

Chapter 18

Feminist Political Geography

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Feminist geographers have contributed many radical, insightful, and innovative approaches to the study of political geography. Early interventions addressed the invisibility of women as research subjects and worked to expose gendered aspects of political power (Kofman & Peake 1990; Pratt 1993; Staeheli & Cope 1994; Staeheli & Lawson 1995; Sparke 1996; McDowell & Sharp 1997). This research influenced the way in which politics is understood spatially, relationally, and at multiple scales. Feminist scholarship did not simply include gender as a category, but rather explicated the narrow analyses associated with masculinist approaches to critical geopolitical scholarship (Dowler & Sharp 2001). Research that examined the embodied experiences of individuals and groups has brought new insights and valuable contributions to the study of politics and spaces, such as spatial marginalization and politically induced migration and mobility. Static and disembodied analyses of political conflict and war have also been challenged by feminist scholars who attend to the complex and multilayered analyses of the body as a geographical site, corporeal experiences of conflict, and bodies as a geopolitical tool or weapon (Hyndman & De Alwis 2004; Mountz 2004; Fluri 2011; Koopman 2011a).

Feminist geographers have implicitly resisted conventional research methodologies through rich ethnographies and qualitative analyses (Kofman 2008). These methods have illuminated the complexities of the corporeal experience of power geometries, structural violence, resistance movements, and conflict. This research has illustrated a breadth of scholarship from the representational identity politics of nation-states to informal political processes and political resistance. Research on racial, ethnic, religious, and other forms of identity politics illuminates the manifestation of politics through the manipulation of socially constructed gender “norms” and relations (Fenster 1996). Some of this research reveals the tentacles of power through gendered identity politics such as state governmental attempts to change societal structures through biological and social reproduction (Smith 2009, 2012). This research has also questioned conventional notions of gendered political spaces and assumptions that politics only happens through “formal” processes (Secor 2001b).

With its breadth and depth, feminist scholarship has had a great impact on political geography, yet more scholarship is needed to push the discipline further toward integrating aspects of race, sex and sexuality, class, and belief systems at the intersection of gender and politics. This chapter is organized thematically in an effort to provide an overview of the various contributions to the study of political geography by feminist scholars, methods, and methodologies. These themes include gendered analyses of the state and nation; feminist contributions to political analyses of public and private space; scholarship on the intersecting relationship between gender borders, mobility, and security studies; and recent and emerging scholarship on corporeal political geographies.

Gender, state, and nation

Much scholarship by feminist political geographers examines how gender intersects with discursive national ideologies and state power. Feminist interventions have challenged the dichotomous representations of the male state and female nation, which both physically and socially positioned women as reproducers rather than productive or active political participants (Sharp 1996; Mayer 2000). Gendered political analyses critique and confront the material and ideological struggles involved in the making of nations as well as counter or revolutionary groups poised to challenge the state (Cowen & Gilbert 2008). Research that counters masculinized representations of the state also attends to feminist nationalist political movements, and challenges hetero-normative nationalisms and dichotomous gender roles and relations (Mayer 2000; Chen 2003; Paur 2007; Fluri 2008). Examining the embodied experiences of women (and men) and attending to the continual formations of place, boundaries, bodies, and power relations remain central for understanding the dynamic affiliations between gender, state, and nation (Mayer 2004).

