Introduction

Women defined and transformed the substance and practice of international relations as it emerged as a separate intellectual field examining the relations between peoples, empires, and states at the turn of the twentieth century. They engaged the international politics of their time in the context of diverse colonial and anticolonial struggles, inter-imperial wars and superpower rivalry, and nationalist, ideological, and political conflict. They addressed war, racial hierarchy and immigration, labor organization and world economy, colonial administration, foreign policy and diplomacy, international law and organization, religion and ethics, technological transformation, and environmental destruction. This wide-ranging work took many forms and genres and was produced in a variety of professional and intellectual contexts. It was well known and influential in its time. And, yet, examining the contemporary field of international relations, its history and scholars, it is as if this past had never existed, as if women had hardly lived, thought, and practiced as scholars, as advisors and policy makers, as journalists, and as public intellectuals.¹ This anthology proves this conventional version of international relations history wrong.

This is the first anthology of women’s international thought, focusing on Anglo-American locations from the late nineteenth century to the long mid-twentieth century. That this is the first such volume reflects two things: first, the centrality of women to early international relations discourses and, second, the erasure and exclusion of women from its history and conceptualization. Partly due to the novelty of the subject matter, the fluidity of its intellectual boundaries, and its co-emergence with the expansion of women’s higher education at the turn of the twentieth century, large numbers of women scholars and teachers were formative in the intellectual and institutional development of the study of international relations. Women founded or co-founded some of its

earliest teaching and research centers, including the Harvard/Radcliffe Bureau of International Research and the Geneva School of International Studies. They worked in and moved between foreign affairs think tanks or in other institutional locations such as women’s colleges. Others wrote on international relations from parallel professional contexts outside academe, such as journalism, activism, social work, and teaching. International relations was crucial to the work of many canonical women intellectuals. Indeed, these women helped to produce the very notion of international relations during the twentieth century.

Nonetheless, this vast store of ideas and contexts is almost completely absent from existing international intellectual histories and even from histories of the academic discipline of International Relations (IR). Contemporary historians and scholars of international relations are aware of how major global developments are produced in and through the terms of gender, race, and class. Yet international intellectual and disciplinary histories have lagged. It is as if there is something unthinkable about historical women’s thought on international relations, something distinctive about the strictures imposed on these thinkers and responses to their work. Indeed, there is: a structural and disciplinary production of women as incapable of and incidental to knowledge about international relations except in highly specific ways or at certain moments in time. We see this in current surveys and anthologies of international thinkers, which imply that women in the past never engaged intellectually with world politics until the 1980s and the re-emergence of feminist IR.

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Despite women being at the forefront of international thought throughout the twentieth century, their ideas were often stolen and, if not, then ignored. The very use of the English term “international thought” can be traced to Florence Melian Stawell’s The Growth of International Thought, published in 1929. Her work is the first of a highly distinctive genre: surveys of canonical “international” thinkers, a genre from which, ironically, she and all women and people of color were later omitted.\(^5\) Indicating so much of the fate and contingency of women’s international thinking, Stawell’s idea to write the book came from her mentor, liberal internationalist Gilbert Murray, after he reviewed Stawell’s proposal for a different book on the League of Nations. Murray appropriated Stawell’s idea for himself and proposed that she write a history of international thought instead.\(^6\) In republishing an extract from Stawell’s book, we are retrieving and honoring the unintended effect of an intellectual theft at the origin of twentieth-century Anglophone histories of “international thought.”\(^7\) More broadly, this volume reveals a major distortion in current understandings of histories of this interdisciplinary field, of how international relations was conceived, and does so, in part, by expanding its archives to include a wide variety of genres, and professional and intellectual contexts.\(^8\)

Much of this important and wide-ranging work is little known, difficult to access, or out of print, further contributing to the marginalization of


For a wider study of such phenomena see Dale Spender, Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them: From Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1983).

women’s international thought. Some of it can be found only in institutional or other archives and took many forms, including speeches, journalism, letters, novels, lectures, radio broadcasts, internal memos, funding bids, book reviews, poems, and memoirs, a selection of which appears in this volume, alongside scholarly monographs and articles. The use of different genres reflects not just opportunity or its absence, but also intellectual and political choice. Rosa Luxemburg, Amy Jacques Garvey, and Amy Ashwood Garvey, among others, formulated their analyses of world order in pamphlets and newspapers to quickly and inexpensively circulate their ideas to the audiences they wished to reach and mobilize. Una Marson and Jane Vialle used poetry and short-form essays to lay bare the cultural as well as political workings of empire in a way that other genres could not.\(^9\) Retrieving and analyzing this work prompts deeper reflection on the dynamics of knowledge production in histories of international thought, a field that always existed at the interstices of theory and practice.

