



Expanding the Combat Zone

Claudia Brunner

To cite this article: Claudia Brunner (2016): Expanding the Combat Zone, International Feminist Journal of Politics, DOI: [10.1080/14616742.2015.1104151](https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2015.1104151)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2015.1104151>



Published online: 11 Jan 2016.



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Expanding the Combat Zone

SEX – GENDER – CULTURE TALK AND COGNITIVE MILITARIZATION TODAY

CLAUDIA BRUNNER

Alps-Adriatic University of Klagenfurt, Austria

Abstract

Although International Relations is still largely androcentric, masculinist and heteronormative, certain issues of gender and sexuality have gained currency over the last decade. At the same time, much of IR follows a Eurocentrist and occidental script that is systematically built into disciplinary ways of knowing. Adapting step-by-step Spivak's famous quote of "white men saving brown women from brown men" across a range of feminist and queer concepts like patriarchal genderism, embedded feminism, transnational sexism, homonationalism and queer imperialism, this article traces the flexible phenomenon of gendered and sexualized epistemic violence from British colonialism in India to imperial western politics today. It shows how the logic of who is to liberate whom for sex/gender reasons gradually shifts from heteronormativity and whiteness to more diverse patterns that contribute to a cognitive militarization of large parts of society. Introducing the notion of the occidental dividend that can be earned in this procedure, we can understand that some forms of sex–gender–culture talk are quite ambivalent achievements that constitute genuine challenges for antimilitarist feminist positions.

Keywords

epistemic violence, cognitive militarization, occidental dividend, geopolitics of knowledge, culture talk

INTRODUCTION: AMBIVALENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Feminists have long complained about the androcentrism, masculinism, sexism and heteronormativity of IR and international relations, and queer theorists have substantially added to, challenged and intensified critique along

these lines. Both have criticized the permanent ignoring of gender- and sexuality-based issues found in academic and political contexts. On the way toward the fragmented recognition of gender and sexuality as relevant categories or at least variables of knowledge, though, something seemingly paradoxical has occurred. Today, women's and queers' rights seem to be of privileged interest when it comes to defending or importing/exporting democracy, starting or ending war – even for those whom we would never have thought of as “converts to feminism” (Heidenreich and Karakayalı 2009, 122). Even more problematic are the “self-constituting practices of unlikely imperialist subjects – queer, feminist, left, and yes, even critical theorists and philosophers – as they simultaneously advance the reach of the Western empire” (Thobani 2014, xvi). While, in IR, “the long-running Woman Question has been supplemented by a set of variously articulated ‘queer questions’” and therefore celebrate the fact that “rights claims on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity occupy an increasingly prominent place in international politics” (Rao 2014, 199), this should not bring about complacency.

As a feminist scholar, I appreciate that gender and sexuality are today taken into account on a broader scale than thirty years ago. I welcome the fact that feminist and queer critiques have, at least partly, reached the mainstream of political science, peace and conflict studies, IR and other fields of knowledge production. But when it comes to recent debates in the field of international politics, and especially concerning the Arab world and its entanglements with what is considered to be the West, some forms of sex–gender talk can do more harm than good. They often go hand-in-hand with a “culture talk” (Mamdani 2005, 17) that is perfectly qualified to naturalize political violence of the first order (direct, physical violence) and to enhance second-order violence (structural, symbolic and epistemic violence) at the same time. As a matter of course, sex–gender–culture talk is diffusing into our knowledge, expertise and analyses about international and domestic politics in a globalized world. It is part of the epistemological foundation of the capitalist and imperialist order that the Global North/West has so successfully been imposing onto the Global South/East for a couple of centuries already.

Obviously, the sustaining coloniality of the global world order does not only include the so-called peripheries that always seem to be in need of political sanctions, preemptive strikes, humanitarian interventions and other euphemistically framed ways of neoimperial warfare. It also shapes everyday life in the centers of the western world that still consider themselves as the legitimate providers of democracy, human rights and pacification – however bloody the latter may be. The knowledge that comes out of an occidental and neoliberal system of research and education supports the dominant state of mind that rules “the house of IR” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004). And, more importantly for our concerns, gender and sexuality matter a lot when it comes to sorting out which and whose violence can invoke legitimacy – and which and whose cannot. This is where epistemic violence is at work, silently but highly efficiently. This is the challenging intellectual terrain to

which feminist and queer critiques have a lot to give: “[t]o point at violence always means to call into question power relations” (Hagemann-White 2002, 29). And with an eye to epistemic violence, this move includes ourselves in these power relations, for better or worse, since as academics “[w]e are complicitous in the same exploitative modes of production we are so privileged as to academically criticize” (Bahri 1995, 77).

