

Feminist Perspectives on Security: The Work of Outsiders, Mavericks or Nomads?

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Introduction

Feminists are arguing that women can no longer afford to defer the provision of security to male authority and that they must be prepared to take matters into their own hands. Cynthia Enloe, for example, insists on writing about international security very differently. By starting her accounts of international relations in the lives of “ordinary” women she aims to level out the political landscape and bring leading statesmen down to size. Her belief is that if we are to change the hard realities currently associated with international security, we must first recognize the contingency of the varieties of masculinity and femininity traditionally enacted and affirmed through the conduct of international politics (Enloe 1993: 5). International politics and sexual politics are inseparable.

But who is someone like Enloe to talk? What kind of consciousness do feminists possess as they re-write relations of international and sexual similarity and difference? Traditionally, scholars of international relations have approached difference in a very negative fashion. Security studies has been about gauging difference in terms of threats to a sovereign body. Difference has been conceived of as something you have to be secured *from*, not *with*: it has been seen as something giving rise to a need for protection, not connection. While feminists appear to want to turn the ontological tables and transform security studies into a discourse of positive difference, the question remains; where do they imagine themselves to be located as they re-write difference and similarity? And following on from this: how do they intend to hold themselves accountable for the new international relations they propose?

These are the questions I wish to engage with here, if only in a provisional fashion. I want to take up three alternative figures for the feminist security expert: the outsider, the maverick and the nomad. While I believe the adoption of any one of these intellectual identities is appropriate for challenging existing state-centric approaches to security, I want to propose that a nomadic consciousness is better for re-enacting international security as a discourse of positive difference. Outsiders or mavericks may have the capability to shift the

subjects of security, but not without falling foul of the same negative vision of difference as those swimming in the Hobbesian mainstream of international relations. They still tend to constitute their subjects of security through acts of exclusion and on the basis of hierarchy.

To explore my three feminist figures I shall discuss the work of three individuals who live out these different roles in exemplary fashion. My security expert as outsider is Virginia Woolf and the particular text I want to take up is her *Three Guineas* published on the eve of the outbreak of World War II. My headstrong maverick is C. Wright Mills, hardly a feminist, but someone whose work has been recently put forward within International Relations as valuable for the qualitative renewal of the discipline. To capture the figure of the nomad I want to take up the work of Rosi Braidotti and her commitment to sexual difference as a nomadic political project. A project that like the one engaging Cynthia Enloe generates a fusion between sexual and international politics.

"As the Daughter of an Educated Man I Want No Country"

Virginia Woolf wrote *Three Guineas* as an attack on the "tyranny of the patriarchal state" and the rising tide of authoritarianism. She saw herself engaging in a struggle involving men and women working together but still in separate ways (1938/ 1992: 303). She remained against moves to merge identities as women "should not give effect to a view which our own experiences of 'society' should have helped us to envisage" (1938/ 1992: 308). However, just as Woolf found it hard both rationally and emotionally to imagine joining forces with men, so she also found it hard to imagine joining forces with many other kinds of women. She considered it best to describe herself as belonging to a group comprised of "the daughters of educated men". This was a group of women potentially strong, but currently weak in the struggle to combat the drift towards war. While working women could refuse to continue making munitions, Woolf saw women like herself as deprived of a serious weapon to enforce their will. Faced with relative powerlessness, Woolf attempted to articulate a new identity for the daughters of educated men capable of uniting them as an emergent class. This new identity was that of the Outsider: together they could form an Outsider's Society (1938/1992: 309). Woolf rooted this Society in a special attitude of "complete indifference" which members would exude in the face of men's war-making activities. This would be an attitude only educated women could properly cultivate: an intelligent attitude with a "firm footing upon fact" and based not only on instinct, but also Reason (1938/1992: 311). An attitude relying upon careful observation to build a sober understanding of what "our country" means to an Outsider:

"Our Country"...throughout the greater part of history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share in its possessions. "Our" country still ceases to be mine if I marry a foreigner. "Our" country denies me the means of protecting myself, forces me to pay others a very large sum annually to protect me, and is so little able, even so, to protect me that Air Raid precautions are written on the wall. (1938/1992: 313)

