

Book Review: A Feminist Voyage through International Relations by J. Ann Tickner

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A Feminist Voyage through International Relations is a collection of essays by renowned feminist IR scholar, J. Ann Tickner. Over the course of a 25 year career, Tickner has pioneered a distinctly feminist, and influential, methodological approach to IR. She demonstrates how, now more than ever, analysing IR through a feminist lens is essential for a greater understanding of the field in general. **Katherine Williams** recommends this anthology to those interested in constructing feminist methodologies as part of their research, or seeking to better understand feminist interventions in IR.

A Feminist Voyage through International Relations. J. Ann Tickner. Oxford University Press. 2014.

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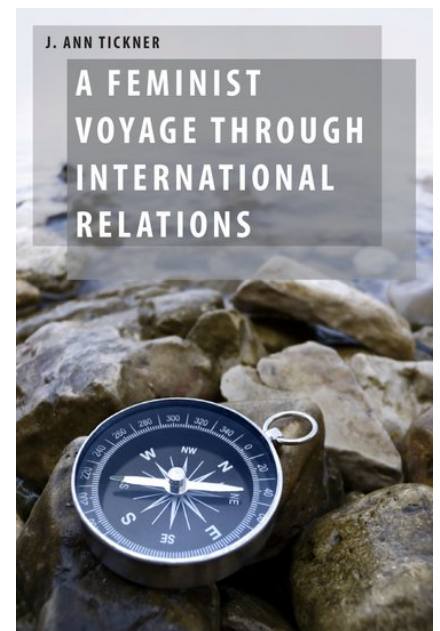
This collection of essays by [J. Ann Tickner](#), Distinguished Scholar in Residence at American University, Washington, DC, and Professor Emerita at the University of Southern California, illustrates the importance of feminist analyses within the traditionally positivist field of IR.

A Feminist Voyage comprises twelve essays spilt into four principle parts. These essays run the gamut from a feminist reformulation of Hans Morgenthau, tricky methodological and epistemological dilemmas that can face feminist researchers, and an exploration of contemporary issues such as 9/11.

In her introductory chapter, Tickner states that 'creating' a feminist epistemology is a collective effort; one which requires contributions from different scholars from a diverse range of disciplines. The common themes that emerge thus shape a distinctly feminist approach to the social sciences, and in turn, IR. Tickner's own journey began as a child living in London during World War Two. Her first-hand experiences of the effects of war on the lives of ordinary people (though not being able to fully comprehend its causes and consequences at the time), have led her to believe that these concerns are central to feminist understandings of war and conflict (xxii).

Tickner's introduction is a distinctly personal one. It chronicles her journey through academia, and her own life in general, lending credence to the feminist adage that the personal is indeed political; the central tenet to any feminist methodological approach regardless of discipline.

She highlights, importantly, that the end of the Cold War helped to broaden the subject matter of IR, heralding a 'post-positivist' era of interdisciplinary research (xvii) that would in time help to legitimise feminist research methodologies (though, as shall be discussed, challenges to the 'validity' of feminist research still exist). In Tickner's opinion, one of the most beneficial aspects of academic feminism is its ability to challenge interdisciplinary boundaries, and to bring new voices and issues to the forefront of analysis. This method therefore consists of unusual methodologies which may pose a 'threat' to traditional IR scholarship, undertake empirical research with an explicitly feminist approach, and highlight the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and so on (xviii).





Sakena Yacoobi, an Afghani woman who set up underground schools to educate women during Taliban rule in Afghanistan, visits University of the Pacific in Stockton. Credit: [Patrick Giblin](#) CC BY-NC 2.0

A chapter that has proven particularly useful to my own research is 'The Gendered Frontiers of Globalisation' (p. 61-73), which prudently illustrates how, despite gains in terms of legal rights, jobs, and education, women across the world still face unprecedented levels of discrimination. Defining globalisation as 'the intensification of economic, political, social, and cultural relations across borders', Tickner explores how feminist analyses of such phenomena can unpack social constructions of gender that have led to the marginalisation of women in terms of global work (p. 63). It is well established that women assume the majority of unpaid reproductive and caring labour, and the gendering of such roles (women as carers, mothers and so on) has, over time, become institutionalised and naturalised. Consequently, traditional notions of the division of labour in society that define women as merely housewives legitimise low-level wages for women in multiple contexts (p. 65). According to the United Nations, over 70% of people who live in poverty world-wide are women (p. 62-63).

Women's entry into the workforce significantly increases financial independence and has a positive knock-on effect on their families. However, Tickner does not believe that women will be able to breach the 'masculinised' frontiers of globalisation until traditional gender expectations regarding the role of women and men are challenged and broken down (p. 69). When the economic basis of a society changes then institutions and entrenched beliefs can also change for the better.

One positive effect of the globalisation of communication for women, argues Tickner, is the rapid growth of social movements. This has increased women's abilities to organise across traditional boundaries (the proliferation of social media in particular, has been an invaluable tool for different groups across the world), and allows women to campaign around a diverse range of issues at a local, national, and transnational level (p. 67).

Additionally 'You Just Don't Understand: Troubled Engagements between Feminists and IR Theorists' (p. 73-92), one of Tickner's most famous articles and a chapter here, is another stand out contribution. Tickner describes how, despite the proliferation of feminist IR approaches in the 1980's, the approach continues to be decried as not 'serious' enough by traditional IR scholars, especially in the US (p. 73). As a result, feminist IR scholars, due to their radically different methodologies and epistemological practices, find themselves facing a continuing silence in the world of academia. Feminist approaches are often mislabelled as merely 'criticism' and thought devoid of analytical merit or potential for rewarding empirical research (p. 75). Tickner identifies three types of misunderstanding in regards to feminism's place in IR: traditional schools of thought often misinterpret the meaning of gender; non-

feminist scholars fail to recognise the differing realities or ontologies that feminist thought centres on (for example, the importance of lived experiences as a mode of analysis); finally, epistemological divides between scholars leads to accusations that feminists aren't actually engaging with theory at all (p. 75).

Ultimately, feminist IR scholars focus on individuals in their social, political and economic setting, as opposed to focusing exclusively on decontextualized unitary states, and the like (p. 79). Naturally, as the goals of contemporary feminism are somewhat progressive in nature, the aim of the feminist scholar should be to expose and challenge gender biases within normative discourses that are so frequently pervasive in society.

A Feminist Voyage is an important collection that tracks the intellectual and personal journey of an academic who has spent her career transforming mainstream IR theory to mirror the development of feminist IR thought. Tickner's writings highlight the importance of viewing IR through a feminist lens, enabling researchers to greater understand the importance of utilising gender as an analytical tool. Her work on the legitimacy of feminist methodologies especially demonstrates to feminist scholars that their work is important and has a valuable contribution to make in the field of IR.

Katherine Williams graduated from Swansea University in 2011 with a BA in German and Politics, and is currently studying for a MA in International Security and Development. Her academic interests include the de/construction of gender in IR, conflict-driven sexual violence, and memory and reconciliation politics. You can follow her on Twitter [@polygluttony](#). [Read more reviews by Katherine.](#)

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