Introduction

Maria Stern and Ann E. Towns

Abstract This editorial introduction sets the stage for the subsequent chapters in the volume. The chapter begins with a discussion of the contradictory situation that feminist international relations scholarship is facing, a situation characterized both by great gains and by growing resistance. It then notes the transnational and global character of feminist knowledges and unpacks why a focus on Europe—as one location among many—is nonetheless warranted in this volume. The chapter subsequently turns to a discussion of the shared premises and questions that inform each contribution.

Keywords Feminist IR scholarship · Europe · Politics of location · Political economy of knowledge production

M. Stern (✉)

School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Göteborg, Sweden
e-mail: maria.stern@globalstudies.gu.se

A. E. Towns

Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Göteborg, Sweden
e-mail: ann.towns@gu.se

Feminist international relations (IR) scholarship has grown dramatically in the past three decades. Having emerged as a set of interventions from the disciplinary margins, the field of feminist IR is now thriving even in core venues, with a flagship journal devoted to feminist international relations (*International Feminist Journal of Politics*), a section at the International Studies Association (*Feminist Theory and Gender Studies*), a large presence in the form of panels and papers at all political science and international studies conferences, an increasing number of publications in top-ranked and even mainstream IR journals, as well as dedicated chapters in IR textbooks on gender or feminist approaches to IR. Today, there are very few questions in international relations that have not been examined from one feminist perspective or another. As a result, IR is a more diverse and inclusive discipline, providing a better understanding of just how pervasive gender is in international affairs. More than ever, it is now clear that research agendas that systematically ignore feminist insights at best provide partial answers and at worst distort how international relations operate.

That said, while feminist perspectives have indeed become established within IR, gender scholarship is facing new and intensifying challenges from currents critical of such work. These currents charge that feminist scholarship lacks scientific legitimacy, that gender analyses are so ideologically driven that they fail to pose questions open to empirical scrutiny, and that gender studies amount to little more than the pursuit of political and ideological ends under the guise of academic knowledge production. As an allegedly ideological and activist endeavor, the study of gender has no legitimate place at universities and is a waste of public resources, these critics contend. In many cases, such attacks come from actors outside of academia, ranging from critical editorials in major media outlets to (more unusual) government interventions, such as when the Hungarian government withdrew accreditation from gender studies programs in 2018. However, there is also a seemingly growing number of ‘anti-gender’ critics within academia.

The aim of this volume is to take stock of and critically engage feminist IR scholarship, but also to celebrate and defend this work. The volume does so because of the contradictory situation that feminist IR is facing, a situation characterized both by great gains and by growing resistance. The contributors to this volume are furthermore quite conscious of the global character of feminist scholarship. Feminist thought has a history of moving across national and other borders, of being translated from

one language to another, of being reinterpreted and reimagined, and of returning in new forms to places of presumable origin. Academic mobility and transnational collaborations have been integral to the development and vitality of feminist work, feminist IR included.

The focus of the volume is feminist IR scholarship produced in Europe. Much of that work was initially inspired in the late 1980s and early 1990s by US and UK scholarship that definitively carved space within IR for feminism and gender studies. Like other critical perspectives, feminist thought arrived a bit late to the party compared with other fields in the social sciences and humanities—a sluggishness which seems to be somehow written into the field in indelible ink, or at least in ink that requires much rubbing before it blurs and fades. Notwithstanding, pioneering feminist IR scholars firmly made their voices heard in a state-centric, “previously gender blind and theoretically abstract field” (Ackerly et al. 2006: 1). Early iterations of feminist IR focused on critically revisiting core concepts (such as the state, sovereignty, war, and security) and assumptions (such as the idea that the world is made up of potentially warring sovereign nation-states, and that this is the world that IR should/must study) from a perspective that took gender and indeed women seriously as belonging in and of IR. Many of those whose work can be credited with establishing “feminist IR” as a self-identified field; mode of theoretical and ontological critique and creativity; site of innovative methodologies; and source for noticing and exploring marginalized subjects, sites, and knowledges had their institutional homes in the US (e.g. Carol Cohn, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Cynthia Enloe, V. Spike Peterson, Christine Sylvester, Ann Tickner). Others came from academic departments in the UK (e.g. Sarah Brown, Jill Steans, Marysia Zalewski). This is not intended to be an exhaustive list or to suggest that feminist IR thought *originated* in the US/UK or even the Global North or West in some primary sense. Clearly, feminist insights relevant to IR have hailed from many different sites across the globe and from other areas of study, practice, and protest. Instead, we mention these scholars and their research foci both to signal that “feminist IR” was first articulated as a self-identified academic field in the US and UK and to signal how much feminist IR seems to have moved—temporally, spatially, theoretically, methodologically, and empirically—over the past c. 35 years. In 2021, it is clearer than ever that scholars whose work is labeled feminist IR are situated all around the globe and that feminist IR includes myriad