Knowing this the daughters of educated men would be able to feel fully secure in their attitude of complete indifference towards the martial exploits of their brothers because each of them would know that; ‘As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world’. (ibid)

Formulated so these brief sentences have lived a life of their own far removed from the (con)text in which they were written. They were written by Woolf in quotation marks as being said by one of her outsiders who could only be a woman like herself—an educated woman and the daughter of an educated man. Woolf didn’t believe that “my country is the whole world” could apply to all women as she wrote it as something only a very few women were capable of saying. These women could not contend that they felt the whole world as their country because they felt an affinity with women everywhere regardless of class or creed, but because they, unlike other women, were able to use Reason to think dispassionately about their particular situation. They could say that they no longer wanted a country because thanks to an education they had become subject to the rule of Reason, and Reason cannot be contained within territorial boundaries. The power of Reason offered them the chance to not only make something worthwhile out of their situation but also to transcend it altogether and rise above the terrible realities of war, violence and patriarchy. In the pursuit of knowledge they would find the best refuge against a world going steadily mad—for them it would have to make the difference between a worthwhile life and death¹.

Maverick (C. Wright Mills)

ma’verick *n.* Unbranded calf or yearling; unorthodox or undisciplined person. [f. S. A. *Maverick*, Texas engineer who owned but did not brand cattle c. 1850]

More than thirty years after *The Sociological Imagination* was published Maverick has ridden into International Relations. In a major debate article in a recent number of *Millennium*, Justin Rosenberg argues that Maverick’s classic text published, by “curious coincidence”, in the same year as Kenneth Waltz’s *Man, the State and War* provides us today with the opportunity to move beyond negative critiques of Realist International Relations towards a concrete conception of what a “non-Realist discipline of IR might look like” (Rosenberg 1994: 86)². According to Rosenberg, the powerful critique Maverick launched against American social science in the 1950s closely resembles the type of critique levelled against Realism in International Relations in the 1990s by a range of individuals, including himself. However, the difference is that Maverick included in his text a “clear and inspiring alternative conception of the method and purpose of social science”; he stamped his negative critique with “real authority” by telling of the historical promise social science was failing to fulfil. Thus, Rosenberg sees it as his task to transfer this stamp of “real authority” to critiques of realism in IR by translating the sociological imagination into the international imagination:

If as Maverick argued, 'the history that now affects every [person] is world history', then no discipline is better placed to take up this vocation today than International Relations. To do so, however, we must turn not to Realism, but to the international imagination. (Rosenberg 1994: 108)

The appropriate question for this paper to ask therefore is whether or not feminist scholars should also aspire to be Mavericks in a non-Realist discipline of International Relations? Is Maverick also the natural choice for them confronted with today's Wilder West and a life on the frontier between modernity from postmodernity?³

Writing of Maverick, Cornel West depicts him as an all-American intellectual and the guardian of a particular culture of radical democracy: as someone who fitted well with "the Emersonian animus against conformity and routine" (West 1989: 124). Although some would no doubt take exception to the comparison, *The Sociological Imagination* can be productively read as an updated and extended version of Emerson's famous oration *The American Scholar*. For Emerson writing in the 1830s, the new American nation was still in a position of cultural dependency vis-à-vis Britain and lacked a mind of its own. He thought the geography of the new nation was sublime but not yet the people; he felt himself in the midst of a "puny and feeble folk". In response to this situation he invented a mythic self who could act as the Saviour of the infant nation:

The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another, which should pierce his ear, it is: 'The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature...in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all. Mr. President and Gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. (Emerson 1837/1984: 69)

Maverick in the 1950s can be interpreted as having been overwhelmed by a sense of nostalgia for something similar to Emerson's vision of America and the ideal of individuality it advanced. A fantastic ideal which held that; "each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state" (Emerson 1837/1984: 68). For Maverick, Emerson's vision had become very close to lived reality in the "self-balancing society" of nineteenth century liberal America. This was Maverick's own idea of a sweet homeland – a place where; "competition was a means of producing free individuals, a testing field for heroes; in its terms men lived the legend of the self-reliant individual" (Maverick 1951/1977: 12)