It is important to note that sex–gender–culture talk, which often overlaps with the category of religion, goes hand-in-hand with a backlash against anti-racist and antimilitarist feminism, while so-called gender-based approaches are gaining ground in the academic field. More relevant for my argument here, though, and a greater challenge for feminist scholars, is the fact that sex–gender–culture talk can serve those who have long been excluded from power and recognition by being a vehicle for social and political upward mobility. Neoliberal capitalism needs to co-opt and tame its fiercest critics while some of the latter might not always resist the desire for inclusion and social upward mobility (Duggan 2003). One could speak of mutual seduction at work. Feminist, queer and gender-conscious voices who find themselves in too-cozy alliances with “cosmo man”¹ (Agathangelou and Ling 2004, 37) might – intentionally or not – contribute to the price of rising racism and Islamophobia that others have to pay. Just like the figure of cosmo man himself, however, the more and more diversified sex–gender–culture talk allies could not enact their cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism without the capitalist and imperialist structures that support its discourses and practices (Agathangelou and Ling 2009, 159). That said, the success story of gender and sexuality having entered political, academic and activist discourses as increasingly recognized variables is also ambivalent and at times problematic. Even the most politicized, emancipatory and progressive claims for gender equality and sexual rights can be entangled in practices of epistemic violence, which are always linked to and often translated into other forms of violence that most of us – critical feminist, queer, gender-sensitive scholars dealing with international politics – had claimed to oppose in the first place.

FIVE CONCEPTS OF CRITIQUE

In order to clarify my skepticism of this apparent success story of mainstreaming gender issues into IR-related debates, let me now present five theoretical concepts that I consider very useful for the antimilitarist feminist perspective to which I subscribe. While we can think of them in chronological order, they also intersect with each other. Just as feminist voices were disruptive in IR debates decades ago but over time gained ground, formerly even more marginalized queer positions have since substantially challenged the field, including feminist IR. I will not focus on the tensions between these perspectives, however, but rather underline ways in which the broader acknowledgment of gender issues in international politics is entangled with cognitive

militarization, that is, an intensified mobilization for the potential legitimacy of political violence in the name of gender equality and sexual liberation: patriarchal genderism, embedded feminism, transnational sexism, homonationalism and queer imperialism are analytical concepts that can help us decipher this phenomenon.

These concepts spell out from different angles how “imperial democracy mainstreams women’s [and queers’] rights discourse into foreign policy and militarizes women [and queers] for imperial goals” (Eisenstein 2007, 27). First, they embody the conviction that the gendered and sexualized ways of thinking and speaking about violence are relevant to the ways in which power relations are maintained or transformed. Second, they are conceived as interventions in the so-called war on terror. Third, they signify that gender issues are not only captured by unpleasant proponents of problematic interests in order to discredit queer and feminist agendas; quite the opposite in fact: many feminist and queer theorists and activists voluntarily and consciously engage in imperial agendas by subscribing to progress and liberation in terms of gender and sexuality, and they sometimes silently accept or promote anti-Islamic/Muslim racism while pushing their own agenda. This is the main problem I want to highlight by raising the question of epistemic violence, and by pointedly speaking of sex–gender–culture talk and cognitive militarization. To delineate the ambivalent expansion of gender-related knowledge across the field of international politics, I will use the famous statement “white men saving brown women from brown men,” written by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak thirty years ago in the context of her critique of British colonial policies and epistemologies in and for India (Spivak 1988, 297). Sex–gender–culture talk has undergone remarkable transformations in the years since. It has been sedimented into a variety of phenomena, which we can see more sharply by modifying the quote² step-by-step and relating it to the concepts in question.

Patriarchal Genderism

... white men saving brown women from brown men.

What Tina Jung (2009) calls “genderism” (149) refers to making use of gender as a mere variable and not as a category of research. It is based on a steadfast belief in gender binarity that takes gender into account if it appears politically opportune, but is unlikely to allow challenges by profound analysis. We encounter it in many places, and this makes it very difficult to insist on feminism as such, let alone raise queerness as an issue of interest. Patriarchal genderism has entered many fields of research and politics without necessarily having anything to do with feminist or queer claims at all. On the contrary, a wide, but superficial post- and anti-feminist genderization of debates may efficiently lead to not having to take sex–gender-based analysis and critique into account. Its proponents – we can think of them as relatives and friends of

