International Women's Day Interviews

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To celebrate International Women's Day, we asked several scholars and previous contributors to E-IR:*How can we challenge gendered inequalities?* Below are responses from Meera Sabaratnam, Manuela Picq, Katharine A. M. Wright, Huili Meng, Caron E. Gentry, Daria Nashat, Jonna Nyman and Harini Amarasuriya.

Meera Sabaratnam is Senior Lecturer in International Relations in the Department of Politics and International Studies at SOAS University of London. View our interview with Meera here.

Whilst there are myriad ways in which our field intellectually and materially reproduces gendered inequalities, I would like to highlight three areas of practice where transformative action can be contemplated. The first is in the better intellectual integration of gender analysis into our thinking and teaching. The primary way of including gender in IR courses and textbooks remains 'additive' – thrown in towards the end of the course and ultimately optional as a conceptual framing for many students. Yet, thinkers such as Cynthia Enloe, Spike Peterson, Sylvia Wynter, Geeta Chowdhry and L.H.M. Ling have shown us how understanding gender is ultimately *transformative* of our efforts to understand e.g. states, capitalism, war, humanism, empire, co-operation, diplomacy and so on. Diana Saco published a hugely important but under-cited piece on the role of marriage in the production of sovereignty. What they collectively help us conceive of is an international relations of complex social reproduction that permeates all of these other institutions and objects of interest, 'unveiling' amongst other things women's agency, thought (being highlighted excitingly by this ongoing project, *Women and the History of International Thought*, led by Patricia Owens) and conditions of life/death. All of these thinkers have also addressed these in ways which can be understood as 'intersectional' – clearly attuned to the role of other structures of inequality such as race and class in these outcomes. Contemplating our current situation, it would be an intellectual travesty if we contemplated and researched the impact of the global Covid 19 pandemic without reflecting on the significant role of gender in producing structured inequalities of death, disease and suffering around the world. Whilst many gendered, classed and raced aspects of work, bodily health and lifestyle have produced different morbidities in different populations, particularly working class men of colour, globally lockdowns have produced an enormous labour burden that is principally borne by women across all classes, but of course most acutely amongst poorer women.

The second area to highlight leads on from the first – to recognise that the effect of lockdowns has been to accentuate gendered inequalities in working conditions that accompany the move to 'working from home' for academic labour, for both students and teachers, and to ensure that they are not disadvantaged by it. The union line "lecturers' working conditions are students' learning conditions" has been reformulated – "lecturers' and students' living conditions are lecturers' and students' working conditions are lecturers' and students' teaching, learning and researching conditions". Working from home has centralised and intensified the crisis of caring work that women do in the workplace/study space as well as at home. Conversely, many academic journals have noted that lockdowns have produced huge gendered inequalities in journal submission rates, for example, which will have knock-on effects on the seniority and power of women in the profession, and worsen the already painful dilemma that many academic women face when deciding if/when to start a family. Women students especially, particularly those living at home, will tend to have increased demands on their time from other members of the household or elsewhere. Universities can choose how they seek to integrate these issues and recognise them in terms of extensions for students to submit work, tenure clocks, the assessment of research outputs and so on – the more these are taken into account, the more they will help address the rising gendered inequalities being produced by this pandemic.

A third area for us all to look at is to move away from the model of the individual brilliant thinker as our model for scholarship, who succeeds through competitively dispelling the conclusions of others and producing their own singular 'original' contribution. We do this in classrooms and in conference spaces and in writing. Whilst many women may of course be individually brilliant, the gendered constructions of masculinity and feminity reward men and women differently for living up to this stereotype – for those who are masculinised this behaviour is largely celebrated, for those who are feminised it is often pathologised. Moreover, it is not really how science proceeds in practice, which is a much more collective and deliberative process which depends ultimately on the cultivation of environments where thinking activity can flourish. The contemporary academy's obsession with specific kinds of individual output, rather than the work of building important intellectual spaces (such as the influential Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies unceremoniously closed by the University of Birmingham, albeit which had gender problems of its own) has impoverished contemporary institutions, leaving many of us working alone, and less productively, on our little projects. By rebuilding our sense of what constitutes worthwhile scholarly activity, and who or what a scholarly subject is, we can break down some of the gendered alienations of the contemporary academy.

Dr Manuela Lavinas Picq is a journalist, activist, Professor of International Relations at Universidad San Francisco de Quito and Loewenstein Fellow at Amherst College. Read Manuela's E-IR book *Sexuality and Translation in World Politics* (co-edited with Caroline Cottet) here.

Little has changed since Kenneth Waltz wrote *Man, The State and War* in 1959. The state is still a man, as Audra Simpson reminds us. The contours of sovereignty may evolve, but it remains inherently masculine and contra equality, just like the entire Westphalia system remains based on hierarchy. As a discipline that takes sovereign states as its unit of analysis, International Relations (IR) is structured around hierarchies, and gendered inequalities are not an accidental error but a foundation of the discipline. Can we, as scholars of IR, challenge these foundations structured around gender inequalities?