Feminist political geographers have also explored women's participation and agency within the mechanisms of statecraft. Gilmartin and Kofman (2004) highlighted the "textual invisibility" of women's historical political labor and influence. Other forms of critical scholarship examine the use of gender as a political tool. This has been exemplified in scholarship that critiques the use of various gendered tropes by states in an attempt to marginalize and situate the distant "other" as inferior. Correspondingly, the symbolic representation of "women as nation" has been incorporated into several independence and nationalistic movements (Fluri 2013). Contemporary geopolitical tools have used gendered tropes in an effort to reinforce or solidify the "need" for military occupations and development interventions in an effort to "save or protect" women in locations such as Afghanistan as part of the Global War on Terror (GWOT; Riley, Bruce-Pratt, & Mohanty 2008; Fluri 2011). In this way, GWOT continues to be framed through a gendered lens that reduces complex social systems to narrow representations, such the framing of Muslim men as abusive patriarchs and Muslim women as helpless victims. Research on borders, public and private space, and mobility by feminist political geographers both questions and reveals the ways in which the gendering of state and nation resonates as part of a particularly and often politically crafted spatial imaginary. The following two sections provide a more detailed review of research on public and private space, borders, mobility, and security by feminist political geographers.

Public and private space

In addition to noting the boundaries between feminist and political geography, feminist scholars were making significant contributions toward destabilizing the implicit division between public (political) and private (apolitical) in much of political geography (Hyndman 2004). Feminist

research on the public and private and the ways in which they influence, enact, and reproduce each other elucidates not the divide or boundary between public and private, but rather their interlinkages and the complications associated with political action and security (Secor 2001a, 2002; Nagar 2002; Cope 2004).

Radcliffe and Westwood's (1993) volume on women and popular protests in Latin America addressed several ways in which gendered expectations of private lives and behavior were used to confront politics in public spaces. Communities marked by racial, class, and gendered marginalization have worked to gain political legitimacy by appropriating public space for political action, such as political demonstrations (Clark 1994). Feminist scholarship has argued that political participation includes the involvement of individuals operating in both formal and informal political spaces (Cope 1997; see also Ali & Hopkins 2012). A counter-geopolitics, as argued by Secor (2001b), challenges the historical representations of politics as operating among states by examining "alternative and multiple loci of power" (2001b: 193). Thus, what constitutes power, spatial, and scalar relations remains fluid, geometric, and multifarious rather than static, hierarchical, or dichotomous. In addition to challenging conventional political analyses in geography, feminist scholars have also sought to focus on the use of conventional gender norms by organizations resisting state policy, action, or violence.

Women activists have opportunistically manipulated the predisposition of the home as an apolitical space in order to plan or execute covert political actions against the state (Dowler 1998, 2001). Female activists, such as the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and the protestors at the Greenham Common Peace Camp, incorporated representations of the home and motherhood as an act of spatial transgression and protest against the state (Cresswell 1996; Bosco 2001). These studies illustrate disparate forms of gendered spaces that challenge the existing dichotomous demarcations of public and private spaces and the use of gendered norms or tropes to counter and challenge the actions of the state and its military.

Domestic spaces have also been associated with women's seclusion, immobility, and abuse, while conversely being associated with comfort, care, and retreat from abuse. Within some domiciles both conflict and its mitigation occur in tandem, which challenges the "expected" role of outside forces such as the state or other agencies in mitigating domestic violence (Fluri 2011; Cuomo 2013). As feminist scholars have shown, the home is a complex and complicated space and one that offers important insights for social, cultural, and political epistemologies. Feminist geographers' examinations of domestic labor provide a nuanced understanding of the fluidity and relational and intersectional linkages between public and private spaces. For example, paid domestic work has historically been seen as less important and outside state regulation, which rendered domestic workers more vulnerable to abuse by employers (Pratt & Yeoh 2003; Pratt 2004). Domestic labor has also been a key area of research for studying the personal and political aspects of gendered migration and mobility.

Borders, mobility, and security

Mobility has in some respects become a "barometer" for the study of gender, class, and other sociopolitical relations (Hyndman 2004: 169). Feminist scholarship examines the intersectionalities between gender and other forms of identity that spatially situate persons as central to, associated with, or at the margins of political machinations and power relations. The complex relationship between ethnicity, gender, and citizenship was evidenced by way of city planning for Ethiopian immigrant women in Israel (Fenster 1998). Jewish Ethiopian migrants were racially othered due to their phenotype and subsequently spatially marginalized, which was used politically to call into question their "Jewishness" (Fenster 1998).