“cosmo man” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004, 37) – can be of any gender. The corresponding mode of thinking about gender and sexuality is clearly hetero-normative, binary, top-down and mostly formulated from rather comfortable positions in society, which is why I call it patriarchal in quality. Patriarchal genderism is characterized by potentially benevolent, but preferably moderate, gender charity rather than radical queer or feminist politics. Still, it claims to be aware and supportive of gender issues as benchmarks of liberal democracy. This often amorphous genderism tends to make universal claims, but it can turn into a very specific form when it comes to speaking about *other* women that come “under western eyes” (Mohanty 1991). With the rise of gender awareness and policies in the relevant domains of so-called international/universal knowledge production, patriarchy has successfully been transferred to distant “Others” in the Global South/East or to its representatives inside global capitalism’s metropolises through a sustainable “ethnicization of sexism” (Jäger 1999). By way of this procedure, the centers of political and epistemic power in the Global North/West appear as the natural address of progressive gender regimes and sexual policies. In fact, this tradition of sexualized and gendered racism is indeed as old as imperialism (McClintock 1995), and it has taken on many forms. It is very efficient, because “[g]ender operates as a kind of technology of empire enabling the West to make the case for its own modernity and for its civilizational projects around the globe” (Razack 2008, 18). We are about to now decipher the latest forms of existence of this successful technology, and we have to modify our instruments of analysis and critique accordingly. The notion of patriarchal genderism and other concepts presented below can help us in this process.

Embedded Feminism

... white women saving brown women from brown men.

Krista Hunt (2006) made use of Spivak’s famous savior slogan in the context of the invasion of US armed forces into Afghanistan in 2002. In this operation, “embedded journalism” (reporters traveling with troops in order to tell “the true stories,” as the US Department of Defense openly framed it) was applied. This inspired Hunt to call the Feminist Majority Foundation’s (FMF) support of the invasion “embedded feminism:” including white women in the maneuver of saving brown women from brown men. Along with Laura Bush and other notable women working in the international political system (women not generally seen as being feminists, let alone as advocates for Afghani women), FMF, the biggest feminist nongovernmental organization (NGO) in the United States, mobilized women across the continent in support of a military intervention abroad – for the sake of women’s rights (Hunt 2006). As Robin Riley (2013) puts it, “[t]his agreement helped silence dissent against the new imperialism” (5), especially from feminist standpoints

beyond that now occupied discursive territory. Similar examples can be found across Europe and in other western countries, where feminists were not only embedded into warfare abroad (Schoenes 2011) or restrictive immigration policies at home (Fekete 2008) against their better intentions, but often voluntarily participated in this process.³ From an antimilitarist perspective, we have to think of these terrains as intrinsically entangled, even if we detect the debates within the very same national territory or across boundaries.⁴ But it is not only the actions of women politicians and feminist activists that we can frame by the concept of embedded feminism. The militaries have discovered women in uniform can be effective ambassadors of military goals through adding a female face to the masculinist business of warfare. As women have entered western militaries in increasing numbers, military strategists have been able to use women as a valuable resource for warfare without taking the risk of making feminist claims. The US Army, for example, has created “female engagement teams” in Iraq and Afghanistan during the last decade (Harding 2012), which is just one element of counterinsurgency that has integrated gender knowhow (Khalili 2011). Contextualized in terms of a *mission civilisatrice*, women provide the soft skills of gathering and disseminating information among the population that any military intervention and counterinsurgency strategy is desperately in need of in order to legitimize their less pacifist operations. Similar phenomena are exhibited by other militaries: for example, the acronym for the Women’s Corps of the Israel Defense Forces, CHEN, perfectly represents the symbolic function of femininity, as it means “charms” in Hebrew (Klein 2001, 167). Some military organizations, such as the German Bundeswehr, have started to celebrate an annual girls’ day to recruit young women for military careers.⁵ In fact, civil–military cooperation can have many faces, including female ones. Even if we do not have to subscribe to these mutilated understandings of what feminism is, we must acknowledge that even the military can think of itself as a gender-liberating institution and perform accordingly.

Transnational Sexism

... white and brown women saving brown women from brown men.

Inspired by Arundhati Roy and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Riley (2013) uses the term “transnational sexism” to depict the specific anti-Islamic/Muslim genderism and feminism that functions both as a precondition and a consequence of the US-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the consequences of which have been sedimented into our cognitive and political apparatuses. She argues that we encounter a new racism that is about empire building and therefore in need of people of color as tokens or iconic figures in order to silence dissent (13). We might think of Waris Dirie, top model and bestselling author, engaging in campaigns against female genital mutilation/cutting

