

## **The University of Bradford Institutional Repository**

<http://bradscholars.brad.ac.uk>

This work is made available online in accordance with publisher policies. Please refer to the repository record for this item and our Policy Document available from the repository home page for further information.

To see the final version of this work please visit the publisher's website. Available access to the published online version may require a subscription.

Author(s): Smith, Nicola and Lee, Donna.

Title: Corporeal Capitalism: The Body in International Political Economy

Publication year: 2005

Journal title: Global Society

Citation: Smith, N. and Lee, D. (2005) Corporeal Capitalism: The Body in International Political Economy. *Global Society*, 29 (1): 64-69.

Copyright statement: © 2005 Taylor & Francis. This is an Author's Original Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Global Society*.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2014.976608>

## **Corporeal Capitalism: The Body in International Political Economy**

Nicola Smith (University of Birmingham)

Donna Lee (University of Bradford)

This themed section takes as its starting point the premise that the body matters in International Political Economy (IPE) and presents four original articles which support and illustrate this ontologically critical and, perhaps, provocative position. Although feminist scholarship has undoubtedly gained a place at the table in IPE, it is curious that one of the most important concerns, and contributions, of feminist IPE – that global capitalism is marked upon, and forged through, bodies – has not emerged as a major preoccupation for the discipline more broadly. In what follows we present what we believe is a strong corrective to that inattention and, in so doing we hope to begin to set out an exploratory agenda for the body to be both foundational and fundamental to contemporary IPE.

Although the body has spawned a substantial and multifaceted literature in a range of cognate disciplines such as sociology, law, cultural studies, philosophy, psychology, criminology, geography and history, in IPE it has remained conspicuous by its absence. This body-blindness is perplexing given the considerable contestation that has taken place in recent years over the nature and scope of IPE<sup>1</sup> and especially given that IPE is

---

<sup>1</sup> See for instance Benjamin Cohen, "The Transatlantic Divide: Why Are American and British IPE so Different?" *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 14, No 2 (2007), pp. 197–219; Richard Higgott,

centrally concerned with issues such as poverty and inequality that in turn relate directly to the material needs of physical bodies.<sup>2</sup> And yet the discipline is also built around abstractions from, rather than interrogations of, embodied social contexts.<sup>3</sup> Historically, orthodox (or ‘regulatory’) IPE was founded upon the twin pillars of ‘states’ and ‘markets’ – two imaginary spheres that were understood to touch and, at times, collide but that remained clearly separable both from each other and from the mess and matter of everyday life.<sup>4</sup> Critical IPE has done much to challenge these dualisms and abstractions, exploring instead how states and markets are socially embedded and how it is in everyday life that the oppressions and struggles of global capitalism are played out.<sup>5</sup> Yet critical IPE, too, remains in some important respects disembodied – both in

---

and Matthew Watson. “All at Sea in a Barbed Wire Canoe: Professor Cohen’s Transatlantic Voyage in IPE.” *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2007), pp.1–17; Nicola Phillips and Catherine Weaver. *International Political Economy: Debating the Past, Present and Future* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2010); Craig Murphy, “Do the Left-Out Matter?” *New Political Economy*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2009), pp. 357–65.

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Hooper, “Disembodiment, Embodiment and the Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity” in Gillian Youngs (ed) *Political Economy, Power and the Body* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 31-51; Ian Bruff, “The Body in Capitalist Conditions of Existence: A Foundational Materialist Approach” in Angus Cameron, Jen Dickinson and Nicola Smith (eds.) *Body/State* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Hooper *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Gillian Youngs. 2000. “Embodied Political Economy or an Escape from Disembodied Knowledge” in Gillian Youngs (ed) *Political Economy, Power and the Body* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 11–30; Jan Jindy Pettman, “Body Politics: International Sex Tourism” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1997) pp. 93–108; Nicola Smith, “Body Issues: The Political Economy of Male Sex Work” *Sexualities*, Vol. 15, No. 5-6 (2012), pp. 586–603.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance John Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke (eds.), *Everyday Politics of the World Economy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Adrian Budd, *Class, States and International Relations: A Critical Appraisal of Robert Cox and Neo-Gramscian Theory* (London: Routledge, 2013); Hans-Jürgen

rendering invisible actually-existing human-beings by folding them into systematic equations<sup>6</sup> and in overlooking embodied social hierarchies such as gender, race and sexuality.<sup>7</sup>

