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‘International political economy and international political sociology meet in Jakarta: Feminist research agendas seen through everyday life’

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Feminist International Political Economy (IPE), with its focus on the gendered dimensions of social reproduction and market life, provides ground for fruitful engagements between IPE and IPS. Indeed, from this perspective, the boundaries between IPE and IPS are much more porous than assumed in some other contributions to this forum. Pushing against the boundaries of narrowly demarcated disciplinary divides is something that feminist political economists have been actively engaged in since the early days. Our approach is one in which we call for a simultaneous recognition of both the ‘International’ and the ‘Everyday’ in research agendas, speaking as much to new research directions in the field of IPE as to writings in IPS. To illustrate our claim, this short piece reflects on a recent research project into the gendered everyday political economy of housing resettlement schemes in Jakarta, Indonesia – pointing to the interrelationships between everyday gendered practices of work, finance and caring, and how these relationships come to be transformed within the context of the global city. Such an intervention, we hope, points to the significant insights that a feminist lens brings to the development of an ever more sociologically informed international studies. Our research project serves to illustrate how even when we engage a very particular starting point (political economic activities, everyday life), the broader issues and agendas that emerge from such research endeavours draw us back out to the international as well as to considerations of security/insecurity. While our project is very much an IPE approach rooted in a bottom-up analysis of everyday lifeⁱ, our research certainly speaks to ongoing feminist interventions in International Relations (IR). In particular, work that seeks to reconsider how empirical schisms have emerged between understandings of security and economy, that limit the possibilities for more integrated analysesⁱⁱ.

From our – outsiders – perspective, IPS appears as a diverse and open-ended field of study that certainly shares significant commonalities, overlaps and intellectual histories with many strands of IPE scholarshipⁱⁱⁱ. Even as IPS scholarship has become ever more attuned to a concern with the materiality of international politics – revealed in its border fences, garbage flows and mass graves^{iv} – there exists disquiet about the extent to which such a focus displays a relative inattention to proliferating markets, economic transformations and material inequalities^v. These are all issues that feminist analysis has integrated and revealed to be distinctly gendered – shaped by both the everyday work of socially reproductive labour as well as the dominance of heteronormative and hegemonically masculinist market logics^{vi}.

When we investigate the overlaps and commonalities between IPE and IPS from the starting point of a feminist approach, we can see that issues of both gender and the everyday provide fruitful points of connection, and push-back against common sense understandings rooted more in classificatory schemes – the state, the market, the household – than substantive concerns. Gender cuts across the divide between the economy and security that still seems to stand behind the separation of IPE and IPS, as so many other substantive interests of IR. Below, we will point to the example of the gendered impacts of housing eviction and resettlement regimes in Jakarta. Before we move to this example, let us point out that our motivation is that of undertaking research that pushes at the boundaries of so-called ‘fields’ to challenge the very foundations of these fields. And indeed, this is exactly what good feminist research should do – it should be driven by a ‘feminist curiosity’^{vii} rather than a desire to

place research in particular journals or to raise one's status within or fit into a particular field^{viii}. At the same time, being attuned to the politics of precisely such fields and divides also requires a heightened awareness of the situatedness of (all) knowledge claims, from positions of power and privilege to the subaltern^{ix}.

It needs to be stated from the outset that, in many respects, IPS has proven to be a far more hospitable environment for the pursuit of feminist research than IPE in which both critical Marxian and positivist approaches have tended to avoid engagement with gender scholarship^x. Although it should be noted that within critical IPE scholarship, the marginalisation of feminist work is vociferously and continuously challenged, leading to a much greater engagement with feminist work, than ever before. This shift has been accompanied by greater recognition of the role that religion, race and colonial legacies play in the production of markets, alongside a broadening out of empirical foci which has occurred in part with the turn to both the everyday and the study of popular culture in IPE scholarship. Of course, challenges remain – as Griffin^{xi} notes in a recent essay, feminist work troubles and destabilises accounts of the global economy that are founded on a materialist class based analysis, *always* bringing to the fore a focus on gender as discourse, performance or social construction. We also note that feminist IPE draws attention to issues and agendas which are often overlooked by an IPS scholarship that has been very much shaped by an overwhelming focus on (competing) notions of security that have dominated IR scholarship – including feminist IR – since 9/11. As Hudson^{xii} has argued, for example, much feminist IR has prioritised 'discursive abstraction', a tendency that feminist IPE work destabilises in important ways by 'guiding it back to a concern with (everyday) economic insecurities'. Nonetheless, in this piece we do not want to simply engage in a discussion of boundaries between fields; rather we want to demonstrate how undertaking feminist research in specific locations of the global economy (in this case, sites of mass dispossession) centred on the study of everyday life requires us to always 'strain the boundaries' of our research. The point here is that we should avoid always trying to make our research 'fit' existing scholarly categorisations of fields.