(Austria), or Ayan Hirsi Ali, former politician in the Netherlands, coauthor of Theo van Gogh's controversial film *Submission* (for/after which he was murdered in 2004) and later scholar in a US think tank, as very prominent examples from Europe (both are of Somali origin). While Hunt's notion of embedded feminism predominantly focuses on white liberal feminism, Riley states that we face more complicated attributions of gender and sexuality today. As women are now simultaneously victims and victimizers, nurturers and fighters, imperial projects are in need of a new sexism (Riley 2013). This is where carefully selected women of color find themselves integrated into liberal feminist attitudes and practices, provided that their class and habitus are at least compatible. Irrespective of these women's courageous and often perilous feminist engagement, we can observe that occidentalist discourse has successfully integrated the "agential Muslim woman" (Allison 2013) into its own need for keeping up power relations while disguising them through emancipatory sex-gender-culture talk. In transnational sexism, "all women's achievements are undermined while some few freedoms or inroads are granted to certain women while simultaneously certain other women are vilified or presented as victims" (Riley 2013, 14). This development widens Spivak's original statement, which we can now spell out as "white and brown [upper class] women saving brown [working class or subaltern] women from brown men," thereby recalling Spivak's own focus on classism in her work on subaltern Indian women. Transnational sexism, Riley continues:

has racism, classism, and homophobia as its foundation and uses them as a means to create divisions among women, but it also uses women, mostly women of color, but also lesbians and working-class and poor women, to create or reinscribe old divisions among people, between states, and within ethnicities. (14)

I suggest that we view transnational sexism as the flipside of embedded feminism:

While the bonds of the body – that is, shared sisterhood – are exploited as reason to go to war, gender, that is shared understandings about the proper practice of femininity, is utilized as a means of division between Western – read white – women and Iraqi and Afghan women (Riley 2013, 14).

It is because of the changes brought about by feminist movements during the last decades that we have to take a closer look at who raises which kind of feminist voice for what purpose, and from this reshape our analytical instruments accordingly. Queer perspectives, which substantially challenged their heteronormative feminist predecessors when entering the arena of international politics, have contributed to improving and modifying these instruments, thereby providing a more comprehensive critique of sex-gender-culture talk in IR and beyond.

Homonationalism

... white queers saving brown queers from brown men.

Jasbir Puar's (2007) concept of homonationalism refers to deployments of LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Queer) rights for racist and Islamophobic ends, resulting in the consolidation of more sexually inclusive, but racially exclusionary, ideas of citizenship. She shows that not only white feminists, but also predominantly white queer activists, integrate themselves into racist and imperialist rhetorics of liberation in the name of sexual self-determination toward an increasingly generalized Muslim homophobe adversary. Our original quote then becomes "white queers saving brown queers from brown men" whose supposed homophobia turns into a characteristic feature.⁶ Puar argues that homonationalism produces queers as regulatory over the racialized and sexualized populations targeted within the imperial biopolitics of the war on terror. Rahul Rao (2010) makes a similar argument, saying that "a global politics of LGBT solidarity has not been an entirely benign development, free from questions of power and hierarchy" (174). One of the most obvious examples from the US context is the inclusion of homosexuals into the armed forces – an old demand from predominantly white queer lobbyists that was certainly not by chance fulfilled in the early years of the new millennium, when both Afghanistan and Iraq were invaded. Having for the first time officially included gays and lesbians into the combating troops, it was all the easier to shape a rhetoric of fighting for gender equality and sexual rights abroad, which was celebrated by many queer communities throughout the West (Richter-Montpetit 2014). Immigration tests in Europe today include questions about progressive gender and sexuality politics. And while queer marriages become legal in many western countries, immigration policies tighten, and they explicitly do so in the name of progressive European/western gender regimes (Butler 2009, 101–137). Sexual exceptionalism is busy establishing itself as a new norm of democratic normalcy, and homonationalism has become an innovative tool for consolidating the imperialist desire by increasing its legitimacy among formerly marginalized groups of society. Following Rey Chow's (2002) notion of an "ascendancy of whiteness," homonationalism is, above all, a useful vehicle for white queers seeking to join the club of political and cultural recognition. But where in this hierarchical grid of salvation can we put the ambivalences that queers of color face when entering this discourse?

Queer Imperialism

... brown queers saving brown queers from brown men.

Jin Haritaworn, Esra Erdem and Tamsila Tauquir's (2007) notion of queer imperialism offers a concept with which to grasp this question. They try to explain the growing presence of some queers of color in public discourse, which seems to have created a new character for casting procedures, talk shows and even political debate. The problem with this, they argue, is not the fact that queers of color do actually appear in public, but the fact that their voices are often heard in isolation from a global context of Islamophobia.

