

Monitoring Our Progress: Gender, Environment and Human Rights

Editorial

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Elite white men no longer dominate the discourse on international issues. A variety of voices have challenged the state-centric, patriarchal model of International Relations, introducing debates on gender, the environment and human rights. These alternative perspectives question the idea of the invincible state, and reveal the multilevel interactions between individuals, civil society, and the state. Cynthia Enloe's statement that "the personal is international" has become the mantra of a new generation of international relations perspectives.

In compiling this journal, I was surprised at the number of peer reviewers who requested articles on gender, human rights and the environment. These three themes stood out as concerns that have piqued the interest of my generation of internationally minded students.

Gender, the environment and human rights have become buzzwords – they are popular topics to discuss in the classroom and in the media. While the inclusion of these themes is quite important, we need to monitor the progress of International Relations in these three areas to ensure that we are holistically incorporating them into our understanding of the world. The following is a brief overview of some

obstacles to examining these three dynamic frameworks in International Relations.

Gender

Gender is misunderstood as an incomplete perspective – it is seen as a partial body of theory. Gender theorists, however, have argued that a gendered perspective of International Relations is not merely complementary to existing theory; it can replace existing theory. By grafting gender onto existing models, we risk shallow analyses that are too tied to preexisting biases. Such analyses could have a negative impact on the progress of gender theory; we see that the word "gender" has been inserted, and thus assume that all the relevant issues have been dealt with. We pat ourselves on the back for a 'gender job well done', and fail to see the overarching issues of femininity and masculinity that define the discipline.

Gender theory is no longer restricted to feminists. Student interest in gender issues demonstrates that we have moved beyond a shallow understanding of gender, and are ready for more mature scholarship.

The Environment

The environment has become a crucial issue of the 21st century. Climate change has proven the truly international nature of the environment; a drought in

Australia connects to flooding in Peru; air pollution from China blows across the Pacific to Vancouver. Environmental issues, simply put, have not been effectively integrated into International Relations scholarship. Other disciplines, such as geography, eclipse international relations in their attention to the interactions between people and place. While we have recognized that “the personal is political; the personal is international,” we have yet to fully understand that the environment is political in an internationally significant way.

Human Rights

What are human rights? Our inability to concretely answer this question reveals the fundamental problem with this category of analysis. Human rights are defined differently by different political and cultural groups. Is it a human right to wear the hijab? Is it a human right to access clean water? The theme of human rights is simply too broad and overwhelming as a framework of analysis for International Relations. Like gender, it has become a feel-good category that is in danger of being more present in rhetoric than in reality. In this sense, International Relations needs to deconstruct human rights to uncover its implications as a global concept. Human rights are incredibly varied; rights can be economic, political, social, religious, geographic, etc. In order to give meaning to this concept, we need precise mechanisms for understanding the various concepts contained under the optimistic umbrella of ‘human rights’.

These three categories all examine the human side of International Relations. By deviating from the classical state-centric model, these themes risk being labeled as wishy-washy and idealistic. We need to constantly ensure

that these themes have equal legitimacy with classical theoretical models.

The marginalization of these themes partially comes from an inability to create linkages between various aspects of society. We often fail to make the connections between the economy and human rights, gender and conflict, the state and the environment. Creating these links can prove invaluable for a true understanding of how our international system sustains itself.

The 2007 ATLIS Journal is an attempt to make some of these linkages between the individual and the international. The following editorial collection of papers attempts to break down the façade of the state to better understand the structures and ideas that support it. Authors draw creative connections between economics and gender roles, biotechnology and poverty, and radio and genocide – proving that the state is not a solitary actor.

This journal is also truly international; it discusses issues in Rwanda, Bolivia, Japan, the European Union, Indonesia and India. Enjoy this diverse collection of undergraduate scholarship.

Sources

Enloe, Cynthia. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). 4