



Louise Arimatsu and Christine Chinkin, *Gendered Peace through International Law* (Hart, 2024) ISBN 9781509970247, 312pp, e-book open access.

Feminism, by its very nature, resists being neatly confined to specific disciplines or conventions, blurring distinctions between the domestic and the public, the academic and the political. It requires a framework beyond the usual structure of a monograph. In *Gendered Peace through International Law*, Arimatsu and Chinkin's decision to begin with a conversation instead of a conventional introduction is a deliberate rupture, echoing the way feminist and critical legal scholars seek to unsettle dominant narratives and its usual structures. The book also closes with a summary of conversations with seven anonymous professors and teachers from four continents about teaching peace. The open access format—with an affordable paperback option—seems another expression of the values underpinning the book's writing and publication.

The opening exchange establishes the activism, sources and interdisciplinary methodology informing their research. It defines feminism as “promoting the advancement (primarily although not exclusively) of women and girls” (p 5). It advances the authors' political and legal academic stance, their use of the word “gender” to divert from patriarchal binaries, their anti-militarist position, and their broader critiques of power structures.

A clarification of the conceptual framework in Part I and an acknowledgment of the long-standing struggles for gendered peace in Part II form the prelude to a discussion of both longstanding and emerging challenges in Part III. This leads to concrete recommendations for integrating feminist perspectives into international law in Part IV, and finally, to a call for transforming the discipline through a gendered lens in Part V.

Chapters 1-3 set the stage by “introducing” the concepts of “gender” and “peace”, in contrast with the clear and succinct working definition provided for the highly contested term “feminism.” As is increasingly common, the effort to establish conceptual boundaries for key disputed terms—essential not only for the academic legitimacy of the work but also for articulating the authors' political and activist stance—is approached with such nuance that it ultimately concludes with the impossibility of fully defining these concepts. The main contribution of these chapters is to explain the importance of language and the difficulties of incorporating such terms in legal frameworks. Some reference to the use of relevant language within the Universal Periodic Review is missing, despite the impact of this human rights monitoring mechanism in broadening acceptance of a more colourful terminology in UN fora, particularly relating to gender, gender identity and sexual orientation. Also lacking is a deeper engagement with the role of UNESCO in framing the right to peace within international law.

The primary strength of the second Part (particularly chapter 5) is unearthing the contribution of women's movements, especially the largely ignored impact of the UN Decade for Women on international law guarantees for women's rights and the promotion of peace. Chapter 7 in this section demonstrates how very hard-earned successes involved costly compromises. This provides context for the core message of the book, fully developed in Part III: women's erasure

from international law and the further deletion of specific groups of women within women's movements respond to intentional silencing rather than accidental oversight. Making women and other racialised, marginalised groups invisible is not a collateral damage from focusing on other pursuits; rather, it is an intentional mechanism essential for preserving the *status quo*, perpetuating the male violence upon which patriarchal structures are built.

"Repeating and naming" like a broken record will induce eye-rolling but it remains the only option for addressing an imposed silence, operating "as an instrument of patriarchal power at all levels, from the international to the domestic" (p 117). A silence that not only oppresses, but generates profits, for instance, when normative muteness facilitates the commodification of hate speech exponentially amplified in the digital age. Although the forms of silencing women is the focus of Part III, this point is the main contribution of the book.