As long as they speak the liberal language of internationality, solidarity and antifascism, and do not substantially transgress these lines in a more radical direction, these voices can equally be linked to imperial projects. Similar to Thobani (2014), Haritaworn et al. contextualize this phenomenon as a specifically racist maneuver of powerful whiteness and as one of the bases of imperialism. Racism is the vehicle that can upgrade white homosexuals, queers and feminists into mainstream discourse. Parallel to the carefully chosen brown woman in the aforementioned transnational sexism, the extraordinary figure of the Muslim and/or brown queer person can co-constitute the imperial hegemony that so efficiently makes use of a universalized human rights discourse that keeps dividing people into subtle categories. According to the civilization–salvation–democracy–liberalism paradigm, queer Muslims can turn into idealized showpiece-victims and find themselves aligned with the generalized topic of supposedly timeless oriental patriarchy, because “Muslim” is equated with “brown” and with “homophobia” by those who design and shape this specific discourse of putative inclusion. With his concept of the “gay international,” Joseph Massad (2008) problematizes the recent phenomenon of “pinkwashing” in a similar way. He integrates questions of racialized and sexualized classism into his analysis, showing that this new internationalism can turn into an elitist and occidental Euro-American project itself due to its inherent imperialist nature. While I cannot deepen the vivid scholarly debates about “homosexuality as a cultural battleground in the Middle East” (Dalacoura 2014) at this point, I think both concepts – queer imperialism and the gay international – can help us to perceive, analyze and criticize upcoming reformulations of sexual exceptionalism as tricky accelerators and normalizers of racism, militarism and coloniality. We can sum it up by transforming Spivak’s statement into “[privileged] brown queers saving [disadvantaged] brown queers from brown men.”⁷

DYNAMICS AND STATICS OF AN EXPANDING GENDER FRAMEWORK

After traversing five terrains of world politics sex–gender–culture talk and introducing analytical tools to decipher its most recent variations, let us now have a look at the extensive transformation of Spivak’s original statement and recapitulate with respect to the argument of cognitive militarization (Table 1).

As we can see in Table 1, the mental and discursive combat zone for what I call cognitive militarization is gradually expanding from a strictly heteronormative setting of liberal white feminism to a more diverse, color-inclusive and queer understanding of gender relations and sexuality in IR. If we focus on the middle of the quote(s) in the second column in the table, it is clear that the goal of all of these attempts is to liberate somebody from suppressive gender and sexuality regimes. The circle of objects (those who are to be liberated) is enlarged from women to queers, gradually including various kinds of gender/sex-based discrimination, but with a clear idea about the color of the

Table 1 Discursive dynamics and statics

<i>Who is saving?</i>	<i>Who is to be saved?</i>		<i>Where is the danger?</i>		<i>Concept of critique</i>
white men	saving	brown women	from	brown men	<i>patriarchal genderism</i>
white women	saving	brown women	from	brown men	<i>embedded feminism</i>
white & brown women	saving	brown women	from	brown men	<i>transnational sexism</i>
white queers	saving	brown queers	from	brown men	<i>homonationalism</i>
brown queers	saving	brown queers	from	brown men	<i>queer imperialism</i>

sexually oppressed: it is brown women and brown queers who are to be saved abroad or at home, provided that they disconnect themselves from what is understood as “their own kind.”

Taking a closer look at the first parts of the sentences, we can see that the circle of subjects (those who are in the position to liberate) is expanding even further, and it does so along the categories of gender, sexuality and race, with class as an implicit co-constitutive element. More and more people – white, brown, straight or queer – can join the club of salvation, as long as they subscribe to the conditions of imperialist world politics on the basis of neoliberal capitalism, nationalism and exclusionary citizenship. When it comes to supporting imperialist policies at home and abroad, more and more parts of society are to be included in the rhetorics and practices of occidental self-ascertainment via a seemingly emancipatory sex–gender–culture talk. In one way or another, “we are all [supposed to be] soldiers now” (Riley 2013, 112), at least in our state of mind.

The discursive expansion of the combat zone, however, does not correspond with a comparable differentiation of potential adversaries. On the contrary, the shape of the enemy is disproportionately simplified in this setting. While the first and the second part of the transforming quote are quite dynamic, the third part of the highly adaptable citation remains the same throughout the five terrains, if we read the modifications of Spivak’s statement as condensations of the underlying sex–gender–culture talks at stake. Whether abroad or at home, it is always “dangerous brown men” (Bhattacharyya 2008) who seem to cause all the sex/gender trouble, a powerful stereotype that relies on tropes centuries old, but proves to be very flexible throughout history. The “dangerous brown men” might be conceived of as eternally fixed homophobes or as constantly mutating unruly terrorists abroad, they may have been Jews in the past and today are Muslims; the general profile may indeed oscillate, but I argue that it does so within limits that are quite narrow variations on one theme: brown men, the ultimate misogynists and these days also homophobes.