The role and work of migrants working as domestics became integrated into Peruvian nationhood because these predominantly female laborers exemplified their “proper” place within the national imaginary through their embodied representations of gender, ethnicity, and class (Radcliffe 1990). Research on Filipina migrant domestic workers in Canada illustrates a complicated mix of intersecting and at times conflicting social and political requisites from the state, domestic workers, and their employers (Pratt 2002). In other examples the state has been actively involved in planning and regulating remittances from its migratory labor force (Silvey 2004). The Indonesian state labeled female out-migrants working as domestics in other countries “heroes of national development.” This was done in an effort to ensure the continuation of this form of migratory labor because of the financial benefits it provided to the state, and despite the negative and at times abusive experiences of many Indonesian women working as domestics abroad (Silvey 2005). Feminist geographers have contributed new insights into the role of migratory laborers in the formation of national identities and ideologies.

Feminist political geographers have made important strides that demonstrate the interweaving of global geopolitical maneuvers with the embodiment of everyday experiences, emotions, and actions (Sharp 2009; Philo 2012). This research examines the ways in which displaced persons experience mobility or containment, along with the ways in which refugee spaces are managed by nations and supranational organizations such as the United Nations (Hyndman 2004; Mountz 2004).

Research on detention has shown the ways in which the state concludes what is both “secure” and in the “best interests of the child” to reinforce family detention practices at the border legally and discursively (Martin 2011). The geopolitics of childhood vulnerability has been used by the state to question parental practices by framing migratory laborers traveling with children as criminals rather than caregivers. Research on prisons and borders by critical geographers challenges the conventional belief that these create social order and security by illustrating how they act as forms of coercive mobility or oppression against the poor or displaced (Loyd, Mitchelson, & Burrige 2012).

Feminist political geographers have significantly shaped the study of mobility as a political process (Silvey 2004). Embodied analysis of mobility and asylum-seeking offers a nuanced understanding of geopolitical and economic modes of security and insecurity, respectively. Mountz (2011) argues that island detention is a form of suppression “where the bodies and identities of asylum-seekers are contained and regulated in the name of border enforcement, national security, and geopolitical imperatives” (2011: 119).

The study of conflict and security by feminist geographers includes macro-scale analyses of security and at the intersection of the global and the intimate (Enloe 1993, 2000; Hyndman 2007). Within locations embroiled in political conflict or war, security is distinctly spatialized and considerably contentious, leading feminist researchers to question “whose security is of concern and to whom” (Hyndman & DeAlwis 2004: 535; see also Kleinfeld 2007; Fluri 2011). The increased presence of gender and feminist research on security was further evidenced by the number of feminist scholars and gender-based research included in the 2009 *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Special Issue on Peace and Armed Conflict (Blumen & Halevi 2009; Fluri 2009a; Henderson 2009; Kleinfeld 2009; Kobayashi 2009; Loyd 2009; Lunstrum 2009). Research on border, mobility, and security tends to include a multiscale understanding of power relations, particularly from the perspectives and experiences of the marginalized and disenfranchised. Analyses by feminist political geographers further explore the concepts and use of scale as a mode of inquiry. Scalar interventions in

political geography include the Marston–Brenner debates (Marston 2000; Brenner 2001; Marston & Smith 2001) and the political construction of scale (Delany & Leitener 1997; Cox 1998; Herod & Wright 2002; Fluri 2009b).

Research focusing on the interlinkages between the intimate and the global have disrupted grand narratives that dominated hegemonic and imperial political reasoning in order to chart a path outside the normative framework (Wright 2009; Koopman 2011a; Pratt & Rosner 2013). As part of feminist political geographers' engagements with scale and calls for examining private, social, and apolitical spaces and places, the body increasingly resonates within feminist study as both a site for political geographical analysis and a methodology for destabilizing the disembodied macro-scale study of politics and space. Feminist political geographers' analyses of the corporeal have significantly altered the geographical understanding of space by emphasizing the importance of embodied practices, place, and intimate knowledge as integral to feminist political geographical research (McDowell 1999; Dowler & Sharp 2001; Mountz & Hyndman 2006; Sharp 2007).