We can consider who speaks about what, how, and for what purposes, to invoke Robert Cox. IR theory still perpetuates modes of inquiry largely based on a supposedly (gender) neutral view from nowhere. We can listen to women and queer experiences, activate the politics of citation to make these voices heard. We can engage feminist epistemologies to disrupt patriarchal worldviews, nurture non-heteronormative standpoints and position gender and sexuality as central categories of analysis in world politics. But if one's gender, just like the color of one's skin, is indicative of the violence one has endured, it does not make one immune to reproducing hierarchies. Gender and sexuality are always about something else; something like authority and modernity.

To uproot inequalities, we need to take IR out of its colonial straight jacket. Easier said than done, but we could start by engaging indigenous worldviews and learn from translation studies to grasp the incommensurability of indigenous forms of governance in Westphalian terms. We need to redefine what constitutes legitimate knowledge and recognize the epistemic violence that silences the subaltern, who are constantly feminized, emasculated. In this process we will expand what IR is and where it is located. It lies in the rap of 22 years-old Sara Socas when she takes over a male dominated space to denounce femicide. It lies in the century and half long fight of the Maori people to defend the Waitangi River. Women, like rivers, are sacrifice zones because there is a sovereign with the authority to value (and devalue) life. In that sense, extractivism is not simply an environmental issue but the basis for violence against women. Westphalia is a way of organizing gender, life itself. What is the starting point to undo the gendered inequalities that structure IR? We need to restructure relations, as Rauna Kuokkanen suggests, by focusing on self-determination.

Dr Katharine A. M. Wright is a Senior Lecturer in International Politics at Newcastle University and Chair of the International Studies Association (ISA) Committee on the Status of Women. View Katharine's contributions to E-IR here.

Inequalities are a reality in an academy and discipline which was built for cis, straight, middle/upper class, able-bodied white men to support colonial logics. Gender therefore intersects with other dimensions of power which need to be accounted for when seeking to challenge gendered inequalities. We have seen progress in recent years but the pushback is real and powerful. This is seen most overtly in the discourse surrounding wider reforms to Higher

Education in the UK for example, but also within our own institutions where it can manifest in more subtle (but also often overt) ways. Those of us who the discipline was not designed for can be on the receiving end of this, but just as easily complicit as either passive or active perpetrators. Any attempt to address gender inequalities must therefore account for and challenge intersecting social inequalities. As Malinda Smith argues, this requires rejecting the false dichotomy between gender and other equalities issues, because failing to do so results in a situation where white women are advanced and the whiteness of the academy remains unchallenged. As she further elaborates, it can also lead to a preoccupation with the benefits of 'diversity', which the few 'other Others' are expected to bring. Equalities work can therefore have the (unintended) consequence of reinforcing, rather than challenging, existing hierarchies within the discipline and academy if not approached in an inclusive way.

We've seen Equality, Diversity and Inclusion roles and committees pop up at many of our Universities and within our professional associations, which is welcome progress. Yet there is a danger that gender and equalities work gets siloed, and others absolve or are absolved of their responsibilities. All of us have an obligation to use whatever privilege we have to challenge inequalities where we are able to do so. This could be in our day-to-day interactions, our research, teaching or through pressing for more active intervention on behalf of our institutions. This is not easy work, often it means shutting up, listening to and learning from others who don't look like us. It also comes at a personal cost, to quote Sara Ahmed 'When you expose a problem you pose a problem'. We therefore need to be mindful that we are taking our fair burden of this work because the repercussions of pushing for change are felt disproportionately by those already in minoritized positions within the academy, and there is a danger (and reality) they are pushed out as a result of such engagement. Ultimately, it is the necessary work for those in privileged positions to undertake *if* we wish to see the change we so often benefit from claiming to aspire to. There are plenty of resources out there to support this work and it is our responsibility to show-up, engage with and attribute that work to (re)build a University and discipline which looks like a much broader definition of 'us'.

Huili Meng is a Senior Lecturer at Nottingham Trent University. View Huili's contribution to E-IR here.

At the beginning of March last year two of my overseas students, with plenty of things to worry about like so many others studying in the UK at that time, decided to do something positive for their new community. These two young Chinese women, who had only been in Nottingham for six months, collected and donated 1050 medical standard masks and hand sanitisers to a local care home. They experienced many things they never imagined they would ever face trying to carry out a charitable act, including racism and gender discrimination, but this also gave them strength and determination. They didn't want to take credit for their charitable actions and told me, "kindness is the best way to fight racism and discrimination and start to make a better world." They may not be followers of feminism and never post any comments about the #MeToo movement, but they are true practitioners of Tarana Burke's #MeTooActToo movement.