In the modern, liberal-democratic script of sexual liberation and gender equality, it seems to be exclusively their predisposition – hence considered biological, today framed as cultural, tomorrow said to be genetic – that generates sexed-gendered discrimination in their own society and political conflicts at an international level. “Cosmo man” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004, 37) and his currently diversified entourage, on the contrary, can keep up their progressive image not only as neutral observers, but as genderwise progressive saviors and liberators – by way of military intervention, if necessary. This perfectly matches the extended gender repertoire of a “meta-racism” (Balibar 2007, 85) of self-declared intellectual elites, who locate emancipatory gender dynamics in the West, while the rest of the world is perceived as a static entity trapped in “culture/religion” and therefore to be educated or eradicated along sexed-gendered lines of argument. In the words of Wendy Brown (2006), “‘we’ have culture, while culture has ‘them,’ or we *have* culture while they *are* a culture. Or, we are a democracy while they are a culture” (151). In such a frame, those who are perceived as present or future enemies or at least as a dangerous threat can easily be controlled, arrested, tortured or declared legitimate objects of targeted killing. The epistemic violence that is woven into much of liberal sex-gender-culture talk can very quickly be converted into all sorts of violence that reach far beyond the sphere of mere knowledge, and cognitive militarization will often turn out to have paved the way for more concrete practices of coercion and violence. Thobani’s (2014) strong words best describe this:

Western feminists recalibrate their alignments with their states as they set out to rescue Muslim women or to protect themselves from their narcissistically construed forms of precariousness; and Muslim women and men supplicants to the West speak in the name of feminism and liberal democracy to indict Islam, along with their families and communities, providing vital alibis for torture and collective punishment. All the while, Muslim men around the world are demonized as misogynist homophobes even as they are incarcerated, deported, raped, tortured and targeted for assassination; Muslim women and queers are raped, killed, bombed and compelled to surrender unconditionally to Western gender regimes if they are to survive. As for the Muslims killed in the hundreds of thousands by bombs, drones and militias, they do not even appear as human in the register of the war, featuring only as collateral damage.

Islamophobia has thus become the *lingua franca* that enables trans/national allegiances to be remade, international accords to be signed, aid negotiations to be consolidated, intelligence, security and border control agreements to be implemented, and assassination squads to be deployed across the planet. (xvi)

In order to decipher this *lingua franca*, we can take advantage of the notion of epistemic violence. It can help us to name and frame our sometimes diffuse unease and concerns regarding the processes described across the above-mentioned five concepts of critique. Less well known, but nonetheless very useful for understanding the gendered expansion of the combat zone through cogni-

tive militarization, is Gabriele Dietze's (2010) concept of the "occidental dividend" (100), discussed in the next section.

EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE AND THE OCCIDENTALIST DIVIDEND

Within a sociology of knowledge-based approach, I understand epistemic violence as the set of contributions to violent societal power relations that are firmly anchored inside the domain of knowledge itself: its formation, shape, organizational form and effectiveness are at stake (Brunner 2013, 228). I use the term in a way that allows for "relating the observed to the observers, products to production, knowledge to its sites of formation" (Coronil 1996, 56), and for including ourselves as scholars of feminist, queer and gender studies or related fields into globally asymmetric power relations. Following Fernando Coronil's definition of Occidentalism (1996), I do not frame "the occidental" as primarily spatial, but rather as a spatially framed and globally effective social category. I do so to emphasize the "entanglements" (Randeria 2006) between epistemic violence and other sorts of direct, physical violence in the realm of international relations. As we have not yet disposed of a comprehensive theory of epistemic violence, however, it is hard to point at epistemic violence. Moreover, political scientists or scholars in peace and conflict studies and IR are quite reluctant to use wide notions of violence, especially when their own business – knowledge production – is involved. Spivak (1988) defines epistemic violence as "the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" (280–281ff). As we have seen above, however, epistemic violence is not only about Othering, but at least as much about Selfing, and this, again, has to do with power. In the words of Enrique Galván-Álvarez (2010):

Epistemic violence, that is, violence exerted against or through knowledge, is probably one of the key elements in any process of domination. It is not only through the construction of exploitative economic links or the control of the politico-military apparatuses that domination is accomplished, but also and, I would argue, most importantly through the construction of epistemic frameworks that legitimise and enshrine those practices of domination. (12)

The gendered discursive and political procedures described above are certainly very specific and subtle ways of enshrining and legitimizing. We might not consider them too important initially, as they seem to happen at the margins of what is conventionally understood as international politics at large. However, concepts like patriarchal genderism, embedded feminism, homonationalism, transnational sexism or queer imperialism allow for a very clear vision of how imperialism works today. That said, we must not too readily be satisfied by the fact that decades of feminist, queer and other interventions have left their traces in public discourse and policies, since many of the ways in which this has been done do not lead to more than selective liberation in terms

of feminist or queer politics. What has happened instead is a wide mobilization for imperialist democracy and the militarization and securitization of everyday life that need the inclusion of formerly radical voices in order to maintain legitimacy. By way of a culturalization of structural and political violence, a specific religionization of gender- and sexuality-based discrimination, not only white men, women and LGBTQ people, but also people of color and carefully selected Muslims can now participate in imperialist politics at the national and international levels. The necessity of military intervention abroad or intensified use of force at home is being normalized by the above-mentioned forms of sex-gender-culture talk. This is what I call cognitive militarization in a discourse that explicitly relies on the notions of peace-building, democratization and, last but not least, rhetorics of gender equality and sexual rights.

