as a place of everyday violence and space for potential radical political subjectivity. Importantly, Raj notes (p. 523):

The *sans-papiers*, while always subverting the order of the state that requires him or her to have papers to be recognized as a person, makes claims on the state. The *sans-papiers*, while forced to inhabit the intolerable conditions of exclusion at the border imposed by the order of state and capital, acts from this position to subvert the very order that turns him or her into an included exclusion.

The content of this subversion cannot be completely detailed as it is constantly occurring (in the midst of backlash and retaliatory violence) at multiple marginal locations around the world; however, we can take Raj's essay as a starting point to begin recognizing how targeted people respond to structures of oppression.

Raj articulates, as mentioned above, the exposure and revelations of the state hegemonic project as never completed and thus not as strong as it projects itself to be. For O'Keefe, the power of menstruation is double-sided – in acting as a

constitutive part of the British state's repressive policy towards the North of Ireland, republican women also used menstruation in an effort to challenge the hegemonic project of the British state and the overall masculinized character of the conflict. Indeed, the subversive use of menstruation is crucial as it is the very symbol, as constructed by the British state and by the patriarchal context, of women's impurities, unwieldy power, weakness, threat – the very instrument of war, humiliation and violent discipline. O'Keefe illustrates that if a hegemonic project needs gender violence in order to exist, in order to confer reality to a power hierarchy by denying bodily integrity, then it is possible to start chipping at the power relations by reclaiming 'control over their own bodies' (p. 551) and by using the very method of violence against the oppressors.

As another example, Eichler finds that the attempts by Yeltsin and Putin to draw on war's legitimacy have had limited success, in part because of a crisis in militarized masculinity and in part because of the challenges of patriotic motherhood. She explains that the link between masculinity and the military has weakened due to the military's overall loss of social legitimacy. The violent practices associated with *dedovshchina* ('rule of the grandfathers'), which severely punish new conscripts, have led to draft evasion and a decline in social trust in the military. Class identities associated with the introduction of a market economy have also produced new conceptualizations of masculinity that are entirely outside of the military. The new '*biznesman*' can evade the draft and still maintain his masculinity. At the same time, conceptualizations of patriotic motherhood have also changed. In the past, the trope of the patriotic mother legitimized militarized masculinity. But, as Eichler shows using the example of the Committee of Soldiers Mothers, 'the soldiers' mothers have challenged the state's justification of war by offering a different interpretation of the threat facing Russia' (p. 657). This civil society group uses the age-old trope of 'soldiers' mothers' to challenge state policies and conceptualization of proper motherhood/femininity. What salience do the concepts of masculinity and soldiers' mothers have once the hegemonic project is revealed to be flawed, cracked and impotent? Will the gendered dynamics of violence and militarism and their fundamental linkage to belonging, nationalism and identity be questioned or rethought? Eichler seems to suggest that the relationship between these concepts is not always seamless and is open to radical negotiation.

## CONCLUSION

If hegemony works as spectacle, but more importantly as a set of practices that come to assume meaning in people's everyday lives (that is, the ways in which ordinary people do the work of the state and the work of war), then all spaces carry the potential for corruptibility. (Alexander 2005: 5)

We have tried to demonstrate that if we do not more deeply interrogate the issues discussed thus far, we unwittingly allow the state to seep into our

everyday lives and thus, as Jacqui Alexander warns, do the work of the state and undermine our own critical efforts to resist hegemony and to create alternative practices that are just. We anticipate that our framework will challenge future scholars and activists to continue to think differently and creatively about the relationship between gender violence and hegemonic projects. Our goal has been to bring together ideas and literatures that have not been fully in dialogue with each other, thus really advancing how we understand violence, power and difference. What emerges from this Introduction is each author's clear engagement with a rich diversity of literatures and political struggles. We anticipate that these essays will not be read as a collection of case studies but as careful contemplations on the difficult concepts articulated here. Finally, we hope that this issue will engender sustained conversations about feminist scholarship and activism – the kind of uncomfortable, jarring and intimate conversations that are required in this political moment.

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## Notes

- 1 Weber's 1994 piece famously critiqued Robert Keohane's disciplining assessment of feminist international relations scholarship. She notes that his understanding of feminism within a positivist framework only results in categorizing feminists as 'good girls' (standpoint feminists, to be 'allowed' if they leave rationalist empiricism intact), 'little girls' (empirical feminists, to be tolerated or neglected) or 'bad girls' (postmodern feminists, to be perceived as threats if they challenge the fundamental epistemological, ontological and methodological *foundations* of political science). Weber accordingly challenges the field to reflect on its relationship to feminism. As such, we believe that when feminists themselves fail to invigorate the discipline by interrogating the very concepts, at the 'heart' of political science, such as power, they risk being sidelined, neglected and belittled.



- 2 Campbell (1992) is relevant here because he examines how states *produce* danger in order to legitimize their existence and their exercise of power.
- 3 See for example Brah (1996), Menon and Bhasin (1998), Anzaldúa (1999), Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler (2002) and Behar (2003).

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