Notes from Jakarta

The three contributors of this short reflection all work broadly within IPE – but undertake research – on gender, race and religion – that pushes across boundaries between fields of study or disciplines. We have been involved in a recent project studying evictions and urban resettlement schemes in Jakarta from the perspective of the women affected. Within a broader global political economic context in which international capital investment acts to dispossess along racialised lines of difference in both urban and rural contexts, the research has taken a granular look at urban poor households facing eviction from Jakarta's low-income urban neighbourhoods or *kampung*s. Some of these households have been resettled in high rise public housing blocks known as *rusunawa* and others have occupied evicted sites, often by setting up temporary shelters on top of the ruins of their former neighbourhoods. There are a number of findings worth highlighting, in this contribution we present four short vignettes. We see all of these as stemming from what Agathangelou^{xiii} terms 'gendered accumulation regimes'. This highlights the centrality of gender to these forms of dispossession that are rooted in the emergence of the global city as a key site of capitalist expansion alongside the extraction of value from the racialised urban poor. It further extends to 'genealogies of violence', that is, understandings of certain, poor and racialised, populations as having lesser value – which are rooted in both the colonial experience^{xiv} and the contemporary privileging of a middle-class centred development ideal^{xv}. In Jakarta, the eviction of *kampung*s has been

more or less constant throughout very distinct phases of urban production. From the making of Batavia as ‘Capital of all the Dutch Factories and Settlements in the East Indies’, to President Sukarno’s early-independence nationalist urbanism-guided production of Jakarta, to the present-day investor-led phase of capitalism in the city which has seen a new middle-class vision of modernity prioritised. Between 2015 and 2017, the eviction of *kampung* communities greatly intensified, and long-established neighbourhoods have been destroyed by the state, displacing thousands of Jakarta’s urban poor.

First, a focus on the everyday political economy of eviction and resettlement starkly revealed the economic impact of resettlement on women. Resettlement into high rise buildings led to a complete fragmentation of communities – breaking down the informal networks that women relied on in order to mitigate the costs of social reproductive labour (e.g. child minding). High rise living also meant that women could no longer run small businesses from their homes that relied on passing trade. This left them facing significant reductions in income at the same time as they were burdened with paying public housing rent and increased bills. Rehousing schemes thus failed to account for women’s unpaid and paid work in the informal sector – the inclusion of ‘trading floors’ in the new public housing complexes in which women were charged rent to run stalls and where there was little passing trade was indicative of this failure. What we see in this vignette then is the way in which sociocultural norms that infuse the male biases of the development process have significant political economic effects which render poor urban women increasingly marginal to the urban economy of the global city.

Second, this intersection between the sociocultural and the political economic was also observable in how the shift to the *rusunawa* public housing was marked by forms of rationalisation whereby the lives of the urban poor were rendered ever more legible to the state^{xvi}. Rationalisation of life takes many forms: CCTV surveillance and policing of everyday activities such as waste disposal and commercial activities, obliging people to set up bank accounts in order to pay rent and bills, ID cards with tenant details placed on each apartment door in the high rise, and a resettlement programme that in itself is shaped by ideas about the ideal family type and women’s roles within the household (i.e. small family units, in which women are ‘housewives’ only). The rationalised and ordered public housing building in which tenants now had to lock their doors to the outside world represented a significant social and economic transformation for the women we interviewed in this study. The distinctive order of the *kampung* (perceived from the outside in terms of the messiness of everyday life) has become the subject of rigid schemes of statist classification. However, this rigid order broke down where women’s livelihoods were concerned, giving rise to new forms of resistance. An important example in this regard was rent strikes – lacking earlier sources of income, several of the women we spoke to ultimately could not and/or did not pay their rent^{xvii}. Thus, ordering devices of rent/taxation characteristic of the modernising state were firmly resisted on the ground.

Third and relatedly, themes of security and everyday insecurity loomed large in the research. Even for those whose homes had not (yet) been demolished, living in homes backing onto ruins generated fears and concerns about personal safety (which had not existed in the formerly tight-knit, high density, long established *kampung* sites). Decimated *kampungs* also threatened to undermine the well-established networks of urban activists – especially female activists that had organised to provide support and shelter for female victims of domestic violence. Those living in the new high rise accommodation did see CCTV as something that enhanced feelings of safety. But interviews with building managers revealed that CCTV was used more to monitor ‘unruly’ tenant behaviours. Indeed, it was this focus on the (in)security of post-eviction life – which was marked by both economic insecurity alongside feelings of a

lack of safety that is one way through which the concerns of IPS and IPE came together most closely in our study. Guided by the stories of our respondents – it was clear that the boundaries that we work with in our academic lives sit at odds with the everyday experiences of those impacted by the political and economic transformations taking shape in this urban context.

Finally, our research points to the importance of the materiality of housing itself – the very walls of the home are themselves central to how the urban poor are seen by the state and capital. Homes painstakingly built in the *kampung* are deemed ‘slums’, in part because the land they are on is ‘illegal’ (in spite of the fact that huge swathes of the city are built on sites with contested ownership claims), investments in housing are suddenly worthless, and families are relocated. But at the same time, the ‘ruin’ becomes a site of resistance and occupation in which women have played significant roles. The ruin of the *kampung* itself thus becomes a site of resistive politics^{xviii}.

In these four vignettes from our research, there is much to appeal to scholars of both IPE and IPS: security and safety, economic transformations, materiality, surveillance, violence, rationalisation, the uneven development of the global cityscape, poverty and resistance. For us, a feminist political economy approach in which global economic transformations are seen as taking shape and impacting at the level of everyday life is one that instinctively speaks to IPS – not least its underlying ‘ethos’ of ‘encouraging research that troubles established ways of understanding the international – where it is found, when it emerges, and what kind of work it does in the world’^{xix}.²¹

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