In the twentieth century, however, everything had turned sour in Maverick's eyes and America had lost its way. In *White Collar*, Maverick tells of how the continued progress of industrialization during the first half of this century had coincided with an ascendent trend of rationalization and the organized pursuit of rationality without reason:

In a world crowded with big ugly forces, the white-collar man is readily assumed to possess all the supposed virtues of the small creature...The white-collar man is

the hero as victim, the small creature who is acted upon but who does not act, who works alone unnoticed in somebody's office or store, never talking aloud, never talking back, never taking a stand. (Maverick 1951/1977: xii)

Surrounded by "small creatures", Maverick saw himself surrounded by unAmerican behaviour. The only source of genuine hope and agency in the nation was once again the lonely American Scholar. With the onset of the Cold War things only got worse in Maverick's eyes. As a new post-modern epoch loomed large, it looked to him as though his compatriots were on the verge of giving up trying to lead human lives altogether and settling for artificial lives instead:

The ultimate problem of freedom is the problem of the cheerful robot, and it arises in this form today because today it has become evident to us that *all* men do *not* naturally *want* to be free; that all men are not willing or not able, as the case may be, to exert themselves to acquire the reason that freedom requires. (Maverick 1959/1980: 193-94 original emphasis)

Faced with such a desperate situation Maverick had no option but to act the Master Narrator and attempt to enslave his helpless readers. This is something Norman Denzin picks up on in a recent article when, in contrast to Justin Rosenberg, he describes *The Sociological Imagination* as "a hypocritical text with dubious ethics" (1990: 4) through which Maverick seeks to construct "a spurious dialogue with the reader" (1990: 3). As Denzin expresses it; *The Sociological Imagination* proposes dialogue only to break down into a harangue and "a monological tirade on the state of mid-century American life" (ibid). In the same moment Maverick takes sides with "ordinary people" he constructs them as inferior to him. Their imagined inferiority standing in direct relation to his imagined superiority. They are branded, docile, disciplined and trapped in precisely the same way that he is unbranded, insubordinate, footloose and free.

At the Risk of Feeling Insecure

Survival in fact is about the connections between things... (Said 1993: 407-408)

Woman is no longer different *from* but *different so as to bring about alternative values*. (Braidotti: 1994: 239)

The figure of the nomad stands in indirected contrast to both that of the outsider and the maverick. Woolf's strategy was to use a position on the outside to appropriate the faculty of reason for Women. However, her new-found position can be interpreted as one of critical no-where-ness, a place of solitude – an observation platform in outer space. From this remote position, which also promises to be a commanding position, it may be possible to visualize Man and Woman differently, but most likely at the expense of many and only to the advantage of a privileged few.

In the case of Maverick, Rosenberg commends him for giving authority to his critique of American social science by clearly articulating the historical promise it was failing to fulfil. People were feeling lost and confused because

social science was neglecting its most important task – the cultivation of the sociological imagination. Moving into the present and the uncertainties of the post-Cold War world, Rosenberg argues that as non-Realist scholars of international relations our task is to supply the world with the international imagination as a package deal of sensibilities nobody can properly do without today. But what do we find when look into the the relations of similarity and difference out of which Maverick constructed his sociological imagination? We find an embattled social scientist determined to stand alone by constructing himself as One of a kind. Maverick stamped his sociological imagination with authority by depicting himself as our last hope. The only trouble is that the more prestige Maverick was able to attach to his own Self, the more pathetic everybody else around him was bound to become. His sociological imagination is nothing we can share in because it is precisely the quality that allows people like him to talk over our heads.