Feminist scholarship has been at the forefront of attempts not only to *bring in* the body to IPE but to *begin with* the body in IPE. There is, of course, no one distinctly ‘feminist’ approach to the body in IPE – rather, the body represents a key site of contestation in and for feminist theorising – nor is the body an exclusively feminist concern either within or outside of IPE. But it is feminist political economy that has the most consistently and insistently positioned the body as absolutely central to globalisation and capitalism in both analytical and material terms. As part of this collective project, feminist scholars have brought together – and brought to life – the macro-processes of global political economy and the micro-practices of people’s daily existence.<sup>8</sup> Rather

---

Bieling, “Comparative Analysis of Capitalism from a Regulationist Perspective Extended by Neo-Gramscian IPE” *Capital & Class*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2014), pp. 31–43; Adam Morton, “Social Forces in the Struggle over Hegemony: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Political Economy.” *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2003), pp. 153–79.

<sup>6</sup> Kate Bedford and Shirin M. Rai, “Feminists Theorize International Political Economy.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2010), pp. 1–18.

<sup>7</sup> Jill Steans, Daniela Tepe. “Gender in the Theory and Practice of International Political Economy: The Promise and Limitations of Neo-Gramscian Approaches” in Alison Ayers (ed.) *Gramsci, Political Economy, and International Relations Theory. Modern Princes and Naked Emperors* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 133–52.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Amy Lind (ed.), *Development, Sexual Rights and Global Governance* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2010); Elizabeth Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Juanita Elias and Samantha J. Gunawardana (eds.) *The Global Political Economy of the Household in Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013).

than treating global capitalism as somehow unfolding above and beyond the reach of actual human-beings, feminists instead highlight and explore how economic and political processes impact directly upon real, embodied human lives.<sup>9</sup> In so doing, they interrogate the intersections between the perpetuation of global structural inequalities, on the one hand, and the various axes of difference along which bodies are categorised and organised (gender, sexuality, race, class, and so on), on the other. Bodies are understood as sites upon which the hierarchies of global capitalism are inscribed, imprinted, produced and performed, so that embodied identities, experiences and practices are viewed as both produced by, and productive of, broader economic and political processes.<sup>10</sup> It is on and through the body, feminists argue, that systems of privilege and oppression are not only reproduced but are also *lived* in the most visceral sense of the word. Seen in these terms, the body can no longer simply be relegated to the 'private' and intimate sphere, for instead it becomes deeply implicated in questions of global economic and social justice.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> See for instance Jacqui True, *The Political Economy of Violence Against Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Christine Chin, *Cosmopolitan Sex Workers: Women and Migration in a Global City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Cynthia Enloe, *Seriously!: Investigating Crashes and Crises as If Women Mattered* (Oakland, University of California Press, 2013); Genevieve LeBaron, "The Political Economy of the Household: Neoliberal Restructuring, Enclosures, and Daily Life" *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (2010), pp. 889–912.

<sup>10</sup> Elina Penttinen, *Globalisation, Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: Corporeal Politics* (London: Routledge, 2007); Wendy Harcourt, *Body Politics in Development: Critical Debates in Gender and Development* (London: Zed, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> For an extended discussion see Nicola Smith, 'Towards a Queer Political Economy of Crisis' in Jacqui True and Aida Hozic (eds.) *Scandalous Economics: The Spectre of Gender After Global Financial Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2015).

