

The Other Histories of International Relations: women thinkers, forgotten locations and unexplored genres

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Despite growing work on historical women international thinkers, the narrative of IR history, its canon and locations, remain overwhelmingly white, male and Western-centric. However, taking women – defined as a historical constructed category, not fixed biological identity – as a starting point reveals other histories, new locations and unexplored genres. The first sixty years of the 20th Century saw both the creation of IR as a distinct academic discipline and the mass political mobilisation of women across the world in campaigns for suffrage, peace, anti-imperialism and anti-racism – phenomena that were not just connected but mutually informative.

The intersection of gender with race and imperialism is brought to the fore in South Asia, where exploring the “imperial experiences” and political participation of Indian women reclaims South Asian feminist thought as international thought. The formative role of colonialism in IR is reinforced by Muna Lee’s international thinking on culture whilst working in Puerto Rico. The gendered restrictions on women thinkers encouraged informal paths such as Miriam Camps’ working in US and UK think tanks after the Second World War. The same restrictions led to the co-opting of Radcliffe’s Bureau of International Research by Harvard in 1924, rendering its women founders and researchers invisible to history. These diverse subjects repeatedly bring to light how lines of gender, race and colonialism channelled women into the very locations, roles, genres and blurred practice/theory lines that were then used justify excluding them from the history, canon and self-image of IR. Recovering women thinkers reveals and disrupts these lines.

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