Those who participate in these maneuvers, however, are not necessarily decoys or victims. Feminist or queer “investments” (Lamble 2014) in international gender policy alliances may, in fact, yield some extra revenues for the stability of the sovereign Self. We have to acknowledge that “[t]o ‘invest’ in something is to give it resources of power in order that it might be sustained, strengthened or expanded – usually with the aim of generating a direct benefit to the investor” (153). Moreover, “[i]nvestment signals both the process of resource mobilization, and the embedding of subjects within that process” (153). Through this procedure, more and more parts of society can be included in imperialist politics, because those who join it have something very valuable to gain: an “occidental dividend” (Dietze 2010, 100). Dietze very convincingly combines Raewyn Connell’s (1995) well-known concept of the “patriarchal dividend,” the profit that hegemonic men gain through gendered hierarchies, with Coronil’s (1996) concept of Occidentalism, which explains the sustaining hierarchies in global power relations by referring to the complexities of 500 years of European colonialism and imperialism. Taking the occidental dividend into account, white heterosexual European men are no longer the only ones who profit from globally unequal power relations. As I have shown across the five terrains of cognitive militarization, the situation is more complicated today with the increasingly diversified reproduction of “cosmo man” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004, 37). Women and queers, of color and white, have gradually achieved more acknowledged positions and rights during their own campaigns for equality and rights, and they make use of their achievements – at times with the best intentions for others, but certainly with payoffs for themselves. As a European woman, for example, it is much easier for me to be acknowledged as a feminist and find established allies for my cause when campaigning against FGM/FGC in Africa, than when opposing sexual harassment or the gender pay gap in my own society. The occidental dividend is transferred to my “account” in the currency of sex and gender issues serving progress in the name of civilization, democracy and global pacification, while I might observe a serious backlash for feminist policies at home, because “the ostentatious talk about the

freedom of the Western woman makes male privilege vanish” (Dietze 2010, 100). This is what Dietze sees as a most powerful byproduct of the “occidental-ist gender pact” (99) after the end of the cold war and especially after 9/11.

Occidentalism – the very condition of Orientalism and not at all its opposite, as decolonial thinkers make clear (Coronil 1996; Mignolo 2009) – stems from and satisfies the desire for a European/western identity; an identity that is shiny enough to be proud of, but still functional enough to retain the privileges that go along with it; an identity that has to be constantly rebuilt in order to normalize its particularity as universal. The continuous reaffirmation of a superior occidental identity relies on gender and sexuality as categories of knowledge and thereby serves as a dynamic interface between political and epistemic violence. For Occidentalism, sexual policies and gender issues are by no means subsidiary issues, but rather the “leading marker of difference” (Dietze 2010, 90) of this new tool of imperial power maintenance. Once explicitly linked to gender, sexuality and human rights issues that are to be defended or implemented in the presumed peripheries of the globe or in the alleged “parallel societies” inside states that claim to be threatened by migration, the prominent label of occidentality nowadays allows for legitimizing state-sponsored violence of all sorts; from torture to targeted killings, from preemptive strikes to humanitarian interventions and all the remaining euphemistic notions that we have become all too familiar with.

Of course, the specific “geopolitics of knowledge” (Mignolo 2002) that lies at the base of a rising culturalization and religionization of international and domestic politics is not new as such. Neither is the sex – gender dimension of imperialism. On the contrary, we have to classify them as constitutive elements of the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2010) that is deeply embedded into the structures of scholarly research and education of which we are all part. This matrix of power cannot be thought of without gender and sexuality – be it in the service of that matrix, or as tools to criticize and transform it. Bringing together feminist, post- and decolonial interventions into the field of IR is a promising way of pointing to the epistemic violence that is inherent in its present gender camouflage. In the footsteps of Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, who exposed the so-called social contract of modernity’s liberal nation-states as sexist (Pateman 1988) and racist (Mills 1997), we could therefore speak of an occidentalist contract that western/northern societies are about to rewrite and sign today without eliminating its patriarchal and racist heritage. Such a project of engendering the *Leviathan* in its occidentalist nature, which is currently supported by white elites of meta-racism and partially sustained by those who might participate in parts of this recognition as political subjects, will not pacify the world, as its proponents claim it will. What successfully continues though, is the reinforcement of a specific racialized and sexualized world of privilege and discrimination along a very specific spatial and temporal arrangement of the world in terms of racism and the labor force. Epistemic violence was and is an indispensable component of this development, and as such, is linked to many other forms of violence in complicated ways.

