



J. Ann Tickner. *A Feminist Voyage through International Relations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 242 pp. \$27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-995126-0; \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-995124-6.

Reviewed by Elisabeth Prügl (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies)

Published on H-Diplo (August, 2014)

Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Feminist International Relations: J. Ann Tickner and the Making of a Field

J. Ann Tickner is one of the most visible scholars in the field of feminist International Relations (IR). Widely acknowledged as having contributed to the founding of the subfield with her seminal book *Gender in International Relations* (1992), she has helped introduce feminist approaches to the IR scholarly community, and has been recognized for her outstanding contributions by being elected president of the International Studies Association (ISA) in 2006. Thus, when Tickner appears with a new book, it is worth noting.

A Feminist Voyage through International Relations assembles a selection of Tickner's articles and book chapters since 1988 and definitely should not be missed. Those who have followed feminist IR will be familiar with many of the pieces presented here. But the book shines through its ensemble. Bringing together the different articles it shows the development of Tickner's thinking over time, her responses to burning issues in different time periods, and her reaction to critics and others that have engaged with her work. The book paints the trajectory of her thinking about gender in IR, which must be placed within the trajectory of the making of the field itself. With a beginning, a middle, and an end, the book makes for highly satisfying reading that captures core arguments and debates in feminist International Relations.

The book consists of three broad parts in addition to an introduction and a conclusion, with articles arranged in a loosely chronological fashion. The first part collects

Tickner's early programmatic interventions from 1988 to 2004, in which she argues the value of feminist insights for security and international political economy. The second part compiles three of her articles on methodology over a period of fifteen years, which spawned intense exchanges with IR scholars, both in the mainstream of the field and in the feminist subfield. The last part includes writings after the events of 9/11 and the U.S. reaction to these events, which led Tickner towards thinking about the valuing of otherness in its various forms in the field of International Relations and in international policy encounters. I provide a summary of the main insights from each section.

The feminist critiques of IR theory presented in the first part of the book are by now familiar, but it is interesting to see them summarized in the five pieces included here. They share a typical Tickner format: starting with a critique of mainstream concepts and categories, the argument moves to a reformulation from a feminist perspective. Concepts including power, security, peace, economic man, production, and globalization are all interrogated and criticized for their narrowness, abstractness, and one-sidedly masculine framing. Thus, why should power be understood only as domination and not also as emerging from cooperation? What is the value of conceptions of security that do not address the structural violence that those on the margins are exposed to every day and that have nothing to say about the ecological disas-

ters threatening survival on our planet? How is it possible to celebrate globalization without recognizing the way it feeds off women's exploited labor in light industry and in services?

What is particularly interesting about these articles is that they show the diverse theoretical influences that inform Tickner's critique. This makes it possible to situate her not only as a scholar of IR but as a scholar of gender studies. Her early pieces in particular were written at a time when radical feminists contributed exciting scholarship. Tickner's work is at its best when it draws on this scholarship: Evelyn Fox Keller's trenchant critique of masculinism in science, Carol Gilligan's theorizing around feminine relationality, and Carolyn Merchant's insightful analysis of masculinity in the relationship between science and nature. The critic's broad brush has tainted these writings with the stigma of essentialism. But this often has been at the expense of recognizing the subtlety of their arguments. Tickner understands the value of these writings and uses them to good effect, producing unique insights into the masculinism of IR theory.

I am a particular fan of Tickner's article on "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism," which first gained her notoriety and which is reprinted as the first chapter in this book. Drawing on the works of Keller and Gilligan, and interspersing some ideas from Hannah Arendt, Tickner weaves an intricate argument that critiques positivist ways of knowing as she reformulates core concepts in IR. At the basis of her critique and reformulation are insights into the relationality of identity formation and the struggle we all undergo to balance our masculine and feminine sides. Knowing, accordingly, is invariably gendered, and given the predominance of men in the field of International Relations, it is not surprising that IR theory is thoroughly biased towards a male point of view.

The second part of the book focuses on methodology, which has been an important concern for Tickner throughout her career. Since feminists tend to favor methodologies that are very different from mainstream IR, will they be able to make an impact on a field that is thoroughly masculinist? Will their critiques even be heard?

With her first article, published in *International Studies Quarterly* in 1997 ("You Just Don't Understand: Troubled Engagements between Feminists and IR Theorists"), Tickner throws down the gauntlet, launching a set of engagements on methodology with various scholars. A second article, published in *ISQ* eight years later, responds

to those who picked up the fight. The series of articles in this section outline well the different ontologies from which feminist research often starts and the epistemological divide between a mainstream IR seeking to put the discipline on a "scientific" basis and the post-positivist inclinations of IR feminists (p. 81). Tickner emphasizes that feminist IR is not simply about adding women to existing explanatory schemata, but that it explores gendered hierarchies in institutions and practices. Along with this, she provides a discussion of the meaning of gender, emphasizing the play of difference, the location of gender in symbols, structures and individuals, and the fact that gender operates to signify power.