Far from simply inserting bodies as some kind of neatly-defined variable into pre-existing frameworks, then, feminist work radically re-imagines global capitalism and, in so doing, challenges the very construction of IPE as a disciplinary (and disciplining) terrain. By asserting the importance of bodies in ontological and not just empirical terms, feminists expose and destabilise the binaries and oppositions upon which IPE is founded. These do not just include dichotomies between states and markets, politics and economics, and national and international – all of which are treated as internal to the field – but deeper separations between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of IPE itself. In particular, feminists draw attention to the way in which contemporary IPE is built around tacit but nevertheless foundational distinctions between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ realms, with the public sphere/s (e.g. of government, of business, of work) distinguished from – and thus treated as detachable from – the private sphere/s (e.g. of home, family, intimacy).<sup>12</sup> This dismemberment of social space is neither natural nor neutral but rather is bound up with the production of deeply gendered divisions and hierarchies. Whereas public space has historically been constituted (and privileged) in terms of the ‘masculine’ sphere of political and economic power, private space has long been constructed (and devalued) in terms of the ‘feminine’ realm of social reproduction, home and family.<sup>13</sup> This has in turn enabled IPE to ‘collude with the displacement of

---

<sup>12</sup>Jill Steans, *Gender and International Relations* (London: Polity, 2013); Georgina Waylen, “You Still Don’t Understand: Why Troubled Engagements Continue between Feminists and (Critical) IPE.” *Review of International Studies* Vol. 32 No. 1 (2006), pp. 145–64; Anita Fischer and Daniela Tepe, “‘What’s ‘critical’ about Critical Theory’: Capturing the Social Totality (das Gesellschaftliche Ganze).” *Journal of International Relations and Development* Vol. 14 , No. 3 (2011), pp. 366–75.

<sup>13</sup> Youngs, *op. cit.* As V. Spike Peterson puts it, gender operates as ‘a governing code’ which ‘privileges (valorises) that which is characterised as masculine – not all men or only men – at the expense of that

both body and sex onto women', with bodies, sexuality, intimacy and femininity all consigned to the private realm and thus removed from disciplinary enquiry.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, feminist IPE regards the body as central to – indeed, a critical starting point for – the theory and practice of global capitalism. This themed section takes up calls from feminist scholars to locate the body at the very heart of the study of globalization, capitalism and neoliberalism – not only by exploring how bodies are impacted upon by political and economic processes but also by interrogating how bodies are themselves constitutive of the global political economy. Our overarching aim in this themed section is very much to showcase feminist IPE but in so doing we also want to foster greater dialogue between explicitly 'feminist' perspectives and others that, although sympathetic to feminist concerns, do not necessarily self-identify as 'feminist' first and foremost. We particularly want to do so because we have seen how the political economy of the body is increasingly being taken up by Marxist and other traditions of IPE scholarship in ways that we believe would be greatly enriched by a closer engagement with feminist work, and vice versa.<sup>15</sup> The four articles in this section explore the body from a variety of different theoretical and methodological

---

which is stigmatised (devalorised) as feminine'. Peterson, V. Spike, "How (the Meaning Of) Gender Matters in Political Economy" *New Political Economy*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2005), p. 502.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Jindy Pettman, "Body Politics: International Sex Tourism." *Third World Quarterly* Vol. 18, No. 1 (1997), p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Suzanne Bergeron and Jyoti Puri's guest-edited special issue of *Rethinking Marxism* is a wonderful example of how Marxist, feminist and queer analyses can fruitfully be brought together. Suzanne Bergeron and Jyoti Puri, "Sexuality between State and Class: An Introduction" *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2012), pp. 491–98.

perspectives and each takes an original, critical approach to the study of body politics within the context of broader debates surrounding globalisation, capitalism and neoliberalism. All take the view that the study of IPE 'as if bodies mattered' can add important theoretical, methodological and empirical insights to the field.

In the first article, 'A Household Full of Bodies: Neoliberalism, Care and "The Political"', Hanna-Kaisa Hoppania and Tiina Vaittinen explore 'the political' of political economy through an analysis of care. Borrowing Glyn Daly's metaphor of the political economy as a disorganised 'household', they show how care 'as a corporeal relation' operates as a specific – and constant – opening of the political in the neoliberal political economy. Through a reading of Foucauldian biopolitics, the authors argue that commodification is already present in our empirical reality, as a powerful technology for the governance of care – and of life. However, when neoliberal governance attempts to subsume care within the order of its household, the idiosyncratic logic and inherent corporeality of care produce constant ruptures in the order. It is only when this rebellious logic of care is taken seriously, the authors argue, that it is possible to recognise and then acknowledged that care can never be fully contained in the neoliberal order. This is because the neoliberal household is, literally, full of bodies that just cannot abide by its economic rules. For the authors, this is good news, since it means that as long as our bodies need other bodies for survival, there is relatedness that continues to make the economy political.