Corporeal geographies

Feminist and critical examinations of geographical scale combined with gender and critical race analyses opened up spaces for corporeal geographies of the political. Security, conflict, and violence are also key areas in which a distinct focus on bodies, body politics, and place-based examinations presents significant and valuable contributions. Some notable examples include Dowler's (2002) analysis of post-9/11 Ground Zero in New York as a masculine space, which included a print media reimagining of the Twin Towers as the body of a male firefighter and police officer. The ways in which bodies carry particular representations of citizenship and its associated privileges elucidate important linkages among citizenship, identity, transnationalism, and mobility studies. Transnational solidarity groups in Guatemala and Columbia put the bodies of privileged volunteers to work accompanying threatened activists in order to provide secured mobility. This form of "proxy citizenship" attempts to alter conflict dynamics through corporealized protection (Henderson 2009). Koopman's (2011a) research on accompaniment further argues that this form of "alter-geopolitics" should garner more attention from scholars seeking to broaden our definitions and understanding of security in order to bolster the amount of attention paid to these and other forms of peace-building geopolitics.

Proxy bodies have also been incorporated into the research on sex workers and brothels as sites for male sexual aggression within conflict zones (Enloe 1993, 2000). In Afghanistan, where the "saving women" discourse curtails sexual engagements between international men and local Afghan women, various forms of sexual abuse, misconduct, and harassment by international men against international women abound (Fluri 2009b). The illegitimacy and illegality of sex workers place their corporeality as a proxy for the release of male sexual aggression and has been mythologized by some men as a method to "protect" local women and other "legitimized" female laborers (i.e., international aid/development workers) from this aggression. Sex work as argued by Wright (2004) became a discursive strategy for questioning the morality and legitimate position of female victims of murder in Ciudad Juárez:

Those ... who blame the kidnapping and murder victims for the crimes perpetrated against them, claim that these events do not reflect problems in the city but instead, problems within the women/girls who brought about this trouble. (Wright 2004: 377)

Associating women's public labor with sex work effectively devalued women's economic agency and their membership within society. In the above scenarios, feminist researchers illustrate the ways in which women's bodies become flexible nodes for an intimately aggressive geopolitics that diverts attention away from male actors/perpetrators and the structures of aid/development and urban governance, respectively, along with the unwillingness of these institutionalized structures to address or curtail these abuses.

Intimate linkages between social and political conflict and daily life are further explored in Sara Smith's work (2009, 2011). She examines the complicated ways in which geopolitical conflicts in Ladakh, India resonate on bodies and currently construct barriers to the formerly accepted practice of intermarriage between Buddhists and Muslims. As Smith ardently argues, "when population becomes part of a territorial struggle, the body itself becomes a geopolitical site" (Smith 2011: 456–457). In many respects, bodies signify and approximate the fragile scale at which processes and promises of geopolitics and political identities resonate (Dixon & Marston 2011). Situating bodies at the center of research on political conflict is necessary to ensure that the bodies of individuals and collectives count rather than being reduced to aggregate sums associated with the collateral excesses of war (Hyndman 2007; Tyner 2009).

The Muslim headscarf/veil has been and remains a prominent symbolic and gendered representation of, or challenge to, the nation within colonial and postcolonial politics. Gökarıksel and Secor's (2009, 2010, 2012) work on veiling fashion provides an excellent method for addressing the contradictions of politics and the economy around the headscarf as a social and political symbol of piety and religious devotion, which simultaneously functions as a motif of capitalist production and consumption. The capitalist use of the veil incorporates it as "fashion" capitalism, which both subsumes and challenges its utility and marginalization within Turkish society. The politics of the veil and its very intentionality are therefore disrupted, while becoming entrenched within the equally oppressive and problematic mechanisms of neoliberalism (also see Gökarıksel and Secor 2010, 2012; Secor 2002). The aesthetics of gendered bodies and geopolitics, as discussed by feminist political geographers, examine the representative ways in which idealized forms of womanhood become representative of nationalism and citizenship through beauty pageants and related symbolic representations of femininity (Sharp 1996; Oza 2006; Fluri 2009c; Faria 2010, 2013).