subjects, ranging from the materiality of stoves “that reduce rape” (Abdelnour and Saeed 2014) to the lived experiences of survivors of torture and sexual violence (Drumond 2019), as well as multiple ways of thinking, knowing, feeling, and being in the space of the international.

So, if feminist scholarship is inherently transnational, then why a volume on feminist IR in Europe? For one, the *TEIRT* series needs to include a volume on feminism—a series on the theoretical traditions of IR in Europe would be partial if it ignored the large body of feminist scholarship produced in Europe. Second, we see great value in the aim of the series editors to localize and situate IR scholarship. In bringing crucial attention to the politics of location in academic knowledge production, we hope both to contribute to more global conversations about international relations and IR (by presenting Europe as but one location where such knowledges are produced) and to interrogate where *within* Europe feminist IR tends to be produced, as “Europe” is not a coherent and given location. Our volume asks about the politics of location in as well as the international political economy of knowledge production: in what national and institutional settings is academic feminist scholarship in Europe produced; in what languages is this scholarship written and published; how might the national, institutional, and linguistic location help shape, set the terms for, and limit what kinds of questions are asked and the theoretical and epistemological approaches to addressing those questions? How does feminist IR scholarship transgress and unsettle any tidy notion of geographical location that would allow us to facilely categorize feminist IR scholarship as “European”? And how might coloniality have shaped and continue to shape the development of feminist IR, both in terms of what we recognize *as* feminist IR, as well as who we recognize as feminist IR scholars.

Our focus on Europe is but a start. While our volume has no comparative elements with other regions, it lays some groundwork and thus makes possible comparisons with mappings and analyses of feminist IR scholarship—or the seeming lack thereof—in other parts of the world. Indeed, we hope this volume will serve as a catalyst for similar studies of feminist IR in other regional contexts. To our knowledge, this is the only volume of this kind, and we are confident that it will be of great interest not only to feminist IR scholars around the world but also to the fields of international relations and gender studies more broadly.

These sort of mapping exercises are of course never innocent descriptions—they are always power-laden, partial, and generative of their own

silences. Such mappings reveal as much through what they do not include as through what they do. Through the different contributions to this volume, we have attempted to draw a broad picture of feminist IR in Europe. Such a picture emerges through many choices of inclusion and exclusion—choices that, if made differently, would have materialized in a different picture. The smaller body of feminist IR scholarship from scholars situated in Southern as well as Eastern Europe compared to that of scholars situated in the Northern countries or in the UK, for instance, gives us much pause for thought. Is this a *seeming* paucity, a result of the situatedness, academic networks, and language skills of our chapter authors? Would a different set of authors, with different networks and more language skills beyond English, German and the Scandinavian languages, have unearthed a wealth of feminist IR scholarship also in Southern and Eastern Europe? Or is, in fact, much less feminist IR scholarship produced in these parts of Europe? If so, then why? And what might the theoretical, empirical, and methodological implications be?

We have put together an excellent line-up of contributors, consisting of leading scholars in feminist IR, covering major themes of feminist theorizing in Europe. Our aim was to create a diverse team, located in different parts of Europe, to mitigate some of the UK dominance that seems to characterize the field. We thus spent a considerable amount of time searching for potential contributors. Roughly half of the contributors are UK based, with the other half based in Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Turkey. Clearly, this list of authors does not represent the many sites in Europe in which feminist IR scholarship may be produced. For example, we have not been able to engage scholars whose academic base is in Southern Europe, a fact that needs to be considered when reading the volume.