CONCLUSION

While it is easy to criticize conservative or mainstream positions from a feminist or queer perspective, it is a different thing altogether to attack those whom you had considered as potential allies in the first place: people fighting for gender equality and sexual rights. So how then, if at all, can we do “feminism in the belly of the beast” (Chew 2008, 81)?

Just as Spivak (1988) showed how epistemic violence worked in colonial India in a delicate interplay not only between different instances of knowledge production, but also between colonizers and local elites, we have to reconsider the many variations of gendered and sexualized epistemic violence in the light of a multifaceted discourse on gender and sexuality in debates of international politics today. As feminist and queer scholars, we might at times even be involved in these processes. Therefore, we must acknowledge and tackle the fact that the neoliberal capitalist state offers multiple sites of complicity for gender-sensitive, feminist and queer commitment, and continue to challenge this complicity, our own included. We need to adapt our analytical frameworks accordingly and continue to modify them, despite, because of and across the enormous cognitive collateral damage the so-called war on terror has entailed during the last fourteen years: the rhetoric of a civilizing mission that gains currency over and over again and in the most sophisticated ways, thereby mobilizing discourses of tradition and modernity, creating a gendered, sexualized and racialized subject of people and peoples who are said not to be able to govern themselves, while gender and sexuality as categories or at least as variables of knowledge gain ambivalent ground for violent politics at home and abroad. And to be clear about the impact of epistemic violence that I have identified as lying at the heart of the cognitive militarization that allows for an expansion of the combat zone: epistemic violence is not only a discourse, a rhetoric and a question of exclusively epistemological concern. Depending on who you are and where you live at what time in history, it may be a question of your very survival.

Claudia Brunner

Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education

Alps-Adriatic University of Klagenfurt

Universitätsstraße 65–67

9020 Klagenfurt, Austria

Email: claudia.brunner@aau.at

Notes

- 1 According to the creators of this brilliant figure, cosmo man “serves globalization’s most logical and desirable embodiment while policing patriarchal boundaries of

- race, gender, class, and culture in IR” (Agathangelou and Ling 2009, 61), and of sexuality.
- 2 I have deliberately reformulated the quote in a provocative way, since – as Spivak’s original – these slogans are not supposed to condense the respective theoretical concepts, but the underlying dynamics of sex–gender–culture talk that these perspectives help to analyze.
 - 3 I concluded this from debates of the German Bundeswehr’s participation in Afghanistan with which I am familiar; as for immigration policies, we can observe this phenomenon across Europe, as Fekete (2008) and Butler (2009, ch. 3) show.
 - 4 Austria being a neutral state, for example, is not directly involved in military operations abroad. Debates about the necessity of military intervention in distant zones of conflict, however, are present and entangled with those on immigration and security on a national level.
 - 5 Girls’ Day is a nationwide program across Germany. The military actively takes the opportunity of feminizing their public relations activities and recruiting potential female soldiers with this event at home, while at the same time deploying units in international military operations abroad (Bundeswehr website, “Girls’ Day 2015”).
 - 6 It is obvious that this formulation reflects an amalgamation of sexual orientation and gender identity and therefore might strike gender experts as not nuanced enough to grasp the problem at stake. However, I use these statements to describe the underlying sex–gender–culture talk, and not to simplify the analytical concepts that we can use to challenge it.
 - 7 See note 3 in this text. As for the dimension of class, I agree with one of the anonymous reviewers that my argument would merit more detailed analysis across all of the five phenomena and concepts described above. However, I consider race to be the more relevant category in this context, as I discuss in the last section on epistemic violence and the occidentalist dividend that allows for a certain upward social mobility.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank the three anonymous reviewers for equally critical and encouraging comments, Kathy Warren Wilson and Kendra Patterson for proof-reading and the editorial team for their patience and accuracy during the revisions of the manuscript. Moreover, I am grateful to everyone involved in the panel discussion on “Gender and the Colonial Question” (organized by BISA’s colonial/postcolonial/decolonial working group) at the BISA 2014 conference in Dublin, where I presented a previous version of this article.

Notes on Contributor

Claudia Brunner studied political science and gender studies at Vienna University and Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. She was a member of the graduate

program Gender as a Category of Knowledge at Humboldt-University from 2005 to 2008 and worked at its Center for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies in 2009. Since 2010, she has been an assistant professor at the Center for Peace Studies and Peace Education at Klagenfurt University. Brunner's work on epistemic violence was awarded the Christiane Rajewsky Prize in 2011 and the Caroline von Humboldt Prize in 2012. Further research areas include peace studies, feminist IR, discourse and dispositive analysis and sociology of knowledge.

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