Her second article in this section is styled as a response to Robert Keohane, one of Tickner's interlocutors, and develops four distinct features of feminist methodology. These include (1) asking feminist questions that often challenge core assumptions; (2) using women's experiences to design research that is useful for women; (3) reflexivity in the sense of problematizing the position of the researcher; and (4) seeking to produce emancipatory knowledge, i.e., knowledge that is not merely geared towards solving problems within existing power structures but that pushes towards transforming such structures. In providing this broad outline, Tickner is able to capture preoccupations shared by many in feminist IR without denying the diversity of their approaches.

In this article, Tickner also puts forward a strong statement about the problems with quantitative research, questioning in particular the limitations of data and the politics that go into their collection. Her continued critique of quantitative approaches has spawned considerable debate in feminist IR, in particular with self-identified feminists doing quantitative research for example on the relationship between gender equality and the likelihood to solve conflicts violently, or on the relationship between economic growth and women's human rights. Tickner recognizes that this kind of scholarship is more readily published in mainstream IR journals than work that takes a post-positivist feminist approach, which confirms the epistemological divide she has diagnosed. In the book's conclusion she acknowledges the value of quantitative work but remains skeptical regarding its ability to build a bridge to the kind of feminist approaches she has been at the center of developing. The issue remains unresolved as some feminist IR scholars have begun to part company with Tickner's relatively immobile position on the issue of quantitative research.

The third part of the book is entitled "Exploring Some

Contemporary Themes and New Directions. Three articles in this section broach 9/11, religion, and IR's understanding of its own history. The common theme here is difference: how to recognize and respect difference and how to generate possibilities for dialogues across difference. Gender still is a central preoccupation, but Tickner's concern now has shifted to encompass other forms of difference: religion, fundamentalisms, race, and the colonial history of IR. As she did for gender in her earlier work, she argues in these chapters for a shift in IR's ontology: the recognition that the foundations of the global order do not only lie in Westphalia, but in histories of imperialism, genocide, and dispossession; the need to understand religious worldviews as a part of international politics. Tickner is of course not the first to take up these issues; postcolonial studies have paved the way. But the strength of her writings lies in popularizing insights from a postcolonial perspective, in making them accessible to those who would not normally engage with postcolonial studies. Her feminist identification helps her make her arguments because it leads her to self-consciously seek knowledge from the position of those living at the margins, and it encourages her to look for and investigate silences and absences.

From her early writings Tickner has focused on conversations as a method, as a way of gaining insight and knowledge favored by feminists, but also as a goal in feminist engagements with mainstream IR. In the context of a world rent by violence across ethnic, racial, and religious difference, the theme of conversations and dialogue has decisively moved to the foreground. In her recent writings, Tickner repeatedly pleads for hermeneutic, reflexive, and dialogical methodologies (p. 148), which she is convinced are necessary in order to overcome the chasm that has developed between secular scientism and religious fundamentalisms.

There is an almost eerie change in ambition that accompanies Tickner's journey through IR. The feminist perspectives she develops in the 1990s are forward-looking and have the tone of a feminist utopia, in which

caring and reproductive labor is valued; security means the absence of economic, sexual, and military violence; power is understood as mutual enablement; people have a respectful relationship with nature; there is justice in the family; subsistence production is valued and the provision of basic needs emphasized; and in which states are less militaristic. This utopia seems both more radical and much further out of reach at a time when fundamentalists of all sort are eager to put women under control, when the United States has militarized the cause of gender equality, and when understandings of categorical otherness are jeopardizing people living with each other. Like many of those having dreamed a utopia of emancipation (including myself), Tickner has lowered her sights, pleading for an ability to engage, to talk as equals, and in a manner of respect. It is something she has long asked from IR theorists, an aspiration which she has learned is seriously hampered by the power of hegemonic knowledge structures (p. 183). But she continues to call on human reason nonetheless, recognizing the central importance of dialogue not only for better scholarship but also for finding a way to get along in a world of difference.

Where Tickner in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 could still criticize (Western?) governments for not making women's human rights part of their foreign policy (p. 145), the idea of putting gender equality on government agendas has become immensely more complicated. Indeed, all that may be left of feminist dreams of emancipation may be the dialogues that Tickner advocates for both our discipline and our world, dialogues that require openness including on the part of those speaking from hegemonic locations and including feminists to changing their understandings. It is a chastened position to arrive at after a heady journey, one that does not invalidate Tickner's many radical insights from the early days of her travels. It is indeed a new pragmatic location that reflects Tickner's savvy in continuing to show the relevance of feminist approaches to both the field and practice of international relations.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo>

Citation: Elisabeth Prügl. Review of Tickner, J. Ann, *A Feminist Voyage through International Relations*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. August, 2014.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=41672>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.