For me, the field of International Relations provides a sphere for people of all ages, genders and ethnicities, in which activists can gather to share their concerns and enthusiasm for all kinds of causes. E-International Relations is one such forum for diverse voices, where I feel comfortable as a scholar to discuss gender and political issues openly. As an academic, almost always tied to my desk and the classroom, I have been distanced from the type of abuse that many women of colour are facing. The act of kindness performed by my overseas students both inspired me and showed me a way to become more involved in my own local, everyday community to support the voiceless and powerless. Academic strength combined with community activism, no matter how small the action, is one way of combating gender inequality, abuse and other problems. This is my answer to the question: Act Too – this time, I don't want to miss the new momentum started by these young women.

Professor Caron E. Gentry is Head of School in the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews. View our interview with Caron here.

Challenging gendered inequalities, as well as others, needs to be in everything that we do. We need to watch it in our classrooms. We need to think of it in our citational practices and when we form panels. We need to think about how we encourage but also critique when we peer review. We need to think about it when we are leaders. We need to point it out when we see it happen – in other scholarship, other epistemological activities, and in the reality of our

everyday lives. We have to create, contribute to, and champion inclusive practices.

Daria Nashat is a speaker and trainer on inclusive leadership and resilience strategies who previously worked in the field of peacebuilding, refugee return and post-conflict development. View our interview with Daria here.

I would like to make two suggestions. Firstly, whether we are doing research or designing interventions, the use of sex-disaggregated data needs to become the norm in order to prevent gendered inequalities. In her brilliant book *Invisible Women: Exposing data bias in a world designed for men* , Caroline Criado Perez describes in detail the everyday consequences for women who live in a world designed for men. Whether it concerns the workplace, the health sector, or security, it is critical to first become aware of the existing data bias before we can end gendered inequalities.

Secondly, I would like to challenge the notion that inclusion is based on participation alone. If we want to overcome gendered (and other) inequalities, we need to move from participation to co-creation. Having a seat at the table is not enough because the location, the timing, the agenda, and the shape of the chairs and the table, matter. Only together can we create a world in which everyone can belong and thrive. In the context of research, this could mean asking questions such as:

1. Who identifies, describes and defines problems?

2. Who develops and defines the terms, concepts, and methodology?

3. Who sets the research agenda?

4. Who decides which idea is most promising and deserves funding?

Jonna Nyman is Lecturer in International Politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Sheffield. View our interview with Jonna here.

As scholars and indeed as human beings I think we have a responsibility to challenge inequalities and unfairness wherever we see it. Approaching inequality intersectionally is crucial, since gender, race, class, (dis)ability and other characteristics are deeply connected, but of course on IWD it makes sense to focus the conversation on gender. There are so many fantastic scholars working on gender in the field: one of the key things we can all do is support them and their work and do more to highlight and mainstream their work, bringing it into all sorts of different conversations rather than seeing work on gender as a niche. In my teaching on security politics, for instance, I introduce students to work on gender and race in week one, and these themes run across the different empirical and theoretical issues we investigate. In the academy itself there is still much work that needs to be done to reduce gender inequality both among staff and students. Speaking more openly about implicit bias is central here, for both staff and students, as is creating more space for more diverse voices to be heard. Visibility is part of this too: in the past I've encountered third year students who have never been taught by a woman before, which seems pretty crazy in 2021. We still have a long way to go.

Dr Harini Amarasuriya is a Member of Parliament in Sri Lanka and a Social Anthropologist. View our interview with Harini here.

As I write this today, in Sri Lanka, 32 male police officers have filed a case against the country's first female Deputy Inspector General of Police. They claim that their rights to promotion to this post have been violated by the promotion of a female office, because the existing regulations do not allow for women to hold these positions. This incident is a stark reminder of the massive challenges women face at every turn, be it in our workplaces, in our homes and in public. Sri Lanka's excellent health and education indices – with little to no gender disparity – and the fact that the world's first woman prime minister was Sri Lankan as far back as 1960 often conceals the deeply entrenched gendered inequalities in our social fabric. This is reflected in the commonly held view that women, rather than fighting

for equality, should demand their 'rightful' place. This is because the 'rightful' place is one of culturally grounded respect and devotion. Why should a woman demand equality when she is treated with respect and devotion is the question we are often asked. Except that we are not. And devotion and respect is of little meaning in contexts of deep inequality and discrimination.

Sri Lanka is not alone in this regard. What we see today are, on the one hand, tremendous advances made by women, of increased feminist consciousness among women of all ages and generations, and on the other hand, extremely regressive attitudes and policies seeking to reverse many battles that women have won up until now. I think we need to examine very closely how and why structures of discrimination, and even more importantly perhaps 'structures of feeling', have remained stubbornly resistant to and almost impervious to change.