In my view, Chapter 11 ("Crisis and Emergency: Entrenching Gender System and Militarism", pp 153-168) forms the pinnacle of this work. We are forced to direct our gaze to male violence, articulated as "crisis" deserving full priority, which then diverts attention away from the structures of oppression. Indeed, labelling violence as "structural" prevents it from becoming categorised as crises able of threatening national security (pp 155-156). Protracted violence becomes context, treated by lawyers as facts, sidestepping "the question of law's part in constituting the new normal, as exemplified by the 'war on terror' or protracted occupations that deprive those entangled in law's crises of peace in perpetuity" (p 157). Gendered assumptions and norms also silence other facts never rising to the level of 'crises' warranting intervention. Of course, our own profession is particularly guilty here. International law writing is saturated with conflict. Every crisis results in overwhelming responses concerning its implication for international law, colluding with those who redirect attention away from other experiences. In focusing on conflicts rather than peace, international lawyers prioritise war—exceptional, and yet perpetually necessary male violence and its corollary militarisation and arms trade—over the everyday struggles of women (and men) in times of peace. As much as international law fails to reinvent itself to protect those in vulnerable positions it demonstrates remarkable creativity in replicating power dynamics, shape-shifting when needed, particularly by focusing worldwide attention to "deserving", ever changing, everlasting crises. Women know they must wait because another more pressing issue takes priority and the structural nature of their own problems prevents it from being categorised as an "emergency".

"What would success look like?" Arimatsu and Chinkin ask (pp 173 and 214) both before and after engaging with the strategies to achieve it (Part IV: Strategic Practice: Gendering Law). Drawing on their own experience and acknowledging the absence of definitive answers to many of the issues raised, chapters 13-16 also reflect the content and structure chosen for the book: the tension between adhering to conventional canon and "doing our own thing"; interventions that seize impromptu opportunities, combined with more systematic long-term and well-coordinated strategies. This in turn mirrors the fundamental dilemma of whether following legal formalism is an impossible route or a necessary geography to master and navigate before any attempt of deviation. The poignant and disheartening experience of the authors with the 2021 *Integrated Review on Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* (see esp. pp 199-203) illustrates this brilliantly: what approach could Chinkin and

Aritmasu—or any other feminist expert—have adopted to avoid being “silenced by the need to stay within international law’s structures and traditions” (pp 210-213)?

The authors’ response to this dilemma can be inferred throughout the book but it is explicitly articulated in the final section (Part V). The (wishful) premise is that international law is not irredeemably trapped by its genealogy but can be transformed. Arimatsu and Chinkin also provide their answer to what success would look like. They envision it as a “transformed international law—a law that no longer reproduces the structures of oppression and exploitation upon which it was founded and no longer serves to justify violence, hegemonic, inter-state, inter-communal, inter-personal” (p 221). Instead, international law would prevent structural justice and violence.

Aritmasu and Chinkin’ frustration—narrated as personal and representative of feminist movements across the globe—is palpable throughout the book and established from the outset: better arguments alone will not alter power structures; those benefiting from these power structures will not reinvent international law to provide greater protection for those in vulnerable positions. The structural link between power and gender is difficult to fight from within and almost unfathomable from outside. Every chapter conveys how the transnational space has been, and continues to be, simultaneously one of hope and inevitable disappointment.

The book’s accessible prose explores complex structures of power combined with personal accounts of failures to address them by influential voices in the field (mentioning Alston on pp 40-41; Crawford and Shaw in p 56) Yet, the authors clearly articulate their commitment to international law early on and throughout the book, alongside their belief that radical transformation from within is possible if enough support is gathered even—or especially—from those who hold less power. They remind us that under the leadership of the Group of the 77, “the concept of apartheid was criminalised to challenge the entire internal structure of a number of states” (p 9). However, “while international law is equipped to name the racist state and act on it, it is unable to address the misogynistic one” (p 121). Core concepts of international law, such as *jus cogens*, *jurisdiction* and *immunities*, perpetuate women’s oppression and abdication of responsibilities. When advances are made, they are often significantly co-opted and redirected—for instance, into international criminal law or Security Council debates—in ways reminiscent of power transfers to local elites during decolonisation, representing false progress or progress that carries a heavy price tag.

This book’s rich content and underpinning research, extensively detailed in the footnotes, also serves as a homage to many other women and a few men who have contributed to imagining an international law transformed/or erased through a gendered lens. On this note, I believe a conventional bibliography (absent from the book) would have better highlighted their contributions.

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