This intellectual production and its practical applications were recognized in its own time, both outside and inside academe, and often centrally so in fields that either pre-dated or were adjacent to the academic discipline of IR. In making selections of this work available in anthology form, some of it for the first time, we begin the necessary and basic work of recovery, reconstruction, and analysis of these international intellectual histories without being defined by the history and current terms of reference within the discipline of IR. In so doing, we model a different approach to histories of international thought, international theory, and pedagogy.\(^10\) Gendered, racialized, sexual, and class hierarchies have been a fundamental enabling and disabling condition for the production and reception of all knowledge about international relations. Hence the exclusion of historical women from histories of international thought does not only concern the past of international thinking or only “women.” It has shaped all international thought and is implicated in a range of academic practices today, from teaching methods and syllabus

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design to citation practices. Like canon formation, anthologizing is fundamentally pedagogical and often conservative, but not without radical potential.11

At the turn of the twentieth century, the study of international relations was a wide-ranging field drawing on methods and approaches from History, Classics, Colonial Administration and Anthropology, Economics, Law, and Political Science. IR developed as a separate subdiscipline of Political Science in the United States during the 1950s and from the 1970s in Britain.12 Recognizing the scholarly and popular circulation of women’s writings in their time, both as a broad interdisciplinary field and then later as a separate academic discipline, raises serious questions about the politics of IR’s disciplinary formation and the appropriation and/or erasure of this large body of international thought.13

Canons are formed to establish and legitimize new academic disciplines or intellectual fields, outlining their central questions and providing for their pedagogical reproduction. Heavily influenced by Political Theory’s canon, the proliferation of works seeking to establish the legitimacy of disciplinary IR from the 1950s focused on a number of all-male “Fathers” of international thought.14 This is nowhere more evident than in the subsequent proliferation of eponymous “schools” of international theory, Hobbesian, Lockean, Kantian, Marxist, Foucauldian, and so on. The existing canon of “great” thinkers and texts was constructed as a conversation by, for, and between white men. These homosocial

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12 There is much contestation around the periodization. Nonetheless, we draw a fundamental distinction between histories of the wider field of international relations and the academic discipline of IR as well as wider histories of international thought by figures who had no, or very little, relationship to IR inside the academy. The selections in this volume encompass each domain, as well as thinkers who worked across both. See the discussion between Robert Vitalis and Nicolas Guilhot in “H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable Review on Nicolas Guilhot (ed.). The Invention of International Relations Theory: Realism, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the 1954 Conference on Theory.” Available at http://h-diplo.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-3-5.pdf.

13 Owens and Rietzler (eds.), Women’s International Thought.

relationships may not have been sexual, though they often involved intellectual crushes.\textsuperscript{15} They took a fraternal and mentoring form, and always involved the acknowledgment of “forefathers,” even if the intention was patricidal.\textsuperscript{16}

This process of IR’s canon formation erased women and people of color, leading to an inaccurate and deficient account of the history of international thought.\textsuperscript{17} This is no surprise. As feminist historians and theorists have long shown, canon formation is not a neutral exercise in which only the worthiest thinkers and genres are singled out. Expectations about intellectual greatness are highly gendered, racialized, and classed such that even the mediocre work of white men can be celebrated and canonized and the exceptional work of those gendered female and racialized as non-white can be ignored, appropriated, and/or maligned. Thinking with individual intellectuals and evaluating their work is necessary to understanding the history of international ideas. But it is not sufficient if it is premised on a narrow swath of individuals and scholarship and if it is retrospectively bounded by the received histories and contemporary assumptions of the contemporary academic discipline of IR. Rather, we need to recognize the diverse scholars and practitioners of international relations who, in turn, were grounded in distinct genres of writing, arrays of publications, actions, identities, and subject positions as fundamental to the histories of international thought.\textsuperscript{18}


This volume builds on and extends to histories of international thought work in the fields of women’s and gender history and feminist theory, particularly Black feminist intellectual history and feminist political theory. For some time, scholars in these fields have shown that it is not enough to simply add a few notable, almost always elite white or Ashkenazi Jewish women to existing canons. As we have seen in IR, recent efforts to expand the canon have included one or two historical women, those working before the late twentieth century, but never more than two in one volume. These figures are presented as exceptional individuals (Hannah Arendt, Susan Sontag) and/or primarily concerned with gender (Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir).