In addition to incorporating gender and feminist theories as accepted and integral aspects of analysis within political geography, feminist geographers have also significantly contributed to research methodologies and methods. Feminist methodologies and research methods provide another important (if at times overlooked) contribution to political geographical inquiry. Methodologically, feminist research seeks to critique the epistemological and ontological understandings of power relations (Staeheli & Lawson 1995).

Methodologies and research methods

The extensive amount of fieldwork conducted by feminist political geographers is astounding. Feminist political geography by and large has included qualitative and ethnographic methods, often in sites and situations that offer several challenges for researchers. These qualitative approaches have contributed both empirically sound and theoretically rich research to the study of political geography and critical geopolitics. Feminist geographers' contributions to research methodologies include challenging the assumptions of research objectivity. Thus, the concept of intersubjectivity between researcher and research populations has become an integral research strategy (Rose 1997; McDowell 1999; Moss 2002; Gibson-Graham 2010). This

includes attempting to disengage the binary structure between subjects and objects, and acknowledging that knowledge can be constructed from research participants rather than only through existing hierarchies of understanding between researchers and research populations. Many feminist political geographers incorporate the concept of situated knowledges (Haraway 1988) to illustrate that the production of knowledge and understanding of politics must be contextualized across space at multiple scales. Situated knowledges refers to including “knowledges that are explicit about their positioning, sensitive to the structures of power that construct these multiple positions and committed to making visible the claims of the less powerful” (McDowell 1992: 413; see also Rose 1997).

Other theoretical interventions include counter-topographies, counter-geopolitics, and the topological. Counter-topographies, a term coined by Cyndi Katz (2004), provide a metaphorical elaboration of the contour line to track the lineage of theory and practice in the production of knowledge. Katz’s topography connects the politics of location and difference by examining the linkages between the particularities of marginalization and political struggle in distinctive locales. Melissa Wright (2008) took up this concept to highlight the counter-topographies of geographical knowledge and activism across the globe. Mountz (2011) examines the counter-topographies of asylum seekers en route between nation-states and argues that “feminist counter-topographies confront directly the fixity of exclusion” in current geometries of power, “seizing precisely on the potentiality of other topological processes of transformation” (2011: 392).

Feminist geographers have also employed topology in addressing the ways in which power can become endlessly twisted formations of abuse and oppression (Koopman 2008). In addition to these methodological interventions, feminist political geographers highlight the importance of field-based empirical research in order to provide rich linkages between theory and praxis, and stress the interconnectedness between the intimate and the global (Mountz & Hyndman 2006).

Most feminist political geographers conduct fieldwork and view this as a necessary if not essential aspect of doing research. This work does not rely on examples or discussions of the mundane, but rather provides a rich and nuanced understanding of small-scale politics (Sharp 2004; Dixon & Marston 2011). Much of feminist geography requires engagements with other populations in various communities in and outside of Anglo-speaking countries in order to inform theory through extensive qualitative, ethnographic, and empirical studies. Feminist methodologies have also influenced research on and use of geographical information systems (GIS) through the incorporation of qualitative methods (Kwan 2002; Cope & Elwood 2009). Fieldwork by feminist scholars contributes nuanced and qualitatively rich research to political geography. Arguably, this is an area that requires more attention from political geographers, particularly those who do not actively engage in fieldwork.