In turn, determining what constitutes “Europe,” “IR,” or “feminist” is each a topic worthy of its own volume. Indeed, the very political and vexed nature of centering an imaginary of a state-centric “Europe” as a site of production of IR scholarship (yet again) without also centering its racist, colonial past, or for that matter, quite simply starting elsewhere instead, is problematic for sure (Rutazibwa 2020). And simply noting this as problematic does little, if anything, to offset the harms that rote reproductions of such imaginaries cause. Furthermore, IR is finally a wider dwelling for thinking about global politics broadly understood. Firmly erecting the walls of this house in order to ponder its contents sits poorly with normative ideas about transdisciplinarity or with the clear evidence

that IR—at least at its most exciting and influential—is largely a repository of creatively borrowed ideas from other fields of study or practice. Moreover, the nefarious consequences of policing the limits of feminism (Sylvester 2010; Zalewski 2013) occasion our unease in risking drawing firm lines between what is considered “feminist” scholarship and what is not.

We nonetheless believe that bringing to the fore an explicit discussion of the politics of location for feminist IR scholarship helps render visible the very political and economic nature of knowledge production in ways that hopefully open instead of foreclose continuing conversations about the contested place of Europe, IR, and feminism. So, with these caveats and sense of caution in tow, we nevertheless draw our coordinates in order for fruitful discussion to occur within the word limits of this thin volume. Indeed, our intention has been to provide initial definitions of these contested terms in order to enable the authors of the contributing chapters to problematize, challenge, refuse, reinscribe, or work within our delimitations in making the mappings and arguments that are specific to their chapters. Hence, in our instructions to our authors, we asked them to cover research that is produced by scholars employed by research institutions in the states of Europe. By “Europe,” we mean EU member states, EU candidate states (Albania, Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey), EU potential candidate states (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo), and Great Britain, Switzerland, and Norway. By “IR scholars,” we roughly means scholars who identify their work in terms of international politics, generally in political science/international relations departments and/or who publish in what is labeled as IR journals. We use a broad understanding of “feminist” as scholars who self-label their work as feminist and/or whose research focuses at least in part on gender, sexuality, men, women, masculinities, femininities, non-binary/trans identities/practices/processes/relations/issues.

The volume is organized thematically, and the chapters cover the following themes: security, war and military, peace, migration, international political economy and development, foreign policy, diplomacy, and global governance and international organizations. The themes chosen are broad enough to include much work that is central to IR as it is broadly defined and taught globally. We chose just *these* themes and not others (such as social movements and the environment) not because others are less important, but because we deemed them to be broad enough that research on many central problems and issues could

be included within their scope. The picture of feminist IR that emerges through this thematic nomenclature is, again, necessarily a partial one; one that we hope continues to be enriched through future endeavors. Our thematic approach also allows for the inclusion and discussion of feminist IR scholarship that might differ in terms of their ontological, epistemological, and theoretical perspectives as well as their methodological approaches, but that can be gathered under a similar theme. While there are indeed differences among feminist scholars, we also note that a large portion of contemporary feminist IR scholarship in Europe adopts a constructivist or post-structuralist approach to gender and its interaction with other power relations. Furthermore, there is little discussion of different feminisms across theoretical schools (e.g. Radical, Marxist, Liberal, or Psychoanalytical feminisms). Indeed, the arguably problematic use of the idea of “turns” within feminist IR (e.g. aesthetic, practice, emotional, affect, discursive, narrative or material) or categorizations based on empirical research subject or question seems to better capture varieties among feminisms within IR scholarship in Europe than any mapping according to schools of thought would. We have opted for an empirical, thematic organization for the reasons noted above.

In sum, then, the aim of our volume is to construct a narrative about feminist IR scholarship in Europe, focusing on theoretical and empirical themes and the intellectual/academic institutional contexts in which feminist IR scholarship has developed. Like the other volumes of the series, ours thus takes the form of both an intellectual history and a sociology of the discipline. The volume consists of eight thematic chapters. The contributors begin each chapter with a mapping, to provide a clear idea about where, when, and by whom the various strands of feminist IR scholarship in Europe have developed. When discussing the theoretical contents of the scholarship, the contributors have also been asked to think carefully about what feminist approaches have been present—and absent—in what institutional contexts in Europe.

Mapping out the national and institutional contexts that have been central to feminist IR in Europe allows us both to point out various strong research contexts and to critically interrogate what the geographical and spatial distribution of feminist work might imply for how international politics is theorized and empirically examined. We also see this as an excellent opportunity to make a strong statement to the broader IR community about the vitality and breadth of feminist IR traditions, as well as about the partial nature and silences of any such tradition.

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