Though a necessary and perhaps inevitable first step, this belated compensation for past neglect does little to expose the appropriations and omissions on which the slightly amended canon was built. It does not address how the production and reception of intellectual labour is deeply gendered, racialized, and classed. It does not account for the intimate and relational nature of intellectual production, for example the work of “canon-adjacent” figures or “wives of the canon,” collaborators who were central to the production of “great texts” by “great men” but are erased in canon-formation. And it rarely centers the multiple genres through which people thought about international relations. In other words, it is limited in its modifications and methods because it does not center gender, race, and class substantially, empirically, theoretically, and methodologically.


Asking questions about women and histories of international thought allows us to identify and trace how these axes of difference organized intellectual production and reception of work on international relations. We refer to “historical women” to indicate both our temporal focus on the late nineteenth to long mid-twentieth centuries, and also to signal the discursive and historical constructs (“women”) emergent from the sex/gender binary and intersecting axes of difference. We understand “women” not as a biological category or ontological designation, but as an historical and intersectional identity which shapes and is shaped by racialized, national, class, and sexual identities and relations. This challenges any essentialization of gender or naturalization of “white women’s IR.”

Thus, in this volume, we adopt a capacious understanding of the gendered history of international thought. Through the twentieth century, norms around gender and sexuality came under greater scrutiny and repeatedly shifted in ways that reflected and reinforced racial and class hierarchies. Indeed, the deliberate exclusion of African Americans from IR’s intellectual and disciplinary histories was constitutive of “American IR” because the early science of international relations was the science of race relations, taking the form of racism and white supremacy. Black scholars were excluded as active agents and


24 Hutchings and Owens, “Women Thinkers.”


producers of international thought while people of color were objects of study and thought, as in works by Margery Perham, Lucy Philip Mair, Annette Baker Fox, and many others in this volume. Since international relations meant race relations, explicitly so in the first half of the twentieth century, international thinking itself is implicated in producing the meanings of racialized difference in the Anglo-American world, including that of a white “Anglosphere.”

Many of the thinkers in this volume were African American. Still more were neither racialized as white nor born in the United States or Britain, but through migration from the Caribbean and elsewhere shaped international thought in Anglo-American locations.

Significantly, most of the figures in this volume possessed something that made them members of a small minority, a university degree, often a doctorate. Into the twentieth century, husbands and fathers held patriarchal legal control over women’s professional and educational lives. Yet the extension of white women’s social and political rights in the United States and Western Europe opened the doors of university education to a privileged few, some of whom rose to the most senior positions, such as Agnes Headlam-Morley, who took the Montague Burton Professorship of IR at Oxford in 1948.

Black women’s educational opportunities in the United States were even more limited and often confined to those institutions built up by African American thinkers and educators, such as Anna Julia Cooper, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and Mary Church Terrell. Among university students in general, women were a minority before the late twentieth century, and they suffered multiple forms of discrimination. Many institutions established separate women’s colleges or institutes that were fundamental to supporting and circulating women’s international thought, though they remain peripheral in IR’s existing disciplinary and intellectual histories.

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was an admission ticket to intellectual recognition, mentorships, and publishing, but it was hard to attain before mass entry to higher education late into the twentieth century. The significance of the co-emergence of the field of international relations and the expansion of women’s higher education is a crucial area of ongoing research.

Critically linked to access to higher education, and the material resources it required, is the privileged class position of most of the thinkers in this volume, especially when it influenced their position in racial and/or international hierarchies. Literacy, the time to write, and access to publication opportunities have often been the domain of a privileged few. At times, class power shaped women’s international thought in very tangible ways. Born into the upper echelons of society in the British Empire and the daughter of an English Viscount, Margaret Lambert used her connections to conduct interviews and fieldwork in the borderlands of 1930s Europe. Similar class privileges were afforded to Bertha von Suttner. Born into the princely Czech House of Kinsky, she later married an Austro-Hungarian baron. F. Melian Stawell was the daughter of a British colonial statesman and a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria, Australia.

Marriage or patronage could facilitate entry into educational and political worlds. Yet, for university women, marriage to a male academic could be a distinct disadvantage as anti-nepotism rules in the United States meant that women married to male faculty were often denied academic jobs. And the intellectual credentials of Agnes Headlam-Morley and her Oxford colleague Sybil Crowe were sometimes disparaged because they were daughters of prominent diplomats.

Thus, while filial and marital relationships could constrain intellectual