In the second article, 'Gender, Financial Deepening and the Production of Embodied Finance: Toward a Critical Feminist Analysis', Adrienne Roberts explores some of the ways in which bodies, and especially 'women's' bodies, and their

productive/reproductive capacities are deeply and complexly intertwined in the global political economy and contemporary processes of financial deepening. Roberts draws attention to the ways in which a series of overlapping discourses and practices are helping to link processes of financial deepening to an idealized (and highly problematic) notion of gender equality. Through a critical feminist lens that views financial deepening as constituted by inherently embodied and gendered social power relations, Roberts argues that dominant narratives risk obscuring the labour associated with social reproduction and promote the commodification of women's bodily capacities to produce. At the same time, Roberts shows how –by looking at a series of separate yet overlapping narratives together, many of which are produced by the same actors – such narratives work to produce, both materially and discursively, embodied forms of difference as well as, at times, to erase the body altogether. This then helps to depoliticize and naturalise inequalities being produced through processes of financialisation, and in the global political economy more broadly.

In the third article, 'The Production of Politics in Front-Line Service Work: "Body Work" in the Labour Process of the Call Centre Worker', Paul McFadden employs a Marxist approach to analysis of the body in IPE in a detailed analysis of call centre work and front-line service work (FLSW). His article proceeds across two stages of analysis. First, he examines the labour process of the front-line call centre worker. By disaggregating the moving unity of the labour process into its elementary factors, following Marx's method of analysis from *Grundrisse* and *Capital vol. I*, he argues that call centre work, and FLSW in general, requires worker to instrumentalise aspects of their being. He goes on to argue that these aspects of being are the same capacities and potentials that people engage when they produce political relationships with one another. In order to examine

this instrumentalisation further, he reconfigures the concept of body work in order to understand the production of politics in FLSW. McFadden's reconceptualisation of the concept of body work emphasises the reciprocal relationality of processes of the production of bodies and he uses this as a tool to understand the power relations that pertain in FLSW. He concludes that service work forestalls and limits the potential for politics because the instrumentalisation of the political capacities and potential of bodies bears upon the potency of the indeterminacy of labour power. Nonetheless, indeterminacy remains a fundamental category for understanding the resistance to capitalist forms of the organisation of work and the instrumentalisation of the capacities by which bodies are political can also represent opportunities for the struggle against the pernicious ontological consequences of wage-labour in FLSW.

Further reflections on Marxism are developed in the final article by Stephen Bates on 'The "Emergent" Body: Marxism, Critical Realism and the Corporeal in Contemporary Capitalist Society'. Bates employs critical realism to consider two views of the body found within Marxism. He argues that the first view – that of the body as simple prerequisite – found within the 1844 Manuscripts should be rejected due to a latent idealism and residual dualisms that render the body under-theorised, ontologically primitive and in limbo. Bates then argues that the second view – that of the thinking body – introduced within *The German Ideology* would be strengthened further by using critical realism in an underlabouring role to reconceptualise the body-in-general as emergent so as to recognise more fully the paradoxical situation in which humans both are and have bodies. This conceptualisation, Bates maintains, would help both to avoid the perception or actuality of a reductionist position and to acknowledge fully the stratified nature of human beings. According to Bates, once there is a move back

towards the concrete, such a theory of the body is able to inform more insightful analyses of the ways in which the body is (re)produced in a society in which biological space, as well as geographical and social spaces, is being infiltrated and colonised by a capitalist logic.

In bringing together these articles, we aim to encourage further academic and political debate about the corporeality of global capitalism. Such a project entails analysis of how political and economic processes are imposed upon and reproduced by gendered, sexualized, racialized and otherwise unevenly marked bodies; it involves enquiry into the complex ways in which bodies represent sites of resistance and struggle in the global political economy; and it also means consideration of what (the erasure and inclusion of) the body can tell us about the terrain of IPE itself as a field of study. As all the four articles in this themed section demonstrate, body politics are integral to both the theory and the lived reality of global capitalism, and IPE as a body of thought would be greatly enriched by engaging in much more thought about bodies.