Conceived with the dangers of outsider and maverick consciousness in mind, nomadic thought is also a form of resistance to hierarchial and exclusionary views of subjectivity. The nomad is not an outsider because s/he is no longer prepared to relate to others as insiders. The nomad is not a Maverick because s/he finds it impossible to find his or her true self among many others. The nomad rejects the view that only settled subjects who are dead sure of themselves can be political and make reasoned choices as *the nomad makes the construction and regulation of subjectivity itself into a political issue*. The nomad practices politics therefore at the level of conflicting ontologies and conflicting visions of nature and humanity. Viewed from the perspective of the discipline of International Relations, the nomad inevitably spells trouble because s/he deprives the discipline of its favourite subject – the sovereign subject. The message is that International Relations has to stop working in defence of sovereignties and start recognizing and constructing other richer, more complex varieties of subjectivity:

Being a nomad, living in transition, does not mean that one cannot or is unwilling to create those necessarily stable and reassuring bases for identity that allow one to function in a community. Rather nomadic consciousness consists in not taking any kind of identity as permanent. The nomad is only passing through; s/he makes those necessarily situated connections that can help him/her to survive, but s/he never takes on fully the limits of one national, fixed identity. The nomad has no passport – or has too many of them. (Braidotti 1994: 33)

Nomads want to recognize and legitimate many sides to both themselves and to others without losing a stable sense of self completely. They want to have the best of many possible worlds. Crucially, this means that they must be able to enact and affirm a positive vision of difference without fear of falling into a condition of moral and political relativism. The spectre of relativism is only something that those wishing to continue addressing international and sexual relations of similarity and difference in a negative fashion will be prepared to raise.

In her work, Rosi Braidotti thinks about interntional difference by thinking through sexual difference. Like Cynthia Enloe she believes that transforming

international politics means transforming sexual politics and that the two are impossible to separate. Who we think we are as men and women is crucial in deciding where we locate ourselves in the world. More than others women have recognized that general calls for global solidarity must be replaced by close attention to, and accountability for, the relations of similarity and difference we enact on an everyday basis. In relation to the pursuit of international politics, feminist scholars are the first to tell us that internationalization starts at home: recognizing the multiple differences that exist among women means recognizing the “domestic foreigners” living in our midst:

Migrant women constitute the bulk of what we would call the “domestic foreigners” in our postindustrial metropolis...How close are we, the “white” intellectual women, to the migrant women who have even fewer citizen rights than we have? How sensitive are we to the intellectual potential of the foreigners that we have right here, in our own backyard?...For internationalization to become a serious practice, we must work through this paradox of proximity, indifference, and cultural differences between the nomadic intellectual and the migrant women. (Braidotti: 1994: 255)

However, the holding of ourselves accountable to the “domestic foreigners” in our midst does not necessarily have to be a pursued in a mood of dour seriousness. If difference is always negative difference then dour seriousness is fully justified, but if the ambition is to emphasize the positivity of difference our mood must be lighter, softer and more sympathetic. If we are to seek security with others rather than from them, we must be prepared to live slightly more dangerously than in the past; putting at least some part of ourselves continually in jeopardy and seeing where this takes us.

Notes

1. Of course it is possible to argue that in trying to articulate the difference between the daughters of educated men and other groups in society Woolf was also trying to articulate the differences she experienced within herself as a result of the precariousness of her mental health.

2. Another person arguing the relevance of Maverick as an inspirational figure for the pursuit of alternative perspectives on international relations today is Edward Said. According to him Maverick can supply us with one of the “best and most honest” answers to the question “what does the intellectual represent today?” (Said 1994: 15). To express what the proper task of the intellectual should have been during the Gulf War, Said says s/he should have done as Maverick would have done and worked to “unearth

the forgotten, to make connections that were denied”; s/he should have staked his or her whole being on a critical sense that refuses “to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do”. (1994:17)

3. Some may wish to argue that Maverick is an impossible feminist figure – that Maverick was and can only ever be a Man. However, in opposition to such a view I think we only have to take into account the most popular and debated “feminist” film of the 1990s: *Thelma and Louise* (Scott 1991). Cutting loose, leaving their ordinary women’s lives behind them, and becoming a law unto themselves, the two heroines of Ridley Scott’s film make wonderful Mavericks.

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