

Squeezedness and Feminisms in the Age of Counterterrorism

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Jayne Huckerby, [Feminism and International Law in the Post-9/11 Era](#), 39 **Fordham Int'l L.J.** 533 (2016).

There are many reasons to like [Jayne Huckerby](#)'s most recent article, and many different ways to incorporate this work into your reading and classes. The article has appeal to feminist, international law, national security, and peace studies. There are several things this article does that I like lots. At its most basic level, it's a helpful reminder of where feminisms stand on or in relation to the complex terrorism and counter-terrorism terrain. Huckerby takes an exhaustive review of the literature, in the best sense of the phrase, presenting scholars with copious notes detailing discussions in law reviews, peer-reviewed journals of allied fields, books, U.N. and U.S. government reports, and the popular press. Anyone eager to learn more about gender, feminisms, and international law, or to write a syllabus, would do well to comb her notes.

Huckerby's writing is crisp, giving readers gems of legal thought like:

[A] post-9/11 account of women's victimhood also tends to focus unduly on women's experiences at the hands of non-State actors (terrorists), rather than to illuminate ways in which State counter-terrorism policies have also undermined women's rights or to address a more complicated picture of victimhood whereby women often feel squeezed between terror and anti-terror.

(P. 557) (citations omitted).

This squeezed-ness is an important concept that I hope Huckerby will pursue further. Huckerby goes to great length explaining the ways in which women are often caught in the middle of national security discourse. In some instances, they are subjects of terrorism and anti-terrorism policy as well perpetrators of non-state violence. In others, they are objects to be protected or passive non-agents who aren't seen as contributing to national security discussions. It calls to mind Martin Heidegger's *geworfenheit*, or [thrownness](#). As Heidegger theorized a freedom in the arbitrariness associated with thrownness, so too does Huckerby's "squeeze" seem to represent a liminal space from which feminist action could take place. That the squeeze between terror and anti-terror is full of frustration and rife with danger indicates its affinity to Heidegger's thrownness. In this acknowledgement there is the potential for challenging the objective case of squeezedness by interjecting in the squeeze a subjective embrace of the arbitrary, opening the door or moving out of the squeeze and toward political action.

A provocative theorizing of subject positions, a masterful command of source material, and crisp writing are not all Huckerby does (which would be more than enough to make the article an important read). In the long shadow of the September 11, 2001 attacks there's been comparatively little work on women's role in both terrorism and counter-terrorism policy. Huckerby intercedes, concluding that we need to focus on four issues, which happen to be interrelated:

the human rights and gender issues at stake in women's engagement in and support of violent extremism; the impact of violent extremism on women and girls and gender equality; the roles of women and gender equality in countering terrorism and violent extremism, including through women's participation in security institutions; and the impact of counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism on women and girls.

(P. 590.)

This is an ambitious agenda to be sure. In today's political climate, feminisms still cause confusion and condemnation from across the political spectrum and indeed occasionally from [feminists themselves](#). This contentiousness is proof positive of the need for more work like Huckerby's, which helps explain the significance of feminisms to better understanding international law. One wonders what hope there is for sustained and meaningful engagement with feminisms and the rights of women and girls, however, when some people amazingly still understand [feminism as a dirty word](#). Of course something needs to be done, and recent attacks in Turkey, continued violence against Kurds and other ethnic minorities throughout Europe and Asia, and instability in Nigeria all indicate that these issues must be addressed by government leaders, activists, and educators sooner rather than later.

Significantly, Huckerby highlights the tension in "women, peace, and security" efforts. These efforts may benefit women and girls, but often serve national security needs. They may also marginalize human rights perspectives (P. 578). While it may be easy to applaud the U.N. for its focus on women, it would be unhelpful to conclude that the U.N.'s agenda is altruistic or, perhaps, even helpful. Huckerby's critique should encourage scholars to consider the advantages and disadvantages of these converging focal points.

Lastly, and this may seem a minor point, I was particularly encouraged by Huckerby's inclusion of girls, who unfairly and quite often are assumed to be included in "women" or "feminisms." At the international level, it is especially important, given children's high mortality rates in many countries and inadequate legal protections, to name them. I hope this move will encourage other feminist legal scholars and writers on international law to remember the important and particularly vulnerable role children have in countries across the world.

This is a fine article and a welcome piece of scholarship on feminist legal theory and national security law.

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