These research methods include many discussions and debates about methods and methodologies along with issues of race, positionality, and critical self-reflexivity (Staeheli & Lawson 1994). The 2002 “Talking across Worlds” special issue in *Gender, Place and Culture* addressed several concerns and debates among feminist scholars on the role of the researcher conducting fieldwork. Several articles argue for feminist geographers to recognize the legitimacy of activists as research participants and political actors, and to reinforce the acceptance of various forms of knowledge (Raju 2002). This includes addressing the tension between institutional demands for theoretically driven scholarship and the political and ethical need for on-the-ground research that is meaningful to the populations with which we work or that we study (Nagar 2002). In addition to the extensive amount of discussion of positionality and reflexivity and their inclusion in feminist geographical research (England 1994; Rose 1997),

Nagar (2002) identifies the continuing problem associated with talking across worlds (particularly on political issues), asking feminist researchers to consider “Who are we writing for, how, and why?” and “[W]hat does it mean to co-produce relevant knowledge across geographical, institutional, and/or cultural borders?” (Nagar 2002: 179). Similar concerns have been taken up by feminist geographers’ critiques of critical geopolitics, such as “[C]an there be a more constructive side to critical geopolitics – a more positive politics?” (Dowler & Sharp 2001: 167). Feminist geographers, along with other critical researchers, engage in various forms of participatory or activist research as a transformative process (Moss 2002; Cahill 2007). The ethics associated with participatory research are also regularly discussed and debated among feminist scholars (Cahill, Sultana, & Pain 2007).

Working with grassroots organizations should also include formal institutions and the state, in order to elucidate the ways in which body and identity politics can be a site for countering or resisting hegemonic or institutional forms of oppression (Mountz 2002; Silvey 2002). Additionally, linkages and intersections between macro and micro scales, the universal and the particular, are often identified as a basis for collaborative politics across social, political, and spatial differences (Pratt 2002). Wright’s (2009) review article on activism highlights feminist scholarship that attempts to contend with the difficult issues associated with struggles over power, global linkages, and the politics of epistemology.

The future for feminist political geography

Several recent articles and discussions within feminist geography more broadly about the role of emotions or affect have included the work of feminist political geographers (Woon 2013). Sharp (2009: 78) argues that “emphasis on the political manipulation of emotion/affect is key, and indeed offers a necessary line of examination for geography.” By linking fears about global terrorism with the lack of attention (and funds) paid to an embodied understanding of the everyday terrors experienced by women in situations of domestic or intimate partner violence, Pain (2009) highlights the need to incorporate emotional geopolitics as part of our analyses. In the recent special issue of *Geopolitics* on “Feminist Geopolitics: Unpacking (In)Security, Animating Social Change,” emotional geographies and feminist geopolitics are intersected in the study of security in a number of articles (Casolo & Doshi 2013; Clark 2013; Cuomo 2013; Dowler 2013; Ojeda 2013; Williams & Boyce 2013; Williams & Massaro 2013).

There have indeed been tremendous strides and contributions by feminist political geographers since Brown and Staeheli’s (2003) “Are we there yet?” article. Going forward, these geographical inquiries must remain vigilant to ensure that gender-based research continues to engage critically with a diverse array of research populations and collaborators, both within and outside the academy. Cultivating transnational connections and collaborations provides another area for increased attention by feminist geographers. Collaboration and learning both from our research populations and scholars outside our respective interpretive communities remain a growth area for political geography, led predominantly by feminist geographers. Intimate geopolitics and scholarship on the global intimate are an exciting growth area for feminist political geography.

The lack of gendered considerations and the disembodied analysis of political conflict among political geographers demonstrate the continued need for feminist interventions in political geography. Research methodologies such as critical self-reflexivity and positionality remain the purview of feminist researchers, rather than political geography more generally.

It is important to continue to push political geographers to incorporate these methodologies in various forms of critical scholarship. Feminist geographers have had a radical impact on political geography, while more research that challenges conventional epistemologies about gender, space, politics, and scale is necessary to move feminist geography from an interventionist subdiscipline to one that is incorporated throughout the study of political geography.

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